DECLINE~AND~ FALL~OFF~ THE~ROOSHAN~ EMPIRE

RED SUN RISING – A GAME PROFILE

BY D.I.A. MACK

Although this recent release's title is also that of a book on the siege of Port Arthur the game is SPI's simulation of the entire Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, combining both the land and sea aspects of the conflict: this it does by using a single sheet on which the land campaign is fought on the operational scale, with a small-scale inset map for the strategic naval aspect. Unlike GDW's 'Russo-Japanese War' the latter is not a separate game but an integral part of the whole, subsidiary but nonetheless vital to the land campaign.

At this juncture it must be pointed out that 'Red Sun Rising', as originally published, suffered severly from vaguenesses and obscurities in its rules, so much so that one could only wonder what the playtesters, let alone the designer and developer, had been about when they were working on it. Fortunately, all or most of the anomalies lay in the rule-book as opposed to the game-system itself and could be easily cleared up, given a little thought and revision: at the time of writing (late May) SPI have produced clarifications to an extent which has much improved playability, although a few weaknesses remain, none of them major ones.

> By now you will have read the errata from issue 14 and there is more in this issue - now you can read the review! (We always get the cart before the horse don't we!) Editor.

General Outline and Description

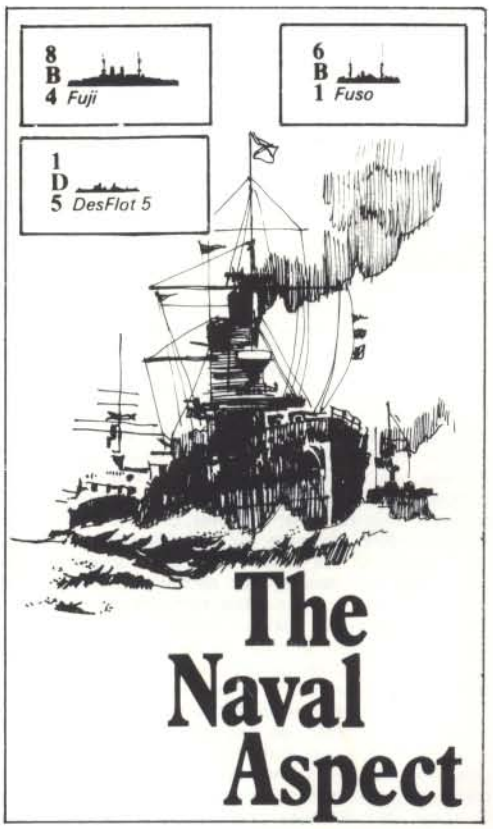
The game lasts a maximum of 23 moves on a time-scale of one month per move, covering the period from February 1904 - the historical commencement of hostilities - to December 1905. It is therefore possible, though unlikely, that play could continue beyond the war's historical conclusion on 29th August 1905: it can also come to an earlier end, particularly should the Japanese army fall behind schedule.

The 22" x 34"map-sheet shows Northern Korea, Southern Manchuria and the southern tip of Russia's Maritime Province, the north-east-south-west extremities being Kirin (modern Chi-lin), Vladivostock, Seoul and Port Arthur respectively, all on a scale of approximately 15 miles to the hex. The blank sea-areas of Korea Bay and the Sea of Japan are occupied by a well-conceived series of record tracks plus a CRT and a terrain key: there is also a 10" x 6" inset map at a scale of about 190 miles to the inch, showing Japan and the surrounding seas and the Asian coastline from north of Vladivostock to about Shanghai via Korea. The hex-grid on this secondary map is much larger than usual, the hexes being one inch across to facilitate speedy 'real time' naval movement.

On the main map the dominant terrain is rough, so much so that movement through it is the 'norm' at 1 MP per hex: clear hexes cost ½ MP and the scanty road network 1/3 MP per hex. ZOC do not extend into rough hexes except along roads: this can provide opportunities for flanking movement and penetration, especially in the fluid early stages of the game. One map feature affects play so much that it merits special mention now: it is the railway connecting Port Arthur to the north map-edge via Liao-Yang and Mukden. This line can be used by both sides, from the entry hex to the first enemy-occupied hex for the Russians, from either Port Arthur or Dalny (once captured) to the first enemy hex for the Japanese. When supply routes and command radii are computed, movement along the railway does **not** count against MF: in addition Russian units always have free movement by rail, whether activated or not - this extremely important point is not made clearly in the original rules but has been clarified subsequently. Moreover, Vladivostock, on the end of the Trans-Siberian Railway proper, is linked to the Port Arthur line at the off-map city of Harbin, another point clarified in the errata.

