Warning Order

Issue #34

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WASATCH FRONT HISTORICAL GAMING SOCIETY

Warning Order

Gaming the Third World War-A Look Back

In the late 70s wargaming was essentially still in its infancy. D&D was just starting to make serious headway into the gaming arena, Avalon Hill and SPI were churning out board games, and there was a small, but ever growing number of miniatures lines. Nothing even remotely resembling today's gaming industry, but at that time that's all there was.

Modern gaming, or WW3 type games, were a very small part of the gaming hobby. Sure, there were board games like SPI's NATO, WW3, Modern Battles Quads, etc., and some micro-armor, but it was definitely down the list of most gamers priorities. Wargamer's Digest had some articles and battle reports on NATO vs. Warsaw Pact, but few of us knew anyone or a group that gamed that period.

As 1980 approached that began to change. Now I will not credit one book with starting this trend, but at least for me and many others, it had a profound impact. The book was The Third World War August 1985 by John Hackett.

Originally written as a warning to NATO and the West about the rise of Soviet arms, the book became the de facto bible for modern period wargamers. When the book finally came out in paperback it really took off with a popularity that surprisingly continues today.

For the first time, readers were able to get a glimpse of what modern combat would be like, from counterattacks by German Leopards to deep strikes by MRCA Tornados. Interwoven with politics, strategic planning, and fictional actions, the book was an interesting read. For many wargamers it gave them the push they needed to begin gaming the period and it also seemed to impact designers as well.

In the next five years or so that followed there was a massive surge of interest in the period. GHQ, Enola Games, and others released almost every type of Russian and NATO vehicle along with aircraft to support them. Rules such as Harpoon, Challenger, Tac Force, and many others
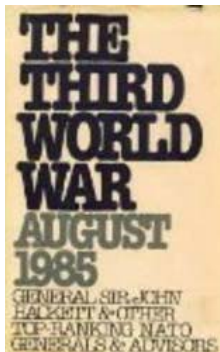
appeared. Board games included Gulf Strike, GDW's Third World War and Assault series, Mech War 2, Firefight, numerous S&T issues, along with many other one off titles. All of a sudden most gaming groups were playing WW3 almost exclusively!

In my own gaming group we had massive collections of micro-armor where we played endless scenarios and campaigns with pretty much every rule set that came out for the genre. We would play all night games where we combined all of GDW's Third World War series or team play of Victory Games' excellent Fleet series. Air combat also was not forgotten, from Foxbat and Phantom to Air War to the Air Superiority series, fictional battles raged across our tabletops for years.

We did take occasional breaks for some RPG games, Starfleet Battles, or maybe a medieval skirmish, but after that it was right back to WW3. Each new release or supplement was eagerly

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Several board game reviews including the new GMT War of 1812 game.*
- *Battle reports using Warmaster Ancients, Age of Reason, Fire & Fury ACW, plus Mustangs.*
- *Editorial and the regular columns.*
- *Extensive look back at WW3 gaming.*

Gaming the Third World War-A Look Back (cont.)

(cont. from p2) anticipated and went right to the table upon arrival. During those years the one book that was constantly referred to over and over again was The Third World War and the sequel, The Third World War:: The Untold Story. There were other fictional books out there about WW3, but this one seemed to be the most *realistic*. It wasn't until Tom Clancy's Red Storm Rising came out that anything else could even be mentioned in the same sentence!

So, what was so appealing about this period in history and why were gamers so enthralled about it? After all, there never were any real battles fought between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. There was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Israel's foray into Lebanon, and the Falklands War where the world got brief glimpses of modern weaponry, but there were no global wars or massive invasions.

My best explanation is the same that comes up every time someone asks "Why are there so many East Front games and how come more continue to be made?" The answer is pretty simple and it's in two parts. The first is that there is a willing audience who wants to pay for games on the subject. The second is that you are talking about a titanic to the death type struggle that features masses of armor, infantry, aircraft, and ships.

This isn't a French & Indian War type skirmish, British infantry fighting a Zulu charge in square, or an age of sail game between four ships. WW3 gaming was about regiments of tanks and AFVs swarming through anti-tank defenses supported by aircraft or carrier air wings trying to penetrate the air defenses of a Soviet task force. The battles were massive, they were going to be fought with state of the art equipment, and the scenario possibilities were endless. Add

into the mix the ability to use British, Dutch, German, Italian, French, Norwegian, Danish, Easter European, and other forces, which gave the gamer even more possibilities.

There were games at the tactical level (SPI's Firefight, AH's Firepower, and West End's Fireteam), operational level (SPI's Mech War, GDW's Assault, etc.), theater level (NATO, Next War, Third World War series), and even strategic level (Seapower & the State, WW3). Add onto that air combat and naval games, plus miniatures rules at different scales and you had quite the mix for gamers!

The other thing the period had going for it was scenario possibilities. From airmobile attacks on vital airfields to meeting engagements to river crossings, there were so many ideas for scenarios that you seemed to never run out. Not only that, you could do these things in various scales, from skirmishing with single figures to platoon based stands for use with GDW's Combined Arms. We even managed a few times to combine Harpoon scenarios with microarmor battles for amphibious assaults. Many gaming magazines had articles about one day campaigns, integrating air battles, and many fictional scenarios. I even recall after reading the book First Clash I went out and bought a ton of miniatures to make my own Canadian brigade, which gave us months of scenarios from the book!

So, life was good for the modern gamer and it certainly reached its zenith around 1988-89. There were no vehicles or aircraft that weren't available for land games and a wide variety of ships in several scales were also out there. Stacks of board wargames, Osprey books, numerous fiction offerings, magazines, terrain, and whatever else you could think of to do WW3 gaming about some part of the globe. So why did the period lose favor so quickly and is just a shadow of its former place in the wargaming community?

Two things happened in quick succession that had a decisive impact. First, the Berlin Wall fell and with it the Warsaw Pact went away. The chances of Russia launching an attack into NATO areas moved from a 50/50 possibility to remote at best. Second, the First Gulf War destroyed once and for all the myth of Russian equipment. Yes, it was the Iraqi army, but the utter annihilation of it and the capabilities of Western forces cast some serious doubt about what Russian and Warsaw pact forces were capable of. It was as if overnight everything you thought you knew about WW3 gaming was cast overboard.

It greatly influenced my thinking on the subject. I had owned and played everything I could get my hands on over the years, thinking that the Russian led forces had a decent shot to get to the Rhine (in the 80s-I'm still convinced that if they had attacked in the 70s they would have reached it) and actually win any future conflict. All of a sudden it looked like they might have a hard time just getting halfway to the Rhine before being decimated from the air. The fire and intensity I had for the subject went right out the window.

Today, it exists as just fond memories for me and many other gamers. From time to time there are efforts to revitalize the interest by game companies and I've tried some of the offerings, but you may just as well be playing a fantasy/sci-fi game as it didn't happen. I tried GSFG (reviewed later here) and the World at War series, but after a few hours with each I quickly lost interest as it felt like watching the consolation game of the Final Four NCAA championship.

For a few moments, however, while playing those games recently, I could remember massive amounts of microarmor swarming across game boards, all day battles, discussions deep into the night at fast food places, and all the fun we had. That era ended, which was great for the world, but not great for gamers!

Gaming the Third World War: Miniatures Rules

My gaming group and I spent half of our time playing board games and the other half with miniatures when it came to the WW3 period. There were plenty of games and miniatures rules to try during that time, so we constantly went back and forth (not to mention that we had plenty of time back then!) depending upon the results of the last game. This article is not meant to be an all encompassing survey about every set of rules for the period, but some comments on what our group played.

First, a quick comment about modern air combat and miniatures. We really never had any good experiences with this during the time period that most rules covered, feeling that board games such as Air Superiority did it much better. Our group recently has been playing Phantoms and found that it does a good job for the Vietnam era, but for what is termed ultra-modern I'm still not sure it's a good fit. The subject is so complex with so many variables that miniatures don't seem to do it justice.

Likewise for modern naval rules. There really has been only one choice and that was Harpoon (specifically Harpoon II when we played- the current version is Harpoon IV), even though a few others attempted to simulate this high tech type of combat. Modern naval combat is definitely one of the most complex types of warfare to game and Harpoon does a good job of at least trying to simulate it. Other games that we've looked at or tried come nowhere near even broaching the subject. We played everything from subs against subs to massive carrier battle groups in the Pacific for campaigns that lasted months.

When it came to miniatures gaming WW3, however, ground combat was king. From one night battles to massive campaigns that took a few months, we literally spent years and thousands of dollars on modern micro-armor. We had a nasty habit of flitting from rules set to rules set based upon the previous battle, always trying to find the right mix between playability and realism, which as many gamers know is the Holy Grail!

