# ANALOG BOARD GAMES AS CITIZEN JOURNALISM

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I have been designing analog wargames for the civilian market for about 30 years, and so far I have published over 65 titles[1]. Many of my games are about conflicts occurring during those 30 years, designed not long after the actual events and sometimes even during the conflict itself. My motivation in doing this is to try to make sense of the world I live in, and to share this understanding with other people, through games.

I believe this makes them a form of amateur or citizen journalism, where the author presents their research on an event or issue in an interactive format. Because it is presented through a set of rules and components that allow other people to discover and explore the event or issue through play, it is unlike other forms of citizen journalism such as magazine articles, blog posts, Youtube videos or podcasts. Yet it is also like these forms because it does have a definite context and selective representation of the events by the game's designer, and certainly does invite discussion, argument and variation by the player.

In this article I will present historical and current examples of these analog games and their various uses under the general objectives of journalism. I will also discuss them as political and commemorative objects, which gives them status as meaningful artifacts of popular culture that exemplify or criticize the culture they come from. And to follow the academic practice of subdividing and classifying everything within reach, I will consider them as illustrations of three distinct genres or types of newsgame.
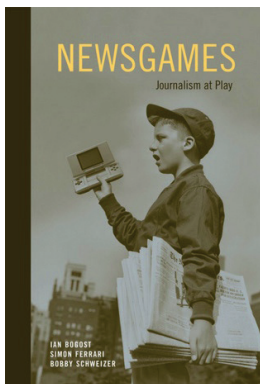
The word "newsgame" was invented in 2003 by the video game designer and academic researcher Gonzalo Frasca, in connection with his satirical video game *September 12th*. The term became much more widely used in the game studies community when Ian Bogost, Simon Ferrari and Bobby Schweizer published *Newsgames: Journalism at Play* in 2011[2]. IIn the book, Bogost described how videogames distributed through the Internet could satisfy the basic objectives of journalism(to inform, educate, criticize and persuade), improve the effectiveness of journalists in achieving those objectives, and possibly rescue journalism itself. Bogost would mention newsgames occasionally in his writing and journalism

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1 https://brtrain.wordpress.com/personal-ludography/.

2 I. Bogost, S. Ferrari, B.Schweizer, *Newsgames: Journalism at Play*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2010.

for a few more years. Then, in 2020 he wrote an opinion piece for *Convergence*, a journal dedicated to new media technologies, called "Curiosity journalism, or the first decades of newsgames"[3]. In it, he described the promise of the early days of newsgames and concluded that while a number of interesting examples had appeared, newsgames have generally failed to deliver on that promise, for a number of reasons:

– Their creators were not inspired or inspiring;
– They were a lot of work to create, from design to coding;
– It took a lot of time to finish, test, and debug them;
– It was difficult to distribute them widely – for example, a promising website called "GameTheNews" could not get its game about the Syrian Civil War onto the Apple AppStore because it was "too political" until they changed the names to imaginary countries and factions;
– Finally, few people seemed to be interested in the end product for more than a few days.

Put simply, the video newsgame model could not be made to pay. The amount of time and work and money required to do it properly could neither respect the high-speed news cycle nor generate the necessary attention and revenue for it to be viable.

> Journalism games were a long shot, for reasons that had little to do with games and more to do wth everything else happpening in the media and tech industries.... Computers turned out to be the authoring and distribution system for 20th Century media, not hosts for proceudural media like software and simulations. Those circumstances can partly explain the shift from games to gamification.... (p. 574, 576)

So it appeared that one of the original developers of the form, and its best known chronicler, was ready to declare it moribund and move on to the Next Big Thing. I was not that surprised to read this, since neither the original book nor this "bookend" piece mentioned analog games at all (except for a chapter in the book discussing crosswords and puzzles appearing in newspapers). It is well known that this area of cultural studies, particularly in the United States, is almost completely devoted to computer and video games and is persistently ignorant both of its analog history and of the analog games that continue to be published alongside digital games.

The fact remains that the practice of producing analog or analog newsgames predates video games by a very long time, and continues today. Many of them stand as fine examples of citizen-based social criticism and analytic journalism. Bogost's remark in 2020 about computers as authoring and distribution systems for analog games was a belated recognition of a process that had started in the 1990s.

Jeremy Antley[4] has noted that analog games present themselves along three axes: material (components), textual (rules and notes) and procedural (mechanics codified by the other

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3 I. Bogost, *Curiosity Journalism, or the first decades of Newsgames*, "Convergence, The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies", April 27, 2020 Vol. 26(3)

4 J. Antley, *Struggling with Deep Play: Utilizing Twilight Struggle for Historical Inquiry*, in M. Kirschenbaum

two axes). He also noted that "wargames are synthesized reflections of the past situated in the present mindset of their creation." The same could be said of any game whose topic relates to not just war, but social and political issues of the past.

