

THE GAME

Merde! is the first wargame I have created. It reflects the ideas that I have been developing about the battles of the 18th-19th centuries, and in particular, those of the Napoleonic period, a fascinating but also terribly difficult subject to tackle, given the enormous number of wargames set between the late 18th century and the first two decades of the 19th century. Napoleon and his amazing military campaigns have always attracted historians, teachers, writers, directors, painters, and game designers. A challenge, therefore. A challenge that I accepted willingly, pouring into this new project my knowledge of the subject, but also some reflections that I have been developing by reading the contributions and analyses of experts on the subject.

One aspect, in particular, I have tried to develop in the game: the system of orders adopted at the time of the events. Almost all wargames are based on an initial setup deduced from the accounts of the battles and on a system of unit activation based on the random drawing of cards, dice or markers, perhaps supported by the value of the commander-in-chief and those under his command. In the meantime, the opponent must wait patiently for the other player to move his pieces and attack him, while he has very little to do, perhaps some artillery or archer fire and little else. It is a very valid system, mind you, but which, in my opinion, is not very realistic.

I was comforted in this reflection by an analysis by Enrico Acerbi (to whom I owe many, albeit involuntary, "tips") which, to summarize as much as possible, could be reduced to the following statement: "a battle is decided the night before". Everything that follows on the day of the battle is a consequence of the battle plan that the commander-in-chief and the commanders of the corps have agreed on a priori, hoping that the information that the scouts were gathering on the size of the enemy army, its disposition, its commands and so on would be confirmed by the facts. In this Napoleon was a true master: his espionage service worked perfectly: the careful study of maps, paths, even the presence of high-ranking officers at events and parties in the area that would be the scene of the battle were not secondary elements in explaining the impressive succession of successes that his armies achieved in twenty years.

But wasn't it possible to try to straighten out a battle that was going badly? Yes, but it was not so easy to send a messenger into the midst of the din and smoke of a battle that stretched for several square kilometers hoping that he would reach the commander concerned, and that he would interpret the new orders correctly and he would be able to get them to the other officers of the corps he led and that they, then, would carry them out.

These reflections have written the rules of my game: the battle plan is decided before the start of the battle and is put into practice through a simple system of commands, consisting of two types of markers with four different symbols: movement in column or line, garrison, support. Orders are assigned in advance to regiments or, better yet, to brigades or divisions that must carry them out without exception. The order of activation, i.e. the sequence in which the various units move, is decided by the same movement orders markers which have the number printed in the center that specifies when they must move in relation to the other units of their army. Activation is assigned only to units that have a movement order because they are the ones that move towards the enemy, they'll attack and try to conquer favourable positions or assigned objectives. Those in support have the task of supporting their action, ready to intervene when they are in difficulty or to target the enemy front line with cannon fire or with harassing actions by the light infantry or with sudden cavalry charges; they are therefore units that move with those activated, but which are not protagonists of the attack. The garrison units remain stationary in the rear to defend the possible objectives that the enemy will try to conquer. Then there are the units without orders, those in reserve, located in the rearguard lines, ready to intervene on an order from the commander-in-chief when the situation requires it.

This system allows to solve three problems: the type of order and the order in which the units move is established upstream, the players move their units simultaneously or, in any case, without dead time, the attack actions stem from the movements, but they do not have an attacker and a defender, but two contenders who always face each other on equal terms.

Can an order be changed?

Yes, but, as it was done at the time, it is not very simple: a messenger is sent to the commander of the corps concerned who must receive it and put it into practice. These steps must go through a check carried out using the Morale cards, used for the reorganization of disordered units, for the notification of changes of order, for all the draws that are necessary. The higher the value of the general who transmits and receives, the greater the chances that a change of order will be executed, but it could also happen that the messenger gets lost on the battlefield or that the recipient continues undeterred with the previous provision.

Another feature of the game is the modular board formed by several 45x30 cm elements on which the players must place the various obstacles (heights, rivers, forests, populated areas), simulating scenarios of battles actually fought or created by them. the modularity of the battlefield allows you to fight battles at

various levels of amplitude, from skirmishes that engage a few units to large field battles that involve several army corps.

Each element or section of the battlefield is divided into six sectors, each of which is further subdivided into 36 orthogonal squares; the vertical succession of the sectors is the area in which the units assigned to it must move: each corps general has the responsibility of attacking the enemy units that are located in his sector.

