

Who, When, and How
Some thoughts on playing ALAMAZE
by Philip McDowell

It is seldom, if ever, that we are truly alone - at least for very long. We shall begin this discussion utilizing this premise for ALAMAZE contests.

When we enter into a game of ALAMAZE we are aware that there are fourteen other individuals participating and we must presume that all intend to impact this contest in various ways. It is logical to believe, at this time, that all participants have intentions of winning this game. It is also true, as we have often heard, that “there can be only one”. What actions might I take to maximize my chances of entering the “Hall of Valhalla”?

The following is the thesis that I have followed, it may be of some assistance to others. While I fully understand that there may be many things I will discuss that many players fully comprehend there is also a possibility that there is some “gem” contain within that just might be of value.

Review the available tools

While we each contend in a “Fantasy World” we have available our current technology.

The ability to use the Internet allows us to easily:

review the most current rules and guidelines for the ALAMAZE games (use the Pegasusprod.com Web Page).. Sounds too basic, I think not! Do not think that all players have the same understanding of these rules, or that there are never mis-entered orders, or that the “Sequence of Events” is always grasped. There is also that “unusual” event that initiates a search for “the best way to handle this”. There have been many changes over the years.

research information concerning the kingdoms you will be competing against. While it is certainly possible that you once were the Ruler of a certain kingdom, that does not mean there have been no changes over the years. It is true that Pegasus Productions often delays the most recent changes to specific kingdoms however what is available might well be more current and accurate than your memory.

attempt to learn about the other players. By using the Valhalla section you have a chance of gleaming valuable information concerning other players. You have been provided, with your Results-0, the names and E-Mail address of those other fourteen players; this can be used for direct contact (more on this later).

get, or take a look at, the aids that are provided. These certainly include things that are down-loadable. A short list of these would include: spell lists, artifact lists, a PowerPoint map, and an Excel worksheet.

Contact with those “Others”

We have the knowledge of not only the kingdoms within our contest but the player who controls that kingdom. You now have some choices to make and some factors to consider.

What kingdoms (and therefore what players) are where? Why and who will you contact and with what intent? Here are some things to consider:

What portion of the ALAMAZE world do you hope to claim as yours?

What kingdom/s might I expect to contend with early?

Are there players that you have personal knowledge about (played in previous games with)? What about that experience (more on this later)?

What ‘deals’ might I expect to make and receive?

How will I make the transition from the early to the middle to the end game? This is an important consideration that is frequently overlooked or misunderstood. It does have a large impact.

As in any contest of skill there are certainly advantages in knowing your fellow participants! We realize that this is not always possible but is desirable with multiple advantages.

What are their tendencies?

What kind of communicators are they?

Are they (and/or their kingdoms) normally fast starters or later developing?

How do they negotiate?

How might they fit into my plans, or me into theirs?

What information are you prepared to share, and expect to get?

What type of agreements might be made?

Can there be any doubt that as individuals we can view things differently from others? We all have traits and tendencies and this can impact upon our relationships, and thus our gaming. Here are some things worthy of consideration.

Do you initiate contact and ideas or wait for others? It is my view (and fits my personality) that early contact is best. It is very common for multiple players within any ALAMAZE contest to open contact with many others within 24 hours of getting their new game material. These contacts can take many forms, included might well be proposed alliances. A reality is that the longer we wait to both initiate contact and reply to others that many things can be getting done; there is a chance that some things might influence our choices and strategy. It is often true that the longer we wait the fewer choices we have. This certainly does not mean that we have to agree immediately, there just might be a better fit out there but don't take forever.

What level of frustration are you able to deal with (and what might you give others)? Some players might want to discuss things very early after getting results to work things out; others might wait until the last day to address issues. Some players reply to inquires promptly, others might require several contacts. Some players will have clear and concise ideas, plans, and orders, others might have only vague thoughts. If there is not a "fit" how will you (and possible others) deal with this? Remember, there is a price to pay for almost everything, what price are you willing to pay?

Is there a "best way" to enter into agreements (alliances) and how will they work? This is an important part of the ALAMAZE games as it is extremely difficult to play a major role in world events without contact and agreements with

others. It is certainly true that this is a potential area for misunderstands, regardless of the player's experience. The following are things requiring consideration.

At what point in the contest will an agreement take place and for how long?

What are the terms and conditions of the agreement?

Are there provisions for renegotiation?

It would appear that these three things are fairly basic, what can go wrong?

Beginning with Results-0 the negotiations begin and a level of expectation will accompany any agreement. Will this agreement be for the entire game or for a certain number of turns? Is this clear to both parties? What is envisioned when Turn-10 is mentioned? What does non-aggression mean (to both parties)?

As usual, it is within the details that misunderstanding and advantages take place. It should not be difficult to comprehend that in politics (is this not such a format), or with legal contracts (many players view these agreements as such) that which party gains the most or is given the most protection can be a vital consideration.

If an early agreement is reached, for a set number of turns - and those turns have expired, does that mean if one player no longer desires to extend the agreement that the other cries foul? The purpose of a set number of turns is to allow a re-evaluation. If events have been harsh to me does that mean you have to ride to my rescue or provide me aid? Might you at this time feel it in your best interest to make a new agreement, with another player, and perhaps even join in an attack against me?

