

Target of Opportunity

RIFLEMAN DODDS

There was a time when boardgaming, and especially war gaming suffered from there being too few games on the market. It used to get to the stage that news of a new Avalon Hill product, leaked to the press early, resulted in a flood of orders before the product had even been described. Now, in some senses, the opposite is true. AH are still doing their one or two a year and SPI are turning out their 'N' games a year and so are 'Y' other companies but there has been a price to pay. We have exchanged quantity for quality and that seems to me to be a great pity. It is also an opportunity we have, in this country, been in pursuit of excellence for an awfully long time. Why have we seen none of it in the publishing of games in this country?

I'm not meaning to knock the attempts that have been made by the improbably named "Warthog Games" or that have come from the presses of the Janus-like World Wide Wargamers — or whatever they're called — but look at it all in the cold light of day and it does seem just a wee bit pathetic. We have a military history that stretches back a loooooooooong way and we can't seem to pick out the smaller incidents from that past and transform them into exciting games. Mind you, that's not entirely surprising when you consider the astonishing lack of incentive.

In essence, some of the oldest questions of business are the very ones we are not told about the business of publishing games by anybody. "What's it worth?" "How much do I get?" "Will you pay me?" Now that the archangel of free enterprise has finally become ruler I think it's about time that we asked of WWW, Warthog and all the rest — including SPI and Simpubs — the above questions. Incentives are great things and even better if they come in the shape of Bank of England promissory notes in large denominations. The industry is now too long in the tooth for "The Honour" of having one's name inscribed illegibly in the corner of the map, or even legibly at the top of the rules, to be sufficient reward for the kind of hard, grinding work that is involved in the business of game design and development. Of course it's not very likely that there will be much of an answer forthcoming from the above organisations since SPI, the most 'up front' firm of the bunch has not answered this point. The nearest we got to an answer was in James Dunnigan's article in their book on game design and that was only vague outlines not hard figures.

I'm beginning to sound like Len Murray and that's not the intention. The intention is to find out the answer to these questions so that there will be enough knowledge of what is going to happen to a new designer when his design is submitted to allow us all to contemplate the giddy heights of the pursuit of excellence from our drawing boards on this side of the Atlantic. What about a national competition run by Phoenix.....?

EDITORIAL CONTINUED

Beda Fomm	6.26	6.29
Agincourt	5.82	6.24
Olympica	5.00	4.67
Rifleman Dodds	4.85	6.49

Grapevine = 6.61
Mailcall = 6.00
Book Review column = 5.90
Simpubs Briefing = 5.68

Idea of book column = 5.73
Interest in military history = 7.33

AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

ANDREW MCGEE

In this article I hope to do two things; first, to encourage more people to take up and study what must be one of the most underrated of all contemporary simulation games, and, secondly, to propose a few amendments which will increase both the realism and the subtlety of the game.

The game is set twenty years after a hypothetical nuclear war; the United States is recovering economically and politically, and has coalesced into four regions, North-East, Mid-West, South-West, Far-West. At the start of the game all four are surviving essentially by means of subsistence agriculture; each of the four players represents one of these regions and his task is to raise the technological and social level of his region by means of economic policies, trade, diplomacy and, where appropriate, force. Although the board bears a representation of the relevant portions of the United States, most of the action takes place on the charts located around the edge of the map, for the emphasis of the game is heavily economic. These charts show the five sectors — Agriculture, Fuel, Metal, Industry, Transport, into which the economies are divided for game purposes. Each region begins with a certain amount of labour and machinery which must be allocated among the various sectors so as to produce various items; the great priority is food — starving people are liable to rebel and defect, but victory is ultimately determined by the ability to provide luxuries for the population, and the production of these requires fuel, metal and industrial capacity. Alternatively these products can be used to build and maintain an army, but this provides such a drain on limited resources that it is most commonly indulged in by players who are winning heavily anyway or who are losing so badly as to be desperate (or, in a few cases, who are just plain bored with the business of economic management).

The standard game lasts only ten turns, which in economic terms is very short, so there is no time to waste. In the early stages the emphasis is on feeding everyone — at least 80% of the labour force must be allocated to agriculture, but the production of extra machinery as well as technological developments should allow the other sectors to be developed in the later stages. Deficiencies can be supplemented by trade but it is never a good idea to be avoidably dependent on others and to my mind it is one of the greatest weaknesses of the standard game that it offers no incentive to specialisation. This both fails to reflect economic reality and reduces unacceptably the amount of trade which takes place, and is the subject of the first of my proposed amendments.



