

The Justification: Ideal Year-limit Y Plugging in all these figures for our parameters yields the following equations:

((Worst win 18 vs 16 (i.e. five eliminations) in third game-year, best draw 17 vs 3-3-3-3-2 in game-year Y))
 a) $(34+18+3+18-10) > (17+17+14+0) \dots$ or \dots $63 > Y+48 \dots$ so \dots $Y < 15$.

((Worst draw 1 vs 17-16 (i.e. four eliminations) in fourth game-year, best defeat any one in game-year Y))
 b) $(17+1+4+0-8) > (1+0+Y+0-0) \dots$ or \dots $14 > Y+1 \dots$ so \dots $Y < 13 \dots$ yielding an integer maximum of 12.

In point of fact, ManorCon has used a game-year limit of 12 in the past, though more pragmatically runs to 11 now. Interestingly, 1912 is what I used to think of as the ideal length of postal game (taking two years at Zeeby speeds). This formula could therefore be plausibly used to score postal Diplomacy or its e-mail equivalent, games going beyond 1912 will not experience inflationary scoring. The same applies to open-ended 1+1 tournaments or those with lengthy cut-off points, while those with game-year limits within 1912 (most use 1908-12) are obviously catered for anyway.

In short, the formula appears to work (that is, yields a plausible result) with precisely the values thus far assumed or deduced. If, for example, we were to significantly and arbitrarily reduce the result value of a draw (currently set at implied maximum) we would immediately reduce Y to a value below usefulness, unless arbitrarily increasing another element – or reducing E, which is in fact already at its effective minimum. Similarly with any of the positive elements, and increasing the impact of negative element E would have exactly the same effect, thus indicating that its valuation at twice the number of players eliminated is both a minimum and a maximum. Finally, introduction of other (so far unconsidered) elements, such as further analogues of the Kinzett-Maslen equation, would create a similar dilemma, suggesting that here we have just enough.

Some examples, from the ridiculous to the sublime and back again.

Extreme win (1912): 34 against six eliminations \dots $34 + 34 + 12 + 18 - 12 = 86$.
 Best possible win of all (1912): 28 ag. 1-1-1-1-1-1 \dots $34 + 28 + 12 + 18 - 0 = 92$.
 Best possible 18-centre win (1912): 18 ag. 3-3-3-3-2-2 \dots $34 + 18 + 12 + 18 - 0 = 82$.
 "Typical" 18-centre win (1910): 18 ag. 9-5-2 (three elims) \dots $34 + 18 + 10 + 18 - 6 = 82$.
 Two-party race for the win (1908): 18 ag. 16 (five eliminations) \dots $34 + 18 + 8 + 18 - 10 = 68$.
 Worst win (1903 capitulation): again 18 ag. 16 (five eliminations) \dots $34 + 18 + 3 + 18 - 10 = 63$.
 Best draw performance conceivable (1912): 17 ag. 3-3-3-3-3-2 \dots $17 + 17 + 12 + 18 - 0 = 60$.
 High-scoring draw perf. (1911): 15 ag. 7-3-4-2-1 (one elimination) \dots $17 + 15 + 11 + 8 - 2 = 49$.
 "Typical" draw perf. / board leader (1908): 10 ag. 8-7-5-4 (two elims) \dots $17 + 10 + 8 + 2 - 4 = 33$.
 Same draw, also-ran performance (1908): 5 ag. 10-8-7-4 (two elims) \dots $17 + 5 + 8 + 0 - 4 = 26$.
 Not-much-progress (or interest) draw perf. (1904): 4 ag. 6-5-5-5-5-4 \dots $17 + 4 + 4 + 4 + 0 - 0 = 25$.
 Low-scoring draw performance (1908): 3 ag. 11-10-10 (three elims) \dots $17 + 3 + 6 + 0 - 6 = 20$.
 Worst possible draw performance (1904): 1 ag. 17-16 (four elims) \dots $17 + 1 + 4 + 0 - 8 = 14$.
 Best elimination (1912): any s.c. count of 1 to 16 in that turn \dots $1 + 0 + 12 + 0 - 0 = 13$.
 Best elimination (1912): also, obviously, surviving until that turn \dots $0 + 0 + 12 + 0 - 0 = 7$.
 Much more typical elimination, surviving until the end of 1907 \dots $0 + 0 + 7 + 0 - 0 = 7$.
 Worst performance of all (just possible for A/F(G): out in 1901 \dots $0 + 0 + 1 + 0 - 0 = 1$.

The nice thing about this last is that you get a point for both being to participate, albeit in a suicidal manner. Literally in Germany's case, as to Josep Kiel in 1901 he has to help convey in another Power.... Some might argue that such a "performance" deserves a negative score, but I'm going to mildly veto this on the grounds that such an evaluation is (according to the above extrapolation) just as arbitrary as any of the others thus far rejected.

