

A BLATANTLY SUBJECTIVE EVALUATION of that Brilliant Egotist, Simulations Publications, Inc.

by Carl Hoffman

EDITOR'S FOREWORD: Succumbing to our masochistic tendencies, we herewith print an article which is highly critical of SPI on many counts. It is presented in essentially unedited form; the exception being the deletion of about three-hundred words of detail concerning the author's customer service problems with SPI. This was deleted because its essence is contained in the paragraph beginning "To make matters worse..." and the detail is something of a personal lament which (I felt) might prejudice the reader to think that the more substantive issues Carl Hoffman raises spring from his pique over the mechanical problems he has had with SPI. I do not believe this is the case, and therefore the section was deleted. The one item in the deleted section that will be dealt with in the Afterword is the author's dislike of SPI's selling of its mailing list.

Readers who are strongly pro-SPI may be irked by this article, those anti-SPI (relatively) will perhaps find some of their own feelings championed in it. It is, however, for the readers with "mixed emotions" that the article is especially presented. Hopefully, by the sharpness of the author's opinions, a serious interchange can be initiated wherein all of our thinking about SPI (and the field in general) will be brought into focus. At least, it's worth a try. —RAS

In a snowbound dormitory in the frozen fastnesses of Iowa City, late in December, 1972, I first heard of *Strategy & Tactics*. Its emissary was an advertisement in a battered copy of *Psychology Today*, telling of the "paper time machine," and within a week I had dispatched money for a subscription. Unknowingly, I was on the threshold of the longest-running devotion/doubt love/hate affair of my life. Not even my relationship with my wife, a fiery-eyed Alabama belle straight out of *Gone With the Wind*, has been more tempestuous.

I had been involved in simulations, sometimes in a major way, sometimes less avidly, since the banner year, 1961, when I received *Gettysburg* for Christmas. My interest peaked around 1968 and began a long downhill slide until 1972, when stirrings were felt and I purchased *Luftwaffe* and *Panzer Blitz*; arriving on the heels of my renewed interest, *S&T* seemed like the Second Coming. SPI was embarked on a policy of "highest possible quality, greatest possible quantity" in game publication, and the titles I saw when my first issue arrived — *Leipzig*, *Wilderness Campaign*, *U.S.N.* — were enough to sharpen my already blossoming interest into fanatical fervor. As far as I was concerned, this was it; SPI had come to lead us to the promised land.

My first two issues, *Destruction of Army Group Center* and *Scrimmage*, were, therefore, greeted with a mixture of mild disappointment and impatience for the following numbers to arrive. The games were mediocre and the articles, though occasionally interesting, contained more facts and figures and less torrential narration of incident than I had come to expect reading

historians like Bruce Catton. To top it off, I had the first hints in the Outgoing Mail columns of (let us call a spade a spade) the arrogance of its writers, though at the time I accepted what they said with complete good faith. There was much talk of trouble and woe involved in publishing a magazine, with which I could sympathize, and the efficiency which would be forthcoming once the new computer was put into operation, an event I eagerly anticipated. At any rate, I viewed Outgoing Mail with total sympathy — after all, one does not doubt the words of the prophets — and when *CA* came along two months later it seemed to justify all my faith.

Looking back on it now, I realize that by putting in my subscription when I did, I had blundered upon SPI at the turning point of its career, the moment when what had previously been an upstart group of game designers and developers was starting to become the major, established company in its field, and all that the word "Establishment" implies. Tenacity and brilliance, accompanied by egocentrism — the very qualities which had allowed SPI to gain preeminence — would now conspire to make the prophet into a tyrant blind to his own faults. Although history is replete with cases of the Great Hope becoming the Great Disappointment and no doubt I should have been forewarned, even expectant that it would happen here, too, SPI's fall (or perhaps not even fall; just the coming-to-the-fore of qualities that had been there all along) was still unpalatable.

