

A-Elm

Soviet Play in Proud Monster

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Proud Monster is one of the most enjoyable games on the eastern front in years. The panzers roam seemingly at will, driving deep across the steppes of Russia. Unlike most east front titles, *PM* gives the German a real chance at winning. The victory point schedule prevents the Soviets from retreating too quickly and forces that player into politically necessary but militarily unpalatable choices. The ponderous but bewildered Red Army seems scarcely capable of the monumental task before it. A Soviet player may find himself losing the game as early as turn 1. How should the Russian Bear come to grips with the nimble, powerful *Wehrmacht*?

Victory

Victory is based on possession of towns and cities of varied worth. If the German player meets the minimum point count at the end of any game turn, he wins. Soviet strategy must therefore be based on denying him those points. This must also be done economically to preserve the army; allowing the Red Army to be annihilated to prevent victory one turn will only postpone the decision. The tension between these contradictory strictures tortures the Soviet player throughout the game, and establishing the proper balance between preventing immediate defeat and forming the basis for future survival is the core of strategic decision making for that player.

I like this approach from both the playability and historicity aspects. It prevents the Soviet player from staging "gamey" runaways. Some might question whether the Soviets would have thrown in the towel on the basis provided by the victory table. We'll never know, but we can be sure Stalin actually directed his war as if that were the case, which explains many of his stand fast decisions. The Soviet empire was a decidedly shaky affair.

In the early part of the war, before the brutality of the invaders became apparent, many Soviets in the Ukraine and elsewhere greeted the *Wehrmacht* with enthusiasm. They knew little of Hitler at that point, but they already knew plenty about Stalin. Stalin could not blithely abandon

large stretches of Soviet territory, however prudent that might have been militarily, without courting the possibility of political collapse. The victory table properly subordinates the conduct of the war to the larger political issue. It tends to channel the game along historical lines. It also makes the game more immediately challenging and enjoyable for both players. *Proud Monster* is a real nail biter, with victory and defeat always in sight.

Soviet Set Up

The set up rules allow you only so much flexibility. You will have many units set up in out of the way places. This grants the German an advantage for the first few couplets. He can therefore defeat portions of the Soviet army in detail. Additionally, he needs only four points in the first turn, or eight in the second, to win the game.

In the Frontier Zone (FZ), the Soviet need only place one rifle division per hex along the portion of the border north of the Pripyet. This sector can't be defended; accept that and move on. The best you can expect here is that the German will be unable to immediately march most of his infantry east, since those units will be occupied destroying your border force.

In the southern FZ, the Soviet situation looks better. The front is narrower, constrained by the marshes in the center and Balkan neutrality on turn 1. Don't place more than the minimum along the border, again using rifle divisions. The 36 tank and motorized infantry divisions should be set up along the Stalin Line and the strip of forests south of the Pripyet. Make sure to extend the line all the way to Romania to prevent the Germans outflanking you to the south, which is particularly dangerous on turn 1 since the Germans can ignore river costs then.

The clear hexes between the Stalin Line and Romania can be guarded by single rifle divisions, since they are too far away for the Germans to overrun.

The marshes north of the Stalin Line should contain one rifle or cavalry unit each; otherwise the German will march his eight-speed Jagers, mountain, and cavalry units around the marsh to try to outflank you from the north. Not only is marsh expensive for mobile units to move through, but they also prevent overruns, reducing any advances there to one hex, assuming you screen it. I prefer screening with cavalry because their extra movement makes them handy for negotiating marsh, but you might prefer sturdier rifle divisions to fragile cavalry in the hope of forcing combat losses on any Germans.

Hexes 1900N, 2028S and 2125-27S should receive special attention since they are within overrun range (six hexes). Make sure to place five units in each of those hexes, with at least two motorized divisions per hex. The other Stalin Line hexes can probably get by with four units, as long as each stack contains at least one motorized rifle division. The really paranoid or unlucky among you might want to backstop the hexes within overrun range with one or more units to prevent a premature German breakthrough.

The high force density in the south will slow the Germans and maybe reduce a few panzers. If the German neglects his flanks, you may be able to place an impetuous German drive out of supply. Don't hesitate; there should still be rifle divisions near the border to help form such a pocket, and if necessary throw in a couple of tank divisions to seal it.

