

Advance Wars
Dual Strike
For Dummies

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Introduction

So you've beaten the campaign on normal and hard mode, cleared War Room and Survival, and bought everything from Battle Maps. All that's left now is to go out and show your fellow players how much of a boss you are at this game. But wait, something's wrong! They're using totally different tactics from what you've been encouraged to use. They don't make AI mistakes that you've come to rely on. To sum things up, you're getting your ass kicked and don't really understand why.

Chances are good that this is why you've downloaded this guide. You're hoping I can give you the secret to victory, tell you why your brilliant strategies aren't so brilliant after all, and what you can do to fix this. Truth be told, I can definitely *tell* you all of this. What I can't do is instantly make you good at applying this knowledge: That's your job. You could do it the hard way and figure it all out yourself, of course. All I'm really doing is saving you lots of time in research.

Think of this guide as pointing you in the right direction. After reading it, pay attention the next time you get your ass kicked. This time you'll be able to see exactly what tactics your opponent is applying to the game, and you'll have an idea of what you should actually be doing. And who knows? Maybe you'll get so good at it that you'll run across something the rest of us missed. Highly doubtful, but not beyond the realm of possibility. AWDS has not been around for half of forever like Chess, after all.

Please note that I will often take a condescending tone throughout this guide. That's mostly to entertain the gaming veterans; you know, the guys who you keep losing to. So bear with it and eventually you'll be laughing as well.

Chapter 1: The Basics

There is nothing basic about this game at the competitive level. You either open right and possibly win, or open wrong and definitely lose. That being said, I probably *should* explain a few things. The competitive “basics” will probably blow your mind if you're used to the AI. Or perhaps not. I don't know you, and I don't know what sort of background you're coming from. Humor me.

Resources

Note the plural. No, funds are not the only one. They follow as such:

- Income
- Unit Count
- Production
- Power Meter

Income is pretty self-explanatory. You capture stuff, it gives you money. The more stuff you capture, the more money you have. You generally want to prioritize capturing enemy structures, since that nets you more income while robbing your opponent of their own. But you've played the game and presumably know this.

Unit count is also self-explanatory or so I would hope. The more guys you have, the more moves you can make. This is where War Room folks will have the most trouble at first: You want to tech up as fast as possible, which often leads to a lower unit count. Strangely enough, you tend to lose competitively. Would you like to know why? In competition, extra units also means extra stuff your opponent has to blow through. Sometimes that's even the whole point. “The Hell,” you say. But as scores are not a concern, why not have extra dudes to sacrifice if necessary? The correct answer is, “If you're harder to kill you're harder to beat.”

Production is, quite simply, the number of units you can produce each turn. You *usually* don't want to tech up to more powerful units sooner than your ability to fill your bases can cope with. “But tech is a game wi-” I thought I told you to sit down and listen.

Lastly there's your CO's power meter. Time your CO Powers to be used at the beginning of your turn, right? Use them the first time that's possible, right? How about, no? Use them when you can do something useful with them. And if you can't manage that, don't use it. And for God's sake, don't get caught in a vulnerable position right after using one. You don't charge your bar when you use them, which puts you at a disadvantage. Of course, if your opponent makes that mistake, then by all means “educate” him.

The Opener

The earliest portion of a game is often called the Capture Phase. Except on a very

small map there is no combat at this point, and your sole focus is on capturing property. A map may be small enough for your Infantry to just walk to the good ones, otherwise use transports. Your transport fleet should consist of T-Copters whenever possible as they are inexpensive, don't tie up your bases, and have by far the best mobility.

So, first target is... whatever's closest right? That's idiot mistake number one. The first thing you always, *always* go for is the bases. Remember what I said earlier about production? That leads to unit count, and *that* leads to good stuff. You can recoup funding from skipped cities later. But please be smart about this: bases can be very strung out, especially on larger maps. By all means shoot forward to get them, but don't take more than you can easily hold!

Judging whether or not you can hold a base early on depends on a few factors. First, you need a few turns to deploy some more Infantry. Infantry are 75% of your army, or at least they should be, and they are very effective at sealing your control of a base. If all else fails, you can barricade it with them. After that, you need time to get a couple of Recons out. Recons are the earliest vehicle you can build and will be the backbone of your force until you can afford Tanks.

The Big Battle

The mid-game begins when your forces begin to clash with the enemy. The entire map hasn't been captured quite yet, but the two sides are mostly even in strength. Often this first clash will be over central properties: buildings that aren't really in either player's "zone," and would likely have overextended their forces had they tried going for them earlier. He who captures the center will usually have a downhill game from there.

This is the stage of the game when CO Powers start to be used. The nature of the vast majority of CO Powers will encourage you to mainly focus on units like Tanks and B-Copters. In fact you probably will not see Artillery very often at all. Their main use is to attempt to seal off a section of the battlefield while you shift your focus somewhere else. That requires that you already hold an advantage in that area, though, and you will have to continue pouring units into that front. While Rockets can support an offensive, Artillery can really only be used for defense. So not only are most CO Powers geared toward Direct-attack units, henceforth "Directs," it's smarter to focus on them anyway and press your advantage. Remember, you can only make so many units per turn, and must make the best investment possible.

The Slippery Slope

In any battle for the center there will eventually be one event that suddenly breaks the back of one player's force. This forces him down what we call the slippery slope, and it is nearly impossible to recover from. This is often the most frustrating part of the game, though, as your opponent will do everything in his power to try and recover. Expect to see Mechs being produced en masse. Mechs are very strong for their cost and can be very hard to cut your way through. What's worse, if that CO actually boosts Mechs some way or another then they actually have a decent chance of throwing you

back. *Do not let that happen.* The only thing harder to recover from than slippery slope is slippery slope induced by a recovery, because that recovery force doesn't just go away.

CO Powers

This is a very broad subject, but I'll take a crack at it anyway. Your CO Powers are a unique tool for you to use to break the ice and gain an advantage. Your management and use thereof are at least as important as the nature of the powers themselves, so pay attention.

As was stated earlier, your actual use of CO Powers shouldn't follow any rules of when they “should” be used. The idea that CO Powers should only be used at the beginning of the turn is a concept invented by scrubs. (See a certain Mr. David Sirlin for more on those folks.) CO Powers should be used when you can gain some advantage from them, plain and simple. If that means you need to hold off on using them, so be it. If it means you have one unit left to move that could knock out a particularly stubborn unit if it just had that firepower boost, then knock that unit out. If it nets you an advantage, it doesn't matter if you leave the scrubs screaming “n00b” and “cheap” at the top of their lungs. They're scrubs. They don't matter.

Now where were we? Ah, yes. A regular CO Power will often be abbreviated as “COP,” while its superior will be similarly abbreviated “SCOP.” Certain parties will tell you that most COs' COPs are useless when a SCOP could be just around the corner. Take this with a grain of salt. Technically they are correct: Because of how fast they charge, SCOPs do tend to eclipse COPs. Be that as it may, COPs still fire off a lot more often. If you're playing a CO like Max or Grimm whose COP and SCOP give them +60% and +90% total firepower respectively, the differences aren't worth agonizing over. You're getting massive firepower either way. Use SCOP if you have it, certainly, but don't take this to mean that spamming COP isn't an option. Anything that will give you an advantage is a perfectly valid option.

And That's It

That's the gist of it. Get a Tank-Copter-Anti-air triangle going, manage your CO Powers, and avoid that slippery slope. Simple, yes? Stick around, son, we haven't even hit the good stuff yet.

Chapter 2: Commanding Officer 101

Okay, you know how to play the game now. What, do you think you're ready to compete? You go out there now you're still gonna get your ass kicked. Sit down.

There is a power flow to this game. Some COs can be grouped, being more-or-less equal within that group. Others are outliers relying on concepts they don't really share with others. The following list should be read from top to bottom in terms of strength. COs within the same group can be assumed to be roughly similar in power.

