

COMPANY WEBLOG

ARCHIVE 2004

Including some material from 2002 and 2003.

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Ramses bagged a rabbit on 7 April 2002, while walking on a leash. He heard or smelled it, went into a crouch, dove into a stand of tall grass, flushed the bunny, then knocked it down in mid-jump and wrestled it to the ground. He then picked it up and trotted home, displaying it to Leanna and Isis but not letting them have it. SVC traded him a bowl of shrimp for the still alive and kicking rabbit, who is safely back home telling his family a really scary story about a new breed of much faster and smarter cat.

2003 was a really bad year for bad luck, lots of impossible errors by printers, but we had a voodoo priest do an exorcism and the problems went away. Until the Kyocera showed up.

From 10 Nov 03: I want to thank everybody who helped us meet the schedule for GMPA, CL27, and GK. Six weeks ago when Petrick wrote that plan, neither of us would have bet a nickle on it happening. There were just too many people who might let us down, fail to do their art/article/ship/review/test, surely one of them would drop the ball and we'd be left hanging. None of you did. Everybody performed, everybody did their part, often under adverse conditions. (I can think of an artist who broke his glasses and hand to squint through the last picture, a different artist who had his DSL go out and had to get us the stuff by hand.) Steve Jackson's review process went smoother than anyone could have hoped. Not only did nobody drop any balls, some of you threw in a few extras. John Sickles walked in from the cold with 10% of the Klingon book done for me. Matthew Francois did the ship data for GK. Jessica scrambled to send me a photograph to go with an article I once told her I'd never use, then used anyway. Ken Peters and Shawn Fisher scratched their heads when I told them I didn't have a clue what a Klingon tank looked like, and then turned in one that was so perfect it was obvious to everyone that the Kraz'Nik could never have been anything else. Tim Sargent has learned very quickly how to get his articles done. John Berg has proven to be an engaging writer. Andrew Harding (in Australia) reviewed things while everybody else was asleep and cut many review circuits in half. Nick Blank pulled a set of deck plans out of his ear in a week that look like he spent two years developing them. Bob Gilson reviewed gurps stuff until he couldn't see straight and gets the credit for making the SJG review process so smooth. Jeff Laikind pulled the last F&E cookies out of the fire after Nick baked the first couple of dozen to a golden brown. Guys, I couldn't have ever believed that every single one of you, including two dozen who didn't get listed, would have all done exactly what you were supposed to do at exactly the right time. But you did, and the victory in this nightmarish plan to get the rest of the year's products in stores for Christmas goes to all of you who helped.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, July 27, 2004 - 03:29 pm
TALES OF THE KYOCERA (executive summary)

We got the Kyocera 9520 in and installed. We started printing a couple of documents. So far, so good.

We needed to print about 90,000 pages for the initial shipments of a new product release. We ordered a huge pile of paper. Found out when we ordered it that it would take a week to get here. Ok, it gets here Monday 9am and we ship the product one week later Monday 4pm. What's to worry?

The paper arrived 11am Wednesday.

Printer specs said a Kyocera 9520 could churn out 33 pages

per minute when printing both sides of 11x17. Found out that this is true only when printing the same page over and over. Printing collated books it cannot do better than 24 numbered pages per minute. Not much difference but with 1200 books to print that meant a 25% increase in print time. We calculated that we had 30 minutes to spare in a 48-hour print job to get the books to the bindery on time Friday. Vendor said don't run the machine more than 12 hours a day or it will self-destruct. He also noted we were running 33% of the monthly capacity in 10% of the month and said "that's just wrong".

During actual production, everything went wrong in a continuing random rolling sequence and this continued through Sunday.

Software problems erupted causing it to print random uncollated pages, stop unexpectedly, and do other dumb things. We finally found a way to print collated books but it was one of the slower ways (slower to give the commands, print speed the same). The software to talk to the on-board hard disk wouldn't work since it had never been updated for Macs. We could print without it, but it was more aggravating.

The hole puncher was set for European paper and parts had to be ordered in from out of town to change it to US paper. The parts did not arrive until today, leaving us to hand-punch hundreds of books.

The vendor had never seen anybody print 90,000 pages in 4 days and ran out of toner cartridges as did his supplier. More arrived just now.

The 9520 has 3 trays and automatically switches to the next tray when it needs more paper. Except that it doesn't switch trays, meaning we had to print smaller quantities per batch and reload paper often even while full bins remained untapped. Software engineers say they should find the solution any time now. Maybe. They hope. (It's now 2009 and we're still waiting for the software engineers to fix this.) If we sent one run (two hours) to the top tray, then sent a second run to the #2 tray, the second run wouldn't run since the printer didn't answer the phone for two hours and the computer gave up.

Every time it prints anything, it prints an extra blank page and counts it against the service contract. Nobody at Kyocera knows why it does this, but we eventually fixed it.

The 9520 has never printed a single book while left alone in the building. Not one, not ever. It will run without a bleep for two hours while I listen from down the hall (at least sometimes) but whenever we leave the building the paper jams, or we get a software error, or a paper jam, or something else goes wrong within seconds. Once I heard its alarm going off as I was literally turning the key in the lock to go home.

These are all things that can be solved, but not overnight, not on weekends. Some of them are still unsolved but we feel sure that they will get solved by next month.

