

STORM OVER

STALINGRAD
FOR DUMMIES!*

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Storm Over Stalingrad (SoS...) was first published in the Japanese magazine *Game Journal* #19. The game uses an ingeniously simplified version of Avalon Hill's area/impulse system (*Storm Over Arnhem* etc.) that many call the "Japanese version". Tetsuya Nakamura knows this system well having used it several times in his games and seemingly improving upon it each time.

Stalingrad and an area/impulse system? *Turning Point: Stalingrad* immediately comes to mind. But SoS has neither the complexity nor the detail of this predecessor. SoS is much more similar to *Storm Over Port Arthur* (SoPA), published in *Game Journal* #10, also by Nakamura Sensei. SoPA almost seems like a first draft of SoS. The situation is very similar (the Russians have their back to the sea and are surrounded by the Japanese), the system is almost the same (without cards), but it has been, for SoS, once again refined and purified.

In a nice box (if you like orange), you'll find: a sheet of 196 5/8" counters designed with simplicity and efficiency in mind, two map-halves providing a total game surface of 15" x 42", a well put together rulebook of 8 pages

STALINGRAD

Tetsuya Nakamura, Adam Starkweather, and Nikolas Eskubi: the shock trio shoots again. And this time, they want us to play the Battle of Stalingrad in less than three hours. Let's see.

featuring many examples of play, two D6s, and... a pack of 55 cards. These are quality components. The map, though perhaps a little drab, is a successful combination of efficiency, elegance, and ambiance. Expect nothing less from Nikolas Eskubi. The rules can be learned in 15 minutes. It takes about 15 other minutes to punch out the counters, setup the game, and be ready to play.

THE BATTLE

The situation is simple. The Russians have their backs to the Volga and must hold on to as many of their positions as possible for six game turns in the face of pretty healthy German forces. Russian reinforcements arrive on crammed ferries and little by little replace the retreating or dead Kamarads. German reinforcements, on the other hand, take whatever routes are available to reach the combat zone.

Before starting the game, players must bid on the number of victory zones (there are seven on the map, each with a +3 defensive bonus) on to which the Russians can hold. The player who bids the highest number plays the Russians and must make good on his bid in order to win the game.

Battle for a free card around the Mount Kurgan



The initial setup (picture from the downloadable vassal module)



RAD

SYSTEM BASICS

The game plays on an area-based map (23 areas in total). Each area is defined by a defensive bonus. Control of an area is rewarded with the defensive bonus as well as easier movement to and from the area. Units (infantry, motorised and mechanised infantry, reconnaissance, and armour) have three values: firepower, movement, and defense. Also noted on the counter is its divisional identification, important for the German player but merely informative for the Russian. Units have a "fresh" side, the latter containing only a diminished defense rating. Units are turned onto their spent side once they have suffered a loss or have completed an action.

The game is based on alternating impulses. Each player selects an area in which he will choose the units that will move. The German player can only activate units together that belong to the same division, which will cause some trouble for him as the game progresses. Units can move or attack units within their area or an adjacent area. A unit can always penetrate into an enemy area, but can never cross an enemy area to attack another (which would require five movement points, while the fastest units only have four). So, not a battle of movement but instead urban combat, block by block and street by street, laborious encirclement, etc. The system suits its subject.

Combat is resolved by adding the firepower of attacking units and the result of rolling two D6s. The defense strength of the highest rated enemy unit (from 8 to 11) and the defensive bonus of the area (from +1 to +3) is subtracted from this sum. The result is the number of losses suffered by the defenders. There are several ways to absorb a loss: flip a unit from fresh to spent, retreat a unit (fresh or spent) to an adjacent friendly-controlled area, or eliminate a unit.

Reading the above and considering the situation on the map, one may get the impression that this is nothing but a tiresome counter-pushing game. Nothing could be further from the truth.

SIMPLE AND CHALLENGING

While the overall strategy and general tactics seem clear from the start and don't allow for much surprise or brilliant ideas, players find victory in the management of the finer aspects of the game.

