WAR BETWEEN THE STATES

by Nicky Palmer

I picked up WBTS at Origins '77 and despite staring lovingly at it from time to time, and mapping this year's visit to the states, never ever played it. The problem was that so many people seemed to think it would not work, and it was a big investment of time and labour. Despite the flood of games since, I keep wondering about it, and I was thus very glad to receive this article from Nicky Palmer on the game. Nicky has been gaming for a long time and his experiences may now tempt me out into the open. If WBTS has one feature that I would especially applaud it is its attention to supply/administration, I think this article shows how important they are, and how accurate the result can be.

What follows is the account of a full game between two experienced players of War Between the States over five days of real time. Although the game has a number of unclear features which we have attempted to resolve (see Rule Amendments), we both consider the game the best on the market for depth of play—every turn offers a wide choice of tactical alternatives, and the full game swells into a strategic symphony of almost unparalleled subtlety and intricacy. I hope that the report can convey not only the ebb and flow of the action but the unrelenting pressure on the players to squeeze the last drop of resources out of their positions: for the better part of a week we lived and breathed WBTS, arriving each morning with a fresh list of plans scribbled down in the small hours after play the previous day.

Starting with...

7/1861-9/1861. The North gain the first initiative, and race to secure Leesburg in the east and Cairo in the west. Leesburg is the linchpin of the only solid river line between DC and Richmond: Union possession forces the South to secure their line in the undoubled mountain terrain to the west.

Polk in Memphis reacts with a strong riverborne force, drops 3000 infantry to build a fort in the crook of the Mississippi and its A2915 tributary east of Alton, and sails north of St. Louis to land behind Alton with cavalry and militia. The second Confederate river transport rushes men from Galveston to man the fort at the Mississippi outlet, but two naval flotillas storm the defences and one forces its way past for the loss of the second: the victorious Union ships sail upriver to Vicksburg.

Sherman appears early and joins Lyon in St. Louis, his first duty being to push Polk's forces off the rail lines running into the town. Threatened by Pensacola militia under Huger, the Union destroys Fort Pickens (whose loss would surrender a political point) and are justified though amazed by the 1-initiative Huger succeeding in giving two movement commands running and destroying the ex-garrison, Chorlton and smug, Huger (who historically had a good West Point record but failed badly in combat) returns to Memphis.

A second Confederate fort at A3616 blocks the second river approach to the South, shielding Memphis and Nashville and completing the ring around Cairo. Cleburne and Forrest are picked from the Leader Pool: two of the best to match Sherman. Rounding off a terrific Confederate month, a political appeal in 9/61 brings Kentucky into the CSA with its rail line intact. Forrest takes cavalry and garrison units by train to Louisville, while Nashville militia are sent to block the Cincinnati ferry over the Ohio. McCook storms the ferry anyway, but Forrest ripostes by riding with cavalry north of the Ohio, slashing at the rail net. Garrisons force march to block McCook and reinforce the Confederate lines in Northern Kentucky.

By contrast, the eastern theatre remains relatively quiet, the North secure around Leesburg but unable to do much attacking because of indolent leadership. Butler is richly resupplied in Fort Monroe and looks set to live off champagne for the rest of the game.

Sherman Foiled by Ewell

10/1861-12/1861. Confederate production booms with over 300 supply points pouring into the kitty: five 3-3 infantry units start augmenting to 10-3s, while the Union concentrates on building up the army from militia and garrisons.

Having neutralized Polk's raiders, Sherman moves south and assaults the western A2915 fort, driving the defenders inside despite personal command of the defence by Price. Sherman hammers away at the defenders with storm after storm, losing 6000 troops for 3000 rebels. The South builds a second fort at A3117, just north of Cairo, to try to distract Sherman from storming the A2915 fort which—unknown to the Union player—is excellently supplied (both supplies and builds were kept secret throughout the game). Sherman takes the bait and moves south, at once driving cavalry (sic) inside for a new siege. The numerous Confederate leaders nearby move to counterattack.

