

## SCENARIOS &amp; VARIANTS

# CHARLE-MAIL

## Empires of the Middle Ages Postal Rules

by John Boardman

John Boardman is one of the seminal architects of simulation game postal play. If my tired brain serves me, he is largely responsible for the system by which *Diplomacy* is notated for letter-borne gaming. *Empires*, one of those games designed to bring out the delicious worst in people, has caught the fancy of the zap-by-mail crowd, and so John once more proposes the necessary structure. And all to the good, the medieval pace of our present postal system should help to get you in the mood.

—RAS

Very often, a multi-player negotiation game can be adapted for postal play. Such an adaptation then makes it possible for players in different parts of the country to engage in negotiation, back-stabbing, double-crossing, and other delightful practices which characterize international diplomacy. SPI's *Mighty Fortress*, *Conquistador*, and *Russian Civil War*, and AH's *Origins of World War II* and *Diplomacy* also have this character.

SPI's new *Empires of the Middle Ages* is eminently capable of being treated in this fashion. Postal playability is a great boon to the isolated wargamer, who has trouble finding one other opponent for *Terrible Swift Sword*, let alone five or six for one of these negotiation games. But if a postal game gets under way, this isolated fan need only send his moves by mail to a "gamesmaster" every three or four weeks, and engage in a game that goes on for some 18 months of enjoyment. Furthermore, when you handle all those negotiations by mail, nobody can get wise. If, for example, you are playing Russia in a game of *Diplomacy*, you and the Italian player can prepare your stabs without getting suspicious looks from the Austro-Hungarian you are about to unload on.

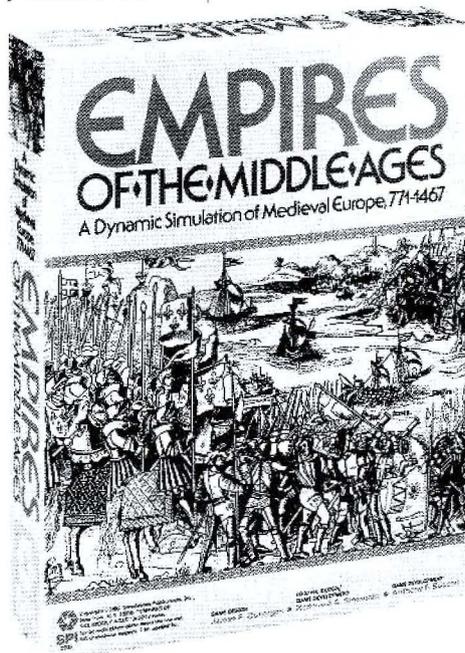
### Play-by-Mail Qualifications

In order to be rendered postally playable, a game needs easily identified locations and a small number of decision points. AH's *Third Reich*, for example, is a very popular negotiation game, but the hexes are not numbered. Even if you painstakingly number every hex on your board, you will find that so many decisions are needed in the course of play that a postal game would be intolerably slow. This author regretfully abandoned an attempt to adapt SPI's *World War I* for postal play, since just about every action by the phasing player requires something to be done by the non-phasing player before play can proceed.

*Empires of the Middle Ages (EMA)* can be fairly easily turned into a postal game, with only one decision point per five-year Round. Conditional orders in advance can handle most of the optional situations that may arise. All of the game's options can thus be incorporated into the postal game.

The following modifications to the rules of *EMA* should make it postally playable:

1. The rules of SPI's *Empires of the Middle Ages* will be used except when specifically modified for postal play.
2. The gamesmaster will undertake to publish, at regular intervals, the moves sent in by the players, and his adjudications of them. He will also set a deadline for the next postal moves.



3. At the beginning of the selected scenario, each player will be assigned one of the empires based on a preference list. The gamesmaster will try to give each player the empire closest to the top of his preference list. Empires which are not played by one of the players shall be considered as a collection of Independent Areas as described in 4.0.

4. The first Round will begin as the gamesmaster executes Phases 1 through 5, and determines whether or not the Christian Churches are in Schism as described in the Sequence of Play. Players should have sent to the gamesmaster their conditional orders for a Parley, should one be required by the

execution of these Phases. The gamesmaster deals out five Year Cards for each player, and makes a note of their numbers and order. He also carries out all activities of any Raiders or Magnates, and executes Defenses against them if players have provided for them under the postal rules.

