

COMPANY WEBLOG

ARCHIVE 2006

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By Steve Cole on Sunday, January 01, 2006 - 04:11 pm
1 Jan 06: HAPPY NEW YEAR!

This is my year-end wrapup and I probably should write it off line and have the whole staff proofread and check it, but there's nobody else here right now and I have a note to get it done.

It was, like every year, the best and the worst. Losing my father (and effectively my mother, who remains hospitalized after her nervous breakdown and will never recover) was certainly bad. Retiring from the military, which had been part of my life virtually since I was born, was sad, not even bittersweet. People would ask me why I did the unpaid reserve duty, and I would answer "I had a choice between this mission and going to Iraq. This was my second choice." Despite my weight and health, despite what it would do to the company and my family, if the Army would send me to Iraq I'd leave tomorrow, and so would Petrick.

Then again, winning a \$50,000 grant, seeing the first expansion of the company since it started (adding Mike and Ken), publishing Fed Commander and the D20 products, and watching sales exceed the previous year by 25% or so were all good things.

Got a lot of product out this year, including:

SFB: F1 and F2 and CL31

Starline: cruiser boxes, squadron boxes, and many individual ships and items.

RPG: Gurps 4, d20 (six total books)

Federation Commander.

A lot of planned and intended products did not happen. Some of this was not our fault. The guys doing Star Fleet Aces never sent it, the sculptor doing the RPG people figures spent most of the year too sick to work, the writer doing the D6 products spent so much time sick he had to resign from the project and his replacement took a month to decide he wasn't going to do it.

Some of it was our fault, or specifically my fault. The federation book didn't get finished and neither did CL32.

Our in-house print shop expanded with our 2nd and 3rd Kyoceras, a cutter, and a new M2 binder. The Kyoceras have so totally changed the way business is done that it's unbelievable. No more stacking money in the warehouse, at least not for books. Now, there is \$50,000 worth of Fed Commander stuff in the warehouse but that is selling steadily. You can't print the color stuff on demand. It's too expensive and the quality ain't there yet.

We're in the process of getting a 576-square-foot mezzanine deck put into the warehouse (gaining over 500 feet of active pallet storage space) and getting more 200 square feet of office space put under the mezzanine. So we'll go from 500 feet of office and 2000 feet of warehouse to 700 feet of office and 2300 feet of warehouse without having to move. I can live with that. (Note in Jan 09: we never put the office building together, and finally sold it in Dec 08. We sold the mezzanine in Jan 09 when we moved to the new office.)

Partly because of mother I spent a lot of the fall in a deep depression. I understand more than ever how Lincoln felt running the civil war. I always get depressed at Christmas and this year was worse than ever, but somehow by about 21 Dec I was feeling happy again. My health has seriously deteriorated in the last year and will be getting some serious attention over the next year. Who knows, I might even go see a doctor, eating reasonable amounts of food, or even exercising. Well, it's a plan, and everybody should have a plan.

Hiring Mike has been a blessing. He works hard and

whenever we want him and goes away when there is nothing to pay him to do. His girlfriend seems to enjoy him having a job as the quality of her dates has improved markedly. We're finding more and more Mike can do.

Ken has brought a lot of ideas to ADB. He convinced me to change Fed Commander from a \$35 product using 1980 production values to a \$60 product using 21st century values and he was right. His simple idea of producing miniatures that match the Fed Commander sets added 50% to the profit of Fed Commander as a product line. We're all waiting to see if his booster pack idea will sell, and I'm not saying where my bets on that one have been placed. The theory was that Ken was going to take over some part of my job but instead Ken has been mostly doing things I never had time to do, such as recruit two new wholesalers and 20 new stores. He'll be doing more of that next year.

We spent a ton of money on advertising in 2005 and proved once again that spending a lot of money on advertising because other companies do it is just pretty stupid. 90% of the advertising money was wasted, but at least we know to never ever do it again. We went to Gencon for the first time and won't go again in 2006 (maybe in 2007) because the product lines we have don't sell there. I'm not sure what all those 20,000 people at Gencon were playing but it wasn't anything we were selling. We sold a lot more SFB stuff than d20 stuff. We've also decided not to go to the GTS show in March 06 since nothing results from the time and money spent going. In both cases (GC and GTS) we're buying space in the Game Publisher's Association megabooth to "show our flag" for 5% of the cost of going ourselves.

I look forward to 2006 but will cover my thoughts on that in a separate message.

By Steve Cole on Monday, January 09, 2006 - 02:56 pm

Operation Pellademo: I am still getting over the shock from the trip (which was quite exhausting) but it's a good tired and was worth it. On Tuesday 2 Jan, the four guys from ADB (SPP, SVC, Ken, Mike) drove to Grand Prairie (near Dallas), disassembled a building that was 24x24x18 feet, loaded it onto a truck, and brought it home. (We got home Friday 6 Jan at 4pm and the truck was unloaded by a hired crew the next day.) Because we were "demo"-ing a building at the Pella windows & doors warehouse, we called it OPERATION PELLADEMO.

It was an interesting experience in male bonding. While not QUITE like going on a combat mission, was dangerous dirty work which we not only survived but accomplished in a time and manner that drew kudos from those watching us do it. We learned a lot about ourselves and a lot about this kind of building. We had no clue how to do anything we did but had to figure it out as we came to each step of the process. We took all kinds of tools with us, and made five trips to Lowe's to buy more tools we didn't know we needed. We did the operation without anybody getting hurt, anything getting broken (besides two ceiling tiles), without accidents and without even having any arguments (except for the one about Ken sleeping outside because he snored). Considering that two of the four of us had "fear of falling" and one is blind in one eye (and couldn't see the edge of the building where an 18-foot fall awaited the unwary) it was something of a miracle.

In a few years when the company has 20 people working for us, it will still be the "pellademo four" who have the closest bond. We've been tested in battle and found worthy.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, January 11, 2006 - 01:26 pm

Trying something new. We've been talking about it since Gencon, and sometimes we did it for a day or two, but we're going to give this a try.

Every day at 1pm I am going to turn off my email and browser and work on "game design tasks" only. Leanna and Petrick and Ken are going to try very hard to leave me alone so as not to break my concentration. In contrast, if they catch me playing computer games during that "design time" my rear end is toast.

I'll come up for air at 5pm. (For a couple of days, I may come up briefly at 3pm just to see if anybody took advantage of my solitude to make trouble on the BBS.)

By Steve Cole on Friday, January 27, 2006 - 12:03 pm

27 Jan: Well, let's see if I can even remember the last two weeks. Mostly it was a matter of working on CL32 which is now shipping. After we finished it (99.9% on Tuesday) we spent most of the time planning.

When we do a new SFB product, it's NEW so we can't do the counters until we have designed and tested the ships and are sure we're not going to have to replace one. When we do a new FC product, we just have to pick what parts of SFB to use. So, I know today (knew last November) exactly what was on the countersheet for a product shipping in August 06.

Now, the sad part is that I have to work like a dog for the next 16 days to do 32 ship cards. Those will be used in products in Feb (4), March (6), and April (4). In the 15 days after that, I have to do a sheet of counters which will be used in products shipping in March, June, and August. In the next 15 days, I will have to do ship cards that will all ship in March.

By Steve Cole on Friday, January 27, 2006 - 05:22 pm

I don't want anybody to get upset about this (I am not) and I wouldn't even mention it except that if you heard the key word without the context you could have a strong reaction. I have three or four easily-treatable not at all dangerous skin cancers. (Technically, I am waiting on the biopsies but there isn't any doubt about three of them.)