I will present examples of these games divided into three general classes of treatment:

– A classical game design given a reskinning to make a critical or satirical point, that is something about the level of an editorial cartoon;
– An original but mechanically simple game design that makes an obvious polemical point, about the level of an editorial or opinion piece;
– A closely researched, mechanically complex simulation game that resembles the data-heavy "special feature" analytic pieces that still appear in magazines or specialized journals.

I will explain how the three classes of games differ along these axes, and give some examples from the past and present.

Three Axes of Presentation:

- Material (components)
- Textual (rules and notes)
- Procedural (mechanics codified by the above two axes)

Material

Textual   Procedural
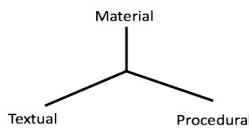
- Jeremy Antley, "Struggling with Deep Play: Utilizing Twilight Struggle for Historical Inquiry".
Zones of Control: Perspectives on Wargaming (463-470)

*Before the Internet: reskinning classic games for classic journalism*

In *Critical Play*, Mary Flanagan [5] writes on the practice of purposeful remixing or reskinning of classic board games by artists and designers for the purpose of parody, satire or to deliver a moral lesson somewhat altered from the original intent. The simplest form of analog newsgame is one that adopts the appearance and mechanism of a classic board game for familiarity with readers, but replaces the original game's contents with content on a contemporary social or political issue. Hence (per Antley) the procedural and material axes tend to be weak, but the textual axis is emphasized.

One of these classic board games is the "Goose Game" or *Jeu de l'oie*, a European children's game. Traditionally, the game uses a spiral-shaped track of 63 spaces and players move forward and backward on it according to the throw of two dice, attempting to win by landing exactly on the final space. It has been used for imparting morality lessons like

(ed.), *Zones of Control: perspectives on wargaming*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2017, 464

5 M. Flanagan, *Critical Play: Radical Game Design*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009.

Snakes and Ladders once was in the English-speaking world, but its structure has been used for many other purposes.[6]
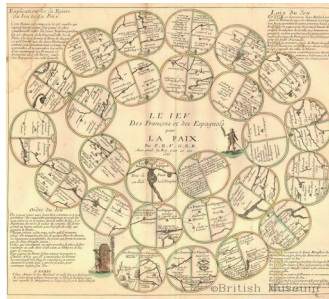
The earliest example I have been able to find of an attempt to document and interpret a contemporary sociopolitical event in the form of a game is *Le Jeu des François et des Espagnols pour la Paix (The Game of French vs. Spanish for Peace)*. The game board is a spiral with 26 spaces, each labelled with a date between 1635 and 1660 and detailing an event in the Franco-Spanish wars. The left side of each space details the French gains and the right side, those of the Spaniards. The final space celebrates the end of the war in 1660, the year this hand-coloured etching was published.
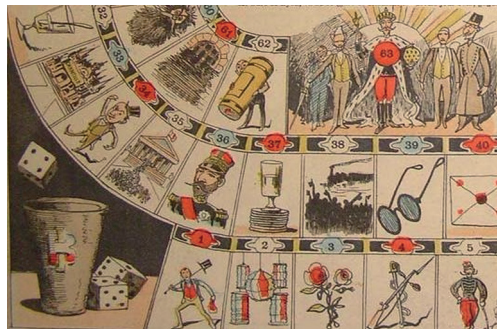
Jumping forward two hundred years, an example of the Goose Game being used for satire is *Le General Boulanger*, a game published in the Paris newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1889. It is about the career of General Ernest Boulanger, a reactionary politician who at the time was threatening to lead a right-wing coup d'etat and become dictator of France. This spiral-track "goose game" format, familiar to readers from their childhood as a vehicle of moral lessons, was subverted as the cellular structure of the game relayed a narrative shot through with sarcastic comments on the stages of the General's military and political career.

6 A. Seville, *The Geographical Jeux d'oie of Europe*, "Belgeo, the Belgian Journal of Geography", volume 3-4 (2008) 427-444. Also, this Italian language website compiles nearly 3,000 examples, editions and variation on the Goose game: http://www.giochidelloca.it/ricerca.php.

Pank-a-Squith was a board game produced in 1909 on the "Votes for Women" movement in Great Britain. Using a spiral track, small lead Suffragette figures would leave their parlour at home in square 1 and advance past hazards like arrest and detainment by police and judges, hunger strikes and so on until reaching the Houses of Parliament.

An example of war propaganda from early 1945 is *Gioco delle 3 Oche (Game of the Three Geese)*, produced in the Italian Social Republic. Its spiral track is divided into 50 spaces with Fascist and racist messages: space 14 features a caricature of an apelike Black American soldier; space 35 shows American "Liberator" bombers destroying schools while space 37 shows V-1 flying bombs striking London; and space 50, the goal, promises the redeemed honour of Italy through secret weapons and the New Order.

