

“Sprawling Wargames: Multiplayer Wargaming”

By Paddy Griffith

Review by Paul Le Long

It seems a bit strange to be reviewing this book as part of classic wargaming works on a blog devoted to solo wargaming. Why? Because it was first published in 2009 and so is hardly a classic in terms of age; it's not really a “book” either – more a collection of writings. And it is all about multiplayer games and is therefore anathema to the soloist; indeed the author is very disparaging about solo wargaming, describing it as the “onanistic depths” (I had to look it up – it's not very nice).



Nevertheless, I like Paddy Griffith's work. He was a great military historian, wargames innovator and iconoclast who challenged accepted ideas about history and about wargames too. And the games outlined in this book are not in any way conventional – there are a mix of play-by-e-mail-games, committee games and freeform, almost role-playing, games. Some of these games are designed for 30 or even 60 plus players. The e-mail games are designed for around 6-7 players. See what I mean? A soloist's nightmare!

What do you get in the book? We start with a chapter on game design and principles before crashing on to a look at an Operation Sealion (German invasion of Britain 1940) committee game, played several times but most recently at Duxford in 2007. This runs to 62 pages – an outline of the game, player briefings, secret

briefings, instructions for the (several) umpires and more. One thing to note is that there are almost no rules. Players talk to each other and to the umpires and the latter judge the success or otherwise of player actions. Freeform roleplaying, really. This is followed by a similar chapter about a game focusing on the invasion of Crete in 1941.

Then we have a section featuring three e-mail games – Barbarossa 1941, which looks extremely freeform; a fictional Napoleonic game set in Alsace in 1799 which is very interesting and features quite a few nice tips on the period (as asides). Lastly there is a Viking exploration game that looks odd but fun.

After that there are a few appendices – a murder mystery game, the author's thoughts on alternative history (opinionated as ever but interesting nevertheless), a Daily Telegraph article from 1974 about a Sealion mega game, statistics from the 1814 campaign published by Griffith in “Empires Eagles & Lions” in 1982 and a list and an appraisal by the author of his (many) multiplayer e-mail games.

As you can see, it's all a bit of a mess really, just a collection of notes bolted together. And if you don't like the author's style – he holds nothing sacred in history or wargaming and he doesn't flinch from telling you – then you will hate this book. And it offers absolutely nothing for the soloist. But I do like Griffith; his work is always interesting and provocative – which I find inspirational rather than irritating. The games themselves are very freeform and not at all what most people would picture when thinking about a wargame (in one of the notes he says that he bows to no one in his appreciation of toy soldiers, but he just doesn't think they are very useful in wargaming). But I think most of the games look extremely interesting and I was certainly inspired by some of them, though as I say, the solo wargaming potential here is close to zero.

Recommended for those of you with an interest in multiplayer games or those who enjoy Paddy Griffith regardless of what he writes. Avoid if you're a dedicated solo-only wargamer.

Details:

- **Paperback:** 262 pages
- **Publisher:** lulu.com (17 Dec 2009)
- **ISBN-10:** 1445202999
- **ISBN-13:** 978-1445202990

This is a John Curry History of Wargaming Project book which is currently selling for £13.46.