

OUTBREAK of HERESY (Issue 23, July 2003)

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MANORCON DIPLOMACY HOUSERULES: The 1971 Rulebook is used, clarified/adapted for our purposes as below.

Players may enter up to three rounds. That held on Saturday is the team event (for which see details at the event), but each player's personal performance in that round will also be entered for the individual tournament along with the games played on Friday and Sunday. See the Programme Booklet for timetables of play and deadlines for entry.

Boards and Great Powers will be drawn by computer (or except during the team round, where team captains assign each of the Powers amongst their team members. The program will minimize the chance of playing the same Power or against the same players as one has already, also the incidence of relatives/partners playing on the same board.

The object of the game is still to gain control of eighteen or more supply centres. However, all boards are time-limited to the eleventh game-year or Midnight, whichever occurs first – a game which reaches this limit without a winner being determined is held to be a draw between all its surviving players. As usual, players may terminate a game by mutual agreement before this point, all surviving players again participating in the draw. Exception: boards terminated in this way before the minimum duration for a "meaningful" game (here the end of Fall 1905) are held to be joint defeats.

Proposals to end the game, if not publicly vetoed by any active player on the board, give rise to a secret ballot arbitrated by the Tournament Director or his assistant: all active players must then privately vote YES to end the game (i.e., the showing of ballots by one player to another counts as a veto). If the game continues the arbiter merely announces that this is the case, without reference to the number of ballots cast for and against or to who cast what.

Diplomacy phases are combined with order-writing phases and are set at twenty-minute intervals (the rulebook's fifteen for negotiation plus a notional five for all other game-business), but may be shortened by the tournament director to fit the timetabled schedule. Each period restarts the moment the order deadline is called, so the longer it takes for other turn business (adjudication, retreats, adjustments etc) the less time for negotiation and order-writing.

Late submission of orders is penalized: one written order is ignored per every ten seconds late, in alphabetical order of extent location. If submission is more than a minute overdue then all of the offending player's orders are ignored. "Out of phase" negotiation is penalized the following turn as if the player's orders are an additional 30 seconds late.

Format for writing orders is the rulebook's "Unit(location) order [Destination if any]", or where assisting another piece "Unit(location) assists Unit(location) [move & Destination if any]". Any order involving assistance (support or convoy) is only valid for the first-listed unit, thus will not of itself be an adequate order for the second-listed unit.

Players may not write orders for another participant's units, so a player cannot "sign over" control of his or her forces.

If an assisted unit belongs to another player, its ownership must be indicated via correct unit nationality for the order to be valid, otherwise it could be argued that the player is ordering under the mistaken belief that he or she (or a third party in the case of misidentified nationality) owns the ostensibly assisted unit – a species of mislocation. Note that permission does not have to be sought or given to support/convoy another player's unit, so assistance which legally and perfectly anticipates another player's order, and which correctly identifies the unit's ownership, is valid.

Other mislocated unit orders are similarly held to be invalid, as is true with non-adjacent destinations. However, merely mis-spelt locations and destinations do not invalidate an order (although see Abbreviations).

Omission and misidentification of coast or unit type are also held to be irrelevant, and so will not invalidate an order, except in those cases specified otherwise in the rulebook. These are: potentially multi-coastal moves/builds for coast (i.e. where either coast could be moved to or built upon); coastal builds for unit type (as either type can be built there); (N.B.: the absence of a corresponding rule proves that inland builds must be of a single type, i.e. armies.)

Abbreviations can be used for any order element (notably the rulebook's hyphen for "moves to") but any abbreviation which leaves the order with two or more meanings will invalidate it. Thus: a location when a player has units in more than one area for which the abbreviation could be appropriate; a move to a destination which could mean two or more areas accessible to the unit; and the use of "A" or "F" for Austrian / French where it could mean just Army or Fleet.

A few post-1971 rulechanges are ignored as unnecessary & irrelevant: Where an army could from the given orders move to its destination by more than one route, i.e. one or more legal convoys have been ordered, the disruption of any (not all) of the convoys prevents the move and the army has no effect on the destination province. Specification of a particular route, whether by land or by convoy, is irrelevant and any such attempted qualification will be ignored.

Civil Disorder Removals: the "shortest route" to a homeland centre (whether or not still owned by the Power in C.D.) is calculated in terms of the number of potential legal moves by that unit (including via convoys by own fleets in place) and is blocked by the presence of other players' units. (Units can therefore become "infinitely distant")

The British edition board is used, so note that Spain and North Africa are not adjacent, Kiel Canal is unmarked, and the Caspian Sea does not exist for game purposes (so Moscow is not coastal while Sev & Arm have only one coast).

