Simulation Reviews

This column is dedicated to the development of a tradition of reviewing games, not simply to the publication of a number of specific reviews. This phenomenon cannot spring forth in mature form by an editorial decision to have such a tradition; it must be nurtured carefully by many people. Patience and constructive criticism will be needed.

We must, for example, determine priorities to guide in the selection of games to be reviewed. We must distinguish between, and describe efficiently, different kinds of reviews: those written in retrospect by people who have played a game and perhaps supervised the game many times; those written as a result of involvement in a play specifically designed as a review session; those written by a person who has considerable experience in reviewing games in general but who has played the game under consideration only briefly; and so on. We must develop policies for publishing reader reaction to statements made in these pages.

Until a clear game review tradition is established, the process of reviewing games is very likely to be compared to the processes of reviewing literature, drama, or even music. Sometimes, such comparisons will be useful; sometimes they will be misleading. In many ways a game which involves a high degree of simulation is analogous to a piece of fiction. Both are abstractions intended by their creators to invoke some thoughts from those who would read or play them. But the analogy breaks down when one realizes that a given play of a simulation game is likely to involve more than one person and that the reactions of any one person may be as much a function of the behavior of the other players during that one play as it is a function of the rules and artifacts of the game.

Thus, one might argue that a game is more like a piece of drama than a piece of fiction in that different groups of people can perform the same work of art in vastly different ways. Drama critics obviously distinguish between the play, its direction, and the performance of particular actors. The play itself can be abstracted as a kind of vehicle which permits a group of people to

move through and interpret a particular set of ideas. The rules and roles of a game can, perhaps, be viewed in the same way. But there is an obvious difference between the performance of a play and the playing of a game. It is the difference between sitting in an audience and being a player. The games that we are concerned with are designed, in most cases, for the benefit of the players, not for the benefit of an audience watching the players. A reviewer of a game can readily be expected to have played the game; a drama reviewer is normally expected to sit in the audience. Little is known about what we may expect concerning the behavior of players as critics.

There is an altogether different approach to "reviewing" than the one suggested by the idea of a drama critic. Scholarly books are not typically reviewed by professional critics but by the author's peers. It may be very valuable to preserve this notion in dealing with the reviews of games, and it can even be argued that the concept of professional critics in this area should be carefully avoided. But who are the peers of a sociologist who has designed a game for high school students? Are they other sociologists in the designer's area of interest? Are they other sociologists who have designed games? Are they other game designers (whether they are sociologists or not)? Or are they educators of one type or another?

Putting aside questions of who should review games, what should a reviewer look for as he embarks on the review of a game? Is he to be concerned primarily with discussing the validity of a simulation? Are we to strive, in these pages, to relate participants' insights to designers' objectives? Can we expect to include comments on the economic value of a game, its "cost/ benefit" qualities?

The present editorial attitude (not yet formalized into "policy") is to be modest with respect to any one reviewer's efforts and ambitious with respect to the overall service rendered. A single review might cover one aspect of one play of a particular game, and do it from only one point of view. But additional comments covering other dimensions of the game will also be solicited. Given the limited resources and space available to the effort, this will mean slow progress at times and the need for all concerned to be fair-minded and constantly alert in order to avoid jumping to unwarranted conclusions.

Illustrations of some of the points just raised can be offered by making a few comments on a simple game which we have found to be quite powerful and provocative. Referred to locally as the "4-2-2-1" game, it is a bargaining game which has been used in various experiments by Loyda M. Shears and W. Edgar Vinacke. A description of work with the game appears in Dr. Shears' doctoral dissertation, and we have read about it in a technical report issued by Dr. Vinacke in his role as principal investigator for a government-sponsored

research project. We chose our use of the game for review in these few paragraphs because of its simplicity and because it illustrates so quickly so many of the problems under discussion.