Bindery. The plan was to print the 1200 books and truck them across town to a big print shop and pay them \$200 to bind the booklets. They said "no problem" and ran a test that worked. An hour later they called, said their equipment could not bind the books, and wished us good luck finding someone who could. One printer refused, another said he would only bind the books if we threw away the 90,000 pages and paid him to print them over, another finally said he would do it for \$330. We took it to him this morning. He called back in two hours asking us to come over. Due to a funny miscommunication nobody told me for two hours. When I got the word I raced to the bindery to find that their machine was literally tearing every second book into small pieces and, having not heard from me, they continued running (and ruining) books until I got there. After assorted recriminations, they offered to run the books through the stapler but not the folder and hand fold them for an extra \$400. After some arguing, they agreed to let me stay in their shop and fold them for \$0 and then they would trim them for us as part of the original quote. I spent the day folding books and noticing that their bindery machinery literally broke and required a mechanic to fix it every 30 minutes for four hours. They don't ever want to bind books again. But not to worry, they said, they guarantee that the job will be done

before anyone leaves. Except that everyone left at 5pm with 300 books finished, 300 books destroyed, and 600 books stapled and folded but not trimmed. We got the rest of the books just a little while ago, along with a bill for the job being harder than they expected. The whole point of the "have somebody bind the first 600 then bind the rest ourselves as we need them" was because of the huge amount of work needed to get a lot of books done in a short time. It actually took more employee time to have outsiders do them. In future, we will bind them all ourselves.

By Steve Cole on Monday, October 04, 2004 - 07:21 pm

WEBLOG July 04: Got home from Origins and jumped into heavy work finishing R9. We put the large scale map on the cart on the 13th.

The new kyocera industrial laser printer showed up on the 14th. The learning curve was a brick wall as we had to trick it into doing things that it said it would do. But we made progress nonetheless and by while I was ready to dyanmite the thing at more than one point in time it finally worked for us.

The master rulebook was updated but we found that the printer who did the first two batches had used two different kinds of binding, so players who bought the wire bound versions had to figure out whether they had 19 or 21 holes.

Desperately needed to work on GURPS stuff but the Kyocera ate all of the time not used on R9.

By Steve Cole on Monday, October 04, 2004 - 07:25 pm

Weblog August: Most of the month was taken up printing and shipping the Klingon G1 gunboat deck plans. Work got serious on planetary operations. I went to State Guard summer camp.

By Steve Cole on Monday, October 04, 2004 - 07:28 pm

Weblog Sept: Most of the month went into Planetary Operations. Just barely saw the start of work on Strategic Operations. Kyocera is running like a champ until we discover something else that it won't do (even if the salesman said it would). SVC signed out of command of Company C 1-39 military police after a very successful three-year command tour.

Monthly update (October 1st): things are going well, but everything is running behind schedule. SVC is almost over bronchitis, has just finished Planetary Operations, is trying to avoid getting dragged into Strategic Operations, and really needs to work on GURPS Romulans. Petrick is trying to get the warehouse squared away (been too busy to declutter since May). Leanna is keeping busy printing master rulebooks. We bought a forklift for the warehouse (it's a little hand cranked job but it goes up to our highest shelf) so we can use the higher shelves. Leanna and Petrick threw away a ton of empty boxes that had been on the top shelf since we moved into the warehouse (the original cartons for all of the furniture had been "stored" there but nobody knows why). The Kyocera is working fine, printing new copies of Module R9 and the Master Rulebook as needed. We spent two entire days trying to get the Planetary Operations rulebook into the right format but the first copy just came out of the printer.

By Steve Cole on Monday, October 04, 2004 - 07:37 pm

Weblog October:

1st: sometime around here we ordered some of those 25th anniversary patches to sell.

2nd: serious work on printing planetary operations. Leanna stopped SVC from working on Strategic Operations until we're done with Gurps Romulans. Petrick is finalizing C5 Magellanics. Serious work on reorganizing warehouse, using new forklift to move some surplus inventory to higher shelves.

3rd: Shrinkwrapped planetary operations. Got the andro tournament ship test started. Ramses entered detox program for addiction to catnip. Leanna is thinking about buying a 12x18" laminator.

4th: started shipping planetary operations. Sales are a little slow but this seems to be a recent pattern. What used to be huge

first day sales and then tiny restocks for years has evolved into disappointing first day sales and then serious restocks for several months. Spent most of my (SVC's) day going through every part of the website and making lists of things for Joe to do. Talked to Chuck about getting the F&E Large Scale Maps finalized. Leanna's TIVO units arrived.

By Steve Cole on Monday, October 11, 2004 - 10:56 am

Apparently I'm going to need people to remind me to update this....

5th: major meeting to discuss future of GURPS product line. Press release to follow. Shipments of planetary operations are going well. Sales are typical of an F&E product, but reorders of SFB products are twice the sales of PO. Continued work on web site.

6th: Continued doing a lot of work on the web site, checking every link and Emailing Joe Butler to do updates. Also extracted the old G1 files from the old software and started creating G2. I began seriously reviewing the C5 project as it was clearly off the rails.

7th: Petrick did the new F1 SSD for for the re-release in January. Did more review and analysis of C5 and the problems were worse than first thought. Integrated all of the files from J2, R7, R8, R9, and R10 into G2. Continued working with Joe Butler to update web site.