(MK: Being a postal forum for modifying or indeed discussing games, and as it turns out rather more frequent than I thought it might be when tentatively reviving it a few months ago. This one is more or less exclusively on Diplomacy (ManorCon houserules, the scoring system proposed last issue, ramifications), therefore distributed to known Dippers plus contributors and plausibly interested parties, and either with ManorCon Progress Report 3 or at this year's event itself. Whereas the projected issue 24 should have a rather wider spectrum of interest. Since the revival I've put out ideas or variants on Carcasonne, Puerto Rico and Krinzia's *Lord of the Rings*, but there's plenty more in the locker and we're nowhere near done with PR, which will on that occasion be led off by this issue's opening estimable gent!))

Dave Thornby: Email. You don't have to carry on a full-blown debate by email: just accepting submissions electronically will increase the number of contributors, as those who can't be bothered to type a letter, print it, print an envelope, put a stamp on it and post it will no longer be excluded. Also, electronic distribution of OoH will increase its circulation at little extra cost to you (provided you stop adding hand-written notes to the bottom of pages).

(MK: Er, yes. The two such were afterthoughts when I had neither opportunity nor inclination to key in footnotes to already-full and printed hardcopies (being due at the printshop in ten minutes). So my sympathy for anyone who can't be bothered to handwrite an envelope, never mind a letter, is rather limited. But I take your point. Actually, I'm perfectly happy to accept emails that resemble letters, as distinct from those confusing multi-contributor tracks where everyone commits their immediate (and thus frequently their worst) reactions to the world at large. However, to make OoH thus widely accessible would mean biting the bullet and exposing my precious machine to email, instead of always borrowing someone else's. I'll have to let you know on that one.))

Dave: Diplomacy. It's some years since I ran a game of Dip but I remember that the rulebook contains a line to the effect that "any unambiguous order must be accepted", which would mean that stating that the nationality of a unit is not required since there can only be one unit in a province (in Regular, anyway).

(MK: Not quite, because you're here conflating the "mistaken but legal order" rule with the "badly written order" rule, both of which are limited by the further "order admitting of two meanings" rule to those that have only one meaning. I've demonstrated that omission of ownership when ostensibly supporting/convoying another player's unit leaves the order with (at least) two meanings. That there can be no more than one unit per area is thus insufficient to redeem such an order from ambiguity.))

Dave: It's a bit like the order A(For) S (F Spa), which can only refer to one fleet in Spain no matter which coast it may be on.

(MK: As per above I don't accept that analogy, though I agree that there's nothing wrong with A(For)S(F Spa) itself – assuming units existed in those locations and both belonged to the ordering player! The missing coast is of course an example of an element which is "irrelevant if omitted/misidentified" except in those cases specified in the Rulebook (the latter with potentially multi-coastal moves, F(For)-Spa or, equally ambiguous, F(For)-Spa etc.). Note there have been GMs who wouldn't accept A(For)S(F Spa), in effect applying the "mandatory & accurate to validate" mode to all situations involving coast. You'll have to forgive me, I was under the (obviously unjust) impression that you were one.))

((But as one of the world's former GMs, even if ex-, I wonder if I can run this one by you. In the case of ambiguous orders it has been suggested to me that a GM or tournament director should be able to decide which meaning is the "true" one. This I find heinous. There might not be such a functionary, as in casual 1+1 games. Even when there is this suggestion is calling upon him or her to be partial when he or she should be strictly impartial. Yes?))

Dave Masten: In the discussion of how Dip orders should be interpreted, you failed to mention one suggestion that I had made, namely that each player should be able to specify at the start of the game whether his orders should be interpreted according to the "mandatory to validate" rule or the "irrelevant if omitted/misidentified" rule. One could achieve this by having two flavours of order sheets available, each clearly headed "Nationalities mandatory to validate supports and convoys" (of other players' units) or "Nationalities, even if specified, to be ignored in support and convoy orders." That would allow each player to write orders in the style to which they are accustomed.

(MK: Aaagh! In theory a nice liberal idea which would be completely horrible and confusing in practice. Methinks also this concession dodges the issue, which is the reluctance of (some) tournament players and (most) tournament GMs to concede that they might just have been getting this wrong. I'd rather they learned to get it right, at least at ManorCon. "When in Rome..." you know? After all, it's a small thing I'm asking, and getting into the habit of including unit nationality is one which certainly wouldn't do any harm to those groups or tournaments which continue to ignore it or which (illogically) regard it as optional. Whereas the reverse is not true.))

Dane Masten: At first sight your proposed new scoring system seemed to be reasonable, though I'm not convinced that it's any more intuitive than the existing one. It still seems necessary to formulate guidelines for players to explain how you get the best rewards from the scoring system.

(NK): Except that here these guidelines are derived from something that all numerate players (not just those most mathematically-minded as with our old equation) can readily calculate in their heads.))

Dane: It was only when you got as far as giving some example results that the flaws showed up... It can't be right for 34/0-0-0-0-0 to score less than 28/1-1-1-1-1. If a player is on 17 centres facing six opponents and can eliminate them all in one game year, he or she clearly deserves a better score than someone who can merely whittle all six opponents down to one centre each. Since when has it been a virtue in Diplomacy to pull your punches?

