Warning Order

Wasatch Front Historical Gaming Society

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BKC4: A Second Look & Battle Report

BKC4 has been out for almost a year now and we've had a few games under our belt. Although we still find ourselves thinking of rules from BKC2, the reception so far has been extremely positive. As mentioned before, we were pretty happy with BKC2 and could have easily stayed with that, especially after the fiasco with BKC3. However, BKC4 has proven to be superior to all prior versions.

For discussion purposes, we're going to examine a scenario we recently played and describe the scenario as well as how BKC4 modeled the action. While there are literally hundreds of WW2 rules available for all scales and tastes, there are often a large number of questions about BKC and how it plays.

First off, we have never used the points system in the rules! This could explain why at times the games seem unbalanced or why the players don't have too many choices in units. There's pros and cons with the points based scenario approach, with the biggest con being that it can take quite some time to come up
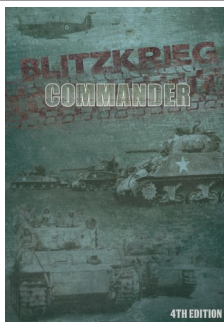
with an army list that is suitable for the number of players coming to the game. However, it might help to better balance out the game and give players more choice. If one side wanted to have a lot more command stands and mortars the options would certainly be there. We are hoping to run some points based games in the future,, but planning isn't one of our group's strong points!

We also decided to go with the optional rule where the hits don't go away at the end of the turn. For our group at least, this has been one of the biggest problems with the BKC system (well, along with large numbers of units firing at the same target) as it

can be difficult to score enough hits on some of the heavier German and Russian armor in one turn to knock them out. With this change commanders were going to need to be a little more wary of charging into things and conserver their units. We were also hoping this would solve the "impregnable" infantry issue when they are deployed in fortifications or in towns.

We also decided to cut back on artillery. We usually go with three batteries (equivalent of a battalion) per side on a 6x4 table. However, while they don't do much against armor or infantry in towns, the artillery was wiping out any infantry in the open along with their transport! Time for the battle.

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Numerous battle reports for BKC IV, Fistful of TOWS 3, Galactic Heroes, Battles for Empire II, Warmaster Ancients, Hail Caesar, and Age of Discovery.*

- *Two new Engagements scenarios.*

- *Reviews of Jaws of Victory, France 1944, Fulda Gap: Battle for the Center, and Dune.*

Situation: Near dusk yesterday, a Canadian mechanized unit with armor support snuck through a gap in the German defense lines and seized a vital town located on a hill at the NE corner of the map. The Canadians were quickly surrounded and have been fighting on and off during the night. The Allied command does not want to give up this vital objective, so they are rushing forward reinforcements and ammunition/supplies to hold it. The Germans are also sending in reinforcements for counterattacks in the area to mend the hole in their lines.

British/Canadian Forces

9 M-4 Shermans w 3 units of Fireflys

3 M-3 light tanks (recon)

3 Cromwells with 1 Firefly

9 infantry, 1 HMG, 1 light mortars, 1 engineers, and 12 halftracks

6 Bren carriers with ammo/supplies

1 battery 6lb. AT guns and 1 truck

2 batteries 25lb. Guns (off-board) w/FAO

Set Up/Arrival

All British/Canadian forces enter anywhere on the SW board edge on Turn 1.

German Forces

On Board At Start

4 infantry and 1 heavy weapons

3 Stug III

2 batteries 105mm (off-board) w/FAO

Reinforcements-Enter Turn 1

Group 1: 4 PzIVH

Group 2: 4 PzV and 1 PzVI

Group 3: 9 panzergrenadier infantry, 9 halftracks, 1 75mm AT gun, 1 Sdkfz 251/2. 1 Sdkfz 251/9, 1 Sdkfz 251/22

Set Up/Arrival

The German forces that start on the board must begin within 12" of the town at A.

For each German reinforcement group, roll 1D6. On a 1, 2, 3, or 4 it arrives at the eastern road entrance, and on a 5 or 6 at the west road entrance. All forces can arrive on the road or within 6" to either side of the road entrance.

The NW Corner Hill-Special Rules

The scenario revolves around the relief or capture of the large hill on the NW corner of the board. At the beginning of the scenario there are 3 M-4 Shermans, 3 infantry, and 1 6lb. AT gun deployed on the hill (German players need to be aware of this as you could get fired on starting Turn 1). However, there is heavy fighting occurring on the other side of the hill (this part of the hill is not on the game board) and due to casualties the Canadians may have to transfer forces to the other side to maintain the defense.

At the start of each turn, the German player(s) rolls 1D4 for each sector and marks the progress on the insert map below. When it reaches a box with a T in it, the British/Canadian player(s) must transfer one armor, infantry, or AT stand/unit to the other side (take it off the board). When one row is completed start rolling for the second row in each sector. It is possible that 4 of the 7 units on the hill may have to transfer which would weaken the defenses for a possible Ger-man counterattack.

Terrain Notes

All of the forested areas on the map should be treated as light woods. The buildings should be a mix of wood and stone. The hills are slight elevations, but would give an advantage in firing positions and defense against attack. The hill in the NW corner, however is steep and should be treated as difficult/rough terrain with severe movement penalties.

Victory Conditions

The Germans automatically win if they take the NW corner hill or if the British/Canadians fail to achieve their victory conditions.

The British/Canadian side must get at least three Bren carriers with ammo and supplies to the hill for a marginal victory. For a major victory they must also get at least three armor stands/units and three infantry stands/units to hill as well to reinforce the defenses.

Variants

Air support could be added in for the Allied side as well as anti-aircraft units for the Germans.

Additional units could be added to both sides for larger games and the board could be expanded as well.

Both sides could also roll for the arrival of their forces which would make for a more interesting, but chaotic game.

Rules

The scenario is designed for BKC4, but could be used with almost any WW2 rules.

This insert shows the defenses around the hill and town and the transfer tracks.

(cont. from p2) The British relief force split into two groups. The first with the Shermans would head towards the long road stretch and try to intercept any German units coming that way. The second group would make for the town its crossroads, securing it first, then pushing on to relieve the Canadians on the hill. The Germans were going to try to rush reinforcements into the town and use any long range firepower to attack units heading towards the hill. This would in essence force the British relief forces to get bogged down in needing to take the town. As long as the German armor survived, it would be a huge threat to the mech infantry and supply carriers going down the road.

The British armored battalion with the Shermans was able to move onto the board then failed its next command roll. This gave the Germans time to move

their main armored force, which consisted of a company of Panthers, a single unit of Tigers, and the Sdkfz 251/22 with the 75mm AT gun down the road to head them off. Both sides got what they didn't want; namely a long, grinding death match in an area where you had to move out into the open to get shots at the enemy forces. The remainder of the panzergrenadier battalion went as fast as it could towards the town to reinforce the defenses there.

The Cromwells came onto the board and were immediately engaged by the Stug IIIs, setting of a multi-turn armor fight that ended with all of the Stugs knocked out. The Stuarts then ran around the woods, only to run headlong into the PZIVH company coming in to aid the town's defense. Once they finished off the Stuarts they looked for new targets and saw the British mech infantry battalion still in their halftracks along the road. The mech infantry then plunged into the forests and awaited further developments.

Meanwhile, the hill's defenses were getting thin, with more and more units getting moved to the other side of the hill, leaving only the bare minimum to hold the side on the game board. However, the Germans had their hands full and had

no intention of attacking the hill with all these British running around! The Germans decided to continue holding where they could and prevent the reinforcements from reaching the hill.

The Sherman-Panther slugfest continued on. By this time there were several burning units on both sides and the Germans were scoring hits, but couldn't knock out the Shermans. Most of the Shermans had hits on them, but the Fireflies kept the pressure on, knocking out the Tiger and the Sdkfz 251/22. A few turns later the final Panther was knocked

out and the road was cleared. The Shermans had lost four units plus a Firefly, but they had taken the best the Germans could dish out and they turned to support the advance past the town. The battle was reaching its crisis point for the Germans who were in trouble. (cont. on p5)

After just four turns the action starts to heat up on all fronts. The Shermans run headlong into the German armor coming in from the left side of the board, beginning a several turn armor slugfest between the Shermans, Fireflies, Panthers, and the sole Tiger. Tanks begin to burn almost immediately as both sides jockey for position. The panzergrenadiers reach the main village and dig in to assist with the defense in case the Shermans break through.

On the other side the German Stugs put up a good fight against the Cromwells, but get destroyed while the Stuarts skirt the edge of the hill but run into the PZIVHs coming up to support the village. They are dealt with quickly then the panzers go after the British mech infantry who close assault the panzers who are now trapped in the forest. During the ensuing battle most of the PZIVHs get wiped out.

BKC4: A Second Look & Battle Report (cont.)

(cont. from p4) The PZIVHs charged into the forests, counterattacking the British mech infantry, which ended up not going very well for the Germans. In a two turn battle most of the PZIVHs were knocked out in a series of close combats, then the survivors retreated only to run headlong into the surviving Cromwells. After a two turn exchange there the PZIVHs were done as a combat force.

The British infantry remounted their halftracks and started to move around the town towards the hill, backed by the remains of the Sherman battalion now coming up the road. The Germans by this time had no armor and no long range weapons that could attack the Allied formations as they drove near the town. Since moving outside of the safety of the town would be suicidal, the game was

called as an Allied victory. Including set up and instructions, the game took just under four hours to play.

After we finished, there was strong support for the optional rule regarding units keeping their hits once their turn ended. This made two things possible; the first is that Panthers and Tigers weren't as dominant as they usually are in BKC, and two, it gave commanders pause to commit damaged units to the front line fighting. This is also going to have a huge impact on infantry units in fortifications or defending towns in that they won't be impregnable any longer. Also, by cutting back the available artillery it seemed to make the game better and it was useful in damaging units, especially with them keeping their hits.

As far as the system goes, we still

really like the command and control aspect of the game. The recon, FAOs, blunders, etc., systems also work really well. The reworked unit stats, limits, and so on seem to be pretty equitable and while you can quibble over some small things, the overall package is pretty good. What is still needed is a book with orders of battle and a legitimate campaign system.

The only problem that still hasn't been solved yet is the ability to pile onto enemy units with long range attacks. There really needs to be a limit on how many tanks or AT units can fire at one enemy during a turn. Sometimes you can have the situation where a half dozen units are all firing at the same target, which would be doubtful in real life. Other than that, however, BKC4 is here to stay with us!

With the return of Cold War gaming, particularly NATO vs Warsaw Pact once again, this was my first chance to try out modern armored combat in quite some time. As I've related in these pages over the years, all of us spent most of the late 70s and early 80s fighting huge armored battles in Germany. Instead of going the NATO vs. Warsaw Pact route, a group of gamers I've known for a long time decided to do something a bit different; try a Russian attack into the Baltic States and Poland.

Yes, it's NATO vs. Russia again, but this time there's no Warsaw Pact. The Russians have much more modern equipment while some of the NATO countries struggle on with their slightly upgraded Cold War versions of vehicles. The forces are smaller than in the 80s, but no less lethal. Modern combat, by nature, is very complex, and while there are many rules for this period, finding a good set is certainly a challenge. While I have played WRG, Tacforce, Challenger, etc., I had never played a Fistful of TOWs.

The scenario postulates a Russian drive with mechanized forces to seize three critical road junctions. There were Lithuanian forces entrenched across the board, consisting mainly of APCs, infantry w/Javelins, and some mortars. They would bear the brunt of the Russian attack until other NATO forces could arrive. With no armor of their own, it was doubtful that they would hold out very long.
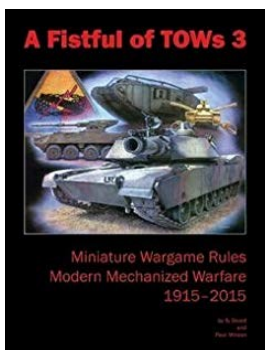
A strong Polish force consisting of a T-72 armored battalion along with a few companies of infantry in BMPs would arrive when the game started, followed by a U.S. cavalry battalion. While there were a lot of missile armed units in the reinforcements, the Poles were the only force that had any considerable armored component and that consisted of some older T-72s.

The Russians had a full armored brigade, consisting of several armored battalions, infantry in BTRs, artillery, SAMs, and recon elements. Their goal was to quickly brush aside the Lithuanians and get to the various crossroads, then defend against the eventual NATO counterattacks. The Russians, however, decided to focus on the side of the board where the NATO reinforcements were arriving, which certainly made the game go faster! The weather was rainy and overcast, meaning visibility was around 15 inches, with many of the vehicles being able to use their thermal imaging sights out to 20 inches.

The rules at first glance appear daunting. They are a large, thick book that with all of the charts and tables goes to around 400 pages. Again, however, most of that is charts, tables, army lists, stats, and so on. The rules are comprehensive and will not be for everyone. They cover artillery, air support, engineering, sighting with various optics, etc. There's no way you're going to play things correctly the first time, so this is one of those sets of rules where you should start out small, maybe a few armor companies against each other to get the movement and combat system down, then layer things on after that. Everything is done with D6s and usually after the first few turns you just need the set of charts that can be printed out.

Firing is done by rolling a number of D6s cor-responding to your rate of fire. Modifiers are added, then if a hit is scored the weapon's strength is compared to the target's armor, which gives a number of D6s to be rolled for effect. The results are misses, quality checks (which if failed the unit withdraws from the fight), and destroyed. Fairly simple once you get the hang of it.

Playing the game did set off memories of days long past with Warsaw Pact formations rumbling across the table into the face of NATO defenses. Unlike many games today where there is minimal preparation for a game, you will need to have unit rosters for both sides showing the

vehicles, infantry, and weapons stats, plus load outs for all aircraft. Yes, this is a set of rules where you can get down into the weeds and in fact, are encouraged to.

I was only able to stay for a little bit past the halfway part of the scenario. The Russians hammered the Lithuanians, except for one group entrenched outside of a small village that simply refused to die! The Poles came on board and instantly went into counterattack mode while the M-3s of the U.S. Cavalry forces engaged the Russian armor at close range. Because of the weather, the ranges were lethal and within the first few turns there were burning vehicles across that side of the board.

The rules worked well and certainly gave the impression of how a modern armored battle would unfold. If you played this period back in the day, you'll be back up to speed in no time at all. Hopefully we'll do this again sometime soon and have a more extensive review of the rules and a full battle report in a future issue.

Several images showing the initial Russian attacks on the Lithuanian defenders. The Poles, who had a brigade of Russian equipment, was rapidly trying to move up to block any attacks towards all three crossroads. The poor visibility made this a real close combat type of fight where the better Russian equipment seemed to do well in.

With time running out and the holidays fast approaching (so only a few of us were available), we needed a three player scenario of BKC IV for game night and needed it within 24 hours! Yes, there would be no careful attempt to balance out forces, choose terrain to give advantages/ disadvantages to both sides, etc. We would just throw things out on the table and make it up as we went along! In the end, it didn't turn out too bad!

The scenario would depict the leading edges of a Russian armored attack somewhere along the Eastern Front in late '44 or early '45. The Germans have a force holding several key points along the table, with reserves being sent in as quickly as possible. The victory conditions were quite simple: The Russians needed to exit as many units as possible off the German held road entrances. Simple in theory, but the terrain was pretty nasty in certain areas, especially with limited fields of fire and the Germans controlling the choke points.

German At Start Forces

(2) Infantry companies (each with three stands of infantry, mortars, HMGs, and AT weapons)

(1) 75mm AT gun & (3) Marder IIIs

(2) Stug IIIG company (3 vehicles)

One FAO with (3) batteries of 105mm artillery and a Recon asset started on board.

There were three groups of German reinforcements that could be brought on board one group per turn:

1st Kampfgruppe-(4) PZIVHs

2nd Kampfgruppe-(3) Panthers

3rd Kampfgruppe-(1) Panzergrenadier company w/(1) Tiger

Russian Forces At Start

(1) Armor battalion with (12) T-34/85 and two stands of infantry

(2) Armor battalion with (8) M-4/76 Shermans and two stands of infantry

(1) Infantry battalion (understrength) plus (3) SU-122s

(1) Recon Company

FAO (w/3 batteries of 122mm artillery) and various command assets. There was a stipulation in the victory conditions that if the Russian recon company got off board along one of the roads the Russians automatically won,

The Russians decided to enter basical-

ly in the same area, keeping the recon company in reserve as a threat to cross the river at any time, which would force the Germans to keep some units away from the main action. The Germans were hampered by only starting with one command stand for the entire board, which would be equalized by the rigid doctrine rule for Russian forces.

The T-34/85 battalion ran into trouble right away, taking fire from the Stugs and when they tried to flank the town, AT fire from the infantry kept them from expanding out. The Sherman battalion attacked into the railyard area, making good progress until the German artillery decimated the infantry battalion that was supporting them. After the first three turns, we were thinking that this was going to be a short night! More German armor was

piling up the road and the Russian attack was going nowhere. (cont. on p9)

The start of Turn 4 find the Russians determined to break out and force the issue. The T-34/85 battalion, which had been taking heavy fire from the town, the Stugs near the other village, and from a counterattack from the Marder IIIs, finally gets into position to return fire, knocking out two Stugs and two of the Marders. One company breaks out and begins closing the range on the German armor moving up the road.

The Shermans, meanwhile, decide to engage the approaching German armor at close range, setting off a duel that would go several turns, but leaves both sides units wrecked. Each time the Germans would counterattack the Russians would hold their ground, especially the SU-122s after most of the Shermans were knocked out. Time and time again, the SU-122s slugged it out with the Panthers and PZIVHs, buying time for the Russian advance.

(cont. from p8) The Russians then broke out, determined to force the action, even at close range and the prospect of losing most of their forces. If progress wasn't made by turn 6 the German position would be too strong to crack. The Shermans attacked the German held village, right into the teeth of the advancing Panthers and PZIVHs. Although most of the Shermans were knocked out, they freed up the T-34/85s to take on the Stugs, which they finished off.

Now it was down to the Panthers and the Marders, who launched a series of counterattacks. The Marders started strong, but were overwhelmed when the Panthers met their demise. The Panthers were blocked by the terrain and fighting between the Shermans and MkIVHs, so they moved down the road and across the fields to get a better angle on the T-34/85s. Unfortunately for them, the Russians chose to have some of their best die rolling of the night and took out the remaining Panthers!

Now the Russian offensive finally got rolling with all of their companies on the move, closing the range and simply obliterating any opposition in their path. The Russian recon company saw its chance and began to move across the river in preparation for a breakout. The SU-122s were still hanging on, swapping shot for shot with the remaining MKIVHs and preventing them from blocking the Russians moving towards the roads.

