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# Games of Empire

Global Capitalism and Video Games

Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter

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#### 4. Banal War: *Full Spectrum Warrior*

##### The Sequence

A Humvee drives along a desert road. Ahead, a sandstorm brews. The convoy's helicopter escort overhead veers away, the beat of its rotors fading into the distance. Suddenly gunfire breaks out, mortar bursts straddling the vehicle's route: an insurgent ambush. A spreading, clammy dread sets in; the driver wipes the sweat from his brow, removes his goggles . . . and takes a break, a luxury only *Virtual Iraq* affords.

This simulation has a seriously niche audience: about 15 percent of U.S. soldiers returning from combat in Iraq suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, with symptoms including "anxiety, nightmare, flashbacks, emotional numbness, extreme jumpiness and physical pain" (Gordon 2007). Bodily wounds such as concussions and crushed limbs are compounded by such psychological anguish. To assist soldiers in recovering from, and *returning* to, duty, the Pentagon has devised "virtual therapies." These are based on the theory that exposure to digital re-creations of traumatic experience allows patients to recover repressed memories, safely confront their fears, and gradually overcome them. "You don't want to send someone who is traumatized back to Iraq," says a military psychiatrist leading the research. "This allows us to bring someone back, but within the situation here" (cited in Gordon 2007).

The "situation here"—here in the apparent safety of simulation—is technologically extraordinary. Elsewhere in the military hospital apparatus, veterans may endure bureaucratic inefficiencies and substandard housing, but in the realm of the digital, no expense is spared.

This virtual healing machine provides the images and sounds of war, vibrates to emulate vehicle engines and detonating weapons, and even feeds in olfactory cues. “They can set off simulated explosions and gunfire . . . add fog, smoke and night-vision effects, along with the smells of body odor and Iraq spices” (Gordon 2007).

There’s a good chance a go at *Virtual Iraq* might result in soldiers recalling more than their direct experience of war: it may also flash them back to their *preparation* for war—the very preparation that was presumably meant to preserve them from wounds and trauma. This is because the basis of *Virtual Iraq* is a digital combat simulator, *Full Spectrum Warrior* (FSW), used in the training of U.S. infantry in the early years of the twenty-first century. When traumatized troops reencounter this simulator in hospital, soldiers will find it has undergone some improvement since they first met it: the vibrating platform, the full-immersion goggles, the smells. In its original training application, FSW was quite simple—like your run-of-the-mill war-themed commercial video game. And, indeed, it *was*: in its second life, FSW was a commercial title, purchasable off the shelf of your local video game retailer. Originally released in 2004, with a sequel in 2006, FSW has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. The “sequence,” as one of *Virtual Iraq*’s developers proudly puts it, was “from training to toy to treatment” (cited in Gordon 2007).

FSW is also, however, illustrative of another sequence important to this book’s argument: the cyclical connection between the actual and virtual dimensions of Empire. Combat simulators are *the* classic example of this link: the intensely, arguably ultimately, corporeal activity of war is rendered into a digital world that rehearses subjects—soldiers—for battle, learning onscreen to make choices (flanking maneuver or frontal attack? use the RPG or call in air support? wait and see, or open fire now?) that then translate into life for some and death for others in the suburbs of Baghdad or the hills outside Kandahar. The psychic wounds the soldier-subjects suffer in these bloodily material encounters are then (ostensibly) healed by yet further simulations, such as *Virtual Iraq*, the better to resupply the actual slaughter. Add into this that combat waged by high-tech armies, of which the U.S. forces are the paragon, is today itself digitally mediated through computerized targeting, mapping, surveillance, and communication systems of contemporary battlespace, and we see how deeply compounded virtuality and actuality are in the reality of Empire. This link

from actual to virtual war is not, moreover, contained to boot camp and battlefield: the connection from military simulation to commercial games—which, as we have seen, is primal and originary for digital play—provides a channel through which training for war spreads into a more widely militarized culture.

This chapter examines *Full Spectrum Warrior* as an example of the technological weapons of “armed vision” (Crandall 2004) essential to new complexes of military power. FSW’s double life as actual trainer and virtual toy, we argue, aptly demonstrates the “banalization of war” (Hardt and Negri 2000, 12)—the enveloping sociocultural-emotional process habituating populations to the perpetual conflict of the war on terror.

### Banal War

“The world is at war again, but things are different this time,” write Hardt and Negri (2004, 3). The world wars of the twentieth century and the cold war confrontation of competing nuclear power blocs seem, for the moment, distant. Sharpening tensions between the United States and either China or Iran could radically change that. But for now, such massive conflict between nations is not the order of business. Yet the world is at war. The 1990s saw a series of savage, but by historical standards minor, conflicts, waged by international coalitions of militarily powerful countries in the name of global order: NATO’s interventions in the former Yugoslavia, and the first Persian Gulf War, sparked by Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and met by a U.S.-led, but United Nations–approved, coalition. Then came 9/11, followed by the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq.

The aftermath—the war on terror—provides a fuller illustration of Hardt and Negri’s thesis that, in Empire, war is waged not to resolve disputes between states but to maintain order within a global territory where “there seem to be minor and elusive enemies everywhere” (2000, 189). The Bush regime’s declaration of the war on terror, ostensibly targeting al-Qaeda, though also providing the pretext for the removal of former ally Saddam Hussein and the occupation of Iraq, is a paradigmatic case: military mobilization undertaken not against an external enemy state but against a shadowy foe, who may take up temporary residence either in rogue states or domestic sleeper cells, and whose threat is sinisterly amorphous and borderless.

This new context of war has several important consequences. First, it is *interminable*. Unlike wars between two nation-states ended by formal surrender or negotiation, there is rarely a definitive moment of victory over today's foes, so that "one cannot win such a war, or, rather, it has to be won again every day"; war thus becomes "a permanent social relation," "a general phenomenon" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 14, 12, 3).

Second, because the enemy is diffuse and ubiquitous, so too the scope of military activities to defeat the opponent *lacks boundaries*. Security becomes the keyword: "Whereas 'defense' involves a protective barrier against external threats, 'security' justifies a constant martial activity equally in the homeland and abroad" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 21). Within the concept of "security," boundaries between civilian policing and war fighting blur: "The separation of tasks between the external and internal arms of power (between the army and the police, the CIA and the FBI) is increasingly vague and indeterminate" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 189).

This situation brings with it a third consequence. Endemic hostilities tend to generate a "state of exception"—that is, an "exceptional," but ongoing, suspension or erosion of civil rights, declared necessary for the preservation of democracy itself (Hardt and Negri 2004, 7–9). One can think here of the debates over the USA PATRIOT Act, but also of the suspensions of civil liberties in many countries justified in the name of the war on terror.

