

# GMT East Weekend

White Plains, New York, April 8-10, 2005

by Marc Guenette

*Soon after the attacks of 9/11/01, I wanted to reach out to our East Coast fans in some way. I then began the process of organizing the first East Weekend. With the fabulous assistance of Richard Berg and others we staged our first event in 2002. Since then, Andy Lewis and his local team of guys have been running EWAs you'll see by Marc's report, this year's event was yet another big success. By the way, Marc was able to also attend West Weekend in Santa Barbara. It was a real pleasure to meet Marc, play some games, and enjoy a beautiful weekend together under the California sun — RBM*

Gaming — it represents the suspension of time, in more ways than one. You set up a game, start playing and enjoying it, and then suddenly it's 1:00am. GMT East Weekend 2005 gave us the opportunity, one more time, to enjoy our favorite hobby at all hours of the day and night. East Weekend is pure bliss for me. So many people, so many games. On the surface it's all about the games, but scratch a little deeper and you realize that it really is about the people, too. I will admit to the fact that the first time attending last year, I was intimidated by the sheer scope of the event, but I wound up having a blast anyway. People were so friendly; they really pulled out all the stops for anyone to fit in *now*. As an example, last year I had the opportunity to play *Manifest Destiny* (the playtest edition) with Peter Stein teaching four newbies with full gusto. It was fun. Luckily enough, I had just received the production version of the game a week before this year's convention. I cracked it open and made sure I would have at least a practice game under my belt before playing it again with — you guessed it — Peter Stein and three other newbies. This is how the love of gaming spreads. And in the process you get to meet the crowd, the players, the playtesters, designers, developers, and maybe even an insider.

East Weekend 2005 started the same way as it did for me last year. Timmy, an old wargaming buddy of mine, and I made the five-hour drive from Montreal on a Thursday night, because we *have to be*

ready to rumble early the next morning, Friday 9:00am. But as opposed to last year, this time I had a full program scheduled ahead of me. Yup, the big plan *and* the big game — four of us battling over the ultimate monster game, *The Three Days of Gettysburg*. We had the added value of playing with the currently in-development *Simple Great Battles of the American Civil War (Simple GBACW)* rules. The plan was to play the full first day of this famous battle. There were two teams of two players each: the Confederate on one side with Jim Anderson (playing Ewell) and Michael Johnson (Hill) vs. Jon Gautier (Howard) and Buford) and me (Reynolds) as the Union.

The Game — well, as playtesters, we decided to go with the now infamous "Buford Retreat Gambit". The intent of such a strategy was to initially save Buford's Cavalry to have them join up with Howard at Cemetery Hill in order to attack the Confederates with a combined force. Unfortunately, we learned the hard way that Buford's best bet is to screen the Confederate advance before they can take position. If the Rebels arrive at full strength, the Union stands no chance. Live and learn. Ironically, to everyone commenting on the position of the armies at the 16:00 turn it appeared as if we had already progressed far into the night (in game time). The spectators all asked, "Shouldn't Buford make a stand and fight at Gettysburg?" Well, yes he should. Despite the lopsided result (a crushing Confederate victory), it was a great gaming experience nonetheless. A (paradoxically) enriched experience with the *Simple* rules, which happen to be complete and concise, and are a great addition to the *GBACW line* of games if you own any of the particular titles.

So the first day of gaming was almost over after the Three Days of Gettysburg session ended (10:30pm), but I was able to coax Michael Johnson into a football game, *Paydirt*. His *Patriots* beat me senseless. Time to lick my wounds and hit the sack.

I had Saturday morning planned out as well — *Manifest Destiny (MD)*. Peter Stein volunteered to teach the game to three more newcomers, with what was left of his fading voice. GMT Games own Andy Lewis graciously stepped out of the game to let another fifth player join in. I don't know if this was a good thing or bad thing for me! The year before, wise Mr Lewis beat me twice in the games (*Santa Fe Rails* and *Ticket to Ride*) in which we both were involved. After the initial card draws and bidding, I started play in Pennsylvania. This position is probably the toughest challenge because there is really only one way out...Go West! To the south there is Virginia, and to the north Quebec. So to the West I went. It was a tightly contested game in which three players were almost tied at the end. Much to my surprise, on the last turn I was able to squeeze ahead as the winner thanks to my *Pioneers*. As in most multiplayer games, there is an issue with 'gang-up-on-the-leader' reactions from other players, although I do think it's less of a problem in MD because there is more than one way to earn Victory Points. I also think that the player with the most judicious investment in the *Pioneers* stands a good chance of victory. You really have to build up your momentum for the end of game. But we were all on the brink of success, thanks to this wonderful design (isn't it always A GREAT GAME when you win?).

