Fear God & Dreadnought

A REVIEW BY DOUG DAVIES

There can be little doubt that the 'state of art' in boardgaming design has advanced considerably over the last decade in the area of 'simulation', but that the 'playability' aspect of most games has in contrast deteriorated. This is one reason in my estimation why recent games have such a short life span; they are no sooner produced, (often with labyrinthine rules to try and simulate every detail of a situation), than a barrage of criticism descends revealing the impossibility of adequately playtesting such a creation. Those few games designed more for playability are, in such a situation, often cast contemptuously aside by the advocates of historical accuracy who now tend to dominate the critical horizons of the hobby. This can be great loss to those simply seeking a good, exciting, and balanced struggle of wits and to hell with history.

Such a game is **Dreadnought** produced by SPI in 1975. If you want to sit on the edge of your chair for a couple of hours, nerves tense, your brain whirring with plans, schemes and doubts, the excitement growing by the minute, but above all enjoying yourself, then give this, the final design of the late John Young, a try. If on the other hand the facts that the Invincible had 6" armour tapering to 4" on the bow, that the director firing mechanism was designed by Vickers, and that the Captain's coxswain was called Campbell are more important to you, then stay well away from **Dreadnought**, it would drive you crazy.

The subject of **Dreadnought**, as the name suggests, are those huge leviathans which for a brief span of years controlled the seas and then passed on in the space of a generation, leaving behind the same type of romantic image often associated with the steam locomotive. The game is on a tactical level and includes counters for every one of those mighty battleships, plus all the various refits made to some of them (yes, Gladys, they were plagued with errata even then) and allows you to fight all the battles which these creations of Jacky Fisher were involved in. As actual battles were in fact rare (Admirals were notoriously inconsiderate about losing ships to provide scenarios for boardgamers) there exists a simple procedure for making your own, — so that you can find out if the Austro Hungarian-Italian-Spanish Navy could have beaten the Brazilian-Argentinian-American Navy in 1917.

The action takes place on one of those chopped up game maps which come in six separate pieces so that you can move bits of it around should any of your ships threaten to sail off the edge of the board. The rules are simple to master, making it a good game for introducing a new recruit to the hobby into the pleasures of boardgaming, with a sequence of play which is basically fire, move and repair. Firing and movement are simultaneous with plotting taking place secretly, which is where the tension comes in as is usual with si-move games. With no terrain to worry about movement is fairly straight forward in that ships may move up to the limit of their movement allowance, with certain restrictions on acceleration and deceleration, and the number and placement of turns which can be made in the course of a move. Battleship counters representing single ships are allowed to stack four high, but screen units which represent groups of cruisers and destroyers are limited to one counter per hex.

Being able to fire depends on the visibility, which can fluctuate from turn to turn, and the range of your guns, and combat is resolved using two 2 - 12 tables, the Damage Point Table (DPT) and the Combat Result Table (CRT). The attack strength of a firing ship, which may be modified by the range and other considerations, is calculated then two dice are rolled with the result being cross-referenced with the modified attack strength on the DPT. This yields the number of damage points obtained which are then compared with the target ship's defense strength to produce the combat ratio used on the CRT. The dice are then rolled again and the results list the actual damage inflicted on the target. Firing strength is affected by such considerations as facing, previously accrued damage, other ships firing at the same target, and if the firing ship is itself under attack.

Damage comes in the usual SPI fashion for naval games — one can suffer 'G' (gun) damage which either halves or eliminates your ability to fire, or 'S' (speed) damage which has similar effects on your movement capabilities. In the damage control phase ships have a 50% chance of repairing 'G' damage, and a 33 1/3% chance of removing 'S' damage. This ability is limited however to the defense strength of the ship, e.g. a ship with a defense strength of 5 could remove five separate increments of damage, but if at any time the damage is allowed to accumulate to a state of 2G2S the ship is deemed to be a wreck with the damage control parties overwhelmed. It is also possible for a ship to explode, but this is a rare event reflecting the designer's view that in general dreadnoughts could sustain tremendous amounts of damage and still stay afloat.

