In This Issue

Where Does The Hobby Go Next?

The wargaming hobby has gone through many, many phases over the last 50 years, which in the world of hobbies is nothing new. From Avalon Hill games in the 60s, the SPI explosion in the 70s, the rise of Games Workshop, multiple scales for miniatures, and so on, there is a never ending stream of products just over the horizon. Despite how large some of the companies are in the hobby such as Warlord Games, Osprey, GMT, etc., it has been and remains a niche hobby.

That is the one thing that makes the hobby so hard to predict. Social and technology trends have little long term effect on the wargaming hobby and either seem to be too far in front or the hobby never seems to catch up. I thought it would be an interesting article to talk about the various parts of the hobby and where they may be going. Again, something that looks promising today could never come to pass and things you would never think would be popular could be, which is what makes the hobby so fascinating.

Miniatures

From 20mm (1/72nd) and small 25mm which were predominant in the 70s to today where currently scales include 2mm, 3mm, 6mm, 10mm, and all the way up to 40mm, there is no shortage of figures to choose from. That the quality of the general figure has risen to unprecedented levels isn't really up for argument here as today's sculpts are light years ahead of those in the 70s and 80s. The crispness of the folds in the clothing, faces, weapons, etc., are astonishing and it even carries on to the smaller scales such as 15 and 10mm. But can it still improve?

I would think that is doubtful. There's only so many details that you can pack on something so small. What will improve are the quality and quantity of the offerings. Expanded lines in all scales, every period under the sun will be covered, and even things like limbers, wagons, transport, etc., will get their day in the sun. Pretty much anything you want for any period in any scale will soon be available.

Although they initially got off to a slow start, the boxed plastic sets now seem to be here to stay. Although there are only a few companies producing them, those ranges continue to expand and they also offer good value for the money. While there are some 15mm plastic ranges, most of these deal with vehicles as metal is still the best option for the smaller scales. That's not saying that it could change as manufacturing techniques continue to evolve. We may wake up one day to see a host of new ranges in 6, 10, and 15mm, all in plastic.

You will also continue to see an expansion of the specialty ranges that have grown by leaps and bounds over the last few years. There are literally thousands of fantasy and sci-fi figs sold by smaller firms, not to mention unusual ranges sculpted in sizes like 36mm. In a niche hobby, these ranges are in a niche all by themselves. Many of the offerings are of a limited
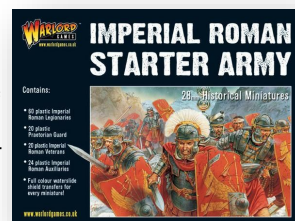
Special points of interest:

- *Several board game reviews, including GMT's new Space Replicators and Next War: Poland.*

- *Battle reports for Fire & Fury, Phantoms, Saga, and Warmaster Ancients.*

- *Two new Engagements scenarios.*

- *2018 Warmaster Tourney and SaltCon 2018*

(cont. from p2) variety and sell out quickly. Also, there has been a rapidly expanding segment of the hobby in terms of the miniatures that are coming out in boxed games. Kingdom Death Monster, Star Wars Armada, Eclipse, and many others offer bags and bags of finely detailed miniatures with their games. Collecting and painting them has almost become a hobby within a hobby!

In summary, miniatures will still be miniatures in the next 5-10 years as the miniatures hobby isn't going away anytime soon. Tabletops will still be graced by thousands of painted (and unfortunately unpainted) miniatures across the globe. What will change will be the depth and breadth of the miniatures. Expanded ranges in all scales, accessories, boxed games with miniatures, and some day pre-painted miniatures that will be way ahead of what had currently been offered. Anything you could want in terms of miniatures will be available if you can afford it.

Rules

The one thing that causes the most arguments and discussions in the hobby are the rules. This is nothing new, from discussions about WRG Ancients in old issues of The Courier to the game vs. simulation arguments over Flames of War today, miniatures rules are the biggest obstacle to uniting the hobby. From the beginnings of the hobby, where there were plenty of home brew rules to the first published editions to today's slickly produced versions, there have always been a wide variety of rules. Getting two gamers to agree on which rules to play, however, has been the challenge!

With today's modern publishing techniques (on demand, pdf, home printers, etc.) and the ability to connect to a worldwide audience via the web, pretty much anyone can get their rules out into the hobby. This is both a blessing and a curse. You can now pretty much find a set of rules on any period of warfare that are for a variety of scales, basing schemes, type of play, and so on. If you want to play the 1879 Zulu War with 40mm figures on bases of 6 figures each

that has turns that are 15 minutes in scale, there's a set of rules for that! Contrast that to the 70s and 80s where you would need to blunder into a set of rules that had what you were looking for, or you had to select a set of rules and figures that you weren't excited about, but that's all there was available.

Today, the problem is too many rules. The amount of WW2, Ancients, and Napoleonic rules is staggering. I monitor polls and threads on various forums and there really aren't any dominant rules in any period, although Flames of War for WW2 is about as close as it gets, with an equal number of supporters and detractors. Finding someone who has even played some of the recently published rules is a challenge all its own and there are few reviews available. Questions on forums go unanswered as many rules have few people who are playing them, even if they sold quite a few copies.

In terms of game systems, the utterly complex games of the 70s and 80s such as WRG Ancients, Empire, and Tractics have been replaced by friendlier systems. Long gone are the days of rosters, written orders, and arguments over casualty ratios, pages of modifiers, and percentages of units in army lists. These things have been replaced by mechanisms that use cards, special dice, chit pull, and others. What could have taken an hour or two in past decades is now handled with a series of die rolls today. Rules designers have substituted ungainly systems with more elegant and fast playing elements.

Now this is still not to say that everyone agrees on the mechanics or how they are applied! Rather, there are new ways of doing things that work remarkably well for today's gamer when you consider the time crunch that seems to be hanging over every gamer's head. In the 70s a Russian tank attack against a German held position on a 4 x8 with 6 players using Tractics could take 8-10 hours and we were fine with it. Today with BKC2 or 3 it might go 3-4 hours and we love it.

Is there anything in terms of rules that could be life changing for the hobby? Probably not. I think if someone had an incredible game system that used dice, chits, tokens, cards, etc., we would have seen it by now. That more rules will

continue to come out is a given. Will there be a set to unite gamers for each period? Although that would be good, I again think it is highly doubtful. In fact, I see rules mirroring the entertainment industry where there are a million series to watch, but finding someone who watches the same things you do is going to be tough. So it will be with rules. Each gamer will have a dozen or more sets of rules that maybe one other person in their area might have one of them as well. That will probably be the period that will get the most play for those two gamers!

Terrain

I was going through an old Gen Con event listing from the early 80s the other day and there was an ad for Galia buildings. Who remembers those? Basically, they were blobs of plaster that had the basic definition of a house, church, etc., but for a long time, they were one of the few companies offering terrain. Add some of those to your railroad grass mat laid over a ping pong table with some lichen for forests and you were ready for a game!

Terrain is one of the problems that gamers no longer have to worry about. Want a 28mm Samurai village? Sarissa has a slew of buildings. Need 15mm desert scenery for your WW2 North Africa games? Battlefront has boxed sets with hills, an oasis, sand colored mat, and more. Anything you want in pretty much every scale is available, especially in 15 and 28mm. The only obstacle is cost, where some of the terrain pieces can certainly get up there in price.

There are a dozen companies providing gaming mats in several kinds of materials that feature snow covered landscapes, deserts, forests, farmlands, and ocean. Ebay is awash in terrain offerings, ranging from bags of trees from companies in China to hand made rivers and roads. Laser etched wood
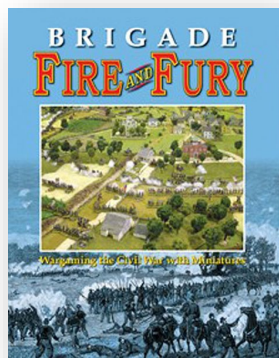
Twilight Imperium V4: The Ultimate Sci-Fi Game?

Over the years my gaming group and I have played a lot of what are called "4X" games, which stands for Xplore, Xpand, Xploit, & Xterminate. From GMT's Space Empires to Stellar Conquest, Godsfire, SPI's Outreach, and many others, 4X games have long been a staple of science fiction wargaming. One game that gets talked about by wargamers, but brings up the touchy subject about what exactly is a wargame, is Twilight Imperium.

That Twilight Imperium is now in it's 4th edition and considered to be a "grail" game says plenty right there. Long considered to be an excellent, if not long, group type game, it combines elements of trading, card play, combat, politics, and more into a space setting. About the only thing it doesn't include is exploration, but there's so much going on anyway that adding that element could make a long game even longer.

After paying your $150 (or somewhere around there), you'll have one of the heavier game boxes that you will ever see. Open the box and it is nothing short of amazing in terms of components. Fantasy Flight Games (FFG) is at the top of the boardgaming industry and selling a nicely packaged game is certainly one of their specialties. To go over all of the components would take some time, but suffice to say that there are over 1500 cards, ships, tokens, etc.! Fortunately, a kind soul created plans for using foam core to store all of the components in an orderly fashion, which was a lifesaver and made setup much, much easier!
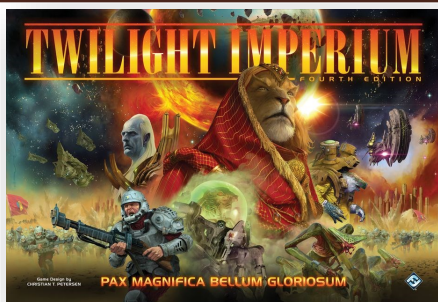
First, there are three short booklets included with the game. The first is the "learn to play" where set up and the basics are covered. The next is a rules reference with every aspect of the game in alphabetical order. Finally, there is a lore book with some great artwork that goes over the current situation in the galaxy. Then there are the faction cards, all 17 of them, ranging from Earth forces (Sol) to pirates/raiders, to high tech beings that live on a sun all the way to xenophobic races. Each one has separate ship attributes, unique abilities, and technologies. Each player also has a huge collection of plastic miniatures for their fleets and ground forces.

On top of all that there are over 500 cards that cover technologies, strategies, galactic council edicts/laws, and far, far more. Round this out with tokens, dice, objectives, etc., and you have a massive package. With this much stuff, however, getting things set up could take awhile if you're not organized as there is a lot to get ready for a game.   While looking the game over and organizing the various parts, sleeving cards, etc., I did get the feeling that you were being overwhelmed. Every discussion or play session report always mentions the length of the game (a 5 or 6 player game occasionally runs 8-10 hours), so combine that with all of the stuff in the box and you start dreading the rulebook.

So, it was with great relief that when I read the first rules booklet I was surprised at how easy the game is to play. There is a short sequence of play, each phase of

the game is explained in simple terms, and compared to many games I own, this one was at the low end of the complexity scale. Every question I had was answered in the rules reference booklet, every detail fits in with something or another, there's a lot of help on BGG and the FFG forums, and basically the game is simple in concept.

Execution, however, is another story entirely. This is where the game length and perhaps the complaints against complexity come in. That the game is fairly simple in no way demonstrates the million or more paths to victory. Each turn there will be a large number of decisions

and this is where the time factor comes in. What to do with your turn, how to use resources, what strategies to pursue, are so large in number that you really need to think each time play passes to you. This is also definitely one of those games where you really need to just get through the first turn. After that it's just layering on all of the options and things that you can do each turn, which does make things a bit easier.

At the start of each turn, each player must select a strategy card, which usually gives whoever chose it something good in terms of technology, trade, etc. Also, anyone else who pays a command token can tag along and get the secondary benefit, which is also pretty good. The problem? You must play your objective and often you may only have one or two tokens in the strategy section of your card. This means you need to be really careful about what (cont. on p5)

Twilight Imperium V4: The Ultimate Sci-Fi Game? (cont.)

strategy you want to focus on. However, you really need each of them, but you don't have enough tokens!

Command tokens are everything. In fact, there are all kinds of articles, postings, etc., about what is termed "command token starvation". You usually only replenish two per turn, but they are used for production, activating systems for movement/combat, actions, and strategy cards. This is almost a game by itself as there are never enough to do everything you need to in a turn. Again, this is the crux of the game; decisions. Not just one decision per turn, but dozens. I should also mention that the turns are interactive, so as you go around the table each player can do one thing and this may go on for some time, making it even harder to decide when to spend your tokens!

Movement is pretty easy to do as you place a command token from your Tactics pool (three pools; Tactics, Fleet, and Strategy) into a system. Every unit within a hex of that system can move towards it. If there are enemy units there then battle commences. While there are rules about how many units can be carried on ships, how many ships per system, etc., there really is nothing complex here. Unlike in some games where movement and combat are highly detailed and take some time, not so much here. The big decision here is if you place a token in a system, everything there is done for the turn, which means no second movement and you can't produce units there as well.

Combat is pretty easy as well. Each ship, fighter, infantry, etc., gets to roll so many dice (usually just 1) and if you score a certain number or higher it is a hit. Each side applies hits to kill off units and then one side or the other can retreat or continue combat for another round. Combat is where you can see different race attributes take effect and where technology research can influence how many dice are rolled. Again, however, this is pretty average stuff and both rule books lay things out in an easy to follow sequence.

Production is also pretty basic. Put a tactic token in the system which activates it, then exhaust planetary resources to get points to buy ships and infantry. What and how many to buy are certainly tough decisions as there are quite a few needs along with several threats to think about. On top of that you need to figure out when to "exhaust" planets. Each plane has a rating for resources and influence, but can only be used for one or the other, then it is flipped over and termed "exhausted" until the next turn. Yes, more decisions! When and what to exhaust them on during the turn is really tough. There are so many needs or things you want to do, but each planet can only be used once.

The same can be said for technology in that there are all kinds of tech for your forces, but if you've exhausted all of your tokens and/or resources for the turn then you won't be researching technology! Again, some really tough decisions about what to do and how resources should be spent. However, some of the tech improves your forces, lowers costs on production, and you can build faster and stronger ships.

The paths to victory are too numerous to go over here. It is possible that you never even fight a battle, but can win the game. Likewise, you may forego the trade, research, etc., and just conquer everything in you path. One option is just go after all of the public and secret objectives, ignoring everything else. If you try to pursue too many paths you will definitely get lost and fall behind the other players. There is a short version of the game that goes to 10 victory points and a longer one that goes to 14. Even with experienced players, just getting to 10 is going to take awhile.

