PLAYING THE GREAT WAR

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World War One during analog wargame's golden age

Game scholar Stewart Woods divides board games in three main categories. 1) Classical games, such as *Chess* or *Checkers* -very old games, so old that they have no author, and therefore are not copyrighted. 2) Mass-market games such as *Monopoly* (1933) or *Scrabble* (1935). 3) Hobby games- niche games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* (1974) or *Magic: The Gathering* (1993), that are enjoyed by relatively small, but highly devoted groups of players[986]. Wargame is one of the thinnest niches in the universe of hobby games.

A wargame is a «realistic» simulation of warfare. We will shortly address the question of what we mean by «realistic», but before that, we must make another premise. In this paper, by «wargame» we will only mean recreational simulations. We will not consider the professional simulations that staff officers of many armies and navies around the globe regularly hold in order to study possible scenarios of war.[987] It is a practice that was introduced in the early nineteenth century, in Prussia, where generals started to prepare their future campaigns with a «game» called *Kriegsspiel*[988]. War planning in the years before World War One was conducted, among other things, also with the help of *Kriegsspiel* sessions, especially in Germany, but also in other countries, such as Russia[989]. We will strictly focus on games played by civilians (or off-duty military personnel) for recreational purposes.

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985 The authors have worked (and played) together, and this paper is a team effort. Nevertheless, Giaime Alonge wrote sections 1 and 3, while Riccardo Fassone wrote sections 2.

[986] See Stewart WOODS: *Eurogames: The Design, Culture and Play of Modern European Board Games*, Jefferson, McFarland, 2012.

[987] On professional wargames, see Thomas ALLEN: *War Games: Inside the Secret World of the Men Who Play at World War III*, New York, McGraw Hill, 1987; Peter PERLA: *The Art of Wargaming: A Guide for Professionals and Hobbyists*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 1990.

[988] In this case we write «game» among quotation marks because, according to Roger Caillois, author of one of the most influential books in the field of game studies, playing is an activity devoid of any practical purpose, while *Kriegsspiel*, albeit labeled as a game (*Spiel*), has a very strong utilitarian goal. See Roger CAILLOIS: *Man, Play, and Games*, New York, Schocken, 1979.

[989] See Richard F. HAMILATON and Holger H. HERWIG (eds.): *War Planning 1914*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010.
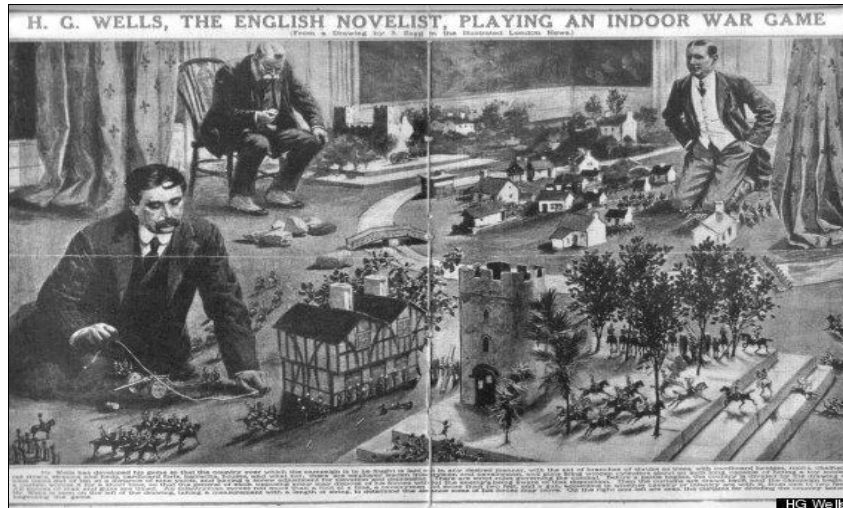
H.G. Wells, *Little Wars* (1913), one of the very first rulebooks for miniature wargaming

In spite of its German origins, wargame became a hobby in the English-speaking world. Miniature wargaming -a toy solider game codified trough a set of rules- was introduced in Victorian era England. The first board wargames -boxes containing counters, maps, and rulebooks- were commercialized by Avalon Hill, an American company, in the mid-fifties.

Wargame's heyday was in the seventies. As we already mentioned, wargame was never a mainstream activity, first of all because of its complexity. Wargame's popularity started to decline in the early eighties also -if not totally- because of the advent of competitors such as role-playing games and video games, where players do not have to master a massive rulebook in order to be able to play[990]. Learning to play some wargames is as difficult as passing an exam at Law School. This complexity is the result of the abovementioned realism. Let's compare wargame with other well-known war-related games such as *Chess* and *Risk!* (1959). In *Risk!*, the armies the players have at their disposal are totally abstract -a pile of identical little tokens. *Chess*' pieces have different shapes, capabilities and names, representing the various units of a medieval army, but it is still a highly stylized representation of war. In wargames, the cardboard counters that compose the opposing forces represent specific units (infantry, armor, paratroopers, bombers, submarines, etc.), each one with its own specificities.

