

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

A MIGHTY FORTRESS

A Solid Multi-Player Medium

by David Schoellhamer

Small World Dept: My family is Lutheran. My brother went to a Lutheran teacher's college about 20 years ago. While in college he made the acquaintance of Rudolph Heinze, who was a couple of years ahead of him. Flash forward to the present: SPI has submitted to it a game on the Protestant Reformation. We decide to do it. I think up the name of the game by free-associating with my Lutheran church history lesson memories. I give my brother, naturally, a copy of this game and he says: "Say, I went to college with the designer of this!" There's nothing as pure as coincidence.

—RAS

A Mighty Fortress (AMF) is SPI's six-player game of all the fun things that were happening during the Reformation. *AMF* is simple in its mechanics and difficult in its diplomacy. This article will first study the mechanics before proceeding to the politics (power grabbing) of *AMF*.

Mechanics

The military tactics in *AMF* are as simple as possible, so, of course, the major armed forces of the countries are armies. All armies move six hexes, except when they are in enemy territory, in which case movement is halved. (In order to make a major invasion possible, players may want to allow friendly units their full movement allowance when moving from a city in enemy territory; the Ottoman Empire is an example.) Political control is gauged during the diplomacy phase, so armies should be positioned to deny the enemy a springboard deep into your own territory.

Navies, although important, play a secondary role to the armies. Navies are most effective when they blockade to protect one's territory. Naval campaigns are rarely successful, since proper placement of just a few navies can delay the enemy until reinforcements arrive. Naval units are also effective in aiding sieges against coastal cities.

Mercenaries are grossly expensive (five "guilders"), but they offer advantages when used properly. Every country, especially the unfortunate Hapsburgs, should keep a mercenary reserve for big emergencies. When those mercenaries are doing battle, do *not* use them in risky attacks — they cost more than twice as much to replace as other units. Use them in attacks where the odds are 3-1 or greater or for garrison duty. When attacking, go after enemy mercenary troops whenever possible.



Missionaries engage in combat with each other in *AMF*. Only the Pope and the

Lutheran have missionaries. The Lutheran should not leave his missionaries out in the open for fear of being walked on. Also, the Lutheran should not get too aggressive early, because the Pope gets points for retaking and holding areas. The Pope should not attack until he has enough units to do some damage. Both players have two basic rules to follow: first, try to win the first couple of battles to gain momentum and friends; and, second, form killer swarms (three 3-3's will do) to scare your enemy and gain friends. Finally, remember that you can find refuge in cities.

Politics

The delight in playing *AMF* comes from the political aspects of the game. First, some general rules.

Know your victory conditions. You should judge what actions you will take by the Victory Conditions you have. The object of the game is not to blast your opponents, but to get the most victory points. Negotiate what you need and take what you need, but do not waste time and effort making enemies of everyone. If you play with the variants, which is recommended, try to grab some areas and cities that are both convenient and are listed on other variants to throw off the players that have your VC's memorized or accidentally look at your card when you leave the room.

Talk to others. Always dip with the other players during the diplomacy (dip) phase. You never know who may become your friend and what interesting plans others have for you, but by dipping a great deal you may get a good idea who is trying to get you and how to stop them. When you are in trouble — dip. Use your natural charms to prevent unwanted wars and to precipitate beneficial wars. Make friends with others, because they may be good for a little money in the future or they may later develop into your best ally, because the political situation in *AMF* is constantly changing. What sets *AMF* above other games is the innumerable opportunities for the players to dip — so do it!

Back-stabbing. Every once in a while it becomes necessary to betray an ally. Only betray an ally when the victory point gain is worth the hatred of another player. When you back-stab, try to get others to go along, and if you are being stabbed by an alliance, try to break it up. All of this is done during the dip phase, but a lucky die roll can totally realign the sides. Be careful when making a written agreement because you may have to

break it, and then everyone knows you cannot be trusted.

