

# **BASIC GAME LIBRARY** by Richard Berg

## **INTRODUCTION**

It has been three years since the Basic Library was formulated, and it is quite interesting to see which games — if any — remain on the list, as stability is usually a sign of excellence in this hobby. The main reason for this is that the state of the art in game design — especially for simulation games — has undergone a rapid advance, almost an explosion, in the past several years. With the advent of an increased sophistication on the part of both the designer and the player, the standards set by both have increased to the point where games once thought of as masterpieces seem almost quaint in comparison to the accepted “giants” of today. In any case, the games listed below are still the subjective evaluations of the author; however the judgments have been made with an eye to informing the playing public as to what their best bets are.

A good wargame should provide, in varying degrees, the best of all possible worlds to the player. It should allow the “player-gamer” to have a few hours of relaxing fun; it should provide the historian with insight into the particular subject; and it should allow the “assassin,” the killer-gamer, to vent his spleen on his opponent by revealing The Master Plan which will not only destroy his opposite number but History as well.

There are few games in the entire hobby that will satisfy completely all three prerequisites listed above. But looking over SPI's hundred-plus output now on the market we can ask the following questions: Is there something about the game that raises it above the others? Is there something that makes that game more desirable to have or more representative of its genre? Is it the definitive game on the subject, or is it just good, plain fun?

The following list is a compilation of 30 games from SPI which could affirmatively answer at least two out of those three questions; they are games which I feel any gamer with more than a passing interest in historical simulations should have. Moreover, the gamer who is approaching the hobby for the first time will find herein games which are sure to pique his interest and satisfy his curiosity. These are games that are not only playable but most typically exemplify the state of the art today.

The SPI Game Library is arranged in groups according to the level of complexity of each game. For prospective gamers, as well as those who have had only cursory contact with the hobby, it is suggested that they start with the games listed in the Introductory Level group. These games all have a high level of historicity and play-interest while, at the same time, presenting only a minimum of

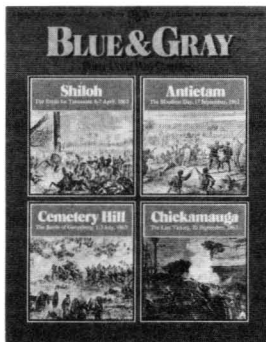
complexity, enabling virtually anyone to be able to sit down and enjoy them after only a few minutes of reading the rules. The games listed in the other groupings contain systems and mechanics that require a somewhat greater degree of familiarity with wargaming in general, while the Complex games are just that — the ultimate challenge in historical simulations.

Whatever level of play you are interested in, you are sure to find a game on this list which will provide hours of entertainment as well as a unique insight into the problems of history, both past and present. Just pick one out and try it; we're sure you'll like it.

## **Introductory Level Games**

### **Wurzburg**

This folio-sized game, available as part of the *Modern Battles QuadriGame*, is a fairly simple game that provides a great deal of playability for its proponents. Covering a hypothetical Soviet/US confrontation in Germany, both sides use a constantly changing flow of forces in order to capture this key communications crossroad. The game is rarely decided before the final turns.



### **Blue & Gray**

This package of four Civil War battles (*Cemetery Hill*, or *Gettysburg*, *Shiloh*, *Antietam*, and *Chickamauga*) is one of the best “buys” in the hobby. All four games are highly playable, yet they retain a remarkable degree of historical accuracy. *Chickamauga* has been chosen for three years running, and the other three are right behind that in popularity. One of SPI's all-time best sellers.

### **Napoleon's Last Battles**

This is a series of four games covering the entire “Battle” of Waterloo. Each game may be played separately, or the four individual

game-maps may be placed together to replay the entire campaign. In either case the games are swift and fun while retaining a high degree of historical accuracy. May be played by two or more players, or even solitaire.

## **Intermediate Level Games**

### **A Bridge Too Far**

This folio-sized recreation of the disastrous Allied-offensive in Holland in 1944 is a fast-moving, tense battle of wits between the Germans and the Allies. The game manages to capture the full-flavor of the Allied paratroop behind the German lines, and the race to open the roads and the bridgeheads from the Allied drop zones to the key river city of Arnhem is fast and furious. One of SPI's highest-rated and most popular games.



### **Musket & Pike**

A remarkably “clean” tactical game of warfare in the 16th and 17th centuries that conveys a solid feel for the period. The scenarios cover battles from the Thirty Years War, the English Civil War, and other period conflicts; there are, in fact, 18 different games to be played, each rated for level of complexity and balance. Gamers and historians can virtually trace the development of the use of gunpowder weapons with this remarkable game.