We started out with the WRG 1950-85 set as many of us were familiar with their Ancients rules, plus we had played the WW2 skirmish rules. If you've played any WRG rules for any period you'll know that they use a clockwork type sequence of play and the English can be hard to decipher at times! While we had some enjoyable games, the generic feel to many of the forces left a dry taste after awhile. We came back to these every now and then we had our fill of complexity in other rules sets, but they were a good, basic set of rules.

Like many gamers in the 70s and 80s we were big fans of GDW. Besides doing Traveler and many other board games, they had a reputation for quality. So, when Tacforce came out we eagerly shelled out the $20 for this modern micro-armor system. The game was unique in that there were data cards for every U.S. and Russian/Warsaw Pact vehicle in existence. Unfortunately, that was also the problem! There were no NATO cards and none ever materialized, severely limiting your scenarios. The booklets and ideas in the rules were definitely something none of us had ever encountered and it gave a good game, but scenarios did take quite some time to play.

From there we went to Enola's Combat Commander. Now this was definitely taking things to the next level as not only was there the original rules, but a supplement, and if I recall right a book with orders of battle. It was definitely a sign from above and as we went through the rules it was apparent that they covered everything, and I mean everything. Nuclear and chemical weapons, bridging, air support, etc., in amazing detail. Not only that, but there were gunnery tables/to hit charts for every kind of main gun in existence! Unfortunately again, this was the main problem.

We definitely had our most
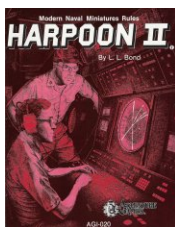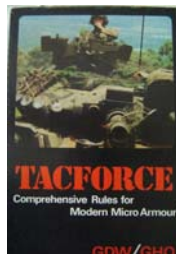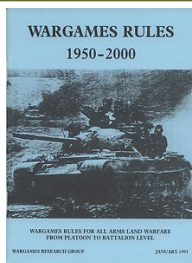
realistic games with this set of rules, but the games lasted sometimes all day. The firing phase could literally go on for an hour or more depending upon how many vehicles were on the board.

After going back to WRG for awhile we came upon Challenger and that's where we ended. Basically an updated version of the WRG rules with additional info/stats thrown in and better explanations of the rules, we found it to be a very good mix between realism and complexity. For the final few years that we had interest in this period, Challenger was our preferred set of rules.

Looking back now, I realize that all of these rules had one massive common problem, and that was of time scale. You would literally play eight hour games that simulated about five minutes of real time. Something was clearly lacking and it wasn't until I read the designer's notes for Command Decision that I realized that there was a serious time scale issue with all of the modern rules that we used. You just could not deploy regiments of armor/mech infantry, have attack helicopters and air support intervene in the battle, and suffer 50-60% casualties in a scale two or three minutes, but that's what these rules produced. If you said each turn was 15 minutes then it was probably about right.

We tried other rules in between, but usually only once. Many of us would order a new set of rules, look them over, and try them out on a gaming night. Usually that was the last time they were seen as the rules in this article seem to do a better job.

This was certainly a high point in my hobby life. There was a ton of excitement and interest where we spent months on projects, building terrain, designing scenarios, and playing campaigns. Some of my fondest gaming memories came from playing this period and it was a shame to see it wind down, but the world moved on and so did the hobby.
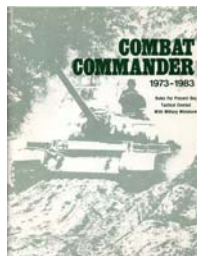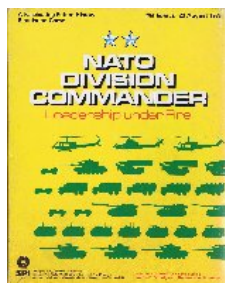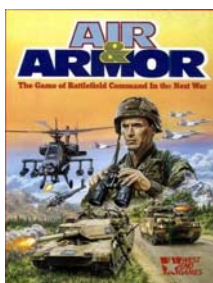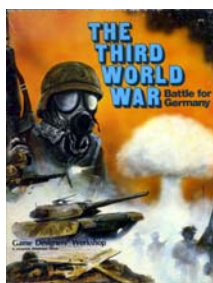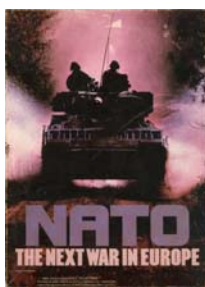
Gaming the Third World War: Board Games

The subject of the Third World War was a boon to board game companies in the 70s and 80s. There are far too many titles to go into here and I owned (and played) plenty of them. Some of them were completely forgettable, but I thought I would focus on those that I thought were pretty good and why.

First, you had the theater level games such as NATO from Victory Games and Warsaw Pact from Task Force Games. Both of these have outstanding gameplay and still hold up well even today. Both games focused on a Russian/Warsaw Pact drive into Western Europe and were fast playing as well as fun. Each game also had numerous scenarios, which gave the games very high replay value.

However, the winner in this area had to be GDW's Third World War series. A group of four games covering everything from Norway to the Persian Gulf that could be linked together for a massive WW3 game. The system was easy to get into, suitable for group play, and my gaming group played the entire campaign at least three times, with a good time had by all. I never had the chance to play SPI's Next War, but my guess is that this series could easily hold its own against it from what I've read.

Scaling downwards you would next come to the operational side of WW3 combat and there are two outstanding games in this area. Although the Central Front series by SPI was always highly thought of, my two choices would be Air & Armor by West End Games and NATO Division Comman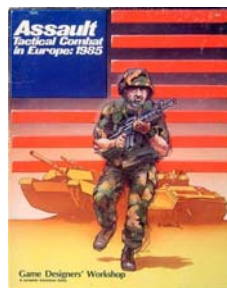der by SPI. Both games had unique systems and took some getting used to. But the effort for both of them was definitely worth it. Air & Armor taught you how to run combined arms operations while NATO Division Commander painted you a picture where you had no idea where the enemy was or what their intentions were. Both were very challenging and rewarding at the same time.

Going down further in scale my next choice would be GDW's Assault series. Not only did they release several supplements, but the scenarios alone ensured plenty of replay. This was set at the platoon level, so players were basically running battalions in tactical combat situations. The game received a lot of criticisms for the overwhelming advantages enjoyed by NATO forces, but time has proven the designers were definitely onto something with their intent.

There were no shortages of WW3 tactical level games during this era, but the best in my opinion was Mech War 2: Red Star/White Star. Not the easiest game to play and getting through the rules was a chore, but it did a good job of portraying modern armored combat. There were quite a few scenarios and the game was very challenging for both sides. The biggest challenge as I remember was getting someone to sit through the rules explanation and play with you.

Other games such as Firepower, Fire Team, and Firefight were also popular and great to play. You have to remember that during this era playability was way down the priority list, so the games usually functioned by trying to deal with a complex subject by you guessed it, complexity! Firefight was perfect example of this where the system was very complex, not the most fun game in the world, but it accomplished what it set out to do.

For modern air combat the clear winner was GDW's Air Superiority. Having played Foxbat & Phantom, Flight Leader, Air War, and others, this one came along and made me forget about everything else. Playable, functional, realistic, and with great replay value, we spent a lot of nights flying high tech aircraft in a large number of WW3 scenarios.

For modern naval combat again the clear winner was Victory Games Fleet series. These games were operational in nature, fairly complex, but did a great job of simulating WW3 at sea. Some games were a bit imbalanced, but still fun to play. I tried other games such as Fast Carriers, Modern Naval Battles, Seapower & The State, but none were even close to this series.

I've left out a lot of other good games such as Berlin '85, Gulf Strike, and a few others as they were more "one off" games, but still they were good and got some serious game play. There were so many that it is hard to describe now to today's gamers. WW3 games almost seemed to be coming out at the rate of one per week for almost two decades, then all of a sudden nothing.

Now some of these are still worth playing even today. Yes, the global situation has changed and the scenarios in these games are never going to happen. However, these are still *games* and can be played as such. Just because Victory Games NATO will never ever happen doesn't mean that you can't have fun playing it as it is very good. It was definitely an interesting era!

One of the ACW battles that has always fascinated me is the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864. Two large armies collide in some of the worst terrain in the United States and the results were mass casualties, confusion, and disaster came close to happening for both sides several times. The problem has always been how to simulate the terrain and the confusion in a gaming situation. There are even very few board games dealing with this topic. I've been playing ACW miniatures for well over 30 years and never have even attempted this battle.

Fortunately for us, one of our members, Steve Clark, came up with a pretty good way to simulate it. We would focus on the second day, primarily Longstreet's attack, but the Union players would get a chance to drive the Confederates back for awhile as well. The board was assumed to be covered in terrain, so we just placed a few trees here and there to remind ourselves. No need to be constantly moving terrain to fit the troops in or around, so this solved a major problem for us. The second idea was that each time a unit moved it had to roll a D6 to determine which direction and how far it could move. This certainly helped to simulate how units got lost in the real battle, didn't come up to support actions, or ended up being surprised themselves.

