Infinitron

or, the greatest game ever invented

(by Zach Barth)

Obligatory Background Story

On a mysterious plane somewhere in another dimension or something equally irrelevant, there lives a race of omnipotent beings, the god-powers. However, being omnipotent, they grow bored very quickly, mainly due to the fact that they can exert absolute control over time and space and what not. Thus, to pass the time, the god-powers created an arena sport – Infinitron – in which they face off in a battle of infinite proportions. Raising mountains, oceans, plains, and armies effortlessly, they fight epic battles to show off their creative, strategic, and mental prowess through the cooperative competition that is Infinitron.

What is Infinitron?

Infinitron is a turn based tabletop strategy game, not unlike Warhammer or the Avalon Hill war games. However, unlike other games of its genre, the units and maps of Infinitron begin blank, and the rules change as the game is played. Players create their units and the terrain as the game progresses, waging dramatic and epic battles. Quite literally, it is a game where anything can happen. Anything.

Also, unlike other games, Infinitron requires a degree of cooperation between the players, despite the fact that they play against each other. Often times it requires a GM, often adding RPG elements, acting as a third party arbitrator to ensure that the game flows as it should. The primary objective is to conquer the other player, but many other objectives exist: a true master of the game must not only realize the role of the conqueror, but also those of the ambassador, architect, and sometimes even the jester.

The Three Elements

Infinitron features three distinct elements of game play, each which play out simultaneously:

Terrain Building:

This element consists of the creation of terrain, or gerrymandering (it's a real word, I promise). Unlike other games, the maps for Infinitron are not defined when you first begin the game. As new locations are discovered (or under other pretenses, which you'll soon understand), the map is extended by the players themselves, typically to their advantage. Highly **constructive**, the results of this are **static**, and remain that way for the rest of the game.

Unit Combat:

The core of the game, unit combat is **fluid**, **dynamic**, and **mathematical**, as units are created, controlled, and destroyed. Also dissimilar to other games, the units for Infinitron are created as the game plays out, following a point system to build units on the fly. This allows for evolving, brilliant strategies, provided you're up to the challenge.

Chaos Events:

Although not a required game play element, chaos events dramatically alter the game in **unforeseen** and **uncontrollable** ways, and are often the only source of randomness in the game. Terrain may be altered, forces may be introduced, and rules may be changed; no one is safe.

Army Basics

Upon beginning the game, each player chooses what they will play as (a **theme**). They must then stick to this theme for the remainder of the game, at the risk of something unknown to the author but totally bad. In a normal strategy game, this is determined for you (or by selecting an army); however, this is not a normal game, and you pick one for yourself. Possible themes include:

- suicidal robot army, with a flair of optimistic 1950's futurism in design
- the black ninja clan, completely with all the totally cliché ninja weapons
- a chicken army, which probably wouldn't be threatening to anything but worms
- the internal revenue service, because taxes are scary
- literally anything else you can think of, keeping in mind you're going to have to go with this for a while and structure an army based around the theme

In addition to a theme, a player must create a **gimmick**, which comes in the form of an **ability** that every unit in your army will have by default. You'll learn more about abilities later. The point value of this ability may vary, and will probably be around one to two points (which you'll understand more later), with the players typically agreeing on the point value before the game starts or having it be decided by a GM. Unlike the theme, the gimmick does NOT have to be defined at the beginning of the game, and may be defined at any point in the game. However, it is advisable that you determine it early on, as it is essentially a free benefit and only applies to units created after the gimmick is defined. Like the theme, the gimmick may not be changed after being defined.

Quid Pro Quo and Zero-Sum:

Bastardized Latin for 'something for something' (or so says Wikipedia), quid pro quo implies doing a favor for a favor in return. It comes up in politics and law quite a bit, apparently. It's also a key concept to the game – some things cannot be determined by a point system, and when a GM is not present, the players must decide if something is fair. Two types of fairness include taking a "con" to balance out the "pro", or zero-sum, or each player taking a "pro", thus quid pro quo.

As an example, let us assume that player A wishes to give a unit an **ability** that, whenever it attacks, allows the player to roll a dice – on a five or a six, the unit is allowed to attack again. An obvious "pro", there would be numerous ways to rectify this; I'll outline a few:

- the unit also gains a con such that it's armor is decreased by one (zero-sum)
- the unit's cost is increased by two (pricing this ability at two, thus zero-sum)
- player B is allowed to create an ability which is relatively equal (quid pro quo)

Of all these solutions, the second is probably the best, as pricing an ability allows it to be easily reused without further need for discussion. However, any of these solutions would work, and all require cooperation. **An ideal mindset for these types of exchanges is that you and your opponent are working together cooperatively, seeking two goals: to slowly develop a strategy that will allow you to win, unforeseen by your opponent, and, perhaps even more important, to develop an interesting game with new features and challenges that captures the sense of creativity that is Infinitron.**

Terrain Building

Initially, all Infinitron maps consist of a blank hex board with any number of cities located across the map; initially, one belongs to each player and is designated as his capital. Each city has two statistics: resource value is the number of resource tokens that the controlling player gains at the beginning of each turn by controlling that city, while terrain value is the number of terrain points a player may use to gerrymander the surrounding terrain when he first discovers the city (done by moving a unit onto the city).