Fourth, this environment of nebulous, dispersed, and protracted conflict means that quasi-war conditions tend to become a way of life—"the new normal." War organizes not just military forces abroad but civilian life at home. "War has," in other words, "become a *regime of biopower*," as "daily life and the normal functioning of power [have] been permeated with the threat and violence of warfare" (Hardt and Negri 2004, 13).

The socialization necessary for populations to endure and endorse such an ongoing condition of life brings us to the concept of "banalized" war. In this situation, war becomes part of the culture of everyday life, with "the enemy" depicted as "an absolute threat to the ethical order" and "reduced to an object of routine police repression" (Hardt and Negri 2000, 13). The long-standing interaction of video game culture and the military apparatus is a component in this process of the banalization of war.

### MIME-NET and the Institute for Creative Technologies

*Full Spectrum Warrior* is a spectacular instance of what the collective Retort concludes is "the total obedience of the culture industry to the protocols of the War on Terror—its immediate ingestion and reproduction of the state's paranoias" (2005, 28). It is a by-product of the military-entertainment complex, or what James Der Derian (2001) calls MIME-NET: "the military-industrial-media-entertainment network." Digital play and military simulation have shared genealogies (Burston 2003; Lenoir 2000; Stockwell and Muir 2003). Early on, the dominant partner was the U.S. national security state, with Pentagon funding supporting the computer laboratories where some of the first virtual games were created in the 1960s and 1970s. By the 1990s, however, with military budgets declining after the end of the Cold War, commercial games had advanced so fast as to be *superior* to the Pentagon's in-house simulations. A newly frugal military began not only to adopt or adapt civilian games for training purposes but also to directly collaborate with private-sector studios to create customized war games.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, gave this rapprochement a massive boost. The military poured funds into codesigned simulations to anticipate the new challenges of the war on terror. Meanwhile developers of commercial games rushed to capitalize on market opportunities created by media coverage of terrorism and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. Sales of war games rocketed, and developers able to cite collaboration with the military gave their products the cachet of "authenticity" that console warriors craved (see Nieborg 2006).

Some instances pushed the intersection of virtual and actual war to the extreme. In our introduction, we discussed the U.S. Army's online game, *America's Army*, launched in 2002 to recruit young Americans with no experiential connection to war, but plenty to video games. Another is *Kuma War*, an online gaming service, launched in 2004, marketing itself as "a series of playable recreations of real events in the War on Terror" (Kuma War 2006). Kuma invites subscribers to "re-live" recent war events in the form of "playable missions" carrying titles like "Freedom's Heroes: The Road to Baghdad," "Baghdad Checkpoint Attack," and "Operation Red Dawn," the latter giving you the chance to help capture "the Butcher of Baghdad" himself. While *Kuma War* is a commercial operation, overlaps between the military and the game industry have grown ubiquitous: the Department of

Defense Game Development Community (2005), a network aiming to connect “the entire community developing games within the U.S. military,” currently lists some forty games “custom-made” for military purposes, and about twenty-five “off-the-shelf” products considered useful.

Even with this formidable competition, the Institute for Creative Technologies (ICT) stands out. The ICT epitomizes the intersection of military planning, computer simulation, film studios, and video game developers in what Der Derian terms “a new configuration of virtual power” (2001, xi). Based at the University of Southern California, the ICT was created in 1999 by the army and funded to the tune of \$45 million to tap into the entertainment industry’s high-tech expertise. A senior official describes its goal as being “to produce a revolution in how the military trains and rehearses for upcoming missions” by “develop[ing] the art and technology for synthetic experiences” to a pitch “so compelling that participants will react as if they are real,” thus providing a “quantum leap in helping the Army prepare for the world, soldier, organization, weaponry, and mission of the future” (Macedonia 2002). The ICT hired talent from game companies and film studios to collaborate in this mission: artists who designed special effects for *The Matrix*, screenwriters for films such as *Training Day*, a designer from the *Alien* movies, and so on. The deal was clear: the military got sophisticated training aids for its soldiers, entertainment companies got insider military knowledge, and the university got external funding.

The ICT’s résumé is extensive: simulations with “branching story lines” to train U.S. officers in negotiating with Afghan warlords; anticipatory visualizations of future war, such as the award-winning film *Nowhere to Hide*, “a sweeping vision of the Army’s Future Force in action”; FlatWorld, which “allows users to experience virtual worlds—say a Baghdad street corner under enemy fire—without wearing clunky goggles”; and the Sensory Environments Evaluation program, an “immersive virtual-reality tunnel that can re-create unpleasant environments”—such as abandoned bunkers filled with bats—“with astonishing verisimilitude” (Kushner 2004). The aim, according to one ICT spokesperson, is “to create veterans who’ve never seen combat” (cited in Kushner 2004). Not the least of the ICT progeny are a series of gamelike training simulations, including *Full Spectrum Warrior*. To understand these developments requires a short excursion into military doctrine.

### Full-Spectrum Dominance

Full-spectrum dominance is a concept whose centrality to Pentagon thinking was announced in *Joint Vision 2020*, a planning document released in 2000 by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Its opening pages declare the U.S. military aim over the next two decades to be the achievement of “full spectrum dominance: persuasive in peace; decisive in war; preeminent in any form of conflict.” It goes on:

The label full spectrum dominance implies that U.S. forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronized operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains—space, sea, land, air, and information. Additionally, given the global nature of our interests and obligations, full spectrum dominance requires that the U.S. “maintain its overseas presence forces and the ability to rapidly project power worldwide.” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2000, 6)

So the term “full spectrum” designates military force that can flexibly modulate its activities across different types and theaters of operations, scaling its responses up and down as goals and circumstances require, shifting seamlessly from, say, tactical nuclear options to guerrilla urban warfare, with planetary reach (see Mahajan 2003).

The possibility of full-spectrum dominance is opened by what U.S. war planners know as the Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA), a transformation in military practices occasioned by the shift from industrial to informational warfare. The possession of overwhelming strategic, operational, and tactical advantage is determined by superiority in high technology, especially in communications and computing, rather than numbers of troops or even equipment. RMA identifies a situation of “virtual war,” fought out “onscreen,” in which the enemy becomes visible, knowable, and destroyable through the mediation of digital technologies, from satellite-generated maps to heads-up display systems and computer-controlled and dispatched weaponry.