The scenario opened up with the Union assault into the Confederate defenses, which were spread pretty thin on this sector of the battlefield. The first few units were overrun quickly while others fell back as fast as possible. The only thing preventing a total Union victory was the terrain and units going off in the wrong direction. By the fourth turn the Confederate positions had been driven back well past the halfway point on the board and several Confederate brigades had ceased to exist. In fact, things were looking so bleak for the Confederates that we were wondering if Longstreet would even appear!

But the terrain was a huge obstacle and when the remaining Confederate brigades formed a meager defense around the fields at the end of the board, the Union forces paused to get (cont. on p. 5)

Union high tide as the Federal lines overrun the Confederate defenses at the start of the second day. Map to the right courtesy of Hal Jesperson, www.posix.com/CW.

(cont. from p.4) reorganized and then pressed the attack, driving the remaining Confederate brigades from the field.

Finally, Longstreet's attack arrived and hit the advancing Union troops. The disorganized advance of the Union actually saved them from being swamped in the first few turns of the attack and they ferociously counterattacked. There were a few turns where it looked as if Longstree would be defeated and the Union would get to the Confederate rear and end the war right then and there!

The Confederate forces, however, rallied and resumed the attack. By this time the Union forces had finally been able to get all of their brigades to the front and their weight of numbers made it difficult for the Confederate to make headway. After a series of coordinated attacks the Union began to fall back, but not before causing numerous casualties to Longstreet's attacking brigades. Finally, a series of charges broke through, driving the Union forces from the fields. By this time the Union forces were down to around 60% of their starting strength and had fought the entire width of the board.

Once the Confederate finally got going it was proving difficult to stop. By the time the game was called it was obvious that the Union forces would have to fall back and regroup, leaving the field to the Confederates. However, the Confederate forces did not achieve their historical results of reaching the Union starting point, so it was deemed that they had lost the scenario.

A very fun and exciting game. It is difficult to simulate historical events, especially surprise attacks, but this scenario accomplished its goals pretty well. We may look at playing a Wilderness campaign some day as this was a lot of fun and the confusion plus the chaos was challenging to deal with.

Warmaster Ancients is still one of the more popular games that we play. I think it's because the game is easy to set up, plays fast, has a lot of action, extremely fun, and it actually looks like an ancient battle on the tabletop! Also, it's a game we use as a reserve when no one can think of anything to play the next gaming night, people have dropped out, plans fall through etc.

Outside of our annual EMA tournaments, we try to run as many large games as possible when we choose to game this system. By large we're talking about at least 1500 points per side and usually 2000 a side. Yes, that's a lot of units and it will sometimes take up to four hours for a game, but these epic WMA slugfests are a lot of fun for those involved. I have two large Indian and Successor armies that can easily go up to 2500 points, so they're usually good choices for the big games.

The Indians went with their usual mix, i.e., a lot of very average units. 12 units of infantry backed by several units of archers, units of chariots, several medium cavalry, and two units of elephants to provide some punch. The big problem with the Indian army is that the units are pretty generic, meaning everything has three hits, no special abilities other than the elephants, and there aren't many saves other than the cavalry, chariots, and elephants. Yes, there are a lot of units and you can possibly overwhelm an enemy, but they're not designed for standing toe to toe with armored opponents.

The Successors, on the other hand, have a massive variety of units to choose from. These range from camels to cataphracts, imitation legionnaires, Thorakites, several types of cavalry, artillery, and more. In fact, picking the units to form the army can be quite challenging as there are so many options.   For this battle the Successors were using six phalanx units, four units of archers, skirmishers, several units of medium infantry, and several units of heavy cavalry. There were far fewer units than the Indians, but most had saving throws and could be counted on slugging it out in melee for several rounds.

The game began with the Successors moving out in good order and actually establishing a formidable looking line of infantry screened by cavalry on the flanks. The Indians had difficulty getting their units into position and by the time they were ready the Successor cavalry was ready to start a series of charges. The first cavalry charges hit the Indians heavy on the Successor right, but Indian counterattacks were well done and the Successor cavalry pulled back having suffered severe casualties. The same thing occurred on the Successor left, where the Indian cavalry and Successor cavalry wore each other out in a series of charges and melees.

With the flanks crumbling on both sides the action now turned to the center. The Successors and Indians had several brigades of infantry that now came into action. There were a series of charges and melees that went multiple rounds. The phalanx units did incredible damage in their initial charges, but were in turn ground down by the large numbers of Indian infantry. By the sixth turn both sides were 75% of the way to their break point and the Indian elephants then joined the fray. The elephants struck the Successor line and cracked it, but there were several units of Thorakite medium infantry around that were sent in as a last reserve and the line stabilized. The elephants in turn were counterattacked and finished off, but not before two phalanx units were broken.

By this time both sides had lost most of their cavalry, the skirmishers had been wiped out, and the archer units were down to their last stand. The few remaining fresh infantry units moved through the chaos towards the final clash in the center. The Indians struck first, but some bad die rolling limited the success of the attack. The Successors counterattacked and drove the Indians back. With no reserves the Indians were now in trouble and a few more attacks by the Successor infantry caused enough damage that the Indians reached their break point and the Successors won the battle.

As with most of our WMA games this one went right down to the end. The game does feature armies that are well balanced through points and it shows on the tabletop. The Indians definitely had their chances and if weren't for the few horrible die rolls at the end of the game they might have won. This definitely inspired me to add a few more units to have an even bigger game next time!

10mm miniatures by Magistar Militum and Old Glory. The village is by Paper Terrain and although a bit difficult to assemble it looks good in this scale. The Successor phalanx units consist of three stands each for a total of 36 figures. Yes, drilling out and fitting 36 wire pikes for each unit did take some time!
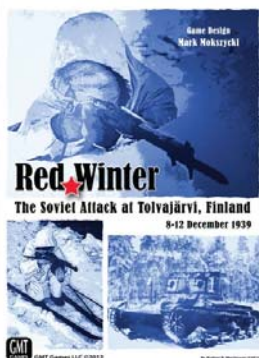
When it comes to unusual games, GMT is not shy about producing them. Red Winter definitely fits into that category, focusing on the little known, but critical battle of Tolvajärvi, Finland, that took place on December 8-12, 1939. Here, a massive Russian attack was met and defeated by a smaller Finnish force. While many gamers, particularly East Front gamers, have heard of the Russian-Finnish conflicts during WW2, there are few games on the subject and it is usually engulfed by larger games dealing with Barbarossa.

Well, designer Mark Mokszycki aims to rectify that kind of thinking and goes overboard in bringing this battle to the wargaming community. Inside the box you get the usual high quality GMT components. A very nice looking 22x34 map, with snow covered forests and frozen lakes marked with some winding roads here and there, starts things off. Then there is a sheet of counters, play aids, rules, and a playbook. After the map the next thing that you can't help noticing is the playbook. Not only is it thicker than the rules, but it's thicker than almost any other playbook I've ever seen.

The reasons for this are many. For one thing, there are well over a dozen historical and hypothetical scenarios along with the campaign game. Then there are a mid boggling amount of designer and historical notes which make fascinating reading. This is definitely taking playbooks to a new level and probably won't be surpassed for quite some time.

The rules are pretty easy to get into and if you've been gaming for awhile, the only thing you need to really pay attention to is the sequence of play. Units are primarily companies for infantry and platoons for things like machine guns, mortars, and anti-tank gun units. The game uses a move/assault then combat sequence that take s few turns to get used to. Assaults (basically close action combat in the defenders hex) takes place in the movement phase, followed by ranged combat and regular combat. The latter two are attempts to drive back defenders by firepower rather than close action. The retreat and advance sections of the rules are also rather unique,, so close attention should be paid when going through those sections.

Off board artillery is handled somewhat abstractly, with units making ranged combat attacks anywhere on the board and using up scarce ammo supplies. You also have Russian tanks, infantry guns, Finnish bicycle troops, and a lot of interesting units to use on the game board. Fortunately, the base system is easy to get into and you can be playing in no time at all.

However, this is offset by the fact that there are a lot of special rules that will take a few plays to get the hang of. Russian tanks, anti-tank fire, Finnish night attacks, bonfires, sub-zero losses, and more are very nice features that only come up a few times in the game, but they will require you to open the rules to that section and go step by step through it.

This is basically my only complaint with the game. My thinking is that the designer wanted to show off some really unique events and actions during this battle and then built a game around them. The turn record and objectives almost force you to use these things and naturally, there are rules for them, so the game at times becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Take for example, the Finnish night attacks with ski troops. The table for that has such incredible modifiers for the first time it occurs that you would be a fool not to use it if you're the Finnish player! So the game gives you these options, but they're so integral to the game that you really have no choice but to use them.