The German will undoubtedly extricate himself from such a tenuous envelopment, while killing the encircling units, but his mobile troops in the pocket, even if air supplied, will temporarily lose their ability to conduct overruns. The German capability to conduct mobile assaults is a huge force multiplier, and the Soviet must look for opportunities to use terrain, weak "speed bump" units, and supply to limit the mobile assault threat.

Your placement in the Interior Zone (IZ) must achieve two things: protect vital victory point sites and move the Red Army west as quickly as possible to enable you to deploy it in a mass.

Looking at the victory points first, the Soviet needs to protect four points on turn 1. The only four in reach of the German during the first turn are: Riga, Kaunas, Minsk and Vilnyus. Kaunas and Vilnyus cannot be properly defended; they will fall. Minsk, on the other hand, can be secured simply by placing a screen in front of it beyond six movement points from the border, thanks to the forest north, and the marsh south, of it. That will keep German units out of the hexes adjacent to Minsk.

Riga is a question mark. The German can get to it in some strength, and even attack it surrounded, if the Soviet doesn't put speed bumps around it. But any such assault will have to be made largely by mechanized units or eight-speed light units. The regular infantry is too slow to get there in significant numbers. With that in mind, I like to put five rifle divisions and one motorized division in Riga. That force is substantial enough to discourage a hasty attack on the city from all but the most aggressive German players. Even if

attacked, the garrison stands a good chance of inflicting two or more step losses; if any panzers participate, the first step lost must come from them.

The loss of one strength point from a reduced panzer division matters less than the loss of one movement point, which reduces its radius of mobile action from five to four hexes at most (since MAs start costing seven movement points after turn 1). That may not sound significant, but it can actually make a huge difference.

I also like to place three units adjacent to Tallin; they can either move into the place later, or toward Leningrad, or forward to slow the German advance (which can be particularly effective if he neglects to send mechanized units into the Baltic coastal area to clear it).

I also place a unit each in 3506N and 3709N. That blocks the non-marsh approaches to Leningrad, which can motivate the German to go elsewhere rather than waste a couplet killing one unit or trying to go around it through the marsh. Those two units can also retreat to the Luga Line if they are ignored.

You should also position units behind the Dvina at 2806-7N, and in front of it at 2808N and 2908-10N. That will aid the defense of Leningrad by preventing German mobile assault on the units at 3506N and 3709N on turn 2. The survivors from Riga and the Dvina can then move either toward Tallin or Leningrad, creating roadblocks. They may also be able to place nearby enemy spearheads out of supply.

Around Minsk I place a mixed force of infantry, tank and motorized units. During the Soviet half of turn 1, move one division into Minsk. I consider this city to be indefensible on turn 2, and you will need as many units as possible from this area to create a solid line farther east. The unit left behind guarantees the Germans will have to lose a step to take the place.

The other units near Minsk should move east to form a line between Vitebsk and Mogilev; they will be joined by other forces strung out between Smolensk and Minsk. This line should contain stacks with four or five units, with at least one motorized rifle division in each to guarantee a semi-effective stack. (The weakest motorized rifle division has a defense factor of three, and on average they're worth about five points each, which will mitigate even the worst case situation of discovering the rest of the stack is made up of 1-1-5s.) The highway should be backstopped with at least one stack of three to five units in case the German runs several lucky mobile assaults and pierces the front line.

You should also string out a few tank divisions and motorized rifle divisions around Moscow, along both the highway and the clear terrain corridor west of Rzhev. South and east of Moscow there should be a fairly undifferentiated mass of rifle divisions and brigades. A few of those can move toward the Valdai Hills behind the GAS line to discourage any German attempt to stretch or flank your line there. The rest can move toward Smolensk. They should mostly get there by turn 3, when they will join the other forces already near Vitebsk (which by then will be falling back as the German moves up his infantry, freeing his mechanized units).

After placing all those units in the north as described, you'll have few extras for the south thanks to the large number of cities requiring garrisons there. Make sure you place at least one motorized rifle division in Kiev, Smolensk, Odessa, and possibly Dnepro-Petrovsk. Whatever remaining infantry and cavalry you have should go north and west of Kiev to help defend along the forest and marshes in that area. I also like to put three or four rifle divisions along the Dneestr River north of Odessa, along with a few mobile divisions.

Units set up in ports can ship directly to Odessa on turn 1, allowing you to get units from the Crimea and the Caucasus into the front line quickly. Even a line of single rifle divisions on the Dneestr portion of the Stalin Line will be enough to deal with the hapless Romanians, who can achieve little without German help. The remaining tank and motorized rifle divisions should be placed near your large mechanized force east of Lvov to help cover wastage there. Make sure you don't place all those up north.