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[990] The crisis wargame went through in the eighties and nineties is a complex phenomenon that in this paper we cannot address in its details. For a provocative and stimulating analysis of this question, see Gregg COSTIKYAN: «Farewell to Hexes: The Wargame. *Requiescat in Pacem*. Born 1958. Died 1996», *Costik.com Blog*, 1996: http://www.costik.com/spisins.html.
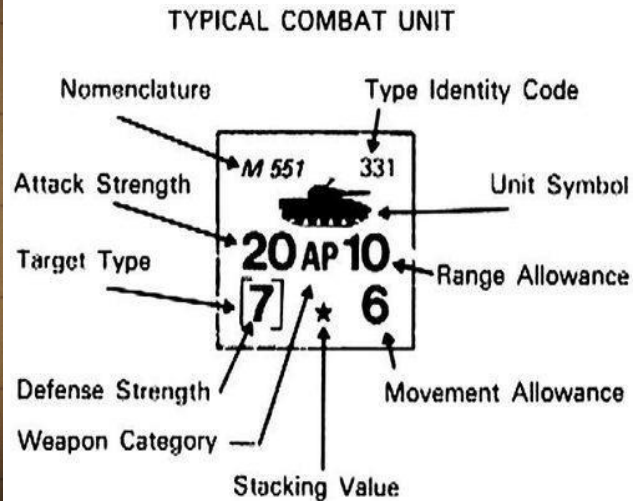
Red Star/White Star (1972), a game on a hypothetical conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact

In *Chess*, the board is a totally abstract space, composed just of white and black squares. In *Risk!*, even if the board represents a world map, geography plays quite a limited role. Wargames are played on detailed maps, with mountains, villages, woods, rivers, etc. Most of the time, a hexagonal grid is superimposed on the map, in order to determine movement. Marching through swamp or desert hexagons (often called simply «hexes») is more difficult than moving along a road. Attacking enemy forces in a forest is more risky than attacking them in clear terrain.

Moreover, depending on the historical period simulated, and on the game's design and scale (some games represent a single battle, others an entire war), wargames can take into account a vast array of other factors, from logistic to weather, from troops' morale to the different qualities of the generals involved in that specific campaign. In spite of its complexity, during the seventies wargame achieved a certain degree of popularity. Avalon Hill's *Squad Leader* (1977), a tactical game set in World War Two, one of the most renowned wargames ever, sold more than 100,000 copies[991]. A considerable success for a game that recreates small units combat with a Borges-like approach, simulating almost every detail, from all the different kinds of weapons and offensive devices, to fighting on different floors of the same building, to movement in the sewer system.

During this period, World War One was largely regarded not just as an unglamorous subject, but somehow as an intrinsically unplayable conflict, because of the static nature of trench warfare. Provided that there is almost no war in the entire human history, from the dawn of civilization to the present, that did not inspire at least one wargame, the main interest has been -and still is-focused on three periods: the Napoleonic wars, the American civil war, the Second World War. There are various reasons explaining the popularity of these wars among designers and gamers. As far as the American Civil War is concerned, the reason is that the largest share of the wargame market is American. As far as the other two periods are concerned, there are two main reasons. First of all, the Napoleonic saga and World War Two are massively present in popular history. As one can easily imagine, recreational wargaming was tightly connected to popular history from the very beginning. Wargamers often were -and still are- military history buffs. By no chance, *Strategy*

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[991] See James F. DUNNIGAN: *Wargames Handbook, Third Edition: How to Play and Design Commercial and Professional Wargames*, New York, Writers Club Press, 2000, p. 198.

& Tactics, the main wargame periodical since the seventies, calls itself: «The Longest Running Military History Magazine». On the other hand, the Napoleonic Wars and the Second World War inspired hundreds of wargames because these wars saw highly mobile forces. One can accept the burden of learning by heart a 30 pages rulebook, but then they[992] expect to be rewarded with the joys of Blitzkrieg. If the result of that hard work is a fruitless «Big Push» on the Somme, the game is no fun.

The few -but not so few- wargames on World War One produced between the late sixties and the early eighties are largely focused on episodes of that conflict where trench warfare was not involved. For example, if we examine the ludography of James Dunnigan, one of the most prolific and influential game designers in the history of wargame, we find that his first two games were devoted to World War One. The first one, published by Avalon Hill in 1967, simulates the battle of Jutland, the only great naval battle of the entire war, a battle that is part of a long tradition of pre-1914 «decisive» naval engagements, from Salamis to Tsushima. The fact that Jutland was actually indecisive is not relevant, because the game is focused on the tactical dimension of the battle and does not address its strategic context. James Dunnigan's second game is *1914* (1968), published by Avalon Hill as well. It simulates the opening weeks of the war on the western front, when the conflict was still a war of manoeuver, in the style of late nineteenth century warfare. If we examine the production of SPI, Avalon Hill's main competitor, we find *Tannenberg* (1978), which is sort of a version of *1914* on the Eastern front, depicting the first, highly mobile, stages of the confrontation between German and Russian armies. Of course, another topic that was particularly suitable to design World War One games full of movement was air warfare. There are several wargames, such as *Richthofen's War* (1972) and *Aces High* (1980), depicting the duels of the «air knights» of the Great War. As we shall see in section two of this paper, it is a subject that made a very smooth transition from analog to digital games. Nonetheless, the Red Baron's epic still works with analog games -it inspired quite a successful contemporary miniature wargame called *Wings of Glory* (2012).
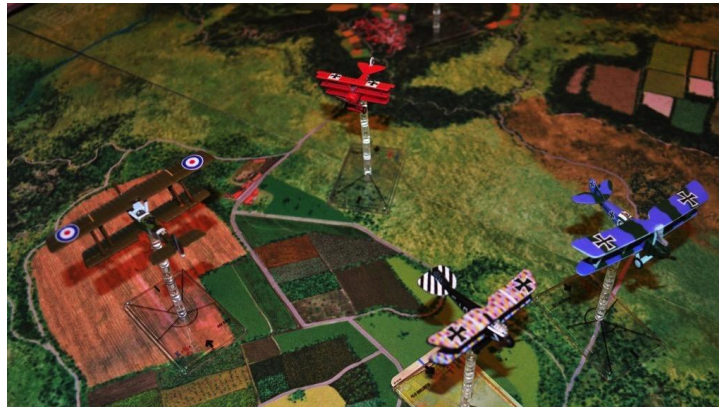
***Wings of Glory* (2012)**