Price, reinforced by 10,000 men from Memphis, assaults Sherman's 7000 but fails to progress; however, Ewell force-marches Kentucky militia from Paducah and succeeds in surrounding the Union troops as other militia move up west of the Mississippi from New Madrid. Faced with imminent capture, Sherman abandons his command and flees alone through the line to St. Louis. The exultant Ewell closes in and attacks from March, liberating the fort, knocking out 3000 infantry and a supply train, and capturing 7 supply points— but Ewell pays the price for his daring and is captured in battle by Union soldiers (who presumably escape with him disguised as farmers), reducing the Southern initiative levels for a week (see Rule Amendments), and forfeiting a quarter political point.

Meanwhile, Lyon has taken over the eastern Kentucky drive from McCook, and has reached the outskirts of Lexington, but the winter-swollen rivers and the constant threat of Confederate cavalry raids hamper operations. The Southern position looks strong along the whole front.

As the year closes, there are several important developments. The North makes a political appeal and promptly swings Missouri into the Union camp. On the military front, Porter takes over the assault on Lexington and succeeds at the second attempt: the first CSA city to fall! Afloat, fortunes turn the other way as two Southern river flotillas appear, and the Union hastily builds a fort at Evansville to protect a flotilla further east: two more Union flotillas are bottled up north of the Mississippi forts.

At year's end the South retains a powerful position, with the entire original Confederacy plus most of Kentucky intact, and what later comparison will show to be an actual lead in forces. This is not as surprising as one might think: even without Kentucky, the Confederacy can expect about 113 supply points in 1861 versus 128 per turn for the Union—who generally have to pay more for units. In 1862, again without Kentucky, the average Union lead widens to about 170-125, assuming that Nashville and Memphis fall towards the end of the year. 1863 should see a 2-1 advantage, but by that time personnel shortages will be far more important for both sides.

As the Southern player, I feel pretty happy with the first day's play, which ends here. The most important advantage is the solid Kentucky defences, especially the
Union-City Paducah river line, which is thickly manned with militia. In Northern Kentucky, the militia are again doing an excellent job, the only problem being that they cannot be retrieved from the front for conversion before the possible February demobilization. The hole in the New Orleans defences is irritating, but I have plans in hand for dealing with this. In the east, I have started to garrison the most important ports, using supply trains to commute between the outposts and avoid using precious railcap for supply (this is, I believe, the only way to hold most of the coast through 1862: there isn’t enough winter railcap to feed both front and ports).

However, the North has also been laying plans, and two hammer-blowes are in store.

**Sherman’s Revenge**

**CSA Disaster in Kentucky**

1/1862-3/1862. No corps yet, but the first Northern Army HQ appears and is given to Lyon. He takes 10,000 regulars from Cincinnati and sails west towards the eastmost fort: the South hastily reinforces it, only to find that the flotilla has doubled back to land behind Louisville, cutting off the forward lines. Louisville and Frankfort tremble on the brink, and the cheerful Southern assumptions about Kentucky start to fade. To the west, Sherman returns and this time successfully storms the first of the forts on the Mississippi. SENDING a besieging force to bottle up the next, he crosses to the eastern fort and lays siege to that as well.

And now, the sword of Damocles falls on the Confederacy: militia demobilization! 55,000 men leave their units, wiping out five months’ Kentucky “income” and denuding much of the front. The South attempts to maintain its front, unwise, for a further 14,000 men surrender from supply shortages behind Lyon, though as a consolation the Union garrison at Cairo meet the same fate. The South cannot reasonably complain: the vast horde of 11,000 militia was the main factor enabling the solid west front to hold, and the risk had to be taken.