Each game-turn is divided into a naval and a land segment, each with its own sequence, the former being used by the Japanese player to move troops from Japan to the seat of war, to establish supply beachheads or ports and to protect these operations with his fleet and by the Russian player to act the part of Demon King and seek to frustrate all these designs. On land the Japanese player, whose army starts the game fully mobilised but all in Japan, must first establish himself on the mainland and then march inland to defeat the Russians and seize various cities: to maintain momentum he must use his limited merchant fleet capacity to keep his units moving across from Japan to already-established landing areas, to ports or to new invasion sites. In addition, he depends on his merchant fleets for supply and must be ever-mindful of the need to keep his logistical beach-heads where they will operate most efficiently. The Russian player must initially make the best of a bad job with his thinly-spread, under-strength and badly-led forces, delay the Japanese until the increasing capacity of the Trans-Siberian Railway builds up his potentially enormous army and then lumber down the line of the railway to drive the impertinent invader into the sea - provided that he has not left it too late.

Two factors dominate the game-system on land, namely Command Control and Supply, both of which will be described more fully later on: suffice it to say at present that neither side can bash on anyhow with any old mixter-maxter of units. Without organisation and proper lines of communication one will get nowhere other than into a mess.



The Naval Aspect

As has been said, the naval side of the game is strategic, but combat between fleets which have sighted each other is played out on a separate tactical display sheet. On the small map fleets are represented by counters, one each for the Port Arthur, Vladivostock and (eventually) Baltic squadrons and for the Japanese 1st and 2nd Fleets (however the Japanese player may, if he wishes, have just one combined fleet) and one for each Japanese merchant fleet in play: a second counter for every merchant fleet is placed on the land map when the appropriate fleet reaches the mainland, in order to determine the fleet's exact location for troop landings and as a supply base.

A naval segment will begin with the Russians in Port Arthur and/or Vladivostock, the Japanese either in port or on blockade outside one or both Russian bases (probably the latter) and merchant fleets in Japan, loading troops, or else in mainland ports or coast hexes, acting as supply sources for the field army. Naval fleets are 'nonactivated' at the turn's start and players wishing to move must

roll the die for activation - a number equal to or less than the appropriate admiral's command factor does the trick, the die roll being modified in all but summer game-turns. As a guide, Togo and Makarov are each rated 5, and next best admiral on either side being a 3. Thereafter the turn proceeds through up to ten Naval movement rounds (one hex per round) during which merchant fleets may move to or from Japan, the Russian may attempt a sortie to carry out raids on merchantmen or to attack the Japanese fleet and the Japanese fleet seeks to drive off the Russian or bring it to a decisive battle. The small map and large grid make it possible to sail between the mainland and any Japanese port with a detour to avoid marauding Russians and for the Russians to sail fom Port Arthur to Vladivostock (or the other way) provided that they take the direct route via Tsushima Strait. At the end of Naval Movement the Russians must be back in a friendly port, the Japanese likewise or else on blockade, i.e. in a mainland port or coastal hex, supported by a merchant fleet and the merchant fleets either in a port or a mainland coastal hex: the penalty for not meeting one or other of these criteria is 100% attrition. Come the winter merchant fleets can no longer shelter in coastal hexes - they too must be in port: this means that to maintain land operations over the winter of 1904-05 the Japanese army **must** have captured either Port Arthur or neighbouring Dalny as the Korean ports will now be too far from the front to act as bases.

