

HIGH TRADER DIGITAL

GUIDELINES FOR PLAY-BY-EMAIL (PBEM) OR PLAY-BY-POST

Eric Finley Dec. 9/08 For HT v2.0.5

High Trader lends itself pretty well to online play; all of the record-keeping can be done player by player, and there's not a lot of waiting on each other that needs to occur. However, there is some, and as such you'll need some additional guidelines for playing HT over electronic media.

These guidelines center on a new concept: being *on the spot*. If you are on the spot, that means that the game requires your input to proceed. You have 24h from the instant you were placed on the spot (presumably due to someone else's action like submitting the last turn). If you fail to submit the required information within this time, some specified consequence will occur.

In some cases this is simply nothing - you don't submit a turn, you don't draw cards, whatever. (In all such cases it's still considered rude to 'default' in this way, rather than announcing, earlier, that you are proactively drawing zero cards or passing or whatever.) In other cases it's a price; the standard price is one time chit per eight hours, or fraction thereof, it takes you to get off the spot again. If this standard penalty puts you into negative time chits **you have left the game**. No ifs ands or buts, nor any hard feelings hopefully, just a mechanical consequence.

These rules are written to be stiff enough to be an encouragement, yet soft enough that they should not feel unfair. Resist the urge to go easy on your fellow players; the game will run more smoothly, and with fewer hard feelings in the long run, if you simply regard these rules as impersonal law, which everyone agrees to follow and not complain about.

In addition, see the end of this file for instructions on how to make your life easier if posting to a BBS where image files are more readily accessible than PDFs.

1. **Pick a basic time interval for the game.** The default interval is one week. From the formal call to open a turn, anyone who has not submitted a turn within this time goes under Scrutiny. Being under Scrutiny – whether because the week has passed, or because everyone but you has submitted – means you're on the spot (or pass) to publically provide a draft for comment.

Submitting a draft for comment puts you on the spot (or pass) to submit a finished turn. Label draft turns [DRAFT] in the subject line, and finished turns as [FINISHED], so that everyone can find them easily. If you submit multiple finished turns (due to revisions, etc), label them sequentially, [FINISHED 2] and so forth, again so it's easy to find the most recent one.

You are allowed to submit secret turns in PBEM play. Enclose them in a .zip file or the like. Players are on their honour not to read your mission until the appropriate point, later in the turn sequence.

2. **Play the Planning Phase as normal.** Eventually everyone will either have submitted a final turn or passed, and you'll need to work through the resolution phases of a turn.

3. **Select a moderator.** It goes to first shout-out, by timestamp, after the last turn submission (the player who made that submission has to wait at least an hour); such a volunteer moderator receives three time chits immediately. If nobody volunteers within 24h of the last submission (or the turn timeout), it goes to the player with the most time+money chits, and they don't get a time chit bribe for it. Either way, anytime this turn that the players are collectively on the spot and fail to produce, the moderator pays half as much as the worst offender (round down).

4. **Moderator reconstitutes the Event deck** from public information (which cards have been drawn, etc), and **draws the Events** for the turn. Beginning at the instant of their selection as moderator, they are on the spot (standard penalty) to post these results.

5. **The Event results put all players on the spot** (else draw nothing, not even Bluffs) to announce their **number of cards drawn**, and how they've paid, including names of any cards discarded.

Each player is responsible for maintaining *their own Harbinger and Bluff decks*. Deal yourself the appropriate number of cards. Each player's deck is independent during each turn; at the start of the game, everybody deals their own starting card and keeps an otherwise full deck to buy from. They'll be reconciled in step 9.

If there are any secret turns in play, you get to open them and look at them once you've made your decision on card purchases. If you were too busy (or lazy) to look at the other players' turns earlier (even though they were public), you should really do so now.

6. **Last submission puts all players back on the spot** (standard penalty) to **submit their card plays**. Publically, all they post is N cards on M player. The other bit here is where you truly need a neutral third party. (Eventually I hope to have some kind of Web app which can accept a game ID string and a list of cards you're playing on each player, and then shuffle them and be set up to reveal them player-by-player.) For now, feel free to use eric@hellequin.net as a neutral moderator in all games where I'm not playing; just identify which game you're submitting for clearly in the subject line, please.