In spite of the intrinsically unplayable nature of trench warfare, during the seventies and early eighties there were a few attempts to create strategic simulations of the Great War, that reconstructed the entire conflict, from August 1914 to November 1918, on all its fronts, including those locked in a fruitless attrition struggle. The seventies, being -as we already said- the heyday of analog wargame, were a time of experimentation. Among the most bizarre fruits of this experimentation were the so called monster games, where the dialectics between realism and playability, which rests at the heart of every waragame, was wildly pushed toward realism. Monster games had not only thick rulebooks, but also huge maps and a very high number of counters (between 1,000 and 2,000). Even though the majority of monster games were based on World War Two, in 1977 SPI published *The First World War*, which simulates the entire conflict with 2,000 counters, and turns representing each one ten days of real time (which means a game lasted 140 turns!). In 1981 Avalon Hill released *The Guns of August*, not exactly a monster game, but nonetheless a game with 1,000 counters and almost 50 turns (every turn corresponds to one month). Since it is a good simulation, playing *Guns of August* is not exactly a thrilling experience. On the western front, you spend hours counting combat factors and throwing dice, but most of the time the outcome is total immobility.

An interesting attempt to design a playable strategic simulation of World War One was made by the already mentioned James Dunningan in 1975. The game, published by SPI, is titled *World War 1* and is the total opposite of a monster game. Dunningan chose a very large scale. In this game, counters represent armies, i.e. very large military units, of about 100,000 men. In *Guns of August* counters represent smaller units, such as divisions and corps (between 10,000 and 40,000 men). So, in *World War 1* there are much less units than in *Guns of August*. The entire French army, for example, is made of just ten counters. Less counters means shorter turns, because there is less calculation. Moreover, each turn represents six months, which means that the entire game lasts just ten turns. Beside its pocket format, quite unusual for a strategic game, especially in the seventies, *World War 1* is interesting for the mechanics James Dunningan elaborated in order to simulate the so called *Materialschlacht*, *i. e.* modern warfare as a confrontation between economic apparatuses supplying the troops at the front with weapons, ammunition, food, clothes. In this game, players absorb the losses they get in battle by loosing Combat Resource Points, which represent the industrial capabilities of the various nations. Instead of losing counters or being forced to retreat, players mark on a track the progressive decrease of their assets. They start losing counters and ground just when they run out of CRPs. It is a very effective way to simulate the industrial nature of World War One's battles, even though, from a ludic point of view, it is not precisely an exciting solution.

World War One and digital games

As we already mentioned, in the early eighties analog wargame's popularity started to decline. On the one hand, the «folly» of monster games, and more generally the imbalance between simulation and playability that hampered many games, had a relevant role in this process. On the other hand,

role-playing games (a spin-off of wargame itself)[993], and then video games, emerged as very popular competitors for analog wargames. The relation between digital games and warfare has been a relevant topic within game studies for a very long time. On the one hand, scholars such as Stahl or Der Derian[994], addressed the formation of the so called «military-entertainment complex», in which video game technologies are adopted for military tasks such as recruiting, planning, propaganda and trauma recovery. On the other hand, authors such as Chapman[995] have produced a number of influential outputs on the ways in which video games can represent military history, addressing issues such as realism, counter-factualism, and exploitation. Despite the general process of convergence between video games and warfare analyzed, for example by Crogan[996], digital games seem to have inherited analog wargames' relative wariness towards the First World War. While early arcade games such as *Defender* (Atari, 1981) represented nameless tridimensional wars, and strategic computer games such as *Balance of Power* (Chris Crawford, 1985) aimed at modeling the intricacies of the Cold War, World War One provided the background for just a handful of flight simulators. According to Wackerfuss, flight simulators set during the Great War such as *Red Baron* (Sierra, 1990), allowed designers to portray air combat as «a contest of skill and chivalric valor»[997], in stark opposition with the popular rhetoric depicting World War One as a senseless massacre. Wackerfuss's note on the moral repercussions of representing the Great War within the medium of video games may be deconstructed into three main arguments addressing the relative lack of WWI-based games. The first argument traces a commonality between video games and analog strategic wargames, in that World War One seem to be significantly less 'playable' than other conflicts. The Great War is thus often framed as an unplayable war, whose thrust derived less from 'grand strategy' operations, and more from prolonged conflicts whose outcomes were largely determined by the use of technologically advanced weapons. A relatively static war -especially on the Western front- in which battles were won through technological brute force rather than strategic ingenuity. The second reason analyzed by scholars such as Kempshall[998] can be described as the moral opacity of World War One. According to Kempshall, whereas games set during World War II allow the player to either perform the morally unambiguous task of killing nazis -see, for example, the *Wolfenstein* series- or play out the dark fantasy of impersonating what is generally considered pure evil, World War One offers a more ambiguous moral canvas. The popular narrative of the Great War as a massacre designed by the ruling elites makes killing an enemy soldier a less unequivocally heroic act. The third reason, which seems to be deeply ingrained in popular discourses on the First World War, pertains to what can be described to the sacred nature of the Great War. In this sense, any convergence between the ludic attitude required to play a video game and the representation of

