

COD I, COD II and COD UK

ACOMPARISON

By Joseph Lanza

I have the pleasure (and sometimes agony) of playing in all three COD's — the original Crack of Doom, Crack of Doom II in the U.S., and Crack of Doom II in the United Kingdom, and have been asked to write a brief review comparing the similarities and differences between the games, which I am happy to do. This review was written originally for inclusion in the U.S. Cosmic Balance, and I put in a little more info on the U.K. version of COD II for the benefit of the U.S. Players. The U.K. GM then asked me to include more info on the U.S. games for the benefit of the U.K. players, particularly on player role-playing. Result — it's long. But hopefully, worth reading.

Although the game mechanics of the original Crack of Doom are familiar to many of us, there are quite a few players in COD II who are not familiar with them. In the original Crack of Doom (COD I) we are limited to fewer character classes (seven or eight if I recall correctly) than in COD II, but one advantage is that all magic spells are available to Sorcerers (the sole spellcasters of COD I), as opposed to COD II where different spells are restricted to different classes, making management of spell resources more challenging in COD II. Additionally, there are fewer skills and bonuses, and we do not have the advantage of foragers, which are an important component in COD II. Another difference, and one I prefer, is the ability of individual troop types to obtain offensive and defensive bonuses, which I think more realistically reflect the quality of different troop types within an army. There are also fewer troop types overall than in COD II, and fewer ship types. All these facts tend to lend the game a pure wargaming aspect, and this is reflected in the mindset of the players. And this is where the game really differs from either of the COD IIs — most of the COD I players, some who have been playing for well over 10 years now — have been locked in a life-or-death struggle for domination of Panagea for many years. Many of the players are thus well established and quite experienced. The waxing and waning of the fortunes of the CSA, LOOT and Kodan Raman versus those of AIM, Terminators and EGA, in this titanic struggle are epic. COD I is played more as a pure all-out wargame, with large armies and empires (20,000+) and high stakes, with the large central continent and a few well-placed islands supplying the perfect stage for playing out massive conflict.

The single most significant change in COD II is the addition of new character classes and in how all characters influence an army or empire. Certain characters, notably Warlords, influence the performance of your army not only in combat but in other things such as foraging, while others, like Bards, influence morale. This was true in COD I to some extent, but their effects have become more

refined in COD II. Some of the character classes, such as Necromancers, provide significant new spellcasting abilities, while others (most notably the Gladiator and Archer) increase the effectiveness of your army in combat, considerably more so than Warlords. It also appears to be easier for the GMs to add new classes as the game matures.

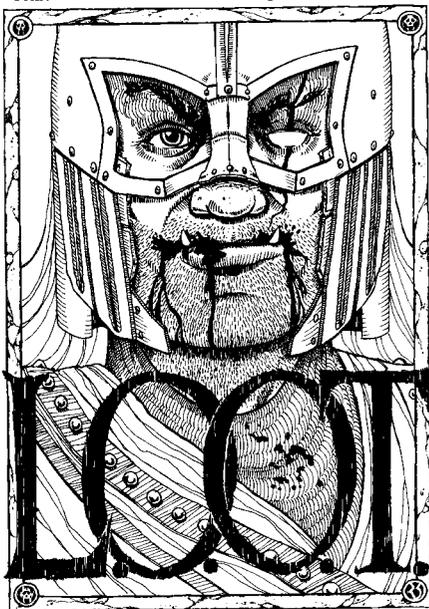
COD II in the U.S. also gives us Foragers. This is another important change, and it makes managing a larger empire easier and brings effective management within the reach of the average player. COD II also boasts expanded troop types, and quite probably more ship types. Gone, however, are specific offensive and defensive bonuses for individual troop types, which I find to be a disappointment. Rather, many of the former bonuses are now lumped together as general armor bonuses, or general offensive and defensive bonuses. However, on the other hand, COD II adds battle-book options (tactical maneuvers) and multiple combat options (land attack, sea attack, city attack, etc.). This gives more flexibility to the combat system, and one that will have to be explored further. As I have already noted, troop types are also expanded. Many generic troop types found in COD I are now found in light, medium, and heavy configurations in COD II. There are also more skills and bonuses in COD II than in COD I, which I think rounds empires out better. It also appears that it is possible to reach higher skill and bonus levels than in COD I, but this is unconfirmed by me. The U.S. game has also imported a few ideas from the U.K. game, which I will discuss later. COD II U.S. is gamed more as a cross between role-playing and a pure wargame. Many aspects of the pure wargame carry over from COD I. This is true, in part, because many COD I players have migrated to COD II (playing in both games). However, there is more role-playing among the players, and with the GMs, than there appears to be in COD I. One addition to COD II is random encounters which can show up at any time. These encounters usually take the form of mercenary units looking for work, or small bands of religious zealots who offer to teach empires advanced character classes or skills if they will convert to their religion. Other encounter types probably exist as well. For the exploration of certain special sites, like ruins or towers, a computer printed