Rather more seriously: it can be seen, I think, how the foregoing is much more intuitive (that is, appealing to what we often mis-call common sense) than the Kinzett-Maslen equation. The main thing would still be to work towards a win if at all possible (you might even succeed), but failing that to draw, with survival-in-defeat a small consolation over elimination. Within this framework apply the following guidelines: the more centres you have (except in defeat or extreme wins), the longer you can keep going, the bigger your lead (if any) and the fewer the eliminations (except when eliminated/deleted yourself), then the better your performance and therefore score.

But the other advantage is "comparative reward for effort". In the old system a low-scoring draw performance would garner something like 2-4% of what the really high performances could get, maybe twice that when compared with more medial draws. Defeat/eliminations got around 1% or less. Here the low draw to high draw ratio is about 25 to 30%, a typical elimination 8-12%. This, I think, is much more like it. I realize that this Supply Centre Equivalence is only an abstract concept, and that (assuming the old system itself ranked performances in a reasonable manner) it would not yield tournament outcomes very radically different. But as one who has always insisted that ranking positions mean very little and that it's really comparative performance which counts, I would rather we had a scoring system conducive to that philosophy!

Anyway, I think this one's worth trying at ManorCon. Now if I can just get David to program it....

OUTBREAK OF HERESY (issue 22, May 2003)

From: Nick Kinzett, c/o 11 Daleway Road, Green Lane, Coventry, CV3 6JF, England

Being an occasional postal forum for modifying games, this time distributed mainly with the ManorCon 2004 Progress Report Two. For those who asked, I rarely debate by e-mail, though I do have theoretical access to it at one of my addresses. My Manorbound sister has found via namesearch that some kind soul (I would guess Stephen Agar) has posted a number of my fulminations on the Web, but anyone looking for a "Nick Kinzett website" (one concocted by me at any rate) as a means of communication will be sorely disappointed....

PROPER COMMUNICATION

Ian D Wilson: Good to see OoH again!

Colin Day: Thanks for the surprise Outbreak of Heresy, which came wrapped in this strange thing called a "ManorCon Results Booklet". Is this your way of persuading stubborn hold-outs like me to attend?

(**MC**: It certainly wouldn't do any harm. After distribution to all last year's attendees I had a few Results Booklets left, so bunged them to old Outbreak of Heresy recipients like yourself to whom I was going to send OoH 21 anyway.)

Colin: The booklet's back page Kinzett Diatribe was something which could have easily belonged in the old Outbreak, but I suppose you would have had to do another three pages! (Plus one for the actual Booklet, adds Nick pedantically.) You're right, of course. In a game like Diplomacy, which just won't work without considerable precision in its written orders, the only way to show that a support (or convoy) isn't mistakenly for one of your own units is to include the unit's ownership. The clearest way to do this, endorsed by the Rulebook as far as I can recall, is to specify unit nationality. (Remember the "Davidian Fleet Baltic convoys Swedish Army Kiel to Sweden supported by Cyrillic Army Norway", or whatever it was?) Now I gather from what you were saying that recent practice among many players, even GMs, has been wrong, er, different. Silly sods. Why do they think the rules mention unit nationality at all?

Steve James (by phone): I thought you'd proved the point before anyway, in the e-mail debate.

Pete Mason: Wonderful to see you in such good form on the back of the ManorCon Booklet, it's bleedin' obvious that unit nationality should be specified if you want these orders to be valid, anyone who says otherwise is simply wrong. But your argument in favour of the above should be held up as an example of what people are up against should they disagree.

(**MC**: Thankyou, my friends. Although I've never doubted that I've been right all along on this issue (not an especially trivial one as it involves the underlying nature of Diplomacy), it's still something of a relief when people who've been playing the game for years wade in and agree. Actually, I was never quite that isolated. Steve, as shown, always agreed. Indeed, he thought I didn't go far enough, holding that coast and unit type should also be "mandatory and accurate to validate an order. Dane Maslen independently derived the same First Principle with which I concluded my essay last time, that all Dip elements must either be "mandatory to validate" or "irrelevant if omitted/misidentified", as optional but relevant if used" is clearly not a viable mode. Like Steve he believed it would be more consistent if all the relevant elements (unit type and coast as well as unit nationality) were governed by the same mode. I may as well here explain why I don't go quite that far: with unit nationality it can be demonstrated that omission might mean something (you're attempting to assist your own forces), whereas this is not true of either coast or unit type. Omission or misidentification of these is thus arguably only relevant in the Rulebook cases specified, i.e. coastal builds and potentially multicoastal moves or builds.)