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[993] On *Dungeons & Dragons* as a by product of analog wargames, see Jon PETERSON: *Playing at the World: A History of Simulating Wars, People and Fantastic Adventures from Chess to Role-Playing Games*, San Diego, Unreason Press, 2012.

[994] See, for example, James DER DERIAN: *Virtuous War. Mapping the Military-Industrial Media-Entertainment Network*, New York, Routledge, 2009 and Roger STAHL: *Militainment Inc. War, Media, and Popular Culture*, New York, Routledge, 2010.

[995] Adam CHAPMAN: *Digital Games as History: How Videogames Represent the Past and Offer Access to Historical Practice*, New York, Routledge, 2016.

[996] Patrick CROGAN: *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

[997] Andrew WACKERFUSS: «*This Game of Sudden Death*»: *Simulating Air Combat of the First World War*, in Matthew Wilhelm KAPELL, Andrew B.R. ELIOTT (eds.), *Playing with the Past Digital games and the simulation of history*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 241.

[998] Chris KEMPSHALL: *The First World War in Computer Games*, New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

such a traumatic event in human history is seen as incompatible with the grieving tone of popular memory around the war. As noted by Chapman[999], this tendency is particularly visible in the discourses that emerged after the television show *Top Gear* shot an episode in the area of the London cenotaph, that generally stigmatized the producer's decision deeming it disrespectful. As we will see, this kind of discourses can be found also in Italy at the time of the release of *Battlefield 1* (Electronic Arts, 2016).

It can be said, then, that, with the exception of flight simulators, World War One has been virtually absent from the scenario of video games for a long time. With the exception of the educational game *Valiant Hearts* (Ubisoft, 2014)[1000], contemporary video games, up to the release, in 2016 of *Battlefield 1*, had been largely uninterested in representing this conflict. Surprisingly enough, one of the most popular genres of digital games, the so-called First-Person Shooter, in which the player is cast in the role of a soldier and experiences the game world through the eyes of their avatar, via an incorporated perspective, had never touched upon the Great War.

On May 6, 2016, Electronic Arts announced the release of *Battlefield 1*, the first FPS set during World War I. The *Battlefield* series, established in 2002, had previously explored a range of historical and geographic settings, but was now offering players the chance to experience the Great War throught the incorporated view of a first person shooter. The launch trailer for the game immediately prompted a series of reactions that can be observed as similar in tone and rhetoric to the ones that had surrounded the *Top Gear* fiasco. The *International Business Time*, for example, deemed the presentation of the game «a masterclass in poor taste»[1001]. Despite these reactions, that framed the game as an exploitative move from Electronic Arts, the game is certainly more interesting -although not less problematic- than what commentators seemed to expect.

Published in the Fall of 2016, *Battlefield 1* offers players two distinct modes of interaction. The single player campaign allows players to take on a series of missions against computer controlled enemies, while the multiplayer mode pits dozens of players, connected via the Internet, against each other on a virtual battlefield. Both game modes articulate specific forms of representation of the memory and historical narratives of the First World War. The single player mode opens with a sort of ludic prologue, lasting about ten minutes, in which the player alternates between controlling various soldiers fighting on different fronts. Every «incarnation» lasts about a minute and is inevitably interrupted by the player's death. A caption reads «What follows is frontline combat. You are not expected to survive». Only the last «incarnation», in which the player is cast as an American soldier facing a German enemy, does not end in death. After a long, mutual, stare, both soldiers surrender their weapon. This is a revelatory sequence: the player, who at this point is not used to the control system of the game, is literally thrown amidst the chaos of battle and forced to experience a series of inevitable and inglorious deaths. The experience of war is undoubtedly turned into a spectacle, but is at the same time framed as desperately chaotic and thraumatizing, starting with the fact that the narrator of the whole sequence is a shell-shocked soldier. After this brief introduction, the player can choose to launch one of five «war stories»,

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[999] Adam CHAPMAN: *It's Hard to Play in the Trenches: World War I, Collective Memory and Videogames*, in «Game Studies», 16(2), 2016.

[1000] This article will not analyze *Valiant Hearts*, as it is our opinion that its explicitly educational nature makes it an outlier in our selection of games. For an engaging discussion of the game, see Chris KEMPSHALL, *The First World War in Computer Games*, cit.