What causes the greatest disquiet to U.S. war planners, however, is the threat of low-tech opponents and “asymmetrical conflict.” The NATO and Red Army forces that faced each other in the Cold War were “symmetrical” enemies, mirror images, each with missiles, tanks, artillery, air, and infantry, as well as tactical and operational doctrines, which, though distinct, fell broadly within the same plane of military logic. But the U.S. troops fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan

face “asymmetrical” foes: insurgents massively outgunned in terms of high-technology firepower, far less well trained, but retaliating with practices, such as suicide bombing, assassinations of civilian collaborators, and other forms of terrorism, that seem to imperial eyes alien, uncivilized, and inhuman. *Joint Vision 2020* identifies such “asymmetric approaches” as “perhaps the most serious danger the United States faces in the immediate future” (Joint Chiefs of Staff 2000, 5).

Associated with asymmetric conflict is yet another acronym: MOUT, or Military Operations on Urban Terrain. Pentagon strategists, as Mike Davis (2004) has noted, now consider the “Third World city” to be the “key battlespace of the future.” The view that “the slum has become the weakest link in the American empire” is based not only on the disasters that befell U.S. occupations of Mogadishu and Beirut but also on Israeli experiences in Gaza and the West Bank. If “the future of warfare . . . lies in the streets, sewers, high-rise buildings, and sprawl of houses that form the broken cities of the world,” then special training is required for the soldiers who will fight in such conditions. MOUT tactics are applied on a daily basis in cities such as Baghdad, Fallujah, and Nadjaf, and preparation for such fighting involves incessant war games, both physical and virtual (see Dawson 2007; Graham 2007).

The ICT’s simulations are part of these rehearsals, most of them digitally modeling asymmetric combat: their title *Full Spectrum Command* aims to train company-level leaders, in charge of about 120 members, and *Full Spectrum Leader* works at the level of a 30-member platoon. Dealing with small-scale squad-level operations, *Full Spectrum Warrior* is intended by the army to help soldiers understand what their leaders are asking them to do: “By taking the ‘boss’s job,’ soldiers might deepen their appreciation for the correct execution of dismounted battle drills in the urban context” (Korris 2004).

What really distinguishes *FSW*, however, is that it is a military-civilian codevelopment with *two* versions: the military version teaches soldiers how to make (or at least follow) smart decisions in the nightmare of urban combat; the civilian version, released in 2004, makes this an entertainment experience. Under the auspices of the ICT, the video game company Pandemic Studios developed both versions, with Sony Picture Imageworks doing special effects. The giant game publisher THQ later prepared the game for commercial sale. Civilian and military versions alike are playable on Microsoft’s Xbox, and the commercial version was later ported to other systems. From the army’s

point of view, “leveraging Xbox” saved on special simulation devices and capitalized on young recruits’ familiarity with game consoles, creating a “potential efficiency” in “training for training” (Korris 2004). The army invested \$5 million. Pandemic and Sony did the development, promising \$2.6 million worth of in-kind work. In return, they got the rights to the commercial game. It is with this “entertainment” version of *FSW* that we begin.

### Mission to Zekistan

Load *Full Spectrum Warrior*; skip the manual; jump directly to the first mission. Here is the dusty, deserted, sinister Middle Eastern town, with its labyrinth of winding streets. Here “we” are, your point of view embedded in the midst of a U.S. infantry squad. Already, barely visible enemies have opened fire from ambush. In front of you, a truck burns; its driver lies wounded. Automatic weapons chatter; distant explosions reverberate. You are a soldier-subject in the war on terror: kill or be killed, and obey orders. This is all you really need to know.

After a few mission failures, you may return to the tutorials or the manual. There you find the backstory. Zekistan is an imaginary Central Asian country with a “three thousand year” history “punctuated by violence and bloodshed” (*FSWIM* 2004). After guerrilla struggle against Soviet invasion came a civil war in which “Mhujadeen fighters,” led by the charismatic “Mohammed Jabour Al-Afad,” emerge supreme. Al-Afad’s regime converts the country to “fundamentalist worship” and persecutes the “ethnic Zekis, the nomadic mountain people that had originally settled the region,” practicing “genocide” and “forced sterilization.” Thousands of “ex-Taliban and Iraqi loyalists” set up “terrorist-training facilities and death camps.” Following a “devastating wave of terrorist attacks” across “Europe and South East Asia,” U.S. intelligence tracks the source to Zekistan. After “repeated warnings and failed diplomatic resolutions in the UN,” NATO votes to invade. Massive air strikes prepare the ground for infantry and armor to begin the land war—which is where you, the virtual warrior suddenly inserted beside a burning truck on a dirty street, come in.

This is a complex geopolitical story. But it is basically irrelevant. All the parts are familiar from innumerable CNN reports, news photos, and movies; the political premises, the allotted roles, and the desired outcome are all predictable. Writing about the first Gulf War, Brian

Massumi observed how the legitimation of state violence operates primarily in “an affective register, through the mass media” (1998, 44). This “affective circulation” depends on a series of conversions, elisions, and blurs. On the one hand, the enemy combines attributes of military opponent, despot, terrorist, thug, and genocide perpetrator—omni-purpose evil. On the other, there is an implied identification between U.S. soldiers and media audiences, and foreign populations supposedly being philanthropically aided by “our” side. As Massumi puts it, “All you need do is feel—a oneness with the prospective dead hero, and, based on that, hostility for the hypothetical enemy” (45).

Such is the universe of *FSW*. “Zekistan” is Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Iran; “Al-Afad,” bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad; the “Zekistan Liberation Front” are composite tyrannical, ethnic-cleansing, weapons-caching terrorist malefactors. You, the player, are “our” troops, at once defending the homeland and liberating oppressed inhabitants of invaded countries. One of the U.S. soldiers, whose position the player adopts, displays on his helmet the letters NYPD. Is this a cue that U.S. soldiers in Central Asia are, indeed, planetary police? In a moment of scripted dialogue, after a ferocious firefight has left bodies strewn all across the streets, one of our infantrymen reflects, “I think just by being here we help.”

### First-Person Thinker

The virtual experience of *Full Spectrum Warrior* is that of commanding two four-person teams of U.S. infantry: Alpha and Bravo. The player’s point of view is normally from behind the shoulder of the sergeant commanding a team. Orders—“Bravo, pay attention! Move!”—are executed by the fire team as a group. The player’s in-game subject position is complex. One can switch from leader of Alpha to that of Bravo and back again. And if it is necessary to get a specific line of site on an enemy position, one can “see” from the position of any member of the team. So it could be said that the player’s implied position is that of a “ninth” officer, invisible and invulnerable, commanding both fire teams. Ultimately the player of *FSW* has a trans-individual position, the consciousness of a collective military entity.

