



# Warning Order

## Issue #40

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# Warning Order

## WW2 Skirmish Gaming-Is Something Wrong Here?

Being an avid historian and wargamer, it's hard not to watch movies like Saving Private Ryan, Cross of Iron, A Bridge Too Far, Band of Brothers, etc., every time they come on, regardless of how many times I've seen them. Then, like many gamers I want to see how they would play out in the gaming world, using whatever rules and figures

that I have available. Although I have or tried a large number of WW2 tactical level board games, I keep coming back to miniatures.

However, the result never seems to satisfy me, but yet I keep looking. After a game of IASBM 3 which is in this issue as a battle report, I decided to explore why WW2 skirmish gaming isn't working for me and why I keep thinking it eventually will!

I first started WW2 skirmish gaming back in 1976 after a trip to a local hobby store where I bought a copy of Angriff along with some Atlantic and

Airfix figures. After a few years the Angriff rules seemed like a lot of work, so I went to the WRG 1925-50 skirmish set (does anyone still remember those?) for a few years. They were a lot of fun, provided a few years of good WW2 skirmish gaming, but with the 80s the move to Squad Leader type realism took over and I started searching for other rules.

Unfortunately at that time there wasn't much better out there, so I turned my attention to Colonials, Starfleet Battles, Johnny Reb, and board games. Then in the 90s we started to play Battleground, then on to Arc of Fire, and many others, with Arc of Fire lasting longer than any of them. In the past few years we've tried Battlegroup Normandy, Disposable Heroes, and IASBM 3 with more than likely a Bolt Action game coming down the road at some point.

So, are all of these rules so bad that we need to keep changing every year or so? Do they not accurately portray WW2

skirmish level combat? What exactly is the issue here? Don't I know that there are all of these really cool figures and vehicles out there in all scales to help you with your games?

The answers to these questions are a bit more complex than a simple yes or no. Today you can find pretty much figures and vehicles in a variety of scales for every theater in WW2! There are literally dozens of companies that can sell you any kind of terrain that you want, from

beachheads to island fighting. There are well over a hundred sets of WW2 skirmish rules with probably

more coming out in the next few years. Pretty much any gamer you know will volunteer to play in a WW2 skirmish game and the period continually polls well as one of the favorite periods for gamers of all time. But yet when we finish a WW2 skirmish game or I read about them on various forums, blogs, etc., why is it that not everyone seems (cont. on p3)



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### Special points of interest:

- Discussion about WW2 skirmish gaming.
- Warmaster Ancients battle report and siege game, both set during the Crusades.
- IASBM 3, WMA, WMM, and BKC 2 battle reports.
- Our first attempt at playing Saga.
- Game reviews and the usual features.

# WW2 Skirmish Gaming-Is Something Wrong Here? (cont.)

(cont. from p2) as excited as they were when the game first started?

I think the first problem is detail and that's a hard one to get around. Rules seem to fall into two categories for WW2 skirmish gaming; slightly complex or beer & pretzels. There doesn't seem to be much in the middle, although I could be wrong with all of the rules that are now available. Some gamers want their detail and this will add to the complexity.

Take Arc of Fire for example, which has a firing system where some weapons can go well past 150 inches on the tabletop and you can track individual wounds. There is nothing wrong with that and the game plays well, but you're going to need some time to complete a game, someone needs to know the rules really well, the scenario needs to be laid out, and you're not going to see hundreds of figs running around the tabletop.

The beer & pretzels approach generates feelings in the exact opposite direction. You can usually have all of the figs and vehicles that you want on the tabletop, things die in droves, only one person usually needs to know the rules (usually just the basics), and you'll get the game finished in under four hours. This is great if you wanted some WW2 Hollywood type action, but if you're into detail or perish the thought, realism, you may have a hard time of it when a jeep knocks out a Tiger tank.

The other huge issue with WW2 skirmish games is hidden movement. Unless you're playing a scenario, where say for example, the Germans are attacking a Russian fortified position out on the grass plains where everyone can see everything, you need some kind of hidden movement system. Most rules give this topic a passing glance as they don't really expect gamers to take it seriously. After all, isn't the point of WW2 skirmish gaming to see all the pretty toys on the board? On the other hand, some rules do take it seriously and of course this will definitely affect gameplay. Keeping track of where everything is, who can see who, etc., can

slow the game down to a crawl.

I recall back in the early 80s I played in a modern micro-armor game where the scenario creator had really spent a lot of time on the set up, objectives, and hidden movement. It was a rewarding experience to me and a lesson in realism as my overwhelming force came up against a recon unit, took a few casualties, then decided to fall back and await reinforcements. I had been defeated by a force 1/5th my size, but I thought I was up against superior numbers. Most of the group hated it however, as there were few vehicles on the board, not much action, and it was slow playing. Nowadays, how many gamers are going to put that much time and effort into setting up a scenario and there would be a revolt as you have all of these expensive figs and they're not getting used!

Another problem is that most gamers in each group know what the others have bought and painted, so basically you know what's coming at some point. IABSM 3 uses a system of blinds that seem to work pretty good, but even that has its detractors. Gamers seem to want to see nicely painted figs and vehicles running through great terrain, not colored ovals with national insignia moving around a board.

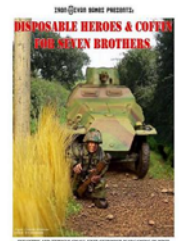
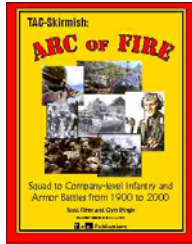
After playing in well over a hundred WW2 skirmish games the last 35+ years I've come to the conclusion that there's no real good way to simulate the "fog of war" on the tabletop. Each squad, platoon leader, etc., would have little idea of what they were facing, even after the shooting started. There would be some surprises with the terrain as well where a badly placed ditch might force a change of plans. Gamers almost always know what they are facing by the end of the first few turns, they can clearly see the terrain, they know what off board support is coming in for both sides, etc. Ask yourself, when was the last time in a WW2 skirmish game that you saw a force move to an attack, find out that the terrain will restrict their movement at the last moment, realize that they were facing far

more opposition than they thought, then pull back and move to attack from a different direction? My guess is never, but in real life this would be a regular occurrence.

Then you get to fire combat and there are yet more issues. The more complex and/or realistic games (insert your view of realism here) can have elaborate fire combat systems that can produce a wide range of results, but at a cost in playability. The simpler sets of rules resolve combat faster, but the casualty rates seem out of proportion to WW2 battle statistics. Not only that, with few exceptions almost every one in a squad shoots each turn, which rarely happened from my readings on the subject. Fire discipline, ammo usage, not firing at extreme ranges, etc., are rarely considered by most gamers, let alone seen in rules. Instead, everything possible that can fire is going to, regardless of the situation.

Tanks in skirmish games are another issue that is rarely discussed. The truth is that the number of tank/infantry actions during the war was only a tiny fraction compared to the number of infantry vs. infantry engagements. Yet almost every WW2 skirmish game I've ever played has tanks in it and if the rules or scenarios don't feature tanks gamers will complain about it. My own impressions are that tanks are the "cool toys" of WW2 and easier to paint up than a platoon of infantry, so that's why you see an inordinate amount of them in every game.

However, tanks create a number of problems for WW2 skirmish games in that tank actions start heading into "rivet counter" territory, meaning that it starts arguments about armor, penetration values, speed, spotting, etc., that the rules really weren't meant to handle. All of a sudden the rules can't decide if they are an infantry skirmish game or a battalion level operational game. Either too much complexity gets piled onto the infantry rules or the armor rules are so generic that tanks (cont. on p6)







Another IABSM3 battle on the Eastern Front in 1941. This was a chance to use a few new vehicles I had finished and we had not played this set of rules in over a year, so we felt it was time to try it again. In this scenario the Germans are trying to push a recon force off the far edge of the board, which was the primary goal. If that was not possible, then they were to attack and seize the town, which was positioned in the middle of the table.

The Germans had a force that consisted of a platoon of four PZ IVDs, a panzergrenadier platoon of three squads, two 50mm AT guns, and a recon platoon with two armored cars and two PZ Is. Because of the strength of the Russian defenses the Germans were given extra cards that allowed the panzers and recon

unit to move a second time, which in the end proved to be a serious error in judgment on my part as I designed the scenario!

The Russians had a platoon of infantry with four squads, two 47mm AT guns, a light mortar section, a MG section, and a platoon of T-34/76s entered the board on the first turn to strengthen the defense. At first glance the Russians appeared to be in great shape, with the AT guns, MGs, and heavier armor all in defensive positions, but things are not always what they appear to be!

The Germans attempted to run the recon unit around the German left side of the village, hoping that the bonus movement cards would get them past the defenses before anyone knew they were

there. Unfortunately, one of the T-34s was waiting at the end of the board and knocked out the Sdkfz 222. This forced the rest of the recon platoon to turn down the side streets where they ran into a blind that when revealed was the entire Russian infantry platoon!

Yes, the Russians were in the center of the town, waiting to react to the German movement when they were discovered. This set off a huge firefight where in the end the Russian mortar sections were knocked out, one of the squads got decimated and it had the effect of breaking up the defenses, although the Germans lost one of the recon tanks to AT rifle fire.

Meanwhile, the PZIVDs went around the other side of the village (cont. on p5)







(cont. from p4) and ran into an ambush with the Russian AT guns. Here's where things went a bit screwy. Because of the card draw and the distances involved, the Russians only drew the AT cards once in the next five turns! The T-34s only got one card in that same time frame and knocked out one of the PZIVDs, but the Germans got card after card after card. Near the end of the game most of the T-34s were knocked out and one of the AT guns was down to one crew member.

In the center of the town the MG section that was holding the entrance to the town was finally knocked out by fire from the panzer grenadiers and the way was clear to move into the town. The Russians were committed all across the board and barely hanging on.

