

They Shall Not Mod!

Representation of the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) in twenty-first century action video game mods

Student Name: Pere Ponsà Olivella

Student Number: 655801

Supervisor: Pieter Van den Heede

Master History

Global History and International Relations

Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication

Erasmus University Rotterdam

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Abstract

This study investigates how modifications (mods) for action video games represent the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). This conflict, despite having an instrumental role as the testing ground for the tactics and weapons used in the Second World War, is underrepresented in the video game industry. The number of games based on the conflict is small, and badly received -especially those made in Spain- but the number of mods that the PC community have created about the topic is growing, and so are the communities playing them. Although scholars have separately focused on historical gaming, modding, or how we remember the Spanish Civil War, very few have covered them altogether. This thesis aims to fill this gap, by formally analyzing the content of two mods for action games. By filtering their content, and observing the paratexts that surround them, the narratives and memory discourses that they portray will be able to be understood.

KEYWORDS: modding, historical gaming, Spanish Civil War, historical narratives, memory

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Research question	7
Literature review	8
Historical Gaming	8
Modding	10
Memory of the Spanish Civil War	13
Theoretical concepts	17
Innovative aspects and inspiration	18
Sources	19
Search results	21
Source criticism.....	23
Methodology	23
1. Call of Duty 2: 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War.....	27
Paratextual Analysis.....	28
Shadows of War: The Spanish Civil War, the foundation of the mod.....	29
The Mod.....	31
Player rules.....	33
Mechanics	33
NPCs (Non-Playable-Characters)	35
Combat Rules.....	37
Level setting and game world	38
Narrative analysis.....	41
Marion and the Republicans	42
Manuel and the Nationalists.....	43
A tale of Two Spains	44
Case Study – Memory of the Bombing of Guernica.....	45
Chapter conclusions	47
2. Red and Blue 1936 (Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars).....	49
The Community	50
Paratextual Analysis.....	50
Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars, the foundation of the mod.....	53
The Mod.....	54
Player rules.....	55
Mechanics	55
New additions	56

Chapter conclusions	58
Final Conclusions.....	58
Weaknesses	59
Avenues for further research.....	59
Bibliography.....	59
<i>Annex</i>	69

Introduction

The video game industry, while only barely 50 years old, has experienced a booming success in the 21st century. For example, a study from 2019 found that almost 75% of Americans had a video game player in their houses, and that 64% of American adults and 70% of children played video games.¹ From an economic standpoint, because of the worldwide pandemic and subsequent lockdown, the games market has expanded hugely, adding 26% to its scale and \$39 billion in spending from 2019 to 2021.² This increase in reach has ensured that more and more people can participate in the medium, further increasing its cultural significance as a disseminator of knowledge, beliefs, ideas and values.³ Therefore, it has also caught the researchers attention on the topic. Historical gaming has been one of such lines of study, one that will be crucial to this thesis.

When looking at the video games that are currently available on the market, it is quick to spot that most games representing historical conflicts use World War I and World War II as their settings. One of the reasons is, according to Marco Minoli, from UK video game developer Slitherine, that the first half of the twentieth century saw an incredibly fast technological advance over a very short period, as it went from horses to nukes. This allows developers to create many kinds of experiences set in those conflicts, games that encompass all levels of command: operational, strategic, and tactical.⁴ Rochat finds that from a database of 1452 historical games released between 1981 and 2015, 515 were set during the Second World War, about 30% of the total analyzed.⁵

However, other conflicts of that time, although they might have had a big historical relevance, do not shine in the spotlight. One such case is the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), a conflict that, despite its condition as a preliminary theater for the Second World War, is underrepresented in video games. As of 2024, only seven official games portray the war in some aspect, with only three being made by Spanish developers.⁶ The latest addition to the roster was the action-shooter in third person *Valley of the Dead: MalnaZidos* (Mediaset Games, 2021).

¹ Simon Tripp et al., *Video Games in the 21st Century: The 2020 Impact Report*, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24016.33287>. 4

² Simon Read, "Gaming Is Booming and Is Expected to Keep Growing. This Chart Tells You All You Need to Know," *World Economic Forum*, July 28, 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/07/gaming-pandemic-lockdowns-pwc-growth/>.

³ Graciela Alicia Esnaola Horacek, "La construcción de la identidad a través de los videojuegos: un estudio del aprendizaje en el contexto institucional de la escuela." (<http://purl.org/dc/dcmitype/Text>, Spain, Universitat de València, 2005), <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/tesis?codigo=7432&orden=0&info=link&info=link>. 92.

⁴ Tristan Greene, "War and Games: Why Are There so Many WW2 Games?," *The Next Web*, March 24, 2021, <https://thenextweb.com/news/why-are-there-so-many-ww2-world-war-two-games>.

⁵ Yannick Rochat, "A Quantitative Study of Historical Video Games (1981–2015)," in *Historia Ludens: The Playing Historian* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 3–19, <https://infoscience.epfl.ch/record/273565?v=pdf>.

⁶ Elena Cortés Alonso, "¿Por qué en España no se hacen videojuegos sobre la Guerra Civil?," *AnaitGames*, April 15, 2021, <https://www.anaitgames.com/articulos/videojuegos-guerra-civil-espanola/>.

Not all these experiences are made by video game companies and their developers, however. Tech savvy players, particularly those playing via PCs, have, since the birth of computer gaming, modified and tinkered with their favorite video games to add easter eggs, new stories, and new gameplay possibilities. These video game modifications are commonly called *mods*. These “modders” have also taken these games, and video games set in other settings and modified them to portray a different message, view, or allow the player to experience a different event that was not present in the base game. The Spanish Civil War is one of these settings, and groups of modders have produced mods that alter existing, more famous games to provide an experience that simulates the war that split Spain in two almost ninety years ago.

Research question

Albeit underground and amateur in nature, the modding community has made enormous contributions to gaming culture and the industry. The mods that this thesis will analyze, come from games that are extremely popular within the modding community: *Call of Duty 2 (CoD 2)*, and *Mount and Blade: Warband (MB: Warband)*. The first game features over 120 modifications in ModDB, and the second, over 670 modifications.

By analyzing the available mods portraying the Spanish Civil War, the objective of this research question and this thesis is to further understand how video game mods are another portrayal of history, culture, and art; especially compared to other cultural mediums, like films or distributed popular videogames.

How is the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) represented in ‘modifications’ for popular historical action video games?

Four sub-questions have popped up to complement the main one, which are:

1. How is the Spanish Civil War represented in the modification (‘mod’) *1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War*, for the game *Call of Duty 2*?
2. How is the Spanish Civil War represented in the modification (‘mod’) *Red and Blue 1936* for the game *Mount and Blade Warband: Napoleonic Wars*?
3. Which historical narratives from the Spanish Civil War do we find in the campaign for the *1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War* mod for *Call of Duty 2*?
4. What historical narratives of the Spanish Civil War do we find presented in the *Red and Blue 1936* mod for *Mount and Blade Warband: Napoleonic Wars*?

The aim of the sub-questions is to understand how specific action mods represent the Spanish Civil War, as well as the how the representations and narratives put forward in the mods compare to memory discourses about the Spanish Civil War, in Spain. This questions are raised with the

understanding that any cultural representation of the past has some bias, agenda, or certain worldview applied to it. Does it adhere to official views and narratives of the subject? Does it challenge it in any way? Van der Vlies's research, although she focuses on history textbooks, can be applied here: it is crucial to avoid this simplistic and nostalgic dichotomies by understanding and analyzing the in-depth narratives of the content.⁷ However, it is good to point out that while, over-relying on these morals and beliefs to retell this tales will always taint the narrative, history is not one-dimensional. Several versions and retellings of history can coexist, although they might differ.

Literature review

My literature report features articles that revolve around the circles of interest of this thesis: Historical gaming, modding as a method of expression and its evolution, and the portrayal of the memory of the Spanish Civil War.

Historical Gaming

Video games have existed since the appearance of computer technology. Humanity's need for leisure has ensured that entertainment and games would find their way into this new way of interacting with the world. Pong paved the way, starting from a simple pixel air hockey match to the breathtaking and sensorial experiences that we have now. Furthermore, videogames engage with a wide range of audiences and allow them to develop interest in and knowledge about the past.⁸

A potential use historians can make of historical games is engage research questions, incorporate primary and secondary source evidence, explore historical themes, present a thesis, and make historical arguments. This makes historical games an interesting topic to cover academically, also with the intend to educate younger generations.⁹

However, historical games are not considered a genre by themselves. Yet "history" is broadly covered by a wide range of game genres, the most popular ones being Strategy games, Action games, and Simulation games.¹⁰ Therefore, "historical," is more of a setting, than a genre by itself. Moreover, McCallum and Parsler acknowledge this, and give a definition that would fit a "historical genre": "The game has to begin at a clear point in real world history and that history has to have a manifest effect on the nature of the game experience."¹¹

⁷ Maria Grever and Tina Van der Vlies, "Why National Narratives Are Perpetuated: A Literature Review on New Insights from History Textbook Research," *London Review of Education* 15, no. 2 (2017), <https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/lre/article/id/2822/>.

⁸ Dawn Spring, "Gaming History: Computer and Video Games as Historical Scholarship," *Rethinking History* 19, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 207–21, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642529.2014.973714>, 208.

⁹ Spring, 208.

¹⁰ Roachat, "A Quantitative Study of Historical Video Games (1981–2015)," 11.

¹¹ MacCallum-Stewart Esther and Parsler Justin, "Controversies: Historicising the Computer Game," 2007, <http://www.digra.org/wp-content/uploads/digital-library/07312.51468.pdf>.

Video games use history to immerse players in historic arts, cityscapes, cultures, landscapes, music, and the act of historical thinking. One of the most prominent examples is the *Assassin's Creed* franchise, that puts the player in the shoes of an assassin in a vibrant, albeit altered and fictitious, historical setting, that lets them relive important historical events and locations, such as Venice during the Renaissance, Cleopatra's Egypt, or Revolutionary Paris.¹² The player interacts with these settings, and also with renowned characters from the time, be it in a friendly manner, or well, assassination.

One of the first instances to blend a digital game with a historical battle is *Eastern Front 1941* (Atari, 1982), a turn-based game where the player takes place in the eastern theater of World War II. However, McCallum and Parsler argue that this game barely resembles the conflict itself, as the lack of capabilities of the system didn't allow it to perform more intricate and well-crafted actions, and a more immersive world.¹³ So, it's clear that hardware conditions can impact the way history is shown through these games, but so is the nature of the games themselves. Uricchio argues that historical games do not represent the past but simulate it. Whereas a representation is fixed in nature, a simulation can generate countless encounters.¹⁴ That is because these video games involve choice.

For example, in the game *Total War Medieval II* (Sega, 2006), set in Europe between the Low Middle Ages and the Discovery of the Americas, one can decide to play as Spain. The "intended," historical way of beginning your playthrough would be to conquer the rest of the Iberian Peninsula and eliminate the Moors faction, and then proceed towards conquering the Americas to the West. However, you could also settle for peace with that faction, and instead expand northwards, towards France and the Holy Roman Empire.¹⁵ These open-ended situations, along with the presence of choice and counterfactual outcomes has caused a scholarly debate about if these gaming experiences are truly historical, as history is what precisely happened and how it precisely happened, not what could have happened.¹⁶ Kushner argues:

Too much information can make the game too arcane or controversial for its own good. For that reason, the historical data used to construct Civilization-like simulations seldom run deeper than the content of an illustrated history book for children.¹⁷

¹² Jeremiah McCall, "Teaching History With Digital Historical Games: An Introduction to the Field and Best Practices," *Simulation & Gaming* 47, no. 4 (August 1, 2016): 517–42, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878116646693>.

¹³ Esther and Justin, "Controversies," 204.

¹⁴ W. Uricchio, "SIMULATION, HISTORY, AND COMPUTER GAMES," in *Handbook of Computer Game Studies* (USA: The MIT Press, 2005), <http://web.mit.edu/uricchio/Public/pdfs/pdfs/cybergames%20.pdf>.

¹⁵ Creative Assembly, "Total War: MEDIEVAL II – Definitive Edition on Steam," Webstore, Steam, accessed March 18, 2024, https://store.steampowered.com/app/4700/Total_War_MEDIEVAL_II_Definitive_Edition/.

¹⁶ Jeremiah McCall, "Teaching History With Digital Historical Games," 526.

¹⁷ David Kushner, "In Historical Games, Truth Gives Way to Entertainment," *The New York Times*, 2001, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/featured_articles/20010906thursday.html.

This position, however, is not held by more contemporary scholars. Chapman argues that historical games should not be solely judged based on historical accuracy. They do not rely on the minutia of its historically accurate details, but simulating “the "feel" of a period or location, the life, color, action, and processes (with which the book can struggle) and which can be easily communicated in games.¹⁸

Overall, historical games are an exciting and flourishing medium by which the user can learn about the past. They have received a significant amount of scholarly attention, in which these researchers have studied the depictions of specific topics and time periods in these games. However, recalling Rochat’s study, and that thirty percent of its results were set in the Second World War, there are depictions that are less prominent, and have not garnered that much attention from scholars. One of these underrepresented settings is the Spanish Civil War. Regarding mods, they are still an understudied topic in a context of historical gaming. This which allows my thesis to position itself in this gap.

Modding

With this previous section about gaming, it is clear to see that video games are an ever evolving medium, with a significant impact in society. One growing aspect of PC gaming, in particular, that is recently gathering a lot of attention is modding.¹⁹ However, the word “mod,” understood as a user-made modification to an existing game, has no clear consensus of its historical first appearance.²⁰ There is no singular event that brings the word mod as we understand it today.

To understand its appearance, we must momentarily first understand “patches,” the bits of content and updates that developers add to their already published games, to either fix any issues that they might have, also called “bugs,” or include extra content. Sotamaa points out that patches for the first-person shooter classic *Quake* were called by the community as “mods.” From then on, the author claims, the concept would expand itself to include many ways of user modification of games. For clarity moving forward, I will use the word “mod” to refer to modifications made to games, regardless as if they were patches, or user-made modifications.

So, mods as we understand them now, come from the late nineties. They expanded in parallel with the development of more powerful game technologies, such as 3D graphics, and the growth and

¹⁸ Adam Chapman, “Privileging Form Over Content: Analysing Historical Videogames,” *Journal of Digital Humanities* 1, no. 2 (2012), 4.

¹⁹ Mark Engelhardt, “The Financial Potential of Game Modding in 2023 and Beyond,” *Medium* (blog), October 18, 2023, <https://niftymark.medium.com/the-financial-potential-of-game-modding-in-2022-and-beyond-79e45c1de401>.

²⁰ Olli Sotamaa, “Computer Game Modding, Intermediality and Participatory Culture,” *New Media*, 2003, 1–19.

expansion of the Internet. With video games and their discussion more accessible to the public than ever before, so were their modifications.

However, not all game modifying was made exclusively from the public to the games, with no relation to the developers. With the release of another Id Software game, *Wolfenstein 3-D* (1992), so came a new wave of modifications, and developers were quick to spot one such modification, which changed the music of the game into the theme song for *Barney*, a popular children's show. The final boss of the game, originally Adolf Hitler in a mech suit suited with machine guns, now was modified to look like Barney, the star of its titular series, a smiling purple dinosaur.²¹

But, making those changes meant that the line of code that made the boss look like Hitler was erased from the file, so reverting the file to its original state was difficult. That prompted the Id Software developers to change things up for the release of their following game, *DOOM*, a year later: they moved the media files from the main executable of the game, into a separate folder, so they could be accessed without worry. This allowed for mods to be made without irreversibly altering the file. However, they didn't stop there: the developers made the source code of the game public, therefore allowing gamers and modders to edit and create their own levels and tools.²² It spread like wildfire, and it paved the way for virtually all user-created content for video games for the future: altering the source code to implement images, texts, sounds, or mechanics that weren't previously there.

With the arrival of the new millennium, mods grew in complexity and diversity, akin to that of their games, and so did societal interest in them. In the last twenty years, authors have started paying closer attention to different sides of modding, namely with three different focal points: identifying and categorizing the different modding practices, identifying and creating demographic profiles for the modders, as well as understanding their motivations to create their modifications, and understanding the social context of modding: how they coexist with developers, what spaces do they share...²³

Regarding the first focus, Unger proposes differentiating the different practices between mutators or tweaks, add-ons, mods. and total conversions or overhauls. Mutators are understood as "small programs that modify limited aspects of the game, like changing the game's speed or adding/modifying some game rules. They do not need to modify gameplay, they can also only have an "aesthetic" effect, like changing the weather conditions or implementing the option to listen to your own mp3 collection while playing." Addons provide some extensions, like patches: new maps, skins, units... The game is untouched, just extended or lightly modified. Mods mean an initial proper change to the game. They

²¹ Sotamaa, 5.

²² Sotamaa, 6.