### **Frigate**

The great Age of Sail, from the 17th to the early 19th century, comes alive in this action-packed game of naval warfare on a tactical level. Players control individual ships, from giant 100+ gun ships-of-the-line down to the speedy brigantines, etc. A large number of scenarios cover all the famous naval actions of the period, including a gigantic recreation of the Battle of Trafalgar! This game has plenty of swash in its buckle.



### PanzerArmee Afrika

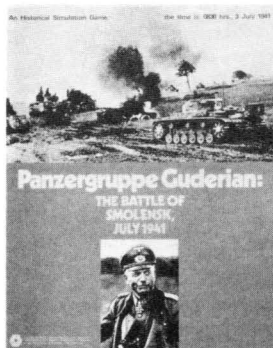
Of all the WWII African Campaign games on the market this is probably the most unusual and, ultimately, the most interesting. Intricate supply rules combine with some unique counter-attack provisions, and those units with the 60 Movement-Point Allowances provide a highly playable game with good historic insight into the fluidity of desert warfare as well as the ebb and flow of this famous campaign.

### La Grande Armee

This is probably the best of the Napoleonic games—an insight into the speed and power of Napoleon's army in its heyday. Three of his greatest campaigns are covered: the 1805 Austerlitz campaign, the 1806 operation against the Prussians, and the 1809 campaign against Austria and Russia. Sweeping movements and sudden battles are aided by excellent supply and cavalry rules, and each of the three scenarios is a major game in itself.

### Russian Civil War

This, the first in SPI's Power Politics Series, is one of the biggest fun-items of the year. Up to six players control the fortunes of the Red and White Armies in revolution-torn Russia (1918-19) as well as the actual historical personalities involved: Lenin, Trotsky, Deniken, Kolchak, etc. Purges and assassinations are rife, and the biggest enemy of all is the omnipresent plague as the players argue, cajole, persuade and, ultimately, fight their way to control of Russia.

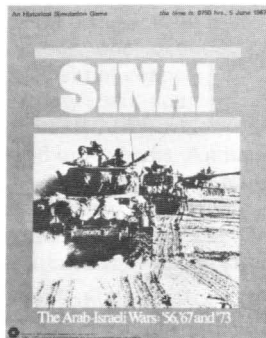


### Panzergruppe Guderian

This tense head-to-head simulation of the German drive to capture Smolensk in the Summer of 1941 is one of the most popular games in the SPI Library. Using a system of "untried" units, whereby neither player

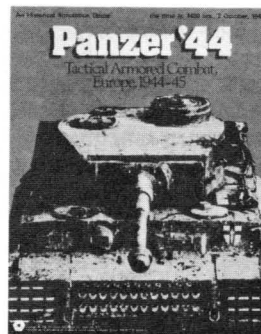
knows the combat capability of a Soviet division until it is actually committed to battle, the game recreates the great German breakthrough across the Dnepr and the frantic, but ultimately successful, effort of the Russians to halt their offensive before it reached Moscow.

## Moderately Complex Games



### Sinai

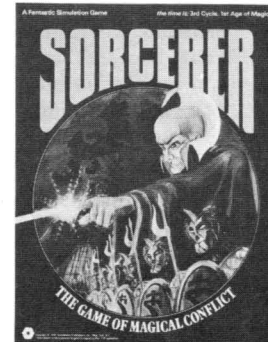
An operational recreation of the three recent Arab-Israeli conflicts ('56, '67, and '73) as well as scenarios for possible future conflagrations. The dangers of fighting a two-front (and often three-front) war become apparent to the Israeli player, who often has to choose wisely where to send his crack armored units. Excellent supply and mobilization rules, along with a remarkably accurate game-map that faithfully recreates the unusual terrain of the area combine to produce a tense game of skill and daring. A unique opportunity to relive history.



### Panzer '44 and Mech War '77

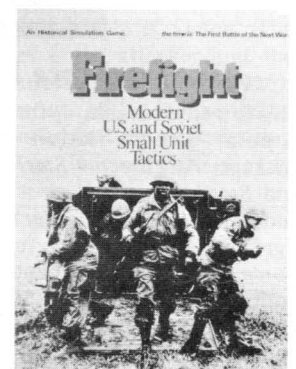
Both of these games (they are packaged to be purchased separately) cover tactical armored warfare, but at different periods of time. However, since the systems are cohesive it would be possible to see how a WWII German Tiger Tank would do against an Israeli M-48! *Panzer '44* covers mobile engagements in Western Europe during WWII, while *Mech War '77* concentrates on possible modern armored conflict between NATO/Warsaw Pact, Arab/Israeli, and even Soviet/Chinese! Each unit is a platoon of tanks or other armored vehicles, and there are provisions for infantry platoons, off-

map long-range artillery, self-propelled rockets, etc. Good playability with a lot of hard information.