When the game was finally called the Germans had the upper hand, but it could be said that the game was still in doubt. The Germans still had a full strength panzer grenadier platoon, three of the four PZIVDs, the two AT guns, and half of the recon force still left, plus a very favorable card deck.

The Russians were reeling, but still not out of it. The AT guns were functional, although a bit under crewed. There was one T-34 still left and most of the infantry platoon in the center of the village, so there was a long, grinding fight still ahead, but we had run out of time.

As with any IABSM3 game as goes the card draw so goes the game. In this case the Germans probably had too many

cards and when the Tea Break cards kept coming up frequently (we use two in our decks with the turn ending on the draw of the second one) the Russians never got to act. I'm not sure how to rectify this as it is basically the luck of the draw.

The main issue is that we had not played in awhile and it showed. There were numerous errors with the rules and I always seem to forget that having this much armor in the game seems to ramp up the complexity a notch. IABSM3 is a well put together, fairly simple game, but with all of the anti-tank rules, tanks firing area fire, extra movement cards, etc., it did force us to spend a lot of game time reviewing those sections of the rules. A fun, but not well managed game by us.



# WW2 Skirmish Gaming-Is Something Wrong Here? (cont.)

(cont. from p3) become almost a joke when encountered.

Now we haven't even begun to talk about command and control, which depending upon the rules, can be so complex as to be impossible to enforce, or it gets left out as it would "get in the way of killing things". Most of the rules I've seen try to have some semblance of command and control written into the rules, either by an orders system, card draw, action points or some other mechanism, or a command range that all of the figures of a unit have to stay inside of. My experience is usually by the 3rd or 4th turn of a game these are "conveniently" forgotten and everyone gets down to moving and shooting!

The truth is trying to command troops and stay on top of the situation on any battlefield is a major challenge and unfortunately, skirmish gaming rules don't do it very well. The answer of course would either add on so much complexity that the game would bog down, or the players wouldn't stand for it and quit using the rules. For example, a squad in a game comes under fire from a nearby farmhouse. You roll on a table under the heading "Taking Fire From Nearby Structure" and come up with a result that says wait under cover for 10 turns while the sarge and another trooper work their way around and take the house from the flank. How many gamers are going to stand for that? None that I know of. Besides, everyone knows that the solution is to break out of cover and charge the farmhouse with grenades and guns blazing!

Yes, this is what passes for realism in our WW2 skirmish games. Now I really don't want to get into a realism vs. gaming debate here as that has been flogged to death over the last forty years, but even the most ardent anti-realism in gaming gamer has to realize that what most rules are portraying on the tabletop bear little resemblance to reality. Yes, that squad of Russian infantry has the appropriate weaponry and uniforms, but then reality seems to diverge once the game begins.



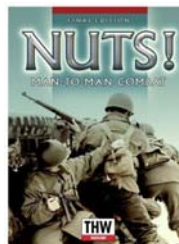
Morale, unit cohesion, off board support, airstrikes in skirmish games, etc., are all topics that could be fuel for the fire here. Usually after 15% casualties a force would pull back, await developments, maybe some reinforcements, pound the positions with artillery or mortars, then maybe try again and more than likely on the following day. In our games 15% is just getting started! Suicidal attacks, to the last man defenses, losing 50% casualties and still advancing, etc., are just common things you see on gaming night!

Now at some point much of the blame must be laid at the feet of gamers themselves. This is what they want. Lots of pretty figs, good looking terrain, tanks running amok on the tabletop, and more. After a long week of work, watching your platoon of British infantry get mauled charging headlong into some fortified German MG positions is almost therapeutic in some way.

The other aspect is that gamers are notoriously poor scenario designers, which is not a fault of the rules. Many of the rules do give leaders certain skills, levels, action points, etc., but it takes some effort to write all of that down, prepare cards, explain how things work in the game, and so on. Using all of those things would probably help the game feel more like a WW2 skirmish action. However, that's usually too much work for gamers who are pressed for time, so everyone in the game is given a standard or average rating then the game starts.

Gamers also want to include every figure or tank that they've painted, especially if it's been in the period in between games. This usually has the effect of having one side or the other overpowered or just putting so many things on the board that the game bogs down under its own weight.

So, the main question is whether or not this will ever change? After having played WW2 skirmish games for almost four decades I think my answer is probably not. However, it could get better.



Taking time to do proper scenario design, balancing forces, resisting the temptation to use every fig that you own, having all of the players own and have read the rules, and more can certainly help out the situation..

That still does not get down to the nuts and bolts of the problems with WW2 skirmish gaming. When I'm playing Age of Eagles as a corps commander I can see the terrain obstacles, know the strength of the opposition, understand how the enemy's and my units should perform, and how far the units can move each turn. These are the basic elements of large scale Napoleonic game. You shouldn't know these things in a WW2 skirmish game, but yet you do. We've taken out the unforeseen developments that occurred with great regularity in modern skirmish combat and replaced them with known quantities. Now how you bring that into your games is a big problem.

Granted, WW2 skirmish rules have been selling for decades and will continue to sell as the level of interest isn't slowing down any. The amount of figures, vehicles, and terrain that is available currently in all scales is simply staggering. Many gamers will continue to fight WW2 skirmishes each week and have a great time with it. To that I say more power to them.

I, however, have started to question the viability of this type of gaming more than ever. Read about WW2 small actions and then think about if your games ever match up to the history. Sadly, they don't seem to. Now this is just my opinion on things and gamers are free to turn the page or go back to their painting 28mm Germans for the next skirmish and that's their right. Will it stop me from trying other sets of rules? Probably not. I think we have a Bolt Action trial game coming up, so I'll give those rules a chance. I just think that this is one aspect of warfare that miniatures gaming can't possibly do justice to. In the end what we see on the tabletop may look like WW2 skirmish combat, but trust me, it's not even close.





# Wargames Factory Vikings by Rob Coleman

## Figure Review

I have chosen to review Wargames Factory Hammer of the Gods minis as part of a series on Studio Tomahawk's Dark Age skirmish game, Saga. To be fair, there are a lot

of gorgeous Viking manufacturers out there with some very nice looking minis; Foundry, Gripping Beast, Artizan, to name a few. Wargames Factory has been around for a while now, and they are well known for their cheap, plentiful boxed sets. They have some negative criticism against them as well as some positives beyond cheapness and I will hope to cover both.

Now I purchased a box of Viking Huscarls, a box of Saxon Fyrd, and some Ancient Germans arms/bodies to build up a 4-6 point Viking warband and a 4 point Anglo-Danish warband. The sprues come with a slew of options, which makes one or two boxes ideal for building up Saga forces. You can easily build up several points of Hearthguard, Warriors, and/or Levy with tons of bits left over. It even enables more esoteric options, such as Standard Bearers as seen in the current version of Saga, Crescent and Cross.

As you can see below, each weapon sprue provides shields, swords, axes (single and double handed), spears, bows, and heads. This gives you a wide variety of equipment in order to build up a full



suite of units that could cover a wide range of options. The one downside is that some of the equipment options are a bit sparse, such as the bows. There is also one gripe, that perhaps only a historical gamer would find, a horned helmet.



For a suite of models meant for the historical gamer and not fantasy this was a pretty glaring inclusion that I always modify. Horned helmets were a way to make Vikings appear like devils/demons in literature, not something they ran around wearing in battle. There is one other problem with the heads,

but we will come to that later. That said, pound for pound the selection is quite good, the weapons are all much closer to realistically scaled than any other historical manufacturer (one of the benefits of plastic over metal, and something I've come to really like about WGF's various ranges).

The body and arm sprues come with 4 bodies and a whole host of arms. The detail, like the heads, is a bit shallow, but again this is perhaps more realistic than most other models, so this is not really a negative, just a stylistic difference. Overall the proportions are generally very good. The thickness of arms compared to hands, legs, torsos, etc., avoids many of the giant hands/ heads issues other manufacturers have. I have Perry, Artizan, Crusader, Foundry, Gripping Beast, Warlord, and other historical metal minis and I find the WGF proportions to be quite refreshing (different, as they are generally much more slender than other companies, even other plastic makers). That said, they won't look horribly out of place mixed in with other company minis.

There are some negatives with the bodies/arms. The mail on the arms is all much too short. It should come down to the elbow, and some arms should be full sleeve. Instead, the mail looks more like Roman Lorrica Hammata, with sleeves that barely cover the shoulders/very upper most arm. I could forgive having a few arms like this, but all arms that way coupled with how shallow the detail is, means there is no way of extending the mail to proper lengths. The other big issue, is the neck socket lacks the neces-



sary depth to mount the heads. The heads all have long necks with a rounded end. This is intended to sit in the torso socket but if you mount them straight out your soldiers will look like giraffes. This means you have to carve the necks down, which invariably means putty work to hide this/make a smooth transition into the torso. It can make for a lot of work.

As mentioned, I purchased some Ancient German arms/bodies so that I could add in some berserkers into my warband.

While these men certainly weren't impervious, and Saga berserkers have a very low defense in the rules, they were frenzied and aggressive. This posed all kinds of problems. First, the Hammer of the Gods heads are much too large for the Ancient German bodies. WGF seems to have almost no consistency between lines in terms of scale. If you look to the left

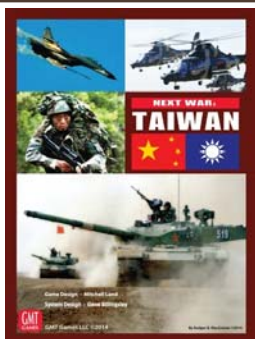
you can see that the Ancient German on the left is significantly shorter than the Saxon/Viking on the right. This is even with the larger head and me adding on a fur cloak. They are off a full base thickness (both models are in a similar stance, so one can't even use that as an excuse). This is a crying shame, and means I had to sculpt fur cloaks onto them so that it would hide the size disparity.

