

WARGAME FIRST REVIEW

Game of Drones	★★★
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Period	Modern	Publisher	Historic Wings
Conflict/Battle	Russo-Ukraine	Designer	Thomas van Hare
Force Size	Team (4)	Date	2024
Mvr Units	Individual Drones	Grid Size	Nodal map, c. 40 locations
DOWNness	1 DOWN	Map Size	~ 15km x 10km rural
Players	1	Turn Dur.	~ 15-20 min, but in time segments not turns
Player Roles	Team Commander/Pilot	Playing Time	~2-3hrs, (~30-60 min per day)
BGG Link	https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/426680/game-of-drones		

Introduction

Subject of the game	Running a drone team in Ukraine
Scope	Run as a campaign over ~8 weeks, each of a weekly rotation, where you get daily taskings and do your own recon to destroy Russian kit. Includes infil by vehicle and foot, exfil, and Russian attacks.
Components	PnP in book form. 60pp A4 softbound book, with 15pp of rules, example of play, 20pp of background, 18pp of maps, play aids and 1 double sided sheet of counter
Presentation – Good	Pretty good, esp as all maps, counters and most tables as downloadable PDFs Suggests replacing crew counters with photos of your friends!
Presentation - Bad	Would have been nice to have all tables as a lot of flipping about Counters are very busy with small text and lot of unnecessary horizontal stripes
Designer's focus/objectives	Learn about the life of a drone team and the war in Russia. Be as realistic as possible. Narrative style – for the best experience need to diarise etc.
Overall system description	Sort of a typical narrative campaign system, rolling for tasks, then steps to complete those tasks, and dealing with potential mishaps.
Real Battle Notes	See YouTube videos of drone teams. Biggest contrast is that those focus on the actual action whereas in the game you might lose days to weather and Russian jamming is your biggest enemy so lots of nugatory forays out which you abandon when jamming is too fierce.

The Game System

Principal areas of reality represented in the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather • Jamming • Need to do recon to find targets • Always at risk of Russians finding your base
Important abstractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not separating launch and control sites • Detected vehicles stay put so can just pick off • Doesn't seem to be any operator or equipment fatigue, can just fly missions all day
Types of decisions required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether to press home task once know jamming level • Where to go with drone, and which type •

Effects of the game system's mechanical requirements on the player's decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When to do rerolls and spend +1 chits
How well do game decisions map to real life decisions	Hard to tell, as mentioned jamming seems the biggest issue, but not typically seen in videos, and targets standing still (and no fatigue) mean you can just pick off once found.
Likes/Good Elements (inc ease of play; really good below)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic mechanism seems sound, but not really my preferred style of play – would be nice to automate some of the more mechanical elements so you seem more like the team commander
Contributions to the wargaming state of the art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time segment mechanism is good • Different drone type behaviours nice, and quite simple so validates some of my choices for B3B
Deficiencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of personnel and kit exhaustion
Improvements? (beyond fixing above)	None
Evaluation of the system's success at achieving the designer's goals	Seems OK, but only a keen narrative player might play through the whole campaign, for most just playing a few days, not even a whole week, might give enough

Overall Evaluation

Evaluation of the player's experience	Can be a bit of a dice fest, like any of these games there's a bit of a core grinding loop
Does the game work? (Veracity/Internal Validity)	Yes
Is the game engaging?	Bit too dice heavy for me, and some of the rule layout is a bit unclear, so not yet got a flow state with it
Is the game useful – for what?	Definitely, just to give some insight into drone ops
How valid is the game? Is the game realistic?	Hard to tell, see above re jamming, exhaustion, separation of controllers and launchers/recovery
Does it provide any special insights	More a general introduction
Replay value	So-so
Who would be most interested in the game?	Anyone interested in modern combat, russo-ukraine war, drones or narrative games
Is the game good value?	Reasonable to good, £24
Overall Impressions	Not bad, but possibly hoped for a bit more

Third Party Reviews	<p>Dlew @ BGG: Game of Drones and Thunderbolt Apache Leader are NOTHING alike! The Leader game is one of the best wargames ever produced. Game of Drones is way, way more random and needs more play testing.</p> <p>Pete Sizer https://spprojectblog.wordpress.com/2024/12/23/read-through-review-of-game-of-drones-2024/ - read through only</p>
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Interesting Expansions	None
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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	Automatic
Comms	None
UxV	Key focus. Fly base to tgt, test for jamming, complete mission, return to base
CEMA	UAV jamming strength is 2D6+DMs, needs to be countered by drone 2D6+DMs
Other ISR	None
Movement	Direct base to target, but distance = jamming DM
Damage	Simple KO
Direct Fire	Na
Assault	Na
Indirect Fire	Fires vs drone base, and drone can bomb or FPV
IEDs/Engineering	Na
Casualties	Light and Severe wounds and death
Logistics	Limited number of UAVs
Morale	Start at 10, reduced with damage, and can restore with "moxie"
Opinion	Na
Victory Condition	
UTZs	Na
Building Damage	Na
Civilians	Na
Subterranean	Na
Other Urban Specifics/Notable	None

Triad Representation

	Challenges		Solutions	
	Elms	Comment	Elms	Comment
Civilian Population	0	• None	0	• None
Civilian Infrastructure	0	• None	0	• None
3D Man-Made Terrain	0	• None	2	• UAVs • Morale

[Per scenario/run through]

Date	21 Jan 25	Scenario	Basic
Players	DB	Constraints	None

SET-UP

As per standard

HOW IT PLAYED

See diary sheet

RESULTS

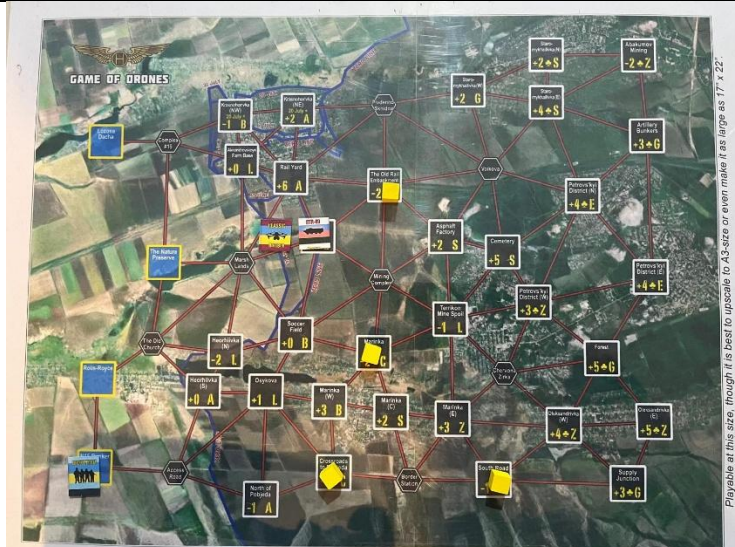
THOUGHTS (c.f. RL AND URBAN, only for subsequent plays)

Quite good at showing some of the frustration from weather and jamming
Not sure how much replay it has for me, be nice to automate most, you just choose target areas

IMAGES



The game set-up, operation map top left, infil/exfil map bottom right, status sheet top right, log bottom left



The main operational area – each task is to check a square basically



Bingo! Target rich environment for the bombers and FPVs. They just wait like dead ducks though!