Turn 2

Much of your strategy from this point depends on what the German does. We can turn once again to the victory point chart for ideas. On turn 2 the German needs eight points, and he can pretty much count on having at least four or five (Riga, Minsk, Kaunas, Vilnyus and Kishinev). That doesn't leave the Soviet much room for error.

In the center and north things may be particularly dicey. Tallin, Vitebsk, Smolensk and even Gomel are within striking distance in two couplets. Leningrad, too, is always a source of concern. Thanks to the terrain there, however, judicious use of blocking units can keep it out of range prior to the end of turn 2. If the Germans have failed to isolate Leningrad by that time, the arrival of the massive

turn 3 Soviet reinforcements will probably rectify any problems here, though the Germans may well breach the Luga Line before its completed. In my experience, the German will tend to go elsewhere to avoid getting his panzers mired along the Luga, but don't be complacent.

If Riga survives turn 1 under Soviet control and is in supply, abandon it except for one unit. That stay-behind forces the German to lose a step for taking a major city hex, no matter what the odds. The other units should retreat in the direction of Tallin and/or Leningrad. If the German fails to send mechanized units into this area, this will guarantee Tallin remains in Soviet hands by slowing the German advance to a hexrow per couplet.

Along the Minsk-Moscow highway you should be able to stop the German in front of Mogilev and Vitebsk on the first couplet. The second couplet is more dangerous. The German will undoubtedly run mobile assaults along the highway and perhaps critically weaken the line, and will also outflank you along the ends of the line at Vitebsk and Mogilev. If he does, short of placing his spearheads out of supply (a dangerous move given your scarcity of units), your best move may be to fall back in strength directly to Smolensk to prevent your army from being destroyed piecemeal. This results in the abandonment of Vitebsk, but he who attempts to defend everything is lost. If you do fall back, make sure the German can't reach those forces during the second couplet. If the German mishandles the advance, or rolls badly, try to retain Vitebsk.

In the south, hold the Stalin Line east of Lvov with your life. Units that can be mobile assaulted from two or three hexes should be backstopped with a stack. Hold the forest strip as well. Don't forget to screen the marshes; it's embarrassing to stop the panzers only to have to fall back anyway thanks to a few Jagers.

The second couplet here will be especially tense since the German will press south to stretch your line and weaken its density. The infantry held at the frontier on the first turn will now be in your face, and will also likely have been reinforced by some of the turn 2 German arrivals. Also, the will probably launch attacks out of northern Bessarabia to force the Prut and Dneestr Rivers and help the mechanized units pry you out of the Stalin Line.

Be careful in the Bessarabian region. If the German slips a panzer corps or two around you there, he may get to Nikolaev and Odessa. If either of those places falls on turn 2, you have probably just lost the

game. Count carefully and use the rivers to limit the mobile assault threat.

Kishinev should be lightly held to force the Romanians to commit troops there. But don't go crazy trying to hold the place; you probably won't have the units to stop them down there for two couplets.

In sum, turn 2 is dangerous. You are still out of position and eight victory points isn't much, since the German will probably have four already in the bag. Identify the German main efforts and try to save either Kishinev, Tallin or Vitebsk. It's not all that unusual to see the German hit seven victory points on turn 2, which will make for a disturbing brush with disaster but is not a defeat.

Turn 3: Light at the End of the Tunnel?

It's usually a pretty grim game for the Soviet up to this point, but the mighty Red Army mobilization machine now kicks in. Depending on what military district cities you control and how your tank brigade die rolls come out, you may receive over 100 new units this turn. That's an impressive force, but one with equally daunting tasks before it. The front will be aflame in a number of places, and it's amazing how fast these new units can be chewed up.

First, you must exercise discipline. From here on, always — and that means every turn — maintain an RVGK reserve. This represents the best response the Soviet can make against unexpected enemy breakthroughs. Fill it up with the maximum 10 units; if you don't you will surely wish later on that you had. Feel free to empty the RVGK on the second couplet, as long as you replenish it at the start of the following turn, but hoard it during the first couplet if at all possible.

As to what goes into the RVGK, on turn 3 I like to place five tank and five rifle divisions in it. I try to keep the tank divisions in as long as possible, since you only receive two more the rest of the game. Otherwise, a mix of rifle and cavalry divisions and a few tank brigades seems best.