In conclusion you get a lot of options and ability to customize for your money. The models will fit in with other manufacturers, and if you are a real stickler they are better proportioned in general. The downside is that some of the key components don't fit well together and will require fiddling. The shallow detail, OK in some places, also becomes too shallow in others (i.e., the beards on the heads, can often lose all detail at certain angles, perhaps appropriate for the scale, but it makes the models feel poorly designed at times). I also would have preferred longer mail for the arms and perhaps some more esoteric braids/beards like Vikings were famous for. Still these were extremely good value for the money. If you want to get into Saga, but don't want to drop a lot of money these sets are an excellent way to go, just be prepared that it will take a bit of work to make them measure up to their potential.

# GMT's Next War: Taiwan

## Game Review

With the success of GMT's Next War: Korea, designer Mitchell Land now takes us to another possible future war hotspot: Taiwan. In what is clearly an emerging series of games, this second volume is not only the next logical choice, but it also upgrades the system that was used in NW: Korea.



The first thing that you notice is that the box is much heavier than your standard GMT game. This becomes self explanatory once you open the box and begin sorting through the components! First, there is a well done 22 x 34 map of the island of Taiwan, which clearly shows that most of the objectives are going to be along the coasts. Then there are three sheets of very nice counters to represent all of the combat units, squadrons of aircraft, support, and markers that will be used in the game. On top of this there is the series rulebook, a specific game rulebook with scenarios, plus a stack of combat charts, tables, displays, and a map of the South China Sea used for naval movement. Yes, there's a lot and there really is nothing to complain about.

As could be expected of any type of modern warfare type game, the units involved are going to need a wide array of ratings and here is where NW: Taiwan starts to get a bit complex. Units are rated for not only combat, but movement type and quality. Air units have various symbols for stealth, stand off attacks, wild-weasels, etc., so the gamer needs to spend some time going over the various units and what they do, especially if you're planning on playing the advanced game.

Fortunately, you do have a choice in what type of game that you play. For those who are pressed for time or are new to the series, the basic game is definitely a classic hex and counter type affair. The rules cover movement, combat, supply, and are fairly easy to digest. The air portion of the game is simplified by using a system of air points that can be used for combat. Since this is an invasion, there are the usual rules about airborne drops, amphibious landings, follow on forces, etc., and this takes up a large part of the basic game rules.

For those of you who want a little more than the basic game and want to delve into the deeper aspects of modern warfare, then the advanced game is for you. This adds in headquarters, a more complex supply system, naval units and combat, clearing operations, and much, much more. This will add another hour or two of rules reading, looking over charts and tables, plus going through the game specific rules to make sure that you remembered everything. You quickly see that this is an entirely new game compared to the basic game.

Then there's the air system, which could be a game unto itself and in fact, one of the advanced scenarios is just played using the air displays! Each turn both sides check for their ready aircraft and send them on missions, which could be air superiority, strike (anti-ship, airfields, HQs, etc.), escort, and wild weasel missions. The air campaign greatly dictates the pace of the ground campaign and there are a large number of decisions each turn regarding the allocation of air assets.

Add in rules about international posture for the U.S. and Japan, plus the units of other countries in the region and you have quite the complex game. Although it sounds like a lot and no one plays it right the first time, there is a pattern of familiarity with the rules as you go through them and after a few turns things become much easier. Learning the naval operations, land-

ings, and the air system take the longest, but once mastered they become fairly routine.

There are several basic scenarios and a full campaign that cover various landing possibilities. It's my suggestion that someone new to the system try one of these smaller scenarios first to grasp the system, then the full basic campaign before moving to the advanced game. The advanced game is going to definitely take some time, especially getting used to the sequence of play. For those with too much time on their hands, there are rules to join this game with NW: Korea for a massive slugfest covering the Korean Peninsula and the South China Sea.

The game, however, plays very good and is a challenge for both players. For the Chinese side trying to find a landing spot, covering it with airborne and airmobile forces, then trying to get follow on



units to the island is a challenge. Now on top of all that add on the air campaign, allied intervention, operations in the South China Sea, etc., and you have quite the complicated mess! Both sides have advantages and disadvantages, which are clearly presented here and there are few surprises. The game also has very good replay value as there are a number of strategies that could be employed by both sides.

To sum it up, this is a very good game in a great series. It is a tad bit complex, but if you stick with it you will be rewarded by some good game play. Although not the cheapest board game out there by any means, it is certainly worth the money and I am already looking forward to Next War: India vs. Pakistan.

196A	296A	3	103B	108B	117B	136B	137B	137B
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147B	148B	149B	150B	151B	152B	153B	154B	155B
4-3-6 2-2-4	4-3-6 2-2-4	4-3-6 2-2-4	4-3-6 2-2-4	4-3-6 1-1-4	4-3-6 2-2-6	4-3-6 2-2-6	4-3-6 1-1-6	4-3-6 1-2-6
156B	157B	158B	159B	160B	161B	162B	163B	164B
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165B	166B	167B	168B	169B	170B	171B	172B	173B
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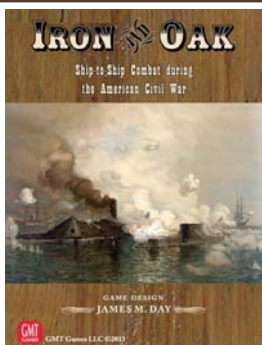


When it comes to ACW gaming, the naval aspect is usually left far behind the myriad of games that have been published about Gettysburg, Antietam, Shiloh, and other battles. One of the few that I can think of was Yaquinto's Ironclads, which is still well thought of even after almost 35 years since its publication. While the land battles, strategic operations, etc., are far more popular, the naval war was also interesting, but usually downplayed by gamers.

GMT and designer James M. Day have attempted to rectify that with the release of Iron & Oak, which is a board game about river battles during the ACW. Having only played miniatures battles of this nature and having looked at, but never played Ironclads, I purchased the game, hoping to fill a gap in my ACW collection.

The one thing that you can always count on from GMT is high quality components and that is no different here. You get a fairly bland map that is in a blue color and broken into grids, which are used to regulate movement and firing. However, that is about the only average part of the overall component package. There are ship counters for both Union and Confederate fleets, dozens of ship data cards, action cards, movement cards, a rule book, playbook/scenario guide, and finally two reference cards with most of the needed charts and tables on them. Overall, another well done job by GMT on the components and there's not much to complain about here.

The rules are fairly straightforward and early on you definitely get the impression that this is not going to be a "rivet counting" type detailed naval simulation. Many ironclad and sailing ship rules do have the habit of getting almost too detailed, which is not a problem here. The rules



themselves are around a dozen pages, with further explanations of the cards and damage counters, but you can easily learn the movement and combat phases in less than 15 minutes. The playbook also has a great description of a battle, which helps the reader to understand the overall system quickly.

Once you understand the concept of opposed die rolls that the game engine uses, everything falls into place quickly. At the start of each turn each player sets out one of four maneuvering cards for each ship that the player controls. Each player can then assign repair parties to deal with damage to their ships, which while it will hopefully repair the damage, makes maneuvering and combat more difficult. Each player then tries to maneuver and engage in combat with the enemy forces.

To move or fire you basically need to roll a die or series of dice, depending upon the ships ratings. Your opponent will also roll a die or dice to block your actions. For example, if you're movement rating is 8-6 that means that you would roll a D8 and a D6, taking the highest roll while your opponent may roll a D8 or D10. If your roll is the highest then you are able to complete the maneuver.

The same system works for combat, where as in the card image on the left you have a D8 for firing. You roll that plus another die for location while your opponent rolls a die or dice depending upon the armor at that location. The result determines if you score a hit and/or critical hits on the enemy ship. Simple, effective, and the different types of critical hits make for an interesting part of the game. Once your total hits exceed the ship's rating, it is sunk. There are also rules for ramming and torpedo

attacks as well.

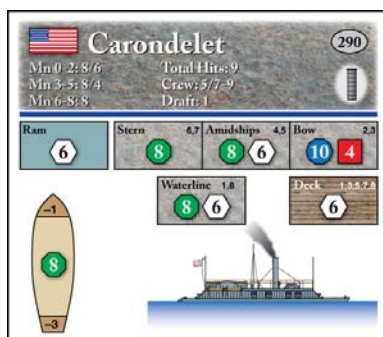
While I have only covered the movement and combat systems, there are also rules for forts, shoals, fouling, and pretty much anything else that you can think of in a naval game from this era. All of it is explained well and while there isn't a great deal of detail, the effect is present. I should also mention that each player receives a handful of cards that can be played during the game that increase combat effectiveness, limit your opponents maneuvering, increase chances for critical hits, and more. This is not a card driven game as the cards just add a little more randomness to the action.

There are around a dozen scenarios, ranging from one on one ship encounters to full fledged battles with forts. Most games will take under two hours, so you can quickly set up another scenario and it is highly suitable for group play. There is

a fascinating campaign system that I have yet to play which uses its own deck of cards. From going over the details it appears as if it could be used for many miniatures rules as well.

Overall, this is a hard game to rate and I liken it to GMT's Nightfighter, which I reviewed several issues ago. An interesting theme that most gamers don't know a lot about, fast playing, well done components, easy to get into rules, and lots of scenario possibilities. So, what's not to like?

For one thing there is a lot of die rolling, so luck plays a huge factor here. You may have the greatest naval tactics in the world, but if you can't roll higher than your opponent your ship isn't even going to move! Also, after a few turns you don't even care if your ship is an ironclad, sailing vessel, or a yacht. In fact, there is little flavor other than the names and flag symbols on the ship data cards. Having said all that, however, there is nothing inherently wrong with the game, but there is a sameness to it after awhile. If you're into fast playing naval games and ACW river battles, this is a very good choice.