(**NMK:** Others with whom I discussed this at the Con simply said it was my tournament. I was giving up games-playing time, I should run it in a way with which I felt comfortable. Which I did. But to take up Colin's last point, there is indeed an widespread practice to the contrary, and its advocates are now trying to persuade me to adopt the same. Which I won't, having worked out that said practice is vulnerable to "varying interpretation" disputes that the old method avoids. The only way these advocates could get around this would be to change the rules, banning unit nationality as a meaningful element. Now God knows I'm no unflinching to changing rules, of any game. But for something as widely established as Diplomacy I'd need a better reason than "that's what most players are used to", this being disputable and of doubtful relevance anyway (majorities have been wrong before). Unit nationality does not appear to be a good rule to drop: my correspondents above indicate that at least some players have assimilated its importance. Indeed, I still await an admission that the practice of ignoring it constitutes a rule change, never mind a sound reason for making such an "official" feature of the ManorCon tournament.)

Pete Messeri: My other observation is that Thank Goodness we will have a year without the stress-inducing order boxes. That and having the food brought in from outside should make this one of the best ManorCons for a long time.

(**NMK:** Ern, by "outside" we mean from central Uri catering, though the quality promises to be better even so. And we may be substituting on-table file envelopes for the order boxes, but at least these will avoid the latter's trans-hall scrumpage. I've got to say I've been impressed by the way some regulatory device has dramatically improved players' deadline punctuality.)

Pete: And bottled beer too!

(**NMK:** So, Colin, are you tempted yet?)

Colin Day: The real problem with getting me to attend ManorCon, or any convention, is that these days I've got too many work and domestic commitments. It's a good job Karen likes some of our sort of game, else I'd be completely deprived. We've now about exhausted our interest in Intimate Diplomacy (though thanks again for running "Adjust Me"), but recently there's been a spate of decent or decent-ish two-player games, like *Lost Cities*, *The Search*, the *Settlers* card game. And *Carcassonne*, which must rate as one of those rare multi-player games which plays OK for two. Here you'll be pleased to learn that your Two-tile variant also plays OK for two. At least, when we tried it the other evening that lovely Cloister-limit rule stopped Karen from marring her usual fifth cloister (out of six)....

Ian D Watson: I must admit to being bemused by your approach to *Carcassonne*. I've always considered it a short "filler" game, not to be taken too seriously. After all, it does have a lot of chance elements. I therefore have little desire to play variants which significantly lengthen the playing time.

(**NMK:** Fair enough if you consider it just a filler game. I think it has a lot more potential, and this quite aside from it being an excellent initiation for people unaccustomed to "our sort of game" (as Colin puts it). The perceived plethora of chance elements is really one big game-pervasive chance element, the draw of tiles, of which there's a sufficient variety that the turn of one at the right time can swing a session, or the continual draw of "wrong" tiles can frustrate the same. The idea of the Two-tile variant was to introduce a level of control over this chance element. Instead of a forced play of the tile just drawn, you can hold it back until a better opportunity or use presents itself, towards which you may be able to play via use of your other tile. So you can plan ahead, or "play to your hand" (such as it is). The variant likewise mitigates the effects of continual "wrong" tiles, not only due to the opportunity to replace duplicates but also because the ability to choose one tile to set up another means there are fewer "wrong" tiles anyway. (This last is especially true when using various expansions.) In short, Two-tile renders the game more skillful, more involving, more fun. Practically everyone I've persuaded to play the variant agrees that it makes *Carcassonne* a much more worthwhile exercise. The greater length of play, it is not doubted, but in fact the amount of "down time" is considerably reduced precisely because you can plan ahead, so in meta-gaming terms it's time well spent.)

[**Skip Press:** Two-tile works with the new Traders & Builders expansion, although you have to drop the "Equal Turns" rule (play continues until all players have placed the tiles they own).]

Centre strength (C) will, naturally, be for the most part a straightforward one-for-one element: by definition each supply centre owned is worth one supply centre! Thus the element can be viewed as the chief tiebreaker between one performance in a draw and another performance in either a different or the same draw. It can even act similarly between wins, if less frequently as victory with more than 18 centres is still rarer than with the minimum criterion. Elimination is of course again worth zero, by definition.

There's a problem with similarly treating s.c. counts in surviving defeats, however. Working on the principle that the worst draw should outscore the best defeat, it might seem that we just achieve this on the basis of the first two elements ($17+1 > 1+16$). As we'll see, however, once the other elements come into play this is no longer the case. We could simply increase the draw's Result valuation accordingly, and presumably that for a win in similar measure, as the worst win should likewise outscore the best draw. But it seems a pity to undo the total s.c. "first on-pipe" with which we began. There is another possibility, stemming from the argument that defeat is the equivalent of being eliminated in this context, as the act of someone winning ends the game (in instant defeat for the rest). Thus Centre strength for defeated parties can be treated as zero.