I particularly enjoy deploying the cavalry divisions and tank brigades. These excellent little units make perfect speed bumps, and have the mobility to get to places quickly. In large numbers they can even overwhelm the German mobile assault capability, albeit at a horrendous price. They're perfect for screening: imagine the German's angst at moving a mighty panzer corps forward six hexes and finding the path to a victory point city blocked by a pathetic 1-1-7 tank brigade.

Of course, there is no real substitute for a strong line of units piled five high, but on occasion you may need to temporize. Rifle brigades also work here, but they don't arrive in the same numbers and are slower. Later in the game large numbers of tank and rifle brigades can form deep zones behind certain portions of the front three or more hexes deep to inhibit German overruns where you lack divisions to do the job.

The main Soviet strategic objective on turn 3 is to compel a supply pause on the German. Why? Because of the victory point requirements on turn 4. The German wins at the end of turn 4 if he has 17 points. Excluding Leningrad, Odessa and Sevastopol, we find the map contains 18 points west of the GAS line. The German player need therefore not expose himself to the vagaries of the attenuated supply table, can ignore difficult places like Odessa, Leningrad and Sevastopol, and still win on this turn. The mass of the available victory points needed for him to do this lie in the clear terrain of the south, particularly near the Dnepr River bend: Dnepro-Petrovsk, Zaporozhe, Krivoy-Rog, Dnepro-Derzhinsk, Nikolaev and Kherson are all within a few hexes of each other in that area, yielding a rich haul of seven victory points.

Of the objectives west of the GAS line in the north, only Smolensk or Gomel can be reasonably expected to hold through turn 4, and then only at a terrible cost to the Red Army. Assuming one of those two holds, the German will have seven victory points in the north. He can concentrate his panzers in the south, skip the pause and go for the turn 4 win.

The Soviets can't strip the north, lest they fatally weaken the front before Leningrad and Moscow. The other alternative is to abandon Kiev and fall behind the GAS line except along the Dnepr bend. But that can result in the Germans moving unimpeded across the center of the map, placing them in a good position from which to strike either north or south. Besides, given the relative speeds of the two forces, the Soviets can't out run the Germans, and the *Wehrmacht* will then butcher them in the open.

That's why from game turn 1 on the Soviet must fight a fanatical forward defense in the south in the hope of taking down a few panzer steps. Without such losses, the German loses his major incentive to take the pause and refit.

The danger for the Soviet in the south lies in the nature of the terrain: besides a few rivers, it's perfect panzer country. As

you move east the front widens, resulting in greater difficulties maintaining reasonable force density. As the Soviet line stretches, the opportunities for a decisive breakthrough by the German increases.

The rivers offer slight protection while impeding the Soviet player's opportunity to withdraw effectively. Both German and Soviet mobile units pay +2 to cross rivers, but that penalizes a 7 movement factor tank division more than it does a 12 movement factor panzer division. Still, the +2 that rivers add to mobile assault costs can be useful in keeping the panzers at bay, and this restriction on the panzers' mobility is worth more than the single column shift rivers provide in combat.

The Soviet must therefore hold on to Kiev and the Dnepr as best he can and take his lumps. At all costs try to maintain a supply line to Kiev through turn 4. The swamp hex in 3028N helps greatly in doing that. If things are working as they should, Kiev will pull many Germans to it like a magnet. As they fix on it, they'll lose the required mass to push toward Dnepro-Petrovsk at the same time.

If the German does push toward Dnepro-Petrovsk, screen Krivoy-Rog as best you can to delay its fall. Don't give it up too early since it's a perfect place for the German to bring in his ArKo, thanks to the many victory point cities nearby. You'll probably lose the place by the end of turn 3, but try anyway.

Nikolaev is also in all likelihood a lost cause, but Kherson can and should be held. You should also occupy the swamps running east of there to channelize the German advance, which will also prevent the cutting off of Kherson. At this stage of the game, few German infantry units will be this far east, and he'll likely avoid running his panzers into the swamps. Besides, if the German pushes his armor too far forward without infantry support in the Dnepr bend, these units along with a few cavalry divisions can close around him and place him out of supply.

Don't forget to block off the Crimea at the isthmus, and leave a substantial force of seven or more units, including one motorized rifle division, in Odessa.