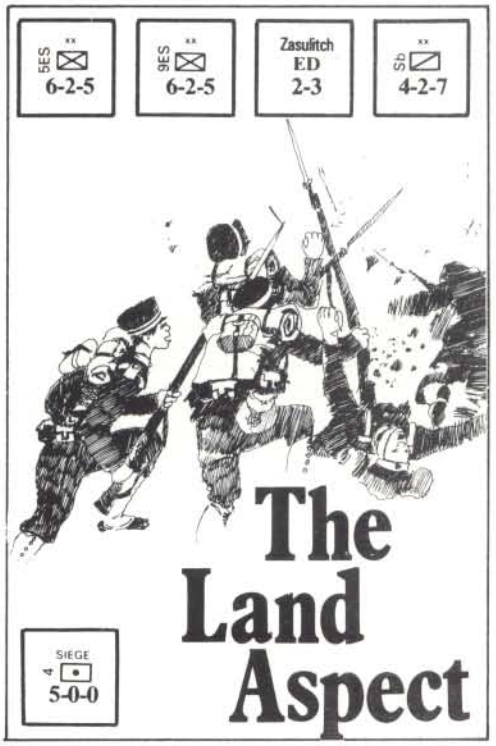
There are penalties for remaining on blockade, the fleet concerned being liable to suffer attrition, especially in the winter months. The worst result is the loss of two battleships, reflecting the loss of the 'Hatsuse' and 'Yashima' to mines in May, 1904: fortunately, this can happen only once per game but losses of 5 or 10 defence factors' worth of ships disabled on every adverse die-roll can erode an unlucky Japanese player's sea-power and give the waiting Makarov his opportunity to come out and seek battle on favourable terms.

Once fleets are in the same hex search may be attempted by one or both sides, weather, the openness or otherwise of the sea hex concerned, and the number of destroyer flotillas present with each fleet all affecting the possibility of a sighting. If the fleets sight, play moves to the tactical battle display. Here, every ship from battleship to the lightest of light cruisers has her own oblong counter with her actual silhouette, her gunnery and defence factors and her disabled state on the reverse: destroyers and torpedo boats appear as flotillas. As in GDW's 'Tsushima', fleets line up opposite each other and have it out with gun and torpedo, ship for ship: however, the RSR system is more flexible, allowing for switching fire and for deployment of the larger fleet's extra ships to best advantage. No penalty for combination of more than one ship's fire on the same target either – director-controlled firing seems to have been developed before its time. A nice touch is that a double die-roll determines how many hours of daylight remain in which to engage in combat and that the weather (and thus visibility) is liable to change from hour to hour - so one side or the other may pray tor two hours only and plenty of fog or for clear weather and a long day to pound the enemy into scrap, combat is simple: a die-roll, modified by range and visibility, is cross-referenced with the firing ship's gunnery factor and the hit number read off: a number equal to or greater than the target ship's defence factor disables her, a second disabling hit sinks her as does a first hit which is double her defence. Before gunnery, both sides may open or close the range by moving a single counter on a track, the ships themselves remaining static. An advantage goes to the fleet with higher morale in each turn, morale being the admiral's command factor modified by casualties to ships. Can admirals die as Makarov dies at a crucial moment for his fleet? They sure can: Hits may and sinkings will do for them whereupon fleet morale drops to zero and the fleet must break off action and flee for the nearest friendly port (another clarification).

This battle display stuff may seem a little too rigid but it can certainly bring out the 'feel' of different types of action, the cautious long-range big-gun duel, the torpedo attack to gain an advantage for the capital ships or to harry a fleeing enemy, and the slide into disintegration of a Tsushima.

The naval segment's chief weakness is that it is quite impossible, given the present rules, for a Russian fleet to catch a merchant fleet at sea – the merchant fleet simply steps out of the hex before the Russians carry out the 'raid' phase. As a result, the Vladivostock squadron, unlike its historical counterpart, is no threat to Japanese sea-lanes and the Japanese player will find that he need not divert ships to the blockade of its base. Perhaps SPI should think again and allow the Russians to 'catch' the merchant fleet on a die-roll before Japanese movement – a 1-2 result, say, meaning the merchantmen are found and sunk before they can run: this would bring the game nearer to history and face the Japanese with more of the problems of 1904. However, a merchant fleet in a mainland coastal hex may not move during the first round of naval movement and is thus at the mercy of a Russian fleet emerging from a port in the same strategic-map hex – and merchant fleets must eventually move into the same hex as Port Arthur if Japanese land operations are not to be severly inhibited, making a Russian fleet 'in being' in Port Arthur an ever-present menace until it can be finally crushed or its base taken by land assault.

