Warning Order

Issue #68

Awash in a Sea of Plastic

At one of the more recent SaltCon game conventions, there was a gamer who was walking out with four of the larger boxed games, two of which were Twilight Imperium and Frosthaven. The other two were pretty sizeable as well, which caused me to think about the thousands of components in those games! Were those games going to get played? How would you organize all of the stuff in them? Do we really need boxes and bags full of components to play our games?

This was recently brought home again when someone was teaching a few of us how to play Oathsworn. He had purchased the full Kickstarter package, which came in three huge boxes plus a lot more so there were boxes and boxes of miniatures of every size and shape. There were so many that he carried it around in three large plastic tubs! This gamer had plans to paint all of them, but I looked at the task in front of him and determined that it might take a while! In the mean time, another dozen or so similar games might cross his path, causing his attention to drift off in a new direction.

The hobby is currently awash in a sea of plastic (I include with the term plastic all manners of tokens, trays, cards, etc., that come with these games) and it appears that there is no end in sight. Scroll through the Kickstarter game list to see what I mean as there is project after project that features all kinds of plastic miniatures for heroes, monsters, cities, fleets, and more. On top of that there are hundreds of cards (usually in non-standard sizes which makes buying sleeves for them a challenge), tokens, rule books, and more.

Not to be outdone, the miniatures companies have their own plastic tsunamis aimed at gamers. Starter sets of Conquest, WH40K, Epic Pike & Shotte, and more have hundreds and hundreds of plastic miniatures included. Not that most of them will ever be painted or the games played more than once, but there is at this time an indescribable urge for gamers to gravitate towards these plastic heavy type games.

Game companies have clearly seen this and over the last few years there have been more and more of these large, plastic miniatures heavily laden boxed games coming out. If you're sci-fi or fantasy gaming project doesn't have all kinds of miniatures and components, it's probably doomed to fail. Gamers are buying more and more of these types of games, but really can't describe to you why! The miniatures rules based games have an easy explanation in that the gamer needs an army to compete against friends, play at a local shop, or

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Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Review and battle report for the new Midgard Heroic rules.*
- *Two battle reports as we try out Black Powder for the Sudan and Seven Years War.*
- *Battle Reports for Age of Eagles, Warmaster Ancients, and Age of Discovery.*
- *Two new Engagements scenarios*
- *Reviews for Blood Rage, La Patrie en Danger, and the new Hail Caesar WOTR book.*

is just interested in a new set of rules. Many of the board games, however, seem to be in the category of (cont. from p2) "one and done", meaning they might open it and play it once, but that's probably it.

The vast number of components themselves can create some issues. First off, there is the question of how to store them! When you open some of the boxes there are hundreds of cards, stacks of tokens, large cardboard overlays, player displays, rules, then the plastic miniatures themselves. Fortunately, there are companies like Broken Token, Folded Space, and others who sell kits that are designed to store all of the components for specific games. However, after dropping $125-150 on some of these games, do you want to drop another $50-90 on a storage solution? If you don't use a storage system, however, setting up the game a second time can become an insurmountable challenge.

Then there is the question of play testing for all of the components. This has been noted by many, many gamers concerning these large boxed games and Kickstarter projects. The base game systems seem to work as designed, but the never ending add-ons such as special characters, additional tokens, event cards, 5th and 6th player options, etc., seem at times to have just been thrown in to keep everyone happy.

Another issue that comes up is that with many of these large games that you either pre-order or get on Kickstarter or Gamefound is that many will come with special sets of figures, along with rules to use those figures. In most cases, there aren't any of these extra figures produced for the retail version. This leads to the common problem of gamers getting the base game, liking it, then trying to find the special figs, which by this time are going for a pretty high price on Ebay. So, do you get in on the Kickstarter to get all of the extras, only to find out the game isn't very good, or do you wait until you see some reviews, but then you aren't able to get the special figures?

For miniatures games, you don't usually get the play testing issues or problems with components. Here it is simply a matter of how much plastic is in the box! Some of the larger Warlord epic sets literally have well over 1,000 figures in them. Whether it is 6mm, 10mm, Warlord's 13mm, 15mm, or 28mm, that is a daunting task that will defeat most gamers. Just opening one of the boxes tells you two things; first, there is a lot of plastic here, and second, this is going to take a while to paint! There's always debates about whether these large boxed sets are a good deal or not, but there's no doubt that there is a lot of plastic in the box.
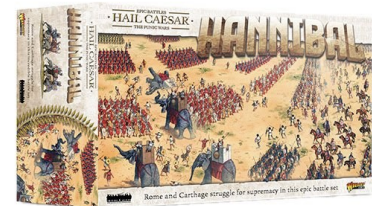
The same goes for the Mantic Kings of War boxes, Conquest Last Argument of Kings, and any of the Games Workshop 40K, Age of Sigmar, or Warhammer Old World sets. You get just enough figs for the core of your army, which in some cases can be quite a few! Again, you look at what's in the boxes and there is certainly a pile of plastic, which is probably intimidating to some gamers and to some there probably isn't enough. For the fantasy and sci-fi crowd the main obstacle is just assembling everything as you don't often see fully painted armies on the tabletops at most stores. In fact, it would be interesting to see a survey about the percentage of these boxed sets that actually get painted.

So at the end of the day, can the hobby survive without never ending piles of plastic figs? The 70s, 80s, and 90s are definitely long gone, where lead figs

were most, if not all of the hobby. Outside of Heroquest or Axis & Allies, you would be hard pressed to think of board wargames that had plastic figures in them. Large amounts of plastic figures in both board games and miniatures boxed sets are now *expected*. This expectation is certainly fueling a majority of the new releases for the larger boxed games and miniatures lines. Could WH40K and other games get by with just offering smaller sets or blisters with one or two figs in it? Maybe, maybe not.

The game companies are certainly poised to continue this for the long haul. Whether or not there are gamers sitting in rooms surrounded by multiple large box-

es with thousands of plastic miniatures that will never get assembled or painted is not much of a concern. Selling new boxed sets, new periods to game, and most of all, the add on boxed sets to expand your armies is the most important thing. There is a killing to be made in giving gamers just enough in the starter boxes, using them as a loss leader, then making the real money on the terrain sets, army books, and additional units.

Is this the future of the hobby? If the past two or three years is any indication, then yes. If you like these big boxed games and miniatures sets, then your future looks bright and there will be more than enough plastic to last you a hobby lifetime. What really needs to happen within the hobby is getting the plastic painted! Until then it will just pile up...

Wars of the Roses: Relief of a Siege Battle Report

We had just played a big Wars of the Roses game using the Hail Caesar rules, so it was a bit surprising when everyone chose to play it again for our big post-Christmas game. So, on a cold and wet Friday after Christmas we gathered to try yet another scenario. Although I had the new Wars of the Roses supplement from Warlord Games, we went with the old army lists in the 2nd edition rules. I listed my reasons for doing this in the review (elsewhere in this issue), but I had already decided not to paint another 200+ archer figures to do the historical scenarios that were included.

The scenario premise was that mercenaries hired by King Edward were besieging a Lancastrian castle. The Duke of Somerset along with Oxford and Percy stage a relief attempt to either a) defeat the King's forces surrounding the castle, or b) destroy the siege cannons and positions. Both sides were about equal numbers, but the Lancastrians did get the advantage of choosing where to enter and what to focus on first, while the Yorkists would enter from the opposite side on the second turn.

For some reason, the Lancastrians decided to enter Percy's forces on one side of the river when they could have entered on both sides, putting immediate pressure on the defenders of the bridge. Once the game got going the Lancastrian side started to reconsider this, but it was too late to do anything about it, so the attack went forward! On the positive side, it would at least pin that Yorkist division and keep it from interfering with the rest of the attack and maybe give the Lancastrians a good chance to win.

While Oxford on the Lancastrian left moved out quickly (in fact, their opening attack had us considering a restart of the game as they might have won it on turn 2!), they were beaten back by a series of melees where they should have won. The Yorkists on that side got their mercenaries in order, turned the cannon around, and tried to hold on for dear life. On turn 2 Warwick's command came up to reinforce them. It probably wasn't the most ideal plan for the Yorkist side, but at the time it looked like Oxford might sweep through the artillery positions quickly.

Then there was the saga of the Duke of Somerset in the Lancastrian middle. No matter what dice were used and on which turn, most units simply refused to move! In a game where this division badly needed to get its units to the road and possibly split the defenders in half, they could not do anything but move a unit here and there. The King's division moved on board and started heading for the hedges in the center of the board.

Meanwhile, on the Lancastrian left, the lone light cavalry unit made a suicidal attack across the bridge in column! Yes, it was destroyed by archery fire from two household units, then mopped up by the heavy infantry, but it did concentrate the defenders in a single area. This let Percy's infantry move up and get into position to attack across the river, which was treated as rough terrain and a +1 for the defenders on the other side. When the attack came, two units were actually able to get across and push the defenders back! By turn 4 it looked like despite Oxford's momentum being slowed and Somerset unable to move that the Lancastrians might still pull out a victory.

On the Lancastrian left, Oxford's division and Warwick's division were going at it tooth and nail. Each side would attack, fall back, counterattack, then repeat the process over and over again. The mercenaries moved to consolidate around the artillery as they had problems with command all day long. At this time the game still hung in the balance and the next few turns would prove critical.
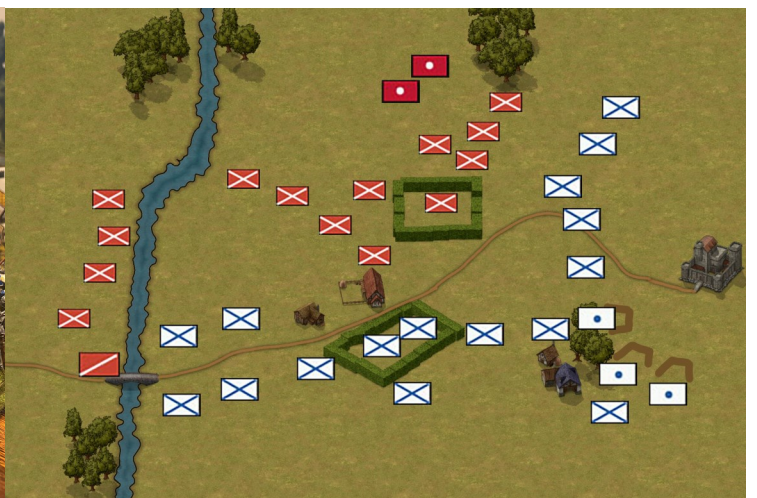
(cont. from p4) Somerset finally got a series of good command rolls and the various units surged towards the road to meet the King's division. A series of long range archery duels opened up and both sides started taking hits. There was some confused fighting around the farmhouse and walls where Somerset's men were able to overcome the defenders. Right then, it looked like one more push in the center might do it. The King's division would be forced to retire, the Yorkist army would be split into two, then the victory would be assured.

That, however, was not to be! Somerset's units attacked across the road, where the King's troops made a heroic stand. Despite all that Somerset could throw at them, the King's forces stood their ground and in some places counterattacked. Even when they lost a unit or two, the remainder were able to stop

Somerset's attack until most units were either shaken or about to go shaken.

On the Lancastrian right, Percy was meeting more opposition than was intended. While the had forced their way across the river and destroyed two Yorkist units, they could not get their reserves into action due to bad command rolls. The front line units were almost shaken, but continued the attack, hoping for help from Somerset, who was heavily engaged in the center.

On the Lancastrian left, Oxford and Warwick had fought themselves to exhaustion. Heavy casualties, many shaken units, and artillery lobbing cannonballs at each other made up the action here. While there was some archery fire here and there, Oxford's division was done and on the verge of retiring. There was simply no way it was going to cut
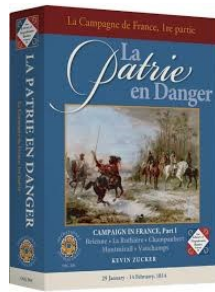
through to relieve the castle. Percy's attack had come to a halt and Somerset, who had been on the verge of breaking the center, was unable to continue on.

A close run victory for the Yorkist side. The desperate defense in the center had saved the army and some timely (bad rolls) command failures for the Lancastrians combined for the victory. Both sides used everything that they had and there were plenty of great as well as bleak moments for all the players. It would have been interesting if there had been more cavalry on both sides, but from what we've seen so far, cavalry doesn't survive long with all the archery around!

After a half dozen battles it may be time to try a campaign now. With over 1,000 figures available and more than 20 units per side, we should have enough for even the largest campaign battles.

OSG, or Operational Studies Group, has long been an enigma in the wargaming hobby, as well as the main or "go to" company for Napoleonic warfare. Kevin Zucker, who has a huge list of wargaming credits, has produced Napoleonic games for SPI, Avalon Hill, Clash of Arms, and of course OSG. For the last decade or so, OSG has been expanding their Napoleonic series of games and reworking older titles. Of course, the enigma part comes from trying to determine what series is what, where do the games fit in, which rules set is the current one, etc.!

For our purposes, this review is about the first of three games on the 1814 campaign in France, using the Library of Napoleonic Battles system. La Patrie en Danger covers the first several battles of the campaign, namely Brienne, La Rothiere, Champaubert, Montmirail, and Vauchamps. The system is the same tried and true one first used in SPI's Napoleon's Battles quads, but now with a bit more chrome. This is mainly standard hex and counter wargaming and if you've played the popular Battle of Leipzig game, then you can get right into this quickly.

OSG's graphical style has undergone many changes over the years, but the current series seems to have settled on a particular style, which is a good thing. You get three maps, 500+ counters, 100 cards, a set of rules, study folder with the scenarios, then a ton of play aids. The maps are fairly basic, but work very well during play and the counters are clear as well as colorful. In terms of components, there really isn't anything to complain about as clearly OSG is giving you everything possible to succeed with the game.

