

# Politics by other means...

A Miniatures Battle Matrix Game



By Chris Engle  
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Welcome to the honorable society of wargamers. Our hobby has a long and noble past. Ever since Robert Lewis Stevenson (Treasure Island) and HG Wells (War of the Worlds) played games with toy soldiers in the 1890's, grown men have been reliving make believe glory in made up wars.

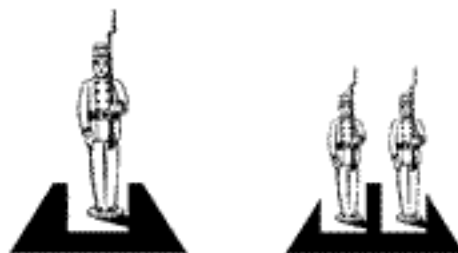
"Politics by other means..." is a simple wargame suitable for children and adults. It is not tied to one historical period. It covers all wars from Summeria to Star Wars TM.

All you need to play are a few figures, some six-sided dice and a table of toy terrain to make a battle field.

The game is played by each player, one at a time, moving and shooting. Everyone going ends the turn.



## Figures



1 or 2 figures per stand. As you like.

This is a toy soldier game. Fortunately we live in the golden age of little men. All types of soldiers are available in a variety of scales. Once you get your men, glue them on 1"x1" bases. Each base is called a "stand". Paint the toy soldiers so you can tell the sides apart. With that, you are ready to play!

**1 stand = 100 men = a company**  
**6 stands = 600 men = a battalion**  
**20 stands = 2000 men = a brigade**  
**40 stands = 4000 men = a division**

If you have figures mounted on different size bases do not remount your figures! The size of the bases is NOT IMPORTANT! The only reason to use one inch bases is that they help movement by acting as their own ruler. This speeds the game up.

**"Politics by other means..."**  
**A Miniatures Battle Matrix Game**  
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"The most odious men to God is the one who most quarrelsome."

Muhammad ibn Abdullah

# The Basic Rules



Each player moves and shoots all his stands. Then the next player moves and shoots, till everyone has gotten to go. That ends one turn. The next turn is ready to begin.

The effects of moving and shooting are immediate so going first is an advantage. If a stand is destroyed before the players turn then tough break – it's gone!

## Movement

The player rolls 1 or 2 d6 to see how many inches his men get to move. Players may roll for each stand individually or roll once for each troop type. Stands don't have to move. Even aircraft can do loops to stay in place.

Players may move in any direction and end up in any formation they want. Terrain does not block or slow down movement. (NOTE: But there is the risk of something unexpected happening!)

|           |       |
|-----------|-------|
| Civilians | 1d6-1 |
| Artillery | 1d6-1 |
| Infantry  | 1d6   |
| Cavalry   | 1d6+1 |
| Vehicles  | 2d6   |
| Aircraft  | 4d6   |

|                        |          |
|------------------------|----------|
| Hand to Hand Combat    | 1"       |
| Thrown/Dropped Weapons | 3"       |
| Bows                   | 6"       |
| Muskets                | 6"       |
| Rifles                 | 12"      |
| Smooth Bore Artillery  | 24"      |
| Machine Guns           | 24"      |
| Rifled Artillery       | 48"      |
| Rockets                | 48"      |
| Lasers                 | Infinity |

## Combat

Players may attack with all stands that are in range that can see a target. Roll 1d6 per stand. 6's hit. Hit stands are destroyed unless the hit player can make an argument to save them.

| Argument Strength | Roll needed to save stand |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Very Strong       | 2,3,4,5,6                 |
| Strong            | 3,4,5,6                   |
| Average           | 4,5,6                     |
| Weak              | 5,6                       |
| Very Weak         | 6                         |
| Stupid            | 7                         |

## Saving Hit Stands

When a stand is hit, the hit player makes up a reason why his men don't die. The player picks an enemy player to decide how strong the argument is. The player then rolls 1d6 to see if he saved his men. (NOTE: This is where cover, formations, range, training, morale status and gun type come into play)

# Unexpected Events

“Politics by other means...” is really to simple a game to be fun for long. It doesn't take into account all the unpredictable events of war.