At this stage, which was around Turn 10 and having played about 3 1/2 hours, the Germans were out of units and the Russians were going to break out. After discussing the situation for a while longer we determined that it would eventually end in a complete Russian victory.

For having just created the scenario out of the blue, it worked pretty well! The terrain forced both sides to come up with some unorthodox plans as there weren't too many fields of fire longer than 20 inches on the tabletop! This meant a lot of close range fire, taking chances by moving in the open to get better shots, and trying to bring numbers to bear was virtually impossible. All in all, it was one of our better games!

This was our fourth or fifth time with the new BKC IV rules and the reactions have been pretty positive. The recon and artillery systems work really well now, plus the army lists and unit stats are pretty reasonable. While we still have to try airstrikes, engineering, etc., so far we like what we've seen. What's needed now are more actual orders of battle, scenarios, and hopefully someday a campaign.

One of the hardest things to do in the hobby is reviewing games. No matter the technology, era, etc., wargaming reviews are a tough assignment. First off, someone needs to voluntarily take this project on, play the game (sometimes multiple times), write out an article, review it, then publish it via a magazine, web site, blog, forum, etc. It takes work, commitment, a desire to share knowledge with other gamers, and you need to set aside hobby time for it.
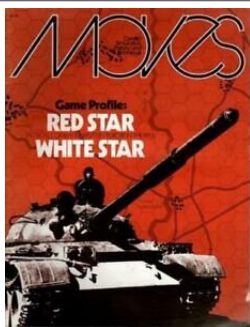
Or do you any more? In the 70s, 80s, and 90s, magazines such as Moves, Fire & Movement, The Courier, and even various sections in Battles, Military Modeling, and others, had extensive reviews of wargaming products, be it board games, rules, miniatures, or accessories. Many of these were well thought out, comprehensive, and even if you didn't agree with them, you got a lot of information from the review. I still remember various reviews, counterpoints, alternative views, and more that filled the pages of several issues over things like The Russian Campaign, The Complete Brigadier, Johnny Reb, Tobruk, and far more. The reviews didn't just cover the games, but they were discussion points that would go on long afterwards you had finished that particular issue of the magazine. In fact, several reviews became long running point-counterpoint articles and generated pages of letters in future issues.

Today that's certainly not the case. A review can be posted on TMP, BGG, and on various blogs and forums almost instantly. Write out your thoughts,, include a few pictures, then sit back and watch. Maybe it generates a lot of interest, there could be some interesting discussion about various aspects of the rules, and perhaps even the designer will pop on to answer some things or explain why certain decisions were made during the design process. Or maybe not.
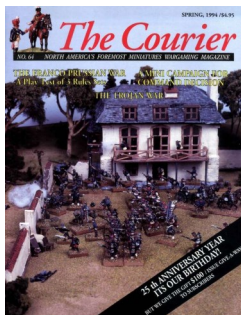
For every well thought out and written review, there are dozens upon dozens that aren't. In this day and age anyone can literally post a review. Yes, many of these sites are moderated and I'm sure they delete some poorly written material, but most of it gets through. Also, how do you stop someone from posting on a blog, then linking to it on other forums? What was once a respected part of the hobby has devolved into a free for all where it's hard to tell if the review is accurate or not. Reviewers use to take their craft seriously and some still do, but their numbers have greatly diminished and continue to do so. While there are a few magazines such as Paper Wars and several web sites that post reviews that are about as professional as you can get, they are few and far between.

Now there are several reasons for this and we can get into them, although I'm sure that I'm going to miss a few. The first and most obvious is the "I'm a gamer, I bought this game, I played it once, so I can review it" type review, of which there are way too many of. These are the gamers who do the "unboxing" videos, first impressions posts, and other things that are fairly obvious to many in the hobby. Yes, I can see that you got the game. Yes, there are three counter sheets and two maps. Funny, the company's web page for that game said the same thing! What, it looks like a WW2 game about Stalingrad? Why, yes, it says something about Stalingrad right there on the box! Whether it's people who can't contain their excitement and need to post something each day, or it's people who think they're the only ones getting this game, these kinds of things don't do the hobby any favors.

The next group are what I call "partial reviewers" and there are surprisingly quite a few of them. They post on blogs, forums, or on Youtube channels things that are almost a full review. This usually entails a quick overview, then they play a few turns, then give their impression and final judgement on the game. In many instances they're playing the game wrong! They are in such a hurry to post something that they don't take the time to actually read the rules, play through a scenario or two, then post something about the game. Many of the times their conclusions are just incorrect and if they had taken the time to do a proper review they would have seen this.

Finally, there is the phenomenon that the hobby has done to itself and that is that most new games, rules, etc., are so expensive that to give something a bad review is to inherently question why you paid so much for in the first place. If you just shelled out $50 for a set of rules, $90 for a boxed set, then a further $75 on extra miniatures and accessories for one game, that game is going to be pretty good in your mind, whether it is or isn't! Just look online for reviews about Cruel Seas or SPQR. While there have been all kinds of posts about the quality of the rules, errata, the game play issues, etc., on various forums, try finding a negative review! It's not easy and those who have spent a sizeable amount of money on these things aren't going to criticize them heavily.

This also ties into what is a "reality" with gaming reviews today and something that even I am forced into at times here in the pages of this magazine. If you don't get the game for free and have to pay $50, 60, 100+ for the game, it better be something that you're interested in! Many of the games I review here in Warning Order are because I had an interest in that game subject and paid for it. Yes, it definitely explains why many of the game reviews here are fairly positive. I like that company, designer, series, etc., I've done research on the game, or I enjoy that particular style of game or period of history. Before the game even arrives there's a good chance I'm going to like it. That's not always the case, but I do read the rules, play the game, follow rules updates, and try to write an interesting review. As with the France 1944 review in this issue I thought it was something I would like, but the changes in the redesign turned it into a so-so game in my view.

Writing informative reviews takes time, dedication, and a willingness to share information with others. That certainly clashes with most of today's hobby where time is of the essence and there are wave after wave of new games coming out. Why waste time going over a game thoroughly when there's more coming today? This really needs to stop. Good wargame reviews benefit us all and they should be encouraged wherever possible.

Engagements 35: Occupy the Village

Situation: Blue is on a punitive raid to find a local tribe that has been ambushing supply convoys in the region. Blue has recently discovered where their main village is and has deployed their forces to enter the area and attack the tribe. Red will defend the village, using the large hill and rocky terrain to their advantage as obstacles to Blue's advance.

Period: Designed primarily for the Colonial era, but could work with Ancients.

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

Terrain Notes: The terrain is barren, but not entirely desert with a dry river bed running north to south on the map. The hill in the center, while not very high, is a formidable obstacle that cannot be crossed by cavalry or artillery. The area to the east of that hill and adjacent to the dry river bed is composed of low hills, rocks, and scrub brush. It should be treated as rough terrain and does block long range visibility. The other areas on the map are scrub brush that offers concealment. The village is composed of mud huts with a pond and palm trees.

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

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the units that enter the South edge of the board on Turn 1.

Enter Turn 1:

12 units of infantry

3 units of cavalry

2 units of rifle armed infantry

Set Up: Red's starting forces can be deployed in any formation north of the red line on the map and start hidden from view if positioned in any of the concealing terrain features. The rifle armed infantry can be deployed on the center hill in rifle pits or shallow entrenchments.

Red Orders: Use the terrain to your advantage to keep Blue guessing about where your main force is deployed. Try to overwhelm at least part of Blue's forces with your large number of infantry

Blue Forces: Blue is advancing upon the village and is unaware of the strength of Red's forces or their deployment. Blue decides to proceed to the attack with their force split into three groups as described below.

Advance Guard:

1 unit of cavalry

1 unit of askari/native cavalry

Main Force:

3 units of infantry

3 units of askari/native infantry

1 section of artillery

1 section of machine or gatling guns

Reserve:

2 units of infantry

1 unit of cavalry

Blue Orders: Advance upon the native village and defeat any opposition by native armed forces. Occupy the enemy held village by the end of the scenario.

Set Up: The Advance Guard enters at either of the Blue arrows on the map in any formation. On Turn 2 the Main Force enters and on Turn 4 the Reserve force enters the board area.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: Blue's askari/native infantry or cavalry are forces loyal to that colonial power, but should be at least one level of experience/skill/morale than the regular colonial troops (i.e., Indian, Egyptian, Natal Mounted Police, etc.).

Victory Conditions: Blue needs to occupy the enemy village by the end of Turn 12 and not have suffered more than 40% casualties. Any other result is a Red victory.

Variants: The first option would be to increase the size of the board and double the forces involved, which would make for a pretty good sized Colonial game! The force ratios can also be adjusted to compensate for the number of players, experience levels, or to fit the rules that are being used.

Another way to add some variation would be to put several forces of different size on cards, then the Red player draws one at the start of the game and those units are set up on the board. Additional cards could be drawn to represent native reinforcements that arrive during the battle, which would make things tough for Blue to plan for.

The native village does not need to be the only objective(s) on the board. Exiting forces off the north of the board, rescuing a garrison in the village, getting a supply convoy through the area, etc., could all be added to the scenario.

For a reversal of sides, you could have a breakout by Blue, who is garrisoning the village against a loose siege by Red, This happened a few times in the early Sudan actions such as at Sinkat. Red would have reinforcements that could arrive from other sectors to stop the breakout. Blue could have a relief force that was fighting to link up with the garrison, but its appearance would be randomized as would its entry point.

Situation: Blue desperately needs a port in this region to land supplies and reinforcements to sustain operations. The only main road to the port, however, is guarded by a heavily fortified town and all of the sea approaches are covered by coastal batteries. Blue needs to either take the port or withdraw from this region, so the decision has been made to launch an ambitious attack against Red's defenses. There are multiple ways to seize the port and Blue will need to choose from several force structures to keep Red guessing from which direction the attack will come from.

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 not steep and while the forests are light, they do provide cover. The villages and towns are a mix of stone and wood buildings. The rivers can only be crossed at the bridges by vehicles, although infantry can cross on foot, but it should be a severe movement penalty. To the west of Town A there is a large marsh area that is impassible to vehicles and can only be crossed by infantry with great difficulty. The coast forts and fortifications at A and B are covered in the special rules.

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

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the units that enter the South edge of the board on Turn 1.

Garrison at A

1 unit of armor

4 units of infantry

1 unit of heavy weapons/mortars

1 unit of AT guns or ATGMs

1 combat engineer unit

Garrison at B

2 units of infantry

Placed Anywhere on the Map

1 unit of mech infantry

1 unit of heavy weapons/mortars

2 units of infantry

Alert Force

2 units of armor

2 units of mech infantry

1 recon unit

Off-board:

3 batteries of medium artillery

Set Up: Red's forces are placed at their starting locations with the exception of a few units that can be placed anywhere on the map. Red's Alert Force will enter on the roads marked 1, 2, and 3 after the scenario begins. Each turn roll 1D6 and on a 4, 5, or 6 the Alert Force arrives.

Red Orders: Stay mobile and prevent Blue from linking up forces to make a concerted attack against the port. A is a formidable objective for Blue, but could be taken and then there is a direct route to the port. If the port is taken quickly, organize a counterattack to retake the position.

Blue Forces: Choose one of the force options from the following page.

Blue Orders: Seize and hold the port at B. This will cut off the town at A and force it to surrender at some point in the near future. If the port is unable to be taken, seize the two bridges and exit units off the road entrances/exits at 1, 2, and 3. This will cut off the town and port, ensuring their surrender.

Set Up: Airborne forces are available to arrive on Turn 1 and can be dropped at any location on the board. Ground and amphibious forces can begin operations

on any turn. Ground forces enter within 12 inches of the blue arrow outside of the town at A. Amphibious forces arrive at the arrows marked 1, 2, and 3 along the coast.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: The bridges are wired for demolition and Red can roll for their destruction once any Blue unit gets within 12" of the bridges. Each bridge is rolled for separately with a d6 and is destroyed on a 1-5.

There are four forts at A and two at B. The three forts at A connected by lines are a series of concrete bunkers and pillboxes linked by entrenchments and minefields (the size of both are determined by the players and/or the rules that they use. The two forts at B and the one fort at A adjacent to the sea are sizeable constructions that house naval batteries that control entrance to the port. The naval batteries can function as artillery with the rules that you use or a simpler method of firing at the amphibious landing forces could be devised, such as rolling 2-4D6's each turn and on a 5 or 6 one landing craft carrying one unit is sunk.

Blue has available two commando forces at the start of the game that will attempt to seize one or both bridges. If they each attempt to seize a bridge roll 1D6 and on a 1, 2, or 3 they take the bridge and prevent its demolition. If both commando forces are used on only one bridge, it is captured on anything but a roll of a 6. **This can only be attempted on the first turn of the game.**

Victory Conditions: Blue can achieve a major victory if they seize the port at B anytime before the end of the scenario. If the port is not taken by the end of Turn 12, Blue can still win a minor victory by taking both bridges and exiting at least six units off the roads at 1, 2, or 3 (this would result in a protracted siege of the town and port).

Engagements 36: Seize The Port! (cont.)

Ground Attack

(4) armor units

(4) mech infantry units

(8) infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) heavy mortars unit

(2) combat engineer units

Off Board Artillery

(3) batteries medium artillery

(2) batteries naval gunfire support

Special Rules

Allow combat engineers to deploy closer to the front lines with the possibility of clearing some of the minefields prior to the attack.

Airborne Attack

(12) paratroop infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) light mortars unit

(1) combat engineer unit

Glider-borne units

(1) battery of artillery

(1) anti-tank battery

(1) unit of recce jeeps

Off Board Artillery

None

Special Rules

May land anywhere on the board.

Amphibious Attack

(4) armor units

(10) infantry units

(2) heavy weapons unit

(1) heavy mortars unit

(2) combat engineer units

Off Board Artillery

(3) batteries naval gunfire support

Special Rules

Each unit will need one landing craft unit assigned to it for transportation to the beach area and there can be up to 8 landing craft units in each wave. ONLY infantry units and combat engineers can be in the 1st wave.

Airborne + Amphibious Attack

Airborne Force

(6) paratroop infantry units

Amphibious Force

(3) armor units

(6) infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) heavy mortar unit

(1) combat engineer unit

Off Board Artillery

(3) batteries naval gunfire support

Special Rules

Each unit will need one landing craft unit assigned to it for transportation to the beach area and there can be up to 8 landing craft units in each wave. ONLY infantry units and combat engineers can be in the 1st wave.

Airborne forces can land anywhere on the table.

Airborne + Ground Attack

Airborne Force

(6) paratroop infantry units

Ground Force

(3) armor units

(3) mech infantry units

(6) infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) heavy mortars unit

(1) combat engineer unit

Off Board Artillery

(3) batteries medium artillery

(2) batteries naval gunfire support

Special Rules

Airborne forces can land anywhere on the table.

Allow combat engineers to deploy closer to the front lines with the possibility of clearing some of the minefields prior to the attack.

Amphibious + Ground Attack

Amphibious Force

(1) armor units

(4) infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) combat engineer unit

Ground Force

(3) armor units

(3) mech infantry units

(6) infantry units

(1) heavy weapons unit

(1) heavy mortars unit

(1) combat engineer unit

Off Board Artillery

(3) batteries medium artillery

(2) batteries naval gunfire support

Special Rules

Allow combat engineers to deploy closer to the front lines with the possibility of clearing some of the minefields prior to the attack.

Each unit will need one landing craft unit assigned to it for transportation to the beach area. (one wave only)

Notes: Regardless of which option is chosen, the commando raids to seize the two bridges occur in each scenario. Players may also want to add airstrikes and air defenses to both sides depending upon the rules that are being used and the size of game that your group wishes to play.

Wargaming Catalogs

One of the joys of the hobby back in the 70s and 80s was the appearance of the various wargaming catalogs, whether it was board or miniatures games. At that time it was pretty much the only communication you had from wargaming companies outside of magazine articles or blundering into some of their products in the local hobby store. They came in all shapes and sizes, with many being just lists of the products they had to offer. A few had pictures, but not many and it wasn't until the end of the 80s that you really started to see a huge improvement in marketing for the hobby.

There were of course the SPI and Avalon Hill game catalogs that came out regularly and were in their magazines as well their games. The SPI games usually featured the covers and that was enough to get a lot of sales, regardless if the games were good or not! Avalon Hill's were pretty standard fare and didn't really cause that much excitement, but those SPI ones sure did. You would look them over with your friends, circle the games you thought were interesting, then either save up enough money to order them or when you went on a monthly trip to the hobby store you could look them over.

Naturally, most gamers would purchase a hobby magazine every now and then, if nothing else for the catalog listings in each issue! Ros Heroics, Minifigs, Ral Partha, etc., were staples in almost every wargaming magazine and they would be referenced continuously when researching figs for a new project. I remember when the first multipage ad for Essex Miniatures appeared in The Courier. The level of excitement was off the charts! It sounds pretty silly today, but back then no one had ever seen something like that. My gaming buddies and I talked about that ad for months. What would come out next? Would there be other scales? Why did they pick those periods? No one knew at that time that Essex would go on to produce thousands of miniatures in several scales and become a huge wargaming operation.

The king of the wargaming catalogs was the one produced by Modelers Mart out of Florida. When this thing arrived at your house, it was like Christmas. Packed with listings for miniatures, terrain, rules, accessories, and more, it was the "go to" resource for gamers worldwide. You would literally spend hours and hours going through the pages, writing down sample orders for various projects, meeting with friends to combine orders, discussing the latest items, and it became an entity unto itself.

The big problem is that weren't any pictures, so when you ordered things you were literally taking the plunge without knowing what you would get. This definitely burned several of us as items that sounded good ended up being pretty poor quality. The other issue is that the orders could take quite some time, especially if they had to reorder items from England or wait for the next shipment from the supplier. You would check the mailbox for weeks at times, always praying that your order would arrive. Later, I found out from someone who regularly shopped at their store that it was much like Brookhurst Hobbies in California where there was stuff literally piled all over the store. How they ever found anything to fulfill the orders is still a mystery!
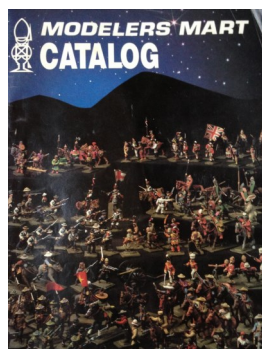
GHQ was also a big leader in wargame catalogs and even if you weren't into micro-armor or naval you certainly looked through it, if just for ideas on new periods. The Ros Heroics list, whether obtained by mail or in a magazine is still perplexing to this day. How one page showing all of their 6mm figs could cause you to stare at it for so long, come up with so many projects, and cause you to figure out how to convert various figures into something you needed still amazes me to this day. Over the years I ordered from them several times, just based off the items I had seen on that one page ad. They certainly got their money's worth from gamers over the years based on those magazine ads!