The rules are fairly straightforward and again, the base system is something that most gamers are familiar with. The command, movement, combat, etc., systems are well explained and it's not until you get to the study folder that things start to get a bit busy. The study folder contains all of the information to play the scenarios as well as the various mini-campaigns that are included. You will find yourself going back and forth between the study folder, the rules, and the separate rules for the cards (these need to be folded into the series rules).

The cards aren't relatively new, but for those who have played the old system and now just trying the newer games, it will be. Basically, there are two card decks, one for each side that consists of various cards that allow for alternate deployments, faster marching, etc. Each side gets so many per scenario and can draw one per turn. Using some of them can cost victory points and there is a separate set of rules that covers some of the more complex cards. The cards came in this particular game, but I've had to purchase them separately for some of the other games, so I'm not sure what the thinking is here from OSG. The cards don't have to be used and from my experience they add a bit of flavor and randomness, but they're not something that will make or break the game.

Each turn you check your commanders to see who is in command and who isn't. Units that aren't can roll for initiative (pretty low odds), then units move. Zones of control are locking, then you have to attack with a standard odds based combat results table (CRT). The CRT is fairly bloodless, so battles become more about position and taking ground than in some other game systems, which is kind of expected with most units being brigades. The main theme is getting your commands in order, getting units to move, then reinforcing success. It sounds easy, but once commanders start separating themselves from the overall commanders, things get much harder to do!

There is a bit of chrome with the combat system in that you can use artillery units to bombard a few hexes away and there are cavalry charges, which are risky, but can overrun defenders during combat so that if they retreat they take losses. The game is really all about causing losses to the other side. Each battle has a display card which shows tracks for the various corps and once they reach certain levels, that corps becomes demoralized and pretty much combat ineffective.
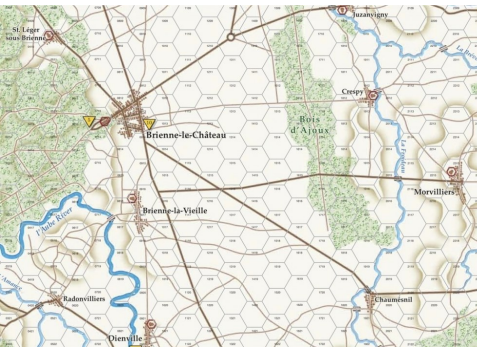
There are quite a few scenarios and mini-campaigns that link up several scenarios. Also, many of these scenarios all have alternate deployments or earlier start times so that you can game out the approach to battle. The biggest problem that you run into with games in this series is that every so often the battles are one-sided, meaning that only with some incredible luck could one side win. Again, and this cannot be reiterated enough, the games in this series are more "studies" than trying to make a fair and balanced gaming experience.
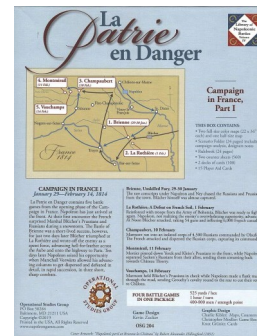
If you've been playing iterations of this series since the SPI/Avalon Hill days back in the 70s, most of this will be familiar to you. You really just need to note what has changed since the last time you played this system, which shouldn't take too long. Sorting through all of the set up cards, finding the right counters for a scenario, reading the scenario specific rules, then getting it all set up is pretty much part of the experience. You quickly learn that the games in this series are not designed for the casual gamer, but rather those Napoleonic gamers who want the final word on these battles.
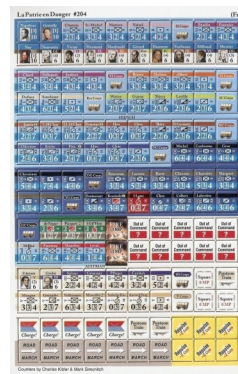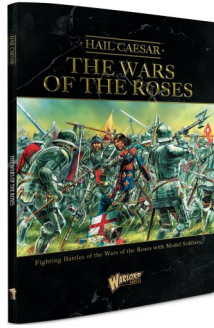
If you are a Napoleonic gamer, or have more than a passing interest in the era, then this game (and others in the series) are a must have. The map, beautiful counters, study guide, and even the scenarios offer great insight into the 1814 campaign. While not complex, they will take some commitment and multiple plays to truly grasp what happened during that time. The cards for this one don't add much, so no need to spend the extra money. For the casual gamer this could be a step too far, but this is a pretty solid series of games.

Hail Caesar: Wars of the Roses Book   Review

As with many of the Warlord Games miniatures rules, there will be a number of supplements and/or army list type books for Hail Caesar, Black Powder, Bolt Action, etc. In the 2nd edition of Hail Caesar there was a chapter for the Medieval and Wars of the Roses (WOTR) period, complete with a WOTR army list. Plenty of gamers started to build units for the WOTR based off of that army list and several of the battle reports you've seen in this magazine over the last few years have been based off of the WOTR list. So, it was with trepidation that I approached the WOTR book that is specifically for Hail Caesar.

First off, this is a sizable publication where you definitely get your money's worth (retail is around $40). There is a large amount of information inside, including an army list, leaders, scenarios, a campaign system, and more. If you pre-ordered the book you also received a King Richard III 28mm figure, which will sculpted nicely is in a strange knees bent, getting ready for combat pose. The book is full of color illustrations and pictures of battles in progress on the tabletop, so Warlord has done a great job on the presentation. Now its on to the content…

First off, you get a history of the Wars of the Roses along with timelines. To say that the war was a complicated affair would be an understatement! The war was full of treason, unusual battles, hard to discern strategies at times, plus there were many things that could have happened, but are included here (in the scenarios) for completeness. You then proceed to the section on leaders, where most of the famous ones are given their own page (or section of a page) along with special rules. The special rules and leader ratings will no doubt be the subject of much discussion! Of course, you don't have to use these leaders and can go with generic ones instead, but the option is there for you to use.

Then there is the section on special rules for the WOTR period, which again, you can choose to use for your games or not. Rules such as Treason, Arrow Storm, leaders dismounting to show solidarity with their units, etc., are all there to add some flavor to the period. The most interesting one is of course Arrow Storm, which seeks to replicate the heavy exchanges of archery at the start of WOTR battles and each archer unit only gets three ammo tokens. This will of course force hand to hand combat, which is what happened historically. However, to compensate for the limited ammo, the pendulum may have swung too far in the opposite direction when you get to the army list.

The army list was the biggest shock during my review. Gone are the small units of dismounted knights/men at arms that were fun to play with on the tabletop. They are now added to household troops and/or billmen by spending some extra points. I'm assuming that most gamers will put a stand of men at arms behind those units to signify that, but no method is really prescribed outside of that. To compensate for the limited ammo rule, the household troops and pure archer units now get 6 (!!!) shots at long range, with the pure archer units still retaining the Marksmen special rule. In many of our WOTR games its not uncommon to get two units to shoot at one enemy unit, but now that could be devastating as it would be on the receiving end of 12 shots! I really wonder how extensively this was play tested.

There are many other changes to the army list that involve all cavalry being small units, the ratings for the Irish are questionable, and essentially, the army list that was in the 2nd edition has been radically altered. Why some proposals or ideas weren't floated on various web sites, Facebook Groups, etc., is beyond me. It's almost like there was a decision to just go a new direction and worry about

feedback later. Probably not the best way to do things, especially when gamers have been used to the old list.

In terms of scenarios there are plenty and they are well done on top of that. Each historical battle (and there are some fictional scenarios based on events that could have happened) gives a background, special rules, and orders of battle using the new lists. If you don't have units of archers in your armies, you're going to need to get painting! Almost every force has at least a half dozen pure archer units on top of the household troops.

The campaign system is simple, but it seems like it would work. The campaigns are fairly short, with just a few turns as they broke down the various periods of the war. There are few forces on the map, so my guess is that things will get resolved fairly quickly once contact is made. There is also a battle generation system that is great for those nights when no one has a scenario ready to go as well as a section on creating your own livery for fictional armies.

Overall, the book is impressive, but with a caveat. The inclusion of numerous historical scenarios, a campaign system, and extensive notes and rules for the various leaders shows that a lot of work went into this. The caveat? Why the major changes with the army list? Surely they must have known that a lot of gamers had been building forces based upon the unpublished list by Rick Priestley and then the expanded list in 2nd edition? Now all of a sudden you find out that you'll need to do a lot more painting (you need a lot of archers) to even attempt any of the historical scenarios. I'll probably use the leader info, may try a campaign, possibly try some of the special rules, but I'm going to use the old list, which should have been included, even if optional.

AOE: Peninsula Defensive Battle

We had been looking to do another fictional battle set in the Peninsula using the Age of Eagles (AOE) rules, but we kept getting sidetracked by other games. Not so this night, where we were able to set up a 4 player game that went surprisingly well! This time it would be two French corps under Massena trying to break through a British defensive position led by Wellington.

The board was pretty basic as you can see from the accompanying images. A few villages here and there, some fields, a river, plus a few roads as well as woods. We've discussed getting a Cigar Box mat that looks a bit more like Spain, but for now we keep using our old GW green mats for pretty much all of our Napoleonic battles. If we keep adding Spanish and Portuguese troops, we're going to have to do something about this!

The French had two divisions for each commander, making two small corps plus a lone brigade of dragoons. A few of the brigades were pretty good sized, with 11 and 12 stands, plus a few were elite as well. The extra strength would be needed as going up against the British firepower in AOE is a challenge, so you need staying power. There were five artillery batteries on the French side, which was also an advantage for attacking a defensive position. The British had several brigades as well, spread out in a line with reserves. Two artillery batteries were on a hill to the British rear, while the others were in between the main village and woods at the start.

In AOE there is a special rule that Wellington has to be present to place artillery batteries, which is a limitation on British forces. Also, while the British were in a decent position, it wasn't optimum as they didn't know where the main French attack would fall and they might have problems shifting reserves to fill holes. The British decided on a wait and see strategy while the French deployed.

The French had a plan, which was to feint towards the center, then really hit the British on the flanks. The 1st French division made for the British right and was soon in a firefight with forces in the woods area, while a battery deployed in support. The 2nd division with the elite troops went in towards the center, planning to peel off towards the French left, but events were to change this. On the French right the two divisions of that corps came barreling down the road while the dragoons raced ahead.

While the 2nd French corps was still moving up, the 1st corps got busy. The 1st division launched an attack into the woods and the accompanying fields, which was successful and drove the British as well as their Portuguese allies back. A follow up attack pushed the British completely out of the woods and fields. All of a sudden there was an opportunity that the French had not counted on, mainly the British outer defensive line falling so quickly, which left a small brigade of Highlanders guarding the entrance to the main village.

The French 2nd division attacked, led by the elite troops, who brushed aside the Highlanders (rolling a 13 with modifiers, while the Highlanders rolled a 1!) and followed up by damaging the artillery battery sent to help. All of a sudden, the French were in control of the main village, had the woods on the French left, and things were certainly looking like the game would be over early! Why even
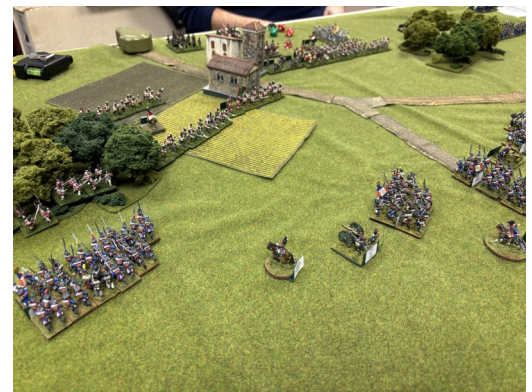
play the next few turns?

Then the French realized that they had gone too far, too fast. The British brought up their reserves and launched a three sided attack, pushing the French out of the village and into the surrounding area. The French brought
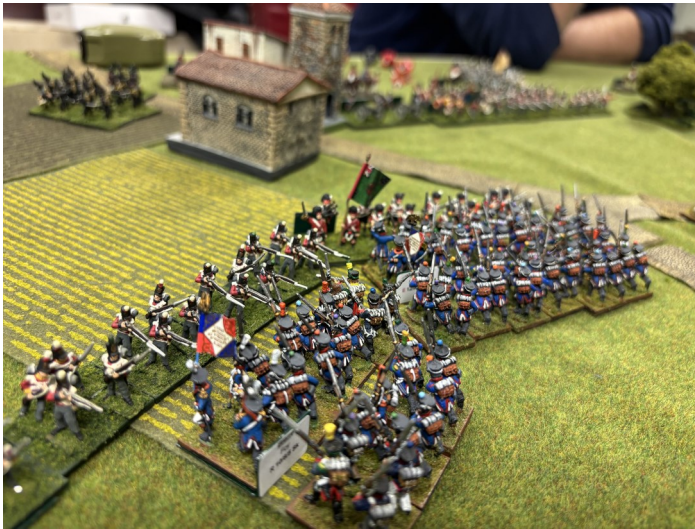
(cont. from p6) up the 2nd brigade of that division, while the British moved up their front line and began a general firefight. This was now turning into a major battle for the village!

On the French right there was a confused battle involving artillery, charges, and counterattacks that left both sides weakened after a few turns. The dragoons were shattered by artillery and musketry, but did their job of masking the French deployments. The French artillery, which was heavier, started to really pound the British counterattacks and again, it looked like there was an opportunity to sweep up the hill on the British right and take the two artillery batteries.

Instead, there was a deadly battle in front of the hill where the British held on by their fingernails. Two French attacks into the only fresh British troops on that

side of the board were repulsed, but the French artillery kept taking stands here and there. One final attack failed and the French fell back to reassess the situation.