8th: Worked on web site with Joe Butler. Reviewed C5 with Petrick and posted two possible fixes for Mass Drivers for over-weekend test. Put the 25th anniversary patch on the cart. Received restock shipment of miniatures from 4G. Posted fixes to the F&E 2xSB issue and began discussion.

9th: Worked on F1 rulebook. Shrinkwrapped restock games. Worked all day on mail orders for Planetary Operations to ship Monday the 11th. Continued web site updates and work on F&E 2xSB issue.

10th: first Sunday in months that I stayed home all day, no trip to office to check email. Checked BBS from home. Continued reading Magellanic files. Did some work on the F&E 2xSB issue. Told players if they wanted model kits to go find me somebody who would do them as McDaniel never replies to email and hasn't sent me any ships to sell in a year.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, October 14, 2004 - 07:19 pm

Update 14 October: been a busy few days.

It was time for the annual "ok, the schedule is a mess, what's really going to get printed" meeting (Monday the 11th) and a lot of stuff got shoved back to next year. Worse, the C5 playtest reports said it just wasn't going to happen and would be delayed several months.

Deal with Steve Jackson was made to continue GURPS stuff, throwing away pretty much the entire inventory (since G3e stuff won't sell any more) and print new G4e versions of it. That entailed sending GURPS Romulans to next year.

Leanna's mother had a bad week, and isn't getting better. She's being moved (next week) to "assisted living" which means a week of packing up and moving her stuff. Not sure how much SVC and LMC will be in the office.

Some good things happened as well.

Lots of warehouse cleanup. We had been busy since April and a lot of "I promise I will think about what to do with this LATER" boxes were all over the place, most of them unlabeled. We went through most of those boxes this week. Some were as simple as "put this back where it goes" and some were as simple as "defective copies of CL28, count them, write them off, throw them out" and some boxes were "Geez, anybody know why this box has six copies of CL27 in it?" and some were "what the heck IS this stuff?". We also had several boxes of incoming stuff that got stuck in odd places and not even labeled.

Every time you do an assembly line run of any product you end up with a handful of defective parts that were set aside. In theory, you count them and do a "spoil ticket" and write them off and toss them. In practice, nobody wanted to bother with writing off one or two copies of five parts, so the stuff just kind of

accumulated. We went to an astoundingly simple system of having a box on one of the shelves marked "defective, count and toss" and threw all the defective stuff in it and today (14th) it got full (mostly from stuff set aside from assembly runs six months ago) so we counted and tossed it. Really cheers Leanna up to throw stuff out and given her mother's case, she needed it.

It has been a very big mail order week with Planetary Operations shipping.

The driver's seat in my car broke (defective welding) which is taking a week to repair (and the automaker is "generously" paying half of the cost of their screw up and sticking me with \$600 worth of repairs). Really annoying to not have a car and have to ride with Leanna who works fewer hours than I do.

Did an updated rulebook for F1. Well, the first draft of it. Leanna plans to release it in February.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, October 19, 2004 - 11:53 am

Update 19 Oct: It's been a pretty awful few days. Leanna's mother has been steadily weakening and it was decided to move her from a retirement hotel to assisted living (which costs twice as much but you have nurses and staff who check on you around the clock). This is complicated by the fact that the place we're moving her to won't be ready until January so we have to temporarily move her to another facility. Packing up some of her stuff for storage (to move again in January) and some to move now is more complicated than moving it all to the same place right now. Even worse, Margaret suffered a collapse and went into the hospital and is expected to be there for a week or more.

Busy mail order period. We love the money but it's work work work!

Arguments continue over the Magellanics. That won't be going anywhere until Draft-4 is ready, and we won't start writing it until after CL30.

Cat is out of the bag on the F&E warbook but at least there isn't a schedule for it so far.

I see emails of the GURPS staff arguing in ancient urdu over some obscure rules point. Wish I had a clue what that stuff means, but I know in my gut that GPD4e, GK4e, and GR4e will all go to press without my comprehending their rules.

Fallout continues from the schedule upheaval. The F&E guys didn't figure out until today that their "February products" won't happen anytime near February.

I finished going through all 26 of the "misc junk" boxes that moved into the building with us in Jan 99, reducing them to 4 boxes of stuff we still have to do. Now I have to go through the dozen or so "current" junk boxes, then start over going through the stuff I can't just put back in a box.

Still waiting for my car to be fixed. Joined a DVD rental club and the first one is now four days over due (it actually never arrived because somebody in the post office stole it). We finally got the network for our three TIVO units to work and have found that TIVO has revolutionized our lives. Used to be that Leanna either couldn't leave the house until she set tapes for that night or she had to be home in time to set them. Now with TIVO season passes it's all automatic. The wireless network is SLOW to transfer shows from the two backup units to the main 60" TV unit so we have to remember to set a show transferring before we go to bed and another one before we leave in the morning. For some bizarre reason, Leanna programs all my cop shows into the unit in the room with the exercise bike and refuses to transfer them to the Den. I wonder if she's trying to tell me something?

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, October 27, 2004 - 09:18 am

Wednesday 27 Oct: Gosh, a week since the last update. Somebody forgot to remind me.

Work continues on CL30; the fiction by Loren Knight is very good. The sculptor doing the starbase and freighters is 10 days late and doesn't return phone calls so I wonder if he's in the hospital with his gall bladder again? Module G2 sits on the conference table with nobody doing any work on it (since we're all working on CL30) and the F&E Large Scale Map is being checked (slowly as it keeps crashing the computers). The 25th

anniversary patches arrived yesterday.