This also had the effect of gamers ordering sample items so that others could see them and determine if they should order some as well. This was particularly true with micro-armor back in the 70s and 80s. GHQ was the top of the line, but they only had so many items and were focused on U.S. as well as Soviet models. If you wanted British, Swedish, Czech, or some weird item to fill out an order of battle, you needed to order it from Enola, Skytrex, Davco, Ros Heroics, or some of the other firms that produced micro-armor. Some arrived as blobs of lead while others were pretty impressive. Once you had the sample in hand it greatly determined if you would order those, wait for GHQ's to come out, or move onto another period!

As the 80s came to a close and the 90s began, Games Workshop started to show companies how to market wargaming products. Some companies learned valuable lessons while many went away, still clinging to their black and white text lists. Catalogs improved, there were more single page ads and flyers, convention posters, handouts, etc., that changed the hobby until the age of the Internet. I was always fortunate in that the areas I lived in had local hobby stores that carried wargames. Not only that, many toy stores carried SPI and Avalon Hill games until the end of the 80s. Being able to go to the local store, look over the racks of GHQ, Ral Partha, Minifigs, and other figures, games, and rules, definitely helped. Other gamers in areas with no hobby stores had to rely solely on mail order, which as mentioned before, was hit or miss.

Today, the Internet has done away with these catalogs. Everything, with pictures, is now available, making ordering figs, rules, games, etc., more of a task than a hobby. Yes, it's better today, but I for one will never forget the excitement of getting wargame catalogs in the mail!

Blast From The Past Pt. 40: Sci-Fi Small Unit Actions

While science-fiction wargaming is a popular topic with many gamers, particular with miniatures, most of it focuses on what are termed 4X games (Xplore, Xploit, Xpand, and Xterminate) such as Space Empires, Twilight Imperium, Eclipse, and more. In terms of board games, outside of Space Hulk, which is a hybrid board/miniatures game, there haven't been a lot of successful small unit games over the last several decades. Although there are all kinds of games coming out today and it's nearly impossible to stay up on what is out there, here are some classics from the 70s and 80s on the topic.

Snapshot by GDW

Probably my first attempt at fighting sci-fi small unit actions and a brief intro into the Traveler universe, from which the game was kind of from. There were several floor plans of ships included, along with all kinds of weapons and armor to equip your troops. The scenarios were pretty interesting and you could easily create new floor plans for other ships. In fact, GDW later released Azhanti High Lightning, which had stacks of floor plans for a single ship!

The main issue with the game (and most GDW products for the time) was the procedural nature of everything, with little left to chance. This made for a sterile type game where you almost knew the outcome even before you attempted any actions.

Olympica by Metagaming

One of the better micro-games where a commando force needs to raid Mars and stop what today would be called the Internet! The only real down side to this game was that units that that were above and below ground had to be displayed on the same map, where two maps would have been ideal. The micro-games had component limitations, so this was understandable and at the time, perfectly acceptable. We were all so starved for games, especially sci-fi ones, that you were more than ready to overlook small problems such as this. This game can still be picked up fairly cheap and it's worth a play or two.
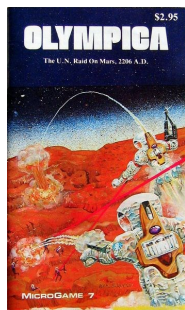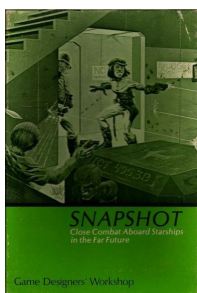
StarSoldier by SPI

For a 16 year old high school student, this game came as quite a shock. How could something with such a cool theme be weighed down by all these rules? Although I had figured out how to play Sixth Fleet by this time (my first board war game), Starsoldier was a bit beyond that. Simultaneous plotting, lots of procedures, etc., turned something that should have been a slam dunk into a several hour slugfest through a scenario. Returning to it today, the game actually works and there are some great ideas here, but it badly needs a components upgrade as well as a new rulebook.

Battlesuit by Steve Jackson Games

By the time this game came out, Ogre and GEV were well established in the wargaming world, having multiple versions, add-ons, articles in the Space Gamer, and more. Battlesuit should have been an instant classic...but that's not what happened. Gamers wanted Ogres, tanks, and artillery, not slugging it out with infantry over barren landscapes. The huge issue is that it was not compatible in any sense of the word with the two main games, so when everyone started reading the rules it was something of a let down. The rules themselves had numerous problems, so the game was quickly forgotten.

Asteroid by GDW

Yet another GDW game as the company really did put out a lot of sci-fi material back in their heyday. We've all seen the plot before; giant asteroid/killing machine heading to wipe out earth that must be stopped. What set this game apart is that you could choose from several characters and the floor plan could change from game to game. For a small game (one paper map and around a 100 counters) it packed a pretty good punch. The systems were a bit procedural, but it worked.
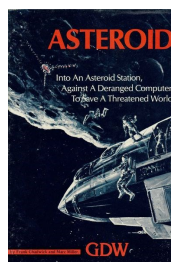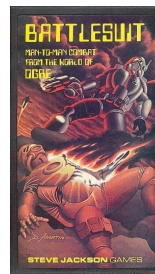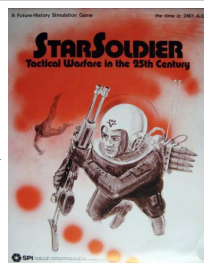
Outpost Gamma by Dwarfstar

Dwarfstar Games put out a set of 8 games (if I remember right) in the early 80s in what would be the flimsiest boxes in the history of gaming! This was a shame in that some of the games inside were pretty decent, including this one. A small, hi-tech force is attacked by a far more numerous native force, which was pretty balanced if I recall right. The game is now available free to print 'n play along with many other games in the series.

Starship Troopers by Avalon Hill

This game is almost at the upper edge of the topic as some of the larger scenarios involve entire companies of troops. Still, this is a classic game where each counter is an individual soldier and you need to use small level tactics to accomplish your goals. Very difficult to play solitaire, but the scenarios involving the bugs are still some of the best sci-fi gaming ever created. For many gamers in the 70s and early 80s this along with the Metagaming micro-games were probably their first try at the genre. Today, the game is still being played and it has stood up to the test of time. You can also safely ignore the movie version of the game!

There are many, many others today, with most having miniatures or are simply WH40K clones. So many, in fact, that any list you would create would be obsolete in a few months as more sci-fi games would have come along. For many of us gamers from the 70s and 80s era, these games hold a special place in our hearts. Many were cheap, we all read a ton of sci-fi books, and it was easy to find players for the genre. Also, you didn't have anywhere near the choice or access to games that we all have today!

Sci-fi tactical games will still come out as the period is far from being exhausted. Some of the games featured here could definitely use an upgrade, but my guess is that what we have will have to do. I still have many of these games and I'm not planning on giving them up anytime soon!
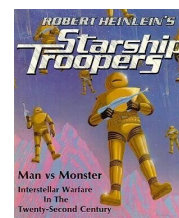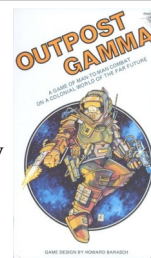
Campaigns for Downloading

If you're looking for a miniatures campaign or are new to the magazine, there have been a number of campaigns published in these pages over the years. On top of that there are several other campaigns available on the web site. This is just a quick summary of what is available and what issue it appeared in.

Drive to the Coast-Issue #44

This is a WW2/Modern campaign simulating a large breakthrough by one side that is trying to reach the coastline of an enemy. The defenders need to protect their ports as well as deny any bridgeheads across the major river in the area.
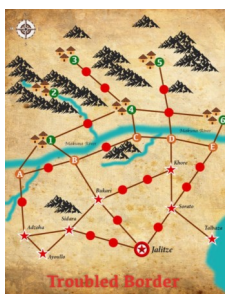
Troubled Border-Issue #46

This is a generic Victorian era colonial campaign that can be used with any forces that your gaming group has available. The campaign simulates an attack by a native force across a major river, trying to destroy the colonial power in charge of that area. Several paths to victory and it should generate a large number of battles.

To Naples!-Issue #47

This is a fictional Renaissance campaign featuring a favorite objective during that time period, which is the capture of Naples. The composition of both sides forces will ebb and flow during the campaign with an ever changing strategic situation.
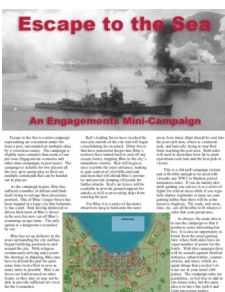
Escape To The Sea-Issue #49

Another WW2/Modern campaign with one side trying to hang onto a vital port to evacuate their forces. The campaign features battles for the surrounding critical hilltops, fighting in the suburbs of the port, naval units, air attacks, and should be a challenge for both sides.

To The Ends Of The Earth-Issue #50

This is a fictional ancients period campaign that can be used with any army. The campaign features a major offensive into an enemy's territory, supported by naval units. There is a complete naval system included, optional rules, and more to make for an interesting and ever changing campaign.
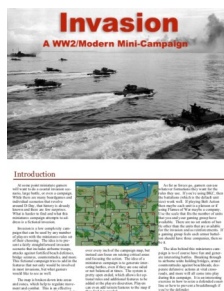
Invasion-Issue #52

Yet another WW2/Modern campaign where one army is invading the territory of another. They must quickly seize a port to bring on follow on forces, then break out off of one edge of the map. The campaign features naval bombardment, paratroops, bridge seizure, and can be used with any size forces or armies that are available.

*The following campaigns are available on the web site: www.wfhgs.com*
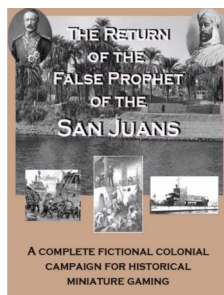
The Return of the False Prophet of the San Juans

This is a fictional Sudan type colonial campaign suitable for any Colonial era rules. The campaign is designed to be played by team as the Mahdist forces are controlled by the system. This is a card driven campaign, where each card can be played for the event, additional forces, or to activate units and gunboats.
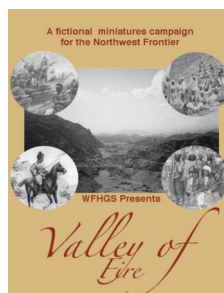
Valley of Fire

Although designed for TSATF, it can be used with almost any Colonial era rules. The campaign simulates a revolt by several local tribes and the siege of a British held fort, deep within tribal territories. The British and their Indian allies must send out a relief expedition to reach the fort and put down the revolt as it spreads throughout the area.
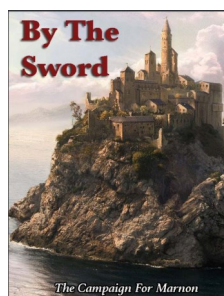
By The Sword

This is a fictional campaign designed for use with Warmaster Ancients with a modified map from the Avalon Hill game Wizard's Quest. There are event cards, mercenaries, fleets, and more in probably the most involved campaign that we've created. Although designed for WMA, it could be used with other Ancients period rules with some modification.

Beyond The Saale

Our first campaign on the web site! This is a fictional campaign where the Prussians win big at Zorndorf, but before they can turn their attention westward, the Austrians and French attack with a massive force. This campaign was designed for Age of Reason, but can be used with other Horse & Musket period rules.

One of the most popular and hard to find wargames that came out of Avalon Hill was Dune, based upon the famous series of science fiction novels by James Herbert. There were several versions of the game, including one with a cover based upon the 80s movie version and even used copies were going for $75-150 on Ebay for the last 10-15 years. With the rights issues seemingly resolved for now and a new movie version coming out soon, Gale Force Nine has released a new version of Dune.

Dune is a war for control of the planet Arrakis, the only place in the galaxy where "spice" is found, which is used to navigate the stars, provide long life, and several other benefits described throughout the series. The main issue is that it is found on a planet without water, with wandering sand storms the size of a continent, and created by monstrous sand worms! There are several faction seeking to control the planet and that's where the game picks up. Dune can be played with 2-6 players, but as we found out, the more there are the better the game is.

The game gets by with the bare essentials for components. There is a small, mounted mapboard, tokens for the armed forces of each faction, faction summaries, and several card decks. All of the components are well done and the company was smart to include the rules as well as a quick start guide. You can be up and running pretty quickly as the game has been streamlined from its Avalon Hill days to fit into a two hour window (probably three hours with 5-6 players).

Each turn players determine where the storms move and that entire planetary sector is out of play and it destroys pretty much anything in its path. Then there is a card draw that determines where the spice shows up for that turn. Spice is everything in the game as it is used as the game's currency. The more you have the

more you can do each turn, seemingly overwhelming your competitors. Factions ship in off planet forces, battles are fought, then victory determined at the end of each turn (the game is 10 turns long).

There is a very involved treachery and traitor element to the game, which makes combat unpredictable. The first turn or two goes slow as everyone figures things out, but then the game flows pretty fast. The 2-3 player versions don't seem too work well and so you really need at least 4 and perhaps the full 6 to get the most out of the game. Fun to play and it seems to have pretty good replay value.

Pandemic: Fall of Rome is not what you think, especially if you are familiar with the Pandemic series of games! Before seeing the game I thought it would be about stopping a plague in Ancient Rome, but actually this is a cooperative (all players on the same side) wargame using the Pandemic game engine. In fact, after playing it I was surprised that it hasn't been advertised or discussed more in wargaming circles.

The map covers the Roman empire at the time of the barbarian invasions, stretching from Constantinople to Egypt. There are five large areas at the top where the various barbarian tribes start their invasions. Along with the map and rules, there are tokens for legions, barbarians, and forts, plus an assortment of game markers and cards. Overall, the components are about what you would expect from most Euro type games and it is an attractive package.

This is one of those games where it is simpler to play than understanding the rules! If you've not played Pandemic before you will need to go through the various parts of the game slowly, trying a few turns to get the hang of it. You also need to stare at a few sections to figure out what is going on as the rules at times don't

seem to make sense, but they do when you play. There's nothing here overly complex and once you get a few turns under your belt things seem to flow pretty well.

Players start with a token representing their leader/general and a few legions, along with some city cards. City cards are the heart of the game as they allow you to travel across the board and when you get several of the same color you can add one of the barbarian groups as an ally, stopping their invasions. The Roman players win if they get all five groups to be allies, which is definitely harder than it looks. The reason is that the Roman players can lose the game in several ways and once things get going poorly, it becomes an avalanche.

Each player can perform several actions such as moving, fighting battles, recruiting legions, handing off city cards, and more. Players will spend most of the game maneuvering around the board, fighting battles, and trying to stop the barbarians from spreading too quickly. Not as easy as it sounds! There are several game mechanisms where similar to Pandemic's diseases, it spreads so fast that only quick and determined action will prevent the players from losing. Make no mistake, the game is actively trying to defeat you!

Moving, trying to raise legions, collecting the right cards, etc., is filled with tension and is one of the more challenging games we've played this past year. Things can really get out of hand quickly and you never know from what quarter the next crisis will come from. Just when it looks like things are under control a city gets sacked, barbarians are everywhere, and it looks like you will lose in another turn! A well thought out game that is more of a wargame than the others in the game series.

Re-visiting Magic Realm

When Magic Realm first appeared in 1979 from Avalon Hill, it generated a lot of controversy for a game at that time. First, what was a wargame company doing putting out a fantasy game? Second, with the rise of D&D and other RPGs, was this game trying to compete with those? Finally, how could a rulebook slightly over 30 pages be so dense that deciphering it proved too much for many gamers?

Some 40 years later, Magic Realm is still befuddling gamers, garnering pretty good prices on the second hand markets (Ebay, FB Wargamer's Marketplace, etc.), and has become a "grail" game for many board game players. With the legal rights tied up with Hasbro for is probably eternity, there are only two chances to get a copy of Magic Realm. The first is through the secondhand markets and the other is to do what is known as the Karim redesign, for which all of the files are still available for free. I wrote a previous article years ago about building this, but in summary it's going to cost you a few hundred dollars and a month of nights to put it together! There is surprisingly a lot of components, huge rulebook, map tiles, and all kinds of bizarre sized counters.

So what is it about this game that drives gamers to acquire and play it? Simply, it is a unique gaming experience. Not a wargame, but not a RPG, and definitely not something you're going to just set up and start playing right out of the box. This is a definitive example of that fine line between genius and insanity. How everything gets put together, the randomness of each game, high replay value, and the ability 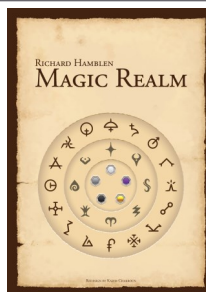to hold up to 16 gamers at once is something you don't see every day. On top of all that, the game system is actively trying to kill you each and every turn!

After setting out the hex tiles, placing all of the chits, setting up the treasures, and so on, everyone picks a character. There are amazons, wizards, knights, dwarves, elves, and more. Each one has distinct advantages and disadvantages, which makes teaming up with others a huge priority. However, killing things is how you win in Magic Realm, which means attacking and/or betraying other players is in line with the game! Each player sets their own victory conditions, so in one game you may be trying to get treasures, in another the focus is on gold, while in another game maybe it's a combination.

The goal is to survive for 30 days in the Realm. Each day the characters record (yes, write down on paper!) the actions they wish to do that day, which include trade, move, rest, alert, search, and more. These are performed in exact order when a player's chit is drawn. Movement is from clearing to clearing and each tile is unique, with caves, mountains, woods, etc., all featured. When all players are finished performing their actions, the fun really begins.

Each tile has one or two warning or site chits, which are flipped over if a character is in that tile. These correspond to lines on the Chart of Appearances, which is where all of the monsters and natives are kept. Each day a certain number of them are prowling the realm. If the warning or site chits symbols correspond to the line of prowling monsters, they appear in that tile. Monsters include goblins, spiders, trolls, giants, dragons, demons, etc., all in various sizes and capabilities.

This sets of combat, which is where most people fail in trying to learn the game. The positioning of the various chits for move/fight, armor, and monsters is a complex ballet that has to be seen to be understood. Monsters are killed, ar-

mor is smashed, characters are wounded or killed, and fatigue can take its toll as well. The combat system is loved or hated; there's no in between. Some characters like the White Knight, can easily kill huge dragons, but five or six small goblins will finish him off as he gets fatigued and worn down. For every advantage in Magic Realm there is a disadvantage.

