

Warning Order

ISSUE #51



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WFHGS

Editorial: Whatever Happened to Playtesting?

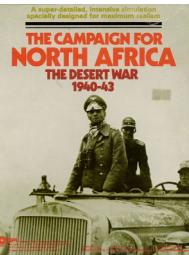
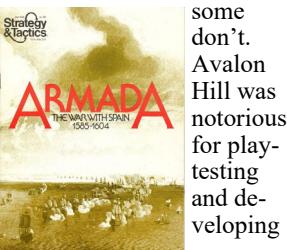
An interesting hobby phenomenon at the moment is the large number of games and rules that are being rushed out, seemingly without being thoroughly playtested.

In the rush to push product out the door, satisfy fans, sell miniatures, etc., many of these products have questionable value and can at times have the opposite effect of what they were intended for, which is to push people to other games!

Playtesting, at least in hobby terms, is spending time with a game that is in pre-publication to iron out issues with graphics, systems, cards, pieces, rules, etc., so that the finished product is playable. Naturally this would include play balance, number of players the game is designed for, etc., but the main idea is to produce a playable, finished product.

Now some companies take this seriously and

some don't. Avalon Hill was notorious for playtesting and developing



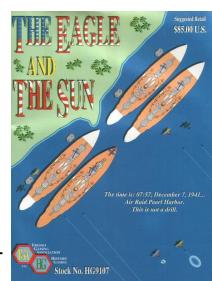
games sometimes for years before publication. SPI on the other hand, had limited playtesting and just pushed games out the door. Both companies had successes and failures over the years that they were in business, but today most gaming companies do limited (and I stress limited) playtesting.

There are three games that serve as poster children for this that will live in infamy in the history of the wargaming hobby. The first is, of course, SPI's Campaign for North Africa. 10 feet of maps, thousands of counters, and the need for an accounting degree to log all of the fuel and supply needs each turn. The campaign game was estimated at over 1000 hours and those that bought it found the entire thing completely unplayable. Rumors quickly started swirling in hobby circles that the campaign game was never playtested at all.

Another entry was SPI's Armada, which again, according to many gamers was an unplayable disaster. This was not uncommon for many magazine wargames, which

strangely enough still continues to this day. The need to produce a magazine and a game on a tight production schedule meant that they quickly created maps, counters, rules, and hopefully they were playable at the end of the day! As an owner of many Strategy & Tactics games over the years I can attest to this as only a handful have been worth keeping or even trying a second play.

Then there was The Eagle & The Sun, which is almost as famous as Campaign for North Africa.



Seven maps, thousands of counters, etc., made for a beautiful, but unplayable monster wargame. To this day, gamers are still trying to rewrite the rules just to use the beautiful components!

These aren't the only playtesting disasters in the history of the hobby, but they certainly do stand out in terms of what not to do in terms of getting a game ready.

Playtesting is not an easy thing to do as my experience with GDW's Phase Line Smash as well as Blood & Thunder will attest. First, you get a package in the mail that has very basic (cont. on p3)

Inside this issue:

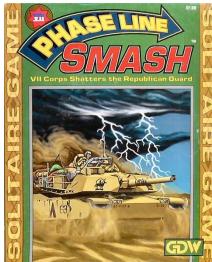
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Special points of interest:

- Two new Engagements scenarios.
- A complete SaltCon report featuring three days of Hail Caesar battles.
- Reviews of GMT's new SpaceCorp game along with Pacific Fury and Across The Narva from Revolution Games.
- Several battle reports.

Whatever Happened to Playtesting? (cont.)

(cont. from p2) components. In fact, you often may need to make your own! The rules are sometimes far along and at times they are just ideas that need to be fleshed out. You must set up the game, play it, play it some more, then play it yet again, all the time making notes to report back. Something that sounds fun becomes a chore and many playtesters quit during the process. If the game or rules or ever produced, you usually get a free copy. If it was worth it or not is debatable. Often, after I got a copy for playtesting I never played the game again!



Which brings us up to today and there's no need to look any further about the state of playtesting than Warlord Games' Cruel Seas. Take an interesting subject (WW2 Channel and island actions), sell some beautiful ship models, pack a rulebook with incredible eye candy, and offer a fast, furious game that can be finished in a few hours. For most of today's gamers, what's not to like? Well, for one thing, 10 pages of errata! Yes, that's right, 10 pages. If that was a board game from GMT or MMP gamers would be assembling outside the company offices with torches and pitchforks!

Whether it was because Warlord was hurrying to ship product for Christmas, a number of oversights, design coordination issues, etc., we'll never know. The amazing thing in all of this is how "accepting" gamers were about this! You just spent who knows how much money for a set of rules that wasn't really tested and may have to be rewritten, yet gamers can't wait to get the cool ship models to the table! Others have spawned threads showing mods, rewrites, new charts, etc., in an effort to make the game playable.

Here's a hint: it's not your job to make the game playable. It's the company's that sold you this set of rules! Today's gamers are afraid to speak their minds on some of these issues, but instead there's this thought of, "I spent all of this money on this game and I better make it work or I'm going to look stupid". Maybe gamers should wait for



some reviews or battle reports by veteran gamers before blindly ordering everything in sight. I haven't even broached the subject about the weird scale used in the game and shooting ranges either.

I've learned my lesson on these things and try to apply it where necessary. For example, the last Strategy & Tactics game/magazine I bought was Reconquista probably 7-8 years ago. The rules were such a mess that what should have been an incredibly interesting subject turned into a nightmare. I sold it and have never bought another issue of S&T. I had been under the allure of magazine games for quite some time, but after numerous problems I decided to forego them until I read a review. Will Decision Games ever take notice of gamers like myself who won't buy their product? Probably not. Their production model depends upon subscriptions and one gamer or two not buying their stuff won't make a difference. To miniatures rules companies, however, a tide of gamers not purchasing their items can be the death knell of their business.

It's also not always the playtesters fault as I've found out a few times over the last several years. My group and I tested several sets of rules for designers, with two of them taking everything we sent in and using it while others ignored every single idea or suggestion to improve the rules. Whether it was arrogance, pride, not wanting to change things, etc., at least two of those sets of rules were published with a lot of problems and made little to no headway in the hobby. The two who did listen produced well liked, highly thought of sets of rules that will be used for quite some time.

If this was a different age in the hobby, I think that there would be far more scrutiny applied to game playtesting. As it stands today there are simply too many games, rules, figs, etc., to thoroughly review what went right or what went wrong. By that I mean if you're one of only a handful of companies putting out a

game, then you can afford to take your time, playtest things thoroughly, make corrections, then get the product out the door and chances are that it will be OK. Today, with so many companies trying to be first and with the ability to issue "living rules", PDF changes, 3rd party add-ons, etc., there is an attitude of let's just get this thing out the door and we can fix any issues as they come up.



Can playtesting thrive in this kind of modern hobby environment? That's a good question and the answers are all over the board. Some games are certainly going to still see the Avalon Hill treatment of testing, changes, testing, more changes, development, more testing, etc., and a well polished game will emerge. GMT's SpaceCorps is a great example of this. However, for every SpaceCorps there is going to be a Cruel Seas, where there appears to be an arrogant attitude towards sticking to the release timeline, which will take priority.

Some of this fault also lies with today's gamers, who at times are too accepting of these kinds of things. Upgraded army books (for no reason other than a money grab) for various games, limited playtesting on rules, expansions for the sake of expansions, etc., are all shrugged off. If there's problems there's no acknowledgement of them, rather gamers just move on to the next game where the process is repeated. Companies have noticed this and realized that they have little to fear from gamers. If they throw something at the wall and it doesn't stick they just move on to the next thing, knowing that gamers will probably buy whatever product they push out the door.

Will this change in the future? At this time I would have to say no. Just look at the number of games coming out on Kickstarter. Do you think all of those have been playtested thoroughly? No, they haven't, but yet gamers are going to support all of them! In the end everyone has stacks and stacks of games, rules, figs, etc., that have been used maybe once and it's on to the next thing. A few spectacular failures, however, might convince some of these companies to take their time, playtest thoroughly, then release a game that will have few, if any changes. That would be refreshing indeed.

Glendale Opening Moves

F&F Battle Report

This is one of those cautionary tales about biting off more than you can chew in the gaming hobby! We usually do a game during the Christmas holiday season and if you've been reading these issues for any length of time you probably have seen some of the battle reports. While everyone is off shopping, seeing movies, etc., we meet for breakfast and do a 4-6 hour game for those who are around.

As is our usual M.O., we didn't decide anything until the night before about what we were going to play! Most of the group had not played the new edition of Fire & Fury, so we brought everything we had, set breakfast for 10am, then we would game from 11am to 4pm. In terms of plans for our group it was one of the better ones! That's where things started to go wrong.

One of our guys (who had a lot of the CSA figs) couldn't make it until 11:30, then we chose Glendale for the battle and started setting up things. This is where reality made a painful entrance. First off, the playing space was too small, so we measured, cut some off, moved things around, etc., which took quite some time. Then we started to see just how big this game was and that we should have started at about 8am setting everything up! Around 12:30 we finally had most of the stuff ready to go and then looked at the turns and victory conditions. There was no way we were going to finish this in anything less than 6-8 hours and we only had 3 1/2 hours left!

We decided to just use what we had as



a learning game to get familiar with the changes as only two of us had played the new version. We finally decided to just play the opening few hours of the battle so that everyone could become more familiar with the rules, then we could do the full battle at another time. Yes, planning is not our specialty!

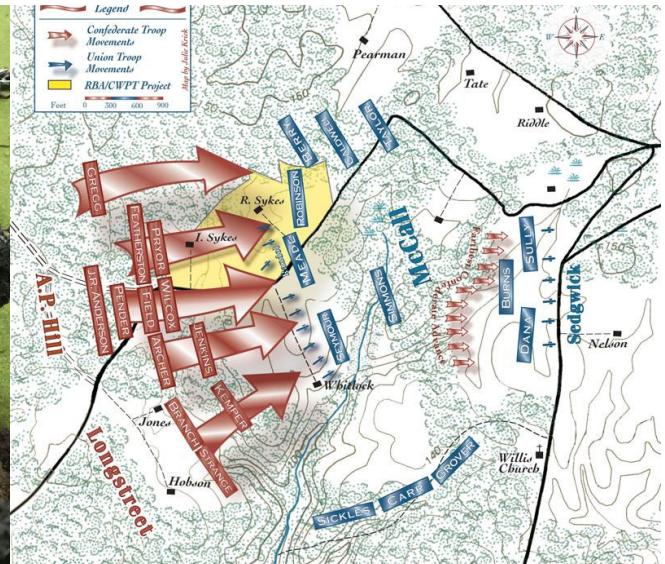
Glendale, also known as Frayser's Farm, was part of the Seven Days Battle or the Peninsula Campaign in 1862. In this battle (as with a few others) Lee's plan to inflict a crushing defeat on withdrawing Union troops was met with poor execution. For our part, we would focus on the part that did go well for Lee, namely the initial attacks which had a reasonable chance for success.

The terrain is particularly nasty for this battle and the pictures don't do it justice. We decided to just use the minimal amount of trees or the entire board would have been covered in forests!

Using some felt and cut out materials, we fashioned the forested areas and added a few trees for effect. There were quite a few roads that crossed the area and very few openings, which is where both sides would try to make their attack or defense, with limited area for artillery fire. There was one small village and a few farms, but the forest is what really dominated the battlefield and would prove to be a huge obstacle for all sides.

The Union player who was McCall should have been on the Confederate side as right from the start they wanted to attack! This came as a surprise to those of us who were on the Confederate side as the last thing we thought that would happen was to come onto the board and go on defense from the start! However, that's exactly what happened and the strategy almost worked. The long lines of stands representing the Confederate columns had to make some quick detours to get into firing positions once they saw the Union forces coming out to meet them. Due to the forests, trying to go anywhere except on the roads was a major challenge.

The fighting began almost immediately as the leading brigades of each side started long range exchanges of fire. At this stage many of the Confederate brigades were still getting straightened out, so the disordered results just made the matter worse. On top of that the Union started getting some good die rolls and the Confederates starting (cont. on p5)



Glendale Opening Moves (cont.)

F&F Battle Report



(cont. from p4) losing stands. As more of Longstreet's and Hill's brigades started coming on, there were some traffic problems and just getting brigades into the firing line was difficult. At this point it looked like the attack was going to fail badly.

