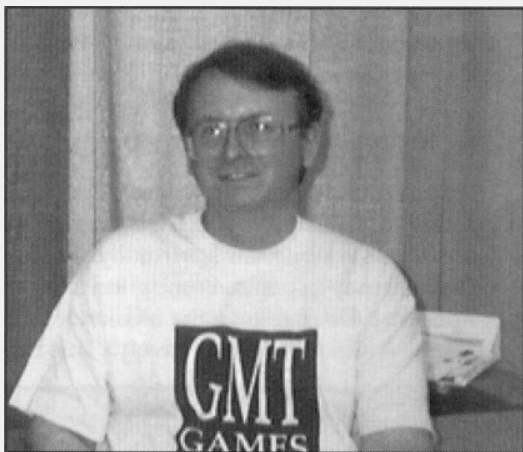


## RODGER MACGOWAN

INTERVIEW by Tony Zalewski



*Rodger's contribution to over 200 games published all over the world has been distinguished by beautiful artwork. However, Rodger has been involved in almost every aspect of the game business. In fact, back in 1975 he founded Fire and Movement magazine. Currently, Rodger works as an art director for film and TV and serves as Vice-President of GMT Games.*

I started my interest in wargames when my father bought me a copy of Gettysburg by Avalon Hill. I was twelve and had just returned from a trip to the actual battlefield. However, I left the hobby when I went to college at UCLA to study art, motion pictures, and graphic design. Being an art director was a separate track for me. I never thought that one day it would combine with wargames.

I returned to the hobby in the early 70s with Panzer Blitz from Avalon Hill. Redmond Simonsen from SPI was largely responsible for the look. Redmond was an outstanding art director who left the hobby after SPI collapsed and TSR took over, and we've been friends and colleagues for twenty years. Some of my other favorite games were Afrika Korps and Stalingrad. I played them to death. Obviously, in those days, Avalon Hill was "it."

### **FIRE & MOVEMENT - WHY NOT START A MAGAZINE?**

After college I became serious about playing. In 1975, S&T was the biggest wargame magazine around. It was owned by James Dunnigan and Redmond Simonsen, with Jim being the head designer and Redmond being the Art Director. They claimed a circulation of about 30,000. But, the hobby had no independent review magazine. I thought that it would be fun to produce something which looked at all aspects of gaming in as fair and independent a way as possible.

### **THE FIRST ISSUES OF F&M**

The first issues of F&M were published in East Los Angeles. We didn't have a budget for advertising. Ev-

erything was word-of-mouth. The first issue had 48 pages, a print run of no more than 2000, and cost us about \$1/ issue to produce. It was very difficult in the beginning. But we were doing it for the love of it. It wasn't until issue 4 that we realized that there was a popular demand.

I was the editor for the first three years during which we published 6 issues per year. But, after the first 18 issues, I was forced to leave. F&M continued to be published by the original printer for two years with Friedrich Helfferich as Editor, and myself as special consultant.

### **SOLD AND SOLD AGAIN**

Then Steve Jackson Games bought F&M and took the magazine to Austin, Texas for two years. Fred carried on as Editor for another year. In 1985, Diverse Talents Inc. bought the magazine. DTI was based in Long Beach and comprised a loose-knit group of wargamers who formed their own corporation and had run all the local game conventions as far back as 1977. It was headed by Alan Emrich and included other notables like Gary Smith, Christopher Cummins and Jeff Albanese.

Alan asked me to come back to the magazine. I had too many of my own projects, but I recommended Jay Selover as Editor. By that time F&M had a distribution of about 5000, and was published eight times per year plus special edition issues, like "The Annual Report" and "Beginner's Guide."

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

Keith Poulter bought the magazine for 3W around 1988. I was uncomfortable with the conflict of interest brought about by an independent review magazine being owned by an active wargame company which also ran two or three other magazines with games in each issue, like The

*Wargamer*. I made a serious attempt to buy it back, but didn't have the resources. In the event it only ran 2 issues under 3W. I recommended John Vanore to Keith, and he took over as Editor for those issues.