Never assume the German will declare the pause, no matter what the situation. I did that in one game, launching Yelnya-style counterattacks along the entire front. That caused great damage to the Germans, who weren't properly deployed to deal with it. Unfortunately, it also resulted in the larger portion of my forces being situated west of the GAS line in offensively oriented positions and salients, all ripe for

the picking. The German skipped the pause, consumed vast portions of the Red Army, which never recovered and declined in strength thereafter since the attrition greatly exceeded reinforcements and replacements. Even with the supply problems, the German went on in that game to win at the end of turn 8. I therefore recommend launching such counteroffensives only after the pause has been declared, and even then use caution since the pause can be canceled: given a good enough reason to do so, the German will cancel it.

If the German begins pulling mechanized units out of the front line and straightening it with two non-mobile divisions per hex, that's a pretty good sign he'll take the pause.

Turns 4 and 5

Let's assume first the German does take the pause thanks to skillful play on your part. What should you do with this golden opportunity?

First, ruthlessly strip the Kiev region down to one unit per hex except for the city itself, which should be kept fully garrisoned. The units thus gained should withdraw east of the GAS line to set up contiguously with the Dnepr bend forces. The units left behind will prevent the Germans from moving forward unopposed. The whole Kiev salient will fall immediately after the pause, but at that point you no longer need worry about Kiev and have no interest in losing a large force there.

Second, you must launch a series of assaults, but in such a way you don't over-expose yourself. Hammer German infantry whenever you can at 2:1 odds or better. By this point he won't have many infantry replacement steps left, if any. Killing units scheduled to withdraw, if possible, is even better — a little victory point insurance never hurts. Such infantry losses, accompanied by future ones taken when assaulting major cities, will greatly inhibit the German ability to keep up the advance.

His mechanized forces can't go into the depths of Russia without infantry support to keep open their supply lines. Without that support, they'll either be cut off or be forced to disperse their mobile troops into smaller stacks less capable of conducting independent mobile assaults.

This pause counteroffensive also reveals your unit quality. You can then distribute them along the front to lessen the chance of embarrassments like a stack of five unknowns flipped to reveal a bunch

of 1 and 2 point defense strength units in a critical part of the line. As for the losses you'll suffer in low odds attacks, don't worry, there will be plenty of steps to give up. A weak unit lost in return for a German step loss at this point is a completely satisfactory exchange.

Third, build up. Use the three quiet couplets to amass a solid line along the front containing stacks of four or five units backed by reserves in critical sectors. When the Germans awaken from their logistical slumber, you'll need the "fat" to live through the lean autumn.

Turn 6

At this point, if you've forced the German to declare the pause, the odds are reasonably good you'll survive to win the game. Make sure you hold on to Odessa, and keep the Crimea bottled at the isthmus. That should be five victory points you never lose.

The Germans will chop up the Dnepr bend, but make sure to garrison Dnepro-Petrovsk. Between that place and Kiev, the German infantry will be fully occupied. Reform the next line from Kharkov to Stalino and fight hard there, especially if the German mobile units advance without infantry support. Be aware the center may open between Orel and Kharkov, possibly leading to the loss of both. Stalino may also fall since it's a large town hex and can only stack five units. If so, reform your lines at Rostov and Voronezh; this must be your *ne plus ultra*.

Make sure to leave some reserves deep in your rear areas. An unexpected *coup de main* at either Voronezh or Rostov can be disastrous. The loss of Voronezh virtually clears the center, allowing the Germans to flank positions both north and south of it and press toward the many one point cities east of Moscow. If Rostov falls, the Germans can rapidly clear the eastern Ukrainian industrial area with its many victory points, and advance toward either Stalingrad or the Maikop oil field.

Watch for a march on Moscow along the dangerous Orel-Tula and Rzhev-Kalinin axes, especially if the game goes into October. The victory point count becomes so high at that point the German player almost has to take a stab at Moscow. By concentrating his armor and chancing a few weather die rolls, he might make it.

Finally, save a few low quality tried units. They can be formed into Guards and thrown into the critical fighting of late autumn, where that extra step often spells the difference between victory and defeat.