## Engagement 7: Airport Assault

**Situation:** The opening of a war between Red and Blue features a Red airborne/heliborne assault against a heavily defended airfield in Blue territory. Red wishes to use the airbase as a staging area for follow on forces and to move air assets in to use the airfield for future operations.

**Period:** Designed primarily for the modern or Post WW2 periods.

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

**Terrain Notes:** The woods should be considered to be light woods. The airstrip runways and tarmac are flat, open terrain. The two large buildings next to the tarmac are considered to be large hangars. There should be several aircraft models represented on the tarmac next to the hangars and runway. The SAM positions should consist of a launcher and a radar unit, although for earlier periods (1950s, 60s, etc.) these could be represented by AA guns.

**Red Forces:** The following forces are either airdropped or arrive by transport helicopter on Turn 1:

6 units of airborne infantry

2 MG sections

2 Mortar sections

1 AT section

1 Engineer unit

1 airstrike on standby

Notes: While the infantry units may possess AT weapons, there is a dedicated AT section as well. The engineer unit is carrying sufficient explosives to knock out any target on the board. The airstrike is in accordance with the rules used and is to balance out the entrenched nature of Blue's forces or to even things out against the Blue QRF force. It is not meant to represent a large section of aircraft waiting in line for ground support each turn. It should be a one turn use type of asset.

**Red Orders:** Seize control of the Admin and Control Tower. Knock out the two SAM sites and damage or destroy the enemy aircraft on the tarmac.

**Blue Forces:** The airfield is defended by the following forces:

4 units of regular infantry

2 MG sections

1 Mortar section

**Reinforcements:** The QRF (Quick Reaction Force) consists of a platoon of three light armored vehicles and a platoon of trucks/AFVs with one infantry unit. It arrives according to the Set Up instructions.

**Blue Orders:** Defend the airfield and when the QRF arrives counterattack and defeat the airborne forces. The Control Tower and the Admin buildings are to be defended at all costs.

**Set Up:** Blue sets up all of the starting units anywhere on the board. Units not set up in buildings may begin in entrenchments/foxholes. The QRF arrives no earlier than Turn 3 and arrives when a 6 is rolled on 1D6, adding +1 for each turn that the die roll was not successful. Red begins the game entering the board either by airdrop or helicopter.

**Initiative:** Red is first each turn

**Game Length:** No set game length. Game ends when either Red accomplishes all of the objectives or declares that they are unable to do so.

**Special Rules:** The SAMs and radars are non-functional for D3 turns due to

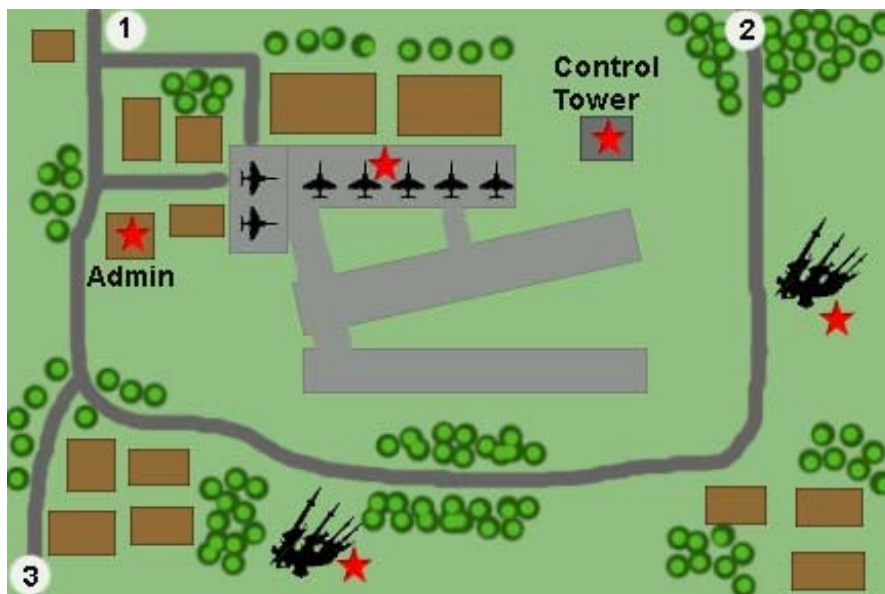
jamming and suppression. Once this time limit has lapsed, however, they are fully functional.

**Victory Conditions:** Red must accomplish all objectives, which are to seize the Admin and Control Tower buildings, knock out both SAM sites, and destroy the aircraft on the tarmac. Any other result is a Red defeat.

**Variants:** There are a large number of variants that could be used for this type of game. Although designed as primarily a skirmish or 1:1 type of game, rules with a larger ground/unit scale could be used. If the attackers are consistently having issues or the defenses look too tough to overcome during set up, allow the attacker to have multiple airstrikes to soften up the defenses or take out critical defensive positions.

The other variant could be that the scenario involves a raid instead of an assault and capture type of game. In this scenario Red would have to do as much damage as possible, then withdraw off of one of the three road exits to be picked up later by helicopters or vehicles.

Historical or semi-historical actions could also be fought such as Entebbe or Grenada which were actual operations. Other ideas would have been an SAS raid at Port Stanley, the Eclipse drops on Berlin, or future war actions in the Baltics or South China Sea.





## Engagement 8: Relief of a Siege

**Situation:** Blue has one of Red's castle under siege. Although Blue was aware of Red sending a relief force the sooner than expected appearance of this force has taken Blue by surprise. Blue must assemble a defense quickly to prevent Red from either reinforcing the castle or forcing Blue to quit the siege.

**Period:** Designed primarily for the Ancient or Horse & Musket periods.

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

**Terrain Notes:** The woods should be considered to be light woods. The road leads through a pass that is formed by the two hills. Both hills are not that steep and should only incur a modest movement penalty. The fortifications are facing the castle and offer no protection to any force on the opposite side. The village is made up of both wood and stone buildings. The castle needs to be represented as an area on the corner of the board and it's up to the players to decide the size depending upon the terrain that is available and the size of the game board.

**Red Forces:** The following forces are deployed in the red outlined area marked A on the map:

- 10 units of infantry
- 3 units of cavalry
- 1 unit of light infantry
- 2 batteries of artillery

**Red Orders:** Exit as many units as possible off the opposite road entrance near the castle (simulates forces moving into the besieged castle). Failing that, defeat Blue's forces and force them from the field, thus relieving the siege.

**Blue Forces:** Blue's forces are split into four groups:

- 1) Blocking Force-two infantry units on the hills and one cavalry unit on the road between the hills.
- 2) Reinforcing Column-three units of infantry and one artillery battery deployed on the road in column.
- 3) Army Reserve-two units of infantry and one cavalry unit.

- 4) Besieging Force-two units of infantry and one of cavalry.

**Blue Orders:** Prevent Red's forces from breaking through to the castle. Force Red to quit the battlefield, thus sealing the fate of the besieged castle.

**Set Up:** Blue sets up their forces according to their group number outlined in the Forces section. The units on the road in group #2 must be set up in column, but all other forces can be set up using any formation and/or facing.

**Initiative:** Red is first each turn

**Game Length:** No set game length. Game ends when either Red accomplishes all of the objectives or declares that they are unable to do so.

**Special Rules:** If at any time Blue takes two or more units out of the siege fortifications to fight Red's relieving force, a Red infantry unit appears at the road entrance near the castle. This represents Red sallying forth to meet the relieving force.

**Victory Conditions:** Red must drive Blue from the field or force Blue to withdraw, thus ending the siege. If Red is unable to do so, then there is still a chance of victory if Red can reinforce the castle. Once the game has determined to have ended (Red is forced to withdraw or quit the field), Blue rolls 2D6 and on a 4 or higher wins the game. For each Red

infantry, cavalry, or artillery unit that exits the road near the castle, Blue subtracts 1 from the die roll total. *For example, Red gets two units into the castle before they are forced to withdraw. If Blue rolls a 6 or higher on two dice Blue wins.*

**Variants:** There are a large number of variants that could be used for this type of game. The first would be to vary the size of both the attacking and defending forces, as well as expand the game to where it was a full siege. This way the defender would have to decide how many forces would need to be taken from the siege lines to stop the relieving force. The other variant is to put a time limit on the relieving force so that it is rushed for time and cannot take forever in the battle near the castle. If they have not relieved the castle by a set turn then the castle is assumed to have been overrun.

Another variant would be for the defending force to be fully deployed and the attacking force allowed to be set up along the entire length of the board on the side that they would normally set up on. Red would need some additional units and/or some kind of opening bombardment to even things out.

Finally, Napoleonic or ACW forces could be used, but these periods often don't work well with these kinds of siege scenarios, although modifications could be made.



Although we've been playing Warmaster Ancients and Medieval for quite some time, we've never tried a siege. I think the main reason is trying to assemble all of the required items necessary to do that kind of a game. You need walls, towers, siege engines, lots of infantry, etc., and it ends up being quite the challenge. On top of that, siege games are sort of unusual and they certainly don't appeal to everyone.

It took me about six months to assemble and paint all of the castle pieces. I used the JR 10mm fantasy castle parts as I already had some and was able to acquire some extra pieces through TMP and Ebay. Had I known that there are now several other firms offering very nice 10mm castles I would have went that route instead.

I then used the very nice 10mm siege equipment from Old Glory for the attacking forces (see the review elsewhere in this issue), but I couldn't find anyone who offered 10mm earthworks, which I found highly unusual as there are large ranges of Napoleonic and ACW figs available in this scale. I also had to make some boiling oil and ladder tokens for both sides. Finally, after a lot of painting and scheduling delays, we were ready for our first game.