On the French left they still held the woods, but that brigade was under fire and had lost some stands. The 2nd brigade near the woods had to give ground and pulled back to avoid being flanked. Near the village the fight went on. A French brigade counterattacked to restore the situation, but some good musketry pushed them back. The British counterattacked everywhere near the village, driving the French back to the middle of the board. With no fresh troops and many units now worn or spent, the French conceded the battle to their British opponents.

For a fictional battle between two fairly even opponents, things went pretty

well! Including set up, about 10 turns, then take down it was about 3 1/2 hours, which isn't too bad. It also shows that sometimes generic battles can be a lot of fun. Historical Napoleonic scenarios take a lot of time to set up, usually have a ton of troops packed into small places, and trying to replicate what rally happened on the tabletop rarely occurs.

We need to revisit this period again, but need to do a better job of simulating the Peninsula. Better defined hills, a mat with a bit more tan/brown to it, some valleys and gulches, etc., would give our Peninsula battles a bit more flavor. Also, someone needs to get going on painting Spanish troops! One of the 2025 projects is for finishing a Bavarian corps, so some Central Europe or fictional Russian invasion battle reports will probably be coming up at some point!
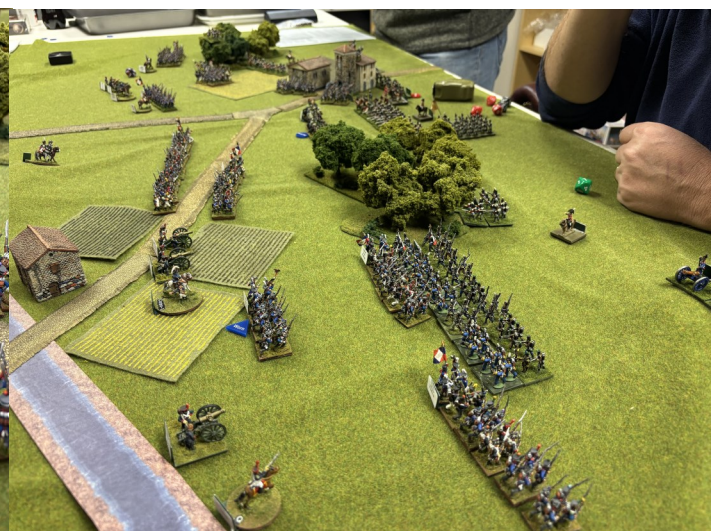
Over many of our hobby lives, we've all known gamers who take advantage of the rules, play a little loose with the measurements, or simply don't read the rules! Most of it is pretty harmless, although at times it can stretch the patience of the most laid back gamer. Usually the biggest problem on game night is that everyone doesn't own the rules that are being played, but now we're starting to see something that's a lot more common on gaming tabletops as well as in online forums.
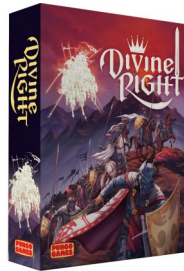
For a long, long time, rules interpretations were nothing new to miniatures or board wargamers. WRG Ancients was usually the culprit and I can remember long arguments that went on so long that half the group went out to dinner, only to come back and find out the argument was still ongoing! SPI rules were probably the second most frequent offender, with their case by case rules listing causing gamers to go back and forth to find out what something really meant. Games such as GMT's World at War, which is an 11 on a 1 to 10 scale of complexity will certainly cause some problems with rules interpretations! Usually, we figured things out and the games went along.

When we arrived at the year 2000, the SPI type complex games were seriously dwindling and more and more simple or streamlined wargames started to show up. You would think that this would solve the rules interpretation issues, but then you would be wrong! Either through poor rules writing or just gamers expecting things to be more complex than they actually were, the problems persisted. Again, fortunately, things were usually worked out to everyone's satisfaction by re-reading, trying out a few die rolls, and finally coming to an agreement. Today, however, the rules interpretation monster has once again reared its ugly head. We'll go over a few of the reasons about why this is happening.
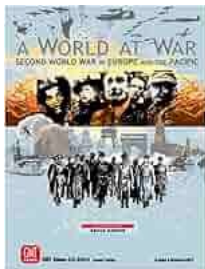
While many of today's game systems are much simpler than in days gone by in the hobby, rules writing hasn't really improved much. Not wanting to go back to the SPI 11.17.2 rules reference style or the GDW paragraphs of run together rules, many game designers have opted for a casual, conversation type writing of rules. This is both good and bad. Good in that gamers can quickly get into the game, grasp the basic concepts, then figure things out while they play their first game or two. Bad because some of the concepts could use a bit more explanation or there are sometimes gaps in what is actually supposed to happen in a turn, cavalry charge, town defense, etc.

The next issue is that gamers have too many games...seriously. With so many rules, game systems, board games, etc., coming out each year and the penchant for gamers to buy as many as possible, whether they need them or not! Gamers want to get new games to the table as quickly as possible, which usually means a cursory glance at the rules, setting things up, then they start playing. As you can imagine, this often leads to the game being incorrectly played, wrong assumptions, then posts on various forums where other gamers point out what they missed and where things are in the rules. Will those games get another play? In most cases probably not as gamers are already moving on to other games. If the game was played properly, maybe there would be some inclination to play again.

On top of all of that you have gamers who want to a) cause as much destruction as possible (especially true for miniatures games), or b) do well in the game, and win the game. You would think all of these would be the same thing, but no, different gamers have different goals for each game. This by itself creates the worst kind of rules interpretation; i.e., just about crossing the line between what is legal and taking advantage of the rules and/or your opponent. These kinds of interpretations are especially dangerous in that they give a gamer tremendous advantages that they would ordinarily not get.

As I wander through various gaming forums (both miniatures and board gaming) I see all kinds of questions that have pretty common sense answers. Every game will have issues and most questions are just clarifications about the sequence of play, how do certain modifiers add up, the victory point system, etc. However, over the years the questions seem to be so nonsensical that you wonder if many gamers even bothered to read the rules! For example, if the rules say that cavalry units are disordered by moving through woods, why would you think that if you changed your cavalry unit into column that you could then move through the wood without penalty? If the rules say that units go disordered after receiving two hits, but your big attack might falter because most of your units now have two hits, why would you think that the rules say that it takes over or more than 2 hits?
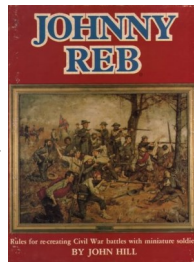
While the old SPI, Avalon Hill, WRG, Newbury, etc., game designers were aware of "rules lawyers" and wrote their rules to clarify every single item, no matter how small, today's games are not like that. Having said that, however, today's rules writers give too much credit to gamers, thinking that they will interpret their rules correctly and play the game as fair as possible. They simply can't fathom that some gamers will do anything to win, ignore common sense tactics, and do things that the designers never intended to happen in their games.

Basically, what you have is gamers looking forward to the weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly gaming session, wanting to win/do well, and kill things on the tabletop. The last thing many want to do is get trounced in a game, have bad die rolls, or see a critical attack fail and their side loses, especially when there's a chance to interpret the rules to help their side! There's only a few hours to game (long games or gaming sessions are rare nowadays) and there's more new games awaiting. This unfortunately leads to the rules being interpreted from time to time incorrectly, usually in their favor.

Is this behavior going to stop? Not a chance. In fact, I think it may only get worse from what I've observed. No amount of rules writing is going to correct this, but hopefully cooler and calmer heads in gaming groups will point out the errors as we all want our games to be fair and for everyone to have a good time.
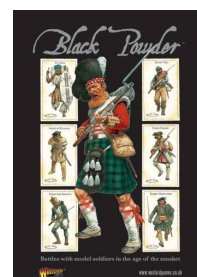
If you're a long time gamer, when have you not thought about playing out Ragnarok? Miniatures gaming over the last 40+ years has always had Viking figures, monsters, etc., not to mention all the years many of us spent in role-playing where Asgardian beings were involved. Both SPI and TSR had Ragnarok wargames and it's a popular topic, so it's no surprise that a game company comes out with a full treatment of the battle at the end of time.

Blood Rage is that game about Ragnarok that you may have been looking for. This is a large boxed game with quite a few components. There is a mounted map of Asgard, broken into provinces and regions as well as several clan displays. Each clan has 8 plastic warriors, a leader, and a ship. There are also "mini-monsters", such as a witch, Valkyrie, etc., that can become allies with the various clans. There are also four large monsters; a frost giants, fire giant, troll, and a sea serpent which are definitely large miniatures! Finally, there are the various tokens and three card decks (one for each age). Overall, the components are pretty good, although the artwork for the cards, rules, etc., may not be to everyone's liking.

I did get the Folded Space storage set for this game, which did add onto the final cost. If you're going to be playing the game more than once and wish to paint the miniatures, then some kind of storage system is going to be needed. There are several of these available for Blood Rage, ranging from fairly cheap (foam board from free 3D plans) to some wooden sets that can get close to $90. The Folded Space one is a good compromise and it has room for all of the miniatures featured in the expansions.

The game can hold 2-4 players, although there is a 5th player expansion sold separately. The cards have markings on them to show which ones get taken out of the deck if playing with fewer than 4 players. Set up is fairly quick and pretty much consists of getting the board out, giving each player their figures, then setting out the various tokens. This is not one of those boxed miniatures games that takes an hour to set up! The longest part of set up is "drafting" your opening hand of cards, where each player gets 8 cards, chooses one, then passes the rest to the other players who do the same.

Ragnarok will come about in three ages (stages of the game) where you do the same thing in each age. You get the deck of cards for the age, draft your opening hand, then start the action phase. There are three kinds of cards in each of the decks; quests, combat, and clan upgrades. Quests show what you need to accomplish to gain more glory (glory is how victory is determined). Combat cards are played when all players are involved in battle with the clans of each other. Finally, clan upgrade cards give some kind of advantage to your clan, such as raising the Horns category, which is how many figures you can have on the board during a turn.

Each player has a clan display in front of them which contains all of their upgrade cards and tracks their Rage, Axes (glory for winning combat), and Horns, plus how much Rage you've spent in the turn. Pretty much everything costs Rage, so managing that throughout each turn is a real challenge. The great thing here is that there is nothing that is complex or hard to explain. Getting everything to work to your advantage, however, will certainly take a few plays!

The map is divided into regions, then provinces, then villages. At the end of each age a region will be destroyed in Ragnarok, so the map gets smaller as the game goes along. Also, in each province there are only so many villages that can hold figures. Each province also has a reward to the clan that pillages it, so they are definitely targets each and every turn. During the action phase, play passes to each player who in turn can play an upgrade card, invade (move figures from your display to the game board), march (move figures from area to area), or pillage (this starts the combat phase), or pass. Once you pass your portion of the turn is done until the end of the age.

When you choose to pillage there is a "call to battle", which allows any player to move figures from an adjacent area to the battle area. All sides play a combat card, then the side with the highest combat strength wins the battle and claims the pillage reward. All losing figures go to Valhalla (you actually get glory for having figures end up there, so sometimes losing is a good thing!) At the end of the age a region is destroyed (any figures in there go to Valhalla as well), you get all of your figures back from Valhalla (along with glory points for them), and play proceeds to the next age by swapping out card decks. Even with four players you can complete a game in under two hours and after you get used to the system, faster than that.

While it seems fairly straightforward, there is a lot of subtlety and strategy here. What to focus on, how much Rage to spend on which cards, when to put down a quest card, should you engage in battle or not, etc., can change from age to age and from game to game. There are so many variations that it's hard to come up with any kind of a killer strategy. In fact, you can adopt a losing strategy by playing cards that lets you lose continuously and you actually get more glory for losing by sending the most figures to Valhalla!

There is a Gods of Asgard expansion that introduces six gods, of which two are selected for each game and give extra benefits to players in a region with a god. Also, there is a Mystics of Asgard, which allows for additional figures and strategies, plus the 5th player expansion. None of the expansions adds a lot of complexity and the base game is fine without adding them.

For those looking for a war themed board game with miniatures, this is a pretty good choice. Fast playing, a lot of fun, plus there is a lot of replay value here and who doesn't like the chance to game Ragnarok?

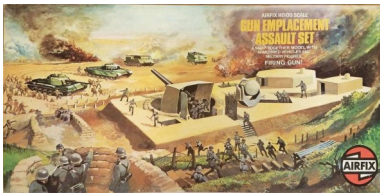# Memoirs of a Miniatures and Board Wargamer Pt. 55

Retro-Terrain

This topic came about when our gaming group recently had a discussion about hills in our games, particularly for doing Peninsula battles with Age of Eagles. Here we were with our fancy Cigar Box or Games Workshop game cloth, using metal figures, professionally produced rules, and other affluent hobby devices (<insert sarcasm here>), but we felt like we weren't doing hills right. This led me to think about what we used to use for hills "back in the day".

When many of us first got into miniatures wargaming, getting through the rules and finding figures was only half the battle. With few periods covered extensively (Ancients, ACW, Napoleonic, & WW2), the rules and figures were almost pre-determined other than the scale that you would use. Once you started reading through the rules, painted up a few figures, got other gamers to agree on a time and a place for a battle, only then was it time to start worrying about terrain.

Many gamers had a ping-pong table and that got used for a lot of miniatures battles. Masking tape roads, some scattered buildings, whoever had some trees brought them, and it was on to the battle. Once wargame magazines really got going, especially here in the U.S., then we started to see just how bad we were doing things! The English gamers were definitely ahead of everyone else and we took comfort that a lot of battles looked like the ones in Wargamer's Digest, so we weren't too far off track.