If something about someone else's turn is not clear to you, a coherent query (about a real ambiguity) puts that player on the spot to answer you, and his reply resets your time available to submit your plays.

7. **For each player, in turn order**, the Moderator is on the spot (standard penalty) to post the **execution of that player's turn**. This includes the list of cards which were played on the player, along with any random rolls or the like, and the resulting timeline, including the results of all of those disasters. Put the net time and money cost of the mission at the bottom in bold print.

8. **When your turn is revealed in this way**, you are on the spot (standard penalty, clocked independently of the Moderator's being on the spot to execute the next guy's turn) to respond with any **defensive card plays**, the actual net cost you end up paying for the mission (and/or your decision to delay or abort), and finally - again in bold print at the end of the message - your final net holdings for the turn, of time, money, and cards in hand. (Discard bluff cards first; don't bother to announce doing so.)

9. **After the last player responds**, the Moderator is on the clock to post a single **summary** which includes the following:

- ❖ A full list of Harbinger cards to discard from each of your decks. If this calls for you to discard a card which isn't in your deck, such as because two guys played Matter-Antimatter on the same turn, or because you've got the last copy of it in your hand, then just discard all you can. Cards in hand are safe and need not be discarded on the basis of this list.
- ❖ Everyone's net worths, in time, money, and cards
- ❖ A list of Achievements which were gained or lost during the turn, and
- ❖ The final VP tally at the end of the turn.

The last line should announce that the next turn begins. The moderator is, at that point, off the hook, and back to being an ordinary player with no special responsibilities.

APPENDIX: SCREEN CAPTURE TOOL

- Installation and use -

I have included a great little utility, called Cropper, in this kit. Cropper is a freeware program written in the .NET framework. I obtained it directly from the author, Brian Scott, at <http://blogs.geekdojo.net/brian/articles/Cropper.aspx>. You may need to install the .NET framework (1.1 or 2.0, it's not clear) for it to work; see the Readme file included in Cropper for instructions. Install Cropper itself in the usual manner – extract it from the Zip and run the .msi installer.

Run Cropper. I recommend putting a shortcut to it in your Startup folder so that it'll run each time your machine starts, but you could also just routinely get it fired up before doing HT stuff. The Cropper icon appears in your system tray.

Adjust the Cropper settings by right-clicking the icon. I suggest setting the output type to PNG, and then (under the Options) the path to something generic you can clean out regularly (the default works), and the full image template to: "[Your faction] {prompt}"

without the quotes, and with your faction name filled in. For example, for testing I used a template of "5RSG {prompt}".

Double-click the icon or hit F8 to bring up the Cropper capture pane. This is a movable, resizable "glass sheet" defining the area to be captured. If you're only going to use Cropper for High Trader, then simply open Acrobat / Acrobat Reader, maximize it (for consistency), and fit the whole form in the window (Ctrl-0, that's control-zero, is the keyboard shortcut for this in all Adobe products). Then fit the pane to cover your whole form and nothing else. The pane size is remembered by Cropper so you won't have to redo this. Hit Esc to vanish the pane again and bring Acrobat (or whatever) back to the foreground.

Now, anytime you want to take a capture of your form, make sure nothing's in front of your Acrobat window, hit F8 (brings up the Cropper pane), Enter (takes a screenshot), type in something like "T1 budget" when prompted (and hit enter), and then hit Esc again to banish Cropper to the system tray. Fast, sweet, and effective.

Now if you attach the resulting PNG images to a post at the Ad Astra forums, they'll exceed the image-inline cap and be rendered only as links, which if clicked will bring the image up in a browser window. Firefox will automatically shrink the image so it can all be seen; not sure about IE (but why would you use that?), Safari or Opera, but I'm guessing they'll show similar behaviour.

Note that the forms themselves have been configured to allow you to save them, data intact, so that it's only the screenshots which are temporary files. You can save the form and come back to it later to finish your turn.