Confederate forces did finally regain their footing and a series of firefights erupted across the front lines. Both sides were pouring more men into the fray as reinforcements started to trickle in. Slowly and surely, the lines began to extend from a few feet to almost 3/4 of the table. The Union was clearly trying to force the issue at the choke points and the Confederates were simply trying to break out into the open. The Confederates had more men at the moment, but the terrain was proving to be a huge obstacle towards any maneuvers.

A momentary crisis occurred when a Union brigade smashed through a weakened Confederate brigade and a hole opened up in the lines. The reserve brigade in that sector was thrown in and it rolled poorly the first few rolls and was routed as well. All of a sudden, for just a moment, it looked like Longstreet's command was going to crumple up and the game was going to end early!

It was at this stage that the continual attacking by the Union brigades began to take its toll. Weakened by a number of firefights, repelling several attacks, etc., their front line began to give way. The Confederate side, seeing its chance, pushed more units into the line and pressed the issue. The Union side, which had been rolling pretty hot for the first half of the game, suddenly cooled off and it began to tell. The Union side began to place reserves in case things went badly.

Which is exactly what happened. Several charges succeeded in pushing the Union brigades back and then a few here and there routed back towards the village. The next round of Union reinforcements would be needed to fill gaps in the line and start to shore up the defenses. It was at this point that the game was called as a slight Confederate victory, but there was still a long ways to go.

Although it ended up as a fun game, we were disappointed at not being able to play the entire battle, which if you read the opening section of this article, was entirely our own fault! Even though this looked like a small game, when you start closely examining things it is actually pretty large. We did like the new version of Fire & Fury, so the game did serve its purpose as a learning tool and now we are looking forward to trying a bigger battle next time.



Engagements 27: Knock Out The Bridgeheads

Situation: Red has effected a major river crossing and now has two bridgeheads in the area. Additional Red forces are arriving and are trying to get across the river as fast as possible to help with the expected Blue counterattack. Blue is assembling forces for a major attack to knock out the bridgeheads and prevent Red's breakout attempt.

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 traversable and while the forests are light, they do provide cover. The villages are a mix of stone and wood buildings. The red boxes are the bridgehead areas where Red's forces can deploy. The one crossing where the road meets the river has been destroyed and the river is too wide深深 for anything to cross except on a bridge.

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:

- 6 units of infantry
- 2 units of anti-tank guns or ATGMs
- 3 units of armor
- 1 recon unit
- 2 batteries of artillery (off-board)

Reinforcements:

- 4 units of infantry
- 6 units of armor
- 2 units of mech infantry
- 1 unit of mortars
- 1 unit of combat engineers

Set Up: Red's forces can be set up in any formation in either or both of the red boxed areas.

Red Orders: Exit as many units as possible off the road at either A and/or B. If that is not possible, hold onto the bridgeheads at all costs.

Blue Forces: Blue's forces have been assembling at Village V2 in preparation for a counterattack on Red's bridgeheads. Additional forces are still moving up on the roads towards V2.

Blue Forces:

- 4 units of infantry
- 1 unit of self propelled guns
- 2 units of armor
- 1 anti-tank or ATGM unit
- 1 artillery battery (off-board)

Reinforcements:

- 2 units of infantry
- 1 recon unit
- 4 armor units
- 2 mech infantry units

Blue Orders: Assemble forces for a counterattack against one or both of Red's bridgeheads. Attack when ready, even if all of the reinforcements have not arrived. If the bridgeheads are unable to be destroyed, prevent Red from exiting forces off of either A or B on the map.

Set Up: Blue's starting forces begin either in Village V2 or within 6" of the village.

Blue Reinforcements Arrival: Roll 1D6 each turn with the number rolled being the number of units that arrive at either road entrance/exit A or B until all available reinforcements have arrived.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: Red must place one pontoon bridge at each boxed area on the map. Each pontoon bridge allows Red to

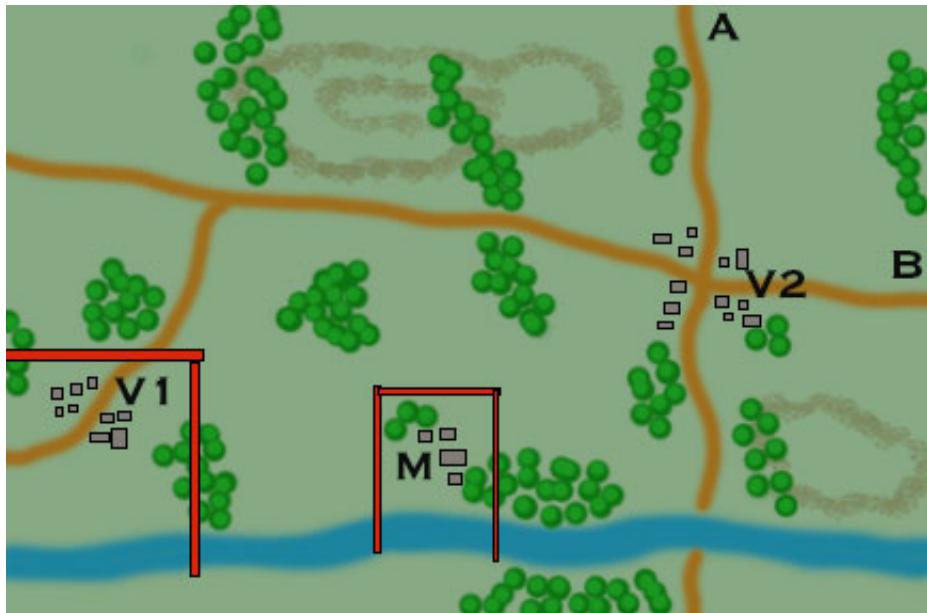
cross one unit of reinforcements each turn. At the beginning of each turn, roll 1D6 and accumulate the number rolled each turn until the total reaches 12, at which point Red can place a third pontoon bridge anywhere along the river.

Pontoon bridges can only be destroyed by direct fire. Use whatever miniatures rules selected for this scenario to determine how much damage each pontoon bridge can take and you may need to come up with a system to allow for delays/repairs where necessary.

Victory Conditions: Red wins if they are able to exit 10 units off the board at either A or B. Red can achieve a draw if at least two of the pontoon bridges are still intact at the end of the game. Any other result is a Red loss. Blue can win if they destroy at least two of the pontoon bridges. Blue can achieve a draw if no Red forces exit off of either A or B. Any other result is a Blue loss.

Variants: Allow the destroyed bridge across the river to be crossed by infantry only units. Assign combat engineers to Red to speed crossing or to repair damages. If your rules allow it, ferries could be added in addition to the pontoon bridges or to balance out the scenario, allow only ferries and no pontoon bridges.

Airpower and anti-aircraft could also be added, with some tasked to provide ground support or to attack the bridgeheads, while Red could use air support to aid the breakout or protect the pontoon bridge areas.



Engagements 28: The Spur

Situation: Blue has a dominating position at the end of a large series of hills, which either prohibit movement or makes it very difficult. The position also guards one of the few road nets in the area which Red needs to seize to continue their offensive. Red will need to launch a major attack to seize this position.

Period: WW2 to Modern, but could be used for earlier periods with some modifications.

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

Terrain Notes: The hills are steep and while the forests are light, they do provide cover (see special rules). The villages are a mix of stone and wood buildings. The red lines along the edges of the map shows where Red's forces can deploy. The brown bars show where the hills cannot be entered/crossed due to how steep the terrain is. See the special rules for the roads across the hills.

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.

Enter Board at Start:

10 units of infantry

2 units of mech infantry

4 units of armor

2 units of self-propelled guns (Stugs, SU-76, etc.)

1 unit of combat engineers

1 battery of artillery and 1 battery of heavy mortars (off-board)

Set Up: Red's forces enter on Turn 1 anywhere along the red bordered areas of the map.

Red Orders: Seize Village V1 and the fortified position above it, then exit as many units as possible at road entrance/exit A.

Blue Forces: Blue's forces are positioned to maintain control of the fortified spur area and to prevent Red from exiting forces into the Blue rear areas.

Spur Defense:

4 units of infantry

1 unit of heavy weapons

1 unit of armor

1 anti-tank or ATGM unit

V2 Defense & Reserve:

2 units of infantry

2 units of mech infantry

2 units of armor

1 anti-tank or ATGM unit

1 artillery battery (off-board)

Blue Orders: Hold the spur and V1 for as long as possible. If this position falls, use the V2 Defense & Reserve units along with any other surviving units to prevent Red exiting at A.

Set Up: The Spur Defense forces can be set up anywhere in Village V1 or the fortified area overlooking the village. The V2 Defense & Reserve units must be set up within 12" of Village V2.

Blue Fortified Area: This village overlooks the village and has LOS to any point on the map except the hill area directly behind the position. The position consists of firing positions/bunkers connected by trenches.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: The hilly terrain surrounding the pass is very steep and there should be severe movement penalties for crossing each elevation. Vehicles may only cross the hill areas on the roads, making movement by vehicles on the upper elevations extremely difficult. If a

vehicle unit is destroyed on a road in the hill area, roll 1D6 and on a 4, 5, or 6 the road is blocked and must be cleared for other vehicle units to continue to move along the road.

Victory Conditions: Red needs to exit at least 6 units off of the road by the end of the game and seize Village V1 and the Blue fortified area on the hill for a major victory. If Red only seizes Village V1 and the Blue fortified area it is only a minor victory. Any other result is a Blue victory.

Variants: Depending upon what each gaming group has for fortifications (which can range from light to very heavy) Red should get an opening turn airstrike or two to pin down the Blue defenders while Red crosses the open areas. If Red is having a difficult time clearing V1 additional artillery assets could be added to help the attack.

Weather could also play a factor and can be used as a balancing mechanism. Light snow would benefit the defender while rain would aid the attacker in getting closer to the defenses without being seen. A night attack could also be tried, although the rules for those in most game systems are far more trouble than its worth.

This scenario could be used for earlier periods by changing the armor units to cavalry, the mech infantry to dragoons or light cavalry for ancients and changing the off board artillery to on board units.



Memoirs of a Miniatures and Board Wargamer Pt. 38

Getting Ready For a Game-Then & Now

A topic that comes up every so often is game preparation, which runs the gamut from just showing up and throwing things on the table, to elaborate scenarios with detailed maps, OB's, etc. Whether it is an RPG game back in the day like Gamma World where someone spent a month creating a world to a group of friends each putting a brigade of ACW troops on a generic battlefield and starting the game, preparation for game day/night takes on all forms.

My first real experience with game preparation was when I was introduced to Dungeons & Dragons back in 1976-77. Thinking that it was the most incredible game ever, I was able to get a set of the boxed rules and created something for some gaming friends. Drawing out a world, places to visit, characters, etc., set me down a path that was to go on for quite some time! Over the next decade I probably created worlds for no less than ten different RPGs, spending thousands of hours, which made me see why the pre-made adventures sold in stores were so popular!



weeks before a Harpoon game just to get things ready. This was way before the Internet, so everything had to be done by hand on paper, which at the time seemed normal, but today would never be accepted.

Of course there was a ton of preparation for campaign games. I've written about this in the past, but we did several modern micro-armor campaigns using WRG's 1950-85 rules, Challenger, Combat Commander, and GDW's Tac Force. No matter what the rules, there was a lot of agonizing preparation. Finding maps or making them from scratch, orders of battle, coming up with campaign rules, adding ideas from wargame magazines such as air combat, and so on took weeks to get ready for something this big. The funny thing is that no one really complained about any of it!

If you're thinking that maybe it was just me that had this OCD type behavior, you would be wrong! I participated in a number of RPG campaigns, ACW campaigns/battles, Starfleet Battles campaigns, and so forth where other gamers had clearly put in a ton of time. Arriving with their stacks of papers and maps, opening up 3-ring binders full of campaign notes, and so on, they had clearly tried to the best of their ability to set up a great battle or campaign. As with everything in life, sometimes things don't work out so the battles were lopsided or a campaign fell apart quickly, but it wasn't due to a lack of effort.