²³ Elisabeth R. Gee and Kelly M. Tran, "Video Game Making and Modding," in *Handbook of Research on the Societal Impact of Digital Media* (IGI Global, 2016), 238–267, <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-4666-8310-5.ch010>.

can have add-ons or mutators inside them. In short words, mods change the original game, its narration, and rules significantly. Lastly, we have total conversions: the largest and most complex mods to create. They make so many changes to the original game, that practically another game is born out of it. It often involves completely replacing the visuals and audio of the game as performing major changes to the game mechanics and narrative.²⁴

Regarding the second focus, authors have tried to understand who were the modders: what life they had, what drove to modify games, and how modding tied into their lives. In accordance with the overall spectrum of video game players, researchers found that their studies and demographics showed that there were no average computer game modders. Their results comprised high schoolers all the way to senior citizens, and with many types of education levels, however a general college education seemed prevalent. Also, in clear parallelism with the presence of women in professional game design, the female presence in the results was very low.²⁵ The results provided several different reasons why they engaged in modding: playing video games or improving them, wanting to understand and manipulate game code, researching content related to the mod, artistic expression, and finally a willingness to cooperate with other mods. Participants of the study also commented that they wanted to use their products and skills as references to enter the game design industry.²⁶

Regarding the last focus, authors have looked at how the modding community and their surroundings behaved. Complex modding teams often gather people of many technical and coding skills: animators, script writers, UI, and interface designers... Thanks to the Internet, different modders, either working solo or on other teams offer each other help through modding forums, where they share test projects, demonstrations of their mods, ask for advice. Some social relations are also built this way, where mods and their creators gather such a fan following that the fans themselves ask for specific content additions or ideas for a development route.²⁷

Modding is still a relatively new world for researchers, however, in concordance with my following topic, I'd like to shortly steer the end of the historiography into a specific direction, studied by Gareth Crabtree: linking mods, and therefore modding communities, with historical reenactors, who preserve memory by reliving or reenacting historical events, therefore ensuring that the public, or audience, is aware of, and immersed in such events.

²⁴ Alexander Unger, "Modding as Part of Game Culture," in *Computer Games and New Media Cultures: A Handbook of Digital Games Studies*, ed. Johannes Fromme and Alexander Unger (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2012), 509–523, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2777-9_32.

²⁵ Gee and Tran, "Video Game Making and Modding," 253.

²⁶ Gee and Tran, 254.

²⁷ Gee and Tran, 255.

Modding communities are a new form of a digital reenactment group, just like those on festivities or theatre, but ones that use technology and video games as their medium. Like these other reenactors, modding communities are driven by rich networks guided by a strong sense of creative spirit, personal achievement, authorship, and at times an obsessive desire for the authentic.²⁸

Memory of the Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War (1936 - 1939) was a conflict that split the Spanish nation in two. On one side was the elected left-wing Republican government, supported by Catalan and Basque nationalists, communists, socialists, and anarchists, and on the other was a nationalist uprising made up of disgruntled army generals and a wide range of conservatives: Falangists, Carlists, aristocrats, monarchists, Catholics... Although both sides received international aid, the Nationalist side received full military support from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while the Republican side received mainly volunteer troops from the International Brigades and arms supplies from the USSR. With the superior military support and discipline of Franco's Nationalist side, and the infighting and lack of a unified force on the Republican side, this spelled doom for the elected government and gave way to a thirty-six-year dictatorship.²⁹

Although it happened over ninety years ago, the Civil War is still a controversial topic in Spanish society and politics. A large part of this is due to the almost forty years of dictatorship that followed, which demonized the defeated Republicans and purged anyone who did not ally themselves with the Nationalist side from the government, either imprisoning, executing, or driving those they could not catch into exile.³⁰

The Civil War was not discussed, except to praise Franco for his just defeat of the corrupt Republic. The dictatorship set up several propaganda mechanisms to impose its own version of the country's recent history. Local authorities placed plaques in urban areas, built monuments, created holidays and rituals to commemorate the conflict (and subsequent victory), and created spaces to mourn and commemorate the fighters who had fallen in the name of Nationalist Spain. The No-Do (short for Noticiario-Documental), the education system, cinema, literature and so many other cultural expressions were used to justify the founding movement of the new regime, which blamed the illegitimate and brutal violence of the war on the Republican side, using the Red Terror as a catalyst.³¹

²⁸ Gareth Crabtree, "Modding as Digital Reenactment: A Case Study of the Battlefield Series," *Playing with the Past: Digital Games and the Simulation of History*, 2013, 199–212, <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781628928259.ch-013.>, 207.

²⁹ Hugh Thomas, "Alzamiento y Revolución," in *La Guerra Civil Española*, vol. 2, 7 vols. (Urbión, 1980), 396.

³⁰ Juan María Roldán Conesa, "La depuración funcional en el régimen franquista" (Bachelor Thesis, 2018), <https://rodin.uca.es/handle/10498/20950>.

³¹ Pere Soler Paricio, "La memoria histórica de la Guerra Civil, la dictadura franquista, y la Transición, en España. Síntesis histórica e iniciativas legislativas recientes," *Cahiers de civilisation espagnole contemporaine. De 1808 au temps présent*, no. 23 (December 26, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4000/ccec.8857>.

While academics of the time contested the story of the Second Republic and the worker's movement, but not the Civil War itself, no progress was made on memory until after Francisco Franco's death on 20 November 1975. During the Spanish Transition process, which started in 1977, Spain would change as a country, shed its authoritarian past, and enter a new age of democracy and prosperity. However, instead of understanding, accepting, amending, and correcting the mistakes of its traumatic past, the Amnesty Law of October 15th, 1977, was published.³² This law effectively disabled any possible national healing with its past, and no respite or mediation for the affected parties. No accountability for the dictatorship was chased, there was no purge to government officials who had collaborated with the repressive mechanisms. Meanwhile countries all over the world were coming to terms with their past in the twentieth century, be it due to their actions during the Second World War, Cold War, or any dictatorial governments they housed. This did not happen in Spain. Spain chose to forget, in hopes of a peaceful and as comfortable as possible transition into democracy.

In 1986, for the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the war, a plethora of activities and demonstrations were held by social entities, but they had no political presence whatsoever. The Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (PSOE) who was ruling at the time, abstained itself and refused any type of link with the commemoration. Their argument was that this was not the moment, reconciliation was paramount and that there was no need to reopen old wounds.³³

One of the larger moves towards restoring memory was the 2007 *Law of Historical Memory*, passed by the PSOE. This law intended to "recover the past in order to apply democratic quality and help the victims".³⁴ The Catalan government, the *Generalitat*, also created a parallel law, but went further, exposing the futility of the transition when dealing with memory, acknowledging the fight against the dictatorship, and restoring legitimacy to the Second Spanish Republic.³⁵ However, a few years later, the ruling Popular Party (PP) cut funding to the institutions tied to this law, essentially making it inoperable.³⁶

However, in later years, several attempts by progressive governments have been made to address the crimes of the Civil War and the subsequent Francoist regime. Most notably was the 2019 exhumation of Franco's body from the Valley of the Fallen necropolis, where he rested since his death

³² BOE, "BOE-A-1977-24937 Ley 46/1977, de 15 de octubre, de Amnistía.," Pub. L. No. 248 (1977), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-1977-24937>.

³³ Soler Paricio, "La memoria histórica de la Guerra Civil, la dictadura franquista, y la Transición, en España. Síntesis histórica e iniciativas legislativas recientes."

³⁴ BOE, "BOE-A-2007-22296 Ley 52/2007, de 26 de diciembre, por la que se reconocen y amplían derechos y se establecen medidas en favor de quienes padecieron persecución o violencia durante la guerra civil y la dictadura.," Pub. L. No. 310 (2007), <https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2007-22296>.

³⁵ Butlletí Oficial del Parlament de Catalunya, "Memorial Democràtic," Pub. L. No. 146/VIII, 13/2007 (2007), <https://www.parlament.cat/document/cataleg/47968.pdf>.

³⁶ Europa Press, "El Gobierno elimina el presupuesto de la Memoria Histórica," *El Mundo*, September 29, 2012, <https://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2012/09/29/espana/1348927097.html>.

in 1975, along with other Falangist leaders. A move by the PSOE to remove the dictator from a place of public worship and exaltation, was met with heavy opposition from Franco's family, as well as other conservative and far-right parties, such as Vox.³⁷

A couple of years later, Pedro Sánchez's PSOE government passed legislation that built upon the 2007 law, and included measures such as the creation of a national census and DNA bank to help locate missing remains and family members. The 128 votes in favor of the law to the 113 against – plus eighteen abstentions – show the clear divide that historical memory still has in Spanish politics and society. The PP, led by Alberto Nuñez Feijóo, said it would repeal the law if it won the following year's general election. The party's previous leader, Pablo Casado, said the law would serve only to "dig up grudges," while the PP's Mariano Rajoy – who was prime minister from 2011 to 2018 – boasted of cutting Spain's historical memory budget to zero after his administration inherited the 2007 law.³⁸

Overall, since the end of the dictatorship, governmental support towards recovering and addressing the memory of the Spanish Civil War has fluctuated, to say the least. Academic interest, although always present, also encountered difficulties that hindered its progress. According to Rodríguez Barreira, who performed a recount on the number of dissertations made about Franco's Spain and the Civil War, found that between 1976-2003, about 83 percent of the results had been written after 1990. Before 1996, the number of dissertations that approached the Francoist dictatorship or the Civil War were less than eleven every two years. After 1996, this number doubled. Scholars were more interested then -or less afraid- to talk about the Franco's dictatorship, or the Civil War.³⁹ Academic investigators were not immune to censorship, even after Franco's death. The establishment, academic, or otherwise, was still Franco-aligned, largely thanks to the amnesty law. Also, sensitive information was tightly kept, and open-minded new scholars were repressed by the already settled, who were commonly Francoists, and only accepted historical studies that would follow a very politically conservative doctrine.⁴⁰

Furthermore, the most careful and descriptive academical study of the repression during the civil war was not published until 1980, and made by a Francoist historian, General Ramón Salas

³⁷ Sam Jones, "Franco's Remains to Finally Leave Spain's Valley of the Fallen," *The Guardian*, October 23, 2019, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/23/francos-remains-to-finally-leave-spains-valley-of-the-fallen>.

³⁸ Sam Jones, "Spain Passes Law to Bring 'Justice' to Franco-Era Victims," *The Guardian*, October 5, 2022, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/05/spain-passes-law-to-bring-dignity-to-franco-era-victims>.

³⁹ Oscar J. Rodríguez Barreira, "La historia local y social del franquismo en la democracia, 1976-2003. Datos para una reflexión," *Historia social*, no. 56 (2006): 153–76.

⁴⁰ Antonio Cazorla-Sánchez, "From Anti-Fascism to Humanism: The Spanish Civil War as a Crisis of Memory," in *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War* (Brill, 2014), 21–50, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004259966_003, 29.

Larrázabal.⁴¹ Propaganda was key during the Francoist regime, and for almost forty years it spread the narrative that the Civil War and its outcome was a victory of good versus evil, of order versus madness, all while minimizing the losses and suffering of both sides, and therefore, the country as a whole. Even now, conservative, and far-right politicians relive the Francoist narrative of a rebellious, criminal Republic, and refuse to acknowledge any respect or memory for the fallen Republican combatants, or those repressed during the dictatorship.⁴²

Within Spain, however, perhaps the greatest example of a non-governmental entity focusing their efforts on the memory of the war and the dictatorship is the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory (AHRM). This is an informal cluster of associations, political parties, volunteers, historians, and publicists, among others that has sought to raise public awareness in Spain about the forgotten aspects of the Francoist repression.⁴³ This organization has campaigned for laws to be signed and actions to be taken. One of their main methods of action, and the reason the organization was created, was the excavation of human remains of the combatants of the civil war. Born in 2000, they are doing what the Spanish Democracy could not: help dozens of families affected by the war recover their loved ones' remains and help hundreds more to understand what happened to their family members. They claim to work to “dignify our past, ask justice for those who deserved it and didn't receive it, and deepen our democracy”.⁴⁴ The AHRM has also showed its disappointment with Sánchez's 2022 historical memory law, claiming that it doesn't address enough, and additionally calls for the derogation of the 1977 Amnesty Law.⁴⁵

If we look at video games, no historical game set in Spain has been a success.⁴⁶ Venegas argues that the absence of studies and contents in the professional and university training of video game creators in Spain, the inexistence of institutes, and public grants destined to the creation of historical fictions based in the country, and the inexistence of meaningful mediation that ensures an aesthetic memory that is understood by the player and a cost effectiveness for its creators are paramount to

⁴¹ Ramón Salas Larrázabal, *Los datos exactos de la Guerra Civil*, 1980, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/libro?codigo=135758>.

⁴² Ritama Muñoz-Rojas, “Almeida, entre homenajes a las víctimas de los nazis y el borrado a las del franquismo,” *ctxt.es | Contexto y Acción*, sec. Política, accessed March 12, 2024, <http://ctxt.es/es/20230501/Politica/43036/almeida-ayuntamiento-de-madrid-franquismo-victimas.htm>.

⁴³ Cazorla-Sánchez, “From Anti-Fascism to Humanism.” 21.

⁴⁴ “Asociación Para La Recuperación de La Memoria Histórica,” accessed March 13, 2024, <https://memoriahistorica.org.es/>.

⁴⁵ Memoria_ARMH [@ARMH_Memoria], “Esta semana se aprueba en el Senado la Ley de Memoria Democrática. Estos diez puntos imprescindibles no están en el texto. <https://t.co/ZsoUOMpJam>,” Tweet, *Twitter*, October 3, 2022, https://twitter.com/ARMH_Memoria/status/1577020366685601792.

⁴⁶ Juan Fco. Jiménez Alcázar and Alberto Venegas Ramos, “Entre la inexistencia y la sombra: la construcción de la Guerra Civil en el videojuego,” in *La Guerra Civil española en los juegos y entornos lúdicos*, La Casa de la Riqueza. Estudios de la Cultura de España 78 (Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana Vervuet, 2023), 175–204, <https://www.historiayvideojuegos.com/capitulo-de-libro-entre-la-inexistencia-y-la-sombra-la-construccion-de-la-guerra-civil-en-el-videojuego-por-juan-fco-jimenez-alcazar-y-alberto-venegas-ramos/>, 188.

confirm the total irrelevance of our past in the Spanish videogame industry. However, the authors refer to the commercial games, not to mods.⁴⁷

Overall, there has been a lot of scholarly study regarding the Spanish Civil War, and cultural interpretations of it have also received interest. Lately, scholars have taken an interest to video games their representation (or lack of) the conflict. However, modded content depicting the Civil War still is an underdeveloped topic, allowing my thesis to fill this gap.

Theoretical concepts

Two theoretical concepts will be especially useful in understanding the topic, and effectively answering the RQs. The first concept is **‘modding,’** as a form of historical reenactment. Modding as a whole will be further explained in the literature review, but in short, a mod is an altered version of a videogame. This alteration can range from small to the software, the addition of new levels, gameplay mechanics and challenges, to the creation of whole new narrative experiences. Modding is a practice very rooted within Personal Computer (PC) gaming and has developed a culture and community around it.

After interviewing historical modders for different games of the *Battlefield* franchise, Crabtree finds that the widespread claim is that for the mod developers, reenactment is the expression of a “living history,” an exercise predicated on the notion that reliving the past is the best way to learn about it. These practices can be likened to traditional reenactment groups, as both communities are guided by a strong sense of creative spirit, personal achievement, authorship, and at times an obsessive desire for the authentic.⁴⁸

This takes a high degree of rigor, motivation, and skill. Just as historical reenactors in real life, they need to be prepared, well documented, and open to growth. When studying how modders portrayed the Chilean independence and the American Civil War, Coen Weeke finds that both modders illustrate their effort in researching and depicting history, often choosing the more difficult and unknown representation of their historical periods educating the users of the mod.⁴⁹ This final idea encapsulates the core interest of this thesis: explore the Spanish Civil War’s presence in video game mods, a situation that, as will be discussed further down, is sorely lacking.

Furthermore, be it for comedic effect, historical passion, or actively changing and improving the game, modders elongate the lifespan of a game. Modding explicitly alters the economic dynamic

⁴⁷ Jiménez Alcázar and Venegas Ramos, 189.

⁴⁸ Crabtree, “Modding as Digital Reenactment,” 207.

⁴⁹ Coen Weeke, “Appropriation & Motivation in Game Modification; Analysing Modders and Historical Mods” (MA Thesis, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2020), <https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/54492>, 49-52.

between producer and consumer by extending the shelf life of games through the provision of extra content at no cost to the developer.⁵⁰

The second theoretical concept is **historical narrative**. Historical narratives are chains of events in cause-effect relationship that unfold over time and involve specific actors, actions, goals/intentions, settings and instruments.⁵¹ They can function as a way for the state or the ruling power to legitimize its position.⁵² Their function has three parts: Firstly, historical narratives are tied to memory. They mobilize the experience of past time, which is engraved in the archives of memory, so that the experience of present time becomes understandable, and the expectation of future time is possible. Secondly, historical narratives give sense to this past-present-future dynamic by giving a sense of continuity. Finally, historical narratives help establish a sense of identity by its authors and listeners. If the listeners are engaged by this continuity and they adopt that historical narrative, they become more ideologically tied to the group.⁵³

Relating to the topic of this thesis, this cycle is clearly represented by the state of historical memory in Spain: the official narrative of the Francoist regime, in power for almost four decades, was that the Civil War was won by the Good side, and Evil lost: the rot of communism had left Spain, and the good Spanish people could now live a peaceful, catholic life, thanks to Franco.⁵⁴ This narrative rooted itself in society, so much so, that even after Franco's death, criticism towards, or attempting to address the crimes, abuses, and injustices of the dictatorship and the Civil War is met with large political and social disapproval and outrage.⁵⁵

Innovative aspects and inspiration

Historical memory in Spain is a fickle thing. Although we are nearing the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Civil War, social and political progress on historical memory in Spain has been uneven. There has been some progress on repatriation, and the introduction of memory laws, but the topic is still very contested, as shown previously.

