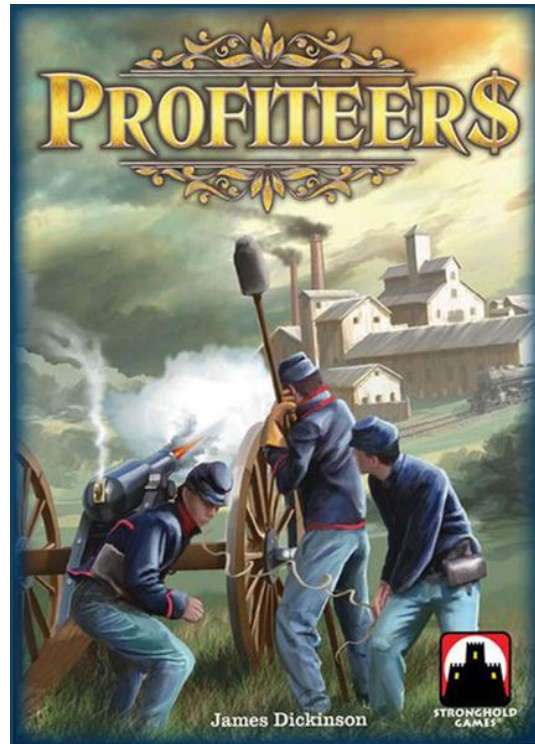


Profiteers – great game – but does it “cross the line”?

After a two year plus wait since it was first published by La Mame Games at Essen I am delighted to be able to say that Profiteers will shortly be available from Stronghold Games. The new design is more colorful than the original La Mame version **(insert pictures of both covers)** and the components of better quality. However, the rules are unchanged – and I really hope that you enjoy the game. It is strategic, interactive and short – in line with the best La Mame games traditions.

When it first came out at Essen in 2018 the game sold out very quickly and was generally very positively reviewed. There was, however, one person who gave us a very negative rating on Boardgamegeek because they considered the game to be in “terrible taste”. We contacted this person and they were kind enough to take the rating down – on the basis that their comment was not about the game as a game, but more about the choice to publish a game on this topic. However as the game designer – I did want to address this criticism.



The comment that this game was in “terrible taste” might surprise you as, of course, there are zillions of Civil War games out there, so what is the problem with this one? Well, perhaps the problem might be in the focus of the game on financial speculation – making money out of the misery of war and, in particular out of that war. The blurb on the back of the box says it all, “*It’s 1861, the US is wracked by Civil War. Great issues are at stake: Slavery, States Rights, the preservation of the Union but you don’t care. As a British profiteer, your aim is to supply the troops on each side and make as much money as possible.*” [My underlining].

Surely though we should care. Slavery was an utter evil, and it has left a bitter legacy in the USA (and elsewhere) that is still with us today. Does this game then “cross the line” of what it is acceptable to make a game about?

Now, gamers are well used to the idea of playing roles in games which they don’t subscribe to in real life. Anyone who has marshalled the German armies in a World War 2 simulation knows this. Driving the D-Day landings into the sea in the context of a game does not make you a Nazi, no more than winning the Battle of Gettysburg for the Confederacy make you a racist. However, maybe it is the sheer amorality of this game that touches a raw nerve. Although it is possible to play this game with a total determination to win the Civil War for the Union, this is not usually a winning strategy (at least it is no better in game terms than trying to win for the Confederacy) – switching sides during the game to maximize profit is normally the best bet – and, in fact, the very uncertainty that this creates between the players is what gives the game its special “buzz”. If this sort of amoral role-playing is going to make you feel uncomfortable, then this is possibly not the game for you.

Perhaps we should not have made this a Civil War game at all. After all, the core mechanics of the game could be applied in a number of different, and less sensitive, scenarios. This was something that we actually considered in the design stage. However, I have to admit that the Civil War was

always in the back of my mind when I was first putting my ideas about the game together. In my “day job”, I am a History teacher – and I teach about both Slavery, and about the Civil War – and, in terms of historical context this always seemed the best “fit” to me.

You see, British merchants did make money out of the US Civil War. We did supply both sides, and in fact, Britain’s attitude to the causes at stake was ambivalent at least. Although the British public was generally anti-slavery and sympathetic to the Union, there were substantial business and political interests which were not. Britain’s industrial revolution was driven by textiles, and depended significantly on the import of slave-produced cotton from the Southern US States. British banks also had loans outstanding in the South, which risked not being paid and, as in the game, financial speculators invested in Confederate bonds which turned out to be worthless in the end.

War is horrible, and, whenever war has been fought, people have made money out of its misery, sometimes caring very little for the actual outcome. Profiteers is just a game, but it does reflect that reality. It also reflects a historical reality about this particular war, the US Civil War, one of the few wars in history for which we can say that its ultimate outcome (for all its defects and incompleteness) was a victory for good over evil. Even in this war there were profiteers, and you are invited to step into their shoes and play that role. I hope that this does not offend you. If it does, I can only apologize, and hope that I have offered at least some explanation for the reasons behind my choice of the Civil War as the background theme for this game.