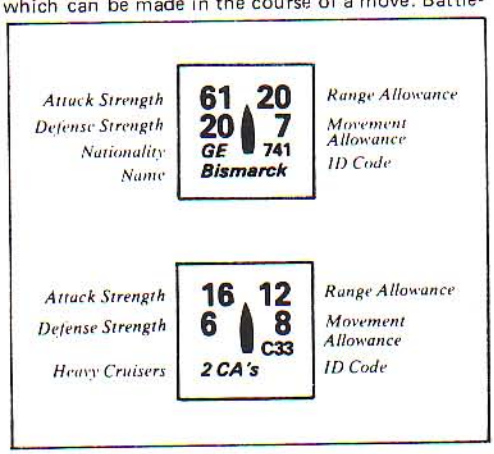
Other rules cover such things as torpedo attacks, secondary battery fire, smoke screens, radar, the position of the sun, and other assorted esoteria which might affect a naval battle. As previously mentioned a considerable portion of the rules deal with the creation of campaign games as well as listing some seven historical scenarios.

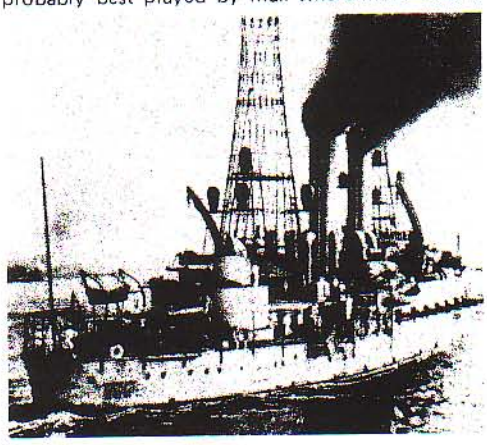
Victory is based mainly on a point system in which you obtain points each time you inflict damage on the enemy, the rewards rising steeply once a ship's damage control level is reached. A couple of scenarios differ in that they are concerned with moving, or preventing a force escaping off a designated map edge. Generally it is a good system which accurately gauges each players performance. However the game system can be wildly dependant on luck (as big gun naval battles often were), and it is therefore better suited to large fleet actions than to individual ship to ship duels, for the luck element will then, in all probability, even itself out. The drawback to such things as the Jutland scenario, with over 80 units in play, will be the amount of book keeping required, and this is probably best played by mail where more time is available, or as a multi-player game, which can be great fun if only for the confusion it produces. For normal face to face encounters a force of between six to ten battleships per side gives a better game.

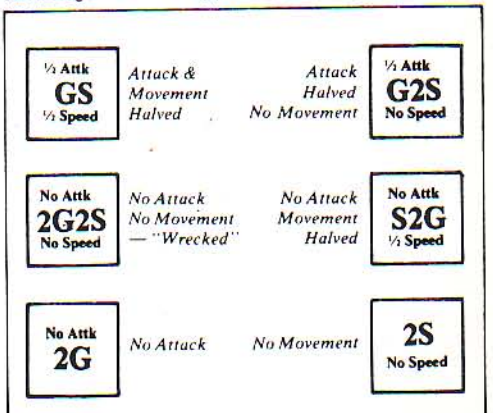
What are the tactics to remember as you sail into battle? Well of course each scenario presents it's own problems but certain guidelines can be recommended. First think long and hard before splitting your fleet into separate squadrons however tempting it might appear. It is rare that the tactical considerations of separate squadrons will coincide allowing them to act in conjunction, and one will invariably find itself confronted by the whole enemy force. This concentration usually takes the form of closing to minimum range on one of the detached squadrons so that the attack factor of each firing ship is either doubled or trebled with a corresponding increase in the possibility of inflicting heavy damage. Of course this effects both sides equally, but a player who has all his ships attack strengths so enhanced will naturally gain a distinct advantage over an opponent who divided his fleet as only half his ships are at close range.