Whole Different Ballgame

Hachi, Sensei, Colin, Kanbei, Sami

Over-Competitive

Eagle, Mass Damage (Kindle, Rachel, Von Bolt, Olaf, Hawke, Drake)

Competitive

Sonja, Sasha, Directs (Jess, Max, Grimm), Movement (Andy, Koal, Adder)

Under-Competitive

Luck (Nell, Jugger, Flak), Terrain (Jake, Lash)

Uncompetitive

Javier, Grit

If you can see a power structure in this, good for you. If not, I'm going to spend awhile explaining, so don't fret about it too much.

The easiest way to explain this list is to use the competitive tier as our baseline and proceed up and down from there. Their game theory has a direct impact on, er, Directs, which you'll recall should be your main units anyway. As we spend a chapter analyzing each tier, we will also get in-depth as to the exact strategies each CO should ideally be playing.

Chapter 3: The Competitive COs

This is our baseline tier, the one that most focuses on using and countering the mainstay units of Advance Wars Dual Strike: the >10k cost Directs. We'll look at each group, and then discuss the COs in more detail.

Movement

The common thread of Andy, Koal, and Adder is, well, *movement*. Their CO powers grant a mobility boost to every unit in the game. This is huge, and the reason should be obvious: faster reinforcements, better ability to break through lines and hit important units. In short, you get a better concentration of firepower.

Adder's main advantage is a two star COP which he can spam with extreme prejudice. The extra movement point can be helpful in overcoming terrain, and getting it as often as he does makes the unit triangle of Tank-Copter-Anti-air very favorable for him since he can more easily chase down the unit he needs to kill with the unit that can make the kill. An Adder player must be aware that Adder does not gain firepower or defense to speak of *ever*, and he has a more difficult time breaking choke points than other COs. As such, the best use of his powers is to try and keep choke points from getting clogged in the first place, best accomplished through the liberal use of Copters.

Koal's main advantage is the road boost he gets during his SCOP. It lets him use roads as a sort of super highway and eliminate anything standing in his path. While his boost is situational and only totals up to a "mere" +40% firepower, a lot of choke points sit on roads, and his boost is usually sufficient to blow units on the road out of the way. The biggest advantage is movement, of course. While he doesn't quite have Adder's spamming capacity, his ability to combine firepower with universal movement more than makes up for this. Once Koal gets off the roads, though, he becomes Adder with a more expensive COP. Bear that in mind when planning your strategy, and try to force your opponent onto the roads if possible. This isn't to say Koal can't pull the Adder strategy, but you're wasting his abilities if you pursue that line.

Andy's main advantage is the massive free healing he provides. Despite having a longer power bar and a smaller movement boost, Andy is capable of bringing units back from the brink of death. He also gives a firepower boost that, while not as strong as Koal's, is not terrain-dependent. Should it become necessary, Andy can fire off his SCOP at the end of his turn; not its most efficient use, but recall my words back in chapter 1. Andy's resilience thanks to this healing ability means that he can mostly recover from a large attack and bounce back with one of his own. An effective Andy player will take advantage of this to make riskier moves, since his margin for recovery is obviously much higher than other COs.

Directs

What Jess, Max, and Grimm have in common is that they all grant significant firepower boosts to Directs. Much like the movement COs, the benefits of this should be obvious: fewer units are needed to bust through enemy lines. This is referring to CO Powers, of course, but their daily abilities don't hurt either.

Jess boosts the fewest units out of the three and doesn't get as much firepower during her CO Powers. She makes up for this by granting additional movement to her vehicles. This lets Jess basically be a better Koal as far as vehicles are concerned, using her extra movement on powers to bring her extra firepower to the fore. When playing as Jess, the easiest rookie mistake you can make is to neglect air units. A weak airforce is better than no airforce: do *not* neglect it. Generally speaking you will want to focus on SCOP to get the most bang for your buck on the land front. Focus on a Tank and Recon build mainly, and use your Copters to attack enemy Copters. If you can avoid having to waste production slots on Antiairs, you should be able to dominate the land front in short order.

Max succeeds where Jess fails at powering up all Directs, including air units. While he doesn't power up Indirects and nerfs their range a bit, recall earlier to what I said about them: Indirects really don't matter much. If you play your cards right as Max, you won't ever need them in any case. Max hits air units with both powers and can quite happily use them to help his land front push forward. Did I mention the firepower? Max's COP is almost as good as Jess' SCOP in that department and fires off a lot more often. Of course when you need some real back-breaking power SCOP is a better way to go. However you decide to roll with Max, just remember to use Tanks and Copters with impunity. Keep hitting that SCOP button when it comes up and you have an opportunity, and as always don't be afraid to downgrade to COP when you can gain an advantage.

Grimm is very unique in that he is the only CO in the game to have a defense weakness; -20% to be exact. Now, understand that AWDS math is a little bit funky and that offense and defense are not calculated the same way. -20% defense will see a CO like Andy getting +20% offense... but someone like Max will actually deal +24% on top of his daily boost. So Grimm's defense gets exponentially weaker as he faces opponents with higher firepower. As such you may be asking yourself, "Why use him?" Well for one thing, Grimm's CO Powers pump up his offense just as well as Max. The key difference between him and the other two is that he powers up *soldiers*. You know, those guys that make up about 75% of your army? That's 75% more units getting some extra *oomph* to them.

It doesn't hurt that they have some pretty decent daily firepower to begin with. It pays to spam COP with Grimm just because he powers up every single unit like this. With the defensive weakness he has, you may find that spamming COP is, shall we say, somewhat easier than it is for other COs. Of course, spamming COP means your

opponent will charge up quicker as well. The idea is to kill enough units so that *their* powers can't do as much.

Sasha

Sasha is, suffice it to say, a very *interesting* CO to play as. Her daily ability is just to gain an extra \$100 from each property. Not a big deal, right? Well let's analyze this for a second. On a standard start of 1HQ 2Base, she'll spend at least three turns building pretty much the same way as any other CO. But even on this minimal start, once she captures some properties her advantage begins to snowball. Eventually you may find that you have an extra \$1k here, an extra there, and suddenly you've taken a bit of a tech lead. Where your opponent is still building a Tank and a Recon, you're building two Tanks. It continues to snowball, and you'll find that as long as you maximize production unit count really isn't hard to maintain.

The real trick with Sasha is her COP, though. At two stars it can fire off pretty frequently, best used after you attack but before you build anything. As you follow this pattern and continue to snowball your funding advantage, pretty soon you may find that your opponent's attempt to bank on SCOP is being delayed by two or three turns. If he anticipated this he's probably spamming COP instead, but even that gets delayed by at least a turn. All this time, Sasha quietly snowballs a funding advantage, with each additional property making the snowball roll just a little faster. The additional income makes her COP even more powerful, and pretty soon SCOP is just a distant dream for your opponent.

Long story made short, Sasha can tech up her force faster, maintain a better unit count, and makes it exponentially harder for her opponent to fire off their CO Powers. This culminates in a slow strangulation strategy in which Sasha denies the opponent much of their ability to power up their units while she circumvents her lack of firepower with better technology. Done right, it is an absolutely brutal strategy.

Your own foray with Sasha is best done on a map with very generous starting resources. A personal favorite of mine comes from the Design Maps website, called [**The Coast**](#). Remember this map, because I'll refer back to it often.

Sonja

Sonja is not as interesting as Sasha, but she does have a very distinct strategy regardless. Her primary ability is to reduce the terrain defense that other COs gain. On a daily basis this is one star, two on COP, and three on SCOP. In some ways this is better than a firepower boost. Remember the little talk about negative defense we had about Grimm? It works in the reverse with positive defense, getting exponentially stronger against higher firepower. So if you actually remove defense like Sonja does, you bypass this problem entirely. Of course, Sonja really doesn't get much in the way of firepower herself, but if you're playing a 3 or 4 player game you'll notice that the terrain effect sticks to the other COs when they fight each other. In a team game, it will not affect Sonja's allies.

