

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

This War of Mine	★★★★★1/2
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Period	Modern	Publisher	Awaken Realms
Conflict/Battle	Generic Urban	Designer	Michał Oracz, Jakub Wiśniewski
Force Size	Small Group (3-4)	Date	2017
Mvr Units	Individual	Grid Size	32 abstract areas
DOWNness	n/a	Map Size	Abstract, single building
Players	1+	Turn Dur.	1 day
Player Roles	Individual Survivors/Survivor group (shared experience game)	Playing Time	2-3hrs? Maybe less.
BGG Link	https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/188920/this-war-of-mine-the-board-game		

Introduction

Subject of the game	Civilians surviving in a bombed out city
Scope	<p>Living day to day, getting food, water, kit, making things, scavenging, fighting off intruders, just staying alive</p> <p>Was a Kickstarter developed from a video game.</p>
Components	Board, 33 plastic markers, 186 card tokens, 200 cards, 12 miniatures, save sheets, scenario sheet, The Book of Scripts (1947 of them!), Journal (16pp set up and get playing guide)
Presentation - Good	Excellent graphics. Journal is well laid out to get you playing immediately after set up.
Presentation - Bad	Set up takes a long time (esp if decks not split!). Many of the rules/FAQs are spread out in the Book of Scripts. (There are 3 rd party collections of them and useful PACS).
Designer's focus/objectives	<p>1pp Designers Notes in the back of the Book of Scripts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowering the entry threshold without having to sacrifice the complexity of the game itself. • To design mechanics that could sustain and present a story of almost any magnitude. <p>See it in a recent tradition of games that tell “expanded and serious stories”</p> <p>“you put movie like content, sounds, emotions, colour, and touching descriptions into a board game? How do you make people feel the burden of their actions without ruining the mood by drowning them in text?... The book of scripts is your display, speakers and hard drive.... It was designed to provide unique combinations each time you sit at the table.”</p>

Overall system description	<p>The board consists of locations in a bombed out house. The game has 3 chapters, each with an objective to be achieved. Each chapter consists of 3, 4 and 3 turns. Each turn consists of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morning – draw and resolve event • Day – Upto 3 actions per PC, but limited by damage, exploring and improving the house. Most automatic but need resources. May give resources. • Dusk – taking food and water, else hunger • Scavenging – someone goes out at night. Exploration deck is both opportunities and task currency. Nice. May gain more kit, may suffer damage. Most fairly auto. • Night Raid – may be attacked. Dedicated dice for weapons-free, blade and gun combat. • Dawn – draw fate card and possibly resolve effects of cold, illness, wounds, hunger etc and PC based drives. Draw narrative card for a bonus action later. <p>All fairly dice free. If anything too dice free, some cards would be faster as tables, and custom dice always a risk. Uses a D10 for most resolutions/choices.</p>
Real Battle Notes	Na

The Game System

Principal areas of reality represented in the game	The struggle to survive. On basis of my first game barely make I into Chapter 2. Importance of food and water. Good fatigue mechanic so after a few busy days have to take a reset day. Need to maintain local security.
Important abstractions	Almost everything. The house is abstract spaces although some spatial relationships. The outside is just 3 changing close/near/far locations (although not sure why different card values). Food is actually quite split (raw/cooked/tinned). Nice “component” abstraction, plus mech/elec components.
Types of decisions required	Which actions people take in the day – how bias between improving, finding resources and recovering. Which roles people take at night – scavenge, guard, rest. When scavenging whether to burn cards or take risks (eg noise). What found items to bring home. How to assign items to improvement tasks. Almost everything else is automatic.
Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	All focuses in on those 5 decisions. Game is meant to be a “shared” experience, so for each phase in the day there is a nominated leader, bit all decisions are discussed collectively and there is no mapping of players to characters. A few cards allow a “look ahead” in the decks to see what is coming.

Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)	Very straight forward main loop. Hardly any need to consult manual and could all be condensed to a 1pp Turn Sequence. The Book of Scripts seems daunting but actually not much used, but whole play develops a nice narrative.
Contributions to the wargaming state of the art	The focus on the civilian experience. The just set up and start playing model. <i>Almost</i> zero rulebook. The blend of boardgame and CYOA script book
Deficiencies	Binding the rules into the script book. Too much use of cards not dice and tables?
Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	Would be nice to make easier to build your own mods if script book separated out – although lots of mods exist.
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals	Think it achieves both storytelling and easy play very well.