The lack of progress continues to be due to Leanna's mother. She finally got out of the hospital yesterday but she's weak and unhappy. Leanna and I spent much of Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday packing up her stuff for storage and setting up her new apartment.

Plans continue to evolve for the G4e versions of GURPS Prime Directive.

My car finally got fixed and the second set of missing rental DVDs showed up. Leanna is learning more and more about that Tivo can do.

John Sickels stopped by last night (and will again this morning) on a business trip. Nice to chat about the future GURPS stuff with him.

Joe Butler has done a ton of work to get the website revamped and jazzed up. Andrew Harding appointed Omega Answer Rapporteur.

The Magellanic bloodbath continues. Work is under way on the secret project.

By Steve Cole on Friday, October 29, 2004 - 12:59 pm

It only takes one honest man to bring down a thief. That twerp who illegally put copyrighted SFB stuff on his web site last Feb (along with the note that he knew it was in violation of copyrights and hoped it would really piss ADB off) did it again. Both times, his ISP was contacted and smacked him hard and removed the items.

I just don't get it.

1. There are so many legal things that SFB web sites can do, what's the big attraction of doing something illegal?

2. If you do something (legal or not) there wasn't any point if players don't know you did it. But if you start telling players about the illegal thing you did, can you really assume that there will not be a single honest person among those you contact?

By Steve Cole on Saturday, October 30, 2004 - 07:07 pm

30 Oct: I have spent most of the last 8 days moving Leanna's mother's stuff, some from her old apartment to her new one and some to storage until the eventual new one is available in January. Leanna's mother (Margaret) is increasingly frail and needed to move to "assisted living" where there are people who will take care of her since she is beyond taking care of herself.

What that means is that I've been in the office an hour or two per day and a lot hasn't gotten done. The F&E large scale map should have been checked this week but I just didn't have time. In my one hour per day I mostly just tried to handle Email and the BBS and a few deadlines that were looming. We got the laminator but haven't had time to unpack it.

Somebody caught me in a good mood today and for my one hour in the office I did an index for CapLog 18-29 (been working on it for years) and the color painting guides for the Feds and Orions. It was easier than trying to do Captain's Log stuff with Petrick since he came to work today in a Halloween costume and I just couldn't take seriously a caveman in a leopard skin trying to explain to me the questions he has about the Unity Update. The last of Margaret's stuff got moved today so I should be back in the office full time for a while.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 02, 2004 - 11:25 am

2 Nov: Snow in Amarillo, about four or five inches and still coming down. Freezing in the warehouse so we won't ship mail orders today (but then we normally ship only M-W-F).

Working on CL30. Loren sent Joe an icon for the site but my browser can't see it. I remain baffled about this.

Discussion continues on buying an in-house color printer, with the choice between \$2K for one that does 9x11 and \$4k for one that does 12x18. Depends on whether we can think of anything that size to print and sell.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 09, 2004 - 04:13 pm

9 Nov: Been a week. We continue working on CL30. Waiting for cover art from Ted. Last Friday we processed our 10,000th

invoice since the corporation opened so we all went out to lunch.

The fundamental problem with the company remains man-hours. We just don't have enough, so there is always a backlog of things not done. Every now and then we realize that something important hasn't been done for a while, like updating the web site (which shut down the company for a week while we generated new information), or sending out press releases for new products. As noted, when we find one of these things we didn't do because we didn't have time, we do it but then we're behind on other things. I don't have anywhere near as much CL30 done as I should.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 09, 2004 - 04:13 pm
STAR FLEET COMMUNIQUE
FROM: AMARILLO DESIGN BUREAU, INC.
TO: GAME WHOLESALERS, RETAILERS, AND PUBLICATIONS
DATE: 10 NOV 2004
RE: NEW PRODUCT, MODULE F1 JINDARIANS
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Amarillo Design Bureau Inc. is pleased to announce that the new edition of Star Fleet Battles Module F1 Jindarians will be released on 21 March 2005. The stock number will be 5614 and the retail price will be \$15.95; these are unchanged from the previous edition shipped in 1994 and long out of print. The product will ship to mail orders on 28 March 2005 and will be available for pre-orders on the web site about the first of March. The Jindarians are a race which has been in space for over 100,000 years. They live in microgravity and use hollow asteroids for their larger spaceships. They have no central government, but operate in dozens (perhaps hundreds?) of independent "caravans". Each caravan moves where and when it wants, usually moving into an unoccupied star system, mining minerals and metal ores, processing these, then selling them to nearby occupied planets. Some caravans avoid conflict with other races, but some simply move into any system they want and you can either fight them or leave. The Jindarians ignore borders between stellar empires and regard such political constructs as irrelevant to their operations. Caravans accumulate wealth and asteroid ships until too large for the Jindavo to control, at which point they divide into two or three caravans. Sometimes, the military forces of an empire will drive a particularly disruptive caravan out of their territory. The original rules from the 1994 edition are being revised even now, and testing of those revisions will be complete in time to ship this product on schedule. Those SFB veterans who want to take part in the playtesting of this or other products can contact rules@starfleetgames.com for info. Cover art for this product is available from sales@starfleetgames.com and can be used in wholesaler catalogs. It is not authorized for use on web shopping carts.