We went with 1800 points for the Saracens and 1200 for the Crusaders, which is the recommended ratio of forces in the rules. The Saracens had a range of options for their siege works and chose five units of earthworks (allows units to

start closer to the walls), one trebuchet, three mangonels (light artillery), three siege towers, one battering ram, and ten ladders (bought per unit). Most of this was dictated by what I had available! The Crusaders had several pots of boiling oil deployed along the walls, three mangonels, some barricades to improve the gate defenses, and some repairs to fix battered sections of the outer works.

After determining the damage to the walls and towers, the attack commenced. We quickly learned that the trebuchets don't do much and need to be deployed in numbers larger than one! The light artillery scored a few successes, but they needed to be followed up by attacks. The Saracen attacks were plagued by terrible command rolls where they simply couldn't even get the siege towers moving in the right direction. The few attackers that made it to the walls were in single units and were driven back by archery, light artillery, and boiling oil.

Finally, one of the towers was damaged and the Saracens were able to get several units and towers up to the walls. By this time things had not been looking good for the Saracens, but in the interest of seeing how fighting worked on the ramparts, we let the game proceed. There was some desperate attacks by ladder and siege tower that was successful, but in several places the Crusaders attacked and forced the Saracens back over the walls. When we called the game the Saracens had a foothold on the walls, but were rapidly nearing their break point.



very good on the table and is an interesting break from the regular WMA/WMM type of battles that we usually fight. For one thing it plays much differently than your regular WMA game, so it took us a few turns to figure out what was going on. Also, that section of the rules seemed to be added on at the last moment as several of the sections weren't fleshed out, important parts of the rules are buried in hard to find spots, and we had a lot of questions.

The one thing that we did learn, however, is that you need a LOT of infantry. There's no need for cavalry here, so both sides need to do a lot of painting and most of that won't be able to be used in your regular army lists unless that army needs that kind of quantity of infantry. The other thing is that you need a wide assortment of siege equipment. To save time I picked out the army lists, but someone else might have chosen things differently, say for example, taking five siege towers or more trebuchets. The issue with that is someone will have to buy and paint them so that both sides have a good selection.

Overall, it was a long and difficult project that seemed to pay off at the end. Siege games are difficult to do properly, but the game looked good and everyone wants to try it again, so that's a good sign! Now it's back to getting more wall sections, creating more damaged sections, finding more siege equipment, and painting more infantry for the next big siege game.



The game looked





Several views of the siege showing the Saracen attack. Bad command rolls prevented the Saracens from hitting the walls all at once, so the attacks came in piecemeal, which allowed the Crusaders to launch several effective counterattacks. The siege rules are very different from the regular WMA rules, so it took us a few turns to get the hang of things.



Over the last few years two of my favorite games have been The Caucasus Campaign and Ardennes '44, both by Mark Simonitch and GMT Games. When I saw that the second edition of Ukraine '43 was finally out and my eternal love for East Front games, it was a no-brainer that I needed to own this. With Mark Simonitch being the designer, GMT produced components, a desperate East Front situation, and plenty of armor units on both sides, how could a gamer go wrong?

The standard sized GMT box contains two large maps, around two sheets of counters, several charts and set up cards, plus the rules. The components are up to the usual GMT quality and there is very little to complain about. The two maps are very well done and show Army Group South's operational area in late summer of 1943. The counters have a wide array of formations, with divisions for the Germans and corps level units for the Russians. There are also Tiger battalions, assault gun units, plus a host of markers for the game.

The rules are fairly easy to get into and anyone who has played some of Mark's other games will quickly see that he uses the familiar "hex-bond" ZOC system, which does take some getting



used to if this is your first time seeing it. The sequence of play is straightforward and one only needs to really focus on combat, advances, mobile assaults, and retreats as this is really the heart of the system. There is some chrome, such as rules for Russian tank armies, German armor quality, Manstein and Zhukov, railroad expansion, etc., but these are easily added on and I rarely had to refer back to them during play.

Basically, you check for weather, receive replacements and reinforcements, move, conduct combat, check for supply, remove disruption markers, then the other player does the same for their turn. The game plays much faster than this would indicate as there is not a lot of combat each turn. Combat is odds based, with modifiers for fortifications, terrain, armor, German quality, air support, and finally the Russians have various artillery barrages that can shift the odds.

Combat is odds based, with modifiers for fortifications, terrain, armor, German quality, air support, and finally the Russians have various artillery barrages that can shift the odds.

What's different than most wargames are the combat results. When units retreat they are disrupted, which means that they can't move very far or conduct combat on their turn. There is an option to conduct a determined defense, which is

often necessary to hold a vital stretch of the line, but there is usually a cost in doing so. Most units have two steps with the armored formations having three, but the replacement schedule comes nowhere near making up the losses. Depending upon the result, some units can then mobile assault adjacent units in the advance hex, which can set off large breakthroughs and/or create gaps in the defenses.

Both sides have numerous challenges at the start of either scenario one or

the campaign game. The Germans are in a belt of fortifications across the entire front and behind rivers on most of it. The Russians can pick where and when they want to attack to achieve a breakthrough. However, there is a victory point schedule that the Russians need to be aware of, so they need to continually move forward or risk losing the game. The Russians launch several major attacks, get across the rivers or through the fortifications in several places, and then the fun begins.

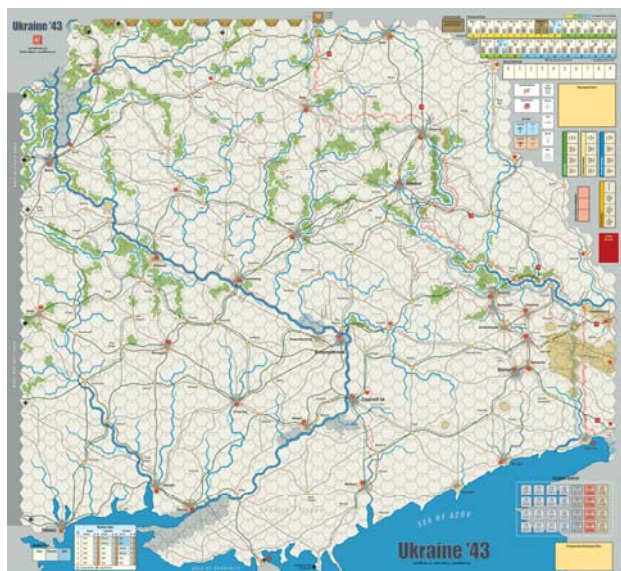
The Germans have by the end of the game close to 20 panzer and panzergrenadier divisions, which are pretty nasty in game terms. They continually shift from



threatened sector to threatened sector, delivering punishing blows to the Russians who have ventured out a bit too far. Slowly and surely, however, they get ground down and the German infantry has fewer and fewer steps available to plug the gaps. The Russians, meanwhile, continue to shift and attack where the panzers aren't, thus generating new crisis points for the Germans.

At some point the Germans will need to fall back to the safety of the Dnieper and await the final Russian assaults. Of course, when to leave, who should be sacrificed, etc., are all decisions that will need to be made. The combat system definitely forces both sides to make some difficult choices about when to retreat, when to die in place, how far to advance, and how far should an offensive be pushed.

If you're an East Front junkie or just looking for a really, really good operational level wargame then look no further. There are three scenarios that cover the various stages of the game in around 8 turn increments, plus the campaign game. The system is very challenging and the situation is desperate for both sides. My highest recommendation.





# Need Melee/Wizard Adventures? A Review of Dark City Games

After my Melee redesign article in the last issue, I thought it would be interesting to review some adventures that can be used with that game and its companion, Wizard.

As I have often commented in these pages over the years, Metagaming's Melee and Wizard are not only two of my favorite fantasy board games, but they are ideal for medieval era/fantasy skirmish combat.

Metagaming also put out a number of solitaire adventures for use with Melee and Wizard. Unfortunately, they now go for a small fortune on Ebay. While Death Test was one of my favorites, I can't see dropping \$50-75 on a copy for a small B&W booklet! While Melee and Wizard are fun as a standalone games, to my mind it was the adventures that really made these little gems stand out.

This led me on a search for adventures that could not only be used for these games, but for solitaire play as well, since it was doubtful I could find too many others who were interested in this. One of the first web sites to come up was a company called Dark City Games.

Not only did they seem to have solo adventures for fantasy, but also for sci-fi and western settings as well, plus rules for all of the periods that they support. In fact, the rules are available free as PDFs that you can download to see if you're

interested in this type of gaming.

What really drew my interest, however, were the fantasy adventures. I had read through their rules, which are called Legends of the Ancient World, and saw that they were very similar to Melee and Wizard with a few changes. The good thing is that you can use their rules or use Melee/Wizard without too many issues. The titles sounded interesting, the artwork looked good, and the counters looked like they were in the style of Melee/Wizard. There was a lot to like here, but the \$12.95 price plus shipping gave me pause. I routinely spend \$40-80 for a boxed game all the time, so I have no idea why I hesitated other than I was used to paying \$2.95 for the adventures back in the day!

So I ordered Shadows in the Dark and instantly saw that they probably could have charged me \$20 for this and I would still have been happy. The module comes with everything that you need for the adventure. There is a tactical map, a sheet of counters for the adventurers and each person/creature that you will meet along the way. The booklet not only contains the adventure, but the Legends of the Ancient World rules as well, which is a smart move on this company's part. There is really no need to own Melee and/or Wizard at all as their rules are a perfectly suitable replacement. I had barely even started Shadows when I went and ordered a second adventure, The Crown of Kings.

It was my misfortune to having chosen one of the toughest modules that they have for my first one! The adventurers are off on a quest through a pretty nasty part of the world and the challenges that you face are pretty tough. One of the things that I liked so much about the Metagaming solo adventures is that they were tough, unyielding, and showed no mercy. Well, this has been carried forward with these adventures! You need to think shrewdly, conserve your strength for the fights ahead, and any rash, charge into battle types are going to die quickly.