[1001] Edward SMITH: *EA's Battlefield 1 Presentation at E3 2016 Was a Masterclass in Poor Taste*, in «International Business Times», 2016: https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/eas-battlefield-1-presentation-e3-2016-was-masterclass-poor-taste-1565258.

taking place in different settings, from Cambrai to Gallipoli, from the Alps of Veneto to the Near East. The game is thus structured anthologically. Instead of fighting an entire campaign as a single soldier, as is often the case in war-themed first person shooters, the player plays through five different stories -often narrated in flashback- that seem to draw from the genre of the war chronicle. These are for the most part stories of what can be defined as the common soldier, that nevertheless inevitably veer towards tones that mimic those of many World War One narratives: heroism and family tragedy. On one hand, then, the game seems to subscribe to what Chapman, via Linderoth, describes as «narratives of empowerment»[1002], in which the player is fully in control of a hostile environment; on the other hand, *Battlefield 1* attempts at reproducing the chaos and despair of the experience of trench war, through a series of confusing sonic and visual effects.

The multiplayer mode, due to its more free-form nature, relies on less rigid narrative motives. Up to sixty-four players are divided into factions and thrown into a scenario reminiscent of a World War One battlefield. Players operate according to precise orders: capture a certain area, defend a building, break through the enemy lines. This mode does not allow us to refer to the categories, often used in describing wargames, of counterfactual or speculative history, since the game does not offer any «historical» rule of engagement, but rather provides the players with a series of arenas in which they can fight. In this sense, Wackerfuss's notion of «technical realism»[1003] seems to be more effective. While the representation of conflict is completely a-historical, the game aims at simulating in a convincing manner the technological specificities of the First World War. More specifically, the faithful reproduction of weapons and vehicles operates as a peculiar limitation to gameplay. Players need to make do with rather inefficient or bulky equipment when compared to the standard of contemporary virtual warfare. In this sense, the multiplayer mode in *Battlefield 1* can be described as a (possibly disrespectful) playground whose theme and technological affordances are based on the Great War. Not just playing at war, but rather playing with war.

This technical analysis of *Battlefield 1* is not sufficient in defining its nature of peculiar popular text on World War One and its influence on the circulating discourses on the Great War. In order to offer a glimpse into the relation between the game and the functioning of popular history and popular memory it could be useful to return to a specific controversy that arose around the game in Italy, where the memory of the Great War has taken, all through the XX Century, a number of often conflicting connotations. On October 21, 2016, the Veneto edition of the national newspaper *Corriere della sera* publishes an article titled «Videogame di guerra sul Grappa. Esplode la polemica degli Alpini» («War video games on Mount Grappa. A controversy among the Alpini corps»). In the article, the president of Associazione Nazionale Alpini, the national association for veterans of the alpine corps, claims that «It is inopportune to turn a sacred place into a video game […]. Delicate topics such as war need to be tackled differently, not in deviant manners»[1004]. Four days later, on October 25, the same newspaper publishes the opinions of the president of the Veneto region, Luca Zaia, a member of the xenophobe party Lega Nord, and of senator Giovanni Piccoli, belonging to the right-wing party of Forza Italia. Both politicians criticize the exploitative nature of the game, and Piccoli explicitly urges the ministry of defense to consider banning *Battlefield 1* from the Italian market. The controversy refers to one of the game's five war stories, titled «Avanti Savoia», in which the player controls Luca Vincenzo Cocchiola, a veteran of the

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[1002] Adam CHAPMAN: *It's Hard to Play in the Trenches*, cit.
[1003] Andrew WACKERFUSS: «This Game of Sudden Death», cit., p. 235.
[1004] The original quote reads: «Non ci sembra affatto il caso di trasformare un luogo sacro in un videogioco […] Temi delicati come quello della guerra vanno affrontati in maniera diversa, non in modi devianti». Johnny LAZZAROTTO: *Videogame di guerra sul Grappa. Esplode la polemica degli Alpini*, in «Corriere del Veneto», October 21, 2016.

Great War, who tells his daughter the story of his experience among the Arditi corps on Monte Grappa. The nostalgic narrative affords the player the chance to perform Cocchiola's heroic deeds. While searching for his lost brother, the Ardito, takes on an Austrian contingent single-handedly, rescues a group of Alpini, and destroys a series of enemy aircraft with a single machine gun. This is one of the moments in the game in which the «narrative of empowerment» is more explicitly articulated: Cocchiola is a veritable superhero who -pushed by the possibly apocryphal motto «o la vittoria o tutti accoppati»[1005]- enacts a recapitulation of the war on Monte Grappa. Despite the amount of historical licenses the writers allowed themselves to take, the controversy does not revolve around a broken promise of realism, but rather, as already happened with *Top Gear*, on the mere association between play and an arguably «sacred» place. This discourse generates an interesting short circuit if analyzed through the lens of senator Piccoli's quote, according to which «Ever since the mandatory military service was abolished, we are in dire need of new educational values: concepts such as homeland, defense, and security cannot be demanded to a video game»[1006]. Despite Piccoli's concern, the narrative of empowerment of the super-ardito Cocchiola, eerily reminiscent of the monumentalization of Arditism operated by fascism after the war, seems to allude to that same nationalistic heroism (in which homeland, defense, security, and a call to the mandatory military service somehow converge) evoked by Piccoli, who may have found in *Battlefield 1* an unexpected ally.