We then discovered the large grass mats sold at model railroad shops and it seemed like we had split the atom! Then someone saw an article about cutting insulation board and flocking it to make hills and all of a sudden we were dwelling in the upper tier of wargaming! No more books under the railroad mat for us. As time went on the hills became a bit more elaborate. We once tried drilling in spaces for trees, but after multiple trees broke off and pieces of the insulation board with it, we abandoned that scheme.

Of course, where would our games have been without felt. Felt was a magical substance that is still used by gamers today. Brown for roads, dark green to outline forest areas, and various shades of blue for rivers and streams. Yes, it didn't always go well with the grass mats, the pieces never stayed in one place, and it created a haphazard looking board, but at least we knew where the roads and rivers were!

Buildings were a big problem in the 70s and 80s. If you were playing Ancients you basically kept to a plain grass mat for your battles. If it was ACW or Napoleonic in 15mm you went with HO railroad buildings. For 28mm you were into scratch building and if you played micro-armor you had to scour the wargame magazines to find the few available buildings, then wait months for them to arrive. When we first started playing Johnny Reb in 15mm back in the early 80s, the buildings were HO scale farms and paper buildings! The figs were too small for the buildings, but it worked to get the games going.

The bad thing about the HO buildings is that for a long time many of them were set in the WW2 or post WW2 era. If you saw a farm on the shelf or something that looked like it might fit in the ACW, then it was a glorious day indeed! Even though many were pre-colored, we did come to every gamer's least favorite thing to do and that was to paint the building. Acrylic paint was just being sold in hobby and craft shops, so a lot of spray paint and Testors enamels were used, with mixed results.

Finally, sometime during the mid-80s, buildings started to arrive for gamers. Many were in what was called hydrostone or something like that, which was a type of solid plaster. The molding on many didn't come out right and some were basically blobs (especially for micro-armor), but slowly and surely things were beginning to change for the better. Several companies actually came out with metal micro-

armor buildings, then Ros Heroics put out some paper buildings. Also, plenty of articles on building terrain started to appear in Miniature Wargames and Military Modelling, which really helped things along.

Trees could take up an entire article! Most of the trees we used were made from crude kits or we used another miracle of modern technology: railroad lichen! Yes, lichen was another be all/end all magical substance that could fill in for rough areas, serve as forest, thicken up a section of woods, or cover as hedgerows where needed. When Woodland Scenics introduced their bags of trees in multiple sizes, a boom in tree production occurred and soon trees for our games were no longer an issue.

The one thing that was not in short supply, at least for all the people I gamed with over the years, was passion for the hobby. Nobody was really content with the terrain situation, so everyone scoured the hobby and craft shops everywhere they went. Even on trips gamers would buy the odd building here and there to add to our selection. Everyone chipped in to paint buildings, add trees, and try to make the games look better.

Naturally, this led to a quite wide variety of terrain on our tabletops! Trees of different sizes, different colors of felt roads, and lichen forests mixed with forests made of railroad type trees. Again, the desire was to do a good job of terrain and at least try to approach what we were seeing in those early issues of Miniature Wargames. Sometimes we came close to achieving those goals, especially with our micro-armor games, but at other times it left a lot to be desired, a with our Colonial games. Still, we pressed forward trying to put on the best games we could.

Today, there are none of these terrain concerns. There are terrain mats, ready made trees, all kinds of buildings in different scales, and really no reason to not have a good looking tabletop. Castles, pirate ships, etc., are all available (for a price!) at your fingertips. Yet we still go on, trying to make our games better wherever possible.

Blast From The Past Pt. 54: Little Known Space Wargames

Long before Twilight Imperium, Eclipse, Star Wars Armada, and many, many other newer (and faster playing!) space games, there had always been interest in science fiction wargames. Back in the 70s and 80s, most gamers not only played a variety of games, but they were avid readers of science-fiction and fantasy books. This meant that many gamers were usually looking for a sci-fi wargame. Unfortunately, they were far and few between.

This was mainly due to a few reasons. First, someone had to design them and with Dungeons and Dragons plus WW3 topics being all the rage, they were a bit down the priority list. Second, why use up a production slot when you could print yet another Bulge, Barbarossa, or Gettysburg game? Finally, outside of Starfleet Battles (i.e., Star Trek), who really cared about the sc-fi wargamers?

This meant that most sci-fi wargames came from outside the usual suspects (Avalon Hill and SPI), with varying degrees of quality. First up would be Metagaming, who produced The Ythri, Stellar Conquest (later Avalon Hill), and Godsfire (later Task Force Games). These three games were pretty strong entries into the sci-fi wargaming field, even if two of them were pretty long to play! Later of course, they would put out Ogre and GEV, plus in the same micro-game format would be Holy War. Metagaming would continue to put out sci-fi wargames right up until their unfortunate demise. Many of these games live on today and a few of them are still pretty good, despite the 70s/80s graphics and components.

SPI recognized that there was a solid base of sci-fi wargamers and they did cater to them from time to time. The Starforce trilogy is still highly regarded to this day, consisting of Star Force, Star Soldier, and Outreach. These games definitely appealed to wargamers who not only liked the science-fiction theme, but complexity as well. Battlefleet Mars was another title that got a lot of play during this period, but seeing the rise of micro-games, SPI also produced Vector 3 and StarGate as well.

Both titles came in the pocket or micro-game format, with minimal components. Vector 3 was a bit hard to decipher for most and it remains to this day as sort of a puzzle that many gamers never quite got! StarGate was a straight up wargame, but needed a bit more development. SPI did launch the Ares magazine with a game in it series, but didn't get too far along before SPI closed up shop.

One of the more interesting companies who produced a lot of classic sci-fi wargames was Games Designer Workshop or GDW. They already had the Traveller series plus a slew of other historical boardgames. GDW then put out Fifth Frontier War, Invasion Earth, Bloodtree Rebellion, and Double Star. GDW quickly became a fan favorite for sci-fi wargamers, even if the games weren't always necessarily great games. GDW also re-issued the classic game Imperium, which is still played to this day by many gamers.
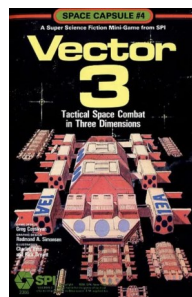
GDW also produced several sci-fi games in their Series 120 line. These were small, boxed games with 120 counters and a 2 hour play time (not always the case). In this series was Mayday, Asteroid, Snapshot, and Dark Nebula. For Imperium fans Dark Nebula is a must as it uses the same system. Even though GDW's life was shorter than it should have been, they produced some memorable sci-fi wargames.

Once SPI closed shop, TSR took over for them and continued producing games in the SPI line. They also got into the micro-game realm with three sci-fi offerings; Attack Force (rip off of the Star Wars trench attack), They've Invaded Pleasantville, and the still highly regarded Revolt on Antares. The SPI/TSR line, however, was short lived and TSR was left with AD&D.

Yet another game company who did sci-fi wargames was Task Force Games. Yes, there was Starfleet Battles, which pretty much carried their entire operation, but they did other micro-games as well. Unfortunately, many of them weren't great with the exception being Cerberus, which is still to this day one of the few sci-fi wargames that focuses on the invasion of a planet.

We would be remiss if we didn't include Avalon Hill, even if most of their sci-fi wargames were bought from other companies then reissued. Best known for Starship Troopers, Avalon Hill re-issued Freedom in the Galaxy, Alpha-Omega, and Stellar Conquest. Science-fiction games were never really a big part of the Avalon Hill lineup, although Starship Troopers has remained popular to this day.

Of course, there were many others as well. The short lived Heritage Dwarfstar games featured Grav Armor and Outpost Gamma, both which deserved better than they got. Yaquinto put out Starfall, which was a pretty serious 4X game with a lot of record keeping. There was the Forever War and Hammers Slammers, both based off of famous books. FASA produced their Battletech line, which is almost suitable for an entire article by itself. There were also many other single titles that have been lost to time that were produced in small quantities.

While it sounds from this article that there were a lot of sci-fi wargames, that really wasn't the case. The chances of your local hobby/game store carrying any of these was pretty low, so you either ordered them through the mail or acquired them in later years. Some of the components such as three color maps, paper thin counters, photocopied rules, etc., seem laughable by today's standards, but back then that was sometimes all you would get.

Today's sci-fi games are numerous as they are beautiful to behold. Most of them have much shorter playing times as befits the age, but they have one problem in that there seems to be too many and quite a few are just the same game. It's sometimes fun to take one of these older sci-fi wargames off the shelf and play it. The passion that designed these games does seem to bring back fond memories...

Situation: Red has established themselves in a strong position opposite a river crossing. The bridge was rigged for demolition, but the explosion damaged the bridge, making it impossible for vehicles, but not for infantry. Blue has established a pontoon bridge further down the river and is crossing both vehicles and infantry. Red is going to make a counterattack from the opposite side of the river in an attempt to take back the town.

Period: Designed primarily for the WW2 and Modern periods, but could easily work for other periods as well.

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

Terrain Notes: The open ground is relatively flat. The village is a combination of wood and stone buildings. There are several farms in the area that consist of several buildings that can form strongpoints. Woods are light, but provide cover and should disrupt most large formations. The hills are low rises that should have limited effect on movement. The river is impassable except at the bridge, which can only be crossed by infantry due to damage.

Scale: The scenario is designed for any scale, although would work best for most operational rules where units are platoon scale if using Modern or WW2 rules

Red Forces:

Blocking Force

- (3) units of infantry
- (1) MG unit and (1) mortar battery
- (2) AT guns
- (1) artillery battery (off-board)

Reserve

- (2) units of mech infantry
- (3) tanks

Counterattack Force

- (3) tanks
- (3) mech infantry units
- (1) AT gun
- (1) combat engineer unit
- (1) artillery battery (off-board)

Set Up: Red's forces listed under Blocking Positions are deployed in and around the hills on the north side of the river. All units are dug in with trenches and limited fortifications. The Reserve is off board, awaiting orders. The Counterattack Force is also off board, awaiting orders to attack.

Red Orders: Prevent Blue's forces from seizing the crossroads at E and moving units off the board at road exits C & D. Counterattack and retake the village if possible.

Blue Forces: Blue has two groups of forces; the first is located in the village and is looking to get over the bridge and seize the positions in the hills. The second is going to cross the pontoon bridge at B and move into Red's rear areas.

Village Force

- (6) units of infantry
- (1) MG unit and (1) mortar unit
- (1) AT gun
- (1) tank
- (1) artillery battery (off board)

Crossing Force

- (4) units of mech infantry
- (3) assault guns/tank destroyers
- (4) tanks
- (1) combat engineer unit
- (1) artillery battery (off board)

Blue Orders: Get units over the pontoon bridge and seize the crossroads at E, then move units off of the road exits at C & D. Hold off the counterattack and maintain control of the village.

Blue Set Up: The Village Force is located inside of the village and surrounding area. The Crossing Force is located at B, with any two units already across the river.

**Game Length**: 12 turns

Special Rules:

- Blue has the first turn in the game.

- Red's Reserve enters at C or D one turn after being alerted, but not before turn 3.

- Red's Counterattack Force enters at A, two turns after notifying Blue that they can see a buildup of forces off board. *Ex., Red notifies Blue on turn 3 that there is a buildup at A, then the Counterattack force enters at A on turn 5 or after.*

- Due to the river's course, undulating ground, etc., the pontoon bridge cannot be seen from the positions on the hills (feel free to adjust the terrain on the board accordingly).

- The bridge is damaged, but can be crossed by infantry.

Victory Conditions: If Blue seizes the hills it is an automatic victory or if Red retakes the village it is an automatic Red victory. If Blue seizes only the crossroads the game ends in a draw. If the crossroads are taken and Blue can get three units off of C or D the game ends in a Blue victory.

Variants: There are a large number of variants that could be added to this scenario:

- For Modern games, convert the AT guns to ATGMs and assault guns to tanks.

- Allow each side to deploy mines.
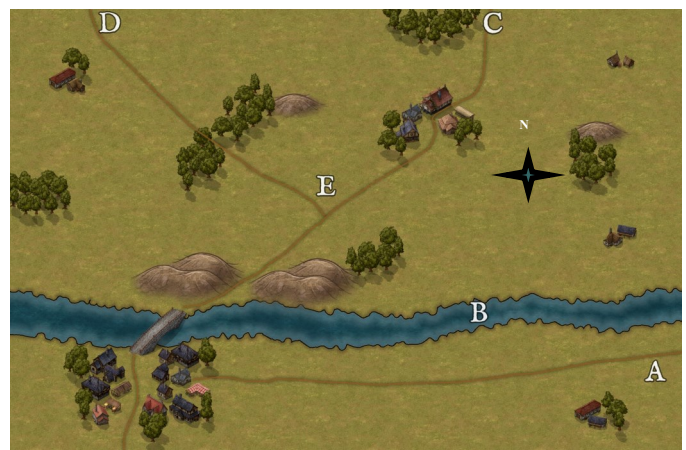
- Add random air strikes for both sides.

Situation: Blue is on the offensive, but has run into a serious obstacle, which consists of a large wooded area with a fairly seep stream in the middle. To continue the offensive, Blue must seize the town at C, which has a major crossroads that will unhinge Red's defensive lines in the area.

Period: Designed for WW2/Modern, but could be converted to other periods.

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

Terrain Notes: The open ground is relatively flat. The town is a combination of wood and stone buildings. There are several farms in the area that consist of several buildings that can form strongpoints. Woods are light, but provide cover and should disrupt most large formations, plus vehicles cannot enter the wooded area. The hills are low rises that should have limited effect on movement. The stream can be crossed by infantry and cavalry (treat as rough terrain for movement), but vehicles must cross at one of the two bridges.

Scale: The scenario is designed for any scale.