For the uninitiated, these are paragraph style adventures, where you are given a series of choices which lead you

to other paragraphs. At times things can seem as if they are going around in circles, but you will eventually move forward. Both of the adventures that I purchased were actually much longer and more involved than I thought that they would be. Also, both adventures were completely different in theme, scope, enemies, and goals, which was good to see as they are not using some kind of standard template for each adventure.

Are there things that need to be worked on? Yes. Only a few of the listings on the site provide information if the adventure is for beginner, intermediate, or advanced characters. The maps that



you receive are playable, but they could use an upgrade and it would be helpful if they sold a generic tactical map for the times where you don't need the terrain, locations, etc. used in the paragraph. Also, some of the rules, set up, etc., need some additional info and a reference card that could be downloaded with all of the appropriate tables for weapons, armor, spells, etc., would be greatly appreciated.

However, these are small things and in no way take away from the enjoyment of running through these adventures. Another big plus is that you can easily play this with more than one player or even as a group. The system is perfect for those looking for some fantasy adventure and combat without having to become reinvested in a complex, ongoing RPG affair. Overall, I definitely like what I'm seeing from this company and for the price you can't beat it. I would encourage anyone with a passing interest in this type of gaming to order an adventure and give it a try.



# The Boxer Rebellion by Diana Preston

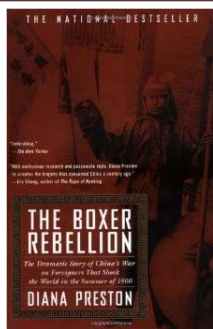
## Book Review

As a huge fan of colonial wargaming I have always been quite curious about the Boxer Rebellion. Besides the colorful setting, it was one of the few times in history where many nations banded together against a common threat. It also featured a wide range of forces and vastly different fighting styles. Over the years I've read several books on this interesting campaign, but this book by Diana Preston provided a wealth of new information.

The book begins by chronicling the situation in China before the Boxers rose up against the foreign contingents. The economic situation, the areas controlled by the foreign powers, and a look at the missionaries throughout the interior of the country area described in vivid detail. One can clearly see that there was conflict coming and it was amazing that so few, including many who had served in China for quite some time, failed to see it.

There is also an extensive section on the Empress Dowager and the political situation in China at that time. The intrigues of the court, political ties, sexual preferences, etc., give excellent insight into how things worked in China. The situation with the Emperor is also explained and how that would affect the coming uprising. To say that China had a large number of problems that were going to manifest themselves in one way or the other would be a mild understatement. The author does a good job of explaining the complex situation in a few chapters.

Naturally, the rise of the Boxers is dealt with and their attacks on missionaries, which is what begins the uprising. Slowly and surely the reader learns of their growing numbers, their political affiliations, and the threat that they pose to foreigners in China. The tension continues to build as more and more reports begin to come into the legations, which finally leads the ministers to ask for reinforcements. At this stage the book begins to focus on the situation in Peking.



Peking as this time had several legations in the city, which were similar to the foreign embassies seen today, that were clustered together. With the arrival of a few hundred troops the book shifts to the outbreak of violence and the siege of Peking. This is definitely the most associated event with the Boxer Rebellion, so the author spends a large amount of time going over the various personalities, the defense situation, the various forces, and the ministers trapped in the legations. This makes for some interesting reading, especially the details provided by many of the survivors. Rather than the heroic legends that are usually written about, this is a no holds barred judgment on those who were there at the siege.

Once the siege of Peking begins the action then switches to Admiral Seymour's relief expedition, which had a ton of problems by itself. The composition of the force, the cutting of the rail line, and their retreat make for interesting reading. The book then shifts back and forth from Peking to the coast where the relief forces try to get themselves organized for a push towards the city.



Unfortunately, you don't learn much about events in the rest of the country as the book settles down to go over life in Peking during the siege. There are several first person accounts on everything that occurred, ranging from the ferocious Japanese counterattacks to what the higher class besieged ate for dinner. The defense of the legations is discussed in great detail as well as the various personalities that played a leading role in the siege.

Finally, the relief force marches towards the city and again the author does a good job of explaining the difficulties of commanding this large, multi-cultured force. The approach to the city, the break in, and the triumphant link up with the

legations make for one of the most exciting chapters or two in the book. The book ends with the flight of the Imperial Court and its return, what happened to most of the primary characters, and some final thoughts.

After reading this book I will certainly have a hard time watching *55 Days at Peking* again! Many of the characters (even those loosely based upon history) portrayed in the movie weren't very good or capable people in real life. Hopefully a new movie on the subject will come out some day that will at least attempt to be a bit closer to history.



In terms of gaming this period this book pretty much ended any plans I had for getting into this era. First, there just weren't that many interesting battles and this comes to light in

the book. Second, the Chinese forces were hopelessly outclassed, despite their numbers, operating in their home country, etc. You would have to so skew any rules for the period as to make the game nearly unplayable. Finally, only the Japanese, Russian, and U.S. forces are worthy of any redeeming praise in this era with most of the other nations forces being not very good at all. I had already suspected most of this from my other readings, but those who have only paid attention to the Osprey book on the subject are in for a rude awakening.

While this is not the first book I've read on the subject, it definitely is the only one that has not been afraid to "tell it like it is". Rather than the glorious campaign where the world's nations joined as one to defeat the Boxers, you get a brutal assessment of the failings of pretty much everyone involved. From the Russian and Japanese obsession with killing everything in sight to the incompetence of the foreign ministers to the suffering of those besieged, there is enough tragedy here to fill several volumes. I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in the period as it is definitely eye opening.



## Trenchworx 28mm WW2 Tanks

## Product Review

After completing their very well received and successful Kickstarter program for World War One tanks, Trenchworx has now started to delve into World War Two. Although you would think by now there are more than enough offerings of WW2 tanks for gamers in every scale imaginable, Trenchworx has found a few things that most gamers don't have!

Besides just starting their latest Kickstarter, Tanks in Manchuria, Trenchworx has released some interesting items, including the Finnish BT-42 and the Russian T-28, both of which are pictured here. On top of that they have a BT-7, Jagdpanther, a Sherman Calliope turret, FT-17, and several guns for their first offerings.

I received the Finnish BT-42 and Russian T-28 for review. The first thing that you notice upon opening both of them is that there are only a few parts in each one. This is



great for gamers who are usually interested in getting the models together quickly and then onto the tabletop! The parts have very good detail and can definitely hold their own with more than their share of 1/56th scale models out there right now and compare favorably to many plastic models I've built.

The second thing that you notice is that the parts fit together very, very well. There is definitely some new methods for assembly being tried out here and

for whatever reason, they work. The models can be assembled quickly, there's few questions about what goes where, and you can have a good looking model sitting in front of you in no time at all.

The material used for the tanks take paint very well. I used black primer on the T-28 shown here and it had no issues drying and then taking another layer on top of it. The



detail on the models themselves are ideal for dry brushing and in the end the final result is well worth the money that they are charging for each model.

Are there any problems? Not many. A painting guide with each kit might be a god thing to include as well as maybe some extra parts for stowage, variants, etc., even if it meant charging a few dollars more. Other than that there's not much room for complaints. I'm looking forward to more models from this company and hopefully they'll move into the modern era someday.

## Old Glory 10mm Siege Equipment

## Product Review

In preparation for our first Warmaster siege, which was reported earlier in this issue, I needed quite a selection of siege equipment. Fortunately, Old Glory does offer several items in their 10mm Ancients range. With the 40% OG Army card most of these items are a very good deal and you can get a good selection for under \$50.

To start off with I ordered a few siege towers, a battering ram, a trebuchet, and some mangonels. First off, the siege towers and battering rams are mostly resin with a few metal parts, while the trebuchet and mangonels are entirely metal. The detail on them, especially the towers and battering ram are pretty good, especially for

this scale.

The assembly isn't too bad, but be warned that there are no instructions that



I could find anywhere, so I had to look at pictures on the OG site! The towers are straightforward, but the holes for the wheels needed to be drilled out a little more. The trebuchet was very difficult to build and needs a lot of super glue, but came out pretty good in the end.

Overall, there is a good selection and the price can't be beaten. My only concern is that the siege towers and maybe the trebuchet seemed to be almost 15mm and dwarf the 10mm walls and towers that I have. I didn't get a chance to order any of the siege engineers, so maybe a few of them added here and there would have helped out on the visual appeal of the models.

# Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 27

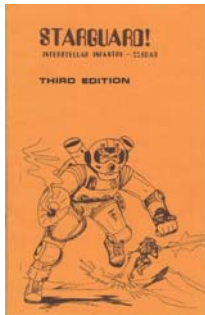
## What is it About Sci-Fi Ground Combat?

My first introduction to sci-fi ground combat in gaming was the old Starguard system, which is still fondly remembered even today. The unusual races, particularly at that time in the hobby, created a level of excitement and interest that you didn't see every day back then. Sci-fi gaming was in its infancy, so anything that came out was treated like royalty!

After that there was a really talented gamer in our area who had a range of 15mm sci-fi troops (I believe they were the old Ral Partha line that was produced in limited quantities) who ran boarding actions on ships, planetary raids, and more. It opened my eyes to several things about sci-fi ground combat; 1) there was more than one scale, 2) you could use any rules that you wanted, and 3) both 1 and 2 were going to be problems that would dog me to this day!

In fact, those were the primary problems as the sci-fi part of the hobby experienced rapid growth in the early 80s and then into the 90s with Warhammer 40K. There were so many figure ranges, scales, and rules coming out that it was an exciting time in the hobby, but it was hard to get a grip on where it was going. Trying to find players wasn't too difficult, but trying to find players who had the same range of figures, scale, and rules was.