Now this is just an observation on a very good and challenging tactical game. Playing the Finns in the opening turns is definitely a nail biter. Hordes of Russians with a morale bonus flood onto the map and the Finns try to hold on for dear life. Then it turns into a bloody battle for several key points on the map, followed by a Finnish counterattack if everything goes well for their side.

With plenty of scenarios, ranging from a few turns that may take an hour of game play to the full campaign which can easily take several hours, there are plenty of options for players. I'm not sure on the replay value as many of the scenarios are variations on a theme. The system works, there are plenty of paths to victory, and the game has outstanding components. The designer definitely has a love for the period which shows in everything involved with the game. Red Winter is definitely worth a play or two and for those into unusual WW2 battles then this is definitely up your alley! Hopefully we'll see this system used in more battles as it is very interesting.

GMT's Space Empires: Close Encounters
Game Review

One of the biggest wargame hits in the last few years was definitely GMT's Space Empires. So much so that it had a strong crossover into what is called "Euro game" fans, who were surprised by the games' thinner components. GMT then released a second version of the game with thicker counters and finally the first expansion has been released.

4X games as they are called (eXplore, eXpand, eXploit, and eXterminate) have been popular in wargaming and gaming in general for quite some time. Stellar Conquest, Outreach, Godsfire, etc., have an almost cult like following, but those games could literally take all day. Space Empires did everything those games did and more in about 3-5 hours. The popularity of Space Empires made an expansion a foregone conclusion, especially since the subject matter is science-fiction, so basically anything could be added!

The first thing you notice is the striking art on the box cover that just screams combat with aliens. The box is also heavy and I'll explain why. First, GMT thought it would be unfair to make owners of the first edition pay extra for the new, thicker counter sheets. Second, gamers would be able to tell in the stacks which counters came from the expansion and which did not. GMT therefore decided to just include the counters from the original game in the expansion so that gamers get both sets in the new thicker counter format. No surprise why GMT is thought of as one of the best game companies on the planet.
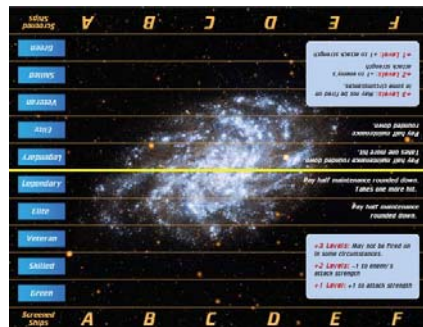
Next up you get a deck of cards broken into racial advantage and alien technology cards, which will be explained later. You also get new counter sheets that feature transports, ground troops, titans, and lots of other new things. There is a battle board to help with combat, new production sheets, a book of rules, and finally, a new scenario book. There is definitely a lot in the box for the price and the components are up to GMT's usual high standard.

The rules should be thought of as a series of options as adding all of them into a game would take some time. The first major change to the basic game is that players can now invest in fleet academies and ships gain experience in combat. These are some really good ideas and don't add that much to the playing time, so they should be readily agreed to by all players. The second is ground combat, which will add some length to the average playing time.   There are militia, regular infantry, heavy infantry, marines, and grave armor plus transports. Now you don't just destroy the other colonies on the board, but you land troops and try to seize them. This is also important for dealing with aliens, which in the first game were too much trouble to get involved with.

The reason that you want to seize alien worlds is because of one half of the card deck which gives you an alien technology card when you are successful. These technologies are usually pretty useful and can give your fleets a big edge in the game. Also, at the start of each game each player gets two racial technologies cards and gets to keep one. These cards give your fleets and worlds some kind of a unique advantage. This could be Hive Mind, where your ships learn and adapt during combat, or others that feature technology focusing on super fast ships, close combat, or ship building. This new card deck gives a game with already high replay value even more.

One of the more interesting optional

Fearless Race

Today is a good day to die, but it is a better day to make our enemies die first.

The ethos of this race places a high value on proving your courage. All of their ships fire at Attack Class A in the first round of combat. After the first round, their ships revert to their normal attack class. However, none of their ships are able to retreat from combat until after round 3. Their ships would still fire at "E" when in Asteroids or Nebulae.

Reveal: When first entering any combat, including Alien ships.

rules is the use of research and industrial centers. Fairly cheap, but they allow players to gain points for building ships and research in addition to their regular income. In game terms this means that all sides are going to be expanding at a rapid rate with huge slugfests coming much more quickly. This could slow the game down as there will definitely be far more things on the board than in an average game.

There are also boarding ships and security teams for those wishing to capture enemy ships. Also, they've introduced titans (aka Death Stars), and unique ships that you design yourself from a list of options.

The scenario book has expanded the several basic and solitaire games that came with the original. Now you have two player knife fights, four player quick contests, two, three, and four player cooperation games, and more. The main solitaire game this time around focuses on defeating a race of amoebas that are engulfing your quadrant of the galaxy. This is actually pretty detailed for a solitaire game and should keep a player busy for quite some time. You definitely have a lot of ways to play Space Empires and by choosing various options, the card deck, and varying set ups, you can pretty much play a different kind of Space Empire game each week!

Overall, this expansion has a lot going for it.   Quality components, new units, and a ton of optional rules that will allow players to pick and choose what they will use. The interesting thing is that even if you use everything and the kitchen sink, it won't add that much to the complexity or game length. Everything, and I do mean everything, has been designed to fit seamlessly into the original design. I'm not sure where the series goes from here, but this game is definitely in good hand and if you get a chance you should try it at least once.

AOR: Prussian Defense

Battle Report

In this issue of Warning Order I go over the "four hour barrier" in the editorial and this game related directly to it! It's always good to have an example about something you wish to bring attention to, but usually it's not something your own gaming group is guilty of! As has been chronicled in these pages over the past decade our group usually does a traditional game on the Friday after Thanksgiving and this year was no different.

When this tradition first started the games were usually well planned out, could take all day and into the night, and on some occasions we might even get in two different games! Not so this year. We barely had four people available, decided late on what to play, came up with a scenario right there on the spot, and had to get the game finished by a certain time so that everyone could meet other obligations.

We decided on Age of Reason as we're familiar with the rules, it's pretty easy to set up, there's some good gaming action, and we generally like the period. The scenario that was decided upon saw the Prussian defending a village and a road exit behind the village, which would count as

withdrawal points for purposes of determining victory. The village was in a good defensive position as it was flanked by a river and a bridge on the Prussian left. There was also a gap between forested areas on the Prussian right that should slow down any attack in that area. All in all, the Prussians were in a good defensive position.

To defend this the Prussians had two brigades of infantry (about ten battalions) and one brigade of cavalry (two regiments) backed by several batteries of artillery. The Austrians had two brigades of infantry, but their battalions were much larger than the Prussian units and they had three regiments of cavalry. The Austrians also outnumbered the Prussians in artillery. At the time we were wondering if the Austrians had enough combat power to seize the village, let alone the road exit behind it. We resolved to add some Austrian reinforcements if things got out of hand early. Naturally, we were proved wrong about this very early in the game!

How many times has this happened to you or your gaming group where you plan a game, set everything up, then the scenario gets turned upside down in the first turn? Well, that's what happened here. When I created the scenario I envisioned a desperate fight for the bridge, pressure all along the Prussian line, then a gradual retreat through the village and maybe a last stand near the road exit. That got thrown out the window with the first charge of the first turn of the game!

The Austrians charged a lone infantry battalion across the bridge in column against a Prussian battalion in line. The Prussians fired with little effect, then got pushed back when they rolled terribly for melee. All of a sudden the Austrians

were across the bridge and the Prussian flank was in dire straits. The Prussians hastily reformed their lines and brought up the only battalion that was being used a reserve. The Austrians then deployed and began to pressure the entire Prussian line near the town. The Prussians counterattacked and achieved some success, but the large Austrian battalions made life difficult for the Prussians in and around the town.

On the Prussian right there were two large cavalry battles that decided the fate of the battle early on. The first occurred in a gap between two woods that saw the Prussians driven back. On the following turn the Austrians, even though they were disordered, charged again and routed the Prussian dragoons. The other Prussian cav (cont. on p13)

(cont. from p12) unit tried to work its way around the Austrian rear to at least draw some attention away from the Prussian right. It worked, but in the ensuing battle they were shelled by artillery, charged, and routed. All of a sudden the Prussian right was a disaster. Two cavalry units in rout, no reserves, and the Prussians had to bend their lines back even further.