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By Steve Cole on Wednesday, November 10, 2004 - 07:37 pm
One of the frustrating things about this business is that, now and then, a customer asks us "send me an Email when XXX happens". This is usually something like "Let me know when

Cory McDaniel sends some model kits" or "Let me know when you do a Lyran Battleship mini" or "Let me know if you decide to reprint Captain's Log #14" or "Let me know when you have 70 large scale maps on order". Today it was somebody who wanted us to email him when we have assigned the ISBN for a product coming out next year.

The problem is, there is no practical way to do such personal notifications. When a crate of model kits arrives, is there some sensor field that detects them and launches a pop up window on my computer that says "notify this email address that model kits came in"? I haven't seen it. When we do the cover for a new product I walk down the hall, get the ISBN book, sign for the next number, copy it onto a piece of scratch paper, walk back to my office, and type it into the graphics program. Is there some computer program running in the background that says "Hey, Steve is typing an ISBN. I gotta notify that guy!" Not that I have ever heard of.

So, what do we do? We tell people how to get the info for themselves. We tell them to check the cart every month or so and see if models or lyran battleships show up. We suggest that they ask us about the time covers will be done for the ISBN. We tell everybody in Captain's Log what happened in the last six months. To date, nobody has ever said "well, you jerks are just mean and nasty people because you won't give me a personal notification". Until today. Now, there's a guy I'll make a note to never do business with.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 16, 2004 - 01:48 pm
16 Nov: Not sure I intended this to be a Tuesday update, but here I am...

Still working on CL30. Had a problem with the art being the wrong size and Ted's new spam filter stopped word from getting to him that we needed a new version. Paul Scott hasn't sent in his article. Petrick has spent 3 entire days on Unity. But it is coming together.

One frustrating part is that two weeks ago I figured CL30 would be done by now. So whenever somebody asked me to do this or discuss that or negotiate this or approve that, I said "contact me on the 15th when CL30 is done" and they did and they're all upset to be told "try again on the 22nd".

This is a common thing. We often (truthfully!) tell people we're in a middle of a project and will talk to them on XXX day. Problem is, all of them assume they are first in line (even when told they are not) and sometimes we don't get to the end of the list of promises before we lock down in the next project. When CL30 is finished, I have the following "first on the list" items....

F&E Large scale map. Players have been waiting for two months for this.

Module C5 revised rules for playtest. We've spent so much time and money on this we need to finish it.

Federation commander playtest pack. We're betting the company on this and it should obviously be first.

Module F2 playtest pack. This one is easier to fix than the Mags and should obviously be done first, right?

GURPS Romulans first complete draft so we can get the data we need to order art and final elements.

GPD4e and GK4e which need to start printing about Christmas.

Year end inventory management, bookkeeping, warehouse reorganization. Family commitments, long unfulfilled promises to take over dad's paperwork and finish Margaret's moving paperwork.

Playtest packs for the SFBF expansions.

Module F1 playtest pack since this is coming out in March.

Module G2 which was promised for Christmas.

A couple of other things I don't remember.

The secret project should reach first complete draft by Christmas and will then become one of the two top priorities.

Parents continue to take more time than Leanna and I have and less time than they deserve. I had to spend 40 minutes in a car yesterday in order to get to my folks and do two minutes of problem solving. Leanna's mother insisted that we do the laundry

run today on the way TO lunch rather than after lunch and met us at the door all ready to get in the car and go to lunch with us. It was a pleasant trap to be caught in as for the last month she hasn't felt good enough to get out of bed, let alone good enough trick us into letting her buy lunch.

Ramses caught another rabbit and has been chowing down on "the food God meant me to eat" and is full of himself. And full of rabbit.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 23, 2004 - 06:53 pm

23 Nov: I really didn't intend this log to be a tuesday project, but here we are again.

Work continues on CL30 and is nearly over. We're getting very close to done. Tomorrow should finish it, then we'll all read it on Thanksgiving and then we can print it friday and hopefully have a thousand of them done before we have to start shipments Monday.

Had something unusual happen today. A game store called us (one in Georgia) and said that one of our rangers had walked in and asked to do a demo. He did one and got a huge crowd of ex-SFB players who quickly picked up the game again. The store owner said he had emptied three of my wholesalers of SFB products this morning and asked nicely if he could buy the stuff he couldn't find directly from us and have it shipped today. We were able to do so (and it was a bigger order than most wholsaler restocks).

We gotta get more of these ranger guys to work out there. Tomorrow morning I'm going to ask Leanna what bonuses we can give people who accomplish such things as this.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, November 25, 2004 - 04:21 pm

25 Nov, Thanksgiving. We all met down here (en route to or from holiday dinners) to swap pages (Petrick and I each took half of CL30 home last night) and discuss plans. We'll lock the design tomorrow by 10am and have copies coming out the printer by noon. It's going to take over 40 hours for the Kyocera to print just the copies for the first round of wholesale shipments, during which we'll find time for nearly 10 hours of book binding. Plus shrinkwrapping and packing and shipping. We're all excited. It's the biggest run done to date (16 cases of paper will be consumed).

By Steve Cole on Thursday, November 25, 2004 - 04:35 pm

HAPPY THANKSGIVING to everyone!

By Steve Cole on Friday, November 26, 2004 - 03:51 pm

Procedure for doing any given book of any given product.