description sometimes is sent back to players; if not, a GM description provides the necessary background. Large alliances have sprung up, particularly KIL, ACE and ICON, and seem to be dominating the politics of Lorasias. The alliances controlled by long-time players COD I, such as G.O.D. and RoC, seemed locked in their age-old struggle and not really engaging the other alliances. Thus, the younger alliances, composed in large part of newer and younger players, with some more experienced ones thrown in, have been able to take the lead in shaping the politics of Lorasias. Some, like KIL and ACE, have been very aggressive, and others, like ICON, have been more peaceful (exception: Deadwood Campaign). There are also quite a few more independent players — players without any real alliance ties.

In both of the U.S. games role-playing is left largely in the hands of the players. Players define their characters through posts to the Cosmic Balance and the ICON message board, and also in their interactions with each other. Within the game itself, however, in their deeds and actions, there seems to be very little ability to further distinguish or define a character. Perhaps I have become locked in the mindset of viewing the U.S. games as more wargames, and have thus not engaged in as much role-playing as may be available, and so perhaps I have failed to explore this aspect more fully. In my opinion, while the U.S. players engage in quite a bit of role-playing among themselves and in the CB, they still appear to view the game primarily from the standpoint of a wargame. This means that the plots in both COD I and COD II are largely player driven with little GM intervention. There are ruins and temples and towers to explore, and quests to be fulfilled, but the main thrust of the action is player driven. As I have already mentioned, in COD I, a tremendous, 10-year struggle between three large chaotic/neutral alliances (Circle of Steel Alliance (CSA); League of Orcs, Ogres and Trolls (LOOT),

'Consume thine enemies and their strength shall become yours.'



and Kodan Raman) and three large Lawful alliances (Aegis In Malum (AIM), Terminators, and Elderwood Guard Alliance (EGA)) dominates play. In COD II, several large alliances are jockeying for dominance, including the Independent Confederation of Neutrals (ICON), Heroes and Raving Maniacs (HARM), Reign of Chaos (RoC), Guardians of Destiny (G.O.D.), the All Chaos Explorers (ACE), and Kobolds Invade Lorasias (KIL). Much of this jockeying is political and economic in nature, with occasional military flare-ups between them, especially RoC and G.O.D. which are composed of many long-time COD I players. Thus, there is considerably more player role-playing in COD II than COD I where the long-term players have settled down into a truly titanic contest of duking it out with large, well established armies and empires.