Red Forces:

- (6) units of infantry
- (2) MG unit and (1) mortar battery
- (3) AT guns
- (3) medium tanks
- (1) artillery battery (off-board)
- ALL infantry, MG, mortar, and AT gun units can begin the game dug in. Two small minefields are also available for deployment.

Set Up: Red's forces may be deployed anywhere to the east of the red line marked on the map.

Red Orders: Prevent Blue's forces from seizing the town at C.

Blue Forces: Blue has two groups of forces ; the first is holding the area on the west side of the bridge and the second is the group that is conducting a fighting withdrawal and trying to reach the bridge.

River Defense

- (10) units of infantry

- (2) MG units and (1) mortar unit
- (1) AT gun
- (6) medium tanks
- (2) artillery batteries (off board)

Blue Orders: Navigate the wooded area to set up your forces for an attack on the town. While the roads are definitely the quickest path, they will probably be heavily defended.

Blue Set Up: All of Blue's forces enter at either A or B on the first turn.

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules:

- Blue has the first turn in the game.
- The hills in the middle of the wooded area allow units on them to see/target units twice as long as the standard visibility for woods in whatever rules you use.

Victory Conditions: Blue needs to seize the town at C by the end of the game.

Variants: There are a large number of variants that could be added to this scenario:

- For Modern games, convert the AT guns to ATGMs and assault guns to tanks.
- Add random air strikes for both sides

(if Modern period is chosen, allow each side some man portable SAMs).

- Add weather, which will cut down the visibility for both sides even more than what the woods already does.
- If there are concerns that Red does not have sufficient forces, allow a garrison unit for the town. If there are concerns that Blue does not have enough strength to move through the woods against serious opposition, allow Blue an opening bombardment of 1-2 turns.
- To use the scenario with Ancients or Horse & Musket periods, do the following to change the force structure:

  - MG units and mortar batteries are now peltasts, skirmishers, or other light infantry.
  - AT guns are eliminated.
  - Tanks are cavalry units with 1/2 (rounded down) light cavalry.
  - Off board artillery can now be on board (ballistas, catapults, etc.). Feel free to add battalion guns or other artillery for the Horse & Musket period forces.

During the Christmas Holidays, there is usually a lot of gaming going on. I say usually because some years the flu hits the gaming group hard, people travel, family commitments, etc., can make scheduling any kind of game a challenge. While I've been at my current job for almost 24 years, it's only been the last 10 years or so where the campus has decided to just shut down for a few weeks, meaning I usually get 10-12 days off in a row, depending upon how the calendar works out.

For years we used to run our Warmaster Ancients tournament around this time, taking a day where everyone got to play three games and a champion was crowned. When Covid hit the tournament was canceled for that year and for some strange reason we've never been able to fit it in since then! Instead, we've tried the last few years to do one big game, then maybe a small one depending upon who is available. This year we did get in the big game, but I played a bunch of small ones with friends at widely scattered times.

The first game I was able to play over the 2024 Holiday season was GMT's A Gest of Robin Hood. This was reviewed in a previous issue, but it's a great game that can be easily taught and it has pretty good replay value. Basically, it's counterinsurgency operations, but with a medieval theme. During the few days leading up to Christmas I also had Avalon Hill's War at Sea on my game table, which is a game I play solo usually once a year as it is still one of my favorite games. Also, I was finishing up another household unit for our upcoming Wars of the Roses game.

From there it was off to play another game with a friend of mine who was stranded at his law firm doing the waiting thing. We usually play board wargames, but he had just received Heat for Christmas, so we

thought we would try it since it's been really popular. Racing games tend to play a bit like wargames and there certainly is a lot of strategy involved. After doing a practice run we went into a full blown race, which was pretty fun. There are several tracks plus a lot of advanced rules to add even more realism to the game.

Next up was our big Wars of the Roses Hail Caesar game, which was reported on earlier in this issue. We had a few players unable to make it, but we were still able to get five us together on the Friday after Christmas. A massive slugfest as you can probably see from the battle report, but we did pretty good in getting the setup, game, and cleanup all in under 6 hours. We always try to do one big game and while we almost went for Twilight Imperium, there was sufficient interest to go back to Wars of the Roses.
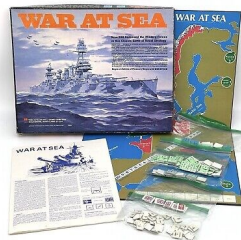
Here and there, I usually watch a lot of college and pro football when I'm not out gaming, visiting family, or shopping. While I'm watching football or movies, I always have a number of painting projects going or am working up to play another board wargame on my game table in the hobby room. This year was no exception with multiple things all going on at the same time. First off, I was trying to get the last two units done for the Wars of the Roses, which would give me a bit over 1,000 figures for the period. Certainly enough to do a campaign with if the group decided to go that route. I had started to assemble figs for rebasing my armies and painting up some new units for the recently released Wars of the Roses book, but I decided not to go that route and stick with the old army lists.

Instead, I decided to con-

tinue work on my Hail Caesar Syracuse army to go up against my Republican Romans. I already had three hoplite units completed, then got burned out with the project. Now, however, deciding that adding another 10-15 archer units for the new Wars of the Roses book is out of the question, it's back to hoplites! I also started laying out the rest of the 15mm Bavarians as well as clipping the World in Flames Deluxe counter set that arrived around Christmas. Have you ever clipped and organized 3200 counters? I'll just mention that it took a few weeks.
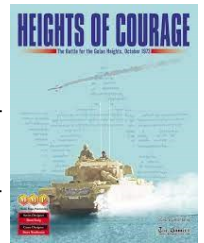
Meanwhile, I received Blood Rage for Christmas (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) and spent some time building the Folded Space insert for the game as well as getting started on painting the miniatures for it, which is going to be a multi-month project. While I was doing all of that, I had MMP's Heights of Courage on the tabletop. I have a love-hate relationship with MMP's SCS system and while it was fun the first few turns, some critical die rolls ended the game early, which happens often it seems for SCS games.

The final event before I went back to work was a combined Battle for Germany/Southern Front game from Compass' Third World War Deluxe edition. I had not played against others for 30+ years, so it was a great opportunity to bring back those memories of games gone by. However, we bit off more than we could chew! After almost 6 hours we were just getting into turn 3 of a 10 turn game! Yes, this is better saved for a multi-day event or even in retirement some day.
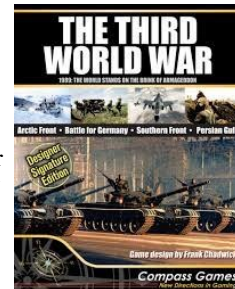
In the end, a successful Holiday gaming season and next year I'm sure that the games will be a lot different and hopefully more of them!

Six more images from our post-Christmas Wars of the Roses Hail Caesar game. The suicidal cavalry charge over the bridge did distract the defenders for the other infantry units to move up and successfully attack across the river. The fighting in and around the hedgerows was particularly fierce, but the Yorkist units held their ground and prevented the army from being split in two.

WMA: Long Night for the Indian Army   Battle Report

Gaming is gaming, which is the response we usually give when someone asks about the matchups we use in DBA, Warmaster Ancients, etc. After fighting the Romans vs. Seleucids multiple times in a row (they are the two largest armies we have and will hold 6 players), we decided to go a bit more off the beaten path. This time it would be an Imperial Roman army expanding the Empire into India.

While we've used the Romans numerous times and know how they fight, the Indian army is one of those enigmas wrapped in a mystery! Yes, there are the elephant units (still probably a bit too powerful with these rules), but after that it is simply a swarming mass of troops, all of who have pretty much no armor saves and the same standard attacks. If there was ever an average, me-

diocre, baseline, run of the mill Ancients army, the Indians are it!

2,000 points of Indians will get you 12 infantry, 8 archers, 2 skirmisher units, four cavalry, and two elephant units, plus leaders. The only reason that there aren't more infantry and archers is that the elephants are the equivalent of four infantry and two archer units each, but the will to paint any more Indian foot units went by the wayside a long time ago! For WMA this is a lot of units and they do take up some space on the tabletop. Only the cavalry and the elephants have a save factor, but with a break point of 14, this army can take some casualties.

The Indians were going to try to seize the village and orchards on the left, try to

achieve parity on the right, then win with a mass of infantry, archers, and elephants in the center. Moving all of these units with three leaders with a generalship rating of 8 and one with a 7 is always a tall task. The Romans set up in their usual formations that we've come to know and love, with the legions up front, backed by auxiliary units directly behind, which gives them a huge support bonus in the first round.

The Indians did pretty well on their first command rolls, getting the left flank moving and the units on the right as well. The center, however, would be plagued the entire night with bad command rolls and only a few units went out to meet the Romans archers and skirmishers. The Romans, meanwhile, had problems with their left flank, which refused to move for most of the game. The archers of both sides were almost in range, so by the end of turn 2 there would be an exchange of fire.

This is where you could see that it was going to be a long night for the Indian army. Three archer units got into range on turn 2 and let loose their first volleys of arrows. 9 dice and no hits! Both sides were still moving up, but this was a bad omen for the Indian side. The next turn there were 11 more shots and only 2 hit! That was 2 of the first 20

for those keeping score. The Indian archers and skirmishers started losing stands, then attacked by Roman cavalry, but they were hanging on. The Indians got to the village and orchards on the left, so things looked good and an attack there could force the Romans to divert forces to deal with it. Fortunately for the Romans, the forces in the village area failed command rolls for the next four turns in a row…

Action now turned to the Indian right flank where the Indian cavalry thought it would make an impact. It was greatly helped out by the Roman commander on that side continuously failing command rolls after moving a unit or two! The first Indian cavalry charge went well, but during the follow up attack rolled 1 hit out of 9 dice and the Romans saved that one hit! The resulting counterattack killed off the Indian cavalry unit and this process was repeated with the second Indian cavalry unit. Up to this time the Indians were doing poorly no doubt, but the game still hung in the balance.

Towards the center where the Indian infantry finally got going and multiple formations started to move up into position for a series of coordinated attacks. In the end, it was a series of uncoordinated attacks! The usual strategy for the Indians was to sacrifice the first several units in order to score hits on the opponent's formations, then by sheer weight of numbers press the attack and finish them off, with the idea that the opponent will hit their break point way before the Indians would. At least that was the theory…

The first few Indian attacks went well, but when the Romans counterattacked things went from
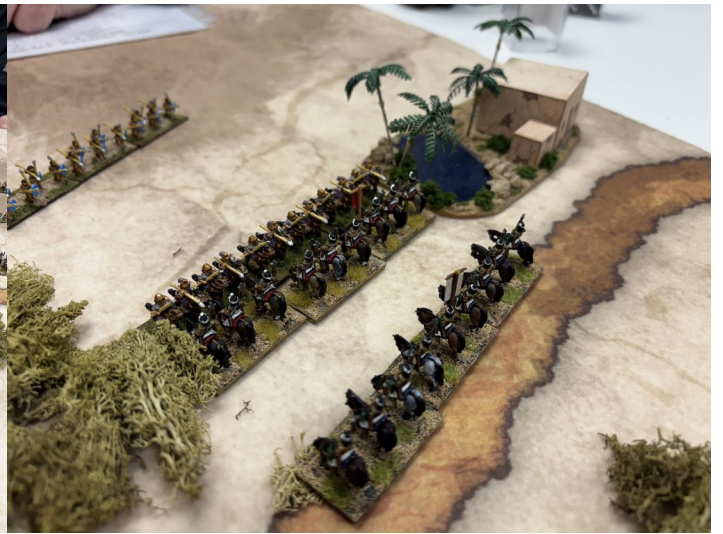
(cont. from p18) bad to worse. In one attack the Indians rolled 3 hits out of 9 dice and the Romans saved them all! The Romans then inflicted 14 hits, wiping out an Indian infantry unit. Things were starting to get desperate for the Indian side and more units rushed forward to fill the gaps in the line.

At this time, the Indians still had a chance. Several Roman units were short a stand or two, the Roman left was barely moving and all it would take would be a few good turns and things could definitely turn around. The Indian left, however, was barely moving and when a Roman cavalry unit counterattacked and threw back the leading elements, that flank stagnated. The Indian right, with two cavalry units and a unit of heavy chariots was still available, but simply could not get going to save their lives!

In the center the Romans and Indians were definitely trading some heavy blows. The archers of both sides were severely depleted and while there were a few skirmisher units out and about, most were down to two stands and were having a negligible impact on things. The Indians looked around, saw what the situation was, and brought up the two elephant units that were in reserve.

Elephants are a blessing and a curse in Warmaster Ancients. Their charge in the open can inflict a terrifying 18 dice, but at the same time they attract a lot of attention and opponent's armies have a tendency to really go after them! The elephants charged and one of the charges wiped out a legion and pressed deep into the Roman center. The other one made contact, scored 4 hits on 18 dice, of which the Romans promptly saved 3 of

them! Not good for the elephants. The Romans counterattacked, wiping out the elephants and all of a sudden, there was a big hole in the Indian center.

Things were really coming to a close and the Romans smelled blood in the water. They pressed everything forward in an effort to inflict just a few more stand losses and win the game. The Indians reorganized their lines and even counterattacked in a few places, but the handwriting was on the wall. One final turn and the Indians broke, having lost 14 units to the Romans 5, resulting in a total Roman victory.

A short (2 1/2 hours), funky, and yet fun WMA game! The Indians couldn't do much right the entire game and maybe painting up some more infantry and archers instead of elephants might be an interesting combination for the future.

Galactic Heroes: Star Wars Ground Action   Battle Report

From time to time we veer off from our regular historical miniatures gaming into board games or unusual topics. At this point in our hobby lives, which for most of us have seen almost 50 years, gaming is gaming. One of our members is a big fan of Galactic Heroes, which is the sci-fi version of A Fistful of Lead. Not only that, but he creates all of the figures and terrain for the scenarios.