After what turned out to be my only win of the weekend, I took the little time off I could spare to stroll around the Hotel. I was pleasantly surprised to find some nice restaurants — Indian, Spanish, Cuban, and Argentinian — only a few blocks away. I was getting prepared for a nice supper when I came back to the hotel 30 minutes later with the confidence of the winner. Lucky enough I was able to join in a game of *Struggle of Empires (Warfrog)* with six other players, amongst them was the ever so friendly Andy Lewis, Wray Ferrell, Marty Sample, Nick Smith (aka Mr. Unrest), etc. The game was supposed to be

## Player's Journal — East Weekend 2005

interrupted by supper. It didn't happen because we were so involved that it went through the three World Wars until the very end. Yet again, Mr Lewis snapped for the win. It was a nice way to pass 3 hours on a seven-player game. Then at 8:00pm, it was off to supper.

Just before I left for supper, I had a talk with Kevin McPartland to have a shot at playing his hopefully soon-to-be-published Conquest of Paradise (on P500 List). Of course after eating, I was 30 minutes late. It was 10:30pm and we were able to round up two other players, John Buck and Bill Cooper. Conquest of Paradise (CoP) is simple at first sight. You explore your surrounding areas, navigating around by revealing tiles and hoping to get some islands in order to build up villages on them so you can explore further. In what could look like the enormously popular Settlers of Catan in the first part of play, CoP develops into a game with strong competition between the players. Yes, combat occurs and cards are involved, too. You need to get 20 victory points to win. It's easy to be so close and yet so far. Since victory points are not only on the board but in your hand as well, so you can only estimate where your opponents stand. Our game ended up with Kevin winning after he bested John in a last stretch effort. CoP is a really interesting game that will appeal to eurogamers and wargamers alike, for different reasons. Furthermore, CoP will be played more or less aggressively depending of the style of the group. Still on the P500 List, this game deserves to see the light of day, and soon. I enjoyed the experience of being taught by the designer.

It was 00:30am, so no time to start a new game. There was time to catch up on friendly chatting with others who weren't involved with a game, and that were still awake.

Now it's Sunday morning. For the second day in a row, I experience the hotel's pool, relaxing before another great day of gaming. No specific game was planned ahead for me. As I walked in the room at 9:30am, I saw Andy Lewis trying to rally people around a Manifest Destiny game. Peter Stein, Bill Cooper and I immediately jumped to the occasion. At some point I figured Lewis *has* to lose a game. After the card draw I start with...

Pennsylvania. Let's say that working on my *Pioneer* strategy didn't pay off at all this time around. I ended up in last place. Maybe they were all out to get me, I don't know. To my great dismay, Andy, now my official nemesis, got away with the win with Louisiana, followed by Bill, leaving Peter and I way behind. Another 3 hours of fun. The more I play MD, the more I enjoy it. And this time, winning had nothing to do with it.

It was 1:00pm and almost time to go, but not without saying goodbye to those whom I didn't have time to play with or talk to. As I said earlier, my second time around at East Weekend I really felt more at ease. Of course, the web (Consimworld) helped a lot in planning ahead this great weekend of gaming. Thanks to everyone who perpetuated the pleasure of being together simply to play, even Andy, the guy who refuses to let me win. Perhaps I'll learn *voodoo* before we meet again next year...

### Chronicles of the Untied Shoe

Some more demos were present at East Weekend. One was Band of Brothers (a company/platoon level game of the battle around Bastogne) which got played by a group for two days. It is a David Fox design, and I would get this one without hesitation.

In another room, Mark McLaughlin had two projects going: Wellington, which is just about to be published (Summer 2005), and Kutusov (P500 List), which is the same system and philosophy as The Napoleonic Wars. Think Napoleon goes to Russia. I heard only good comments from two players, and hopefully this one will see the light of day soon too.

Renaud Verlaque was present to play his Price of Freedom (P500 List). For those familiar with the popular Age of Napoleon from Phalanx Games, you will recognize Renaud's distinct touch. This is a great American Civil War CDG that can be played in less than 3 hours. I was involved early in the playtesting of the design, and this one is quite promising.

Brian Youse and Ken Dunn from MMP clashed with Andy and Wray Ferrell at Sword of Rome. Frankly I don't know if

*that guy* won again. To quote Woody Allen, "I feel an empty void". And Ken Dingley and Mark Kalina from a new company called Compass Games attended East Weekend. It's nice to have an open door policy of gaming at the event.

Other games also on hand Richard Berg's Pax Romana and Onward Christian Soldiers. Two games I would have loved to play.

In Chris Janiec's annual's Down in Flames Series bombing mission, this time around, the Japanese were bombing the surroundings of Guadalcanal. Robert Tyson and Tomuki Kondo won the top scoring USN and IJN DiF players award. John Buck graciously donated DVD prizes for those two top players.

What was the most played games over the entire weekend? That's a tough one. Friday it was Sword of Rome all over the place. Saturday, many Empire of the Sun matches were played. I saw a few Grand Illusion games going, with designer Ted Raicer on hand.

Thanks to Allan Rothberg, Andy Lewis, and GMT Games for setting up the event and tolerating our 'French Invasion'. Until next year, I bid you all farewell — see you in 2006!