On the Topic of Maps:

Although the maps are blank to begin with, they really aren't fully blank. Initially, at least two capitals and various undefined cities may be scattered over the map, in addition to special structures as part of scenarios and what not. For a quick game, try playing with just capitals and increased territory point values. The game resorts to each player having the same, fixed income, and thus focuses more on unit creation and combat beyond the initial terrain creation period. For longer games, add more cities.

Capturing a City:

A city (or capital) is captured by moving a unit onto it while no enemy units exist in the surrounding territory (the surrounding, contiguous hexes that are defined while gerrymandering); if it has never been captured before, it has no territory, and thus a player must simply get a unit to the city first to capture it. When a city is captured for the first time, its territory is created (gerrymandering).

Gerrymandering:

The territory of a city consists of a connected set of hexagons that ultimately border with the city itself. Territories for a city are created by the first player to capture that city, and remain as such for the rest of the game.

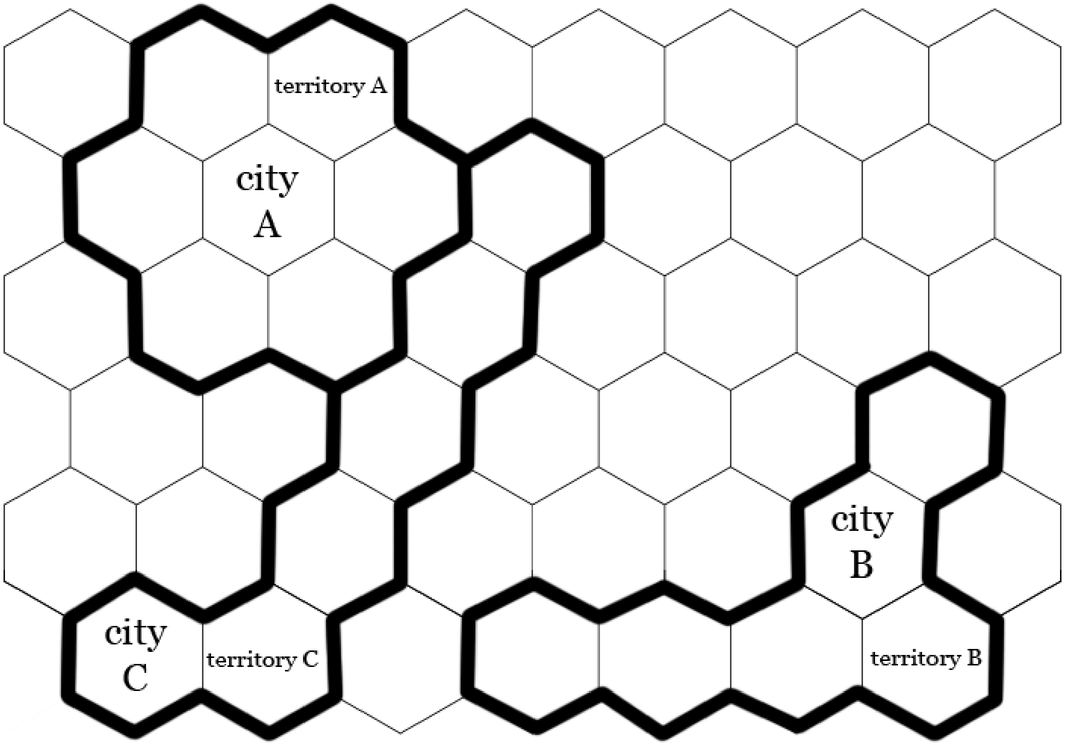
Each city has a terrain value, which is the number of "points" that may be spent creating terrain around a city. There are three types of terrain:

Blocking Terrain: Costing **one** terrain point to place, blocking terrain may not be passed by any unit.

Label Terrain: Costing **one** terrain point to place, label terrain has no abilities by itself – it simply has a name, such as "Tundra" or "Streets", on which certain abilities may only be used. However, relying on label terrain for an ability to work makes it cheaper, and therefore provides various strategic options.

Effect Terrain: Costing **one** terrain point to place, effect terrain has a certain effect that applies to every unit to stand on it, whether as part of the move or at the end of a move. It may NOT function as label terrain, and thus no abilities may use it as an identifier. Examples include "Lava", doing ten damage each time a unit walks onto the space, or a "Repair Pad", allowing you to pay one resource token to heal a unit for a point as they stand on it. However, keep in mind that these effects are usable by any player, as effect terrain affects every unit regardless of side.

In pricing effect terrain, it is often wise to use the ability pricing scheme, which is detailed below. This is often easier said than done, as you will also soon see. However, don't worry about it quite yet.



Unit Combat

Creating Units:

To create a unit, a player must create the unit template, not unlike a class definition in object oriented programming. This costs **two resource points**, and describes what all units of this type will be like. An example unit template for a cliché ninja is pictured below.