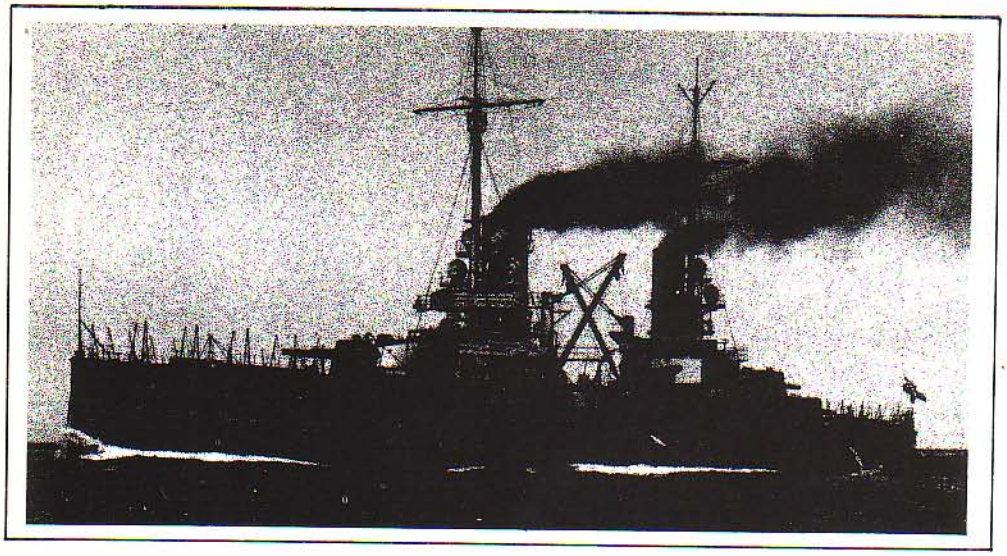
If you outnumber the enemy make sure you engage every one of his vessels, for a ship under fire suffers adverse adjustments on the DPT, and concentrate your best ships and the extra ones against his weaker units. These are easier and quicker to get rid of and it allows you to bring larger concentrations of fire against his better armoured ships later on with more chance of hurting them. A useful tactic to use in conjunction with this is the 'soak off' attack in which you employ ships which are suffering '1G' damage, and whose attack factor is therefore halved, or your least powerfully gunned ships, (such as the older German battleships at Jutland) to fire against the strongest enemy units. The idea being not particularly to hit them, although of course you might be lucky, but rather to allow you to fire two, three, or even more, of your most powerful units against a single target, hoping to overwhelm it in the space of a single fire phase, giving the enemy no chance of carrying out any damage control.

If on the other hand you are outnumbered try to use your destroyers to shield your battleships from *part* of the enemy strength by employing a smoke screen, thus reversing the situation for a while, and let the exposed portion of his fleet suffer the disadvantages of the inferior side, if only for a turn. Clever use of such smoke screens will frequently split the enemy into two — in effect making them into separate squadrons with it's opportunity to close for a killing. Also a player who finds he is outnumbered will usually discover a compensating advantage — he may be fortunate enough to outrange the enemy in which case he should endeavour to keep the action at long distance, hoping on the odd turn to be able to hit without any chance of reply. Alternatively he might hold a distinct speed advantage over his opponent, which, with careful









manoeuvring, can result in a concentration being made against part of the enemy battle fleet.

When you succeed in hitting an enemy ship continue to fire at it in preference to fresh targets, endeavouring to push its damage level up to 2G2S before damage control can remove the hit. This particularly applies to vessels with speed damage, which is harder to remove, and which will tend to become detached from the main body of the enemy fleet giving your opponent all kinds of nasty problems. Naturally keep a check on targets which are approaching the limit of their damage control capability because once this is exceeded, and damage starts mounting, so too, do the victory points you gain with each hit.