The objectives are the numbered flags (one per sector) that the players must place in a well-protected position in their own half of the field, whoever conquers two thirds of the opponents wins the battle.

The absolute protagonists of the game are the elongated pyramid-shaped counters, each of which represents a different type of unit: a battalion of infantry, a squadron of cavalry, an artillery battery, a commander. Each of them has the identification number of the regiment to which they belong, the type of weapon and specialization, the level of experience in battle, the attack, defense and movement values, in the center an image of the soldiers to which the counter refers. One side of the counter carries four soldiers (two for the artillery); the second side is used when the unit loses companies; the third side shows only the flag of the State, it is used at the beginning of the battle to simulate the fog of war, when the unit reaches a square where it can be seen by the opponent, the counter is turned to show the type of unit. Two units form a regiment and always move together. It is possible to simulate various types of formations: in marching column, in line, in divisional column, in square.

The same principle that guided me in the design of the order and activation system also applies to armed clashes: each player is both attacker and defender during an action, even if triggered by the movement of only one of the two.

The combat phase begins when the movement phase of all units ends. Attacks are contingent and this is also a characteristic of the game: the offensive capability is of utmost importance when fighting, a disordered unit reduces its attack capability.

Each attack is resolved by the Attack markers, each of which has an attack and defense value, ranging from 1 to 6 points; these values are added to the strength of the unit: 1 point every two figures of soldiers, the attack and defense values relative to the type of clash (fire or melee), any modifiers given by the position, the passive defense, the number of units involved in the clash, the presence or absence of elite units or the commander. If the sum of the attack points exceeds those of the opponent's defense, the latter suffers a damage, otherwise the blow has failed.

The Attack markers are assigned before a clash, they range from three to five depending on the level of the unit and must be distributed between the shooting phase with the muskets and the charging and melee phase with the white weapon. Once a clash in a sector has been resolved, we move on to the one triggered in another sector and so on, until the combat phase ends.

The artillery, on the other hand, attacks in a different way, through two other markers, the Objective and the Shot. When a regiment is within range of the battery, the one who moves it randomly takes an Objective marker (numbered from two to the maximum range value of the artillery pieces, i.e. 5 or 7), the one who shoots chooses two Shot markers and turns them: if one of the two has the same number as the opponent's objective marker, the shot has hit the target.

The damage ranges from the loss of a point in attack to that of an entire Attack marker, up to the halving of a unit. Each damage is reflected on the psychological resistance of the unit that remains disordered, reducing its movement capacity, until, in the reorganization phase, the corps commander fails to reorganize it by carrying out a Morale test using the appropriate cards; if the test fails, the unit further reduces its combat capability or it's routed, leaving the battlefield.

The basic box has all the elements to compose the battlefield, the Target, Fire, Damage, Command markers, the counters of the French and Austrian armies, the rules and various types of boxes to be cut out and assembled to store the various components.

With the expansions it is possible to enrich the game with the Russian, Prussian, British and other states armies.

From the website you can download various scenarios of real battles with the maps that allow you to reconstruct the area of the clashes and the battle orders of the units that faced each other.

The game, like all my latest creations, is a Print and Play and can be purchased via PayPal.

Il progetto

L'idea è nata da un vecchio progetto, risalente ad oltre 35 anni fa: seguire la nascita e la crescita di una tribù che - attraverso lo sfruttamento delle risorse economiche, le relazioni con altri popoli e la forza delle armi - prendeva il sopravvento sulle altre popolazioni.

Da qualche anno ho ripreso quel vecchio progetto, precisando meglio i contorni dell'idea che intende offrire ai giocatori un campo d'azione sul quale sperimentare le loro capacità politiche e diplomatiche, cioè cercare d'intuire quali possono essere le alleanze che possono aiutare il processo di crescita dello Stato, come indurre altri giocatori ad accettare di unire le forze, quali possono essere gli avversari più pericolosi e come imbrigliarne la politica di espansione, qual è il momento migliore per procedere da soli, come sfruttare al meglio le risorse del proprio territorio e come trasformarle in strumenti al servizio del "bene dello Stato", come utilizzare nel miglior modo possibile gli eventi e i supporti tattici che man mano vengono conquistati, quando è il caso di osare economicamente e quando è meglio conservare il denaro per utilizzarlo al momento opportuno, come impostare l'esercito per trasformarlo in una macchina flessibile e potente al tempo stesso, temuta quel tanto che basta a indurre gli avversari a cercare le meno pericolose vie diplomatiche anziché la guerra senza spingerli a coalizzarsi, quali sono le strategie migliori da adottare per vincere le battaglie. Da questo è nato il progetto "A capo dello Stato ci sei tu".