So, what is standing in your way to get started playing Twilight Imperium 4? The first is cost, as the going rate for this game is around $130. You get a ton of stuff in the box, but it isn't cheap. The second is time. A 5 or 6 player game could be 8-10 hours, meaning that this is not something you're going to play all the time. Despite those two obstacles (and yes, they are pretty big) this is an incredible game. They've had three previous editions to sort things out, so this edition plays pretty smoothly. The amount of options, paths to victory, and how each phase of the game interacts with the others makes this a game that you should try to play at least once in your lifetime.

One of the most popular wargame series currently is GMT's Next War. For modern gamers and those interested in potential conflicts, these games are a fascinating look into what combat operations would look like in various areas around the globe. So far, the series has featured possible wars on the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan, and the India-Pakistan border. The newest game, Next War: Poland, takes a look at a potential Russian invasion of the Baltics and into Poland, where various NATO forces would come (hopefully) to its defense.

The Next War series is definitely a components heavy game and Poland is no exception. With four counter sheets, an operational map that covers most of Poland, a strategic map of the Baltics, and

various rules, scenarios, tables, cards, etc., there is a lot of stuff in the box! As is usually the case, all of the components are up to GMT's high standards and although the games are fairly expensive (at full retail) you do get your money's worth.

By flipping through the rules, however, you can certainly see that this game is not for the meek, those with only a few hours to play a game, or something you're going to just sit down and learn in 15 minutes. While the standard game is very similar to many hex and counter wargames, it will still take several hours to learn the rules, set up the first game, and integrate the various systems into being able to play the game.

It's the advanced game that can really frighten the average gamer. HQs, cruise missile strikes, operational level air combat, special forces raids, and much, much more. The advanced game sequence of

play deserves some study as it is very different from most games. You can clearly see that modern operational combat is very complex, there are numerous strategies to employ, and pushing around the various brigades of mech infantry, armor, paratroops, etc., is only half the battle.

Fortunately, the rules are well laid out and there are several folding charts/tables that help to walk the gamer through the processes. The designer, Mitchell Land, is readily available on Consimworld and Boardgamegeek where he regularly answers questions as well as posts errata and other useful information. The best way to get going with the Poland game is to set up one of the standard scenarios and get started. Most of these scenarios in the series are pretty standard fare, with only the air system and helicopters that may take a second reading of the rules for how to use them.

The Poland game is actually two games in one. Most of the action takes place on the 22 x 34 map of the Polish border with Russia. This is where the main combat units will maneuver to seize the various objectives. However, for the advanced game there is an operational map of the Baltic area which is also used by itself for a scenario to learn how to use it in relation to the advanced game. Here, naval, air, and some ground units can conduct battles in areas, but this can influence events on the other map! Yes, once you get to this stage the complexity goes up a whole other level and learning how to juggle resources on both maps can be a challenge.

There are several scenarios that cover various Russian operations in the area, from a siege of Warsaw against Polish and U.S. airborne units that takes only a few turns to a full blown invasion of Poland with supplementary attacks into the various other Baltic states. These scenarios range from the simple to the moderately complex, so there is a good mix for gamers looking for something that may only

take a few hours all the way up to at least a full day of gaming. There's also a scenario that just takes place on the operational map so that gamers can learn how to use that for the advanced scenarios.

What makes the game so interesting and provides such good replay value is that you don't really know which NATO units are going to respond. Because of the rotating nature of the NATO forces on rapid response, there are plenty of counters, ranging from Canadians to Italians! U.S. and French troops will usually arrive at some point, but you never know

what is going to be arriving next. There is also an incredible array of air units that cover Russian fighters and strategic bombers, U.S. F-35s, NATO Typhoons and Eurofighters, plus much more.
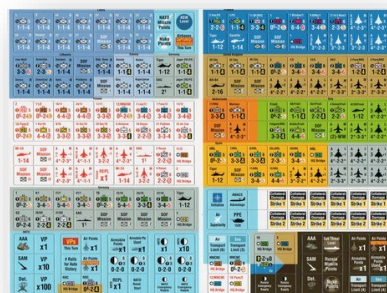
The Poland game should be a template for other gaming companies as everything has been well thought out, tested, and is presented in an easy to use format for the gamer. Is there a lot going on? Yes, there certainly is! There's no way that you will be able to sit down, read the advanced rules, then get everything correct in your first playing. This is a game where patience is rewarded by first playing a basic game, then slowly adding the various pieces of the puzzle to it. The number of options that you have each turn is breathtaking and it will take some experimentation to learn what is the best tool for certain situations. In this day and age of new games coming out each week and fewer hours for gamers in their hobby, spending weeks on this could be a tough task.

Overall, Next War: Poland is another great addition to the series. Fantastic components, plenty of scenarios, well laid out rules/charts, and more. Can it be too much for beginning or intermediate gamers? Yes. Once you've added everything and the kitchen sink, just moving units can seem daunting as you search for the terrain costs in a sea of charts and tables. However, (cont. p7)

(cont. from p6) if you are into modern gaming then this is what you've been waiting for! The chance to pit squadrons of Russian SU-35s against F-22s, Russian mechanized forces against the 101st Airborne, naval warfare in the Baltics, possibly invading Swedish held territory, etc., is all here.

So how does the Next War series work? The basic game is just that; basic. If you have ever played a standard hex and counter type wargame then you will be right at home with this. Movement, zones of control, combat, step losses, replacements, etc., is pretty standard fare. Learning the ins and outs of the terrain, helicopter use, and air points adds a bit more to it, but it's nothing that the average or even first time gamer can't figure out. In fact, you can have a lot of fun with all four games by just playing the basic scenarios. Each game features some short scenarios as well as a full campaign, so you only have to move to the advanced rules if you want to.

There's the crux, however. Those beautiful aircraft squadron counters, cruise missile strike markers, special forces raid tables, and more keep calling out to you! If you want to use them however, then there is going to be a learning curve. Just by taking a look at the advanced sequence of play, once can see that each turn is going to take much, much longer than in the standard game. This is not saying that the advanced game is poorly laid out or too complex, rather, it is a great attempt at simulating modern operational level combat through an interactive turn sequence that gives both sides a multitude of chances to use their hi-tech weapons.

First off, there is the air game, which is where you get to use the large number of aircraft counters provided in each game. Air units can be used for air superiority, close combat support, escort, and

for strikes against combat units, headquarters, etc. Assigning air units and running through the air combat sequence each time definitely gives the game a tactical feel and you also start to see how important airbases are, since they can be targeted. The one thing you will learn is that there is a high loss rate for modern air combat operations!

Then there are cruise missile/missile strikes and special forces raids which are used to knock down the air defense tracks both sides have, destroy airfields, knock out supply dumps, and locate/attack HQs. Yes, there are a lot of options each turn about how to use these assets and that is the one thing that new players have a hard time with in this series and that is using all of your resources in a single battle plan. It's WAY too easy to get distracted and attack things that have nothing to do with your main attack, critical defense of a hex, or some other strategy.

Ground combat in the advanced game becomes a bit more complex as well, with HQs lending support, combat support from aircraft, helicopters, etc. There are a large number of decisions to be made and both sides need to pay careful attention to the terrain modifiers. Speaking of which, one of the more innovative things in the game series is the use of clearing markers for cities. Unlike most games where ground units walk in and take control of a city, here you randomly draw a clearing marker, then ground units must roll on a table to see if they successfully take the city or if they suffer a step loss. This can go on for several turns and can be an expensive proposition in some instances.

Once you've mastered these things you can actually go further. The international posture matrix is a great component where you roll for various countries posture over a coming war, which determines alliances and how fast/slow combat forces are introduced into the region. Naval combat, which is handled a bit abstractly by using a separate map marked out in areas, can definitely add another layer of complexity to operations.

Finally, if this still isn't enough, you can purchase (or print the online version for free) Series Supplement #1, which adds things like cyber warfare and aircraft packages, which is an even more realistic way to do aircraft missions rather than use the existing aircraft squadron markers. The designer and GMT also do an outstanding job of keeping things up to date by furnishing replacement counters for the various countries with each game to keep the series current.

Overall, if you're into modern combat, then what are you waiting for? My suggestion would be to start with the India-Pakistan game and then work up to Poland or Taiwan as it doesn't use the naval rules or additional maps. Play a few of the easier scenarios before progressing into the advanced game. In my opinion, there really aren't too may cons with this series as if you are going to invest some time into it, the games can be very rewarding. This series will definitely open your eyes into what modern operational combat is all about, but again, it is an investment in time. My biggest question is where was this series back in the 80s for Warsaw Pact vs NATO when it was needed?

Back to the frontiers of Rome with another Warmaster Ancients slugfest between the Seleucids and the Romans. We've yet to build Republican Romans yet, so we're still using Imperial Romans for now. They're pretty far off in years in terms of historical opponents, but luckily the WMA system works well and we've had some pretty balanced battles between the two for quite some time.

This was also the first time that we had a chance to use one of the Cigar Box Battle Mats (reviewed in this issue) and we were favorably impressed, especially compared to older images of our past games! For this scale it looks like a section of Syria or eastern Greece, which works well for battles between these two opponents.

Both sides used army lists that had fought previously with the Romans going with their tried and true standard of legions backed by auxiliaries in the main battle line. There were some archer units and skirmishers out in front of that line and cavalry on the flanks. The Roman cavalry is nothing to get excited about as its job is to just hold the flanks long enough for the legions to do their dirty work and end the game. The Romans also had a unit of artillery, which unusually never gets into the action except to get overrun! That would change with this game, however.

The Seleucids went with their standard mix of pikes in the main force, with archers and skirmishers deployed forward. There were several units of imitation Romans, light infantry, and Thorakites to provide some combat power in support of the pikes and to protect their flanks. The Seleucids went with only one unit of elephants this time as the two elephant unit army means cutting off about 4-5 units from the overall force. True, you have tremendous striking power, but if things go wrong you will regret not having those extra units for a reserve!

The Seleucids as usual, had plenty of cavalry. Guard cavalry, heavy cavalry, cataphracts, and light cavalry not only screened the flanks, but offer mobile striking power that is hard to beat. The Seleucid cavalry more often than not is a battle winner and is usually a recipe for success when they win. With the armies chosen from the lists and put on the table to split up between teammates, we moved to the deployment phase and the start of the game.

The Romans were clearly going to stall on the flanks and mass in the center, hoping to hit the pikes before the pikes charged them, which is always a good idea in WMA. The Seleucids were for their part going to hold on their left, then move forward and suddenly veer left, hoping to overwhelm a part of the Roman legions opposite them. Most of the Seleucid heavy cavalry were on the right, so it sort of tipped off the strategy, but with a few good command rolls it could still work.

Both sides got off to a good start on their command rolls, with almost all of their units being able to move at least once. At the end of the first turn the deployments looked about the same, just 20-30cm further onto the board than at the start! Then things began to go wrong for both sides. The Seleucid left refused to move for a few turns, which held up the advance of the pikes for fear of being flanked.

On the Seleucid right, a strong brigade of heavy cavalry got onto a hill and could look down on the Roman left. For one moment there, if they could charge there was a good chance that they could crush that flank.

Unfortunately, they failed their roll. This gave the Romans time to maneuver in extra units and their mounted skirmishers kept holding up the Seleucid attack. When the attack did come, bad die rolls meant that the results were a push, which is definitely something that the Seleucids don't need in WMA as they have a low break point due to a lot of skirmish type troops. The Romans and Seleucids on the left kept dancing back and forth, causing a few casualties, but there were no decisive blows. The Seleucids on the extreme left simply could not get going all at the same time and the overall strategy was falling apart. For the Romans this was ideal as the Seleucids had the combat power to crush both flanks, but so far one was a stalemate and the other was going nowhere, so as far as the Romans were concerned, this was great!

(cont. from p8) The Seleucids were now pretty spread out along the front. The archery and skirmish duel with the Romans for a few turns had hurt both sides, but the Romans could afford it in the center and the Seleucids could not. The pike units were left unscreened and the Romans were preparing to take full advantage. With the flanks in disarray, but not posing any threat, the time was now for the decisive action in the center of the board.

In WMA, it's always good for the narrow based units to hit first as they can choose how to line up against an opposing unit and it can be devastating. The application of combat power along a narrow front is a battle winner and most opposing units do not survive the first round of combat. However, the down side to this is that if they get hit first, their advantages are negated and it usually goes poorly for them, which is exactly what happened here.

The Roman legions crashed into a few pike units and crumpled them up offering several breakthrough attacks which saw them attack the elephants and reserves. Through a combination of bad rolls, no supports, and being strung out due to poor command rolls, the elephants for the first time ever went down in the first two rounds of combat, not even taking out one enemy stand! The psychological shock of it was almost enough for the Seleucid players to cede the game right there!

The Seleucids desperately tried to stem the flow of the tide, throwing the light infantry, Thorakites, and imitation Romans into the fray. They were met by fresh legions and the Roman artillery, which for the first time in a long while caused numerous casualties and added to the slaughter. The Seleucid units were chewed up one by one and despite causing casualties to the Romans, were overrun and the center was completely Roman occupied. The Seleucids hit their break point while the Romans weren't even halfway to theirs, ending the game.

Most Seleucid vs. Roman game go down to the last unit to break, but this was over from about turn 5. The Seleucids had bad command rolls at the worst times, once rolled 3 hits out of 36 dice, and never could get going. The Romans just slowly advanced, picked out units, then destroyed them one by one. For the Seleucids, it's back to the drawing board. A refinement of the army list, some new units, and a different strategy are all in the works for a rematch!

Cigar Box Battle Mats

For a long time in the hobby there weren't a lot of choices about what to use in terms of a gaming mat or covering for your table. From railroad grass mats to painted fabric, gamers tried everything under the sun to simulate a battlefield for their miniatures. Over the last several years, however, there are a number of companies that have appeared offering a wide variety of gaming mats. One of the fastest growing is Cigar Box.

Having seen numerous threads about them on TMP and posts on various other forums, I decided to go ahead and order a desert type mat from them. I had recently spent (detailed a few issues ago) a lot of money and time into creating a desert mat with canvas, sand, gravel, adhesive, etc., which looked great, but is a pain to transport. I ordered one of the mats and waited patiently for about two weeks for delivery.