Sometime in a couple of weeks I will take the afternoon off and go have them treated and that will be the end of that. All of these are "basal" and aren't dangerous. You just freeze them and scrap them off and the cure rate is 98%. If they grow back, you go have a slightly different treatment and the cure rate for that is 99.99%.

This is a big nothing, no worse than if I had stubbed my toe, but if somebody said "Steve Cole has Cancer" without explaining that this particular form of cancer is a big fat nothing there could be dancing in the streets. I'm seriously likely to die of a heart attack any minute, but this skin cancer isn't going to be what gets me.

I do not want anybody sending me messages of hope or concern or good wishes or get well cards or anything else. I'm not posting this so I can get sympathy or use it as an excuse for days I get pissed off at people. This is far less upsetting or disruptive than a minor fender bender would be. Just ignore it.

Even mentioning it to me does more harm than good so don't. I've already "processed" this. Think positive thoughts if you will, but please don't take up bandwidth over this. It's a big fat nothing and wouldn't even be mentioned except that there are far more dangerous forms of "cancer" around and if you just heard the word and maybe remembered that an entirely different form of cancer killed by brother you might wonder. So just ignore it. Please. Really.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, February 15, 2006 - 11:16 am

15 Feb: The current theory of running the company is that I spend four uninterrupted hours per day designing new products. That includes the Fed Commander booster bonus ships, the Klingon attack ships and scenarios, the rules for FC Booster 0, the fiction for CL33, Prime Directive Federation, the countersheets for Klingon attack (and several other products), fixing the GPD rulebook, Managing the D6 project, keeping the D20 guys busy on final frontier, managing the production of new miniatures, Index tabs, the gold hat card game, the ISC Scenario for F&E, battle damage code red, the master starship book, watching Loren do Prime Directive Tholians, the F&E warbook, the revised rulebook for Advanced Operations, deals with other game companies, and so forth.

Now, the plan is somewhat simpler and somewhat more complex than that. What I do is take "the next deadline" and the number of days until that deadline and plot a "smooth curve" to

reach the deadline. So Let's say its 1 Feb and I have 14 ship cards to do by 15 Feb. Easy. Every day I start my four hours of design time with one ship card and then spend the rest of the time on other things (ensuring that when they're first in line they're easier to do because some of them has already been done). If circumstances keep me from doing a ship card on one day, I do two on the next day and only then start on other things. If it works out that I am in a ship card mood I do an extra one which means I'm ahead on the next day and get more time to spend on "other than the next deadline" stuff.

If I have two deadlines in rapid succession (countersheets on 10 March and Sheet C on 15 March) then I have to plot a curve for BOTH projects and do the "curve" items first and THEN have "free play".

Nice theory.

It's now today and Sheet B isn't finished. (The FC Rev 3 rulebook took twice as long as expected because people were disguising requests for rules changes as questions about existing rules. So instead of saying "the rules ALREADY say THIS" I got trapped into believing that the rules did not actually answer the question.) Latest problem was that sales of Prototype Kit Alpha, Prototype Kit Beta, and Space Battle Maps were DOUBLE what we expected and I spent Monday and Tuesday in the warehouse packing those products instead of designing games. We also discovered a glitch in the software that tracks minis inventory and had to have some missing DNG parts flown in at the last second.

So, we're now into "overtime" mode. I have to spend all of my design time today on Ship Card Sheet B. In theory, I'll finish it and send it to the staff.

Which means tomorrow I will sit down and work out the "work flow" for counters and Sheet C and every day from now to 10 March I will do 1/25th of the counters and one of the ship cards and if there is anything left after that (and there should be) I will work on other things.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, February 23, 2006 - 07:28 pm

23 Feb: Today, the contractor finished installing the mezzanine deck in the warehouse, giving us another 500 square feet. Petrick is already planning what to store "up there" as opposed to "down here". Leanna is already marking out some of the space under the mezzanine deck for two hundred square feet of new "working space" where we will, for the first time, have the assembly and packing areas in a climate-controlled area. [Pity, but that never happened.]

My own work schedule has settled down to a furious rodent treadmill. Today I did the last of the 16 squadron SSDs for Klingon Attack (Sheet C) and did the new Basic Set countersheets. I have three more countersheets (Romulan border, Klingon+Romulan attack, and a sheet for Ken Burnside's company) to do and expect to finish well before the deadline.

I have, however, been prohibited from working on the ISC scenario, Prime Directive Federation, or CL32 until after Sheet C, the counters, and the "get the warehouse back in working order" projects are complete. I figure another 10 days for all of that.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, March 22, 2006 - 03:53 pm

22 March: Just barely got this posted before the dreaded "one month and no new blog entry, SVC must have died" syndrome set in.

No new equipment, we haven't had time to set up the new modular building. I've finished all three of my cancer surgeries and while all three wounds keep seeping blood, gunk, and other unidentified fluids there really isn't any pain any more and heck it's good to no longer have cancer.

Ken went to the GAMA trade show so I didn't have to (since I hate vegas and consider the GTS to be a waste of time). He reports that there is no new "one big game every store must have" and that more and more retailers are looking at smaller and smaller manufacturers to find something to sell. Well, that could be wishful thinking.

Miniatures sales are strong and Bruce reports that things he hasn't cast in a year are now burning out the molds made two (or

more) years ago. Mike is busy checking the latest shipment even now. It's not just "get a bucketload of them for Ken's next release of Fed Commander boxes" but it's generally accelerating sales across the board. We're restocking ships that aren't even in Fed Commander, ships that haven't sold well in years.

The first booster packs have been shipped and while sales started slow the restocks are rolling in steadily. Something very serious changed in the industry about last October, a new business-distribution model has appeared and the industry is having trouble adapting. When I was running TFG sales in 1981, the model was "call the wholesalers, they guess how many they think they can sell, then the wholesalers call the stores". When ADB incorporated and became a publisher in 1999 the model was "tell the wholesalers 90 days in advance, retailers place pre-orders, when product is one week from shipping the wholesalers count up the pre-orders and notify us and we ship that many. NOW, a totally new model is in place. Retailers are not placing pre-orders. Half of them are fed up with phantom release dates and won't order until the product is in stock at the wholesaler. The other half won't order until a week or two later when they hear that other stores in other towns are having success with that product. This is driving the wholesalers NUTS since they can't really afford to order lots of copies because somebody might order them and can't really afford to not have it in stock when a store suddenly decides they want it.

A plague has swept the office and disrupted everything. Leanna was out three days last week. I started getting sick on Friday, showed up Saturday but might as well have stayed home, was in bed coughing and moaning all day Sunday, felt somewhat better Monday but not even half-speed at my desk, was in pretty good shape Tuesday and here it is Wednesday and I'm probably up to 75% of normal operating efficiency. Petrick got sick yesterday and by today was in such horrible shape we had to order him home at gunpoint. All of this is delaying and disrupting everything. Mail orders were not done while Leanna was out, and some things didn't get done while I was down (and I'm not getting as much done today as I normally would).

Customers continue to express concern that the company is going in too many directions at once and is losing track of product lines that deserved attention. We haven't done a new Omega product since Bruce stopped doing them (although my latest chat with Bruce indicated he might resume shortly). The "audition" files for D6 have been here a week and a half and nobody has read them (due to being sick). I still want to be doing the expansions for SFBF and I have got to bite the bullet and hand over Prime Directive Federation to somebody else and admit that I'll never get it done by myself, but not yet. Not much getting done on the MSSB or Warbook but I'll get to those.