That's when I found out that both Christopher Cummins and Russell Sipe, the publisher of *Computer Gaming World*, were also interested in buying the magazine. When Christopher took over, he asked me to take over as Art Director. John Vanore remained for about the first three issues for *Decision Games*. Those issues were the first I did totally on a computer with desktop publishing, and it was a whole new look. You know the rest.

## COMPUTER GAMES

I have been a graphic design consultant with *Computer Gaming World* for years, and tried to introduce computer game reviews to *F&M* when it was owned by *DTI*. Computer games are getting better, but the best board games are still superior, both graphically and as historical simulation games. Cutting corners on history and facts in any game is what bothers me the most.

I use music and movie scores to inspire my artwork. I've collected film scores since the 60s. It's a passion with me. Jerry Goldsmith is a favorite. I'm a night person, although I've become a night and day person because of the pressures of work.

I'm married with a 3 year old son, Steven-Donald. None of my family have ever been interested in games. I live in Santa Monica which was affected badly by the recent 6.6 earthquake here in Los Angeles. However, it is normally a very pleasant city with great beaches on the Pacific Ocean.

## GMT GAMES

What I've enjoyed the most at *GMT* is working together with the designer and developer from an early stage of a game design rather than being brought in at the end. I enjoy finding graphic solutions which improve the dynamics of a game design — "Art design for effect." For example, I worked closely with Gene and Dan Versson on *Hornet Leader* to design a look and feel which ended up radically different from what was originally intended.

## A VISUAL FEAST

When I sit down to work on a new game at *GMT*, I go back to the early days when I started as a player. With great anticipation, I imagined all sorts of wondrous things in those game boxes. So now, I create the sort of visual feast which I so much wanted to experience back then. I have a whole library of those sorts of concepts. Those are the sorts of ideas which Gene and I have worked on together since the beginning. We're on the same wavelength. I think that Gene and I are much like the James Dunnigan/Redmond Simonsen team of the 70s. Our sales and feedback confirm that we've successfully combined some outstanding design and graphics. The results are award-winning games like *Silver Bayonet*, *Hornet Leader*, and *SPQR*.

accurate, although frustrating to game. With German pressure on the transportation network, and all the problems caused by an infantry army and military defeat, Allied units rarely get to where they are going on time. This is especially true if the historical scenario is used. The Allies must go where they don't want to—far into Belgium in accordance with the pre-war plans that bore little relation to the plans the Germans ultimately used. There is a reaction phase in the game, which allows limited responses to the attacks of opponents. But both sides, attacking and defending, can react in a combat, and the Germans have several advantages in the number and type of units that can effectively react.

## WHERE'S GODZILLA?

Fortunately, the designer provides a vast array of optional "what-ifs" for the Allies at the cost of varying amounts of victory points. This is where the fun in the game really starts. While some of the options are a little far-fetched, they never reach the Ty Bomba-esque plateau of Godzilla stepping in to help the Allies. The French can choose to extend the Maginot Line or build other fortresses. There can be better cooperation among the various Allies. The French can mechanize their cavalry, concentrate their numerous but dissipated tank forces, raise a few paratroops, motorize some infantry divisions, expand their air force, build more AA guns or AT guns, provide better training to their troops, or strip North Africa of its garrisons. Some of the more far-out options include doing away with the French command structure and allowing the French to develop a blitzkrieg doctrine of their own. Other options include foregoing Allied intervention in Norway and more British interest in mechanized forces. One wild option does away with the Maginot Line completely. Why would the Allied player ever pick this option? It provides bonus victory points with which the Allied player can pick and choose many other options. (However, it does not return to the French player those military units "factored into" the fortifications.)

These options allow the Allied player to mix and match options, balancing security against the loss of victory points. Different combinations may allow different results. These options go far beyond the alternate orders of battle presented in **France 1940**, and they provide a good measure of replayability to **Victory**. A player may want to play the Allies just for the chance to tinker with history. The only complaint that I have about the options is that they don't go far enough. The vast majority deal with the French. What about an option for increased British participation on the continent? Or