Name: Cliché Black Ninja	Cost: 6	Health: 60	Move: 2	⬡ Σ
Attack: **Ninja Sword** – Damage: 20, Range: Melee				
Ability: **Herbal Remedy (1)** – Heals 20 points of damage, Range: Self				

To identify a unit, each unit template is given a distinct symbol (determined by the creator) to identify what type a unit is after it has been created. One could use symbols from another language, geometric shapes, or entirely made up pictograms – it doesn't matter.

Units must cost a minimum of 3 points, and a maximum of 12. Of course, both numbers are completely flexible, but both should exist at some point – a minimum point value keeps players from flooding the field with weenie units, while a maximum point value prevents players from creating progressively larger super units.

Health is added in 20 HP increments, with each 20 HP costing **one** point. By default, at 0 cost, units have 20 HP. Units cannot heal above their starting HP, and die when their HP reaches 0.

Movement points cost **one** point each. However, having zero movement, and thus creating a stationary unit, decreases the cost by two, as opposed to adding anything to the cost. By default, at 0 cost, units have 1 movement.

Each unit may have either one attack and one ability or two abilities. Attacks add to the cost **one** point for each 10 points of damage, and the cost of whatever range the attack has:

Name	*Description*	*Cost*
Melee	any adjacent hexagon	0
Medium	maximum of one hexagon between	1
Long	maximum of two hexagons between	2
Artillery	either three or four hexagons between	2
Super	maximum of four hexagons between	4

Ranged units may, by default, attack over blocking terrain. However, they may not shoot over other units.

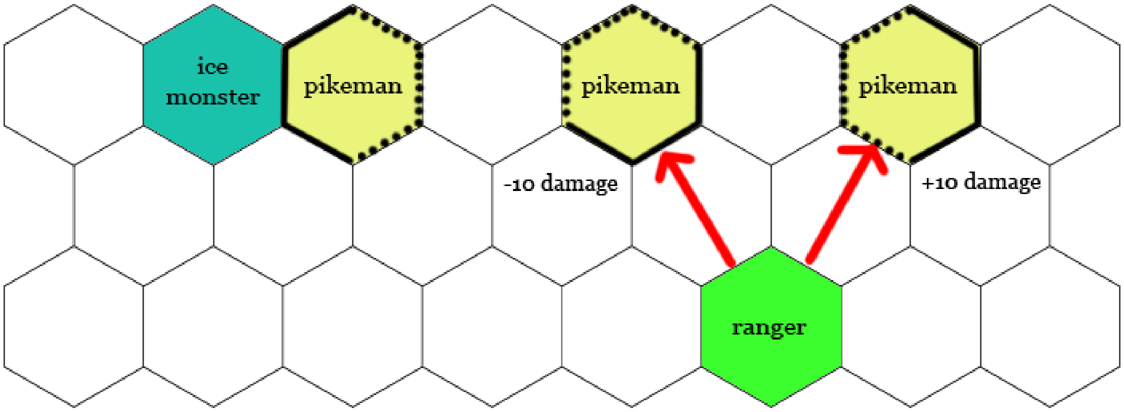
Unlike attacks, abilities have a resource cost to use, which is calculated when the cost of the ability is calculated. In the ninja example, the ability "Herbal Remedy" has a cost of one; thus, it costs one resource point every time it is used, and adds one resource point to the cost of the unit.

Again looking at the example, the cost of the ninja is eight: two from health, one from movement, two from the attack, and one from the ability. It would cost two points to create this template, from which it would then cost six points for each Cliché Black Ninja brought into existence.

Armor:

In addition to those things mentioned above, all units have armor, with a different value on each of the six hexagons. Initially, all units have zero armor on each side; by giving one side negative armor, you may make another side positive armor, thus leaving a net armor of zero. Armor is created on the unit template, thus giving each unit of the same type the same armor layout.

Positive armor, represented by a solid line on a side, subtracts ten from any damage taken from that direction. Negative armor, represented by a dashed line on a side, adds ten to any damage taken from that direction. A pictorial example follows.



Moving and Attacking:

If you've ever played Final Fantasy Tactics, you'll pick up the combat system quickly: units may both move and attack / use an ability in the same turn, but the movement must be done before the attacking / ability using. Thus, you may move and attack, but may not attack and then move. You may also not attack and use an ability in the same turn. Units may be used in any order, but you must finish moving and/or attacking / ability using with a unit before controlling another. You may create units at any point during your turn, but a unit cannot move, attack, or use an ability the turn it was created.

At the beginning of a turn, each unit begins with movement points equal to its Move value. Moving to an adjacent hex decreases movement points by one. Once the movement points reaches zero, that unit cannot move until the next turn, and must attack, use an ability, or finish its turn.

Units may not move onto or through other units.

Abilities:

Abilities are used in the place of an attack, and unlike attacking, cost resource points to use. However, they allow units to do many interesting things aside from movement and standard attacking, such as:

- healing
- area damage
- delayed damage
- transportation
- special damage
- literally anything else you can think of

An ability will sum to a certain cost X, which will add X to the cost of a unit and will cost X additional resource points every time the ability is used. Passive abilities, such as being able to cover a certain type of terrain quickly, have no cost to use. Determination of the cost of abilities (and effect terrain, as it is priced in the same fashion) is one of the more difficult aspects of Infinitron; however, a framework method is laid out for you.