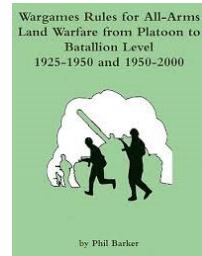
As the 80s ended, you began seeing a major change in game preparation. As RPGs went through their dark period and burnout stages, board games seemingly in limbo with the demise of SPI and Avalon Hill, plus the appearance of Warhammer 40K, game preparation took off in a new direction. For the 70s and right up to the 90s the things I had just described were the status quo. Sure, there were gaming groups who just showed up and threw things on the table for a game, but they were derided and held up as an example of what not to do. But that changed....

Enter the points system and the end of game preparation as we knew it. Certain-

ly there had been points systems in historical miniatures rules, but other than Ancients tournaments they were hardly ever used. All of a sudden, almost every game that was coming up used a points system. Now there were some who took this seriously, spending hour upon hour finely refining their army list painting up the optimum number of units against certain opponents and so on, but primarily it became a show up and throw 500 points each on the table for a quick game.

Despite this, a few gamers I knew and myself still tried to hang onto the old ways. Many of us would still create maps, orders, lists of units, etc., in an effort to make the game better or more interesting for those participating. With

the advent of the Internet and so many gaming sites today, game preparation is even easier, which is why it's astounding that not many use it for that! Even to this day we occasionally participate in some games that have had a lot of effort put into them just to get things to the tabletop. Sadly, however, these are far and few between.



Today there are usually all kinds of scenarios that come with the rules or most games use a point system. Also, there are a large number of scenario books for many games, so you just show up with your miniatures, lay out the terrain, and get started. Granted, this does save a ton of time and probably fits what most gamers are into today. Long gone are days of calling your gaming friends to see what kind of forces they have or could they have certain units done by the next game. Transferring maps from the library to paper, busily copying army lists, and so forth that use to be part of every gamer's life has been left behind.

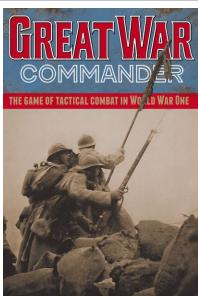


Yes, today's games, miniatures, terrain, and accessories are dramatically improved. However that passion for the weekly or bi-weekly game seems a bit diminished and even my own group is guilty of it at times. Often, if nothing is ready, life got in the way that week, etc., we just choose Warmaster Ancients and roll out our 1500 point armies. As gamers we're definitely not going back so game preparation going forward will probably get even simpler or vanish.

To say that GMT's Combat Commander series has been popular would be an understatement. With four boxed sets, several supplements, and additional material available in the C3I magazine, there is enough WW2 tactical level gaming here to last gamers several years!

One of the things gamers in my group and I often discuss is why this game system hasn't been used for other periods. Arab-Israeli Wars, Vietnam, Korea, etc., would seem to be fruitful ground for expansions. Hexasim, a French wargame company, has answered that question with their release called Great War Commander (GWC).

GWC is the first in what hopefully will be several boxed sets in a series transporting the Combat Commander system to WW1. Hexasim is known for their high quality products and the boxed game here is no exception. You get several double-sided mapsheets, several



sheets of Euro style counters with rounded edges, several card decks, a large terrain card, rules, scenarios, and a play book. The components are all top of the line and combined they make for a pretty impressive package.

The maps show some real artistry, varying from a landscape of shell holes in no man's land to maps covered in forests or an entire large village for certain scenarios. One of the unique things here is that the victory point, casualty, time, etc., tracks are printed on each mapsheet, which at least to me was a huge upgrade over GMT's Combat Commander games. The counters are striped for the 1914 scenarios and have decidedly fewer kinds of squads than in the CC games, making set up far easier. You also notice something that's not in the CC games; tanks!

Yes, tanks are pretty much absent from all CC games (except for the C3I supplement that had a few scenarios for them in 1940), but not here. There are counters, rules, and several scenarios that feature French tanks, which leads to a few small issues with the game. First, the rules regarding tanks are all over the place and they should have had their own section. Hunting through the rules during a game for rules on tanks wasn't fun. The other small issue is that only the French have tanks.

This first game in the series has a strange choice of combatants. There are Germans and French for 1914-1918 along with French tanks. On top of that there are the Americans, who only have infantry. No British or Russian troops are anywhere to be found and rumor is that they will be making appearances in future supplements.

For the uninitiated, Great War Commander is very similar to the Combat Commander series of games. Each player receives a number of cards in their starting hand based upon their "posture", i.e., attack, recon, or defend. You may then play a number of orders each turn defined by the scenario/year and/or actions or discard a set number of cards. At the end of your turn you draw new cards back to your original hand size. When you reach the end of your deck, the game turn marker is advanced and you reshuffle the deck.

There are also a series of "trigger" cards or effects on the cards themselves, such as snipers, events, and time (this moves the time marker) that seem to pop up at the most inopportune moments! There's no die rolling as the die numbers are printed at the bottom of each cards, so you will regularly turn over a large number of cards each turn. Orders are given by activating an officer and all units in his command radius or to individual units. Orders include Move, Fire, Advance, Artillery Request, Rout, Recover, and more, with each order allowing the units to do particular things each turn, although each unit and/or officer can only be activated once each turn.



Firing is done by taking one weapon or unit's fire strength, adding a modifier for each additional unit firing, modifying by command, range, terrain, etc., then adding a die roll (on the cards). The defender gets the terrain bonus and a defense roll against their morale. If they fail they are broken and if they fail again that unit is eliminated and victory points are scored. Once a side reaches their casualty level for that scenario they have lost or when the time marker hits Sudden Death and a die roll is made that is lower than the turn the Sudden Death marker is on, the game ends.

What results is a chaotic situation where both sides never seem to have enough of the right cards! Most games go down to the very end and the scenarios have very high replay value. Naturally, this lack of control drives some gamers crazy, but if you are looking at a fast paced, interesting tactical level game, then this is right up your alley! Great War Commander certainly falls into line with the rest of the Combat Commander universe, so you just need to read the changed sections of the rules for WW1 combat and you're ready to play.

These changes include rules dealing with tanks and aircraft, which are present in many scenarios. The new Offensive order in GWC that allows for a human wave or large attack is also featured, as are rules for creeping barrages and gas attacks. The good thing for CC players is that these are just new things and there's no need to relearn a whole new game system. After playing CC for years, we were able to get right into the scenarios and thought the rules additions were pretty good and didn't take much effort.

There's a wide range of scenarios that come with the game that will keep you busy for quite some time. From tank attacks across no man's land to desperate fighting in deep, dark forests, there is certainly enough for CC and WW1 fans alike. There are some small issues and a page of errata, but that's not much for what you get with this game. We are looking forward to the next module in the series, which should be the British.

Blast From The Past Pt. 37: Fantasy Wargames

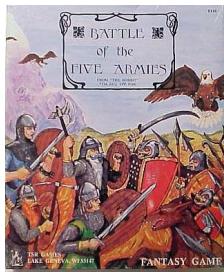
I've mentioned this before, but most wargamers who have been around as long as I have at one time or another have dabbled in fantasy gaming. Whether it was role-playing, skirmish, or full battles with miniatures or cardboard counters, there was something about commanding fantasy armies. Of course back in the 70s and 80s many of us read a lot of fantasy and sci-fi series, which certainly fueled the passion for fantasy gaming.

However, what we're talking about here is fantasy wargaming and by that I mean commanding large armies with paper maps and cardboard counters. You would have thought in a time when everyone who was interested in any kind of gaming at all was involved in fantasy in some way that there would be a ton of these kinds of wargames, but you would be wrong! In fact, the quest for the best fantasy wargame for many of us would go on and on back in the day, with no real champion emerging. This installment is going to look at some of those games from decades ago and try to see why not many have survived to be thoroughly played today.

The earliest game I can remember owning and playing was the original Battle of Five Armies. As with most others from that era, I had read The Hobbit and Lord of the Rings, so when I saw this in the local store I saved up my money and got it. Crude by today's standards, it was a hex and counter wargame that I was able to get into easily and it gave me hope that there would be many, many more of these games to come, which didn't really happen.

Another early fantasy wargame was White Bear & Red Moon by Chaosium, which was later remade by Avalon Hill as Dragon Pass. Unfortunately, I never played it, but saw it played a few times

and it's one of my great gaming regrets! The detail and passion that was put into the original version of that game really struck me as being what fantasy gaming was all about. It was a pretty sizeable and ambitious game for its



time and while rumors of a reprint continue to surface every now and then, I'll believe it when I see it.

Of course, no discussion about fantasy wargaming would be complete without something about The Lord of the Rings. In the 70s and 80s

it was required reading by all fantasy gamers and SPI put out three wargames on the topic. There were two mini-games; Gondor and Sauron, which were basic hex and counter wargames that covered the huge first battle at the end of the First Age and the game covered the siege of Gondor. They were available separately and in a huge package with SPI's War of the Ring. When this game came out, it stood at the height of fantasy wargaming, eclipsed only by fantasy role-playing. The beautiful map, counters, cards, and the ability to play a search and/or military campaign was too good to pass up.

Today it's hard to describe how prevalent fantasy role-playing was and how most other gaming took a back seat to it in the 70s and early 80s. So it was here with fantasy wargames. There were just so few that almost anything that came out was celebrated, bought, and played! That's not saying they were any good, but surprisingly, there were few to be had anywhere. You would have thought that game companies would be cashing in by providing board wargames that could also double as campaign settings, but pretty much everyone poured all of their resources into role-playing.

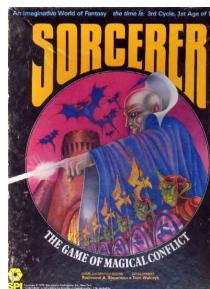
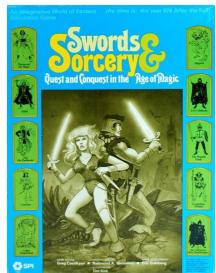
Two unusual entries into the mix were SPI's Sorcerer and Avalon Hill's Titan. Sorcerer just because of the weird colored map that could make one go blind! The game system depicted various sorcerers summoning creatures and units that battled for control of citadels throughout the world and it was actually pretty interesting. There were a large number of scenarios and you could play with 1-4 players. Titan was a big monster slugfest and just barely qualifies as a true wargame. More of an extended arena gladiatorial battle, players roamed a

strange land of triangular pieces, recruiting monsters and trying to defeat the other players. Not a short game by any means and occasionally fun if it went the distance. Today, both are still played by a small number of gamers and in the case of Titan, it got the deluxe treatment by Valley Games in what was a pretty good redesign.

There were others to be sure, such as SPI's Swords & Sorcery, which was a combination of role-playing and army level, very similar to their War of the Ring game. Others came and went, but there really wasn't anything out there that was going to dethrone the War of the Ring in terms of fantasy wargames. Again, this was surprising as fantasy gaming was fertile ground. Slowly, but surely, however, sci-fi roleplaying, better miniatures, etc., started cutting into the fantasy gaming realm. As we moved closer to the 80s, quite a few us back then thought that this next decade might see a shift from NATO vs the Warsaw Pact board games to fantasy and sci-fi. We were wrong.

However, the age of the magazine game and micro-games did arrive. Metagaming had produced Melee and Wizard, but no fantasy army level games. While they didn't get into the act others did. You can go on for quite some time about the impact of the micro-games, but they did set off a decade long trend that was tried by several game companies. These games only sold for a few dollars, had minimal components, the play-testing was questionable at times, and so on, but they were popular.

Along with Metagaming, Heritage eventually launched their Dwarfstar range of micro-games. There were a few that certainly fit the fantasy army level wargame category, which included Demonlord, Goblin, and Dragon Rage. (cont. on p11)



Blast From The Past Pt. 37: Fantasy Wargames (cont.)

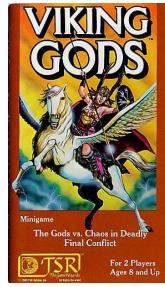
(cont. from p10) These three games were actually pretty good and are still thought well of even today where most of the games are available free for download so that you can make your own.

There were many others as well, including Steve Jackson Games' Necromancer, which features armies of undead slugging it out for control of a realm. Then there was Task Force Games, who had quite the run in the 80s with their Starfleet Battles and Starfire micro-game series, which were certainly some of the best selling micro-games of all time and are still around in one form or the other today! The popularity of those games convinced Task Force to release an entire series of games with uneven results. Some games such as

Intruder are still pretty good today while others like Checkpoint Omega have conveniently been forgotten.