Speaking of weather, pray for rain and mud. Rain slows the Germans by one movement point while leaving you unaffected. One movement point doesn't sound like much, but it will significantly slow the enemy infantry, particularly the reduced divisions. It also helps against mobile assaults, especially with respect to panzers already down a step or more. As for mud, it's your best friend. With its coming the German advance will come to a grinding halt thanks to the doubled movement costs and, more importantly, the prohibition against mobile assaults. Mud also greatly slows the German infantry cleaning up the major cities in the rear like Kiev and Dnepro-Petrovsk. But don't get too comfortable with mud. The weather table can just as easily switch to dry, rain or frost on the following couplet, and you must continue to deploy properly to be ready to confront such changes.

Frost can be annoying. It negates rivers and turns marsh into clear terrain. That may cause problems in areas depending on those kinds of terrain for defense strength. On the other hand, the Soviet can take advantage of this as well, particularly south of Novgorod if the Germans aren't pressing on Leningrad. An offensive there can dislocate the German line on the Luga and threaten the northern flank of Army Group Center.

When the snows arrive, assault the German line along the entire front (assuming your opponent is willing to continue play). It's fairly easy to get 1:1 odds at this point, and thanks to the snow they become 2:1s. Given reasonable die rolls, 20 or more such attacks along the line will chew up the Germans. If they hedgehog, ignore those positions and work to annihilate those forces in the open. He should soon concede the game.

No Pause

If the German doesn't declare the pause the game can get ugly. Up north it won't be so bad, since you'll be behind the GAS line there anyway. After Smolensk falls, there's no point staying west of the GAS line up there, and while you may delay the Germans around Gomel, you won't stop them.

A reasonable withdrawal up north can see the Soviets build a solid line of five-unit stacks running from just west of Bryansk to the Valdai Hills. Most of this area contains forests, which (along with supply effects) makes mobile assaults here difficult for the Germans. A maximum column shift of four will bring most panzer corps to a halt, and you can expect two or

three column shifts, on average, with the forests.

The strip of clear terrain in front of the highway requires careful attention. Make sure to place roadblock units on the highway itself to prevent the Germans from waltzing into Moscow. The clear strip in front of Rzhev and Kaluga should contain either a second line, three to five units high, or several lines of single expendable units (brigades and cavalry divisions work well here) to absorb German thrusts.

If the German makes a major effort during the summer for Moscow, you'll have to fight it out hex by hex. You'll probably lose the Vyazma Line, and maybe even the Mozhaisk Line, before activation. On the other hand, the forests and supply problems will hurt the Germans considerably. Moscow itself, provided you keep it in supply, is an exceptionally difficult objective; it will be easier for the German to take nine points worth of objectives in the south — but without the possibility of a sudden death victory as with Moscow.

After skipping the pause, the German will probably look south. A southern concentration has several advantages for him: 1) The terrain there is mostly clear; 2) many victory point sites lie west of the GAS line; 3) given the likely course of events in the north, there will be a bulge along the Dnepr to Kiev and the marshes above just begging to be cut off; 4) even without a quick win, rapid seizure of the numerous military district cities in the south will cripple the Soviet economy, laying the foundation for a Soviet collapse in the late autumn; and 5) the German can win the game in late autumn if he seizes the Donbas, even assuming no progress at Leningrad, Moscow or the Crimea.

So what can you do? You'll lose Kiev; accept that fact. Leave 20 to 30 divisions in the environs of the city; try to keep it in supply as long as possible, retreating the rest of the units behind the GAS line as quickly as you can. That will at least force the German to leave a lot of infantry to deal with your stay-behinds.

The only place you should try to hold west of the GAS line is Dnepro-Petrovsk, and maybe Zaporozhe. Kherson can also be a good place to distract the German, given the strip of marsh running east of there. But Kherson, too, will fall. Just make sure to occupy the Crimean isthmus, making it difficult to clear for the German.

You must hold Dnepro-Petrovsk until at least turn 5. Afterward, you may abandon it if the Germans are butchering you there. But leave a 10 unit garrison, even if it's going to be immediately cut off. It may

take two or more couplets for the German to clear it. This applies to Kiev as well.

The next major line of defense runs through Kursk-Kharkov-Stalino. Kharkov and Stalino, as military district cities, are particularly important, and you should fight hard here. You'll have little terrain to help you, but the German will now have to deal with possible supply shortages. The increased capacity to take in reinforcements at Stalino and Kharkov aids your defense tremendously.