COD II U.K. is, in some respects, almost like another game. The U.K. players are much more into the role-playing aspect of the game, and the GM is more than willing to engage them in this respect. In that regard the wargame aspect of the game is very secondary. Where in the U.S. game we tend to take a city by force, in the U.K. game cities have been taken by treachery, coup d'etat, the occasional combined assault by several cooperating armies and, apparently, the Crack itself as it moved across the land (I have no desire to be in its path). Races traditionally weak in the U.S. games because they do not do as well in combat and growth under the game engine are the most powerful empires in the U.K. game — Goblins and Dwarves — due solely to their players' role-playing skills. NPC armies (run by the GM) are also more active in the U.K. game and their actions must always be taken into account. Quests are frequent and easier to find, but certainly not easy to undertake! The underlying game mechanics are essentially the same, however, although the U.K. GM has added many more skills and bonuses to the game. For example, there is a musical arts skill, and one player has used it to establish a drums and bagpipes unit within his army which marches with the army going into battle, giving a morale bonus. There are, I hear, clothes-making skills, and armor-making, fletcher, and weapon smithing skills, and many other skills. I think these are a great addition to the game. The U.K. game also allows armies to possess unique items, and that addition has now made its way into the U.S. game. Another interesting extra in the U.K. game is the ability of characters to gain skills. This creates a special niche for Squires, who can work with the Craftsmen on, say, metalworking skills, and thereby know metalworking. I recently had a Squire working with the Craftsmen in this manner, and then had them make a sword (with him directing the operation) which was entered into and won third place in a contest. I suspect Squires can gain healing arts skills and become the equivalent of doctors, or other skills, such as engineering or manufacturing. The possibilities seem endless and presents a good use for Squires. The U.K. game also adds a new kind of magic, Tandilus Magic, to

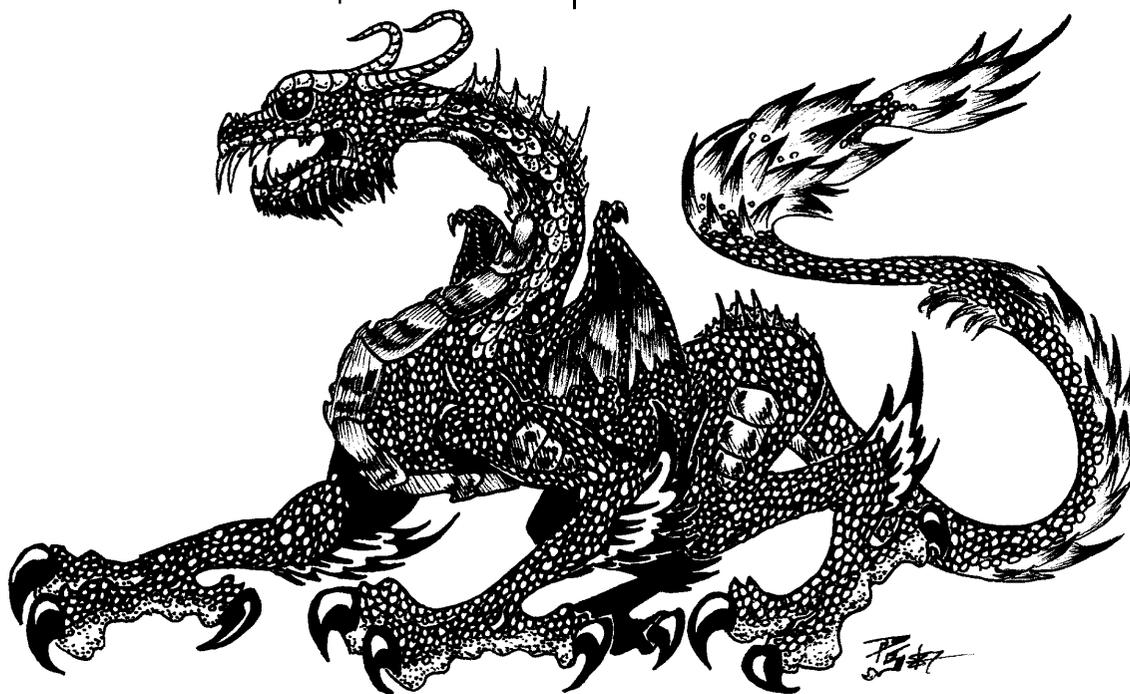
the game, which is sort of a free-form version of magic. It is dangerous and expensive to learn, and I know very little about it, other than I want to learn it (soon). Training characters and troops is also very different. Troops can only be acquired and trained at a settlement, unless your empire carries with it sufficient resources to outfit and train troops in the wilderness. This latter is apparently assumed in the U.S. game. Some characters can be trained anywhere, such as Warlords and Battlemages, whereas others have to engage in specialized training for several months with a teacher (Bard) or temple (Paladin). I suspect that advanced classes fall into this latter category. Increasing character stats is also a bit more difficult. In the U.S. games we can repeat an action; in the U.K. game, however, repeating an action generally doesn't work — you have to add something to it. Take agility, for example. I started the character off practicing dodging techniques and acrobatics. The next turn I added additional sparring, and the turn after that the character had to start dodging thrown items such as rotten fruit and vegetables. This last turn I had the character combine the acrobatics with the sparring.