There are treasures to be found, deals to be made at inns and houses, natives (woodfolk, lancers, guards, etc) to hire or meet when they are on patrol, and areas to avoid. Everyone has allies and enemies, once again weaving a complex narrative over this fantasy game. The next step could be finding a treasure that when sold will win you game while the next monster roll might bring something horrible to your clearing and you meet your end. With Magic Realm, there's no telling what is coming next. Just playing each of the characters could take years and if you add in the advanced rules like weather, visitors, mission chits, etc., a vast game gets even larger.

Is it for everyone? Assuredly not. The rules are long, it will take some trial and error, plus some map set ups can be an exercise in frustration. Today's gamers aren't going to be patient while others may find fault with a system that shows no mercy. There's no do overs, roll a D20 and escape on a 1-5, etc. However, it is a rich and rewarding experience that should be tried by any gamer interested in a fantasy setting. If you ever get a chance top play it, then by all means take the time at least once. The game also plays great solitaire.

Part of the fallout when SPI collapsed back in the day was that some of that team started a new company called Victory Games, which was under the Avalon Hill umbrella. In their short run, VG produced some memorable games, including Gulf Strike, Ambush, the Fleet series, and more. One of the more unusual and less successful games was France 1944: The Allied Crusade in Europe by now famous designer Mark Herman. The game covered the breakout in Normandy over the summer of 1944 and up to the crossing of the Rhine, using a unique command/ movement/combat system.

I remember getting this game for $5 when all of the Avalon Hill and Victory Games' titles started showing up in clearance sales across the country. The game wasn't bad, but it was a different take on the Allied drive across France and was conveniently put in a stack of games and forgotten about. As part of their Designers Edition series, Compass Games has released a slightly redesigned version of the game that will someday soon mate up with another game covering the Eastern Front using the same system.

To say the original game had few components would be an understatement. There was a paper map in garish colors, a small countersheet, and most of the map was composed of charts and tracks. Not so with the Compass version. The map is very well done and not only that, it is mounted. The charts, combat tables, etc., are all separate, including an additional Normandy map to ease congestion in the first few turns. The counters are thick,
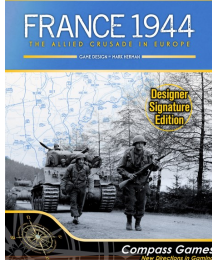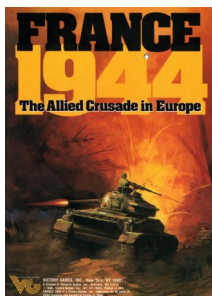
pre-cut, and rounded, so there can be little to complain about in terms of quality for the counters. Plenty of markers for various game functions have also been included in this version. Rounding out the package are a very nice rulebook and play book, with all sorts of examples of play included.

There's been a lot of Normandy games produced over the years, so what makes this one so different? First, the invasion has already occurred and the game starts with the breakout. The next phase of the game is the pursuit across France the Low Countries to the Rhine, followed by the crossing of the Rhine and the advance into Germany. Later this year there will be a follow on game for the Eastern Front that will mate up with this game to show the entire 1944-45 campaign on both fronts.

The key to the game is using your supply and reaction points. Each turn both sides receive a number of supply points, which some or all can be committed to the following turn to buy action chits. When a chit is drawn that side can activate one HQ, which can then activate a number of infantry and armor units to move/fight. Each infantry unit represents a corps while armored units are divisions. A bit unusual, but it works. Reaction points are assigned each turn and after each side's actions the other side can spend points to move individual units or activate one HQ. This does create an interactive game where both sides can activate forces during the turn at different times.

The big system change from most games is what happens when units get activated. Both sides have a movement/ attack increment chart where they pick an option for that HQ. Some are for just movement, some combine movement and attack, while some are designed for a huge attack, then some movement. Selecting the right option for that HQ's units is a pretty big challenge and it will take some getting used to. This is a huge change for most wargamers, so some are going to like this and some will

certainly hate it.

There are two types of combat; set piece and mobile. Each side picks a lead unit, rolls 1D6 against their morale rating, then cross references the results on the combat matrix for either a successful attack/defense or a failed attack/defense. You also roll a hit dice for each side that can produce 1-3 hits. The results listed are in step losses and retreats modified by the odds as well as terrain. This definitely took some getting used to. It also can create some weird situations where a large force rolls poorly and suffers heavy losses while the smaller force escapes with no ill effects.

There is also air support, supply, Rhine crossings, a German late war offensive option and more. The rules are actually fairly simple, and there is a long example of a turn in the playbook, which certainly helps gamers to wrap their heads around these new systems. There is some chrome here and there, but it's pretty manageable. There is also a unique way of handling the Allied second invasion and the German units in the south of France by having them enter the map on the second turn.

I'm still unsure what to make of this game. Clearly the game is designed for a massive Allied breakout on the first and second turns, a race to the Rhine, then trying to cross that river and advance deep into Germany. However, the unusual movement and combat system can easily thwart that plan, more so than how the German player sets up their strategy. That the game is unique among 1944 invasion and breakout games is a given. Do gamers want to take the time to learn something new when there are already so many games out there on the subject? That's a good question and if you have an interest in this period it might be worth a try, but I'm not sure that this is a game you need to rush out and get today.
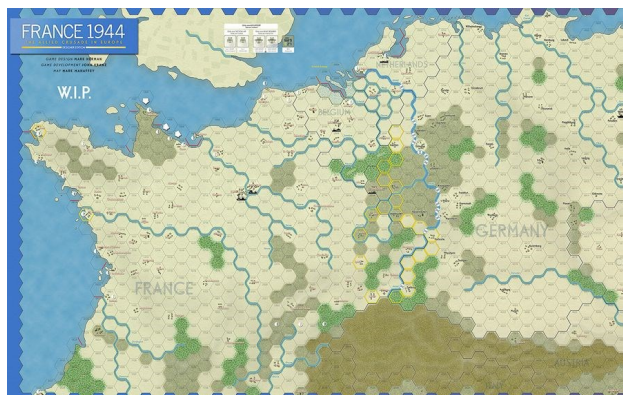
The one great thing about Warmaster Ancients (WMA) is that it is great for showing newcomers to the group or hobby. Fairly simple, but with a lot of subtleties and nuances that you don't pick up at first. It plays fast, is fun, and best of all, it looks like a huge ancient battle on the tabletop! We had a few first time players, so we went with a Romans vs. Seleucids battle at 2,000 points per side, which easily gave everyone enough units for a 3-4 hour contest, which would also include a how to play rules explanation at the start of the game.

The Seleucids rarely win twice in a row. The reasons for this are numerous, including the skill of the army's owner (that would be me) which fluctuates wildly, the enormous amount of unit options that work some nights and don't on others, plus knowing which units should be set up where is always a puzzle. Trying to figure out how elephants, scythed chariots, skirmishers, cataphracts, camels, and so on will interact during the battle is something most ancient generals didn't

have to worry about! The main thing is that there are a lot of units and not enough commanders, plus the pikes usually need to be in the center, so at least there is some consistency there.

The break points showed a pretty big disparity with the Romans set at 13 and the Seleucids at 10. The reason for that was fairly simple in that this time the Romans would have fewer skirmish capable units, relying more on the legions and two units of artillery. The Seleucids, however, had all kinds of skirmish capable units as well as cheap infantry and archers. The Seleucids outnumbered the Romans, but outside of the pikes, heavy cavalry, and elephants, the Seleucid force had some mediocre units.

After set up and a brief rules explanation we were ready to begin. The Seleucids did not start out well, with only one brigade on the left actually moving with a handful of units in the center. The Romans had a similar start and this is how it went for the first few turns. By the end of Turn 3 both sides had several units on the wings that were pretty far out, but the centers were a disorganized mess. Finally, on the start of Turn 4 there was some action as the archers and skirmishers of both sides got into action and some of the cavalry on the wings started to attack.

The cavalry did not last long for either side in this game, which is something of a rarity. Charges, counterattacks, skirmishes rushing in to finish off damaged units,

etc., made short work of the cavalry. After two turns of combat on both wings, 75% of the cavalry units on both sides were combat ineffective or completely destroyed. The few units that did survive waited just outside of charge range, looking for an opportunity to swoop in and finish off some units.

Something must be mentioned about the role of artillery in WMA. Whether by design or accident, artillery deployed in the center doesn't seem to work well. Yes, we've had a few games where it has done some amazing things, but most of the time it gets in some shots at the start of the battle, then either gets overrun or forgotten about, which is what happened here. Because of the Seleucid advance, the legions had to move up to counter, which blocked the artillery's line of sight. When it finally cleared they were overrun by a successful Seleucid attack.

A little past the halfway point and the Romans were ahead on break points, having only lost 4 to the Seleucids 7, so it was desperation time for (cont. on p21)

Here at the mid-game point the Seleucids are pressing the attack, even though at this time they were trailing in break points. The decision was made to force the issue and get into contact with as many Roman units as possible. The alternative was to allow the Romans to continue to pick and choose where the action would be as they slowly whittled down the Seleucid units.

This is when the elephants saw their chance and charged into contact. Using elephants in WMA is a tricky things as they are great when attacking, but not so great defending. The –1 Terror modifier for enemy units and the +1 elephants charging makes them a formidable enemy as they were here in this game. They obliterated two entire units and heavily damaged a third, which was an even exchange in points but scored 2 1/2 break points to losing only 1 for the Seleucid side. The artillery remained blocked for most of the game and its effect on the Seleucids could have been greater if it had some open gaps.

(cont. from p20) the Seleucid commanders. The decision was made to attack all along the line, casualties be damned, and force the issue, which is exactly what happened. The last of the Seleucid heavy cavalry units attacked as well as the elephants, then they got some extremely favorable die rolls, crashing through the first unit to oppose them and into the second line.

The Romans counterattacked and for a time had things going their way again, but another series of bad die rolls in combat turned the advantage back to the Seleucids. The pikes and legions began mixing it up in the center, which followed a familiar pattern; good initial Roman attacks with poor pursuit, meaning the Romans ended the turn worse than when they started it! By the end of Turn 7 the Seleucids were ready to launch a series of final attacks and finish the game.

The Seleucids did just that. Knowing that they had four units to go to their break point and the Romans only 2, they picked out sections of the Roman lines to attack, then sent the best available units to complete the task. Maybe a bit gamey, but there's always a chance in WMA that things will go wrong with command rolls, bad combat dice, etc., but this was the path to victory laid out in front of the Seleucid commanders and they took advantage of it.

The final attacks went in and despite the high casualty count, they were successful and pushed the Romans up to their 10 unit break point. Since the Romans went second in the turns they got one more chance to attack and even things out, but with their units scattered and many damaged, there simply wasn't enough combat power to force the issue into a tie.

So, does this mean that the world will end shortly after two Seleucid victories in a row? Probably not. The Romans had some bad luck with one brigade sitting on the baseline the first five turns! However, the Seleucids had several pike units that got hopelessly left behind and never got into the action. It was a pretty good game and went longer than usual, but that may have been due to us taking the time to teach others.

What we really need to do at this point is get a WMA campaign going. There is the By The Sword campaign available on our web site and it's probably past time to give that a good try as we now have around 10 armies that could be used. It would be a good break from the standard "so many points" battles that we seem to write about in these issues. It's also a great incentive to paint more figs!

My gaming club has recently started to try out Fistful of Lead as an option for a good, adaptable, historical skirmish game. Currently we play Saga, Ronin, and En Garde! in this arena, which when you mix the other games (BKC, Warmaster Ancients/Medieval, Sword and Flame, etc) starts piling up in terms of rule sets. Galactic Heroes just released a campaign and I figured this would be a good place to try round two of FFoL with the added benefit of comparing it to Ronin (which is a very excellent game in it's own right).

I modified one of the campaign missions (which are a fantastic tribute to the Flash Gordon serials from the 30s) to suit Feudal Japan, printed up some cards, and setup for a 4-play game. I added a bit of randomness to the game with blind draws which occurred when a player searched a house (eliminating starting position advantages and better fitting with the narrative). Additionally, I wanted to capture some of the feel of political maneuvering which occurred during the Sengoku Jidai period, so the players could switch sides during the game.

Episode 1: Aftermath

The Otomo clan has been negotiating with Portuguese traders to supply them with superior European harquebus and cannons to deal with rival clans. A ship carrying the first shipment and the key Otomo negotiator, one of Lord Otomo's daughters, sank in
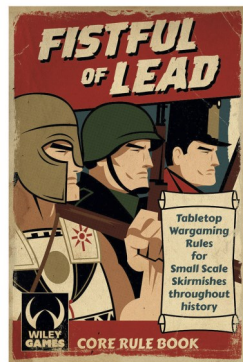
a fierce storm. The survivors successfully offloaded some of the cargo and have holed up in a small village. Players represent either the rescue party, a rival Shimazu clan party, or loosely aligned parties that have converged to scavenge what they can. The goods are scattered around in various buildings and the highest prize of all, Otomo's daughter, is still in the village.

Special Rules:

Sights to Search: Deal out 6 cards (A, K, Q, J, 10, 9). Each one of these cards corresponds with a location below. When a search is initiated, flip over the top of these six cards and place it next to the building being searched. If a player fails in a search, unless noted otherwise they may search again.

Searching: A miniature that enters one of the searchable locations can spend actions searching as per the Dark Day of the Destructo Ray rules.

Check for results based on the location below.

A: Document cache. *The building contains what looks like key papers that the finder searches through. Perhaps there is something useful?*
Successful Search: You have found important trade agreements which will secure trade rights with the Portuguese. 2 RP for finding the trade agreements
Something Bad: A feral cat was hiding amongst the papers and tries to attack the searcher. Roll on the Wound chart with

a -1. Armor has no effect on this roll.
K: Otomo's Seal. *A chest containing the Lord Otomo's seal has been found. The bearer could forge all kinds of papers with this.*
Successful Search: You can secure the seal from the chest. 3 RP for finding the Seal
Something Bad: Booby-trap! The crew clearly didn't want this to fall into the wrong hands. A hidden mechanism sparks flint and powder which burns the chest/seal and possibly the searcher! Roll on the Wound Chart. No future searches can be performed on this location.

Q: Otomo's Daughter. *A willful and headstrong girl at the best of times, she has been shaken and is afraid after the near death experience and the crew having left to seek rescue. Otomo will want his daughter back and might even pay for her return.*
Successful Search: Lady Otomo is a bit tetchy at the moment. She may not be ready to come back with a rescue party she does not recognize. The searching party must make a Hard Task roll (8+) to convince her they are Otomo clan retainers or over power her and take her captive. If failed, move the lady up to 10" towards a new hiding spot and this site cannot be search again unless she flees back to it. If successful she joins the controlling player's party and activates on the same card as that model on all future activations.
Something Bad: BANG! Armed with a harquebus and supplies

(cont. from p 22) she fires on the searching model. Roll to hit at close range with a d10. If hit, roll on the Wound Chart as normal.
5 RP for 'rescuing' Lady Otomo
J: Weapons. *Key supplies and munitions are in the building. These could be valuable to your war effort.*
Successful Search: You find useful equipment. This could be used to arm your forces for the coming conflict. 2 RP for securing supplies

Something Bad: Piles tip over. Stacked up haphazardly, the munitions tip over and threaten to burry the searcher. They must make a Hard Task (8+) to avoid injury. If the task is failed roll on the wound chart.
10: Snakes! *Oh no! You've stumbled on a nest of snakes that have apparently moved into the abandoned building! Defend yourself!*
Successful Search: Lucky for you the snakes are out, and you have found some koban hidden under a pile of dirty clothes! 2 RP for securing the koban
Something Bad: Snakes attack. Roll a d3 and place the equivalent counters on the ground next to the searcher. Each snake uses a D8 for close combat , has 1 wound, and has the Poison/Venom trait.
9: Abandoned House: *The building is deserted and the is nothing of value inside.*
Successful Search: A lucky charm is found amongst some broken crockery. 1 RP for securing the lucky charm
Something Bad: Nothing of value is found. Cannot search the building again.
Additional RP: 1 RP is scored for each

enemy model put Out of Action
1 RP is scored for each snake defeated

Finale:

The crew ending the game with the Lady Otomo gets to choose their starting location in the next mission. If no buntai is in control at the end of the game, roll a D6 for each player with surviving models. The highest number gains the Lady, in the confusion she has run into your lines and been picked up by loyal forces. The game ends after 10 turns

Factions:

Otomo: A minor outpost near the edge of Otomo territory, a survivor washed ashore near you. You are a Samurai that has been tasked with reaching the site and securing anything salvageable. Your Hatamoto has tentatively secured an alliance with a local Buddhist shrine by promising them they can continue to practice their heretical faith. However, they are still heathens and maybe you could secure an alliance with the Shimazu against enemies of the true faith?
You start the game by combining points with the Sohei at the end of the game to determine victory. At any point during the game, you can try to convince the Shimazu Coastal Patrol player to join forces against the heathens. If the player agrees you will abandon your alliance with the Sohei and combine points with the Shimazu player at game end.

Sohei: You are a monk at a small Buddhist temple nominally on Otomo land. With the clan's conversion to Christianity the abbot is leery of what may happen to the temple. Currently you are aligned with the Otomo clan in a desire to appease them and avoid trouble. However, the situation on the ground may dictate that you abandon the Otomo and start a rebellion.
You start the game by combining points with the Oto-

mo at the end of the game to determine victory. At any point during the game, you can try to convince the Bandit player to join forces against the Christians. If the player agrees you will abandon your alliance with the Otomo and combine points with the Bandit player at game end.
Shimazu Coastal Patrol: You were part of a Shimazu costal patrol mission who sheltered in a near-by bay when the storm blew in. You saw the Otomo ship run aground and the survivors make for a local abandoned village. A small scouting party, you are looking for opportunity to expand your clan's influence. You have tentatively hired some Bandits to help you, but maybe its beneficial to allay suspicion and support the Otomo party?
You start the game by combining points with the Bandit at the end of the game to determine victory. At any point during the game, you can try to convince the Otomo player to join forces against the heathens. If the player agrees you will abandon your alliance with the Bandits and combine points with the Otomo player at game end.
Bandits: You are a local bandit group that saw the ship go down but were intercepted by the Shimazu coastal patrol on the way to scavenge. Nominally you have aligned with them out of fear of reprisals, but maybe the Sohei would be better allies?
You start the game by combining points with the Shimazu Coastal Patrol at the end of the game to determine victory. At any point during the game, you can try to convince the Sohei player to join forces against

(cont. from p23) the Christians. If the player agrees you will abandon your alliance with the Shimazu Coastal Patrol and combine points with the Sohei player at game end.

