

## CAPSULE ANALYSIS

# CREATURE FEATURE

## Digesting the Creature that Ate Sheboygan

by Alan M. Gopin

CTAS is a happy combination of schlock nostalgia and enjoyable game mechanics that is promising to become a new phenomenon for SPI: a game that actually breaks out into the general gaming market. We've just re-packaged the Big Lizard into a slim version of our hardbox in order to place it in toy and department stores. Is SPI selling out? In a way, yes! The game will (we hope) ensnare more converts to serious gaming and provide some of the profits SPI needs to expand its base. Just wait 'til you see our game on The Lime Jello from Outer Space. —RAS

The four Space Capsules comprise SPI's entry into the market of very small games that was first popularized by Metagaming's Microgames. All the Space Capsules use 11" x 17" maps and fewer than 100 counters and can be played in reasonable lengths of time (usually under two hours). *The Creature That Ate Sheboygan* concerns the efforts of a typical Japanese grade B movie monster to devour a typical midwestern city, and the attempt by the police and national guard to avoid being the appetizer. *Creature*, as it is affectionately called by most gamers, is the most popular of the four games.

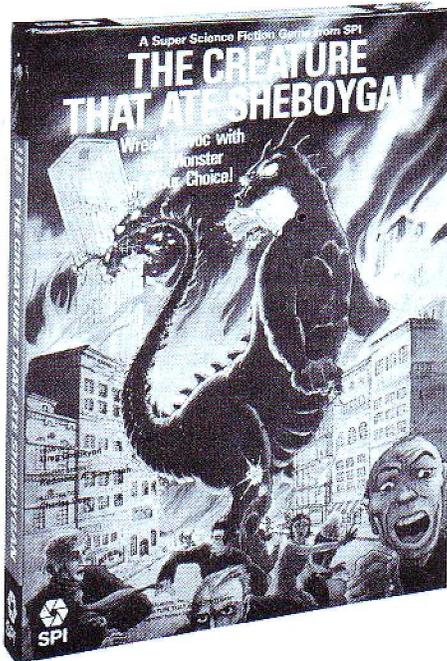
This game can easily be compared in tactical style with Metagaming's *Ogre*. In both games one side has a single very powerful unit that gradually loses strength as it is attacked, and the other has a hoard of smaller units that get blown away by the opponent. The game is well balanced and can be won by either side with proper planning and execution. Advanced scenario B will be discussed here, but the lessons that can be learned from it can be applied to all the scenarios.

The winner in *Creature* is determined by comparing the victory level with the number of victory points that the monster player has accrued until the monster is killed. If the monster has achieved less than the victory level, the human player wins; if the monster has exactly the victory level, it's a draw; and if he exceeds the victory level, he wins. Victory points equal to the combat strength are awarded for the destruction of human units. Three victory points are awarded for the destruction of low buildings, and five victory points are awarded for the destruction of high buildings, bridges, and populace units.

There are really two parts to playing *Creature*: selecting forces and playing out the scenario. Since the creature player can choose its abilities and allocate its strengths, he can make or break himself before the

monster ever sets foot (or claw, or pseudopod, or whatever) onto the map.

In advanced scenario B, the monster has a force pool of 40 points to allocate to five areas: attack strength; defense strength; building destruction strength; movement; and special abilities. Also, the rules require that at least one quarter of the total be spent on special abilities.



### Monster Special Abilities

The first special ability that the monster should take in this or any other scenario is *lightning throwing*. Lightning throwing costs 6 points and allows the monster to attack at up to a range of 3 instead of only at adjacent targets. This is of crucial importance because attackers do not suffer combat results during attacks made against non-adjacent targets. A look at the combat results table shows that the monster has a 50% chance of eliminating a human unit at 1-2 odds. If the monster player doesn't have to be concerned about taking damage from his own attacks, this becomes the optimum attack odds. Note that in order to get an improvement of one chance in six on these odds, a 2-1 attack is required. The monster will probably be able to make several attacks at 1-2 odds during a game-turn, and will have a good chance of eliminating at least some human units.

Probably the next most useful special ability is *mind control*. This costs 6 points

and allows the monster to take over one human unit that is in its line of sight. This ability should be used as early as possible to take over a tank unit that is as far away from the monster and as close to the populace units as possible. The use of this ability gives the monster player several advantages. The human will have to detach units to deal with this threat, thus taking some of the heat off the monster. The controlled tank may well cause some casualties, both civilian and military, that will give the monster player victory points. Finally, tanks are worth 6 victory points apiece and the human player will have to give those 6 points to the monster by destroying the controlled tank.

These two abilities cost a total of 12 points and satisfy the required 25% point expenditure for special abilities. These abilities should be the ones chosen *most* of the time. It is never a good idea to become predictable as the monster, and occasionally other abilities should be chosen to substitute for mind control. Because of the advantages of being able to make non-adjacent attacks, lightning throwing should always be taken.