Now that's all fine and good, but if this and her Fog of War boosts were the end of Sonja's abilities we'd need to kick her downstairs with Lash and company. What makes Sonja competitive is ability number three, which kicks in when she fires off her 5 star SCOP. Counter Break makes her counterattacks act as if she gets the first shot off when her opponent attacks. That is, if an enemy bomber attacks one of Sonja's Antiairs, the Antiair still gets the first shot. The battle animations don't show this, but you will see it in the damage. It's possible to confuse this for high defense until you notice that attacking Indirects still results in them getting pummeled; the same goes for using Indirects.

The obvious advantage of this is that you can activate this power the instant you get it. You may not necessarily want or need to, but the option is there. This is because the effect is not noticeable until your opponent's turn, so when you activate it on yours doesn't matter. Now generally speaking, your opponent is not going to be stupid enough to attack any matchups that won't end well like Tank vs Tank. On the other hand, do try and be smart with your unit placement, because your opponent is not going to shy away from Tank vs Recon or Tank vs Antiair even if it results in a bit of damage. The important thing is that this will give her a positioning advantage similar to the movement COs, because as I mentioned certain units are off-limits for the opponent to attack. You could use this in a similar way to Sasha to forestall an enemy CO Power usage, but in all reality it will suit any defensive purposes.

The last thing I need to mention about Sonja is her luck weakness. In addition to the normal +10 luck any CO can roll up to, Sonja can also roll as low as -5. This means that if something that would normally deal a one-hit-kill, or OHK, is dealing any less than 105% damage, Sonja's unit may not be able to make the kill. For example, a Fighter attacking a Bomber deals 100% damage without modifiers. Sonja's luck means that it might leave the Bomber at 9HP. On the other hand, an Antiair deals 105% damage to Infantry on roads; therefore, even if Sonja rolls the maximum -5 luck the kill will always be made. Make sure you pay close attention to the enemy's HP and the damage you are about to deal, and keep that possible -5 luck in mind as you do so.

Conclusion

Hopefully it is now clear to you exactly what makes a CO competitive in this game. COs whose CO Powers give a strong focus to Directs in some way, shape, or form are best equipped to compete in a game centered on these units. Some depend on their CO Powers to augment their day-to-day positioning, while others do the complete opposite. Either way, the point is that they have the same unit focus, and as such have similar priorities even if the exact strategy is different.

Chapter 4: Less Than Competitive COs

So we've covered the competitive COs and what makes them competitive. Below them are two tiers of COs that are, shall we say, not so competitive. The under-competitive COs *do* boost Directs, but they do not focus on them like the competitive COs do. Then there are the uncompetitive COs, who don't do anything to Directs *at all*. We'll start at the bottom and work our way up.

Grit

Grit is the worst CO in the game. Period. I mean I literally can't give you any advice on how to play him well at the competitive level, he's that frikkin bad. Still, this is a strategy guide, so I'll give you a few tips to at least avoid the obvious pitfalls.

The classic Grit strategy is to expand slowly and wall up. That is, he builds a large amount of Infantry and uses them to protect his Artillery. Grit has the dubious honor of having the best Artillery in the game; they are also the cheapest unit he gives any sort of boost to, and this is probably why the classic strategy was developed in the first place. Here's the problem: The classic strategy was developed when the metagame was still young, back when people still had a tendency to use War Room tactics. It works plenty fine against people that try to tech up too early like that. When people figured out that other COs could tech down too, though, it stopped being quite as dominating.

The only way Grit can get close to being competitive is to start with a standard Direct build and only later begin introducing Indirects. There aren't too many problems with this *at first*. His Directs are weak, but they can still function just fine. The problems start when CO Powers start firing off. At this point we're talking about simple math: The more units you have on the board getting powered up, the bigger the crater you can make. With Grit revving up as slowly as he does, by the time he gets out the units he needs he's already losing the game... at least on what most people would consider a competitive map. See "The Coast" from earlier.

If you want to give Grit any chance at victory, you need to pick a map that's really skewed in his favor. First of all, the map needs to be a linear "one front" map, as two or more fronts will spread Grit a lot thinner than he wants to be. COs generally have a limit of doing two things at a time; and rather than managing two fronts, Grit needs to manage two unit types, and doing both at once will strain your economy. Next, there need to be no airports. Grit has enough to worry about without also having to turn out Antiairs and possibly Missiles. Next, there need to be no center bases. Expansion bases are fine, but Grit's consolidated strategy means that he can't race his opponent to the center and expect to win. Finally, you either need heavy terrain or a lot of choke points, preferably both. This limits how well an opponent can mount an attack. All of those requirements being met, Grit has a chance at winning. Otherwise, you're kind of SOL if you play as him.

Javier

Javier is an interesting CO. Without towers, though, he kinda sucks. Sure, the guy has no weaknesses. He also doesn't give his Directs any kind of firepower boost, nor does he defend them from other Directs; and unlike Grit, he doesn't even have another unit to try and fall back on. In short, if he's up against the other COs he actually performs *worse* than Grit does.

Now all that being said, Javier does happen to be a purpose-built Grit-killer. In addition to Grit's Directs being fairly suckish to begin with, because of how the damage formula works Grit's Indirects also do less-than-normal damage. It doesn't really help that Javier's CO Powers have the sole effect of making Grit's one good unit completely useless. As you can probably gather at this point, Javier is very, *very* good at killing Grit. If you find yourself up against him, spam COP until you start seeing a fair few Indirects, and then use SCOP so that you can destroy the supporting units without fear of retaliation.

Now that we've gotten that out of the way, you're probably expecting me to talk about towers. We're actually going to wait until Chapter 6 for that bit. You'll understand when you get there.

Terrain

Our terrain duo have the trait in common of being map-dependent almost to a fault. Beyond that they have little in common, though, so let's just get straight to it.

Lash's gimmick is to gain +5% firepower for every terrain star her units gain. This means she only powers up land and sea units with emphasis on land. Basically she rewards the player for seeking terrain cover, which you should usually be doing anyway. Her COP reduces all movement costs to 0; it's also next to useless, don't use it. As Lash you want to control the terrain so that you can gain the maximum benefit from SCOP. Unfortunately Lash doesn't get as much firepower under SCOP as most COs do, so you need to rely on defense. Provided you can stick yourself on some forests and cities you'll be good to go.

- Obviously it's inadvisable to fight COs more than a single tier above your own, but Lash has a special case in the form of Sonja. Because all of Lash's stat modifications are calculated off of terrain stars, Sonja's removal of terrain stars pretty much turns Lash into Javier. So basically, don't fight Sonja as Lash.

Jake gets +10% firepower while his units are on plains, which means he powers up land and air to the exclusion of sea. His CO Powers and abilities are such that he has been described as “trying to be Hawke, Jess, and Grit all at once.” He's sort of a “jack of all trades” if you will. Unfortunately the full saying is “jack of all trades, master of none.” Remember that whole thing earlier about boosting Directs and *focusing* on them? Jake doesn't do that. Jake can't really compete with anyone focused on Directs; while he can get more firepower than his natural rival Koal, unlike that CO his terrain of choice isn't

as popular in map-making, and in some smaller maps you'll be hard pressed to find more than two plains tiles on the entire map. He also only gets a movement boost on SCOP, and it's only a +1 boost like Andy's.

Because he doesn't do that well at focusing on Directs, playing Jake like the jack-of-all-trades he's supposed to be is *probably* the smartest way to play him. In fact Jake is better at executing Grit's strategy than even Grit is: since Jake actually *can* use his Directs to a good degree, he can compete in a rush for the center and potentially win that way. You can never get better than +1 range (while Grit can get as good as +3), but when combined with +1 vehicle movement you're relying on that hopefully not mattering. Fire off SCOP for rushes, and spam COP to buy time for said rushes.

The big, glaring flaw in this strategy is obviously that your opponent will see these rushes coming. But I've often found that it pays to have big, glaring flaws in your strategy, because sometimes the result is just audacious enough to catch your opponent off-guard. But that is a story for another guide. Flawed or not, this is still the smartest way to play Jake.