I was not disappointed. The Cigar Box battle mats are made of a fleece like substance that doesn't appear like much at first. However, when laid over a table and with miniatures on it as in the image on the right, it looks fantastic! The 6 x 4 mat folds up easily and fits into any bag or box for transport, making it ideal for games where you need to bring a mat. I picked up another desert mat with roads that also looks just as good. Yes, you're going to spend $70 or so with shipping, but they are an investment and would seem to last for quite some time.

Another member of our group got in on the Kickstarter double sided map they were offering and that also looks really, really good. There are a large variety of mats, from European to jungle to ocean, so you can certainly find the mat for your particular gaming period. They also offer the mats in circle shapes for those who are into skirmish gaming in small areas. This is definitely a quality product and highly recommended.

Space Empires: Replicators

The big problem with GMT's Space Empires series is that we can't seem to find time to get it to the table enough! We are all big fans of the game and were anxiously awaiting this newest edition, called Replicators. This game has been a long time coming with rumors that getting the Replicators just right is what took so long.
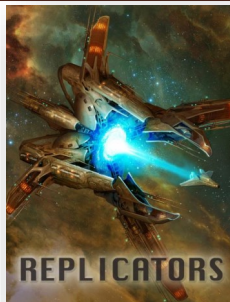
First off, however, this boxed supplement isn't just about adding a new race. As is customary for GMT, the box is loaded with quality components to make a great game even better. Included in the box are all of the counters for the Replicators, new resource cards, hex tiles, scenarios, advanced ships, and replacement counters for various ships in previous games. As usual, the quality of all of the items are off the charts and this is why so many gamers support GMT.

The new hex tiles are the size of the game board hexes and replace the smaller counters used before to represent home worlds, asteroids, supernovas, etc. This is a great idea and makes things much easier to see while playing a multi-player game. Next up are the new resource cards that are handed out to each player at the start of the game. With an ever changing game with a lot of randomness, this definitely adds to the chaos! There are also rules and counters for advanced or "X" ships, which are usually a theme of science fiction books and games. Also, rules for battle carriers, new deep space terrain, and much, much more.

The main star of the boxed supplement, however, are the Replicators. They are the newest race and pretty nasty, especially if allowed to be left alone for awhile to build up. Unfortunately, they are so different than other races they have their own section of rules and will take a few tries to get them right. In essence, they are self replicating and are handled much differently than a player's usual faction.

The Replicators really advance when they contact ships of another species, adding that technology to their own. Couple that with being able to produce ships quickly from pretty much anything and you suddenly can have a nasty neighbor next door to your empire! Yes, they can be defeated, but it's not going to be easy and it could take awhile as you need to force them to exhaust their resources. This is a clever new race that has been added to the game and is going to change how the other players usually conduct their business.


Overall, this is another great boxed supplement and adds quite a lot to the previous two releases. You could play quite a few games with all three and still not see and/or use half the stuff that is now available. If you're not playing Space Empires you should be! This is a great game series and a lot of fun that should not be missed by any science-fiction gaming fan.

Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 35

Being in a Club

My first introduction to wargaming clubs was as a 14 year old who walked in carrying the only game I owned at that time, SPI's Sixth Fleet. This was at Edwards AFB in California and the other members (I think the first day there were about 20) instantly said, "That's probably the wrong game to start with!" On that first day I saw a group playing D&D (yes, with the three brown books), some Avalon Hill games, and a medieval skirmish. My mind was immediately opened to the fact that there were a lot of things about the hobby that I had no idea about.
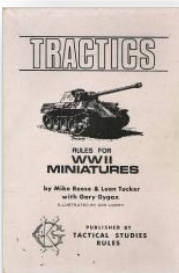
In the weeks that followed and the irregular schedule of meetings, I had the chance to play WRG Ancients, micro-armor, and a ton of board games, plus members sold me some of their older games, which greatly helped me to establish a small collection. Being in a club was a tremendous help back then and it definitely put me on the right path for the hobby. There was good and bad with the club (as with most clubs), but several of the members did it the "right" way. By that I mean they were always willing to help out, introduce the hobby to newcomers, readily answer questions, and focused on the positive. While I haven't always followed those guidelines, it did show what a good club can do for its members and the hobby as a whole.
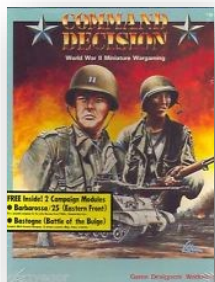
From there I got into a period in the hobby where there was no formal type of club. For a few years I gamed at a local wargamer's house with people who were hit and miss, then when that person moved out of the area at a local hobby store on Saturdays. This was at a time when many hobby stores not only carried plastic models, but wargames as well. Many of them had extra space at the store or some adjoining space in the same strip mall. Anything that would draw in gamers who would buy board games and models was worth it for the store owner. This went on for quite a few years, where there really was no formal structure. We would play a lot of games, sometimes with three of us and

sometimes with 12 or more!

Gradually, you would meet other gamers with common interests, which is where I spent years playing various role-playing games, Starfleet Battles, modern micro-armor, and more. No one was really excluded, but there was no set schedule, no agendas, and it was pretty much those available played. Often, you would find out that you missed out on a game when 3 or 4 guys all of a sudden decided to play on a Sunday night!

Things would ebb and flow as well, so when a group had enough of Starfleet Battles, for example, I got in with a few guys who were into Johnny Reb and we played that for a few years. Being near a U.S. Air Force Base also meant that gamers would come and go, so the size of the games, what was played, who was available, etc., changed continuously. While these were great times and made for some lasting memories, there were some huge problems in terms of group projects, scheduling, and so on.

Contrast those times in the 70s and 80s to where I've been the past 25 years, which is in a series of clubs. In the 90s I was in a large club that showcased all of the good as well as the bad elements of hobby clubs. We were fortunate enough to have a member that had a spacious house with a very large table (16 x 6 ?) that could host a lot of gamers. We had massive battles with Empire, Age of Reason, Command Decision, and much more. Some of these would go two to three nights with a dozen players! We could run massive campaigns that generated excitement for months and greatly helped our painting production. Times were good and our club was the envy of many an out of state visitor.

As I stated earlier, I've belonged to a "series" of clubs over the last 25 years. What happened? Well, several things caused that group to break up. The first was the introduction of 28mm figs by Old Glory. Most of our collections were 15mm and there was a split in the group for those who wanted to move towards 28 and those who wanted to stay in 15mm.
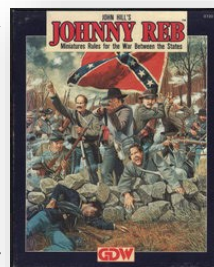
Then, the games were getting too big and taking too long. When we tried running multiple games there were complaints from those who wanted to play in both, didn't want to offend one or the other, or just wanted to do large group games. Finally, for some of the members, they had moved to a stage where the social aspect of the game was more important than the game itself. We would spend two hours on the set up, then only get in one or two turns as everyone talked about new rules, went to look at each other's projects, etc. This caused massive divisions in the club which led to a break up.

After that, various members cobbled together a series of clubs and the one I'm in has existed for the last fifteen years in one form or the other. There's been ups and downs, differences in opinions, changing membership, no set place to play, etc., but we've stuck together through good and bad. In the end, this is a hobby and you have to choose how to spend your time with the hobby. By that I mean that you could lock yourself in a room and paint each day, or you can join a club and participate in one way or the other. When you do choose to join a club you need to understand that you won't get your way all the time, you need to help out on group projects, people are going to have bad days, and so on. Some of this comes with age and experience, as I'm far more patient and tolerant today than I was 25-30 years ago!

The issues with many gamers are that they can't function within a club setting. I see this at local gaming stores, have experienced it with gamers who want to join our club, and read about it on various gaming sites. I also think that with today's society, time constraints, etc., that clubs may be a thing of the past and the closest thing is a group of like minded individuals who may or may not show up for a game at a certain time.

It's been a long, strange ride (so far), but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. The clubs, groups, casual gatherings, etc., I've gamed with over the years have produced some fond memories and in the end it was worth every minute.
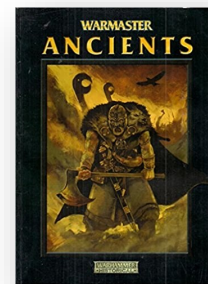
Blast From The Past Pt. 34: FITG to Star Wars Rebellion

You had to hand it to SPI "back in the day" as they had a knack for coming up with unusual game systems that somehow worked as wargames. From Starforce Alpha Centauri to Sorcerer to Citadel of Blood, they continuously came up with unique maps, rules, etc., for these games on top of the hundreds of historical games that they produced over the years. One of these was Freedom in the Galaxy (FITG), which was later produced by Avalon Hill.
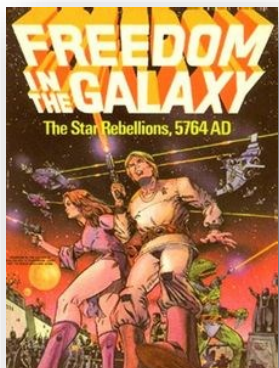
To say that FITG was a blatant rip off of Star Wars would be an understatement and pretty much everyone accepted it with a wink and a nod. A murderous empire exploiting its subjects is challenged by a rebellion of planets led by an unusual cast of characters. There's missions, planetary defenses, fleets, ground combat, and more. The empire even has a weapon that can destroy entire worlds. Sound familiar?

The box had some great artwork for its time and certainly captured the imagination of sci-fi gamers everywhere. I remember the game coming out and thinking that this would be a great chance to play something similar to Star Wars, plus there's been very, very few counterinsurgency games in a sci-fi setting. Many gamers, including myself, opened the box thinking that this would be a great game with lots of space combat, fleets, Starship Trooper type land combat, and so on.

However, upon opening the box there was a nervous, deflating moment and second thoughts about what did you just spend your money on! First, the map was like nothing you had ever seen before. Provinces broken into systems, each system with various tracks covered in symbols, orbital tracks, and more. OK, you thought to yourself, this isn't going to be as easy as originally thought. The coun-

ters were bland, even for an era where counter graphics weren't great. Then there were the character cards, possession cards, etc., and even back then we thought the names on the cards were cheesy. There was also a rulebook that looked intimidating and a galactic guide that had even more information in it. Clearly, you weren't going to sit down and start playing this in an hour, let alone five or six hours!

Going through the rulebook you saw that there were a variety of games that you could play and SPI laid things out in a manner that greatly helped anyone getting into the game. You could play a few turns in a system, a few turns in a province (made up of multiple systems), or play the entire rebellion. The rules were broken down so that you learned how to use the characters, space travel, rebellion, fleets, etc., in a way that each separate game built upon the last, all the way to a full rebellion. Many gamers got through the first few games, but the full campaign eluded many and today it is almost considered to be a "grail" game if you can complete the full campaign.

Yes, this was not a simple affair. Just learning the rules and getting a few small games under your belt was quite the achievement. Was the game overly complex? No, but it dealt with subjects and mechanisms that most gamers had never encountered before. If you were used to playing Russian Campaign, War at Sea, Panzergruppe Guderian, etc, reading about how systems revolt, completing missions with characters, etc. was a much different realm than what you were used to. Not only that, but a full campaign is going to take at least 10 hours and if the rebellion is doing well some games may go up to 20 hours. Back in the 80s when everyone had more time that would have been a challenge, but today it is nigh near impossible.

The game worked by having groups of characters running around the galaxy trying to complete missions.
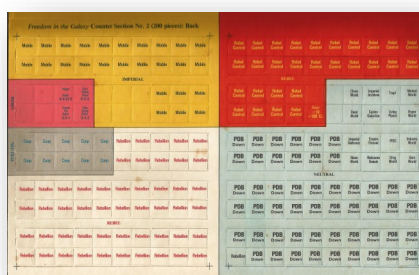
Each character had ratings that helped with diplomacy, war, melee, etc., so picking the right characters for each task was important. The empire's characters were also running around, trying to kill or capture the rebels and put down any rebellions. Getting systems to revolt was the key to the game and took a lot of work. Most systems had garrisons and planetary defenses that had to be overcome and made it easier to detect the rebels. Each group also had their own ships and equipment, might have to fight off natives, encounters with imperial troops, and more. The character game by itself was a challenge just to manage

Once systems started to revolt things got interesting. The rebels would have troops and fleets join the cause, all the
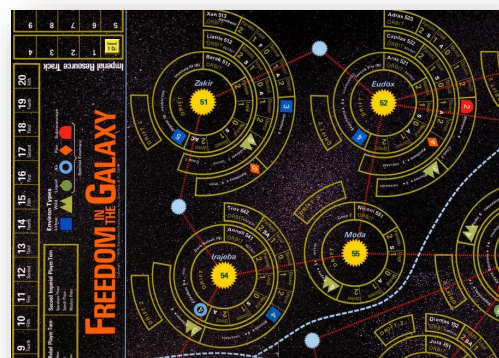
time trying to keep the location of the rebel base secret. Knowing when and where to strike was a huge challenge as one misstep and the rebellion could be crushed. The empire was handicapped by not being able to devote all of its resources to search for the rebels, so when things went poorly they could find themselves all of a sudden staring at a rebel fleet equal to their own!

This is what made the game so interesting, in that the systems the game used were unusual, but they worked. Taken as a whole, it produced an interesting game and something you didn't see every day in the hobby. Even to this day it is still considered to be quite the achievement, even if it is very long to play and takes a serious commitment. There have been numerous discussions about bringing the game back, reworking it so it's simpler, better graphics, etc. Those that had thought about doing it, even up to this year, gave up after they experienced something similar to FITG: Star Wars Rebellion. (cont. on p13)

(cont. from p12) In essence, Star Wars Rebellion is FITG done right, Produced by Fantasy Flight Games, maker of well known board games such as Twilight Imperium, Descent, and many, many others, this is what FITG was probably meant to be.

Now it certainly helps to not only have the Star Wars licensing rights, but to be able to throw money at a game solution. Fantasy Flight is certainly known for this, which is basically coming up with a concept, manufacturing incredible components, break the rules down into sizeable chunks, and shipping an expensive, but high quality product. Star Wars Rebellion is no different than many of their other products in that you are going to get your money's worth in terms of components, but whether the game suits your tastes is entirely up to you.

The box is pretty heavy and once you open it up it's easy to see why. Thankfully I blundered into a component storing thread on BGG where you use foam core to create custom inserts. This is a great trend I'm seeing in the gaming community and there are hundreds of files available for all kinds of games. It does take some building time, but it's cheap, looks great, and works. The build for Rebellion only took me about 5-6 hours, which is shorter than the Twilight Imperium one which was several days!

First off, there is a beautiful hard mapboard in two sections that features all of the planets from the Star Wars movies. Each planet lists the resources that it can produce and it is important to note the movement areas surrounding each one. Next, you will see bags and bags of plastic pieces, ranging from super star destroyers to X-wings. Each one of these is a miniature masterpiece and it's not uncommon for some gamers to paint these figures, although that would be quite the undertaking. Then there are tokens, custom dice, action cards, mission cards, project cards, tactics cards, and finally cardboard characters on stands. Definitely an impressive package and little if anything to complain about.

The rules are broken into two books, which is usually how FFG handles things. First, there is a the basic rules, which goes over what the pieces are, how to set up your first game, then it walks you through how to play the game. Simple in execution, plenty of examples, and the basic rules can be read in under 30 minutes. My only criticism is that there should have been a graphic of each side's command sheet explaining all of the symbols instead of having to find them in several locations spread throughout the rules. There is also a second rulebook which has everything arranged alphabetically, which makes it easy to find part of the game that you are unsure about or need a better explanation for.

At the start of the game the Rebels have a few ships and ground troops with several planets already in rebellion. The Empire has huge fleets and armies, plus they are building a Death Star. Their issue is that they are spread out while the Rebels can concentrate quickly. Each turn the players assign their heroes/characters to missions, the missions are resolved, movement, combat, then production. It sounds like a lot when you first read it, but after the first turn things flow pretty good. Missions can be blocked and who you send on them is very important as you need to roll dice against their assigned skills. Missions can be to turn planets to your side, capture characters, increase production, raid, and much more.

It wouldn't be a Star Wars game without combat, so yes, you do see X and Y-wings fighting Tie fighters, ground combat with walkers and speeders, plus the use of various tactics cards makes each battle unique. After that it's onto acquiring new characters and in some turns, production of new units, so by the mid game period there can be a lot of figures on the board. Also, the Empire player draws two Probe cards which show which planets the secret rebel base is NOT located on. This is a unique and interesting way to simulate this very important part of the game.

The Rebels are trying to convert planets, destroy the Death Star, impede Imperial production, and run out the clock on the turn track by completing strategic objectives each turn.   The Empire is looking for a big battle to strike a major blow, capture enemy characters, keep planets in line, and find the rebel base to end the game with a massive attack. Yes, this sounds like a lot, but it all comes together so seamlessly you would think that this system could be used for many other games.

Overall, this is an outstanding game and everything that FITG wanted to be. I still love FITG for what it is, but Rebellion is far and above it, plus the replay value here is off the charts. Set up and a full game will probably take you 3-4 hours depending upon speed of play and it is certainly worth the money and time to learn the system.

Scenario: Saxon Retreat

Forces:

Roman
2 units Mounted Hearthguard
2 units Foot Warriors
1 unit Limes Levy w/Manubalista

Saxon
2 units Foot Hearthguard
4 units Foot Warriors

Terrain:

Forest with a river. Played on a 6'x4' board. Saxons start on one short edge with a river running through the middle. Trees are setup to create a main road down the middle with small side tracks down the side with varying access points between main and side tracks along the way.

Special Rules:

Ambush: Roman forces deploy in secret. Place 10 markers on the board, at any point after the second turn the Roman commander can replace a marker with a Roman unit. No marker may be placed within L (12") of a deployed Saxon unit.

Saxon players can deploy up to 4 units on the main road to start the game, within L of the short edge they start on. The remaining units must be brought on with an activation, making a normal move from their edge of the table into play as their activation.

Barricades: The Romans may deploy a single barricade on the far side of the river with river in front of the barricade being fordable. Units behind the barricade count as being in fortified cover. The Barricade can be attacked by either side, dealing 1 damage for each attack directed at it. The barricade has 6 health, and cannot be crossed as long as an enemy unit is within VS (2") of it. Roman players do not have to fall back if they lose a melee while in contact with the barricade

Hidden Fords: There are two potential fords on some back tracks. If a player reaches the spot of the potential ford they may be given an activation to test the water. Roll 1D6, on an even number the river is fordable at that spot, on an odd number it cannot be forded at this location.

Victory Conditions:

Saxon Players score 1 point for each unit over half strength which they get off the opposite short edge of the table.

Roman players score 1 point for

each Saxon unit under half strength at the end of the game.

The Battle

The Romans decided to hold the barricade with the levy and the ballista, forcing the Saxons to either charge into it (not likely) or force them to the flanks, where the terrain and the Roman cavalry would hopefully take care of the problem. The one thing that the Romans didn't count on was the Saxons charging right into the barricade and deciding the battle right there!

The first group of Saxons hit the barricade and this started a melee that would go on for several turns. The levy had fewer dice and were certainly outclassed,

but the defensive benefits of the barricade definitely aided them in prolonging the fight. On the Roman left a cavalry unit moved out of cover and found a ford, enabling it to cross and set up for a flank attack on the approaching Saxons. The Saxon infantry on that flank halted and made ready to receive the attack, meaning that they weren't able to help with the attack on the barricade.

In hindsight this was probably a good strategy, with one small problem; the Roman cavalry needed to do well! The cavalry unit charged in and lost three of its four man unit. All of a sudden the flank on that side was in serious trouble and meant that the fight at the barricade was not going to go as the Romans had planned. The Romans instantly moved another infantry unit that was waiting in ambush on the right flank to the barricade just as a small unit of Saxon infantry hit the other half of it.

(cont. from p 14). The fighting now intensified at the barricade as both sides had two units each in the melee. The levy was slowly and surely cracking, while the Saxons were taking heavy casualties as well. The lone survivor of the Roman cavalry charge crossed the ford back to safety with the Saxons in hot pursuit. The lone remaining Roman infantry unit waiting on that side in ambush rushed out to meet them, while on the opposite side the second Roman cavalry unit was searching for a ford to cross for a counterattack.

The Roman cavalry unit found the ford and proceeded across, only to find the last, fresh Saxon infantry unit waiting for them. What followed was almost a repeat of the other Roman cavalry charge where the Romans crashed in, did some initial damage, then were pretty much cut down to a man. By now, both Roman cavalry units were out of the fight and the Saxons, while bloodied, were still pressing forward. The Romans on the left had some horrific die rolls and were in serious trouble, causing the Roman overall leader to commit himself to the battle, which also involved the overall axon leader.

Things did not go the Roman's way and the leader was cut down, along with most of his troops. The levy finally cracked at the barricade, freeing up one Saxon unit to start chopping at the barricade itself. Soon, the barricade was down and that was the signal that this was the end for the Romans. A few more rounds of combat and the game was called as a Saxon victory. The Romans had not done poorly, but a few bad die rolls here and there doomed them.

What could the Romans have done better? Impatience certainly played a part here, as it would have been better to allow the Saxons to spend time searching for the fords, then attacking them as they cross. However, it's been my gaming experience that patience isn't seen very much in skirmish games! The desire to launch counterattacks, while sound, ended up knocking out the Roman's best units.

That does bring up a slight problem with Saga in that I can't recall cavalry units doing well in this set of rules. Whether it is the small units or circumstances, they don't seem to have much shock value or lasting combat power. Anyway, it was a good scenario and both sides certainly had their chances. From reading the scenario instructions to clean up the game was about 2 1/2 hours long.

Engagements 21: Invasion!

Situation: Blue is launching a massive invasion against Red and in this sector Blue needs to secure the port quickly for follow on forces to use. Airborne troops will set up blocking positions to prevent Red's forces in the area from attacking the landings until the port can be secured.

Period: WW2 to Modern.

Table Size: 6 x 4, but a larger table could be used with more terrain added.

Terrain Notes: The hills are very low, but will provide cover to units beyond the crest and benefits to any unit defending on the hills. The port and village are a mix of stone and wood buildings. The bridge is stone/brick and can support vehicle traffic. The river can be crossed by infantry, but is impassable to vehicles. The port should have numerous large buildings that could be defensive strongpoints.

Scale: Can be used with any rules and any scale.

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the units on the board at the start and reserves that arrive later in the game.

On Board at Start (Port):

3 units of infantry

1 unit of armor

1 unit of mortars

On Board at Start (Village):

1 units of infantry

1 unit of mech infantry

Reserves:

4 units of infantry

1 unit of mech infantry

2 units of armor

1 unit of mortars

1 battery 105mm (off board)

Set Up: Red's forces set up as indicated above at either the port or village. They must be deployed no further than 6 inches from the boundaries of either.

Red Orders: Prevent Blue from seizing the port. Break through the airborne and any delaying forces to link up with the port defenders.

Blue Forces: Blue's forces have been split into two groups for the attack. The

first will attack and pin the forward defenses while the second launches a flank attack. However, the flanking force has been marching through the night in difficult terrain and may or may not be in position for the dawn attack.

Wave 1:

4 units of infantry

1 unit of combat engineers

1 units of heavy weapons

3 units of paratroops

1 unit of paratroop heavy weapons

Wave 2:

2 units of infantry

2 units of armor

1 unit of mortars

Wave 3:

2 units of infantry

1 unit of armor

Artillery Support: Ships off shore provide the equivalent of two batteries of 105mm artillery support.

Blue Orders: Use the airborne forces to delay Red's reserves and give the landing forces time to seize the port.

Set Up: Blue's invading forces start off board and are either airdropped (paratroops) or enter at either of the beaches.

Blue Invading Force: Wave 1 arrives on the first turn, with the airborne troops able to drop onto any location on the game board. Wave 2 can arrive on the second turn and Wave 3 arrives on the third or any later turn after 3. All units in the various waves must land on the beaches to either side of the port.

Red Reserves: Each turn, roll 1D6 for each Red unit in reserve. On turn 1 a roll of 1 means that unit can arrive. On turn 2, a 1-3 is needed, on turn 3 a 1-5 is needed, and on turn 4 the remaining units arrive. Reserves can arrive at any of the Red lettered entry points. Red can hold units back at these points to enter as larger formations at the same time.

Initiative: Blue is first each turn.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: The bridge is not wired for demolition. If a Red unit spends one turn adjacent to the bridge it can be destroyed at the end of the following turn.

Victory Conditions: Blue needs to seize the port for a victory. Red can achieve a draw by having any unit still in the port at the end of the game. Red is victorious if they still have a unit in the port and any one road leading to the port is clear of Blue's forces.

Variants: Increase the number of units of both sides and the board size for a larger game. To balance the game out a number of airstrikes could be added to one or both sides. Allow Red to have beach defenses and/or Blue to have a pregame bombardment.

Engagements 22: Road March Ambush

Situation: Blue is marching through unfriendly territory, but has reached a point where the terrain opens up and friendlier areas are ahead. Because of the terrain, winding road, and long march, Blue's units have become spread out too far and a Red ambush has just destroyed Blue's flank guards in the hills on the right.

Period: Ancients to Medieval.

Table Size: 6 x 4, but a larger table could be used with more terrain added.

Terrain Notes: The hills are very low, but will provide cover to units beyond the crest and benefits to any unit defending on the hills. This area is poor for cavalry and there should be modifiers for any mounted units trying to move and/or fight to that side of the road..

Scale: Can be used with any rules and any scale.

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the units on the board at the start.

On Board at Start

8 units of medium/heavy infantry

2 units of skirmishers

2 units of archers

2 units medium/heavy cavalry

2 units of light/skirmish cavalry

Set Up: Red's forces have overrun Blue's flank guards, but the terrain combined with the fighting has destroyed Red's plan of attack. Roll 1D6 for each of Red's At Start units and place them within 6 inches of the number/area marked on the map. The units can be in any formation.

Red Orders: Defeat Blue's main body before either the advance or rear guard can intervene. Push through the troops and burn the farms on the other side of the road if possible.

Blue Forces: Blue's forces have become strung out along the road and the flank guards have been defeated. Parts of the main body has turned towards the sound of the fighting, but the rear and advance guards are still unaware.

Advance Guard

2 units of light cavalry

1 unit of skirmish infantry

1 units of archers

Main Body:

6 units of medium/heavy infantry

2 units of medium/heavy cavalry

2 units of archers

Rear Guard:

2 units of infantry

1 unit of light cavalry

Blue Orders: Withstand the first set of attacks until the forces of the main body can organize a defense. Once the units of the rear and advance guards join the combat, destroy the ambushers in detail.

Set Up: The Advance Guard has a unit of skirmishers deployed across the road with the units of light cavalry to either side of the road and the archers in column on the road. All units must be within 10 inches of the A on the map. The Rear Guard is deployed in column with the leading unit at the R on the map and the other units stacked up behind them on the road. Deploy all of the main body in column along the road at the spots marked M.

Blue Special Rules: Before the game begins and to simulate some of Blue's officers hearing the combat to their right, then trying to get their formations turned around, roll 1D6 for each unit in the Main Body. On a 1, 2, or 3 they remain in column. On a 4 or 5 they may adopt any formation and/or facing, and on a 6 they may adopt any formation/facing and

make one free move.

Blue's Rear Guard must proceed in column until they spot a Red unit. At that time they may move freely. Roll 1D6 for the Advance Guard on the first turn to see if a messenger finds them. On a 1,2, or 3 they move one turn towards the road exit, then may move freely on the second turn. On a 4,5, or 6 they may change formation and/or facing on the first turn, but not move.

Initiative: Red is first each turn.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: The bridge is not wired for demolition. If a Red unit spends one turn adjacent to the bridge it can be destroyed at the end of the following turn.

Victory Conditions: If Red destroys more Blue units than Red loses or forces Blue to flee the field, it is a minor victory. If Red also destroys the farms on the board it is a major victory. Any other result is a Red defeat.

Variants: Increase the number of units of both sides and the board size for a larger game. If Red is having issues getting to the road for an attack, lessen the terrain penalties or allow them to set up closer. Allow Red to have identified several trails through the hills that would allow for faster deployment. If using this scenario for the horse & musket period, allow Red to position artillery on at least one of the hills with a clear field of fire to start the game. Allow Blue to select one or two units to defend the farms.
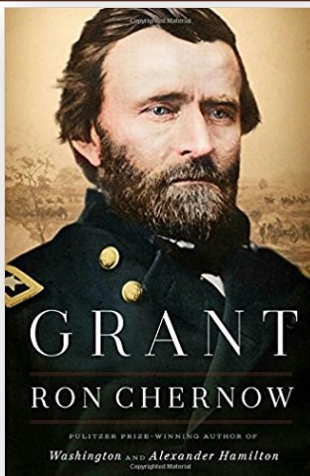
A few issues back I reviewed another book on Ulysses S. Grant called American Ulysses, which focused mainly on his pre and post war life. With Grant, author Ron Chernow goes in a similar direction, but with more emphasis on the Civil War. In fact, this is a tale of the Civil War with his life thrown in for good measure!

The first part of the book deals with the early stages of his life, which aren't really unique when you consider the period of history and comparison to many other historical figures of the time. The author does spend a few chapters preparing the way for his Civil War service, going over his family life, school, philosophy, and events that lead up to the war itself. It's at this stage of the book where you begin to see some differences with its predecessor, American Ulysses.

The chapters on the Civil War are fascinating. Not because you've probably read everything there is to know about the campaigns, but the things that you rarely hear of. I'm talking primarily about his relationship with Halleck, the constant up and down of the early years of the war, and Lincoln's steadfast support of Grant. Yes, these things have are usually hinted at in most books, but in this one they are given great detail, which proves to be very interesting. There are also quite a few details regarding his staff and there issues along the way.

Naturally the book traces Grant's entire course through the war, starting in an obscure command and rising to be over all of the army for the Union. The author again does a great job of discussing the role of Grant the obscure general to a theater level command and then over an entire nation. The changes in strategies, commanders, staffing, logistics, etc., are all discussed in detail, making for very interesting reading.

Of course no book about Grant would be complete without Civil War politics and his drinking problems. Grant found himself burdened with a large number of incompetent generals who were politically connected and the book goes over each situation as it is encountered. The drink-

ing issues are continually raised and this was my one real complaint about the book is that it kept delving into the issue, over and over again. It's hard to forget about when it's being brought up every 15-20 pages of the book! Another fascinating aspect of the book was Grant's comments and thoughts about Confederate generalship, which makes for interesting reading.

The last part of the book deals with Grant's Presidency, the corruption, his world tour, and finally death. There are some interesting stories in the last few sections and a discussion about his term and politics. Again, it's probably nothing that most have not seen before, but the final chapters provide a fitting end to this interesting book. Is it as good as American Ulysses? Yes, as it spends more time on the war itself, which for the historical minded gamer is a big plus.

The Battles of Sailor's Creek

In the final days of the Civil War, one of the worst disasters for the Confederacy during the entire four years of war occurred at a place called Sailor's Creek, Virginia (also known as Sayler's Creek). In most books about the final campaign, little is written about this affair, with most of the attention focused on Five Forks, the attack on Petersburg, the taking of Richmond, and the final surrender at Appomattox. In most books there is usually a paragraph or no more than a few pages dedicated to what really happened at this battle.

The author has certainly produced a labor a love in writing a book that details the entire battle. There are no large sections of photographs, the maps are of varying quality, and it is not a celebrated hardbound book that was recently on the New York Times bestseller list. However, this book does what few others have in outlining the final campaign that sealed the fate of the Confederacy and that is

how it details what happened that day and how it spelled the end for the Army of Virginia.

The first thing you learn is that the Battle of Sailor's Creek was in reality a series of battles that included Harper's Farm, Marshall's Crossroads, Hillsman Farm, Double Bridges, as well as several running battles throughout the day. Again, most ACW enthusiasts know that the Union cavalry cut off a large segment of the Army of Virginia and in conjunction with VI Corps destroyed and/or captured a sizeable portion of the army, causing Lee at one point to ask if the army had been dissolved.

However, there were a series of battles throughout the day, command problems, coordination of the rear guard and skirmishers, etc., that led to the disaster. The author painstakingly goes over each of these elements in the prelude to the battle. The Confederate forces were exhausted, starving, and definitely on their last legs. Desertion had increased since abandoning Petersburg-Richmond, there were few supplies, and the Union cavalry was everywhere around them. All that was needed were a few small lapses that day, which is what exactly happened.

The battles are detailed and by that I mean in gaming terms you could re-fight these actions in a variety of scales, from regimental all the way down to skirmish. Each section of the battle, whether it is a counterattack on the side of a road, a defense of a farm area, cavalry charge, etc., it is in this book! Names, units, etc., are given for each action, along with numerous eye witness accounts. Again and again you marvel at the level of detail for this relatively unknown battle.
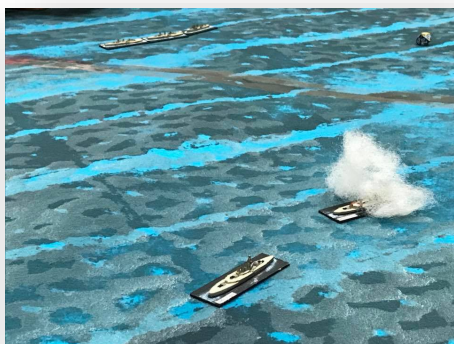
If there is a criticism of the book it is that at times there is too much detail. Each small battle reads and feels just like the last one and trying to keep the sequence of events straight in your head is a real challenge. That the author knows the subject matter is never in doubt, but the presentation at times is uneven. Still, if you are a fan of the final campaign in the Eastern Theater for the ACW, then this book is a must have for your collection.
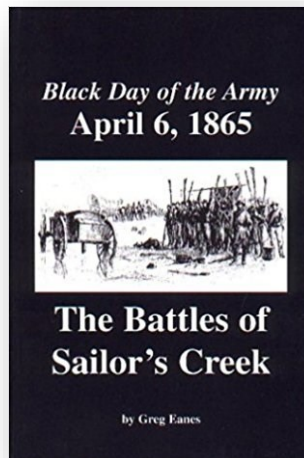
I'm sure that many gamers have seen the recent rise of board games, not only in the number of games coming out each year, quality of components, and broad range of subjects, but also the number of people who are now into the hobby. What was for a long period of time simple family games has exploded into a global phenomenon. From its meager beginnings, SaltCON, which is Utah's premiere boardgaming show, is now a four day event that needs to be held at an actual convention site.

This year's event was held at the Davis Convention Center in Layton, Utah, which is about 30 minutes outside of Salt Lake City. The venue is in an ideal location being just off the main highway with plenty of parking and about 30+ eating establishments nearby. Plenty of rooms, open areas, etc., made for a great place for a convention.

Although the main focus for the convention is board games, the convention organizers were interested in trying out miniatures gaming and were kind enough to set aside a room specifically for that. We were able to get several games set up on short notice, which included a Frayser's Farm scenario for Brigade Fire & Fury, a Phantoms scenario in the skies over North Vietnam, two Seekrieg V scenarios (one in WW1 and one in WW2), and there were various Star Wars Armada and Star Trek Attack Wing games going on in the same room.

Putting together a convention game is a much different affair than your usual gaming night with your club. First, you're given a time block, usually four or five hours. The game, including how to play, needs to finish in that allotted time as gamers usually have other events scheduled. This means no large scenarios, cut down the number of special rules, and you have to be flexible with the number of players as that can continually change, even when the game starts! You also need handouts for the game, arrive early for the set up, and stay later to take everything down. Running a convention game or games is a thankless job!

The other thing to consider is terrain. It has to be portable and able to hold up under a variety of users. Elaborate, model railroad type of setups are difficult to pull off and presenters need to be aware of that. For the F&F ACW game we went with different colors of fabric for the open and forested areas with just enough tree to give the impression of forest without impacting game play. The good thing is that it worked. We could have spent a day setting up the board, laying down bags of flocking, hand crafting roads, etc., but most of the gamers we interacted with wouldn't have cared!

We had six new gamers at the first ACW battle and all of them stayed for the whole thing. We discovered that we had perhaps started the game with the forces too far apart, so for the second game we had them start closer, which worked out great. The Phantoms game had only four, although we were counting on more, but schedules got in the way of that one. The Seekrieg V games had 5-6 people at each scenario and the games worked well as an introduction to not only naval gaming, but the Seekrieg system. We thought there would be a big turnout for the Saturday ACW game, but only four of us ended up playing.

The gamers who participated in the games ran the gamut from grognard to WH40K fans, meaning the games were always different in terms of gaming styles. At a convention you can't choose who can and can't play, so you will at times get some "interesting" gamers to play the games! Fortunately for us we didn't have any major problems, but it's a constant reminder that you need to design these games so that things move along fast, keep the scenario simple so that there aren't any rules arguments, know the rules, and the goal is to have fun.

The convention was pretty impressive, with the tickets selling out with 1750 gamers in attendance! There was a great vendor area where representatives would teach you new games, open areas, tournaments, and more. Games went on 24/7 and there was a massive variety of games present at all hours. The game library was a great idea where you could "check out" a game to try in the open areas. There was also a game swap room where you could sell games by putting a price and your text number, then gamers would coordinate the sale. These are some great ideas and both areas were packed all four days.

From attending several miniatures cons, there was a different feel to this one with all the boardgames, but we think we made some inroads with miniature games. The convention was certainly well attended, managed well, and everyone seemed to be having a good time with it. We will definitely volunteer to come back next year and offer some new games as well.

(cont. from p3) buildings, one off companies making tables, animals, fences, etc., and more are all available for a price. You can pack your game board with whatever you need as long as you can afford it.

Still, the question needs to be asked about why in this day and age do we still see unsightly game boards? Green painted 4 x 8's, lichen for forest, roads printed on paper, etc., are still to be seen on blogs, newsletters, etc. Is this intentional? Not enough effort? No money for terrain after spending it all on rules and figs? Or just gamers being lazy, which is usually the answer!

What is in the future for terrain? Game mats will certainly increase in quality and selection, so gamers should be able to find mats to fit whatever period they are interested in playing. Buildings of all scales for every period will also be available. Blue Moon produced a Peking Legation for their new Boxer Rebellion line, so my guess is that you'll see more boxed sets for famous places in history. Again, the only thing that will prevent you from building whatever terrain board you need will be the cost.

One final thing is that we may see custom printed battlefields for whatever scale is needed. At the university where I work I've recently seen some 3D terrain models that were created from ArcGIS ()files. The examples I saw were pretty incredible and looked like some of the 3D battlefield maps that you would see in history books. Imagine printing sections of Antietam or Borodino in whatever scale you needed. Probably not practical in the next few years for widespread hobby use, but for a convention game or special project I could see it one day.

Complexity

Possibly one of the most debated topics in the history of the hobby and one that divides gamers quickly is the complexity and/or level of realism in our games. From the early beginnings of the hobby in the late 60s where home made, handwritten rules were the norm, through the 70s and 80 when complexity was the name of the game, all the way to today's games where playability is the primary design factor. All one has to do is compare a copy of Tractics to Flames of War to see the different approaches to the same topic.

The pendulum has swung so far to the playability side that it may never go back. Games like Command & Colors, Star Wars Armada, Flames of War, and many new skirmish games embrace this concept and have been fairly successful with it. High production values, short playing times, not a lot of rules reading needed, etc., have taken the hobby by storm and this looks to continue for quite some time.

While the gaming public has no desire to go back to an age of complexity, you are beginning to see some gamers wanting more from their games. Every day there are more questions and comments about wanting to find rules and/or games that are bit more in depth, meaning that the current crop of games/rules may be getting tiresome for some gamers. Will there ever be a sweet spot where realism/complexity meet with playability? As usual, the game companies, particularly larger ones such as Fantasy Flight Games will help determine that as they need to invest a lot of resources into creating those games. If one or two of a new hybrid emerge, others will follow quickly.

Board Wargames

If there is one area where the wargaming community has seen a phoenix like rise from the ashes it is board wargaming. From its glorious heights in the 70s and early 80s to its near demise in the 90s, it has come roaring back. In fact, companies like GMT, MMP, Compass, and many others are becoming so invasive in the hobby some miniatures gamers are considering just switching to board games. Simple, medium, and high complexity games are available for almost every topic along with beautiful maps, cards, counters, and rules.

Why buy and paint up miniatures for air combat when you can just buy a board game that has all of that prepared for you? Don't want to paint up entire Napoleonic armies? Purchase GMT's Command & Colors series. Where before miniatures were preferred because certain periods or scales weren't available in board games, now that has been erased. If you were into space combat you could purchase Full Thrust, spend a few hundred dollars on ships, months of painting, etc., ,to get a game to the table for your club. Now you can drop $50 and get a beautiful space combat game with GMT's Talon. No painting, no space mat needed, and the game is better supported than most miniatures rules.

We haven't even broached the games put out by Fantasy Flight Games and many others that feature miniatures. Star Wars Armada, Star Trek Attack Wing, Twilight Imperium, and many others feature incredible components, are easy to understand, and you can find opponents almost anywhere. Wings of Glory, Sails of Glory, and many other similar games are starting to make inroads into historical gaming as well.

My guess is that the board game surge continues for the next several years. The games are just too good and there is a willing audience ready to pay whatever cost is needed. Look for more board games played at homes, local stores, cons, etc., instead of large games of Fire & Fury, Hail Caesar, or many other army based miniatures games.

Computer Games Ending The Hobby

This subject has come up for the last 30 years and seems nowhere near reality as it has been for quite some time. The computer and console gamer is a vastly different beast than the board and miniatures gamer. Some gamers do both, but the hardcore electronic gamers really aren't too interested in either the board or miniatures wargame hobby.

While computer games are great for some things, especially
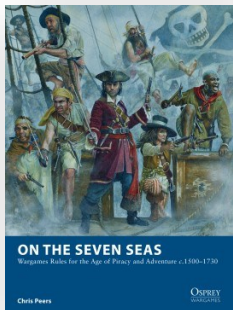
(cont. from p20) logistics, hidden movement, tracking rules, etc., the game play can leave one cold at times. That's not a problem if you are primarily a solo gamer or who is interested in very complex games, but there is no social aspect to the game or tactile feel, which has fueled the surge of boardgaming recently.

Clubs

Here is where one of the biggest changes has occurred in the hobby and that is with various gaming clubs. Go back through old issues of The Courier, Miniature Wargames, Wargames Illustrated, MWAN, etc., and look at all the articles from clubs along with postings about how to join one. Clubs for a long, long time, fueled the growth in the hobby and were kind of a center of the universe. They were a market square of ideas, how to do painting, building terrain, putting on events, sharing resources, and more.

Today, that is no longer the case. Most gaming seems to be done with a few close friends at a local home or a quick get together at a store. That gaming is occurring and on a far larger basis than at any time in the hobby is a fact, but it has radically changed. When I observe Fridays or Saturdays in local stores you have a group of people wandering in looking for a quick 2-3 hour game. Sometime they'll have an army and sometimes not. They may have scheduled something with another gamer via text or email, or just showed up to see what was going on. The days of everyone prepping for two weeks and in constant communication about a big game seem to be long gone.

One of the other aspects that seems to be affecting clubs in this day and age are the endless distractions in the form of new rules, miniatures, periods, etc. Where before a club usually had a core group of rules and armies that its members regularly played, that is no longer the case. Clubs, at least from postings in various forums, blogs, etc., are wandering from game system to game system, never really putting down roots in any of them. This could just be an evolution of the hobby and certainly the arrival of new products is not slowing down.

Has the gaming club gone the way of the dodo? Not yet. There are still a large number of clubs out there in the hobby, although their numbers seem diminished. At this time the focal point seems to be the local gaming store (despite being able to order most gaming items online) and this trend will continue. The challenge will be trying to find someone who plays the same game systems that you do, especially with new games and rules coming out almost every day.

Is Gaming Too Easy Today?

This is certainly a topic that gets asked quite often today. Many gamers, especially those that have lived through the various changes in the hobby, tend to agree that everything today is done for the gamer. There's little need to scratch build anything, convert figures, or hunt for books in the library about uniforms or battles. I think many would also agree that this is a good thing! Online resources, figures in every scale and for every period, buildings, game mats, etc., are all at your fingertips. The only obstacle at this time is money.

For example, if you wanted to get into Saga, you would order the rules, pick a few starter sets, get some buildings from Sarissa or 4Ground, a few Ospreys, and a mat from Cigar Box. In less than one hour you can have everything ordered and inside of week it will all be at your house. Sure, it might set you back $300 or so, but you will have everything you need to host a Saga battle except the painting. Back in the day, this process might have taken six weeks to find the right items and have everything shipped in, which was also pretty optimistic for the time. Often projects like that might go on for a year or two.

Now no one wants to go back to those days, but you can see where it leads to the thinking that the hobby is pretty easy these days. Not only that, you can pick up and drop a new period in no time at all, which many gamers cite for some of the problems in the hobby today. Gamers are moving from period to period, game

system to game system too quickly, producing pile upon pile of un-played games. This may also account for fewer large games and/or battles being seen at cons, local stores, and online through various sites and blogs. There isn't enough depth of interest to spend a few years painting and assembling large armies.

In Summary

Nothing could demonstrate more about where the hobby is right now than when I was standing in the game swap room at SaltCON 2018, holding a copy of SPI's WW3 ($20 for the designer's edition!) and looking around at the other games for sale. A map done in three colors, one sided counters with bare essentials graphics, and a b&w rulebook. However, in the mid 70s that's what was considered "state of the art". Meanwhile, directly under that game was a Twilight Imperium and Star Wars Armada, both boasting full color rules, miniatures, and super high quality components. The games of today are light years ahead of anything we've seen in the past and they are only going to get better.

More and more people are into gaming as well, both in miniatures and the board gaming side of things. Anything you want is out there and you merely need the money and the time to get into a new period, game series, or expand a game you already own. Is this a cycle? Will the gaming hobby experience what happened to sports cards in the 90s, comics shortly afterwards, or what the modelling hobby is experiencing right now? In all of those cases there was a huge surge in sales and interest due to quality products that came out, then died down once people figured out that there was way too much and confusion, then apathy set in.

Hopefully not for the hobby's sake. The games that are out now plus those in the works should keep the fire going for the next several years. A consolidation might not be too bad, especially in terms of rules, at least to get gamers to focus on fewer projects. If pre-painted figures ever get straightened out you will certainly see another renaissance in the hobby!
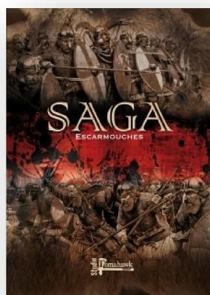
Phantoms is a great convention game for a variety of reasons. First, it's simple to teach and by the end of the first turn everyone has figures out how the game is played. Second, it can accommodate any number of players at a moment's notice as you just hand out aircraft data cards and set up the miniatures. Finally, it's a lot of fun and even large games with a dozen or so aircraft can be finished in around four hours.

For those not familiar with the Phantoms rules, it is based off of the old Avalon Hill board game Mustangs. There is a clever and easy to use maneuver system where you place the maneuver in a number of hexes in front of the aircraft according to the current speed. When the aircraft reaches the counter it performs the maneuver along with any associated speed loss. Phantoms adds hidden maneuver markers along with climbing/diving for each impulse. The game does use an impulse system divided into ten segments and everything is based off of D10 rolls.

In an effort to promote miniatures gaming, SaltCON, which is mainly a board game convention, was open to setting aside a room strictly for miniatures. Phantoms was selected as it looks good visually and plays fast. While there was some interest in the game and we thought that there would be at least six players for the game and possibly seven, we ended up with only four, which still worked out

in the end. This meant that the original scenario of a USN strike on a SAM site with escorts would need to be abandoned in favor of just a MIGCAP scenario pitting two F-8s and two F-4Bs up against four Mig-21s.

The game began with the two F-8s and four Migs having spotted each other and merging into the battle. The F-4s were coming in late and had to pick up the enemy visually before firing any radar homing missiles. The first turn was spent with both sides racing into the best firing position, but there were counters to each maneuver and no clear shots, although the F-4s did get into spotting range and were cleared to engage. By now a general dogfight had broken out with both sides desperately maneuvering to avoid getting shot down!

First blood was drawn when a Mig got behind a F-4 and fired an AA-2 Atoll, which is a primitive version of the very successful AIM-9 Sidewinder heat seeking missile. The chances that the missile falls off the rail successfully, then hits anything at all are pretty remote,

but it worked here! The missile caused only a few points of damage, but the 10 roll on the critical hit table left one Phantom plunging to the earth in flames.

Now things were really getting serious! The remaining F-4 was now hell bent on some payback and stayed in the fight, while the Crusaders and Migs kept up with their turning battle, racing back and forth over the same area trying to get some kind of an advantage. The F-4 did get a radar lock on one of the Migs and although the first missile went straight into the ground, the second one hit and caused large amounts of damage that severely damaged the Mig, causing it to crash.

A Mig then rolled into the rear area of the remaining F-4 and hit it with a glancing blow from a missile, which wounded the pilot and prevented the aircraft from performing any tight maneuvers for the rest of the game. An F-8 broke apart from a high deflection cannon shot that got a great series of die rolls from a Mig and all of a sudden it was 3 against 2. The game was nearing an end, but no one wanted to break off from the dogfight and run for home at this stage.

A Mig forgot to pay attention to the radar arc of the F-4 and turned the wrong way while chasing one of the F-8s. Again, one of the Sparrows fell off the rail and into the ground, but the second flew straight and true, causing two fires and serious damage to the Mig. After another impulse or two it broke apart. With that the final turn and both sides out of combat fuel it was time to egress the area with both sides shooting down two aircraft each. For the USN it was mixed bag, but for the NVAF it was a glorious day! They could afford having their planes shot down, but to take out two USN fighters on the same mission was definitely a victory.

Another good Phantoms game that proved the system works well at conventions. The rules explanation and scenario took just under three and a half hours, easily fitting into our five hour slot. Next time we'll probably run multiple games and this will hopefully provide me with incentive to finish my Korean War jets.
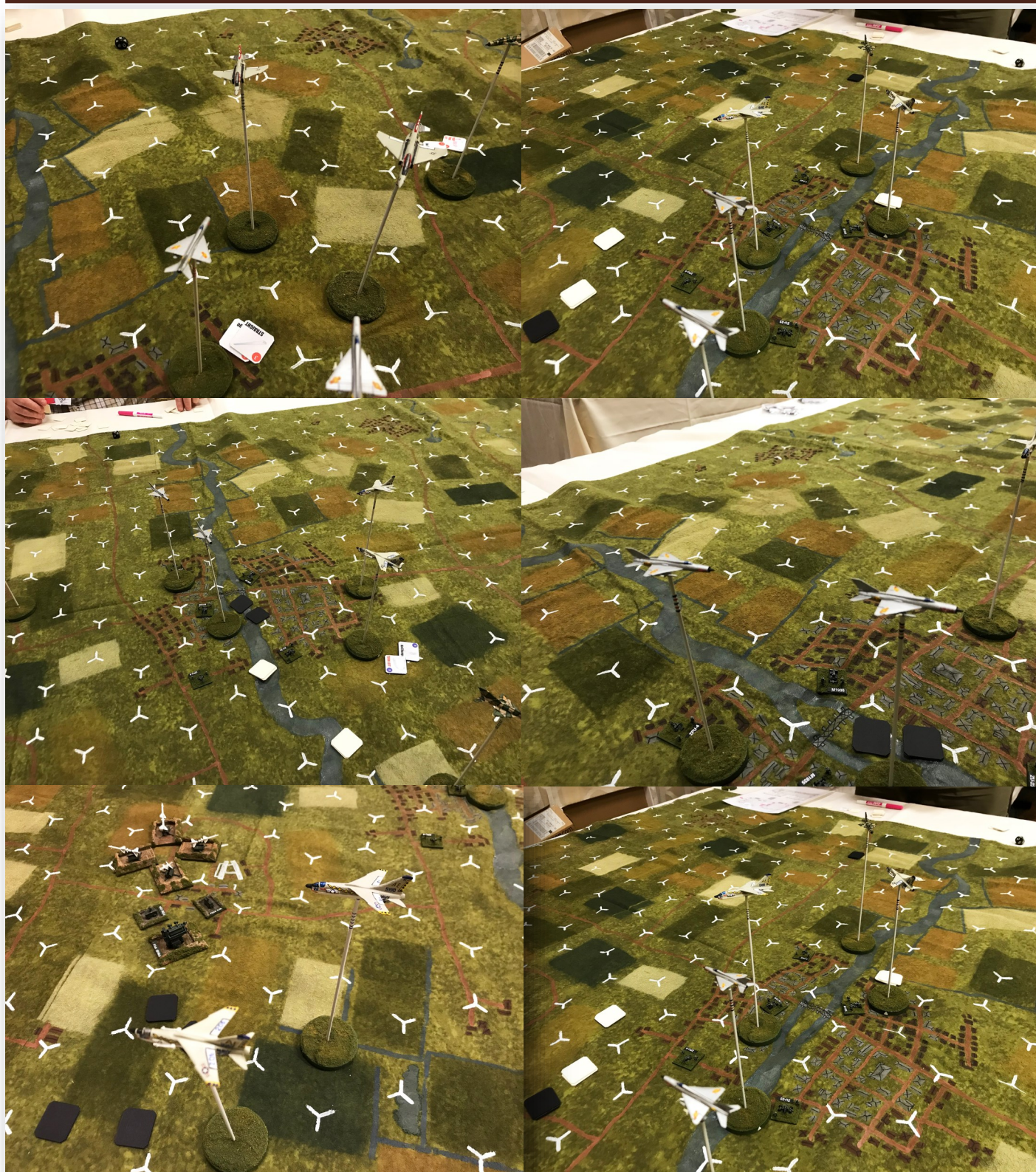
Several images from the Phantoms game at SaltCON 2018. The Migs and the F-8s spent most of the game in a series of turning maneuvers and only got off a few low probability cannon shots at each other. Much of the action focused on the F-4s vs. the Migs and in the end both sides shot down two aircraft each, which is definitely a win for the NVAF.

Frayser's Farm, or the Battle of Glendale as it is sometimes called, was one of the pivotal moments in the 1862 campaign around Richmond. The Union, looking for a knockout blow to end the war, found itself engaged in a series of bloody battles, which included Frayser's Farm. This battle was also unique in that if the Confederate attack had succeeded and split the Union army in two, the Civil War may have turned out much different.

First off, this was a convention game for SaltCON 2018 and would be run twice over three days, which was good in that it would allow us to make some modifications if needed for the second battle. We arrived early on the first day for set up, but not early enough! At the starting time for the game we were still sticking labels on brigades and getting them ready for play. This definitely showed that you can never arrive too early for a big convention game.

The terrain for the battle was a real challenge in that except for the roads and a few fields, everything else was covered in forest. We got around that by using sections of dark green fabric to mark the boundaries of the forests, then just placing a few trees here and there for the scenic effect. The thinking there was that with most of the forces needing to move through the forests all game long and with some players who had never played miniatures games before, it would be easier to move a few model trees than try to maneuver all of the stands through hundreds of them!

This was also our first time teaching the latest version of the Fire & Fury rules, which caused some issues as while we had read the rules, you never notice some changes until you actually get into the game! It took us a few turns to get used to the new firing tables, but after that the turns went by pretty fast with few, if any problems. We kept the introduction session to just 15 minutes, focusing on the reference card with the maneuver and fire tables. Fire & Fury is great for group games and here it was easy to pick up for new gamers.

The battle begins with the Union spread out in a defensive line with most divisions pinned in place until attacked. The command situation at the start of the battle was chaotic to say the least and there was little coordination between commanders and formations were split up all over the battlefield. The Confederate side, however, had a definite plan of attack and their formations came piling down the road fast and furious. McCall's division, which was exhausted from previous fighting, was in a dangerous position in the center of the Union line and the prime target for the Confederate brigades.

In the first battle the Confederate commanders were an exceptionally ag-gressive group and attacked anything that they had a line of sight to! They piled into Hooker's division on the left and McCall's in the center. Hooker's brigades were forced back while the Union reinforcements moved from off board to the threatened areas. Hooker counterattacked, but could not retake the road. In the center, McCall's division was forced back slowly, but held, which was a surprise to everyone involved.

We were unable to finish the game in the time allotted, but were about 3/4 through the game when it had to be called. The Confederate forces had won a marginal victory by cutting one of the roads, but the situation was still in doubt. We reassessed the game, especially the number of turns and decided to start the game on turn 3, moving
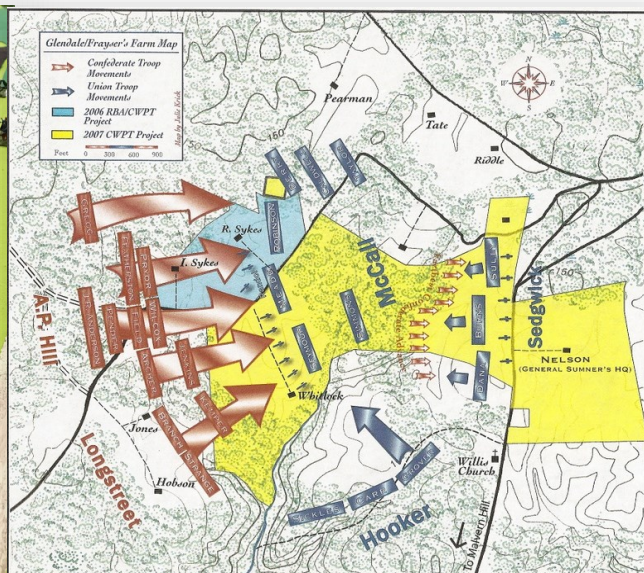
(cont. from p24) the Confederate forces up on the roads and preparing for an attack on turn 4. This proved to be the right idea and we almost finished all of the turns in the second game.

When we ran the game again on Saturday, Hooker was left pretty much untouched on the far flank of the Union. Some of his brigades close to the center came under attack and this started a long series of smaller battles on the left flank of McCall's. Speaking of McCall, his division held out again in the center, despite heavy casualties. This is definitely something that no one had planned on as in the real battle the center pretty much collapsed! The Confederate attack on the Union right had some initial success, but was checked.

When the game ended the Confederate brigades were spent. They had a great plan of attack, but the unending sections of forest, bad die rolls, and McCall's stubborn defense in the center doomed the overall attack and it ended in a Union victory. Everyone involved seemed to have a great time and it generated a lot of onlookers all three days it was set up.

The new version of the rules worked well, but are definitely more bloody than the original, which we thought was a good improvement. There were a few modifiers that had been changed and we had some questions that we would need to follow up on (i.e., spend more time reading the rules!). F&F is a great game for conventions as once you get the hang of the tables everything else falls into place quickly. The game plays fast, looks good, and there is a lot of action/die rolling, which appeals to today's gamer.

For the future, we need to do several things to improve our convention games. The first is to get some metal label holders that can attach to the stands, which will make things much easier for all involved. The second is to rethink the size of the battles. A smaller affair, maybe on a 4 x 6 that can fit into a 4-5 hour time slot might be better, especially since you have no idea how many will show up. It's fine to do a giant battle such as Antietam, Shiloh, etc., every now and then, but if you don't get the required number of players things might not work out.

Overall, we were pretty happy with the game that was put on and we hope to do more. We introduced at least 8 new people to ACW miniatures gaming and answered tons of questions from onlookers. Just a few small tweaks here and there for the next time and we'll have a pretty good convention game.

2018 Warmaster Tournament

Each year we run a Warmaster Ancients (Medieval is also allowed) tournament for the club, with sometimes as many as six participants. It's a great excuse to play Warmaster for a night and to try out various strategies, deployments, and armies that we usually don't see. We're able to get in several games and everyone has a good time with it.

The format is pretty simple. Each player gets 750 points and a free general. On top of that, three territories are rolled for from the campaign system in the second book. These territories usually add a unit or two to each army, increasing the break point of the army and making most forces end up around 1100 points. It's a good balancing/reward mechanism as you get extra units and if you win, you either get to take one of the opposing player's territories or one that was just rolled up. If you win a game or two you can really have some good territories that generate better than average units which will really help your army.

Since we only had four players this time, we set up two tables with just a few areas of woods to make the table interesting. We've debated changing terrain each time, letting players choose the side they wish to enter from, etc., but over the years we've found that the simpler the better! Players are paired off against each other, with each player having three games. Wins and losses are tabulated, plus how many casualty points you inflicted on the other side, which is used as a tiebreaker and for a special Master of Mayhem award, which everyone really tries to win each time!

Set up is by brigade and 20cm from the edge of a 6 x 4 table. We use the die roll method for determining game length, which can range from 6-8 turns, although this year we had most games only going 6

turns, which means you really need to push it to get into contact and defeat your opponent.

This year we had a surprising number of medieval armies, with Samurai (their first year), Teutonic Knights, Imperial Romans, and Hittites. Yes, the Hittites, winner of the last two out of three tournaments and the least armored out of all of the armies! As is usual with this tournament, it is interesting to see the choices that are made when everyone wants to go with their best force. You rarely see artillery or any of the more uncommon units as players want to concentrate on the core, hard hitting units that can get in and do some damage.

In the first round of games we had an unusual situation, but with the WMA command system it does happen from time to time. Basically, both the Romans and Teutonic Knights failed their command rolls time and time again, barely moving and/or fighting the entire game. Couple that with only rolling for a 6 turn game and the Teutonic Knights won almost by default, scoring around 50 points! The Hittites barely defeated the Samurai and so we moved on to round #2.

Surprisingly, the Hittites triumphed once again versus the Teutonic Knights. The knights failed some command rolls at the wrong time and the Hittites did what they always so, namely throw cheap troops at you and skirmish with the chariots, which can be frustrating and leaves you wondering how they could beat anybody, but they do! In the other game the Samurai and the Romans had a bloodbath that went down to the final turn. Both sides were

involved in quite a few melees along with some back and forth charges across the battlefield. In the end the Romans prevailed, but just barely.

This left the final round, where the Hittites and the Romans got into a pretty tense battle, with both sides gaining, then losing the advantage. The Hittites had no answer for the Roman legions and entire units melted away in the melees, while the Romans had no answer to the Hittite chariots. In the end, however, the Hittites prevailed once again. In the other game the Samurai went all out against the Teutonic Knights, figuring that waiting around to win on points wasn't going to get the job done. The knights were in a defensive perimeter, only unleashing the cavalry once the Samurai were committed to a series of attacks. The Samurai made some headway into the defensive lines and actually split the knights in two parts, but could not capitalize and lost on points.

The Hittites were once again the champions of the tournament, going an incredible 3-0! Not only that, they won the Master of Mayhem award by causing the most casualty points. The Teutonic Knights came in second and the Romans third. The Samurai were just a bit behind in casualty points as all of their battles were bloody affairs, but they ended up winless. In a repeat of previous years, everyone stood around for awhile wondering how did the unarmored Hittites win the tournament again!

For myself as the Samurai commander, it's back to the drawing board. The Samurai cavalry and infantry are pretty good, but expensive. I think the secret may be to pay for some heroes to attach to units, even though that will seriously drop the break point number. Anyway, it was another fun tournament and we were able to get in three games each in just under four hours, which is pretty good for us!

2018 Warmaster Tournament (cont.)

More images from the 2018 WMA/WMM Tournament, showing the various armies and formations that were used. Being able to play three consecutive games gives you a chance to try out all kinds of strategies against different opponents.

Victrix Republican Romans

After painting nearly 500 points of Seleucids for Hail Caesar it was time to move on to creating an opponent for them. After thinking about it for awhile I settled on Republican Romans, thinking that they could also be used as an opponent for other armies if I decided to expand my horizons for the era. While there are a large number of figures for the era, I decided to try a box of Victrix's Republican Romans.

First, they are designed perfectly for the small units (8 figures each) that are suggested for the Republican Roman army lists in Hail Caesar. With 60 figures in each box that will give you two units of Hastati, two of Principe, one of Triari, and two units of Velites which will leave an extra four figures. Victrix sells these early Romans in two different boxes; one with the pectoral armor and one with chainmail for the later periods. There is also a box of Italian allies available as well.

Each sprue has enough parts to make several figures, with arms, heads, spears, etc., in a wide variety. Most of the figures are the standard Roman soldier of the era, with a tunic, sword on the right, and all that needs to be added are the two arms and a head. Most of the right arms are shown holding a pilum while the left is positioned for a shield. The heads have a few varieties of feathers, but are relatively uniform. There are arms with long spears that can be used for the triari.

The only specialty figures are a few that have full chest armor that can be used for officers, some standard bearers, and by rearranging some body parts you can make some musicians as well. The officer figures are nice as are the standard bearers (sadly, only one type of standard is given), but the musician was a bit tricky to build. It would have been nice to have had all of the command figures on their own sprues, but it's nothing to cry over as in the end they look fine with the rest of the units.

Finally, there are enough figures to make two small 8 man units of Velites. They offer a variety of heads, swords, javelins, and arms along with round shields to make some interesting units. There are several heads with wolf skins along with multiple pieces for the rest of the fur that can be added on to the heads, which is a nice touch.

Assembly is pretty straightforward, with each figure usually consisting of up to five parts. Picking the right parts, cleaning up the flash, and assembly for each figure only takes a few minutes, so several units can be created quickly in a few hours. They don't really tell you that the figures work best sort of standing to the side, especially for those throwing a pilum, so you learn by trial and error. The pieces fit together well and ordinary plastic modeler's glue worked well.

The only issues I had were that you need to keep careful track of all of the parts needed for the triari, officers, etc., as there seems to be just enough parts for those. The other huge concern is that you need to do a few test figures to make sure that the poses you are using will fit on the unit bases! I learned this the hard way with my first unit that some of the throwing poses and left arm positions don't fit well with certain other poses. If I had to do the Velites over again I might have mounted them on round bases that could go onto a single base if they formed up as light infantry. I think the round base would give more room for the skirmishing poses that the figures are designed for.

There are no decals or transfers included in the box, which was surprising. Victrix offers quite a few choices on their site, which are from the same company that does most of the ones for Warlord games, which is Little Big Man Studios. These come in packs of 16, so yes, you're going to need several unless you want to leave the shields one color or paint the designs yourself! While these look great when the figures are finally finished, they are not the easiest things to use. Each one needs to be cut out, then attached to the shield, then I use a decal setting liquid to make them conform and stick. You will also need to go over the areas that don't have the transfer with a wash to match the color of the transfer. Not easy and time consuming, but the end result is worth it.

Overall, this boxed set is a good deal. A wide variety of figures, easy to assemble, and they look great once finished. Each box equals one Roman legion in Hail Caesar terms, so for the beginning player or someone just getting into this period the $45-50 for the box works out great. The LBMS transfers will add to that price, but they are a great option if you have time and patience. Victrix continues to put out more and more figures for the ancient era, with many that can be used for my Republican Roman and Seleucid armies, so I'll be buying more in the future.

Bits, Inserts, & Tokens-Enhancing Your Games

It could be that with the cost of games going up, many popular games having lots of miniatures, or gamers just looking to enhance their games, an entirely new industry has sprouted up in the hobby and is growing at an exponential rate. That new side of the hobby is providing tokens, markers, storage containers, card sleeves, and much, much more. From wanting to preserve the game pieces to having things made easier for set up, it has ballooned from just a few items several years ago to entire pages in online catalogs of gaming products. The big questions are what can you get, is it worth it, and what is out there for your favorite game.

For a long period of time in the hobby, the only pieces you got with the game were the ones that came with it! Command Decision and Johnny Reb had order counters with the rules, TSATF made you go buy card decks, gamers would have to make their own hit markers for some rules, and most board gamers just used sandwich baggies to store the counters. There were always some gamers who would go the extra mile and make their own accessories, but they were far and few between. Dice of all shapes and sizes were substituted for fires, casualty counters, suppressed markers, and more, not to mention pipe cleaners of all colors!

Today, that has changed dramatically. You first started seeing a change with items like the TSATF Event Decks, many gamers using casualty figures for hits, then companies like Litko coming out with all kinds of markers, bases, etc. Flames of War really got this part of the hobby kick started when companies began producing tokens, objectives, templates, and more for their games. All of sudden it was the thing to do and accessories began to appear seemingly out of nowhere each week! Yes, gamers have been using things like this for decades, but most were home grown, scratch built, one of a kind items that weren't sold in stores.

The other event in the hobby that has fueled this craze is the growing number of games that have miniatures in them. We're not just talking about games like Space Hulk, Blood bowl, or others from decades past, but games like Star Wars Rebellion, Mice & Mystics, Descent, 878 Vikings, and many, many more. The advent of the intermingling of board games with wargames has created a whole new territory, with many gamers being introduced to the "other side" of the hobby. Many of these games, i.e., Twilight Imperium, have miniatures, cards, tokens, reference cards, and more in them, meaning that they are very component heavy.

Companies and many gamers have realized that while everyone can just put things into plastic baggies, stack the stuff in the box, etc., there is a market for something better. A number of these game accessory companies have produced a whole range of items for these games that vary greatly in quality and price. In the last year or so I have purchased several, including the Mice & Mystics insert set from Etsy and the foam storage tray for Space Hulk. Both items were well done, fit in the box, and have helped tremendously with the storage issues on both of those games. The Mice & Mystics insert was made from laser cut wood and miraculously fits inside the box with space for each of the components.

We're not talking about a huge sum of money as both inserts were around $30 including shipping. Now most gamers probably will just pack everything back in the box, but these inserts greatly help with the game set up as you don't have to hunt for specific items. There are also a number of companies that produce gaming mats, replacement tokens, additional parts, etc., for games. I recently saw an entire series of game accessories for Eclipse that would

seem to greatly aid game play. The only hindrance is how much money do you want to spend on a game that you may or may not play that often. A complete replacement of Twilight Imperium command tokens by Litko is going to set you back over $100, where you've already spent close to $150 for the game!

A service for gamers by gamers is the design of foam core inserts for many of today's popular games. Using 3D modeling tools, many gamers are designing inserts and publishing the plans online through sites such as BGG (who also has a huge Geeklist of games with inserts available). All you need are some sheets of foam core, glue, a sharp knife, and some time to create some incredible inserts. So far I've completed the inserts for Star Wars Rebellion and Twilight Imperium, which have proved to be life-savers! Everything fits into its own tray, the cards are organized, and it greatly speeds the set up. I'm now actively looking to build more inserts for the games that I have .
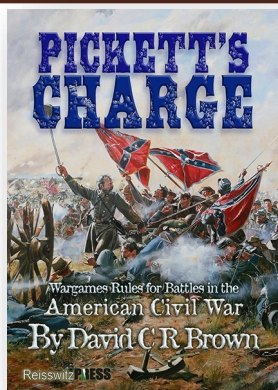
In summary, these companies and gamers are providing a huge service to the hobby. You can argue if you really need some of the items or not, but at least they are available. From replacement tokens to extra miniatures to new play aids, the amount of additional materials continues to grow each day. The free foam core insert designs are a stroke of genius and the gamers who have spent time providing these for the hobby deserve our gratitude.

Pickett's Charge Rules Playtest: Longstreet at Gettysburg

While many in our gaming group are content to play Fire & Fury Brigade rules for the ACW, there are a few members who continuously search for a good set of 1:20 rules as well. There is certainly a different feel in the 1:20 games than where each stand is a regiment and we regularly have discussions about scale, tactical vs. operational, etc. Fortunately for us, most of the group are fans of the ACW as a period, so we're pretty willing to play almost any kind of ACW game!

