

DUAL

Being a manual of instruction including a translation, notes & commentary on X'i Ma Wen's poetic tutelage: "A Master's guidance"

By Hemual D'al Mur

*This being writ in the year 1823 N.C. all hail her
Imperial Majesty Galg la Zenta, protector, mentor and
mother. She whose beauty enthral and whose enthrall
provides sanctuary.*

It should never be presumed that something so embedded and established within a culture, & seemingly known by all, is actually known at all. For it is assumptions such as these that cause the many to fall in line with their own conspiracy of ignorance and then, having falsely perpetrated such an outward facade of knowledge, become so acutely embarrassed should they be questioned, that no questioning itself ever arises, as all are caught up in the assumption. There are many examples of this throughout many cultures, where politeness becomes a means which ultimately serves the interest of none but maintains the interest of all. So we should not be too judgemental regarding our human frailty - for this condition is most definitely not owned by a single culture within the expanse of Kingdoms and Empires which encompass our world but almost a defining characteristic that we share with all our brothers and sisters. And if we are to learn anything from it, it should be to laugh at ourselves, for, as it is said 'in laughter does learning lie'.

So, although it may seem to some, many, or all, a rather redundant venture, I shall no less set out the rules of Dual so that, for those who live in the shadow of assumptions, some light may spread. Those however, and it is assumed that it is all, who already know of such intrinsically familiar matters, may you accept my humble apologies for lecturing the wise.

Hemual D'al Mur 1823 N.C.



The dressing of the board - the initial player :

They who are first ranked, initiates the turning of the tiles and the selecting of the first 16 pieces. Starting with a left-handed piece, as is customary, and then alternating this selection until the spacial hex before them is filled, with each tile exhibiting its design and placed in sequence as the shadow of a gnomon moves with the sun, and as the sun itself blossoms with an expansion from inner to outer.

Upon completion, should the lesser ranked wish to play the set then the board is turned (or the players defer to each other their own seating) and the first ranked repeats the process again. If not then the lesser begins the process until the final four tiles only remain unclaimed.

These last four tiles are selected one at a time by each player, placing them upon the mill lines of their opponent (those that lie to a player's left), again with custom dictating that the shortest side of the tiles be presented inward-facing, and that the selection should be of left then right.

Finally the hex counters are taken - 9 by each (though if an officiated match, where ranking is observed, 2 counters are removed for each ranked difference between highest and lowest rank from the first ranked).

For each player, all but 1 counter is placed in the left bowl with the remaining counter placed in the right.

The game is now ready to begin.

*The sequence
of tile selection*



*A typical set up
- note there is no
requirement for
any of the tiles to
match at any
point throughout
play.*

The intricacies of play :

There has always been some discussion in terms of the advantage or disadvantage of first play. Leading to the distinction between the Ordish or Xin convention. The Ordish in that the player of lesser rank performs first play whilst for the Xin the player of greater rank does so*. The third form which many believe to be superior is that the lesser rank is given the option of first play should they wish but may insist upon the higher going first.

In any way, play develops by turn with whoever plays first taking the tile nearest to them (which will always be a left handed tile) upon their mill lines (the lines to their right) and performing the necessary procedures.