In fact, it first happened with the release of Stryker. Up to that point you either played Starguard, the Superior Models system (I found it too simplistic), or you modified RPG systems for your sci-fi ground combat games. Here was a full set of sci-fi rules specifically designed for a range of figures that looked pretty good. While Stryker had some great ideas, good presentation, etc., the rules were actually a bit complex, took a lot of prep work, and the figures designed for it never even got a quarter of the way finished.



So then it was onto other things, including battles using Gamma World, Star Frontiers, miniatures conversions for all kinds of other rules, and even some home grown sets, which actually weren't too bad. The thing is that gamers are suckers for sci-fi ground combat and will gravitate towards almost anything new. The problem as always was trying to find something that everyone could coalesce around.

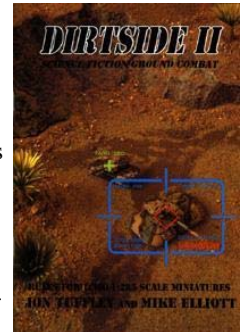
From there we were into the Star Wars Miniatures combat for awhile and amassed quite a few miniatures, but that universe seemed to have some unusual limitations and everything seemed the same after awhile. Then we got into WH40K as most gamers did, which set off almost a decade of sci-fi gaming that ranged from skirmishes with our 28mm stuff to gigantic battles with the epic system to Space Hulk. I've written about our GW phase before, so no need to rehash this again. Suffice to say, we thought we had found the ultimate sci-fi system.

However, as the armies got sillier and sillier, the eternal rules changes, the costs of the figures, etc., it was time to move on again and sci-fi ground combat for the first time went way down the line of priorities. I think at some point this happens to all hobbies where something that you really like takes a backseat to either life or other interests, even within a hobby that you are involved in. For a long time I didn't even give sci-fi ground combat a passing thought.

Upon further reflection I think it was the fact that I had tried about two dozen sets of rules, painted hundreds of figures, fought a ton of battles, and really had nothing to show for it. No one could agree on what rules to use or figures for that matter, but there was also a large amount of high quality historical miniatures coming out and so our attention turned in that direction.

It wasn't that there wasn't anything available. There were seemingly hundreds of Battletech figures and two of us briefly explored Heavy

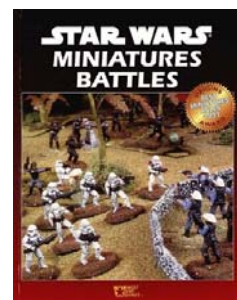
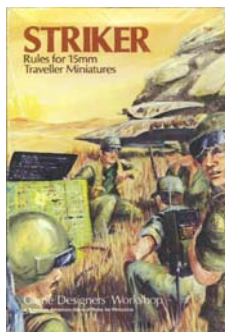
Gear, which had very cool miniatures and a great back story, but the rules were not very good. Towards the end of the 90s I spent several hundred dollars on armies for Dirtsides II and we played a few scenarios. Dirtsides II was very similar to Command Decision 2, which we played heavily at that time. The problem was that those kinds of rules (sort of complex) were going away as was the ability of the group's members to play 5-8 hours at a time.



Today, I have no sci-fi ground combat miniatures at all, nor any rules sitting on my shelf. That's not to say that I'm not interested in the subject, but rather afraid to get back into it. Dropzone Commander, Gates of Antares, and many more have beautiful figures, good looking rulebooks, and are probably fun to play. The issue is how much money and time will it cost me to get into it, who else can I count on to help with the project, and how long will the interest last before people move on to other things.

In that way sci-fi ground combat is very similar to fantasy miniatures gaming, where I've experienced similar issues. Both have incredible ranges of miniatures available, tons of rules, terrain, and so on, but I don't own anything in that aspect of the hobby either. I think that deep down, each gamer sees sci-fi and fantasy gaming differently. I want to see battalion level ground actions, but another in my group may only want to do boarding actions. Unlike Napoleonic or Ancients for example, where you can find some commonality, in sci-fi or fantasy gaming the differences can be vast. I

think that this perpetuates that ever continuing search for the right rules, scale, or setting, but it continually eludes us. I'm still looking, but as I get older it seems that the odds are shrinking that I'm going to be able to find something.





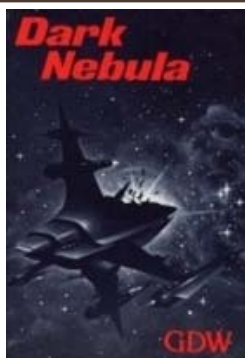
## Blast From The Past Pt. 26: Dark Nebula

### GDW's Dark Nebula

Way back in the day a wargame company called Game Designer's Workshop, or GDW, created a range of games called Series 120. The idea was to have a standard sized box, 120 counters, light to medium complexity rules, and the game could be completed in around 2 hours, hence the name. There were several games in this series with my favorite being 1941. Over the years the series had its supporters and detractors as the games weren't bad, but they weren't great either! Dark Nebula definitely fits that description.

Imperium was one of GDW's most beloved designs and still a favorite of mine after all of these years. So, how could GDW miss by putting out a smaller version of it in this series? Well, the answers are many as Dark Nebula isn't quite Imperium and most of that has to do with the self imposed limitations on the game series.

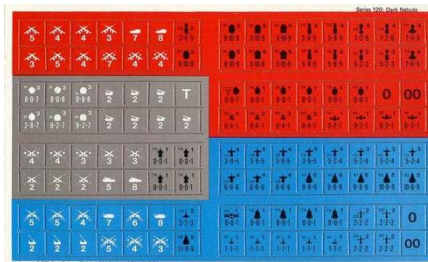
The first thing you notice is the maps, of which there are eight of them. The sections are geomorphic and form the backbone of the game. The warp lines, planet boxes, etc., are standard Imperium fare, but the maps can be changed around for each game, which gives Dark Nebula tremendous replay value. It is also perhaps, one of its greatest problems as the maps at time can form choke points and you end up using very little of the rest of



the planets or areas on the board.

The counters are also very similar to Imperium, with each counter rated for beams, missiles, and defense. The two main protagonists have slightly different ships, making selecting your fleets a bit of a challenge and there are quite a few strategies in the production phase of each turn. There are also some gray counters which represent neutrals that can be added as allies or mercenaries. The issue here again is that the one counter sheet limitation means that you only get so many ship types for each side, which severely limits your choices.

Dark Nebula follows the standard Imperium sequence of play with one side doing maintenance and production, movement and combat, the other side's reaction phase, then a second round of movement and combat. Simple in concept, but turns can take awhile if there are a lot of ships and/or ground combat. Each turn gives both sides ample opportunities to move forces, react, then move again to set up their next turn or to block an enemy's advance. Not quite cat and mouse, but one of continually seeking the best advantage. This is especially important since ships can move pretty much anywhere on the board during each movement phase.

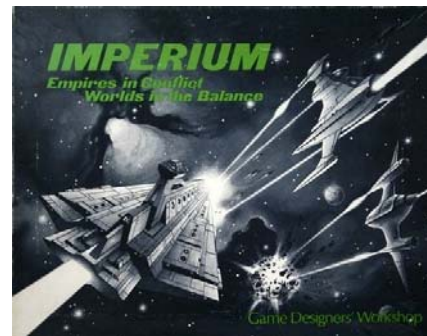
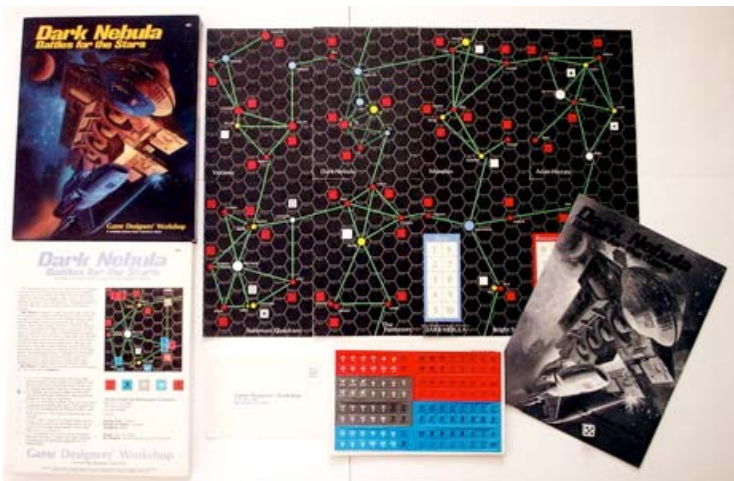


this is a critical part of combat. After each round both sides can continue combat or withdraw. Planetary combat consists of ground troops exchanging shots with each other as well as planetary defenses. Combat is quick and lethal, so you need to continue to capture worlds to get the points necessary to build and maintain new ships.

What sets Dark Nebula apart from Imperium are two things; neutrals and the nebula itself. Neutrals are randomly drawn at the start of the game and can turn into allies, then mercenaries by rolling on a chart. This adds a bit of flavor to the game, but it won't serious imbalance it. The nebula is a map where both sides can send exploration ships to seek out new jump routes as well as technologies. Again, this won't be the path to victory or defeat, but you can invest in this adventure and may be rewarded.

Overall, this is a good little game and certainly worthy of any Imperium fan's time. The varying map set up does give the game good replay value, so if you have a quick game you can set it up and try again with a different map combination. The counters do provide some limitations on forces and you can find at times the fleets battling over the same choke point for several turns. Is it a perfect game? Not by a longshot. GDW attempted to put a big package in a small box and it definitely feels that way at times. More counters, expanded rules for neutrals, a more permanent map board, etc., are all things that would have made this a better game. Still, I'm hanging onto it and will play it every now and then as well as Imperium.

Ship combat starts out at long range with missiles being exchanged simultaneously, then both sides determine if they want to go to short range or not where beams are used. With both sides having different advantages in weapon types



# Heroes of Normandie: Board Games Meets Miniatures

Board games with miniatures have been with the wargaming hobby for quite some time. Games like Space Hulk, Descent, and many others have used miniatures with board game mechanics, but it has usually been restricted to fantasy and sci-fi themes. You have also had numerous games such as Memoir '44, Battle Cry, etc., where the miniatures with the game merely serve as tokens, but not even close to what a true miniatures game would look like.