Two of the games, however, qualify for the category we're discussing. These were Spellbinder and City States of Arkyll. Both games, like all in the series, came in a small format, where the rule book was shrink-wrapped with a small map and a half sheet of counters. The components were definitely minimal, but usable and they weren't going to win any awards. While the games were hit or miss, at least these two were playable, if not short. Both games can be finished in an hour or two, which is exactly the time frame that the micro-games were designed for.

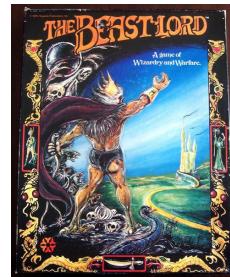
The Task Force micro-games were pretty much the end of an era. The micro-game craze came to an end, although TSR did produce a short lived line as well. These games had the benefit of being pretty well funded, so those that did eventually get published had good colored maps, the counters weren't half bad, and the games were at least better than average (well, except for Iceberg!) One of the more interesting games that fits here in this article was Viking Gods, which today is not easy to find and still gets some plays here and there.



This was also the era that saw the rise and fall of the SPI magazine Ares. Designed as a fantasy/sci-fi supplement to their very popular Strategy & Tactics magazine, the magazine put out almost two dozen issues and was gone. The titles were all over the place as was the quality. In typical SPI fashion the games were pushed out the door, whether they were seemingly ready or not. Some were close to a disaster while yet others are still popular today. Three of the games that were in Ares fit into our discussion about fantasy army level wargames.

They were Albion: Land of Faerie, Barbarian Kings, and Ragnarok. All of the Ares magazine games had full color maps, a full sheet of counters, and for the time were very professionally done. These three games weren't that bad, suffering from what pretty much all magazine games have in common in that the counter mix was too limited and the game needed more development time. This really hurt Barbarian Kings, which is a unique setting, but all the units are the same color and you need to write down which ones belong to which faction! Still, these games were a cut above the average fantasy fare.

Not to be outdone by others, Yaquinto entered the realm of fantasy games with The Beastlord. Yaquinto was a short lived company that was a cross between Battleline and Avalon Hill. They produced (for the time) high quality wargames with thick components as they tried to make their way to the top against Avalon Hill and SPI. The Beastlord was very similar to their sci-fi game Starfall, which had some unique ideas, but was long and procedural. The map, counters, rules, etc., are well done, but don't expect this game to be done in a few hours! There is a good game in there somewhere, but working your way through it is a challenge.

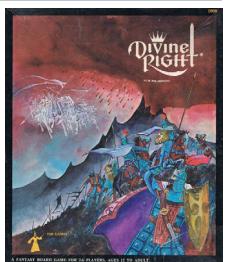


Finally, we get to the standard bearer for fantasy wargames for the 70s and 80s era, which was TSR's Divine Right. Definitely a monster game and sort of the fantasy equivalent of Twilight Imperium in terms of many components, number of players, diplomacy, game length, etc. This was the fantasy wargame that everyone was looking for, made all the more challenging by trying to find a copy! Combining armies, characters, intrigue, events, battles, and much, much, more, Divine Right stands alone in this conversation.

There was a reprint, which really did nothing to increase the availability as it is still hard to find to this day and goes for a pretty good price on Ebay. There has long been a rumored upgraded version, but the company who currently holds the rights, Excalibre Games, definitely isn't one known for putting out games on a schedule. Whether or not the gaming public will ever see this new version remains to be seen, but it should do well, especially with previous owners and grognards if it ever shows up again.

Today there are all kinds of fantasy army games, from Small World to Battlelore to the War of the Ring and all of its add ons. However, these are more Euro games than wargames as the interest in military style fantasy campaigns probably isn't enough to sustain a massive print run. Even back in the day while most of us desperately wanted a fantasy type wargame with huge forces, it was something that once you started playing it you weren't really sure why it was that interesting in the first place!

Basically, all we are left with are either the Euro type fantasy wargames of today or to find some of these older games on the secondary market. There is hope that some of them may reemerge after all these years such as Dragon Rage, which is beautiful to behold and gives me some hope in this area.



11th Annual Warmaster Tournament

Usually during the holiday season or in some years, right after that, we hold an annual Warmaster Ancients tournament. Most years we have four players, which works out well in that everyone gets a few games, has a chance to play against non-historical opponents, and it's a lot of fun to see how each army does.

This year we went with a slightly different format, although having everyone play three games still took precedence. Each army would get 1,000 points plus the units generated by the free, three territories that were rolled up using the second WMA book. Usually this gives everyone an army of somewhere between 1150-1250 points and a break point of 8-10 depending upon the army. This year we also rolled for the commanding general's trait from the same book to add some extra flavor to the campaign.

Both armies start out 20cm from the edge of the board and deploy by brigade to save time. If we could hang a curtain in the future that would save even more time, although usually there's so much room in between the armies that with a few good die rolls you can usually redeploy your forces. Games can end in two ways; the first being the turn limit, which is rolled for before the game, and the second is by an army hitting its break point, which is usually how we play our big WMA battles. The unusual thing this year is I can't remember any army hitting its break point!

This year we had Imperial Romans, Hittites, Indians, and for the first time, German Landsknechts. Definitely an interesting combination of armies, with the smaller forces of the Romans and Landsknechts going up against the masses of the Indians and Hittites. As usual, each army has its strengths and weaknesses, with the biggest usually being not enough commanders! During the tournament everyone usually foregoes extra commanders for additional units, which sometimes works well and sometimes not!

Since no one had played the Landsknechts before they were naturally hard to deal with. Coming up with tactics on the spur of the moment was pretty hard and it wasn't until the end of each game that most players figured out how to fight them, which of course was too late! The combination of artillery and muskets could only be overcome by concentrated



attacks, which none of their opponents was able to pull off!

The Indians did have one comeback victory over the Romans and did pretty good against the Hittites, but then were severely beaten by the Landsknechts where everything that could go wrong did go wrong. Poor command rolls, two blunders on the first turn, no saves, etc., doomed the Indians from the start and they never caught back up. Why I keep taking them is beyond me other than that they are fun to play! I'm pretty sure next year I will take Assyrians or Successors, just for a change of pace.

The Hittites were their usual annoying selves, launching attacks with their skirmish capable chariots, then grinding down the opposition with unit after unit of cheap, unarmored troops. Simple, but very effective and difficult to stop. The Romans simply had bad luck and had several victories taken away on the last turn or two. They usually started out well, then things went south at the end of the game. The Romans are definitely built to take on the other armies and negate their strengths, but bad die rolls will ruin you every time!

In the end it came out like this:

- | | |
|-----|---------------------|
| 1st | German Landsknechts |
| 2nd | Hittites |
| 3rd | Romans |
| 4th | Indians |

The Hittites won the Master of Mayhem award for causing the most casualties.



11th Annual Warmaster Tournament (cont.)



Several more images showing the wide variety of armies and tactics used in the tournament, which makes it a challenge for all sides. From the masses of the Hittites to withstanding the elephant charges of the Indians, each army did its best to take advantage of its strengths, although not always successfully!

Across the Narva by Revolution Games

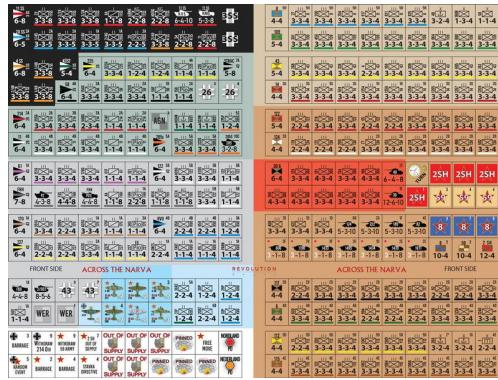
Game Review

I recently reviewed Konigsberg '45 from Revolution Games, which is unofficially part of the A Victory Lost series of games since it uses the same mechanics, combat tables, etc. Now another entry into the series has arrived focusing on the Soviet drive into Estonia during the early part of 1944.

As with Konigsberg, this a bare bones game that actually looks pretty good once you've opened it. Mine arrived in a ziploc bag with a set of rules, a cover for the game with a reference card of sorts on the back, a 22 x 34 map, and a sheet of counters. Certainly not a boxed game with a massive amount of components, play book, etc., that you might see with Compass or GMT, but impressive nonetheless for the price.

The map needs to be discussed here at length. It covers the fortified positions of the 3rd SS Corps around a major city in the north all the way down the river through much of Estonia. The first question is why isn't the map white or off gray since it was winter instead of the spring/summer green that it was printed in? The next thing is that there are a few crossings that are vital to the game that appear as thin roads that when counters are on them they are very hard to see. I didn't even see some of them until a few turns into the game. Also, half of the river is frozen until mid game, so it should have been outlined heavier to differentiate it. Despite these minor issues the map is suitable, functional, and most of it looks great.

The counters represent the combat units and HQs for the various formations in the game along with markers for



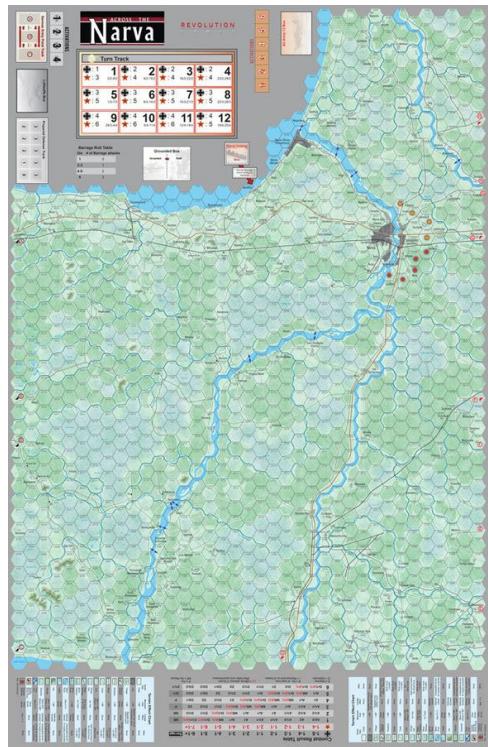
pinned, out of supply, etc. The counters are well done and work well in the game. The reference card really needed to be two sided and with two of them for a FTF game, but I understand the need for minimizing production costs here. The rules are again similar to Konigsberg in that they are straightforward, fairly easy to get into, and if you've played AVL, AVD, or Konigsberg you can be playing in a few minutes.

The one area where the rules need to be rewritten is the command situation for this game. The German one is pretty simple, but rules for it are in multiple places. The Soviet structure took a few readings to get right and then seeing it in practice during the game certainly helped, but the entire section needed to be rewritten and include every single reference to command all in the same section.

Despite the uneven nature of my comments on various game components so far, in the end this is a very challenging and fun to play game. It is a unique situation with the Soviets rolling in massive reinforcements while scattered German formations are coming to aid the defense. By scattered I mean all over the board! Various formations are all over the place and trying to get them back to within range of their HQs is an almost impossible task. Unlike in some other games in the series, each time a HQ is activated it can move/fight with all of its units plus three additional units in range. This certainly helps, but determining what to do with all of these units is a challenge.

The 3rd SS Corps is holed up in strong defensive positions that only get stronger each turn. If they get overrun and Soviet units enter the city they win the game. However, doing that isn't easy and it means that everything else on the board will be going nowhere as you only get so many chits per turn to activate formations. The alternatives are to cross the river in other places and try to cut the main highway leading to the city. The Soviets have several paths to victory, but none of them are going to be easy and require focus as there are a lot of distractions.

The other main issue and that is not apparent until a few turns in, is the terrain on the map. Yes, everything looks green and there's roads/trails all over



the map. However, that's only part of the story. Swamps that prevent mech movement, a handful of ferry sites on the unfrozen section of the river, trails and roads that go nowhere near the action and so on all contribute to a chaotic situation. Trying to pull the right chit, keep units in range of the HQs, rushing reinforcements forward, etc., is hard enough and then you add on the terrain and it's really hard to make any plan come together!

This is a very fluid situation with about 75% of the units coming onto the board during the first 3 or 4 turns. The command chit pull, random events, forced attacks (Stavka chits), etc., make for an unpredictable and exciting game. The game also has very high replay value and I'm sure it will hit the table at least two more times this year for myself. If you are into East Front wargaming then this is a must buy and if you like the AVL style of games, then again, this is one to add to your collection.