Luck

There's no point covering these three COs separately. Luck is very screwy, and it is because of this screwiness that Flak, Jugger, and Nell play almost identical games. The big difference is that Nell doesn't get bad luck and has a better chance at dealing OHKs to units under SCOP. Flak and Jugger tend to get better averages than Nell, though, so it evens out.

Luck COs have something in common with Grimm in that their boosts apply to soldiers. This is something you will be paying special attention to during CO Powers, as it is often smart to just randomly throw Infantry at vastly superior units just to try and deal extra damage and free up your other units. On a daily basis you'll notice that your units will sometimes deal more (or occasionally less) damage.

Playing the luck COs well requires being able to adjust your strategy on the fly. If you dealt more damage than you anticipated, you've gotta be able to capitalize on it. If you deal less than you hoped, you need to be able to adjust to that as well. This is both the strength and the pitfall of the luck COs, since while luck can be extremely helpful it is also exactly that: luck. You can't rely on it; merely adjust to it.

Conclusion

A lack of focus on Directs is not necessarily a bad thing. Just don't expect to compete with COs that *do* focus on them. AWDS is a fast-paced game where sitting on your ass and turtling up will be rewarded with defeat.

Chapter 5: Over-Competitive COs

Now you understand the rules of competition. You've seen what makes COs competitive, and you've seen what makes them somewhat less than that. Now it is time to show you the COs who beat that. These COs still play by the competitive strategy, but have begun to introduce new game mechanics that simultaneously bolster their efforts and damage yours. As such, they have a very annoying tendency to kick competitive COs in the crotch.

Mass Damage

Mass damage is the biggest group of COs in the game. The common trait of all these COs is that they deal a lot of damage across the board for free; when you consider that most other forms of damage require some expenditure of HP on your part, this is huge. Also consider that *all* other forms of damage feed your opponent's power bar, and you begin to realize just how huge this really is.

Now before I get started you need to understand that mass damage comes in three flavors: wave, demi-wave, and concentrated. What all three have in common is that they can be used at any point in the turn and still have the full effect you would want.

Wave damage is the territory of Drake, Hawke, and Olaf. Wave damage hits all enemies on the battlefield, which creates several interesting effects. First of all, any units on properties will repair the next turn, draining funds and limiting construction options. Secondly, and most obviously, enemies will be damaged and thus require less effort to kill. Third, and related to the second, is that damaged units have less firepower, so it's almost like a free defense boost in addition. Each CO also brings an extra trait or two to the table, so let's go ahead and get to that.

Drake's invocation of mass damage brings rain into the picture. Rain makes it difficult for the opponent to counter-attack, though the degree to which this is true may vary depending on how you conduct your turn. Ideally, you want to destroy any Recons on the opponent's front line to blind them during this turn. In this way your opponent will be reeling from the effects of mass damage and simultaneously be unable to retaliate. If you really want to be a dick when you're facing any competitive CO who needs some amount of timing for their CO Powers, do this right when you think they're about to light off. In the absence of Drake having a huge unique advantage himself, your main strategy will be to make your opponents fight on your terms.

Hawke has firepower and healing. As such he is very good at bouncing back from his opponent's CO Powers, and is able to diminish the effects of any mass damage he sustains himself. He is one of the more challenging opponents for other mass damage COs to face because of this. Hawke has a couple of different strategies depending on whom you are fighting. Against the tiers below his you should focus on a strangulation strategy, waiting for SCOP or spamming COP as the situation dictates. This is a no-

brainer against most of these COs who really have no way to compete with Hawke. Sasha can give you a little trouble with the extra money at first, but once you whittle down the early tech lead she'll have nothing else to fall back on. (Spamming COP *will* be necessary in that matchup, just warning you.) Andy can't avoid economic damage, but Hyper Upgrade can still be a pain in the ass, so practice some US Marine credo on him: do unto others *first*.

Once you get to Hawke's tier and above, you'll want to opt for a blow-for-blow strategy instead. Much like Andy, you'll want to use Black Storm to mitigate enemy mass damage and send out your own. Hawke's matchups with other mass damage COs is probably among the best, because unlike any of them when he uses a retaliatory power he eliminates some of the lasting damage they deal. Against COs like Eagle and above, you're going to return to a strangulation strategy, though it will be much more difficult at that point. We'll get to that part later.

Olaf brings a lot more firepower into the equation than Hawke does. The snow usually won't do anything, but occasionally you'll get lucky and cause units to run out of fuel; especially helpful if said units are air or naval. With Olaf you will pretty much never use your COP unless it's a heavy naval map and you're *really* intent on sinking ships. Olaf's snow lasts for two turns, so you have a couple of options. I recommend always kicking things off with Winter Fury no matter what; he's a mass damage CO and you're best advised to use it. After that you can spam COP or continue with SCOP as the situation dictates. With the aforementioned two-turn snow, Olaf can pull off what many fans call a "Nuclear Winter" strategy in which he keeps the weather conditions almost permanently snowy. This can be annoying to lower tier COs with the fuel penalties and Olaf usually getting some kind of attack boost. For the most part, and especially against his own tier and above, you're best advised to just stick with Winter Fury the whole time. With his firepower combining with mass damage for two turns, you'll be able to really lay on the hurt to your opponent. Even though Andy and Hawke will be able to mitigate the second turn's round of firepower, most COs don't. Just make sure you're aware of how charged your opponent's power bar is, and in particular *which* power they're using. The last thing you want is to use Winter Fury only for your opponent to have some major bounce-back power... but we'll get to that.

Demi-wave damage belongs to Kindle. It's a demi-wave because even though it hits like a wave, it only targets enemy units on properties. This is very specific damage; Kindle will only inflict economic damage and make units on properties easier to take down, and won't get any frontline-boosting power. Urban Blight being the cheapest mass damage in the game is what makes this a serious game-changer. As Kindle, you'll want to fire off Urban Blight every time it charges the instant it charges. The economic damage from its repeated (ab)use can be quite horrendous, especially if her opponent just bought some very expensive units or even just has a bunch sitting on their own properties. Rachel can be especially hurt by Urban Blight since it deals 3HP damage as opposed to the usual 2HP; Rachel being a 3HP healer means that even if the damage

doesn't last, the trade-off is her production being close to demolished for that turn.

As you progress through the match, you can switch Kindle to being a firepower CO if an opportunity presents itself. I would only advise this if you're fighting lower tier COs and have serious property lead, as she only gains +3% firepower per property. And do remember that Kindle happens to be a terrain CO in addition, so make sure you're getting that +40% firepower from properties whenever possible. This bumps up to a total of +90% every time you use Urban Blight, which is all the more reason to clear those properties if you get a chance when using it. Ultimately, as Kindle you will rely on this heavy strangulation strategy, always trying to drain your opponent of funding so you can out-produce and/or out-tech him.

Concentrated damage, which is basically launching missiles as a CO Power, is the area of Rachel and Von Bolt. These two have pretty different strategies, but both are can be very challenging for your opponent to counter. What this type of mass damage does differently is that it is all offensive; you will hardly ever make economic hits on your opponent, and instead are focused on destroying his frontline. You will only deal major economic damage near large property centers, at which point the game is already close to being over.

Von Bolt has the longest power bar in the game, and only has one CO Power. Being one of only three COs in the game with any sort of defense boost, you'll want to play an attrition game with him. His missile aims for the largest concentration of monetary damage, which might not be the frontline necessarily. It freezes the units hit for a turn, which is conducive to the attrition strategy. This is most useful on a two front map like The Coast, mentioned earlier, as Von Bolt can basically shut down an entire front for one turn. The choice of capitalizing on that front or using to time to bolster the other is up to you, and will largely be determined by the situation you face. On a one front map, you'll instead want to use this as a free turn to hack away at the frozen units awhile they can't fight back. A very annoying tactic is to use your opponent's own units to protect yours by clogging up the front with units; since he can't move them out of the way or delete them, he has no way of reaching you.