Protect your own damaged ships by turning them away from the enemy line, blanketing them behind a smoke screen while you attempt to carry out repairs. Try to keep your own fleet between your cripples and the enemy in order to prevent him from closing with them. Should you have the choice between removing gun or speed damage always roll for the latter first for if you are successful the damaged ship can attempt to flee the scene, but if instead you remove the 'G' damage the chances are that you will eventually be caught by the enemy and pounded into submission. Ships nearing the limit of their damage control level should clear off out of the battle. Far better to lose a small portion of your offensive power than the loss of large numbers of victory points should the vessel remain.

Remember that screen units are highly vulnerable, and that they can also provide a good harvest of victory points if caught without capital ships to protect them, so keep them out of harm's way. In a fleet action destroyers are better employed putting smoke screens round your damaged heavy units, or in trying to divide the enemy fleet into two as described above, rather than in desperate torpedo attacks against the enemy battle line which will rarely succeed in the face of massed secondary battery fire. Torpedo attacks are difficult to execute in this game system and virtually the only time they are profitable is when your opponent is behind on points and is desperately trying to close so that you can predict his course with some chance of accuracy. Cruisers can be used as 'soak off' units if absolutely necessary but this can lead to trouble for their defense strengths are naturally weak and the enemy may well knock them out. Unless their presence is vital it is best to run them out of danger at the very beginning of the battle rather than risk losing the victory points on their demise.

Of course, when you actually get embroiled in action, you soon discover that many of the tactics and considerations discussed above are diametrically opposed to each other, and that you are continually having to make compromises between them. It is this constant battle between conflicting interests which provides the game with its entertainment factor, and as every playing of each scenario can be different, even a constantly played situation will often provide a different set of problems to be solved.

All this might seem sufficient to whet the appetite of any simulation orientated gamer — so why the warning at the start? Well to begin with many of the values assigned to the various battleships are, to say the least, a little controversial. Naval buffs, who spend hours arguing about the relative merits of each ship as it is, will shake their heads in amazement when comparing the factors of some of the vessels depicted in **Dreadnought.** The French battlecruisers "Dunkerque" and "Strasbourg", for example have bigger attack factors than the battleships "Richelieu" and "Jean Bart", which were of the same era and carried larger calibre guns and consequently fired a much heavier broadside. Slightly more difficult to detect, but more serious is the undoubted undervaluing of the whole British World War 1 Fleet. This could have been done to balance the game's main historical scenario — but it has been carried to such lengths that the odds are firmly on a German victory — try telling that to Reinhard Scheer! That German dreadnoughts were better protected than the British is of course widely acknowledged but surely not by the factor of 100% which the designer would have you believe. Also the generally larger British guns are rated below the inferior German calibres (and I know all about the disadvantages of lyddite charges). Further the range factors of many American and Japanese ships of first world war vintage are grossly overstated, and were American ships always so superior to their contemporaries? No I fear we must accept the fact that the designer did not make a good job of trying to sort out an admittedly tangled web of conflicting factors in producing his ship values. Those particularly incensed by this can of course try making up their own counters — they probably would have done so anyway.

Then we should examine the vexing question of arcs of fire. In the game you can fire over any intervening ships at targets which in all probability would have been masked. Now this subject of maintaining clear arcs of fire was one of the main tactical considerations in favour of the battleline against other sailing formations and as such it was an Admiral's prime concern. One of the advantages of crossing the 'T' was that the rear ships of the enemy line would have great difficulty in seeing their assailants, and, of course, only their bow guns would bear in any case. Yet all this is virtually ignored in **Dreadnought** apart from a slight adjustment to the die roll on the DPT to reflect bow or stern fire. This makes the optimum formation not the battleline but the battleblob, a grouping of ships round a central hex. A simple rule change can rectify this situation, but I know many people do not like tinkering with rules.