Do it (text, graphics, etc.)

print the "draft copy".

Petrick proofread

SVC proofread

LMC proofread some pages

Make fixes.

Special cases fixes (e.g., SSD-vs-rule-vs-MS-C-vs-SIT)

For each section, spell check, search-and-replace double spaces, fix links manager (unlink text, auto-link graphics).

Print the "final pagemaker draft".

Check the two printouts to see that all marked changes were made and were made without making more mistakes.

Fix anything that needs fixing.

Reprint pages as needed.

Lock the book (no further changes).

Convert to Kyocera format.

Print one copy, known as the "Kyocera draft".

Check against final draft.

Fix problems and reprint pages as needed.

Print Mass Quantities "Samantha"

Bind books on "Daniel"

shrinkwrap into bundles

pack wholesaler orders into cartons.

Stack on dock.

Hand over to UPS.

By Steve Cole on Monday, November 29, 2004 - 02:52 pm

Thought on the Kyocera's effect on the production of games...

Products with books printed in Dallas (53):

BS, AM, C1, C2, C4, D3, E2, J, J2, K, M, O1, O2, O3, O4, P6, R1, R2, R3, R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R10, S1, S2, T, W, X, Y, CL18, CL19, CL20, CL21, CL22, CL23, CL24, CL25, CL26, CL27, CL28, CL29, Tac, CDH, TR, F&E, AO, CO, FO GPD, GK, GMPA

Products with books printed by Kyocera (6):

C3, R9, CL30, PO, GDP, MRB

In 90 days, we'll add...

GPD4e, GK4, GR, F1, G2 which (with deletion of GPD3e and GK3e) will make the score 51-11

In a year, things could be really strange. Let's say in an extreme case that five products run out of print (46-16), that we do the F&E stuff over (41-21), that we do eight new products (41-29), and reprint caplogs 10-17 (41-37) and Cadet Handbook (41-38).

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 30, 2004 - 10:41 am

I was asked about the Kyocera....

WOULD YOU DO IT AGAIN, KNOWING WHAT YOU DO NOW?

Absolutely! We'd do it again because of all the reasons we did it in the first place. Of course, knowing what I know now I could avoid a ton of expensive mistakes...

Once we got over the learning curve, we've found that we can actually print a book on the Kyocera for a per-each price that isn't much more than the 3000-copy unit price from Dallas. Considering storage space, tying up cash, and buying more copies than we could sell in a reasonable time, the Kyocera books actually cost less.

WILL IT BREAK EVEN FOR YOU?

It already has in the sense that doing business the old way we'd have more money tied up in books stacked in the warehouse than we spent on the Kyocera and Fastbinder. We needed more C3 SSD books and would have had to spend a thousand bucks on a minimum print run of replacement books, which would wipe out the profit on that product for a year or two. Instead, we printed the 50 books we needed for this quarter. We will run out of Basic Set and Module M sometime in the next 1-2 years and those are expensive books to print (when calculating total dollars for a pallet load of books). Being able to print them as needed from the Kyocera would avoid tying up a lot of money in a five-year supply of Basic Set or a ten-year supply of Module M.

HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THROWING AWAY PRINTED BOOKS, USING THE KYOCERA TO PRINT NEW ONES AS NEEDED, TO SAVE WAREHOUSE SPACE AND INVENTORY TAXES.

We have considered this and may do it in the case of sold very old stuff printed by TFG that we have entire pallets full of copies but sell only a few a year. While it would in theory save inventory taxes and insurance, warehouse space isn't really the issue. The warehouse is pretty full and under the old way of doing business we'd be overfull by now. But under the Kyocera Pathway, we aren't bringing in much new stuff (covers, counters) while the older stuff (june 04 and before) continues to flow out of the warehouse at the expected rate.

In theory, we could look at the sales-vs-inventory figures and in some cases throw out anything more than a five-year supply, knowing that with the Kyocera when that supply runs out we would never really be out of anything. This would, in theory, free up some space. However, you don't have empty space in the warehouse to admire the empty space, but so you can move around (not a problem) or so you can stock something new. For example, if we wanted to launch a sideline business stocking something to sell to the non-gaming local market (say, spare

parts for photo copiers) we could create space by doing this.

Another possibility is to pick a book, throw away all of them, and print a new edition which doesn't have the mistakes in it. This is a pretty radical thing and while in theory you might make a case that it would work for this or that product, it's a pretty scary concept. To actually make it pay, you'd need to know you'd sell a bunch of "replacement books" to people who bought the original printing. It might make sense with the uber-fanatical F&E players, or it might not.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, November 30, 2004 - 11:00 am

30 November: I really am not trying to make a habit of doing the weekly post on Tuesdays, but it worked out that way. I was going to do it yesterday but decided to wait for Tuesday just because....

Anyway, CL30 is done. The first shipments have gone out and the rest are being printed. The Kyocera is churning out books at the rate of 12 per hour and we can bind 12 books in 15 minutes. When Leanna shows up in a few minutes she can bind what I've printed since I got here at 7am. I don't normally come in that early but I did today to get the Kyocera running.

After today (dedicated to book production and shipping the rest of the orders) we have to tackle the "do immediately" list. The first items are...