The unpalatability came fast to the surface in the form of SPI's remarks about Avalon Hill. For the U.S. at large, summer 1973 was Watergate summer; for me it was the season of *Richtofen's War*, Avalon Hill's simulation of aerial combat, 1916-1918. Every waking moment was consumed calculating and plotting better ways to destroy enemy aircraft; each day off from my job was spent playing scenario after scenario. I was, therefore, rather upset when the following quote showed up in *S&T* 39 in August: "AH's *Richtofen's War* is so similar to SPI's *Flying Circus* that its future can be predicted with a great deal of accuracy. *Flying Circus* received an initial rating of 6.58... After six months its rating went down to about 6.00. There is has stayed and will probably remain." I had purchased and exhausted *Flying Circus* sometime before, and while acknowledging *R-War's* debt to it, found *Flying Circus* a much more limited game, and the smugness of *S&T's* pronouncement both gratuitous and offensive. And apparently other people agreed. Consider the following

data, taken directly from SPI's periodic game ratings:

Richtofen's War (Date of release - 3/73)

Initial Rating - 6.64

Rating after:

Six months - 6.60*

One year - 6.88

Fifteen months - 6.33

*[It will be noted that *R-War* was released in March 1973; since *S&T* comes out during even-numbered months (most of the time), the ratings for *R-War* at "six months" and "one year" are actually after seven months and thirteen months. "Fifteen months" reflects the latest figures, compiled last July and published in December.]

These figures speak for themselves. The acceptability rating of *Richtofen's War* not only exhibited little decline over the first year, it actually showed a substantial upsurge at the end of that period. Even last July, one year and three months after its release, *R-War* was well above the 6.00 level Outgoing Mail had predicted for it after only six months. And though this is the most blatant and off-base instance of SPI belittling AH, it is far from the only one. *1776* and *Third Reich* had their turns under fire as well, and every second issue of *S&T* contains some sidesweep at Avalon Hill.

To make matters worse, Simulations Publications, Inc., despite numerous claims to the contrary, is an inefficiently-run company, at least within my experience, and I have spent in excess of \$200 with them since that cold night in 1972. This total includes between fifteen and twenty games bought directly from SPI, retail game purchases, game boxes, and subscriptions to *MOVES* and *S&T*. As far as I'm concerned, this is mostly money well spent (the games themselves will be dealt with a little later); it's the service I received that was so poor. None of my numerous game orders has ever reached me in less than 4½ weeks (even when UPS wasn't on strike) and my longest-ever shipment took nearly eight. All this at times when Outgoing Mail was saying delivery should be four weeks at maximum (more likely two or three) and an order received on Monday would be processed by Thursday. The delays have occurred too consistently for me to believe they are mere chance.

Now all of this may sound like nothing more than an extended gripe, and in one sense it is. However, it's based on two of the oldest axioms of human psychology: 1) people don't care to hear even acknowledged champions speak too long or too highly of their own achievements — even the admirers of Bobby

Fischer and Muhammad Ali couldn't stand it if they had to live with them the way gamers must "live" with SPI; and 2) those who talk much must also deliver much. The writers of *Outgoing Mail* make many claims for SPI, and make them in a manner which, in effect, says, "We can lick any man in the house:" when these claims aren't fulfilled, they become mere blowhardism.

As for the simulations themselves: many wargamers complain that SPI produces too many games to spend the necessary amount of time on them, but this charge is only partially true. While mass production has presented us with bombs like *The East is Red* and *Combined Arms*, it has also yielded *Frigate* and *American Civil War*. It isn't mass production *per se* that bothers me so much as the rather mechanistic spirit with which games are sometimes produced; it's obvious from playing *Combined Arms*, for example, that whatever life it possessed when it was still a gleam in the designer's eye was lost somewhere before it reached the public. Even the map is identical with that of *Red Star/White Star*, with only the colors changed, and the description of the game's development in *MOVES 19* makes it sound as though everyone heaved a sigh of relief when *Combined Arms* was released because the damn thing was finally out of their hair. (By the way, the annual *This Is How We Did It* issue of *MOVES*, in which the preceding SPI game year is discussed, is recommended for its flashes of revelation of the characters of the people at SPI. If nothing else, the occasional hints of touchiness and singed nerves help them to appear a lot more human than they do in *Outgoing Mail*.) But this spirit of mechanism manifests itself in other ways, too. On the evidence of efforts like *Wolfpack* and even *World War II*, I am beginning to think it possible to over-design and over-develop a game. There is a certain ho-hum-what-else-is-new quality to perfection, and these games are indeed "perfect," every variable neatly quantified, every intangible quietly calculated or eliminated. The Player is left to manipulate immaculate little instruments, which leave little or no room for spontaneity and possess (almost) a self-contained existence of their own. To stretch the point, these simulations need gamers as much as Hal the Computer needed the astronauts in *2001*. Finally, mechanism is demonstrated in the recent proliferation of changeable-map, plug-in the unit value games with 4,000 scenarios. I am one Player who enjoys simulations because they give me some inkling of what men in ages past have endured, and games like these just don't create enough of an illusion of reality. This is because, ultimately, most wargames are based on one thing, the application of force over distance. The differences between games come largely from three things: 1) the varying amounts of force assigned to differing units; the counter representing the 130-gun flagship *Santissima Trinidad* in the Trafalgar scenario of *Frigate* will naturally be able to exert more power than the counter representing the frigate *Euryalus*; 2) the