Pickett's Charge is to Guns at Gettysburg as General d'Armee is to General d'Brigade, which is basically a faster playing version of the basic General d'Brigade rules. Those who are not familiar with Guns at Gettysburg or General d'Brigade should understand that they are 1:20 scale rules with an emphasis on command control. While not the most complex set of rules (I would rate them as notch below Johnny Reb in complexity), our experience is that games can take awhile, especially if there are quite a few troops on the board. In this era of more games coming out each day, gamers with limited available time, and wanting to get games finished in a single session, new versions of the rules have appeared in an attempt to streamline the system.

Pickett's Charge certainly scores points in trying to move the game along at a quicker pace and the four pages of charts that you need to run the game looks intimidating at first, but are in reality pretty easy to use. If you've played General d'Armee you will be able to immediately step in with Pickett's Charge and be playing in minutes. The game is based upon the number of stands in the regiment (the base unit), so pretty much any base size/number of figs can be used as long as it is consistent across the tabletop.

At this point it is important to note the command and control system. Depending upon the number of brigades you have you roll a certain number of D6s that generate "staff officers", which are then assigned to the various brigades to help with activation, rallying, entering the table from reserve, etc. Brigades still roll for activation each turn, but these staff officers allow for re-rolls if they are assigned to the brigades. Definitely a simple command and control mechanic that is easy to explain, but there is some strategy involved each turn about which brigades should get extra help.

On to the scenario. Gettysburg is a hard thing to pull off in the gaming world, whether it is a board game or miniatures, no matter what the scale. Most gamers know the history of the battle and the god like view from above in board and miniatures games usually prevents what happened in history to unfold before the players. Usually there are all kinds of special rules and restrictions placed in these games to keep things close to the actual events, but we are usually fine with anything where both sides have a fair chance to win the game!

This scenario would focus on Longstreet's attack, mainly Kershaw's and Barksdale's attacks on the second day, where they almost succeeded in cutting the Union army in two. The game begins with Hood having just been removed from the field of battle and his units scattered in the forest on the Confederate right. This would be followed by a Confederate artillery bombardment on the
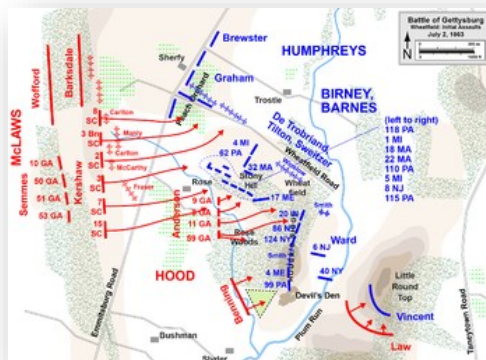

Union front lines, then the main attack against those units that were still on the ridge in front of them.

There was an interesting rule regarding Sickles where the Union would roll for staff officers, assign them, then there was a separate roll to see if Sickles reallocated them! That rule, plus the fractured nature of the Union command, made their fairly strong force on the surface have a number of problems that would plague them on the first few turns. The long row of artillery, however, did strike fear into the hearts (cont. on p33)
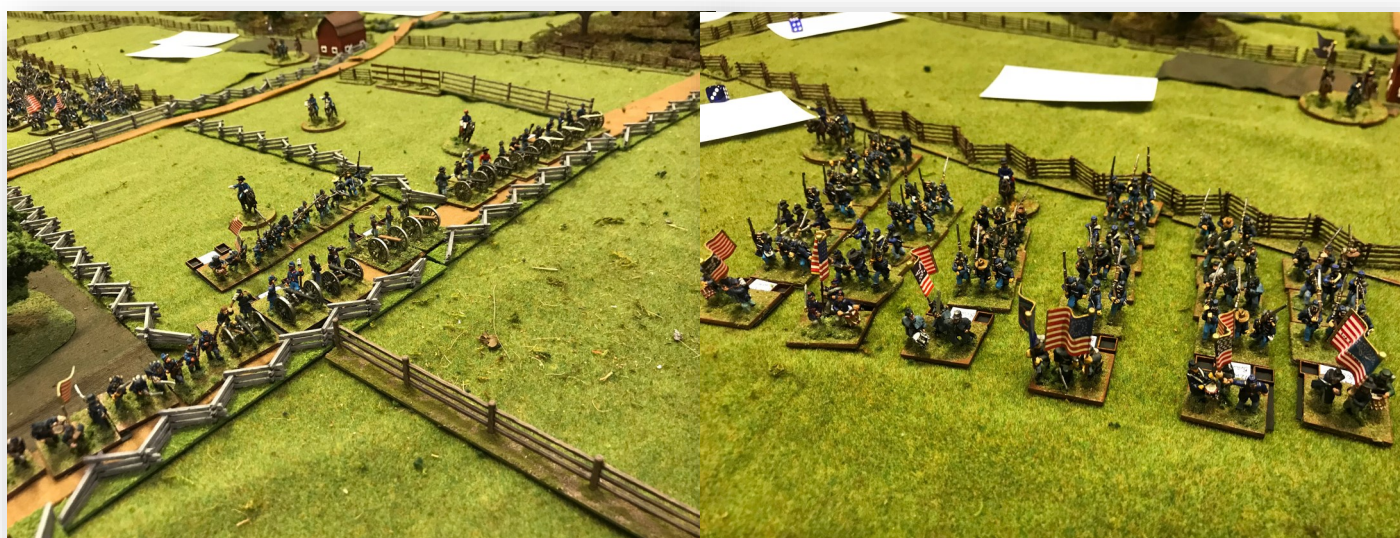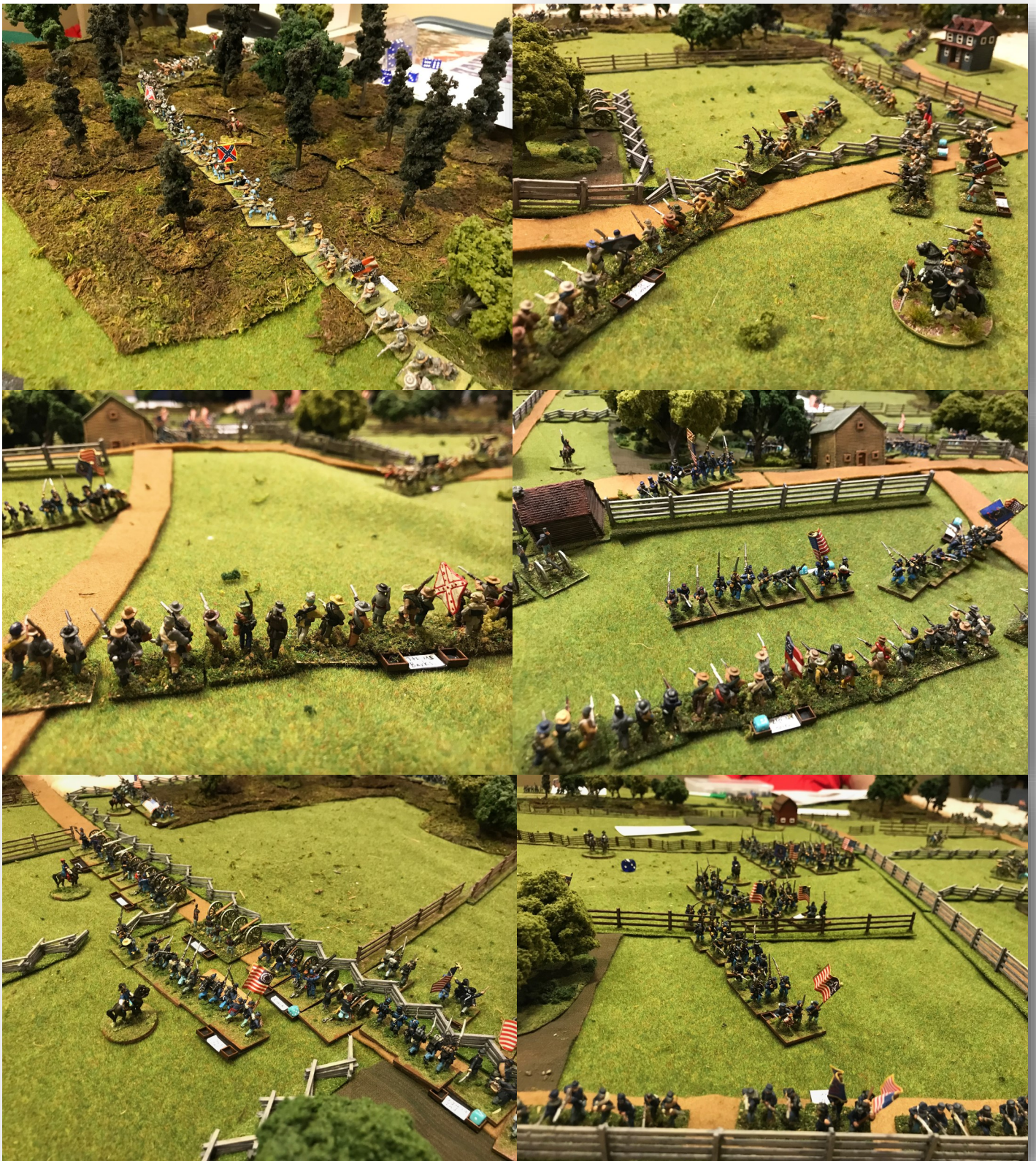
More views of the first night's action where we spent most of the time getting set up and learning the rules! Hood's disjointed attack gets stopped in the woods while the remainder of Longstreet's divisions move up and begin their attack. Union reinforcements race desperately to get to the front lines before the defense crumbles.

Several more views of the battlefield from the second night. Barksdale's brigade finally clears the hill while the Union center evaporates. However, stiff resistance on the flanks forces the Confederated to focus on the center, but poor command rolls and the terrain prevent any kind of decisive breakthrough.

(cont. from p30) of the attackers.

The Confederate attack started out strong, but fizzled out during the middle of the game. Whether it was an unfamiliarity with the rules systems, poor planning, or a combination of both, the Confederates were definitely behind the historical timetable. By the end of the first night (about 4 hours of play) the Union center was threatened, but the flanks were still holding strong.

On the second night the Confederates made some serious progress with Barksdale finally overrunning the hill that looked down upon the Union center and several Union brigades faltered and fell back. All of a sudden the Confederates just had to get their troops moving and they would cut the Union forces in half. However, the terrain and some bad command rolls constantly thwarted the Confederate advantage. Coupled with the heavy resistance on the flanks and serious casualties, getting enough combat power to the center was going to be a challenge.

At the end of about 7 1/2 hours of playing we figured that there was still 2-3 more turns still left before a winner was decided. With the game needing to be taken down we had to call it as a draw at that point. Special mention to Steve for setting up the beautiful game board and creating great looking orchards in between the first and second nights!

Naturally, there will be questions about how the rules performed and what we thought. A very large game that involves the Battle of Gettysburg probably isn't the ideal way to try a new set of rules! One member was pretty enthusiastic, two would probably play at any time, and another two were a bit skeptical about some of the systems, but would still play. First, the command system worked well and it is a unique idea to generate staff officers that can assist with various orders each turn. The 1:20 scale felt right in terms of movement and firing, so those looking for a more tactical game than Brigade Fire & Fury should be interested.

The casualty system was a bit fiddly and there was something about the charge mechanic that seemed off, but there was probably a chance we weren't doing things correctly. It is much different than other ACW rules that we've played over the years and it is heavily firepower orientated, which may or may not be right for your gaming group. Overall, however, it was a good first test of the system and no doubt we'll play it again soon.

By The Sword

The Campaign For Marnon

THE RETURN OF THE FALSE PROPHET OF THE SAN JUANS

A COMPLETE FICTIONAL COLONIAL CAMPAIGN FOR HISTORICAL MINIATURE GAMING

Be sure to check out our various campaigns for rules such as WMA, TSATF, and BFE II on our web site.

With this being the first issue of 2018 it's probably time to take stock of what is going on in terms of the gaming we hope to do this coming year and where the hobby is going. I find myself entering the realm of many other gamers who are going to just focus on a few periods this year. There is too much out there right now and it's also coming too fast, so there is a tendency to get distracted and go off in a million directions. I'm going to finish my 10mm Samurai army for WMA, then start on a Korean army to face it as one of my primary goals. I am currently working on painting a 28mm Republican Roman army to face off against my Seleucids that I documented building in recent issues. The remainder of my time will be spent adding a few units for Fire & Fury, Battles For Empire 2, some terrain, and will hopefully get back into BKC2 now that the 3rd edition has been scrubbed. No new rules systems (at least at this time!) at this point as I think I've settled on those that I'll be playing for quite some time. You could literally devote your entire forthcoming year of gaming just learning new rules systems! I also need to paint my genestealers for Space Hulk and play many of the various boardgames that are getting stacked higher and higher in my gaming room!

In terms of the hobby in general, I think this is the year where there's even more Kickstarter or special sets released. There seems to be a tendency at the moment to go back and revisit older gaming projects by putting out a new version with a ton of components. You can see this with Hannibal, Twilight Imperium, GW is supposedly re-releasing Epic, and even Compass is going to redo the popular Third World War series by GDW. Yes, what's old is new again, but with much better graphics! Board games with miniatures will continue to expand with games like Gloomhaven, 878 Vikings, etc., continuing to see growth and many more similar offerings. I think the danger here that I'm seeing is that most gamers don't have the time to play many of their new games more than once, even though they desperately want to. The lure of new items coming out so fast continues to push games that they like into the background as everyone focuses on the next greatest thing. I myself am starting to wonder if I should focus on a few game series as trying to collect/play all of the things I'm interested in is getting to be impossible. The issue with many of these game systems is that you just can't pick up the rules, play the game, then move on. You need to re-invest yourself in the rules, test out a few turns, then play the game several times to make the effort worthwhile. Many gamers, however, rather than spend the time on these systems are just returning to something they already know well or simpler systems. Meanwhile, the stacks of unplayed rules, games, and unpainted miniatures grows larger.

I'm also interested in how much the boardgame world is cutting into miniatures games. There are some high quality products being put out right now (many with miniatures!) that are challenging even the best miniatures systems. It's a good problem to have and shows the hobby is healthy. Everyone promises in Spring of each year to play their old games, but we'll see what happens when summer comes.