Analog wargaming in the time of World War One's centenary

In the mid-nineties, a new type of wargame -the so-called card-driven wargame- appeared, and saved analog wargaming from cultural irrelevance, if not sheer extinction. In card-driven wargames, players move their units, make them fight, and perform other actions, through a deck of cards. Each card gives the player one or more capabilities -the arrival of reinforcements, the activation of a neutral nation as an ally, some kind of bonus in combat, etc.

[1005] Literally «either we win or we all die». This seems to be a permutation of «O il Piave o tutti accoppati» («either the Piave, or we all die»), a motto used during the second Piave battle in June 1918. The only source that refers to «O la vittoria o tutti accoppati» as a real motto of the Arditi is Salvatore FARINA: *Le truppe d'assalto italiane*, Milano, Libreria militare editrice, 2005, a somewhat celebratory treatise on the Arditi.

[1006] The original quote reads: «Da quando la naja è stata abolita, c'è la necessità di trasmettere nuovi valori educativi: concetti come quelli di patria, difesa e sicurezza non possono essere lasciati a un videogame». Andrea ZUCCO: *Guerra sul Grappa, caso in parlamento. «Ritirate quel gioco, oltraggia i morti»*, in «Corriere del Veneto», October 25, 2016.

Axis (blue) and Allied (red) cards in *Barbarossa to Berlin* (2002)

Card-driven wargames saved wargaming from obsolescence because of two main reasons. On the one hand, the cards represented an alluring novelty, very well in tune with other popular card games of the time, such as *Magic: The Gathering*. On the other hand, card-driven wargames tend to be more player-friendly than many traditional wargames. Rulebooks are thinner, also because part of the rules are on the cards, so players can learn by playing. Moreover, card-driven wargames often have fewer counters, and so shorter game turns.

Usually, *We the People* (1994), a game on the American Revolution, is credited to be the first example of this new genre. Among the first big hits of card-driven wargame, there is the very first wargame that made trench warfare «playable» -*Paths of Glory* (1999), designed by Ted Raicer and published by GMT, the new leading company in this sector. One of the main differences between contemporary wargame and the hobby's heyday is the number of copies printed per game. Today, dozens of titles are still released every year, but the market has shrank, so companies print less copies than they used to do in the seventies, and most of the games quickly go out of stock. *Paths of Glory* is an exception. After twenty years, it is still in production. It has been translated into several languages, and a new deluxe edition has been published in 2017. How did this happen?

There are two main reasons for *Paths of Glory*'s success in turning World War One into a playable conflict. One reason is scale. Raicer chose a large scale, similar to Dunningan's *World War 1*. It is not exactly as large as Dunningan's, because in *Paths of Glory*, along with armies, there are also corps (smaller units), but they play a secondary role. *Paths of Glory* needs less than two hundred counters to represent all the troops of the opposing coalitions, quite a low number for a strategic game. Moreover, each game turn represents three months of real time (beside the first two turns, that represent a single month each), for a total of twenty turns. Since the rules are relatively simple (for a wargame), you can play a turn in about thirty minutes, and the entire war in eight/ten hours, which of course is outrageous if you are used to play *Scrabble*, but if you grew up playing wargames in the seventies, it sounds like a very reasonable option. *Paths of Glory*'s scale just makes World War One «playable». Raicer made this conflict «exciting» through the cards -this is reason two. The cards, along with the strictly military dimension, simulate also

political, diplomatic, and economic factors, but without the «bookkeeping effect» of *World War 1*. These factors confer realism to the game, and at the same time make every turn highly dynamic, even when some fronts are static[1007].


If *Paths of glory* became a long seller, it is definitely for the quality of its design, but also because, at a certain moment, its popularity started to interact with the growing interest toward the First World War generated by the conflict's centenary, both in academic and popular history. Right after the release of *Paths of Glory*, other World War One wargames were published, presumably trying to emulate Raicer's success, but starting with 2012 and 2013, wargames focused on the Great War, and sometimes strictly focusing on trench warfare, considerably grew. In the first section of this paper, we already mentioned one of these games, *Wings of Glory*. Its title clearly echoes that of Raicer's game, but we suspect that the main reason why it was produced was the Great War-mania of the mid-teens. We cannot name all these games, because they are too many, but we want to mention at least one particularly original and entertaining game, a miniature wargame called *All Quiet on the Martian Front* (2014). It is an alternative version of the Great War, hybridized with H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*.

The most interesting aspect of the interaction between wargame culture and the Great War's centenary is that it produced some sort of a cultural revolution. Wargame has always represented battles from the point of view of old fashioned military history, i.e. strictly focusing on the military dimension -tactics, weapons, plans, qualities of the various commanders, etc. Until the sixties, these were the only topics military historians -often retired army or navy officers- worked on[1008]. In the seventies, the so-called New Military History appeared. A new generation of military historians brought new topics and new methodologies, mixing the study of war with cultural history, psychology, sociology, history of literature. In this theoretical upheaval, the Great War


[1007] On *Paths of Glory*'s conception, see Ted S. RAICER: «The Paths of Glory Lead but to the Gaming Table», in Pat HARRIGAN and Matthew G. KIRSCHENBAUM (eds.): *Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2016, pp. 141-147.