Duration (D) One problem with the Kinzert-Masien equation, briefly referred to above, is that its tiny rewards for lesser draw performances (as a percentage of their more spectacular equivalents) meant that those for eliminated or defeated parties were still finer, even denser, and could be felt not to reflect the effort put into (say) a draw-out but ultimately unsuccessful rear-guard action. (Otherwise known as "All that for less than one score point?") This seems especially relevant when summing Team or individual performances. Happily, because it makes no sense to talk in terms of supply centre fractions, the minimum equation between duration and centres is one supply centre for one game-year, and as even this dramatically improves the proportions under scrutiny we'll try it as the chief tiebreaker between defeats and/or eliminations.

Rather more controversially, I want to use the same as a further tiebreaker for wins and draws. This on the grounds that, up to a certain limit which can be determined from our own parameters, the longer a game than arguably the better its quality. Draws agreed early usually have a lot of play left in them, while wins achieved early are pressurably against weaker (or on the day less organized) opposition. Of course, duration in this context must be expressed in terms of scheduled game-years, else a board already privately agreed on a draw might start running to one-minute deadlines (as some, overlooking that I'd already anticipated the scam, tried to do when I used this idea once before).

The shortest possible (non-conceded) win is by the end of the third game-year, just about, so the shortest legitimately agreed draw is plausibly by 1904 – for, say, the purpose of establishing stalemate lines against a potential win or an apparently unbreakable alliance. (Thus we have always effectively banned pre-04 draws by refusing to score them.) The longest game at a tournament is set by the round's game-year maximum, if any, ideally this needs to be no more than our "certain limit" referred to above. We can determine this ideal game-year limit by applying our parameters on "worst win / best draw" and "worst draw / best defeat" (see below).

Leader Bonus (L) reflects, as aforesaid, the theoretical drive to 18+ centres, i.e. is the incentive to get ahead towards the anticipated end of the game. It counterbalances the temptation towards an even-split, unbreakable alliance because the parties involved will be aware that only one player (the board Leader, if any) will gain this bonus. The same will be counterbalanced even more by making the bonus the difference between the supply centre counts of the Leader and his or her nearest rival, again treating those of defeated parties as zero but also this time all wins as 18 (as this element is the incentive towards a win). This recreates something of the balance inherent in the Kinzert-Masien equation.

Elimination factor (E) This can only apply to those who draw or win, since those being eliminated or effectively so will no longer have a game for which the "diplomatic quality" has any relevance, neither should their now-completed performance be adversely affected by further eliminations (and thus, in retrospect, other earlier ones). Thus $E = 0$ for defeated or eliminated parties.

For the rest we're saying that the quality of their result is adversely affected by the number of actual eliminations, on the grounds that it reduces the game's raison d'être (diplomacy) and is suspect as being for purposes other than striving towards victory. (Or to put it another way, it reduces player participation, which is always a bad mark in any game.) In order to avoid having the disincentive for eliminating others simply compensated by the gain in supply centres (element C), each elimination must obviously carry a penalty of more than one supply centre. The consequent minimum of two would mean that any player would only make a net profit from elimination by taking three centres, ignoring the effects of L (which is fair enough as L rewards the drive to win). Again let's use this as a ball-park figure: for those who draw or win, $E =$ twice the number of players eliminated.

The Formula is therefore confirmed as: $S = R + C + D + L - E$ (see next page for D maximum).

Score = Result element(34, 17, 1, 0) ... plus... Centre strength (defeated=0) ... plus... game-year Duration(max 12) ... plus... s.c. Lead (leader only, max 18) ... minus... Elimination factor (0 if defeated/elim, else 2 x elim. players).

DIPLOMACY SCORING PROPOSAL

or Oh my god, Nick's off again....

At ManorCon we've used variations on the Kinzert-Mastler equation for some years now (since 1986 in fact) and it's served us pretty well. Because it does away with X-way Draw Syndrome and other values essentially derived from Places Philosophy, we've by and large encouraged players not to think in those (I think detrimental) terms. Instead we concentrate on something a lot closer to the spirit of the game as originally conceived: the drive towards victory (18+ centres) or failing that, maintaining a balance of power or viable diplomatic position (here expressed by a function derived from the overall pattern of supply centres). The big drawback is that the equation itself is somewhat abstruse, to put it mildly. To express how it works and why (despite certain appearances) it is not counter-intuitive, we're usually reduced to offering rules-of-thumb: e.g. increasing your centre count will increase your score except when another player gains overwhelmingly more, or the more evenly divided your opponents the better your score. The formula is also squarely aimed at drawn games – admittedly the usual Diplomacy outcome, but around which the scoring of wins and defeat/eliminations has proved a somewhat contrived exercise in which we have usually undervalued the effort that goes into both (particularly hard-fought if unsuccessful struggles against elimination).