(NK): But surely it is, in almost any worthwhile game. It is at least arguable that achieving the stated goal of a game without destroying or eliminating your fellow-players argues a greater degree of finesse and skill than does simply bulldozing them, for which in this case you'd need their actively suicidal connivance anyway. Thus there's nothing "clearly deserving" about the case you cite at all. It is, however, counter-arguable that persuading others into such suicide is itself a diplomatic skill, see therefore a possible revision (Version Two) later on.))

Dane: This might seem a somewhat irrelevant objection given that such results do not occur **(NK: not at all!)**, but the existence of this anomaly is an indication that there might be other instances in which a player will discover that a better score would have resulted from gaining one fewer centre! The one that immediately springs to mind is that 18/3-3-3-3-3-1 would score more than 19/3-3-3-3-3-0. So in Autumn 1912, with 18 centres securely under your belt and four armies surrounding an isolated single-centre opponent, your "best play" is to refrain from taking the centre. That would be perverse.

(NK): Not to me it wouldn't. In fact, to win the perversity is in your implication that the centre should instead be taken. Here's why: if you already have a forced win (bearing possible errors in your final orders) then there is no operational or tactical value in taking that centre. You can only be doing it for reasons outside of the stated goal of the game. What in effect I've done here, in fact, is go back to the principle from which we originally started seventeen years ago: *Diplomacy is a game about reaching a specific number of centres, not about eliminating opponents.* While it is true that you have to gain centres to stand a chance of reaching the stated goal, its very difficulty has reduced many players to thinking that the object of the game is instead to gain as many centres as they can, or to destroy as many opponents as they can, regardless of the consequences for the game as a game.))

Dane: The problem of course is the "E" component in the formula. The Kuznetz-Masten equation penalised eliminations unless a player picked up "more than a fair share". The "E" component penalises all eliminations, even if the player picks up everything. It will always be better to pick up all bar one centre and then preserve the opponent's existence. I repeat, that is perverse.

(NK): Again, I disagree that this is perverse, for the much the same reason as above. If elimination of an opponent has an operational or tactical purpose, i.e. it promotes a victory which is subsequently achieved, only then it can be justified in game-terms (reflected by having a win bonus that is overwhelmingly greater than the penalty for eliminating or allowing the elimination of an opponent). Otherwise it is again suspect as being for reasons outside the stated goal of the game. Even if committed with the intention of trying to win, failure to subsequently do so justifies the relative penalty. And, as above, if you can win without eliminating others it argues greater skill, thus no penalization. Now I say "relative penalty" back there because you overlook the Leader Bonus: if in taking an opponent's final centre the leader gains one over his or her nearest rival (i.e. nearest rival's s.c. count remains static), then the penalty for E is exactly balanced by the overall gain in C and L. This doesn't work in your "Win scenarios above because of the cap on L, so it's this, not E, which is causing your problem. But again see Version Two for a possible solution. Then see Version Three for a way in which the leader (the player most likely to be doing it for a win) might eliminate at a profit.))

(As for it always being better in score terms to preserve an opponent's existence, that was precisely the point. It is always better for the game to preserve an opponent's existence. Not only does this reflect the Guy Thomas theory (the "best", N.B. not "easiest", way of winning is to keep your opponents many but divided), it likewise satisfies the Arnold Arnold principle (the purpose of gaming is to participate in a game) and opens up a session to all sorts of interesting possibilities (capture or puppet allies, rogue units, scatter theory). As opposed to irrevocably getting rid of a fellow-player just because it lies within your power to do so. In this respect I'm now persuaded that our old equation's slant on eliminating opponents doesn't go nearly far enough!))

Chris Berry: A penalty for eliminating others is a good idea – we stopped playing Diplomacy face-to-face because people were being knocked out to no purpose, as nobody won anyway. But not rewarding centre-strength for losing survivors is not such a good idea. I know this is part of your usual prejudice against places and place-minded players, but even you have to admit that one way to try to win is the "race for victory", which this system must discourage.

(NK): Fair point. See Version Two for a correction of this. Then see Version Three for what I originally had in mind, which was to effectively penalize even surviving losers for eliminating others, except that this time I do it directly.))

DIPLOMACY REBOUND

Of course, the logical corollary to the foregoing article is that Diplomacy is a flawed design anyway, in terms of the participation ethos, merely for allowing the possibility of permanent involuntary elimination. This partly follows from its slightly corrupt usage of the term "draw", which properly speaking should indicate not only a "no win" situation but also one of "no defeat". (Between voluntary participants at any rate: as Stephen Agar once observed, those who want to be permanently eliminated should be permitted to do so, but must consider themselves defeated.)