[1008] See Stephen MORILLO with Michael F. PAVKOVIC: *What Is Military History?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2013.

played a very relevant role. One of the seminal books that helped shaping the New Military History paradigm is John Keegan's *The Face of Battle* (1976), that includes a chapter devoted to the battle of the Somme, which was some kind of the quintessence of the British experience in World War One, and, for contemporary sensibility (also thanks to Keegan's book), the quintessence of World War One's experience in general. The cover of *Paths of Glory*'s box has the very same picture of the 1991 edition of Keegan's book.
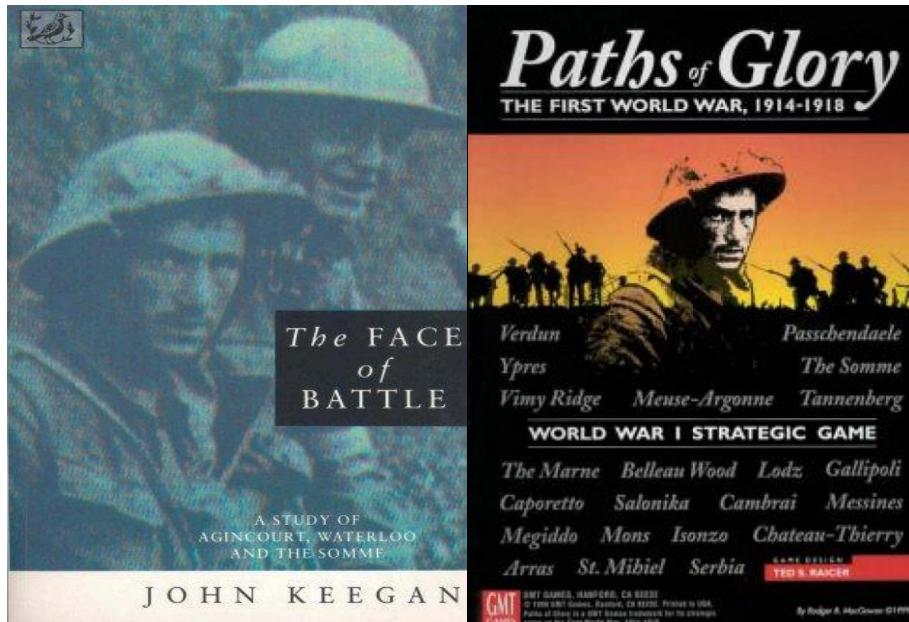

In 1999, this was quite an odd choice, because, until then, soldiers on wargame boxes had been portrayed in heroic poses, fighting, like on the cover of this Avalon Hill game:
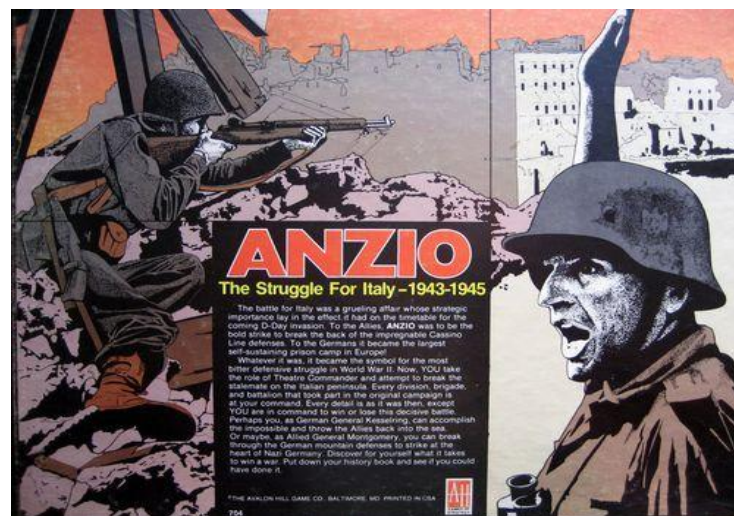
This is the 1977 edition. The original 1969 cover had the face of Mussolini

Choosing a discouraged soldier that eerily stares «at us» is a choice perfectly in tune with the New Military History, that often addresses the question of human suffering, an issue almost entirely ignored by traditional military historians. Not only the box cover has a clear anti-militarist connotation, but the game is titled after an anti-war film, Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory* (1956), whose somber story is set during World War One.[1009] With the centenary, the image of World War One as a disaster produced by incompetent or mad generals and prime ministers, who made the entire European population pay for their incompetence and madness, has become widespread among popular -and to some extent even academic- historians. We find this kind of gloom and tragic representation in several war related games published during the centenary. Just see one of GMT's most recent products dealing with the Great War, a game titled no less than *Fields of Despair* (2017).
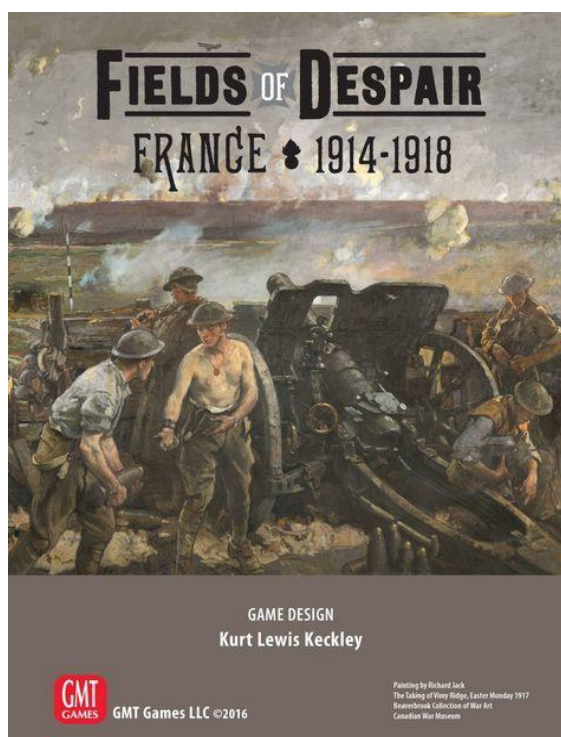
The subjunctive «despair» needs no comment, while «fields» is a reference to *In Flanders Fields*, a poem written by a Canadian officer in 1915, which became a real emblem of the British and Imperial experience in the Great War. The poem -that is also reproduced inside *Paths of Glory*'s box- is not an anti-war text. On the contrary, it talks about fallen soldiers lying in the poppy fields of Flanders who ask the reader to carry on the fighting: «Take up our quarrel with the foe: / To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high»[1010]. Today, the warlike disposition present in the poem has been overshadowed by the mourning dimension. It is