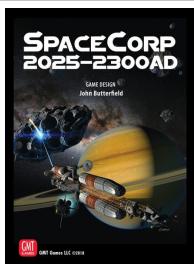
What is needed for the future? If this is going to be a series, then a series rulebook needs to be developed along with reference cards for each player along with set up cards. Both Konigsberg and Narva are games on the cusp of greatness that with a little more effort could at some point become classics .

SpaceCorp by GMT Games

Although GMT is primarily known for wargames, it does have a pretty good track record with non-wargame games such as Dominant Species, Twilight Struggle, Grand Prix, and more. Into this mix comes SpaceCorp, from long time designer John Butterfield. Definitely not a wargame, but its components, systems, etc., will be easily picked up by wargamers.

The components are up to the usual high standards from GMT, although there aren't really that many components outside of the multiple decks of playing cards. You get three game boards for each of the three eras, both of which are double-sided but with different purposes. There's a bag of wooden tokens, a sheet or so of counters, a multi-player rule book, solo play book, and several decks of cards. The map boards are wonderful and while the tokens and counters are functional, they won't win any awards. The cards look confusing at first, but as you play their design definitely helps the functionality of the game.

Here's the part that took a bit of getting used to until you see how it plays or read through the rules a few times. That is, there are three separate eras in the game; Mariners-mankind's jump to the LaGrange Points and Mars, Planeteers-moving out to the fringes of the solar system, and finally Starfarers-colonizing the neighboring star systems. Each era has its own board, cards, and chits, so it is entirely self contained and can be played separately. The eras can also be sewn together for a campaign



where you continue onto the next board by swapping out the cards, tokens, etc., then playing on.

Each player has a number of teams, represented by wooden cubes. Teams are used to explore and build bases, which earns the player profit (think of this as victory points). Getting to certain locations quickly, exploring, building a base, and then producing from some bases is the name of the game. In the different eras each of these actions can earn different amounts of profit, plus the choices expand as you progress through the eras. Simple, right?

Yes, in concept. However, in practice getting the right cards, moving to certain locations, getting the right cards again to explore, then having certain cards to build a base is harder than it seems! There are a number of "offer" cards on the side of each map where players can choose a Research action and take some of those or draw from the deck. You can usually take a card if you are below four in your hand, so getting cards can be a bit slow at times. Cards are rated for Move, Explore, and Build, plus some of them can be used to enhance your Infra, or infrastructure.

This is one of the keys to the game as you only start with Research and Move on your infrastructure card. By slowly adding better Move cards, Build, and Explore, you can quickly expand out by needing only a few cards. It comes down to a juggling operation in terms of moving teams, building infrastructure, exploring, getting bases set up to leap further out, and getting badly needed cards. The interesting thing here is that you can use other players infrastructure! Yes, this is a unique concept and the other player gets rewarded for it, but it can help you to achieve your goals much more quickly.

Movement in the first era is pretty straightforward, but as the eras progress the distances get longer and longer, so you need to be doing multiple things while a team is traversing the stars to a location. In the first era there's only a few areas to explore and only a few choices for bases. As you move along the options for bases and colonies in-

Game Review

crease and some thought must be given about production for profit vs. setting up to go further out. Also, there is a small wheel on everyone's card that tracks progress towards breakthroughs and genetics, which when reached gives you a card that can seriously impact your operations.

On top of all that, there is a board that lists various contracts for each area and the first one to achieve these earns additional profit. Some of these contracts are hard to fulfill such as having a number of teams on certain locations, bases in multiple areas, and so on, but there are many, many paths to victory and fulfilling contracts is one of them.

It sounds like there is a lot going on and there is, but it flows together smoothly. In fact, 15-20 minutes after you start playing the only questions that usually come up revolve around the types of bases and how to transition to the next era. The game play is pretty fast, there's not much down time, and you can get through the individual eras in around 90 minutes each and the full game with all three eras in around 4 1/2 hours. Mention must also be made for the solo system, which is very well laid out using small icons on the various card decks to regulate the "competition" that is played by the system. There is an entirely separate rulebook for the solo system, which is a superb idea and should be used in many other games.



There's really not much here to complain about. The one issue I experienced is that I usually put everything under plexiglass to preserve the game, so at the end of the era having to dump everything and set it up again is a bit of a hassle. Also, getting a group to sit through all three eras might be a problem as well.

Other than that, this is a really good space exploration game. It is NOT a wargame, however, so those looking for a 4X game need to go elsewhere. The systems are well thought out, the game plays fast for its size and scope, and there's not many questions during play. Definitely a game that should be added to your shelf.

Ronin: Raid on the Dojo

by Rob Coleman

We've recently had several folks ask about playing with our gaming group. So, for this Friday we tried to pick something that would be easy to setup for a group of new players: Ronin. It is an easy to learn game which usually provides for

some very cinematic moments, plays quickly, and can be adapted easily to meet the needs of the players, which ended up being fortunate as none of the new folks showed up and we had to quickly alter the game for 3 players!

The backstory (and there is always some backstory to make the game more fun) involved the 3rd son of a local lord. It seems this son was constantly getting into trouble at home and his father had



At the start, the koryu (non-ninja, hereafter referred to as the koryu with the ninja referred to as ninja) and the bushi were aligned and shared points. If he was killed or captured the alliance failed and they were then out for themselves. Conversely, the

ninja and the bandits were aligned as long as the ninja Sensei was alive. If he died the bandits would splinter off. The ninja and koryu received double points for killing each other, and the ninja triple points if they captured the kid (a novice in the school). This gave multiple different outcomes, required some working together, but could cause utter disaster if you failed in your obligations.

towards them, having fallen back into his old habits of thinking he was invincible because dad's retainers were around.

The koryu sensei wisely sent his two junior students to restrain the impetuous youth pulling him back into the trees just as the bandit archers broke cover and prepared to pepper him with arrows. This earned them a sharp retort from the ninja's sensei, and they redirected fire onto the hapless ashigaru struggling with the river's strong current. Arrows flew out, knocking the unlucky ashigaru's jignasa askew and causing him to stumble about in the rapids.



promptly shipped him off to his cousin's dojo to learn discipline. It just didn't do for a newly converted Otomo lord to have his progeny out drinking and carousing. A rival school of ninja got wind of the son being there and hatched a scheme to either kidnap or kill him, thus disgracing the school and driving a wedge between it and the lord. To help they had applied pressure on a local group of bandits and coerced them into supporting a raid on the village and school. Unfortunately for them, the lord had recently sent a retainer and some men to check up and make sure his son was applying himself. The bushi arrived just as the bandits starting looting and burning the village as a distraction meant to draw the sensei, his students, and the kid out.

bandits and a lone ninja prepared to flank the bushi in the river to divert time and effort away from their main objective.

The bandits were initially carried away by the prospect of potential loot vs the chance of setting foot in the open and being shot by bushi snipers. It took the ninja to force their reluctant allies forward when they saw the kid rashly move up



Meanwhile, the ninja sensei and his lieutenant jumped into the edge of the woods, eager to grab the kid before he could escape. There they came face to face with the unlucky initiates and quickly dispatched the youthful swordsmen. Several bandits, carried away by the bloodshed promptly stopped to cut their heads off and shout profanities at their foes. (cont. on p17)



Ronin: Raid on the Dojo

by Rob Coleman



(cont. from p16) Heartily chastened, the kid fled for the safety of his sensei and the senior koryu student. The bushi, seeing their flank about to crumble diverted men to help causing the ninja to pull back slightly to reconsider their options.

The lone ninja coming up the river wasn't doing much better than the hapless ashigaru fording the stream, who kept being stunned by narrow misses, making him drop his yari numerous times. Finally the lone ninja reached him just as he recovered his wits, yelling a battle cry he lunged in only to slip and fall in the water

and be stabbed in the leg for his efforts. The two would spend the next couple minutes locked in a desperate fight that saw the ninja, now wounded and alone eventually over powered and dispatched.

Meanwhile, the koryu sensei and his eldest pupil charged out into the bandits to support the other ashigaru spearman who had been luckier in fording the river. Incensed by the cowardly attack they came in blades flashing to crush the bandit's first line with consummate ease. The ninja sensei pulled back and grabbing the bandit leader by the collar the thrust him forward only for the bandit

leader to go down like wheat before the farmer's scythe. Seeing the tables turning, the bushi leader charged at the bandit archers screaming a victory cry only for the bandits to both roll 12s, essentially shooting him right in the face and throwing him flying off his horse, dead.

The ninja leader promptly called out his rival, only for the eldest student to dutifully support his master by flanking the ninja. After a tense stare down the rivals plunged forward, but the sun caught off the koryu's blade blinding the ninja, slowing him just enough for the grand master to grievously wound him. Shocked by the outcome, he could only stare open mouth as the elder student took him with a ghastly slash through the neck.

At this point the bushi and the bandit's nerve failed them, and they stared shell shocked at the sudden turn of events. The surviving chunin (ninja's second in command) thrust forward the last ninja to act as a human shield while he tried to salved things by grabbing the kid from behind. However, at this point the ashigaru finally found their mark, and their archer and arquebusier shot true. They first gunned down the lone human shield and then perforated the chunin. At this point the bandits, who were down to just their archers (who had killed a lord, stopped the main bushi attack, and managed several other wounds) broke and ran for it.

It had been a heavy price, but the lord's son was safe and the samurai could mark with honor their fortitude and commitment to bushido.



SaltCon is Utah's largest boardgaming event each year and this year it has branched out into three events which are planned for 2019. However, the first one at the end of February/early March is the biggest and this year saw attendance records shattered. The convention starts on a Thursday and goes 24 hours a day until Sunday evening. The convention is held at the Davis Convention Center in Layton, Utah, which is about 20 minutes outside of Salt Lake City with great highway access and not too far (30 minutes) from the airport.

The central ballroom area is reserved for vendors at the big show at the end of February. This year there were more vendors than I remembered from last year and it seemed like they were doing brisk business. Although most are clearly focused on board games, there were a few that featured miniatures, miniatures painting, and pre-made dungeon sections that could be purchased and painted.



The vendors at these shows do something that you don't see in many other hobbies and that is they actively teach you to play their games! There were large crowds in the vendor rows all weekend where volunteers and game company representatives demonstrated their games and by all accounts sold quite a few. I was also surprised to see how the game accessory market is evolving as there seems to be more and more custom play mats, tokens, trays, board edges, and more that are available for sale.

Two other things that the con does very well are the flea market room and the game library. The flea market is a place where gamers simply drop off their new or used games with the price and their text number on the box. Everyone can look through the stacks, find a game



they're interested in, text the person, then arrange to meet them at the con for payment. Simple, effective, and there were some great deals to be had over the weekend. The other very popular event was the game library. Using their convention badges, gamers could check out hundreds of board games that were available to play at the con. In fact, the hallways, open areas, etc., were flooded with gamers all trying out various games. A great idea and I'm sure it helps to promote sales of the various games that were available.

I was asked once again to help provide some historical miniatures events for the convention. Two other friends I've gamed with for almost 40 years take the lead on this each year and between the three of us we can usually put together 8-9 events over three days. While last year there were some sci-fi miniatures events, this year it was all historical in nature. The convention allocated us a room with a dozen tables, a well done sign, had our events online and in the program guide that was handed out, so they did try to get us participants.

After a few months of planning we decided to do the following events:

- F&F Regimental: Battle of Shepherdston
- F&F Brigade: Brandy Station
- Seekrieg V
- Fistful of Tows 3: Ukraine
- Naval Command: USN vs. Russia
- Mustangs: Battle of Britain
- Hail Caesar: Romans vs. Se-

leucids (three slots-one per day)

- BKC2: Eastern Front 1945 (two slots)

In total, there were 11 events using 8 different sets of rules and once again, we were going to experiment somewhat by offering some games that were not at the con the previous year. This was good and bad, as some had great attendance and others had no one show up at all! This is the one thing that usually surprises gamers at cons and those who are hosting events. The sign up function (online or paper) does not indicate who will actually show up! One of my games had one person register, but five others showed up while another had seven people, but only five actually came to play.

The other thing about convention games is you can't control who signs up for your games. I was fortunate that I had some good groups for my Hail Caesar, BKC2, and Mustangs games, but there were a few exceptions in there. One player left suddenly and never returned halfway through the game, a few others took phone calls during the game, one or two kept getting way ahead in the turn sequence and were almost playing their own game, and so on. One person was actually trying to pull parts off of one of my Seleucid elephants to see what it was made of!