Rachel has a shorter bar than Von Bolt and relies more on aggression, with sheer destruction by the missiles being her ultimate goal. The missiles target as follows: One hits the most soldiers possible, one hits money like Von Bolt's, and one hits the highest HP concentration (usually the same soldier group again). On a two front map this will often shut down the front clogged with the most soldiers similarly to Von Bolt, as 4HP units are very easy to cut through. What's most annoying is that the soldiers won't make their usual contribution to the enemy power bar, and so Rachel almost becomes a mini-Sasha in this regard. On a one front map, the missiles will quite often land in almost the exact same spot, leaving many units at 1HP; this is extremely devastating, as besides being easy to cut through the units make practically no contribution to the power bar. Your strategy should be obvious: Spam SCOP and blast through.

Eagle

Eagle is the sole practitioner of the only other game-changer in this tier, and that's two moves in one turn. Specifically, it's how often he can spam these two moves with his COP being only 3 stars. It's a common mistake by people to assume that because Lightning Drive cuts firepower in half (before the default boost is applied), it's worse than Lightning Strike. In truth, Lightning Drive is arguably better simply because of how spammable it is. You always use it at the end of the turn, so it's almost completely immune to any powers that take a toll on your ability to gain star power. Having two non-soldier moves sort of makes Eagle a glorified movement CO with an important difference: He has the option of making devastating balls-out attacks and immediately consolidating to a less vulnerable position. Of course, you can also just continue the attack during this turn; there's no rule saying that less firepower precludes you from attacking.

It's for this reason that Eagle can compete so well with mass damage COs. In spite of having no firepower boosts to speak of, he can concentrate so many units to the front at any given time that it almost doesn't matter. He can join, suicide, and shred with the best of them. His building ability is such that he can build vehicles at his forward bases, leave the back ones empty, and then move his vehicles off during the same turn to crank out soldiers on those same forward bases. You should *always* abuse this when possible, you just would not believe the difference it makes when you can get those forward soldiers and your opponent *can't*.

Done correctly, there's no reason why you should ever have to save up for Lightning Strike. With Lightning Drive you will constantly be driving into your opponent's lines, constantly be abusing your capacity for reinforcements, and constantly be getting that advantage in forward soldier production. Say what you like about Tags (which we will cover later), the sheer spam capacity of Lightning Drive is far, far more dangerous than just the basic merits of having two moves.

Conclusion

As stated, what makes these COs so dangerous is that they introduce new rules to the game. No other group of COs deals free damage; no other group gets multiple moves. By adding a new rule to the game, you change the meaning of the word "competitive." This isn't to say these COs possess unfair advantages; you're perfectly capable of having entertaining games between these guys and the competitive tier. As long as you bear in mind that these COs rely on a derailing strategy more than just power alone, you will always have a slight edge to abuse.

Chapter 6: A Whole Different Ballgame

We are now in the big leagues. Cast aside your notions of competitive strategy; they barely apply anymore. These COs are powerful enough that to compete outside their own tier is almost child's play; there is no fair game there. You will understand why as we get into describing them each; and since there are no groups here, we *will* be describing them each.

Sami

The first of the big five we will talk about, Sami's strategy is completely different from the ones we have seen thus far. Your typical game will still use vehicles competitively just as you have been for the rest so far; however, your CO Powers will now be affecting the *other* 75% of your army. Once you get forward bases, your main production focus should be Mechs as opposed to Tanks. In spite of being slow, Sami's Mechs are virtually unstoppable by a vehicular force and counter Tanks and Antiairs alike, especially once you get their numbers growing. The real value of this becomes apparent when you start building Copters; in an ironic twist, Sami is a *very* effective air CO on account of the low-cost ground force she uses. For the most part, you can use her Copters both as an anti-air and anti-ground force. Your own Antiairs will rarely be necessary, and instead you should think about banking on a Fighter. This may sound expensive, but a key part of your strategy will lessen the expense.

That key part is Victory March. When you launch this off every one of your soldiers, even the damaged ones, become extremely deadly. All you have to do is clear a little bit of room to contested/enemy properties and have someone zoom in there. It doesn't matter what sort of counter-attack you receive, because the damage is done at this point. You will reap the income for *at least* one turn, and your opponent will suffer any lost income for at least double that time. The economic damage won't become apparent until you kill a few of his units, but that lack of powerful reinforcements really stacks up.

You don't need Victory March just to be annoying, though. If your soldiers start capturing at 10HP, they have to be knocked down to at least 2HP to prevent a two-turn capture. I am not exaggerating when I say that as Sami, you have the game's deadliest soldiers. It is all too easy to pursue a strangulation strategy, and once all is said and done you will out-tech your opponent to death.

Kanbei

Our next contender is Kanbei. Kanbei is quite possibly one of the most dangerous COs a competitive CO can ever have to fight against. He's got the firepower of a Direct-attack CO, but with defense to match. His higher costs may hurt your opening depending on what your starting funds look like, so you may end up having to settle for a slightly

more consolidated capture phase. The payoff you get in return is worth it, though. Not only are Kanbei's units superior to those of nearly every other CO, his SCOP is nearly unstoppable. Samurai Spirit guarantees you a safe advance into enemy territory for one turn. Not only do you get 160/160 stats, your counter-attacks are 320/160. It is a matchup changer to the point where Tank vs Recon becomes dangerous to the *Tank*. You really can't be attacked when you activate this; your opponent is screwed if he leaves you alone, but he's even more screwed if he's dumb enough to attack.

You will of course be planning your entire game around the use of Samurai Spirit. Your capture phase setbacks *may* put you on the defensive first, but the first use of Samurai Spirit will change that. Proceed very much as you would with Eagle, driving into the enemy and attacking without much regard for what can threaten you; nothing *can* threaten you. You might get thrown back now and then, but I think you will find that your attacks are quite irresistible. If you start capturing properties during this turn, there's not a whole lot your opponent can do about it. Your soldiers are nearly invincible on properties at this point; on mountains and HQs they actually *are* invincible. If the point isn't sufficiently clear yet, your opponent is screwed.

That being said, don't get cocky within your own tier. Kanbei's fellow Big Five have quite a few "unbeatable" tricks of their own, and they are just as capable of punishing you as you are of punishing them.

Colin

This guy definitely ranks among the more annoying COs you can fight, and one of the most satisfying to use on an unsuspecting opponent. He is the opposite of Kanbei in many respects, and the play style you'll use with him shows this. Much like Sasha, Colin can afford certain units earlier than other COs. Unlike Sasha, he does this with absolute impunity. Weak firepower or not, you'll quickly find that Colin's ability to tech up his forces is quite frightening.

Your main strategy is going to center around spamming Gold Rush as much as possible. It doesn't really matter when you use it so long as it's before you decide to buy anything. Now even without Gold Rush you should be chugging along fairly quickly on the tech tree. What Gold Rush will do is help this process along. That Md Tank you would have needed to save an extra turn for will be available *this* turn.

When you feel you've used Gold Rush enough, it's time to switch gears to Power of Money. Now for most COs firepower is just firepower. But remember, you're a lot more heavily teched up than most COs at this point, so that firepower is gonna go a lot farther. You will need to build up a proper stockpile for this as you only get +1% firepower for every 300g; if you fire off SCOP without at least 18k in the bank you're wasting your time.

There isn't much else to say about the strategy you'll be pursuing beyond "tech tech." The whole goal of Colin's strategy is to tech up just as fast as you possibly can until your opponent can no longer resist the sheer force of it; then finally bringing the hammer down with firepower.

Sensei

The name of the game with Sensei is pure, unadulterated spam. With Sensei you are going to play fairly normally until you start spamming COP. The idea is to just spam it so much that sheer force of numbers will start causing your opponent some problems. You can combine the Infantry or just send them headlong into the enemy; it doesn't really matter. Sensei's CO powers are self-feeding, since the units they create actually feed the power bar. There are absolutely no consequences to sending the free units you get to gum up the front lines; in fact that is exactly what you should do. Just perform mindless suicide attacks and cause damage, pile them up, make a big fat wall of units. By the time your opponent breaks through, your actual army will be more than prepared to take him out. Not to mention, the sheer COP spam will do amazing things to your Copters. If you aren't abusing your Copters, you're not playing Sensei correctly.