⁵⁰ Crabtree, "Modding as Digital Reenactment," 202.

⁵¹ Pieter J. B. J. Van Den Heede, "'Experience the Second World War like Never before!' Game Paratextuality between Transnational Branding and Informal Learning ('¡Experimenta La Segunda Guerra Mundial Como Nunca Antes!' La Paratextualidad de Los Videojuegos Entre El Branding Transnacional y El Aprendizaje Informal)," *Journal for the Study of Education and Development* 43, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 606–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02103702.2020.1771964>.

⁵² Andrew Pilecki and Phillip L. Hammack, "Negotiating the Past, Imagining the Future: Israeli and Palestinian Narratives in Intergroup Dialog," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, Critical Junction Theory, 43 (November 1, 2014): 100–113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2014.08.019>.

⁵³ Jörn Rüsen, "Historical Narration: Foundation, Types, Reason," *History and Theory* 26, no. 4 (1987): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505047>, 89.

⁵⁴ Gladys Granata de Egües, "La memoria actual de la Guerra Civil española," *Boletín GEC: Teorías Literarias y prácticas críticas*, no. 20 (2016): 36–51. 38-39.

⁵⁵ Jones, "Spain Passes Law to Bring 'Justice' to Franco-Era Victims."

Many of the internal political problems and obstacles that Spain faces to this day can be traced to this lack of accountability, repressed anger, and lost hope. That is why although some work has been done, such as the removal of Francoist street names in Madrid, there is still a lot of work to be done. Capdepón writes: “Street names installed by a past dictatorship fit uncomfortably into the memory culture of a democratic society and constantly challenge its fundamental values.”⁵⁶ It is also interesting that, despite the conservative (but also progressive) governments of Spain since the Transition have been very punitive towards outsider violent and non-violent movements such as the Basque nationalists of ETA, or the Catalan separatists, virtually no aid has been given to the families affected by Francoist repression by comparison, something that the AHRM also protests.⁵⁷

Scholarly commentary on different forms of cultural media, such as film, photography, or literature representing the war has been plentiful, however gaming analysis has been less covered by authors, especially due to the small number of games produced on the topic. However, modded representations of the Spanish Civil War are a very recent topic, and therefore, still absent from the academic, or even casual discussion corpus.

Here is where my research fits in. By studying the products that the modding community has produced, I aim to fill that void, and aid further research and discussion to find a way to redirect the public and political discourse of the country in a meaningful way.

Sources

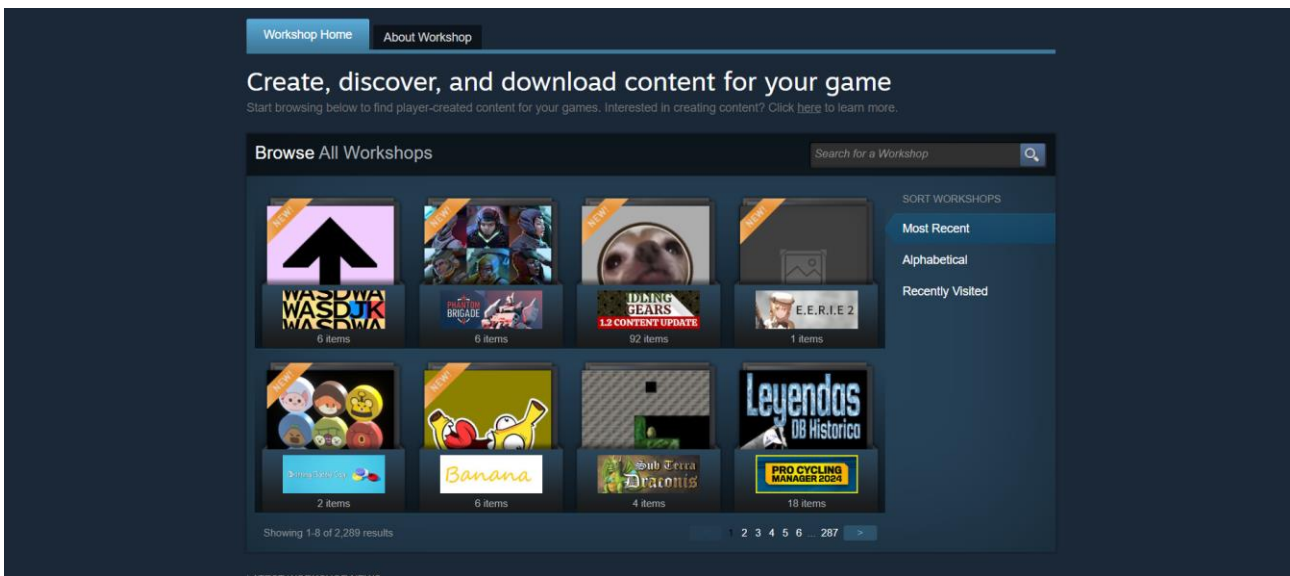
The body of this research will focus on two mods about the Spanish Civil War, one for the game *Call of Duty 2* (Activision, 2005), and the other for *Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars* (Tale Worlds Entertainment, 2012).

Call of Duty 2 is a first-person shooter set in the Second World War, which the player experiences through the perspectives of four soldiers: one in the Red Army, another in the United States Army, and two in the British Army, in four different campaigns. *Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars* is a multiplayer-focused downloadable content (DLC) for *Mount and Blade: Warband*. This expansion is set during the Napoleonic Wars, where up to two hundred players can fight in historical battles. The search has been conducted through online mod pages and platforms that allow the user to download mods:

⁵⁶ Ulrike Capdepón, “Challenging the Symbolic Representation of the Franco Dictatorship: The Street Name Controversy in Madrid,” *History and Memory* 32, no. 1 (2020): 100–130, <https://doi.org/10.2979/histmemo.32.1.06>, 103.

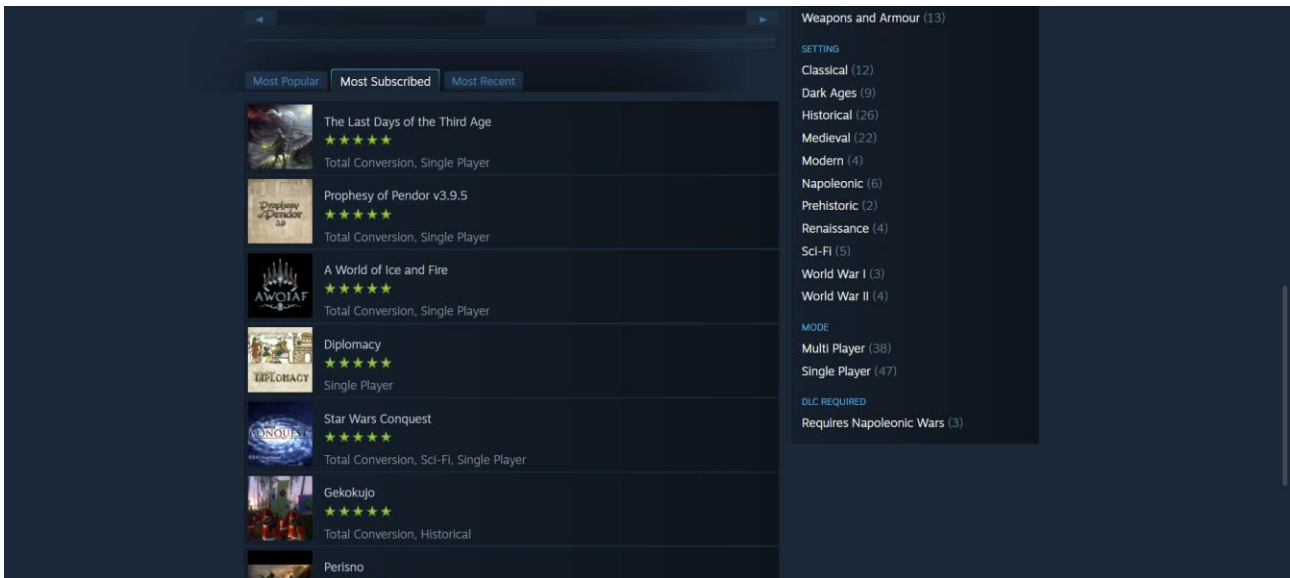
⁵⁷ Memoria_ARMH (@ARMH_Memoria), “Esta semana se aprueba en el Senado la Ley de Memoria Democrática. Estos diez puntos imprescindibles no están en el texto,” *X (formerly Twitter)*, October 3, 2022, <https://t.co/ZsoUOMpJam>.

The most popular gaming platform on PC is Steam, with over 400 million games sold in 2022.⁵⁸ This online platform features a Store to purchase games, a Library to manage and peruse owned games, and social media functions, such as discussions, player guides, or video broadcasting, in its Community section. Another function in this section is the “Workshop.” In this “workshop,” modders create mods for games found in the Steam Store, and players can download and rate them. For many games, one can use the Steam workshop to peruse, download, install, and catalog hundreds of thousands of mods. However, not all games have modding compatibility, and for some other games that do, Steam does not allow mod support through their platform. *Call of Duty 2* is one of these games.



1 Home page of the Steam Workshop

⁵⁸ J. Clement, “PC Gaming Worldwide - Statistics & Facts,” Statista, April 27, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/topics/11985/pc-gaming-worldwide/>.



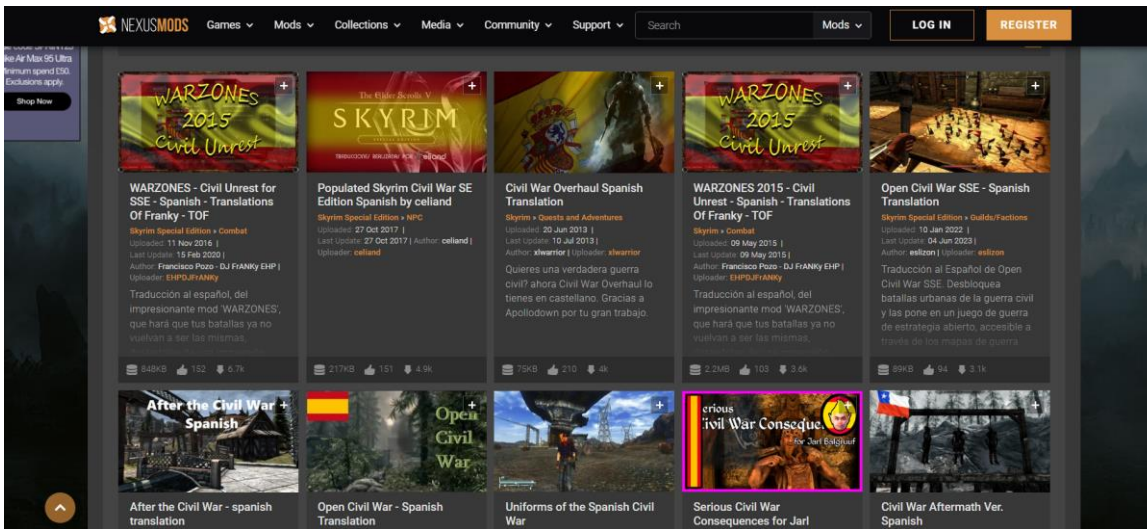
2 Most Subscribed mods in the Mount and Blade: Warband Workshop

Other popular modding sites for gaming, ModDB, and Nexus Mods, have similar amounts of user-created content or are even larger than Steam. In fact, as of 2014, ModDB had more than 36.000 files and more than 130 million downloads.⁵⁹ However, the main drawback when using these platforms is that, unlike Steam, these mods must be installed manually, whereas with Steam, one only needs to subscribe to the mod in the Workshop, to which the mod will download and the system will automatically install it into the game. This creates a barrier of entry to less tech-savvy users, as sometimes coding and encryption need to be used to successfully activate the mod. But the modding community is aware of this, and the comment sections and discussion pages of these mod sites are filled with guides and tips to correctly install mods. In these libraries of mods, search filters have been employed to tighten the search, using the keywords “Spain,” “Civil War,” “Spanish Civil War,” “1936”.

Search results

Nexus Mods showed seventeen results, but all inconclusive, as none of them were related to the Spanish Civil War. Most of the results were Spanish translations of the events and dialogues of the Civil War which is present in the game *Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*. The others were aesthetic modifications, such as mods that paint the player’s tank with Republican and Nationalist decorations and insignias in the game *World of Tanks*. None of the results from Nexus Mods have been used for this analysis.

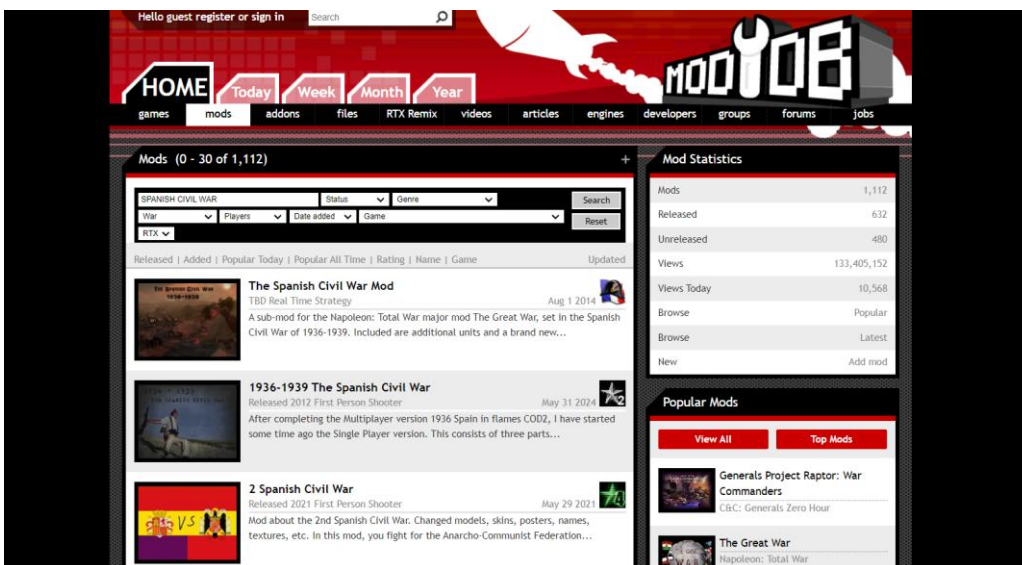
⁵⁹ Gee and Tran, “Video Game Making and Modding,” 252.



3 Mod results in the Nexus Mods page after the search

The Steam workshop proved very unwieldy to use, as it does not have a general mod search, allowing only to search for games, and only then, one can search for mods made for each game, so keywords have little to no use. Furthermore, the few mods that ended up fitting the search, were also found on ModDB.

ModDB was the most successful search out of the three mod pages, displaying 3,245 results with the “Spanish Civil War” keyword, and down to 1,112 with the War category selected. However, the search engine is not very precise, and most results had either something to do with Spain, or a Civil War, but were not related to the 1936-1939 conflict. However, the top results were adequate and referred to the Spanish Civil War. Eight results were deemed adequate at first, however there was a large disparity in content between them, as some of them were still in early development, some had no playable version available, and others were small mods, content-wise.



4 Mod results in the Mod DB page after the search

Considering the scope of the thesis, the chosen mods were two overhauls, or “total conversion” mods, as these types of modded content provided the richest base of analysis among the overall results.

They are:

- 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War (*Call of Duty 2*): This is a single-player, first-person shooter mod that applies a Spanish Civil War storyline that substitutes the one from the base game. The player goes through twenty-four missions that recreate different events and battles of the war, such as the original uprising in Melilla, the battle for Madrid, or the bombing of Guernica. The mod was finished in March 2012. The mod has more than thirty-six thousand downloads.⁶⁰
- Red and Blue 1936 (*Mount and Blade: Warband - Napoleonic Wars*): This third- and first-person multiplayer shooter allows the player to fight in historically recreated scenarios and battles from the Spanish Civil War. It features an active community that sets regular meetings to gather and play matches. The mod was finished in July 2018. The mod has been downloaded ten thousand times.⁶¹

Source criticism

The main strength of these two sources is that being two overhauls, they provide an abundance of content to analyze. They are also highly rated by users, which gives them a social relevance in this niche community. Another strength is, since they are both action games, and shooters more specifically, they can be more easily compared to each other, and will be able to be analyzed using the same tools and metrics. However, this is also their weakness: some of the results that did not end up making the cut, were from other video game genres, such as Turn-Based or Real Time Strategy (RTS). This choice in sources gives an acute but limited view of the representations present in different video game genres, as I have decided to just focus on one.

Methodology

My research will use formal videogame analysis, with two subcomponents regarding action games. First, the body of my research will be using Clara Fernández Vara’s handbook *Introduction to Game Analysis*, which will provide my main approach to analyze the mods. My second methodological source will be Holger Pötzsch’s article *Selective Realism: Filtering Experiences of War and Violence in First- and Third-Person Shooters*. Finally, I will also use Pieter Van den Heede’s

⁶⁰ Triby, “1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War Mod for Call of Duty 2,” ModDB, March 29, 2012, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/1936-1939-the-spanish-civil-war>.