Overall Evaluation

Evaluation of the player's experience	Very good, mechanics don't get in the way of the game, and it becomes an experience
Does the game work? Is it a good (enjoyable) game (Veracity)	Yes, despite the theme and the fact you're likely to lose every time its an enjoyable game
Does it have real world validity?/Insights? Is it useful game?	Any little thing it can do to help remind players of what its like to be caught up in the middle of a war has to be useful
Replay value	Good for quite a few I'd have thought. 3 scenarios in the box, and lots of official and fan expansions
Who would be most interested in the game?	More or less anyone
Is the game good value?	About £50 – yes for quality and topic
Overall Impressions	A good, almost very good game. Would need to play more to confirm and see if there are any real holes, or if it becomes too repetitive.

Third Party Reviews	<p>Loads at https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/188920/this-war-of-mine-the-board-game/forums/63</p> <p>https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1816826/this-war-of-mine-review-by-survivor-of-the-siege-o</p> <p>- " I am, often, asked 'How was it, living under the siege?'. Talking about it does not do it justice. From now on, if I get that question, I'll sit down and play a round or two with ones who asks."</p> <p>- "I'll end with this: If you ever thought that war and killing might be, or is fun (there are people who do think that, apparently), please play This War of Mine. You will have fun playing it, but also, you will learn how terrible war is."</p>
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	<p>https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/1791290/a-harsh-picture-of-the-realities-of-war</p> <p>- you can die almost randomly – but isn't that war?</p> <p>https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/3166772/review-still-fun-after-ten-plays-my-pros-and-cons</p> <p>- probably at limit at 10, and playing it more to win than for the experience</p> <p>https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/2901774/this-war-of-mine-a-study-in-hope-a-cardboard-refle</p> <p>- “ it is a masterpiece”</p> <p>https://boardgamegeek.com/thread/2608942/moral-dilemmas-and-emotions-with-some-heavy-mainte</p> <p>- “A rare game that can inspire emotions and forces you to make moral choices, marred by too much mechanical maintenance.”</p>
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Interesting Expansions	<p>https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/188920/this-war-of-mine-the-board-game/expansions?pageid=1</p> <p>Different expansions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a city centre map and ability to move around it - sewers, with card based layout - farmers/farmers ,market - Orphans - tactical combat
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MECHANICS (relative to Urban/PhD)

(include Intricacy of the system, and the mechanical ease of play)

Aspect	Mechanic
Activation/C&C	3 actions per character, but reduced by wounds, fatigue, illness, hunger etc
Comms	n/a
UxV	n/a
CEMA	n/a
Other ISR	n/a
Movement	Automatic to destination
Damage	Essentially 4 "hits" in any of the 4-5 characteristics.
Direct Fire	Custom dice for fists/melee wpns/guns.
Assault	n/a
Indirect Fire	Random start of turn events, wounds to PCs and loss of fittings
IEDs/Engineering	n/a
Casualties	The PCs themselves.
Logistics	Its all about having enough food and water, and then kit to build things, ammo, fuel for the fire etc. It's primarily a logistics game.
Morale	PCs have Misery which kills at 4 just like anything else
Opinion	n/a
Victory Condition	Surviving the 10? turns
UTZs	n/a
Building Damage	Caused by artillery events. Lose fittings and boarding up.
Civilians	The PCs. Also "visitors" and "night raids" and people you encounter in the scripts – all mostly people like you trying to survive
Subterranean	Cellar in house and in some locations.
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	Playing the civilians caught up in the trauma and trying to survive.

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	16 Aug 24	Scenario	Baseline
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

- Turn 1
 - Scavenging and night raid (memories) went off ok, made water check, smoked a cigarette
- Turn 2 (1120-1148)
 - Shelled :-(
 - lots of mech parts on scavenge as wanted for fittings, but minimal food/water
 - Mostly fought off some starving people
 - Bruno and Anton at Wound=2, Anton and Boris at Fatigue=2
- Turn 3 (1150-1221)
 - Last in chapter 1, need to keep misery low
 - Rest day really, only 1 action each
 - Only found water, and took some moonshine from the drunks.
 - Our vigilance scared off some hobos so nothing lost
 - Complete lack of any food
 - Bruno hung himself, too hungry, wounded and ill. Might have been able to save him if I'd got him drunk!
 - Boris just walked out straight afterwards, took some food, never seen again
 - Anton on his own, illness=3, wound, hunger, misery all 2
 - Failed chapter goal (misery <2)
- Turn 4 (1230-1236), Chapter 2, aim is giving food to the hungry!
 - looks like Anton is going to die as no actions and v cold
 - Anton had to go on stag. Starving people took to booze and herbs, he couldn't fight them off
 - Yep, he died of his fever just as his wounds began to heal

RESULTS

All dead!

THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Of course probably nowhere near real (but see Sarajevo review) but gives some flavour of the hard struggle just to stay alive, and probably where the focus needs to be (Maslow?!)

