

The Designer Proposes, the Developer Disposes

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TLNB moves into very unfamiliar (geographic) territory with the mountainous BOP Maps. We've never had a game set in the mountains (except Rivoli). Rendering this territory presents special graphic problems. I thought that adding Alto Terrain would automatically bring out these key mountain crags that were of such importance in controlling the hinterland. The Alto rule is - in theory - a short & simple rule that already exists (which turned out to have a downside too), from Four Lost Battles, the Kulm game.

Only one problem: As far as I know, this rule did not gain any traction with the gamers. So after hours and many emails between me and Charlie, I have decided to jettison an unused rule. I did so after consulting the playtesters, who felt it wasn't worth the overhead. It is a short rule, just one paragraph. I wanted Alto terrain in the game, mainly because I thought it would make these ridges and crags stand out - as they were the most fought over land except

for the towns and bridges, on a map without many of either...



FINAL MAP



WITH ALTO

This week, I gave Charlie the go ahead to apply the finished photoshop textures to the Montenotte map, which is tested, and unfortunately, when I saw the final effect of the Alto (with burnished edges) and the woods (no longer a solid dark green), I at once realized that the effect I wanted didn't come off. Instead of becoming more prominent, the Alto terrain tended to vanish into the woods surrounding it (both terrains are light green).

At that moment a thought flashed through my head, and I realized I hadn't mulled-over the actual usefulness of Alto terrain to the player, and the fact that we never tried repeating Alto confirms this. I think it was a goofy rule - I cannot recall any player comments one way or the other.

This is a case of design clutter - not only rules clutter but map clutter. A rule that people probably wouldn't use, merely to get the visual effect in the mountains, to lead the eye with a bright color to the crags and high ridges. To test this I printed a section of Charlie's latest map proof, with finished photoshop textures. Then I printed it again, in black

& white. And this time the facts were clear. Far from bringing the Alto terrain forward, it had the opposite effect, and it was instead the clear terrain that now comes "toward the eye" and stands out prominently (and makes it look higher, instead of being lower).

Now, if we had had the freedom to make the Alto terrain yellow, instead of yellow-green like in 4 Lost Battles, it might have worked better. But I suddenly realized that this was all Much Ado About Nada, dead wood that had to go. This is called trimming the hedges. By asking the question, "Does this (really) further the Design Intent?" you figure out the shape of the design and you keep to that.