One of my favorite techniques involves abandoning the cities and all adjacent hexes during the second couplet and redeploying those units along the line where no reinforcement sites exist. During the initial phase of the following turn, Kharkov and Stalino can bring in new units into and adjacent to themselves, thereby completing a solid line. Another nice thing about the Stalino-Kharkov line is that you can anchor it on the Sea of Azov coast, which will nail down at least one flank to a good degree.

It will be difficult to form a back up line in the south given the length of territory you have to defend. The area around Kursk, in particular, can cause headaches thanks to the utter lack of terrain and reinforcement sites. Your best bet here may be to screen Voronezh so as to prevent any breakthroughs near Kursk from taking it in a *coup de main*. Voronezh should be far enough so the German can't both breakthrough near Kursk and overrun units adjacent to the city. You may also want to leave a substantial garrison in Voronezh, depending on what the German can get next to it. Just count hexes and place your units accordingly, always keeping aware of the mobile assault threat. Whatever happens, do not lose Voronezh. If you do, you've just put the German in the driver's seat and you may well lose the game.

Even with a double line from Kharkov to Stalino, you should consider placing deep reserves here as well. The hills behind Stalino and the Mius River help here by restricting the German's ability to maneuver. As with Voronezh, plan for the worst, count hexes, and either screen Rostov or place a substantial garrison in it. Losing Rostov is just as bad as losing Voronezh.

If you can prevent a *coup de main* to Rostov or Voronezh, you'll be safe until the mass of German infantry along the Dnepr catches up to the mobile forces. German mechanized units plunging deep into the Soviet rear area by themselves can be easily cut off and neutralized. By the time his infantry arrives, you should have

numbers and mud on your side. At some point before the mud comes, the German may grant you a breathing space by pulling his mobile units out of the line to refit (or he will forfeit his chance to do so). At the same time, his supply rolls should be adding up to quite a few extra losses for the *Wehrmacht* by late autumn, and his situation will only worsen with mud.

As the game lengthens, the German may begin to glance longingly toward Moscow. For your part, you must never become so fixed on one area that you ignore the rest. The German can redeploy most of his mobile forces to the central front in one frost or clear couplet. If he does so, react accordingly and welcome the chance to meet the enemy in front of Moscow. Between the supply problems, the terrain, the fortifications and weather, you stand an excellent chance of repulsing them. The most dangerous sector lies along the Orel-Tula axis. Try not to let the Germans get around you to cut off Moscow or take the many one point sites east of there. The German can't safely stretch his line without infantry, so don't be shy about hitting his grunt units there.

Conclusion

Proud Monster is a design Ty Bomba can be proud of. It doesn't possess the order of battle detail of, say, *Fire in the East*, and is certainly a less complex game. But this elegant design reveals the tension and dynamic of the Russian Front in a way no other comparable game has. Many games have attempted to present a detailed snapshot of this decisive campaign; *Proud Monster's* frankly impressionistic approach succeeds far more by eschewing such detail. Instead, it immerses players in a total gaming experience aimed at revealing the larger forces at work during Barbarossa. It contains the proper mix of supply, maneuver, political constraints, and attrition. I've played every major strategic level game of the eastern front, and *Proud Monster* beats them all as a simulation of the overall ebb and flow of Barbarossa. It's also a rip roaring game.

Suggested Soviet Initial Deployment

Northern Soviet Frontier Zone, 1st Echelon: 2006N-1603S, along the border: 39 RD, 3 RB, one per hex. 1703S, 1804S: 1 TD per hex. Lvov (1525S): 1 RD. You will lose virtually all these units. In the southern edge, the two TDs will be safe, and some of the nearby units in the Carpathians may survive as well.

Southern Soviet Frontier Zone, 1st Echelon: 1905S, 1907S, Kishinev (2019S): 1 TD per hex. 2009S, 2011S, 1912S, 1814S, 2104S: 1 CD per hex. You may want to substitute RDs for the CDs from the marshes north of the Stalin Line at 2028N (see below) and place the CDs in the marsh. The CDs will be vulnerable wherever they go, and their mobility may be better suited to the marshes. The TDs can maneuver north and strengthen the Soviet position in northern Bessarabia during the Soviet half of turn 1.