For example, the stacking limit of ten per area requires careful planning of movement, retreats, and advances in order to ensure that the optimal amount of units will be in the right place at the right time. It's also necessary to leave room for retreating units if you don't want to see them completely desert the combat zone. The German player has to manage a difficult balance between divisional integrity, permitting the creation of a "death stack", and the need to advance quickly. The longer the game lasts, the more difficult it becomes. The arrival of reinforcements and their movement to the front line also becomes more and more problematic. The Russian player has to carefully manage the distribution of casualties. Choices in this game are numerous and important. In short, all of these little details make SoS a very tactical and pleasant game.

SAVE OUR SOULS

On the SoS map, chaos is king. To win, you don't need the perfect plan but instead the ability to constantly adapt to combat results and the unfolding of events. Combat inputs a lot of randomness and defensive movements are unpredictable and numerous. More importantly, in your hands you hold the elements that can change the game completely: cards. Each player has a deck of 27 cards. The German player will always have six in hand while the



The reinforcements waiting on the turn track.

Russian player, depending on the turn, has three to six. The player who controls area G (Mamayev Kurgan, the hill in the middle of the city) can have an extra card. It appears extremely important for the Russian player, at least for the first three turns, to keep control of this area. Cards can replace an action, counter an enemy action, or support an action. The artillery cards are usually played at the beginning of a turn to "tenderise" enemy defenses. "Pioneers" can accompany an attack to eliminate enemy trenches. "For the Motherland" permits the Russian player to play two rounds in a row in order to reinforce a vulnerable area, for example, etc.

Combinations aren't possible as cards are played one at a time, but it is possible to counter cards your opponent has played. For example, the German player plays the "Overrun" card (allowing his troops to move and attack in the same impulse), to which the Russian counters with "Defensive Fire" (allowing him to fire on units entering their area without his units being flipped to spent). The German player could then play the "Russian Ammo Shortage", which cancels Russian fire. The Russian could then play "Mines" which has a good chance of stopping the German assault. The German player then invalidates that card with "Engineer Support" (which negates the precedent). The Russian player then plays "Sniper", cancelling out the German card. The German player then plays a "Sniper" card too, and a sniper duel is resolved to determine which card prevails. Admittedly, such a rapid succession of cards happens very rarely but it shows the potential level of interaction between the two players and the opportunities to throw a wrench in the enemy's plans. Fun. The cards also allow the game to take into account all of the aspects of the battle without incorporating them into the rules. It is a fun bonus to this system that would've been nice to see earlier.

CONCLUSION

Despite using a system that has been around for a long time, SoS has managed to innovate and re-new it with a turn towards simplicity. It is certainly not the ultimate game on Stalingrad, nor the game of the year, but it is definitely a very good and indispensable little game.



Easy and quick to play, challenging, fun, providing the atmosphere of its subject, it is one of those games that will be returned to with pleasure in ten years or so, when you have two or three hours to kill or when an old wargaming buddy has dropped by unexpectedly. It is also ideal for initiating newcomers to the hobby. Here we have, maybe, the makings of a future "little classic".

HOUSE RULES AND NEW TACTICAL CARDS

- 1) Russian Counterattack:** If the German player loses control of one his starting areas, he loses one tactical card (the Russian player randomly selects one). Until he has re-gained control of the area, the German player receives one fewer card per turn than indicated.
- 2) No Retreat!:** Once per turn, the Russian player can declare "No Retreat" before the German player resolves an attack. If so, the German player rolls three D6s instead of two to resolve the battle. The Russian player takes his casualties normally but can immediately bring back into the area units that have retreated.
- RUSSIAN TACTICAL CARD - FRIENDLY FIRE:** May be played instead of "Chukov rallies the troops". This card must be played before resolving a German attack in an area containing German units. The casualties are applied against the German units in the area.
- GERMAN TACTICAL CARD - STUKAS ON THE VOLGA:** May be played instead of "Dive Bombing". The German player resolves an attack (Firepower = 6) against a Ferry Landing box. The defensive value of the box is zero. Russian units can not retreat. This card can be cancelled out by "Anti-Aircraft Guns".

* AND AS USUAL : «A REFERENCE FOR THE REST OF US»