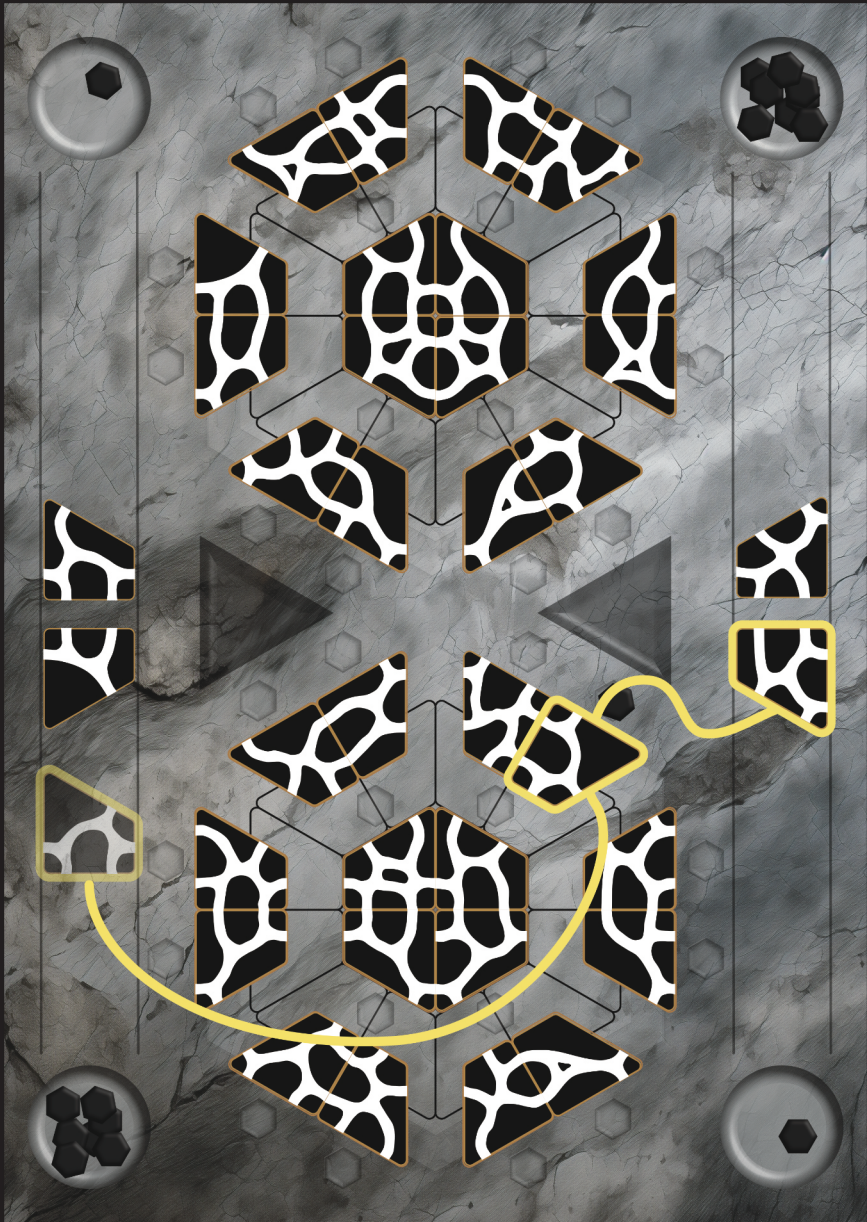
The aim of the game :

To complete a fully connected Hex16 before one's opponent does.

Basic movement :

Play proceeds in turns and always requires the Player to pick up and place into their tile set the nearest tile to themselves from the mill lines on their right. This necessitates the replacement of at least one tile, and the final removal of a tile which is then placed on the tile slide to the left of the Player.

*It has been noted that this convention plays exceptionally well into diplomacy as when the trade deals of House Marima are determined each trade cycle with the Xin, for there is never a need to establish rank between players, and therefore no requirement for a stand off over who is to go first.



Here the tile far right is taken, replacing the tile indicated within the hex design which is subsequently removed and placed into the opponent's mill lines.

Although the performance of such a basic move may not really warrant it, it is still considered good etiquette to place down a hex counter to signify the tile's movement.

Although it has already been noted, it is emphasised again that swapped in tiles do NOT have to match/connect with their neighbours.

The tile that is picked up from the mill lines on the Player's right MUST be placed into the Hex16 design. It CANNOT be simply moved across from the right mill lines to the left ones unless payment is made* (see Use of Counters).

Left-handed tiles MUST replace left-handed tiles and right-handed tiles MUST replace right-handed tiles.

Multiple replacements, known as cascades can occur.

In theory, a cascade could go on forever, even though there are only a maximum of 8/9 tiles being manipulated, therefore a simple rule is introduced:

A tile may only be moved once during a single turn.

thus counters are therefore introduced so that it is clear which tiles have been swapped during that turn.



Here, Player 2 has performed a cascade of 3. Note the use of hex counters to signify which tiles have been moved.