Abilities consist of benefits, costs, and modifiers, all which affect the final "price" of an ability. Many will be developed as you play, which you may wish to record, balance, and save for later games to make the process easier. The following are provided as a place to begin:

The default range for an ability is melee, meaning that it can only be used on either the unit using the ability or a unit in an adjacent hex. From here, the same costs apply as with a standard attack (e.g. Medium range adds to the cost by one).

Passive abilities may only target self. Typically, passive abilities will be limited to those such as movement increases, by which moving to an adjacent hex of a certain declared type of label terrain only decreases movement points by half of a point. This passive ability costs one point.

Anything that deals with changing health, such as damage or healing, comes at a cost of one point per 20 HP.

Typically, having an ability only work on certain declared types of label terrain decreases the cost of an ability by half, rounded up to the nearest whole number. Thus, while healing for 40 HP may cost two points as an ability, healing for 40 HP on "Magic Fairy Healing Zone" terrain squares only would cost one point. (Note: when using these rules to calculate the "price" of effect terrain, this rule does not apply.)

A basic framework for transport units, which carry other units, is as follows: the ability is passive, and does not cost any points to use. However, loading or unloading a unit counts as an ability usage. Units unloaded from a transport may not move until the turn after the turn in which they were unloaded. Units may be picked up and dropped off into any hexagon neighboring the transport unit. The transport ability adds two to the cost of a unit with the ability.

Abilities that do not take effect until the following turn, such as a flamethrower not “burning” and therefore dealing damage until the next turn, are less effective than if the damage was done immediately. Thus, such an effect decreases the cost by one, much like discounting in economics. In fact, other elements of economics can be used, such as expected value, whereby an ability which only hits 50% of the time would only cost half as much. However, that is to your discretion.

As there are literally infinite possible abilities, you will quickly discover one that is not easily priced. With thought and discussion between you and your opponent, and most likely a GM, you will hopefully be able to come to a conclusion that seems fair and just. Much like many other aspects of Infinitron, this seems to be an area that would benefit from an open community, sharing and discussing mechanics outside of the game, where we are likely to feel less attached and opinionated with ideas. With that, I wish you luck.

Chaos Events

Chaos events represent random, extreme, and sometimes absurd happenings that are out of the control of the players. Designed to disrupt the game, they change the game that has developed thus far in largely consequential ways. Because of this, you are free to leave them out – there’s a very good chance that a chaos event could ruin what was so far a well developed game. They are simply provided to add an additional level to the game.

Chaos events can happen at any time, be it ordained by a GM or a random device (such as dice rolling or an electronic chaos timer). Although a few have been provided, you will most likely want to make up your own and circulate them with other players of Infinitron. The sheer randomness is all part of the fun.

Asteroid Strike:

An asteroid (radius of roughly 1/3 playing field width) strikes the map.
Anything within the radius is destroyed.
Units may no longer traverse within the area of impact.

Giant Mech Drop-Pod:

A pod (width 3 hexes) containing a giant Mech crash lands in the middle of the map.
Anything within those seven hexes is instantly destroyed.
Players may capture the Mech (using a unit with ability "convoy", passive, cost two).

If the "convoy" is destroyed, the Mech is dropped.
If the "convoy" returns to the capital with the unit, it activates under your control.

Name: Voltron III	Cost: ~	Health: 200	Move: 2	⬡ M
Attack: **Solar Combat Spears** – Damage: 40, Range: Medium				
Ability: **Power Jets (1)** – +2 movement points, may move again				

Fish Market:

Ten to twenty fish tokens are evenly scattered across the map (depending on map size). When a player moves a unit onto a fish token, they must remove the fish token from the board and then gain a resource point.

Winning the Game

To win a game, a player must accomplish a victory condition. Typically, this would something such as controlling all the cities or simply capturing the opponent’s capital, although a game may have alternative victory conditions set by either the players or a GM at the beginning of the match, such as destroying a structure on the map or rescuing an artifact and returning it to a capital.