⁶¹ Red & Blue:1936 Development Team, “Red and Blue: 1936 - Mount & Blade Warband: Napoleonic Wars,” ModDB, July 18, 2018, <https://www.moddb.com/mods/red-blue-1936>.

article *Replaying Wartime Résistance? Studying Ludic Memory-Making in the Open World Game The Saboteur*.

Clara Fernández Vara proposes a threefold approach to analyze a game more critically and scientifically:

First, understand its context. Fernandez Vara points out different possible ways that a game's context might be studied: understanding the in-game context, such as what type of level the analysis is being done; defining and describing the genre of the game; understanding the technological context of the game – in our case, comparing the changes from the mod to the base game might be an interesting addition; understanding its socio-historical and economical context; describe how the audience reacted to this game; and finally, relating this game with other similar games, franchises, or inspirations.⁶²

Secondly, give an overview of the game. It is important not to lean excessively on this, as that would make the analysis more akin to a commercial review. However, the analysis will cover these parameters: how many players can play this game, which are the game mechanics, what is the story about, and where does it take place, and how does the player interact with this story and world. These last three are especially crucial to determine which narratives are present in the games.⁶³

Finally, discuss the formal elements and characteristics of the game. Some of these are: how is the level design? What are the game's values (as in, what does the game reward, or punish)? What choices can the player make? How does the point of view of the player affect the gaming experience?⁶⁴

Although, Fernández only points out mods as an added characteristic of a game, not as the focus of the investigation. However, I believe this just to need a change of optic, as the same rules that order a game, also do it for the mod.

Pöttsch develops the concept of “selective realism” in order to understand how narratives in first- and third-person shooters exclude certain relevant, but unpleasant, features of warfare such as problematic forms of violence, long-term psychological impacts, or socio-political blowbacks.⁶⁵ To do this, the author uses *filters* to see how game-based simulations of war and violence “insert an ideological bias into the various representations emerging from contingent practices of play that connect these games to war-prone discourses and interests”.⁶⁶ These are four: the violence filter, the

⁶² Clara Fernández-Vara, *Introduction to Game Analysis*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351140089>, 59-83.

⁶³ Fernández-Vara, 86-109.

⁶⁴ Fernández-Vara, 117-163.

⁶⁵ Holger Pöttsch, “Selective Realism: Filtering Experiences of War and Violence in First- and Third-Person Shooters,” *Games and Culture* 12, no. 2 (March 1, 2017): 156–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555412015587802>, 1.

⁶⁶ Pöttsch, 6.

consequence filter, the character filter, and the conflict filter. For this thesis, the violence, character, and conflict filters will be used.

The violence filter determines which forms of violence are depicted and can be enacted by the player throughout the game. This includes friendly fire, attacking civilians, or collateral damage being presented to the player. The author explains that games typically avoid showing this type of violence and brutality, and that the only violence portrayed is “battle-related and targeted at opposing soldiers or paramilitary forces,” thus avoiding portraying well documented war-related abuses such as rape, the killing of children, or the targeting of non-combatants. This plays into discourses that sanitize warfare and present it as a struggle limited to soldiers and armies.⁶⁷

The character filter, as the author puts it, determines “which in-game protagonists can acquire an identity other than combatant and gain a voice to explain their point of view in an accessible and relevant manner”⁶⁸, and influences the biased presentation of individual heroism and sacrifice. This filter looks at the player, its allies, and opponents. It looks at how characters behave, if they align with the player, or if they change sides. It also looks at how the opponents and their aims are portrayed, if they’re caricatured, or if their antagonistic and evil plans, legitimize the player’s violence.⁶⁹ This filter will be especially visible in the 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War mod for *Call of Duty 2*, as it is story-driven, and follows a specific plotline and sequence of events, with acted dialogues and scripts.

Finally, the conflict filter limits the understandings and solutions of the conflicts found in the game. Normally, in first- or third-person shooters, the main conflict is presented as necessitated by ruthless and inhumane opponents with remorseless and terrible actions. Therefore, these narratives present that the only possible response to these actions is severe violence. It excludes any alternatives such as negotiation, de-escalation, or surrender. The default mode of interaction is violence, in such way that sometimes the only way to complete a level is to eliminate all opponents found in it.⁷⁰

Pieter Van den Heede’s article raises the attention, not just to historical video games, but the *paratexts* that surround them. Just as paratexts that accompany and shape our expectations and experience of a cultural text, such as advertisements, previews, interviews, so have video games.⁷¹ Paratexts are considered as another way for developers to interact with their public, the text argues, and that marketing paratexts like interviews and trailers are relevant, because they are the first glimpse of content that the players receive before the game’s release.

⁶⁷ Pöttsch, 7.

⁶⁸ Pöttsch, 8.

⁶⁹ Pöttsch, 9.

⁷⁰ Pöttsch, 9.

⁷¹ Pieter J.B.J. Van den Heede, “Replaying Wartime Résistance? Studying Ludic Memory-Making in the Open World Game *The Saboteur*,” *Games and Culture* 19, no. 2 (March 1, 2024): 178–98, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15554120231160904>, 182.

Van den Heede also argues that “a thematic analysis of promotional interviews with the creators of a game, as a traditional publisher-driven paratext, can greatly complement the intermedial analysis of the memory-making potential of historically themed digital entertainment games”.⁷² This way, the analysis can identify which aspects of the past the developers of the game wish to represent, and how they wish to do so, as this allows researchers to carry out a more targeted analysis of the game from a historical and cultural memory perspective, Van den Heede argues.⁷³

With these two concepts in hand, thematic analysis, and paratexts, Van den Heede uses two analytical guidelines⁷⁴, that will prove useful for this thesis:

1. Identify which fictional and historical sources of inspiration the creators of 1936-1939 *The Spanish Civil War* and *Red and Blue 1936* highlight.
2. Whether or not the creators of the mods formulate explicit arguments about the past or aim to contribute to the remembrance of past events while talking about their sources of inspiration.

All in all, my methodology will be this: Fernández Vara’s body of formal analysis and Pötzsch’s filters will let me create a systematic and filtered analysis of the mods, so I can understand their characteristics and narratives. Van den Heede’s paratext analysis will allow me to analyze the mod creator’s participation, and inspiration. This will allow me to analyze what memory discourses are being put forward by the mod creators, and their creations.

⁷² Van den Heede, 183.

⁷³ Van den Heede, *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Van den Heede, 184.

1. Call of Duty 2: 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War



⁵Official thumbnail of the mod. ModDB

1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War is a mod for *Call of Duty 2*, developed and published by a modding team, led by a modder nicknamed “Triby”. This mod is an overhaul, a total conversion of the original *Call of Duty 2* campaign. The mod features twenty-four missions set in the Spanish Civil war, and adds assets such as new vehicles, weapons, character *skins*, and sounds. The development of the mod lasted 3 years, and its definitive version was released on March 30th, 2012.⁷⁵

Triby’s real name is José García, and he is a Spanish modder. His information can be found in Triby’s blog, Triby’s profile page in Mod DB, José García’s LinkedIn page, and José García’s YouTube page. This YouTube account, inactive for over ten years, is where he posted updates from the mods he was working on, as well as a video recording of a live historical reenactment of the Spanish Civil War in Candamo, Spain. He has also used the nickname “Div36///-M.Astur”, as seen on Twitch⁷⁶. The user joined Mod DB on March 24, 2009.⁷⁷

Triby has also been working in other mod projects: “1936 España En Llamas” (1936 Spain In Flames) for *Call of Duty 2*, “Spain At War”, for *Call of Duty World at War* (Activision, 2008), and “MWM Redline”, for *Call of Duty World at War* (WaW).

The two first mods are also depictions of the Spanish Civil War, the first one being the multiplayer counterpart mod for 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War.⁷⁸ The second is a brand-new

⁷⁵ Triby, “Mod 1936 – 1939 La Guerra Civil Española,” *TribyBlog* (blog), October 7, 2012, <https://tribyblog.wordpress.com/mod-1936-1939-la-guerra-civil-espanola/>.

⁷⁶ Enredador, “Triby el Camarero,” Twitch, 2014, video, 0:15, <https://www.twitch.tv/videos/42993488>.

⁷⁷ “Triby,” ModDB, March 24, 2009, <https://www.moddb.com/members/triby>.

⁷⁸ Triby, “Mod 1936 España En Llamas,” *TribyBlog* (blog), October 7, 2012, <https://tribyblog.wordpress.com/mod-1936-espana-en-llamas/>.

single-player and multiplayer mod. As of June 2024, only the multiplayer mode is available, and Triby has confirmed that they are working on the single-player campaign.⁷⁹

The third and final mod is a custom map for the *Call of Duty World at War* “Modern Warfare Mod Redline.” This map, Triby says, depicts the city of Washington, “more specifically where the Capitol and the Obelisk are located.”⁸⁰ Few details are known about this mod.

According to his LinkedIn page, José works as a technician in a telecommunications warehouse, but that his “true vocation and passion is Computer Science, and especially video games.” He then describes his modding projects and creations, claiming that he is currently working on the Spain at War mod, and that, in this project, he has had “the privilege of counting on professional voice actors, and soon, with historians.”⁸¹

Triby’s blog also mentions and credits several other users that collaborated on creating the mod. One of them, such as username “Matapijos”, appears to be a close acquaintance to Triby, as they are seen playing together in videos.⁸² This Spanish user is credited with providing translations in English, and they are also given special thanks by Triby, for the “great support” they’ve provided during the duration of the project.⁸³

Paratextual Analysis

Triby uses his social media accounts to inform users online about the updates in the mod he works in, by adding articles where he explicitly talks about progress on the mod creation, as well as tutorials on how to correctly run them. He also interacts with commenters that either congratulate him for creating these mods, that report feedback and bugs found within the mod, and that also share other sources with him from which to draw inspiration.

His blog is where most information regarding the project can be found. Triby says: “After more than three years of work with the single-player version, at last I can announce the release date for the definitive version. It has been a long journey, with its obstacles and joys, but the final result I believe has been better than what I expected in the beginning of the project. With this mod, I am finally relieved to see a CoD 2 “Spanish style”, the first single-player FPS of the Spanish Civil War.”⁸⁴

This expression, “Spanish style” (A la Española, in Spanish) is also present in other comments where he repeats the general message of satisfaction. This expression could just mean he is happy that Call of Duty 2 content created by Spaniards exists, but it could also subscribe to the term “españolada”, used by Antonio César Moreno. Moreno argues that this concept could be defined as a

⁷⁹ Triby, “Mod Spain At War,” *TribyBlog* (blog), October 7, 2012, <https://tribyblog.wordpress.com/mod-1936-spain-at-war/>.

⁸⁰ Triby, “MWM RedLine,” *TribyBlog* (blog), October 7, 2012, <https://tribyblog.wordpress.com/mwm-redline/>.

⁸¹ José García, “About,” LinkedIn, accessed June 7, 2024, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jose-garcia-50861620/>.

⁸² Enredador, “Triby el Camarero.”

⁸³ Triby, “Mod 1936 – 1939 La Guerra Civil Española.”

⁸⁴ Triby.

musical, cultural, film, literary, and even pictographic genre, one that is rooted within the stereotypes of an image of Spain from the sixteenth century to the present: passion, blood feuds, sensuality, Flamenco music, and vineyards, to name a few.⁸⁵

Triby also names the sources of inspiration that helped him “create some missions and content of the mod, and that deserve special attention.” These are a list of different books, documentaries, and films, which talk about and portray the Civil War. The ideological content in these sources is diverse. Some of them are more neutral, scientific catalogues of propaganda posters, of armaments and uniforms, and archive newsreels and video from the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation (RTVE), Spain’s state-owned public corporation that manages public radio and television. This type of inspiration is seen throughout the game, as the scenarios are full of propaganda posters from the time, the uniforms and weaponry of the characters and NPCs is dutifully researched and historically accurate, and historical characters are represented how they appeared in archive videos and images.

Some of the sources, namely the films, take more personal and ideological viewpoints and stories from the Civil War. To name a few, Ken Loach’s *Land and Freedom* (1995) (*Tierra y Libertad* in Spanish), or *13 Roses* (*Las 13 Rosas* in Spanish) (2007) by Emilio Martínez Lázaro. The overall number of film sources, and especially these two mentioned, overwhelmingly take a pro-Republican stance, as it also happens with most of the other type of sources presented. Only a couple sources are critical of the Republic’s effort or structure, and one of them criticizes the fervent anticlericalism and violence towards religious personnel of the Republican side.

Interestingly, several of the sources represent the struggle and difficulties that women faced during the time. The most prominent of them, the film *13 Roses* tells the historical account of a group of leftist propagandist women who were jailed in the women’s prison of Las Ventas, in Madrid, after being wrongly accused of assassinating a local Francoist Civil Guard commander. They were then sentenced to death by shooting.⁸⁶ This shows a clear interest in the lives and experiences of women during the war, how they participated in it, and how they were repressed for it. Something that is clearly seen through Marion, the mod’s female Republican protagonist.

Shadows of War: The Spanish Civil War, the foundation of the mod

Many assets from the mod, such as the plotline, dialogues, and characters are ported from an earlier game: *Shadows of War: the Spanish Civil War*. This is a Real Time Strategy (RTS) game released in November 2007, made by now-defunct Spanish game developer *Legend Studios*. It was

⁸⁵ Antonio César Moreno Cantano, “Españolada, memoria histórica y representación digital: la Guerra Civil española en el mundo del videojuego,” in *Ocio, cultura y aprendizaje: historia y videojuegos*, Historia y videojuegos 7 (Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Murcia, 2020), 185–204, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=7619732>. 187

⁸⁶ “Las Trece Rosas: quiénes son y por qué las fusiló el franquismo en 1939,” *La Sexta*, August 5, 2020, https://www.lasexta.com/noticias/nacional/trece-rosas-quienes-son-que-fusilo-franquismo-1939_202008055f2a806007c1dd0001b802c8.html.

only released in Spain, due to the low-budget of its development, and to the negative critic reception it received.

The game was a commercial success and sold over sixty thousand copies in under a year, which prompted the developers to release a content expansion in the November 2009. Despite this, it was negatively received by critics, noting its tedious and generic story, bad gameplay, and dated graphics.⁸⁷ Lead developer Francisco Perez stated that the game was intended to spark conversation in Spain about the war, and that “as well as being entertaining, it could serve to remind people that they need to be conscious of past events to make sure they are not repeated”.⁸⁸ However, Santiago Macias, then vice president of the AHRM, publicly criticized the game:

By putting both sides in an equal playing field, the game gives a wrong impression. A video game about the Civil War should have an educational component and explain that it is about a military uprising against a constitutional and legal government. In Second World War games this is no longer needed, but the Civil War is a relatively new conflict to come into mass consciousness and does require this didactic labor.”⁸⁹

However, Vandal pointed out the sound department of the game: from the high-quality music and documentaries, the voices of the characters and the sound of battle.⁹⁰ This is something that flows into *1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War* and is merged with the improvements that the modders made.

For their portrayal of the Civil War, the developers chose a more comic book tone for the game instead of a realistic and grounded one. The stylized design of the characters contrasts with the abundant documentary sequences meant to contextualize in the action. Gómez argues that this caricatured nature is useful to avoid a portrayal of violence that might have been controversial in the society of the time.⁹¹

The game features two campaigns, one from the Nationalist side, and one on the Republican side. Despite this, the game is almost absent of symbology of either faction, instead creating new iconography to represent them, which shows that there was an utmost effort to not create controversy. For example, the icon of the Republican campaign is a star, crossed by a sword and a shotgun, while the Nationalist campaign is identified by an eagle with a cross. In both instances, although not the official symbols of each side, the game uses topics and tropes that are often attributed to said factions.

⁸⁷ El equipo 3DJuegos, “Análisis de Sombras de Guerra,” 3DJuegos, November 27, 2007, <https://www.3djuegos.com/juegos/sombras-de-guerra-la-guerra-civil-espanola/analisis/review-sombras-de-guerra-la-guerra-civil-espanola-071127-796>.

⁸⁸ Josh Griffiths, “Shadows of War: The Spanish Civil War Is Alive After All,” *Cliqist* (blog), November 30, 2017, <https://cliqist.com/2017/11/30/shadows-war-spanish-civil-war-alive/>.

⁸⁹ Julián Díez, “‘Sombras de guerra’ reabre viejas heridas sobre la contienda civil,” *El País*, December 3, 2007, sec. Radiotv, https://elpais.com/diario/2007/12/03/radiotv/1196636403_850215.html.

⁹⁰ Julio Gómez, “Análisis Sombras de Guerra: La Guerra Civil Española - PC,” Vandal, December 23, 2007, <https://vandal.lespanol.com/analisis/pc/sombras-de-guerra-la-guerra-civil-espanola/7356>.

⁹¹ Julio Gómez.