One other point: the possible loss of two Japanese battleships gives the loophole specialist the opportunity to discard the weak 'Chin Yen' and the tin-can 'Fuso' whereas a fairer (and more realistic ploy is for the Japanese player to pick two battleships 'blind' from his counters, the names of the lost ships being kept from the Russian player (in 1904 the Russians were kept ignorant of the loss of the 'Yashima' for over a year).



All land combat units are back-printed, their 'unactivated' state being on the reverse. The main unit on either side is the division, which can take a one-step loss and be replaced by a half-strength version of itself: however while the Russian army consists entirely of infantry and cavalry divisions the Japanese have thirteen Kobi (reserve army) brigades, two cavalry and two artillery brigades and seven regiments of seige artillery, only the divisions having a second step.

As was mentioned in the first part of this profile, the land game is dominated by Command Control and Supply, the move-fight system being otherwise simple. To deal with Command Control first, certain generals appear as leader counters, either starting on-board or appearing in the course of play, each leader having a command rating: the Japanese range from 2 to 4, the Russians from 1 to 3. Every unit on the map must be under command of one or other of the leaders currently in play, a special counter for each unit showing its allocation on a display sheet. As in the naval segment each turn begins with all units and leaders deactivated. The Supreme Commander (if in play) is thrown for first and, if he activates, can then 'lend' his command factor to each of his army commanders within command range – 3 MF, extensible by railway: thus Kuropatkin can lend his 3-rating to Bildering (2), giving the latter a command factor of 5 as far as Bildering's own activation is concerned. If the Supreme Commander does not activate then the generals must try to do so on their own and the better ones will obviously be more likely to get going without waiting to be told what to do. Thereafter each army commander activates the units of his army, adding **his** factor to that of each unit within command range, i.e. Bildering boosts a full-strength division from 2 to 4, a half-strength one from 1 to 3: each unit must move on activation if it is to be moved at all so in other words you make your plan, give your orders and hope that everyone understands what is to be done and does it. Of course, if an army commander fails to activate then his whole army remains deactivated likewise.

This rule simulates the effects of 'friction of war', of misunderstood orders and of failures in communication which beset both sides during the war and especially the Russians with their old, slow generals, their bureaucratic staff-system and their lack of confidence in themselves. It can also leave players finding that while the frontal attack goes off as planned the flank march which was to have cut the enemy's L of C and thus brought about his ruin simply fails to get going. In the winter and spring/autumn turns the die-roll is modified, sometimes severely limiting operations – often to the glee of whoever is pursuing a defensive strategy at the time.

Supply. Supply – or rather the lack of it – is a killer. At the beginning of each turn on land the supply situation is assessed and any unit which cannot trace a line of supply to a supply source loses one step straightaway: thus two turns out of supply eliminates a full strength division. Moreover, units out of supply may not attack, although they may activate, and if they are **attacked** they are eliminated, regardless of the CRT result.

The Russians basically trace a supply-line of up to 3 MF to the railway and thence off-board to an unlimited source, provided that the railway is not cut behind them. The Japanese must trace their supply lines to a merchant fleet or fleets on the coast, each fleet being a **limited** source able to supply up to four command factors, i.e. two full-strength divisions, four half-strength divisions or brigades or combinations of these. Once Dalny or Port Arthur are captured they can use the railway to extend their L of C and concentrate the merchant fleets in the port but they may never exceed their fleets' combined supply capacity. On both sides a leader may extend the L of C to units under his command, i.e. 3 MF from source or railway to leader and a further 3 from leader to unit, thus making possible the flanking attacks which are a feature of good manoeuvering in RSR.

These two factors make the game. The Japanese have the better leaders and thus the more effective army but their supply is limited and can be imperilled by Russian success at sea. The Russians have leaders who range from the reasonable to the paralytic (General Grippenberg was old, deaf, epileptic and ignorant) but their supplies are plentiful and their L of C is secure, given adequate protection. Success in combat will be dependent on the correct use of supply, army organisation and the best leaders available. Combat is on an odds-CRT which inflicts step-losses, usually on both sides, making 2-1 attacks inadvisable as a tactical doctrine. Attrition through combat will be the Russians' bane at first but will become a mortal danger to the Japanese if the war drags on.