Manipulation. The tools you have to dip with are victory conditions (territory), armed forces, and money. One good way to gain friends is to give them what they want. A loss of five points in a good cause is better than a loss of 50 due to obstinacy. And remember, you can always get back lost land. Another tool at the disposal of the diplomat is the force of armies and navies he possesses. Tell your potential friend that you will help him attack so-and-so. Lastly, if you have money, pay 'em off.

Money. Having enough money is an important key to success in *AMF*. Navies can be moved double and triple their normal distance by expending money. Also, money must be expended in order to attack. Because money is important, use it wisely. All expenditures should be justified, and income should be maximized. Have as much money on hand as possible, since wars can start at any time and they can last almost indefinitely. Do *not* start a war unless you have a lot of money; for example, the Hapsburgs should wait until they have about a hundred "guilders" to declare war. Fiscal conservatism is the best policy.

AMF is a very balanced game partially because each of the six countries has its own set of problems. It is important to examine the countries individually.

Ottomans

A major advantage and disadvantage that the Ottomans have is being the first country to move each game turn. Moving first is an advantage because the Ottoman player can declare war immediately before he moves, so the potential victim has no advance warning of an attack. The disadvantage comes on the last turn, when all the countries are grabbing what they can. Unless the Ottoman has carefully placed his units, he may lose areas, and victory points, because he either left an area ungarrisoned or inadequately protected against attack.

The Ottoman player has many problems. He lacks any true friends that he can always count on for aid. This lack of aid hurts financially because much of the Ottoman's army is composed of mercenary units which cost a lot of money, and the Hapsburgs fight wars that are expensive for their enemies. The Lutheran hates the Hapsburgs, but he wants them to stay in Vienna and Prague, so the Lutheran is no help to the Ottoman.

Despite the problems, Suleiman has some advantages. In addition to the fact that he moves first, the Ottoman player's country is difficult for the enemy to move in, and Constantinople and the other cities are difficult to take. The armed forces of the Empire are large and they only have one major enemy — the Hapsburgs.

To properly balance the game, the players may want to increase the number of Ottoman fleets. The players may want to follow the Ottoman's player card and give the Ottoman three additional navies above the counter limit. Another option is to allow the Ottoman player to buy three mercenary fleets, which will create a greater financial burden for Suleiman.

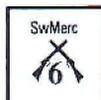
Pope

The Pope has many problems to overcome. First, the Lutherans hate his guts, and the designers of *AMF* gave God's man on Earth an ineffectual army and no navy. England and Henry VIII went out of the church and, unless the Pope keeps the other Catholic countries in the fold, the Papacy is in for a lot of heat from God.

The Papacy does have a few advantages which must be used fully to stay in the game. The Pope is the second to move, he collects income when at war, and he is the Catholic banker. The power of excommunication must be used to keep the Catholic brothers in line. Use it during the dip phase, but remember, once excommunicated, that country will probably land in the Lutheran camp. The only way the Pope can win is by dipping, not fighting; so dip to get the forces of the other Catholic countries to do the muscle work for you.

Hapsburg

Charles V has more problems than any other player. His victory conditions are spread out into the other countries, so he must be mean at some time to everyone. Most importantly, the other five players have victory conditions in Hapsburg territory. This means that everyone is out to get the Hapsburg Empire. To prevent a five on one, make peace and be friends with a couple of countries and kill the rest. The most common and most successful strategy is to be nice to England and the Pope, be mean to the Lutheran and Ottoman, and kill France with help from England. Just remember, at any time any situation can degenerate into a bunch to one.



Charles can best overcome his problems by dipping. He can give a city or an area to make a friend — Hungary, something Italian (Venice), Franche Comte and Navarre, and Antwerp are examples. Remember that lost territory can always be recaptured. The armed forces of the Hapsburg Empire are impressive, so threaten the others with extermination. Another advantage that the Hapsburgs have is their income, which is 36

“guilders” at the start of the game. Dip to get your strong points across to the other players.