Putting on convention games is a lot of work, and frankly, isn't very fun! Just for my games I had to design scenarios, make handouts with unit stats, run through some sample turns to see how the timing would work out, etc. This doesn't even include painting, packing, setting up, then taking down all of the miniatures events, which is a quite considerable amount of time. I'm not sure how much time was spent on the other (cont on p19)





(cont. from p18) games run by the other guys, but from the handouts, game markers, unit labels, research, etc., it looked like months of preparation as well.

I was also fortunate in that one of my gaming group who had played BKC2 and Hail Caesar before attended the con and helped out on a few games. This kind of assistance is not to be underestimated as things flow much smoother. Why some events were well attended and some weren't is hard to explain. The Seekrieg V event for example, had several players last year, but none this year! Slowly and surely, however, we are getting the hang of what people want out of our events and what we should feature in the future.

The gamers who did participate in our events seemed to have had a good time

and we intentionally left up the huge Hail Caesar game all weekend to draw people in to try to get them interested in miniatures. This did seem to work for some who wanted to try it out, but may have scared away others because of the time and money invested into that game. The one thing I did see is that next time we need to have some one sheet summaries of what the game is, miniature scale, and some web links with purchasing info.

In fact, this is where we ran into some problems/opportunities. Some gamers wanted to join one or both of our groups, needed more info on how to get started into the hobby, were looking for historical opponents, etc. We spent several hours in between games trying to answer all of the questions, but the historical miniatures gaming community in Utah is

scattered and fractured at best, so we pointed them to various stores that may or may not be able to help them out. It seemed weird that we were putting on all of these games, but really had limited answers if someone wanted to join somewhere to play these kinds of games all the time!

Overall, it was another good con, despite the frantic schedule and trying to run all of these events with only a handful of people! We'll definitely need to rethink some things as we go forward such as more handouts, timing of events, maybe getting some free handouts from game companies, etc. Even though it is primarily a board game show, all of us felt that there was some crossover potential. Now it's time to start planning the events for next year!



BKC2: Two East Front Battles at SaltCON

Battle Reports

There were two BKC2 battles run at SaltCON this year on consecutive days. This was a late war Eastern Front action that was designed to get players into the action quickly as well as feature some of everyone's favorite heavy armor. There were six slots open each day and on the first day we filled five of them and then on the second day filled five more, so the attendance was pretty good for this scenario.

When you're doing a convention scenario there are so many things that you have to think about which aren't needed at your regular gaming night. The first is how to set things up so it's fairly simple as there is a 99.9% chance that no one who signed up has ever played the rules before! The next thing is to fit it into the time slot, which for this game was 3 hours and 50 minutes. You have to get through the rules intro, have players set out their forces, then play the game to a reasonable conclusion and save a few minutes for them to get to their next game.

This means that you need to choose forces which don't take a ton of explanation. Combat engineers with mines, bridging, overly complex forward air controller rules, etc., need to be left behind. Each player needs a small to medium sized command, a clear objective, and there has to be backup in case someone gets their command eliminated quickly. Trying to design all of this into one scenario is seemingly impossible. Also, the board needs to be fairly small so that everyone is into the action no later than the second turn of the game.



The scenario had a Russian force established across a bridge and trying to expand in the face of a German counter-attack. There was a company of Sherman 76s across the river, backed by a T-34/85 battalion w/mech infantry, plus some IS-2s and SU-100s in good defensive positions along the length of the board. The idea was to pass a Russian recon battalion along the length of the road and over the bridge, plus as many supply trucks as possible. The Russians could win by scoring a set number of points by doing these things OR counterattacking and seizing a vital crossroads and a hill or a combination of everything.

The Germans had several small, but powerful battlegroups that had several companies of PZIVHs, Panthers, Tigers, Marders, and a panzergrenadier battalion. The Germans were to counterattack to seize certain terrain objectives and exit forces off the road at village V19 if possible. Failing that they were to prevent the

Russians from achieving any of their objectives. Using the BKC system the German command system was rated as flexible, while the Russians was rigid, which is a pretty big advantage in the game.

Both sides had artillery support off board. The German support, consisting of three batteries of 105mm artillery, could be scheduled or called in through a FAO. The Russians had three batteries of 122mm, plus one battery of Katyushas that could be scheduled for four turns. The big difference here is that the Russian FAOs are not very good (a value of 6 compared to the German value of 8-what is needed on 2D6 or less for the artillery to arrive).

Both games saw some interesting strategy. The first game was played by gamers who had been in historical gaming for quite some time and could apply some strategies to their side, plus they knew the basics about what their units could or could not do. The Russians hunkered down on a defensive line while the Germans tried to punch a hole through the defenses. The Russians were able to get their artillery to show up almost every turn, which was extremely annoying for the German players!

There were long range tank duels, counterattacks, and some pretty good strategy overall. The break in the game came when the Russians had one ineffective turn, then the Germans responded with a turn where everyone activated multiple times and the defenses were crushed. The Russians scored some victory points, but lost the game overall to the Germans. (cont. on p21)



BKC2: Two East Front Battles at SaltCON (cont.) Battle Reports



(cont. from p20) The second game was entirely different! The players were younger gamers with limited exposure to historical miniatures gaming, although they had come straight over from a Fire & Fury game! After a brief explanation of the rules (fortunately they had played Hail Caesar the night before which uses a similar command system) they set up and went right at it.

This time the Russians counterattacked right from the start. The Germans ignored setting up forces on the other side of the river and the Russians took full advantage of it, capturing the hill (which I thought would be nearly impossible when I set it up) and flanking the German armored spearhead. The T-34/85 battalion counterattack didn't fair so well. Pummeled by German artillery and numerous activations by the Germans, they

were below 50% in less than two turns.

The Russians pressed on with a force of SU-100s and JS-2s at one time rolling five activations in a row (one was snake eyes-two actions)! They rolled down from the ridge on the other side of the river and cut through the Germans on that side, wiping out a PZIVH company, a Marder III company, and damaging the panzergrenadiers before they escaped. At this point it looked like the Russians might pull this thing off after all.

Then the German heavy armor got going again. Taking care of the T-34s they swung about and counterattacked the Russian heavies, creating a brutal, Kursk type firefight on the German side of the board, which the Germans barely survived. With most of the Russian armor burning, the game was called. Both sides

ended up achieving their objectives so everyone walked away happy!

Having two games with the same set up, forces, etc., was a lifesaver as trying to do two different games with the convention schedule would have been problematic. While I had reference sheets with stats available on them, I really felt that I should have made a handout that explains the games basics, which may have cut down on some of the rules explanation time or forgetting certain things vital to the players.

It was interesting seeing the deployments and strategies for both games since both groups had players of differing gaming experience. One group did the classic attack-defense, while the other threw caution out the window and counterattacked, which was a big surprise!



What's needed at most gaming cons, especially at a board game con where few people are miniature gamers, is to have something to lure them in or pique their interest. To that end I brought down my entire 28mm ancient collection and ran three games of Hail Caesar. The game was set up in the middle of the room on a 4 x 10 foot table, so it was hard to miss when entering. The idea was to draw people in, get them to ask questions, and possibly sign up for a game or two that would be run in that room over the weekend.

The good thing about Hail Caesar in 28mm is that the miniatures in their individual units give the appearance of preparing for a massive battle. Also, the system itself is easy to teach, is suitable for any number of players, and most importantly, the games can be played to a reasonable outcome in the standard four hour time slot that most conventions use. With the table width being just under four feet, with a good die roll or two the action would get started pretty quickly. I also had unit rosters for both sides ready to go that were easy to use.



In the interest of time and to lessen confusion, I decided to run the same battle three times, with the same starting forces, and the same deployments. The reasons for this were many, but mostly centered around that many of the people attending may never have played an ancients game in their lives and I didn't want to spend an hour of valuable gaming time on force deployment. It also eased in the take down and set up after each game as I didn't have to change forces, unit rosters, terrain, etc. I know that some gamers might have not been too happy about this, but in the end it worked well and there were no complaints.



The Romans had two legions with each having one additional skirmisher unit attached to it. There was also a division of Italian allies consisting of two armored Oscans/Samnites, one unit of Campanian hoplites, and two skirmisher units. The cavalry contingent was broken into two groups of three units each, with one group deployed on each wing. There were two Roman units, one Spanish, and three skirmish cav units to round out the army.

The Seleucids had six pike units, two elephants, Red Sea Arabs, Persians, Galatians, and several units of skirmishers broken into three divisions. The Seleucid cavalry was broken into two small divisions, with the Companions and cataphracts on one flank and the Galatians with several skirmishers on the other. Both sides were pretty even in points (around 500 for each army), so the battle would be about as balanced as it could get.

For the first game we had six players, four of which had never played Ancients and the game went surprisingly well. The second game had nine! Trying to manage that was one of the hardest things I've done in gaming, but it worked out well. The final game only had four, but I had set the board up so where the desert mats overlapped I could call that the end of the world and just use the three divisions each side had on one half as it would have been very difficult for four players to manage all of the units on the board!

Naturally, with so many new players and few with any Ancients experience the strategies were all over the place. Fortu-

nately, the Hail Caesar system is fairly easy to understand, so by the third or fourth turn most players could run things by themselves. There were a ton of questions about tactics, what would certain units do to other units, supporting units, charges, etc., but there weren't any major problems in all three battles. The only problem I encountered on all three days were gamers getting too far ahead in the turn sequence and needing to slow down to wait for others to finish. Whether this was just enthusiasm to fight battles, a product of an impatient society, or something else, it did seem like it occurred more often than usual in the games I've been in.

After having seen two Roman victories in our club's first two battles with the Hail Caesar system, the first two days here were a complete change! In the first battle the Roman cavalry forces did better than expected, but the legions were gradually worn down by the Seleucid pike attacks. When the Roman right flank was obliterated about halfway through the game, it was easy to see that the Seleucids were going to win in the end. By the final turn it was pretty obvious that the Romans were going to have to withdraw, having suffered heavy casualties.

The second game was a meat grinder, with both sides losing a large number of units. There were massive melees, counterattacks, feeding units into the line to plug holes, and general mayhem during the battle. Both sides played very well, considering most had never played Ancients before! The Seleucids had a stretch where it looked like they were going to break and get swept from the field, but they rallied and came back, winning a very close contest.

The third game was a (cont. on p23)





(cont. from p22) bit smaller and closely contested as well. The Romans had a player who understood the maniple system and used this to great effect, rotating damaged and shaken units back into the rear while feeding fresh troops into the front lines. The Romans also had some success on the cavalry front, holding their own and eventually trading the Seleucids unit for unit. Unmolested, the legions continuous pressure all along the front finally broke the Seleucid pike units and won the game.

So,, two Seleucid and one Roman victory, with all of the battles being very close with a lot of casualties to both sides. Some of this could be attributed to using the same set up, units, etc., in all three games and giving each side very few choices, but for a convention it worked. There weren't any complaints

and all of the games finished earlier than their allotted time, which freed up the gamers to move on to other things, which seemed to be appreciated by all.

After watching all three battles and running a few other games at the con, I had some observations about what I could improve and how to make the games better. First, I think the games may have been too big! There were a lot of units on the board and just running the games by yourself is a challenge. If I repeat this with this many units I think I would need a second person familiar with the system to help. The second thing would be to improve the handouts.

While I had the charts and tables available, plus the army lists for each side, I thought that maybe something the size of a playing card with the sequence of play on it might help. The danger here

is you don't want each player holding a stack of papers, which never seems to work well. I also thought about making some colored counters for the unit skills as many players forgot those during the game. Again, the issue here would be clutter on the table that along with the dice, markers, handouts, etc., might be too much.

On the positive side we did get in three large games of Hail Caesar and by having it set up in the middle of the room for three days, it served as an advertisement for the hobby. The games generated a lot of interests and comments, all positive and I think if I had run more Hail Caesar games we would have filled up most of the spots. Another big positive is that it introduced ancients gaming to about 20 new players, which is always good!





Several more images showing the huge Hail Caesar games that were run at this year's SaltCON. Most of the images do focus on the large pike blocks, but that's because they literally dominated the center of the battlefield just by their size alone! The cavalry fights on both flanks during all of the games were some of the most interesting parts of the battle.

