

CHINA WAR

A Statistical Report of Game Characteristics

by Claude Bloodgood

Preparing a statistical review for a game that simulates potential conflicts in today's world is both interesting and challenging. The hindsight a designer may utilize for historical simulations does not exist, and this lack necessitates a strong dependence on designer judgment and speculation. This review reflects the nature of the subject and the judgment factors involved; conflicting opinions on designer evaluation of various military potentials are the bridge that spans the gap between gaming and reality, and this is what makes wargaming so unique.

China War has three scenarios, and gamers at the Virginia State Penitentiary have given the first two a good workout, but have had no real interest in the third scenario which they consider unrealistic. Scenario 1 ("The East is Red") simulates a Soviet invasion of China, and this is the primary subject of this review; scenario 2 ("Objective: Hanoi!") simulates a Chinese invasion of Vietnam and is a secondary subject for this review. All statistics were compiled separately for these scenarios, with each treated as a game in itself. The first stats listed are for Scenario 1, and those following in parenthesis are for Scenario 2.

Statistical Analysis

Participating Players: 43 (67)

53.1% of active players selected Scenario 1 from inventory of more than 70 titles available during the six months ended 8/15/80. (82.7% selected Scenario 2.)

Repeat Players: 30 (52)

69.7% of 43 participants played Scenario 1 again after completing one set (both sides played). (77.6% of 67 participants repeated play of Scenario 2.)

Total Games Played: 76 (142)

Scenario 2 was played more than 1 for several reasons. It is ideal for learning the game system, plays quickly, and the historical Chinese invasion of Vietnam (1979) provides an index for gamers to measure results against before trying Scenario 1.

Average Playing Time: 5.55 hours (2.76 hours)

Total playin time was 422 hours for 76 games with Scenario 1. (Total playing time was 391½ hours for 142 games with Scenario 2. New players should play one of the small scenarios first (2 is recommended) and can expect their first game to take 4½-5½ hours unless thoroughly familiar with the rules.)

Shortest Recorded Game: 1.25 hours (0.45 hours)

Conceded after 4 complete turns between experienced players in Scenario 1. (Conceded

after 4½ turns between experienced players in Scenario 2.)

Shortest Complete Game: 3.50 hours (1.50 hours)

Both were played between experienced players repeating the same scenario.

Longest Recorded Game: 13.75 hours (5.75 hours)

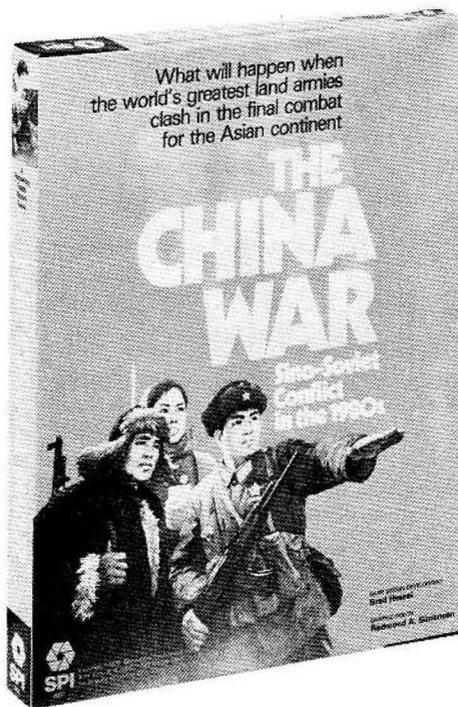
Played between two relatively new wargamers, one new to *China War*, and one with a Scenario 2 set of games previously played before trying Scenario 1. (Scenario 2 time recorded between two inexperienced gamers new to *China War*.)

Best Side Results: PRC 39-37 (PRC 82-60)

Scenario 1 proved to be a highly challenging game from either side. (Scenario 2 results reflect some unequal pairings, but these are minimal.)

Game Imbalance: 2.6% (15.5%)

Formula is wins minus losses, divided by number of games played. Average play-balance is in the 12-14% range.