A remarkable adaptation of the Goose Game appeared in the Italian comics magazine *Linus* in April 1976. *Il Gioco de L'Ockheed (The Game of L'Ockheed)* satirized the multinational Lockheed aerospace company bribery scandal, even playing on the assonance of the company's name and "*le oche*" (the geese). Players moved along a classic spiral track of 63 spaces to the ultimate goal. [7]

In the United States, the structure and rules of *Monopoly* would often be used for these kinds of games because the mechanics and conventions (roll and move, acquiring property

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7 Italian author, game designer and journalist Andrea Angiolino organized "I Newsgame di fine millennio" (Newsgames at the end of the Millennium), an exhibition of Italian analog newsgames in Modena in March, 2011 as part of a game fair. Many examples of Italian-language games in this article are drawn from documentation of this exhibition: http://www.giochidelloca.it/storia/modena.pdf.

while trying to bankrupt the other players) would already be well-known to readers from their childhoods.

Blacks and Whites (1970 + 2020)

An attempt to explore the issue of race and inequality was *Blacks and Whites*, which was included in the March 1970 issue of *Psychology Today* magazine. It used the general concepts of *Monopoly* and was conceived as a painless way for middle-class whites to try to understand the frustrations of blacks. Examples of game rules that reinforced this included: a White player started with 100 times more money than a Black player and was able to buy property anywhere, while Black players were always the minority of the players in a group, started with less money and collected less on each trip around the board, were unable to buy certain properties and had to draw from a separate Chance deck.

A later redesign of the game encouraged playes to change the rules, after debate, when anyone landed on the "People's Park" space (analogous to Free Parking). The new rules gave Black players an opportunity to use – and even to beat – the System. From the distance of 50 years this revision seems charming in its optimism and earnestness. However, in 2020 a graphic, mechanical and content update underlining how little has changed was made for a 50th anniversary edition; it handily achieved sufficient funding on Kickstarter to be published.


The drug war was parodied in the September 1971 issue of *Playboy* magazine with *Feds n' Heads*,which used underground cartoonist Gilbert Shelton's cartoon characters "The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers". It was a roll and move game somewhat like *Monopoly*

though instead of buying property, players moved around the tracks on the board trying to buy kilos of drugs and stash them at home, while avoiding Burns, Busts and Bummer cards.

All of the examples given here predate the Internet, and in fact predate video games themselves. Most of them belong to the general roll-and-move genre, as something that would be mechanically familiar to both children and adults. Again, they are not innovative game designs themselves, nor (to be honest) even particularly interesting games, but they are purposeful in their application under the objectives of journalism to variously inform, educate and criticize.

The politically performing object: original game designs as propaganda and polemic

There is also a more modern tradition of socially or politically critical newsgames on contemporary topics that do not imitate the structure of classic board games but are relatively simple mechanically, in order to present the players with the basic features and dilemmas of the situation quickly. Here, the material and textual axes are more prominent than the procedural though the points made through the exercise of the mechanics can be quite strong.
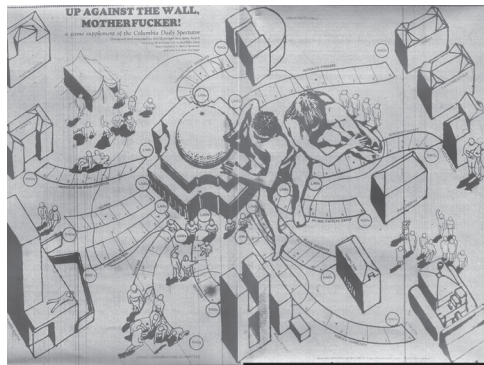
An early example that dealt with the unrest on American college campuses in the 1960s was *UP AGAINST THE WALL, MOTHERFUCKER* which appeared in the *Columbia Daily Spectator*, Columbia University's student paper in 1969. The game board, which is a number of trails winding around the buildings of the Columbia campus, looks like a standard roll-and-move game. Instead, players allocate resources to these trails, which are actually scales of the attitudes of different groups contending within the university power structure – Conservative Students, Alumni, Tenured Faculty, and so on – and rolling dice in hope of changing these attitudes. The game was designed by James Dunnigan, who went on to create Simulations Publications Incorporated or SPI, a company that produced hundreds of historical wargames between 1970 and 1982.
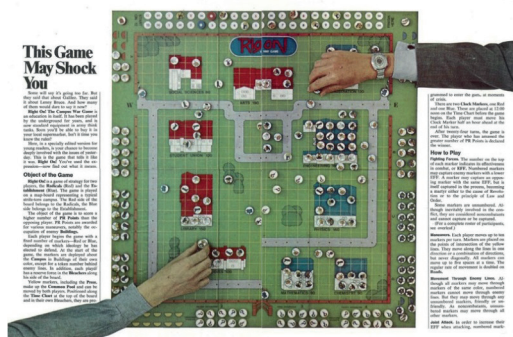
National Lampoon also published "Right On! The Campus War Game" in its October 1971 issue; this was an article presented as the partial rules, pieces and map for a simulation of conflict on an American college campus between red Radicals, blue Establishment, and yellow Common Pool pieces like journalists, Concerned Mothers, and the campus chaplain. Though the game was unplayable, it described several mechanics recognizable in early wargames such as a combat rating on counters, terrain affecting movement, and so on.