The player must complete a series of increasingly challenging missions. Alpha and Bravo clear streets, evacuate wounded, relieve surrounded comrades, discover mass graves, eliminate antitank weapons halting U.S. armor, call in air strikes on enemy vehicles, fight their way

through a palace, a university, and an oil refinery, rescue captured air-crews, and eventually unearth Al-Afad himself.

The necessary skills are rapidly learned through the in-game MOUT Training Course. There are two types of commands: fire and movement. Fire commands select weaponry, targets, and the intensity of fire: “point fire” takes out specific targets, “suppression fire” unleashes a maximum volume of bullets, compelling foes to keep their heads down or die. Movement commands direct the team to its next location, with the cursor showing exactly where each member will end up; teams can “rush,” moving with maximum speed, or “bound,” advancing cautiously, keeping weapons trained where enemies may appear.

The player, as squad leader, doesn’t directly fire weapons but rather orders others to do so. The art of the game is the balance of fire and movement; the rapid detection of enemies; the location of covered positions with commanding fields of fire; and the interplay of support between the two squads, maneuvering one so that it can cover the other’s assault—all while managing ammunition supplies and navigating through a city. The process is remarkably cerebral: in contrast to conventional “first-person shooter” games, *FSW* has been called “a first-person thinker” (Macedonia, cited in Adair 2005).

### Alpha, Bravo, and the Tangos

But *Full Spectrum Warrior* has its affective dimensions. It goes to some lengths to personalize the members of Alpha and Bravo, whose backgrounds are described in detail in the game manual and, in the Xbox version, in introductory scenes. Of Sergeant Santiago Garcia Mendez, we learn that he is a “first generation American,” born to Cuban immigrants who instilled “his strong work ethic and drive to better himself and his community,” and that he is “a fiercely protective and loving father, a trait which comes through in dealing with his squad” (FSWIM 2004). Corporal Andre Ellis Devreux—“Crawdaddy”—is an African American who had “a typical suburban middle class upbringing, complete with little league, summer camp and a trip to Orlando, Florida when he was ten. That was the summer before he lost his mother to cancer.” “Nova” Picoli “grew up in a crowded household with four older sisters” and joined the army to escape debt. Private “Gidget” Ota is “the middle child of single working mother in Honolulu.” In a bow to Middle Eastern amity, the squad includes both the Arab American private Asher Shehadi Ali (“although he finds aspects of his

parent's culture fascinating and takes pride in his heritage, he is also a proud American" and considers himself "no different from any other Southern California guy") and the "Caucasian," clearly Jewish private "Philly" Alexander Isaac Silverman, who is Alpha team's "resident smart ass."

One of the game's main tropes is thus that of the "band of brothers," familiar from war movies. In their mix of ethnicities and classes, Alpha and Bravo are an equal-opportunity paradigm. Of their eight members, three are Caucasian, two black, one Arab, and one Polynesian. There are four high-school diploma holders, one graduate from university (pre-law), two from college, and one from police academy. Though painfully programmatic in its inclusiveness, this is actually a semiplausible representation of a combat squad in the actual contemporary army, which is "in essence a working class military," enlisted from people who are "upwardly mobile," but from families "without the resources to send them to college" (Halbfinger and Holmes 2003). With "minorities overrepresented and the wealthy and underclass essentially absent," its composition resembles that of "a two year commuter or trade school outside Birmingham or Biloxi." Alpha and Bravo are somewhat better educated, and more ethnically diverse, than the statistical norm, but not unbelievable.

This militarized multiculturalism is explicitly thematized in the game. In a cut scene at the end of one mission, one of the white soldiers raps. "You are not, nor ever have been, black," says one of his African American team members. "Blackness is a state of mind, brother," the white soldier retorts. Sergeant Mendez then intervenes with a proper assertion of uniformed race blindness: "There's only one color in this army: green." "Philly" Silverman pipes up, "With respect sir, I think that's brown"—presumably referring to the actual color of camouflage battle gear. "Yo, shit brown," quips another black trooper. In the imperial army, race and class antagonisms are subsumed not only in the common uniform but also in the shared, shitty grittiness of soldierly life.

The "buddy" ethos is sustained throughout the gameplay. When a squad member is hit, his team members cry, "They got Philly!" (or Mendes, or whoever). Soldiers comment on the heat, "I wish I had a pop, nice and cold"; the pathos of war, "It doesn't have to be this way"; and inactivity, "Nothin' wrong with chillin' for a while, I suppose." They become agitated if exposed to fire without cover: "I thought standing out in the open was pretty much what they told us *not* to

do!" Remarks range from the salacious, "You should see my wife in the morning, just after she gets out of the shower"; to the properly domestic, "Should be a letter waiting for you from your family"; the derogatory, "This place sure is fucked up in all kinds of ways"; and the virtually reflexive, "When we get back to base, I'm going to whip your ass on the Xbox."

The enemy is, of course, different. Apart from the Osama bin Laden surrogate, Mohammed Jabour Al-Afad, the opponents are nameless and mostly faceless. At the beginning there is a fast-cut scene displaying masked figures opening a crate of rocket launchers as the U.S. troops roll into town. Other than this, the Zekistan Liberation Army always appear from the perspective of its U.S. opponents as rather rudimentary figures, usually in the middle to far distance, at the end of streets, behind sandbags, or on rooftops spraying fire down the street. Scarves often hide their faces. When they are spotted, Alpha and Bravo identify them as "Zekes," "Motherfuckers," or, most often, "Tangos," from "T" for "target." They appear with small icons above their heads indicating whether they are "under cover," "engaged" (that is, pinned down by incoming fire), or dead—marked with skull and crossbones. They thus do seem like targets on a firing range. When they die—and, of course, they must die, nearly all of them, for the player to succeed—they crumple into inert heaps. As Alpha and Bravo pass by, they occasionally give the dead an epithet: "Should have done something else today, Zeke."

### Armed Vision

*Full Spectrum Warrior* suggests aspects of contemporary warfare beyond simply the firepower and discipline of U.S. light infantry, aspects specific to new media of visualization and virtualization. In an incisive analysis of "armed vision," the artist and media theorist Jordan Crandall (2004) posits that in the history of visual technologies such as photography, cinema, and video, one can distinguish two major perspectives: "horizontal" and "vertical." The horizontal orientation is set at "ground level" and is concerned with "the advance or retreat of sightlines and perspectives along the terrestrial expanse of the earth." The "vertical," or "aerial," orientation is concerned with "looking downward rather than sideways." The vertical dimension is in origin an optic of surveillance and command: "Mapping changes and discovering patterns, the objective was to understand what moves

(troops? construction materials?), how it moves, and how that movement can be intercepted or exploited.” It adds to our visual experience “an orientation that is somehow ultimately not ‘for us’” but rather is “the perspective of a militarized, machinic surround,” an eye involved in “positioning, tracking, identifying, predicting, targeting, and intercepting/containing.”