Fortunately, by adding in unexpected event arguments all the unpredictability of war is brought into play.

Once a turn (ie all the players moving and shooting once) each player gets one free argument to make something unexpected happen. Players can try anything – even rewriting the rules as the game is being played! Suddenly a very simple games become open to a whole world of possibilities!



Players can make their argument at any time in the turn. They may interrupt other player's turns or even other player's arguments! But once the argument is used, it is gone. Unused arguments are lost at the end of the turn. Players get a new argument at the beginning of the next turn.

When a player makes an argument, he picks an enemy player to decide how strong it is. Then the player rolls to see if it happens. If it happens then it takes effect immediately!

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Suggestions on Unexpected Events</b>     | <b>Give yourself a second move.</b>          |
| <b>Take an extra shot.</b>                  | <b>Kill an enemy stand.</b>                  |
| <b>Cause a unit to surrender.</b>           | <b>Make a unit's morale break.</b>           |
| <b>Make supplies run short.</b>             | <b>Build something (like a trench).</b>      |
| <b>Hide (they can't see you).</b>           | <b>Scout (find hidden opponents).</b>        |
| <b>Set up a perimeter (block movement).</b> | <b>Infiltrate through perimeters.</b>        |
| <b>Set up a conditional order.</b>          | <b>Give a stand a status.</b>                |
| <b>Fix a status given to you.</b>           | <b>Cause a disaster (killed by terrain).</b> |
| <b>Improve your roll to hit.</b>            | <b>Increase the # of shots you get.</b>      |
| <b>Make each hit, hit more than once.</b>   | <b>Increase a weapon's range.</b>            |
| <b>Increase movement.</b>                   | <b>Add a morale check.</b>                   |
| <b>Add terrain effects.</b>                 | <b>Or anything else you can imagine!</b>     |

# Campaign Games



Players can link a series of battle into a mini campaign. When this is done the rules of one battle carry over to the next battle. So the rules of that war evolve as the game is played. Each war is thus unique.

In between battles roll 1d6 to see how many arguments the players get to make to prepare their troops for the next battle. Preparation, not fighting wins wars.

If players want more meat to their campaigns they should try a Military Campaign Matrix Game.

# Toy Battlefields

Half of the fun of miniatures battles is moving neat little soldiers around on interesting toy battlefields. The more detailed the terrain the neater the game. Be warned, terrain making and figure painting is addictive. You will spend hours in great contentment and joy preparing games for your friends. But it is time well spent.

| Terrain          | Basic                                   | Good  | Great                                     |
|------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Ground</b>    | A green table cloth or green felt.      | A flock covered terrain mat.                  | Sculpted terrain boards.                  |
| <b>Trees</b>     | Circles of green cloth to show forests. | Green lichen put on green cloth circles.      | Individual toy trees with green lichen.   |
| <b>Hills</b>     | A book underneath the cloth.            | A free standing hill sculpture.               | A hill sculpted into the terrain board.   |
| <b>Roads</b>     | Strips of brown cloth or tape.          | A strip of kitty litter sprinkled on the mat. | Permanent roads built in the board.       |
| <b>Rivers</b>    | Strips of blue cloth or blue tape.      | Strips of blue plastic.                       | Permanent rivers built in the board.      |
| <b>Buildings</b> | Boxes and pieces of wood.               | Toy buildings.                                | Scale built buildings or sculpted cities. |

# Setting up battles



## Why is this battle happening?

Real battles never happen in isolation. They are fought for reasons. To run a successful miniatures game the players need to know why they are fighting. Mind you the reason does not need to be a good one! War is full of stupid fights.