On the fringes of the Empire, multiple factions are looking to find three devices which when combined form a MacGuffin (plot device to move things along). These three things are spread somewhere throughout a settlement. The scenario was designed for 4-5 players, but due to illness and last minute scheduling issues, we were down to only three. One player took the Rebels, the other the Imperial forces, and finally the third player was the referee as well as running the local citizenry.

The Rebels, led by Han Solo, entered at one end of the board while the Imperial forces entered at the other. There was also a sheriff and several deputies who would only intervene when the citizens were threatened. Each player basically had one leader, one secondary leader, then three ordinary troopers. The river running down the center of the board was the only major obstacle, but all of the buildings and trees limited line of sight in most places to about 18 inches.

Galactic Heroes, when you get right down to it, is a pretty basic skirmish system that can be used for almost any period (which we have proved with our Samurai, Flash Gordon, and Star Wars scenarios!). Each turn a player gets a number of cards according to how many figures he still has on the board, i.e., five cards for five figures. You then start with Kings and move down the list (Aces are wild cards), so when you have a King you play it, which allows the player to activate one figure. That figure can then perform two actions, i.e., move/shoot, move/move, shoot/shoot, etc.

When figures shoot at each other you check the range (needing an 8 to hit at close range and a 5 at long range), add/subtract modifiers, then roll either a D8, D10, or D12 according to that figure's skill level. If you score a hit, you then check for the severity, which can result in a shock marker or a wound. Three wounds is a kill for all of the characters in this scenario. Some cards such as the Queen of Hearts allow you to take a wound off, others give a +1 to shooting, and so forth, so playing the correct card at the right time is vitally important to your tactics.

On to the game. Both sides entered the board and immediately moved up to the local citizens and asked them if they knew where any of the three MacGuffin parts where. Of course, none of the citizens closest to the entry areas knew anything, so this was going to be difficult! As the ranges closed it was only a matter of time before the shots rang out, which happened on turn 3 when an Imperial heavy weapons trooper shot at a rebel. Now the fun really began as both sides detailed half of the force to keep looking for device parts while the other held off the enemy.

At first, it looked like the Imperials

were going to have an easy win as the heavy weapons trooper, who was firing at anything that moved, killed on Rebel trooper and inflicted a wound on another. Clearly, these weren't the famous Imperial Stormtroopers of lore as they were

actually hitting their targets! Unfortunately for the Imperial forces, they shot at a Rebel who was questioning a citizen and missed, hitting the citizen instead!
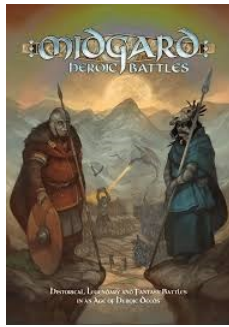
Now the sheriff and deputies joined the fight, so it was now 8 against 5, but that did not deter the Imperial forces, who had found one of the MacGuffin parts. Instead, they decided to set policing back on this planet by 20 years when they engaged and kill two deputies and wounded the sheriff. Just another day in the Empire! The Rebels, however, found the other two parts, so now the race was on to hold one of the two spaceships to effect an escape once all of the parts were secured by either side.

Now things started to go bad for the Imperials. One trooper who had a shock counter tried to rally and rolled a 1, meaning they fled the field! Another ran out of ammo right in the middle of a firefight and got killed while reloading. Han Solo then joined the fight and despite getting hit a few times, made his presence felt. The main characters who roll a D12 are pretty tough, but the Imperial leader (who also had a D12) kept rolling low and eventually ran out of ammo too. By turn 10 the Rebels were closing in on victory and the Imperials were down to just one trooper. He was overwhelmed in close combat and that was the game.

A pretty fun scenario for a system that plays really fast. Once you've played a few turns you rarely even need to look at the play sheet. I'm sure we'll do this again at some point.

With the current glut of miniatures rules in the hobby, it's hard to know what new set of rules will fit what your gaming group needs. Almost every day we are seeing a new set of Ancients, Napoleonic, Age of Sail, WW2, etc., rules designed to convince you that everything you've played before isn't very good and you should immediately cast them aside and start playing this new set! As always, the first thing you consider when seeing a new set of rules is how many players will it fit, what are the basing parameters, and how hard will it be to teach the gaming group?

After seeing numerous Facebook posts, YouTube videos, etc., about a new set of rules entitled Midgard Heroic, it spawned a tiny spark of interest. When it was noted that you could use them for Wars of the Roses and some army lists were provided, it couldn't hurt but to purchase the rules and give them a test. Although we use Hail Caesar for our WOTR games, the new army lists in the separate WOTR book were a bit off putting, so maybe somewhere out there is an alternative?

The first thing to know is that despite the title, these rules can be used for pretty much any period where swords, spears, and bows are the primary weapons. Yes, there are army lists for Orcs, Elves, etc., along with rules for dragons and sorcerers, so you can play pretty much any Ancient or Medieval period as well as fantasy. This is a big selling point as the system works for pretty much any army you may have, regardless of what scale or whether it is historical or fantasy.

There are several features to these rules that make them a bit different from the already crowded field for these gaming periods. The first is that each hero/commander is rated for how many Mighty Deeds that they can do each turn.

These deeds can be to force a re-roll on movement command tests, aid in melee, add bonuses to archer units firing at an enemy, etc. This is a novel and interesting approach to commanders in sword and shield type games. Also, heroes are encouraged to engage in single combat and lead units into melees.

The second item is the use of "reputation" points. Each leader and unit contributes so many reputation points to the force, which is then divided by 4 to get how many tokens you start the game with (i.e., 36 reputation points worth of forces divided by 4 yields 9 reputation tokens for the game). When a leader charges into combat you gain points as well as when units are destroyed you lose points, among other possibilities. Once a side is out of reputation tokens, they have lost the game. Again, this an interesting approach and will force players to constantly monitor where they are with the reputation tokens.

The stat lines for units feature some common themes in terms of the number of combat dice, points value, reputation points, armor, and stamina. An average Warrior unit will have 12 combat dice (melee), 3 or 4 armor, a Stamina of 4 (think hits per unit), and a Reputations point listing so if the unit is destroyed, then that side loses that many points. Most archer units will also have 8 shooting dice, plus there are stats for skirmishers, artillery, light cavalry, and of course knights or heavy cavalry.

Movement, command distances, and shooting are all based on "spear throws", which is 12cm. Most infantry move one spear throw, cavalry move two spear throws, command ranges are also two, while shooting can be anywhere from one spear throw for javelins to four spear throws for longbows. This keeps things pretty basic and they do sell tokens that measure things out. Also, it is important to note the concept of a "killing zone", which is a box in front of a unit where you get full shooting dice and enemies are locked in to moving

straight ahead. Again, there is nothing here that is overly complex and in practice things move along pretty quickly.

At the start of each turn heroes reset their number of mighty deeds, the attacker moves, attacker melee, defender moves, defender melee, then shooting is at the end of the turn, using an alternating unit by unit system. A bit unusual and it took a few turns to get the hang of it, but the system seemed to work well. Some units can shoot earlier in the turn or during charges.

Shooting is half dice at anything over the killing zone distance, so causing stamina hits is tough until you close. Shooting and melee means that you roll a number of D6s, needing a 5 or 6 to hit, then you need to score multiples of the armor value of the target to inflict stamina hits. For example, if you score 5 hits against a target's armor value of 3, you would only cause 1 stamina hit as you would have needed 6 hits to cause 2. Once units start taking stamina hits they suffer all kinds of command and combat penalties, making close combat pretty decisive.

There are of course a large number of traits and special rules that can be added to heroes and units, so you can customize pretty much any army or period that you have. The army lists include Greek-Trojan War, Saxons and Normans, Elves, Dwarves, Orcs, and more. There is also a published list for Wars of the Roses and my guess is that there will be more for those who are interested in other armies and/or periods. The system is pretty customizable, so it should be able to handle any scale or basing that you might have.

In summary, this is an interesting system and certainly worth a play or two. Once you get the hang of the unusual turn sequence and run through a melee or two, things get pretty easy. The quick reference sheets in the rules have everything you need, so once play begins you just need to look at the modifiers. A fast playing, decisive system that would probably be great for campaigns or those gaming groups looking for a 2-3 hour battle.

Following the review on the preceding page, it was time to actually play test the rules. It was decided to keep things simple, i.e., similar sized forces, not many special traits, etc. The thinking was that we could play this time with just the basic units and slowly figure things out. Luckily, the designer had a set of Wars of the Roses mods and army lists available for free which helped out greatly.

The game setup focused on three things; Reputation, Mighty Deeds, and the stat lines for each of the various units. Fortunately, the quick summary sheet in the rules is extremely helpful and after a few turns we were pretty much able to run the game from that. We went with the pure longbow units, billmen (Warriors), one unit of light cavalry, one unit of heavy cavalry, and one artillery battery for each side. Each group of 3-4 units was given a hero (commander). With no idea how this would play out, we got started!

The command system is fairly simple, so both sides moved pretty quickly and some used their Mighty Deeds to give units a second movement command. This means that cavalry can cover a lot of ground very quickly. We didn't have the measurement tokens sold for the game and didn't want to convert the 12cm standard over and over, so we went with one spear throw being 6 inches. The good thing with this system is that you can use any scale, basing, or unit of measurement.

We did shooting wrong at first, thinking that the full amount of shooting dice was only halved for certain things. Then we figured out the "killing zone" aspect

of shooting and all of a sudden, shooting started to be more of a lucky stroke as outside of that zone you only get half dice. This means for a longbow unit that gets 8 D6s, you will only get 4 D6s and you need 5s and 6s for hits. The hits then need to match or surpass the armor class to produce stamina hits. Once your stamina takes a hit, things get harder and once a unit is at half things start to slip away.

There was a big cavalry fight as both sides knights got into a charge-countercharge situation. A unit that charges gets to re-roll 1s, which is pretty helpful! Most units have 12D6s in combat, plus heavy cavalry with no stamina hits add two more, plus whatever Mighty Deeds any attached heroes use. This means that at times you could be rolling 15-16 D6s! However, hitting heavy cavalry is tough, so you need to cause 4 hits for one stamina point loss. This caused a series of push backs, then when both sides lost 2 stamina, the combat dice get halved. We figured out that heavy cavalry in this game are tough to kill and if they were going up against

regular infantry it could get ugly in a hurry.

The rest of the forces on both sides slowly moved into the center of the board, exchanging arrow fire that occasionally caused a stamina hit here and there. We learned that the best thing in these rules is to not waste time and get into close combat as soon as possible. Once you suffer a stamina hit it gets harder to take commands and once you've lost half of your stamina your combat power goes down as well. Again, we had no idea what we were doing and really didn't figure things out until about halfway through the game.

While the cavalry were destroying each other on one flank, both sides got ready for the main event in the center and

on the Lancastrian right. While the armies were basically equal in points the Yorkist side thought that they were the attacking side as the were labeled the "Attacker" in the sequence of play! We thought the rules should have used the terms Side A and Side B
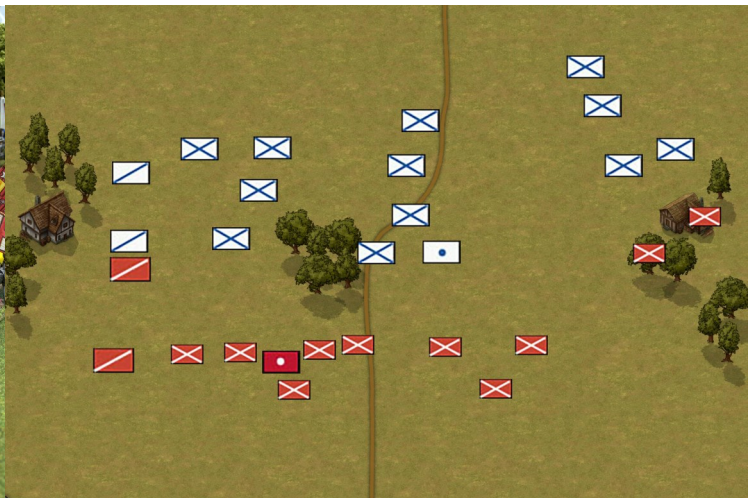
(cont. from p22). Whether by thinking they were the attacking side or just the aggressive nature of the players on that side for the night, the Yorkists went straight in.

This is where we started to see multiple melees occur across the board, plus it brought home to us the grim realities of the rules in that the game can end abruptly! With both sides usually rolling 12 combat dice in hand to hand, plus the charging unit gets to re-roll 1s (also, a unit winning a melee and following up also gets this feature), which meant things started to die. Soon, several Yorkist units were at 3 stamina hits and lost half of their combat dice. The Lancastrian units that followed up had huge advantages and usually finished those units off quickly.

While the Yorkists were also causing

casualties, they were losing reputation tokens much faster than the Lancastrian side was. Just charging into combat and earning one token was not offsetting losing 3 when a unit got destroyed. Once units get into melee it is going to be decisive and you better have enough reputation tokens around to survive the loss of a few units.

The light cavalry of both sides got into combat on the flank and after a series of attacks and counterattacks, the two Yorkist cavalry units were destroyed, but the remaining Lancastrian cavalry unit was at half stamina. The loss of those two Yorkist units, plus three more in the center of the board was enough to doom the Yorkist cause. Being out of reputation tokens the Yorkist side had to resign the game.

Despite the number of units we had on

the board and this being our first time playing, the game was finished in a little over 2 hours! Several players commented that they liked how there are basically no saving throws, so combat is based solely on the hits that are generated. Interest was also expressed in the command system, Mighty Deeds, and the pace of the game. We definitely have to get into the unit traits, how heroes can be designed, and the scenarios in the book so that everything isn't a meeting action!

Overall, we thought this was a good first test and there appeared to be enough interest for another try. The customizable nature of the rules means that they can be used for anything ranging from Ancient Egyptians to Forest Elves. The rules would certainly work well for campaigns as you could do map moves, set up a game, and resolve things in one night.

There's been a few features on this topic in the past, but one aspect of today's hobby involves painting the plastic miniatures that come in many of today's war themed board games. Back in the day, no one really considered painting the plastic pieces in Risk, Fortress America, or any other board game. Recently, however, the miniatures that come with board games are little works of art and one starts thinking about how would they look if they were painted.

For many games this may be impractical due to the large number of figures, so one needs to make a few decisions before undertaking this kind of a project. An example would be Twilight Imperium or Eclipse where there are stacks and stacks of ships, which would be a daunting task. However, if this is your go to game and you're playing it once a month, it might be worth the effort. That's usually how these projects get approached; i.e., how many times will this get played and how many figures are there to paint.

From my own experience, I usually only paint the figures for board games where they make sense. In my case that would be games that I'll probably play at least once a year and where there aren't a lot of miniatures. Over the past few years I've painted the figures in Space Hulk, Heroquest, Successors, Hannibal, and the

Dark Ages games. Now these have been limited in number and where it made sense to paint them. When I started the project to paint the miniatures in Blood Rage I was really on the fence. First, there were a lot of miniatures (close to 50), second, how many times would this get played, and third, they were more

detailed than the usual plastic fare.

In the end I decided that these were some unusual and interesting miniatures, plus we could always use a "change of pace" board game to break things up. What I didn't know at the time was how long this project was going to take! I've gone over this before, but it bears repeating again. There are two challenges when you are painting miniatures for a board game (especially the more modern games). The first is that there really isn't a painting guide! I went online to see some nice (and some not so nice) examples of how other gamers painted their pieces. Often, companies will pay someone to do a complete set and that's what usually shows up in the first grouping of searches. The second issue is that these aren't your typical miniatures.

By that I mean that most historical and even fantasy miniatures are designed to be painted, i.e., they have folds, weapons, etc., that are easily accessible and set up to be able to paint large numbers for armies. Not so for board games! These figures have multiple swords in weird places, fur wrappings, clothes folded over weapons, armor all over the place, and the overall effect is to produce unique miniatures. In the priority of things, being easy to paint for gamers is way down the list!

I actually started with the giant monsters as believe it or not, they were the easiest to paint. While they certainly look daunting, they paint up relatively quickly. All of the armor, fur, etc., is pretty well defined, so the biggest challenge was just coming up with a color scheme! Once these were finished it was onto the mini-monsters (which weren't sculpted that great) and the gods (I had purchased the Gods of Asgard add on set). Again, these went pretty quickly and things were really looking up.

Then I got to the individual clans and this is where things really bogged down. Each clan had 9 figures, of which one is the leader, then two four figure sets. Basically, there were three variations of figures for each clan. Sounds simple,

right? Well, actually no and this happens a lot with the miniatures that come in the boxed games. While they were essentially Vikings, Danes, Norseman, etc., they had some fantasy elements as well. Each clan had different standards, armor, weapons, and furs.

Naturally, these figures need priming badly, just so the paint will adhere to something other than the mass produced plastic. Next, coming up with a color scheme that will be represented across all of the figures of that clan. Finally, doing a test figure to see where all of the undercuts, scabbards, greaves, and so on started and ended on the figure. As you start painting these figures you have to continually ask yourself questions about where does the fur cloak end, is that the end of a scabbard under that shirt, why does one strap start there, but you can't see any ending, and so on.

They are basically fantasy figs after all, so you can paint them however you wish and there is no right or wrong. However, there is a certain level of frustration at times as some parts of the figures are well sculpted while other parts you just have to guess what they are! I also tossed the colored rings that designate the various clan figures and just painted the original bases. You probably would also want to delineate the bases by making each clan a bit different than the others with grass, snow, etc.

In the end everything came out well, but it took much longer than what I thought it would. Why I did this I have no idea! What started out as something simple turned into three months of painting and I have no idea if we're even going to play this game again! In regards to these boxed game miniatures each gamer is going to have to decide for themselves whether or not the investment in time is worth it.
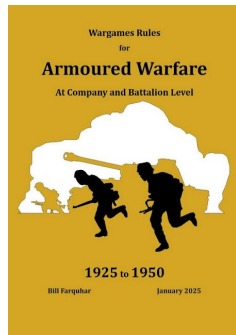
WRG 1925-1950

When I played my first WW2 micro-armor game it was with the Tractics rules back in 1976. Not entirely satisfied with those rules, many of us moved on to WRG's 1925-50 rules and later their 1950-1985 rules for our NATO vs. Warsaw Pact games. Despite trying many other rules we somehow always came back to WRG. Later, when Command Decision, Challenger, and now Blitzkrieg Commander came out the WRG rules were sold off or buried under other books and rules.

There is now, however, a new version of the rules in larger booklet form available from Lulu Publishing. For about $20 they print and ship the rules directly to you. Now these are "old school" and I mean really, really "old school" rules! There are no graphics, no examples of play, etc., just lines and lines of text. For those of us who grew up with these rules it is certainly a trip down nostalgia lane! There were no quick reference sheets provided (like with the old rules), so they were provided as a download after numerous requests came in. These are "minimalist" rules taken to the extreme!

The rules themselves are not going to appeal to everyone. Orders are given (objectives need to be written down as well as standing orders), forces move, spotting is attempted, then firing occurs. Everything is D6 based and either everyone needs a set of rules or the person running the scenario needs to write down all of the vehicle data for each player. This is a nuts and bolts type game, so you try to spot, find the weapon your vehicle is armed with, calculate the hit probability, check for a hit, then check the armor

Wargames Rules for
Armoured Warfare
At Company and Battalion Level

1925 to 1950
Bill Farquhar   January 2025

of the target and see if the hit penetrates. While we all loved this process back in the 70s and early 80s, my guess is that this isn't going to be very appealing to many gamers today.

The rules are pretty comprehensive, covering artillery, engineering, air support, etc., but are really designed for tank battles as infantry is kind of a sideshow, especially with the low movement rate. We discussed having a "retro night" and playing these at least once again, but we'll see if that ever happens. It's good to see these rules made available again, but I'm not sure how much interest there will be.

Cigar Box Sicily Country Mat

Our group has several of the excellent Cigar Box game mats. As noted in many issues, we've been dissatisfied with our AOE Peninsula tables, so we started looking around. One of our current projects is to build a Syracusan army to fight Republican Romans with the Hail Caesar rules, so trying to find something that could do double duty was a challenge.

However, the Sicily Country mat looks like it will do the job. First off, it's great for Sicily, so our Syracusan army will be right at home! Second, with some Mediterranean buildings and trees it should prove to be quite passable for Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. The mats are made of high grade fleece and the colors are blended to give that aerial view quality of the entire mat. The Cigar Box ordering system is simple to use and the mats usually take a bit less than two weeks to arrive. Highly recommended.

The Awful Green Things From Outer Space

If you've ever watched the cult classic The Green Slime and wondered, " I sure wish that there was a game about this", then look no further! Now in it's 8th edition (!!!) it tells the story of the starship ZNutar that develops an infestation and it's up to the crew to stop it. This edition features a mounted map as well as much thicker counters than the previous versions.

The Awful Green Things are broken into four groups; fragments, eggs, babies, or adults. Each turn one group evolves into the next higher groups, then attacks

CIGAR BOX BATTLE MATS
Mediterranean battles!
4x6 plus!
Sicily Country

the crew. If the crew doesn't do anything or takes too long, they will soon be overrun. The crew has a wide variety of weapons available, from stun guns to cans of rocket fuel. The problem is that you don't know which one will work on the aliens, so you draw a chit which could end up killing the aliens or making things worse!

That this game continues on to this day is amazing by itself, having started as a freebie in the old Dragon magazine. It's a two player game that will only take a few hours and while there is some clunkiness with the old system, it still works and it is a bit different each time. I'm really surprised that after all of these years and editions that there isn't an "ultimate" version with miniatures and a larger map board.

Wargame Vault

If you think that there are a lot of rules, games, supplements, etc., then you haven't really seen anything yet! Take a visit to Wargame Vault, which continues to grow each and every day. For those gamers who have not been to this site, it is well worth a trip just to see if there is anything that you might be interested in (good chance there is!). The ordering system is very easy to use and extremely fast, with the files being sent to you as quickly as possible.

WARGAME VAULT

THE AWFUL GREEN THINGS FROM OUTER SPACE
BY TOM WHAM
STEVE JACKSON GAMES

Basically, this is a gaming site where magazines, orders of battle, campaigns, some board games, and most of all, miniatures rules, can be found. Not just a few of each, but literally hundreds and hundreds! Many nicely designed, professionally laid out rules are available here for every period under the sun and for reasonable prices. There are card models, STL files, Osprey rules, and so much more that it is hard to describe. You can literally spend hours on the site each time that you go there.

Yes, the one down side is that you have to print out most of the products yourself, but you can also save the files for future projects, then print them when needed. This is an invaluable service to gamers and it's hard not to find something that you would be interested in.

It had been staring at me on my rules shelf for several years. Why we never used it was beyond our group's understanding, but after trying something new with Midgard Heroic, maybe it was time to try another new set of rules! With that in mind, I took down Black Powder and started to read through it. Having played Hail Caesar and Warmaster for quite a few years, there wasn't anything really new here...but...it was *different*. Two of our members play Black Powder regularly at games held at the local gaming store on Saturdays, but for most of us it would be our first time.

Since our group already has a huge 15mm collection for the Sudan, starting with the El Teb scenario in the rulebook was a no brainer. While one person had a second edition, we used the first edition, which had a slightly different El Teb scenario in it than the one depicted in the Blood on the Nile supplement. The gaming mat we had did not have a dry river bed that worked, so we quickly created a substitute with a ice covered river, which is why the river bed looks blue in the images! Also, while we have about 50+ 15mm Arab buildings, we did not have any Dervish or Zulu type huts that composed the historical village. It would still be El Teb, but not quite how it should have looked!

Historically, General Graham came out of his camp and attacked the Fuzzy Wuzzies who were entrenched on a series of low hills in front of a village. The

British forces consisted of two infantry brigades of three battalions each, a cavalry brigade, plus an artillery piece plus a few gatling guns. Due to the distances that units can move in Black Powder as well as to negate the British firepower, it was suggested that the British need to seize the village in 8 turns. This was going to be a tall order, especially with a new set of rules!

With the command and movement systems (although not the distances units could move) being the same as in Hail Caesar, there wasn't much to explain before we began the game. The British moved the cavalry to the right flank to keep the Dervish cavalry busy, while the two infantry brigades moved up the center to attack the entrenchments. Here's where the first problems for the British started; i.e., command rolls! The British for the first few turns moved in fits and starts, so coordinating an attack was difficult at best.

Once the shooting started (we used inches with the 15mm figs), we ran into our first problem with the Black Powder rules, which was the ease that units can get disordered. Every time a unit fires (usually 3 or 4 D6s), when a 6 is rolled, the target unit is disordered, meaning it has to sit still for one turn. This makes coordinating an offensive really difficult and the Fuzzies only had two rifle armed units, plus two smoothbore artillery pieces. There were one or two British units that spent most of the game in a disordered status. We could only imagine the amount of disorders that would be caused if every unit could shoot!

The 19th Hussars launched a charge and rolled poorly, then got rolled up during a Dervish counterattack and they

routed off the board! The 10th Hussars charged in, destroying one enemy unit, but being held up by the others. The rest of the British force kept trying to get up to the front, but bad command rolls, being disordered, etc., held (cont. on p27)

(cont. from p26) them back. By turn 5 it was apparent that getting to the native village by turn 8 was going to take a miracle!

The British did actually get across the dry river bed and attacked the Fuzzies behind their entrenchments/rifle pits. The British captured one of the artillery pieces, destroyed the other with firepower, and cleared the hill of enemy units. However, there were 8 fresh sword and spear armed units waiting behind the hills for a counterattack. The British units all had 1-2 stamina hits as it was and successive charges were going to wipe them out, plus it was already turn 8 and the village was still a few moves away. At that point the game was called as a Fuzzy Wuzzy (with some Dervish help) victory.

At this point we had an interesting discussion about the Black Powder rules.

Everyone pretty much agreed that the command system (despite the bad rolls every so often) works well, much like in Hail Caesar. The movement rates are huge (an infantry unit rolling three orders could go 36"!) and that took some getting used to. You were never really safe anywhere on the board as within 2 turns a unit could be across a 6 foot long board. The artillery and the firing systems seem to work well as did the melee mechanic (again, similar to Hail Caesar).

While the players who had used Black Powder before shrugged off the disorder part of the rules, for many of us it was a bit too much. If the British had been facing 6-7 firing units across the width of the board, the only way you're getting up to them would be luck! Any 6, even if it is saved, causes disorder. Which leads to another discussion about saving throws. In Hail Caesar it's understandable as

many troops have armor, shields, etc. However, for every unit to have saving throws against rifles, muskets, etc., seemed really weird. It works for the game and seems to balance things out, but it makes the game very luck orientated, more so than many other rules.

I think the main point is that everyone picked up on the rules fairly quickly and while we had questions, everything was resolved. With each unit only having 2-4 stamina hits, units are going to dissolve before your eyes maybe faster than you would think. However, this will enable gamers to get even large games finished much faster than in other rules. Battles for Empire 2 is still our preferred set of rules for Colonials, but this was still fun. We discussed doing a Seven Years War battle just to see how it plays, so look for that in these pages sometime in the future.