Other examples of critical games that appeared in periodicals include *Strike!* in *Games and Puzzles* magazine in 1981. This game was a simple simulation of the British car industry of the 1970s and was a reflection of the tumultuous labour unrest of the period. The game asks players to do the impossible: the game is played in teams of two, one representing the managing director of a car manufacturer, and the other the union leader of its workforce. Each team must work to achieve their diametrically opposed objectives within the company, while helping to sweep the competition (other teams) from the market. *Tchernobyl sur Loire* ran in the French magazine *Jeux & Stratégie* in 1990: in it, two to four players representing industrial conglomerates tried to get as rich as possible by developing polluting industries and manipulating ecologists to interfere with other conglomerates' development.

▲
Business – Il gioco del potere riguarda il controllo trasversale di aziende di vario genere, dalle banche all'informazione pubblica e privata. Dal punto di vista dei meccanismi ludici, echeggia il Go come il dilemma del prigioniero; in copertina Gianni Agnelli (collezione R. Vadalà).

A remarkable but short-lived experiment was the Italian magazine *Il Bel Paese*. It existed only from 1985 to 1986 but each month saw the publication of one or more simple games

in its pages inspired by news and current events. Scandals were plentiful at that time, so the designers had plenty to work with as they made fun of the embarassments of government ministers, politicians and figures like Silvio Berlusconi, then a major media and broadcasting figure before he formally entered politics. The games had simple short typeset rules, many mechanics were based on card play, and a very simple graphic style prevailed. The satirical magazine *Totem Comic* also occasionally produced political satire games [8]

The 1990s saw the mass acquisition of desktop computers in homes and of course the advent of the Internet. One result of these developments was an upsurge in the number of self-published games, due to two things: the development of cheap, easy to use desktop publishing software and the Portable Document Format to produce them; and the use of the Internet to store and distribute them – that is, the Print and Play format. It was now possible for not just large publishers but also small companies and individual people to design, develop and distribute their own games over the Internet for free.

TerrorBull print-and-play games (2010-15)

In It Together

Mosqopoly

Bullshit Plug

Our Sonovabitch

"TerrorBull Games are on a mission to rediscover and resurrect the forgotten tradition of using board games to tackle real life dilemmas. Games used to be a tool of understanding, a prism through which to interrogate the world - a fun tool, but a tool nevertheless. Now they're all about trading sheep or wooing princesses." -- TerrorBull Games Manifesto, 2015

Terrorbull Games published the controversial board game *War on Terror* in 2006 and also produced a number of free print and play games on its website: *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* (2010) on managing public relations during the BP Deepwater Horizon disaster; *In It Together* (2015), a simple lesson on perpetuated inequality; *Our Sonovabitch* (2011) on arms sales to countries in the Arab Spring; *Mosqopoly* (2010) about the "Ground Zero Mosque" controversy in Manhattan; *Metakettle* (2011), a game for protesters to play while being confined by the police; and *Deepsea Desperation* (2010) – designed for Greenpeace, a game in which one player creates marine reserve zones on a grid representing the ocean while the other player drills for oil, extracting profits. Each game was only one or two pages long, with short rules and simple principles – for example, *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* used the Prisoner's Dilemma as a resolution mechanic for players matching cards and trying to maximize their scores.[9]

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8 Angiolino exhibition documentation.

9 A. Sheerin, (designer): *Crunch: The Game for Utter Bankers* (2009), *Deepsea Desperation* (2010), *In It*

As noted earlier, Bogost's book did not mention analog games at all. Bogost doesn't seem to have written very much about board games generally, and in this case he was probably even less interested in spending any time writing about the analog past or present of something he was explaining needed to be done in the digital realm. However, in 2011 Simon Ferrari, one of the book's co-authors, wrote a piece for mediashift.org about paper prototyping as a method of developing a videogame. In it, he did a quick review and analysis of several of these Terrorbull print-and-play games and singled them out for praise, saying that they "far exceed the quality and complexity of many editorial video games (and all of the prototype-quality videogames seen on Flash game portals)" and "it shows that the combination of paper prototyping and print-and-play have the potential to make valuable contributions to ludic commentary on both breaking and ongoing issues." [10]

Other illustrations of this can be found on Boardgamegeek.com, a database and information resource on boardgames that has entries for over 84,000 items. A quick search reveals a number of free "web published" games with satirical or critical political content. Examples include: *Final Decrees* (1999); *Run Hippy Run!* (2000); *Bastards Inc.* (2004); *Free at Last* (2006); *#Occupy Boardwalk* (2011); *Austerity* (2015); *Construction Boom* (2020) and many election-themed or party politics games from 2001 onwards that take place in real or imaginary/generic settings. These games are normally small in size, short in length, and are presented with simple graphics or use only a small number of components so that assembling and playing them is not too onerous or complex.