Its story revolves around the two main protagonists, Marion Barrena as the Republican protagonist, and Manuel de Guadarrama, who goes by the nickname Ghanin Shabah, as the Nationalist protagonist. These two fictional characters had a romantic relationship in the past, and are now separated by the war and ideology, fighting in opposite sides of the conflict. Their love -and now hate- relationship plays a part in the story, but only in the ending Nationalist mission. Even though it is a small fragment of the overall story, its meaning can be used to explain the symbolic meaning of the War, and its conclusion. Depending on the campaign chosen, the player will control either character. In the end of the Nationalist campaign, Manuel confronts Marion, and shoots her. In the opposite campaign, in an alternate history ending, the republican forces storm Burgos, and detain Francisco Franco. This conflict between the lovers adds an emotional weight to the story, which leans heavy into the "two Spains" myth. This, according to Kuschel, removes the historical context from the memory of the Spanish Civil War, instead leaning on a romanticized view of the conflict.⁹²

The Mod

The mod takes this story and characters and translates them into a First-Person Shooter setting. At first glance it would seem that the mod is burdened with the same narratives and memory discourses that were criticized by critics and the vice president of the AHRM, but the mod offers additional resources, and editing decisions, which enrich the story and immersion of the character within this conflict. As Kuschel points out, due to the nature of the mod being in first person, the experience is more immersive, akin to a subjective travel through the most memorable moments of the Spanish Civil War.⁹³

The campaign consists of eight chapters, with a total of twenty-four missions, which span through the main stages and events of the Civil War: The Rising, the battle of Madrid, the struggle and Fall of the North, the bombing of Guernica, and the Ebro battle. This would conclude the historical timeline. However, same as in *Shadows of War*, the mod offers two alternate history missions which expand the Republican storyline, in which allied spies intercept Hitler's plans to invade Poland, and the Allies offer full assistance to the Spanish Republic, turning the tide of the war. It takes seven hours to finish the campaign, but this may vary according to the difficulty level chosen, and the skill of the player. Some mission sections, such as the central battle in the "No pasarán" mission, are challenging, even in the lower difficulties, whereas others, such as "El día de la Victoria," is only four minutes long, with no combat or difficulty found.

⁹² Daniela Kuschel, "'¿Nacionales o Republicanos? —¡tú decides la historia! —' el mito de 'las dos Españas' en los videojuegos Sombras de Guerra (2007/2008) y 1936, España en llamas (2012)," *Memoria y Narración. Revista de estudios sobre el pasado conflictivo de sociedades y culturas contemporáneas*, no. 2 (March 5, 2021): 85–94, <https://doi.org/10.5617/myn.8664>. 89

⁹³ Kuschel. 92

Once we start the mod, the main menu plays “Варшавянка” (Varshavianka) as its main theme. This is a Polish socialist revolutionary song from the end of the nineteenth century. Later, in 1936, Valeriano Orobón adapted the piece to Spanish, and became one of the most recognizable songs of the Spanish Civil War, tied to anarcho-syndicalism. This song, titled “A las Barricadas”, has since become the anthem of the National Confederation of Labor (CNT).⁹⁴ From there, we could start a new campaign, continue from we left off if we already started one, or choose a specific mission to play from scratch, erasing any progress previously saved on a mission.

The main bulk of the story is told through cinematic introductions that serve as worldbuilding, and build context around the battles and offensives that the player takes part in. These give the player information relating to the actions of politicians, the roles of external agents and countries, and the nature of the mission that the player will play shortly after.

The cinematic introduction of the first mission, “The Day of the Rising,” presents the situation before the Rising on July 18, 1936, the state of the Spanish Republic, and gives reasons to why the coup d’état happens in the first place.

This is the transcript of said cinematic: On July 18, 1936, the most conservative members of the Spanish army revolted against the Republican government, leading an uprising that quickly spread throughout the country, beginning the Spanish Civil War. This is the culmination of years of covert dissent between the various factions, both political and social, that have been forming in recent times. The strong economic differences between the privileged and the non-privileged, the growing discontent with an ineffective political class, and the rise of new ideologies on the European scene produce an escalation of tensions in Spain at the time. The Second Spanish Republic was the swan song for the stability of a country that, for more than a century, was accustomed to solving its problems through a military uprising. With the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera still very recent in the memory of the Spanish, moderation and the promised social changes of the Republic give way to extremism and radicalization. While the Falangist squads turn the streets into scenes of bloody fights, the sectors of the left contribute to general insecurity with acts of protest and vandalism. Revengeful assassinations from one side or the other, occupations of farms, savage strikes, and settling of scores continue, without an overwhelmed and divided Republican government acting firmly. It is in this scenario, when a group of rebel soldiers weave a plan to start the uprising that would bring stability to Spain. The day of the National Uprising has arrived.

This retelling of the events that led up to the Rising is very neutral in nature and adheres to the “both sides are equal” narrative. It establishes that the social unrest and violent and turbulent situation of the time, was an equal moral footing for an illegal, antidemocratic coup d’état by members

⁹⁴ Marco Antonio de la Ossa Martínez and José Antonio Sarmiento, “La Música En La Guerra Civil Española,” *Revista de Musicología* 31, no. 2 (2008): 597–602, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20797938>, 317.

of the Spanish Army, as Macias and the AHRM would criticize. It does a good job, however, of portraying the long-drawn struggle between factions and social classes, and the Spanish political tradition of alternating governments via coup d'état, especially present during the early to mid-late 19th century, since between 1833 and 1874, there were approximately 0,7 military uprisings per year.⁹⁵ This created an atmosphere of uncertainty regarding the power of the army in Spanish politics and society, and for the army itself, a historic precedent to which overturn a rightfully elected government.

It also mentions the rise of “new” ideologies, without contemplating or mentioning the nature of them. Italian Fascism and German National Socialism were very influential to Spanish Falangism, Rafael Sánchez Mazas, one of the leaders and founders of the Spanish Falange, identified himself with the Italian totalitarian ideology, and after bringing it to Spain and with several others, created the movement.⁹⁶ Sánchez Mazas also coined the motto “Arriba España!”, found very present in Nationalist dialogue in the game. This unwillingness to position itself, to instead lay an equal base for both factions, does still tell a narrative that both sides were equally powerful, brutal, antidemocratic, or that their actions had the same consequences.

Player rules

Mechanics

Due to the nature of the conflict, and the fact that the mod uses *Call of Duty 2* as a base, most actions that the player can perform throughout the campaign are related to combat scenarios. This results in a limited view of the conflict, where the primary action that its participants perform is violence. Despite this, there is an exception, the bombing of Guernica mission, which will be developed as a small case study further ahead.

The player is taught all the controls, movement, and weapon mechanics in the first mission, which serves as a tutorial or training ground. After an obstacle course to learn the movement mechanics, the player is brought to a shooting range to get used to the weapons, presently a rifle and the pistol, and later a demolitions area to practice throwing grenades with accuracy. Also, the mod team added a bayonet for the rifle and knife, which replace the generic melee strike with the butt of the rifle. This can be seen as an increase in violence and deadly intent.

The player is also introduced to the compass, which is always present on the bottom left of the screen and given meta-advice to click “Tab” if they desire to see a description of the current

⁹⁵ Oriol Sabaté, Sergio Espuelas, and Alfonso Herranz-Loncán, “MILITARY WAGES AND COUPS D’ÉTAT IN SPAIN (1850–1915): THE USE OF PUBLIC SPENDING AS A COUP-PROOFING STRATEGY,” *Revista de Historia Económica - Journal of Iberian and Latin American Economic History* 40, no. 2 (September 2022): 205–41, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0212610920000270>, 236.

⁹⁶ Mónica Carbajosa Pérez, “Rafael Sánchez Mazas,” *Real Academia de la Historia*, accessed June 23, 2024, <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/6414/rafael-sanchez-mazas>.

objective. The location of said objective is always marked on the compass, which becomes invaluable in more open and chaotic levels, where the player can get lost in the level design.



Tutorial. We can see the objectives (top-left), compass (bottom-left), and magazine and total ammo count (bottom right)

Although most missions are tackled in the traditional way of “going from point A to point B” while eliminating any resistance, some missions vary. In the Republican mission “The Gold of Moscow,” the player is placed on the back of a truck armed with a Submachine gun and tasked with protecting the convoy said truck is following. The player is unable to move during this section, not even in the back of the truck, so it is difficult to avoid shots from incoming enemies. This is a weakness of the engine, as there are no such missions or sections in the base Call of Duty.

When the player takes damage, a red arrow will point from where the damage came from. The more damage taken, the more the screen is covered in a red, bloody filter. This indicates that the player is wounded. If they continue to take damage, they will die. However, if they can manage to find cover or avoid taking any more damage, they will start regenerating their wounds after several seconds. This ensures that, even though the player might be surrounded, they can continue to fight if they take their time and do not attack wildly. When the player dies, a death screen is shown with famous quotes uttered by prominent people of the conflict, such as Manuel Azaña, Francisco Franco, or Dolores Ibárruri. They then appear in the last saved checkpoint.

This hyper focus in combat, in line with a Call of Duty game, just illustrates Pöttsch’s conflict filter even more: violence is king. All interactions that the player can do relate to harming and killing their opponents. Negotiation, diplomacy, and surrender are thrown out of the question. The addition

of bladed weapons just adds weight to this, as the player's role is not to make prisoners, just to eliminate the opponents by deadly forces.

Finally, in the end of each mission, another quote, this one tied to the mission and event itself is shown. An example of this is after the end of the battle for Madrid in "La Ciudad Universitaria" mission, in which a quote by Franco is seen:

Know, madrilenians, that the greater the obstacle, the harder the punishment on our part. The accompanying sketch, which shows how three quarters of the national territory is in our hands, should open your eyes more than any long speech. Madrilenians, the day of your freedom is very close! If you want to save lives and avoid irreparable damage, surrender unconditionally to our generosity.



6Victory screen of "La Ciudad Universitaria"

NPCs (Non-Playable-Characters)

There are different factions within the conflict of the two sides, but they are only different aesthetically, as all of them play the same. The Republican side features soldiers from the International Brigades, from the Republican Popular Army, or from the Republic' Special Security Forces. The most common NPCs found in the Republican side are Popular militias, composed by anarchists, Marxists, farmers, as well as women. Marion and these militiawomen serve as the only feminine presence in the mod. The Nationalist side features soldiers from the Spanish National Army, the Italian CTV, the Civil Guard, the German Condor Legion, and the Army of Africa, composed by Moorish Guard legionaries and *regulares*. These last faction are Moroccan soldiers, and they are portrayed, like Manuel, as dark-skinned. Another form of characterization is that The Italians, the Germans, and the Africans are portrayed with exaggerated, satirized, and stereotypical accents and pronunciations.

Through gameplay, the mod depicts both sides as equal. The player spends as much time in the shoes of Marion or her Republican colleagues, as with Manuel and his Nationalist allies. Both sides have similar armaments, use similar tactics, and share similar generic battle voice lines. The

different factions are presented in passing, with only uniforms and some lines of dialogues to differentiate them, and in the case for the Army of Africa, a darker skin tone.

Friendly NPCs

Both friendly and hostile NPCs are visually styled according to their factions, with many faction-specific clothing and outfits researched from historical sources. For example, in the Republican side we might see soldiers dressed in anarchist militia attire with red and black motifs, or farmers with plain jeans and shirt, or the elite Assault Guard with their top equipment, for example. In the Nationalist side, we will see Moorish Guard with traditional clothing and headscarves, falangist militias, or Civil Guard officers in uniform. In specific missions with international reinforcements, soldiers with swastika armbands and German helmets, or British Tommies with World War I attire from the International brigades can also be spotted. This is, I believe, an incredibly positive addition by Tribby and his team, as it reinforces the idea that this conflict was a transversal one, not just fought by regular armies, but by people from all sorts of social classes, ideologies, and countries.

However, in the heat of battle, it might be chaotic to distinguish friend from foe. The main way to distinguish ally from enemy is that when aiming over an ally, the name of their character will be displayed, whereas enemies do not. These names are tied to which faction they belong, so the player will find Italian troopers when fighting alongside the CTV, or German names when meeting with the Condor Legion.

Friendly NPCs are not interactable in any friendly way. Dialogues happen during cutscenes or are scripted in the mission, but the player cannot approach a character and interact with them to start a conversation. There is one exception, in the “El árbol de Guernica” mission, that will be discussed later. Unlike important NPCs to the story, friendly NPCs may die in battle, but will keep respawning in an endless tide of reinforcements. It will always be the same number, but the player does not need to worry about being outnumbered and being the last character alive. They can be, however, shot and killed by the player, which will fail the mission. The player will be branded as a traitor and be forced to start from the last saved checkpoint. Both friendly and hostile NPCs will taunt each other during battle, with faction specific taunts and insults, such as “Die, communist scum,” or “kick out the fascist invaders!”

Hostile NPCs

There is only one way to interact with hostile NPCs: violence. As soon as the player is spotted, hostile NPCs will engage in combat, usually targeting the player before any other NPCs, so it is a valid tactic to stay back and shoot enemies from afar, while other friendly NPCs take the brunt of the damage.

All interactions with hostile characters are always lethal. During gameplay, there is no surrendering, or taking of prisoners. It is always a dual state: alive combatant, or dead combatant.

There are instances where injured NPCs will crawl for a few meters before dying, bleeding to death, which could be seen as the game giving the player the option to give that soldier a mercy kill, as that will stop the crawling. However, this is never taught, announced, or even rewarded in any way. Wounded soldiers sometimes might lie on their back, clutching their belly, which will lead to death in a few moments, but they are still able to shoot with a sidearm, making them threats to take out.

Most hostiles the player will face will be soldiers, equipped with different equipment and weapons. However, in a few instances, the player will face enemy armored vehicles and tanks. These enemies are impervious to gunfire and are heavily armed with cannons and machine guns. The player needs to sneak up on these vehicles and interact with them, which will plant a timed bomb. The player then needs to step away, or else will be taken out by the explosion as well.

Both types of NPC will make use of cover, grenades, and flanking tactics to engage their enemy. Hostile players will also employ powerful stationary weapons like machine guns, and therefore become priority targets. The player can also use these weapons.

Combat Rules

When initiating combat, NPCs will immediately seek cover, and advance if they can. If the player is spotted, Hostiles will focus on it, while still advancing. In most missions, the level will consist of corridors or streets to traverse. This means that the player will have to advance through them with the friendly NPCs, eliminating any enemies. This makes said hostiles relatively stationary: they can move from cover to cover, but they will never advance through the level and catch the player unawares.

During these skirmishes, the player can freely grab any weapon they find. Most are dropped by dead NPCs, hostile or friendly, while some are hidden away in the levels, like collectibles. If a player has a weapon and walks by the same weapon on the floor, the player will recover ammunition. It is the main way to maintain your fighting ability. As the player does not carry all that much ammunition to begin with, not enough to last the whole level, this promotes an attitude of moving around the battle, changing covers, and looking for new weapons or ammunition. In the only instance where the player cannot move, the “Gold of Moscow” mission, the player is given infinite ammo.

In some missions, such as “Suicide Hill,” the player will be tasked to defend a location from incoming waves. The hostile wave will approach the player relentlessly, often charging through open fire. This makes the use of stationed weapons a viable, although risky strategy, as the player is out in the open while using said weapon. Said mission also features a heavy use of artillery, and the player is warned to seek shelter to avoid the shells. Smoke screens also cover the enemies, so chaos unfolds. This breaks monotony and forces the player to look around for flanking opportunities, or any allied help.

Level setting and game world

The campaign is mostly set in mainland Spain, from 1936 to 1939. The only exceptions are Melilla, in the first chapter, and Berlin, during the alternate history ending. The player follows the biggest the most relevant and memorable battles and events of the Civil War, alternating missions between the Republican and Nationalist factions.

The first chapter takes place in Melilla, during the Rising of the Nationalists against the Republic, on July 18th, 1936. The first two missions are from the point of view of Manuel Ghanin Shabah, where the player takes part in the uprising, and the taking of the Atalayón Airbase. The third and final mission of the chapter is from Marion Barrena's point of view. She is sent to Melilla by the Republic, hours before the uprising, to spy on a mutinous meeting. It is notable to point out that since this is the ignition of the Civil War, the number of enemies found is small, compared to the later chapters. The first mission has only a short skirmish with a handful of enemies, while in the second mission, the player encounters no more than twenty enemies. In the third mission, combat is optional and not-recommended, as the player is outnumbered. In fact, as soon as the first gunshot is heard, the player receives the objective to escape.

The second chapter takes place in Toledo. In the first mission, the player defends the Alcázar against Republican forces. This moment has a central position in the Nationalist lore and memory of the war. The Colonel in charge of the defense, José Moscardó Ituarte, received a telephone call from the Republican besiegers, who demanded the immediate surrender of the Alcázar, or else they would kill the Colonel's son, who was captured. After discussing for a second, Moscardó told his son to commend his soul to God, to shout "Viva España," and to die like a hero. The son was subsequently shot, with Moscardó listening. Historians have pointed out flaws on the retelling of this story, but it is clear that Franco and the Nationalists stuck to this tale, hoping it would inspire their troops and population with heroism and a moral imperative over their Republican opposition.⁹⁷ The second mission happens in the same time frame, but instead of defending the Alcázar, the player storms Toledo and the fortification with the Republican troops, seeing the other side of the battlefield.

After this, there would be the third and fourth chapter, but they can be thematically classified as the Battle for Madrid. The third chapter covers the Republican missions, whereas the fourth chapter covers the Nationalist ones.