My new management system (a weekly form listing things to work on) is actually working. Major improvement is that it has a list of "phone calls to make every day" like the sculptor doing the prime directive figures and the casting house that does kit bash packs. I have indeed been calling them every single day for two weeks but have never gotten anybody actually on the phone so while I am calling it's not working. What is working is that the form includes a place to write "Ken told to order stands" so I don't lose track of what I told the four other people in the office to do. I always had the attitude that "I told him to do it so I don't have to check to see if he did" and that's a pretty damned awful way to run a business.

It does look like Secret Project 10 (I think it's ten but I keep losing track) will get signed this week. Fun announcement to follow. Another secret project has been stopped cold by the plague (Leanna is still catching up on orders) but the third one seems to be moving forward.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, April 13, 2006 - 12:19 pm

13 April: We're drowning in sales. Business was up 25% in 2005 compared to 2004 and it continues to grow. We're looking at a 20% or more gain this year over 2005. We can't get things done around the office because we're printing, packing, and shipping new products. I didn't get to finish Booster Zero because

the only way to get Boosters 4-5-6 shipped on time was for me to pack them while Steve shrinkwrapped them.

Ken and I attended a business seminar on web marketing last Monday and it was an eye-opener in many ways. We're going to jump into cafepress as soon as we have a couple of hours that we're not packing new products. And we have another little web project that should do even more. Either of those has the potential to boost sales another 5-25%. Then I have a "shot in the dark" project I want to try (buying classified ads in random cities that send people to federationcommander.com) which might lose \$50 or might make \$50,000. What the hell. And one of the "secret projects" finally came to fruition yesterday when the check went in the bank. I can't talk about that one now (or ever) but what it will become obvious in due course.

We're planning to spend a couple of thousand on a super-charged high-end PC since there are some things on the web (and even the Kyoceras) that the Macs just will not do (at least not Mac system 9.4). It's cheaper to go buy an Uber-PC than to repurchase all of the Mac software to run under OSX (not to mention that OSX just stinks).

I cannot speak highly enough of Mike, who showed initiative last week when doing a miniatures inventory. He got fed up and went to our web site from his home computer, copied the catalog, and did his own inventory form. What a guy.

Ken, like all creative types including myself, is chaotic. He makes mistakes (sometimes more than everyone else combined can catch) and he spends hours doing things that I can't figure out what he's doing, then comes up with an off-the-wall idea that makes more money than I pay him. He's good to have around, but getting more and more into his own company which is doing quite well.

Leanna is being worked like a dog and isn't liking it. The boom in orders and sales means more work for her doing inventory and invoices, and she's maxed out, working 10+ hours a day, plus chunks of Saturday and most Sundays, trying to keep up. I offered to hire her an assistant but instead she wants to hire a computer consultant to change the way we charge credit cards which should cut her workload by 20%. I'm all for it.

Petrick is settling in nicely to his new promotion as head of SFB, and the Magellanic module shows that he's the guy who should have been running SFB for the last seven years. He's also spending more and more time in the warehouse packing orders (Mike is working as many hours as he can, almost 40 consistently) and we're thinking of hiring another part time warehouse guy.

I should mention the "sixth employee" who is Joe Butler the webmaster. He recently did another massive upgrade to the web site. Ken wants to throw half of the stuff out of the web site just to make it less scary to new customers, but I plan to go build a totally separate web site just for products that don't scare people and send the new web-based customers over there instead of here. We'll then slowly leak the news to them about the "real" website.

I have a new form to run the company with. I have been using it (continually refining it) for several weeks. It lists the priority project of the day, time that people are going to be somewhere else, the morning meeting and daily assignments, the list of things to do, list of phone calls to make, and a "daily duties" list for me which includes the daily phone call to mother. The form has made the company a little more efficient and things are not getting lost. One thing is has is a 'weekly tracking' block that means I no longer give somebody an assignment than ignore him for three months.

Miniatures sales are unbelievable. Monday I ordered a shipment of over 2000 ships from Bruce, virtually all of which will ship on a single day (the 22 May release of Border Box #2). Plus over a thousand ships from Reaper. Who would have thought that a \$99.95 box of 24 starships would sell? ●●● that Ken! We're expecting the first two monsters and the Fed CVS any day now. The Kzinti NCA and Klingon D5W and Tholian DD+NCL are selling strongly. Bart Pyle suggested we recast the old base as the "base station" to go along with the newer "battlestation" and

plans are underway to do this.

Our main artist, Ted Geibel, has been away from the pixel mines a lot for the last month. His aunt (who raised him) is nearing the end of her journey. Our prayers are with Ted and his aunt. Adam Turner did the two "attack" covers while Ted was busy, and will be doing more covers for us in future.

We still haven't been able to contact David Whelan, the casting guy who does the kit bash packs, Gorn DNC, Fed old CV, old Gorns, peladines, and other ships. I talked to him three months ago and he said he would ship things within days but now he doesn't return phone calls and when I get his wife on the phone she promises to force him to call and he does not. Alvin Belflower (artist and sculptor) remains very sick and unable to work on the prime directive character figures.

The Kyoceras continue to run great, even better if we have the PC run them as Kyocera can only barely comprehend that Macintosh computers exist.

We're planning to erect the building we bought last January sometime during May. [This never happened.] While plans change every week (last week we were going to build a 12x18 workspace) the current plan (as of yesterday) is to erect the entire building in one corner, and move the shrinkwrap machine, cutter, and assembly line and order packing into it.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, April 26, 2006 - 11:32 am

26 April: While we're thrilled to hear Paramount is doing another trek movie, we have some concerns. They are planning to do that "academy movie" they have been wanting to do for a decade despite the fact that the fans have said loud and clear that they do not want "the academy movie". Trying to do a young Kirk/Spock is not going to work. Maybe there is hope that the new director will change the movie in mid-stream? Paramount should have been listening to the fans instead of trying to tell the fans what the fans want.

Should Paramount get smart and hire ME to run Star Trek, here is what you can expect....

STAR TREK: KLINGONS: A new TV series set in the Klingon Empire during the time of the Original Series. See how the other half lives. These will be "Nobel Russians" not mystic Samuris. Michael Chiklis stars.

STAR TREK: THE EVIL EMPIRE: A new TV series set in the mirror universe, where people are just plain mean. We'll have a rotating cast and plan to kill and replace at least three of the seven main characters every season. Go boldly among the stars and contemplate the joys that may be found in genocide.

STAR TREK: PRIME DIRECTIVE: A new TV series about a prime team including Bruce Campbell and Jessica Alba will get into all kinds of secret missions, riding around the galaxy on a small starship captained by R Lee Emry.

STAR TREK XII: REPUBLICANS IN SPACE: A major motion picture epic in which Admiral Denny Crane (his brain warped by Mad Cow Disease) and Captain James Spader will steal the USS Ronald Reagan and start a war with somebody while violating the humanoid rights of just about everybody in the Federation by eavesdropping on their subspace phone calls. I guarantee to have Denny personally shoot at least five people during the movie.

By Steve Cole on Monday, May 15, 2006 - 12:08 am

14 MAY: It's been a tough mother's day. Leanna's mother passed away a few days ago and she's still processing it. I lost my mother (to alzheimers) a year ago but still visit her in the hospital even though she has no idea who I am.

The loss of Margaret (Leanna's mother) was tough on everyone here. We all knew and loved her. I have often recounted that I proposed to Leanna the day I met Leanna's mother. She was so fun, so loving to her husband, so intelligent, if that was what Leanna was going to grow up into (and it was) all I could say was "sign me up". In driving relatives back and forth to Leanna's old home town where Margaret spent most of her life, I was able to show them to spot where I stopped the car to propose that fateful day.