differing ways this force is applied, such as the diminishing attack value over longer distances in *Frigate* or the doubling or halving of "A" fire in *PanzerBlitz* depending on what kind of target is being attacked; and 3) the rules governing movement of units through the map grid. There are, of course, hundreds of thousands of possible combinations of these factors, but in the end they all boil down to numbers, the most sterile and lifeless of human tools (unless you're a mathematician, of course). The fact that simulations are basically numbers games has been grasped and exploited more by SPI than any other publisher, and herein lies the problem. With multi-scenario games attempting to represent widely-differing real situations on the same map with the same counters — *Patrol's Riff War* scenarios vs. its Okinawa scenarios, for instance — a great many of the graphic details which can give a game the feeling of occurring at a specific place are necessarily deleted to allow the simulation to contain its huge range of subject matter. As a result, it becomes even more apparent that the game is just an exercise in mathematics, and instead of giving the gamer the illusion that he is actually experiencing something that took place, or could have taken place, in the Atlas Mountains or on a Pacific island, he is forced to acknowledge that, after all, he is only sitting in his living room fiddling with a collection of cardboard squares and a piece of paper with hexagons on it. Occasionally a game can get away with abstraction without sacrificing much "realism" — *PanzerBlitz*, the first of the multi-scenario games, was quite successful in this sense — but it involves a limitation in the material. *PanzerBlitz* came off so well because it didn't attempt to deal with tactical combat everywhere in the world from 1914 to the present, only with tactical combat on the Eastern Front in World War II. The villages of Grabyosh and Opustochenia from its map have a hundred times more integrity than Towns 1 and 2 of *Kampfpanzer*, and not just because they have names. They have *Russian* names, and by its very nature *Kampfpanzer* could not have town names typical of only one nation.

In short, the illusion of reality is not created by game mechanics alone, however realistic and playable they may be.

All of which sounds, I know, as though I am summarily condemning SPI's total R&D operation. Nothing could be further from the truth; *Frigate* is already a classic in my opinion, and efforts like *La Grande Armee* and *Panzer Armee Afrika* are close on its heels. But I do think some things are going definitely awry and should be given serious consideration.

The final facet of SPI's operation to be covered here is one I hesitate to broach at all because of the immense debate it has already undergone. Unfortunately, it is the area of SPI's greatest and most tragic failure, a failure which (again) is largely attributable to

the company's smug self-confidence. I am referring to the sale of games to military organizations in the U.S. and other countries.

During the last week of February, 1975, two magazines were mailed to me on successive days. The first, *Time*, contained an article on modern weaponry as well as a cover story dealing with the world's arms trade, subtitled "Guns for All." Together the two pieces depressed me terribly. The first showed that weapons today are incredibly complex and sophisticated, and that the U.S. and U.S.S.R. are engaged in an increasingly expensive and wasteful battle of research and development. The second exposed the high-powered competition between arms-supplying countries, many of which end up supplying *both* sides in the brushfire wars which have proliferated since 1945. It wasn't until *S&T* arrived a day later, however, that I started getting mad. The simulation in this issue was *Sixth Fleet*, dealing with a hypothetical naval war in the eastern Mediterranean between NATO and the U.S.S.R., in which the two sides employ many of the identical weapons described in *Time*. The same issue of *S&T* made mention of the fact that SPI has sold large numbers of games to foreign countries including Russia, Israel, and the Arab states, justifying this with the statement that these countries recognize it as "far better to fight these wars on paper than to do it for real." Reading this, I was forced to ask myself if SPI was in the market for the Brooklyn Bridge as well.