The two clans each had two Samurai, and then Ashigaru retainers. They took light armor for their team trait while the Sohei had Fearless and the Bandits had Stealthy.

The clans started in opposite corners, with the bandits and sohei in the other opposite corners (adjacent to their allied faction (playing area is 4 x 4, moving in off the long ends of my table).

It is said, that you should keep your friends closed and your enemies closer. So what to do with 'enemies' who are temporarily friends. Apparently you shoot them. The bandits and Shimazu came out shooting at each other in a rush to secure supplies for their faction, proving that the alliance was tenuous at best.

Apparently their ancestors were displeased as one of their searches turned up the abandoned building and they rolled a 1 ensuring absolutely nothing but old, moth eaten garments and mats were found. To top it off, each side suffered some minor wounds before coming to their senses and turning to face the encroaching Otomo clan at the other end of the village.

The Otomo clan stopped at the last building in the village on the north side, and began to flow, like water around it, wary of their Sohei compatriots and the rival Shimazu clan. Their search was initially unsuccessful, and their first volley up the field was inconsequential.

On the subsequent turn they searched again, and this time discovered a nest of snakes inhabiting the building. Luck went even further against them when the luckless Ashigaru was bitten and poisoned by one of the vipers before he could react. Meanwhile the Sohei would secure Lord Otomo's seal and his daughter while a missile battle erupted down the length of the village. In this the Otomo/Sohei alliance seemed to gain the upper hand, wounding or killing the encroaching hordes.

The bandits and Shimazu were finally able to meet some success, and uncovered both a weapon stockpile and the trading documents (respectively). Momentum seemed like it was about to switch towards them as despite wounds/death among the regulars, their heavy hitting specialists and leaders had marched up the field ready to deal death to the Otomo line which was spread apart.

Meanwhile, the Otomos were struggling with the deadly vipers, one Ashigaru going down and the other heavily wounded before they finally subdued the snakes. They barely had a chance to catch their breath before bandits reached their lines. The noble lieutenant was ordered to move up by his captain and secure the rear while he continued to organize defense of the main road. The dour samurai took the orders to heart, and promptly massacred his opposition with little fuss (some very very bad die rolling, all night long by the bandit player, at one point rolling a 1, 3, 3, and a 1 in successive rounds of combat).

Meanwhile, the Sohei were starting to crumple under the Shimazu onslaught. They were holding the line, but sensing opportunity and fearing what they would do with both the seal and Otomo's daughter, the Otomo captain called out to the Shimazu captain and the Christian clans joined forces against the heathens. Stunned by the betrayal, the Sohei captain was cut down while standing aghast (rolled a 1 in combat vs the natural 10 of his opponent). The two Sohei archers moved backwards to buy time as it was late in the game at this point. In the end, it was a narrow victory for the Christians, winning 13 to 12 in the final score. The Sohei would retreat to lick their wounds and the rebellion seems likely. Who knows what chaos will ensue with a powerful bargaining chip in Otomo's daughter and the opportunity to forge any number of orders?

Overall we really enjoyed it. It was interesting how well we captured the variances in armor, weapons, and skills with the FFoL system (capturing the feel for the era and mimicing aspects we like about Ronin). The guys generally agreed that while they liked the Ronin combat pool system, the rules and play for FFoL seemed to be a bit better. Surprisingly, remembering special abilities seemed easier, even though there are more in FFoL. Perhaps the lack of adding/subtracting of modifiers coupled with having the figure stats on cards was the deciding factor.

As always, while we enjoy a straight up slug fest, having a scenario also makes the game far more enjoyable. I think we'll play it again, and I'll have to see how I want to adapt the campaign to fit the narrative as it develops.

New England Simulations is a highly unusual wargame company, having only published five games in around three decades. However, those five games, particularly The Killing Ground, are highly thought of and can be difficult to track down. Well made games on interesting topics with beautiful components, coupled with the infrequent releases makes them one of the most interesting companies in the hobby.

Their latest release is Jaws of Victory-Battle of the Korsun-Cherkassy Pocket Jan.-Feb. 1944 which simulates the Russian attack and pocketing of German forces, then the various relief attempts, and finally the breakout of the trapped German forces. While there have been games about this topic over the years, my guess is that nothing published previously will look anything close to this game. The game has a fairly high price tag ($90 pre-order and $120 retail), so this is probably not something that will be owned by a lot of gamers, which is definitely a shame.

The box is packed with components and upon opening it, your first thoughts are something along the lines of, "What did I just get myself into!" The two 22 x 34 maps are beautiful, depicting the snow covered landscape, forest, villages, and towns where the battle took place. There are several sheets of counters (1170 overall), rule book, play book, scenario set up cards, record tracks, charts, and more. Yes, this qualifies as a monster game and fortunately there are some smaller, one map scenarios included. All of the components are well done and there is very little room for complaint, so you do get your money's worth with this package.
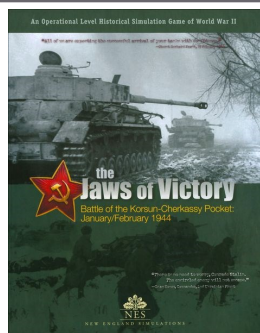
The rules are long, but not hard. Yes, there is a fair amount of chrome here along with some new systems that gamers are going to need to get accustomed to. Rules covering air supply, combined arms, bridges unable to support German heavy armor, replacements, etc., are familiar to gamers, but possibly not to this level of detail. Rules such as regrouping, disorganization, armor superiority, and more are going to take some time to get used to. The one good thing is that the terrain effects card, combat tables, game tracks, etc., all usually have the rules reference number attached, which is a huge help in learning the game and finding things.

Combat is almost a game itself! Add up the strengths of the units involved into an odds ratio. Add in artillery support where you roll to see what the odds shifts, if any, are. Pull a chit for air support (if available) which may or may not help you, then proceed down the list. Terrain, combined arms bonus, armor superiority, supply, etc., are all factored into the final odds. Then there is the armor battle, which is actually a pretty interesting mechanic, followed by the die roll to get the combat results which are in the step loss, retreat, disorganized type of variety. Most infantry units have a strength marker under them with a number of steps and their assigned strength, which is again pretty clever in how its done. Combat in Jaws of Victory is pretty attritional and attached armor can be decisive, but it does take a beating as most units have some sort of AT ability.

Supply is another detailed part of the game and for those who hate supply rules, this game may not be for you. Each side gets a number of what are called SDMs, which have supply points on the back side, which are used to re-supply artillery units and sustain attacks. Placement of these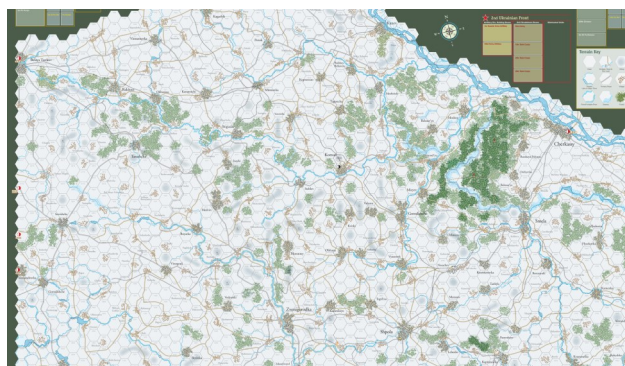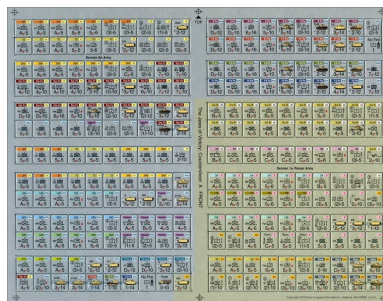 SDMs is heavily governed and is done with range increments depending upon the weather. There placement will determine if your forces can attack this turn, with how many units, and can artillery be supplied for the attack and/or defense. We haven't even mentioned how the pocket around Korsun gets supplied which also has a series of tracks. The system works, but it's not going to be for everybody.

There are several one map scenarios covering various aspects of the battle along with the full campaign. The individual scenarios will take some time to set up and play (6-8 hours), with the campaign probably taking 50+ hours! Yes, the full campaign is huge, with two maps and several hundred units on the board. The play book and set up cards work great together, showing the tremendous amount of work that has been done to make this game as playable and gamer friendly as possible.

In the end, you have a beautiful game on a very interesting battle that is sure to excite many East Front gamers. The wide variety of scenarios and the full campaign will keep you busy for quite some time and there is pretty good replay value here. But is it for everyone?

That's a very good question as this game is definitely a step up from most games that you probably play. If you're coming to this from Red Storm, Thunder in the East, etc., then you'll get right into it. However, if you play A Victory Lost type games, SCS series, etc., this could be more work than you want to get involved with. Jaws of Victory is close to being one of those games that is a "study" type game where you look over each village, examine the supply lines, move artillery units for an offensive several turns down the road, and more. You can't fault the game for that as it is very well designed (and beautiful!), but this is not going to appeal to everyone.

Back to the Northwest Frontier for one of our favorite sets of rules, The Sword and the Flame (TSATF). The scenario involves a British-Indian force moving up in a remote area to relieve a British garrison that has been taking some fire the last month or so. Upon arriving on the field of battle, the British commander sees Pathans trying to break into where the garrison is located and hordes of Pathans pouring out of the mountain pass. In one swift instant the mission has changed from relieving the garrison to rescuing it!

The British garrison has barricaded itself in a large building with a high surrounding wall. They have been reduced to 10 men along with 10 wounded and are unable to break out. The relief force consists of the following:
2 units of Bengal Lancers

2 units of British infantry

1 unit of Indian infantry

1 unit of Gurkhas

1 battery of screw guns (2 sections)

The mission would be changed to buying time for the relief force to get up to the garrison, evacuate them safely, then withdraw down the road. The British and Indian players came up with their plan, then set their forces up.

The Pathans had a unit surrounding the garrison, a unit nearby on the hills, plus one unit off board as a reserve. On turn 1 a tribe of three clans (units) would enter from one area of the board, then on turn 2 another tribe from the mountain pass, and finally when there was an opening, two units of Pathan cavalry would emerge, probably somewhere between turns 3 to 5. The Pathan reinforcements had a ways to go to get to the road where the British and Indian troops were arriving, but in TSATF units can move pretty far if they roll good.

On turn 1 the race was on to see who would reach the village first. The Pathans wanted it as a forward staging area for further attacks while the British and Indians wanted it as a roadblock to break up the Pathan attack. The Bengal Lancer squadrons moved out pretty fast,

but the infantry rolled poorly and could barely even get on the board. By the end of Turn 2 the Pathans were setting up shop in the village and the Bengal Lancers were being shot at! The British and Indians were still pushing up the road, but very slowly.

The first squadron of lancers decided to buy some time and charged into the mass of Pathans. This set off a four turn battle of charges, counterattacks, melees, heroic deeds and more. In the end two Pathan units were fleeing and the squadron of lancers, reduced to only two troopers, withdrew off the board. However,

they had bought several precious turns for the other units to deploy. Meanwhile, the Pathans in the village exchanged fire with the British holding a walled field and the second squadron of lancers, who withdrew and moved around the British position to attack elsewhere.

On Turns 4-5 and one squadron of Bengal Lancers finds itself in a tight spot, surrounded by enemies and losing men rapidly. Nevertheless, they continue to attack to buy time for the rest of the column to deploy. After having been reduced to only two men, the squadron finally flees the battlefield, but they've held up the Pathan attack for several vital turns. Meanwhile, the Pathans in the village and the British behind the walled farm fields continue to trade volleys while the other British and Indian units move up.

The screw gun battery finally gets into action, knocking out the defenses around the garrison while the Gurkhas emerge from the tree line to begin the attack. The Pathans throw themselves at the Gurkhas, British, and Indians on that side of the field, but fail to close with their enemies. The battle now reaches its climax as the Pathan horse and remaining infantry set up to make one final charge to cut the road.

(cont. from p26) Things were, however, heating up on the other side of the board as well.

It took the Gurkhas and Indian infantry a long time to deploy as they kept running into traffic jams, poor movement rolls, events, etc. They finally got sorted out just in time to face a Pathan charge that was easily defeated. The Pathans on the hill, however, were a different story and were causing casualties to the lone British infantry unit on that flank. The screw guns finally got set up and their first salvo scattered the Pathans up on the hill. The reserve Pathan unit came on board and immediately charged, but got stuck right in front of the screw guns and the remaining British infantry, which caused their immediate demise.

The Pathans surged forward from the village towards the British and Indians in the hopes of cutting the road and preventing the garrison from being evacuated. The second squadron of Lancers, down to almost half strength, charged and tied up the Pathan cavalry and infantry. The Pathans were taking dreadful casualties from the better British fire and when the game was called the garrison was safe and the Pathans were simply out of effective units.

A British & Indian victory, but it was closer than it appeared. The Pathans were plagued by bad movement die rolls, bad shooting, numerous events, and let the Lancers hold them up for too long. We drew an event card every other turn, which seemed to be just right and added some flavor to the game. We also use the action decks from The Virtual Armchair General, which are great and the strange thing was that we only had the turn stopped by drawing the two Halt cards once! We also had two new players who were able to fit right in, showing once again that the system is great for both new gamers and group play.

The only problem that cropped up was scenario balance and that some of the objectives seemed too far away for the Pathans who entered the board, which is a fair critique. TSATF games are notoriously hard to balance and when you are using the action as well as the event decks, the game becomes almost too random to even attempt to plan out. You basically give each side their forces, an objective, then get going. The scenario did, however, achieve its objectives of being able to teach some new gamers the system and provided the gaming group with a fun few hours as it was a wild and crazy battle!

Obscure War Films To Look For
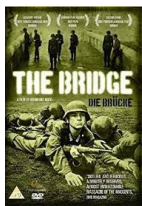
Die Brucke (The Bridge)

This one was paired with The Longest Day one night on Turner Classics as the director for this film went on to be the assistant director for The Longest Day. Set in the final days of WW2, this is the story of several school friends who get called up and positioned to defend a bridge outside of their village. The main theme is that of young people thinking they know what war is and then having to deal with the horrifying consequences of it. The Sherman tanks aren't too convincing, but everything else was. The movie does take a while to tell the back story of the young soldiers, but the end result is certainly worth everyone's time.

April 9th

Nothing says obscure like a movie about a Danish bicycle company! This fascinating movie follows the mobilization, deployment, and battles during the brief German invasion of Denmark. The filmmakers did a great job on uniforms, weapons, and vehicles. The German armored cars, motorcycle sidecars with AT rifles, etc., look like they just rolled off of the assembly line!

The movie is pretty easy to follow as the characters go through their call up, drawing weapons, going over plans, and then their defense against the initial German attacks. While a bit slow at times, it is a fascinating look on a little known part of WW2. The movie changes tone once the Danish defenders realize they're being overwhelmed, but they still go about their jobs as professionals. Highly recommended.

Panfilov's 28 Men

There certainly aren't a lot of Battle For Moscow type movies, so this should immediately catch your attention. The movie revolves around a platoon of Russian infantry holding a defense line on the approaches to Moscow in November of 1941. While the English over dubbing is terrible, the viewer is rewarded with some pretty good scenes of the Russians preparing the defenses, taking on a German combined arms attack, and some desperate trench fighting. The 45mm AT guns, MMGs, sweeping view of the Russian landscape, etc., are pretty realistic, so for wargamers it's certainly worth watching.

The King's Choice

Continuing on a theme of early WW2 movies comes The King's Choice, which covers the first few days of the German invasion of Norway. The movie focuses on the Norwegian royal family as it tries to make sense of the situation, negotiate, then finally their flight to escape their German pursuers. There aren't a lot of action scenes, although the German ships trying to sail into the harbor against the fortresses is a highlight. More of a drama than a WW2 combat film, but the movie works on a little known topic.

Danger Close

One of the more controversial battles in Viet Nam was Long Tan, when an Australian company ran into an NVA regiment of 2,000 men. The casualty count, roles of various officers, and what actually happened outside of general information is still in dispute. Danger Close is pretty good, with chaotic battle scenes, you get to see M-113s in action, and it follows the general history route pretty well. However, the drama scenes at times feel forced, the command situation as portrayed in the movie seems highly unbelievable, and you're left with a good, general overview of the battle, but not much else.

The Magnificent Adventurer

There are so few Renaissance movies that when one pops up you have an urge to watch it, even when it's not that great, such as this one! It does include a siege of Rome scene and there are great costumes, but for what is supposed to be an action movie there's little action. The story is interesting, just not well carried out, but as stated above, there are so few movies about the period that it's worth a view.

The Malta Story

Here's a movie that can't decide if it's a documentary, war movie, or a love story and it continually moves back and forth through all three! Starring a fairly young Sir Alec Guinness, the movie does a pretty good job of interspersing the actual history of Malta into the main plot, which is a love story between a Maltese girl and a British pilot. In between you get actual footage of the island being attacked, ships being sunk, and a good look at the island. Definitely not the greatest war movie ever made, but it's worth a view, especially if you know little about Malta's role in the Second World War.
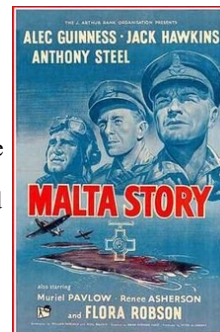
Gaming Under Quarantine: The Hobby & Surviving COVID-19

Like many of you, I was under a lockdown, although living in Utah meant it wasn't as severe as in some other places. While my job went on from home, I did find that all of a sudden, I had a lot of free time on my hands! With no theaters open (I love movies), most stores closed, and with my gaming group unable to meet, etc., that left a lot of time to spend on my gaming hobby! During the first few weeks of course it was pure chaos, with my time split between Zoom conference calls, emails, and going to the store once a day to track down toilet paper, flour, eggs, and sugar! However, once things started to fall into a pattern, I was able to schedule my job requirements, running three times a week, working on my lawn/garden, and other things to where I was able to get a lot of painting and solo board gaming in.

With the days blurring into each other and no difference between Sunday and Thursday, I found myself doing a similar routine each day. I would wake up, get my coffee, fire up the laptop and get caught up on emails, then review my day's work schedule. While things were pretty chaotic the first few weeks where I was putting in 12-14 hours a day, after a few weeks work became more sporadic. I would have a board game set up on one part of my table and get in a few turns each day. In between emails and Zoom meetings I would get in 2-3 hours of painting each day as well, so this definitely helped get a few units completed earlier than I had planned for this year. Every so often I would watch a movie while I cleaned figures, assembled kits/buildings, or clip counters from newly arrived board games.