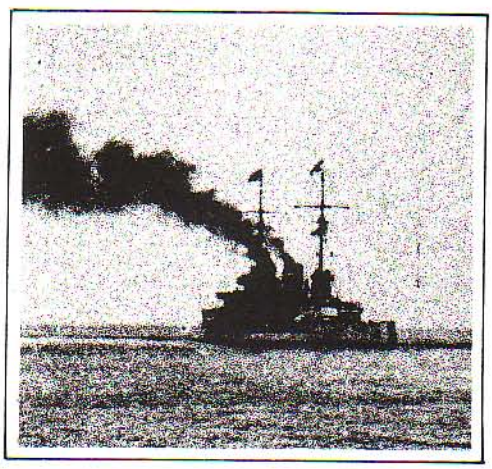
Next comes the problem caused by the complete absence of any form of command control in the scenarios which would make the combatants obey strategic common sense. Instead a player can order his fleet to its doom in an orgy of self destruction without even a nod in the direction of reality. Surely something like the preservation level system as used in **Frigate** could have been included? This problem is admittedly tackled in the campaign game, but the thought of Jellicoe and Scheer watching their vessels disappear beneath the waves without any apparent concern detracts from the game's major historical scenario.

Finally, mention must be made of the difficulty of actually sinking a ship. It is virtually impossible, as the rules stand, to have more than a minimal chance of sending a dreadnought to the bottom — which reflects, as I've mentioned before, the designer's contention that they were capable of sustaining tremendous degrees of damage. This is all very well, but I've seen so called wrecked ships stand several turns of fire, at minimum range, from eight to ten battleships without sinking. I suggest that once a ship reaches a state of "2G2S" it's defensive factor is halved and any 'E' result on the CRT be treated as a sinking, — normally one rolls again with an over 75% chance that the target won't explode.

The above are all design problems and, to it's credit, the game has few rules problems and none of these is of great import. Nowhere does it state what happens to secondary batteries when a ship sustains 'G' damage. The actual order in which one removes damage from a ship can have an effect, yet it does not state in the rules if 'G' damage must be removed before 'S' damage, or vice versa, or indeed if the player has a choice (this being the method I prefer).

Following such a catalogue of simulation type faults why do I enjoy the game so much that I urge you to find a copy and give it a try? Partly it's so you can experience the sensation of feeling that wonderful air of calm assurance you had, as you planned the utter destruction of the enemy fleet, slowly evaporating to absolute horror as you realise that fool of an opponent hasn't sailed north, as all logic said he must, but instead, has gone south, and is in fact about to cap your 'T'. It's the nervous waiting between completing your plot, which frequently becomes so intense that you can scarcely bear to wait any longer, to see where he's gone and how you can clobber him. Then the nightmare realisation that your biggest battleship has failed to obtain a hit at point blank range. Don't despair however, just as you are about to hurl the dice into the fire and take up Ludo or Ochi one of your destroyers, against all the odds, succeeds in torpedoing a whole column of the enemy's battleships. It's that marvellous feeling of elation when your longer ranged guns give the enemy a couple of broadsides without reply and your frantic opponent is forced to come charging onto your waiting guns. Above everything else it's because the game is so bloody exciting even when your ships are blowing up and you can't see the enemy for smoke.

Yes, in spite of its limitations, it does show you how Jellicoe could have lost the war in an afternoon, and it does so in a highly entertaining manner, so never mind what its critics say — Fear God and Dreadnought!



The following sources are acknowledged:
From The Dreadnought To Scapa Flow (five vols) by Arthur J Marder
The Battleship Era by Peter Padfield
Naval Battles Of The First World War by Geoffrey Bennett
Dreadnought by Richard Hough
The Strategy Of Sea Power by S W Roskill
Moves No23 and No26 by SPI

DREADNOUGHT scenarios:

GRAHAM WHEATLEY

Almost all of the real-life campaigns and battles have been beaten to death. And so, in a fit of insanity, I have cooked up the following what-if scenarios to grace your hex sheets:

Background: Dreadnought is a tactical level game of sea combat in the first half of the 20th century, in the Dreadnought era. Each counter represents one Dreadnought, two cruisers or five destroyers. Each game-turn represents 15 minutes of real-time.