Here's some ideas addressing these points as simple modifications / modules / variants, or however you prefer to think of them. (Some have already been suggested in nascent forms in *Outbreak of Heresy* and elsewhere, including as proposals in sessions of the rule-changing variant *Somewhat Demimuric Diplomacy*.) I'm not at this stage seriously proposing that the standard game be "replaced" by any of these, though some could certainly be seamlessly added to a future rulebook revision. But it would be interesting to see what players or GMS of the standard game think of them. Personally I think Sudden Death too, er, sudden, while the Partisan Module would probably make winning even more difficult. But DIAAP plus the other three modules could even be played as a package. Note that any of them played in conjunction with DIAAP would obviate the need to penalize the elimination of other players in any scoring system, as those eliminated would still participate in the draw provided they stayed with the game. Such players also get to vote in proposals to end the game, which gives them a diplomatic handle they didn't have before.

Sudden Death Version: The game ends with the first Fall turn that eliminates one or more players. The winner is the player owning the most supply centres in that adjustments phase. If there is no sole leader, the result is a draw between all active participants – including those just eliminated, but excluding those who have previously resigned (see DIAAP below). The game can end as an agreed draw between all active participants (see again DIAAP) or in an eighteen-plus centre victory, as usual.

Draw: Includes All Active Participants, as opposed to All Survivors. ((DIAAP and applicable to each case below.))
Eliminated players (including those effectively eliminated by having all units disbanded and disbanded but owing no home centres to rebuild) may stay in touch with the game and continue to negotiate, spy etc, even though they have no units to directly influence the board. They must attend adjudications to prove their continued interest – by post or email this could consist of sending in a statement to that effect by the deadline. Such "active eliminees" participate in calls to end the game and will share in the draw if passed. Whereas players who have either formally or in effect resigned cannot participate in the draw. Effective resignations are determined by failure to submit orders / attend adjudications for two successive turns. ((The old postal innovation, and a damned useful one.))

Cession Module: The retreats phase of every Fall turn is actually a "retreats and cessions phase", wherein each player may in writing cede ownership of one of his or her unoccupied supply centres to another player. Note that such a cession would be obviated should a third party legally retreat into the nominated centre! In this way players may in effect exchange centre ownership (provided that both submit appropriate cession orders) or simply provide another player with a building opportunity (including those previously eliminated if they're still with the game as per DIAAP).

Exiles Module: As part of written adjustments a surviving player may set up one eliminated in a previous Fall – as "Exiles" in an unoccupied non-supply centre within the surviving player's own territory, provided the host still owns at least one adjacent supply centre. For this to work the formerly eliminated player must simultaneously write a build in this province (which if coastal does allow for a fleet); this is raised even though the unit goes temporarily unsupported.

Refuge Module: Eliminated or effectively eliminated players may seek refuge in the inaccessible areas nearest their former homelands: Ireland (considered adjacent to Liverpool via a "Moses Crossing"), the Caspian Shore (considered adjacent to Armenia & Sevastopol) and Switzerland (considered blocked from Burgundy but not other adjacent areas). On the Fall adjustments phase following that of (effective) elimination, the refugee player establishes an army, notionally supported by the Refuge (Swi & Cas may simultaneously hold different players' armies). An army in a Refuge may thereafter hold or be ordered to the adjacent area in his or her former homeland only: any other order is considered illegal. The move may of course be supported by an on-board unit. If a refugee army gets back to the main board, it must be supported by a centre in the next Fall adjustments phase, else the player is again eliminated. Re-eliminated players may again seek refuge, reestablishing their army with the next adjustments, etc.

Partisan Module: In any Spring movement following that of their elimination or subsequent re-elimination, players may raise a temporary (Partisan) army in an unoccupied non-supply centre within their home territory or adjacent neutral. Such an army will of course be eliminated in the following Fall if the revived player has not acquired a supply centre. This raising is in effect an attempt to move into the province from a hole in the ground, so others will prevent Partisan appearance if simultaneously ordering to the province. Alternatively they may order their existing units to "patrol", which will in effect stand off Partisan appearances in each adjacent province to which the patrolling units could normally move. (NB patrolling units count as moving, so may not be supported in place.) Yet other units may support the appearance of Partisans, although only for a specific adjacent province to which the supporting unit could move. Likewise a unit may instead support a patrol, effective for all areas to which both units could move.

DIPLMOACY UNBOUND

As also mentioned in passing in the auxiliary debate, this is getting almost like the old days, when Diplomacy Scoring Systems rightly just failed to win the R.J. Walkerdine Most Boring Topic of Correspondence three years in a row....

In that same debate Dane raised the key question: What is the system designer's purpose? In my reply to David in the previous pages, I declared what mine isn't: production of a ranked list of participants, although that's certainly one fallout for those intrigued by that sort of thing. I'm instead much more interested in striving to express performance as a numerical value so that players can, if so inclined, compare their notional showing against an equally notional ideal ("Victory scores at least V and I achieved A-V", etc). This on the theory it gives a mild incentive to playing a game for its own sake and even to play it in the "right spirit". For being a big advocate of *participation* as gaming's raison d'être I believe it helps if those involved have some idea what their involvement has meant – how successful, if you prefer, they have been in playing towards the given goal.