DRONE (2013)
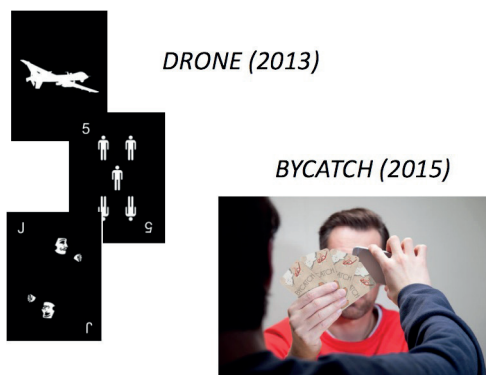
BYCATCH (2015)

Two illustrations of this cheap and cheerful approach can be found in two games dealing with drone warfare: *DRONE* (2013) and *Bycatch* (2015). In the former, the designer Sonny Rae Tempest offers a sheet of free print-and-play instructions to use a deck of ordinary playing cards (a version with more thematic artwork is available for sale through The Game Crafter) to simulate seeking out hidden targets while minimizing "collateral damage" (dead

Together (2015), *Metakettle* (2011), *Mosqopoly* (2010), *Operation BP: Bullshit Plug* (2010), *Our Sonovabitch* (2011), *War on Terror* (2006). Terrorbull Games, 2006 - 2015.

10 S. Ferrari, *Why Newsgame Development Should Look to Paper Protoyping*, Mediashift.org, September 16, 2011. http://mediashift.org/2011/09/why-newsgame-development-should-look-to-paper-prototyping256 [December 20, 2020]

civilians). In *Bycatch*, players hold hands of cards, and choose which cards of their rivals are eliminated based on badly focused cellphone pictures of those hands, taken the previous turn by a phone held backwards. Both are strong statements on the collection and use of intelligence and its human costs, using common objects to follow simple but novel rules.[11]
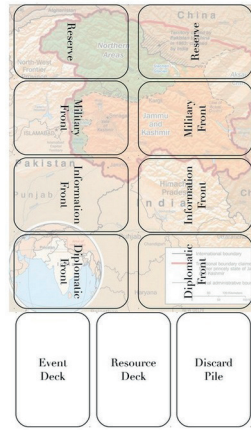
Here is an example of my own work in this vein: *Kashmir Crisis*, a simple card-based game for 2 players. It is about the February 2019 Pulwama suicide bomber incident that caused several months of tension between India and Pakistan. A month or two after the incident an academic researcher and photojournalist at Toronto Metropolitan University in Canada suggested to me that with his research and fieldwork in Kashmir, and my game design experience, we could work together in this "gamer-citizen journalism" vein, to let people find out a bit more about the crisis in Kashmir. So, we did and very quickly we offered it up for free print-and-play, just a few months after the initial incident.

Kashmir Crisis is played with a deck of ordinary playing cards and takes about 15 minutes to play. During each game turn, players will receive a number of cards from the deck and play them onto Diplomatic, Information or Military Fronts. This abstractly shows the scale of effort a country is investing in obtaining a favourable result in that sphere of activity. Players were scored on the cards they had played and there were consequences for winning or losing on different fronts.

We thought that this might have seemed just too abstract for some players, and others who could not imagine what playing a "5" card represents, and why a "5" is better than a "3" but not as good as a "7". So, to give them a bit of a verbal prompt in building the story of the unfolding of the conflict together (which is the goal of playing a game with another person), we included a sheet of "narrative prompts": that is, adjectives, verbs and nouns that might help someone describe or imagine what they are doing in the game.

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11 S. R. Tempest, (designer): *DRONE* (2013) and S. Udayasankar (designer): *Bycatch* (2015)

Later on, a computer science student at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh made a digital version of this game as a course project, so making it a form of semi-digital newsgame. [12]

Board wargames and historiography

The most complex strain of analog newsgame is the serious board wargame devoted to the study of current or hypothetical events. Where previous examples could be compared to shorter snappier editorials, opinion pieces or satires these are analogous to the analytical, data-heavy "special feature" magazine or journal piece. They can feature considerable depth of analysis as the result of intensive research, delivered to players through innovative mechanics that have been thoroughly developed and tested. Of course, there are also many examples of wargames that fall short of these adjectives, but in the end historical board wargames on contemporary topics are strong along all three of Antley's material, textual and procedural axes.

Matt Kirschenbaum, a professor at the University of Maryland who writes on the digital humanities and new media as well as wargames, calls the unfolding of the play of a board wargame the construction of a "vast procedural narrative": [13]

– vast because the number of permutations and decisions in even a small wargame is much, much larger than those in a game of chess;
– procedural because the decisions are both driven and limited by an elaborate but transparent set of rules; and
– a narrative of the play of the game – optimistically called an "after action report" by players – can read like a very plausible and even entertaining piece of war journalism (depending on the skill of the writer).