Between a couple of days spent moving Margaret from the rehab center to a nursing home, then her being rushed to the hospital, the agonizing night she almost died, the tough decision to stop trying to keep her alive when it was clear she wasn't going to come back, the days waiting for the inevitable and the days waiting for relatives to arrive and the funeral and then a whole day of running relatives to the airport, we lost almost two entire weeks (and frankly I'm still not back to full speed work or much fun to be around).

There is a lot going on, with Captain's Log to finish, Romulan Border to start, counters to reprint (and a new product to do) for F&E, and work to push forward on other projects. Getting lost in my work might help if I could avoid getting lost in thoughts about all we have lost since the company started (Petrick's father and mother, Blackie, my father and mother, Leanna's mother and uncle).

By Steve Cole on Friday, May 19, 2006 - 06:52 pm

Ken Burnside will be leaving ADB today to work full time for his own game company, Ad Astra Games. Ken is not quitting, and we are not firing him. It is simply time for him to spread his own wings.

When we hired Ken, it was with the understanding that he was going to be spending a lot of his time pushing forward his plans for Ad Astra and that, sooner or later, his big contract deal (see his web site) would go through and he would be leaving ADB.

The "Year of Ken" was intended to give ADB a start on really marketing our products (since we have only just begun to do games which COULD be marketed to non-SFB fans) and, just as importantly, to give Ken some real experience in working at a full-size game publishing company as opposed to his part time back-bedroom operation. We have learned much from Ken and he has learned more from us; we wish him every success. Everyone at ADB (including Ken) genuinely believe in helping any other game company that asks for help.

Ken did many things for us. He helped us look at marketing to the un-convinced, something we had never had to deal with. SFB and our other games sold themselves to our current fanbase (mostly by the efforts OF that fanbase), and while Federation Commander can and has done the same thing, the whole point of doing it was to sell into an even larger market.

Ken also contributed some ideas for a new graphic look and feel to all of our products, something that sometimes worked better than other times. Ken has a lot of ideas about what graphics can do and with a couple of years of experience (i.e., learning when to back off on the bevels, glows, and smudges; and actually confirm the dimensions of the cover before printing it) he could find a satisfying career as a graphic designer. His mistakes that made it into print are outweighed by his successes. Hopefully, the success of Ad Astra will never give him a need to find a non-gaming job.

Ken brought some new ideas to the company, although not as many as he thinks he did. While his company was one of the first to move into Print on Demand technology, ADB got there by its own path and has far surpassed Ad Astra's tentative steps to become the acknowledged source of information for companies moving into PoD systems. Yes, we bought a piece of equipment that had once Ken suggested, but we selected it entirely on our own after an exhaustive study of the available types and would have bought what we bought regardless.

Mostly, Ken helped us get out of our box. Within months of his arrival, all of us had learned to see "the next step" in logical product development. Ken conceived the Squadron Boxes (SFB was the only successful space game that was not miniatures based, something nobody at ADB realized). While Federation Commander was most of our recent growth, Ken made that even better with his miniatures marketing plan. His was one of the voices that convinced Leanna it was time for ADB to publish a first-class all-color game for the 21st Century.

We paid Ken back, idea for idea, and already see Ad Astra using many of the marketing, production, and business

techniques he learned from us. No doubt, once their new warehouse in Cedar Falls, Iowa, is up and running, his customers will no longer see month-long delays in fulfilling orders. (ADB regards a 48-hour delay in filling an order to be a devastating failure.)

We will miss Ken, just as he will miss working for ADB, but there comes a point at which he has taught us all he knows and learned much of what we know, and that is the perfect time for Ken to spread his wings and fly. Good luck, Ken, and God speed the success of your company.

By Steve Cole on Saturday, June 17, 2006 - 05:11 pm

Saturday, 17 June. Captain's Log #33 is printing down the hall and Petrick runs in here every few minutes with another copy. (It takes about five tries to dial the cutter to exactly the right point, and it takes several minutes to do each run. Once it's in place, we lock it down and cut all of the covers.) Ah, Petrick just nailed it and is cutting the rest of the covers. Mike has started binding.

I wish I could just sit back and relax but I have to start right now finishing the Romulan Border rulebook which needs to be printed on Wednesday. I'm pretty shot right now (been down here very late for three nights in a row) but I will somehow rise to the demands. I am a river to my people.

Mike is working 40 hours a week and doing great. There is a lot more for Mike to do but we're out of Mike Hours on what he's doing now. Joe Butler is doing a great job on the web site. My long-awaited book HOW TO RUN A GAME PUBLISHING COMPANY has been published and is the talk of the industry for its hilarious stories of things I screwed up and the vast knowledge of the industry it shows. You can get a copy at www.starfleetgames.com/book if you want one. It is free, my gift to the industry I love.

Current plan is to hire one or two people after Origins. We either need two part-time or one-full time people. One of these jobs has to be using photoshop pretty heavily doing covers. Ken did these while he was here but the job went back to Leanna and she wants rid of it. The other job is "paid intern" where the person basically does chores and errands for me (Starlist, convention support, etc.). These jobs require a physical presence in Amarillo and cannot be done remote. We've got to hire this/these person(s) or strangle. The business has grown past the point we can just suck it up and do the extra work ourselves.

Home life is good. Leanna and I are losing weight and doing more around the yard. We have a professional landscaper do the back yard and turn it into a place friendly to people and bengals. We put in a cat door so that Isis and Ramses can go outside any time they want (but they cannot get out of the back yard due to the "rambo barrier"). There have been days I got home just burned out and strung out and passed out and spent time in the gazebo watching the flowers bloom and it did a world of calming down for me. Leanna misses her mother terribly and I miss mine (who is still there but doesn't know who I am). Leanna and I are going to the football game in three hours but after two seasons of winning a lot of games, other teams hired almost all of our players and the team is full of rookies who throw away games on rookie mistakes.

The modular building STILL has not been set up but that will happen in July [no, it did not] and change the office dramatically. The new PC has made the Kyoceras run better since the software for those things was written for a PC and badly ported to a Mac and not supported worth a darn. I've used the thing to watch some movies but that's about it.

Sales remain very strong. SFB sales are climbing as old SFBers buy FC and then notice all the SFB stuff they missed and buy that too. The FC booster packs are selling steadily. We're stunned at the sales of \$100 border boxes.

The big problem remains having so many things we want to do, so many directions we want to go in, and not enough time. Hiring the new people should help. I want to hire a woman and hope Petrick falls in love with her and gets married, but don't tell Petrick that. The cafepress thing never happened (but it will)

simply because we didn't have enough time to format the files. Leanna did get the new miva-5 cart working and it's cut her workload by a third but still has some glitches. So far, all her extra time is going into catching up things she didn't do during the mail order boom.

Still no word from Whelan, and after Origins I'm going to do something about a kit bash pack from another source.

I miss Ken ("Hey, Ken, I'm forwarding you an Email, send this convention the standard box" and ".... that Ken, miniatures sales are up 300%, I wonder what his next cool idea will be?) and I don't miss Ken ("Would you get your crap off of the conference table? And why are their soda cans all over the place? And what happened to all of Leanna's bottled water? And how come the only things on your list of things to do that actually get done are the ones you think are fun?"). Ken is busy on Ad Astra but is also getting the new APT and CC done.