In terms of painting, I got quite a lot accomplished, even though at times it was hard to find motivation. You dream of having all kinds of time to paint, but then when you get it, you really don't want to paint all day and night long! The first unit I completed was another 40 man pike unit for my Hail Caesar Seleucid army, so now I have seven of those. I also got started on my third Republican Roman legion as well. Since no one does 15mm Bashi Bazouks (except maybe Peter Pig which are too small to fit in

with my stuff), I ordered some Mamelukes from AB figures and swapped a few heads. Painting 24 mounted figures all different colors certainly took some time, but it came out pretty well. I also continued with my 54-60mm fantasy project by painting a few figures and got through painting up almost all of the figures in the Gloomhaven game.

Once those things were out of the way, it was time to work on some other projects. One of our members has been into DBA for a long, long time and wanted to show all of us how to play, but there was a shortage of armies. While he had three 15mm armies, that wasn't going to work if there were 6-8 of us on game night! The answer was for the rest of us to paint up some armies, which has been the problem for well over a decade. With time on my hands I got to work on Marian Roman and Galatian armies in 15mm. The Marians were from Baueda, which comes with a base camp, while the Galatians were from Essex. The good thing about DBA armies is that they are relatively cheap, although by the time you add in all of the optional stands it might not seem that way! Within a few months the group had three new armies and a fourth on its way, so we're making steady progress here.

In terms of board wargames I was able to play during the quarantine period, it was off the charts. Fulda Gap: The Battle for the Center, Jaws of Victory, Ukraine '43, Storm Over Arnhem, Konigsberg '45, Poland Defiant, Dragon Rage, Bar Lev 2nd ed., Warsaw Pact, Storm Over Dien Bien Phu, 1941, SPI's War of the Ring, Russian Campaign, A Victory Denied, Wing Leader, and London's Burning all got to the table. Some of the games went pretty fast while others seemingly took their time due to having to take a break to do actual work! There was definitely a different mindset where in most weeks of the

year I pick a game Sunday or Monday that I'm going to focus on for the next weekend, read the rules during the week, then set it up on Thursday night, followed by playing the game over the weekend. However, with a lot of time on my hands I just grabbed a game off the shelf, chose a scenario, then set the game up while I read or re-read the rules.

I did get in some actual gaming that wasn't solo based during all of this. One of my gaming friends and I played several board games over Zoom, which works OK at times. The important thing was the social aspect in terms of keeping in contact, having fun, talking about other stuff during the game, and so on, which made that a memorable set of experiences. We did play a campaign from Zero, Warriors of God, Hammer of the Scots, and a few Combat Commander scenarios. I really wanted to use Vassal, but through a strange quirk of circumstances, Vassal on my laptop needed an upgrade and I couldn't get my tech group to get the upgrade installed before we shut down. That meant using Zoom, which again it worked, but wasn't the best way to do virtual gaming. Late in May I was able to meet up with some of our club to do some DBA battles for a few hours, then I was able to play Admiral's War (an updated version of AH's War at Sea and Victory in the Pacific) with another group in my area.

At the end of the lockdown/quarantine I had accomplished quite a lot in hobby terms. However, the question needs to be asked whether it was fun or not? That's tough to answer as while I was able to do a lot of solo board gaming, catch up on my reading, finish some odds and ends, etc., there was really no one to share it with except online. I certainly wasn't bored, but at times it seemed as if one was going through the motions, which could just have been the overall situation. I started to think if this is how retirement is going to be (I'm still about 7 years out) then I better make sure there's some friendly gamers around!

It's been almost 18 months since our last Battles For Empire 2 game, which is kind of strange in that we really like this set of Colonial era rules! Since the last time we played I added new units such as the 10th Hussars, two companies of the Staffords, and a unit of Bengal Lancers. I had set up a scenario, then asked if the players wanted to run mainly Egyptian or Anglo-Egyptian forces. The Egyptians by themselves are pretty unpredictable, but this time the decision was to see some British forces on the board.

Before we begin and there are questions about the size of the units, yes these are some fairly large units with 24 figs each for both cavalry and infantry. While I use 15mm I chose to use the 28mm basing sizes and pack the bases with as many 15mm figs as I could. Definitely a lot of work as painting units of 24 figs is time consuming, but the large units does give an impression of a large battle. The other interesting effect it has on games is that you can only fit so many units into certain spaces, so it forces players to identify choke points, choose their leading units carefully, and it shows how numbers alone won't always win.

The Anglo-Egyptian forces have been constructing a rail line to a new forward operating to support a new offensive against the Mahdi's forces. The Mahdists have dug in across a hill and brought up some sections of Krupp guns to shell the railroad and any train trying to move past it. The British have responded by railing in troops to launch a flank attack to seize the line of entrenchments and put the guns out of action.

The Anglo-Egyptian forces aren't numerous, but have some very good units.

3 units of British infantry

3 units of Sudanese

3 units of Indian infantry

1 battery mountain guns

2 units of cavalry

The train has a gatling gun and a 7.5 in. gun, but they could only remain in place on the track for the scenario.

The Mahdist force had six units of cavalry, twelve units of infantry, and three units of rifle armed infantry at the start of the scenario. Depending upon how long the game went, more infantry could be sent in as reinforcements to balance things out. The Dervish Krupp guns were limited to having to remain in their entrenchments, but could pivot and fire within a 30 degree angle. The Mahdist forces were hidden except for the units on the hill when the scenario began.

The Anglo-Egyptian forces began with a large square that contained most of the units, except for the cavalry brigade on the right of the square and two infantry units that moved out to screen the train. Part of the scenario victory conditions were that if the train was destroyed the Anglo-Egyptian side automatically lost, whether by being overrun by Mahdist units or taking hits from the Krupp guns. The square advanced slowly the first few turns towards the center of the board, while the Mahdist forces revealed a few units, hoping to provide a distrac-

tion and force the square to move to their right. This would hopefully free up some Mahdist units around the hill to drive straight for the train.

In hindsight, this proved to be a very bad idea! To meet the threat, the Anglo-Egyptian force dissolved the square into its component units, who moved out quickly to form a firing line. Now it was the Mahdists who were taken by surprise. Sensing an opportunity, several units that were hidden in the rocks and scrub rose up and charged, which set off an epic battle where the Mahdi's units launched themselves with reckless abandon at the various companies, only to see their numbers get cut down by Imperial firepower.

The camel borne mountain guns unlimbered on a hill and with a clear field of fire, plastered several enemy units moving up into position. The first few charges were dealt with severely, eliminating three infantry units for no losses. The Bengal Lancers then (cont. on p31)

(cont. from p30) charged the closest Mahdist cavalry unit, which had the effect of creating a giant traffic jam. Whether it was intentional or a stroke of luck, this combat went back and forth for a few turns, just when the other Mahdists units were attacking. Had these six camel and cavalry units hit at the same time, the game may have turned out differently!

Instead, several had to move around this melee, which of course made them prime targets for the mountain guns on the hill, who poured in salvo after salvo, driving them back. By this time there was fighting all along the Anglo-Egyptian front line, with several fanatic charges being close run affairs. There were a few times where if the melee rolls had gone the way of the Mahdists, things would have become desperate for the Anglo-Egyptian forces, but they prevailed in virtually every attack.

At this time, with the ambush having failed and more and more units being poured into the attack, the Mahdist players decided to go all out. With some good rolls there were several fanatic charges that came very close to breaking the Anglo-Egyptian line, but they were thrown back. The exception to this was near the train where disaster reared its ugly head for a turn or two. The Anglo-Egyptian line was stretched pretty thin and near the train it was the thinnest. Several Mahdist units, despite having taken casualties, surged forward at the same time and almost broke through to the train, which would have ended the game. In the end these attacks were defeated, but it was very close.

There was one final turn of combat, including the Bengal Lancers returning to the fray and jamming things up again. Out of units, very few Anglo-Egyptian

casualties, and short of firepower, the Mahdist players conceded and the game ended as an Anglo-Egyptian victory.

A few observations. First, this was probably more units than three players (all we had available this night) could handle! It was a long game (almost 4 1/2 hours) and could have gone on for another 90 minutes to finish the attack on the guns if we had time. The Mahdist units had horrific melee rolls and every time it looked like they might break through with one good roll, they failed!

However, it was still a good game and the Mahdist had their chances. Native players definitely need patience and this was something in short supply this night! We also thought that putting a small village in the center of the board might have given the Mahdist side a good staging area to even things out. Maybe next time.

Several more images of the action, showing the Mahdist horde trying to get out of its own way to attack the British, Sudanese, and Indian companies that have now broken from the square. The Bengal Lancers created a traffic jam by launching several charges that tied up the Mahdist cavalry for multiple turns and prevented them from bringing their full weight to bear in the attack.

With the rise of the board game industry over the last several years and the advent of Kickstarter, the one common denominator is the incredible amount of components that are in countless game boxes. From miniatures to tiles to markers, many of these games have stacks and stacks of counters, miniatures, markers, boards, and more. Back in the day not many of us thought about painting the parts or upgrading the board games we played, but then again many of them didn't look like what's available now!

Take for example, Gloomhaven, Star Wars Rebellion, or Twilight Imperium. Very popular games that are literally packed with components. Twilight Imperium alone has 1500 ships, cards, markers, and more! It took me 10 days to build the foam core trays and sort out everything for Gloomhaven, which even while I was doing it I felt overwhelmed! Look at many of the Kickstarter projects under development and what do you see? Components. Lots and lots of components. Buildings, figures, tiles, and more pack the listing, which is needed as these games are in competition with each other

to get the gamer's hobby money and a larger slice of the overall hobby pie.

Now many gamers just open the box, punch everything out, then start playing. Using the plastic bags provided you simply just sort everything into what you think will work, then throw it back in the box. Of course when you open it to play the game you need to sort everything out again! This can take some time, especially with something like Gloomhaven where there are hundreds and hundreds of parts, cards, and more.

As discussed in a previous issue, this is where the companies who produce

organizers step in. There are a wide variety of these now, ranging from the high quality wood offerings from The Broken Token to 3D drawings for gamers to create storage trays out of foam core. More and more of these accessories keep coming out each day in an effort to help gamers get their games organized.

For many gamers, however, organizing these large games is where things are just getting started. Now gamers are painting the miniatures! There are some incredible examples of the pieces for Star Wars Rebellion, entire fleets for Twilight Imperium, all of the forces in the Space Hulk box, and more. Not only the military pieces, but buildings, towns, forests, etc., that come with some games are getting the full treatment. There are even gamers who refuse to play the game until they've painted all of the figures!

Painting the miniatures can be a challenge as many of them aren't made by companies who regularly do miniatures. I painted the full set of Gloomhaven miniatures (not the ones pictured below) and it was a challenge. At times you couldn't tell where the cloak and an arm joined, what was the face and what was part of a hood, was this part fur or not, and so on. I struggled through them and the game looks better for it, but it did take much longer than my usual 28mm historicals. I also painted the full set of generals that came in the Hannibal & Hamilcar set, which again was tough as they were a strange size (36-40mm?) and many parts blended into each other.

Some of the more recent Kickstarters, however, are using professionally done 3D models which are simply amazing, so some gamers are buying the games just for the miniatures! No longer do you need to buy miniatures online, purchase them from a local store, or off Ebay. You simply sign up for the

Kickstarter, save the miniatures and toss the game!

Then there are the game tile pieces that are coming out, along with 3D printed models. Terraforming Mars will soon be offering a version with a ton of beautiful 3D printed tiles and other companies are offering replacement pieces for many of the games. Translucent markers, fleet displays, card holders, bonus cards, promo cards, designer's editions with wooden cases, and more are flooding the hobby. The more popular the game the more accessories are available for it and there appears to be no end in sight. Whatever you think you may need for a game, chances are it's out there somewhere.

The big difference here is that many board gamers do not approach things the same way as wargamers do. Many of us probably aren't going to play many of our board and miniature games 20-30 times in a year! This allows many of these gamers to spend a lot of time (and resources) on their games. Those who run these games at conventions can easily sink an entire year into the presentation.

Where is this going for wargamers? Will there be boxes of terrain tiles, miniatures and markers coming some day? Probably so. Board games are pointing the way in what is trending and wargames will follow suit. However, as time has shown, painting everything is what really slows all of us down!
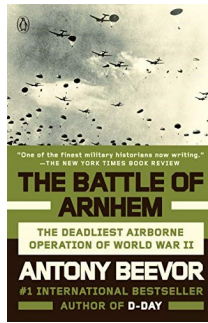
After the Battle of the Bulge, the WW2 campaign that generates the most debate has to be Operation Market Garden. This was an audacious plan by General Bernard Montgomery to lay a "carpet" of three Allied airborne divisions in Holland to seize various bridges, allowing British XXX Corps to rush up a highway and across the Arnhem bridge over the Rhine. This would allow Allied forces to then thrust into Germany's Ruhr industrial area and end the war early.

The historical outcome, however, did not go according to plan. German forces were stronger than initially recognized, the British 1st Airborne dropped too far from the bridge, and there were a host of errors that in the end contributed to a mild advance through Holland. The British 1st Airborne bore the brunt of the casualties and there was plenty of blame to go around when the campaign ended. What should have happened, who was at fault, how did the plan fall apparat, etc., have been the topic of conversation for well over 75 year now and it is a fertile ground for wargamers.

Antony Beevor delves into this popular campaign with his book The Battle of Arnhem. Surprisingly, the sections dealing with Arnhem are only part of the book and much time is spent with the American divisions as well as XXX Corps. In most of his previous books, Beevor is usually quick to assign blame and comments extensively on the leaders involved in various campaigns. Not so much here. Instead, he spends a lot of time focusing on the plan, what went wrong, and then various small actions that occurred during the campaign. It is definitely different than his other WW2 books, which in the end proved to be good and bad.

Most readers and gamers interested in the topic know about the various scenes in the movie A Bridge Too Far. The initial 9th SS recon counterattack across the bridge, Frost holding on in Arnhem, the Son bridge being rebuilt, and so on. Here, these things are barely mentioned and instead, you do get an unusual path through the battle, learning new information, but yet hoping for more clarification on things you might already know. This is the interesting part of the book in that you start out wanting it to confirm things you've already seen, but it veers off into the unknown.

First off, a good deal is spent on the plan, explaining the previously cancelled air drops, the politics behind the decisions, and Montgomery's thoughts on how the forces should be used. Instead of clearing Antwerp he kept focusing on getting into Germany. Also, for some reason they just had to use the airborne troops, so they would fit whatever plan was finally approved! What entails are constant changes even up to the start date, which baffled many commanders and created confusion on a number of levels. The lift schedule was basically unworkable and no one really had any idea what to do if things went wrong. Of course, XXX Corps would be to Arnhem in two or three days, so further planning didn't matter!

Once the landing occurs, the author spends a lot of time going over what went wrong, which is natural as quite a lot did! Instead of focusing on what we now know, he does take a different path here in going over some lesser known things. One example of that is while Frost and a few scattered units did reach the Arnhem bridge, not much is known about the other units that tried to push through afterwards. In this book some of those actions are described and are quite interesting, particularly those along the river road. Another place that is usually ignored is the German attack out of Germany towards the positions of the 82nd, describing how their drop zones were almost overrun several times.

There are also some interesting battles with the 101st that are not usually touched upon in most books on the subject and you also get some views from the German side as well. Of course there are the usual criticisms of leaders which is a hallmark of Beevor's books, so here Horrocks and Browning get the worst of it and deservedly so. The overall planning, the rush to get the operation going, the slow pace of XXX Corps at times, and once things went wrong there seemed to be no plan to fix them. Most of this has been detailed before, but this a bit different perspective on the subject.

There are two new angles here, however, that are explored. The first is the Dutch resistance and the German reprisals that followed, which are pretty interesting and would make for a separate book all by themselves. Why the British chose to ignore the warnings or use the Dutch resistance to their fullest is never really explained, but the missteps here were certainly fatal. The other issue was Polish General Sosabowski, who doesn't quite come across as heroic as portrayed in the movie. This is also an interesting sideshow to the entire campaign, which just adds to the mystery of the various failures.

In the end what you have is yet another book on Operation Market Garden. Is it the best one yet? That probably is still A Bridge Too Far, just because it reads like a novel and is easily accessible. Is it worth buying? That is a good question as there is some new information, different perspectives, etc., but are those few things enough to cause you to add it to your military history library. I found the book interesting at times, but you pretty much know the story and so I'm still sitting on the fence in regards if you really need to add this one to your collection.
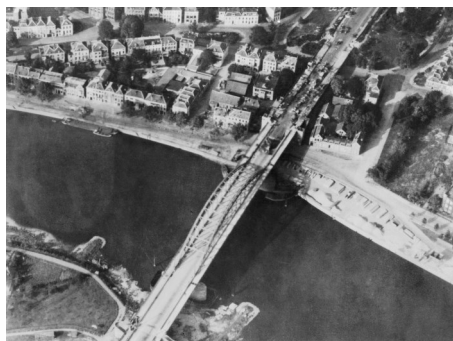
Along with the Battle of the Bulge and D-Day, Operation Market Garden has to be one of the most popular subjects for gamers. After reading The Battle of Arnhem recently, one gets naturally inspired to take a game down off of the shelf and set it up to play. The issue here is that there are a lot of games on the subject with widely varying systems and scales! Over the last several decades I've owned and played quite a few games on the topic, good and bad, with the ones listed here as ones I've played several times before selling/trading them or thought worth keeping. This list is by no way comprehensive as it would take almost an entire issue to go over all of the Market Garden games out there.
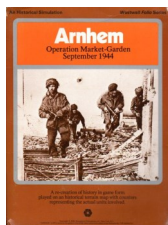
SPI's Arnhem

One of the earliest games out there on the topic was SPI's Arnhem, which was part of the Westwall quad. The quad games all had the same standard rules and systems, so they were easy to pick up and play, making them still popular to this day. Arnhem was one of the better SPI games and while maybe not the best game on the topic, it is playable and usually comes down to the final few turns.

SPI's Highway To The Reich

This game was one of the first monster games and had a large following for quite some time. The four maps, 2,000 counters, numerous charts, etc., made it stand out as the pre-eminent game on the topic for most of the 70s and 80s. It was big, complex, but for the first time you could really simulate the entire campaign with all of its hundreds of units. There were holes in the rules, many questions, and the game length was certainly an issue, but that didn't stop us from playing it several times! Decision Games released an updated version called Highway To The Reich 2, which had beautiful maps, but the rules were a mess and it was difficult to know if you were playing the game right.