A Few Advanced Notes

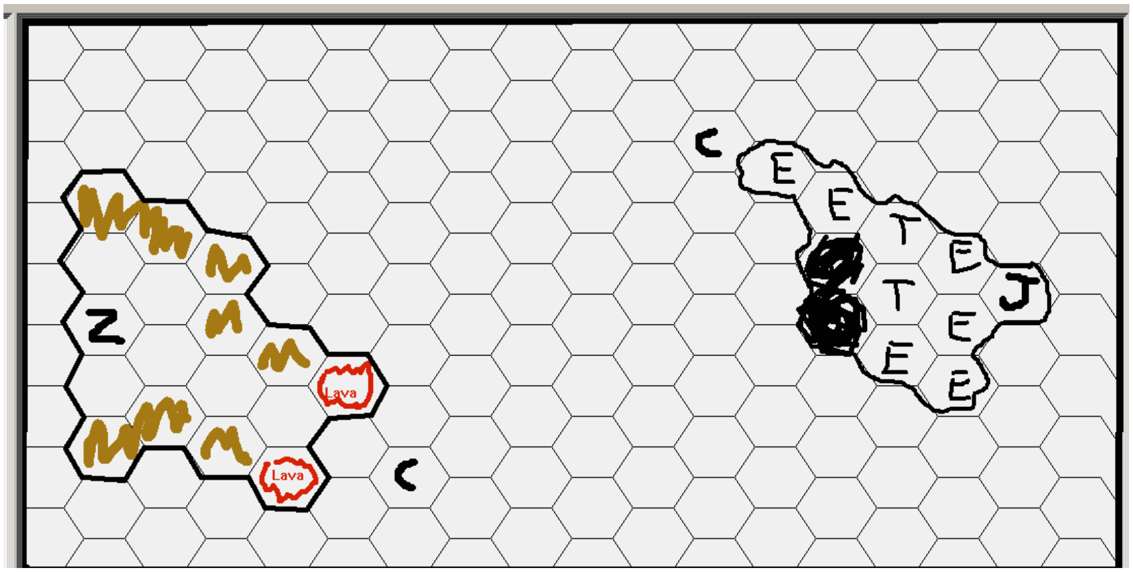
By changing the rules, starting maps, and equalities, you change the way the game is likely to play out. By making cities closer, and having them give more RP, the game tends to rush more – eliminating cities and giving each player a fixed income from their capital may work to encourage more defensive play. Also, by upping the amount of HP you get for 1 RP during unit creation will make combat last longer and allow more units to get to the board. One could also try having it such that, when producing a unit, two or three are actually created, creating more interesting and intense unit combat.

An Example Game

In this game, I’m playing against my friend Jon. My capital is represented by the Z, and I’m playing as the Legion of the Damned (as today happened to be 06/06/06), while Jon, whose capital is the J, is playing as some sort of Shadow army. My gimmick, “Soul Food”, allows my units to recover 20HP whenever they kill an enemy unit. Jon’s, “Shadow”, gives each unit a 1 in 10 (rolling 10 on a d10) to dodge an attack.

We both begin by drawing out our initial terrains for our capitals. The hexes with the “C” are cities. We’re playing that each capital gives 3 RP per turn and has 10 TP, while each city gives 2 RP per turn and has 10 TP.

We’re using a program called OpenRPG to play this game, where everything sort of had to be scribbled onto the map by hand. Bear with the drawings. We’re also not playing with armor, as it’d be too hard to represent with this program.



On Jon's side of the map, the "E" hexes stand for "ethereal" spaces, a type of label terrain. The "T" hexes are temples, which provide an ability to heal for 20 HP at a cost of 1 RP, which may be used once per temple per turn. The black squiggly shaded hexes are pits, which are considered impassible.

On my side of the map, the brown squiggles are mountains, which are impassable. The red circles are lava, which deal 20 points of damage to any unit to walk onto it, done immediately as they walk onto it. Jon was nice and let me create my terrain as not being directly connected to my capital, giving me the large area of terrain within the shaded lines. However, the spaces in the back are open – not quite what I'd hoped for, but still not bad.

BEGIN TURN JON :: J(3) Z(0) ← that's the number of RP we have

Jon creates a template for a unit, shadow puppet. He bargained for a trait, ghost, by which a unit can have 0 HP and cost one less RP (they normally begin at 20 HP for no cost and technically can't go down). However, if it is attacked for any value or even so much as walked over, it is destroyed. It seems fair to me, so I let him do it. This costs him 2 RP.

Name: Shadow Puppet	Cost: 4	Health: 0	Move: 2	⬡ S
Attack: **Creep** – Damage: 30, Range: Melee				
Ability: **Ghost Walk** – Walking to an Ethereal space only costs 0.5 MP				

The unit's move of 2 costs 1 RP, while the attack costs 3 RP (3+0). Ghost Walk added 1 RP to the total cost, while the 0 HP (ghost trait mentioned earlier) brings the cost down from 5 RP to 4 RP, as listed on the card.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(1) Z(3)

I see that we're going to be in for an initial game rush, as usually happens with valuable cities located relatively close to home. Thus, I set out to make a scout of my own.

Name: Imp	Cost: 4	Health: 40	Move: 3	⬡ I
Attack: **Claws** – Damage: 10, Range: Melee				
Ability:				

Creating this template costs me 2 RP, the standard template cost. The unit itself will cost 4 RP – the increased health brings the cost to 1 RP, with the move of 3 MP bringing the cost to 2 RP. My 10 HP melee attack brings the cost to 4 RP. Now that I think of it, I probably should have made some sort of accelerator terrain like his ethereal spaces.

