Rolling On - A Message from Scott

Dear **HPS Simulations** customers,

Thank you for your support.

At the recent Origins '95 convention, I received a lot of questions on the outlook of computer wargaming, and how I think HPS will fit into that future. Since this seems to be of such high interest, I thought I'd talk about it briefly in this issue of SITREP instead of my planned subject (I was going to talk about piracy and copy protection).

I'll begin with a look at the computer wargaming market, which I believe is expanding overall. To begin with, there are more wargaming titles from more publishers hitting the streets than ever before. The average number of games sold also seems to be increasing. However, there's a catch - and that is that the new blood is coming in through games like *Panzer General*. Not that there is anything wrong with *Panzer General* (I wish I had written it!), but that it shows the computer wargaming market is expanding towards the entertainment side of things. The "serious" side of the market, in contrast, is basically static - the grognards all seem to be holdovers from the era of board wargames back in the 1960's and 70's.

Leaving the market analysis aside for a moment, a key component of this discussion is the computer itself. I made an appraisal of its capabilities when I first started programming *Point Of Attack*, and I believe my assessment is still valid. My opinions were reinforced at Origins '95 while talking to **Winston Hamilton** (from **Game Research/Design**) about board wargames and their conversion to *Aide De Camp*. As Winston and I agreed, for effect, the computer screen simply can't replace a map on the table. At least not for serious wargamers. There's something about having the map spread over the table and actually moving stacks of counters. Sure, in a lot of cases just being able to play the game on the computer is tremendous in itself. But for us, no matter how good the graphics, a 15" or even 19" computer screen is going to come up short every time. Of course, for miniatures players it's even worse. Without a doubt, for wargamers presentation is the major computer weakness.

On the other hand, the computer is a wargamer's dream in that it offers the ability to store and manipulate vast quantities of data. It eliminates the need to memorize thick rule books. The computer also offers the opportunity to play against other players by mail/email, or against a computer opponent.

Now looking back at the market, I've decided the serious wargaming segment remains the best target for HPS. To begin with, its interests coincide with my own. Secondly, I feel the serious gamers have a high degree of product and company loyalty that is not shared by the rest of the market. Between these two points, for HPS the grognard segment offers the best long term opportunities.

My second decision is to continue placing emphasis on what I feel are the computer's wargaming strengths and against its weaknesses. Which means my efforts are going to go into the details and calculation routines and the interface rather than the graphics and sound. This isn't to say that the graphics and sound won't continue to improve and evolve - they will. Just look at the difference between Point Of Attack and Panthers. And, not too far down the road HPS products will probably all be in Windows. But "breathtaking" graphics and cinematic effects are extremely expensive, and yet probably provide the least amount of value to the typical HPS customer. I can't do it all (at least not and stay in business), so I'm going to continue to concentrate on "meat" and interface and the expense of chrome.

Of course, I'm not sure this strategy will work out. However, the best indication it might comes from the virtually identical comments I've been hearing lately as well as my own experiences. It seems that even with all the goodies available today, we wargamers keep going back to the older games. Why? To paraphrase President Clinton's motivational sign from the last presidential campaign, "It's the GAME, stupid".

-Scott

Ed note: If you're not familiar with the term *grognard*, it is a French word meaning "grumbler", and became a nickname for the veterans of Napoleon's campaigns. The term was later used to identify serious board wargamers - no doubt after witnessing a few key die rolls.