*Fire breathing*, at a cost of 8 points, is another useful ability. It allows the monster to set adjacent building and park squares on fire up to three times during its movement on a roll of 1, 2, or 3. The monster can get a large number of victory points by setting buildings on fire. This will destroy them in 4 turns if the fire is not put out, and the fire may spread, depending on wind conditions. To counter this the human player will get firemen once fires break out. The monster should eliminate these as its first priority, since once they're gone any building set on fire will burn to rubble.

*Flame immunity* costs 2 points and allows the monster to move through boxes containing flame markers. There usually isn't much need for this ability, but a monster taking fire breathing might want to consider it.

*Great height* costs 5 points and essentially allows the monster to destroy one last building or any adjacent units when it dies by falling on them. If the game winds up close, the monster player will wish that he had chosen this, but usually the 5 points are better spent elsewhere.

The monster can use *web spinning* which costs 5 points to block off up to 2 adjacent boxes with webs, making them impassible to human units and trapping any human units in them for two turns. This is usually not worth taking because the monster can't

block off enough streets fast enough to justify the cost.

*Fear immobilization* costs 4 points and allows the monster to keep any two units within 3 boxes of the monster from moving during a movement phase. The effect lasts for one movement phase but may be repeated. Those human units immobilized *may* still attack. This ability is useful against tanks at range 3 (out of their range) and infantry at range 2. Artillery will always be able to attack when this is used against it, providing it has a line of sight. Since this ability can only be used against 2 units a turn, it is not usually worth using against the 1 strength point units unless there are no other targets. Fear immobilization turns out not to be highly cost effective in the long run.

By the use of *blinding light* at a cost of 4 points, the monster can prevent the human units from attacking twice during the game. This ability can be used to spoil the first large coordinated attack by the human player. Once revealed, this ability forces the human player to snipe at the monster since any second large scale attack can be stopped cold. The monster player should realize that the threat of the second use of blinding light is potentially more damaging than the second use itself, since once it is used twice, the human player ceases having to worry about it. This ability is one that should be taken occasionally. Occasional use of this ability will tend to make human players cautious.

*Jumping over buildings* costs 3 points and allows the monster to move to any box two boxes away without passing through the intervening box. This ability is helpful in keeping the monster from being blockaded into a single street by human units. Its low cost makes it attractive, and it should be employed relatively often.

By using of *radiation* at a cost of 7 points, the monster can prevent units from combining attacks from different boxes. If this ability is coupled with a high defense strength (at least a 13 is necessary to force tanks to attack at 1-3) it becomes difficult to inflict damage on the monster. However, in order to do this, the monster player will have to severely curtail the monster's other abilities. A monster using radiation will be hard to hit, but it won't be capable of inflicting much damage either. Since the monster's strengths will degrade with combat damage, the situation will eventually be reached where the monster won't be able to do much of anything to the human units. At this point, it doesn't matter how good the monster's defense is. Sooner or later it will be taken down. Use of radiation is expensive and probably won't be effective.

*Flying* costs 8 points and lets the monster enter any box at a cost of 1 movement point. Flying is like a Rolls Royce; it would be nice to have, but it's too darn expensive.

### Monster Strengths

Allocation of the monster strength points will depend on what special abilities are chosen. These will affect both the number of points remaining to the monster and

where they should be put. If lightning throwing and mind control are chosen, there will be 28 points left in advanced scenario B to distribute among attack, defense, building destruction, and movement. A good distribution to use is 8 attack, 7 defense, 8 building destruction, and 5 movement. This distribution has several advantages. Two tanks and an infantry unit can all be attacked at 1-2 odds in a single turn. Under normal conditions, at least one of those units should be eliminated. With 7 defense points, two attacking infantry units will be attacking at 1-2. Since they must attack from an adjacent box, they have 4 chances in 6 of taking casualties. By using 8 building destruction points, the monster can get a 4-1 or two 2-1 attacks against low buildings and bridges, or a 2-1 attack against a high building. Finally, a movement allowance of 5 will allow the monster to keep pace with any human ground unit.

### Human Units

When the human player picks his units, those with ranged attack capabilities should be taken first, for the same reason that the monster should take lightning throwing. They can attack at low odds without suffering adverse combat results. The human player should select his units based on their ability to use ranged attack and their combat strength. An overview of the characteristics of the various units follows:



*Tanks.* These are the most valuable units that the human player has. In advanced scenario B the entire counter mix should be selected. Tanks have the largest combat strength of any human unit, and are faster than anything else the human player has except helicopters. Their two box attack range lets them stand off and attack the monster without directly suffering the consequences, while their five box speed lets them get to the action fast if they have been initially misplaced, and stay with the action once they get there. It is highly unlikely that the monster will be able to outrun them unless it can fly. A stack of two tank units makes a very effective roadblock. The monster will have to eliminate both of them to get by.



*Artillery.* Artillery has a respectable attack strength of 5, but its major advantage is its incredible range of 6. Artillery can stay out of the reach even of lightning throwing and pound away. The major problem with artillery is its low movement allowance. Artillery can't keep up with a mobile battle. Also if it is initially misplaced, it will be a long time before it can make its presence felt in combat. Therefore the initial placement of artillery is very important. It should be placed near the center of the map where it can react in any direction. Its initial placement should be such that it can advance to cover

the southeast corner of the board on the far side of the river in not more than 2 turns and preferably in 1.