Lyon forces the river crossing at A4319 and reaches two hexes from Bowling Green, but now the counterattack sets in. Wheeler leads reinforcements from the town to drive Lyon back over the river, and Forrest, Hindman and van Dorn gather scattered forces to meet in Southern Kentucky. Hooker brings reinforcements to Lyon upriver as three Union flotillas race past the remaining Mississippi fort (losing one to the guns) to engage the CSA flotillas: all are sunk in an exchange, and the river is momentarily free, but new Union flotillas appear off the production spiral to shift superiority to the North.

In 3/1862, the Union takes a well-prepared second volunteer call, and are able to put 92,000 infantry on the spiral, thanks to numerous 3-3 infantry awaiting augmentation and a large hoard of supply points. Another Union Army HQ appears, though they gnash their teeth that it isn’t a few corps instead.

The eastern fort starves, opening the river approach to Nashville, and Sherman takes infantry to threaten the rebel rear with encirclement again, but this time Wheeler, Forrest and Hindman are ready and quickly mop up the token landing force: Sherman takes the remainder to help Halleck’s new Army cross the Ohio at Evansville.

In the east, McClellan lands in Morehead City and Newbern, and J. Johnson is forced to send a strong force to pin the invaders to the coast. The northeast is getting hot as well, with the constant Union pressure a steady drain on Southern resources.

Pretty grim!

**South Prays for Rain**

4/1862-6/1862. The last Southern fort north of Cairo falls, leaving Memphis exposed, but within a month a new fort has appeared at A3024 to protect the city. As the winter ends, the rivers subside and the Union offensive surges forward; cavalry breach through to cut the Confederate rail line from Memphis to Nashville before being pounced upon. However, Bowling Green, a Confederate department, now has a truly massive force: Lyon and Hooker take a sharp look at the bulging pile and pull back across the river. Forrest pursues them with cavalry and surrounds them with their backs to the river: seizing the chance of a whole political point and a month’s bonus to Union initiative by killing an Army commander (see Rules Amendments), Forrest personally leads his troops into battle. The gamble fails, and Forrest himself is killed, but despite their good fortune the Union forces retire further and are effectively neutralized for the moment.

An ironclad appears at New Orleans and exchanges with the Vicksburg flotilla, freeing the river from New Orleans to north of Memphis. Militia demobilization strikes the South again, but only 12,000 disappear.

McCook tries a left hook through the woods east of Bowling Green, and is furiously engaged by Cheatham with a superior force and a double initiative: in desperate fighting, McCook’s force is wiped out and he himself is captured. Lyon attempts to cut off Cheatham in his turn, but is frustrated by lack of initiative: an infuriating week for the North! McCook is exchanged for Ewell, the conqueror of Sherman, who returns home in triumph.

At the end of the second day’s play at this point, I still feel reasonably happy despite several serious setbacks. I feel that by steady fort-building I can prevent the Mississippi from ever being cleared. The eastern seaboard seems reasonably secure, and the Kentucky situation is as good as can be expected after the militia disaster.

**New Orleans Joins the War**

7/1862-11/1862. The South takes its first draft, pushing the political point balance to 7½: no more drafts until a Union draft brings the figure down! I am deeply regretting taking three volunteer calls: two political points forfeited for a pathetic extra 15 personnel points.

Couch takes three ships and 20,000 men to Proctorsville, from where an assault on New Orleans can be launched, but the defence is too strong to allow a real threat as yet.

In the west, Lyon plucks up courage and moves back towards Bowling Green. Militia demobilization strikes the Confederacy once more, but the CSA leaders are resigned to rampant pacifism in the militia and are not building anymore: in any case, they are too expensive in the increasingly precious personnel points. Despite a growing preponderance of strength, the North is maddeningly unable to progress. Sherman and Halleck drive south with 37,000 men from Evansville, only to be surrounded by small harassing forces and lose 5,000 men to supply shortages. They fight their way to the river, where supply is guaranteed, and join Lyon, successfully surrounding and destroying a blocking force of 7,000 Confederate regulars. The joint Union armies move forward and at last conquer Bowling Green, but a vast stack of 46,000 men, including most of the remaining Kentucky rebel militia, blocks further progress. Partisans appear and gobble the Army supply of the unhappy Sherman, though the main supply train in Bowling Green is inviolate.

