

Capsule Reviews

THE SPACE GAMER reviews board games, role-playing games, computer games, video games, and game supplements. We review play-by-mail games if a reviewer is enrolled. We will review any science fiction or fantasy game if the publisher supplies a copy. We do not guarantee reviews of historical wargames. TSG may publish a review of a game we are not sent — IF a reader submits a review.

The staff will make reasonable efforts to check reviews for factual accuracy, but opinions expressed by reviewers are not necessarily those of the magazine. For information on writing reviews for TSG, see "Writing Reviews for THE SPACE GAMER" further on in this section.

Games for which reviews have been received or assigned include: *Action & Bumper Games*, *Attack of the Mutants*, *Basic Role-Playing*, *Breakout*, *Dallas*, *D&D Dungeon Geomorphs*, *D&D Outdoor Geomorphs*, *Dungeon Drawings*, *Furioso*, *High Guard* (2nd Ed.), *I.S.C.V. Leander*, *I.S.P.M.V. Fenris*, *Monster Mash & Battleship*, *Scouts & Assassins* (2nd Ed.) *Sewers of Oblivion*, *S.F.V. Valkyrie*, *Thieves' Guild*, and *Tulan of the Isles*.

Games for which we are currently seeking reviewers include: *Amoeba Wars*, *Asteroid Pirates*, *The C&S Sourcebook*, *Conflict 2500*, *Dark Stars*, *Demon's Run*, *The Dragonlords*, *The Hammer of Thor*, *Imperial Data Recovery System*, *Interstellar Skirmishes*, *ISPS/ISIS Maps*,



Nebula 19, *Oregon Trail*, *Space Ace 21*, *Space Raid!*, *The Sword and the Stars*, *SwordQuest* (boxed Ed.), *Swords & Sorcerers*, and *Torpedo Fire*.

THE BARBARIANS (Yaquinto); \$8.00. Designed by Neil Zimmerer. 8-page, 8½" x 11" rulebook, 200 extra-thick die-cut counters, one die (of two required), 2 mounted map boards, "improved album" format with liner box. 2 or 3 players; playing time 30 minutes to 1 hour. Published 1981.

THE BARBARIANS is actually two games in one. *Sack Rome* is a game of the fall of the Roman Empire while *Mongol* covers "the Mongol invasion of Europe, 1237 to 1242 AD." These games are quite similar. Both are stylized and use area movement. *Sack Rome* is unique in that Rome almost always falls to the barbarian hordes. To determine the winner, two games are played with each player taking a shot at Rome. The winner is the one to hold Rome the longest.

THE BARBARIANS are clean, quick, and simple games to play. Though designed for two players (with an optional third player for *Sack Rome*) they are very easy to run solitaire. The "improved album" format is super. No more warped map boards due to storing counters in the jacket sleeves. The biggest drawback is that these games are too simplistic. Even the optional rules do nothing to change this.

All in all, THE BARBARIANS are excellent beginning war games. They are also pretty good as short fill-in games. To add just a touch more,

I suggest changing the "shifting initiative" optional rule to give the high roller the choice of who moves first. Even then, these may be too simple for the serious wargamer.

— Gregory Courter

DAWN OF THE DEAD (SPI); \$8.00. Designed by John H. Butterfield. Boxed, with 8-page 8½" x 11" rulebook, 11" x 17" multi-color map, 80 counters. 1 to 4 players (basic design for 1 or 2); playing time 1 to 2 hours. Published 1981.

This game plays just like a sequence from the movie from which it takes its name. The four humans, trapped in a small shopping mall, try to clear it of zombies and close the outer doors. Meanwhile, the zombies shamle ever closer to the humans, trying to ambush, overwhelm, and eat them. A human can be "infected" by a zombie attack; then it's only a matter of time until he, too, becomes a zombie.

The best thing about DAWN OF THE DEAD is the beautiful graphics. In some games, all the artistic effort is lavished on the cover, and the game components are cheap and drab. Not so here! The map and counters are well designed and skillfully executed. They mesh well with some good points of the rule system — for instance, a few zombies are hidden when the game begins, and these are shown in a separate holding area. Movement is by square grid, and the human movement system is excellent. Humans movement uses a modified action-point system allowing them to trade movement for actions, such as closing doors and grabbing weapons. No human may move two turns in a row — a design oddity that gives a nice effect in play. The rules are well organized and fairly clear, as any rules this short ought to be. On the whole, the game is fun the first few times, for those who can get into zombie-ing or zombie-hunting.

But development should have continued longer on DAWN OF THE DEAD. Once players grasp the game's essentials (which may take two or even three plays) the human player will realize that an ultra-conservative, ultra-boring strategy of "run up, shoot a couple of zombies, run back" will almost guarantee a win. The only thing that can defeat this is bad luck in the form of a strong hidden zombie and bad die rolls. In contrast with human movement, the zombie movement rules are boring. Normal zombies cannot stack, and usually move only one square per turn (berserks move two, super-zombies a big three.) By contrast, human movement runs from 12 to 20! On any given turn, most zombies may not move at all, a few will be forced to move one square toward any humans they "saw," and 1 to 6 may move one square in any direction the player likes. The zombie player has little chance for skill; he is reduced to pushing his units wistfully about, hoping his opponent will trip over a concealed zombie or do something stupid. If the zombie gets one human, he can usually get a couple more and win — but if he doesn't get a kill in the first ten turns, before the scattered humans can link up, he's not likely to get any at all.

On the whole, DAWN OF THE DEAD would be worth the money to somebody who liked the movie. It also plays much better as a solitaire; in a two-player game, the zombie player will feel like a zombie himself before the game is over. If zombie movement had been slightly higher, or if normal zombies had been allowed to stack, it could have been more interesting and better balanced. As is . . . pretty counters, nice try.

—Steve Jackson

WRITING REVIEWS FOR THE SPACE GAMER

Capsule Reviews

Most of the reviews we print will be "capsule" reviews — 400 words or less. We pay \$5 for each capsule review accepted. We want to run a review for every new s-f or fantasy game or supplement.

Each capsule review should be five paragraphs long and contain:

(1) Basic information. Present these facts, in this order: NAME OF GAME (Publisher); price. Designer. (If applicable: "Supplement to ---," "Companion to ---," or similar note.) Format: list of components, with sizes of maps and rulebooks, number of counters, etc. Number of players; playing time. Publication date.

(2) General description of the game: background, the sides, course of play, special features, etc.

(3) Strong points. Discuss what is good about the game; in every game, there IS something worthwhile. "Fun" is a useless adjective. Be specific.

(4) Weak points. Every game has its problems, too. If the only faults you can find are minor ones, say so. If the game is fatally flawed, come right out and SAY SO. If you can phrase your criticisms as suggestions for improvement, do so.

(5) Summation. Your overall opinion of the game. Who should and should not buy it, and why.

All reviews must be signed; the reviewer's name will be printed. No game may be reviewed by its designer, by a playtester, or by an employee of the publisher. (Designer's articles are welcome, but must be billed as such!) Final note: If you can write a complete review in less than the full 400 words, by all means do so.

This review format is designed to encourage fairness and to give the reader enough information to let him decide whether he wants to buy that game. Keep that in mind when you write. This is a short review, not a complete analysis. For those who want to write longer reviews, each issue will have one or two —

Featured Reviews

These will be game reviews 1,000 to 2,000 words long. They should contain all the above information, plus whatever else the reviewer wants to say. They may be written in any format. A featured review may cover either a new game or one that has been on the market for some time. If TSG has not already printed a capsule review, write one and submit it at the same time. We may even use both.