Which is actually an obscure issue in any boardgame, given the utter uselessness of ordinal (place) theory in this regard. Even when a performance can be reduced to "in/out of P participants", all this tells us is how many other players failed to win by a still greater margin than a given non-winner, which has to be the biggest, "so what?" factor in the entire field of multi-player gaming. With Diplomacy the issue is further complicated by the fact that often, in fact usually in typically time-constrained face-to-face games, no one achieves the given goal, an outcome defined in the rulebook as a draw between all those with units still on the board. In making this definition the rulebook commits the tautology of stating that such survivors "share equally" in a draw, which is merely a convoluted way of emphasising that they do indeed all draw – the "no win" concept familiar from Chess, Cricket and other two-sided games (and one which, incidentally, the participants may force or agree despite very unequal final resources or situation) but which is perhaps not quite so intuitive to multi-sided pastimes. Note that the tautology is in no way an admission that participants in a draw must be scored equally (see e.g. the bonus point scheme of County Cricket), except in the sense that they have achieved so many draws out of so many games played (see e.g. a typical Chess tournament).

Unfortunately, the misconception that Diplomacy was a game in which a putatively fixed award was divided equally between survivors (something I call X-way Draw Syndrome) led long ago to a mindset that ran directly contrary to the given object of the game. Under this philosophy the perceived rewards of numerous three- or four-way draws were so much easier to achieve than that for any victory that the latter was scarcely a factor, let alone a serious goal. Thus the game tended to be corrupted from its premise of manoeuvring for 18+ supply centres into a grim exercise in survival and/or eliminating as many others as possible. This by itself should have been sufficient to show that the X-way Draw Syndrome made nonsense of the design, and so was not a logical extrapolation of the aforementioned tautology. Hence, as outlined last issue, the development of the Kinzlet-Massen equation and other scoring systems which refused to use the X-way philosophy as a foundation of which actually countervailed it.

My view is now that we didn't countervail it enough. The problem is as outlined on the previous pages: even under systems like the K-M one most eliminations are not undertaken in order to promote one's chances of achieving the goal of the game, but instead to improve one's perceived or actual reward. I suspect that this has been a factor in the decline of Diplomacy as a popular convention game over time: gamers become understandably less inclined to spend hours on such a potentially flawed pastime. It's not so much that they might be eliminated, more that their elimination (and thus participation) is meaningless in terms of the actual goal of the game, even for those doing the eliminating. Diplomacy ought to be a lot different from something like, say, Monopoly, in which the given object of the game *is* to eliminate everyone else.

It's true that due to the possibility of permanent involuntary elimination Diplomacy has always been a somewhat dodgy face-to-face game, except maybe in convention settings where the elected at least had a theoretical opportunity to play something else. But even the latter, already a comfort of a rather negative sort, is made still colder when the cause is so pointless. The only way around this phenomenon, so far as I can see, is address the problem directly, hence the proposal to penalize all cases of eliminating or allowing the elimination of other players. (In at least comparative terms: although Version Three of the "First Principles" system on the previous page allows the leading player to eliminate at a profit, he or she would still score more if achieving the same s.c. count-and-lead without eliminating another player.)

It may seem as if I have a bee in my bonnet about elimination in Diplomacy, and I have. Rightly. For over the years, our best efforts in reforming value systems notwithstanding, it has been transformed from the occasionally inevitable fallout of a session's progress into something very like an alternative goal – to the detriment of the given goal and thus of the game itself. Going back to my earlier comparison, this indeed reduces Diplomacy to the level of Monopoly – the latter (unless modified) being to me a worthless multi-player game not because of its big chance element, but because its goal is to eliminate, which strikes at the very heart of the participation ethos I consider so vital to gaming.

Given this damning comparison, it can be seen why I think it's appropriate we should seriously consider this issue from now, a year in advance of ManroCon's proposed hosting of World Dip Con. At the very least, those happy with the current situation can seek to persuade me that it's not as bad as I'm making out!

David Norman: My first reaction is that what you have come up with is very close to the Detour scoring system used Downunder, which the players who went to World Dip Con last year generally agreed led to very boring games, because two players who get together and sweep the board have very little to gain by doing anything other than sticking together from 1901 until the end of the game. Sure, there are a few leader bonus points (as there are in Detour), but they are not enough to make it worth breaking the alliance. Like your system, Detour has a point per centre plus a leader bonus, and a significantly higher value on wins than draws. The only real differences are the duration (which I think will have no effect, see below) and the elimination penalty. I don't think this is enough to mean that the system will play significantly differently.