The Prussians now had to withdraw to a shorter line as they had no cavalry, no reserves, and were under pressure on three sides. They tried to pull back some units, but they ran into trouble right away. The Austrian infantry had several successful charge rolls and crashed into the main Prussian defense line, pushing it back into the withdrawing troops. As you

can imagine, it was a total disaster. By the end of turn 5 most of the Prussian army was in serious trouble. The Austrians had a sizeable advantage in numbers, particularly cavalry (one unit went up two morale levels by capturing two flags!), and had taken two of the three objectives. With the Prussians in serious trouble and with no chance of winning or even playing to a draw, the Prussian side conceded and the outcome was a major Austrian victory.

So much for scenario planning! The scenario was basically ruined when the Austrians got across the river on the first turn, which was a development that I thought possible, but highly improbable. Then, seeing the Prussian cavalry destroyed pretty much ended the game. I

don't think that there's too much you can do about this in scenario design as it's just one of those things that happens during games.

After playing about 100 AOR scenarios we still don't have a solution to the titanic cavalry battles that occur on the flanks and end the game by threatening one side's flank or the other. I get that this happened frequently historically, but in AOR it seems to happen way too early. It could be the high movement rates, lack of command & control mechanisms, etc., but my readings of the period show that this happened, but sometimes several hours into the battle. With our group it's usually in the first hour! I'm not sure what to do about this, but I'll keep looking to find a solution.

The Four Hour Barrier   Editorial

Does anyone remember those games of Empire in the 80s and early 90s that could go on for 8-12 hours? You were lucky to get the set up and play half the game in that time, but it was a lot of fun. Or, how about all day games of NATO vs. Warsaw Pact micro-armor or all night Starfleet Battles marathons? It is true that most of us were single at that time, there weren't a lot of distractions like the Internet, Xbox, on demand movies, satellite TV, etc., so this wasn't an unusual thing.

Fast forward to today and it seems as if most of our gaming has been turned around 180 degrees. In fact, I can only think of our group playing longer than four hours once or twice in the past few years and that's usually for our annual WMA tournaments. We've had a few occasions where we were lucky enough to be able to leave up a game for a few Friday nights, so we did crack the four hour barrier, *but it was not during the same gaming session.*

So, what has happened to cause this? Speaking personally, I've usually been at my job since 7:30am, so when it rolls around 11pm you get tired and want to go home! Family obligations, maybe needing to get up early the next day, work related stress, etc., all contribute to that, "Hey, we've been at this for almost four hours, let's declare a winner and call it a night".

However, is it something a little more complex than that? Are we going through the motions just because we need to get in a game? I think that there are more questions raised than there are answers. I could see if it was only our group, but I watch a lot of games at local stores, read blog entries, and troll the gaming forums now and then. Almost all of them point to the same thing; i.e., the game must not crack the four hour barrier.

Somehow, some way, this time increment became the standard for which games are measured according to their playability, complexity, fun, and keeping the interest level up during the game. Also, it's not just miniatures gamers who

have arbitrarily arrived at this four hour level, but board gamers as well. Look through the BGG forums and there are thousands of comments about gamers not being able to find others interested in games that go past four hours. Not only that, there are again thousands of comments saying that anything over four hours is a "non-starter" for their gaming group.

Most gamers I know have been playing wargames since at least the 80s and some longer than that. Most of us remember the days of playing GDW's Third World War series all night, setting aside a Saturday to play a multi-player game of Godsfire, or one of the longer campaigns in Victory Games Fleet series. In miniatures terms we would spend the first three hours just getting set up, eating pizza, talking sports, and not even get the first turn in!

Again, it's more than likely just old age, changing times in society, more entertainment options, and a faster paced lifestyle. But how is it affecting our gaming style? Here is where you really see the changes in the types of games we're playing. Usually fewer miniatures on the board (could be cost issues, no painting time, etc.), simpler rules, maybe a smaller table (i.e, a 6x4 instead of an 8x5), and not much inclination to go beyond that four hour time barrier.

You see the debates in gaming forums all the time about simpler vs. more complex rules, but I think it's more of an issue of time. If you're a serious WW2 gamer, why wouldn't you want to invest some time into finding a set you thought portrayed the period as you feel it should be, regardless of complexity. Then, play the games and maybe they go five to six hours. Why is that bad?

Instead, you see many players choose something simpler, hold their tongue over some "gamey" sections of the rules, then after a few games declare that this is what they were looking for all along. It fits a game in under the four hour barrier, you get to use some miniatures, kill some things, and you played a WW2

game. By this point it almost becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

However, maybe you know this gamer and have seen them play Challenger, GDW's Air Superiority, or other longer type games and they aren't afraid of complexity. Why are they turning away from all of that and going to something that years ago they wouldn't have touched with a ten foot pole? Is it that they can't find opponents? Do their interests clash with those of other gamers in their area? Or, does the game fit inside the four hour limit and they can find others who think the same way?

Having watched some games recently or followed a few on blogs, they may just as well have been rolling colored dice and when a blue side turns up you rout a Federal unit and if a gray side then a CSA one for an ACW game. Sure enough, at the bottom you see a statement saying that they got the game in under three hours including set up. Why has time become so important to today's gamers? Have they convinced themselves that anything over three to four hours is too long, too complex, or that it won't be fun?

Maybe the miniatures, scenarios, terrain, rules, army lists, etc., are in such abundant supply that it enables gamers to skip the creativity part of the hobby, which used to be a big part of it for many of us. Reading rules, setting up a scenario, trying to figure out how to create terrain, etc., used to take up a lot of time back in the day. Maybe now it's done for everyone, so you just show up and game?

I don't really have any answers for this, nor do I see it changing anytime soon, although I am a big believer in cycles. For now, the four hour barrier is there and many dare not break through it. Maybe this will change in the future and maybe it's gone forever. I remember with fondness many day long games and the good times that were had. Hopefully some of today's gamers will get a chance to experience this at some point and maybe that barrier can be pushed back...even just a little bit.

Group Soviet Forces Germany

In keeping with the WW3 theme of this issue, I thought it would be a good time to review this Strategy & Tactics issue, even though it is a few years old. Actually, while writing the opening article my interest in the period was briefly renewed and I went out and purchased this. It was difficult to find as it is well thought of and sells quickly on Ebay.

The game is Group of Soviet Forces Germany (GSFG) and was meant to replace the old SPI NATO game. You get a 22x34 map of Western Europe, rules, several magazine articles on the subject, and around 200 counters. Units are brigades for NATO and divisions for Russian/Warsaw Pact forces. The map is your standard S&T/Decision Games graphic style, which means functional, but it won't win any prizes. You instantly see that there's really no Denmark, Norway, Italy, etc., on the map, so yes, you will primarily be fighting in West Germany. I was hoping for a treatment ala Victory Games' NATO or Task Forces' Warsaw Pact, but the focus is clearly about a drive to the Rhine.

While reading through the rules the first thing I noticed is that there's no Zones of Control. This instantly sends up red flags with me as most of these kinds of games fail miserably in my opinion. Although I own and play a few that are successful, i.e, Drive on Stalingrad and Proud Monster, that's because they have so many counters that you can form lines that act as ZOCs. The interesting thing is

that Russian units that start next to NATO forces can't move at all, so that does act a bit like a ZOC.

Movement and combat are pretty standard, so there's no real surprises. If you've ever played a game where you can either fight and move or move and fight, then you're halfway to understanding the rules. Air power is handled abstractly by rolling on a chart. Here the NATO forces get stronger and stronger and after a few turns can start allocating air power to deep strikes, which delay or damage Russian reinforcements. The other use for airpower is to bombard enemy units and weaken them for attacks. I didn't buy into the premise that Warsaw Pact units would be so untrustworthy that they would be left behind, so anyone thinking that they would see Polish, Czech, etc., formations in this game is going to be disappointed. You do get some East Germans and that's about it.

The Russians win by securing city hexes and they need a lot of them to win. There's a few ways to do this, but the most direct route is to drive to the Rhine and secure the mass of them situated in that area. You can elect to spread out NATO forces and go for various cities around the map or just drive for a few areas. So, after reading the rules and setting things up, how does the game play?

The first thing you notice is that there aren't a lot of counters on the board. In a game with no ZOCs and liberal supply rules this didn't look good. Basically units can zip around the board and setting up a defense will be difficult, if not impossible. The Russians look like their attacking on short notice, so they enter West Germany from only a few places instead of being allowed to concentrate where the player would like them to. The first few turns are predictable, with the Russians running through the border defenses and wiping out most of the opposition. Those NATO forces that do survive fall back as fast as they can to good terrain and/or cities.

By turn 4 NATO reinforcements are showing up and NATO airpower is already making life miserable for oncoming Russian reinforcements. The Russians do get a large number of them that keep coming and coming, but they do take awhile to get to the front. The Russians don't want to leave behind too many NATO forces to operate in their rear, so they can't necessarily just bypass everything. This creates the weird situation with most NATO forces holed up in the city objectives with Russian forces trying to pry them out. Most of the map is void of units and it doesn't feel like any WW3 game that you've ever tried.