Four players are assigned numbers, frequently by dealing each of them a playing card from a very thin "deck" consisting of only four cards, a four, two deuces, and an ace. The numbers can be written on slips of paper, represented by sticks of varying lengths, or recorded in any number of other ways. Since this part of the equipment for the game is so simple, it might be said that the only real requirement for the game is a one-minute egg timer.

Once each player has a number, the timer is turned over and the players have one minute to arrive at an agreement as to how they are willing to split twenty points. An agreement between the player with the four and the player with the one (ace) is a more powerful agreement than an agreement between the two players with the twos (deuces), for the cards held by the first pair equal five while the cards held by the latter equal four. Thus the person with the one might be offered five percent of the twenty points by the player with the four in order to enter an agreement with him. Placing the cards together can be a symbol for an agreement. If the one is then offered ten percent to join with the two twos (thus forming a coalition with the strength of five and overriding anything the four can do by himself), he can ask the four if he will offer him a better deal to stay with him. Players may make and break agreements at any time until the sand runs out. At that point, the most powerful agreement is the one that determines the distribution of the points. Players' scores are recorded, the cards are shuffled and redealt, and a new round is begun. Clearly, after the first round, past scores and past behavior become influential in determining who will bargain with whom and on what basis. The game can end in any number of ways depending on the purpose of the play.

This reviewer has played the game many times with many different kinds of people and has supervised its use on innumerable occasions. By coupling it with a game which involves principles of sampling, I have given it entirely different dimensions and can claim to be related to it, at least in part, in the sense of designer. While doing these things, I have been involved in playing, supervising, and designing several other games and also have been involved, as a professor of education, in teaching by many other techniques the people with whom I have been playing this bargaining game. Thus I can claim a variety of relationships to the game.

Its value lies in its ability to generate a rich set of human interactions in a very short time. Players claim to feel a sharpened sense of sympathy for people in positions of little power, but also to feel considerable ambivalence concerning the responsibilities of great power. The overwhelming importance of timing in matters of negotiations becomes conspicuous to all concerned.

The notion that the world looks very different depending on your relative position in it emerges. Concepts of equity, justice, and fair play develop as very open-ended, future-oriented values. Many people dislike the game intensely; many enjoy it and ask to play it again and again. No one should use it with people whom they suspect might have trouble handling difficult social situations unless the director is confident of his ability to cope with erratic responses on the parts of players. It tends to be a very powerful game and can lead to situations which involve antagonism, bitterness, withdrawal, and the like.

No claim is made, by this reviewer, for the game's validity in the sense that it models bargaining confrontations as in labor or national negotiations. The claim is made that it is a reliable way to generate discussions concerning the dynamics of interpersonal relations, discrepancies in power, concepts of justice, and communication skills. It is obviously inexpensive to operate; it is obviously flexible. After playing it a few times, a variety of adaptations and new applications frequently emerges.

Teachers, from the later elementary grades up to college, should give consideration to its use not only if they are concerned with the teaching of social studies, but also if, as teachers of English, they are looking for topics to be talked about or written about. It provides a simple way for running psychological experiments for the study of a variety of phenomena. It should be kept in mind by game designers as a useful device for providing certain dynamics which might otherwise be hard to generate.

Readers are now asked to help us determine whether this type of game, which represents such a simple simulation, should be included as an appropriate type of game for review in these pages. If not, why not? Are observations about the game too informal? If not, how formal need they be? How much more detail need be given about the game itself before its review can be of value to a reader? (If the answer is "considerably more," what are the implications for reviewing most simulation games, since this one is such as classic of simplicity?) Should one play have been described in detail and reviewed extensively? Should several players' views always be formally incorporated in a review, or is it adequate for one reviewer to summarize them, as in the statements made here? Need it be reviewed by a psychologist to be of value to psychologists or by a sociologist to be of value to sociologists? Does the fact that I have played, supervised, and had designer-like, ego-involving relationships with the game make me a more or less useful reviewer in the eyes of the public?

Our policies and standards will emerge from reactions to questions as simple as these.

—FREDERICK L. GOODMAN
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN