War of the League of Cambrai (1508–1516)  
or  
War of the Holy League  
or  
16th Century Game of Throne  

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An intense conflict with fascinating characters, diplomacy and war, guided by chance/fate
Situation around 1500

Venice has 180,000 inhabitants and is the second largest city in Europe after Paris and probably the richest in the world.

The Republic of Venice has 70,000 km² (27,000 sq mi) with 2.1 million inhabitants (England has 3 million, the whole of Italy 11, France 13, Portugal 1.7, Spain 6, and Germany/Holy Roman Empire 10)
Born Giuliano della Rovere, he was elected in 1503, succeeding Pius III (who was Pope only a few months) and Alexander VI (Borgia)

- created the Swiss Guards

- commissioned Michelangelo to paint Sistine chapel

- his main goal was to “free Italy from the Barbarians”

- nicknamed the Warrior Pope or the Fearsome Pope, he modelled himself after Julius Cæsar

Machiavelli described Julius II as the ideal prince. Erasmus strongly despised him
The situation

France (King Louis XII) occupies North Italy
Ferdinand of Aragon is crowned King of Two Sicilies (Naples, South Italy, Sicily)

Pope Alexander VI had conquered Romagna. It is not clear whether these lands belong to the Papacy or to the Borgia family

The Lords of Romagna seek Venetian help in order to expel Cesare Borgia. Venice takes advantage of the situation to seize a few coastal towns (Rimini, Faenza)

Julius imprisons Cesare Borgia and attempts to restore Papal control over Romagna, but Venice refuses to yield more than nominal authority
Julius calls France and the Holy Roman Empire for help. Venice yields a few towns, but these concessions fall short. Maximilian I enters Venetian territory in 1508. He is defeated and routed by a Venetian army under Bartolomeo d’Aviano. Truce between the Holy Roman Empire and Venice. Pope Julius is humiliated.
Pope Julius forms a large alliance against Venice. The agreement calls for complete dismemberment of Venice’s Italian possessions, to be split among signatories!

- Papal States
- France
- Spain
- Holy Roman Empire
- Duchy of Ferrara
- Venice
Operations

April 1509: Louis XII enters Venetian territory. Venetian army is split between two condottieri, Bartolomeo d’Aviano and Niccolò Pitigliano. Although the two are cousins, they work poorly together.

Battle of Agnadello between Louis and d’Aviano. Without support from Pitigliano, d’Aviano is completely destroyed.

Sensing the situation, many of Pitigliano’s mercenaries desert.


Venice’s situation is hopeless!
Imperial rule proves unpopular. Revolt in Padua, aided by a Venetian detachment (17 July 1509)

Padua gets besieged by Maximilian with French and Spanish support. Padua resists, and Maximilian retreats to Tyrol

Offensive of Pitigliano in mid-November; he recaptures Vicenza, Estre, Feltre, Belluno, defeats a Papal army, but fails to capture Verona. The Venetian offensive stalls, and a French advance forces Pitigliano to retreat to Padua

Venice is short of men and funds and is forced to come to terms with Julius. Harsh terms: Venice loses the power to appoint her own clergy in her territory; she surrenders her towns in Romagna and she pays a compensation

(The Council of Ten secretly decides that these terms were forced on Venice under duress, and can morally be violated when possible)
The French remain a menace for Venice. But Pope Julius becomes concerned about them, and he quarrels with Alfonso d’Este (Duke of Ferrara). He now allies with Venice!
The Pope hires Wildlings from North of the Wall Swiss mercenaries from North of the Alps and orders them to attack Milan. But they arrive in Lombardy, pick up a bribe from Louis, and leave Venetian troops under Lucio Malvezzo drive the French out of Vicenza. A joint Venetian-Papal force under the Duke of Urbino captures Modena on 17 August 1510.

Without opposition from the Swiss, a French army moves to Bologna, where the presence of the Pope is resented. The French commander (Charles d’Amboise) dies, which throws his troops in disarray. This allows the Papal forces to take the fortress of Mirandola.

Gian Giacomo Trivulzio takes command of the French army and immediately makes progress.

Alfonse d’Este defeats the Venetians on the Po. The Pope leaves Bologna; his forces, commanded by Cardinal Alidosi, must leave the town.

The Pope blames the Duke of Urbino, who is furious and murders Alidosi in full view of the Papal guard!
By June 1511, most of Romagna is occupied by the French. In difficult situation, Julius II proclaims a Holy League against France. Joined by England (Henry VIII)
The energetic Gaston de Foix stops the advance of the Spanish to Bologna, sacks Brescia which had defected to Venice, besieges Ravenna and defeats a relieving force. Gaston de Foix is killed, and his successor Jacques de la Palice proves overly cautious.

By May 1512, the French position has deteriorated. Swiss mercenaries install Maximilian Sforza in Milan. The French abandon Romagna, the Duke of Urbino captures Bologna and Parma, and the French retreat across the Alps.

The League then conquers Florence.


This prompts Venice... to turn to France!
On 23 March 1513, Louis and Venice sign a treaty in Blois. They agree to divide North Italy between them.

- Venice
- France
- Papal States
- Spain
- Duchy of Ferrara
- Holy Roman Empire
- Scotland
- England
- Duchy of Milan
- Swiss mercenaries
Operations

In May 1513 Louis de la Trémoille crosses the Alps, seizes Milan, and besieges the Swiss in Novara. On 6 June, a Swiss relief army routs the French at the Battle of Novara, and pursues them all the way to Dijon. The Swiss are finally bribed and they retreat.


James IV of Scotland invades England at the behest of Louis but he suffers a catastrophic defeat (Battle of Flodden, 9 Sept 1513) so he fails to help the French.

Spanish troops enter the Veneto, and arrive in view of Venice. Bombardment is fortunately ineffective; lacking boats, the Spaniards go to Lombardy. 7 Oct: Battle of La Motta, terrible Venetian defeat.

But further operations prove inconclusive. Henry VIII concludes a separate peace with Louis (1514). Julius had died on 21 Feb 1513, leaving the League without a leader. His successor Leo X is much more inclined to peace.
Battle of the Spurs (Pas-de-Calais, 16 Aug 1513)

Meanwhile, **Henry VIII** besieges **Thérouanne** and defeats **La Palice** at the Battle of the Spurs. He captures **Tournai**

**Winston Churchill** (History of the English-Speaking Peoples): It was called “Battle of the Spurs” because of the rapidity of the French retreat

**Wikipedia** (English): The day was soon called the “Battle of the Spurs” (in French: La Journée d’Esperons) because of the haste of the French horse to leave the battlefield

**Wikipedia** (French): Cette bataille fut aussi appelée «Journée des éperons» car la cavalerie française se servit plus de ses éperons (pour manœuvrer) que de ses armes (pour combattre)
1515 – Marignano

**Louis XII** dies on **1st Jan 1515. Francis I** succeeds him; on his coronation, he assumes the title of Duke of **Milan**

Marching through the valley of Stura, **Francis** manages to evade the Papal/Swiss troops that guard the main passes across the Alps

**13 Sept**: Battle of **Marignano** between **Francis** and **Swiss** mercenaries. Terrible battle, inconclusive, expected to continue the next day. The arrival of a Venetian army on 14 Sept is timely and the Swiss melt away

After the battle of **Marignano**, the League cannot continue the war
Aftermath

**Francis** captures **Milan** on 4 October

**Francis** meets **Leo** in December at **Bologna**. The latter agrees to surrender **Parma** and **Piacenza** to **Francis**, and **Modena** to the Duke of Ferrara

**Francis** and **Charles V** sign the Treaty of **Noyon** on **August 1516**, that recognises French claims to **Milan** and Spanish claims to **Naples**

**Emperor Maximilian** makes another attempt to invade **Lombardy**, but he fails and enters into negotiations with **Francis**. The resulting treaty recognises Venetian claims to **Veneto**

The war has come to an end, essentially resulting in *status quo ante*

Peace would last 4 years. The election of **Charles V** as Holy Roman Emperor in **1519** would prompt **Francis** to start the Italian wars of **1521-26**