I look forward to the rest of the year. I have one more round of FC stuff to do (Romulan Attack) but I really want to work on the new SFB stuff (got to pick the modules for the new countersheet), F&E Strategic Operations, the F&E Warbook, the SFB Ship manual, the battleforce expansions, the Federation RPG book, the character figures, and Leanna's fighting starships. It's going to be fun.

By Steve Cole on Monday, July 10, 2006 - 01:15 pm

This is a "missing" or "delayed" report from before Origins. We left an hour late because wholesalers were restocking Romulan Border before we even shipped it and Petrick and I had to get some parts cut and sorted and set out for them to use while we were gone. I was going ballistic about every snag in the schedule (such as "It's 2pm, time to load the car, and what do you mean you never boxed up the maps that have to go in first?") but we've done this Origins thing eight times now and we're pretty good at it. When we finally started loading the cart an hour late, it took only half an hour to load everything because we knew where it went and didn't have to figure it out. The schedule problems caused by Margaret's death caused us to not have the ship book for Origins, and given that the only real point was to sell it at Origins I am not sure how far down the priority list it will fall before we actually get to work on it. I have three or four "must do right now or the company will die" projects and the company won't die if the ship book is six months late.

Origins report

Monday: We left an hour late. First time we had ever left without the new product shipments totally ready, but we now have Mike who can pack stuff while we are gone. No problems on the drive but got slightly lost in Tulsa and took an extra ten minutes to find the hotel.

Tuesday: Nice quiet drive, lots of construction, good barbeque.

Wednesday: Flat tire at our usual gas stop, which is also a tire store. The Gods smile and the tire was replaced quickly. Got to Red Roof without getting lost (that new highway loop is spiffy), had lunch, got signed in, set up the booth, had the singalong. The "bins of junk minis" went over great.

Thursday: Sales started very strong and did not let up. First day of sales was about 80% of the four-day sales last year. For the previous seven years, I would have lots of ex-SFB players wander by and wave. This year I could say "want to see the new one?" and wave a color SSD and hard-mounted map at them. "Yes, the demos are at the top of the escalators, turn right and ask for Paul". Back 30 minutes later to buy the game. Not one single person said \$60 was too expensive for what's in the box. Players very happy with new event space. I didn't eat anything all day (missed breakfast and lunch arguing with cell phone company) and wolfed down two cheeseburgers only to throw them back up. Went to bed early.

Friday: Reached last year's sales figure by noon. The booth babes made sure I ate a decent breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Miniatures seminar went great. Got word late in the evening that SFB was selected for Hall of Fame. It was a good day.

Saturday: Sales continued very strong. It was clear to me that this would be a new record. Credit card machine stopped working at 4:30pm and did not start again until 4th of July when we were back home. I had a decent breakfast and a so-so lunch. Went to Hall of Fame dinner and found that there was nothing I was not allergic to. Seminars went well.

Sunday: Seminar went well. Sales were booming and reached a new record, nearly double last year. In the previous seven years, the last sale was at 3pm and I could quietly pack up the booth before closing time at 4pm but this time I had customers right up to 4pm. So it took a bit longer to load up and a bit shorter because there were only three boxes (out of 14) of games that did not sell. Got to St Claire at midnight.

Monday: Quiet drive home. Arrived safely at 9pm.

Lessons Learned:

1. We're veterans, we've done this before, don't panic. Lots of things we did every year worked very nicely.

2. Was kind of embarrassing that we had no FC posters in booth, but sales were not really affected.

3. Need to have some more visibility for events, such as a banner over the escalator and a sign in the booth. Need to better publicize location.

4. Convention food was the worst in history. Next year, take cans of Dinty Moore.

5. Need to make sure Petrick is "booth qualified" just in case SVC is sick.

6. Nobody could make sense of Ken's FC tournament. Need a whole new structure.

7. Need to move F&E seminar to 8pm so I can get to bed faster. Doing that "work all day, drive to midnight" thing on Sunday based on four hours of sleep is not safe.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, July 13, 2006 - 03:25 pm

I came home from Origins with the usual:

1. A list of things from the show to do. I did most of those, such as inventorying the unsold stock, doing the show invoice, putting away the display materials, filing the stuff I brought back.

2. A stack of work that landed while I was out of town. Most of this was quick stuff already done. Some of it looked like it would take longer and was shuffled off to my priority-1 and priority-2 bins to handle later.

3. All the stuff during May-June that I told people would have to wait until after the show. I have much of this yet to do, and the previous discussion of the "to do list" was an attempt to find what I had lost.

4. Getting new products ready for press, specifically booster packs 789, squadron boxes 789, border box 3, and Romulan Attack.

I've been busy this week actually doing a bunch of creative things. I have done all 32 ship cards for Romulan Attack, and had them checked by Petrick. I just sent them to Mike West and told him to take a week if he wants to get back to me. I know that some of you roll your eyes and say "He's off playing with his new FC toy again, why doesn't he work on" but guys, FCRA is what will pay the 4th quarter bills. I have done the covers for booster packs 7-8-9-10. I had to do 10 because we print them four at a time, not because 10 will be released soon, it's set for Sept. I got four new minis from Belflower, and had four waiting here, and sent them to Reaper. We did an inventory of minis for squadron boxes 789 and B3 and ordered a couple of thousand more ships. I did communicate 4 last week and 5 this week. I fixed a minor glitch in the FCRB rulebook and did the new RCKB rulebook. I got the Fed CC project moving, and love the new Seltorians that John S did. I also did a lot of thinking about marketing. My list of things to do is still very long, but at least I'm in a mood to actually work, actually write, actually create.

By Steve Cole on Thursday, July 20, 2006 - 02:16 pm

PLEASE READ: THREE NEW PROCEDURES

1. PUTTING NEW PRODUCTS ON THE CART

Every time a new product is getting close, players start asking me to put it on the cart or when will I put it on the cart. We have,

for years, put the new product on the cart on (or near) the day it ships to wholesalers (7 days prior to shipping to mail orders). During this summer, I was convinced by customers to put CL33 and FCRB and other items on the cart two weeks early. This proved to be an accounting disaster that cost Leanna entire days of work because the "amounts charged on credit cards" would not match up with "sales during the same calendar week". So, in future, it goes on the cart the day it ships to wholesalers and not one day before. A week is plenty of time for pre-orders and saves Leanna days of extra work. If something is shipping that day you can ask me that day to put it on the cart.

2. STAFF SHIPMENTS

Those staffers who get a free copy of something or other merchandise credit for specific work on specific products or general work on entire product lines were always handled by me in the past. I had a chart that tracked what they were getting and why, which was easy, but at that point it ran into a brick wall. I had to verify addresses, ask them if they wanted to buy anything else, do a mailing label, and go pack the orders myself because the system was incomprehensible to anyone else. Staffers often got their freebies weeks late. NO MORE. When I get the list of who gets a freebie I will Email each person and you can go "order" it on the shopping cart. This simplifies everything, keeps me out of the warehouse (and out of the way of the warehouse crew, who all had to stand around watching me pack boxes because I was in their way), verifies addresses, let's you swap the freebie you got for something else, let's you add to orders and make special requests. This also allows me to send gift certificates less than a full product price (or more than that) to those non-staffers who did more than most.

3. NOTIFICATION SYSTEM

Previously, we've had people ask us "email me when [some product we aren't even working on] comes out" and had no way to do this. We're going to TRY this and see if it works. Here is the system. If you want to be notified of something (a product release or whatever) Email Leanna (sales@starfleetgames.com) and tell her (in the subject line) NOTIFICATION REQUEST: ITEM. Obviously, replace "ITEM" with the item in question. For example, NOTIFICATION REQUEST: ORION DW MINI or maybe NOTIFICATION REQUEST: REPRINT OF CL14 or even NOTIFICATION REQUEST: KIDS COLORING BOOK. You have to send a separate email for each notification. If you change Email address, you have to send a new notification Email. [Sooner or later, we'll have this as a script on the web site sort of like starlist.] She will move these (without reply) to a folder in her email system. Whenever we do something that is on the notification list, she'll send a reply to each of the emails listing that item that the item is available.