Avalon Hill's Storm Over Arnhem

While nearly 40 years old, this is still a pretty good game and hopefully will get remade some day. One of the first area

movement/combat games, it's arrival was a bit of a surprise for those use to the hex and counter fares that you would usually see. The game focuses solely on the battle around the bridge at Arnhem and does it very well. I've probably played this game 20 times and never get tired of it. There's also quite a few optional rules, random events, etc., which can show what would have happened had several other units in the area showed up around the bridge.

GDW's Operation Market Garden

Of course GDW had to get in on the Market Garden act and this game was part of their short lived double blind system. This game and the one on Normandy were unique in that both sides' units were hidden from the other. You basically just saw a string of Allied or German symbols on counters that could or could not be actual units. In theory this was a great concept and for the first few turns it was actually pretty good. After the game got going, however, it soon became quite the burden in having to continue checking each counter and making a major effort to keep up with the system. Not the worst game on the subject, but not the best either.
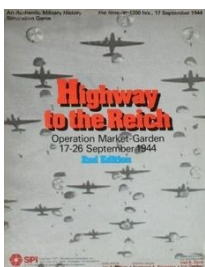
Victory Games' Hell's Highway

With the demise of SPI emerged a new company under the Avalon Hill banner called Victory Games. One of their new games of course had to be on Operation Market Garden and surprisingly, it is still considered one of the best games on the topic. Using a unique blend of scale and new systems, you got quite a lot in a standard size wargame box. Not as simple as Arnhem, but nowhere near as large or lengthy as Highway to the Reich, this game represented a pretty good compromise. Featuring two maps, around 600 counters, and charts, you were able to play the full campaign without getting mired in detail. The concepts of modes for units, counters that looked much different than other games, etc., combined to make this a classic that has stood the test of time.
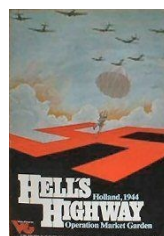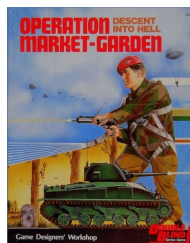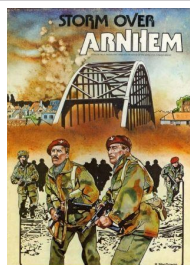
MMP's Monty's Gamble

For those who like area movement games such as Storm Over Arnhem and Breakout Normandy, Monty's Gamble is right up your alley. Featuring a large map of the campaign area broken apart into areas and featuring a unique movement/ combat system, Monty's Gamble is a 5-6 hour operational level treatment of Market Garden. The second edition also includes the German 1940 attack into the same area.
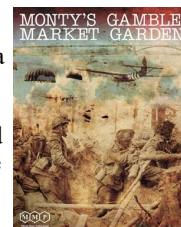
MMP's The Devil's Cauldron & Where Eagles Dare

Two massive games in what is known as the Grand Tactical Series (GTS) where each vehicle unit is a platoon and infantry are in companies. Featuring incredibly beautiful maps, thousands of counters, scenarios, campaigns, and more, this is probably the ultimate treatment of the campaign. Tactical in nature, but more of a giant operational level game, there is something here for all gamers. At this time the cost is prohibitive, but rumors of a new, upgraded second edition that matches the latest rules and counters of the other games may be coming...someday.
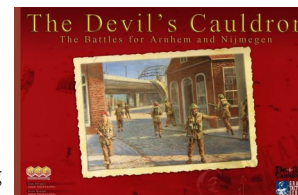
GMT's Holland '44

The newest entry into this subject is from designer Mark Simonitch, who has a string of successful games in this "series" that includes Normandy '44, Stalingrad '42, and others. This is actually a pretty good treatment of the campaign, with good replay value, although the Allied path to victory usually doesn't go the actual historical route. If you play the other games in the series you can be up and running with this one in no time. For a one map treatment this game is probably at the top right now.

Over the years in the pages of this magazine, I've written several articles concerning the reemergence of Cold War/ WW3 gaming, what were some of the best games on the subject, and so on. Then things simmer down for a few years, then a few games on the topic come out, then it simmers down again, lather, rinse, and repeat. This time, however, the surge is unmistakable. Games on WW3 are coming out so fast and furious you would have thought we took a time machine back to the 70s and 80s where every game store had stacks of Avalon Hill, GDW, and SPI WW3 games standing by for your purchase! In the last few months there have been a few new games in this era and there's more to come. Red Storm and Fulda Gap: The Battle for the Center are reviewed in this issue, but that is just scratching the surface for this year. Here is a list of games that either have just come out or will be out by the end of the year.

Red Storm

This game had a full review in this issue, but in summary this is an operational level treatment of what air battles would have looked like over Germany in WW3. By no means a simple game, this is a very comprehensive look at air operations that includes reconnaissance, SEAD, anti-SAM attacks, airfield denial, jamming, ground attacks, and more. With around 30 scenarios, several campaigns, plus a few solo missions, there is enough gaming here to keep one occupied for years to come. Not the easiest game to play, but once you figure things out the turns go by faster than you would think, but this is definitely not for beginners. This game was so popular that the follow on supplement called Baltic Storm, has already hit its pre-order number. If you liked Downtown, Elusive Victory, The Burning Blue,
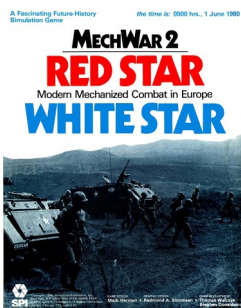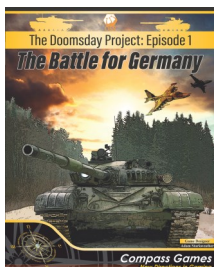
and Blood April, which are all part of the same family of games, then this will be something you should be interested in.
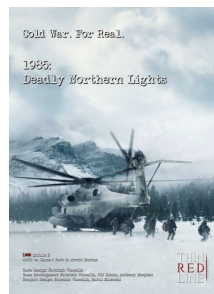
Deadly Northern Lights

This is the follow on game to 1985: Under an Iron Sky, which came out last year and has sold out two printings with a possible third on the way. These games should be thought of as a redesign of SPI's Next War, which was a monster game that came out in the 70s that postulated a Soviet attack into Western Europe. This game adds Norway and the surrounding area to the previous game that focused on Germany. Lots of maps, plenty of counters, and a moderately complex system that will appeal to grognards of the 80's era. Combining both games would take a lot of room and plenty of time for the campaign game.
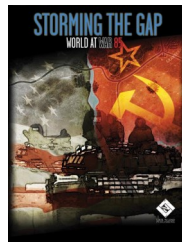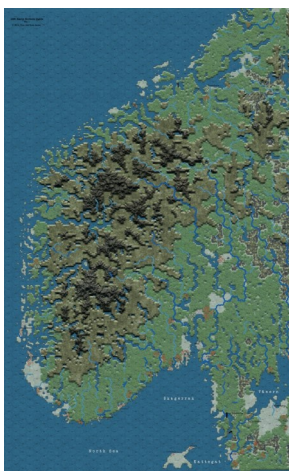
World at War '85

This series from Lock 'N Load Publishing has been around for a while, but late last year they released a massive boxed set with tons of maps, counters, scenarios, etc. This is an operational level series with platoon level combat, so the games are fairly tactical in nature, but some scenarios can be pretty large with a lot of units. For those who want to use Soviet regiments of T-80s trying to break through NATO defenses, then this is definitely your sort of game. There are a lot of proposed supplements and the company does a good job of putting out product for its fans.

The Doomsday Project-The Battle for Germany

The first in a five or six game series

in Compass' OSS series of games. This is a bit higher on the complexity scale and uses a system that is certainly unique for portraying combat strength of units. There are already games out that cover the Korean and Vietnam wars, so you can look at the rules on their site to get an idea where this is going. With several other boxed games already planned to cover other theaters, plus a naval game, this is going to be a massive series once it's finished.

The Fulda Gap: Battle for the Center

The first WW3 game in Compass' CSS series, which so far has focused on WW2 battles. This particular game covers the 11th Armored Cavalry's fight to delay the Warsaw Pact offensive so that other NATO formations can mobilize and move to their defensive positions. A large footprint with four maps and lots of counters, this is an operational level monster game. Also, it is the first of what will be four or five games that cover other critical areas in a potential WW3 setting.

Blue Water Navy

A strategic level WW3 naval game focusing on the North Atlantic, which would have seen massive amounts of ships, subs, and aircraft if there had been a war. Using a new system for naval operations, Blue Water Navy adds in cards to what previously have been
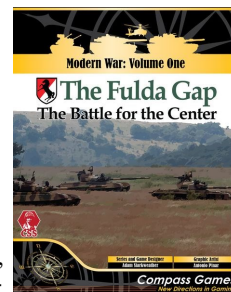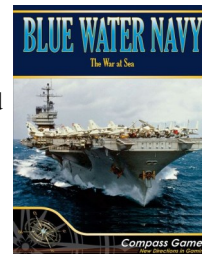
hex and counter affairs for modern naval games. A Pacific version is now in development.

Third World War

Perhaps one of the most popular WW3 games/game series was GDW's Third World War. Broken apart into four separate games covering theaters ranging from Norway all the way to the Persian Gulf, it is still played by a lot of gamers even today. The Compass Game's redesign will mainly be just a graphic upgrade at this time and all four games will be in one box, but there are other modules to add onto these four games in development. This system was groundbreaking when it first appeared in the early 80's, combining an operational level air campaign into a massive ground battle across the length and breadth of Europe as well as the Persian Gulf. Playing the full combined game is still one of the highlights of my hobby life.

Air & Armor

Back in the 80s, West End Games introduced an operational level game called Air & Armor that was radically different than many WW3 games at the time. The game was mission based, with players trying to integrate air support, helicopters, artillery, engineering, and combat units to complete their tasks. The game was perhaps a bit too far ahead of its time, but it has gained a vocal following, which has led to this new edition coming out soon.

NATO Designer's Edition

The designer of Air & Armor also came out with a Warsaw Pact invasion of Germany game in the late 80s called NATO, which was part of the Victory Games line (part SPI and part Avalon Hill). The game was moderately successful and was a different look at a po-

tential WW3 that created strong opinions for and against the system. The game covered operations against Denmark down to Austria and part of France, so it was limited in scope. The new edition will have upgraded graphics and will be expanded to two maps.

7 Days to the Rhine Vol 1: Objective Nuremberg

Back in the day, the SPI Central Front series was highly regarded and still has a following to this day. It used a controversial friction point system to depict combat formations losing momentum and modes to offer various avenues for attack and maneuver. Decision Games proposed a redesign of the series for their Modern War magazine, but somewhere along the line the system was changed to something much more streamlined and simplified, which also necessitated a name change to 7 Days to the Rhine. The first volume just came out and there will be other games in the series that can all be combined.

Again, this is just scratching the surface! Compass Games is currently working on redesigns for the entire Victory Games' Fleet series and it wouldn't surprise me if there are more supplements for the Red Storm series, remakes of games like Warsaw Pact, Fulda Gap, Air Superiority, Seapower & the State, expansions for Under an Iron Sky, and a lot more. WW3 games were what got many gamers into the hobby decades ago, so nostalgia certainly plays a role here and game publishers have recognized this. What's old is new again!

While playing some of the more recent games, however, I've run across a few issues that gamers may want to consider. The first is price, as many of these games are definitely not cheap! The Fulda Gap game comes anywhere from $110-140 and the Third World War when it comes out will be close to $200. Deadly Northern Lights, Less Than 60 Miles, and Under and Iron Sky are limited production games with pretty good sized price tags as well. The issue here is that in this day and age of the hobby you're going to be paying a

premium for something that may only hit the table once if you're lucky as more and more newly arrived games vie for time.

The other issue is that with recent research, unclassified documents, the Gulf War experiences, etc., new light is being shed on what a possible Third World War might have looked like and frankly, things weren't favorable for the Soviet Union and their Warsaw Pact allies. However, gamers really don't want to hear this and I'm not sure that the designers want to either. The reason? Well, some of these might not be very good or fair games! This leaves us with getting games that are basically straight reprints of the old ones. Yes, the maps are a huge improvement, better counters, and cleaned up rules, but most of the situations, scenarios, missions, etc., are what gamers wanted back in the 70s and the 80s as well as today.

What would be interesting is if GMT's Next War series of games took on the 80's using its system, but unfortunately the designer has no interest in doing so. The use of special forces, missile strikes, a highly sophisticated air campaign, etc., would make for an interesting comparison against the tried and true game systems from back in the day. The Next War system, at least in my opinion, is what many of the older games from that era were trying to become! The series has plenty of fans, but still gamers want to go back in time.

As long as gamers keep putting down their money for 80's Warsaw Pact vs. NATO games the game companies will do what they can to please them. The dreams of seeing masses of T-72s pouring across the border to engage M-1s is something that simply will not die in the hobby, even though it never happened! Yes, that is the funny part about all of this. The war never happened, but gamers love this theme. Is it simply nostalgia, where so many got into the hobby through games on the topic? One thing is certain, however, is that it is not slowing down any time soon and more games are on the way!
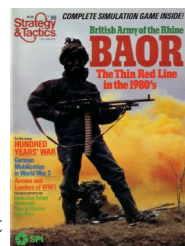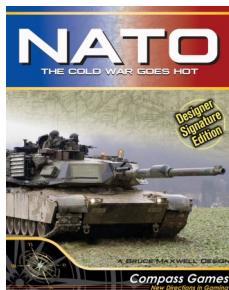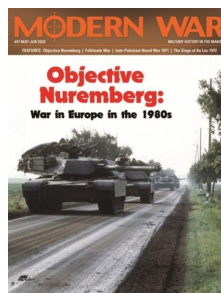
As many gamers have probably seen, WW3 has roared back to life over the last few years with both new miniatures and board games on the subject. A new entry to the genre is Fulda Gap: The Battle for the Center, which is the first of a five part series in the CSS (Company Scale System) series by Compass Games. CSS is an off shoot of the very popular GTS (Grand Tactical System) games from MMP, which includes The Devil's Cauldron and The Greatest Day. Adam Starkweather, the driving force behind those games has reworked his GTS system into CSS and moved it to Compass Games. While there are already several WW2 games out in the CSS series, Fulda Gap is the first modern game and the first in a series of WW3 games. The game is not cheap, so many gamers are probably going to wonder about the system and what comes in the box.

First, the box is well packed with components. Four 22 x 34 maps, 8 counter sheets, rules, a play book, and quite a few organizational displays and game cards. The four maps are definitely works of art and at 500m to the hex they show amazing detail for the towns, cities, rivers, forests, slopes, etc., where the battles will be fought. Terrain is a vital
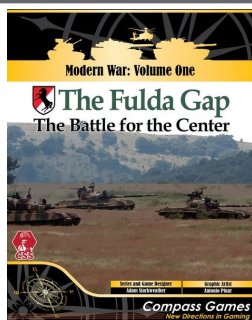
factor in this series and there is a great deal of attention paid to it in the rules and charts. The counters are well done, showing vehicle silhouettes, commanders, aircraft, and all kinds of information about their weapons that is packed onto the counters. The rules have plenty of examples, the play book has the various scenarios laid out, and the displays are extremely easy to use during game play. In terms of components this game is certainly at the upper end at this time in the hobby.

The game covers a Warsaw Pact invasion into the Fulda Gap region of West Germany in the 1980s by several mechanized and armored divisions. The U.S. 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment must screen the attackers until the remaining West German and U.S. forces in the area can mobilize and move to the front. There are two one map scenarios and three others that use all four maps, which leads to the first criticism of the game. The first one map scenario is used as an introduction to the system, which works well to show how the various formation chits are used, artillery, direct fire, assaults, etc. The second one map scenario depicts the U.S. 3rd Armored Division's counterattack into a spread out Russian armored division and is a pretty interesting battle. The other three scenarios, which includes the full campaign game, are all designed for four maps. Not many gamers are going to a) have the space to use all four maps, and b) have the time to play a massive game with all four maps and well over a thousand counters on the maps. Why there weren't some two map scenarios or more smaller actions on one map is a good question.

If you're familiar with GTS, then transitioning to CSS won't take too long. If you're new to the system then there's a lot to take in. Each turn a number of formation chits are "purchased" and then put into a cup with some standard chits for refugees, wind, air support, etc. When a formation chit is drawn, all units of that formation can move, assault, rally,

fire, perform engineering functions, and so on. If you have a number of divisional commands available, units can perform a second action during the same turn (turns are two hours each). This means if a side can afford to purchase a division chit, a formation chit, and gets a sizable allotment of division command points, a unit could perform up to three actions in a turn. Pretty manageable with a few units, but when there's multiple formations on the board the turns can be pretty long.

Combat can be pretty involved at times, but the color-coding system for the different weapons (artillery, small arms, anti-armor, etc.) does make things a bit easier to grasp. Choose a unit, decide to fire at either the hex or individual units in the hex, subtract the defense modifiers, roll a D10 and check for results. Terrain, as mentioned above, is extremely important during combat, not only for defense modifiers, but for determining ranges as well. The West German terrain is pretty dense, so there aren't a lot of areas to use long ranged weapons. Units can be pinned, suppressed, or suffer several levels of disorganization. The results all correspond to unique counters that are placed on the combat units that have the modifiers in the same places where the units have their stats, which makes it pretty easy to see how the results impact the units fire strength, quality checks, and movement. Assaults are pretty involved and thankfully there is a page long example that definitely helps to grasp how it works. During an average turn expect to see artillery fire to suppress enemy forces, long range fire, followed
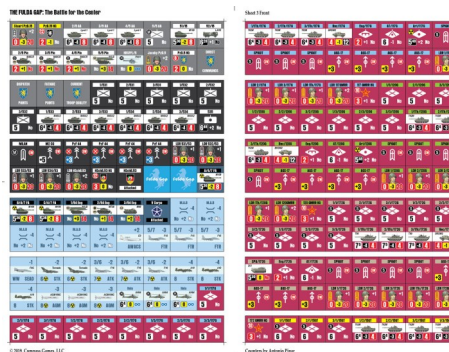
by assaults (cont on p39) (cont from p38) into the enemy's hexes. Everything works well, but there is going to be a learning curve here.

There is also a lot of chrome here in terms of air support, refugees, engineering, leaders, town/city hexes catching on fire, smoke, and much, much more. Most of the sections are fairly small in the rules and are pretty easy to implement. However, they do add layer upon layer of things that you need to do each turn on top of constantly referring back to the rules. The good thing is that once you get going and have several turns under your belt the additional steps in each turn get easier. All of this results in a very interactive operational system, with both sides trying to maneuver into position, launch combined arms attacks, seeking out defensive terrain with good fields of fire, dealing with chemical and nuclear attacks, and trying to figure out which formations to activate. The game has a pretty high replay value due to the chit pull

system which would allow players to try different strategies when replaying the scenarios.

