

A related game — not surprisingly — is the V-I destruction scenario in Battleline's Air Force.

Type C games give the player the least amount of freedom but, compensatingly, I feel, are likely to lead to the most interesting situation. So far as I am aware there is no example of such a game available commercially (and one may wonder whether it would sell if there were). Thus the effort required in order to play this sort of game falls upon the player entirely. I believe it is here that soloing comes into its own.

One definition of 'game' in the OED is "A diversion in the nature of a contest, played according to rules, and displaying in the result the superiority in skill, strength, or good fortune of the winner or winners". Perhaps by these terms a type C game is not really a game at all. Those that are prepared to invest the time and effort in setting such a game up will most likely not be overly worried about the outcome: the end will probably be of little concern when compared with the means. It is significant, I feel, that Featherstone in his book on soloing stresses the amount of planning and preparation that are generally needed and suggests that solo play is admirably suited to campaign games (7).

This approach to soloing has been usefully explored in two articles by Russ Smith in Moves (8) and it is thus convenient to draw upon this account. However, it must be said that, stimulating though his ideas are, they are not presented in the most palatable form. Smith's first article deals cursorily with systems theory and the second, and more interesting one, with the application of the theory to a single-handed game of Borodino, a game that has always scored highly for solo playability. The theory has a certain relevance but it cannot properly be said to provide a necessary or even adequate background for what follows it.

In his first article Smith makes the obvious enough point that a wargame presents the participants with a constant flow of information. For effective play each player must be able to assimilate it, process it and make consequential decisions. If one plays solo the problems of information control are, as a minimum, doubled. Broadly speaking, the bigger the game the more complex the processes — which must help to account for the high ratings for solitaire playability that quadrigames usually get (as Marshal Saxe said, "Multitudes serve only to perplex and embarrass").

How to cope with this complexity is the subject of Smith's second article. He begins by stating that to make a solo game enjoyable the state of total comprehension that comes from being the sole player must be restricted: the fog of war must be introduced. This is done by the prior preparation of strategic and tactical operations guides (which yield the unfortunate acronyms SOG and TOG). Several of the first should be developed for each side. Each will set out one broad course of action, specifying objectives, OBs, forces committed, reserves and a timetable. One SOG is then chosen randomly for each side. It should also be determined for each side at what point the original SOG will be deemed to have failed and a new one — again randomly picked from a new set — required.

One TOG will serve for both sides. It will show the range of tactical situations encountered in battle and the conceivable resolutions of them. Thus when attacking an enemy line one could:

1. make a frontal assault
2. attack one end of the line
3. attack both ends of the line
4. outflank the line, or
5. await reinforcements.

The method selected is decided upon by a die throw but the outcome of this is biased according to the personality of the particular commander involved. Thus for the sake of variety, to put it no higher, each side's forces should be divided into armies, corps, divisions or whatever is appropriate, as they are historically or in some other convenient manner. Each of these formations is then assumed to have a commanding officer. His personality may be known from history or it may be determined by die roll. Smith suggests the following scheme:

aggressive	0, 1, 2
average	3, 4
cautious	5, 6, 7.

For specialist forces subtract 1, and for militia or battle-weary units add 1 to the throw.

Therefore, to return to the attack on an enemy line, the action likely to be taken by each of the three types of commander is resolved by yet another die roll, according to the following table:

Die Roll	1 2 3 4 5 6
aggressive leader	1 1 1 2 3 4
average leader	1 2 2 3 3 4
cautious leader	1 1 2 5 5 5

(the numbers, of course, refer back to the first table).

This is the essence of Smith's method. His second article gives more details and comment than can suitably be included here.

It will be plain from this account that some games lend themselves more readily than others to this manner of play. Essentially there should be discernible an actual or implicit structure within the forces deployed. If leader counters are supplied, so much the better since their survival may be important. With these crude criteria in mind I offer a personal selection of games that I consider to have appeal for solo play (an asterisk indicates that leaders feature in the game as published):

Waterloo*, Chancellorsville*, France 1940, Fury in the West*, Torgau, Marne, Lee Moves North*, American Civil War*, La Grande Armee*, Breitenfeld*, Grenadier*, Cobra and Friedland 1807*.

From the examples I have used it will be evident that ideas for solo play are widely scattered throughout the literature of the hobby (and there are, of course, others that it is not possible to quote here). Whether or not one learns of a particular idea is usually due more to luck than anything else. The hobby is largely characterised in its literature by amateurism and ephemerality: the exceptional journals may be numbered on two hands. Yet jewels turn up in the most unlikely places. Can anything be done to preserve them? Would this be a suitable cause for Phoenix to concern itself with?

