

Conan

If you've heard that SPI is doing a game on Conan the Barbarian, you probably heard about it before the designer; the designer is always the last to know. As it is, the game has come through two designs and has finally settled down to the final product design that you, the audience, will see.

Conan is for 2 to 4 players with each of the contestants representing one of the major factions of Hyborea (Conan's fantasy world). Each faction has agents at their disposal with which they attempt to thwart their enemies' plans while enlisting the aid of our fearless hero, Conan. There are five types of agents: Wizards, Warriors, Courtesans, Assassins, and Thieves. Each type of agent has different capabilities and different strategies for enlisting the aid of our hero.

The object of the game is to gain Conan experience points — the more experience points the better. The number of points a

player amasses during the course of the game determines the success of Conan's career (while under a player's control) as well as how successfully the player has performed. For example, if a player can amass 50 experience points, Conan reaches the level of Captain of the Imperial Guard, whereas 125 experience points is a kingship for our intrepid hero.

Players can amass experience points only when they are in control of Conan, maneuver him to the proper place and send him on an adventure. Adventures are taken from the Robert E. Howard stories. One such adventure, for example, is called "The Queen of the Black Coast." In this particular adventure, Conan first escapes the police by leaping into a handy trading vessel just leaving port; the ship is attacked by pirates and Conan, alone and surrounded, wreaks bloody havoc (what else?). At the last possible moment, the beautiful captain of the pirates, Belit, falls in love with Conan. They merrily raid the southern coast and each other for a time. Later, they sack an ancient evil city where all the pirates including Belit are killed, and Conan is forced to avenge his love by killing the evil flying man-ape who did the gory deed. For a successful completion of the adventure (utterly obliterating the murderer of Conan's first great love), the controlling player is granted 35 experience points.

Control of Conan is gained by sending agents after Conan and either seducing him (Courtesan), befriending him (Warrior) or hypnotizing him (Wizard). In addition, if Conan can be defeated in combat, he can be controlled (this one is really tough to pull off). Thieves can also steal horses and magic items, while Assassins can kill enemy agents. To make things even more interesting, Wizards who capture enemy Courtesans can sacrifice them to the Nameless One and increase their magic level. Well, back to the Hyborean drawing board... more next time.

Mark Herman