Use of counters :

Once a tile is replaced, a counter is placed in a counter space next to that tile's position (a black hex).

In theory only 8 counters should be required but in practice each Player starts conventionally with 9.

At the beginning of the game, each Player places a single counter in the large circle section to their right and the remaining 8 counters in the large circle section to their left.

Play commences as described and for each tile replacement, the Player whose turn it is places a counter next to the replacement tile position until they have moved all tiles that they wish OR until they have no counters remaining.

A Player who is playing a left-handed tile, may ONLY remove counters from the left-handed circle.

A Player who is playing a right-handed tile may ONLY remove counters from the right-handed circle.

At the end of a Player's turn, any counters that are still in the circle corresponding to the Player's turn are transferred to the opposite circle.

At the end of a Player's turn, any counters that have been played (now placed around the Player's Hex space) are returned to the circle that they came from.

REMEMBER. A Player can only replace a tile if they have a counter to place next to the tile space. Therefore the number

of counters a Player can play determines the number of tiles that they can move that turn.

With time and experience a player will begin to understand how important it is to manipulate their counters.

Depending upon the relative skill levels of the players, different numbers of counters can be allocated to each Player at the start of the game.

As stated above a player at the beginning of their turn must play the nearest tile from their mill lines into their hex grid.

*However for a payment of one counter from the active side, a player may choose not to do this and simply transfer the tile directly across to the opponent's mill line feed. If doing this the tile payment is placed into the LEFT HANDED CENTRAL TRIANGLE SPACE (relative to the player) and cannot be utilised again during this game.

Additionally if making this initial payment, should a player wish to they may swap any tiles of their choosing (either right handed or left handed) for an additional counter payment. When swapping, counters are utilised as normal in that they are placed to indicate which tile has been moved but at the end of the turn, they are removed from the hex diagram and placed in the left handed central triangle space.

Note should it occur that a player's turn starts with no counters present in the turn's corresponding circle then the game is forfeit.

WINNING THE GAME :

As stated previously in the aims, to win a player needs to have a fully connected Hex16. Once a player believes that they have achieved this then they simply push their tile pieces together.

If the pieces form a fully connected Hex16 then they are declared the winner, if they do not, then they forfeit the game to their opponent.

Tiles may be pushed together at any time.

Additional Notes on House League Variance :

It should be recognised that the traditional game - that which has just been outlined - is not the only way in which Dual is played. Within J'ah Ga Noor and the Imperial House League a slightly different variant is played whereby the meditative turn based progression of the game favoured by the Xin is not observed. Instead two timers of 5 tournes each are introduced, one for each player along with a 30 second timer. Play occurs simultaneously with an observing referee to ensure that all moves are legally carried out. Both timers are started at the beginning of play and once either player has finished their initial move, they lie their timer on its side and turn the 30 second one. The other player now has 30 seconds in which to finish their move - if they do not then they forfeit a counter from their active circle. Once the other player finishes their move then they too lay their timer on its side, counters are



A winning hand...

moved accordingly, and then the timers start again. Should a player's timer fully empty then again a counter from the active circle is forfeited and assuming they have further counters, the timer is just flipped and play continues.

This timer based approach ensures a maximum time limit for the game, facilitating a large number of league matches to be able to be held within a season. Only the semi-final and final are allowed to be played without a time limit, though timers are still utilised in respect that once a player finishes their turn, the opposing player must finish theirs within 30 seconds else they forfeit a counter.

It is interesting to note the psychological difference and pressures exerted due to time limits of play and how the game alters in style.

Of further note, once a player times out and has no counters to play then their opponent may play whatever tiles are left upon their mill lines without any time constraint. Points are then awarded for the number of connected tiles, with any remaining counters for the non-timed out opponent contributing an additional 2 points to their total. The winner is then the player with the most points. It is, therefore, possible & in rare circumstances to obtain a strategic/tactical victory over an opponent by deliberately timing out.