The narrative that emerges from the wargame flows from both the dense information packed into the game via its components and from the way the players have processed that information.

In both circumstances the rules are what most strongly affects the processes. A game with detailed rules tends to have a map and pieces with a similar level of sophistication and detail.

But these material components are the medium through which the game takes place, subject to and limited by the (textual) rules which establish procedures. In a well-designed game, the textual element fades into the background while players explore the game world and together create the narrative, the story, the "hook" that a journalist strives to place in their work to achieve their objective.

12 "A Playful Learning Exercise: Kashmir Crisis". Authors: Charlie Murray, Hans-Wolfgang Loidl, Brian Train. Games and Learning Alliance: 10th International Conference, GALA 2021, La Spezia, Italy, December 1–2, 2021, Proceedings Dec 2021Pages 3–13 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92182-8_1.

13 M. Kirschenbaum, *War Stories: Board Wargames and (Vast) Procedural Narratives*, in P. Harrigan (ed.), *Third Person: Authoring and Exploring Vast Narratives*, MIT Press, Cambridge 2009, p. 357.

In 1969 James Dunnigan founded Simulations Publications Incorporated (SPI) while he was still an undergraduate at Columbia University (where he had designed the *Up Against the Wall* game mentioned earlier). This was one of the first publishing companies devoted to the hobby, and it would publish more than 300 wargame designs before it folded in 1982. About a hundred of them were designed by him, and about a quarter of the company's total output was published in *Strategy and Tactics*, a bimonthly magazine that was the first periodical devoted to wargaming that contained playable games. While the original company is no more, the magazine is still active and has published more than 350 issues as of this writing.

Each issue of *Strategy and Tactics* contained a playable game. These games were something very different for their time. They were sophisticated, researched and modelled simulations, designed by people who were generally not professional analysts or historians. Besides the game, the magazine would also contain articles totalling 5,000 to 10,000 words or more of analysis and context – the history, course and broader aspects of the conflict portrayed in the game. Normally this was also written by the game's designer, so the writer's research would be presented twice: once as a standard written feature in a magazine, and again where the research was quantified and joined with a set of game mechanics to make a game that readers could play and explore the topic for themselves. These are clear examples of amateur analytic journalism, and are a version of the "platform" genre of newsgame described in Bogost's book, where a game is supported by extensive background material.
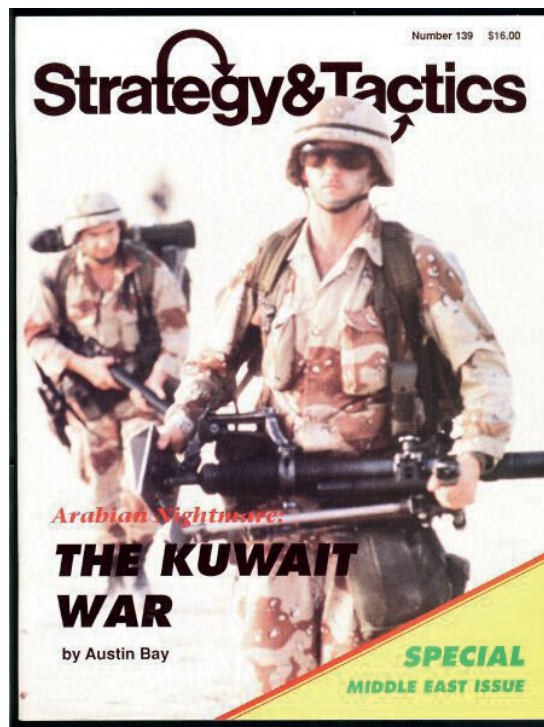
Dunnigan was also fascinated by the ability of board games to explore contemporary and hypothetical conflicts. This wasn't anything that the American professional military wasn't already doing, with good reason. So why shouldn't civilians also explore these problem spaces for themselves, with the benefit of some research and tested game mechanics?

One of the earliest examples of this is *Year of the Rat*, a game on the Easter Offensive in Vietnam in 1972 and published less than six months after the actual event (in 1972 terms, that was still within one news cycle!). In the following year SPI staff, mainly Dunnigan, were working on *Sinai*, a game on past Arab-Israeli Wars, when the actual 1973 Arab-Israeli War started just as they were playtesting a "hypothetical 1970s" scenario. The story is told that several times, a military attache from the Israeli consulate would stop by SPI to see how testing was progressing and what results were being generated from the games. Finally *Arabian Nightmare: Kuwait War* (1991) was probably the first analog wargame to be designed, tested and developed mainly over the Internet. Within days of the Iraqi invasion in August 1990, Dunnigan and his co-designer Austin Bay began to communicate over the GEnie online service with developers, playtesters and graphic artists to create a game that reached subscribers in January 1991, just as the real Operation Desert Storm got underway.