5. Along with the information required by postal rule 4, the gamesmaster will deal an Event Card for each player. If the card is not a Holding Card, the gamesmaster will execute its instructions immediately and announce them to the players along with the results of Phases 1 through 5. If the card is a Holding Card, the gamesmaster will privately inform the player for whom it is drawn of its number. A player who has drawn a fourth Holding Card must discard one of his Holding Cards without playing it as soon as he learns of this draw. If he does not do this, the gamesmaster shall determine by a random process which of the player's four Holding Cards shall be discarded. Otherwise, a Holding Card shall remain private until the player chooses to announce, with his other move orders, that he is playing it.

6. Upon receipt of the gamesmaster's report of the events described in postal rules 4 and 5, each player shall send in five Endeavor orders for the Round, in any combination of Conquest, Pillage, Ruling, Fortification, and Diplomacy. Furthermore, one Defense Endeavor will serve for all attacks, by players, Raiders, or Magnates, whether Conquest or Pillage, during that Round and the Raider and Magnate Phases of the next Round. Defense Cards may not be augmented by gold under 13.11. Players must pay for each Defense Endeavor even though only one may be ordered; in the absence of money in the player's Treasury, the Defense is not made. Players should also, at this time, send in any instructions regarding Colonization, and conditional votes about Parleys that may come up.

7. All taxes will be collected after the Endeavors have been adjudicated. Tax collection orders should be sent in with Endeavor orders, indicating which areas are to be taxed and by how much. An area may be taxed only if it still belongs to the player after Endeavor orders are executed.

#### SAMPLE ORDER:

Tax Bavaria 1g only if the Unrest has been put down there.

#### SAMPLE ORDER:

Tax only areas that speak North Italian.

**SAMPLE ORDER:**

Tax every area with a positive Social State, for whatever amount will not cause the Rebellion Value of that area to exceed 4.

**SAMPLE ORDER:**

If the Unrest in Bohemia has been put down, tax Bohemia 2g. If the Unrest has not been put down, Plunder Bohemia.

8. All Endeavor orders will be executed simultaneously. Fortifications become effective for Defense in the Round after they are built. Social States and other determinatives for Effectiveness Ratings are calculated as of the beginning of the Player-Turns as far as Endeavors by other players are concerned. However, for a player's own purposes, changes he makes in a Social State will be cumulative.

**EXAMPLE:** France owns Burgundy and the Holy Roman Empire owns Switzerland. The Social States of the two areas are respectively +3 and +1. Burgundy is attacked twice from Switzerland. If the first attack lowers Burgundy's Social State to +2, then +2 is the value figured in to the Effectiveness Rating as the Target Area Modifier on the second attack. However, if the French Ruling of Burgundy causes it to drop -1 in Social State, this does not affect the Social State of Burgundy as a Target Area Modifier for foreign attack.

**EXAMPLE:** Brandenburg has a Social State of -1. On his first Endeavor, its owner Rules to raise its Social State to 0. This is then "Social State of Base Area" should the owner of Brandenburg Fortify it on his second Endeavor of the Round. He may further raise the Fortification Strength to 3 on the third Endeavor of that Round. However, should Brandenburg be attacked on that same Round, the Fortifications are not effective, and for the first attack Brandenburg's Social State enters the computation of Target Area Modifiers as -1. During that Round, as far as the attacker is concerned, Brandenburg's Social State does not change except as a result of the attacker's own actions.

9. A player may send in more than 5 Endeavor orders, and indicate conditions under which some of them may be ignored. The gamesmaster will execute these orders until five have been finished.

**SAMPLE ORDERS:**

1. Rule Aragon, with additional 2g expenditure.
2. Rule Aragon, unless Unrest has been put down in Endeavor 1.
3. Use Aragon as a base to Conquer Castille unless there is Unrest in it.
4. Establish Diplomatic Tie with Tuscany.
5. Establish Diplomatic Tie with Tuscany. (This will be ignored by the gamesmaster if a Tie already exists, unless the player specifies otherwise in hopes of a "C" result.)
6. Use Aragon as a base to Conquer Castille, with additional 5g expenditure.
7. Rule Castille with additional 2g expenditure.
8. If Unrest persists there, rule Castille with additional 2g expenditure.
9. Use Verona as a Base to Conquer Venice, with additional expenditure of 6g.

If Order 1 succeeds, Order 2 will be ignored. If Order 3 succeeds, Order 6 will be ignored. If Orders 1 and 2 fail, Order 3 will be ignored, as will Order 6. If Order 7 succeeds, Order 8 will be ignored. If Order 4 succeeds, Order 5 will be ignored. Only Endeavor orders that can be attempted will be reported; thus, if this player is not able to try Order 9 this Round, the owner of Venice will not learn that there are hostile designs against his city.