France

France has one and only one major problem — it is easily killed by a combined Anglo-Hapsburg assault. England is always ready to attack France, and the Hapsburgs can eliminate one of their rivals. Unless France gets the Pope to bless the die, France is incapable of handling the situation militarily. France must dip to keep out of trouble. France can give Brest, which is indefensible, and Rouen to England for peace. Or France can give part of Southern France to the Hapsburgs for peace. Francis has to play it cool.

France does have a couple of advantages. If Edinburgh is lost or given to England, France loses no victory points. Also France can promise the Pope all sorts of nice attacks on the Lutheran player in exchange for a little Papal protection. It is obvious that France and the Hapsburgs have many problems. To better balance the game, players may want to increase the size of Paris and Madrid from two to four armies. This will be especially beneficial for France.

England

At the start of the game, England's overriding concern is the divorce question. Henry VIII, that incestuous and adulterate beast, has several options. To lose more than four victory points is to err. VP's won and lost by the divorce question are permanently disposed of. Henry should negotiate with the Pope to get the best terms possible. Do *not* assume the question is clear cut; historically Pope Clement VII offered Henry the chance to have two wives. If England stays in the church, the Pope keeps his excommunication noose around England's neck, so treat this question with respect, because its outcome will affect the rest of the game.

In addition to excommunication problems, England has many other troubles. France hates England, and Edinburgh has two French armies in it. England has few armies to protect its northern flank and Calais while launching any type of land campaign. Finally, England is just a small island, and it moves next to last, so all England's plans are easily known by the other players.



England's problems are usually outweighed by its advantages. The English navy is strong enough to handle almost any situation. England's isolation is beneficial, because it is difficult to invade. And on the last game turn England moves after everybody but the Lutherans, so Mary is able to capitalize on any of her enemy's mistakes and wage a little war with no worry of losing points.

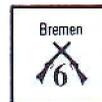
Lutheran

The Lutheran has two goals: to get the Pope and to survive. Dip heavily against the

Pope, especially with England. Have your missionaries grab all of Germany and possibly Switzerland early. If a city within your reach is left unoccupied, it is probably best to walk in. If the Lutheran is too aggressive too soon, the Pope will gain, because he gets a victory point for each area he reconverts and holds at the end of the game. Lastly, a mean way to get the Pope is to have the Ottoman visit Rome. Although it's hard to swing, give it a try.

The Lutheran's end game play must be survival. When the Jesuits start coming in, the Lutheran should be defensive, because the CRT favors the defender. When other countries start threatening you, the best response may be to give them what they want. All the Lutheran victory conditions are based on religious control, so the Lutheran can give away most of his country to make others happy and lose little because he moves last.

The greatest advantage the Lutheran has is being the last player to move in the game. It is true that he telegraphs all his plans, and he is the most susceptible to attack because he moves last, but these problems are nothing compared to the bonus the Lutheran gets on the last turn. All he has to do on the last turn is to go down his victory conditions and allocate his missionaries to the most valuable areas without fear of being walked on. This is also an excellent bargaining tool. [Ed. Note: There are *new* conversion rules; see page 23.]



The Lutheran army replacement situation is unique in *AMF*. Each of the Lutheran's armies come into the game in an area specified on the counter. If an army is supposed to show in an enemy occupied area, it is not brought into play. If an area has fallen — Bremen for example — position any armies from Bremen where they will be comparatively safe. If such an army is killed, do not spend the money to replace it unless you have a good chance to regain control of the area. Do not position your armies so that they are defending their home area, because if that area falls the army is lost too, assuming that the army is killed.

A Mighty Fortress is, more than anything else, a fun game. The military tactics are simple and the politics are engrossing. The game is as interesting and as lively as the players make it. *AMF* deserves to be placed amongst the greatest multi-player games and even amongst the greatest games in existence.

A MIGHTY FORTRESS Cumulative Results of 8 Games

Country	Points per Game
1. England	24.9
2. Lutheran	21.6
3. Ottoman	13.9
4. Hapsburgs	8.1
5. Papacy	8.1
6. France	-15.3