In the end, however, the game is fairly close and the Russians will either fall a few cities short or barely eek out a victory. Much of it depends upon NATO airpower rolls and how fast the reinforcements for the Russians can get to the front.

Overall, it's not a bad game,, but I can't understand what the fuss was over it and why it sells so fast on Ebay or why they're hard to find. There's definitely something wrong here as either the ground scale is too big with too few units on the map, or the unit scale is all wrong and there should be more of them. With TAC airpower, attack helicopters, etc., there should be ZOCs and units should have a hard time going anywhere they want. In the end I was left with the feeling that the game could have been better with some minor changes. I still think that Warsaw Pact by TFG and NATO by VG are the better games. There's nothing really that bad about the game, but there's nothing that great about it either. Or, it could be that my interest level in this period has faded more than I realized!
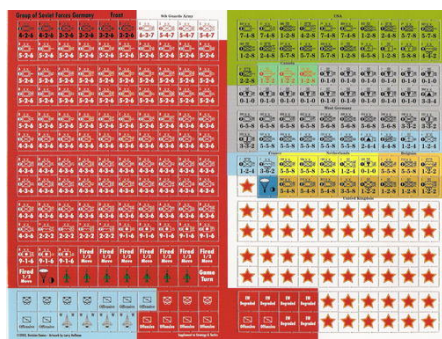
Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 21

In the late 1980s I was definitely into Games Workshop's Rogue Trader 40K system. Everyone had armies, we bought every issue of White Dwarf, and battles raged across local tabletops for several years. So, when a new game based upon the civil wars referenced in the original rulebook was announced, excitement reached fever pitch.

The pictures in White Dwarf were astounding and the preview pages promised a box full of parts, buildings, rules, and more. Giant war machines in a sort of futuristic gladiatorial combat through vast cities. On top of that you could customize the titans, there were promises of more material forthcoming, and it just exuded cool. At that point there was no need to sell me on the concept any further and I was there at the local store the first day they arrived!

GW definitely delivered with that boxed set. I spent days poring over the rules, designing my titans, building them, and applying custom paint jobs with banners, chains, and the works. They came out very well and within weeks we were having our first games. The even better thing was that the system worked and everyone had a good time. Within a few months almost everyone owned a dozen titans which allowed for some truly massive slugfests.

My opinion about this era of Games Workshop still has not changed to this day. I firmly believe that at the start they truly cared about their customers, provided quality components, wanted to expand their customer base, and wanted everyone to enjoy their games. Their designs were again in my opinion, aimed more at the adult gamers who wanted hard sci-fi than the kids and their parents that they target today. It definitely made for an exciting gaming era as they continually seemed to strive for topping their existing items with even better things.
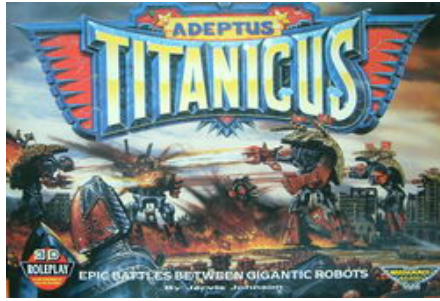
Sure enough, the next item was Space Marine, a second boxed set with tons of stuff in it. Now you got to create armies of space marines along with their vehicles plus the rules to use them alongside titans. Future releases included Orks, Eldar, etc., and you could basically have almost any of the 40K armies in what was termed epic scale.

The boxed sets were a great deal as if I remember right, at the time they were around $40-50, which is incredible for the amount of stuff that you received. If you could afford a few boxes you were capable of making massive armies that could cover a board, which is exactly what we did. It wasn't long before we started scratch building more terrain, playing campaigns, large multi-player battles, etc., and for awhile we kind of forgot about 40K!

I think the problems began, at least for me, when the Imperial Guard equipment started coming out. You had these massive Baneblade and other tanks in blister packs and they weren't cheap, even back then. You then started to add up how much it would be to create full sized units and the costs began to add up. As with many of these types of games there is an escalating arms race which the manufacturers love, but it can begin to drain your wallet to essentially "stay in the game" at the local gaming stores.

By this time WH40K was beginning to get into what I refer to as the "silly stage" where it became less and less a hard core sci-fi game for adult gamers and more and more a gateway game for younger teens who would need financial backing from their parents. However, we still had the epic game and so we focused even more attention on that. Battles raged on nearly every weekend and we brought in more and more players. The local gaming store couldn't keep the boxed sets or the blister packs in stock as everyone was building armies.

So, what happened? Well, as GW is fond of doing, they changed the rules. Not only did they change the rules, they changed the organization of the units and the point costs. I analyzed my forces and found that I would need to spend another several hundred dollars to get into compliance and several gamers started immediately. This created two separate groups with different army lists and it went downhill from there. After seeing WH40K ruined (at least from my point of view) and now this, I sold off everything of GW that I owned and vowed to never return. I basically held to that until Space Hulk came out, but even then that was a short lived experience and I have not bought a single GW item since, which must be around 20+ years.

I still have fond memories of playing epic scale games with titans and large formations battling it out across alien landscapes. The game looked good, played good, was easy to get into, and was one of the best hard core sci-fi games I've played. Why things couldn't have been left alone is one of the great unanswered questions in gaming. I still think that if GW had not implemented so many changes at the beginning of the 90s that many of my friends and I would still be loyal GW customers. Instead, most of us turned away from sci-fi and back into historicals, which is another story for another time.

Blast From The Past Pt. 20: Revisiting Ral Partha

When I first started getting into miniatures gaming around 1978 there weren't a lot of choices. Although I had been involved in board wargaming for about two years and had played in some miniatures games, I never owned any except for some Atlantic and Airfix WW2 tanks. That began to change as I moved from California to Utah and became involved with D&D plus the fact that there were far more active miniatures gamers here than board gamers.

My first miniatures were Amerons from McEwan Miniatures (does anyone remember the old Starguard line?) and some Minifigs Orcs to help out a friend with his D&D set up. My first paint jobs as you could expect were quite crude, usually using enamels as water-based acrylics weren't an acceptable medium back then! From there I bought some skeletons, some ACW figures, and then branched out from there. I had no idea about how to start an army, paint well, or the pros and cons of the various scales. I was just buying and painting what I wanted.

Even then, there was one miniatures line that was regarded as better than the rest and that was Ral Partha. At that time known more for their historical miniatures, they were the Cadillac/Rolls Royce of the miniatures gaming world. Usually sold as one creature, sometimes 3 or 4 foot figures, or a mounted plus dismounted figure, they were what everyone wanted if they could get a hold of them. One of my friends had several historical armies of just Ral

Parth figures and they were beautiful to behold. With the explosion of D&D in the late 70s and early 80s Ral Partha really came to the forefront. It seemed like every D&D gamer had at least some Ral Partha fantasy figures in their inventory. Whether it was an Umber Hulk, Fire Giant, Orcs, etc., you could usually see Ral Partha miniatures during a D&D game.

So why were they so popular? First, as I stated earlier,, there wasn't much else to compete with them. Sure, there were the Minifigs lines, some of the Grenadier stuff wasn't too bad, Superior Models had some good fantasy figs, but after that your choices were pretty limited. The other huge advantage is that they were available at retail stores. Yes, you could actually go to a hobby store and see their selection. In a day and age where you had to mail order most items sight unseen, this was a huge plus and I'm sure it generated a lot of impulse sales.

Looking back now, the figures were good, but compared to today's modern marvels many are lacking the detail we desire in today's gaming world. The figures were true 25mm scale, but all of the damsels in distress looked like they were 15s! Also, armies using Ral Partha figures had a tendency to look the same which is because all of the figures in the multi-fig packs were the same! Also, they would put out the core troops and do a good job with those, but the specialist figures that you needed desperately to fill out your army list had to be purchased through other companies. Many fantasy gamers used the historical figures they offered to create units for their

armies. One gamer in our area had a beautiful "Men of the West" type army composed of hoplites, Romans, and other medieval troops that he would use against his evil forces consisting of Ral Partha Orcs, wolves, giants, etc., and we had a great time fighting the battles with the WRG Ancients rules.

In the 80s Ral Partha came out with Victorian colonials, which were some astoundingly beautiful figures and the company continued to produce an incredible number of fantasy and historical ranges, even moving into Battletech in the 90s. The designers for the company won pretty much every major gaming design award possible during their best years and they were the standard against which all newcomers were measured.

So, what happened? Well, a lot of things. Changing trends, a move by gamers to 28mm, increased competition, and Wizards of the Coast purchasing them in 1998 pretty much ended Ral Partha's reign in gaming.

However, for a time there was genuine excitement when you walked into the local hobby store for your regular Saturday visit or opened the pages of the latest Dragon magazine. What new miniatures would Ral Partha come out with? What new armies could you create? Ral Partha was a legend in gaming and to many of us it always will be.