Each loading of *FSW* opens with a vertical perspective, a view as if from a surveillance satellite: first the earth from space, then a continental view of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, then a city image, finally zooming to an overhead view of the streets where combat is occurring. These aerial views are granular, with static interference; it is the optic of military command scoping out the battlefield from an “eye in the sky.” Soon you are down at street level with Alpha and Bravo, in the composite collective eye of the squad, making your way through Zekistan. Here you progress horizontally, street by street, building by building, corner by corner.

The urban landscape is lavish. Papers blow across the streets, burned-out cars litter the intersections, smoke from conflagrations billows thickly upward, crows and cats rise and run as your squad passes. The squalor of debris, the beauty of tilework in Islamic palaces, the colors of flaming sunsets glimpsed at the end of streets—all are created in gorgeous detail. But be entranced at your peril. Simply finding a designated objective can be a challenge. And since Alpha and Bravo are often outnumbered and always moving in the open—awaiting enemies, vulnerable to ambush—it is only by getting some advance warning that you’ll find what you need: in other words, by invoking vertical vision.

At any moment, the player can press a button to obtain a view via his Global Positioning System (GPS) receiver. Here you see a city map with a view of several blocks surrounding your current position. The two teams are marked; your field of view shows as a green cone; medical aid points and objectives are displayed; and enemies appear as red icons. Additionally, you can request helicopter reconnaissance. This invocation of vertical armed vision is especially strongly marked, because the helicopter pilot, although only present as a radio voice, is the one persistent female presence in the game (the only other women are medics and aid workers who appear fleetingly): “Louise.” So the move from the horizontal orientation of the grunt infantry on the ground to the vertical, aerial dimension breaks the game’s gender code.

If a flight is available, the pilot confirms her approach via radio.

The helicopter can be heard and, in some of the game’s most striking visual moments, seen, circling in the sky through gaps in the city skyline. As it passes overhead, Louise marks enemies on the GPS and informs the player whether their presence is heavy or light: “Tangos galore,” “Tangos like ants on soda,” “Targets up.” Such flights are, however, limited: use too many, and Louise may respond to your panic-stricken request with a cool “Sorry Charlie, that’s a negative.”

Sometimes fire can be summoned from the sky. A crucial role for Alpha and Bravo is not directly defeating the Tangos in firefights but spotting for devastating air or artillery strikes. Here the role of the infantry is thus, in Crandall’s (2004) words, “to act as a direct human interface to a machine that cannot yet fully interface with all of the ambiguities of a material world”—a function performed in-game by placing a special green bomb icon on target. After a few moments the screen is rocked with spectacular explosions, providing a pyrotechnic gratification acknowledged by one virtual soldier’s scripted comment: “Ahh never get tired o’ that.”

This interplay of vertical and horizontal is, of course, integral to the doctrine of full-spectrum dominance, which depends on the combination and cooperation of air force and army into a single, invincible striking power. The first Gulf War was christened the “Nintendo War” because it introduced television watchers to gamelike perspectives of gun-sight and bomb-nose cameras. *FSW* takes things further by offering both vertical and horizontal perspectives on war in a situation where the role of the human horizontal sight is to vector in the apocalyptic power released from the vertical heights. We experience, virtually, what Crandall terms “the integration of analyst, operator, database, and weapons network into a smart image . . . unlike anything we understand in civilian perspectives.” *FSW* is one of what he calls the “new kinds of militarized formats” in visual media, fusing “technological innovation and the erotic charge of combat” in “renewed, compulsive militarization.”

### War Is Peace

That video games are too violent is a common claim. But *Full Spectrum Warrior* is perhaps not violent enough. The price of failure is remarkably low. If soldiers in Alpha and Bravo are lightly injured, blood spatters across the screen. If one is more seriously wounded, he falls, and if unaided, he will eventually die. He can, however, be carried by his squad

back to a Casualty Evacuation point, where healing is almost immediate. The wounded man staggers to his feet to upbeat comments from the commander: "You've still got your looks"; "Wow, am I glad to see you again, Sarge!" "He's one tough son-of-a-bitch."

If two or more soldiers are seriously wounded, the mission ends abruptly. There is a sudden cut to cinematic animations of your team falling to enemy fire. Soldiers jerk back, crumple to the ground, or are lifted off their feet by the impact of bullets and hurled through the air; fountains of scarlet blood jet from the punctures stitched across their bodies. The animation and game physics involved in these moments are extraordinary. Bodies fall realistically in the precise situation where they were hit. When an infantryman seeking cover among a stack of crates is caught in a burst of machine-gun fire, not only is the chipping of containers by bullets striking them and ricocheting around visible, but the unfortunate soldier's cheek slams against the side of the crate as he is hit, his head snapping back convulsively before he slides to the ground.

All of this, however, only lasts an instant. Almost before you register that you have led Alpha and Bravo to death and disaster, a voice-over comes up with some good advice for next time, "Always use cover." Then the "Mission Over" screen appears—with the "Return to Last Save" option, which restarts the game at the most recent of the designated save points scattered through its course. This may mean having to repeat several minutes of maneuvers and re-kill a number of Zeke. Let this happen a few times, and whatever horror you may have felt at the deaths of your men turns to exasperation. It is essential to *FSW* that time can be reversed, and every mistake undone; the "save-die-restart" sequence makes Alpha and Bravo immortal. This is, of course, the big lie of war-as-video-game.

There are other subsidiary lies in *FSW*'s virtual war. That missions end if you have more than one serious casualty reflects the U.S. military's well-known concern for (and success in) minimizing politically volatile losses to its highly trained post-Fordist techno-soldiers. "The U.S. Army has zero tolerance for casualties!" the manual sternly declares (*FSWIM* 2004). But it also means you never witness the annihilation of large numbers of your own troops. And—need it be said?—this is war where no one lies for hours gut-shot and shrieking for his mother; has his testicles blown off; or wakes in the hospital finding he has lost a limb. It is war without mutilation or post-traumatic stress disorder. It is also war without moral dilemmas. And there are almost

no civilians. The miracle of Zekistan is that its streets are deserted and houses empty, apart from the ubiquitous Tangos (who all die instantaneously when hit). Air and artillery strikes do not hit wedding parties. There is no collateral damage. War is peace.