What do both parties mean when they agree to this set number of turns? Can adverse actions be taken with that turn or only after that turn's results (thus the following turn)? What is considered to be an adverse action? If I move a political or even a group to a PC you own, but do not flip the PC or attack it, is that considered "breaking the agreement"? What about me spying on one of your PCS or groups? It is important to realize that there are different points of view and that this aspect should be discussed and understood fully. Do not be surprised, disappointed, or embittered if you "assume" too much. The importance of both

players understanding exactly what the agreement entails is what is important.

Are agreements ever broken with true intent? This is, in both my experience as a player and gamemaster, a very rare event. Does this mean it has never happen, with over 400 completed games the answer would have to be no. If word reaches you that a certain player breaks their agreements what should you do? First thing is to realize that while whoever is advising you may well believe it is true that does not make it a fact (see above about assumptions). As with most disagreements, there are often different points of view and at this time you have heard only one. While attempts are being made to discover “the truth of the matter” (not always easy) you certainly would be prudent to exercise some degree of caution (perhaps even with both players).

Yet another aspect of agreements is too be careful to review how they might “block you in”. If you have reached agreements with multiple other players what does this do to your expansion plans. In living up to your agreements will you have to move to the far ends of the ALAMAZE world to gain new holdings?

In making an agreement remember that some look to “the letter of the law” (agreement) and some to the intent. This is often where misunderstandings and feelings of betrayal can take place. Again, agreements are often a necessity and can be of great benefit, just be sure what the agreement entails.

As the contest progresses there is an aspect of game play that is too often ignored. How might a player, getting close to a Secret Victory Condition, be stopped or at least delayed? The High Priestess Order-770 is available, but used infrequently. It is possible, with some work and communications, to gather a coalition to impact upon this front-runner. This should open the way to yet another type of agreement, to halt hostilities with another kingdom and take steps reduce the holdings and abilities of the kingdom getting close to winning. While this is not an easy task, long “conflicts” can cause a “blood lust”, but logic would dictate there should be an effort.

Winning an ALAMAZE contest, like most victories, is a pleasing event. The victor has competed with fourteen unique kingdoms/ players and with skill, daring, and yes, often good agreements, has prevailed. It is also true that there are multiple reasons why we participate in these games. There is the challenge of the

competition - from the player in their first game matching wits and strategies against experienced players - or veterans seeking to prove their mettle. There might be the rivalry among friends. There are those who might be looking for that special battle report or even a place in game records. There are those who are searching for fun, entertainment, and perhaps a momentary escape from reality. There are those looking for enjoyment in this special genre. Whatever the reasons might be for playing ALAMAZE a very nice byproduct is that friendship have been formed and enjoyed.

At this point you might think, that's all very nice but how do I win. Now that is a good question. As the records of completed games reflect, all kingdoms have won and placed second and/or third. With this basis, I suggest that while a kingdom, with certain traits, might best suit your personality, there is no kingdom that is assured of winning! Can it be that certain players will always win; again the records (and history) would reflect that this is not the case either. If either of these were true then it is very doubtful that ALAMAZE would continue to be a viable choice for your gaming experience. While I have had my successes since 1987 (or Game-1) there certainly have been multiple defeats.

Might the kingdom's starting location be the key to victory? Again, this is not the case; victories have been earned from all beginning locations.

Perhaps it might be the player with the greatest number of allies? No, this is not the case either. As was mentioned earlier, sometimes there can be "too much of a good thing". There is little doubt (in my mind) that having and working with allies is important, and a key to victory, it seldom will be the primary reason in winning.

Perchance then it is either making great advances early or being patience and waiting until others have engaged in conflict and have been weakened? So sad, neither of these approaches is universally true either. An early leader can draw a lot of attention and it is know that some just wait too long.

Just to close this discussion, it is also NOT: the greatest military, the most and best politicals, high wizards, efficient agents, or having the most available orders.

While many of the above factors can enter into a victorious contest there are

certainly even additional elements. Here is an further list: making no (or very few) incorrect orders, knowing all the available orders and spells to maximize your options, realizing the strengths and weaknesses of both your own kingdom and the other kingdoms, gleaning game specific information about as many kingdoms/players as possible, and being careful with the information you supply to others.

As with life, and certainly games, there are usually various elements that lead to success. Knowing when to exert pressure and when to step back; developing a “feeling” for events and individuals, and yes, even having some luck! Thus there are multiple considerations that enhance the chance of claiming the ultimate prize of an ALAMAZE game victory. If I had to “boil it down”, I would suggest that knowledge and its best usage is the definitive key.

Let me leave you with these last thoughts:

While I have participate continuously in ALAMAZE games since Game-1, have been the Gamemaster for many years, and have initiated many changes in the game system - I continue to be amazed with the imagination of our player base!

I am still learning! There are strategies and rule interpretations by players that I had never considered (but now work into my games).

I appreciate the overwhelming good will, cooperation, fellowship and suggestions that ALAMAZE players have so graciously provided over these many years.

PLAY LONG AND PROSPER!