Iron Dice – The 1914 Megagame

What to Expect

As *Iron Dice* has attracted an unprecedented level of interest from potential players who are new to Megagames, we thought it would be helpful to explain at this stage what you can expect from this game.

Megagames are large, multi-player games in which the players are organised into teams. **Megagame Makers** run a wide variety of such games, which vary in their subject (e.g. historical, fantasy, science fiction settings), in their size and in their mechanisms.   Some games are primarily military, others are primarily about political negotiation, others are a mixture of both.

If your first experience of a Megagame was our previous game *Watch the Skies,* or you have seen the video of that game online, you will find that *Iron Dice* is a very different game, but one which we hope you will find equally enjoyable.

Iron Dice is a *historical, high level, operational* megagame with a *closed map system*:
- **Historical** – *Iron Dice* models a real historical campaign, the German invasion of Belgium and France in 1914, and covers the period August- early November 1914. The strategic options and the forces available to the players are those available in 1914, but their initial deployment and subsequent events will be determined by the players' decisions.
- **High level** – The player teams represent the Army and High Command headquarters of the nations involved. Their decisions are concerned with the deployment of Corps and Divisions, not battalions and companies.
- **Operational** – The focus of the game is almost entirely on military operations. There are no players masters with political roles.   However, the High Commands are answerable to political masters represented by members of an impartial umpire team known as 'Control'. If you are used to traditional board wargaming, you will find an operational megagame differs in a number of ways:
  - **Teams** - Players are organised into teams, who need to work in much the same way as a real-life operational headquarters
  - **Command Hierarchy** – The teams are organised in a hierarchy of teams that mirrors a real-life military hierarchy
  - **No Rules** - Players do not operate a rule-system – all adjudication is done independently by the Control Team.
- **Closed map system** – In order to simulate the "fog of war", players are not allowed to see the master map on which operations are resolved.   They direct their "armies" by written orders passed to an umpire who also feeds back the outcome to the player team.
- *Iron Dice* is not primarily an RPG. There is an element of role-playing in that most players will be representing a named historical commander or staff officer, and we want players to feel the pressures and understand the issues facing them in the same way that their real counterparts did. Players are encouraged to think themselves into

the role, not necessarily the individual character, of their historical counterpart and behave appropriately in their interactions with other players.

Teams

You will find yourself part of a team of players. It is very important to your experience of the day that you get to know your other team members.

Within the team you will have to sort out specific roles and jobs. You will find that if the team works like a discussion group, with everyone discussing and agreeing each action, events will happen much too fast for you to keep up.

Within your team there are three key activities that have to carried out:

- Command
- Intelligence
- Operations

Command – the Commander player has the final responsibility for the operational decisions for the formations under his command. This responsibility extends to reporting *up* the chain of command to senior level players. It also means that they have to follow orders (a difficult task for many gamers).

The game simulates a real military hierarchy – and it will allow for realistic consequences for failure or disobedience. If you like being the commander, the best way to hang on to that role is to do a good job.

The Commander listens to his operations and intelligence staff before deciding what he wants the formation to do – he can then leave it to his operations player to write the orders.

Intelligence – this is understanding what the enemy is doing. An Intelligence player will listen carefully to what Game Control or subordinate teams report and build up a picture of what is facing the formation. This can be a complex and difficult task at times, but if neglected can lead to some costly mistakes. Intelligence players will also probe Team Control for information and liaise with neighbouring formations. In a higher headquarters, the intelligence player will be asking for information from subordinate player teams as well as asking for information from other sources such as cavalry or air recce.

Operations – this is understanding what your own troops are doing. An Operations player will listen carefully to what Game Control reports about the status and capabilities of their own units. Operations will manage the movement of units and prepare order sheets.

Communication - The game moves at a fixed rate without pause. Each half hour represents **one week** of operations. Within that time, players will have to do all the things described above AND communicate effectively.

This game is as much about effective communication as it is about manoeuvring combat units.

In the game, players will normally be allowed to move to the tables / HQs of friendly forces to communicate. However, don't forget that the game goes on – if you spend too long chatting, you may not have time to write your orders properly. Players might choose to send written reports or messages to other teams.

In some special cases, Game Control might place a team out of communication. If this happens they obviously may not move about and talk until communication has been re-established.

Command Hierarchy
We aim that in this game, the military hierarchy is observed (so far as it is possible with non-military players). You can disagree with superior commanders, but you may not disobey them unless you are prepared to take the consequences. This applies to command teams at the higher levels as well, because they will have been given orders from even higher authorities (represented by the Control team), which they must try to follow.

This means also that, as in real life, no commander has a completely free hand to do what they like.

No Rules
Ok, there are rules *really*. It's just that the players, as a whole, will not be shown all of them. The reason for this is that we want players to react and think like real-life military commanders (who don't have 'the rules' either) rather than chess-players will a full knowledge of the consequences of every action. The 'no rules' principle is particularly important in this game because all the generals involved were fighting their first battles of the war and had yet to learn some hard lessons about what worked.

So you **won't** be able to say to yourself *"...if I push that formation into hex 2345 I will gain a +1 on the CRT and block his zone of control.."* or similar. You might instead be saying "*If we advance XX Corps to Ypres we may turn the British left flank and threaten their line of communications* ".

The Game Handbook and National Briefings will contain guidelines setting out out key assumptions about such matters as the relative capabilities of units in certain circumstances, how far you can expect units to move, and how much supply they might consume. These reflect the game designer's interpretation of the available historical data reduced to a playable system.

The Game Control team will also do their best to report back to you in realistic terms. You should **never** hear *"..your right wing attacked at 3:1 odds with a +2 bonus, got a WIN result and took two Combat Value losses.. "* You **will** hear something more like *"..your right wing encountered and attacked a British force at Mons, estimated as being two Corps. The British put up a determined defence before withdrawing to the south. Both your Corps suffered losses in the region of 10% but the Commanders report that they are ready to continue their advance."*

Who has won?

We do not award Victory Points or announce a "winner". There will be an assessment of the strategic situation at the end of the game, but for most megagamers the satisfaction is

gained from our own assessment of our performance, how far we have achieved our personal objectives and the feedback we get from other players – whether at the end of the game or at the traditional post-game informal debriefing.

We hope that this has given you a picture of what to expect on the day, and that you will find the game challenging, stimulating and enjoyable.