Il punto di partenza per impostare le regole di un gioco come questo è quello di individuare periodi storici che offrano il massimo delle potenzialità a più Stati e, quindi, a più giocatori, magari con qualche aggiustamento della situazione di certe aree in determinati periodi della vita dell'umanità. Gli Stati coinvolti non devono già essere grandi potenze, ma diventarlo grazie alle capacità dei giocatori. Tra i periodi storici che più mi hanno intrigato cito l'età del bronzo in Mesopotamia, quella del ferro nell'Italia centrale e in Grecia, l'epoca comunale nell'Italia centro-settentrionale del Medioevo, l'inizio del Settecento in Europa centrale dove alcuni elettorati della Germania del Sacro Romano Impero cercarono di emergere a spese degli altri Stati e dello stesso Impero Austro-ungarico, il periodo fra le due guerre mondiali del XX secolo.

A sedurmi è stata la fluidità della situazione politica di quelle aree all'epoca in cui ho sviluppato i giochi. La necessità di offrire ai giocatori le stesse opportunità di partenza mi ha indotto ad alterare la verità storica e i confini degli Stati, ma ho preferito mantenere un contatto con la realtà, anziché ambientarli in territori ed epoche di fantasia per renderlo più attraente: immaginare di calarsi nelle vesti di Romolo, di Provenzano Salvani, di Federico I di Prussia, secondo me, è decisamente più coinvolgente, senza contare la possibilità che viene offerta ai giocatori di stravolgere gli accadimenti storici in una sorta di sliding doors da tavolo.

Quelli attuali e i futuri giochi che mi auguro di realizzare nascono all'interno di un progetto di riappropriazione degli avvenimenti storici, un pretesto per rivisitare momenti e aree che hanno presentato particolari caratteristiche di fermento e dai quali sono nate alcune delle più importanti civiltà.

Spero che possano intrigare i giocatori che amano questo tipo di giochi e che, oltre a costituire un'occasione di divertimento, essi possano offrire lo spunto per approfondire lo studio di quei periodi storici che hanno segnato profondamente il cammino dell'uomo sulla terra e per comprendere meglio le motivazioni che sono alla base delle decisioni di un capo di Stato.

Qualche notizia sull'autore

Fin da bambino ho avuto due grandi passioni: la storia e i giochi da tavolo. Crescendo ne ho sviluppato un'altra, la comunicazione che mi ha portato negli anni ad abbracciare la carriera giornalistica, prima come redattore di alcune testate e poi come editore. Ho l'orgoglio di avere fondato nel 1995, assieme ad altri tre pazzi, il primo giornale italiano espressamente concepito per il web, Sicilia On Line News, un progetto affascinante e stimolante, ma un po' prematuro per la Sicilia di allora.

Da qualche anno sono in pensione e sono tornato ad occuparmi a tempo pieno delle altre due mie passioni, quella per la storia (che non mi ha mai lasciato) e quella per i giochi da tavolo, che ho ritrovato.

Ho riesumato qualche vecchio progetto, rimasto allo stato di bozza, e lavorando alacremente ho scritto il regolamento del gioco che presento. Mi sono occupato anche della grafica dei giochi (migliorabile, lo so). Tutti quanti sono giochi di politica che affondano le radici in periodi storici che mi hanno sempre affascinato, ma mi piacerebbe sviluppare altri regolamenti per altri periodi storici.

L'idea è quella di avvicinare alla grande storia tanti giovani attraverso il gioco, divertendoli e stimolandone la curiosità. Peraltro, le regole dei giochi e dei possibili futuri progetti si discostano (e si discosteranno) volutamente dalla storia, sono pretesti sui quali impostare con assoluto equilibrio una partita.

I puristi della storia storceranno il naso per certe alterazioni politiche, sociali e geografiche, ma lo scopo non è quello di ripercorrere le vicende realmente accadute, semmai quello di permettere a chi si siede davanti al tavoliere di reinterpretare certe situazioni mettendo in gioco le proprie capacità strategiche, politiche, diplomatiche, militari.