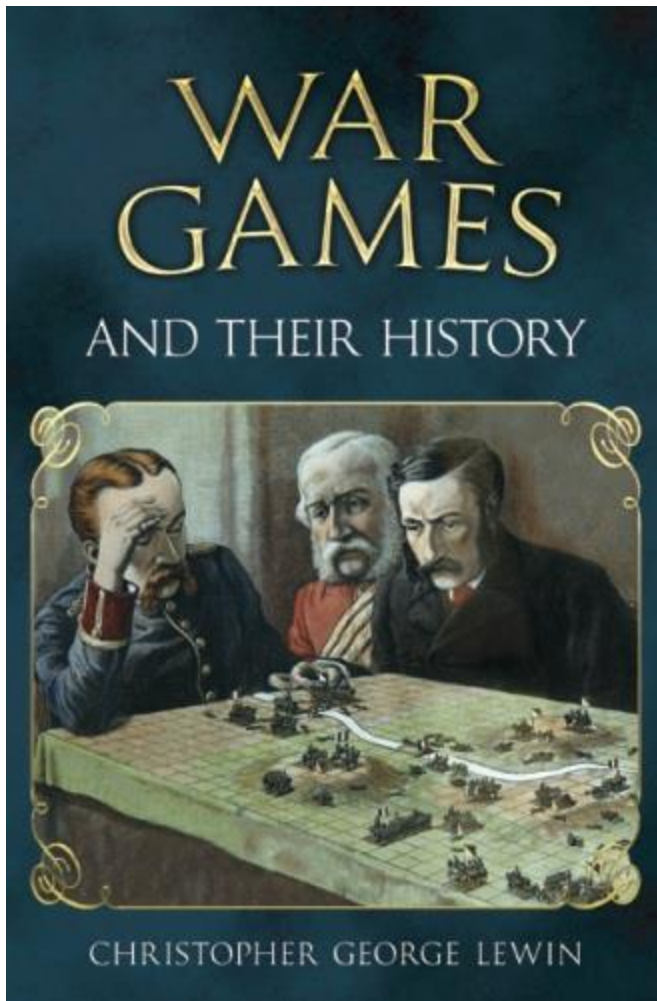


'War Games and Their History'

By Christopher George Lewin

Review by Paul Le Long

Let me start by saying that although I enjoyed this book, it won't be to everyone's taste. First of all, it does not cover wargaming with miniatures although it does briefly mention this as a branch of the wargaming hobby. But it goes no further than a very brief nod to HG Wells and a mention of Donald Featherstone and Terry Wise; a couple of sentences is all you get. In fact, the casual reader would be forgiven after reading this book for thinking that wargaming with figures didn't exist at all.



Ok, so what does it talk about? Two things really. First, wargames developed by the military to simulate conflict, plan campaigns and fight battles and, second, boardgames with a military theme for public consumption. The book by the way is stuffed full of lovely photos of boardgames, the boxes, the pieces and the games in play.

We start off with chapters on games invented in ancient Greece and Rome, through to the Middle Ages and going up to 1800. Many of these games are pretty abstract (Chess and Draughts for example). Then there are three chapters on games developed by the military, broken down into modern games developed since World War II, naval games, (including the Fred Jane game and the Fletcher Pratt game) and games like Kriegspiel developed in the nineteenth century. There are also four chapters on games developed for public consumption, 1800-1900, 1900-

1925, 1925-1950 and 1950-the present.

The author describes each game in greater or lesser detail and gives a brief overview of the rules, how the game plays, when, where and why it was developed and so on. For some games there are several pages of description and for others just a couple of lines. Most games, especially the later ones, have several colour illustrations. There are a great

variety of games on offer here ó some are simple track games (like snakes and ladders but with a military theme) while some, especially those developed by the military, are quite complex.

I was struck by the number of games which used as their base the non-military Fox and Geese idea ó essentially a cross between Draughts and Solitaire. This game seems to have spawned dozens of others, the only difference being a painting of a castle on the board! One game that deserves a special mention is Polemos, which is illustrated on the cover. This uses figures and looks very much like a proper wargame of the Joe Morschauser variety.

The chapter on modern games for the public is the one in which readers of this blog will recognise games that they have themselves played. Here we are in the territory of Avalon Hill type boardgames ó though the author describes only a sample. Computer games are discussed here as well.

Overall, the feel of this book is summed up by the cover ó Edwardian military men playing a military themed game in a gentleman's club. This is not everyone's cup of tea, I know, but you will like this book if the following things appeal to you: vintage games, collectible games, lots of great colour photos of those vintage or collectible games, the development of various, often simple, rules mechanisms through the ages. The gamer who is only interested in wargaming with figures will be disappointed, as will the boardgamer who only likes the more modern Avalon Hill type of game since this latter is not covered in enough detail.

To be honest, I play games with figures and if I play a boardgame it is of the more modern type. Nevertheless, I enjoyed this book ó the development of games over several centuries was interesting, the photos were lovely and the Edwardian billiard room feel was nice. So I'd say that even if this isn't your thing (as it isn't mine either) this is still worth a look if you can pick it up cheaply or from your library as I did.

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