

How lawyer-proof should rules be?

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In the painting *Napoleon Crosses the Elbe*, Bredowski hasn't tried to render the windows on the church in the background, and the church's reflection in the river is entirely abstract.

He doesn't want us to focus there; he wants us to look at Napoleon's mighty finger and thumb. That is how he laid out his art. In a photograph, you see all the tiniest details, but the composition of the painting is simplified. You cannot take in the whole world in a work of art.

Just like that in TLNB the designer wants you to look at important things, and avoid topics which are not within the design intent. For example, the actions and special uses of HC are outside the design intent.

When there are questions that are not clarified in the rules one way or another, I like to think the players can work things out for themselves. Rules should merely be a *guide* for a person of good will. Should we produce rules to hog-tie the rules lawyer who asks most of the

questions? Or count on the majority to figure things out on their own, using reason and imagination? Some players wish to defer to authority, others are comfortable using their own minds.

If his imagination tells him one thing, but the rules say another, or are silent, then let him try it his way and see if he starts "digging a hole."

Creating a shape for the design is like trimming a hedge. If you don't set limits, then you will have shoots sticking out all over. Unrestrained growth tends to lack a definite shape.

In a few cases issues are not addressed when the answer would lead into a tedious series of questions raised. I think of these areas where the rules are silent as an untended corner of the back garden. Go there if you like the high weeds.

In order to ensure a fun and playable experience, a game requires short, clean, tight, concise rules and simple, intuitive mechanics. By way of contrast, *Squad Leader* had an ever-

expanding rules set. Eventually it became too much even for the grognards. TLNB is not *Squad Leader*, but it could turn into that if a designer did not set limits. It is supposed to be playable in one evening (though the larger battles are not).

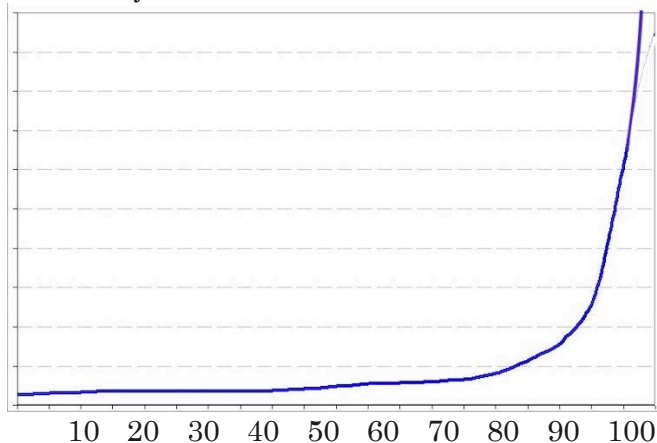
In my experience, the original rules to *Napoleon at Bay* were the best, even though they had lots of holes. Once we fixed the holes, the rules were complete but the game was not as much fun!

I recommend using the rules as a "guide" for people who just want to *play*. The series rules concept is successful with gamers. Not an iron cage for rules lawyers.

Some folks have special problems with TLNB but it isn't that the rules aren't air-tight. They may not like the way the rules are written, or the concepts employed, but that is a matter of style. It isn't possible to please everyone. We should be clear about what our goals are, and set about to achieve them; not let some concept of perfection set the agenda.

In my view, no one plays a game simply because of the rules... "Here's a game I recommend because the rules are 100% complete and unambiguous!"¹ People play a game for the fun and challenge of history. The more fun, the less will ambiguities bother them. There must be a trade-off at this point.

Perfection does not exist and never did, this side of heaven. "Perfection" is a word that has no objective correlative.



In the chart above, the effort scale is on the y-axis and the percent of completion runs from left to right along the bottom (x-axis). To get to 80% completion takes only 1x time. To bump that up

to 90% takes another 1x, and moving along from 90% to 95% takes another 2x. Getting from 95% to 99% doubles the total time again. So we are spending the vast majority of our time and effort on only a few subjects. To reach 100% would require infinite effort. The game of Chess took a thousand years to reach its final form.

"But why didn't you fix this in development?" The more we try to tighten-down the rules, the longer and more turgid the rules become, and the less fun. Don't make everyone read all that minutia! Instead, let them get started playing in a few minutes and resolve any questions as they come up. No two people are going to ask the same questions anyway. You might not even realize that you are solving matters that haven't been addressed. In the case of the TLNB Series Rules, thousands of games have been played enjoyably and individuals are still coming up with questions that have never been asked before! Writing rules is an *art*, not a science.

In January of 2024 we had a discussion about the March Order rules, and two proposed changes (below, in *italic*).²

Forces Removed from March Orders:

A unit is removed from a March Order, *at the player's option*, if his unit is placed in the ZOC of an Enemy unit or vedette. If it is a phasing unit, it has to make a successful repulse upon the adjacent unit. If the repulse fails, the March Order is removed.

March Order includes Leaders:

All *leaders and units* under a Movement Order are considered In Command (20.1).

Then I remembered the First Law of Holes:
"When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging."



¹ Kurt Gödel's two Incompleteness Theorems show that a formal system cannot be both consistent and complete.

² The changes were **not** adopted.