The Union takes its first draft. Sherman leads the dual Army against the Confederate block, giving 6,000 losses to each side in the first week of the campaign. Van Dorn takes command for the defence and leads them to a famous victory in the second week: 12,000 Union dead! Sherman gives up in disgust, curses his corps shortage, and moves instead against Cheatham, who has 13,000 men at A4019 northwest of Bowling Green.

Much more important and (for the South) sinister developments are occurring in the east, however, where McClellan and McDowell land 40,000 men between Richmond and Fort Monroe. Confederate reinforcements shore up the blocking force before the Union leaders can gain attack command, and Lyon is sent east to give the attack more punch.

The East Crumbles

12/1862-2/1863. Reinforcements pour into the Eastern CSA departments, but now the Union pressure is building up to fever pitch. Buell takes 10,000 men to seize the remaining free port at Brunswick, and Lyon arrives east of Richmond. In the ensuing battles, A. Hill is captured, and McClellan gains attack command at last to drive one hex from Richmond in the biggest battle of the eastern theatre: 45,000 Union troops to 44,000 rebels! In the west, the Confederates pull back behind the Cumberland, thanking heaven for the winter, and gain a small victory as McCook is captured again trying to clear Missouri. Sherman pushes south to reach one hex north of Nashville, and crosses to the northeast.
Another climactic battle by Richmond, with both Magruder and McClellan flung into the fight: Magruder dies, McClellan survives. J. Johnson is taking tremendous losses in holding the Northern Virginia line, and accepts the inevitable: the front starts to pull back towards Richmond. Buell lands on the Rappahannock peninsula with another 10,000 men. The Union assault is halted again at the gates of Richmond: Lyon does not have the command span to make the final assault, and McClellan and McDowell lack the initiative.

At the end of the third day's play during this period, the rosy Confederate situation in the west is overshadowed by the grim problems in the east: despite corps HQ starvation, the Union has been able to exert considerable pressure, and the arrival of head-quarters will turn the position very bleak. In retrospect it would have been wiser to fortify the York and Rappahannock rivers and divert more reinforcements from the west into Richmond; I was lulled by the ineffective Union leaders in the area into a false sense of security.

The Net Closes

3/1863-7/1863. Thomas catches the Confederate rearguard north of Richmond and wipes out 9,000 men. From all points of the compass, rebel troops stream into Richmond, the partisans arriving to hit Union supply and give a brief breathing space. A new scratch line forms along the Roanoke. By 4/1863, Richmond is surrounded, and the task for the defence is to stay outside the fortress as long as possible so that more reinforcements can be funnelled in.

In the west, Sherman triumphs at last as Nashville is stormed during the 5/1863 strategic turn. A month later he is at Memphis and attacking with 65,000 troops to 49,000, inflicting a heavy exchange: the defenders retreat inside the fortress with 90 supply points, led by Wheeler and Cleburne with an Army HQ and corps HQ. The Union reaches 900 supply points and stops counting: Nor is supply a problem for the South, thanks to the over 50 cities still in CSA hands.

In the south, the Confederates complete a maneuver planned for several turns by building a fort south of New Orleans, cutting a major river and building a fort south of New Orleans, cutting a major river and building a fort behind Proctorville. This stalled the Union campaign in the area until late 1864 — far too late to take New Orleans. Atlanta's defenders delayed the assault until the end of 1863, after which 30,000 entrenched defenders were able to hold on till the end of the war. Sherman stripped the Memphis siege of forces and marched east to take command against Richmond, but Wheeler attacked out from march and threw off the Memphis siege for three weeks; the arrival of fresh Union troops sent him back inside, and despite entrenchments the city fell in early 1865.