### Sorcerer

A game of fantasy and imagination that uses a unique system of color comparison to simulate magical warfare in the Age of Sorcerers and Magic. Players are given demons, dragons, trolls and other figures of fantasy, as well as human and not-so-human armies as they take their Sorcerers, who each have special and differing magical capabilities, in a campaign to overthrow the power and might of their enemies. The brilliant multi-colored playing map adds to the excitement of the game.



### FireFight

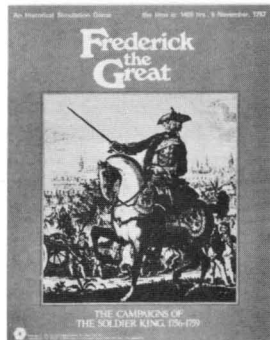
One of SPI's most comprehensive, treatments of modern mechanized-infantry small-unit tactics in the 70's was over a year in preparation. Using the latest military information on both the Soviet and US armies, the game faithfully recreates, to a remarkable degree, the problems and intricacies of small-unit tactics. All the modern weapons and unit capabilities are portrayed, and the player has to compete with his opposing number but also with himself as he



struggles to maintain command control and communications with his severely hard-pressed company. Lots of action with a bonanza of hard-core military information.

## Frederick the Great

This recreation of the campaign of the Prussian King during the Seven Years' War covers the years 1756-59 and is one of the finest game designs of all time, a masterpiece



of fusion between game balance and historical perspective. Virtually every aspect of the game is new and fresh, from the interwoven play sequence to the rules for surrender and Honors of War. Never before has the flavor of an era been so accurately captured on a strategic level. A must for any serious gamer.



## The StarForce Trilogy

This is a true bargain — three of SPI's most popular science-fiction games in one package. All three — *StarForce*, *Outreach*, and *StarSoldier* — have a common theme and "fictional" basis. *StarSoldier* is tactical "ground" combat in the future, while *StarForce* and *Outreach* expand to the strategic limits of the universe — and the mind. Each game is complete in and of itself, and each game is an exciting voyage in the realm of futuristic adventure.

## Dreadnought

Another multi-scenario tactical simulation, this time of all the great battleships from both World Wars. A comprehensive coverage of virtually every major naval engagement during the age of battleships, and all the great ships are there: *Bismarck*, *Missouri*, *Yamato*, and many others. Other counters portray heavy cruisers, light cruisers, carriers, destroyer flotillas, etc., with hints and aids on formation sailing and

combat. Scenarios cover the sinking of the *Bismarck* down to the great WWI battle of Jutland. A must for naval, as well as game, enthusiasts.



## High Complexity "Super-Games"

### Sniper

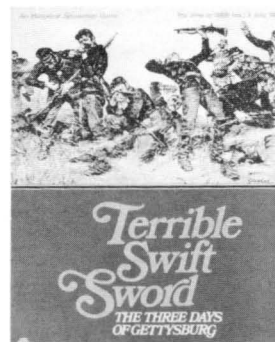
This is the nitty-gritty tactical-level game, and one of the best fun items in years. Each counter represents one man, and each Player controls 8-10 men with various weapons (rifles, machine-pistols, grenades) as they fight their way through a section of a war-torn city. They run from house-to-house, seeking cover, as they search through each house for any possible enemy. Rules cover every aspect of movement a soldier could



make, from falling down stairs to tossing grenades through windows. One of the most interesting and most playable games in the SPI Library, it is also a consistent best-seller.

## Terrible Swift Sword

This giant (three-map, 2000 counter) grand-tactical recreation of the Battle of Gettysburg is one of the highest-rated SPI games of all time; an exhaustingly thorough, yet extremely playable, Civil War battle game that truly recreates the feel of warfare in that era. All the regiments, all the batteries, and over 100 generals and colonels (from Lee down to Custer) are individually represented. The different weapons are all there: carbines, Austrian muskets, 12 lb Napoleons, and even long-range Whitworths. Players can "retire by prolonge," form into line or column,



launched all-out assaults, or rest their battle-fatigued corps for the last ditch defense.

## War in Europe

The largest, most comprehensive game in the entire hobby, this nine-map simulation of the entire European theater of WWII is an achievement unto itself. Every country, even Switzerland, is represented by all its units. Extensive production rules for both the Germans and the Russians enable them to direct the course of the war in any way they wish. Every event in WWII from 1939 to 1945 is



covered in loving minute detail. *Endless* hours of entertainment and fascination are available in this, one of the most outstanding of design achievements.



## Wacht am Rhein

This is the ultimate Battle of the Bulge game. Fought on a huge, colorful, four-piece game-map using battalions that break down to companies, this game is almost a living section of history as the German armies race against time and fate in an effort to achieve a breakthrough to the Meuse River. Every unit is included, even the German infiltrators! This is a long game, but it is not an overly complex one and can be enjoyed at almost any level of play.