

TribeNet PBeM: A Rose Amongst Weeds



In a world inundated with games offering immediate gratification, profoundly predictable gameplay, and near-mindless questing and raids, there are few games left which appeal to those players who favor strategy over flashy graphics, inter-player interaction over PvP, and an immersive, dynamic world over scripted storylines and endless cut-scenes.

TribeNet is one of those games.

Born of the PBM genre in the mid-1990's, TribeNet developed a large following of die-hard strategy and empire building gamers who didn't mind spending 2 weeks pouring over detailed turn reports and maps, contacting allies, arranging trades, or hatching battle plans before jotting down the next turn's orders and sending them off by post. And then waiting. It's what we did, and we loved it. The excitement and suspense we felt when we knew our turn reports were going to arrive was palpable.

TribeNet went through a short list of GM's during those early years, and was eventually turned into a PBeM game with the arrival of the Internet Age. Since 1997, TribeNet has run almost continuously, and has been, for the past 20 years or so, helmed by Peter Rzechorzek ("Peter the Unpronounceable" to many of his long-term gamers)

A complete "re-boot" of the game happened a few years ago, and the world started anew. Many of the Old Guard returned to play in the new version, and a host of new players have joined, as well. We currently boast in excess of 50 players internationally, with more joining every turn.

The beauty of TribeNet for old-school PBM-ers lies in it's nostalgic look and feel....reports are delivered in text format, and mapping is performed by the players themselves (with most of us using Hexographer, which makes map sharing easier.)

The allure for old and new players alike lies in the game's expansive geography, open-ended "story", and near-limitless avenues for expansion and growth (either by the sweat of the brow, or on the backs of your conquered opponents.)

The milieu of TribeNet is very similar to Bronze Age or Iron Age Western Europe, though there are aspects which bring to mind Eastern cultures and the slow advance of knowledge and technology. Steel swords can

be used right alongside primitive bone Spears, and warriors wearing plate armor are often pelted with Mongol-inspired Horsebows. Any "fantasy" element is only alluded to in a vague description of the Alchemy skill, and even that is only a rumor.

The primary social/political unit in TribeNet is the "Clan", which can be split into smaller tribes to conduct various activities, build villages, and more. Tribes can be further split into smaller units which are useful for a wide variety of tasks including exploration, Mining, transporting goods, or exploring the vast and mysterious oceans.

There are no pre-designed "classes" in TribeNet...no Clan is pre-destined to be a "Merchant" clan, or a "Warrior" clan, or a "Slave Trader" clan. The player controlling the Clan makes the call on how he/she wishes to run the Clan based on the Skill Attempts chosen each turn during game play. And, the list of skills available is pretty expansive, offering many, many opportunities for deciding which direction you wish to take. It is entirely up to the player.

The first few turns of TribeNet are offered for free, as a sort of "trial period" to see if it is the kind of game for you. After the initial 13 turns or so, turn fees are not extravagant, and, for the entertainment value you can receive, are actually quite reasonable. A player such as myself can easily spend a few hours per day planning, communicating with other players, exchanging maps, and generally enjoying the various aspects of the game. That time requirement is not typical, and most orders can be completed in under an hour for a fairly well established clan. But, you can put as much or as little effort into the game as you wish. That is what sets TribeNet apart from so many of the modern time-sink games which require you to spend a certain amount of time online each day. TribeNet is a hobby, and can be played as such. It is, however, an immensely enjoyable hobby, and I urge any player, from any type of game, to contact Peter and request a start-up.

It won't cost you anything, and you might just stick around to see if you have what it takes to conquer the world!

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