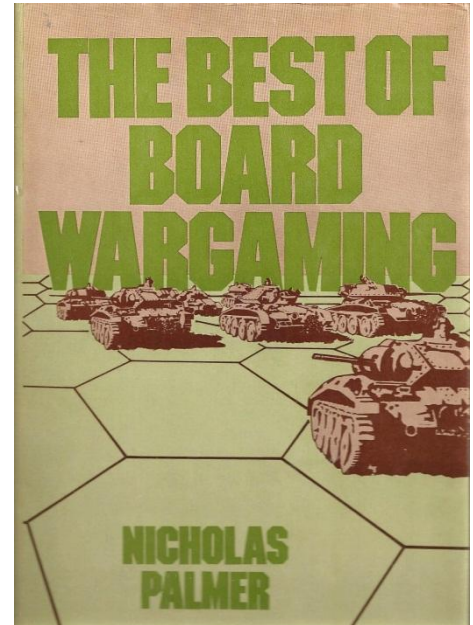


# **‘The Best of Board Wargaming’**

**By Nicholas Palmer**

**Review by Jonathan Aird**

This was Nicholas Palmer’s second book on the subject of board wargames – following on from the laudable if ambitiously titled “Comprehensive Guide to Board Wargaming”. This second volume aimed to rectify what was, by the author’s own admission, the greatest weakness of the earlier book – the reviews were too short and had no independent measure of quality between them. As well as addressing this fault, “The Best of Board Wargaming” also looked to encapsulate the ever expanding game market of the late 1970s. The aim was to highlight the best to appear and also look to having subsequent updates every couple of years. Sadly, this last ambition did not come to pass so we’re left with this single edition.



Fully three quarters of the book is devoted to reviews, with the remaining 50 pages addressing game types and trends of the day – including the now unbelievably complex monster games that were in vogue at the time. These were not, sadly perhaps, games about Godzilla and his friends fighting but rather games that were “too big to ever play.” Too big? Really? Well, Palmer estimates that a full game of SPI’s monster “War in Europe” would require something like 840 hours to play (at an hour a day of play that’d be over in less than two and a half years!). Which is surely a “thanks, but no thanks” to all but the most fevered boardgame fanatics?

The survey of the field is broken down into six sections – operational games, SF games, monster games, beer & pretzels games, realistic games and (very briefly) computerised games. Each chapter gives an overview of the state of play under each heading -- what qualifies as an operational game, the various highlights and pitfalls of SF/F games, the “new” vogue for quick play microgames and the

seemingly endless SPI Quads or GDW 120 Games (designed to set up and play in just 2 hours!). The chapter on computer gaming is short and a blunt reminder of the change in the times – it can be paraphrased as “they pretty much don’t exist, please create some.”

So far, so nostalgic – however the best is still to come. The remainder of the book consists of game reviews – rated under five subjective metrics – Excitement level, Rules clarity, Complexity, Realism and (rather wonderfully for our purposes) Solitaire Playability. Yes, 150 pages of reviews at about a page per game and all rated for solo play compatibility! The reviews are conducted by several very experienced gamers and give a good overview of the contents and subject matter and through the scores a good measure of how the game may suit different potential purchasers. Some of us want everything pinned down and highly “realistic” – go for the games scoring highly on Realism and Complexity. Some of us want a reasonable game that won’t take a week to play – so look for high ratings for Excitement and lower scores for Complexity. Certainly, you may not agree with every review - one of my favourite games, OGRE, takes a bit of a slating – but the views are generally pretty fair and generally very useful. Very useful? Well, yes. Surprising as it may seem, a lot of these games are still available one way or another. A few are still in print (Squad Leader, for example) but with many specialist second-hand dealers and, of course, eBay, very few of these titles are actually all that hard to track down. This means that this volume still remains a useful guide to boardgames of the late Sixties to the late Seventies.

The “Best of Board Wargaming” is thus highly recommended to all solo board gamers out there as still pretty much an essential purchase. Copies are currently (June 2012) available on Amazon-UK for around £10.

Arthur Baker Ltd, 1980  
ISBN 0 213 16770 0