SVC: the F&E LSM

SPP: Module G2

LMC: getting the roof replaced on the house (it was damaged in hail storm on 21 June and we've been too busy to take the time to get it done). Of course, Leanna won't actually be nailing on shingles, just picking the color and hiring the contractor.

After that, we have the following "immediate" projects...

I need to do a stack of press releases.

Continue making steady progress on CL31.

Module C5 playtest pack IV.

Federation Commander playtest pack III.

GURPS Romulans complete draft so we can order art and create the missing pieces.

Do the Drafts of GK4e and GPD4e so we can get them approved.

Year end bookkeeping.

Module F1 playtest pack

Module F2 playtest pack.

Playtest packs for the SFBF expansions.

January: Bases & freighters, print and ship GPD4e, print and ship GK4e. Move Leanna's mother to her new apartment. We should have the draft of the secret project sometime in January.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, December 07, 2004 - 11:16 am

THE TRAIN WRECK (an article from CL30)

Our last issue described an aggressive but plausible schedule of new product releases. As expected, it didn't all happen, but a whole lot of it did. The problem is that once something went wrong, the whole schedule started stacking up. If any product on the list runs two weeks overtime, every product from then on will be two weeks late. If that happens to several products, we end up rescheduling some products in order to keep others on track.

The battle plan assumed that Module R9 would go to press before Origins. That did not happen because a certain home improvement project could not be delayed and took SVC out of the office too many days. When we returned from Origins, we drafted a plan to finish R9 in two weeks and succeeded. But that brought us to the day that we would have sent it to Dallas to be printed. By that point, Leanna had bought the Kyocera printer and we actually had two more weeks before R9 had to go "to press". We probably should have let R9 stand as it was and move on the next product, but the work spent getting R9 to print on the Kyocera caused us to get creative and keep spending more and more time tweaking R9 (including entire days spent adding the infamous "Crawford Charts" to each SSD). Then we reached the magical day of sending R9 to press, and well, the

learning curve on the Kyocera looked more like a vertical brick wall. Chalk up another week to learning how to trick it into doing what it does.

The next project was the GURPS Gunboat Deck Plans, which benefitted from an extra unscheduled week of graphic design improvements. We lost two more weeks getting the "map sheets" to print as they involved different software, drivers, and paper.

Starline 2400 was the year's bright spot, releasing three fleet boxes, many individual ships, and we have a fourth fleet box in production at the casting house.

F&E Planetary Operations took a week longer than expected as the F&E Staff grabbed the opportunity to finish work on many additional rules and scenarios. The Magellanic module for SFB finished its "final" round of playtesting but was still not ready for press. The GURPS products ended up being kicked to next year due to the Fourth Edition situation (which made Module Prime Beta into an unworkable concept), as noted elsewhere.

Add in a little "friction of war" and that left us just enough time to do Captain's Log before the end of the product year.

Star Fleet Aces and the swordfight books never showed up from the perpetually promising designer, and we just ran out of time to work on the SFBF card game expansions.

We decided to hold FEDERATION COMMANDER for next year so that it could be given a proper launch.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, December 07, 2004 - 11:26 am

The Train Wreck, Part II

We sat down one day working on CL30 and said "since we'll finish CL30 by the end of this week, we need a plan for the rest of the year." That plan included the F&E LSM, G2, the revised GK4e and GPD4e, the playtest pack for Fed Commander, and the playtest pack for the Magellanics.

Then CL30 took about a week longer than expected.

Then actually getting it produced and shipped (due to the Kyocera running at half speed due to a broken part) took longer than expected.

I sat down one day and said "ok, I'm going to take today to do clutter on my desk, but tomorrow and the next day I will work on GK4e". Then Petrick said "Can you look at this fiction story and if it's workable we could schedule it for CL31 and get ahead of that project". That story took two days to fix. Then I sat down to work on GK4e on last friday and somebody whose first name is "colonel" seemed to think I was going to spend the day writing the brigade warning order for the surprise drill the next day. Two days later, I was in the office on Sunday, but so was Leanna, and mail orders for CL30 (and everything else) was so huge that I couldn't work on GK4e at all; I had to spend the whole of Sunday helping her with mail orders. So finally, yesterday (Monday 6 Dec) I did the changes to the first half of the GK4e book and sent them out to be reviewed.

I also discovered that Petrick, rather than working on G2, had been working on another project. Seems somebody sent in an idea for a product, and I said "hmm... in theory it could work" and asked him to send Petrick "one rule" so Petrick could decide how much work was going to be involved in fixing the rules. Petrick found a lot of problems and we told the guy to go away until he fixed them. He stayed up all night to fix them by the next day and Petrick felt an obligation to try to show him what he did right and wrong and spent the day tutoring him on rules writing.

Anyway, we're back in firm control over the schedule and determined to keep the train on the rails.

But then, somebody sent me an outline this morning for a novel we might publish in two years and seems to think I'm going to read it in the near term.

By Steve Cole on Friday, December 10, 2004 - 02:09 pm

10 Dec 2004: Trying to keep things on the rails and partially succeeding.

The GREAT DRAGON has arrived again. For those not familiar with him, the Great Dragon is any project which shows up and consumes all available time and stops most or all other

projects. (It's always a different great dragon. Sometimes a captain's log or other product having to go to press, sometimes a family or military responsibility, or whatever.) This time, the GREAT DRAGON is a huge influx of mail orders, setting a new all-time record. People are ordering EVERYTHING in sight, all different modules and other products. Leanna has done nothing since last Friday (eight straight days) and it's keep Petrick and Myself busy too.