So for some time I've been contemplating a change to a simpler, thus more intuitive, system which still reflects the desired values but is derived from the given parameters of the game. What I have in mind here is something where indicators of performance (result achieved, supply centre strength, endurance, the theoretical drive towards victory and the even more theoretical diplomatic quality of game) can all be expressed in terms of a single game-derived measurement, and therefore summed. There is really only one choice for this plausibly universal measurement: supply centres, because the game progresses and is ultimately defined in terms of gaining or losing them. In short, the question being posed is "How many supply centres is Performance indicator X worth?", under the assumption that this is a legitimate equation to make. I'm looking at something like this:

Overall Performance = Result value + Centre strength + Duration in game + "victory drive" + "diplomatic quality".

For reasons covered in a moment I assess the last two elements in terms of, respectively, a Leader-only bonus (L) and a negative Elimination factor (E). Together these form a simpler substitute for the old formulas in-built balance, and are supposed to reflect that the game is about a quest for 18+ centres (even though there is only a small chance of achieving it) and is not about eliminating others from participation (although this is sometimes the fallout of the aforesaid quest). The more players that are eliminated, the poorer the diplomatic balance of the game and the greater the possibility that it was done for reasons unconnected with the quest for 18+ centres (which was the great fault of the old X-way Draw Syndrome and thus still a conceptual error in any scoring system using X-way values as a basis). Conversely, using a bonus based on the Leader's distance from nearest rivals (as opposed to actual proximity to 18+ centres) lessens the possibility that the prevailing position is due to reasons unconnected with the ostensible quest, such as forming an unbreakable alliance aimed at eliminating others with no intention of attempting to go for a win.

The proposed equation therefore becomes: Score S = R + C + D + L - E.

Result (R) In Diplomacy (as in fact in most games, though rarely explicitly stated) there are really only two legitimate outcomes: one player wins (here by achieving 18+ centres), thereby defeating all the others (some of whom may have been eliminated in the process); or else the game remains unfinished as a draw, here held to be between all survivors and so excluding those eliminated by implication. (For now we'll leave aside my firm conviction, explored elsewhere, that this exclusion constitutes something of a corruption on the true meaning of a game-draw.)

As victory is held to be "control of Europe", it is arguably worth the game's grand total of 34 supply centres. The worth of a draw is trickier to assess in the same terms, however. To divide a notional total of points (34 or otherwise) evenly between those held to participate in the draw is to commit exactly the X-way Draw fallacy mentioned above: because this is exactly equivalent to a joint victory, and easier to achieve than a real victory, it actually acts as a strong (maybe overweighing) disincentive to playing towards the stated goal of the game! In any case, to think in terms of different "qualities" of draw is not a legitimate proceeding in the present context: we are merely concerned with what a draw, any draw, should be worth as a Result when victory is assessed as the equivalent of 34 centres. As the most actual centres that can be controlled in a draw is half this amount, and as the draw is generally seen as a satisfactory result, this suggests a maximum value of 17. We'll use this as a ball-park figure and see what transpires.

Elimination is easy to assess: as the player can no longer function in the game other than in a notional (advisory) sense – which incidentally is the game's greatest flaw – then as a Result it can be worth no supply centres at all, unless you want to award an entirely arbitrary figure for the player's participation. (We later do this rather less arbitrarily through the Duration element.) Defeat but survival is arguably marginally better than elimination: were history to go on, so to speak, such players would still be able to influence events, however hopelessly. Unlike a draw it is an undestorable as opposed to satisfactory result, thus suggesting the minimum value possible: 1 supply centre.

Len D Watson: Onto *Puerto Rico*. My initial reaction was also "this is what *Outpost* should have been", and further playing has only confirmed that opinion. So what is wrong with *Outpost*? The main problem is the random nature of the availability of colony upgrade cards; whereas *PR* has all the buildings available from the start. ((**NMC**: This thought gives me ideas for *Outpost*....))

Obviously, I agree that victory point chits should be public, etc. But your suggestion to keep a public track of players' total VPs is pointless because, like *Outpost*, a player's current total is not necessarily a true reflection of how well they're doing.