So decide what the fight is about when setting it up.

Maybe one side needs to hold a hill or defend a town.

Maybe they need to get supplies through or break a siege.

It doesn't matter what as long as there is a reason.

## Zen and the Art of Terrain Placement.

Laying out terrain on a battle field is like painting a picture. There need to be lots of details but there also need to be empty spaces. A game with around 25 stands per side looks best on a 24"x24" battle field. (Figures take up 10% of the space.) On the field there need to be 3 to 6 big terrain features. Peoples eyes (and little men) will be drawn to them. The terrain features do not have to be evenly distributed. Bunch several together and have large open spaces elsewhere. The end result is like a Chinese bamboo painting.



# Different scales of battle

## Figures

54mm Man to  
Man actions

30mm and 25mm  
Skirmishes

20mm and 15mm  
Battles

10mm and 6mm  
Grand Tactical

Depending on the size of figures used, miniatures battles appear to be very different. "Politics by other means..." works well with figures as small as 6mm and as large as 30mm without changing ranges or movement. 30mm and 25mm figure games look like skirmishes. Where each stand represents a squad or platoon of men rather than a company. 20mm and 15mm figure games look like battles. Where a stand represents a company. While 10mm and 6mm figure battles begin to look grand tactical. Each stand representing a battalion. Strangely the weapon ranges and movement seem to feel right even though the size of battle is different. The explanation is that the length of each turn in real time is different. Skirmishes 5 minutes, Battle 15-30 minutes, Grand Tactical 1 to 2 hours a turn.

# Designer Notes on PBOM...

First off, the title "Politics by other means..." is Clausewitz's description of war in his famous book "On War." I like this title since this game is made to work well with other Matrix Games. And Matrix Games invariably get into the politics behind each war.

My goal in this game was to make a single system that could work as well for 6 year olds as for adults. I've noticed that detailed movement rules don't work for children. They invariably do them wrong and appear to be cheating. So I decided to make movement as loose as possible. The same rule of complexity applies to combat. Kids like rolling dice and love getting every man to shoot but don't handle firing formulas and combat tables well. So I decided to making shooting use one roll where 6's hit. There are not morale rules because kids don't understand these well. While saving arguments do make sense to kids. I've noticed that when a kid loses a stand he will always jump in a say why it didn't happen. So I just added that into the game! As it stands this is a complete (if very simple) game.

I've used game systems like the basic rules of PBOM... for many years. A lot of convention games are dumbed down to this level so games can be completed in four hours. Personally I like such games. They emphasize speed and playability over detailed realism. But when the rules are set in stone they can be justly criticized for their obvious limits. That is where the Matrix Game comes into play. Saving hit stands is one form of matrix argument but the important argument is for unexpected events. This opens the game up for changes even as it is being played. So nothing is truly predictable and specific situations become more important than "head in the clouds" rules writing of designers. Each player becomes a designer! After people get over the strangeness of making arguments I've found that gamers seem to like this. It allows young and old gamers to game together – since they make different arguments. And it brings in a world of complexity without having to have a ton of rules.

Clearly these rules are indebted to earlier game makers. TSATF contributes the idea of variable movement. The love of d6 comes from Hal Thinglums colonial convention games of the late 80's early 90's. While this version of the Matrix Game is very close to what Paddy Griffith calls Mudder Games. In Mudder Games the players discuss what the best solution to a given situation is and make up rules to cover it. PBOM... is a little different in that players make arguments in a more competitive fashion but the end result is the same – an evolving game.

To date I have used these rules to do ancients, horse and musket, WWI and WWII and science fiction battles. All of them seemed to work. It did not matter that in one game there were horses and in another tanks and airplanes. This may be due to the sheer simplicity of the rules. All games look roughly like this so there is no reason why it should not work. I am encouraged by this. I have finally found a game to stick with because it can be different each time it is played!

Chris Engle March 17, 2000