Besides these near-immediate treatments of actual contemporary conflicts, many games on hypothetical topics appeared in *Strategy and Tactics*. Issues published before 1990 deal with large-scale regional wars (*Oil War, Revolt in the East, South Africa, The China War, RDF, Nordkapp, Central Command, Target Libya*) or a World War III in Europe that never happened (*Berlin '85, Fifth Corps, BAOR, Superpowers at War, North German Plain, Donau Front*).

The United States tends to dominate the board wargaming hobby in terms of publishers, titles and players but three examples of hypothetical wargames that did not appear in an American specialty publication were: *Il Golpe (The Coup)*, published in three consecutive issues of the Italian weekly newsmagazine *Panorama* in the spring of 1980; *Polonia '81 (Poland '81)* in February 1981 in *Pergioco*, a monthly game and puzzle magazine; and *La battaglia delle Falkland (Battle of the Falklands)* in the weekly news magazine *Il Mondo* in early 1982. Respectively they dealt with a conjectural military coup in Italy, a Soviet invasion of Poland, and the war for the Falkland Islands (hypothetical when designed, it was published just as the actual invasion got underway, much like *Arabian Nightmare: Kuwait War*). All three of them took the visual form of hex-and-counter games with short rules. [14]

This speculative practice continues to this day, and even got a special focus with the launch of *Modern War* magazine by Decision Games (the current publisher of *Strategy and Tactics*) in 2012. Many issue games reflected current fears and concerns, from piracy off the Horn of Africa to a future collapse of China, a war of all against all in the Middle East, or possible Russian expansionism against all points of the compass.

As a side note, unfortunately that magazine ceased publication in 2022 because of poor sales. After 30 years of designing these games, my conclusion is that while every board

14 Angiolino exhibition documentation.

wargamer may have a deep interest in one or more particular periods of history, often they are no more interested in current affairs than non-gamers. Even after "9/11", the most transformative and psychologically traumatic event for Americans in their recent history, the explosion of books, magazine article, blogs and websites devoted to counterterrorism and counterinsurgency was not matched by any large increase in the number of intellectually demanding commercial board games on the subject.

As noted before, personal computers and the Internet have made distribution of simpler analog newsgames possible through print-and-play. The same factors apply to quick production of analog analytical games on current and hypothetical topics. It has been possible for some time for a person so motivated to produce and distribute an analog newsgame on a particular topic far faster than the video newsgames that Bogost proposed in his book.

Here are some examples, several from my own work.
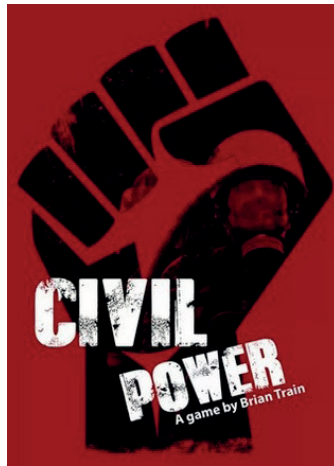
Civil Power was one of the first games I designed, in 1991-92. It was a tactical game about riots and other civil disturbances, an unusual subject for a wargame, but a very common topic in the news. I designed it as a "sandbox" game, a deliberately flexible approach to design with generic components and maps that permit and encourage players to come up with their own situations. So while the game's original list of scenarios included situations from 1968 (Paris and Chicago) and 1975 (Northern Ireland), I also included ones for a student riot in Seoul, a confrontation with neo-Nazis in Pretoria, and the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles. These were contemporary events: while I was working on the game, I would read about an event in the newspaper and come up with a game scenario for it.

The latest edition of the game (2022) has scenarios for anti-government riots in Hong Kong, Venezuela, and Paris and incorporates rules for anti-riot technology that did not exist in 1992 such as drones or the use of focused RF energy to disperse crowds.
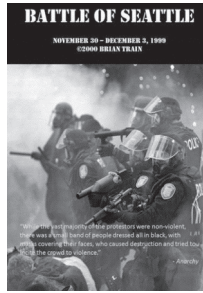
At the end of 1999, there were three days of popular demonstrations against the World Trade Organization conference in Seattle. Within two weeks of the event I had designed the game *Battle of Seattle*. This design reflected some of my thoughts at the time about violent civic confrontations and perceptions of how one side or the other could "win" the battle for image leverage and information dominance. It was a mostly serious game on an important episode of public protest, but I also gave it a satirical quality through the playful images I put on the counters and in some random events like "Paperwork", where a Police unit is removed to spend the rest of the game filling out forms. I've made the game files available for free on my personal website and on Boardgamegeek for years, but they also were pretty promptly "copylefted" and have appeared on some anarchist and radical websites. [15]

In November 2012, in response to the Gaza Missile Crisis, the American designer Paul Rohrbaugh produced a solitaire game called *A Reign of Missiles*. The player attempts to defend Israeli territory from randomized rocket and missile launches from Gaza. What was interesting about this design was not only the speed with which it was produced – again, within two weeks of the actual event – but also that it was featured in the November 28, 2012 issue of *Foreign Policy* magazine. The files to the map, counters and rules were linked to the online version of an article by Michael Peck, a journalist who was also a gamer. Readers were invited to download them, print them out, and make comments and suggestions.

