

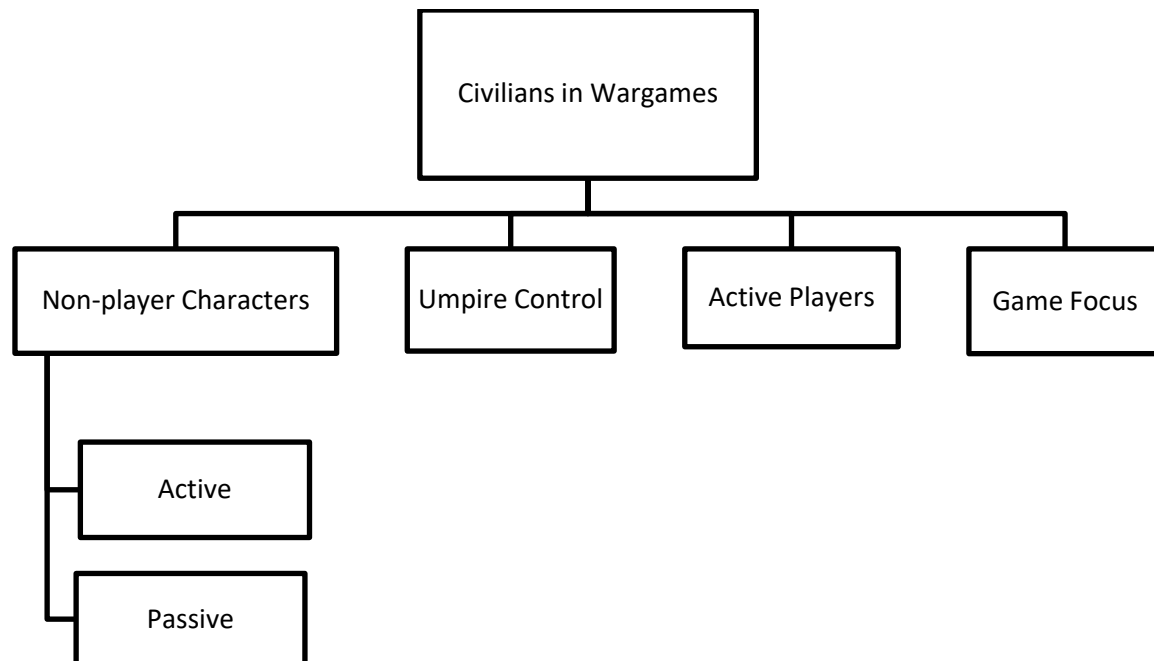
## Towards a Typology of the Representation of Civilians in Wargames

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As part of my research into urban wargames, the extent to which the civilian population is, or my likely, isn't represented by wargames has been of increasing interest to me. In order to bring some sort of structure to my analysis I have started to develop the typography described below. I expect that WD has probably developed more games that would fit into this typology than any other organisations. So if you know of a game that would fit well into this, from The Nugget, from passed COWs, or just from your own designing or playing them, please let me know though WDDG at Groups.io or directly to [david@burden.name](mailto:david@burden.name).

The typology has four top level categories, defined by whether civilians are:

- Non-player characters, controlled by the game mechanics;
- Under umpire or game master control;
- An active player in the game; or
- The focus of the game itself.



### Non-player Characters

Probably the most common form of representation I've found so far in games is where the civilians are very basic non-player characters (NPCs) or units. This category can be usefully split down into 2 sub-categories:

- Passive - where the civilians have no agency in the game; and

- Active - where the civilians have some degree of agency.

Many chit-pull solo games have examples of passive NPCs, such as *Battle for Ramadi* (Ward, 2018) and *Fallujah, 2004* (Miranda, 2016) and they are also present in games with random event cards, e.g. *We Are Coming Nineveh* (Le Ménahèze et al., 2017). They also feature in humanitarian relief games, such as *Aftershock* (Brynen & Fisher, 2015) (where they are primarily implemented through event cards), which could be expected to have more active civilian NPCs. A key feature is that once the civilian event has been dealt with it typically just evaporates and disappears back into the pot or deck.

A sub-category could even be “civilians as pawns” where players move civilian counters to reflect their actions – but without giving them any specific agency. For instance, all of the matrix games in *Advanced Matrix Games for Professional Wargaming* (Curry et al., 2023) feature counters for refugees or civilians, but not civilian players (beyond a tribal elder who has his own agenda).

An example of a more active civilian NPC is Jim Wallman’s *Hell and Uncivil Disorder* (Wallman, 1997). Here “mobs” can be “summoned by a Demagogue” and then move around the table to their own, largely dice controlled, agenda. The rules are an excellent example of treating modern technology as magic as discussed during the “This Was the Future” session at AVG 2022. My own *City & CEMA*, as played at COW2023 also has active civilian NPCs who move across the board and generally get in the way.

