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Moshe Callen
(whac3)

1. Introduction

Time and again here on BGG I have encountered people smug [Risk](#) and how to play. The most obvious dead-giveaways that what they're talking about are the beliefs that the game is dor takes some horrendously long time to play. The fact is that **Ris** play with a natural victory condition which is well suited to the many people have a bad experience playing **Risk** is that they conventional wisdom of how to play, and that conventional wi: strategy article seeks to explain how the game should be play consistently win the game (and have fun)-- albeit no strategy ' completely. The discussion is about standard rules world conq variants are ignored.

The three elements of play in **Risk** are armies obtained for ter the combat mechanism and the cards. The topology of the bo: elements listed, the number of armies received for territories i combinations are governed by strict probabilities and are relat combat mechanism, i.e., the dice rolls, are not predictable for are very strictly governed by a Gaussian probability distributio dice rolled) and therefore predictable in the aggregate. In othe elements of the game, strategy can and will dominate play if p doing.

Some will admit the above, but then object that **Risk** takes too I've been playing for about thirty years and have certainly pla into the thousands. My consistent experience time and again i 6 player game will typically take 5 or 6 rounds. Games with fe correspondingly more rounds.

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2. The basic ideas

Risk is about ruthlessly crushing one's opponents. If one want might try [The Settlers of Catan](#). If playing with a child (or other eliminated), **Risk** is definitely *not* the game to play.

Generally speaking, attackers have the advantage. True, on an equal advantage favors the defender, but of course the attacker gets the advantage when the attack occurs and so again the advantage will go to the attacker.

Hoarding armies for a future attack will often work with inexperienced players. This point is one of the bits of conventional wisdom. People think taking one territory per turn against otherwise piling armies onto one's territories is a sure-fire win. In reality, against competent opponents, it's a sure-fire losing strategy. It's better to use your armies to take territory now than to wait for a future attack.

At the heart of **Risk** is an arms race. In the end, the person with the most armies and uses them most effectively will win. Therefore the winner (if the players are equal) is whichever player is in the lead, *unless* attacking someone's armies. These additional armies may be from taking an entire territory or from taking the player entirely and thereby taking his **Risk** cards. If no player has more armies than any other (at least among one's opponents) and no player can take a bite out of another player's continent, then one should go for the player with the most armies. If one can take a bite out of another player's continent, one should go for that player. If one has no intention of holding the territory involved, one should go for the player with the most armies.

3. Start of the game

When I was a kid, we did what was then the standard out of the box by placing one army on a territory in turns until all territories were populated. The rules talk about in how to play will naturally extend into the choice of which territory to place the army on.

Later versions of **Risk** used as standard what some of the earlier versions used as an optional "quick set-up". Namely, one temporarily removes all armies and shares out the territory cards as evenly as possible among all territories on the board. The territories are randomly distributed among the players. This makes for a better game in many ways and has become standard. It is assumed that this type of set-up is in use hereafter.

When distributing one's armies, one needs to bear in mind two things. First, to complete continents, all territories are of equal value when controlled. Second, territories which are adjacent or very nearly adjacent (especially those that can form the nucleus of a strategically powerful base from which to attack) are more valuable. If one is in a starting position where a territory cannot immediately be attacked (e.g. Madagascar if one also controls South Africa and East Africa) one should place armies on that country but use them to fortify the buffer territories (e.g. Africa in the example). Armies should then be divided as evenly as possible among territories that can immediately be attacked. If one then has a territory that cannot get an equal amount, the priority should go to that territory or else nearly so.

4. Weighing the odds

A number of otherwise well educated people dismiss **Risk** as a game because its core combat mechanism relies on dice rolls. Since no given roll can be predicted, they argue, one has no control over the outcomes in the game. This is a flaw in the logic here is that while each roll is supposedly random, the player can control the outcomes by choosing which territories to attack and which to defend.