BEGIN TURN JON :: J(4) Z(1)

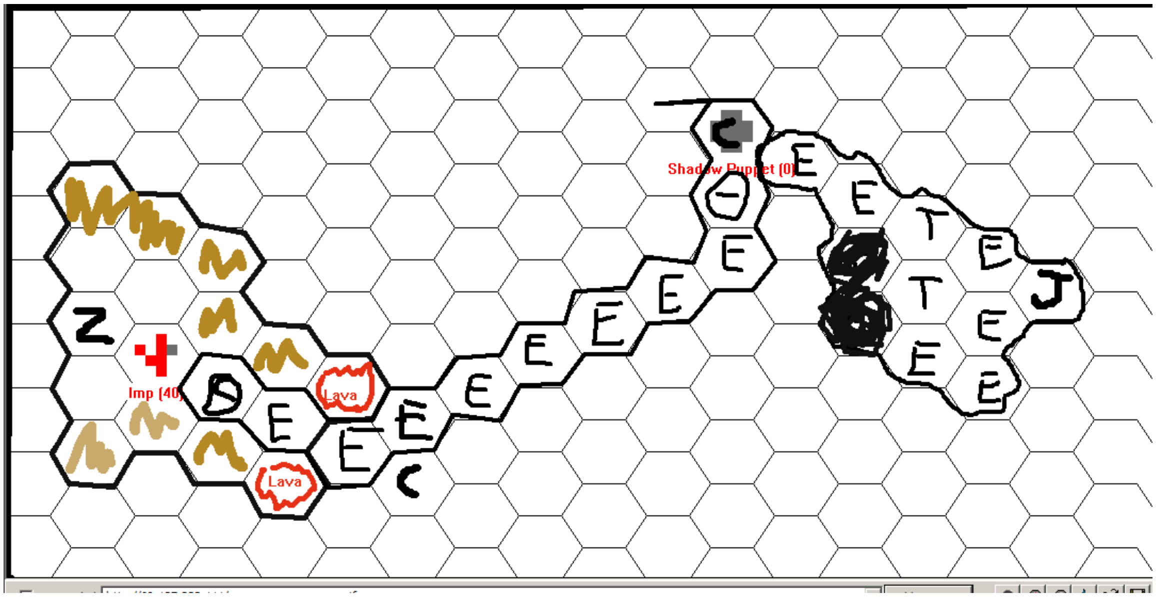
Jon creates a Shadow Puppet on the "E" to the top left of his capital.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(0) Z(4)

I create an Imp in the hex to the bottom right of my capital.

BEGIN TURN JON :: J(3) Z(0)

Jon wants to move his Shadow Puppet to the nearest city – however, he only had enough MP to get the E right *next* to the city (1 MP to get to the T, 0.5 MP to get to the next E, and then 0.5 MP to get to the final E right next to the city). I let it slide, as he thought he'd be able to make it and I'm *such* a nice guy, and he captures the city and starts creating terrain.



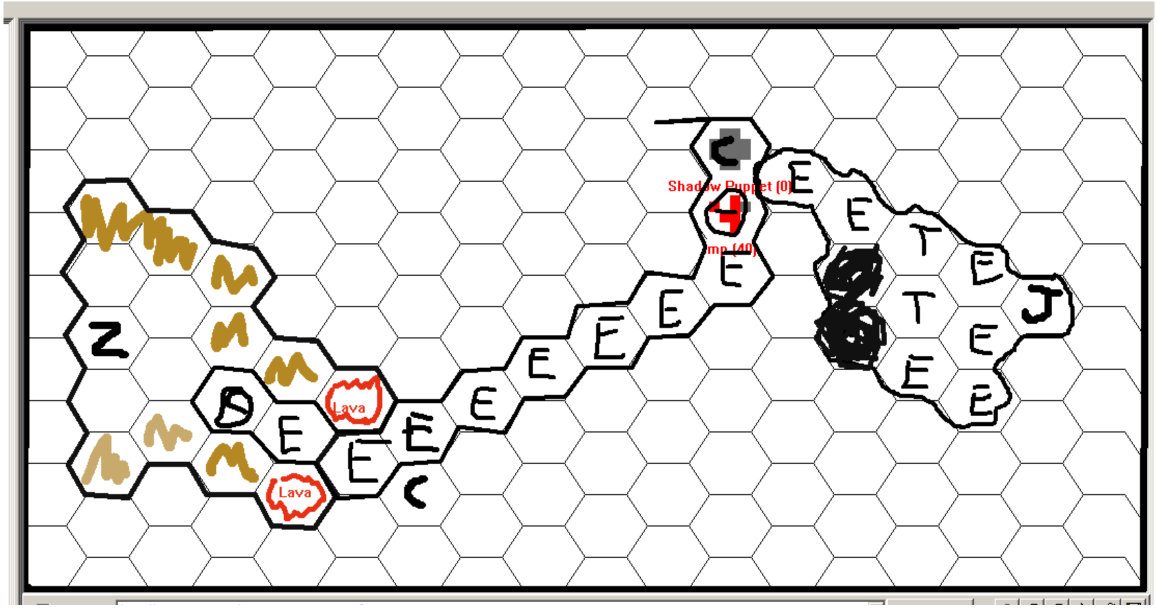
What does he do? He heads straight for my base with an offensive terrain creation. Since my territory was a bit larger than it should have been (he let me bubble in more than my 10 hexes), he plowed straight into the heart of my base. The theta like symbols are portals, something we agreed on, which I'll explain in a second.

