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**Martin van Creveld, *Wargames: From Gladiators to Gigabytes*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013. Pp. x, 332. ISBN 978-1-107-68442-3.**

**Review by Eyal Ben-Ari, Kinneret College on the Sea of Galilee (feba@netvision.net.il).**

Prolific historian Martin van Creveld (Hebrew Univ. of Jerusalem) has written what is sure to be the definitive history of wargames. His engaging and well written book spans topics from gladiatorial competitions to computer games. Packed with keen insights, it will help readers make sense of the vast variety of wargames. Van Creveld does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis of each genre or game but rather to clarify what characterizes each type of game, what it can and cannot achieve. Readers desiring fuller discussions of specific points will find expert guidance to relevant scholarship in the book's valuable footnotes.

Van Creveld poses the following kinds of questions:

Where did wargames come from? What purpose did they serve? Who participated in them, why, and what for? What forms did they take? What factors drove their development, and to what extent did they reflect changes in the art of war itself? What did they simulate, what didn't they simulate, how, and why? What do they reveal about the conduct of war at the times, and in the places, where they were played? How useful are they in training for war and preparing for it? Why are some more popular than others, how do men and women compare in this respect, and what can the way the sexes relate to wargames teach us about the nature and relationships between them? Finally, what does all this tell us about real war, fake or make-believe war, the interactions between the two, and the human condition in general? (308)

Fully knowledgeable in the previous scholarly literature, van Creveld convincingly shows that a unique "logic" sets each kind of wargame apart from others and determines the social or cultural roles it can play. He starts with semantics, contending that "wargame" denotes some sort of simulation of armed conflict between two or more thinking and calculating actors or groups of actors in a defined fictive world set off from ongoing reality. The creation for a set time of a wargame reality, with its own ground rules and expectations, allows participants to ponder, mimic, and explore real-world warfare. Furthermore, like all social activities that create a world apart (children's play, drama, etc.), wargames can be entertaining or educational or both for participants and onlookers. What distinguishes them from other play is that they always entail strategic or tactical interchanges in a context of rule-restricted violence.

This definition allows van Creveld not only to identify the essential elements of wargames but also to explain how different types of games reproduce very different things—a war, a campaign, a battle, a skirmish, or a one-on-one fight. These distinctions lend themselves in diverse ways to usefully rehearsing and training for armed conflict. Chess, for example, simulates a battle rather than a war, while some advanced computer games are better at modeling higher levels of war. These genres stand in contrast to actual field manoeuvres that replicate at least some physical aspects of combat: fatigue, mental stress, weapons use, etc.

The book comprises seven chronologically arranged chapters framed by an analytical introduction and conclusion. Chapter 1 traces the move from hunting and combat sports through ritual fighting to the combat of champions. Chapter 2 treats the origins, development, and decline of gladiatorial contests and the extent of their potential to mimic real battles. Chapter 3 discusses trials by combat (as part of the judiciary process) and the rise and fall of tournaments within the cultural milieu of the West. Chapter 4 assesses the re-creation of battles and campaigns by both amateurs and professionals and the gradual introduction of politics into wargames. Chapter 5 tracks the shift from board games (often played in whole rooms) to reenactments by forces in real terrain. Chapter 6 concerns the development of computer games (often mixing reality and virtual reality) and the advent of full-scale war simulations. Chapter 7<sup>1</sup> is devoted to "the females

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1. The inclusion of this chapter may reflect the author's long-standing interest in issues of women and the military; see, e.g., his *Men, Women, and War* (London: Cassell, 2001). In any case, it is much more impressionistic and anecdotal in nature than the others.

of the species,” with discussions of women both as participants in games of war and as spectators. Throughout, van Creveld explains that, as wars became more complex, wargames followed suit in ways that improved (or were thought to improve) the training of professional soldiers. Thus, the establishment of staff colleges led to the institutionalization of games in the armed forces in the late nineteenth century.

Van Creveld judiciously assesses the limits and potentials of games of combat, battle, and war. In his discussion of simulations during the Cold War, for instance, he writes:

Overall the games may not have yielded many earth-shaking new insights. Some would argue that they were merely an enormously expensive way to bring out the obvious; if so, however, then the same also applies to many other kinds of research done in other fields. Others claim that wargames of every kind may actually make the events they simulate more acceptable and thus more likely to take place. On the positive side, they certainly caused players to think about what they were doing. By testing and validating all sorts of concepts, they may even have helped bring about significant shifts in American strategic thought. (186)

The moral of this thought-provoking, solidly researched book is that military and security professionals must be well aware of what can and cannot be trained for by means of wargames. Readers of his previous, often bestselling publications have come to expect of Martin van Creveld a remarkable breadth of historical perspective and acute analytical discernment. *Wargames* will not disappoint them.