A Master's Guidance by X'i Ma W'en

- a new translation and commentary by Hemual D'al Mur -



*Bewildered by complexity, grasping at shadows and chasing countless forms,
the untrained mind loses itself, faltering at every branch,
seeing only the many and not the one.*

*Confronted by another, the untrained mind misplaces its focus,
ignoring its own true nature as the essence of its struggle.
And thus, when strategy first emerges, it is to impede this perceived opponent.
Then, in understanding this futility, it seeks to obfuscate its own intentions,
only to lose itself in its own machinations.*

This art is not a battle of moves.

*Only when lost does the untrained mind realise
the requirements of training.*

The initiate seeks simplicity, but where is this to be found?

The initiate seeks certainty, but how can this be attained?

The initiate seeks the absence of an opponent, but wherein should their focus lie?

*Ever present, all, simultaneously there, and each its own centre,
the shifting tiles, a carousel of form and structure.*

*The master seeks efficiency, a calculated maintenance of balance.
Self, perceived solution, and mind are one.*

A note on X'i Ma W'en :

X'i Ma W'en is an almost mythic figure in the annals of the Xin, but most definitely a real person (circa 808 - 904 N.C.) who did much to influence the study of Dual - known as Min T'a in his native culture. It was said that he was a warrior, born of a normal family, who rose through the ranks of the Xin army. Noted for his bravery, in particular for his conduct during a skirmish with some westerly tribe on the borders of what was then known as Fen'te, a region famous for its plains and wild horses. Subsequently, he was given a position of leadership as captain of an outpost at Xar. It was here, with time on his hands, that he began his study of Min T'a in earnest. Retired, at the noble age of 65, he relocated to the capital Mandur, where he set up the Ma W'en School of Min T'a and continued to teach students well until his nineties. It was said that his knowledge and skills were unsurpassable and in many games won in one or two turns and at times wouldn't even start a game but merely stare at the board, shake his head, chuckle to himself, and walk away. There are many accounts of X'i Ma W'en performing strange acts which may be described as magyckal in nature and also of his students having inherited some of his abilities but, as said, he was a 'mythic' figure and these types of fanciful, unsubstantiated tales are often attributed to such. The most famous tale is of him clapping his hands twice in succession for his students to stand when he entered a room. On one such occasion it is said that several new students, who had been sent from rich families, refused to stand for an old man they considered their lesser, whereupon X'i Ma W'en

laughed, clapped his hands once more and, as a lightning bolt exploded in the street outside, as if summoned by his clapping, said "Must I kill one of you to gain the respect of the others - let me not have to applaud your ignorance again."

Other instances of such demonstrations of hidden powers are well documented and recounted and can be found in numerous texts so we shall not dwell upon them here. However, of note, in terms of this mystical aspect it was said that he was a proponent of the Wyr and spoke often of this mystical aspect of reality and it is believed taught his most closest students secret teachings regarding how to activate these powers within oneself. This being said, there is no evidence of active lineage present today and if the stories are to be believed then whatever esoteric powers that X'i Ma W'en had access to have ultimately evaporated.

Commentary :

It should be observed and will be observed by anyone who starts upon the dualist's path that there are definite stages of progression that one experiences with this undertaking.

Firstly it is not some parlour entertainment as such (although it can be) in that to fully understand and play it requires commitment and study. It is not for idle reason that it is considered a necessary endeavour by 5 imperial households each holding an earnest belief that to develop one's skills in this arena is to develop one's mind in the skills required for the commitments of each House.

It is with regard to these first experiences that we will initially turn to X'i Ma W'en's tutelage and discuss.

Bewildered by complexity, grasping at shadows and chasing countless forms, the untrained mind loses itself, faltering at every branch, seeing only the many and not the one.

A single tile selected and stared at is the first memory most dualists have. What is this? What...simply...what? ? The complexity is utterly apparent from the beginning. Experientially every decision point represents an almost infinite branching of possibilities and therefore there appears to be no correct decision and indeed the multiplicity of options can cause one to falter almost immediately. Note here the focus for the absolute beginner is directly upon their own domain. Any notion of opponent has instantly vanished and they are overwhelmed simply by the complexity at hand.