When it comes to relative strengths the Japanese start with a distinct advantage, their whole army mobilised and ready to be ferried to the mainland, whereas the Russian divisions in the East are few in number, scattered and at half strength. But as the game progresses the Japanese receive no additional units and only a limited number of replacement points wherewith to rebuild reduced divisions – lost units may never be replaced. The Russians on the other hand receive an initial trickle of reinforcement points, building up to a steady flow as the Trans-Siberian Railway becomes better-organised, points which can be used to build up weak

divisions or to bring on fresh ones at either half or full strength. At the start the Russian player will have to decide on every turn whether to bring on new divisions or to strengthen the ones he has but by October 1904 his reinforcement points will equal two full-strength divisions per turn, greatly increasing his options.

Victory Conditions are measured in terms of cities controlled and force the Japanese to keep to a timetable: at the end of each season an increasing number of cities must be Japanese-controlled – Spring '04, one: Summer '04, two: Winter '04, three, and so on up to a possible seven. When at last a season ends with the Japanese falling short of the target figure the game stops there and then and victory is assessed on the number of cities then in Japanese hands: four gives them a marginal victory, three a marginal victory to the Russians and so on in either direction. The historical total was four – Seoul, Liao-Yang, Port Arthur and Mukden, the last -named falling in March 1905: the timetable reflects this, the number of cities after this being hypothetical although the seasonal 'ladder' remains.

The land game can follow the campaign very closely, with both sides facing the problems that faced the real contestants. An initial Japanese landing in Korea will be successful and Spring will bring the opportunity to carry out other landings to extend operations. By Winter a port must be taken and in any case Port Arthur should be taken in order to exorcise the menace of the Russian fleet and to release the entire Japanese army for the advance to Mukden – or beyond. Encirclement to cut the Russians off from supply will be a more economical tactic than frontal attacks (the Japanese were most impressed by Prussia's victory-by-encirclement at Sedan) and the Russian player may well find himself deciding, as Kuropatkin did, to withdraw rather than risk losing half his army. He will certainly have to decide on the relative priorities of reinforcing Port Arthur or building up a field army to check the Japanese advance from the Yalu and must be prepared to accept initial defeats provided that the Japanese are delayed sufficiently to allow a strong defensive to be built up before Mukden. If this can be done, then the Japanese may be unable to assault except at an unacceptable cost in losses, while the Russians build up ready for the recapture of Liao-Yang in the Spring of 1905. In fact, a likely ending is an exhausted Japanese army in Mukden, unable to continue the offensive and looking to the Summer's end to bring peace before the Russian colossus can pick itself up and shuffle forward.....

However, the Command Control system and the possibility of Russian success, even partial success, at sea prevent any certainty of a step-by-step re-enactment of the real war: that it is a pedantic simulation is a criticism that has been levelled at this game but I feel that this is unjustified, possibly having been made on too few playings. The rules as originally presented are GDW-like in their profusion of 'black holes' but corrections already to hand have put most of these to rights and the rules themselves are logically presented and backed by a very well-devised set of graphic playing aids – take a bow, Simonsen! The rather intimidating-looking rule book with its 32 pages has in fact only 12 pages of rules, the rest being taken up with designer's and Player's notes and by an S & T-type article on the war, complete with maps, charts and information boxes. By the way, player's notes for the Russian player should be taken with a handful of salt: the suggested initial plan of campaign is possible only given phenomenal Russian luck plus abysmal Japanese ditto and, command control apart, just how one gets enough units to construct the defence of Liao-Yang advocated is a mystery unless the Japanese forbear to cross the Yalu before midsummer.

'Red Sun Rising' has had me grinding my teeth at my appalling luck: it has never had me bored.

Tail-Piece

Q. What the blazes is a **Kobi** brigade anyway?

A The Kobi Hei-eki (roughly Reserve Army) consisted of those men who had completed their 3 years full-time military service and their 4 years in the first-line reserves used to bring regular units up to strength. A Kobi brigade was based in each of the twelve divisional areas in Japan and there was also one for the Guards Division's reservists: these brigades were called out for periodic refresher training.

Contact!

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a) If there are any errors.

b) If you want it changed or removed.

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