# Nomonhan 1939 by Stuart D. Goldman   Book Review

When you think about the WW2 era, the Russian-Japanese conflicts that occurred prior to the opening of hostilities in 1939 and again late in 1945 hardly register on the scale. Most authors focus on the Pacific campaigns, the Normandy landings, Kursk, the fall of France, and so on. What the author of Nomonhan 1939 tries to do, however, is explain to you why those things happened and it that it was all because of an encounter in the middle of nowhere in 1939.

If you're looking for a book that is solely based upon combat and give a blow by blow description, then you will be sorely disappointed. In fact, you don't even get to the actual battle until at least mid-way through the book! The author, in painstaking detail, outlines the political and geographical situation not only in Asia, but in Europe as well. Readers of this review may now be thinking what I was while reading the first few sections, "What does this have to do with Russian-Japanese combat in Mongolia and Manchuria?" Well, actually it does have something to do with the battle and for the direction that WW2 ended up going in.

The author details a number of "incidents" that slowly pushed both countries to the brink of, and then finally into limited war. There is the slow, but steady build up of Russian resources, transfers of troops on both sides, and a look into the planning of both sides. The book also
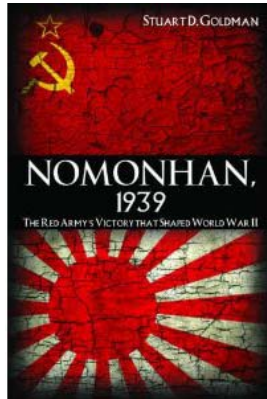
shows what has been reported widely in a number of recent books in that the Japanese command structure was rife with insubordination, poor intelligence operations, and continuously mis-reading an enemy's intentions.

This battle would also be a test for an officer who would become world famous in just a few short years and his name was Zhukov. Sent to command a corps that had performance issues, he would show the Russian high command and the world what he would be known for. Marshaling his forces, deceptive measures, overwhelming artillery barrages, armored thrusts, and a willingness to sacrifice large numbers of troops to obtain objectives.

The battle that occurred along the Halha River near the village of Nomonhan was remarkable in several ways. For one thing, the Japanese had never run into large armored formations, which isn't a good thing if you're short on anti-tank weapons. The second is that the massive Russian artillery barrages caught the Japanese off guard as their artillery had only limited means to reply. The Russians themselves learned about the aggressiveness of the Japanese and how determined their defense of geographical objectives could be. The battle is an interesting look at two opponents who used far different means to achieve their objectives.

Again, the battle is fascinating for a number of things and the reader will be enlightened about combat operations in this relatively unknown theater. Even when the Japanese were being defeated they were determined to counterattack and escalate the conflict even to the point of defying the Imperial authorities. It is an interesting look into what would develop to be severe problems for the Japanese high command later in the war. Readers need to enjoy the battle scenes and combat operations as after this the rest of the book goes back to politics and

the results of the battle.

So you've spent the first third of the book getting an in depth view on the global diplomatic and political situation of the major combatants followed by several chapters regarding the actual fighting around Nomonhan. Now you go back to the diplomatic, political, and military situations at the start of WW2. Many will ask why is this important and shouldn't these views have been left out?

My answer is no. First, the non-combat sections are some of the best explanations I've seen written about how and why WW2 occurred and the steps towards actual combat. The second is the end of the book is one of the most interesting and plausible "what if" segments I've seen about WW2.

Basically, if Nomonhan had not occurred, the author argues, then the Japanese may have joined in on an attack with Germany on Russia instead of attacking the U.S. at Pearl Harbor. When the Russians counterattacked, those forces were led by Zhukov and the "Siberian" units, many who had experience from this battle. However, Nomonhan changed all that. The Russians were found to be a tough opponent and their artillery, armor, and airpower were not to be taken lightly. It would be much easier to let Germany handle them while Japan turned its attention on the United States and Britain in the Pacific.

Overall, a fascinating little book into an area that few WW2 enthusiasts and certainly gamers know little about. Getting through the politics, diplomacy, etc., is tough, but very important to see the book in its entire context. It definitely changed my view on a lot of things.

Mr. Madison's War: The Incredible War of 1812   Game Review

There are very few games about the War of 1812 and my guess is that few gamers know anything about it. Yet the War of 1812 did have global consequences and was an important time in the history of the United States. One of the biggest problems it would seem for designers delving into this period is how to portray the battles, the importance of naval combat on the Great Lakes, the British fleet in the Atlantic, North American Indians, and so on.

Mr. Madison's War has a somewhat different take on this war. First, the operational area is confined to the Great Lakes region. Second, it is a card driven affair with some interesting nuances in the card play as well as the combat system. Finally, the designer attempts to portray the entire war to two gamers in about three hours. Certainly this is a tall order, so I was interested to see how it would play out.

Naturally, the components from GMT are top notch. The 22 x 34 map that covers the Great Lakes up to Quebec in point to point fashion is very nicely done. The counters are well designed and work great with the set up cards, there are color reference charts, well done rules, an informative playbook, and finally a deck of cards used to drive the system. The cards are broken down into three decks, one for each year. The rules are pretty easy to grasp and if you've played any card driven games you'll get into this one pretty fast.

It seems over the last five years or so there has been a wave of card driven wargames, so what makes this one so unique? First off, the setting is very unusual as are the starting positions of the forces. Both sides have ships and land units scattered all over the map, so naturally it will take some time to organize.
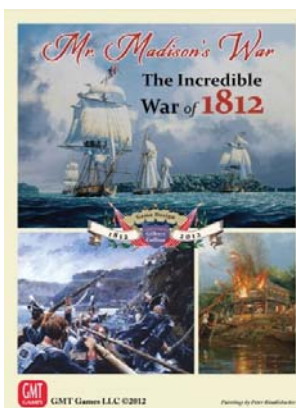
The next thing is that the first turn of the game is of variable length as both sides need to draw a Declaration of War event to get the festivities started. This will usually allow each side to consolidate their positions. Also, each year's deck is only used once. By that I mean once the cards are dealt that's it. There's no picking up discards, waiting for the other side to throw something away, reshuffling, etc. The two hands you get for each year are the only cards you will have.

The cards can be played to rebuild units, move forces, build ships, create supply areas, or play them for the events. As with most card driven wargames, how well you manage the cards is definitely the path to victory. There are three turns per year (nine overall for the game), but the Winter turn only allows for attrition and the playing of winter event cards that were held back during the other turns of the year. Yes, this means the game can go pretty fast between experienced players. As with many card driven wargames the choices as to what to use each card for can at times be overwhelming. There are so many needs for each card, especially for this game with the forces spread thin all over the board.

Combat comes in two forms, naval and ground. Ground combat is kind of a meatgrinder, with unit quality, leadership, cards, and terrain all playing a factor. Units are almost fed piecemeal into combat and get chewed up, resulting in step losses and/or retreats. What's different is that combat can go on for multiple rounds, so a force can really take a beating. Naval combat is nasty and decisive, with one battle usually deciding what is termed lake control and scoring victory points for one side or the other. You can literally focus all of your cards on naval actions and ignore the ground action, but do so at your own peril!

There is chrome in terms of how the Indians are used, winter attrition, amphibious attacks on the lakes, and fort sieges, but these add little to the overall rules length. In fact, depending upon how the cards are dealt and the various situations that occur, there's a good chance you may not have to use any of the additional rules outside of standard movement and combat.

Basically, both sides are getting ready for a full blown war in 1812, then the United States side is reinforced by a lot of ground units and ships in 1813, followed by the British getting an army for reinforcements in 1814. Both sides will get their chance to run amok for a year and they need to gather all the victory points that they can while they have the advantage. Another interesting point to this game is that you only score VPs for locations if you physically have troops there, which adds even more to the decision making process.

Overall, I found this to be a quick playing, highly entertaining game with plenty of options and replay value. My only problem (however slight) is that you only get one chance at cards your side may need desperately, so it can be very luck dependent at times. I also found that any questions I had were covered in the rules in a logical order, which is the mark of well written and thought out set of rules. For the price it can't be beaten and it will definitely teach you something about the period. If you've been curious about this period here is your chance to try it out in a fun game.

5th Annual WFHGS Warmaster Ancients Tournament

Five years ago we started having a one day Warmaster Ancients tournament and at that time we had four armies to choose from. Now in its fifth year we now have nine armies to choose from! We usually select a day around Christmas or New Years that everyone has some time, but this year we were a bit late and did the tournament on Friday night, Jan. 4th, which was our usual gaming night as several members had scheduling conflicts.