Automatic corps HQ gave the Union assault on Richmond full power from 9/63. A mind-boggling 250,000 men under Sherman confronted 70,000 inside the fortress under Lee, who had been drawn from the pick at last in late 1863. By the time entrenchments arrived in 1864, Sherman had reduced the defence to 34,000, enabling attacks to continue on the 131-160 column. Both sides threw in their leaders with desperate abandon, but gradually the inability of the South to reinforce the capital took its toll, and the city fell in 2/1865, three months before the end.

The political balance at this stage reached 15, but the first Union political appeal for victory failed. With two months to go, the second appeal succeeded: Union Player Victory with a month in hand!

Post Mortem

The victory margin could hardly have been narrower, but it was nonetheless well-deserved: the Confederate ingenuity around New Orleans and Union slowness in putting pressure on Atlanta were outweighed by the correct emphasis placed by the Union player on the Richmond campaign. There were 30,000 too many defenders in the west: placed in Richmond, they would have enabled me to hold out to the end, gaining a further six political points even if Atlanta had fallen as a result of the weaker western defence — giving a two-thirds chance of surviving Union political appeals.

We feel that the game's generally high historical accuracy slips in the last two years, when the CSA were able to field mobile forces; in the game they are nearly always reduced to garrisons under siege. This causes a decline in interest as well as realism, and a better-balanced effect would be given by reducing entrenchments to triple value but linking personnel income to the number of cities still controlled, giving the South a richer reward for holding their ground into 1863, and discouraging a quick run into the major cities. This would also give more use for the supply point total, which starts to bulge obscenely for both sides from 1863. There seems no reason to limit armies to the standard counter mix, but navies must be kept to it; Ellerbrook's suggestion in Fire and Movement allowing five Southern flotillas would unbalance W BTS, as the tenuous grip in our game shows.

But we can't wait for our next game!

RULES AMENDMENTS

W BTS is a flawed masterpiece. Some rules are unclear or omitted; others produce unintentional loopholes for players to pervert. In addition to the office errata (MOVES 35) and the minor additions by designer Irad Hardy in Fire and Movement 12, we adopted the following rules for this game:

[5.26] A movement command covers embarkation, movement and disembarkation on an RT/NT. The destination must be written down and only changed by (a) a further command or (b) an abort returning the mission to base in the event that the destination has become occupied or there are enemy naval forces in the way. This prevents a "floating reserve" just as 6.56 prevents an entrained reserve.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE ARMIES

<table>
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<th>End 1861</th>
<th>Union</th>
<th>Regulars</th>
<th>Cavalry</th>
<th>Garrison</th>
<th>Militia</th>
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<th>Building</th>
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<td>20</td>
<td>93</td>
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<td>45</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>111</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>224( +88)</td>
<td>16( -4)</td>
<td>83( -10)</td>
<td>9( -21)</td>
<td>332( +53)</td>
<td>237( +146)</td>
<td>70</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>117( -36)</td>
<td>22( +14)</td>
<td>90( +45)</td>
<td>12( -65)</td>
<td>241 - 42</td>
<td>50( -61)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>366( +142)</td>
<td>23( +7)</td>
<td>90( +7)</td>
<td>3( -6)</td>
<td>482( +150)</td>
<td>40( -197)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>46( -44)</td>
<td>1( -11)</td>
<td>210( -31)</td>
<td>60( +10)</td>
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The figures (in thousands) reflect the game. In 1861, not only does the South have a lead both in on-map strength and building on the spiral, but the composition of the force shows the active Confederate posture. 1862 shows a dramatic swing: the Union now leads nearly 2:1 in regulars, but the Confederates have taken the lead in garrisons — not least, of course, because of the conversion rule coming into effect in 1863. Six months later shows the Union force still growing by leaps and bounds, but the sharp drop in forces still on the spiral shows the first draft running out. Meanwhile, the South has managed a small increase in regulars, but the garrison figures show the grim pounding of the major city defenders. Note also the increasing cavalry forces as the war expands into the open after 1861; the Southerners increase is due to cheap augmentations. After mid-1863, the Union curve flattened out while the Confederates ran steadily downhill.