By Steve Cole on Saturday, August 05, 2006 - 08:45 pm

Ken Burnside is at the World Boardgaming Championships where he reports that Fed Commander is selling like hotcakes. Next week at Gencon, our sales agents (Flying Buffalo and Final Sword) will tell us if we should have gone to that convention. I'm trying to get the convention support program back on track.

The big problem remains that the list of things for all of us to do is getting longer, not shorter. We need to hire one or two people and we've just been too buried in word to do it. It's not like calling somebody at random and saying "report for work" it's a matter of coaxing game stores, college marketing departments, and business associates to give us the phone numbers of promising candidates. Two so far both insisted on doing the work remotely (from five whole miles away) and we know that this will not work. The hunt proceeds. Meanwhile, I am desperately trying to transfer all of my non-design functions to anybody else around the office who doesn't run away fast enough. Leanna is now in charge of ordering paper and Petrick is doing the "send back to casting house and tell them what they did wrong" gig and the staff has responded well to the "go to the cart and order your freebie and tell Leanna not to charge you" system.

Federation Commander continues to sell very well. I've almost got romulan Attack finished. I did the covers for squadron

boxes 7, 9, 11, and we already have zero but there was a problem with #8 so this continues to snag. We got something like 300 pounds of minis in this week and rejected more of them than I would have thought we would have.

Star Fleet Battles is doing well. It's off a little compared to last year but not really very much. FedCom is actually bringing in more SFB business than it's stealing. Ex-SFB players come back to FC and while they're at it buy all the SFB products since they quit.

Federation & Empire looks good. Strategic Operations is almost finished. I gotta find time to work on ISC War.

Starline is going great guns with many new ships (Fed CVS, CS, CC; Tholian DD, NCL; Klingon D5W; Large ore Carrier; Wyn shark; Orion DW and DR; Armed transport) with more to come (including Seltorians and the WYN fleet box).

Prime Directive needs my attention. The gang tries to remember to get work done without me but when they send me something and it takes six weeks for me to read it, they seem to stop working. What are they worried about, that I won't like part 1 and they wasted their time writing parts 2, 3, and 4? Like when did THAT ever happen?

My list of things I haven't done yet is annoying long. Here's just a sample....

Register stores for in-store FC campaigns
Loren Knight Tholian Files
John Sickels Federation files
Strategic Operations SIT, cycle 42
Master SIT update
Survey of ships already done for SFB R11-12-13.
Answer memo from somebody on Omega
Hire somebody in Amarillo to do the cafe press project
Take class on photoshop
Get new Squadron 8 cover from Ted
Get Strategic Ops cover from Adam
Work on CL34 story "for the good of the empire"
FC Communique 7 including plasma D rules
FCRB ad page
FCKB ad page
Article about FedCom for Games Quarterly magazine
Article about company for Economic Development corporation
Speech to Amarillo Inventor Forum on game industry
Print covers for squadron boxes 7, 8, 9
print covers for border box 3
Get ted to DO cover for border box 3
Order spare parts we don't need yet but might need for shrinkwrap machine
Get that place to do F&E XLMS
Finish Romulan Attack Rulebook
And probably a bunch more.

Other than that (and the death of Leanna's only living uncle, and my mother thinking I'm my dad, and Paul Franz's father passing away) it hasn't been that bad a week.

By Steve Cole on Friday, August 25, 2006 - 01:29 pm
25 August: Things are happening around ADB.

1. We have hired two new employees. One will be doing Graphics and the other will be doing Marketing, Customer Support, and general office stuff. (Yes, it takes two people to replace Ken.) I will introduce them later; I don't want to jinx things at the last second by revealing their names.

2. We have hired a professional web development company to do a spiffy new FC-only web site so that the new customers are not terrified by the legacy rulebooks. More later.

3. We're expecting the last ship for squadron box 10 any minute now, and if it's good we'll have it to the casting house Monday. Depending on our conversation with the casting house, we should release Romulan Attack and Squadron Boxes 10-11-12 on either 11 or 18 Sept.

4. Having two new people around here is (I hope) going to radically change the company, even more than having Ken around did (since these two women won't be running their own game companies). By handing them anything they can do or can

be taught to do, I will free up much more of my time to wait for it.... design new products.

5. I don't want to go into details but a complex time-eating fiasco happened a couple of days ago and I've lost a lot of traction and ground dealing with it. We got a shipment of new game parts and we only got 2/3 of what we ordered, even that count is wrong so we probably got closer to 60% of what we ordered, and at least half of that is defective. We're having a meeting with the vendor.

6. One of the things that the Graphic Designer will do is to upload new painted photos for our minis to the cart.

7. We shipped a huge pallet of games to Germany on Wednesday for the Essen show. I hope that works out.

By Steve Cole on Monday, September 04, 2006 - 01:48 pm

Things are moving forward with considerable excitement around here.

Jolene has finished her first week, and has proven that we picked the right person. She knows Photoshop better than anyone I have ever seen and can make it sing. It took Jolene a few days to get over being afraid of me, but by Friday she was brave enough to start pointing out my mistakes.

Vanessa is halfway through the two weeks notice she had to give her previous job. She's been in for an hour or two on several days and we're hoping her previous employer will release her early. Again, we picked the right person, and got more than we bargained for. Vanessa is not just a marketing person but a business administration person and will find plenty of things to do. We're already reassigning some of Mike's jobs (things that used to be Leanna's jobs) to her. She'll be here in a few hours for her daily 1.5 hour "initial training" and will be doing starlist requests. Vanessa is already coming up with things I never told her about what ADB isn't doing but should be doing.

Mike remains the best hiring decision in the history of business. The kid has initiative, drive, and we couldn't have survived the last six months without him being in the warehouse to check (literally) tens of thousands of miniatures. But there are more things on his list than he has time for, and we're already reassigning some of his duties to Vanessa and thinking about hiring another part-time warehouse guy.

Federation Commander remains a strong seller and a constant challenge. Last Friday we discovered we were out of Romulan Border counters but tomorrow we will reprint those and oh by the way print the Tholian Attack counters. Today I was getting the bonus ships for boosters 10-11-12 ready to print. (Did I ever mention that Boosters were Ken Burnside's second "strike gold" idea? As much as I pick on Ken, he did come up with the booster idea talking to retailers I have never met at a trade show I never had time to attend. What a guy! Shall we call him Ace Burnside from now on? Nah, it would go to his head.) Anyway, 3 bonus cards on a sheet of 16 leaves some blanks. We are flat out of Fed CA and Klingon D7 cards (at least, cards not already in boosters or boxes) and three other KB cards at down to 10 each. Then I had to fill the other eight, and discovered a conundrum, I am very low on eight KA cards and seven RB cards. After much thought (and tossing a coin) I put the KA cards on that sheet and will use the RB cards for the next sheet (which will probably have the bonus cards for boosters 13-14-15).

Meanwhile, Romulan Attack ships a week from today. The cover is at the printer, the maps are in the warehouse, the cards are at the printer, and the rulebook is being finalized. How about a "mention in dispatches" for Mike West, who has done most of the scenarios for Romulan Attack. I gotta remember to list him specially in the credits. I spent a day last week studying everything about Day of the Eagle (as a historical event) and am adding some new history to that event in FCRA.

