

IT'S A CRIME!: THE CONCEPT

Way back in late 1986, which seems like eons ago, I was introduced to the play-by-mail game *IT'S A CRIME!* I was sent a starter package when I replied to an ad in the *COMIC BUYERS' GUIDE*. I found it intriguing, as I was looking for that kind of entertainment and challenge at the time. And since the turns were inexpensive, the game promised to be simple for me as a beginner, and I was getting my first two turns free anyway, I figured I had nothing to lose, and sent in my very first turn card.

Now, over three years, many struggles, surprises, exultations, disappointments, and almost 400 processed turns later, I have come to a very simple conclusion:

I like this game.

It is a very simple one, in comparison with some others that I have examined. Yet it is very deep when you get into trying to outguess the computer and master its system of play and success. And even though everyone has problems with ANY play-by-mail company, I have been treated more fairly and more professionally by A.B.M. than by any other company I have dealt with. I have tried several other games, and at this point in time, *IT'S A CRIME!* is the only game I am still playing.

There was a time, though, when I wasn't sure how much I was going to like the game, how well I was doing, or if I was even going to survive. In my first ten turns, I ran the gamut of about every problem a gang could experience (or so I thought at the time), and was facing incredible odds of even being around five turns later. I had no experience in the game and no contact with any experienced players. [There evidently weren't that many back in game 10, at least not that I met.] I was on my own. The police seemed to foil almost everything I tried to do. I played it as conservatively as I possibly could, praying that I would still be around a few more turns to have some chance of succeeding in the game.

Simply put, I can place myself into the shoes of the novice player, who is scared to death coming into a game where it appears from the concept of the game that his gang will easily be chewed up by other master players within a dozen turns. Knowing what it would have meant to me to have had such help, I have always tried to befriend and help such players whenever possible, and have found that course of action to be helpful to myself as well, providing me with some strong friendships through the duration of these games.

In *IT'S A CRIME!*, you are the leader of a budding street gang, looking to carve out your own piece of the turf of New York City, contending with the police and with other expanding gangs as you move and weave your way through the neighborhood, trying to become the top gang in your area and, eventually, the whole city. Gangs who succeed in excelling over others in their neighborhood becomes part of a select few who move up later in the game to a different level of play, and continue to compete with one another in an effort to win the game outright.

But it's a tough road. Along the way, you will discover that some of your actions will be misinterpreted by others, that you will accidentally aggress against another gang, and you will have to deal with that. Also, you will suf-

fer setbacks of arrests on orders you needed to succeed, frustrations from being chased away from completing an order which should have worked, and the agony of seeing some of your best men being picked off in a total surprise attack from some overambitious gang lord.

I am certainly not telling you all this to discourage you from playing the game. There are several good things that can happen. As you experiment with different orders, you will discover some that will succeed beyond your wildest dreams. You will find along your border some strong gang that you write to quickly to save your own skin, and its leader will turn out to be the best and most powerful ally you will ever have. Or you will make that dramatic move where you take the last block away from a struggling gang, wiping them off the face of the earth, and people all over will know and respect and fear YOU! Many good things can indeed happen during the course of the game. But we are being realistic in our approach and expectations of the game and need to point out that just as in life itself, there are thorns among the roses, and sometimes they do cause you to bleed.

Success in IT'S A CRIME! is made up of a number of factors, but the main one is *perseverance*. A dozen strong turns, no matter how strategic, will not win a game for anyone. Those who win are those who stay in there for the duration, who don't quit when it gets tough, who don't give up when no one seems to answer their letters, who don't throw in the towel after some disastrous results or the computer messes up a turn and causes some unexpected mishaps. Winners never quit, and quitters never win, remember? If you are a novice player, or even if you've been here before, remember that this is a marathon, not a wind sprint.

There are several goals you can set for yourself in IT'S A CRIME! The most obvious one is to win the game as the Godfather. But with over 400 others vying against you, that's not always a very realistic goal. There are other ways to be successful which are also recognized publicly and have their own sense of satisfaction. Just making Boss is an accomplishment in itself. You may also want to acquire as much money as you can, and be ranked among the city leaders in wealth. [I found that goal particularly satisfying in game 40, breaking the previous record for wealth for a gang, going over \$100,000 by turn 20!] If you just missed qualifying for Boss, chances are that you are one of the Toughest gangs in the city, certainly in your area, and you now become one of the leaders in the streets, where the real battle is fought. You can also try to climb to the top of the lists noted each turn on the results sheet: Notoriety, Sickest, and Highest Income. Or, if your diplomatic skills are above average, you can work to put together an alliance of local gangs early in the game, and build a fortress of strength around you which will help all those gangs involved to grow to even greater strength.

What you do is up to you. Everyone wants to win, of course, and the plain truth is that 90% of the players won't even have any connection with the winning team. If that is the only possible goal you have in the game, you will probably be one of those many gangs who quit around turn 22 of every game. But remember that you don't have to be Godfather to win! In my first game, at the time of Boss selection, I was a nobody. But I redirected my goals, found a Boss to work with, and eventually became Capo in that game, winning enough free turn credits that I played two gangs in a later game at no cost at all! So friend, you CAN make it, no matter what the odds are. Just get a goal in mind that you can reach in your situation. And work a plan to reach that goal. It's a unique world, but with perseverance, planning, communication with others, and a little bit of luck, anyone can do well in IT'S A CRIME!