((**NMC**: Obtaining any such reflection was not why I suggested this; rather, current VP totals constitute information which should be public so that players can calculate the likely fall-out of any particular decision should the game then end. However, I agree that this is only relevant very close to the end of the game, which can be judged from open-to-scrutiny cities, VP chits and colonist stock. Calling for a public VP tot-up on such occasions might then be sufficient.))

lart: Curiously, I've noticed that Hospice is very popular with inexperienced players but not with experts, at least as a first purchase. Although it reduces the number of times Mayor has to be picked, it does little towards giving you VPs. My experience so far (mostly four-player games) seems to show there are three viable strategies in the standard game:

- 1: The Corn Merchant. Produce lots of Corn to ship, gaining lots of VP chits.
- 2: Factory King. Produce one of as many types as possible and buy a Factory, earning money through production & trading to buy big buildings, and ship some goods as well.
- 3: Trader. Produce Coffee or Tobacco, buy markets, make money trading, buy big buildings.

It is also possible to combine these, in pairs, for three mixed strategies, giving a total of at least six "routes to victory". Numbers 2 & 3 benefit from having quarries but no.1 does not so much. The "produce lots of Indigo" strategy does not work. ((**NMC**: ...at least in Standard four-player.))

I've also noticed that the game is quite different in "feel" for different numbers of players....

((**NMC**: To the extent of demanding (as Steve J pointed out when teaching me the game) rather different tactics, if not actual strategies as outlined above, for each of the Rulebook variants.))

lart: Something you may want to apply the grey cells to: buildings that don't hack it at present. The Large Warehouse is rarely bought, but the worst is University. Office is rarely worthwhile, but I won with one tother day, so it can't be that bad. And the Hacienda is possibly another problem, unless.... Have you tried the "official" expansion yet? You can download it from www.rograndegames.com. Not only does it make Hacienda more worthwhile, it also makes Indigo and Sugar more useful. Various people have ideas on how to choose which buildings to start the game (probably depends on the number of players too).

((**NMC**: From which I gather that this expansion, actually variant, allows you to start with one or more In-place buildings. As for those that don't hack it: we usually find Office fine, and I've won with University by buying it early. But Tony Foss agrees with you on University and suggests it should come ready-made. He's also made Hacienda better by having the extra plantation chosen from the piles or preferably discards. However, I think the real problem here is that the game usually ends too early for these buildings to come into their own. So my proposal is that the game should instead finish when TWO of the game-ending criteria have been achieved. Mayor and even Captain would have tactical uses (moving colonists and re-circulating goods) beyond their main function, whilst Builder would of course still be useful to those with unfulfilled cities. Incidentally, I've never seen VP chit exhaustion come even close as a game-ender, suggesting that the initial stock could safely be reduced to twenty per player.))

((The other big problem is the poisonous quality of the Craftsman, which gets worse the more players there are, setting up those following for Trader and Captain with rare benefit to himself. I suggest that Craftsman gets a further extra good in four-player games and yet another in five-player, and that one extra good may immediately be exchanged for one gold.))

Knizia's LORD OF THE RINGS boardgame -- some comments and ideas

I know that some gamers, including at least one whose views I respect a great deal, dismiss Knizia's LOTR as a "solitaire game" because – prior to the *Sauron* expansion at any rate – the players are on the same side against the game system. This is not actually an issue of "all players losing together" (incidentally a concept which I think would improve most games, serving to remind that gaming is also a co-operative activity) or "all players winning together" (formal teams being one of those rare conditions in which Joint Victory would be regarded as legitimate even by me). The real reason these gamers are uncomfortable with LOTR is that they feel the game must boil down to making the same key decisions: keep back this card for this, keep back that card for that. So to them you might as well be playing it solo, for once the optimum pattern has been worked out then any different player-decisions can only be to the team's detriment. The corollary is that, just as in Card Solitaire, the outcome would then swing entirely on the chance factors – here mainly the speed with which the Events occur, rather than the order or distribution of the cards.

This would-be criticism mostly misses the point of playing any game at all: the would-be critics often being unaware that their preferred games (including those with few or no internal chance factors) are subject to a variation on the same theme. In any non-solo game with more or less equally skilled players the victor will still be a matter of chance, if only because it comes down to whoever makes the fewest errors in a given session (an external chance factor). There are of course those who believe, devoutly, that the process of winning demonstrates that the players are not "more or less equally skilled", indeed that obtaining such evidence is the chief purpose of playing games. This attitude is so far removed from my own reasons for gaming (exploration of systems, exercising my wits, participation in a tolerably social activity) that I sometimes wonder if we're talking about the same hobby.

LOTR can certainly be played solo: you just play several Hobbits with a hand of cards apiece. This obviates only the last of my given reasons for gaming, and perforce ignores what is anyway LOTR's great unenforceable rule: players should not show each other what cards they hold. To recreate Reiner's Intention here for the two- or multi-player game, any card so shown should be either immediately played or discarded. But the latter, naturally, is not the only thing which raises the design above that of a Solitaire activity. The "optimum pattern" referred to above is neither obvious nor invariable: it can take a number of sessions for any group of players to work out a reasonable strategy, and by the same token the game changes again whenever you have the opportunity to play with different players.