(NK): But then again you don't below address the penalty for eliminating others, which as you can see from opposite I think makes all the difference in the world. The reason L and E together might form an acceptable substitute for the balance inherent in the Kinzlet-Massen equation is that there are a fixed number of centres (34) to go around. So if alliances are constrained on the one hand by the impossibility of both/all reaching the victory criterion (the L bonus going only to the solo player, if any, who gets nearest) but on the other by the penalty for knocking others out, then the "worst" that your putatively unbreakable alliance will gravitate to is 14-14-2-1-1-1-1 or 15-14-1-1-1-1-1 or thereabouts – which, as I'm sure you will agree, should give some scope for one or other of the strong players to break for the win. In short, the perceived problems of the Detour System might be precisely because it had no penalty for eliminating!!!

David: I think the duration bonus will end up giving 11 points (the ManroCon maximum!) to everyone who survives. Why will anyone ever declare a draw in 1906, when they can all write "all hold" for five years (or hold and support orders only), and get five extra points?

(NK): Dane too (in your auxiliary email debate) feared this "going through the motions" scenario if we rewarded longer draws, but it might be interesting to see a board actually try this. As I specified duration is in *scheduled* game-years, the players would have to keep returning to the board every twenty minutes to adjudicate, otherwise the tournament director simply ends the game at the scheduled game-year last played. Indeed, they have to do this *en masse* lest someone doesn't play by the supposed agreement. And if they're having to do this, they might as well keep playing properly. So you may be right that the Duration element would tend to give all survivors the maximum available, but that's all to the good so far as I'm concerned because at least games will have been given an incentive to develop as far as they can, and those who want to play on won't feel diplomatically browbeaten into finishing early just because the rest want to play *Junta* or whatever. Notwithstanding which, I do consider the counter-case in Version Three!!!

David: Five points would have made the difference between first and fifth, had this system been used at ManroCon last year. Or between a trophy and eighteenth. Doing it twice and getting ten extra points would move you up into a trophy position from twenty-fifth!

(NK): Which transformations are spurious if most or all players are playing as long as they can. Even without that these observations are nothing like as decisive in my mind as you evidently think they should be – see next bit!!!

David: Another problem is that the system simply doesn't have enough divisions. A winning score is still going to be about 75, but all scores will be integers, which means you only have 75 divisions and nearly 70 players. Ties will be very common.

(NK): Doesn't bother me: I don't think that the purpose of a scoring system is to produce a ranked list of participants' performances anyway, still less one with as many discrete rankings as possible. By themselves positional statistics are meaningless, and when you have (as per our present system) so-called rankings separated by two-decimal place fractions in a range at least three magnitudes greater, you might as well call them equal. The only "problem" with ties arises through the entirely artificial requirement we've imposed on ourselves to distinguish the top seven individual performances. Now if I'd been doing ManroCon all along instead of intermittently, I'd have long since evolved the following alternative: award up to X non-differentiated shields for the top X performances, substituting a distinctive trophy for the outright winner if any. Where ties near the top would award more shields than were available, we simply wouldn't award the shields to the tied group where that excess arises (though we could print consolation certificates). Unused shields and trophies get held over for potential use next year. Heresy? Of course!!!

David: Finally, the most obvious question of any scoring system. Does it do what we want? Consider the following two results from ManroCon 2002, recorded under this system. Jeremy Tillet: Round 1: 10 centres in 10-7-6-5-4-2-0 ((1905 finish)); 33 points. Dan Lester: Round 3: 6 centres in 15-10-6-2-1-0-0 ((1911 finish)); 30 points. Are those results really of almost equal value?

(NK): Yes, according to the assumptions underpinning Version One, the apparent narrowness of the gap being down to the statistic I had to insert in your examples (Duration). Alternatively, three points is really a big gap in this context. Better would be to compare Dan's 30 points with the 27 which would have been scored by the 7-player in Jeremy's game, who happened to be me. I'd happily accept that Dan outperformed me, because where I wrapped out at the first legal opportunity he took his game as far as he could. Of course, what you are in effect suggesting here is that Duration is being overvalued if we do accept that longer games should be rewarded. See Version Two!!!

David Norman: If we do come up with a good alternative system then I think it is worth trying it, but probably better if we do so at a small tournament (e.g. OxCOn, if the organisers are prepared to do so), rather than at ManorCon. And whatever we do, I don't think we should change anything at ManorCon until after World Dip Con (ManorCon 2004!).

(NK: I fancied running this or similar alongside the current system (which could still be used for this year's "official" results) to see if it made sense. I published it in OoH to elicit feedback from Dippers and ex-Dippers alike, and thanks for yours (Dane and Chris too). As for next year's WDC, can I make an offer? I would be willing to run all/s rounds if I can run the tournament with a system with which I'm happier. See my "Diplomacy Unbound" article later on.)

(David finished by trying to "correct" the Duration draw minimum and maximum, to 1905 and 1911 respectively, though I am of course well aware of these current constraints at ManorCon (derived from the Con's time parameters). The figures of 1904/1912 are more general and were derived from first principles, extrapolation and/or observation.)

