

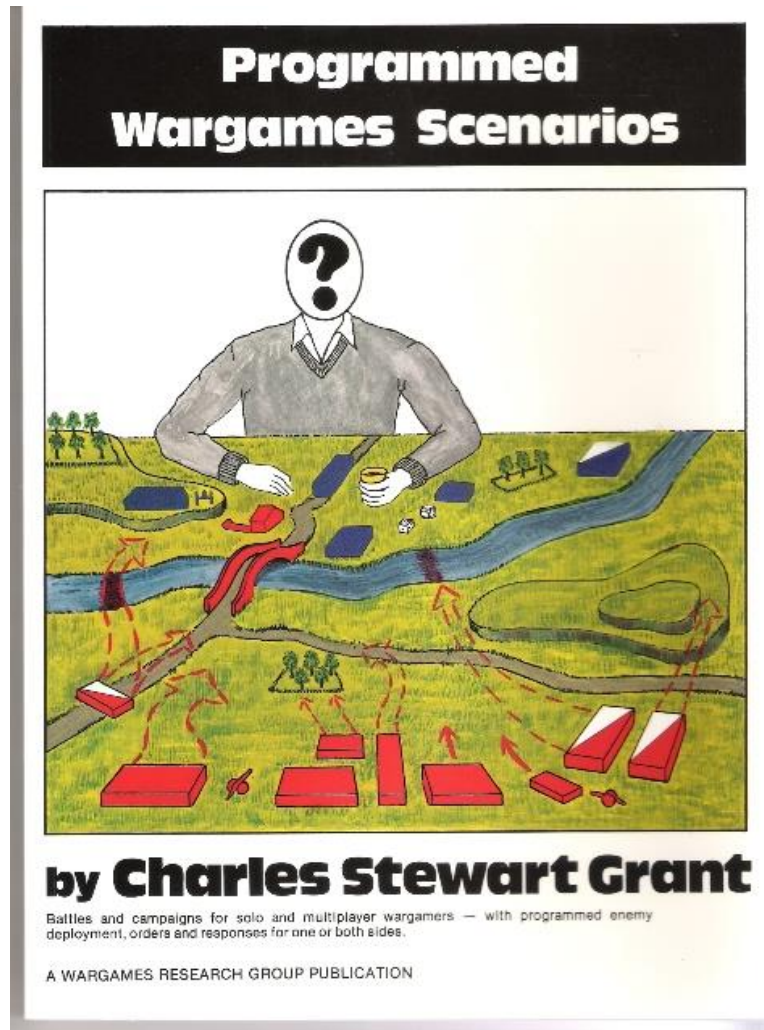
'Programmed Wargames Scenarios'

By Charles Stewart Grant

Review by Paul Le Long

There are three books in the wargames canon that specifically serve soloists ó Donald Featherstone's 'Solo Wargaming' and Stuart Asquith's book of the same title. Both are a general introduction to soloing and contain advice on things like random deployment, random force selection and automated enemy responses.

The book under review here deals with all of those things but is a rather different animal in character. It is almost a sister volume to CS Grant's 1981 book 'Scenarios for Wargamers.' In 'Scenarios,' Grant presented just that ó lots of scenarios, each with a map, list of forces for both sides, objectives, victory conditions, starting orders, deployment and so on. The presentation here is very similar and anyone who has the 1981 book will recognise the set-up instantly. But the big difference is that the scenarios in the present volume are aimed specifically at soloists. We still have Red army facing Blue army and we still have the same type of battles but this time either army (or indeed both armies) can be automated, as if commanded by a computer programme.



It is probably easier if I simply go through one scenario to give you the idea of how it works ó there are 20 scenarios by the way ó 10 'attack and defence,' eight 'confrontation' and two mini-campaigns. The first scenario is 'Hill Line Defence,' with Blue defending high ground and Red attacking. You can either play Red with Blue automated or play the Blue defenders with the attacking Reds automated; you could even automate both sides if you want ó there are systems to allow you to do any of these

things. I'll just keep it simple and describe the procedure you need to follow in order to take command of the Red army attacking the high ground.

First, you generate the terrain for the battle ó you do this by random dice roll choosing from three options for each flank and centre ó so there are a number of different ways the table can be set out for each scenario ó 27 in fact. Next, we turn to the instructions for our own army (Red) ó you choose this from a list of options set out at the back of the book. You then randomly decide whether your scouts have done their work ó if not, you know only that Blue is defending the high ground but you don't know the composition of his force or his deployment. If, however, you deploy after your scouts report to you, you will know the basic dispositions of the enemy (though not the precise composition) and can deploy your own units accordingly.

Still with me? I know it sounds convoluted but all these instructions are short and easy to follow ó even if they are more difficult to explain! Anyway, now that our Red army is chosen and deployed, we are instructed to write orders for the battle before moving to consider the enemy (Blue). We choose (randomly) a Blue army from the list then we deploy those forces ó again randomly. The deployment options are things like: 50% centre, 25% each flank; 30% on each flank and centre, 10% in reserve ó you get the idea.

Then we decide Blue's standing orders ó randomly again (all of this is a D6 roll). Orders will be something like: "Hold the line well forward, give up no ground and will not advance" or "give ground to maintain the line but commit the reserve to keep the line intact." Note, the (Red) player doesn't know this until *after* he has committed himself to a battle-plan. Red has also committed himself to a battle-plan before he knows the composition of the Blue army and, depending on the success of his scouts, he might not know the general deployment of Blue either.

Finally, we have programmed Blue responses. These are a list of "if Red does this, Blue will do that." In this case, the "ifs" are flank attack in strength, frontal attack in strength, attack across the whole front. The responses are decided by another D6 roll in each case and are of the following type: denude other flank to support attacked flank; denude centre to support attacked sector; withdraw from threatened sector; commit reserve to threatened sector and so on.

There are other bits and pieces in this book, rules for a third force (Green) ó neutral forces that might be hostile to one or both armies, random characterisation for commanders, explanation of the basic system and some appendices.

This book is in my view a must for all soloists. The scenarios have excellent replay value since the layout will be different every time and so will the forces on both sides. Enemy deployment and standing orders will also be different each time, as will enemy responses to your actions. Even if you don't fancy one of the scenarios, there is a lot here that you can adopt for your own battles ó random enemy deployment, plans and reactions especially. And it is all very simple, just a few D6 rolls really. The option to play either

side (or to automate both) in each scenario is also good and increases the replay value even further.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough ó in fact I would choose this over the other books on solo wargaming.

Details:

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