Hold it, the reader says, hold it, I've heard this somewhere before. Isn't this the same issue Bill Crandell raised in his letter to SPI in *S&T* 42 way back in February, 1974? And wasn't it laid to rest by the time *S&T* 45 came out? The answers are, respectively, yes, it's more or less the same issue, and no, at least not in my mind. It will be recalled Mr. Crandell wrote to protest SPI's flirtation with a number of government agencies and government-contracted corporations which were thinking about using SPI to produce simulations for Defense Department consumption. The thrust of his argument was that SPI should steer clear because of the possibility the simulations might help give high-ranking Pentagon officials an unwarranted confidence in U.S. military capabilities, perhaps precipitating some sort of bloodshed. In the same issue *Outgoing Mail* stated SPI's position, which consisted basically of two points: 1) though SPI had indeed been approached by these groups, very little work had actually been done for them, and 2) because SPI had already published games like *NATO*, *Sinai*, and *Red Star/White Star*, the company was obligated to try to control the way they were used. The following quotes were used in support of this second point: "...if one maintains that our basic approach to the problems of war and military institutions is *wrong*, then we've been wrong for years," and "One can say [that by dealing with these groups] we're playing with fire. That's probably true. But

we are not going to control fire simply by turning our backs on it and walking away."

First of all, SPI is to be applauded for the forthright manner in which the affair was opened to debate. It need not have been mentioned in the pages of *S&T* at all, yet Outgoing Mail devoted much space to readers' comments in *S&T* 44 as well as 42. [By the way, it was in *S&T* 44 that Outgoing Mail made its First Amendment "nobody tells a magazine what to print" observation which so outraged me because of the way my own right to privacy (by SPI's sale of its mailing list) had been violated.] On the other hand, it seemed to me then (and now) that the final conclusion — that SPI had been doing the right thing all along and would continue doing it — came a little too easily, a little too quickly. There was a small, but vital gap in its logic which bordered on being self-serving.

Let's put it this way: I have always looked with some trembling on simulations of the "modern period." While games covering wars and battles 100, 50, or even 30 years ago don't bother me, history since 1945 is a little "too much with us" for me to be able to lose myself in simulations of the present era. It's too ghoulish, too much like dancing on fresh graves. In my opinion *Red Star/White Star* and other modern period games should never have been published. Given the situation in February, 1974, however, SPI quite possibly did the right thing by declaring its intention to attempt "control" of its products, even though "control" is next to impossible because anybody with the money can buy the game he wants and use it for whatever purpose he sees fit. But SPI erred, and erred gravely, by giving only a perfunctory re-thinking to its modern period production program. The company seems never to have understood the full implications of the fact that the very *existence* of the modern period games was the root of the problem, that so long as SPI continued to produce new ones the Pentagon (and whoever else) would be interested; all this even though in the apology in *S&T* 42 Outgoing Mail gave a lucid and learned analysis of the "occupational hazards" (among which was governmental interest) of their particular type of research. SPI never seemed to realize that with the production of each new modern period game their problems of "control" would multiply; they never seemed to realize that while one does not control a fire by turning his back on it (and the fact that Outgoing Mail described its contacts with the government using the word "fire" indicates the company was aware of the potential dangers) neither does one throw in more fuel. In short, the course for SPI was to have stopped production of new modern period games and attempted control of the existing ones as best they could. But here the company's reasoning faltered, self-servingly I think; it was not viewed as possible that only the modern period games were a mistake; the whole SPI operation was put under scrutiny with the zero-sum assumption that the company had been

either completely right or completely wrong through all the years of its existence. While on the surface this seems a radically honest self-confrontation, it is actually quite the opposite because of the incredible difficulty people (and companies) have in condemning themselves totally, even when such a judgment is the correct one. And in SPI's case, with large numbers of harmless "pre-modern" games, it definitely was not. With the proposition stated in these all-or-nothing terms, not only among the SPI staff, but to the readership as well, it is not surprising or remarkable the company judged itself "completely right" and went ahead with its old production program.

Wait, the reader says, there was a second argument advanced in Outgoing Mail. SPI had not really done very much work for the military-oriented groups that approached the company. If this is true, why the fuss?