Eventually you'll want to gear up to SCOP just for kicks and giggles; actually, this is almost a necessity against his own tier. Infantry are nice, but Mechs are better. As you build momentum you'll be able to smash your way into the opponent's main base and nail him with the sheer swarming power.

On maps like The Coast, it's also worth considering that Sensei can reach center bases a *lot* faster than other COs. Properties other COs can reach in three turns he can often reach in two. It's not a pretty sight when Sensei gets that big of a lead on someone, and the results can be quite disastrous. Remember, production is one of your four resources. In fact it's worth noting that as Sensei, you hold an advantage in all four resource departments. Your CO powers take care of both unit count and production, your faster transports can help *secure* production, your CO power units charge up your CO powers again, and those same units can be joined for free money. Consider that, and you'll understand the math of the game and why Sensei can be so overwhelming to opponents.

Hachi

This guy is arguably the best CO in the game next to Sensei. You've got the cheap factor going for you like Colin, but in a slightly different direction. On a daily basis you'll actually want to focus on Infantry spam with Hachi. You may think this is squandering his abilities, but the point is to build up a stockpile for SCOP. Build a Recon or two for defense, of course, but don't try to tech up to Tanks... yet. Once SCOP comes around, that's when you slam the production lines.

As for what you actually buy, there are a few options. Some people hold the ability to buy an early Megatank as his ultimate strategy. While undeniably difficult to counter, you're wasting your money if your opponent isn't in your own tier. A much more economical choice for your first SCOP is a Black Bomb and a Tank/Copter spam. You can destroy far more units this way and get a better unit count to boot. For the second use, upgrading to Md Tanks is still your best bet; keep the Black Bomb, though, and buy as many Tanks as you can afford.

The best time to build a Megatank is probably when you reach a stalemate in the

middle, which is most likely to happen within Hachi's own tier. The reason is simply that even though a Megatank can do a lot of damage, it's only one unit. During the early game, you're still much better served by building up a good unit count of decent combat units, especially if Sensei is your opponent.

There's not a lot else to say about Hachi. You get your superior firepower by binge-teching. Once you start taking a property advantage you can stop binging so much and start teching up a little daily. This is too much for most COs to handle, for obvious reasons. Mass damage can't stop you: you're Infantry spamming on a daily basis. Firepower can't help your opponent: what's a Tank supposed to do against a Md Tank, or even a Megatank? Basically, there are very few ways to lose when playing as Hachi. Just beware of your own tier and make sure you use your own pitfalls while dodging theirs.

Javier

Remember this guy? I told you we weren't done with him yet. We still have to cover what to do when he has towers on his side.

When Javier gets one tower, he's already up at the competitive level even if his opponent gets one as well. This is because it brings Javier up to Von Bolt stats and makes his CO powers fairly impressive. COP will give you 130/130 stats, and SCOP will give 140/140. While the firepower isn't as impressive, it's the defense that's important. But we haven't even gotten to the fun part yet.

When Javier gets a second tower, he comes up to *this tier*. If he had previously been playing a competitive opponent, that opponent is now screwed. Javier with two towers is Kanbei without a weakness, and he plays that way too. His SCOP is arguably better at this point, giving 170/170 to Kanbei's 160/160. Even without the doubled counter-attacks of Samurai Spirit, that's still quite a game changer. You'll basically play like Kanbei at this point, but won't have to worry about the little cost issue.

Once you get to a third tower, Javier is pretty godly. It's Grimm firepower with defense to match, and his 2 tower SCOP becomes his COP. On his 3 tower SCOP, he's invincible unless he's already taken damage. Even Hachi will have a tough time dealing with this Javier, especially since he's usually a result of capturing one of his opponent's towers. You'll still play a lot like Kanbei at this point, but the stats are such that you'll have an even easier time playing. This Javier can take a Megatank's best shot and come through relatively unscathed under SCOP.

Four towers will probably only happen in a game where both sides can get two towers, which means you're already winning once you get this Javier. Javier 4T can take on higher tech units even on COP at 190/190, and SCOP is invincible unless you already took serious damage. There's really nothing more I can say about Javier with towers. His performance is variable, but you're in for one hell of an unpredictable game. All I can say is watch out for Sami: since your towers are your source of power, she's the best CO to try and undermine that power. At all costs do not let that happen.

Conclusion

I say these COs are playing a whole different ballgame, because they really are. They do everything the competitive COs do, but take it up to 11. Sami is the ultimate strangulation CO, Kanbei is the ultimate defender, Colin is the ultimate tech fiend, Sensei is the ultimate spammer, and Hachi is the ultimate producer. Honorable mention to Javier with sufficient towers. These COs are truly the best of the best, and you can be sure that games involving them will be quite epic; especially if all parties involved are using one of them.

These COs are also an incredibly cruel joke to pull on friends who are less knowledgeable at the game than you are. If you ever run across a cocky player who thinks he's hot stuff, pull one of these guys on him. It's hilarious.

Chapter 7: Tags

The big game mechanic that was added to Advance Wars Dual Strike was the Tag mechanic. This allows you to use two COs in the same match, build up both SCOPs, and fire off a Tag Break (henceforth known as Tag CO Power, or TCOP). A lot of people instantly assumed that Tags are a broken mechanic and that the first TCOP would win the game. I spent the better half of 2011 dissecting the Tag mechanic, and I'll tell you right now that it is definitely not broken. Quite the opposite in fact, it really doesn't change a whole lot about the game balance. I'll tell you why.

Two Moves

One of the defining features of the TCOP is the two moves aspect. Think of it as Lightning Strike on steroids, where you get to move soldiers twice and have a different SCOP effect each turn. Sounds good, right? But recall back to Eagle: specifically, what makes him good. Two moves in and of itself is not what makes Eagle good, but rather the *frequency* with which he gets these two moves. TCOPs typically take a turn or two longer to charge than their longest component SCOP. If a good enough SCOP hits before the TCOP fires off, the TCOP isn't going to be a lot of use to you. To sum it up, TCOPs are really just glorified SCOPs.

That fact alone will diminish their effectiveness in certain Tags. You don't want to use a Kindle Tag's TCOP, you want Urban Blight. You don't want Sensei's TCOP all the time, you want Copter Command and the Infantry spam that comes with it.

They really aren't the game-changers a lot of people will try to convince you of them them being. Truth be told, you could take that whole tier list I gave you in chapter 2 and just make a Tag tier list defined by the better CO in each Tag. You'd have a Hachi tier, followed by a Sensei tier, etc.

Ghetto-Victory March

Speaking of two moves, since it applies to soldiers you will occasionally have opportunities to do one-turn captures. One problem: remember what I said about sufficiently powerful SCOPs? If your opponent gets one off and damages some key soldiers, the ghetto-Victory March won't work; a problem the *real* Victory March doesn't have.

Synergy

Another issue you'll run into when picking a Tag is synergy between COs. Sami and Max, for example, don't really use the same strategy... at all. Sami and *Grimm* can get along quite happily, though. Grit can't really Tag with anyone all that well; for the most part you'll just use the better CO and bring out Grit for the occasional TCOP opportunity.

How to Use a Tag Well

This is a very broad question to try and answer, but I will do so anyway. Using Tags requires good knowledge of both COs' capabilities. You must be able to recognize how they'll interact, and make good judgments on whether or not to go for the TCOP. Sometimes the TCOP just isn't the best solution; if you've got Eagle and Kindle, spam Lightning Drive and Urban Blight! But if you have Rachel and Von Bolt, go for the kill shot! You have four missiles and you might as well use them. And there might even be times where you want one CO to focus on COP while the other goes for SCOP. Having Sensei go for Copter Command while Hachi goes for Merchant Union is a perfectly viable strategy; there's no rule that says you *have* to fire off Grizzled Vets, their TCOP.