Abbreviations: C= heavy cruiser; L= light cruiser; D= destroyer.

14.0 ADDITIONAL SCENARIOS

14.1 Falkland Islands 8th December 1914

ORDERS OF BATTLE & DEPLOYMENT

British Player:	hex/facing/speed
Invincible (191)	D0709/NE/6
Inflexible (192)	D0609/NE/6
C11	D0410/NE/5
L21	D0906/NE/6
German Player:	
C51	D1608/NE/5
L61	D1708/NE/5
L51	D1807/NE/5

GAME LENGTH: 16 game turns

SPECIAL RULES: The British C11 cruiser unit has a top speed of '5'.

BASE VISIBILITY: 12 hexes

VICTORY CONDITIONS: At least 2 German units must break sighting with no irreparable damage by game-turn 16. British must sink or wreck all German ships. If neither condition is met, the game is a draw.

14.2 Dogger Bank 24th January 1906

ORDERS OF BATTLE & DEPLOYMENT

British Player:	hex/facing/speed
Dreadnought (011)	D1602/N/5
L11	D1601/N/5
German Player:	
Hessen (701)	A1608/SE/4
C51	A1709/SE/4
D51	A1809/SE/4

GAME LENGTH: 20 game turns

BASE VISIBILITY: 8 hexes

VICTORY CONDITIONS: German player must exit the south or east sides of map F with the Hessen by the end of the scenario. The British player must wreck the Hessen (or sink it). If neither condition is met the game is a draw.

HISTORICAL NOTES: After the First World War broke out in late 1905 two small squadrons of ships met off Dogger Bank. The Germans, believing that their new pre-Dreadnought Hessen was unsinkable, sent it out into the North Sea for trials. But they had not reckoned with the Dreadnought, which was cruising in the area (I know, but I have to think of something!!)

14.3 Trafalgar 12th November 1914

ORDERS OF BATTLE & DEPLOYMENT

French Player:	hex/facing/speed
France (504)	E0812/NW/5
Paris (504)	E0913/NW/5
C11	E0713/NW/5
C12	E0811/NW/5
L11	E0712/NW/5
D11	E1013/NW/5
Spanish Player:	
Espana (951)	D1306/NE/5
Jaime I (952)	D1206/NE/5
Alfonso (953)	D1107/NE/5
C51	D1405/NE/5
L51	D1307/NE/5
D51	D1007/NE/5

BASE VISIBILITY: 10 hexes

GAME LENGTH: 12 game-turns

VICTORY CONDITIONS: Victory is based on point count, with the Spanish Player getting 10 extra victory points for each French dreadnought wrecked or sunk at the end of the scenario.

HISTORICAL NOTES (!): Let me see ... Oh, yes. Soon after Austria–Hungary's declaration of war, Spain entered the war, on the Central Powers' side. Because of the lack of troops any major conflict between Spain and France was likely to take place at sea. And so it happened.

14.4 The Falkland Campaign October-November 1914

Campaign Game

British Player:	
Force 1:	Force 2:
Australia (202)	C11
C11	L21
L11	L22
Force 3:	Force 4:
C11*	C11*
	C12
	L11

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WALLGAMING

C. MACLACHAN

For those of us without a spare room, board games would be easier to play and keep on playing, if we could hang them on the wall. The board itself, of course, presents no problems; you can suspend an S.P.I. map-sheet using plastic poster hangers. The trouble is to stick the counters to a vertical surface. I have heard of people who use Blu-tack, which ruins both counters and board eventually, and S.P.I. have been advertising magnetic strip, although not the sheet metal to put behind the map-sheet nor advice on how to fix such a sheet to your wall. Neither of these methods seems to suit back-printed counters. What is wanted is something which does not alter the appearance of either board or counters, and the cheaper and lighter the better.