Have you ever had that feeling during a game when things are going really badly and you suddenly wonder why you spent so much money on figures, painting, terrain, learning the rules, etc., only to have a miserable gaming experience? If so, then this scenario demonstrates that some times, if you hang in there long enough, you can at least walk away with a draw! We couldn't coordinated what we were going to play after trying Midgard Heroic then Black Powder, so with time running out we went with Age of Discovery.

This would be a straight up battle, with a town on one side of the board, a few sections of woods, and no hills, so both sides were not disadvantaged in any way. We went with the standard two pike moves from the center of the board set up, meaning that the front edge of each side's starting forces were just 16 inches away from each other. You then roll on the movement chart which give you and A, B, B, etc., type result. Then, each side places one of their divisions (battles using the medieval term) on the board. After a few rules reminders, we were ready to begin.

The French broke their three divisions into the following; the first division on the left flank had a unit of gendarmes, two units of archers, then two units of light cavalry. The gendarmes were class 4 (the best) while the archers were class 3, giving the French a pretty good heavy cavalry punch. The middle division had two batteries of medium artillery, a unit of arquebus, then four units of Swiss pike (class 4), which would be the driving force in the battle. Finally, the third divi-

sion on the right flank had two units of Swiss pike and two of Italians (class 1) supported by one heavy artillery battery.

The Imperialists had two units of Spanish pike (class 2) and two units of Italians (class 1) on their left flank. The artillery, German heavy cavalry (class 3) and two units of Spanish lancers (class 3) along with a light cavalry unit covered the center. At the far right the third division had five units of German landsknechts along with some skirmishers armed with arquebus.

The initial French plan was to hold on the left flank, then watch as the Swiss rolled through the center and finished off the Imperialist left as well. The plan was pretty well thought out and had but just one flaw, which was what happens if the right flank collapsed? The French side thought there was little probability of that since the French had great cavalry and one more unit than the Imperialist had. It would take a calamitous set of events to have that happen, which is exactly what did happen!

The Imperialist moved first, moving their cavalry from the center over to their right to cover the advancing German pike. Seeing their chance, the French heavies charged, crashing into the Imperialist Spanish and German cavalry. Unfortunately for the French, two of their units were defeated and routed, with the one remaining heavy so damaged that it was effectively out of the game. At the end of the first turn the French left was in serious shape and we actively discussed restarting the game!

Saner heads prevailed, however, pointing out that you need to give the other players their shot at a glorious victory, so we pressed on. The only thing

that saved the French on that flank was that in their zest to finish off the remains of the cavalry, the left themselves exposed to flank attacks by the French light cavalry (light cavalry can only charge heavy cavalry in the flank, rear, or into an ongoing melee). After 3 turns, both sides had lost an entire division of cavalry and things began to even out, Now it was down to the pike units (cont. on p29).

(cont. from p28) What we thought would be an epic battle between the Germans and Swiss pike (which is what usually happens in our AOD games) turned out instead to be an epic Spanish vs. Swiss battle! The French right decided the time was right to advance, especially since the heavy artillery battery blew up a turn earlier! The Italians tried to accompany the advance, but kept getting shot at and one of the pike units routed. The Swiss, however, pressed on and ran headlong into the Spanish. Usually, the Swiss would make quick work of the Spanish, but not today. A multi-turn knockout brawl started that ended with one Spanish unit routing and the other falling back, but both Swiss pike units had taken a lot of casualties.

By this time both sides were starting to lose steam. The Imperialists lost all of their artillery when routing units went past them not once, but twice, making them abandon all of the guns! The cavalry of both sides were in ruins, with only one French light cavalry unit intact and the Imperialist German heavies were at 50%. The German pike were still way out and the Swiss weren't moving quickly towards them.

It was clear that the French were going to take the Imperialist camp, so with that in mind we added up the withdrawal factors. Both sides had a pretty high break point (56 and 58 respectively) and each side was around 45-48 plus an up/down die roll, so things were perilously close for both sides. We determined that even though our gaming session was at an end, the game could have gone on for a few more turns. We decided that night was falling and both sides drew apart, so

the game was called a draw. The French had persevered through a disastrous start and soldiered on, almost achieving victory despite some horrific die rolls.

Age of Discovery is unique in that all morale, shooting, and melee rolls are done as an up/down die roll, i.e., roll a D6 and on a 1, 2, or 3 the second die is a "down" result and on a 4, 5, or 6 the second die is an "up" result. In the first three cavalry melees the French rolled a down 5, down 5, and down 4 while the Imperialists rolls and up 6, up 5, and a second up 6! Yes, catastrophe for the French side.

Again, while it was tempting to restart the game we were glad that we pushed on. It gives one side a chance to redeem themselves while the other has a shot at gaming glory, but in the end it's just good to be gaming with friends!

While we have mainly used Age of Reason for our Seven Years War (7YW) games over the years, we're always looking for something a bit better. This has proved elusive, so in between our Age of Reason games we sometimes experiment with other sets of rules for the period. After using Black Powder for the Sudan, there was a suggestion that maybe we should give it a try for the 7YW.

There was a mix up in who was supposed to bring what, so we ended up with not enough Prussians and at the last minute had to revert to French vs. Austrians. Yes, they were historical allies, but in a few of our Sport of Kings campaigns they did come to blows, so not entirely out of the realm of possibility during this time frame! We set the battle up as a meeting engagement with each sides choosing 16 units from the list in the Black Powder army book for the era. This left the Austrians with a pretty good cavalry and infantry mix while the French had a lot of infantry and not much cavalry. The Austrians were fairly short on artillery, but we decided to go ahead and see what happens.

After a lot of discussion we settled on using centimeters for the 15mm figures. We had used inches in our first Black Powder game in the Sudan, but the movement rates were pretty crazy for 15mm and it seemed to create some weird situations. We did some sample measurements with movement, musket fire, command ranges, etc., then when everyone seemed satisfied we pressed on with the game.

There wasn't a lot of terrain on the board and with both sides starting a foot in from the board edges, we figured it wouldn't factor into the game that much, which proved to be right. We've learned over the years that when playing the 7YW it's best to avoid towns and villages! Both sides came on and started heading for the road, which seemed to be a clear demarcation line on the board. There weren't really any objectives (a mistake here) other than figuring out how the rules would work for the period.

The French cavalry struck first, charging the Austrian cuirassier on the French right and routed them pretty much right off the board! This created some panic in the Austrian command as they were now positioned right behind the Austrian lines! Fortunately they were way out of command range and some Austrian reserves started to move over to intercept them. Both sides continued to move up, but the Austrian command rolls weren't great while the French did better than average, with many of their units getting to the road first.

Then we had the usual reoccurrence in our games where when we do a meeting engagement one side reaches a certain point and stops. The other side then beats their head against the wall (or in this case the side that just turned into defenders) trying to attack them for no good reason at all! Again, this happened on this gaming night as well. The Austrians went into attack mode and the French just stood there, firing at the Austrians as they charged in! It's hard to believe that this happens over and over again in our games, but it does.

On the Austrian right the Austrian cavalry brigade tried to make some progress, but was stopped by musket and artillery fire. Even a charge against infantry in line was repulsed with ease. The Austrian infantry on that side tried to close the range, but once again, was met by fire and driven into disorder. Trying to dislodge the French was going to be a tough task, but the Austrians reorganized and tried again.

Elsewhere, the French cavalry breakthrough was contained and the Austrian infantry on that side of the board went into the attack. This time they made some significant progress, even breaking through the French lines in one place before the French closed up the hole. Even though the Austrians on the left side were showing progress the casualties were starting to mount. When the French counterattacked things started looking not so good for the Austrians. One unit, then another failed their break tests and by turn 6 the Austrians were down 6 units to the two of the French.

At this point the Austrians were in real trouble and clearly stated that the battle was pretty much lost. The French then counted their units and found out that they had 20 units and not 16! Yes, the Austrians were attacking a larger force who was just standing there waiting for them! After a good laugh by all of those involved, we decided to call the game as the Austrians were in deep trouble and had no way to come back.

(cont. from p30)   So, what had we learned about Black Powder from our two games? On the positive side we could clearly see that the rules are a) highly suitable for group games, b) you can use a large number of units fairly easily, and c) it's easy to teach. All of these things would seem to be good points for a gaming group looking to play horse & musket games in 3-4 hours on a Friday night. The rules are in print, well supported, and also will work with any scale figure so long as the basing is consistent. One can easily see why the rules are popular and why the epic scale boxed sets do well.

However, there are some issues that we did have. First, the rules are pretty generic. Yes, there are all kinds of special rules for armies of different periods, but the base stats are relatively the same. A British rifle regiment in 1765 is going to get the same number of shooting dice as a regiment in the Sudan in 1885 and both will need a 4+ to hit on each die. Then there is the concept of saving throws for being shot at in the horse & musket period. We had one instance where a French infantry unit got five hits in two turns and saved them all! I can see this being interpreted as training, willpower, etc., but even this was a bit hard to understand.

In another instance an Austrian cuirassier unit got hit twice by artillery and three times by infantry, for a total of five hits, then saved four of them! Cuirasses were not suits of armor! Where the saving throw makes sense in Hail Caesar with many different kind of armored troops, here with Black Powder it seemed more like a gimmick that introduced a lot of luck to the game.

The other interesting part of the rules is that when a unit shoots at another unit it is disordered on a roll of a 6. Time and time again we had units that were constantly disordered and simply could not get any traction. Also, with each unit having only a stamina of 3, units start to die off pretty quickly, which makes the game go much faster. The other intriguing thing is that units can pretty much march anywhere in any kind of formation, which is unusual for the horse & musket period where formations seemed to be critical (at least in many other rules.)

Will we go back to Black Powder in the future? Not sure at the moment. A few members liked the rules, one or two others could take them or leave them, and at least one was a definite no. Sounds like we'll keep looking...
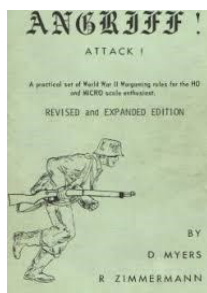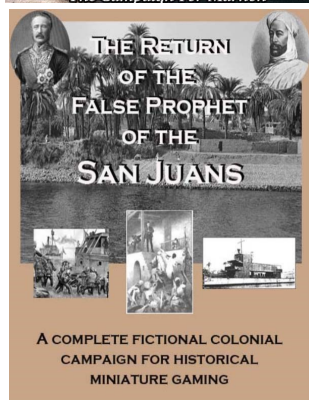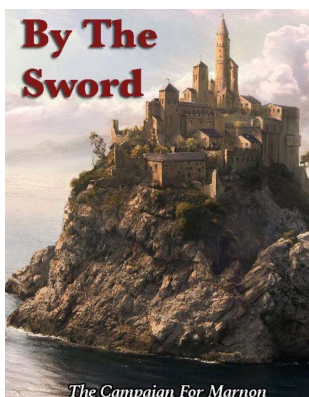
By The Sword

The Campaign For Marnon

THE RETURN OF THE FALSE PROPHET OF THE SAN JUANS

A COMPLETE FICTIONAL COLONIAL CAMPAIGN FOR HISTORICAL MINIATURE GAMING

Back in 1976 when I went to the local hobby store to see what new games SPI or Avalon Hill had come out with since my last trip, I saw a set of miniatures rules called Angriff! Instead of buying another board game I bought the rules, a box of Airfix 1/72nd WW2 figures and a Matchbox tank. I had been building models since I was 7 or 8, so this would be right up my alley! The rules were way different than the few board wargames I had at the time, but another friend and I struggled through them. I was soon buying Atlantic vehicles, Airfix figs, and the occasional Matchbox or Airfix diorama kits just to get the buildings!

For many of us long time gamers, plastic was how we got into the miniatures side of wargaming. While there were metal figs available, most of us had to do things on the cheap and that meant plastic. When I joined a wargame club almost a year from buying Angriff, it showed me an entirely new world when I saw my first GHQ models, metal Napoleonics, Ral Partha WRG Ancients armies, and someone lent me a wargame magazine or two. Plastic was still the main driver for WW2 gamers, but things were changing in the hobby. I even had two Airfix ACW armies for use with the Newbury Fast Play ACW rules.
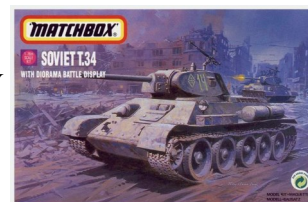
When I got my first issue of The Courier, my hobby world changed. There was an article about 6mm figures and I quickly sent off an order for some Ros Heroics, then I saw the Stone Mountain ad and a new set of rules called Johnny Reb. From that point forward, metal miniatures were the way forward! Over the next 10 years I had metal forces for Harpoon, Mexican-American War (anyone remember the Complete Brigadier rules?), GHQ Modern forces, 15mm ACW, and 28mm Sudan Colonials. It wasn't until the first WH40K boxes for Rogue Trader came out that I ventured back into plastics and that was only briefly. Over the years I was always tempted to get back into 1/72nd, even at one time buying a box of French Foreign Legion and painted them up for a skirmish game, but then it was back to metal figs for another 20+ years.

Today, things have come full circle, especially with the amount of wargaming figures that are available in plastic. The brittle, flimsy plastic figs are not the only option and there isn't much need to assemble a 100+ part 1/72nd scale tank any more. My Wars of the Roses armies are 95% plastic as are at least 80% of my Seleucid and Republican Roman forces. Not only that, but almost all of the painted board game pieces I've done over the last several years for Blood Rage, Successors, Heroquest, Space Hulk, and more have all been plastic. What's old is new again and it's been a strange journey only to end up where I began!