"FIRST PRINCIPLES" SYSTEM, revisited

$$S = R + C + D + L - E \dots \dots \text{(Score = Result + Centre strength + Duration + Leader bonus - Elimination factor)}$$

Version Two: This addresses the main criticisms made above: Chris's about surviving defeats being over-penalized (due to setting their $C = 0$), Dane's about the perceived anomaly between closely matched wins (due to the cap on L), David's about the possible overvaluation of Duration in a system rewarding longer games (due to a C:D ratio of 1:1).

Instead of converting everything to a supply centre equivalent, we can use another quantifiable variable, game-years. This would allow us to stick to the integer principle but have a higher C:D ratio for draws and wins (meeting David's implication), the next available being 2:1. In other words, doubling the s.c. count of those who draw or win converts their Centre element C to this putative game-year scale. We can now introduce a C:D ratio for surviving defeats (meeting Chris' point) of at least 1:1, i.e. surviving losers' s.c.s are worth 1 game-year apiece. As the latter means that for any given game-year a surviving defeat automatically outscores an elimination (one of our fundamental assumptions), there is no need to distinguish between these in the Result element provided that both still get no penalty in the Elimination element. Thus for all defeats R can equal the base number of game-years (zero).

The Leader Bonus (lead in s.c.s) conversion to game-years can be as little as 1:1 as long as we remove the cap on wins (meeting Dane's anomaly), noting also that surviving defeat counts are no longer considered zero for this purpose either. The removal of such restrictions actually simplifies the equation. To meet my theory that the penalty for eliminating should be equal to the potential gain C:L - allowing a leader some scope to eliminate for tactical or operational reasons but punishing the rest - E should be set at 3 for those who withdraw.

Sticking to Version One's observed "effective maximum" for D of 12 and the empirical minima of 3 or 4 (wins/draws), we can now derive the minimum Result values for draws (X) and wins (W) from our other two basic assumptions:

WORST DRAW, i.e. 1 against 17-16 (4 elims) in 1904, should outscore **BEST DEFEAT**, i.e. 16 against 18 in 1912+
 $(X + 2 + 4 + 0 - 12) > (0 + 16 + 12 + 0 - 0) \dots \dots X - 6 > 28 \dots \dots X > 34 \dots \dots X = 35+$, thus 35 for purposes of:

WORST WIN, i.e. 18 ag. 16 (5 elims) in 1903, should outscore **BEST DRAW**, i.e. 17 ag. 3-3-3-3-2 (0 elims) in 1912+
 $(W + 36 + 3 + 2 - 15) > (35 + 34 + 12 + 14 - 0) \dots \dots W + 26 > 95 \dots \dots W > 69 \dots \dots W = 70+$.

Leaving us with the following revision: **SCORE** $\dots \dots$
...equals **RESULT** element (Win = 70, Draw = 35, Defeat = 0)
...plus **CENTRE** element (number of supply centres held at game-end, doubled in wins/draws)
...plus **DURATION** element (number of scheduled game-years played to a maximum of 12)
...plus **LEADER** element (sole leader only, unmodified difference between leader s.c. count and nearest rival's)
...minus **ELIMINATION** element (zero if defeated, 3 per eliminee for those who win or draw).

This gives us some interesting contrasts with Version One. First, the potential range is greater, although in practice I suspect there will be two-point gaps in the lower subset of draws (assuming that David is correct that all survivors will play as long as they can, although now the relative payoff is not so great). Second, we've dealt with Dane's perceived win anomaly, for not only does the extreme win just outscore every other win for any given game-year (154+Y points against next nearest 153+Y for any win ranging from 33/1-0-0-0-0 to 28/1-1-1-1-1), the same adjustment has at least equated "one more elimination" with his "pulling punches" scenario (thus 19/3-3-3-3-0 and 18/3-3-3-3-1 both score 121+Y). This satisfies both of our philosophies, for Dane can say the greater s.c. count hasn't lost out whereas I am happy that it hasn't gained anything either! Finally, as per Chris' suggestion we've given some incentive for risky play such that surviving losers can now significantly outscore those eliminated for any given game-year. While it's true that this has about halved an eliminee's relative score, this is still much greater than the proportions that the current ManorCon system can offer.

Version Three: This considers dropping Duration as a factor in wins/draws (as per Dane and David, both above and below), increasing the impact of the Leader Bonus (to meet David's suspicion that the old valuation wasn't enough) and a scaling of the Eliminating factor (to address the possibility that this over-penalizes even genuine attempts to win as in my reply to Dane, plus that it under-penalizes surviving losers as in my reply to Chris).

In the auxiliary debate Dane argued against rewarding slower wins as possibly conducive to perversely delaying one's own victory. I think such delay would be most unlikely: it runs a greater risk of win-denying error or opposition rally, and it's also plausible that if you try it and win anyway it's indicative of skill greater ability! Still, the point is moot. Conversely, Dane thought that if there was a time element here at all then it should reward faster wins, on the grounds of theoretically greater skill. This I doubt from experience, my 1905 postal win being down to disorganized opposition much more than to the victor's pounce. Likewise with my 1906 defeat, where I was part of the (totally) disorganized opposition. Whereas my later wins, incidentally around the "effective maximum" mark, demanded much more of me. But it's possible that these two factors (greater skill and weaker opposition) so counterball each other as to make meaningless any time element in victory.

