

THOUGHTS & REFLECTIONS

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There is an interesting game company out of Italy that has produced some extravagant failures. International Team Group is a division of a larger company called Kosmos. Kosmos is primarily a company that produces very striking jigsaw puzzles. The International Team Group has produced over a dozen fancy boxed games (13" x 20") with excellent graphics and high prices.

Recently, I bought Norge which is their game on the Invasion of Norway in 1940. I've always been fascinated by this campaign and consider Narvik by GDW as one of my favourite games. I got Norge for half price (\$25 instead of \$50!) and came away with very mixed feelings about it.

The game itself is physically quite impressive. One receives one strategic and six tactical mounted mapboards that cover a total of 37" x 24". The tactical boards are of specific areas (Oslo, Bergen, etc.) while three of the six interlock like the boards in Air Assault on Crete to stretch from Narvik to Trondheim. There are several dozen colourful game counters that are back printed with the various ships, planes, and battalions at half strength. One paratrooper is missing its movement factor number and some of the die-cutting was less than perfect. The box also includes an example book, a rules booklet in four languages (French, English-sort-of, German, and Italian), a CRT and Turn Record Chart, storage tray, die, and submarine/convoy pad.

One must work with the rules. Apparently they were first translated into German and then into English and some of the terms used are a bit unusual. For example, the term "convergence" is used for what is normally called stacking! The play of the game has one first predicting the weather for the northern portion of the strategic mapsheet (which affects the tactical ones as well) and the southern portion for the following turn. That is, you know what the weather will be for the next two day period and so one can plan for it. This is a rather nice touch.

All naval units move on the strategic board only. Norge is an abstract game portraying the main elements of the campaign and is not an exact simulation of it. This is clearly brought out in the naval segment where one has battleship units, carriers, and convoys. Submarines are not actual units but are position plotted for possible attacks of units passing in their particular areas. Germany ends up with more battleships than the Allies in this segment. While clearly historically absurd, it makes sense in terms of the game mechanics, where the German player first moves and then the Allied player responds: thus the Allied player has an important advantage. This, combined with the use of carrier-borne aircraft, allows the Allies to dominate the northern portion of the mapsheet while the Germans maintain control of the southern portion, producing an historically accurate situation.

The armies are a bit abstract too! Reconnaissance units become cavalry and there are no real limits on Norwegian mobilization such as in Narvik. The German goal is to build up forces and dominate the whole of Norway by the end of 10 turns. Each tactical map is given a separate point total and whichever side dominates that tactical map gains those points. The land CRT is pretty classic with either retreats or eliminations, though odds are divided into not just the standard 1 to 1, but also 1½ to 1, 2½ to 1, etc. I've always liked that little extra breakdown on the odds.

Only the Germans have land based air units and they gain in strength as they sieze Norwegian airfields. If your air units dominate an area, you may add their strength into your attacks. With the Germans beginning the game in the process of disembarking troops at the various key Norwegian ports, they have a chance (but not too good a one) to capture all the airfields. It certainly creates a fluid game, mirroring the actual campaign.

So, one receives a game using classical game mechanics with some nice innovative touches like the weather rule and the combined arms effects of land, sea, and air units on the same mapboard. It is over priced, even if imported, but is a good looking game. It creates the illusion of the campaign. It gives a player the reasons to land at Namsos or Andelsnes, the need to run more units into Norway, or for the Germans to link up with their various scattered units. But it does not create that illusion with any sort of historical research or accuracy. It reminded me of Avalon Hill's Waterloo or Stalingrad in that respect.

Frankly, I had a difficult time with this game in comparison with some other recent games. While I enjoyed Norge, I realized from the start that it was simply a game and not an historical thesis on a mapboard. Just looking at the strategic map of Norway and noticing the ahistorical geography alerted me to that. Yet I also bought at the same time Falklands Crisis: Falklands or Malvinas by E.M. Lightfoot & Associates. It claims to be a simulation game, yet even newspaper research reveals errors on the British submarine attack capability, and there are bogus rules such as only allowing two ships to stack in each vast hex.

Judged on the basis of its claim to be a simulation, Falklands Crisis is a failure. Norge makes no such claim, and so may be considered successful as a game. Just the same, I wish it was not so ahistorical and did not have such a high price tag.