### HA2P1PY9TURSTLE: Decline and Fall?

The package of *Full Spectrum Warrior* boldly declares, "Based on an actual training aid for the U.S. Army." Immediately after release it was discovered that entering a "cheat code,"—HA2P1PY9TURSTLE—into the Xbox commercial game unlocked the Army version (this option was disabled when the game was ported to the PC and PS2, suggesting the disclosure was unwelcome to the military). As many reviews attest, a major attraction of *FSW* was that it gave gamers a glimpse, if not of real war, at least of real military virtuality.

The military version plays like the commercial game, but with significant differences. It spans two theaters of war, the Middle East and the Balkans. The personalization of, and banter between, soldiers is removed. So is much of the graphical polish, special lighting, blur effects, and visual detail. There are no cut scenes. The audio quality is markedly lower. The rich musical score that added excitement and exoticism is gone. Apart from faint wind and distant gunfire, all is quiet in the streets—with one exception: in the military version there are more civilians, and they speak to your soldiers more often. In the commercial game, this happens very occasionally and is entirely benign: in one cut scene, the Arab American private Shehadi gets directions from a friendly Zeke (after a lengthy dialogue in Arabic, the Sergeant asks, "What did he say?" "North," replies Shehadi). In the military version, there is some of this fraternization—"Come this way, America"—but also many expressions of hostility: "Filthy American pigs!" "This is our home, capitalist pigs," or, when the U.S. troops are facilitating elections, "Go home, don't vote." While the civilian game presents a war of liberation, the military version familiarizes U.S. soldiers with being unpopular.

Less spectacular than the civilian version, the military game is harder to survive. Cover is scantier; fewer onscreen icons give information about the vulnerability of friends and foes; there are more civilians, so identifying "hostiles" is harder. The enemy attacks more aggressively, from a greater variety of directions; the awkward behavior of weapons like grenades is more accurately represented. Instead of

the GPS, the soldier gets a crude hand-drawn map of the missions, although the interplay between vertical and horizontal vision is preserved by the ability to lift the camera hundreds of feet into the air, seeing the entire map from bird's-eye view in real time. It is possible to modify the quantity and aggressiveness of opposing forces and civilians and also to change the capabilities of one's own troops, altering their accuracy and reaction times. Wounded soldiers cannot be carried to evacuation points: you gather their weapons and ammunition and move on. On balance, the military version is a sparer, but more complex and challenging, simulation than the civilian game.

But perhaps not complex and challenging enough. In 2005 scandal erupted around *FSW* when Taxpayers for Common Sense, an organization critical of the Bush regime's military spending, suggested that Sony, Pandemic, and THQ had obtained massive public subsidization for a commercial venture that fell far short of military training needs. News reports suggested that *FSW* should be reinterpreted as "Full Spectrum Welfare" and that the army had been "out-gamed" (Adair 2005). The source was a whistle-blowing graphic artist, Andrew Paquette, who claimed he was fired from the *FSW* development team after writing repeated memos warning that the game would not be realistic enough for the army. Most of the city buildings, Paquette pointed out, are just facades: those that have interiors can be entered only on one level. Hence what is usually considered the worst part of urban combat—floor-to-floor house clearing with enemies lurking in cellars or upper floors—simply doesn't exist in the game. "What they did," Paquette said, "was give the Fisher-Price version of a city" (cited in Adair 2005). Suing both Sony and Pandemic for wrongful dismissal, he said the companies "didn't pay attention to what the Army needed," and that their attitude was "We don't care about the Army, we're making money off this." Paquette lost his case. But his complaints were echoed from other sources. Taxpayers for Common Sense unearthed internal ICT e-mails warning, "we have a huge problem on our hands" because the army "was not satisfied" (Conroy 2005). Military training personnel corroborated this, saying that the game was "incredibly shallow" and had a "very limited set of situational challenges" (cited in Adair 2005).

ICT spokespeople responded by ceding ground, declaring *FSW* a useful experiment that would improve other training aids. "We have learned a lot," said one army official involved. "And that's the purpose of research—to learn those types of things, not to deliver a product"

(Macedonia, cited in Adair 2005). Set against the daily death toll in Iraq and Afghanistan, the scandal around the ICT expenditures seems trivial. But it provides an insight into the Achilles' heel of full-spectrum dominance: the Iraqi insurgents or the Taliban cannot beat the U.S. Army in the field, but they may spend it into the ground. The low-casualty (for the United States), high-technology strategy on which the Pentagon depends is monstrously expensive. Empire's vulnerability is not battlefield defeat but economic crisis caused by the collapsing overhang of military budgets. The heist of five million dollars from the U.S. Army by Pandemic, Sony, THQ, and Microsoft is dwarfed by the war profiteering of corporations such as Halliburton, but it offers a microcosm of imperial decline and fall.

In the short term, *Full Spectrum Warrior* was nonetheless a success. The commercial game earned enthusiastic reviews and industry awards, sold about a million units, and grossed US\$50 million. In 2006 Pandemic released a sequel, *Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers*. It continued the saga of the Zekistan expeditionary force, though with new weapons and troops. *Ten Hammers* was developed independently of the Pentagon; Pandemic was now using its well-subsidized military expertise for a purely commercial project.

Nor did the company escape political controversy. In 2005 Pandemic had joined with the Canadian video game company BioWare to create a new "superdeveloper" studio, a \$300 million deal financed by the venture capital firm Elevation Partners (Thorsen 2005a). One of the main investors was U2's front man and celebrity activist, Bono. Shortly after the formation of the new company, Pandemic announced a new game, *Mercenaries 2: A World in Flames*, a game that follows soldiers of fortune as they topple a "power hungry tyrant" who "messes with Venezuela's oil supply" (*Mercenaries 2*, 2007). Responding to that obvious allusion to the troubled relationship of the United States with Venezuela's socialist leader Hugo Chávez, the Venezuelan Solidarity Network (2006) wrote a letter to Bono, pointing out Pandemic's *FSW* connection to the Pentagon, criticizing the anti-Venezuelan propaganda of *Mercenaries*, and petitioning him to use his influence to cancel the game: "Our concern is that this game will only deepen an already antagonistic relationship between the U.S. and Venezuelan governments. Millions of Venezuelans fear an invasion from the U.S.; knowing that a company that works for the U.S. military has created a game in which their country is completely destroyed will increase those concerns." These concerns were echoed by

a Venezuelan congressman, who said, "I think the U.S. government knows how to prepare campaigns of psychological terror so they can make things happen later" (cited in BBC 2006a). Pandemic, apparently feeling a little liberated from even putative military authenticity, shook off the objections, saying, "One of the key reasons Venezuela was chosen for the setting of *Mercenaries 2* is that it is a fascinating and colorful country, full of wonderful architecture, geography and culture" (cited in Buncombe 2006). Despite the furor over the funding of *FSW*, on November 20, 2004, the U.S. Army awarded ICT a new five-year, \$100 million contract.