The Battle for Madrid begins with a side mission in Cartagena, where the Player, playing as a crashed Soviet pilot, must protect the Republican convoy carrying the gold of the Bank of Spain to the docks, where it will be shipped off to the USSR as payment for the soviet aid. As mentioned

⁹⁷ Lynn Cartwright-Punnett, "How Spain Sees Its Past: The Monumentalization of the Spanish Civil War" (Bachelor of Arts with Departmental Honors, Middletown, CT, Wesleyan University, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.14418/wes01.1.196>, 20.

before, this mission differs from the others, as it features an on-rails section, where the player has infinite ammunition. After this, the Battle for Madrid starts. The player will fight in numerous different situations: in streets, squares, and amidst ruined buildings. Battles will be fought in the University District of Madrid, as well as in the surrounding countryside and villages. In the “Pindoque Bridge” mission, the player is put in a stealth section, the only one in the game, to avoid detection when crossing the bridge. But as soon as the player crosses the bridge, it plays out like any other mission.

The player will fight alongside the International Brigades in the Republican missions, and with the German Condor Legion and the Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie (CTV) in the Nationalist missions. The Battle for Madrid is the longest part of the campaign: the third chapter has five missions, and the fourth chapter has four missions. These chapters allow the player to play other characters other than Manuel and Marion: Félix Breznhev, a soviet pilot tied to the International Brigades, and Mateo Ferrero, a soldier of the Italian CTV.

The fifth chapter covers the Nationalist Northern Offensive, from the perspective of the Republic. The first mission, “The tree of Guernica,” is especially poignant, and unique among the other missions. It portrays the events of April 26th, 1937, the bombing of the Basque village of Guernica. I will further analyze this mission and its relation to memory afterwards, but what I will say is that it is a mission with an absence of combat, the only mission in the campaign where this happens. The role of the character, an unnamed medic, is to escort a wounded civilian through the streets of Guernica, seeking refuge from the bombing. In the second mission, the player defends the Basque bunkers against the attacks of the Nationalist Navarran brigades and *requetés*.

The sixth chapter mirrors the offensive of the North, but from the Nationalist perspective. The player will retake Brunete, a village fought over several times during the campaign, for the final time. After that, the player will follow the Nationalist advance towards the northeast, conquering Aragon with the Siege of Teruel.

The seventh chapter is the last one for the Nationalist campaign. It depicts the Ebro battle, the longest and bloodiest battle of the war, which became a dual symbol for the legacy of the conflict. For the Nationalists, as it symbolized their military victory over the Republic, but also for the Republic and the International Brigades, which for them represents a legend of the international antifascist resistance movement.⁹⁸

The player will fight in both sides of the battlefield. From the Republican side, Marion will meet with Republican generals, who will command her a secret mission abroad. This is a setup for

⁹⁸ Edmon Castell and Lluís Falcó, “Across the River: Interpreting the Battle of the Ebro or Battlefields as a Didactic Resource,” in *Fields of Battle: Terrain in Military History*, ed. Peter Doyle and Matthew R. Bennett (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2002), 257–64, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-017-1550-8_16, 258.

the ninth chapter, the alternate history ending. A special moment is dedicated to mention the “Quinta del Biberón” (The baby-bottle Levy), a last-ditch effort of the Republic to put soldiers in the frontline which, after having its manpower depleted, levied over 30.000 teenagers, between 14 and 18 years old to reinforce.⁹⁹ This moment is treated in horror by Marion and the other characters, and they acknowledge that sending untrained teenagers to battle would surely mean their deaths, so effort is put to show the desperation of the Republican leadership. The player must then escape, and witness the retreat of the International Brigades, who have been called home by their countries. As the Nationalists, you receive a surprise attack from the Republican forces. The player fights back and is allowed control of artillery to shell enemy positions. With this victory, the Nationalist side de-facto win the war. Therefore, the following and the last of Nationalist missions, “El día de la Victoria,” is a conclusion of the Civil War. In it, Manuel encounters Marion in a surrendered Madrid, and then kills her. Immediately after, Manuel turns on the radio, in which Franco proclaims the Nationalist victory. April 1st, 1939. The war is over.

The eighth and closing chapter is, as was said before, an alternate history. A “What if?” ending where the Republic wins the war. This is clearly stated from the initial introduction screen of both missions. In the first mission, set in September 1938, Marion and Félix travel to Berlin, to spy on a secret meeting. After sneaking through the nazi soldiers and officers, Marion encounters Hitler’s plans to expand through Europe. Marion and Felix make their escape, knowing that with this information, all the major Powers will support the Republic’s fight against Fascism. The second mission is set on April 30th, 1939. In this fictional Spain, a reinvigorated Republic with the full support of the Allies sends a final advance against Burgos, the Nationalist capital, and from where Franco is commanding the troops. The last push will be made by the International Brigades, led by Marion. The mission begins with said *brigadistas* signing *The Internationale*, arguably the anthem of the socialist and worker’s movement¹⁰⁰, in a circle, with their fists raised. This is presented as a cathartic moment by the game, as one can draw parallels between this scene and a similar scene in Ken Loach’s *Land and Freedom*. The player then storms Burgos with them, encircling the building where Franco is hiding. In a cutscene, *El Generalísimo* is then detained, to be tried so he will answer for his crimes.

What can be analyzed about the mission locations is that it follows the most well-known battles and events of the Spanish Civil War. The Battle for the Ebro, Madrid, and the Bombing of Guernica are iconic locations of the discourse remembering the Spanish Civil War. However, all these are very “safe” representations. Following Pöttsch filters, one can see that the story evades showing brutal massacres and episodes of civilian and prisoner repression such as the Massacre of Badajoz in

⁹⁹ “Quinta del biberón: la generación perdida,” *La Vanguardia*, April 25, 2023, sec. Hemeroteca, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/hemeroteca/20230425/8915815/guerra-civil-espana-la-quinta-del-biberon.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Leonardo Cruz, “El Himno de La Internacional Comunista | Militante,” *Militante*, January 11, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100111021048/http://www.militante.org/el-himno-de-la-internacional-comunista>.

August 1936, a month after the Rising, where the Nationalist victors executed between 1800 and 4000 Republican prisoners.¹⁰¹ It doesn't portray crimes committed by the Republicans either, such as the Paracuellos massacres, in which, before and during the Battle for Madrid, around 2000 Nationalist supporters, were repressed and executed by Republican forces.¹⁰² The portrayal of such events would be very controversial, and it is something which clearly would require a lot of nuance to achieve.

However, one can find historical events of discord and infighting, especially in the Republican side, which would make for a much deeper portrayal of the Republic's composition, and weaknesses, and overall enrich the current dialogue. The "May Days" of 1937 in Barcelona caused a deep fracture in the cohesion of the Spanish Republic, after anarchist and anti-Stalinist parties clashed against communists and the governmental powers of the Catalan government and the Spanish Republic. This infighting led to the deaths of over five hundred to a thousand militants, and more than a thousand wounded. It has been portrayed by media several times, such as in Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia*, in which the author personally participated in such clash, or Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom*, also depicting the events as an important catalyst of the Republican defeat of the Civil War.¹⁰³ A portrayal of an event such as this one would have helped to convey the complexity and fragility of the tapestry of factions that made up the Republican side during the war, instead of portraying it as a just unified force for good, that tragically lost against the Fascist war machine.

Despite this, the modders have meticulously recreated the scenarios, locales, and buildings where these battles take place. The Alcázar of Toledo, the Battles in Madrid, or Guernica are very faithful recreations of what those buildings and locations looked like, which enriches the simulation of participating in that battle, just like Uricchio argues.¹⁰⁴

Narrative analysis

1936-1939 The Spanish Civil war is an action FPS depiction of the Spanish Civil War. This means therefore that instead of feeling dread, sadness, desperation, or hate, the player feels adrenaline, power, and enjoyment; the player is put on the shoes of an action hero, regenerating any wounds received and changing weapons on a whim, a tireless super soldier. The most one can feel is frustration, if a mission sequence becomes difficult, or a lucky grenade takes the player out and then gets sent to an unluckily placed checkpoint. This already conditions the retelling of a topic as controversial as the Civil War. As to be expected, Tribby's mod is laden with ideology, and that can be seen through the characters, and factions:

¹⁰¹ Alejandro Torrús, "76 años después de la matanza de Badajoz," *Público*, August 12, 2012, sec. España, <https://www.publico.es/espana/76-anos-despues-matanza-badajoz.html>.

¹⁰² Hugh Thomas, *The Spanish Civil War: Revised Edition* (New York, 2001), 463.

¹⁰³ *Land and Freedom*, Drama, War (Parallax Pictures, Messidor Films, Road Movies Dritte Produktionen, 1995).

¹⁰⁴ Uricchio, "SIMULATION, HISTORY, AND COMPUTER GAMES."

Marion and the Republicans

The Nationalist persona, and more specifically, Manuel's, fit perfectly in the shoes of a Call of Duty protagonist. However, it does also somehow work for the Republicans: not as a lone soldier against peril, but as a united, popular front. The mission that best exemplifies this is "No Pasarán." There is some poetry to it, that the mission with the main Republican warcry, attributed to Dolores *La Pasionaria* Ibárruri¹⁰⁵, best represents the fighting spirit of the whole faction, and the way antifascist and left-wing movements have remembered that conflict. As was said before, the Nationalist side remembered a victory, and the Republican side remembered a struggle, and both based their memories and narratives around that. In juxtaposition to Manuel and the Nationalists, Marion is seen caring for the weak, the civilians, and the victims. In the ¡No Pasarán! mission, after fighting in the streets of Madrid and repelling a Nationalist advance, the player receives the objective to escort or protect civilians and noncombatants and lead them to safety. Marion can also speak English; she acts as a bridge between the International Brigades and the local soldiers and calms any type of dissent between them. Furthermore, she routinely performs speeches to her comrades to encourage them to push on, or to hold the line. She is presented as a pure force for good, and an icon of feminism in the frontline.

Republican women were one of the focus of Republican propaganda: they were presented as capable mothers, workers, and militiawomen. They replaced the men where was needed during the war: industry, farming, and politics.¹⁰⁶ But their presence was also reported on the front as well, both as fighters and as logisticians.

A possible analysis is that Marion Barrena is characterized as a videogame adaptation of the Marina Ginestà, the militiawoman whose picture on the roof of the Hotel Colón in Barcelona would tour the world, giving the image of a young, strong woman fighting for her land and for the Republic.¹⁰⁷ Even though Marina admitted that she never saw any combat, her cultural presence and her propagandistic shadow could be used to create a strong woman leader like Marion. Félix Breznhev, the other playable character in the Republican campaign, is also shown as a force for good, a simile of Matteo, one of the Nationalist characters, but one that does not evolve into changing sides during the war.

¹⁰⁵ Dolores Ibárruri, "¡No pasarán!," *El Independiente*, April 3, 2018, <https://www.elindependiente.com/tendencias/2018/04/03/no-pasaran/>.

¹⁰⁶ Pablo Iglesias Foundation, "Dones a la Guerra Civil Espanyola," Google Arts & Culture, accessed April 25, 2024, <https://artsandculture.google.com/story/0040/pQUBFVZfCziemg>.

¹⁰⁷ Yvonne Scholten, "From Toulouse to Trotsky's Assassin: The Story Behind an Iconic Photograph," *The Volunteer*, May 17, 2020, <https://albavolunteer.org/2020/05/the-girl-who-dated-trotsky-s-assassin-the-story-behind-an-iconic-photograph/>, <https://albavolunteer.org/2020/05/the-girl-who-dated-trotsky-s-assassin-the-story-behind-an-iconic-photograph/>.



7 Marina Ginestà on the roof of the Hotel Colón, Barcelona, July 1936. Photo Juan Guzmán (Hans Guttman)

Manuel and the Nationalists

The Nationalist side, and all its characters, embody a *machismo* much present throughout all game. Manuel is the embodiment of the Francoist stereotypical male, the example every man under Franco “should” be. The Spanish archetype of a *Don Juan*, a virile, strong, masculine man, with an obstinacy for the Spanish unity. One that protects Spain against the antipatriotic hordes.¹⁰⁸ What was surprising is that Manuel, being part of the Moorish Guard, is characterized as being of North African descent, and having dark skin. However, unlike his Moroccan counterparts, he has a deep, commanding voice, and does not have the stereotyped accent that other Moroccan soldiers have. The decision to make the character this way can challenge both the Francoist narrative, and the overall Gaming folklore of action heroes.

The heroics and ruthlessness of the character perfectly fits with the philosophy and style of play of the title: take no prisoners, shoot first and ask questions later, and everyone who a friend is not immediately, is an enemy. Even Marion, the supposed long lost love of the character, is killed in cold blood by him after the defeat of the Republic. Other voiced characters follow a similar tune. As mentioned before, Colonel Ituarte orders his son to commend his soul to God, and to die like a hero, while screaming “Viva España.” When the player encounters crashed German pilots with swastika armbands and *Totenkopf* regalia, these repeat these same masculine ideals, while being a caricature of themselves with the addition of German Nazi supremacy. The fact that their voice actors make Spanish imitations of German accents, only helps to poke fun at the comments that they make.

¹⁰⁸ Nerea Aresti, “The Battle to Define Spanish Manhood,” in *Memory and Cultural History of the Spanish Civil War* (Brill, 2014), 147–77, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004259966_006, 153.



8The player encounters German Nazi allies.

The only character that does not embody this masculinity, this model, is Matteo Ferrero, the CTV soldier that the player controls in some missions. He is a jovial, roguish, and charismatic soldier, in contrast to the Nationalist troops. He takes care of his squad, but through camaraderie and cooperation, not supremacy or obedience, like Manuel. This also translates to his engagements with the enemy. When crossing a field towards Belchite, Ferrero's squad encounters another squad of Italians, and immediately engage in friendly conversation. It is only after reaching Belchite and informing the Nationalist official about such encounter, that Ferrero understands he just casually chatted and gave information to an enemy Italian International Brigade squad. He then laments the fact that they have to fight their own countrymen in a foreign war. This contrast in character with the faction he is fighting for causes Ferrero to change sides to the Republic during the campaign and ends up capturing Franco alongside Marion. Ferrero is an example of change and growth in a sea of testosterone and immobilism.

A tale of Two Spains

1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War presents an already fictitious proposition, that both sides were equal, or in equal footing to fight. Something that is seen even more clearly in *Shadows of War* *The Spanish Civil War*, is that one of the two factions must win. It is more evident there, due to the two different and separate campaigns. Any player will have the chance to win the campaign, regardless of the side they chose. The choice of blending the two campaigns into a single sequence of missions, helps players see both sides of the conflict, and the people involved. However, it does

not challenge either of the factions, as the characters are always sure they are fighting “the good fight.”

The notion of a fractured, irredeemable Spain is very present in the game, to which Kuschel argues: “The two video games [*Shadows of War-The Spanish Civil War* and *1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War*] refuse a reconciliatory gesture because it does not fit within the logic of a classic war game with the objective of 'neutralizing' the enemy.”¹⁰⁹ Both experiences take this notion of two, separate, views of Spain and make it integral to their core. This, Kuschel adds, is fully expressed by Marion and Manuel’s last moment together:¹¹⁰

In the last mission, played from the perspective of the national army, the two former lovers confront each other and Ghanin Shabah shoots Marion Barrena, deciding that "only one of us will die today, and it won't be me...". This decision verbally sharpens the fissure between 'the two Spains', which are mutually exclusive. Marion Barrena's death symbolizes the annihilation of the Republican side, the tragic end of a love-hate. It therefore expresses the essence of the myth of 'the two Spains'.

A weakness regarding the story is that it tells a lot through the documentary videos but shows little in regards of gameplay. While playing, the player is shown a simplistic portrayal of both factions and sees mostly moments of heroism and battle-frenzy, not of repression, infighting, or injustice, which were quite common in both sides of the war.

Case Study – Memory of the Bombing of Guernica

However, one of the most touching moments of the campaign is the mission titled “El árbol de Guernika.” The opening description already sets the stage, and the positioning of the narrative in relation to the event:

On April 26th, 1937, the settlement of Guernica, of no strategic value whatsoever, is indiscriminately bombed. The city is almost practically destroyed. One of many terrified civilians to save themselves from the death from the sky that is being delivered by Italian and German bombers. Before the city is utterly devastated, they must reach the symbol of the Basque freedoms: the Tree of Guernica.