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MOVES in English
(continued from page 17)

[6.7, new rule] Siege trains (only) may make a "half move" paying some of the movement points needed to move one hex on one turn and complete the move on the next, using one movement command. This also applies to embarkation/dismarkation. Special rule to prevent an invulnerable CSA fortress being built in forest on the Mississippi.

[7.26] Units may disembark directly into an enemy controlled but unoccupied port (Hardy, F&M) but cannot use further movement points on that turn. Prevents troops leaping off ships and storming 100 miles up a road inland in one week, or slashing a rail line.

[7.54] Houston is two hexes off-map west of 0130 connected by rail to Galveston and Sabine City (source: Civil War map). Count Houston as department for supply purposes only, and give two railcap to south for this line permanently. First of several rules to enrich the western campaign.

[11.22] Naval units cannot directly support amphibious assaults.

[11.22] Ships entering or transiting a fort hex are attacked on arrival, each turn they stay and when they try to leave, using Table 11.24. This is a middle course between the official rule and Irad Hardy's suggested "strong fort" alternative in MOVES115. Normal transit involves two attacks.

[13.3] Troops under siege roll twice for supply, and in cities a further time on the 101 column (suggested by William Glankler in F&M).

[13.4] Only occupied forts may be voluntarily destroyed.

[17.51] Depot creation does not require command. Depot units need supply like all flesh and blood.

[21.3] The South gets points for captured Northern cities in the same way as vice versa.

[21.4] Militia converts by units (so maximum resulting unit is strength 4), but you can pool all militia converted on one turn and reassemble them as units from 1 to 4 as you think fit: thus three 4-2's can be converted to four 3-3's.

[21.63] When deploying garrisons count five points as a unit if counter limitations permit (prevents all garrisons going to one department).

[22.13] The South can build departments in supplied towns in Kentucky and Missouri: in pure Union states they must hold every town (i.e. forget it).

[22.43] Fortress construction requires three combat strength points. The Union gets a free fortress in DC and forts in Cincinnati and Baltimore. The Confederacy gets a fortress in Richmond and forts in Norfolk and Charleston. (Modified from suggestion by Brent Elberbrock in F&M). This prevents the speculative and game-killing first-month gamble by the South against Baltimore proposed by Cornhaghe and Glankler in F&M.

[22.5] Dead leaders are out of the game permanently (prevents suicide becoming respectable in the endgame when you'll pick the fellow again immediately if returned to the cup).

[22.53] The parole rule doesn't work properly: one can hardly avoid losing a leader or two to cap­ ture sometimes at the time the leader in battle (especially the South) and put none or ities in supreme command to avoid the rule zapping someone important. Instead: if a leader is killed, then we rule that the initiative rating of all other leaders on his side drops by one on the next turn (direct command not affected as the grim news discourages his colleagues from recklessness. If a leader is captured, then in 1/4 political point is lost as well (prestige). If an army commander is involved, increase the respective penalties to one month's initiative reduction and a whole political point (imagine Lee being captured!).

[23.11] Personnel point calls/drafts: 10 points is the minimum, as otherwise the 2nd and 3rd drafts should never be taken.

[25.43] Foreign intervention: replace the 26-cycle effect (equivalent to CSA victory) with allowing the CSA to import a US-sized river and sea navy on US terms. This reflects the historical building of CSA warships in Britain: "If these (ironclad rams) for the Confederacy... had been delivered they might have changed everything" (The Civil War, Catton, American Heritage 1971). Various rules govern the ships' arrival which need not be detailed here as the rule was not triggered in the game.