Love Letter

Praetor

with even probability (i.e., in a fair die no one number is no lik a comparison of dice. Any comparison or combination of dice i [Gaussian distribution](#). Rolling equal numbers of dice, the defer because ties go to the defender, *but* the attacker can roll more very slight advantage to the attacker. The shift is small but en on the overall statistics. Roughly what this means is that if one of times for an attacker using three dice versus a defender usi two and one), a good approximation is that the attacker would the time and the defender slightly less than half. The variance rolls more times according to thee square root of the number i a fine detailed analysis of the probabilities nor is this discussic gives one a good enough approximation to inform strategic pl

What all this means in practice is that as a rule of thumb, if on territory, one should if possible begin with at least twice the n attacked (preferably more) *if* the number of armies involved is decided by only a few rolls of the dice, the statistics don't mea but the more rolls involved, the less influence fluke rolls will ha

A corollary of the statistics is that the more often one attacks i involved in the process, the more control one has over the gar distributes his armies over the territories he has and attacks o turn throughout the game, then **Risk will** become largely luck-claims this is a strategy for winning the game. On the contrary recipe for abrogating one's control of the outcome in the game know how to use the key mechanic of the game will time and i attack a territory or two a turn throughout the game. Often thi derided as merely aggressive play and assumed to lose more needs to bear in mind that the strategy also involves when an play does not mean one ignores defensive play; used properly play.

5. Where and when to attack

Especially in the early part of the game, armies are in limited i what armies one has as effectively as possible. The key eleme borders. Building up armies on territories that cannot be attac cannot therefore attack either) is largely a waste. The benefits advance but one cannot stop an advance which takes the nur all armies in territories that cannot attack are just that fewer a objective of the game-- conquering the board. In the same wa territories one has, the more powerful those territories can be armies.

This aspect of the game lies at the core of the legend of the su taking control of Australia and using it as a base to build out fr attacked from outside Australia, and one can only make such i could pile all of one's available armies onto Indonesia or bette controlled behind it by one army a territory. Such a position is invincible it's not.

The Australia legend however raises two important points geri attack. Namely, continental bonuses should not be ignored. Th may be small in absolute terms, but relative to the number of number is usually significant. That means one should always t likewise one should always deny a continent to another player point raised. A player gets armies for territories controlled at t takes Ukraine from a player who had control of Europe, that la armies for Europe that turn-- even if he takes Ukraine back im

building up a strong position, one absolutely should attack it-- cannot take the territory involved, one should attack anyway to advantage; one will destroy more armies that will otherwise be attacker in a losing contest than as the defender on the opposite play. Ideally one takes the territory one would be attacked from eliminates the ability to attack from the given territory or at least Opponents should not be allowed to build up powerful positions drive specially to do so and even if one does not keep all the territory brings up another point as well, one should not be afraid to lose conquers more territories than one loses, one is advancing towards

What this all means is that when choosing one's target for attack reducing opponents' ability to attack one's own territory, then creating a buffer zone of territories about a continent one has borders. These considerations need not be mutually exclusive terms of a single territory to attack but a series of them when

When one should attack is generally whenever possible, but one string of attacks which allows one (after fortification) to leave with a number of armies comparable to those armies from which attacked. When more than one territory can attack, leaving them comparable to the total of all territories it could be attacked from means one chooses not to attack one of those regions. The more armies one gets and the less one's opponents will correspondingly

6. Distributing armies

When placing armies, one should place armies for the attacks turn, whether the armies are from territories held and continents **Risk** cards. Whenever possible one should before attacking figure a non-branching path of territories to attack one after another. For Brazil and wants to take all of South America, one should attack then Venezuela with armies starting in Brazil rather than attacking dividing the armies between an attack into Argentina and one must move as many armies as one rolled dice in the last attack. Attacking Argentina first, in the example, is generally superior because Argentina dead-ends and so stops any advance. (Forcing armies in this manner is a great defensive tactic because it forces effectively waste armies.)

When figuring out if one has enough armies for a series of attacks twice as many armies as the armies occupying the territories plus an additional army for each territory one will have to occupy in the better.

One should remember as well that the number of **Risk** cards a player has information, although what cards they have specifically is not. If a player and thereby acquires a total of six or more **Risk** cards immediately-- even in the middle of a turn. So eliminating a player to fuel an additional series of attacks is a great tactic whenever possible. choice between eliminating various opponents on a turn, if possible will give one a total of six **Risk** cards or if that's not possible will be one the most **Risk** cards.

7. Risk cards

A number of people complain because **Risk** cards increase in value but the increasing value of sets of **Risk** cards is an essential feature both as a leveling mechanism to mitigate the advantage the late

force players to play for the win. The cards fuel an escalation that result a situation where each player must either eliminate others or be eliminated himself.