Meanwhile David came up with a similar case for rewarding faster draws (beyond a minimum for a meaningful game), survivors having achieved a mutually agreed result more efficiently. This I would reject as discouraging players from developing the game further - in other words, seeking to win - which development was precisely the reason I wanted to reward longer draws instead. As I observed, it's difficult to accept that a 7-6-5-4-4-4 draw called in 1905 is as hard-contested as one which fluctuates further but comes down to that pattern in 1911. But again it's plausible that the two factors (greater efficiency and the quest for victory) counterball each other much as above.

So this Third Version begins with the assumption that for draws and wins, D equals zero. If we do this, however, we no longer have to compensate for an overvaluation of D in wins/draws, so removing the rationale for evaluating all indicators in game-years. This brings us back to converting to supply centres and a C:D ratio of 1:1 for all purposes - retaining a greater ratio for wins/draws merely creates a series of meaningless scoring gaps in the lower (non-leading) subset of draws.

But the L:C ratio can be increased without the corresponding problem: all survivors get C, but only sole leaders get L, and there won't necessarily be a sole leader. Setting the Leader Bonus to the next available ratio of 2:1 (i.e. the gap is held to be worth twice its own size in supply centres) may meet David's concern that the old ratio wouldn't be enough. It also creates some interesting possibilities for E. My reasoning that the latter should compensate for the potential gain in C:L again yields a multiple of 3, but this overkills non-leaders for whom an E of 2 per eliminee would be enough. Therefore I suggest that only winners (who are by definition leaders and by definition cannot eliminate beyond the win criterion for tactical or operational reasons) get an E of 3 per eliminee, whilst those who draw get 2. This at least addresses Dane's concern about the perceived perversity of never eliminating, since a non-ye-won leader (again the player most likely to be doing this for tactical or operational reasons) who takes another player's last centre and who thereby increases his lead over the nearest rival would actually make a profit.

Finally, such a scaling of E allows us to tackle the impact of eliminations on surviving losers, for they too could have knocked others out with no intention of going for the win. An E-multiple of 1 seems adequate here, given the losses already inherent in surviving defeats, although we would of course need to reset their Result element (F):

WORST SURVIVAL in any game-year Y, i.e. 1 ag. 33 (5 elims) must outscore **ELIMINATION** in same game-year Y:
 $(F + 1 + Y + 0 - 5) > (0 + 0 + Y + 0 - 0) \dots \dots F + Y - 4 > Y \dots \dots F - 4 > 0 \dots \dots F > 4 \dots \dots F = 5+$.

WORST DRAW (1 ag. 17-16 (4 elims) anytime) outscores **BEST DEFEAT**: [16 ag. 18] to [11 ag. 18-1-1-1-1-1] in 1912+
 $(X + 1 + 0 + 0 - 8) > (5 + 16 + 12 + 0 - 5) = (5 + 11 + 12 + 0 - 0) \dots \dots X - 7 > 28 \dots \dots X > 35 \dots \dots X = 36+$.

WORST WIN, i.e. 18 ag. 16 (5 elims) anytime, should outscore **BEST DRAW**, i.e. 17 ag. 3-3-3-3-2 (0 elims) anytime
 $(W + 18 + 0 + 0 - 15) > (36 + 17 + 0 + 28 - 0) \dots \dots W + 7 > 81 \dots \dots W > 74 \dots \dots W = 75+$.

Leaving us with the following revision: **SCORE** $\dots \dots$
...equals **RESULT** element (Win = 75, Draw = 36, Surviving Defeat = 5, Elimination = 0)
...plus **CENTRE** element (number of supply centres held at game-end)
...plus **DURATION** element (wins/draws = 0, otherwise number of game-years played to a maximum of 12)
...plus **LEADER** element (sole leader only, twice difference between leader s.c. count and nearest rival's)
...minus **ELIMINATION** element (per eliminee, 0 if eliminated, 1 for survivors, 2 for those who draw, 3 for winners).

This gives much the same potential range as in Version Two with much the same proportions, but tidies up a number of the remaining objections. In particular, of course, we no longer apply the controversial Duration element to wins and draws, removing all incentive for gerrymandering (however unlikely I think this). Eliminating others can be done at a profit if the leader gains further on his rivals, which puts the onus on preventing eliminations on the other players. "Typical" draws will cluster about the 35-45 range but leader performances up to a dozen or more points higher, which must give some incentive to break alliances. Finally the "race for the win" is encouraged to a degree commensurate with the principle that eliminating others should not profit those who do not achieve the victory (i.e. surviving losers).