The first time he did this, he actually made those last few hexes in my base blocking pit hexes, effectively blocking me into my base while he would teleport to the second city, strangling me for resources as he built up a strong army. Because this would suck, I threatened to forfeit and then removed his mountains. Technically, none of this ever would have happened had I stuck to the rules of terrain being attached to your capital and not created the extended terrain which I allowed him to invade into with his terrain (I could have walked out through the lava, albeit taking 20 points of damage). Interesting never the less

For the portal, we established a simple set of rules. Moving a unit onto a portal and paying 1 RP would instantly move it to the other portal. This would terminate the unit's move phase, even if it had left over MP, but would still allow the unit to attack or use an ability immediately after teleporting.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(3) Z(3)

In response to his dickery, I sent my Imp charging through the portal. Landing at the second portal, I attacked his Shadow Puppet, rolled for a number other than 10 on the d10, and therefore hit and killed his shadowy Shadow Puppet. I don't gain any HP, because my unit is already at full health. Although he still controls the city (I was unable to move onto the city to take it for myself) and will receive 2 RP additional at the beginning of his next turn, I'll be sure to fix that soon.



BEGIN TURN JON :: J(8) Z(2)

Jon does nothing.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(8) Z(5)

I move my Imp to the city and capture it (he controls no units on the terrain, so it becomes mine), and then move back to the portal to guard it. With an income of 5 RP per turn, I wait the rest of my turn out.

BEGIN TURN JON :: J(11) Z(5)

In an effort to bring out bigger weapons, Jon creates a template for a 9 RP unit, Dream Devourer, and then creates one. This costs him 2 RP + 9 RP, or all 11 of his RP.

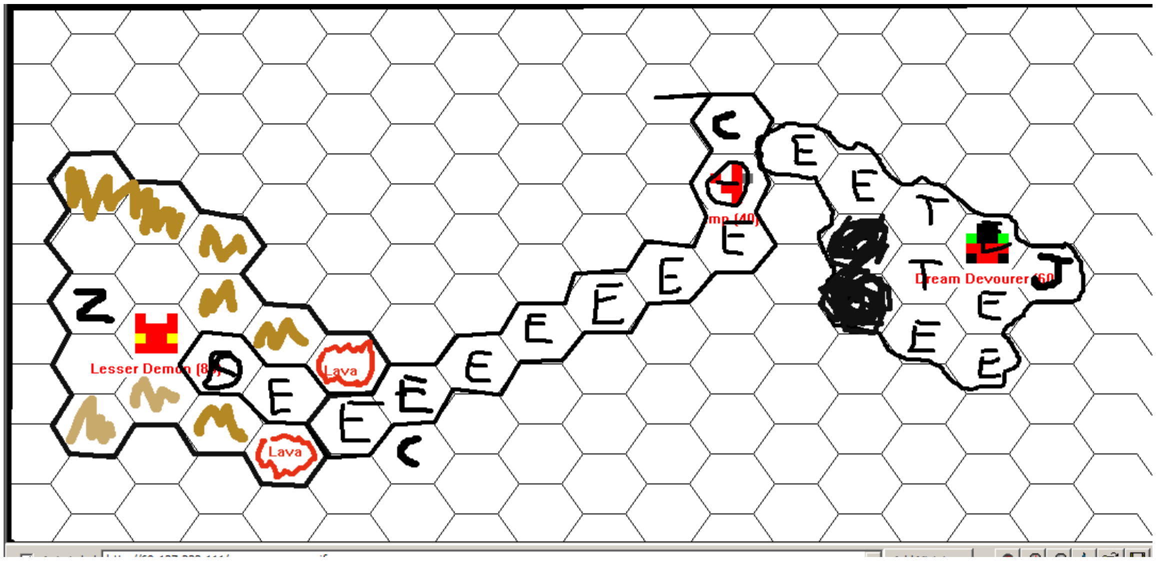
Name: Dream Devourer	Cost: 9	Health: 60	Move: 5	⬡ D
Attack: **Devour** – Damage: 30, Range: Melee				
Ability:				

With a 40 HP increase (2 RP), 4 additional MP (4 RP) and a 30 damage Melee attack (3 RP), the total cost comes to 9 RP. Fairly simple.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(0) Z(10)

In response, I create my own new unit template and unit – Lesser Demon.