Three remarks to conclude with:

First on Don Featherstone's book (7), which is still the only one devoted entirely to soloing: his interest is, as one would expect, in figure gaming. There are ideas here that can be adapted for board-games but I have found them to be indicative rather than prescriptive. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that Featherstone does bring together some methods devised by other gamers that would otherwise be well nigh irretrievable. Boardgamers should be so lucky.

Next on Phoenix: it would be graceless to omit mention of the solo scenarios that have already appeared in these pages — Roy Gibson on Coral Sea (9), A.J. Gilham on Foxbat & Phantom (10), Tony Jones on Richthofen's War (11) and most recently, J.D. Beardsworth on Outreach (12).

Finally, may I invite any actual or potential soloists, if they have not already done so, to join the Solo Wargamers' Association? Details of membership may be obtained from:

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References

1. B.W.Farcou, Moves No. 14, 1974, P.17.
2. P.Kosnett, Moves No. 19, 1975, P.13.
3. N.Palmer, 'The Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming', Arthur Barker, London, 1977, P.121.
4. J.Richardson, Moves No. 1, 1972, P.20.
5. R.Sandell, Perfidious Albion No. 7, 1976.
6. M.Saha, The General Vol. 11, No.6, 1975, P.6.
7. D.Featherstone, 'Solo-Wargaming', Kaye & Ward, London, 1973, P.7.
8. R. Smith, Moves No.10, 1973, P.8. No. 12, 1974, p.13.
9. R.Gibson, Phoenix No. 4, 1976, P.6.
10. A.J.Gilham, Phoenix No. 6, 1977 P.14.
11. T.Jones, Phoenix No. 11, 1978, P.5.
12. J.D. Beardsworth, Phoenix No. 13, 1978, P.4.

This is but an appetiser for the main course coming up next time with discussion of War of the Ring but hope that this whets your appetite!

SAURON

ED

MERRYWEATHER



Sauron is SPI's simulation of the battle between the last alliance (elves, men and dwarves) at the end of the second age. Those of you that have not read 'Lord of the Rings' (both of you) won't have a clue what I mean. As the subject of this article is the game, I suggest you beg/steal/borrow a copy to get the history O.K.? Good. Meanwhile, back at the battle

The combat system is two-stage. First, you compare your attack rating (A is best, down to E, which is worst) to your enemy's armour protection rating (4 if best to 1, worst). The two are cross referenced to find a range of values for two dice (e.g. 4-7, 3-6, 2-7). If you roll within these values, then you are entitled to roll on the casualty results table, cross referencing with the units morale value (W-Z) to get your casualties. Units are backprinted to give two-step reduction. Units retreated are automatically disrupted, and have to be undisturbed by a leader. Leaders can also have a go at each other via an individual combat results table. Elendil and Gil-galad are equipped with magic weapons which increased their chance of killing someone (i.e. Sauron, a ringwraith or Gorgol). The ringwraith incidentally is not identified so I don't know whether it is 'permissible' to have him killed by a man. Also, what happened to the other eight?

Missile combat (as in bows and arrows) is designated on units capable of it by a small letter 'e'.

This is all very well, but on a straight military fight the Mordor forces would get slaughtered with their rather lousy combat/morale ratings. So what do we add to balance it ... spot on man, Sorcery — this is what gives the game its sheer superbness in my eyes (or on my boardgaming table). Sauron is blessed with the ability to do a bit of amateur conjuration, like turning day to night which makes orcs fanatical, enabling them to skip the first part of the combat procedure and go straight to the casualty table. He can create sinister visions which gives all but the stoutest (not fat — brave!) nasty feelings and they become disrupted or bringing on the Beast of Mordor (a nasty piece of work something like the Inland Revenue on four legs). This is not an historical animal, but something that is 'a lot of fun (a designers invention in toto)' (Designer's notes), sentiments I'd tend to agree with. Last but not least is Wrath of the Ringwraith which spurs units in close proximity to same to fight a bit better.

The Sorcery is done by allotting Sauron magic points. Each spell costs so many of these points which are knocked off his total. Incidentally, the Sorcery rules are far better than those in 'Sorcerer'.

So what have we got? A good pitched battle, balanced and lots of fun. It gives a victorious Sauron general a chance to do better things like the conquest of all Middle Earth. It's magic!