Comparative Costs Chart.

Amendment to Sections (6.0)(7.0) and (9.0).
In determining primary production and industrial capacity the total of Labour and Mech points allocated to each sector is multiplied by the percentages shown. This multiplication is performed before the effects of R&D and/or weather are taken into account. Production less than a whole unit is lost.

	NE	MW	SW	FW
Food	75	100	110	115
Metal	120	90	85	110
Fuel	110	115	105	90
Industry	120	90	105	85

The treatment of the problems of labour is necessarily rather abstract, but I doubt two particular points. The first is the ease with which labour can be re-allocated from one sector to another; admittedly we may assume a low level of technology, but occupational mobility would surely not be so great as is here suggested. Accordingly I would propose the following modification to Section (17.0):

Labour Re-allocation.

A Labour Point which is to be re-allocated must spend one complete turn unemployed. In the Labour re-allocation Phase the Labour Point is transferred to the unemployed pool, and a premium of \$2 is paid in respect of it. It then remains in the unemployed pool until the next Labour Re-allocation Phase when a further \$1 is paid in respect of it; it may then be re-allocated. Provided that the first \$2 premium has been paid, the Labour Point is not regarded as unemployed for the purposes of the Political Disassociation Phase, but if the owning player is unable to re-allocate it after paying the \$1 premium, it begins to be regarded as unemployed for all purposes.

Labour Re-allocation is often of considerable importance in the middle game, when players are trying to shift away from subsistence agriculture to a higher level of technology; one of the effects of this amendment is to emphasise the importance of getting the labour allocation right at the first attempt.

The second objection I have concerns the circumstances under which strikes take place, and this provides a convenient moment to discuss the whole issue of Consumer Points. These represent luxuries, an increased standard of living in other words, and it is by the standard of living, as measured by Consumer Point expenditure, that victory is determined. There is a graded system of "Sector States" varying the capabilities of each economic sector with the number of Consumer Points expended. It may sometimes be advantageous to raise the level of just some of the economic sectors, but if this is done there is some danger that the others will go on strike. However the likelihood of a strike is determined by the number of deprived Labour Points divided by the number of Consumer Points hoarded; but this confuses two quite different causes of strikes—inequality of treatment as between different sectors and poor treatment of everyone. To deal with this Section (11.62) is amended as follows:

There are now two strike tables. The first is used where there are deprived Labour Points (a deprived Labour Point is defined as "A Labour Point in a sector whose sector state is lower than the average of all the sector states in the region"). The second is used where a player chooses to hoard Consumer Points for use later, a practice common in the standard game, but likely to occur less often in view of one of the amendments to be proposed later.

A. Deprived Labour Points Strike Table.

DLP's	Die-Roll (2D6)											
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S
2,3	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S
4,5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S
6,7	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S	S	S	S
8,9	x	x	x	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S
10,11	x	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
12,13	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
14,15	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
16+	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

S=Strike x=No Strike. Throw separately for each sector containing deprived Labour Points. The options in case of a strike are the same as in the standard game.

B. Consumer Points Hoarded Strike Table.

Reference to this Table is neither necessitated nor excluded by reference to Table A.

Points Hoarded.	Die-Roll (2D6)											
	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S
2-5	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S
6-9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S
10-13	x	x	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
14-18	x	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
19-22	x	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S
23+	x	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S	S

In the area of Sector States and Social States two further changes seem desirable. The first is in the rule that effective Social State for victory purposes is judged only in the last two turns of the game; this encourages the artificial hoarding of Consumer Points. Instead the Effective Social State for Victory Point purposes is re-defined as "The average of a region's Social States throughout the game." Secondly, it is, in my experience, virtually impossible in the Standard Game to reach even Social State 2; since the rules state that anyone failing to reach this level has lost, there are rarely any winners, so the following schedule of Sector States is substituted for the standard one:

Sector State.	Consumer Points Expended.
0	0
1	1 (Total)
2	1 per 2 LPs
3	2 per 3 LPs
4	1 per LP
5	3 per 2 LPs
6	2 per LP
7	5 per 2 LPs
8	3 per LP
9	7 per 2 LPs

Of course it is still fairly uncommon to reach Sector State 4 in ten turns, but the higher levels may occur if play is prolonged beyond the ordinary game.

The obvious aim of the Consumer Point system is to simulate the effects of giving or refusing to give labour the benefits of its efforts, and the revised rules presented here are a rather more sophisticated attempt in the same direction.