From the first moment, the story says that the village of Guernica was of no strategic value, and that the carnage and destruction it suffered was almost total. The following gameplay just exacerbates these claims:

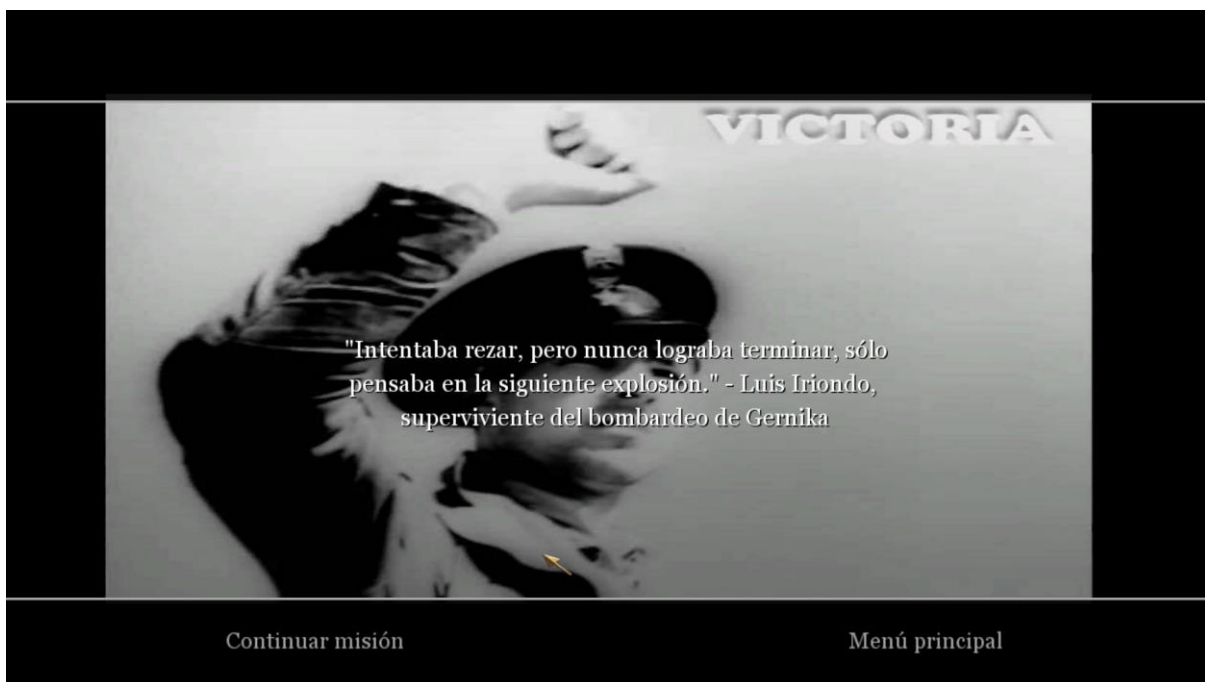
The player, playing as an unnamed civilian, is greeted with the sounds of bombs. “Get to safety,” is the objective. After navigating through a building full of wounded and other victims of the

¹⁰⁹ Kuschel, ““¿Nacionales o Republicanos?”, 93.

¹¹⁰ Kuschel, 92.

bombing, the player encounters a second civilian, bleeding to death. The player must then find a med kit to patch them up, being the only moment of the campaign when the player is allowed to do such an action. From then on, the player must guide the civilian to the Tree of Guernica, where the Republic has set up a medical shelter. While doing so, bombs fall around the player, knocking them down and deafening them. Laying on the floor, the only thing that can be done is observe as planes swoop down and riddle the streets and survivors with bullets. The player needs to duck and dive and hide in buildings when they hear planes coming, but sometimes that is not enough. It is chaotic and the bombs fall randomly, making it a display of desperate and senseless violence. Once the duo reaches the Tree, they are greeted by soldiers who are protecting the wounded.

The victory screen of the level says “I tried to pray, but I could never finish, I could just think of the following explosion”- Luis Iriondo, Guernica bombing survivor. This clearly juxtaposes with Franco’s early quote to the people of Madrid and encapsulates the difference between both campaigns.



9Victory Screen of "The Guernica Tree"

This recreation of memory is not that different from what accounts of the event recounted. In a 1996 study, María Jesús Cava Mesa and her team interviewed eighty survivors of the attack to recover and revalue the survivor’s memory of the bombing. The team’s message was this:

We’re not so much looking for the culprits and perpetrators of the bombing, not pretending to be an objective history, but showing the impact of the bombing and the regime

of repression that followed on the life routes of the victims: the chapters of the book are a true itinerary of lives in seconds, hours, days, weeks, months, years and generations.¹¹¹

Some of the survivors claim that the shelters were inefficient, that the old houses could not stop the bombs, and that the shelters were built with logs and whole trees, but that buckled easily under fifty-kilogram bombs. But in general, all survivors agreed that the bombing was an unjustifiable carnage. There is no definite recount of the casualties, but according to the survivors the number was around two hundred. Widespread recounts exacerbate the death toll up to 1200. Most of them, survivors say, died in the shelters, but they also say that a large number were gunned down by the fighter planes, when they were trying to escape.¹¹² According to the interviewed, three days later, there were still bodies in the streets, and that entire families were being taken out of their houses, all dead.¹¹³ Catastrophe, carnage, and impotence, all according to the survivors.



10 The player, wounded, and a civilian survive a strafing run.

Chapter conclusions

1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War has an apparent issue. It is burdened with the same script, plotline, and narration that of *Shadows of War The Spanish Civil War*. Therefore, if the original game was panned and criticized for its “all sides are equal,” controversy-free retelling of the Civil War, this mod should then face the same issues. However, Triby and his modding team have created a memorable experience, which could be used to be the first step when discussing the Civil War. The stereotypical and exaggerated voice lines of the characters are still here, but the mod goes the extra mile of researching historical manuals to find appropriate uniforms, weaponry, and settings, so that

¹¹¹ “Memoria colectiva del bombardeo de Gernika. María Jesús Cava Mesa,” *Gernika Gogoratuz* (blog), accessed April 28, 2024, <https://www.gernikagogoratuz.org/portfolio-item/memoria-colectiva-del-bombardeo-gernika/>.

¹¹² “Memoria colectiva del bombardeo de Gernika. María Jesús Cava Mesa,” 145.

¹¹³ “Memoria colectiva del bombardeo de Gernika. María Jesús Cava Mesa,” 146.

these characters do not feel as satirical, and stereotyped. The inheritance from the original game is transformed into a work of respect, and education of the past. Of course, as an action game, it prioritizes certain actions, playstyles, and philosophies that at first do not translate well with respect for the memory of a conflict, but representations like “El árbol de Guernica” show that it can be achieved.

2. Red and Blue 1936 (Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars)



11 Official thumbnail of the *Red and Blue 1936* mod. ModDB

Red and Blue 1936 is a mod for *Mount and Blade Warband : Napoleonic Wars*. It has been developed by a team of modders, led by user “Yeбенoso,” and the official version of the mod was released on July 17th, 2018. It has then received several patches over the years, with the current available one dating from October 17th, 2020. The developers announced in December 2023 that they were working on version 5.0 of the mod, according to their social media.¹¹⁴ The mod is a multiplayer action game, in which the player can participate in simulated iconic battles of the Spanish Civil War.

Yeбенoso’s real name is David Pastrana, a Spanish modder. Unlike Tribu, not much else is public about him, or his team. In posts he often speaks on behalf of Jaume, a modding colleague and friend of his. It was Jaume and him that in 2011 first thought of creating a mod based on the Spanish Civil War. In his posts he claims that he is not professional, and that despite this, he is proud of creating modded content that is enjoyed by many different people, despite his limited ability in the subject. He assures that most of the work done is not his own, but the people who have voluntarily

¹¹⁴ Red&Blue_Official [@RedBlue_Off], “May This Year Bring You Victories on and off the Battlefield! We Invite You to Join Us for Our Upcoming Events and Discover Exciting Updates of the Incoming V5.,” Tweet, *Twitter*, December 31, 2023, https://twitter.com/RedBlue_Off/status/1741551383516446782.

participated. Although he said in a 2018 blog post that he would abandon the practice of modding, he has returned and is actively working on the project.¹¹⁵ It is also notable to mention that Tribby and his team have collaborated with the Red and Blue development, as they are credited with providing the weapon models that the game uses.¹¹⁶

Despite this being a small mod, especially compared to the last chapter, it is still brimming with content, narratives, and historical reenactment, easily observable through the paratext of the mod, and the efforts of its small but resolute community.

The Community

Being a multiplayer mod, it depends on its community to function. The community uses a Discord server named Red and Blue 1936 Official Discord server to gather, discuss, and interact with one another. Discord is an instant messaging social platform that allows for voice and video calls, text messaging, and media and file sharing. Users can communicate individually or through communities commonly known as servers. Moderators of these servers can create different channels to establish official messages, chat and voice rooms for users to gather and communicate and can create roles and tags for the members to distinguish and identify themselves. Even though the chat rooms are not regularly active, with only the few same members chatting or sending memes, the community is dedicated, and events and matches are hosted every Saturday at 21:00 GMT/22:00 CET.

Paratextual Analysis

The first instance one can find of development of the mod is in 2013. In forum thread of Taleworlds – the company that developed the Mount and Blade games-, Yebenos presented the idea of a multiplayer Spanish Civil War- themed mod using the Napoleonic Wars DLC as a base. Although the images have been lost, Yebenos showed the ideas and progress on soldiers and units and presented the Mod Team: himself doing several roles, and other members of the team taking care of roles such as coding, art and design, or animating. The post was also used to ask for help in any vacant roles that needed filling, and to request historical sources to base the units and maps for the mod. The author also briefly mentions a previous attempt to create a singleplayer mod for unmodded Mount and Blade Warband, but the author clarifies that the project was scrapped.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ davidpastranapr, “Some Words from Mod Developer,” IndieDB, July 18, 2018, <https://www.indiedb.com/news/some-words-from-mod-developer>.

¹¹⁶ Yebenos, “Red and Blue 1936 v2.1 Patch Released!!,” *Flying Squirrel Entertainment*, November 3, 2014, <https://www.fsegames.eu/forum/index.php?topic=19349.0>.

¹¹⁷ Yebenos, “MP - Modern - [NW] Red & Blue : 1936,” *TaleWorlds Forums*, July 10, 2013, <https://forums.taleworlds.com/index.php?threads/nw-red-blue-1936.279191/>.

The main forms of communication that Yebenso and his team use are Discord, to orchestrate and coordinate the efforts of the Red and Blue community, X (formerly Twitter), to inform the public of any updates¹¹⁸, delays, or notable details; and YouTube, where they upload footage of the battles with the community, and fully acted trailers.

Yebenso, his team, and members of the Red and Blue community created a trailer in 2018 to advertise the official release of the mod, with versions both in Spanish and English. “Simulate the Episodes,” “Defend your Ideals,” “Fight for them,” “Will the Nationalists win again?,” “Or will you change history?.” These are the slogans appearing in the trailer, all in between videos of players reenacting famous battles, events, and actions of the war.¹¹⁹

What is notable about the community’s performances in the video is that their actions challenge Pötzsch’s violence filter. In several instances, the execution of prisoners and surrendered combatants is shown. This violence is committed by both sides, something that was widely reported during the Civil War. It even depicts the burning of a church, and the shooting of unarmed priests by Republican soldiers and militia, something quite common in the years before and during the war. Where other media shy away from these brutal moments, this community finds interest and passion in recreating this dark and violent past of Spain.

It is also notable to mention that the background music for the video is Paquito *El Chocolatero*, by Gustavo Pascual Falcó. This song is an anthem of Spanish folklore, local festivities, and Spanish identity. A takeaway from this is that, besides on leaning on the entertainment and fun side of historical gaming, the mod team tries to show that this, in essence, was a war between Spanish people. This line of thinking would reuse the “Two Spains” narrative, mentioned in the last chapter.

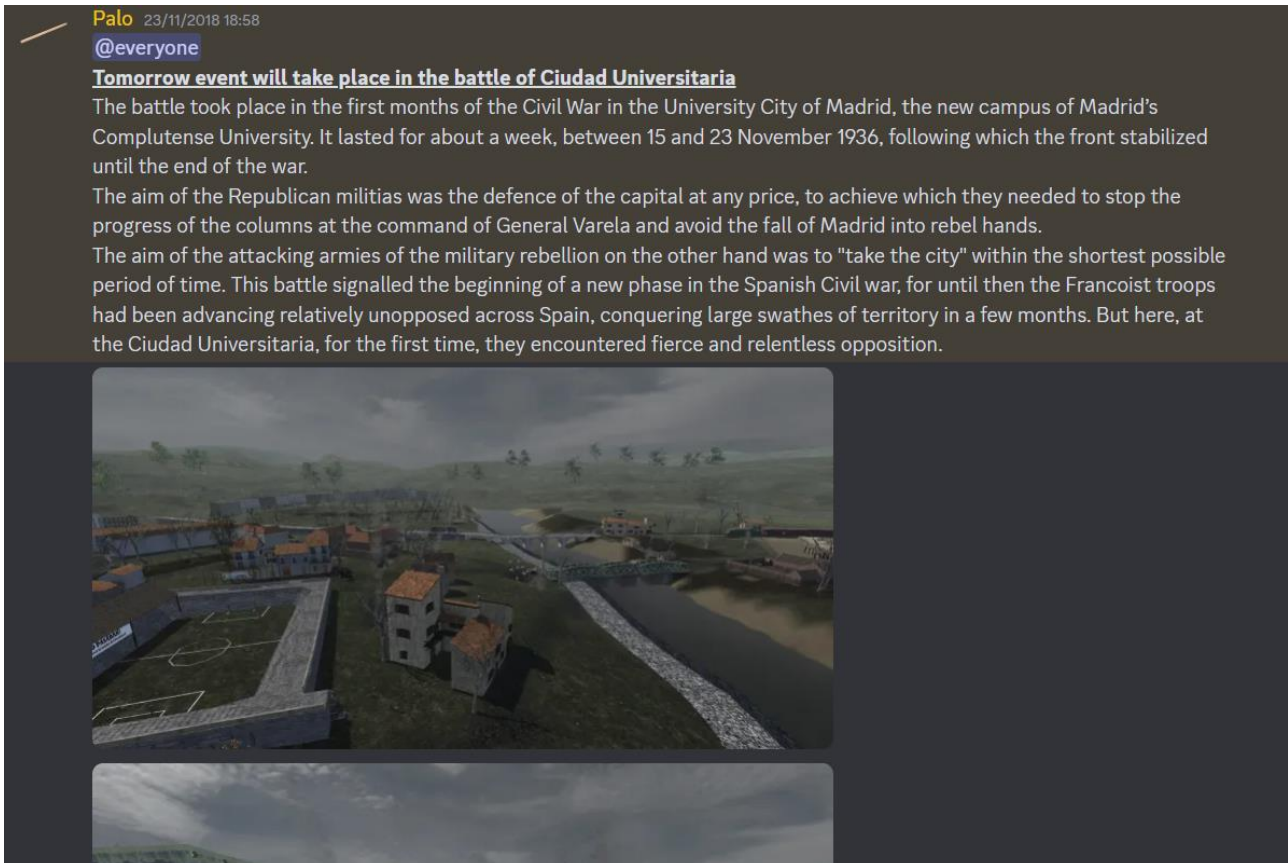
On June 3rd, 2024, another video was uploaded to the Red and Blue Official YouTube page, this time announcing the release of version 5.0 of the mod. This new video features English voice acting and features a small narrative: two Englishmen come across a Spanish field with rising smoke and debris, and they wonder if there has been a skirmish recently. The video then shows that the skirmish was no less than a full battle, complete with cannons, cavalry, experimental weaponry, and tanks. The players take the role of the soldiers, acting in formation and performing their roles: taking cover, driving tanks, and performing support actions, such as digging trenches. This passion exemplifies this mod community’s desire for reenactment and attention to historical detail and simulation, and it further illustrates Crabtree’s article.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ “Red&Blue_Official (@RedBlue_Off),” X (formerly Twitter), June 20, 2024, https://x.com/redblue_off.

¹¹⁹ RED & BLUE 1936 || English Trailer, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX4OJkzqwWs>.

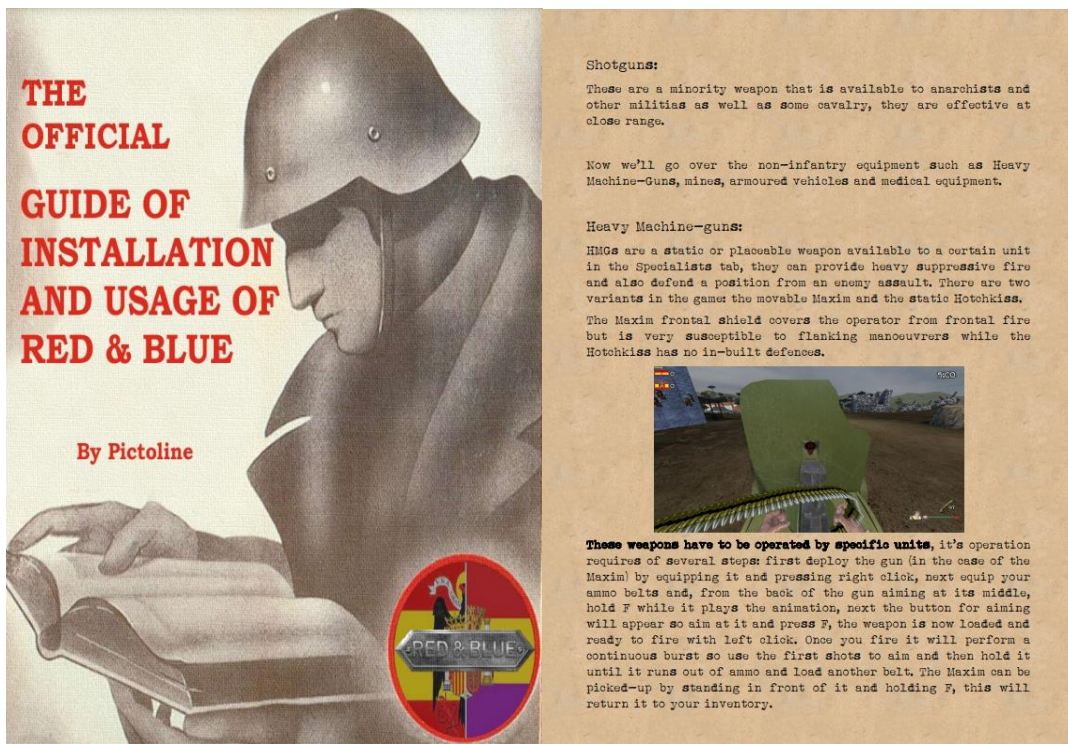
¹²⁰ Crabtree, “Modding as Digital Reenactment.”