Soviet Frontier Zone, 2nd Echelon: 2222N-2225N: 1 RD per hex (may substitute CDs from Southern Soviet FZ). 2226N: 3 TD, 1 MRD, 1 RD. 2227N: 2 TD, 1 MRD, 1 RD. 2127N: 2 TD, 2 MRD, 1 RD. 2028N: 2 TD, 2 MRD, 1 RD. 1900S: 3 MRD, 1 TD, 1 RD. 1901S: 2 TD, 1 MRD, 1 RD. 2228N, 2100S, 2001S: 1 TD per hex. 1802S: 2 TD, 1 MRD, 1 RD. 1702S: 2 TD, 1 MRD, 1 RD. The hexes in range of German mobile assaults (2127N, 2028N and 1900S) will be tough thanks to the two to three MRDs and the Stalin Line bonus. They're also backstopped, just in case. The rest of this line can't be mobile assaulted, and much of it won't be disturbed by the German infantry, since those grunts will be busy cleaning up the screening force along the border. These mixed stacks all contain one RD to absorb minimal losses: there's nothing like trading an RD for a panzer step! Watch the eight-speed Jagers, cavalry, and mountain types: the German will try to end run you in the marshes, and you must screen for that with at least one unit along a four to six hex front north of the forests.

Interior Zone

Minsk Area: 2816N, 2716N-2718N: 1 RD per hex. Minsk (2817N): 1 MRD. This effectively screens Minsk: the forests and swamps prevent the Germans from getting around the screen to attack Minsk, and the units screening are just outside mobile assault range. The MRD can move back along the highway during the Soviet half of turn 1 along with any survivors. Leave one RD in Minsk to force the German to lose a step to take it.

Riga-Dvina Line: Riga (2705N): 1 MRD, 4 RD. 2806N-2811N: 1 RD per hex. This Riga garrison should deter all but the most aggressive German player on turn 1. The other units again lie outside of mobile assault range, and will limit

German crossings of the Dvina to 2806N-2807N. The survivors can fall back toward Leningrad, or, alternatively, move to cut off any German spearheads, depending on how the German handles his forces here. As with Minsk, leave on RD in Riga to force a step loss.

Within 11 Hexes of Kiev: 11 TD, 3 MRD, 12 RD. Some of these should be used to backstop the marsh line. The rest can move toward Galicia to join the units in and near the Stalin Line. Don't forget to garrison Krivoy-Rog and Gomel.

Within Five Hexes of Orsha: 12 TD, 6 MRD, 8 RD. These units can form a line from Mogilev to Vitebsk, joined by the MRD at Minsk on turn 1. If the German can mobile assault this line, backstop the highway. Don't leave Smolensk empty, either, if a mobile assault possibility exists; you'll need this place.

Within Four Hexes of Tallin: 4 RD. These RDs can either screen Tallin, move toward Leningrad, or go south to plug the small gap in the marsh line at 3505N. You should think of these units (along with the Riga/Dvina forces) as part of your Leningrad defense group. How you handle them will directly impact how strongly the German can threaten Leningrad.

3505N, 3709N: 1 RD per hex. You must keep these two forest hexes plugged up as long as possible in order to force the German to attack them or mire himself in the marsh. They will be difficult to mobile assault thanks to the nearby terrain. These should also be included in your thinking as part of Leningrad's defense.

Within Six Hexes of Leningrad: 8 RD, 1 CD. Keep most of these units near the Luga Line. The CD should be positioned to act as a speed bump somewhere near the marshes between 3505N and 3709N. The low numbers of units in this area is deceptive: the Soviet defense of Leningrad is echeloned in depth and begins all the

way out on the Dvina. Properly handled, these units can frustrate the Germans until turn 3, at which point you can man the Luga Line in strength with the help of reinforcements. The point is to keep the Germans away prior to turn 3.

Within 10 Hexes of Moscow: 1 MRD, 3 TD, 3 CD, 9 RB, 41 RD. The MRD and TDs should be placed as far west as possible to intervene near Smolensk. The RBs belong in the rear, with as many RDs as needed to fulfill garrison requirements. Split the remaining RDs north and south of Moscow (about two-thirds south), to march either toward Vitebsk, Smolensk or Bryansk. Since the forest doesn't slow them, there's no need to confine them to the highway. But try to avoid march paths that take you across rivers. The CDs should be placed near Kalinin, where they can move rapidly through the Valdai Hills (paying only one movement point per hex) toward Leningrad.

Remaining Forces: 4 RB, 24 RD, 1 MRD. These go in any cities and towns not falling within the deployment areas described above. The MRD belongs in Odessa. Don't forget to use sea movement to get RDs out of ports in the Caucasus and the Crimea, shipping them to Odessa. ☼

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