Lastly, and as mentioned previously, consider the synergy of the COs before putting them on the field. If Max and Grit don't sound like they'd work well together... well, it's because they don't! COs in a Tag need to have similar unit focuses or the Tag just won't live up to its full potential. On the other hand, don't be afraid to change strategy to accommodate possible exploits. Sami and Eagle have different unit focuses, but on the other hand their TCOP opens up brilliant opportunities for securing important properties or even snagging the enemy HQ.

Conclusion

Short though this chapter may be, understand that Tags are not an overpowered mechanic. They are fun, and they do let you pursue some different strategies. Just don't take in a Grit Tag and expect to beat a lone Hachi player.

Chapter 8: Force Ranks

Ah, Force Ranks. Also called Skills. Whatever name you choose to call them by, Force Ranks are, shall we say, a very *interesting* mechanic, much like their cousin the Tag. Much like Tags, Force Ranks don't really change the balance of the game much, if at all. Give every CO the same set of Force Ranks and you'll just get the same tier list. So that being said, let's dive right into a few basic pointers.

Money Forces

Let's get one thing straight: If your opponent takes the cost reduction forces and you're not Colin, you're screwed. You guys either need to agree not to use them, or agree to *both* use them. The reason for this is simply that a CO with cheaper units is going to beat a CO without them, especially if they're in similar tiers. Colin and Hachi live where they do for a reason: Lower costs, better tech.

Soul of Hachi, Mistwalker

Again, two forces you guys need to come to some agreement on. Soul of Hachi lets you produce units on cities during SCOP, like Hachi does. Mistwalker gives you first strike counter-attacks on SCOP, like Sonja. While effectiveness can vary depending on your CO, the fact of the matter is that these forces are very powerful and can significantly alter the course of the game by giving your SCOP capabilities the designers didn't originally have in mind.

Prairy Dog, Pathfinder

The last pair you need to have some kind of agreement on. If only one person uses these on a terrain-heavy map, the effect will be utterly brutal and the other person will not be able to answer regardless of what CO they use. Having Recons that can zip across the map while your opponent's move at a slow crawl is no laughing matter.

The Handicap Exception

Sometimes you want to use a lower tier CO despite knowing your opponent won't come down to your level. In this case, it is acceptable for you to use forces while your opponent goes vanilla. For example, giving Grit the forces Sale Price, Gold Rush, Fire Sale, and Soul of Hachi pretty much fixes most of the flaws that prevent him from competing; it gives him sufficient production in bursts and helps get his ideal force built up.

Tagging

A major decision when using a Tag is deciding how to split the forces. Do you give some advantages to each, or use the three team skills to turn one of them into a souped-up killing machine?

My Personal Favorites

The choices you make for a particular match will always be different, so instead of giving you tips I'll just give you some of my personal favorite combinations. Note that they range from fun to downright evil.

Give Sensei the Transport Boost.

As if having faster T-Copters weren't enough, go ahead and turn Sensei into Mr. Speedy. Chances are good you might actually reach an opponent's expansion base before even they do.

Give Sami the Capture Forces.

Because her daily abilities aren't evil enough to begin with, let's make it so her full health soldiers have to be taken down to 1HP to delay a capture. To be extra annoying, throw in some defense forces.

Give Olaf the Snow Boost.

So not only is he blasting you with mass damage, but on the turn of his SCOP he gets to hit you with +50% firepower, +40% the turn after. And you think your are not screwed?

Give Sasha Gold Rush, the Money Forces, and Star Power.

Oh the lulz to be had here. You make more money than God and charge fast enough to use Market Crash nearly every day. This is the part where you wish your opponent good luck in ever getting a decent shot off at you.

Give Kanbei the Direct-Defense Forces, the Money Forces, and a Partner with the Team Forces.

Just watch as your opponent tries to deal with your 133/150 stats, occasionally with an improved Samurai Spirit that brings them up to 173/190. Oh and these units only cost a sliver over normal price and your partner can fix your capture phase issues. Bonus points if it's Colin with Fire Sale as a fourth force.

Give Grimm the Direct-Defense Forces, Star Power, and Mistwalker.

Not only do you no longer take extra damage from everyone, but now you get the satisfaction of using Haymaker and watching your opponent crap his pants at the prospect of first strike counter-attacks at 190/110. And you get to do this even more often than normal. And while we're on the subject...

Give Kanbei Mistwalker.

Because he still gets the usual doubled counter-attacks. So if your opponent wasn't reconsidering hitting your Samurai Spirit units before, they are now. 320/160 first strike counter-attacks. Do you feel lucky, punk?

Conclusion

I've given you a lot of fun suggestions. But as I said before, Force Ranks don't really change anything. If you gave everyone the exact same set, the balance wouldn't change one lick. Still, if you want to get some fun matches with COs of differing tiers, Force Ranks aren't a bad way to set up handicaps. Just make sure they're appropriate handicaps; giving the set to Grit I mentioned earlier is fine and dandy, but don't give that same set to Max and then fight Hawke. Exercise a little sense, keep it classy, and keep it fun.

Chapter 9: Game Modes

So we've covered Tags and we've covered Force Ranks. But what about those little options that show up in the next screen? They don't change the balance of the game. They *do* present new strategic options you must adapt to in order to *maintain* that balance. Let's go over them one at a time.

Fog of War

Fog takes away your normally-complete information on the battlefield and forces you to fight only where you can see. While most of the time you can almost win on better CO stats alone, Fog opens up the possibility of skill playing a bigger role than normal. Mass damage will do as it always does, but other matchups become a lot more interesting.

Obviously in fog you want to dive for cover as much as possible. This means you'll generally avoid sitting out on your properties and instead head for the woods. Indirects can be helpful, but they are not strictly necessary. Remember that units hidden in woods are harder to kill because they must be revealed before they can be damaged, let alone killed.

Vision mostly shouldn't be a problem since you should be building Recons in the early game anyway. Make sure you park soldiers on those mountains to get a better view now and then; it's an advantage that's easy to overlook.

If you're playing a mass damage CO, you'll find that your ability to wreak economic destruction goes unhindered in this mode. In fact mass damage COs probably benefit the most from fog, as their CO powers work independently of vision. You need to see what you're doing with firepower; you need something *to* see with Sonja's vision. Mass damage requires neither, so use it just as liberally as you always would.

There isn't a whole lot else to say about fog other than, well, use it! Guile is not absent in this mode, and it can succeed where stats would normally fail.

Weather

Aside from the default "clear" weather, there are four weather settings you can choose to play with: snow, rain, sandstorm, and random. Three of these obviously fix the weather in a particular pattern, whilst random will cause the weather to fluctuate.

Permanent snow will force you and your opponent to think about fuel more than you normally would. Air units are in slight danger, so be sure to keep an eye on their fuel gauges. Olaf holds an obvious advantage in this weather, and it's a good way to set up a handicap if you feel the need to do so. However, there are two other COs with advantages often overlooked in this weather: Jess and Drake. Jess should be fairly obvious, as her CO powers are such that she rarely has the air unit fuel problem in this weather. Drake is easier to miss, but logically he should be one of the first COs you jump on. You see if you think about it, Drake may well be better than Olaf in permanent

snow because his powers cut fuel in half. This won't necessarily be a problem for ground units, but any game against Drake in permanent snow will invariably see Drake's opponent making only minimal use of air units. Whether you should spam COP or go for SCOP, you will receive different opinions. Differing opinions are a good sign that it's a matter of personal judgment; regardless, it gives Drake an advantage in being able to exploit air units more than his opponent.

Rain changes the game in its own way, creating fog with one less vision and generally playing this way. This, oddly enough, can disadvantage Drake. One of the biggest strengths of Typhoon is its ability to blind Drake's opponent, and even in fog of war it can do this. If it's already raining, all Drake does is deal damage, making him the least effective mass damage CO you could choose. Olaf, on the other hand, is possibly one of the most dangerous COs to face once the rain comes down. Unless you actually have fog turned on with the rain, Olaf holds the sole power in this mode to turn off the fog at his leisure. You periodically deal mass damage, gain some respectable firepower, and turn off the fog for two turns. Even though your opponent can see you too the advantage is still well in your favor as Olaf.