The fuss is because SPI needn't work directly for an agency or government for the work to possess a usefulness for that government or agency. We have been told that games have been sold to foreign countries, so we must assume that these countries at least think the simulations have some utility for them. And for the sake of our own consciences and perhaps the welfare of humanity, we must assume that utility is an ill one until proven otherwise. I am eagerly looking forward to the day an Arab champion sits down across a *Sinai* mapsheet from an Israeli champion to decide bloodlessly the outcome of the next Mideast war, but realistically I'm not expecting it in the next century, and neither are the Arabs or Israelis. Until that day arrives, I must assume these countries purchased the games to improve their performance on real battlefields with real bullets when the shooting starts again. And mind you, selling games to foreign countries makes them a hundred times harder to "control" because of the distance and language barriers involved. SPI may be able to influence officers from Washington, but I sincerely doubt a similar influence extends to Cairo, Moscow or Tel Aviv.

In short, at this moment, much more than February 1974, SPI is clearly in over its head.

I can be accused here, doubtless justly, of 20-20 hindsight, because these things did not come clearly into focus in my mind until those two days last February when *Time* and *S&T* came to my home and I realized that SPI had become another arms dealer selling to both sides. But then, I *had* been vaguely aware of these things before that, and nobody's paying me to give them special consideration. And hindsight or no, the current depressing state of affairs remains unchanged. Faced with the only really serious moral decision of its career, SPI fell flat. Three additional modern period games, *Sixth Fleet*, *World War III*, and *Search & Destroy*, have been published since *S&T* 42, and as of this writing two more are in the works, one of them a QuadriGame. SPI's chances of control are that much slimmer.

The problem has reached a point where it probably cannot be completely solved; the best that can be done is quit now and hope for the best, a decision entailing no small amount of courage.

On that grim note, this blatantly subjective evaluation of SPI will end. In closing, I would like to say that despite all the foregoing, I hold out at least a modest portion of hope that SPI is opening up. *MOVES* 19, for instance, was one of the most candid, light-hearted, and informative issues I have read to date. For that matter, the fact you are reading the present article in *MOVES* is further evidence of the same trend.

EDITOR'S AFTERWORD: Still with me? I'll now attempt to summarize what I feel are Mr. Hoffman's main points and/or criticisms and say something about each. I'll not indulge myself in any thoroughgoing rebuttal, since I expect the debate engendered by this article (and its editorial predecessors) to be an ongoing affair incapable of being "settled" by any glib reply on my part.

1. *SPI has become the "Establishment" in wargaming, blind to its faults and arrogant in its editorializing.*

It's true that SPI is now the largest wargaming company in the field (which incidentally is a very small field) and that relative size may carry with it some of the "odor" of being part of the "Establishment." Whether or not one sniffs such an "odor", is, however, very subjective. SPI is certainly not *conservative* in its product, editorial stance, or even the appearance of its offices and personnel (as any visitor will attest). SPI does not have a *stranglehold* on the field (in fact, since the advent of SPI, more game companies have sprung into existence — an event that SPI's apparent success may or may not have had anything to do with). It's difficult to see how SPI could be accused of "resting on its laurels" as a typically Establishment company is wont to do — we're turning out more products (and more different products) than ever before (witness the rings under my eyes and my coffee jitters). Are we "blind" to our faults? I'm sure we are some times, but whether or not SPI can stand hearing (and saying) only good things about itself is something that should be examined in the light of our various Feedback systems, the amount of mail we read (*all* of it), the publication of unaltered ratings of our own games (and other publishers' games), the printing of errata for our games, and the airing of critical comment in our own columns and pages. Are we arrogant and egotistical? In given instances, yes! There have been times when we tooted our own horn too much or twitted the competition in an ungracious way. The individual humans that constitute SPI do have fits of hubris as do most creative people. I don't believe, however, that SPI has ever treated its *audience* in an arrogant manner (which would, if nothing else, be stupid from a strictly business viewpoint). (Somebody out there has just stopped reading this and has begun dashing off a letter to me pointing out an instance in which they were treated arrogantly by SPI. *sigh*.)

2. *SPI is an inefficiently run company.* Anyone who has bought anything by mail from any company has at least one juicy horror-story concerning service. That's not an excuse for any service problems that SPI has visited upon its customers, its simply an existential fact of mail-order business. Indeed, there was a period in 1973 when SPI service was just *awful*. Awful. There are many explanations for that period of awful service, but few excuses. From all appearances, such periods of bad service are behind us (we do try to learn from our experiences). In fact, we are now getting *complimentary* letters on our service. Inevitably, there will still be times when an individual order gets truly fouled-up and that individual may develop the feeling that somebody at SPI is out to get him, personally. I've bought things by mail, had my order screwed up and begun to feel that way even though I'm intimately acquainted with

the pitfalls of mail ordering from a complex industry. We do make a very strong effort to service complaints. We do care about our customers and we do want them to remain our customers.

