

Crosstime War

By AlHazred ([original post](#))

It was a mysterious mailing that first alerted you to the game, Crosstime War. Billed as the “ultimate wargame experience,” the ad got you really excited, so much so that you're here, bright and early Thursday morning, at a tiny gaming Con in a strange hotel in the sticks.

Nevertheless, you found the out-of-the-way ballroom where the game was being held. Shrouded with black curtains that hang down from the badly-lit ceiling almost twenty feet above you, the room seems to have quite a bit of space, really - only ten people have signed up, yet you see easily twice that many people already here; apparently, the organizers have quite a staff. It looks like they really went all out promoting the proper atmosphere for the game, too - you were given a black robe to put on over your street clothes, before you even got to go through the curtains.

The game looks like it will be everything it was advertised to be, though. Beautifully-detailed game surfaces reflect a huge variety of tactical terrains - a futuristic city that actually glows in the dim light, a small village of mud huts in a terrifyingly savage jungle, dangerous-looking back-alley streets in modern New York - airless worlds and untamed wilderlands and mysterious plains, oh my!

Well, you spent all weekend playing the game, but it was really, really worth it! The vendor in the corner sold his food much cheaper than you expected, and he had a steady supply - brought in by a steady circuit of delivery boys, everyone wearing the same black robes. With the food cheap and in plentiful supply, and the amazing detail of the game, the time just flew by - you think you may very well have been up for the full 96 hours of the Con! You feel that way, anyway.

But none of that fatigue can take away from the sense of accomplishment you feel. The game proved to be an intricate contest between rival factions in control of time machines. You were encouraged to participate in diplomacy and espionage between rounds spent directing your imaginary troops in challenging combats. You will always remember the triumph you felt when your squad of medieval knights managed to seize the flying saucers on the English countryside, and the effect they had “centuries later” when you brought their “descendants” in as reinforcements during an interstellar battle near Proxima Centauri. Triumph and camaraderie, as your faction won - these are the things that make wargaming worthwhile.

As you emerge, blinking and bleary-eyed, into the corridor, you turn to find a lot of the other Con-goers near you eyeing you strangely.

“Well, it took all weekend, but it was worth it! That was a great game!” you mused. “What time is it?”

“It's 9 o'clock,” a staff member says. “And what do you mean, 'all weekend'? It's Thursday! The Con hasn't even really started yet! And that ballroom's not in use, anyway!”

Plot Hooks:

1. *Mystic*: The Crosstime Wars game is actually a moment magically unstuck in time. All sorts of people have participated in it, for the most part generals reliving old glory or youth burning to try themselves on the fields of war. The player might have stood across the table from a black-robed Julius Caesar and not known it, for the magic is such that people communicate on a

mental level and never even notice, bypassing language barriers completely. Perhaps the magic was made for a reason, bringing insight to people of different times and places, inspiring great military victories. But to whose benefit? Or it could be inhabited by the ghosts of people who were and people yet to come, a chance to interact with might-have-beens. Perhaps one of the other people in the player's faction is actually his potential descendant, or his ancestor in another timeline. All that is known is that it is a controlled phenomenon: the player received an ad in the mail, after all. Someone's casting the spells - the questions of the day are, "Who? And why?"

2. *Weird Conspiracy*: The game is actually part of a real military operation taking place across space and time. The factions are real, and from the future when time travel technology exists. However, to prevent causality from ruining their efforts and possibly destroying their future, they cloak the war behind this elaborate facade. The different factions recruit people from all walks of life and all times and places, bringing them to a number of sites located in areas protected from time-shifting, all under the auspices of the Chronal Accords (think of the Geneva Convention, but governing crosstime conflict). The player has unwittingly been tapped for his knowledge of tactics and strategies, learned from years of playing wargames. Is this Crosstime War the last? Or will there be future conflicts where the player will again be invited to a "very special wargame."
3. *Fortean*: The "Crosstime Wars" event is actually a being of supernatural power. In but a moment, it draws lifeforce from those it ensnares, draining some of their essence and perhaps memories as well; they experience a period of "extra time," a hallucination which their minds fill with imagined experiences according to their expectations. Some people never emerge, their essences consumed utterly by the creature while they are enslaved to its will - those people reappear in other people's hallucinations as the "organizers" or "staff" of whatever imaginary event is created.

The being has grown powerful over the years. Where before it could only feed off of one or two people at a time, now it draws in almost a dozen. It uses its enslaved minions to draw in specific people, chosen for the succulent "flavor" of their life force. Perhaps over time, it becomes greedier, leaving none to emerge from the trap. Will the players realize what's behind the string of strange disappearances of whole classrooms or board meetings? And what will happen if the creature turns out to be "eating for two"?

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