Because we only had a few hours (basically 6:30 until midnight) we cut the army lists down to 750 points per army, but with a free general. We also used the campaign system in the second book where each player gets three randomly generated territories that can be used to generate extra troops. This gives each player basically a break point between six and eight, depending upon if you choose high points cost units or not. For example, my Indian army had two commanders and 17 units, of which two were skirmishers, so my break point was 8. 18 unit is pretty easy to manage for one player, so the turns go fast.

Naturally, there is a lot of thinking about what goes into creating your army for only 750 points! There is a temptation to go with the cheapest units possible in order to keep the break point number high, but you need striking power as well. Several armies, such as Indians or Successors, have elephants and shock cavalry that can rack up the points pretty fast. The problem with those units is that if they are lost then the rest of your forces are in deep trouble and if the game is decided by casualty points those can give your opponent a huge advantage.

I decided to run Indians for the third consecutive year, thinking that my bad luck in this tournament would finally run out! I also decided to forego the elephants as they get instantly targeted by the other players and once they're gone the rest of the Indian army gets rolled up pretty fast. I went with six infantry units, four archers, one skirmisher, two cavalry, and one unit of heavy chariots. My three territories gave me an extra skirmisher unit and two extra infantry units. The Indians are one of the most average armies in the lists and by that I mean everything; attacks, hits, movement, etc., are all average and most units are unarmored. You definitely get a lot of stuff for the points, but it is very average.

We used to have an elaborate schedule for the games, but with only four players we found it's easier to just keep rotating opponents until you've played everyone! Basically we roll for which side of the table to set up on, then roll who starts to set up first (players take turns placing brigades of units on the board), then who goes first. We played until one side or the other broke in the first game, then switched to a random number of turns in the second game as we were concerned about finishing. However, the second games were over so quickly that we went back to trying to break the opposing army for the final games.

We start the armies 60cm apart and begin play. Once one side or the others break, casualty points are added up (they are used as a tiebreaker) and a new territory is rolled for. The victorious army can keep the new territory or exchange it for one of their opponents. This is pretty simple in practice and then the winner decides if they will stay at that table or switch tables.

Well, my Indians actually won their first game! The Indians defeated a Viking army thanks to a heroic archer unit that crushed a Viking unit just when it looked as if the game was lost. However, the second battle against the Normans was a complete disaster and then I lost my third game right at the very end where either the Hittites or my own army were going to break on the last unit engaged. The final standings were:

1st Place	Dave	Vikings
2nd Place	Gary	Normans
3rd Place	Mark	Hittites
4th Place	Matt	Indians

Dave also won the Master of Mayhem award for inflicting the most casualties, beating Mark's Hittites by only 22 points!

So, three games including set up and take down in only about five hours, which is pretty good. It's a lot of fun and we are talking about doing this more than once a year. It's a great chance to go up against armies that you would not historically see, different tactics, and allows for a wide variety of units. Most importantly, however, it is a lot of fun and everyone looks forward to it each year. One of these years I'm going to win this thing and do it with an Indian army!

Several views of the various games played during the tournament. We used one desert setting and one European type setting for the battles with some random terrain elements added in. The armies are all 10mm with figures from Old Glory, Magistar Militum, and some AIM/Minifigs.

Like many gaming groups we do like trying air to air combat from time to time. For WW2 we settled on a miniatures version of the Avalon Hill board game called Mustangs. Mustangs uses individual aircraft (we use 1/300 scale) on a hex mat to help regulate movement. The system is unique in that each aircraft has a set of maneuver markers that are placed in front of the aircraft (we flip ours over until the aircraft move into the hex and then reveal them) and when the aircraft reaches the marker it then performs the maneuver. Simple, effective, and keeps both sides guessing.

The firing, damage, and flight systems are fairly straightforward, so the game is excellent for large groups and you can play to a reasonable conclusion in a few hours, particularly if you use the ammo rules.

The setting for this scenario was over the English Channel in 1940 during the Battle of Britain. A bombing group consisting of 4 HE-111s and 2 JU-87s escorted by 2 ME-109s is flying over the Channel en route to targets in England. They are being intercepted by 4 Spitfires that were broken into two pairs and entering from opposite sides of the board.

The Spitfires immediately went for the bombers and the ME-109s feinted one way then turned into the other pair of Spitfires, which decided to ignore them and pressed on to the bombers. The first pair of Spitfires fired at the bombers, blowing chunks off of the two closest, but not causing any serious damage. The ME-109s fired at the Spitfires, but did

little damage. The ME-109s smartly maneuvered in behind the Spitfires as they plunged into the bomber formation. One of the Spitfires caused some serious damage to a HE-111 and it started to stream fuel. However, one of the Spitfires suffered a pilot kill and splashed into the Channel.

On the other side the other pair of Spitfires closed in and fired several bursts, again causing damage but mainly just knocking tiny pieces off the bombers. One of the Spitfires strayed too near the bombers and was knocked down after suffering multiple engine and fuel hits. The remaining Spitfire on that side continued to press the attack, flying out of the bomber formation briefly then turning back in sharply.

Back to the other side where the one remaining Spitfire ran out of ammo and decided to make a break for it. While it turned away we allowed that player to bring in another Spitfire as a reinforcement, which headed straight for the bombers. The ME-109s were now behind the bomber formation and looking for targets, even though they were out of cannon ammo and just had their weak MGs still left. They spotted the other remaining Spitfire on the other side and

started to maneuver to get behind it.

That Spitfire bravely dove back into the bomber group, scoring multiple hits again, but failing to get any sure kills. By this time two of the HE-111s were crippled, but still flying. This Spitfire ran out of ammo as well and then turned towards home, trying to evade the ME-109s that had been closing in on him.

The lone remaining Spitfire now moved through the front of the bomber formation and turned to bring one of the crippled HE-111s to bear. The ME-109s could not close fast enough and it went spinning into the sea, the victim of several bursts of MG fire from the Spitfire. Finally, the Spitfire closed in on the pair of Stukas and got off two bursts, then ran out of ammo (the Spitfires only carry four bursts each). However, one of the JU-87s was crippled by multiple hits and at that the scenario ended.

Three bombers crippled and one shot down for the loss of two Spitfires. With the damage the crippled aircraft had it would be doubtful if they would make it back to airfields in France, so the Spitfires fared OK. Overall, it was a fun and fast playing scenario. From set up to finish it was a little more than 2 1/2 hours. This system is fun, can be taught easily to new players, and plays fast, so it's perfect for those gaming nights where everyone is unprepared!

Aircraft are all 1/300th scale from Scotia. Mustangs uses a set of varying altitude sticks cut from brass tubing that affix to the aircraft models and to stands with heights marked from 1-9 that help regulate movement on a hex grid. The game mat is fabric with five inch hexes painted on with acrylic paint. The game system is fairly cheap to get into, but just needs time to get everything ready for a game.

WFHGS

A fan drawn map for SPI's Arnhem from the Westwall quadrigame from the 70s. The map features turn tracks, clearly marked bridges, all of the tables needed to play the game and more. An excellent example of what can be done to freshen up older games.

Over the last few years one of the real positive trends in wargaming has been the rise of the fan created add-ons to existing games. The increases in technology regarding video recording/editing, graphics programs, etc., has enabled gamers to produce amazing and very helpful tutorials, reviews, maps, counters, and more. Two examples of this are in the lower left of this page featuring a reworked map for SPI's Arnhem game and a completely new version of Metagaming's Chitin I to the right.

In the first example, someone has taken the $2.95 Metagaming microgame with its crude map, counters, rules, etc., and has created a work of art. Beautifully colored map, tracks for food chits/victory points, updated counters, and an illustrated rulebook. Granted, it will cost you around $50 now, but it is a tremendous achievement and a much needed upgrade to what still is a well thought of game. The second example is definitely a fan who wanted more from a favorite game of theirs. Because of production timelines many game companies, particularly in the 70s and 80s hurried games into production without adequately thinking designs through. After years of being on the market and numerous plays, fans now know what to add in or leave out. This reworked map now has all of the charts, tables, entry points, bridges, etc., clearly marked or added on, which is a major improvement.

Are there any problems with this recent development? Sure. For one, printing off these maps is not cheap and if a game company could do them en masse it would be cost effective for gamers. However, there are copyright issues, so unless the original designer, the gaming fan, and a game company can come to terms, you have to print everything off yourself. Not too much of a problem for rules, charts, or maps (other than costs), but counters are a huge issue as getting them die cut is cost prohibitive. Second, as mentioned before, copyright is a huge issue. The Chitin:1 redesign rests right on the edge where it has been entirely reworked and you can pay a company to produce all of the materials for you. They're not necessarily selling you a game, but all of the parts that go to make a game. Yes, semantics!

Overall, this is a great trend and I hope it continues. The only other issue is that gamers have little to no say in what gets done! You're basically relying on fans of games, sometimes obscure ones, to create new materials. Sometimes you'll be interested and sometimes not. Still, I like what I've seen so far.