15 https://brtrain.wordpress.com/free-games/.

In March, 2014, the people of the Crimea held a referendum to decide whether they should stay in Ukraine. This was a drastic escalation of the brinkmanship and potential violence in the region. So, I did what anyone with an interest in current events and a free weekend would do: within 48 hours I designed an analog newsgame on the political, military and information warfare dimensions of the crisis, called *Ukrainian Crisis*. I posted the print and play game files to my webpage for free download on March 16, 2014, the day of the referendum itself. It's been available as a free Print and Play from my website ever since, and the game files have been downloaded over a thousand times.

An important point to repeat about newsgames is that they often have greater temporary value than permanent – that is, they are suited to explore the event as it was understood at the time of its production. The earlier examples I have given were reactions to scandals and concerns of the day, and while some of them are still matters of concern like racism or the drug war, they have to be understood as ephemera.

For example, my *Ukrainian Crisis* game is appropriate only for the first six months of the crisis, ending with the First Minsk Agreement in September 2014. After this the possibility of a large overt Russian invasion faded into the background while a low-intensity war continued. However, this did not stop people from asking me, when that invasion finally came EIGHT years later, when I would design a new scenario for the game.
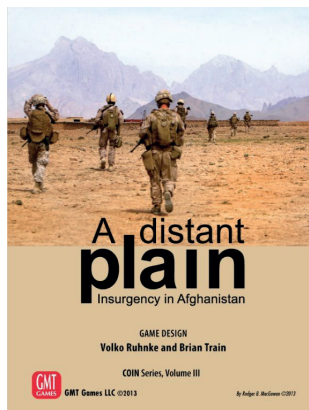
The same thing also happened in 2021, as Afghanistan finally fell under the rule of the Taliban.At that time I was repeatedly asked for an "update scenario" for *A Distant Plain*, a game I had co-designed about the war in Afghanistan in 2012, while the war was still going on, and which ended in 2013/14, to concide with the announced end of NATO's combat mission in Afghanistan. The 2021 situation, in game terms, would have required meta-level events and arrangements far beyond the framework of the original game design, combined with a lot of deliberately bad, illogical and counter-productive play. To reflect these, one would need a new game, one that would reflect those changes in political and operational parameters outside the scope of the original game.

There are occasions when one can be speculative, and also quite wrong in that speculation. A few days after the beginning of the Israel-Hamas War on October 7, 2023 and in advance of the actual ground offensive by the Israeli Defence Forces, I published on my website a variant map and rules for *We Are Coming Nineveh* (a game on the 2017 Battle of Mosul that I had helped to design and develop in 2019) for Gaza City. At the time many analysts and commentators confidently predicted a fierce urban battle, but as it turned out there was no such event and the most intense fighting over the ensuing months was concentrated in the refugee camps to the south.

This is an enduring problem for board wargames on current and hypothetical subjects: people tend to look for answers and predictions in them, but the lessons they teach are generally not as clear or opinionated as the other two classes of game I have described. What they will teach you is that the world can be a lot more complicated than you think, or that your understanding of the situation was quite wrong. And that is also one of the major purposes of journalism after all.

James Dunnigan said about wargames: "if you can play them, you can design them." He meant that the physical act of playing a physical, analog game brings its players into intimate contact with the game's design and mechanics, expressed through its rules. The player cannot help but be exposed to its structure, logic and intent in a very different way from the code that underlies a digital game, simply by handling its pieces, moving them on a map, and consulting the game's rules and notes in a cycle of practice and discovery. Some recent experimental research also indicates that levels of player engagement in manual board wargames are significantly higher than computer versions of similar games. [16] More importantly, this tactile connection, and the simpler physical and mechanical structure of the game gives power to the person who likes to play games and has something to say, in that the game can easily be changed – that is, altered, subverted, parodied or even inverted – simply and quickly to suit their own purposes and inclinations. This is not true of a video or computer game, unless you are comfortable with coding. It's the critical, questioning attitude that seems especially easy to apply to analog newsgames, of all types. These games are truly experiential media, and impart experiential learning. Playing a game is all about building a

narrative together and sharing a collective experience. Even someone playing by themself is still spinning a story, interrogating where it came from and exploring where it can go.

Therefore, we can be our own observers and interpreters of events through blogging and use of social media. We can also go deeper and explore the processes that gave rise to these events, or speculate on their direction. And we can prompt others to do the same, not through words on a screen, but through games; games made – and played – on paper.