So a natural question arises whether one should hold onto **Risk** cards so that when one turns cards in the set will be worth more. This is because armies are *the* limiting factor in how much one conquers on a given turn, the more armies one gets *and* the more cards one will get. Moreover holding onto **Risk** cards makes one a valuable

One should also not forget that if one controls the territory on hands in, one will get two additional armies on that territory-- where one has a choice one should choose the cards in a set that on a territory, again if possible. If one has more than one territory choose the territory most useful for attack actually or at least to place the extra armies. Of course if one can do so when one territory shown on one's **Risk** cards, one should hold onto one territory for the next set.

8. Conclusion

In general, the more armies one gets *now* the better. The more the more control one has over what happens in the game. One mean that one should make pointless or wasteful attacks that position. If the attacks have a likelihood of success or are worth should make the attacks-- otherwise not. Preemptive attacks, the territory being attacked, are the heart of defense in this game numbers of dice should be avoided. Whether as attacker or defender the most dice possible.

When taking continents, having a buffer zone about that continent one can do it. The rule to remember is that one should attack units as the defending armies, plus one army for each territory the case is borderline, one should usually **Risk** the attack but armies one has becomes comparable to the number of defenders.

Players get armies for territories held at the start of a turn and cannot hold but which deny an opponent armies is always advantageous in fact manage to hold the territory, so much the better. To this attackable borders should be minimized. Armies on those borders When at the end of a turn moving reinforcements, one should from which one most wishes to attack next turn.

If an opponent has done so with a large amount of armies, one *especially* if one is massively outnumbered. In such cases, one roll three dice unless one has reduced the opponent to a single

If all players play in the manner described, then borders will be has to do to win is have one's losses on the whole outweighed

22

2.07

[Quick](#)

Moshe Callen
(whac3)



This post by
Jared
(Twinge)



<p> </p>	<p>is interesting as a side-note. It lists the actual probabilities o</p>
	<p>Quick</p>
<p>(markgravitygood)</p> <p>YOUR AD HERE!</p> <p> </p>	<p>Nice assessment.</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Quick</p>
<p>Richard Gagnon (rgagnon)</p>	<p>I haven't played Risk with 5 or 6 players, but would expect tha a smaller number of players. With more players, it is easier to and get cards that produce more armies to have an early adv</p> <p>My primary experience with Risk was playing against my brot Those games devolved to the turning in of cards and having b with the cards providing each player 25, 30, and more armies. would beat the other back to a few armies only to have the op doing the same in reverse. That stopped the game from being</p>
	<p>Quick</p>
<p>Randy (big_buddha)</p>	<p>I have found that the best way to attack my opponents is to g Meanwhile, I nibble away at the fringes for as long as I can rer attacker has the advantage, yes, but the attacker still usually taking territories that your foes won't even try to take back. TI massive troop levels; as you note, that's a losing strategy. But each of your frontier territories, that will help discourage attac they have been wearing each other down, will be looking for a don't feel like they can take a strategic one. This works if your territories you hold as strategic for themselves.</p> <p>I am actually a fan of leaving troops behind your front lines, as reinforcements are being used. This can make your troop leve your opponents tend to worry about only what you have amas when the time is right you can, for example, conquer all of Au: choke points of Kamchatka, Ukraine and the Middle East all we those stragglers to the front.</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Quick</p>
<p>Eggy Toast</p>	

(EggyToast)

rgagnon wrote:

I haven't played Risk with 5 or 6 players, but would expect that a smaller number of players. With more players, it is easier to eliminate cards that produce more armies to have an early advantage over

My primary experience with Risk was playing against my brother. Those games devolved to the turning in of cards and having back the cards providing each player 25, 30, and more armies. On the other back to a few armies only to have the opponent turning reverse. That stopped the game from being fun or remotely realistic.

I think that's true for most people's experiences. The defense there's a right way to play it, which is counter to how everyone mechanic that a defender always wins on a tie encourages people if the odds are ultimately in the attacker's favor assuming the new or newish player who attempts to play aggressively and quickly assume that playing offensively isn't the right choice, a mechanic.

The card thing is the other element that's usually overlooked. based on playing aggressively, uses the cards to amass a gear through everyone still on the board. Whether you acquire the waiting, the end condition is the same. If you remove the card the game to something that is more purely strategy, but also significantly!

1[Quick](#)Nicholas Retallack
([nickretallack](#))

I still have some questions about strategy. Help me apply this

Lets say we have a game where one player has taken Australia and another has taken South America. All three are low-yield territories that people are likely to take near the beginning of the game. on their borders.