Game Balance Analysis

Scenario 1, "The East is Red," has an excellent play-balance that is rarely found in wargames, and if the designer's judgment of Soviet-Chinese military capabilities is anywhere near accurate, confrontation between these two powers is a wild gamble for both. Scenario 2 is not so well balanced, and the

"victory points offered for PRC occupation of Hanoi and Haiphong make it tough for the Vietnamese player to win. The long history of mountain and jungle warfare in this area clearly conflicts with the concept of winning by taking these cities; while it appears the designer sought an artificial means of balancing the play, the device selected was unfortunate. Despite this criticism, Scenario 2 is a good introduction to *China War*, and is recommended. Some minor adjustments to the victory points awarded for Hanoi and Haiphong will balance play.

Subjective Analysis

Play Balance: 8.31 (5.62)

Average of 43 responses (67 responses for Scenario 2): 9 is perfectly balanced, 1 is totally unbalanced.

Playability: 7.32 (7.03)

Average of 43 responses (67 responses for Scenario 2): 9 is supremely playable, 1 is unplayable.

Length of Game: 7.27 (6.74)

Average of 40 responses (65 responses for Scenario 2): 9 is exactly the correct length, 1 is much too long or short.

Game Challenge: 7.81 (6.59)

Average of 43 responses (67 responses for Scenario 2): 9 is extremely challenging, 1 is no challenge.

Rules Disputes: 6.96 (6.84)

Average of 43 responses (67 responses for Scenario 2): 9 is none of consequence, 1 is constant disputes.

Comments on the Game System

China War utilizes a moderately complex game system that covers a broad range of mechanical game functions, and while not excessive, these functions must be learned. The "Objective: Hanoi!" scenario provides a good basic understanding of the rules with limited units that simplify learning the system. The movement/reaction movement rules are the strongest part of the game system, and around this all the rest fall into place nicely. The use of terrain effects on both movement and combat is excellent, especially restrictions imposed by mountainous terrain.

The unit Cadre Level rule is the weakest part of the game system, not because of designer inaccuracy, but because what it represents is intangible and players fail to understand its purpose, and this leads to disputes. Most other rules are clean and clear; supply problems are handled with lines of supply and sources, and work perfectly. Chemical and Electronic warfare are possible

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tions. When used in conjunction with widely varying planetary attributes, these create an almost infinite variety of exploration possibilities. The 100 counters represent the crew of the *Pandora*, its bots and equipment, creatures that may be encountered, alien artifacts, and other extraterrestrial items. Simple rules covering FTL travel, the effects of extreme gravity and atmosphere, expedition preparation and supply, and communication with extraterrestrials will make *Voyage* an ever-intriguing one-player game.

John H. Butterfield

Citadel of Blood

By the time you read this the game will have been printed and on the way to the eager hands of the *Ares* subscribers. I am very happy with the game. I got a chance to test it extensively when I was on vacation and it works well. I had several interesting games, one of which came down to five attempts by two heroes to roll a 1 to destroy the Helgate. They failed and the party was killed attempting to flee the maze. It was very exciting. There's not much else to report except to say that I think players enjoy the changes I have made in the system.

Eric Smith

Task Force

Task Force (formerly known as *Naval War*) is complete as of this date (22 September) and is in the hands of Brad Hessel for rules editing purposes. The game is slated for publication in early January

1981. A number of helpful suggestions were offered to me during a seminar at *Origins 80* in which the game was discussed which helped add a bit of "chrome" to the simulation. I also had a chance to visit *HMS Birmingham* when it was in NY harbor earlier in the year, which clarified my impressions of contemporary naval affairs a great deal. The only work that has been done on the game over the past two months is the addition of numerous optional rules, such as the employment of DPEWS (Design to Price Electronic Warfare System) on U.S. Navy warships in the 1980's or the introduction of the Tomahawk cruise missile during this same period.

Joseph Balkoski

Stat Rep: China War (continued from page 25)

for the USSR player with Combat Results Table column shifts, with PLA Mass Attacks conducted the same way.

The most controversial aspect of the game might prove both interesting and amusing: 48.9% felt the USSR should have greater Nuclear power; 39.5% thought the PLA should have some Nuclear power; 7.0% believed the PLA should have considerable Nuclear power; and 4.6% agreed with the rule as written. Thus, although the vast majority of players disagree on the rule, it would appear that the designer found a happy medium. *China War* is a fine game-system that requires a little extra effort to master, but well worth the time taken to learn it. ■■

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