It is not surprising therefore that when training a dualist, the houses have adopted the system of utilising the game of Hex16 to familiarise their noviciates with the pu'hlka and one can see in the ward cards that are used, as a means of initiating the game, the relationship to Dual, both in their design and function. With some experience, and familiarity with the tiles, there is at least some degree of focus in terms of a finalised aim - to complete a Hex16 - and, from Hex16 itself, an understanding of the importance of developing the centre and finding a balance with the central connections and the number of available short-edged connectors.

With this awareness, a simple strategy usually emerges in that the player seeks to organise their tiles, swap in that which arrives and attempt to maintain an increasingly connected domain. And this is an entirely obvious and quite rational pursuit. Within this simplistic process one or two other things will gradually present themselves on the periphery of the player's awareness. Firstly that a consideration of the furthest tile from play upon their mill lines is actually a better point of focus than the one immediately to be played...and then gradually one will begin to consider what their opponent is doing and begin to ascertain potentially what it is their opponent requires (assuming their opponent is playing the same strategy of course) and consider what tiles within one's own domain could potentially make life difficult for them.

And thus, when strategy first emerges, it is to impede this perceived opponent.

It is at this juncture that the thought will usually arise that this is not a game at all, as it will be never ending, that there is a flaw in the design. If the player can see their opponent's tiles and see their opponent's attempts to construct a connected domain and all tiles are visible, then one could simply sit and deliberately feed one's opponent tiles that they cannot possibly use to win. i.e. ignoring one's own aims, the focus can shift entirely onto preventing one's opponent from winning. This is of course true and is the first real step in understanding strategy:

“If all tiles, choices and movements are visible then one must hide one’s intentions and no truer a statement can be applied to the principles of warfare.”

*Of course there are many treatises on dualing strategies not just X’i Ma W’en’s and the above is a famous line taken from General Morim T’abl’s famous book *Siege by Moonlight*.*

So with a suitably reflective mind, one will come to review one’s initial strategising and, should one have the will and tenacity, begin to build and develop a skill set of mind whereby one attempts to hold together one’s aim, and choices to fulfil that aim, without explicitly allowing one’s opponent to understand exactly what one is doing.

Then, in understanding this futility, it seeks to obfuscate its own intentions, only to lose itself in its own machinations.

X’i Ma W’en’s outlook sums up the issue. This is not an easy path to take and initially at least, the player will find themselves completely disoriented and lost with regard to what they are doing and what they were trying to achieve. It is only at this point that one may realise the true subtlety of Dual and begin to perceive it as a true art form:

This art is not a battle of moves.

And so, having reached the threshold of initiation into the art form one must ask, to proceed what are the requirements to training? To which X’i Ma W’en’s reply would be:

Simplicity, Certainty & Focus.

The initiate seeks simplicity, but where is this to be found?

The initiate seeks certainty, but how can this be attained?

The initiate seeks the absence of an opponent, but wherein should their focus lie?

His answer to these questions is highly esoteric but some small amount of reasoning provides at least enough insight into unpicking the knotted meaning of his response:

*Ever present, all, simultaneously there, and each its own centre,
the shifting tiles, a carousel of form and structure.*

Return to our first insight: that of the importance of developing a centre and finding a balance with the tiles that utilise that centre. It seems that X'i Ma W'en asks one to ignore the underlying structure of the board and simply consider all tiles as the centre, all simultaneously present, and simply observe as each rotates through play around the board. It would further seem that via a consideration of all, as form and structure change, it is within this changing dance that one must perceive the holistic solution. Now one may scoff at this notion, particularly when one realises that there is no further guidance given but via consideration the very fact that this has been laid before you as an ideal, and something it would seem the X'i Ma W'en had himself achieved is a gift in itself. For is this not as they say the first tasting?

One may taste the height of the mountain when the clouds have cleared: the first step in perceiving one's goal. Every subsequent step til the summit brings a truer understanding of what that height really means.

*Having at least provided us with the view of the summit,
X'i Ma W'en leaves us with his final understanding:*

Self, perceived solution, and mind are one.

*We must then assume that this is the view from the summit.
We have then the beginning and end of the path. X'i Ma
W'en has provided us with the view and the direction of
travel. How we achieve this he has left up to ourselves.*