*Helicopters.* The major advantage of helicopters is their large movement allowance and their ability to fly. They will normally be able to stay in the battle no matter where it goes. Helicopters should be initially set up in the middle of the map. No matter where the monster appears, they should be able to join the battle by turn 2 at the latest, and in many cases, should be able to attack on the first turn. Helicopters have standoff attack capability that allows them to safely attack at low odds. This is valuable considering their major weakness is a lack of attack strength. With an attack strength of 1, the major use of helicopters is in upfactoring to get better attack odds, particularly in combination with adjacent units, and in making sniping low odds attacks.



*Infantry.* Infantry units in *Creature* have some problems. They don't have enough speed to get to the action and stay there. This is compounded by the fact that they can't ride on vehicles. Also, infantry units have to attack from adjacent boxes, so they suffer all adverse combat results. Because of this fact, infantry should be used in combination with other units in high odds attacks. Unless odds of 3-1 or better are achieved, infantry units will have at least a 50% chance of taking casualties.

Infantry units do have some special advantages over tanks and artillery. They can enter and go through buildings. This advantage allows them to get from one block to the next in a hurry, as they go through it rather than around it. In fact, there are a couple places on the map where they can effectively go farther than a tank. They can also ford the river. This can be of crucial importance if a bridge is destroyed. The infantry will be the only units that can follow the monster directly across the river. Finally, infantry units can make suicide attacks which double their strength, but automatically destroy them. This tactic should not be used unless it has a good chance of killing the monster, or the human player is desperate. The loss of the unit and the victory points that the monster gets for it will usually far outweigh the gain made in the attack.

Infantry should be deployed on the southeast quadrant of the map, and mostly, but not completely, on the far side of the river. This is the most probable area where the monster will appear, and this area will allow the units to take advantage of their fording ability if necessary.



*Police.* Police units are not very good fighting units. They move at infantry speed,

have no stand off attack ability, and possess a combat strength of 1. However, they do have an ability that makes them worthwhile. Police can carry an unlimited number of populace units. By using police, the human player can triple the rate at which populace units move. Police units should be used to get the populace units as widely separated as possible and as far from the monster as possible. It is not a good idea to stack a lot of populace units together. If the monster can get at them, it will pick up a large number of victory points cheaply.

**Firemen and Fireboats.** As you might expect, firemen and the fireboat are used to put out fires. They appear when the monster starts fires and can put them out in any box where they burn. (The fire boat can put out two boxes of fire up to a range of 3.) The human player can either get 3 firemen and the fireboat or 4 firemen. Taking 4 firemen is usually the better choice. The number of buildings within 3 boxes of the river is relatively limited. Firemen have to be protected. If the monster can eliminate them, it will almost certainly win by burning down the city.

### Initial Setups

Guidelines for the initial setup of most of the human units have been included in the discussion of those units. Some general

guidelines on setting up are included here. As the human player, you don't know on which board edge the monster will enter. However, you can probably make a reasonable guess. The southeast corner of the map is isolated by the river and is hence vulnerable. Putting units in a position where they can get to the southeast corner by both the bridges and the tunnel is a good idea. If a bridge is destroyed, the tunnel will become the only way across the river for your mobile units. Artillery should be centrally placed and should be covering the bridges. If the monster does go after them early, it will be exposed to artillery attack. The other units should be divided into a central reserve that will be used to react to the monster's entry when it occurs, and a group to protect the southeast corner. Most of the infantry should be in this group. If the monster appears in this area and destroys a bridge, infantry will be the only units that can follow it across the river. Also, infantry doesn't have the speed to be part of the central reserve.

The monster player has to pick his side of entry before the human player sets up. The southeast corner of the map is potentially the most vulnerable but may be heavily defended. Also, if the monster player can outguess his opponent and enter in a lightly defended area, it will gain time to destroy buildings for easy victory points. Normally,

the monster should choose the south edge. This allows it to enter in the southeast corner if the pickings look good, and it also allows the monster to enter in the southwest, where there are lots of buildings that will probably be lightly defended.

### Tactics

There really is not a great deal of tactical finesse in this game. The human player should try to box the monster into a street with units so it can't get away, and then pound it to pieces. Once the monster loses its mobility, it won't be able to destroy additional buildings to gain victory points, and artillery units will be able to stay out of the monster's range and attack with impunity.

The monster's tactics should be to avoid being boxed in. Keep moving and destroying buildings. If the human player does isolate the monster in a street, the monster should cut its way out immediately. The two ways to do this are reducing a building to rubble and going through it, and destroying blocking units. The former is definitely the better way, since destroyed units can be replaced during the human movement phase.

*Creature* is a fast, easy-playing and enjoyable game. Winning is based on proper selection and deployment of forces, and on using the available forces to their full potential. ■■

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