The new "national" web site is making me say "wow" as the (expensive!) web developers find ways to present Federation Commander to customers who have not already decided to buy it.

That's just one aspect of the Paradigm Shift caused by FC. Of course, we designed FC to cause a Paradigm Shift, to take us

into new markets and new audiences. We'd have been idiots to do a major advertising campaign for SFB but we're now scrambling to push such a campaign for Fed Commander. We're going to try a lot of things including pay-per-click and running classified ads in random newspapers around the country. A classified ad that says "wanna fly a starship? www.FederationCommander.com" will (once the new national page takes over that url) bring a lot of trek fans into contact with us for the first time. Selling one copy of FCKB would pay to run such an ad in a major city for a week.

I will, in a few minutes, send the key email that will, I hope, see the F&E LSM (and the even larger XSM) to the market within a month.

I hope to have the Cafe Press stuff up and running in two weeks. Vanessa is picking the products and Jolene is rebuilding the graphics. Vanessa is a great gal and we all had a hell of a giggle over the "thong with Klingon emblem on it" before decided not to actually put that on the market.

The "painted minis on shopping cart" product is off to a strong start. When Jolene gets here Wednesday she will have dozens of them to upload. Check back Wednesday night.

The time-eating fiasco was F&E double-sided counters and we will shortly resume marketing grab bags. If anybody is interested.

It's good to be alive, good to be in business. Good to be in a business where sales are up 25% a year and if that national web site performs as advertised may take us to a 50% increase this year. And I didn't even tell you about three other projects which I'm not going to jinx by talking about, any one of which could cause an increase in our sales of 25% a year.

Stay tuned. My next post will be the 100th in the Company Weblog and I want to save it to announced something (anything, really) that is really special. Even I wonder what that will be.

By Steve Cole on Tuesday, September 19, 2006 - 06:00 pm

New "national" web site. We are getting closer to taking this thing live, although it's at least a week away, maybe two. Here is some info....

We own www.StarFleetGames.com (this site) and we own www.FederationCommander.com (which right now "points" to www.StarFleetGames.com).

In a week or two, www.FederationCommander.com will go to an entirely new and different site. A site that focuses 90% on Fed Commander (it includes some Prime Directive and SFBF). SFB gets a periferal mention. The integrated cart is built with color art and a different look and feel.

The original www.StarFleetGames.com site will continue to serve the needs of SFB players and F&E players and any other players who want to visit it for years to come.

As we move through this fall and next spring, Jolene and Joe Butler will be doing a serious revamp of www.StarFleetGames.com to make it prettier and easier to access. There will NOT be a wholesale cleaning out and throwing away of stuff. If the stuff is here, it's because it needed to be here and it probably STILL needs to be here. We will look into ways to eliminate some of the duplication.

The "new" site is designed to serve the needs of non-gamers and casual gamers who will be attracted to that site by a series of advertising and promotional efforts. This is part of the overall plan that was written three years ago to change the company and its product lines. We all know that if we ran an advertisement in the New York Times or the Harvard Gazette or Newsweek and brought people to www.StarFleetGames.com and tried to sell them SFB that we would be wasting our time. The whole point of doing Federation Commander was to create a product we could try to sell to "civilians" (not to mention to "gift givers"). And we are going to now start trying to sell it to them.

We will always have SFB and F&E and will print new products for for them as long as even modest sales continue. SFB players will welcome the wealth of new starships for the 2400 range which Fed Commander will force into existence. We would not have Seltorians, for example, if not for the high

miniatures sales of the Fed Commander market. The SFB market would not support doing nine new Seltorian ship. The FC market will.

By Steve Cole on Wednesday, October 04, 2006 - 07:18 pm

Most people dont' know that I write these things without any planning or notes, and without any input or proofreading, so I always leave something out. Oh well, here goes...

Big thing at the moment is that Leanna and I are leaving for Essen on the morning of 17 October, and will get back sometime on 30 October (but probably won't get into the office until the next day). We're going crazy around here trying to do things that:

1. Have to be done for the show, such as getting new posters done for the display, a new catalog, presentations for European distributors, and buying me a new watch (the one I have had 20 eyars is no longer reliable).

2. have to be done before 1 Nov (or should have been done by now), such as packing demo copies of FedComm and sending them out, getting the new web site finished, re-launching the banner advertising campaign, and lots more.

3. things that people left behind will need. One example is that Vanessa is going to try to get our games into some local stores while we're gone, and she has to have all of the terms sheets and forms for that. Another is that Jolene is going to do special wrap-around art for coffee mugs and Christmas ornaments and we have to give her all of the pieces.

Other than Essen, the normal business of running the company goes on. Mail order and Distributor Orders remain strong. We are four weeks ahead of the sales goals for the year (said goal being \$50K over last year). I'm trying to find a scenario so I can finish Communique 10. Buying thousands of miniatures for Border Box 4 has produced hundreds of "seconds" which is why we now have Gorn, Romulan, Kzinti, Fed and other bags. Our sales agents going to various conventions are selling hundreds of dollars of stuff per month.

All of this is complicated by an enormously time-consuming fiasco with the new die cutting company who cannot do things right. We're not paying for the bad stuff but sorting the good from the bad is taking two hours out of every one of my days for the next three months.

Petrick has almost totally taken over SFB and CapLog. Leanna is catching up on backlogs since she now has some help. I'm actually finding time to work on design stuff. Vanessa is really enjoying marketing (and people who I never had time to talk to are very happy to have Vanessa emailing them news and color sales fliers all the time). Jolene is plowing through graphics, doing a better job in 30 minutes than I can do in five hours (or Ken in six).

Work proceeds on new products including CL34, Strategic Operations, Prime Directive Federation, Prime Directive Tholians, Prime Directive Heroes, Character figures, Leanna's fighting starships, star fleet battle stations, and more.

We never have gotten "the building" set up and that won't happen now until after Essen (and probably after Thanksgiving).

The Great Project remains expanding the company, which covers Cafe Press (that annoying technical problem was solved today), the new web site (it's mostly done and should be live by Monday), Pay Per Click ads (which should start by 1 Nov), the Z-Store and Ebay-Store (which should be up by early November), and finding European distributors (at the Essen show).

Star Fleet Battles continues to sell well and there has been a surge in sales for Star Fleet Battle Force. We need more photos of painted minis for the shopping cart, particularly of entire Squadron Boxes. We have only two entries for the Gorn Squadron Contest and will continue to delay that contest until we have more entries.

By Steve Cole on Friday, November 17, 2006 - 03:07 pm

17 November: Wow, it's been six weeks since I updated this. My apologies. During that time we launched www.FederationCommander.com and we went to Germany and England for a couple of weeks and we've launched Star Fleet

Alert and we're about to launch the on-line newsletter and the pay-per-click ad campaign. Exciting times as ADB, Inc., Indeed.

I should say that we are never going to shut down www.StarFleetGames.com as it has its own market and audience and mission.

The new site (www.FederationCommander.com) has its own blog, which (like this one) communicates company thoughts, plans, and information. Unlike this one, web spiders can read it (discus doesn't get read by spiders because it's in frames) so we blog that one every day with an orchestrated set of posts. (If the spiders don't see something new every day they forget you. We've brought FederationCommander.com to #3 on the charts in six weeks, something of a miracle.