The U.K. game also has a unique movement option — give up all special actions, and you can double move in a single turn. Quite useful. Also, the U.K. game allows you to run two armies on a single turnsheet (special turnsheet) for an additional fee. This is not quite as expensive as running two separate turns, but a nice option when you don't want to do a ton of special actions. Additionally, the GM will usually pick one action as an expanded action, which means you get anywhere from half a page to several pages of a response. In this regard, the GM is much more expansive on writing out turn results, with even routine special actions getting a short (or long) paragraph in response, usually with a healthy dose of humor. You can opt for the short

“Your craftsmen gain level 1 woodworking” type of response, at a reduced cost, if you so desire. Finally, one of the biggest differences between the U.S. and U.K. games is that each player in the U.K. game is allowed only one empire, as opposed to three in the U.S. game. On the other hand, NPCs can join your empire, and NPC empires can become allied with yours, giving you a degree of control over their actions.

Finally, in the U.K. game a great deal of attention is paid to characters. In both U.S. games characters (lots and lots of characters) are trained up as resources — spell casting resources primarily. In the U.K. game a fewer number of characters get trained up, and more effort is spent on developing their attributes. A single highly trained character leading an army can be extremely effective. In this regard I lag behind most of the U.K. players because I have been using U.S. tactics. Basically my warriors all got their butts kicked in the annual Lorasias Games (the U.K. games equivalent of the Olympics) by other empires' characters, although I did well in a few events. I will be paying more attention to developing stats in the future.

The U.K. game is a little more expensive. The difference in the exchange rate is unfavorable to the U.S. dollar, and U.K. banks will charge an additional service fee to process a money order or check. You can pay online via credit card, however, with no penalty. Turn fees I think come a little higher overall, but I haven't done the math. Also, there is a three-day turn around, as opposed to 10 days in the U.S., but that is because the mail doesn't have as far to travel in the U.K. (and with the exception of three U.S. players, all the players are in the U.K.). On average though, one turn every week-and-a-half is average, for about three or so a month.



There are also differences in the newsletters. The monthly battle reports are not reported in the U.K. CB. The U.K. GM explained to me that because many of the players were engaging in various plots, and because the emphasis was more on role-playing, not reporting army battles was his way of preserving the fog of war, whereas in the U.S. games, which were being played with more emphasis on overall strategy and tactics, reporting the battles was necessary so that everyone could keep up with what everyone else was doing. Thus, the U.K. CB pages are filled more with player contributions, and can be either very short (one or two pages) or very long (such as when I submit one of my now infamous 7 or 8 page poems).

Ultimately, however, the most important differences in the games come down to the players and GMs. I have had the good fortune to correspond with many players in both games, but I must admit I've never had any out-of-character correspondence with any Lawful players in the U.S. games, which I find disappointing. This may be because I'm perceived to be a primarily Chaotic-aligned player, but I would nonetheless welcome out-of-game correspondence not only from Lawful players, but from any player (in truth, only one of my COD empires is Chaotic). I also

correspond with the GMs. Having two little girls of my own, I'm always interested in the progress of Sammi, and so usually ask about her when I send in turns. I also correspond with the U.K. GM. In my opinion, each GM brings a different approach to the game, based in part upon their perceptions of what the majority of the players want, and upon their own skill. All do a great job.

I hope you all enjoyed reading this. I tried not to babble for too long. I enjoy immensely playing in all three games. I would welcome any correspondence from any player, Lawful or Chaotic, U.S. or U.K. You may e-mail me at lanza@neosoft.com (or through the ICON home-page), or diplo me through the games (C#1102 Shu-Cho-Kan, E#423 Minzoku in COD I; C#672 Prester John, E#251 Tamarkand in COD II U.S.; and C#783 Aethelu Wintersong, E#328 Horseclans of Ageria in COD II U.K.). And now, I think I have about thirty turns to fill out ...

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