### "Everyone's a General"

*Full Spectrum Warrior* also has a context beyond the institutional linkages we have described. Here we return to the notion of full-spectrum dominance and the role of the banalization of war within that. Implicit in this doctrine is an understanding of war as a project with not only military but also ideological and political dimensions. Maintaining an imperial populace's will to fight is as important as battlefield dominance. In a U.S. context, this is reflected in neo-conservative determination to cure the so-called Vietnam syndrome of peacenik disaffection to which the country's historic humiliation in Southeast Asia is ascribed. From this point of view, whatever the success or failure of simulators such as *FSW* in preparing soldiers for Baghdad, their role in habituating civilians to perpetual war may be as, or more, important.

To suggest games such as *FSW* prepare not only soldiers but also civilians for war is to enter a complex and frustrating debate about the links from virtual to actual. The success of military simulators in improving soldiers' battlefield performance—for example, learning to fire swiftly and accurately—has led video game critics such as David Grossman (1996) to claim that first-person shooters constitute informal "training to kill." Such assertions, widespread after the Columbine massacres, have been revived by the demagogic lawyer Jack Thompson (2005), who, while seeking publicity for victims of alleged video-game-induced shootings, denounced the ICT as a "tax payer rip-off" responsible for "training" terrorists.

We find these unilinear media-effects claims simplistic and unconvincing. Positions inscribed in games are never necessarily replicated by players. The effectiveness of simulators in military training arises

from their specific insertion as one relay in the war machine of military institutions. In that context, virtual violence is part of an ensemble of practices aimed at disinhibiting, disciplining, and directing deadly aggression, ferociously etching direct lines from simulation to actuality. The idea that these conditions are replicated every time a shooter is played in a civilian living room is naive.

By the same token, however, when the same militaristic identities and assumptions are reiterated by numerous media channels and asserted by many institutions, the chances for their reproduction rise. In societies on a war footing, militarization, as we mentioned earlier, becomes part of everyday life, from downloading a free mission from the *Kuma War* Web site to CNN reporting the daily threat level based on Homeland Security's color-coded terror alert system (see Massumi 2006). The boundary between the barracks and the living room is thus imploding, and we enter the war on terror version of what Deleuze (1992) called "the society of control." Hatred toward an officially designated enemy, triumph in his death, or at least indifference toward its necessity, vigilance against his wiles, acceptance of casualties in the course of struggle, uncritical loyalty for "our side," and so on, all become values promulgated across a wide social bandwidth, on a full spectrum, from the president's podium to daily news reports. In the era of the war on terror, this is the situation in the heartlands of Empire.

What of the motivations for this current round of militarization of which *FSW* is a part? One response is suggested by the context surrounding *FSW*'s incubator, the Institute for Creative Technologies. The erosion of the boundaries between state and corporation represented by the ICT—as well as the opening up of its host university as a facility for producing intellectual property—is symptomatic of a process that is finding its purest and most vicious manifestation in the regions of the Middle East that are the setting of war games like *FSW*. That process, discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, is "primitive accumulation" (see Retort 2005, 10–12), capital's drive to satisfy its requirement of perpetual expansion by continually capturing new territories—be that education or a country—in which to implant its logic. Primitive accumulation's current delivery system is what Naomi Klein (2007) identifies as "the shock doctrine": the calculated method of seizing or fomenting crisis of various types as an opportunity to crack open zones formerly restricting capital's free play—an aim achieved now with the supplement of unprecedented military shock, or

full-spectrum dominance. Shock fosters Empire. And Empire, we remember, is a regime unified by a single, capitalist economic system. In Iraq, the U.S. struggles, with extraordinary realism, to secure for itself the top slot in that Empire. In American living rooms, meanwhile, the armed vision of *Full Spectrum Warrior* and its ilk contributes to the culture shock necessary on the homeland to banalize the global violence of primitive accumulation: nothing more perfectly encapsulates the intersection of war, profit, and cultural shock than the attempt (eventually withdrawn) by Sony in 2003 to trademark that “brutally abstract” slogan “Shock and Awe” (Retort 2005, 16), Pentagon jargon for the strategy of overwhelming and disorienting force applied against Iraq, for use as a possible video game title (BBC 2003b).

In this setting, games such as *FSW* generate subjectivities that tend to war. They prompt not atrocities of gothic delinquency but displays of loyal support for “staying the course.” Their virtualities are part of a wider polyphonic cultural chorus supporting militarization, a multimedia drumbeat for war. Dissonance is still possible: tens of millions marched in opposition to the invasion of Iraq, we cannot forget. But the battle song is loud. *FSW* contributes to the broader banalization of war by promoting uncritical identification with imperial troops; by rotely celebrating the virtue of their cause and the justice of their activities; by routinizing the extermination of the enemy; by diminishing the horrors of battle and exalting its spectacle; by forming subjects of, and for, armed surveillance; by investing pleasurable affect in military tactics and strategy; and by making players material partners in, and beneficiaries of, military techno-culture. Virtual involvement of civilian populations in actual imperial war makes military games a home-front component of full-spectrum dominance. “Don’t bring out the General in you!” warned Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 24–25). As one of the developers of *Full Spectrum Warrior* said of this game, however: “The bumper sticker version is, ‘Everyone’s a general’” (cited in Silberman 2004).

### The Tangos Get Game

But if everyone’s a general, so, presumably, are all your enemies. In 2000 Osama bin Laden and his followers, fleeing U.S. cruise missile attacks on al-Qaeda’s base in Sudan, arrived in Afghanistan. Bin Laden’s children were with their father in the desolate caves of Tora Bora. While holed up in this uncongenial setting, the teenagers endured

a “strange, unstable mix of boredom and mortal danger.” The boys—though not the girls—had the opportunity to attend school but “did little other than memorize the Quran all day.” There was, however, one line of escape. Bin Laden—reportedly regarded by his children as “quite liberal”—let his younger son “play Nintendo because there was not much else to entertain him” (Bergen, cited in Wright 2006, 253–54).

The countries of the Middle East have large youth populations who are just as fascinated by video games as those elsewhere on the planet. What the Institute for Creative Technologies may not have foreseen is that the United States’ insurgent foes would use the same simulatory techniques as the Pentagon to train recruits and inspire support. A number of games by Middle Eastern developers are intended to counter the situation of Islamic youth playing “against themselves” in products such as *Full Spectrum Warrior* or *Delta Force*, which depict Muslims mainly as terrorist foes. Games played from the position of a protagonist in the guerrilla movements, religious militias, and nationalist regimes in armed struggle *against* the United States or Israel are what the games journalist Ed Halter (2006b) terms “Islamogaming.”