Name: Lesser Demon	Cost: 8	Health: 80	Move: 3	⬡ L
Attack: **Fireball** – Damage: 20, Range: Medium				
Ability:				



BEGIN TURN JON :: J(3) Z(0)

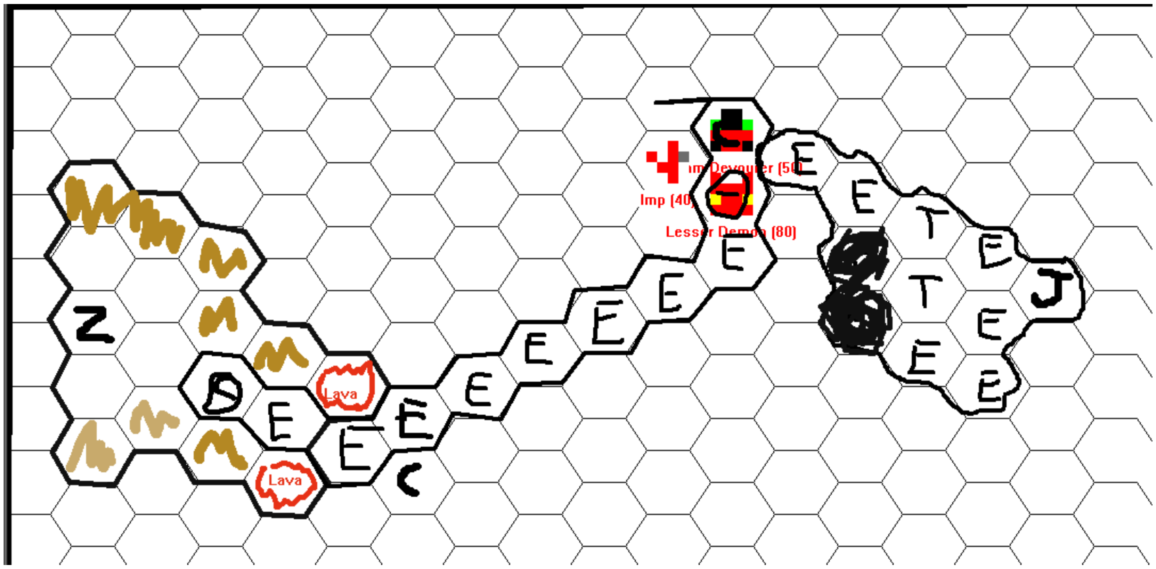
Jon moves his Dream Devourer to the city and attacks my Imp, reducing him to 10 HP. Despite the fact that he is now on the capital, he does not control the city because of the fact that I still have a unit (the Imp) on the city's territory.

One downside of an offensive territory, as demonstrated, is that they are difficult to capture as the territory reaches towards your opponent more so than yourself, making it much easier for them to defend.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(3) Z(5)

I move my Imp and attack for 10, hitting.

Bringing in reinforcements, I teleport my Lesser Demon and attack, but roll a 10 and miss! What a shame…



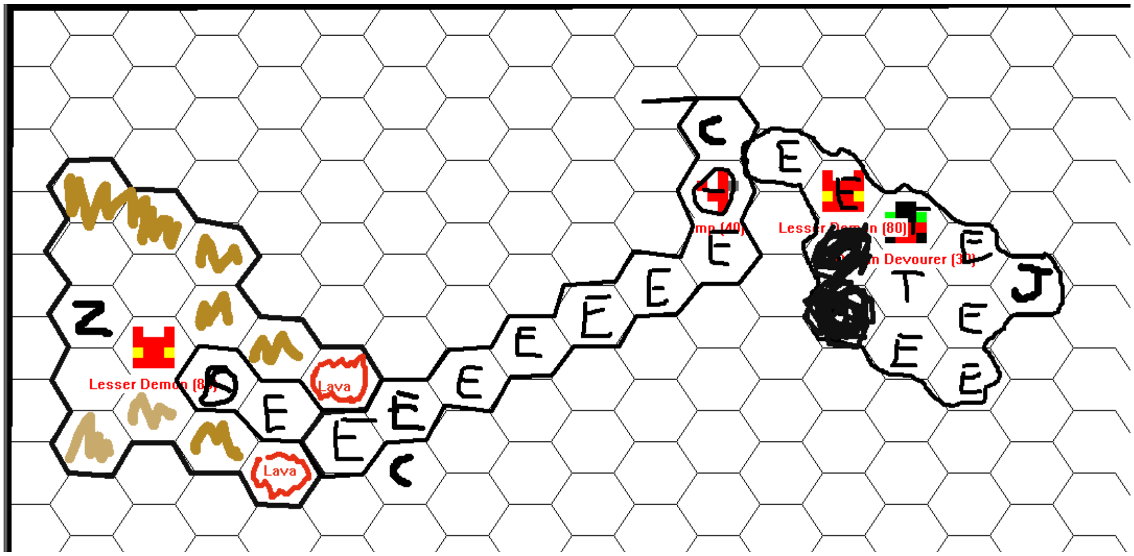
BEGIN TURN JON :: J(6) Z(4)

Jon retreats his Dream Devourer into his base.

BEGIN TURN ZACH :: J(6) Z(9)

First, I make another Lesser Demon. This knocks me down to 1 RP, but gives me something else to continue pressing to his base with, especially with the existence of his portals.

I then chase with my older Lesser Demon and attack for 20, and then move my Imp back to the portal on guard, incase he attempted to make a run for it.



At this point, we decided that we'd played long enough for the example game. Although I was pressing hard, he conceivably could have held me off and put up a counter attack, especially with the temple (which he was already standing on). With its costing 1 RP to use, however, he may not have been able to fund the reinforcements quickly enough.

Regardless, it was a nice, illustrative game. I hope that this helps in your understanding.

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