Let me tell you a funny story which shows how the company changed. Many moons ago Frank Brooks and I had a chat about SFB-PBEM and while I don't remember the details one result of that conversation was that he went to work creating FC-PBEM which started operating yesterday. I had forgotten all about it. (I'm so busy that those of my department heads who actually function in their jobs do so without a lot of guidance or supervision because they learn I don't have time to keep track of what they're doing. Frank is one of the better department heads who just keeps doing his job even if I barely remember his name or his department.) Frank dropped me a note yesterday that he had FC-PBEM up and running and wanted a BBS topic for it. I set one up and forgot about it. (Most department heads know that they can get me to do BBS stuff fairly easily since it's no biggie.) I noticed that there were messages in it and since I was working on Communique #11 I thought to post a note for Frank to give me something to print there, and this morning he did it. On the way out of the building to lunch, I stopped at the office where Vanessa and Jolene work (it's off the hallway between me and the door) and handed Vanessa Communique 11 to proofread and marketing-edit and said "Oh, by the way, Frank Brooks launched Fed Commander play by Email this morning so I asked him to send me an article to add to Communique 11." I even thought to mention to Jolene that I had so admired her new SFBOL logo that I wanted her to do a logo for FC-PBEM and by the way for FC-OL and for SFB-PBEM. I thought I had done well, but a flash of phaser fire from Vanessa's eyes told me I had screwed up. Fortunately I was already moving toward the door and avoided most of the burn damage. After lunch, Vanessa and Jolene cornered me in my office (easy since I actually do sit in one corner) and advised me that "Launching a new customer service, no matter how large or how small, deserved more of a launch than an oh by the way" and that if I wanted ADB to grow into a real company I had better get with the program. Within minutes (which my head spun around in a whirlwind of information) Vanessa advised me that FC-PBEM needed to be part of Communique 11, the next Star Fleet Alert, the on-line newsletter, the blog, Myspace, and well the list just kept going. Jolene (who has gone from shy to assertive in the months we have had her around) advised me that the old logos for SFBOL and SFB-PBEM were just not going to cut it with "the new customers" which we were attracting to Federation Commander. All I could do was keep apologizing and agreeing with them until they left my office with the warning "do not ever let this kind of surprise happen to us again!" Now, they're busily at work "Launching" a new customer service they first heard of three hours ago and I'm still trying to figure out if I work for them or if they work for me.

The University Intern Office came by and certified that Jolene and Vanessa were doing a good job and could stay working for me and that I was giving them a positive and enriched work environment and could continue to employ them for the next semester. Using interns is great because you get really smart people really cheap. Most small businesses never think of using Interns (paid interns, they're not free) and most interns work at huge businesses where they're the #17 person in a department and don't get to do much other than clean the coffee pot and run errands. The interns working for me ARE their departments and have a lot more authority, responsibility, work experience, and FUN than their friends who are interns for huge

corporations. I am going to start calling Vanessa "H.R." and let her figure out who that refers to.

We got the last FC product (border box 4) shipped and the annual F&E product (strategic operations). We shipped some new minis (OK6, Federation Command Cruiser, Auxiliaries, ore carrier). We're working right now on CL34 which promises to be a dynamite issue.

The "building" hasn't been built in the warehouse yet (but is scheduled as next after CL34). We need the space desperately.

Mike Sparks now virtually runs the warehouse without supervision. He can do everything out there but run the power-cutter (and only the insurance company is stopping him from doing that).

Isis and Ramses are still happily using their cat door to go to the back yard (which they cannot get out of) when they want to play and we're not home (or home but not awake). The cat door saved their lives when that gas leak filled the house. As reported, we got the doors and windows open a couple of hours before it reached the detonation point and destroyed the house. Lucky lucky lucky.

The big problem remains having so many things we want to do, so many directions we want to go in, and not enough time. Hiring the new people has helped some but they're mostly doing things that we were not doing (but should have been doing) and we need somebody to start doing more of MY non-design job so I can do more of MY game design job.

We got the cafe press thing working and we set up a MySpace thing to drive more traffic to the new site.

Federation Commander is selling well and the Alliance Restocks are coming in at a faster than normal schedule. Vanessa somehow convinced Diamond to release FC as a series of "new" products for Feb-Mar-Apr-May and that could amount to nothing or to a 25% gain in sales.

Film at 11.

By Steve Cole on Friday, December 08, 2006 - 07:14 pm

The "Workflow Plan".

This is something Petrick and I have wanted to do for years, but Leanna refused to be the "task mistress" since she thought we should grow up and work without being forced to work. She should know better.

Anyway, Vanessa came to me a while ago and said she had watched us work 16-hour days to finish CL34 and what a physical and mental toll it took on us (Steve Petrick and Steve Cole) and wanted no more of it. I told her about the workflow idea we had wanted to do, but that it would only work if some really mean female enforced it and made sure there would be no failures.

The basic concept is multi-faceted, but let me try to explain it.

1. Nothing goes on the formal published release schedule until we have almost everything from outside the office, have done a substantial amount of work, and are really confident that an excellent product can be done by the selected release date.

2. The release date will be set somewhere between 30 and 150 days in advance, based on when production slots are available (e.g., no releasing a 144-page RPG book on the same day as a 120-page Captain's log as the printers will melt) and based on a logical orderly flow of products for that particular product line (e.g., four RPG books ready now would be released over four separate release dates 2-4 weeks apart). Generally speaking, we now consider it more important to get the release dates right, not follow arbitrary release delays required by the comic book industry.

3. Petrick and I always wanted to work on projects (particularly Captain's Log) over a period of time instead of in a crisis-managed bunch at the end. We never could because the time when we could be "working ahead" on Captain's Log was the time we were trying to finish Module This or That Operations. To avoid this, Vanessa and I scheduled only three products (FC Tholian Attack, FC Battleships, and CL35). Of course, there are a bunch of boosters and miniatures boxes which push the total

much higher, but those are not really work for the design office.

4. A "workflow schedule" has been set to get FCTA and CL35 done. CL35 will get five pages a week for 20 weeks, then we'll do the last 20 pages (the communications pages which have to be done at the last minute). So far so good, 5 pages last week and this week. Tholian Attack has a more complex schedule, but I've already done this week, next week, and part of the week after next. After we get a chance to do a planning document, I'll add "so many pages for PD FED" and Petrick will add "so many pages for the next SFB product". As we go along, we'll adjust things. If somebody wants to add a product to the schedule, we'll see if we are or are not meeting quotas. If not, no new product goes on the schedule. If yes, maybe one does.

5. Projects are scheduled in a priority basis. If we get the pages done for the scheduled products and not for the non-scheduled products, the non-scheduled products won't become scheduled products for a while longer. But the point is that if we do some work on non-scheduled products, they will have a vastly improved chance to become scheduled products. For example, let's say that over a period of a month or two, I do my required pages for CapLog35, PDFed, and TA and do a few pages for Master Starship Book, but not enough to make it's "release at origins quota". We'll know this months ahead, and can either reprioritize to get it caught up, or scale it back and do another project instead, or just keep doing whatever we can and then, after some other projects are finished, move it up in priority.

6. Some effort will be made (now that Vanessa and Jolene and Mike have taken over many tasks done by SVC and SPP) to clear some backlog. Last Saturday, we cleared half of the "tactical papers with rules problems" and the rest tomorrow. After that, time will be set aside to do "submissions" each week.

All of this only works if Vanessa "motivates" us to work on stuff (by threats of physical violence, or just a hurt look). That means she doesn't just drop in on Friday afternoon and say "how many pages have you done?" but she asks Monday morning "what pages are you going to do?" and then asks every day how many of those are done so far.

END OF 2006 FILE