Pacific Fury by Revolution Games

Game Review

While there are many, many wargames on the Pacific War, very few would be termed fast playing! Even those on famous battles usually can be all day affairs and most of the campaigns can be thought of in months of playing time. Into this void comes something rather unusual from Revolution Games, a game about the Solomons campaign that can be finished in under 90 minutes.

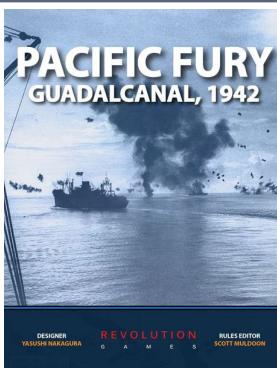
The game is Pacific Fury, which simulates the struggle for Guadalcanal through the use of sea power to achieve objectives, which is the destruction of the enemy fleet and control of Henderson Field. Pacific Fury is a folio game, meaning that everything you need to play comes in a zip-loc bag. The package contains a cover sheet, rules, a map, and one sheet of counters. Yes, the components are minimal, but this is a game with a small footprint that can be completed quickly.

The map is the first thing you examine and it is fairly small with a fold in the center. The map is broken into four sea zones, which are basically the only playable areas on the board. There are two boxes for each side's fleets when they return to base, a Japanese fleet reserve box, a Henderson field control track, and two operations tracks, one for each side. There's no need for a terrain chart as there are only four areas that ships can move in!

The counters consist of around two dozen or so ships for each side, an initia-



tive marker, and two operations markers. The counters are printed on one side only, which is an interesting choice. The ships are rated for airstrikes, combat factors, and defense, making them easy to figure out. Anchor symbols on the counters show how hard it is to sink ships while aircraft symbols show airstrike factors.



The rules are definitely something that need to be discussed as they are both good and bad. The rules that came with the game are pretty basic and only take one reading. Understanding what is going on, however, is an entirely different thing! In fact, there is a one page errata/clarifications sheet that shows examples of play to help gamers learn the rules. What was definitely needed here was a one turn example of play, complete with illustrations, which would have been extremely helpful. Instead, gamers need to play the game a few times to figure out what's going on.

Now the game is not hard, but coming up with a strategy is. Everything revolves around the contest for Henderson Field. Whoever holds it has the initiative and goes first in the turn, enabling players to get ships in the area to defend against a quick amphibious assault. The side that does not have the initiative gets to roll on the events table, which could result in bombers damaging Henderson, Japanese reserves being released, and damaging/sinking ships with submarine attacks. Also, the side that does not have initiative gets two transports or for the Japanese, one transport and the Tokyo Express marker.

Henderson field must be disrupted to be invaded, so that means that the side that does not hold it must launch airstrikes to attack it or use a bombardment task force to hit the airfield. Once that occurs the transports can land and each one that does shifts the initiative marker one way or the other. The trick is getting the transports to the Ironbottom Sound area unmolested and timing their entry so that they can be protected. You can also take the gamble that the other side will be distracted and you can sneak them in there.

Each turn both sides arrange their ships into three kinds of task forces: TF-A which are amphibious task forces that have transports, TF-Bs which is bombardment or for surface actions, and TF-Cs for carrier task forces. Carrier Task Forces cannot go into The Slot or Ironbottom Sound, so they go into the two far right sea areas where they can

strike other task forces or Henderson. Deciding how many task forces, what ships should be in them, and what order they enter takes a few games and can change drastically from turn to turn. If you move or use a TF-C for combat as an operation everything on the track gets pushed back a slot, meaning that it is possible that some task forces don't enter the board that turn. The game is only four turns long, so there's not a lot of time to decide on long term strategies! Some turns you may only use a few task forces while on others you may fill up most of the operations track.

Combat is done by rolling 1D6 against the unit's combat rating, then rolling a second D6 to determine if you damaged or sunk the target. There's some strategy here in that depending upon how you allocate the hits vs. a ship's armor decides the odds of sinking it. You can



allocate all the hits to one ship with good odds or split them amongst many and take your chances. Any ship that isn't sunk is damaged and returns two turns later. This is the one rule that I did not care for as it becomes a tactic to just score hits to damage powerful ships to remove them from the game, which on turns 3 and 4 is the same as removing them from the game.

While I found the game fun and fast playing, it was a bit difficult to explain to a first time player and it takes a few turns to figure out what is going on. In the few games I've played the number of sunk ships seems fairly high compared to the actual history of the campaign. The game also is pretty much impossible to play solo as bluffing is a huge part of the game. Overall, this is a solid, but not great game. With a better rulebook and more examples of play this could be the basis for a series of games using the same system.

More 28mm Ancients

Figure Review

On the preceding pages covering the Hail Caesar games you can see several images of the figures that are reviewed here. I had previously reviewed some of the Warlord Games products for the Seleucid side, so here we will focus primarily on the Republic Roman side. Although I have two legions made from the Victrix boxed sets, they desperately needed allies to face off against the ever growing Seleucid army.

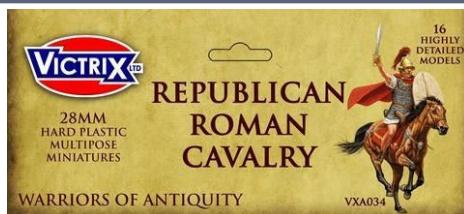
Most Republican Roman armies of the time took the field with a variety of Italian allies. Whether or not some were armed like the legions, what armor they wore, unit sizes, etc., are the subject of much debate. I decided that I would do some generic units that could be used as Samnites, Oscans, or any of the various Italian hill tribes that supplied forces for and against Rome. After looking at some of the metal/lead options I decided to go with Victrix.

You can get the armored and unarmored Samnite boxed sets on Ebay for a pretty good price. You get 24 figures in each box that can be made to resemble a variety of troop types. The Victrix figures come with multiple arms, heads, arms with weapons, and different shields. They are perfect for portraying Samnites, Oscans, or any other similar tribe from



that era. There is some assembly required, but it goes pretty fast and there is no difficulty assembling the figures. LBMS sells four sheets of transfers for the various shields that look great, but aren't the easiest to put on!

Next up is the Republican Roman cavalry, which strangely enough, comes in a boxed set of 16 figures and horses. Whether this is intentionally designed to allow the gamer to create two small units of cavalry for rules like



Hail Caesar (which is what I used them for) or larger units for some other set of rules is unknown. As with most Victrix mounted troops, the horses go together well, but they seem a bit thicker than many other manufacturer's horses. As with all of their other boxed sets you get a wide variety of heads and arms, so you can make some interesting units. I had some issues getting the assembled riders onto the horses and had to keep swapping horses to fit some of the poses, but in the end they look great once finished. Again, LBMS has three sheets of transfers for the Roman cavalry of the period.

Another unit that works as Roman allies for the earlier periods are the Iberian cavalry that Victrix sells. There are 12 figures in this boxed set that can be made to be any of the various Spanish units that served with both Rome and Carthage. For that matter, they can be used for a variety of medium/heavy cavalry units of the period. These figures go together very well and look fantastic once finished. Once again, LBMS has transfers for the shields, which look great but can be a challenge at times, especially finding matching colors for the shield edges.

Overall, Victrix is pretty good value for the price. The combination of various arms, heads, shields, etc., gives each gamer the opportunity to make each unit unique. The pieces are molded well, assembly is fairly easy, and the models themselves once assembled are pretty resilient. The figures are also easy to paint and the sculpting detail on them is extremely high for plastic figures. Victrix offers discounts on multiple boxes from their site,

but there are also a variety of sellers on Ebay offering their sets, but the prices are all over the place.

For some more Roman allies I decided to use a few Warlord Games selections to complement the Roman force. The first was the Thessalian cavalry which are sold in packages of three, so six of them is going to run you around \$40 with shipping. The figures are sculpted well, but



when side by side with the Victrix mounted units look extremely thin. The riders are sculpted onto the horses, which at least to me, increases the difficulty in painting, but certainly does help their sturdiness.



I also bought a pack of Spanish light infantry to use as skirmishers. These 8 figures go for around \$20 and are a good deal. The Warlord infantry seems to paint up well, looks great in units, and match up with figures from other manufacturers. This is what I use the Warlord Games stuff for, which is primarily for small units and



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they seem extremely well suited for that role.

Next time it's on to Aventine's stuff.

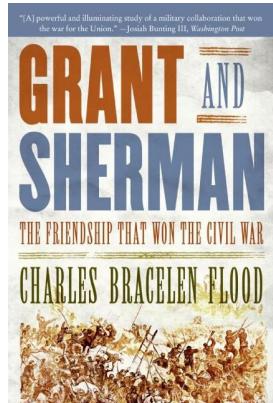
You would think by this time that everything concerning Generals Grant and Sherman would have been uncovered by this time, especially given that there are several thousand books on their campaigns and lives. Grant and Sherman by Charles Flood, however, takes this in a slightly new direction by seeing the relationship through the eyes of their friendship.

The book takes a cursory glance at their early lives before the Civil War, examining who they were, how they knew each other, brief glimpses of family life, and so on. While many books on similar subjects spend chapter after chapter on this part of their lives, this book goes over the basics and moves on to the Civil War period. Frankly, I didn't have an issue with this as I've read several other books on their lives, so a summary will probably work for most readers interested in the era.

Naturally, it's the start of the Civil War where things start to get interesting and what takes up most of the book's pages. From Sherman's start at Bull Run to Grant's meager beginnings in administration in the Western theater, the early part of the war is detailed in terms of their relationship with each other. Once Grant begins to make headway on his river campaigns of which Sherman plays small roles, the relationship begins to expand outward into feelings of mutual trust.

By the time of the Shiloh campaign there is a working relationship, which continues through the end of the war. Here you see both men as they work their way through the battles, political fights, supply issues, and more towards the end of the war. If you're looking for detailed descriptions about the battles then you'll probably need to search elsewhere. The longest battle scene is Shiloh and that's only a few pages. The idea seems to be that most readers will know about the battles and campaigns, so there's not much time spent dwelling on those other than as part of the entire Civil War.

The book goes into the end of the war, their lives afterwards, the jobs they held,



and of course their relationship after the war. The few sections about politics are fascinating in that you get to see all of the machinations of the generals, Congress, and their enemies. My biggest takeaway from the book were the monumental obstacles that both had to overcome to achieve victory. At times it seemed almost impossible that they would prevail, but they did.

I'm not sure what to make of this book. It has some interesting sections and if you know nothing about the men involved it's probably a good starting point. If you're an ACW buff then you've probably read most of this in other books. A good, but not great book.

The next book is *China Station* by Mark Feeton, which covers England's action in China, from the early 1800s to the hand over of Hong Kong in 2000. Since I am a Victorian Colonial gamer I was especially interested in this era and was not disappointed by the book, despite knowing very little about England's operations in that part of the world. Outside of The Boxer Rebellion there is little known about these turbulent times and the role that England played in them.

The book spends a great deal of time focusing on the Opium Wars, of which not much is known about in the West. The author does a good job of explaining the system of ports, trade, and armed forces that were present in and around China at that time. Rather than spend chapter after chapter on Chinese history and how things got to this point, all of the effort is spent instead on explaining how England got to this point with Chinese trade and the importance of opium.

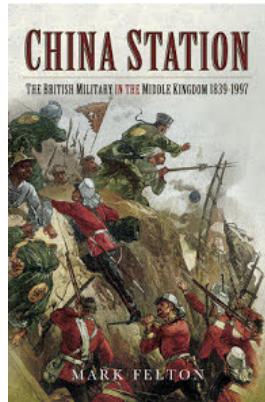
There were several wars that involved opium in the early 1800s, 40s, and 50s that are described in the book. England pretty much caused the wars, directly or indirectly, and they followed a similar pattern. Basically, the English fleets went up and down the rivers and inshore areas, pounding all resistance and sinking any Chinese ship that dared challenge them! Yes, a bit repetitive, but fascinating nonetheless.

There are amphibious assaults against forts, fleet action, raids, bombardments, etc., against various parts of China. That England was able to accomplish what she did is remarkable and the casualties were heavily in favor of English forces.

As the book progresses towards The Boxer Rebellion you can see that the Chinese forces are getting a little bit better. The naval actions and battles during this period become tougher on the English forces and they begin to take more casualties. There is a brief section on The Boxer Rebellion that included some information I had not seen previously, so even though that section was perhaps a bit too brief, it was very interesting. The book then skips ahead to the turn of the century and to the start of the Japanese encroachment upon China.