10. Orders which the player cannot afford to execute are invalid. If a player submits fewer than 5 valid orders, 5 Year Cards will still be turned up for him.

11. If a player takes any action which might cause another player to call a Parley under 20.0, the gamesmaster will call players' attention to this and call for votes with the next Round's moves. Parleys will be adjudicated before the other Phases are worked out by

the gamesmaster. In the event that a Parley depends upon a player's initiative (for example, as in 20.41), other players will send in their votes conditional to a Parley being called. The votes will not be printed unless the Parley actually takes place.

**SAMPLE ORDER:**

If the Byzantine Empire contests Poland's acquisition of Bulgaria by a Dynastic Inheritance Card, France votes to support the Polish claim.

**SAMPLE ORDER:**

If anyone calls for a Crusade under 23.0, the Holy Roman Empire will vote in favor of a Crusade.

12. Treaties must be submitted to the gamesmaster in identical signed texts by all participants in order to be valid. The penalty for breaking a Treaty shall be Excommunication only if the Treaty so specifies, and if the aggrieved party calls for it. Other agreements among players must also be phrased as Treaties.

**SAMPLE ORDER:**

The Holy Roman Emperor agrees to pay the King of Poland 10g if at the forthcoming Parley the King of Poland votes to support the Holy Roman Empire's claim to Burgundy.

13. If the conditions for a Crusade should exist, players should cast a vote under 23.0 for the next Round. They should send in conditional votes for a Parley in case it takes place, and orders for Phase 5 as well.

14. After publishing adjudications of Endeavor orders, and the Colonization record, for each Round, the gamesmaster shall carry out and report Phases 1 through 5 for the next Round. These items will all be published by the gamesmaster, and a deadline will be set for the Endeavor orders of the next Round. This sequence will continue until the end of the Scenario, at which point the gamesmaster will determine the winner under 26.0. ■■

**MOVES in English** [continued from page 27]

indication to the rationale behind this rule. Playing the game with this rule forces one to use *Musket & Pike* tactics. Surely this was not the designer's intention.

Playing the game with made up optional rules, not allowing units to fire in the turn they fix bayonets or are in melee, enabling them to fire only once per game-turn (to simulate the difficulty of reloading with the bayonet fixed) and modifying fire for inaccuracy caused by having the bayonet attached, makes the game more complex but more realistic, given that each game-turn is approximately six minutes (this is not stated in the rules).

Melee takes place within a single hex based on a differential combat results table. Points are added or subtracted according to the presence of officer or flag, whether all the attackers have fixed bayonets, are attacking the enemy's rear or across barrier hexsides. The results of melee are retreat with loss and disorganisation, loss, or disorganisation. Morale checks are obligatory in all cases. Morale checks are taken as a result of fire

combat as well as melee. A unit's initial morale is decreased for each strength point lost (noted on regimental status sheets as in TSS). It is decreased further for receiving volley fire, being fired at from the rear, and for being disorganised. The Confederates suffer additionally for being fatigued. The die roll is modified if an officer or flag is present in the affected hex. Failure of a morale check results in disorganisation, retreat disorganised, or disintegration of the unit, removing it from the board.

Disorganisation immobilises a unit and reduces its combat ability. Disorganised units may be rallied at the expense of command points or by chance on the roll of an inevitable 6. Ammunition supply, fatigue, capture of flags, officer casualties, and the 20th Maine detachment are other elements reflected in the simulation.

Do the heart and body function in tune with each other? In the games I played, there did not appear to be a perfect strategy for either side. As always, or so it seems, units will break at the crucial time, blowing all the best plans to the four winds. This then

puts the onus on the players to do as the original commanders had to do; make the best of a bad job. The excitement is intense when one is trying to rally exhausted troops to make that counterattack that is going to gain those few vital yards. Therefore, I do feel that the designer achieves his aim in giving players the feel of bloody, close combat between determined troops, as well as simulating the intense struggle which formed a crucial part of a crucial battle on the hills around Gettysburg.

OSG has found a good system for simulating the pressures of tactical warfare. Some refinement is required, however, in the detail of Civil War combat — e.g., the fixed bayonets problem. Also, I feel that designer's notes would have aided the appreciation of the system and of the events being simulated. As capsule games, with detailed rules, rather than "pint and a pie" games (as us Britains call "beer and pretzels" games) are the trend at the moment, let us hope that future designs are as well produced and, more importantly, as rewarding as *The 20th Maine*. Malin ■■