[25.44] Control of Kentucky gives 2 militia per turn per town (unless occupied by the enemy - need not be Garrisoned) for 6 cycles only. Missouri gives 1 per town. The original rule can give the Union almost as many border militia as troops from the rest of the Union!

[25.44] One can decline to "gain" a border state: one may not want Kentucky neutrally allied.

[26.8] Leaderless isolated units are immobile except in retreat after combat. Isolated leaders can move alone without the 1-point initiative reduction.

Additional Rules

Intelligence: Forces within an infantry march (not forced march) of an enemy unit must on request be placed in one of the following categories:

- 0 combat points: Unarmed force
- 1-5 points: Small force
- 6-15 points: 10,000 men
- 16-35 points: 25,000 men
- 36-60 points: 50,000 men
- 61-85 points: 70,000 men
- 86-125 points: 100,000 men
- Above 125 points: Vast force

The rule gives a realistic picture of partial information but leaves a tantalizing veil over the exact strength. WITP owners may like to torment themselves further by using the uncertainty chits, encouraging delayed attacks while information is checked!

Western forces: Sabine City and Galveston count as ports while in rail link with Houston off-map. Uncaptured Southern towns give 1 militia turn in Texas/Louisiana during 1864/5. The North gains a political point for clearing CSA forces in each of (a) Texas and Louisiana and (b) Arkansas and Missouri by the start of 1862 and 1863, for a maximum of 4 points if both objectives are gained in both years. The South gains a point for retaining 5 combat strength points in each pair of states at the start of 1864 and the start of 1865. Militia west of the Mississippi can treat roads as rail for supply purposes, without using railcap.

The Players

Chris Strachan, USA: Danish player with a decade of experience; historian with special interest in the Civil War period. Careful, methodical player, now taking his fourth game of WBTS with the North. Strengths: planning in depth, precise execution of well-prepared operations.

Nicky Palmer, USA: English wargames devotee since 1965; author of Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming; mathematician. Aggressive, resourceful, but careless, in his fourth game of WBTS with the South. Less accurate than Chris but adept at finding unexpected escapes from bear-traps of his own making.

Each player is taking the side foreign to his instinct: in WBTS the North must drive forward fiercely, while the South must live with the knowledge that each slip might be their last: this "stretching" of natural inclinations adds tension to the game.

Forward Observer
(continued from page 12)

use of simultaneous movement, generally considered a mistake in a fantasy game, is well-disguised by the use of a Personal History Pad, which can allow players to feel a sense of accomplishment and to identify with their character.

Unfortunately, Magic Realm was not properly developed. The combat system, to put it bluntly, just does not work. Any player with an IQ over 80 can easily calculate whether or not his character will win or lose a combat before engaging in or declining battle. Therefore, the weaker characters will attempt to flee whenever possible, and will die a very quick and unsatisfactory death when the system forces them to join in combat. It is also easy to figure out the power structure: some characters are better than others, and there is no amount of good game play that can change this fact. Even after such ramifications as magic and natives are added, it is still fairly easy to calculate the result (and the balance of power changes slightly). After realizing the care and effort that went into this game, I feel that if a solid development job had been done, this could have been one of the best releases of the past few years. As it is now, Magic Realm will frustrate players.

It is time for gamers to make clear their feelings about the product standards set by the major companies. Without exception, all the companies that can afford excellent graphics are businesses, and need the dollars of the consumers to stay afloat. Therefore, the individual gamer can inform the companies of his opinion of their product in language the companies will clearly understand: by funding the companies to reward them for good games, or by refusing to buy from those firms that do not fulfill their responsibility to the gamers. It had best be soon, though: in most entertainment industries, once large retail sales are assured to a company, the quality standard always drops.

Star Quest, from Operational Studies Group 1261 Broadway, New York, N.Y. $3.95

Magic Realm, from The Avalon Hill Game Company 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, Md. $15.00