With pleasure, then, and pride, I have to announce that this problem has been solved. Yes, solved! Now you can hang your games up, and leave them up, out of reach of children, small dogs, house-cleaners, rats and other vermin. First, you need a sheet of clear plastic to cover your board (Furnham Trading, of 3 Church Lane, Market Square, Wantage, Oxon., sell it by the yard – send them a S.A.E.). Second, to make the counters adhere to this smooth surface, wrap them in freezer film (also known as cling film and available at most supermarkets).

Wrapping the counters is a tedious and fiddly job, best done by cutting a quantity of film from the roll, smoothing it out on a chopping board and then, with a sharp knife, cutting out a piece about 1½ inches square for each counter. Lay the counter in the centre of this piece of film, fold in two opposite sides and smooth them together, then fold in the remaining ends. The smoother the folded surface, the better the adhesion on that side. You may have to rewrap a few counters which just will not stick at first, but once these teething troubles are over all the counters will fix themselves to the plastic overlay if pressed firmly, which means you need to hang the board against a flat, unyielding surface. Like a wall.

You can stack counters, because they will stick to each other, and because the film is transparent you can see both sides of a back-printed counter. I have had games hanging up literally for months, without mishap, and a friend of mine has also tried the idea with success. I verily believe that it will prove a boon to boardgamers everywhere, especially those who play solo or by mail. All I ask in return is that commercial organisations, when they recommend this method, acknowledge its inventor, and that gamers when they cast dice or pick chits invoke my name with honour as a friend to mankind?!

SIMPUBS BRIEFING

MALCOLM WATSON

WRITTEN JANUARY 4th 1980

Welcome to 1980, the start of a new decade and 'The Year Of The Chip! ..... or so we are led to believe. In our own case I hope most sincerely that it becomes just that with the lovable 'Superchip' swinging into action at last. As predicted the last issues of Moves, Phoenix and S&T were the first to go into the post courtesy of our various working programmes. An explanation of the codes and indicators to be found on your labels was sent out with these issues and we are now waiting for details of any corrections to be made on individuals subscriptions and or names/addresses. The main mail order programmes have been put through their initial tests and the errors that were detected have been corrected. We are now moving into the 'fine tuning' stage where we hope to adjust the programmes to enable them to deal with all of the strange things that can happen during the course of a mail order transaction.

It behoves me to bring two points to your attention, both of which are a declaration of procedure to be adopted when we go on stream. First, for all purposes including subscriber discounts, a subscription will be deemed to have expired at the point in time that the label for the last issue in that sub is created. From that point on, 'Bigbadchip' will discontinue giving subscriber discounts to the lapsed subscriber. With this in mind it will be evident that subscribers who wish to continue their subs must get their renewals to us on or before the date indicated on their expiry note. The second change affects orders that are underpaid. In the past it has been our practice to issue an invoice for the balance of an underpaid order, in future we will send as much of the order as is covered by the remittance received. The balance of your payment, if any, will be put into credit against your account. It is quite possible that this procedure will affect the subscriber discount given on an underpaid order since discounts will be worked out on the final invoice value. In all cases where we are obliged to implement this procedure we will use our discretion to ensure that the maximum number of items will be sent out with the minimum adverse effect on subscriber discounts. Of course if sufficient payment is made then none of this need concern you. As a postscript to this section, when we get the mail order off the ground we will no longer issue credit notes per se, rather we will maintain a credit balance (assuming there is one of course) against individual accounts. The current state of your balance will be shown on the delivery note that comes to you with each order.

The briefing feature in issue 22 contained a certain amount of gloom with regard to the situation at SPI, happily it looks like they are getting themselves back together at last. There has been a marked improvement in the service and co-operation that we are now getting from their shipping department. The last shipment received was almost

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