The player on Africa is at a disadvantage because they are sandwiched between two powerful players. If they attack one of their neighbors, the other will be Also, they have to defend more territories than the other player continent. What should they do? Expand into Europe? Attempt hope the other neighbor doesn't swoop in? What should you do are stuck in between two powerful players?

Assuming two players have equally-sized armies on bordering to attempt to chip away at each other, even if you don't intend

If you do end up busting in to another player's continent bonus place on that territory, knowing that it's likely the player will re you leave just one troop to minimize your losses, three troops have an ok probability of hurting them when they attempt to take risk major losses and possibly lose your own continent bonus

What should you do if you are losing? Say for example you only have enough troops to discourage other players from attacking stockpile troops in this situation? Is it advantageous to attempt order to get a card, or is this only going to hurt you? Is it better


	<p>per turn and stay as invisible as possible?</p> <p>How do you handle suicidal maniacs? Nearly every time I have gone on a rampage across the map just to mess up another pl army to single-troop territories that tend to get eliminated bef players often play kingmaker by weakening a strategic player continent bonuses so others can swoop in and hurt them more eliminating this weakened player for their cards, even if it mea changing their swath of one-mans into one mans of your own up for cards?</p>
	<p>Quick</p>


<p>Moshe Callen (whac3)</p>  <p> </p>	<p>Personally I'd probably attack South America. The player with Usually what I do though is build a buffer zone. don't just take East, Southern and Western Europe-- i.e. anything bordering A continent, you just need take one country of it to deny the arm</p>
	<p>Quick</p>


<p>Roger Hobden (Mallet)</p> <p> </p>	<p>NOT playing Risk makes you a winner every time. 😄</p>
	<p>Quick</p>

<p>Moshe Callen (whac3)</p>  <p> </p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>Mallet wrote:</p> <p>NOT playing Risk makes you a winner every time. 😄</p> </div> <p>Please kindly take the anti-Risk comments elsewhere. This is the game.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Quick</p>

<p>William Bowers</p>	
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<p>(faustus)</p>  <p> </p>	<p>Nice article, but it seems to ignore the diplomacy side of the game to mitigate their betrayal. How to successfully manage multinational the difficult parts of the game.</p>
	<p>Quick</p>

<p>Moshe Callen (whac3)</p>  <p> </p>	<p>faustus wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>Nice article, but it seems to ignore the diplomacy side of the game to mitigate their betrayal. How to successfully manage multinational the difficult parts of the game.</p> <hr/> <p>Yes, I downplayed that aspect of the game, partly because the game grew up with and am still used to discourage out of game agreements expressly allow them. Frankly it's viewed as a mild form of cheating by no means universal.</p>
	<p>Quick</p>

<p>William Bowers (faustus)</p>  <p> </p>	<p>whac3 wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>faustus wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>Nice article, but it seems to ignore the diplomacy side of the game to mitigate their betrayal. How to successfully manage multinational the difficult parts of the game.</p> <hr/> <p>Yes, I downplayed that aspect of the game, partly because the game grew up with and am still used to discourage out of game agreements expressly allow them. Frankly it's viewed as a mild form of cheating, although not universal.</p> <p>I have a friend of a similar mindset. Tried to play with a group that mostly plays online now which is kinda sad because he is good.</p>
<p>1</p>	<p>Quick</p>

<p>Not Available (Gallumph)</p>	<p>whac3 wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>1. Introduction</p> <p>If all players play in the manner described, then borders will ebb and flow. The key to do to win is have one's losses on the whole outweighed by one's gains.</p>
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	If all players are attempting to have their losses outweighed by the gains you describe, the only factor that will determine a winner are dice rolls.
	Quick

<p>Moshe Callen (whac3)</p> <p>GAME DESIGNER</p>  <p> </p>	<p>Gallumph wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>whac3 wrote:</p> <hr/> <p>1. Introduction If all players play in the manner described, then borders will be lost. One has to do to win is have one's losses on the whole outweigh the gains.</p> <hr/> <p>If all players are attempting to have their losses outweighed by the gains you describe, the only factor that will determine a winner are dice rolls.</p> <hr/> <p>No, the use of dice does not imply luck is the dominant factor. It's a normal distribution-- in this case Gaussian-- doesn't work that way. If it doesn't describe anything, but it does extremely well.</p>
	Quick