Now there are some issues here and a few things that I still feel a bit unsure about. For one, there's already a few pages of errata, which is never good. As mentioned above, only having two scenarios that use one map is a big drawback for gamers who don't have room for all four maps. While the flip sides of the combat units have the unit in column (big change from GTS where that system uses column markers), which is easier, it creates some weird things like when infantry dismounts from Marders or BMPs, they disappear! All you have left is the infantry and in this game the infantry can't move, only assault adjacent hexes, which is a bit strange. Also, the practice of attaching weapons such as Dragons, LAWs, grenade launchers, etc., to certain units in the battalions seems like one step too far at times during the game. The air support system, while kind of interesting, often produces not much in terms of aircraft actually arriving over the battlefield.

In the end, what do you have? A monster game that is the first in a series covering operational level combat in a potential WW3. The CSS system is certainly faster than GTS,

but I'm not sure it's better overall. The lack of additional one and two map scenarios will definitely be a factor in purchasing this game when gamers consider the high cost of the game itself. In fact, that could be a topic all its own. You have all of these beautiful maps, counters, etc., but outside of one scenario you need to assemble everything on a 6 x 4 table to

play! How often are you going to be able to set up the entire game to play these larger scenarios? That's a good question and some more thought should have went into the scenarios.

The system does work, however, and careful analysis of the terrain is rewarded. If you ever wanted to command armored and mechanized divisions in a large battle during WW3, then this is your game. Hopefully some of the issues listed above get worked out when the second game in the series gets released in the near future.

Once the virus restrictions started to be loosened up, it was time to get back to group gaming. We did take some precautions here and there, but for the most part it was business as usual after not meeting for well over two months. It was suggested that we do a Renaissance battle and while I have armies for four different periods of the Renaissance (Fornovo, Pavia 1525, 1544, and the early Wars of Religion) it was decided that we would do a battle in the 1525 period. After getting the terrain set up and the forces laid out, we chose sides and started to break the units into three brigade sized forces for each side, which is how the rules are set up. As a reminder to those who have not read about our Renaissance battles before, is that we use Warfare in the Age of Discovery (AOD) as our preferred set of rules. They are unusual, there's some holes in the rules, etc., but we love the chaos and the pike battle system is really well done.
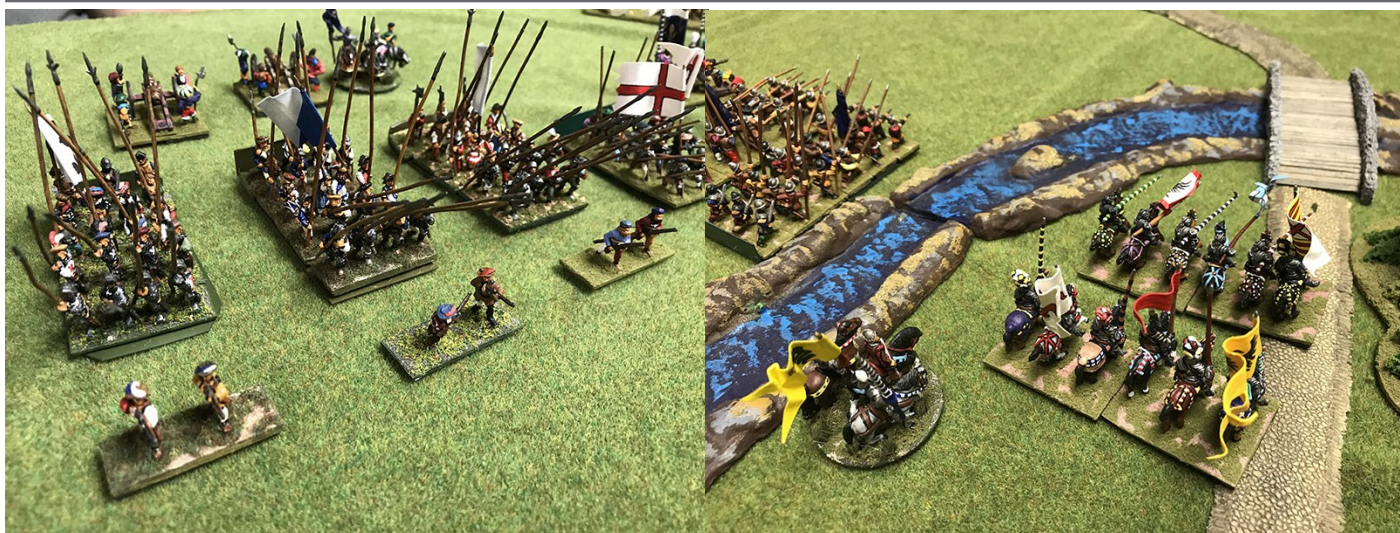
The French army was typical for most French forces of that era; a large contingent of Swiss pike, heavily armored gendarmes, then another sizeable force of mercenaries for the light cavalry, artillery, and some Italian pike units. Not a very large force, but the Swiss pike and the gendarmes were a powerful combination that could sweep anything before them. One problem, however, was that there were two heavy artillery batteries that once placed at the start could only pivot during the battle and not move. This was to have some consequences once the battle started and like many other things in the rules, the artillery was a

wild card. The other issue would be that with their small numbers, the French might get spread out too far and flanked on one side or the other.

The Imperialist forces were as usual, a wild combination of unusual units. There were the usual German pike units that could be counted on as well as a few Spanish pike units that would form the center of the army. The cavalry were a mix of mounted arquebusiers, crossbowmen, and stradiots who formed the light cavalry along with one unit of German heavy cavalry and two units of lancers. The three units of heavy cavalry would be essential in checking the French heavy cavalry, which had proven through the years to pretty much demolish anything they came into contact with! There were a few units of foot arquebusiers and some medium artillery batteries to round out the army.

The Imperialists had several more units than the French, but were lacking in quality forces.

The battle plans were fairly simple for each side. For the Imperialists it would be to try to hold the left flank with just a few units long enough to win in either the center or the right flank. The center had almost all of the pike units along with the artillery, while the right flank had two units of heavy cavalry, all of the light cavalry, the two units of arquebusiers, and two units of Spanish pike that could quickly move to the center if needed. The French would demonstrate on their right, use the Swiss and heavy guns to attack the center, then try to hold and/or slow down the Imperialists on the left. The lack of French units meant that they couldn't cover all avenues of approach, so they adopted a strategy of winning in the center as early as possible.

The French came right out of the gates driving into the center with the Swiss, while the heavy guns tried to soften up some of the opposing German pike units. The Imperialist light cavalry crossed the stream and spread out, looking for an opportunity to raid the French camp while the French cavalry on that side was faced with units advancing upon them in three directions and not enough units to block them all. On the Imperialist left The German heavy cavalry charged into

the French archers (heavy cavalry) and destroyed the first unit, then severely damaging the second before they were destroyed themselves. All of a sudden, one flank for both sides were out of play as a threat as the dominant units on that flank were rendered combat ineffective. The Imperialist right flank was fraught with opportunity and disaster all at the same time. The heavy cavalry clashed near the bridge, but both sides ended up in a bloody stalemate. The Imperialist stradiots charged some mounted French arquebusiers who turned and fled completely off the board! The stradiots, who were in hot pursuit, followed them right into the teeth of the French defenses. They survived being fired at by artillery, multiple charges, but finally with only a figure or two left, fled the board. Meanwhile, another Imperialist light cavalry unit snuck in and briefly occupied the

French camp. Both sides tried to come to grips with each other, but the terrain, poor morale grades of the units involved, etc., combined to make it a weird and ever changing situation on that flank.

Then it was time for the main event in the center. The Swiss, German, Italian, and Spanish pike all charged, countercharged, and suffered horrendous casualties in a massive battle. The Swiss were actually checked and pushed back several times, but broke through in a few of the melees. After three turns most pike units were well below 50% strength, with several units in rout or on the verge of routing. This is what eventually finished off the Imperialists is that one of the German pike units routed and the artillery batteries who were closest fled along with them. While both sides had well over 25% losses by this time, the Imperialists

were actually checking for army withdrawal and if the game had gone on for another turn or two they would have surely lost, so the game was declared a French marginal victory.

A pretty good battle that was in the balance for quite some time. We had a lot of unusual situations that weren't covered in the rules, so the game took much longer than usual. We can usually get a game this size completed in 3-4 hours, but this one went 4 ½ hours easily and could have gone on longer if we hadn't have called it early. The rules definitely need an index and when you're only playing them once a year, players naturally forget things or confuse other rules with this set! Overall, however, it was still a lot of fun and we will surely revisit this period again down the road.

Everyone loves to play Hail Caesar, even though we only have Republican Roman and Seleucid forces! Having added a few new units for the Seleucids as well as getting started on a third Roman legion, it was time to set up another big battle. What was planned as a six player slugfest with about 550 points each got cut back severely when only four of us were able to actually make it due to various conflicts. Even then, 400 points a side is a lot of units and plenty for four players. After going over the

rules for the one member of our group who had never played before, we got to the set up and on to the first turn.

The Seleucid forces were in three divisions. The first division had four pike units (including an elite unit) that was screened by two skirmisher units. The second division was a mixed force; two pike units, a Red Sea Arab unit, Persian infantry unit, two elephants, elephant guard, and two skirmisher units. Finally, there was the third, or cavalry division with A Greek heavy cavalry unit, a Persian heavy cavalry unit, a unit of Tarantines, and a bow armed Persian light horse unit. One player would take the huge second division while the other would take the first division and the cavalry. Overall, it was a large force consisting of some solid pike blocks, good heavy cavalry, but some of the other forces were a question mark.

The Republican Romans were also split into three divisions. The first two were each composed of a legion with one additional skirmisher unit. The cavalry division had a unit of Etruscan medium cavalry, Spanish medium cavalry, Numidian light horse, and some Thessalian

light cavalry. The legions were pretty tough and were the backbone of the force, with each one having two units of Hastati, two of Principes, one Triari, and two Velites. The cavalry was good, but not great, but its role was to just occupy the Seleucid cavalry until the legions could win the battle. The Romans had a powerful force, but using the legions takes a bit of practice and finesse at times, which can be difficult on the tabletop.

Both sides had really bad command rolls the first two turns, meaning most of the infantry units barely moved. That was not the situation with the cavalry, however, as both sides had good rolls and the various units moved out to begin skirmishing. The Romans had started with some of their cavalry behind a legion, hoping to influence action in the center, but with the Seleucid cavalry moving out quickly and the threat of being outflanked a real possibility, they had to shift to their own flank. The Seleucid Persian cavalry hit the Spanish cavalry unit head on, inflicting an incredible 7 casualties during the clash and only one hit was saved. In the wink of an eye the Spanish cavalry were broken. The other Roman medium cavalry unit then charged the same Persian unit and met the same fate. In two combats the Persians had inflicted 13 hits and routed two enemy forces for the cost of three hits to themselves. All of a sudden, the Roman left flank was in serious trouble.

This meant that the Romans needed to press the issue with their infantry and as quickly as possible. The one area where the Romans excelled in the early game was that they eliminated most of the Seleucid skirmisher units. With some great rolls and several pairs of 2s and 3s rolled by the Seleucids for break tests, their skirmisher units evaporated. This let the Romans pick and choose where they wanted to fight. Any advance by the main Seleucid infantry units had to run a gauntlet of skirmish fire to get to the Roman legions, then the various legion units would pick off damaged Seleucid units in a series of charges. By Turn 5 the legions were getting into hand to hand combat, successfully defeating an attack by the Persian and Arab infantry. The game was

still in the balance, but the next few turns would be critical for both sides.

The big problem for the Seleucids was that their heavy cavalry really had no answer for the remaining skirmish cavalry the Romans had. They would charge them and the Roman cavalry would run away. If they tried to maneuver to charge the various units of the legions the skirmish cavalry would move in quickly and shoot at them! This went on for several turns and basically negated the huge advantage the Seleucids had, which was two relatively intact heavy cavalry units which could have done some significant damage. The Seleucid elephants charged into a unit of triari, that had moved up to fill a gaping hole in the Roman line. The combat was back and forth, then the elephants lost a round of combat when the Romans saved every hit and the elephants saved none. One elephant unit rolled snake eyes on the break test and routed while the other stampeded back into the pikes!

By this time the Seleucids were in real trouble. No skirmishers of any kind were on the board for them, they were getting pinpricked to death by the Roman cavalry, and they had lost three of the six pike units. With little chance of things turning around anytime soon, we called it a Roman victory at that point. Usually due to set up/clean up time and myself being the only one with the army lists, the forces are usually set before we arrive. If there were more than these armies available or if more of the group had the army lists, we could see some variation in the forces chosen and how they're deployed. We've played Hail Caesar with these armies a few times now with pretty much the same forces and set up, so it's time to shake things up a bit by adding some more units, hidden deployment, and some scenario objectives for next time.

Several images from the battle showing the massive pike phalanx advancing towards the Roman lines. The Seleucid cavalry had a bad day and in the end the various light Roman cavalry units running around forced the Seleucids to abandon their plans as they were continually under pressure from several sides.

This Saga battle happened right at the start of the Covid-19 crisis. While many of us were figuring out what to do, trying to get work situations straightened out, and trying to find groceries in packed stores, there wasn't much time left for gaming! This would be the last meeting of the group for quite some time and those who were able to make it this night were indeed fortunate. Gaming is definitely a social happening and you don't realize how important it is until you can't meet for quite some time!

Due to stay at home requests, it was a low turnout this Friday, albeit a needed one for those of us that could make it. With all of the restaurants closed for in room dining, we met at a member's house and ordered some takeout prior to setting up for a 3 man Saga game. In order to simplify things we played a King of the Hill scenario. Each player had a 4 point warband (Normans, Anglo-Danes, Vikings) and a camp to start from. Points were generated by having a unit with over half it's models within short (4in) of the central objective or within short of an opponent's camp. After a brief review of the rules, and players choosing their forces we deployed and started the game.

The Normans had two mounted units and moved aggressively up the side of the field while their foot slogged towards the center. The Vikings, similarly, moved straight up towards the center while the Anglo-Danes spent several turns consolidating (forming a large, slow moving shield wall like front).

The Vikings were the first to reach the center, and would tenaciously hold on all match to the lead. Meanwhile the sneaky Norman milites rode into the Viking camp, and promptly looted all of the wine store there. The Anglo-Danes only looked on as the pueri and bondi mixed it up between the buildings.

The pueri initially had the best of it and closed on the center but were chopped up by the Viking hearth-guard. Meanwhile, the Norman crossbows continued to show their value in yet another game as they slowed and bled out a unit of Anglo-Dane warriors.

In the end the Normans and Vikings had almost bled each other dry and were forced to team up their remaining forces to deal with the mostly intact Anglo-Danish lines. Several rounds of intense combat saw the Vikings almost obliterate the Anglo-Danes, and the game was called with the Vikings at 12 points, the Normans at 6, and the Anglo-Danes with 6. Most of their men had gone to Valhalla, but it was a glorious battle in which much booty was looted from the market square.

A few more images from the Saga battle featuring 28mm Anglo-Danes and Vikings painted by Rob. Saga is a versatile system that can be used for a variety of Ancient, Dark Ages, and Medieval periods. There's even a fantasy supplement out now!
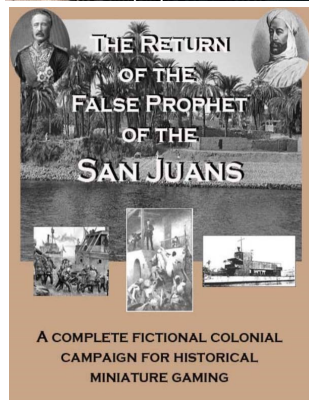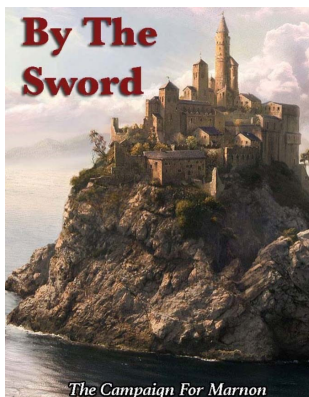
One of the most pointless and irritating hobby things on the Internet these days are the endless threads about, "What are the best Ancients rules?" , "What commercial set of WW2 rules can handle up to 100 tanks and be finished in 1-2 hours?", and so on. This usually results in the proverbial opening of Pandora's Box, giving every gamer a chance to promote what they play, what they hate, or add things totally unrelated to the discussion! In the case of Ancients, for example, answers include popular sets like To The Strongest, Hail Caesar, Warmaster Ancients, etc. You also get some rarities and obscure titles such as Shock of Impact, Newbury Fast Play, Classical Hack, Charles Grant's books, etc., that would not only be hard to find, but having your forces based for any of those games would severely limit who you could play with. Finally, there are the inevitable responses of, "We use our club rules, "Caesar Kills Everything", "We converted a set of WW2 rules from The Courier for Ancients", and finally, "We use our Cold War rules, Nuclear Annihilation, modified for chariots and elephants".
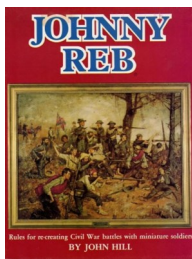
If this was a pointless exercise back in the 70s and 80s, it is even more so today. Back in that era at least there was a point of reference that you could at least discuss some likes and dislikes. There were basically only two scales (25mm and 15mm), army lists were few and far between, and even if you played Shock of Impact, for example, you could at least figure out WRG's system in a few turns. You may or may not have liked Johnny Reb for ACW, but you more than likely had heard of it, maybe had played it, and you could certainly find other players across the country. I remember rules reviews and analysis in many of the gaming magazines and even if you didn't play those rules, it was an interesting read and you at least could figure out what the rules were about.

That's no longer the case. Many of these sets of rules have barely been playtested and are lost amongst the stacks of other rules that are continuously released. Back in the day if you walked into the local store and saw a set of rules for a topic you might be interested in, you probably bought them, even if it was just for ideas. This is why so many of us ended up with all kinds of obscure rules! While looking through the shelves of our local store recently, there were shelves and shelves of rules, covering all kinds of periods, for all sorts of scales, and catering to different tastes. You then scan the endless shelves of Osprey rules, Flames of War, Warhammer, etc., then add in all of the boxed sets, figures, etc. A new gamer can't help but feel overwhelmed. They ask a simple question and get back 200+ answers, all different. At this point they go back to their Magic The Gathering, Euro games, and Kickstarter projects they've backed. As a part of the hobby, miniature wargamers need to do better in this area. What the solution ultimately is could be anyone's guess, but we have identified the problem!