Here's where the book changes gears and you learn a great deal about England's forces in China and Hong Kong during the 1930s leading up to World War 2. The units are discussed, available

ships, where they were located, and what the general strategies were if war should breakout. Suffice to say, England was ill prepared to fight on two fronts and their forces in China were merely there to buy time, which was shown in the defense of Hong Kong. If you don't know much about this campaign, the few pages allocated to it are enlightening. There is also an interesting chapter on the intelligence operations there which were almost comical.



Perhaps one of the most interesting sections of the book were the actions after WW2 where the Chinese forces were driving the Nationalists back to Taiwan. I had never heard of any of these ship actions, but they were well laid out and explained in great detail. Finally, the book ends with the handover of Hong Kong to the Chinese at the turn of the century.

If you know nothing about this period then this book is for you or if you're looking for something out of the ordinary, then again by all means try this out. The book is well written, contains some interesting battles, and will certainly educate you on a topic for which little is known.

Saga: Saxon Village Defense

Battle Report

With more Saxons and Normans painted up, plus some new fortress wall sections and village pieces, it was time for another Saga scenario. Saga works well for not needing too much prep time, it can usually conform to the number of players we have that night, plus we can usually get the game completed quickly with few issues. Fortunately for our group we have one member who has multiple forces for several eras and the 28mm terrain to go with them!

For those who have never tried Saga you don't need many figs per player, usually 4 figs for mounted units and 8-12 for foot. Groups should easily be able to produce multiple units in no time at all. The heart of the Saga system are what are termed "Saga dice". These are D6s with various symbols on them and are used on specific faction play cards. You match up the dice with the things you want to do for that turn, such as add bonuses to shooting



units, a bow armed unit, and three foot units that began the attack. They were split across two sides of the board, thinking that they would enter fast, loot the outer buildings, then join up in the center. It was a good starting plan that just never really got going! Sometimes in Saga you don't realize what you have in terms of units until you go through a few turns and see what the advantages/disadvantages are, which is what happened here. The Norman horse were completely mismanaged, but by the time we realized this, it was too late.

The Saxons were spread out across the village, with most of the warrior units coming out of the fortress to the defense of the village. While the Saxons really didn't have anything you would deem special in terms of units, they did have a few unique options with their dice that allowed for multiple activations. This coupled with the fact that the Saxons seemed to know what they were doing proved to be a tough challenge for the Normans.

The game began with the Saxon villagers fleeing to the safety of the fortress while Saxon units rushed to the front lines. The Norman cavalry charged right into the attack, which was a mistake in that they should have let the other units soften up the Saxons. Thinking that time was of the essence the Norman cavalry attacked and attacked, but while they did some serious



or melee, extra charges, stronger defense, activate twice, and so on. Getting the right dice at the right time is the trick as well as figuring out how to use the dice you have for that turn.

The scenario called for the Normans to raid a Saxon village, causing death and destruction everywhere, or just another day in Dark Ages England! The Normans scored points for looting buildings, burning said looted buildings, killing villagers and warriors, and capturing certain Saxon villagers. The Norman players debated just killing everything in sight to simplify things, but figured they might not earn enough victory points that way!

The Normans had three mounted

damage they were all but wiped out. After about five turns there was no Norman cavalry left and more Saxons coming to the village.

The Saxons were now in a position to basically run out the clock as the villagers were getting to safety, few buildings were looted, and at this point the Normans were their own worst enemy! The Saxons to their credit, however, attacked, clearly thinking that the best defense is a good offense. The Saxon units clogged up the center and flank approaches, preparing themselves for the inevitable Norman infantry charges.

The Normans did charge, but could make little to no headway. If the loss of the Norman cavalry wasn't enough, the die rolls in combat didn't help any either! The Normans used everything they had, but the casualties were piling up fast and they simply could not hold the initiative. The Saxons used their activation dice well and kept the pressure on, bringing up fresh units and throwing them into the fray. While several Saxon units took serious casualties, the Normans were out of men and time. With that the Normans had to withdraw and the Saxon village was saved.

Clearly, the faction sheets need to be studied closer before the game begins. The Normans threw away their advantages, thinking it was more of a Hail Caesar type game than a small scale skirmish. The attacks weren't coordinated and bad melee rolls just compiled the disaster. Despite that, it was a fast and free flowing game that gave both sides a good chance to win. Including scenario instructions and set up the game only took us about 2 1/2 hours.



Saga: Saxon Village Defense (cont.)

Battle Report



Several images showing the Saxons rushing to the defense of the village as the Normans approach. The inability of the Norman mounted units to make any headway doomed the overall attack. With the mounted units defeated the Saxons were able to concentrate on the Norman foot without having to worry about their mobility, defending the various choke points and inflicting a crushing defeat.



With Blitzkrieg Commander (BKC) 4 coming out in July, the group thought that it might be a good idea to get back into the swing of things by running a game. We were going to use U.S. forces for a change, but in the end decided to do a late war Russians vs. Germans game. There was really not much of a plan do to some last minute changes, but we came up with a quick scenario that worked out pretty good!

This was to be a meeting engagement, but with a small twist. Both sides had seized a village along a main road and had several mobile forces moving quickly to reinforce their positions. Due to the road net on the board, these forces would certainly come into contact somewhere in the center for a fairly large meeting engagement. Victory conditions were fairly simple; there's four objectives on the board and each side started in control of two of them. The side that ended up with three of them at the end of the game wins.

The German force was broken into several battlegroups. Each battlegroup rolled 1D6 to determine its starting posi-

tion except for the understrength infantry battalion that held the village. This created a unique tactical situation with the village strongly held by infantry and armor, with more coming up on the roads.

- (1) Infantry battalion
 - (1) Tiger company
 - (1) PZIVH company
 - (1) Panther company
 - (1) Stug IIIH company
 - (1) Panzergrenadier battalion
- Recon assets and one battalion of 105mm artillery in support.

The Russians also had one infantry battalion already deployed in their captured village. The Russians got lucky with their die rolls as well with the main Russian anti-tank force already in position next to the village. The remaining Russian forces rolled and entered from the two roads on their side of the board.

- (1) Infantry battalion
- (1) IS-2 company (3) vehicles and
- (1) SU-100 battery (3) vehicles
- (1) T-34/76 battalion + infantry
- (1) T-34/85 battalion + infantry

The Russians also had recon assets and a battalion of 122mm artillery off board.

Both sides had similar plans in that they would try to get as much of their force forward as quickly as possible. Defend their infantry held villages, prevent their opponent from slipping in be-

hind them to seize the objectives at the ends of the board, crush the opposing armor, then focus on the enemy held village. Simple and effective, but as usual with BKC the command die rolls can have disastrous results for plans.

The game began with the T-34/76 battalion attacking the German held village. The ten or so T-34s moved out in a staggered formation, followed by the company of infantry in halftracks. Several artillery barrages hit the village to keep the German's heads down during the attack. The German tigers were licking their chops at the approaching Russians while the PZIVHs positioned themselves to clean up what was left.



However, this was not to be. The Germans rolled a blunder, with one Tiger charging out in the open and was quickly set on fire. The remaining Tigers could never do better than one order a turn and the Russians kept rolling well on their saves. By the 4th turn the Germans were in trouble with all of their Tigers knocked out and the Russians on the outskirts of the village. (cont. on p31)





(cont. from p30)

In the center there was an 8 turn slugfest between the Panthers and IS-2s plus the SU-100s, then the Stugs moved up and joined in. This created a huge traffic jam behind the lines and a no-man's land in the center as these two powerful forces collided. With heavy armor, however, both sides were having a hard time doing damage to each other. The panzergrenadiers moved up and debarked into a large forest, getting ready to assault the Russian held village.

By this time, both sides were heavily engaged, with artillery barrages dropping all over opposing enemy units and long range tank duels. Any time a unit tried to move closer or get to a better position it was set on fire. A series of bad command rolls by both sides led to some very fast

turns and all of a sudden it was Turn 10 and things appeared to be in a stalemate.

The Germans, however, then had one really bad turn where several Stugs and a Panther went up in flames, Russians closing in on the German held village, the panzergrenadiers were pinned down, and the T-34/85 battalion was beginning to move towards cutting off the German forces. The Germans responded with plenty of opportunity fire, but by this time things were not looking good. Two turns later the Germans had to concede the game.

The Russians really had not done anything spectacular, but just persevered. The German Tigers and Panthers simply could not deal the damage that we were used to seeing, which is usually frightening! Once they were knocked out or forced back, the Germans did not have

enough anti-tank assets to defeat all of the remaining T-34s that were on the board. Some of this could be due to us always giving the Russians too much as we keep thinking of 1941-42, which by the end of the war is not the same thing. The T-34/85s can slug it out with the German armor and we may have erred in giving the Russians too many, but it seemed like the Germans had their chances during the game, but could not take advantage of them.

There was some concern about the lethality of artillery barrages against built up areas, which was negligible. Infantry in this game when dug in are almost impregnable and we discussed using the optional rules about carrying hits from turn to turn. We do hope that this gets addressed in the next version as we really like this system and would like to see it improved where possible.



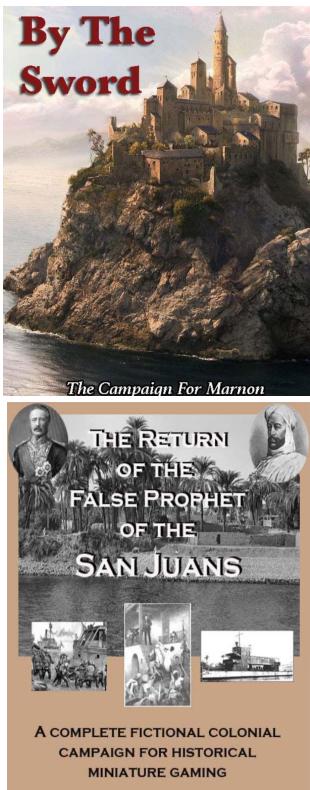
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First off, I want to thank all of the people who contacted me after the last issue came out and who expressed appreciation and thanks for the magazine. After going from a handful of comments after Issue #49 to close to 100 after the last issue, it certainly showed me that there are quite a few gamers who are interested in seeing this continue! This made me reconsider things and now I'm determined to carry this on for as long as possible or until the feedback drops to zero. Again, I'm really thankful for those who took the time to tell me what they like and how they look forward to each issue.

One thing I'm noticing, especially when looking at images from conventions, is how "big" games are celebrated now where in the past they were just ordinary games on club night. By big, I mean anything over 100 figures! What was commonplace during the 70s, 80s, and 90s has become the exception rather than the rule. At one of our local cons I was asked over and over how much money I had sunk into my Hail Caesar armies and when I said several hundred dollars there was shock and surprise. The next day, however, some of these same people probably went down to their local store and dropped several hundred dollars on a few figs and vehicles from Games Workshop! Game manufacturers have seized upon this and what you have now is a hobby awash in skirmish rules where everyone only needs 5-10 figs for a game. To each their own and I don't mind a skirmish game every now and then, but I don't play them just because I would need to paint more than 10 figures for other games!

What was once (skirmish gaming) a part of a larger hobby has now become the largest piece of pie in the hobby, judging by all of the available rules, eras, etc., that are designed for skirmish gaming. The only other thing that can rival it at this time is Flames of War, which is almost a hobby unto itself. How do gamers who like to play large games with hundreds of figures get more people involved so that we can see large games on a regular basis? Well, it's not going to be easy. With the time constraints on gamers lives, limitless entertainment options, and most army level rules being buried under an avalanche of Osprey rules titles, getting others to paint large armies is going to be a challenge. I spent considerable time at the con where I ran three Hail Caesar games talking to gamers, showing them starter sets by Warlord Games, how to organize units, and so on. It's not much, but it's a start. The more people that can be converted to paint more historical figures in large units the better!

You're seeing this in board wargames as well, but it's more a complexity vs. effective design issue. For every game like Cataclysm that comes out there's a dozen or so simpler designs that have large followings. In fact, GMT is going to be increasing their "lunch time" games series as the first one, Ft. Sumter, did very well. I played it several times, and while fun for a while and fast playing (around 45 minutes) there was little depth to the subject. That is the crux of many of these games; fast playing, simple, but if you're yearning for more history, tactics, why things happened, etc., you've gone to the wrong place. I definitely don't want to go back to the era of SPI's Air War, but a little more effort by today's gamers would benefit all in the hobby.