Several examples involve the Palestinian struggle. One of the earliest was *The Stone Throwers* (2001), a relatively simple game that positioned the player within the *intifada*. This was followed by *Under Ash*, a first-person shooter in which the protagonist, Ahmed, progresses from throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers to destroying Israeli military positions. *Under Ash* was criticized for being too hard. Nonetheless its first pressing of ten thousand copies sold out in a week. Its sequel, *Under Siege* (2005), takes as its point of departure the 1994 massacre of Islamic worshippers by the Jewish extremist Baruch Goldstein at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and the subsequent street battles between Palestinians and Israeli troops. Both *Under Ash* and *Under Siege* are made by the Damascus-based Afkar Media, a subsidiary of the Syrian publishing company Dar El Fikr. Commentators have remarked on the similarity of these games to *Full Spectrum Warrior* (see Frasca 2005; Ghattas 2002; Oliver 2004a), but the games’ author, Radwan Kasmiya, rejects the comparison, saying that players will be able to “tell the difference between a history game based on lives of real people trying to survive ethnic cleansing and a political propaganda that is trying to inject morals in future marines to justify their assaults on nations far away from their homeland” (cited in Oliver 2004b). Also in this genre is *Special Force*, a first-person shooter

published in 2003 by Hezbollah, which invites the player to take the part of an armed member of the Islamic resistance to the Israeli invasions of Lebanon.

The virtual war over the Middle East recently escalated. In 2006, in the midst of international crisis over Iran's alleged nuclear weapons program, Kuma Reality Games—whose news-based simulations we mentioned earlier—released a playable mission called “Assault on Iran,” in which U.S. Special Forces destroy Iran's Natanz uranium-enrichment facility. In 2007 it was reported that the Iranian group Islamic Student Societies planned to develop its own game in which a Iranian Special Forces hero, one Commander Bahman, must rescue one of his country's top atomic scientists, who has been kidnapped by U.S. forces, and battle with those forces fiercely in the course of events (Halter 2006b). Claiming enthusiasm for the ludic “dialogue,” and certainly keen for the potential profits from the well-publicized game battle, Kuma (2006) promptly announced its forthcoming “response to the Iranian gaming counter-attack,” *Assault on Iran Part 3: Pay-Back in Iraq*. At the time of writing, both games remain “vaporware,” so simulatory war proceeds at a fully phantasmagoric level.

So-called Islamogaming takes its place alongside the growing mastery of the virtual by Middle Eastern movements varying in political inflection but sharing in an antagonism to the United States, Israel, and the West. Examples range from the Palestinian “digital intifada” to the cybernetworks of al-Qaeda and the online videos of the Iraqi insurgency. This highlights one of the limitations of Hardt and Negri's perspective on the contemporary situation. The two-sided collision between Empire and multitude that they describe is enormously complicated by the fact that since 2001 the major opponent to capitalist modernity to emerge is fundamentalist jihad aiming to restore a medieval caliphate. To take account of this, the binary opposition of Empire and multitude must be rethought as a triangular fight whose third point is theocracy. On this, Retort is correct to take the antiwar movement to task for failing to adequately confront the rise of “revolutionary Islam” (2005, 132–69). We anticipate that the coming years will see more games rendering this third protagonist, theocracy, playable.<sup>1</sup>

Hardt and Negri's analysis of Empire retains its cogency on a central point: a global capitalism with “no outside” is unable to control the technologies that uphold its supremacy. The fears aroused by “weapons of mass destruction” and nuclear proliferation in Iran and elsewhere register a dawning awareness of this situation. The seizure

of the digital by militant jihadis demonstrates the same dynamic. The powers that created *Full Spectrum Warrior* to train soldiers to fight shadowy, nameless, faceless opponents—“the Tangos”—in the dusty streets of strange cities confront a dreadful reality: the Tangos have got game.

Meanwhile, undiscouraged, the Pentagon intensifies yet further its links with virtual games: in 2007 it announced the formation of the Training and Doctrine Command's (TRADOC) Project Office for Gaming, or TPO Gaming, a branch of the National Simulation Center at Fort Leavenworth. Perhaps with an eye to avoiding future debacles such as the one with Pandemic, one of TPO's first projects was to create an army game kit enabling military personnel to build and customize their own training scenarios “without needing a contractor to do it for them.” Says TPO's commanding officer: “We will empower that soldier to build his own scenario rapidly so he can train for his specified task” (Peck 2007).

Instances of the gamelike virtualization of war continue to proliferate. The best directors of remote-controlled armed aerial drones such as the Predator and Reaper now crucial to the U.S. war in Central Asia are apparently not air force pilots but hard-core videogamers, who, installed in trailers in Virginia or Nevada, controller in hand and monitoring multiple screens virtually, deliver actual attacks on villages in Afghanistan and Pakistan, occasionally logging off for meals and family time (see Singer 2009). For an even more futuristic example of how virtual games spawn in and out of imperial battlespace, we can, however, take the Defense Advanced Research Project's plans for a Deep Green supercomputer that will generate automatic combat plans for military field commanders. Deep Green—a khaki variation on the name of IBM's famous chess-playing computer Deep Blue—has several interlocking components: “Sketch to Plan” reads a commander's doodles, listens to his words, and then “accurately induces” a plan, “fill[ing] in missing details.” “Sketch to Decide” allows a commander to “see the future” by producing a “comic strip” of possible options; “Blitzkrieg” quickly models alternatives; and “Crystal Ball” figures out which scenarios are most likely and which plans are optimal (DARPA 2007). Skeptics say Deep Green will never work; but even as a multi-million-dollar boondoggle, it will generate innumerable spin-offs for the game industry. If it succeeds, future wars in Iran, Nigeria, Venezuela, or Kazakhstan will be truly plug-and-play, separated only by a few orders of computing power from a commercial war

game such as the recent Tom Clancy--scripted *End War*, in which players give voice commands to air and infantry units deployed in global combat theaters.

To do justice to the likely destination of such projects takes comic book writers such as Anthony Lappe and Dan Goldman (2007), who in their brilliant graphic novel about militarized regimes, *Shooting War*, envisage an Iraq war ongoing in 2011, where U.S. forces include the "Tenth Infantry Division Remote Battlefield Operations," running miniature tanks controlled by a roomful of cubicled adolescents on "PS4s." One has only to imagine the encounter between such forces and jihadis trained on their own game-derived simulators to see the war on terror for what it is—a death match between Empire and theocracy in which most of the planet's population loses.