### **Under Umpire Control**

A next step up in representation is when the civilians are controlled by an Umpire (or game-master). How well and accurately the behaviour of those Civilians are modelled is probably open for debate. It would be good to think that they behave in a realistic way given the context and circumstances of the conflict being fought, rather than just being a bit of window dressing.

At a more practical level, Mike Elliot’s *Street Cred* SF urban security game (Elliot, 1993) (Nugget #86) had the rioting populace controlled by a plumpire (a ‘player-umpire’). Jim Wallman’s *Civil Disorder* (not be be confused with his *Hell and Uncivil Disorder* discussed above) also features plumpire controlled rioters (Wallman, 2001).

Another example of Umpire Control is in Role-playing Games (RPGs). Here the Umpire controls whatever civilian elements are important to the adventure, from individual villagers to the whole population of a town or space-station, but again they risk being just window-dressing or a way to impart information. Role-playing systems with “modern” settings where civilians (and factions) are a significant focus include *Albedo* (Kidd & Hilton, 1988) and *Twilight:2000* (Fager, 2021).

### **Active players**

Civilians become active players in a game of certain they have comparable aims, objectives, actions and agency to other actors represented in the game, such as militaries and government. The civilians could be represented as a single actor, played by a single player,

or divided into multiple actors, perhaps representing factions allied with or against other military or political actors, different strata in society, or even criminal factions.

Two areas where there are significant examples of rigid (and free) games with civilian players are Riot and humanitarian games. Jim Dunnigan's *Up Against the Wall Motherf\*\*\*\*\*!* (Dunnigan & Avorn, 1969) features a player and track for the Harlem Community, whilst *Chicago '68* features a very active "demonstrators" player (Goldstein, 2024). Our own esteemed Editor of course penned *Riot* (Hartley, n.d.), a 6mm set of riot rules and "Tim Price" wrote *Basic Law* (no details available). Jim Wallman has *Little Lambent Meteors*, based around 18<sup>th</sup> century Riots and featuring an Index of Response and Excitement (IRE). There does perhaps need to be a distinction here between the rioters/demonstrators themselves and the civilians being caught in the crossfire between them and the police.

In terms of Humanitarian games, in *The Day My Life Froze* (*The Day My Life Froze*, n.d.), as well as playing a variety of NGO, players also take on the persona of individual refugees to experience what it is like to be on the "receiving end" of a humanitarian operation.

It could be hoped that examples of civilian players may be more common in non-rigid Wargames, particularly matrix games, but in most of the examples found so far (as described above) the players seem to be agencies and factions, with the innocent civilian being reduced to a counter pawn. Some good examples of a matrix player as actually representing the hoi polloi gratefully received.

One final type of game that has always intrigued me, but I'm yet to find a decent example of is what I am calling orthogonal games. The idea is that two games are played out simultaneously over the same terrain, but the two games only have marginal touch points between them. I first heard of the concept in the context of a Napoleonic era game. Two players fight out a regular Napoleonic wargame, but two other players play out a battle of the Fairie Kingdom - where Fairie magic is likely to cause unexpected interference to the human battle, or fey warriors might be trampled under horses' hooves. The novel (and TV series) *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* (Clarke, 2004) is probably the closest I have seen to the idea - but if anyone knows more about the original game that I've heard rumours of I'd love to know! As to how this might apply to a civilian game, one notion is of a conventional urban wargame being played between two military forces and their players, whilst a separate group of players play out a (probably co-op) game of trying to survive in and/or escape from the city. Who knows, perhaps I'll try and bring something like that to COW one year!

### **The focus of the game**

The final category is where the civilians are the focus of the game, and it is the military and other actors whose are reduced to be non-player characters.

Probably the most well-known game of this type is *This War of Mine* (Oracz & Wiśniewski, 2017). This started off in 2014 as a solo computer game, the player playing someone just trying to stay alive within an urban war zone. The boardgame version was released in 2017 and can be played both solo and multi-player. The premise is the same, with each player undertaking missions in order to gain food and water, and to improve their shelter and protection, and the game combines boardgame and choose-your-own-adventure mechanics.

There are at least 2 other computer games which similarly represent the plight of civilians caught up in wars. *Bury me, my Love* (*Bury Me, My Love*, 2017) about two refugees fleeing the civilian war to Europe, and *Liyla & the Shadows of War* (Abueideh, 2016) about a Palestinian family trying to survive in Gaza.

Even a relatively simple game such as John Curry's *My Aunts War* (Curry, 2024), a "black" career game about a young woman growing up in Nazi Germany and played at VCOW2024 fits into this category.

## **Conclusion**

This is only an initial attempt to create a typology for civilians in wargames, and will most likely undergo some revision and refinement as I get more comment and conduct more of my own research and analysis. As a start though it does seem to offer a sensible way both to characterise games which represent civilians, and to hopefully encourage discussion and debate and good and bad representations, and to prompt some thought as to how the representation of civilians in wargames could be improved.

If you know of a game that you think should be in this review, and particularly where it fills out some of the sparser areas of the typology then please let me know at [david@burden.name](mailto:david@burden.name) or via WDDG on Groups.io.