The casualty of the great dragon is the LSM. This can't be done without Leanna and myself working together, and Leanna just hasn't been available (despite her pulling overtime). Thus, nothing has gone forward on this, but we do expect to have some Leanna-Time for this within a day or so.

Petrick has G2 moving forward. All of the errata is in the annexes. I've done most of the missing abbreviations. We haven't tackled the MSC yet.

I have finished the conversion of GK3e to GK4e and sent it out to be checked. I've done a little on the Secret Project but all of that has involved getting it back to where it was after a key player pulled out and had to be replaced by somebody who approaches it from another direction. I am hoping to see progress on GPD4e shortly.

By Steve Cole on Sunday, December 12, 2004 - 07:57 pm

Leanna and I went to a "business seminar" at the local university on Saturday. We came away with our heads swirling over the ideas of what ADB is and could or should be.

What we've determined is....

1. We're never going to make more money than we're making from JUST the existing customer base.

2. We've pretty much exhausted ways to seriously expand the SFB/F&E customer base, although we're gaining more people than we are losing.

3. To expand the company, we need to maintain our existing product lines (dance with the girl who brung ya) but we must also new product lines such as RPGs, Federation Commander, people miniatures, general interest games, paperback books, and the long-delayed SFBF expansions.

4. That isn't going to happen as long as the creative team spends as much of their time as they do on non-creative tasks such as packing games, packing orders, binding books, etc. While the Kyocera project revolutionized the cash system of the business (previously, most of the profit on any given new release was composed of thousands of books on a pallet in the warehouse), it has also added even more manual labor that must be done by the creative team. Bad idea.

5. The only way out of the trap is to hire one or two people (part time at first, expanding to full time as we grow) to handle stuff like mail orders, game packing, order packing, convention support, starlist, and so forth. That would give me another day or two each week to focus on new products for ALL of our product lines including SFB and F&E.

This is WAY beyond my comfort zone and scaring me half to death, but it seems like something that needs to happen, unless I decide I like working for what I am paid now.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, December 22, 2004 - 01:48 pm

22 December: Forgive me, father, for I have sinned. It's been ten days since my last confession.

uh....

I'm still really not sure if this weblog thing is supposed to be a complete company history of every event since the last post, or just some random thoughts.

Things progress on many fronts.

The LSM is at the printers and we're waiting for them to bring us the proof copies. After those are approved, our printer will send the project to one of their printing plants out of state and that plant will generate the actual negatives and send us proofs of those. Once that gets approved, they will be printed and sent to us and sent back out. I don't have a release date, probably a random date in January.

G2 is being worked on. Petrick has been working on the

MSC for about five straight days. Sooner or later he's going to actually expect me to make his fixes and give it back to him to check again. We'll have this sometime in January, maybe even by the third.

The bases and freighters are here and once Leanna is satisfied with the back cover photograph we'll start packing those. They'll ship on schedule on 10 Jan.

Gary and I are busy on GPD4e and while the total number of pages finished so far is, well, like 14 out of 190, we've just reached the point that I can start slamming major chunks into pagemaker.

Gurps Klingons 4th Edition is finished (has been for some time now) although as of this morning Gary and I have figured out a need to add several rules pages to the back of it.

The Secret Project is progressing. Actually, this is three projects. Serious progress has started on one of them, and a handshake deal has been reached on the second. I gotta find time to track down the guy who will sign the third deal since he's already said he wants to do it.

I think the big thing around here is the attitude of change. The business conference Leanna and I attended on a lark on the 11th has given us a totally new outlook. We'll be bringing in new employees soon (sooner if I have anything to say about it) and working on getting new equipment and new product lines.

The Kyocera project is working well. We just had to "do a reprint" of C3, R9, CL30, and PO. Since we do these in small doses, that is becoming more and more the norm.

We had a TON of mail order last week and the week before and it has continued into this week.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, December 23, 2004 - 11:31 pm

The Dark Days: We have these every year starting Christmas eve. The name Dark Days doesn't refer to my traditional Christmas depression, but is a show biz term. When a show is "dark wednesdays" it means they take the day off and use the time for maintenance of the sets and stuff.

We use the Dark Days for accounting. It's mostly Leanna. Since we will have no more mail orders, she can do the sales tax report (and write the check for it), the royalty report (checks mailed to Paramount, Franz Joseph Estate, Steve Jackson, and some project designer), and most of the corporate bookkeeping. Leanna is proud that the company has ZERO debt and the only liability on the books at the end of the year is the credit card charges on the statement we haven't received yet.

For Petrick and myself, it means time to do a deep cleaning of the warehouse without being interrupted for mail orders, do a major restock of assembled products, and a major housekeeping operation. We can't tear down entire pallets and restack them when we're packing mail orders.

By Steve Cole on Friday, December 24, 2004 - 10:36 am

Merry Christmas to all. To those of other faiths, Happy Holidays (Eid, Qwanza, Mithrasday, whatever). Happy New Year.

I want to thank everyone for six years of loyalty that the rest of the game industry only wishes THEIR customers had toward THEIR products.

Next year is going to see ADB Inc. evolve into a very different thing, but one still worthy of your loyalty. We will always do what we have done, but we will start to do bold new things.

END OF 2004