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[1009] Also another Ted Raicer's World War One game, *Grand Illusion: Mirage of Glory, 1914* (2004), is titled after a very famous anti-war film, Jean Renoir's *La grande illusion* (1937).
[1010] John MCCRAE: *In Flanders Fields*, in Jon SILKIN (ed.): *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1996, p. 85.

no chance that poppies are symbols of remembrance in British ceremonies for World War One's dead. So, the word «fields» stands for grief, and is very well in tune with the image on the box of *Fields of Despair*, that represents war as an utterly un-heroic activity, an undertaking good for miners and factory workers.

Nonetheless, a wargame is a wargame. Its main goal is simulating fighting not mourning. So, *Fields of Despair*, despite its gloomy box cover, is a game where you must kill the enemy, even using poison gas, a kind of weapon rarely mentioned in wargames. This explicit reference to chemical warfare -which, one hundred years from 1918, is still a taboo, a red line governments should not cross, as shown by recent events in Syria- could be interpreted as a clue for *Fields of Despair*'s «political awareness». This game makes you play war, but does not hide its horrors. Still, other contemporary wargames are joyously bellicose, like *The Great War* (2015), a hybrid between board and miniature wargame, where players win by collecting medals, which they get by annihilating enemy units.

The Great War (2015): a card-driven miniature wargame

In sum, the mixing between wargame and New Military History did not change the inner nature of these games. At the most, some of them became somehow more politically conscious. To find a real anti-war statement in War World One related games, one has to exit the wargame area and enter into the cooperative game zone. In 2015, a French company released *The Grizzled*. The original title is *Les poilus*, after the nickname that was given to French soldiers serving in the trenches. The game was illustrated by artist Tignous, killed in the *Charlie Hebdo* terrorist attack. In a cooperative game, players do not compete against each other, but work together. In *The Grizzled*, each player plays a *poilu* on the Western Front. Their goal is surviving, but most of the time they do not achieve it, because the cards that are at the core of the game only generate negative effects, from rain to gas attacks. In the entire deck, there is just one card that produces a positive effect. It is the Christmas card. The oblique reference is to the Christmas truce of 1914, when British, French and German soldiers fraternized in the no man's land. This episode plays a very relevant role in the martyrological representation of the Great War, which, in the last forty years, emerged on the boundary between popular and academic history.

The Grizzled's rulebook starts with the six characters, all friends from the same village, who read with deep anxiety the mobilization orders issued by the French government at the outbreak of the war. The rulebook does not mention the cheering crowds that all over Europe, in the August of 1914, hailed the troops leaving for the front. In *The Grizzled*, the war is represented as a catastrophe produced by distant institutions, a catastrophe that falls on a peaceful and harmonic community. *The Grizzled* is an accomplished game, but its depiction of the Great War is totally in line with the abovementioned martyrological narrative. It is a narrative that emerged in the Seventies, with the New Military History, which has the great merit of dismantling the old jingoistic representation of the war. But when this new narrative is simplified through popular history and mass media, it becomes as false as the old patriotic narrative. The Great War was not just a plot organized by European ruling class against the masses. There was genuine prolonged consensus, even among those who were fighting in the trenches. Otherwise, such a horrible war could not have lasted four years. The men did not stay in the trenches just because they feared to be courtmartialed. Playing *The Grizzled*, you get only the martyrdom dimension, and cannot grasp why another common man, like the six game's characters, on July 31, 1914, assassinated Jean Jaurés.

Being a cooperative game, *The Grizzled* opposes both wargame's and war's logic. As we already said, in this game you do not win *against* the other players, but *with* them. You do not move counters on a map, in order to conquer territories and destroy enemy armies. You just try to survive in the midst of an apocalyptic conflict. The game literally gives the feeling of an Old Testament plague. Not only all the cards -beside the Christmas one- produce negative effects, but there is almost no way to soften these effects, as it happens in other card-driven games, such as *Twilight Struggle* (2005) or *Labyrinth: The War on Terror -2001-?* (2010), where players can «bury» the most dangerous cards in their hand. Winning a game at *The Grizzled* is relatively rare. The «war memorial» card, which marks the death of the characters-players and the end of the game, very often appears, but this is precisely the beauty of the game, along with its political message.

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