I have not yet dealt with the role of money in the game. Revenue is raised by taxation, as one might expect, and in the standard game the most noticeable point is that there is always plenty of it around; indeed its only real uses are for producing Consumer Points and paying for Research and Development. Some of the amendments in the industrial rules, proposed below, provide extra uses for cash as well as increasing the scope of a player's options.

The system of calculating industrial capacity is linked to the taxation system, for excessive tax rates will diminish production (notwithstanding Mr Healey's theory that high rates of tax actually make people work harder.) The rules for determining effective capacity have given a lot of trouble, especially in the areas of Capacity Purchase, taxation bonuses/penalties and unemployment caused by under-utilisation. The following suggestions represent a fairly substantial redesign.

First, the effects of taxation are declared to last one turn only, i.e. they are calculated afresh each turn. Secondly, Capacity Purchase represents wage increases paid to offset the effects of high taxation; it gives a productivity bonus for one turn only (this is directly contrary to the provisions in the standard game). Thirdly, in the event of under-utilization of capacity, there is a choice between unemploying labour and paying a subsidy to keep them in employment. Accordingly the new Industrial Capacity Adjustment Procedure is as follows:

1. Calculate Efficiency x (Labour + Mech)
 2. If there has been under-utilization, unemploy or pay subsidy.
 3. Add Capacity Purchase, if any.
 4. Add/Subtract for taxation effect.
- The rate of subsidy required to avoid unemployment for under-utilization is \$10 per Labour Point. The maximum capacity purchase in any one turn is three units. The cost is \$5 for 1 unit. \$15 for 2 units. \$30 for three units.

The remaining important element in the game is that of expansion. Not all areas on the board are initially occupied, and expansion is important because a player's score at the end of the game is his Effective Social State multiplied by the number of areas he controls. A player wishing to take control of an adjacent area must conduct a plebiscite, the result of which depends entirely on the amount of good old-fashioned bribery he is prepared to practice. Acquisition of a new area involves acquisition of all resources located in it and of its population; since these latter have to be fed, expansion is a mixed blessing in the early stages, but once agriculture has been mechanised and efficiency increased, it is highly desirable.

On the Military side there is relatively little to say; combat is resolved on a differential CRT and, with one turn equal to one year, is necessarily fairly abstract. The cost of fighting a war is considerable, and this is normally sufficient to deter all but the most belligerent.

Finally, two more little amendments which I have not so far mentioned. The first is aimed at games which run longer than the standard ten turns (this is a very interesting variant which changes many of the strategies normally required). It increases the maximum labour allocations per Fuel and Metal site at higher Sector States.

Sector State	Max Allocation per Site
0	1
1-3	3
4-6	4
7-9	5

My very last change is directed at the Starvation Table; this determines the extent to which starvation will cause areas of a player's region to disassociate. I consider this to be unduly severe in its effects and propose the following amended table:

Starving LPs	Die-Roll (1D6)							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-3	-	-	-	-	0/1	0/1	1/0	1/1
4-8	-	-	-	0/1	0/1	1/1	1/1	1/1
9-15	-	-	0/1	1/0	1/1	1/1	1/2	2/1
16+	-	0/1	0/1	1/0	1/1	1/1	1/2	2/1

The figure before the oblique stroke is the number of areas lost; the second figure is the number of areas downgraded to poor control.

I hope that this rather rapid run through the workings of the system has shown people who do not know the game that it is something quite different from the run-of-the-mill simulation game. Probably it will have appeared fearfully complex, as indeed it is initially, but if you are interested in economic matters, your curiosity may have been stimulated sufficiently to give it a try. Although the economic system is in some ways rather simplistic (the banking sector is completely ignored, for example) it does give a good basic understanding of the difficulties of managing an economy. The amendments suggested here will tend to make the game more rather than less difficult, but they should also add to the challenge presented by the game.



Labor Point: This is an indirect measure of population. It is the number of adult workers per 200,000 people, i.e., roughly 80,000 workers.



Metal Point: An abstract amount of raw material; basically metal ores (copper, iron, tin, lead, etc.)



Food Point: The amount of grain, meat, fish, fibre, wool, timber, etc., necessary to provide adequate diet, shelter, and clothing to a Labor Point for one year.



Consumer Point: The good things in life: prime steaks, television sets, motorcars, waterbeds, fur coats, second homes, municipal orchestras, good books, etc.



Fuel Point: A unit of readily used energy; i.e., petroleum, coal, and in some instances, hydroelectric power.



Mechanization Point: Tools and equipment which increase the ability of labor to produce. Mech Points are added to the economic sectors to raise output in these sectors.