Sand... well there's no polite way of saying this, but sandstorms really don't do anything beyond perhaps adding some atmosphere. It's not really the game's fault, but Indirects just matter so little to begin with that there's really no way to spin sandstorms to sound like they do anything that matters. So basically if you play on a desert or wasteland tileset, just go ahead and turn on a sandstorm for the full desert effect, because for all intents and purposes they don't affect the game at all; well, except to make Grit and Jake suck... more.

Random weather is where we start to get something really interesting to talk about. Unless you also have fog turned on, random weather is the only time when you can get "random fog" unless Drake is in the game. You'll want to always be paying attention to where your opponent's units are, because at any moment you could lose that benefit of knowledge. Random weather makes Olaf games similarly interesting, because at any time he could get a boost in firepower. Random weather usually won't cancel out the effects of Drake's and Olaf's SCOPs, and occasionally will even prolong them. This is obviously more helpful to Olaf, firepower boost and all, but the fact does remain. Now as mentioned earlier with sandstorms being what they are, you basically have two weathers that matter and two that don't. You'll want to use a combination of all the advice I've given thus far in order to be able to react properly to weather.

Funds

Funding levels are such a broad subject that they almost need their own guide to be covered properly. We'll do precisely that in the next chapter.

Capture Limit

The final game mode that actually changes something about the gameplay. What a capture limit basically does is force the game to end in the middle of the battlefield as

opposed to in the opponent's base. This can make games a lot shorter and less frustrating since the decisive battle and the final battle are the same thing. While the options will let you do less, you're usually best advised to set the capture limit to that map's maximum: one more than half the properties.

Some of you may be inclined to think that this gives Sami an unfair advantage: to be perfectly honest, though, this mode doesn't let her do anything she can't already do. If Sami gets the leg up in properties she's already putting on a stranglehold that will let her eventually win.

This is, in fact, my personal pick for a “default” game mode; that is, if you play a versus match at all this mode is a better choice than the default settings.

Conclusion

Different game modes change your strategic options, and if you want some variation in the game or just want to throw off your opponent a bit, this is a good way to do it.

Chapter 10: Funding Levels

Yeah, the big one I skipped last chapter. I'm not kidding when I say that they are a big, broad subject to try and cover, because every level of funding right down to the individual 500g jumps significantly alters the flow of the game. Because of how broad this subject is, we will be focusing on one map in particular to demonstrate what differences you'll be seeing. This map, as before, is The Coast, which I will now picture here:



1000

The default funding level, I must explain this first so you know the basic strategy of this map. You start with 6k income, and both players are going to want to get a T-Copter and an Infantry first. Blue can reach either expansion base in a single move, while red can only do the same with its southern expansion. Blue can reach the southern center base in two moves, while red can't reach either one in less than three.

Colin has a huge advantage in being able to produce two Infantry on day 1. Sasha and Hachi can do the same on day two. Kanbei is slightly disadvantaged as he cannot get a T-Copter until day 2, and so he will lose any race to the north-center base. Sensei enjoys a great advantage on this map, being able to reach any expansion in one turn as either player, and being able to reach the north-center base in two turns as either player. He will always win expansion races.

As either player, the north-center base is a critical point to hold and should be pursued at all costs. Since blue can reach the south-center base quicker than red, red should focus on tying up the south while pursuing the north. Blue should do the opposite, pressing its advantage in the south and

tying up the north. There are three airports available for each side; the battle will get very bloody, and do so very quickly.

As far as tie-up strategies go, this map does favor Indirects to some extent. Pick your choke point and fire away.

500

Pretty major change here already. With only 3k income, the first T-Copter won't be seen until day 3. The usual suspects get their production advantages and *can* get T-Copters on day 2, though they can't afford the accompanying Infantry and thus ruin the point in doing so. Kanbei can avoid his earlier pitfall by buying only one Infantry on day 2.

The main battle is going to have an inordinately large focus on cheaper units, with Recons replacing Tanks as the mainline vehicle. Tanks will be units that you actually have to *tech up* to, and you can pretty much forget about anything that costs more than 10k.

Mass damage COs will be having a field day with funds being this low, and you'll almost be able to play them like a tech CO once they get the ball rolling. As for firepower COs, hold onto those Tanks for dear life or you'll have no answer to your opponent's. Beware Sami at this level of funds: her base unit is so cheap it makes near as no difference to her playing style. Also beware the luck COs, since unlike the firepower COs they can actually hurt Tanks with Recons; granted, it's *luck*, but being as Recons are normally useless against Tanks it's the kind of luck that has nothing to lose.

1500

This is the only time you'll see a jump this wide, so don't get used to it. Anyway, this tiny jump bumps your starting income up to 9k, which is enough to let any CO amass an impressive T-Copter fleet very quickly. This is already enough funding to where Md Tanks are to your Tanks what Tanks in 1k are to your Recons. Aircraft up the yin-yang is the order of the day in order to break the ice, and bringing up some Artillery from bases further back isn't a bad idea. Wait, Grit's units you say? Eh, get back to me later.

We're not *that* high, though, and mass damage is still going to have a field day draining funds out of expensive units. Beware Sami, her Mechs are still stupid good at what they do and now she's got Bombers and Fighters. And if Colin or Hachi is involved, beware Black Bombs. In fact, beware Black Bombs anyway because your opponent might just be crazy enough to bank on one and that'll just ruin your whole day right there. Especially if he's Grit. Yeah, that could go south *real* fast. So if your opponent banks on a bomb, do it too. Go blow for blow.

2000

Very similar to our last jump, but at this point you may as well resign yourself to the fact that Black Bombs are about to become a very big part of your life. The rest of your army might tech down a little as a side-effect, but don't dwell on that too much.

Firepower's going to take a back seat once again with the damage that's going to be flying around during this match, so break out the luck trio again. You have a better chance of dealing good, solid damage with these folks than with the firepower trio when a low HP environment is concerned. Get a Fighter if you can, because even if you can't always shoot the bombs down you can still make your opponent build them farther back. Missile-locking them is also an option, but often more difficult to pull off and not always worth it, plus you can only cover one airport at a time.

If Sasha's in play then CO Powers will be, ah, rare. Mass damage COs are still having a field day at this point with draining funds from expensive units. Continue to beware Sami. Actually, beware Sami no matter what. Just take that as a general tip and rule. In the meantime, you may be thinking Hachi is less of a worry. Think again. He still bumps up that little production resource remember. That never goes away.

The Rest

Oh yeah, you really thought I was going to go through each and every little bump. Haha, very funny. What continues to happen as you go up is the game becomes an incredible Black Bomb festival. The tech level goes up, but that's about it. If there were no Black Bombs in this game I could go into more detail, but this is pretty much the end of it.

Interesting though it may be to speculate about, there is a reason why people don't typically talk about high fund games. It's boring after 2k, nothing but a Black Bomb fest.

Well, have fun with it if you want. 1.5k and 2k will make your game more interesting by broadening your unit choices. Combine it with weather and fog for additional laughs. Roll with it.

Wrap-Up

So now you know some competitive strategy. You can play with the best of them, use your COs to their most extreme advantage. You even know some handicaps to use if you want to spice up the match a bit.

Go back and try out your War Room and Campaign again. Try some of these strategies, and put score on the back-burner. Suddenly you'll notice that the AI is trivially easy to beat. Try again with score in mind, and you'll notice that you're still falling back on these strategies. The AI is so stupid, these competitive strategies can actually get you a better score than War Room strategies.

You know some ways of making the game fun, how they actually change the game, and how to use those changes to your advantage; hey, no one said you couldn't have a little fun with it.

Now seeing as this is not a real "For Dummies" book, there is no "Part of Tens." But if you actually had your heart set on that you would have bought a real "For Dummies" book and not my hack-job imitation that doesn't even imitate it.