3. *SPI sells its subscription list to other mail order solicitors which means more irritating "junk" mail sent to me.* (Note that this is the one substantive item in the section of the author's manuscript deleted for the reasons cited in the Foreword).

SPI does indeed sell its mailing list (as does almost every magazine and mail-order business). SPI has also, upon occasion, *bought* mailing lists and made mailings to the names on those lists. This is simply another form of advertising. What if the companies that buy that list inserted paid advertising in the pages of *S&T* itself? Would that be considered unusual or irritating or ethically dubious? In fact, it's a lot easier to ignore "junk" mail (which you can recognize and discard without even opening) than magazine advertising. SPI does sell its list through reputable brokers, the sale is "controlled," i.e., a one-time sale and cannot be resold to unknown list-buyers, SPI's list is "salted" with staff names so that a constant check on the mailings can be made. I would like to hear from those readers with definite views on this subject; I personally think selling mailing lists to reputable organizations (and the resultant "junk" mail) is innocuous, but anyone who can point out real pitfalls that could harm SPI and its customers is encouraged to write me about it.

4. *Some SPI games are "mechanistic" and devoid of intrinsic historical identity and this fails to provide the proper "illusion of reality."*

This is, unfortunately, a highly subjective point which is true in different ways for different gamers. Sounds like a cop-out, doesn't it? Some people thrive on games with great variability, spanning a wide selection of situations; others want highly "flavored" games dealing with specific, identifiable historical elements. Still other gamers want both. The selection of SPI games available allows you to have both. If we produced only a few games a year, we would be open for criticism if the games we did produce were only of one sort or the other. I would be amazed if any one gamer liked *all* the games we did in any one year. Since all of our games (except for one or two per year) are produced strictly as a result of audience feedback, and since we produce so many titles per year, a good number of games are virtually guaranteed to strike in your interest area. It is impossible to produce a comprehensive line of games that will please *all* of the gamers *all* of the time. It is possible to produce a line of games that will please all the gamers *some* of the time. That's what we aim to do. I know some of you get annoyed when you see a good game subject handled in a way that differs from your mental image of the ideal. But please have patience with the fact that the SPI audience is really a *collection* of audiences whose tastes differ widely. We're trying to provide a wide enough selection so that everyone can have a choice. Every other month you get four Folio games, one SSG, and one S&T game to choose from. They are usually all very different in handling and subject. I wish I knew the magic formula for producing thirty-six games a year that everyone would like and want to buy. I don't know it and I have a pretty strong suspicion that it is a chimera.

5. *It is morally wrong for SPI to produce modern period games. It is morally wrong for SPI to do work directly or indirectly for the U.S. Army, any government agency, or any foreign army or agency. By producing such games (and by doing such work) SPI has wrongly decided the only serious moral issue of its history.*

SPI produces (primarily) war games. The business of producing war games (regardless of the modernity of the subject) is in itself the basic moral question. Carl too finely divides the point when he restricts his squeamishness to contemporary games. War is organized murder for (usually) political and economic purposes. If one sees the point of conflict simulations (war games) as being an illustration of the efficacy and desirability of solving problems by the use of organized murder, then one can easily condemn any company or individual that produces, sells, or *uses* war games. Obviously, SPI does *not* see the aforementioned as the point of conflict simulations.

Basically, we see them as games and history/information systems. Almost all information can be used for constructive or destructive purposes, even within the relatively narrow range of strictly military information. If SPI had some sort of Machiavellian ulterior motive in presenting contemporary military situations in such a way as to foment or encourage war, there would indeed exist a moral case against the company. The question revolves around whether or not one believes that the production of unbiased war simulations can contribute to the *political* decision to use war as an *instrument of policy*. Since almost all real-life answers to such questions are probabilistic, the best answer I can give is: they probably do *not*.

Let us assume that the game *MechWar* shows that, on a local level, U.S. Army organizations can beat the hell out of the Soviets. Does it logically follow that the U.S. Army winds up and attacks Soviet units in Eastern Europe? Does it even follow that the U.S. Army will be authorized to engage in provocative acts along Warsaw Pact borders? Would you get cocky if a couple of die-rolls showed you could K.O. Muhammad Ali with the correct punch?