However, there is much truth in the charge that the game largely swings on the speed with which the Events occur, and this is a chance factor over which the players have practically no control. The worst part of this is that it can, and frequently does, reduce individual players' participation in the game: since the standard rules force the Active Hobbit to keep drawing tiles (and enacting their effects) until he draws a movement tile, it's perfectly possible for those further around the circuit to get little or even no play at all before the Scenario is over (and the team is in deep trouble). This I've found so unsatisfactory that I've introduced the following tile-draw limit. The Active Hobbit draws tiles until revealing a movement tile or until T tiles have been drawn, where T = 2,3,4. After enacting the movement or Tn the effects, said Active Hobbit proceeds to his usual options (note that in some cases he will do so without the benefit of a Tree movement). T depends on Scenario or how hard you want to make the game. I suggest marking chips with a distribution of these numbers, the Ringbearer choosing which is to regulate the current Scenario from the stock of so-far unused chips. A basic game distribution of 2,2,3,4 gives an interesting choice of when to play the higher values, as normally you wouldn't want to risk them on the final Scenario (Mordor-Gondor, as I prefer to think of it).

I've adjusted a couple of other vaguely unsatisfactory bits and pieces. To give a slightly greater incentive of going for the Big Shields (rather than trying to rush-end the Scenario by putting on the Ring), initial mix should be 1,2,2,3,3,3 and the Mount Doom big shield yield should be available for use before attempting to destroy the Ring (it can be assigned to any Hobbit present, so may give an opportunity for a Gandalf card). Furthermore, if the Ringbearer has put on the Ring in the Mordor Scenario, only he may attempt to destroy it, although if failing he may get a second chance thanks to the following additional rule: If Gollum has been brought into play, the final failed attempt to destroy the Ring may be "replayed" by moving the Hobbit one step back from Sauron along the Corruption Line and rolling again (if the Hobbit survives then Gollum has seized the Ring but promptly fallen into the Fire). In the *Sauron* expansion, the Ring pass-on card cannot be used whilst the Ring is being worn.

The Gollum innovation got me doing something about the story's other major characters, who played a rather larger part in the book than their "one shot" game-cards suggest! So now all the other members of the Fellowship (Gandalf, Aragorn, Boromir, Legolas, Gimli, plus Pippin & Merry if not represented by a player, plus Gollum as above) have character chips (I use those from The Search two-player game, incidentally). These chips are brought into play face-down when their appropriate character card is played for its normal effect, or face-up as a straight exchange for that card (as may be tactical; see also Bag End mods). Each player-Hobbit may turn one face-down character chip he "owns" face-up when reaching a Refuge; the party as a whole may then turn one additional such chip face-up. Face-up character chips represent grey/white feature cards of value 1 Fighting or Travelling (i.e. when spent, turn them face-down). If an Event calls for Fighting, face-down characters may be "sacrificed" to meet the following Fighting costs: Gandalf 5, Aragorn 4, Pippin & Merry 2, Gollum 0, the others 3; but Boromir may not be used in this way until he has been TESTED; see below. If a non-player member of the Fellowship dies by this or any other method, including enforced card loss, then the "owning" Hobbit rolls the Die as per Sam, representing the character's grief (exception: Gollum post-Shield or seizing the Ring).

Refuges are: Rivendell, Lothlórien, Edoras (any advance on the KingTheoden line of Helm's Deep Scenario if the First Event costs are met), Henneth Annun (after the Farinuil space) & new location Minas Tirith. For every right to chip reward the party cannot achieve on reaching a Refuge (the Hobbits lacking the face-down chips), they receive a Hobbit card instead. NB Watchful Peace can only be used while in Refuge & costs party 3 Shields.

If Aragorn/Strider is not present (either as card or chip), these feature cards cannot be played or picked up: Anduil, Arwen, Army of the Dead. In addition, activity lines on such Scenarios are begun "one space back" (i.e. the first space on each line that is moved onto will be the blank one). This includes Bree/equivalent, hah heh! Gandalf Cards can only be bought (as opposed to being free via Gandalf's Letter) if an allied Wizard is "in play". This is important if using the Friends & Foes expansion, any of my proposed alternative route Scenarios (which will feature the other Wizards) or this addition to the Morná final event, Gandalf slain. Note that if Gandalf the White turns up in the Isengard Scenario, he has been either resurrected (if slain previously) or "upgraded" by the Valar anyway. For "duplicate characters", i.e. Aragorn/Strider and Gandalf the Grey/White, whoever last plays or exchanges the relevant character card will receive the appropriate character chip.