Another clear sign of paratexts used by the mod team is found on the Discord Server, in the “Imprenta” channel, which means Printer, or Printing Room, in Spanish. Here is where the mod team shares official news and videos with the community. In this section, the developers upload pictures of locations, buildings, and battlefields that they have created to add to the mod. Sometimes, they even add a historical contextualization of what happened in this location, normally in anticipation of the weekly event.



12 A developer presents the location and historical context for that week's reenactment battle.

An official Guide made by the developers can also be found in the channel. This guide explains newcomers how to install and correctly run the mod, presents the new additions and changes from the main game, and overall teaches the community how to correctly participate in the experience.



13 Official Guide to Red and Blue

In the end of the Guide, the modding team express a message:

We are very passionate about this project, and it is from new people, as well as the veterans, that we can keep on experiencing it, developing, and loving it as much as we do. We hope that this guide was a testament of this, and it got you as eager to play as we intended. As a bit of a sour final remark on this topic of history, this period is very divisive even today, we are aware of that and we must ask you to treat it with due respect, you'll find that this community is extremely diverse and open to freedom of speech, but this is still a real war which destroyed a country with all its consequences.

This is a clear declaration of intentions: this small but resolute team knows how divisive this period of Spanish history is and expects its players to treat it with the respect it deserves, an understands that only through a common sense of belonging and dedication, an enjoyable reenactment of memory can be achieved.

Mount and Blade: Warband – Napoleonic Wars, the foundation of the mod

The mod uses *Mount and Blade: Warband - Napoleonic Wars* as its base to build upon. The Mount and Blade franchise is no stranger to modding and complete overhauls, as all its editions have large repertoires of mods and total conversions.

The base game, *Mount and Blade Warband*, is a sandbox game set in a fictitious medieval setting. In a few words, a sandbox game is a non-linear game where players are offered large, full of

life worlds, and they have freedom to choose how to progress through their journey.¹²¹ In Warband, the player is free to engage the surrounding factions and kingdoms however they like. They can join one as a vassal and help them with their conquests, work as mercenary and jump from faction to faction, or they can establish an independent kingdom themselves, and wage war upon the others. As mentioned before, the Napoleonic Wars DLC is a multiplayer-only expansion that transforms the warfare from swords and shields to musket and cannon.

The base Warband has been extensively modded, and the game has over 750 mods listed in ModDB. Napoleonic Wars has 75 mods listed in ModDB that mostly focus on transporting the conflict from a Napoleonic context to other battlefields and eras, such as World War One, the American Civil War, or the Anglo-Zulu War.

Unlike the previous analyzed mod, Red and Blue 1936 does not feature a singleplayer campaign, so a traditional campaign narrative cannot be found here. Despite that, other themes and narratives can be found, especially related to the paratexts involving the mod.

The Mod

In the initial loading screen of the mod, the player is greeted with two flags on the screen, the Republican on the left, and the Nationalist on the right. On top of each, three quotes of famous politicians, generals, and distinguished individuals from each faction are shown: all six of them evocate a fighting and patriotic spirit, and a violent rhetoric, as if asking the player himself to take up arms for either struggle. Upon reaching the main menu, the flags persist, but now in front of them there are two soldiers, looking at each other. The left is Red, the right is Blue. The background song is again *Paquito el Chocolatero*.

In the main menu, the player can choose different options, first of them is the Multiplayer. In this option, the player can either create and host a game, and choose how many computer-controlled “bots” are added to the match, and other variables, or join an already existing one. The players of the Red and Blue community do not play casual matches. Whenever they play, is because they have previously agreed and prepared to do it. Regiments are created, and tactics are discussed. This gives another layer of reenactment and participation to the community.

The player can also create a custom game, in which they will play in an all-bot match. They can regulate how many bots are there, from which faction and sub faction, and which unit percentage is there. This means that the player can decide whether to make a close-range infantry brawl, a long-

¹²¹ S. Ocio and José Antonio López Brugos, “Multi-Agent Systems and Sandbox Games,” *Adaptive and Emergent Behaviour and Complex Systems - Proceedings of the 23rd Convention of the Society for the Study of Artificial Intelligence and Simulation of Behaviour, AISB 2009*, 2009, <https://digibuo.uniovi.es/dspace/handle/10651/35615>.

range sniper shootout, a more predominant presence of cavalry, or somewhere in the middle, to provide a balanced experience. When joining the match, there seems to be no other option but to play as a commander, which restricts the armament and gameplay possibilities that the player can have. For this analysis, I have tested and experimented in an empty multiplayer match, which provided a perfect situation to experience all the mod had to offer, without being tied to the weekly match schedule of the community.

Player rules

Mechanics

The mod does not feature any in-game tutorial. The controls are the same ones as *Napoleonic Wars*, which in turn are the same to *Mount and Blade Warband*, but the mod makes some new additions. Aside from role-playing with other players, combat is the main interaction that the players will perform.

The player has the choice between a first person and a third person, over the shoulder view. Both have their advantages: first person might be more useful when aiming at a long range, and third person might be useful to achieve a holistic view of your surroundings or peeking around a corner.

The movement mechanics consist of moving around – with the possibility to move at a slower pace-, jumping to vault over obstacles, and ducking to make use of cover and better accuracy. The main interaction the player has with the world is through combat. When holding a gun, pressing, and holding left-click on the mouse will aim the weapon, and releasing it will fire it. If it is a melee weapon such as a knife or a saber, pressing and holding left-click while moving the mouse in a specific direction will charge an attack from that direction. Up, right, and left will swipe or slash, and aiming down will charge a stab. Holding right click with a melee weapon will block, with the same directional system. Scrolling the mouse wheel will swap weapons.

The player can also issue orders to fellow soldiers. When playing alongside friendly bots, the player can use different contextual orders to different regiments or unit types. The unit type or regiment will be selected by clicking a key between 1 to 9, whichever it is assigned to, and then the player can issue an order by clicking any key between the F1 and F8. These are orders such as “Charge,” “Hold Fire,” “Retreat,” or “Form a line,” to name a few. When playing with other players, an in-game chat message can be used, but players can also use the voice chat provided by the mod. However, if they wish to speak to their team, or a specific squadron of players, they can set up a voice chat room in the Discord server and speak privately through there. This makes it easier to coordinate friendly forces, and not risk communicating with the opposing team. These controls are the same ones from the base game, and their key bindings can be modified in the Options menu.

Although less than in Warband, horses and mounts are present in the mod. However, they are uncommon, and they are used by generals and commanders to move around the battlefield, and for elite bodyguard cavalry units.

New additions

Red and Blue 1936 adds new controls and mechanics to the roster. In the previously mentioned Official Guide, the mod team describes the new actions that the player can perform, with already set key bindings: “Attach Bayonet”, a “Prone” movement mode, several types of salutes and military animations, and a war-cry, which will increase the strength, speed, and resistance of the player for a short duration.

The mod also introduces other weapons and weapon types that were not present in Napoleonic Wars, and therefore had to have new animations, scripts, and mechanics implemented for them to work. One such example is the submachine gun. This weapon is aimed with the right click and fired with the left click, as opposed from the normal rifle, which is aimed and fired with the left click. Pressing Q will change from a hip-fire to a shoulder-fire position, after a short animation.



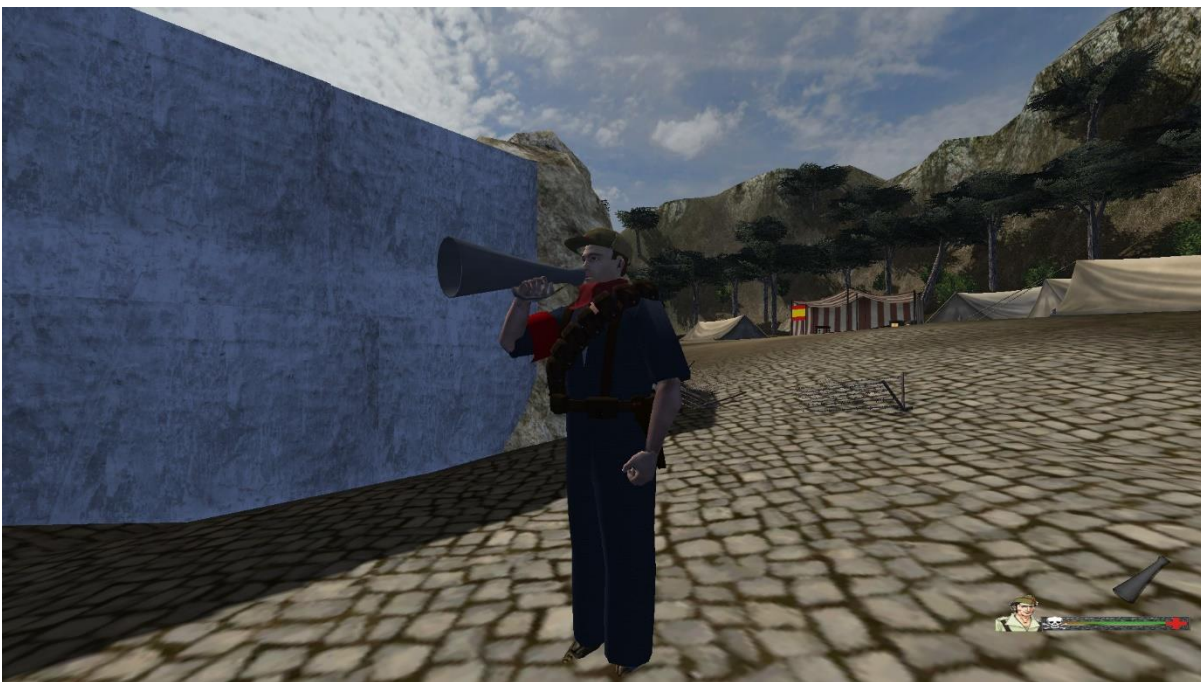
14 The player aims a submachine gun. In the bottom right we see the health of the player, and above, the total ammunition available for the weapon.

The armament that the player can choose is tied to their faction and class. Each side has six types of possible archetypes: Infantry, Internationals, Specialists, Militias, Cavalry, and Quartermaster. There is a total of sixty-seven different regiments from which to choose from within

these archetypes, such as the Italian *Battaglione della Morte* for the Republican Internationals, or the *Tercio de San Miguel* for the Nationalist Militias.

All these regiments have further units inside them, diversifying the experience even more. Most are standard combatants with a standard armament: a rifle, a bayonet or dagger as a melee weapon, and a hand grenade. So are more elite units, armed with machine guns or explosives. The number of these elite and specialist units can be restricted when creating a match.

Others, however, offer a different playstyle, such as the Megaphone/Musicians/Priest. These units are armed with a handgun for defense, but their distinctive trait is that they have a megaphone, horn, and Holy Bible each. With them, they can choose between a selection of audio files to play. Megaphone units, present on each side, will play speeches from distinguished figures of either side, such as Buenaventura Durruti and Dolores Ibárruri for the Republican side, and Francisco Franco and Gonzalo Queipo de Llano for the Nationalist side. The Musicians group of units will play different instruments, such as drums, bugle, accordions, or guitars. These will play different tunes, be it songs, or bugle calls and drum rolls. Finally, Priests will preach for the soldiers, in a somber tone. Neither of these affect gameplay but add to the immersion.



15 A Megaphone wielder from the Rovira-Lenin Column (Republican Militias)

An analysis from the combat mechanics shown in the game is still that violence is key to succeeding in the game, as all players have some type of weapon to attack or defend themselves. If the reenactment allows for it, and the players wish to play the role of surrendering combatants, or prisoners, then that condition can exist, but this option is inexistent when playing alone with bots. The non-combat roles of Megaphone wielder, Priest, or Musician are useless when playing with bots,

as their unique traits and characterizations are purely for simulation and immersion purposes, something that is achieved when playing with other players. However, this choice of characterization speaks volumes to the commitment of Yebenoso's team for historical accuracy and representation, even when it would mean implementing unorthodox roles in a shooter game.

Chapter conclusions

Although Red and Blue 1936 is still in development, and its community is still growing, it is a clear image of how modding as reenactment is an expression of living history, just as Crabtree argues.¹²² The small but dedicated mod team faithfully recreates the scenarios of the Civil War, with ample knowledge and understanding of its contested nature. Although it still uses the same combat mechanics that bind its wings, the creators added other non-combat roles to promote self-expression and enhance the simulation of the participants. It is refreshing to see that the paths that the previous mod's story tried so hard to navigate around, confirming Pötzsch's violence filter, are plainly embraced by this community.

Final Conclusions

This thesis shines a light into an understudied topic in a group of subjects that are receiving increasingly scholarly attention: mods, historical gaming, and the Spanish Civil War. At first glance, representations of this Spanish conflict, be it from a commercial game, or modded content, follow the same historical narratives, and memory discourses of the Spanish Civil War. Namely, the idea that "both sides were equal." So, my Research questions have been answered: both mods analyzed present the war with an equal power balance between the opposing forces, while avoiding the intricacies, infighting, and brutality found behind the frontlines. They both perpetuate a violent conflict with no diplomatic or humanitarian alternative.

Most cultural products, such as films and video games depicting the war use historical narratives that morally support the failed efforts of resistance of the Republicans, something that 1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War leans heavily on, burdened by its content heritage of *Shadow of War: The Spanish Civil War*. Red and Blue 1936 however is a refreshing and honest representation of the conflict, that although presents both sides as equally capable of winning, its nature of single, multiplayer battles makes this equality plausible.

Despite this, something that both mods have in common, is the enormous diligence, dedication, and historical rigor found within their development teams. If the modding community can take notice and learn from these teams, one can expect a bright future for the industry.

¹²² Crabtree, "Modding as Digital Reenactment."

Weaknesses

Although my thesis is sound, one weakness is related to the primary sources: the choice of narrowing my search to mods of one specific genre, meant not analyzing other mods from other genres, such as Real Time Strategy, or Grand Strategy. The choice of two action mods allowed me to answer the research questions in a fitting manner, but this does not create a full picture of the perception of the Spanish Civil War by modders of different genres. It is a weakness, but also one brought by time limitations of the thesis process itself. A secondary weakness can be attributed to the nature of video game modding in general: mods are not born equal, and although some become full to the brim with content and good ideas, most end up abandoned, or unable to be played, or their development is too slow and scarce to do any meaningful analysis. With the small offer of mods depicting the Spanish Civil War, this problem has been apparent. However, with the expansion of the modding community and practice, this could change for the better.

Avenues for further research

The choice to focus on one single genre opens the door for future research avenues to fill the gap left by those genres. Complimentary studies to this one will only help to enrich the understanding we have of mods and how they portray contested histories. Of course, the Spanish Civil War is not the only underrepresented conflict, so it would be an interesting idea to establish a web of articles and scholarly literature that covers and shines light on mod creations of other lesser-represented conflicts.

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Annex

Missions in the mod “1936-1939 The Spanish Civil War” for *Call of Duty 2*

1. El Alzamiento (The Rising)
 - a. El día del Alzamiento (The day of the Rising)
 - b. Atalayón, el último reducto (Atalayón, the last redoubt)
 - c. Melilla, un día antes (Melilla, a day before)
2. España en llamas (Spain in Flames)
 - a. Asedio del Alcázar (Siege of the Alcázar)
 - b. La toma del Alcázar (Taking of the Alcázar)
3. Madrid resiste (Madrid Stands)
 - a. El Oro de Moscú (The Moscow Gold)
 - b. ¡ No Pasarán! (They Shall Not Pass!)
 - c. La colina del suicidio (The hill of suicide)
 - d. La contraofensiva (The counteroffensive)

- e. Contraataque en Brihuega (Counterattack in Brihuega)
4. Objetivo: Madrid (Objective: Madrid)
 - a. La Ciudad Traidora (The Traitorous City)
 - b. La Ciudad Universitaria (The Ciudad Universitaria)
 - c. El Puente de Pindoque (Pindoque Bridge)
 - d. La toma de Brihuega (Taking of Brihuega)
 5. La Caída del Norte (The fall of the North)
 - a. El árbol de Guernica (The tree of Guernica)
 - b. El Cinturón de Hierro (The Iron Belt)
 6. Ofensiva Republicana (Republican Offensive)
 - a. El primer aniversario de la Guerra (The first anniversary of the War)
 - b. La defensa de Belchite (The defense of Belchite)
 - c. ¡Sangre y... frío! (Blood and... cold!)
 7. La Batalla del Ebro (The Battle of the Ebro)
 - a. Dos orillas, dos Españas (Two shores, two Spains)
 - b. El día de Santiago Apóstol (Apostle Santiago Day)
 - c. Una misión que cambiará la historia (A mission that will change history)
 8. El final de la guerra (The end of the War)
 - a. El día de la Victoria (Victory day)
 - b. La toma de Burgos (The taking of Burgos)