Since the time that Carl wrote his criticism, SPI has engaged itself in a project that he will like even *less*: the design of a tactical simulation for the U.S. Army (which is also to be sold as a "civilian" game; see Designer's Notes in this issue). Basically, this game (*Firefight*) is a redesign of *Tank* with a more complete characterization of the role of infantry. Will the design of this game have any noticeable effect on the proclivity of the U.S. Army and the Executive to go conduct an aggressive war? If SPI were *that* influential and if simulations were accorded that fantastic amount of weight then you would probably not be reading this: we would all be drunk with power in the cellar of a clandestine operation. In the world of manual conflict simulation, SPI is a big fish in a very small pond; in the ocean of the fabled "military-industrial complex" SPI is a very small catfish: too small to be eaten — too small to change the course of the whale. Incidentally, all of the moral criticism on modern wargames seems to spring from the assumption that the U.S. Army is going to be the *aggressor* in any future engagement. I'm not saying that that isn't a distinct possibility, but is it automatically so? When they changed the name of the War Department to the Defense Department they weren't being totally frank, but is it totally dishonest? Can't we ever imagine U.S. forces being attacked? It could happen, you know; we're not exactly living in *Festung Amerika*.

Will SPI be tied to the Army's "apron strings" by a juicy government contract? Well, the contract is just not that juicy. If you think that \$25,000 (the total amount of the USA contract) can turn the multi-faceted head of SPI, you sell us cheap. That's not even 2% of our annual income. Will SPI be compromised by involvement with "classified information"? No. The game that you'll be able to buy is the game the Army will get. No top secret, for-your-eyes-only, burn-before-reading, mumbo jumbo. Will SPI make U.S. forces look better than the information we work with indicates? Doctor Pangloss is not a member of this project and the Army has not assigned him as a consultant.

What then are some of the potential immoral uses to which such a game could realistically be put? What are the deleterious moral and/or philosophical effects it could have upon my favorite corporation? Perhaps some Army lobbyist could show an appropriations committee the negative results of hundreds of simulation trials in order to snow them into a bigger budget for the Army. Perhaps some Soviet lobbyist could show some appropriations committee the negative results of hundreds of simulations trials in order to snow *them* into a bigger budget for the Army (theirs, not ours). That's not a joke: information systems can show whatever you want them to show if you want it badly enough and are moderately clever: witness the Imperial Japanese Navy cheating at its own wargaming of the attack on Midway when it showed the Americans sinking a number of IJN carriers. Perhaps the game will be misleading (or its results improperly interpreted) and lead to the adoption of infantry tactics that jeopardize U.S. lives. That is a risk whenever one depends upon one type

of training simulation. I doubt the Army is unprofessional enough to do so. Perhaps SPI will be encouraged by its first experience with working under Army contract and be seduced into further ones to the detriment of its civilian output. If this is seduction, the Army better put aphrodisiac in the water cooler, quickly!

Don't misinterpret my pale attempts at wit for just a cheap-shot dismissal of what is a serious set of issues for that corporation with which we are all involved. I fully expect much intelligent mail from you people telling us what you think the dangers are in this situation. In fact, an additional question that was never asked by anyone is: what effect does SPI's work for the military have upon the manner in which the readership perceives SPI? Whether the outcome of such work is benign, neutral, or malignant, will you feel any differently towards SPI knowing that the game design resources of SPI are being directed, in part, to work for our government?

As I mentioned at the beginning of this Afterword, I don't believe that anything I've said constitutes a complete and final answer to the points raised by Carl. We may never arrive at a stance which will satisfy every felt moral/philosophical/practical consideration of all the issues touched upon in the article and the Afterword. Carl titled his article "A Blatantly Subjective Evaluation"; I might have titled my Afterword "A Somewhat Subjective Reply." We'll keep this up in future issues (assuming we're not boring you all to death) via Footnotes, Designer's Notes, and possibly (shorter) special treatments such as this one. Obviously, I'm acting in my company's behalf, as a spokesman affirming what we're doing. I do *mean* what I say, however; I'm not simply playing "flak-catcher." Write us, pro or con or in-between. We rise and fall on your demands and the fulfillment of your expectations. SPI is not a distant, secretive corporation doing mysterious things strictly for its own benefit. Neither are we a band of good-natured rubes naively playing the shell game. We're something else... and you are the largest determinant of what that may be.

— Redmond