When first considering a private expansion to LOTR, it struck me that there were a number of missing scenes; these I set about designing either as Scenarios (mainly Erador) or as "Episodes" (as I now define all the minor locations, including Bag End and Mount Doom). Friends & Foes has, however, largely made my initial concoctions redundant, except for the following. (If using with *Sauron*, I strongly recommend starting Sauron at 15 on the Corruption Track!)

GREAT RIVER episode (after Lothlórien). (A) Down river: Party spends Boats or Two Travelling, otherwise Eye.

(B) Winged Nazgul over Sam Gebur: Party spends Bow or Two Hiding, otherwise Eye.

(C) The Testing of Boromir: Ringbearer rolls Die, Fellowship BREAKS if he suffers Wounds or Eye (see below).

(D) The Uruk-Hai: Party (Group K only if BROKEN, see below) must spend Fighting equal to six plus number of symbols on the Ringbearer's roll in C, distributing two Wounds amongst Hobbits for each Fighting not spent. Boromir may on this occasion sacrifice himself for twice his usual value (remorse). If Party undertakes, it may voluntarily split or proceed as one to Isengard/Helm's Deep, Minas Tirith, or Shelob's Lair (latter costs 5 Eyes).

Breaking of the Fellowship: The latter splits into two groups, unless there is only one player-Hobbit (the Ringbearer) who would thus be defined as Group K (the Kelnaped). Otherwise he is of Group L (the Last of the Fellowship), and may select to accompany him one other player-Hobbit (who must at once reseat himself on the Ringbearer's left), provided at least one is left for Group K. The other Hobbits, player and non-player, comprise Group K. All non-player Fellowship character cards/chips in play (except Gollum) must now be redistributed amongst Group K, but Grp L may then select any one card from Grp K (except Boromir). If more numerals put Gollum in play he must follow Ringbearer.

If there are indeed two groups they then execute one Scenario apiece, in effect simultaneously. Grp K always starts (with Isengard, or Helm's Deep if not using the F&F expansion), the initial player being the one of that group nearest the Ringbearer's left. Thus all Group K players will have a turn before play reaches the Ringbearer's Group L, who tackle Shelob's Lair (or its equivalent), in which all Event Shield costs will now be reduced by one. Play continues clockwise as usual, except that each group will of course be on its own board. Note the Scenario-start effects of Aragorn's absence from one or both parties, mentioned above.

Only one set of Event tiles, one set of Life tokens and one line of Foes (F&F expansion) is used for the two parties, but when one Group finishes its Scenario any Life tokens it has garnered will be available for the other – or indeed itself, if it then has to immediately start another Scenario, as Group K must do with Helm's Deep if they have not obliterated it (NB if the Ringbearer is absent from H Deep, the second Event's effects on him are ignored but not the last Event's). Although a party without Gandalf may buy a Gandalf effect card (provided an allied Wizard is in play), one group may not "temporarily" aid the other except via those cards which influence factors that both Scenarios perforce share (thus Foresight for rearranging/selecting the commonly-held Event tiles).

When one group has completely finished its Scenario or set of Scenarios (Isengard/HD is followed by Minas Tirith), play simply continues for the other until it too has finished. Although still separate, the groups in effect combine their efforts for the Mordor-Gondor Scenario (so may "temporarily" aid each other), but the Ring draws with Grp L. The event "Sam saves Frodo" is valid only if these two are in the same group; and only the Ringbearer's group tackles Mt Doom.

MINAS TIRITH episode (Refuge). Follows Isengard/Helm's Deep, and may follow Great River if party unbroken. After applying Refuge effects, Denethor makes his judgement. One Hobbit (must be Ringbearer if present) rolls Die, adding Eyes to the result or non-result for the following: Boromir is dead (one Eye), Helm's Deep Scenario has not yet been performed or successfully circumvented (four Eyes). The HD effect can be ignored if the party proceed there. Otherwise party go to Shelob's Lair, unless this has already been done, in which case they start on Mordor-Gondor.

Bag End episode mods: Gandalf: Each player-Hobbit receives X cards, where X = 10 minus no. of player-Hobbits. Preparations: Always die-roll (not Sauron expansion). 2 cards each may be exchanged for non-player Pippin/Merry chip. Nazgul Appears: If playing the Sauron expansion, a Nazgul movement of three spaces always occurs.

F&F mods: [Rivendell] Erador heals 1 Hobbit of two damage. [Morná] In 2nd Event, Bill the Pony flees (discarded).

F&F-Sauron mods: Die-roll or Sauron/Nazgul "card-loss" result can either be ALL card-loss or ALL additional Foes.

Title mod: I've also created a blank "joker" tile which can be used to represent any other tile.