On top of that you have had a large number of WW2 miniatures rules come out over the last decade that include Bolt Action, Disposable Heroes, IABSM 3, Battlegroup Normandy, and too many others to mention here. Finally, WW2 tactical board games that include Combat Commander, Conflict of Heroes, ASL, ATS, and so on and so on. The board game and miniatures sides of the war-game hobby are swamped in WW2 tactical level games.

Into this crowded market comes a new game, Heroes of Normandie from Devil Pig games. At first glance Heroes of Normandie may tend to blend in with the other several thousand board games at your local game store. However, once you open the fairly heavy box your viewpoint quickly changes. Then, as you begin sifting through the components you



become certain that this is definitely one of those unusual items you see every now and then in the gaming hobby, with the unusual being in a good way.

For one thing there are a ton of components in the box. Several double sided, geomorphic game boards are the first items that greet you, followed by a large number of cardboard sheets with the game pieces. Then there are the order blocks, dice, two decks of cards, a rule book, and finally a scenario book. These are high quality components that compare to the best Euro type games. This also gives you the effect of feeling overwhelmed as a great many questions race through your mind about what does each piece do, how do the cards work, what are the various units, etc. Thankfully, this is explained pretty easily in the rules and scenario book!

The combat units, leaders, and vehicles are some of the most impressive components and catch your eye right from the start. Here is where the feeling that this may be a true miniatures/board game hybrid first appears. For one, the figures on the pieces look like a top down view of some 15mm miniatures on a tabletop. The artwork is definitely done in a unique style. Not quite a cartoon, but not Keith Rocco either. I've heard it described as a "Hollywood" type portrayal, which does describe the art in the rules, scenarios, and hero cards.

The vehicles are to my eye the components that stand out the most. In the basic game each side gets a mixture of light, recon, APCs, and one tank per side. The artwork for the Sherman, PZIVH, and others is truly remarkable and definitely adds to the beauty of the game. The

only issue here may be that you only get one each of several vehicles, so naturally most of the scenarios will be featuring just those vehicles and anyone hoping for a platoon on platoon encounter of vehicles will have to wait.

Sorting through the remaining items in the box shows you that there is a lot to this game! There are "unit trays" where the various commands are sorted out for each scenario (more on this later), a variety of blocks for giving units orders, and a large number of cards, plus the rules and scenarios. You also get several "heroes" that are represented by pieces similar to the infantry units. Yes, most of these resemble characters from Kelly's Heroes, but it's a nice touch and adds some flavor to the game.

You finally come down to the rules and the scenario books, which usually

makes or breaks these kinds of games. I did not have access to the latest version of the rules at the time of this review, so my thoughts are on the rules that come in the box.

The rules aren't difficult and most wargamers are going to be pushing around counters in no time at all. What does take some time is getting used to all of the symbols on the counters and how they are used. Things began clicking for us when we just put some units on the board and started trying the orders, firefights, close assaults, etc., which seemed to work for us. Again, there's nothing hard here, but it's one of those games where there is a lot of chrome and it takes getting used to all of





## Heroes of Normandie: Board Games Meets Miniatures (cont.)

(cont. from p20) For this playtest we did try two of the scenarios. Over the last year we've played quite a few scenarios of GMT's Combat Commander and also Conflict of Heroes, so we were anxious to see how this game stacked up to the others.

The first thing is to get your commands organized, which is where the unit trays/command track pieces I alluded to earlier fit in. You get basic units and then add markers to fill in the available slots. Each of these markers corresponds to a number of pieces that will be put on the board and they show their victory point value on the other side. Certainly an interesting way of doing things and it does help keep track of which units are functional, their compositions, worth, etc.



You also get several cards per player that can be used at various times during the turns. There is a symbol (yes, this is a recurring theme where symbols are used everywhere!) on the card telling you during which phase of the turn it can be used in. Cards include airstrikes, artillery, extra command points, die re-rolls, and a lot more. This is NOT a card driven game, but the cards are used to enhance the game for both sides. We liked the cards as they weren't too powerful, but gave each player a different range of options to use for each turn.



Players get to set out a number of orders for each of their units, which determines which ones go first. The first thing you notice here is that you only have a few orders and far more units! The idea is to give orders to units that really, really need to do something and then prioritize those as your enemy will be doing the same. At the end of the turn all of the units that did not get orders will get a chance to move. Units that received orders, however, can either move or fire.

Players then alternate going back and forth during the turn, moving and firing their units that have orders, playing cards (if available), and then moving the remaining units. From reading the rules, seeing all the symbols, etc., you might think that this could be a complex game that might take awhile to play, but that is far, far, from the truth. Heroes of Normandie plays fast and our first learning scenario barely took an hour!

The combat system allows player to roll a number of dice to obtain hits on units, depending upon the stats on their counters. With units being rated for anti-infantry, anti-tank, and defense, plus special firing symbols, the first few combats will take a bit longer. You compare the totals of the attacker and defender to get a result. After a turn or two, however, it gets pretty easy just by looking at the units. Most units take two hits and are flipped over on the first hit and eliminated on the second. Vehicles can take several hits and you roll a D6 that will add markers to the vehicle that denote some kind of damage.



The interesting thing here is that you do need to use real world tactics, i.e., avoid getting anywhere near vehicles with infantry (they are death dealing machines), study and use the terrain symbols to your benefit, assign overwatch and covering fire, and so on. For what appears to be a Euro or light wargame is in reality anything but in how it is played.

The scenarios start out pretty basic, but by the fourth or fifth one they can become pretty substantial, with several commands on up to six boards, plus artillery, anti-tank guns, heroes, and more. We were impressed with how quickly the scenarios that we tried played and our thinking is that even the larger scenarios should take no more than 90 minutes to complete. The game is fully supported by the company with a web site/forum and there appears to be a large number of expansions, terrain packs, scenarios, etc., either already out or coming soon.

So where does Heroes of Normandie fit in the wargaming world? It's certainly nowhere near as comprehensive or as complex as ASL, but it's more involved than many of its competitors. There are a large number of advantages that this game has in terms of components, ease of play, and playing time. If you're looking for WW2 skirmish actions that are fast playing, looks good, and will provide you with several hours of fun, then Heroes of Normandie may be what you are looking for.





# First Battle with Saga

# Battle Report

My gaming group and I have played a lot of skirmish games over the years, but surprisingly very few in the Dark Ages or Medieval periods. We did run a few Pig Wars games and I use to play Chainmail back in the day, but there has never been to be have been quite the level of interest for those eras.



several dice depending upon if they still have a leader and how many units they have still on the board. There are specially designed dice for each faction in Saga that has its own unique symbols, although I have seen some homemade D6 conversions. The players then match up the dice to their faction card, which will enable the units to move and/or use their special abilities.

With Saga however, there has been some interest and although the rules have been out for well over a year now, it's taken this long to get a game together for the group to try it. One of our members has been the driving force behind this game (this does usually help significantly in getting a game to the table) and not only provided the forces, but the wonderful custom made terrain seen in these images.

So what is Saga? Saga is a Dark Ages skirmish system with each player controlling several units. Units are usually 4-12 figures each and while the game is primarily a two player affair, we had four players and everything seemed to work pretty good. On first glance Saga may seem like any other skirmish game where the figures are primarily armed with melee weapons with a few bows sprinkled about. However, that would be underselling the product, which has a few unique features.

For one, the orders system is pretty unique and essentially drives the game. Each player at the start of every turn rolls

This does provide a degree of randomness and chaos for the battle as you never know how many of a certain die that you will get and usually there's a large number of needs each turn. It's also tempting to use several dice for special skills, but then you won't get to activate as many units. This is a good trade off in the game system and forces players to think carefully about what they're trying to accomplish each turn.

Combat is basically adding up how many figs in each unit are in contact, figure out any modifiers, then roll several dice to determine a number of hits. The defender does get a chance at saving throws, so again, combat has a certain randomness about it, but it's pretty easy to grasp the concepts.

So after a quick explanation of the rules we started our scenario, which wasn't exactly historical! The forces we had included Teutonic Knights, Welsh, Vikings, and Normans. It was all that was available and it was a training scenario, so some slack should be given here! The Welsh and Teutonic Knights were tasked with stopping the Normans and Vikings from looting the village along with kidnapping the local priest/bishop. We each started in our respective corners and it was a good thing that we weren't in contact range as it took a few turns to get the order system figured out! By the end of turn 2 things were

clicking and the game started to go faster, but no one really knew the capabilities of their forces, except for Rob who set up the game!

The Normans and Teutonic Knights wasted little time in expressing their dislike of each other. Both sides moved to



contact pretty quickly and a few Normans went down from German crossbows early on in the battle. This set off about a eight turn no holds barred slugfest with a series of charges and counterattacks.

On the other side of the board, the Welsh and Vikings were dealing with the terrain. The Welsh struggled through a forested area while the Vikings had a river to cross, which had one bridge and then a second bridge that was of the make-shift variety. After about five turns both sides were near the bridge and ready to do battle. The first few charges by both sides were to control the bridge, with each side taking a fair amount of casualties.

The number of command dice that you roll drops considerably depending upon your losses. Another group of Vikings crossed further downriver and charged the Welsh, who had set up a blocking position to the entrance of the village. (cont. on p23)







(cont. from p22) The Normans and Teutonic Knights continued their duel to the death, with both sides taking quite a number of casualties. Both sides continued to maneuver to draw out the other, but the final Norman attack was defeated and with it the Teutonic Knights controlled the center of the town. Although victorious, the Teutonic Knights had been cut down to a few mounted knights, some crossbowmen, and a few infantry soldiers out of a much larger force. The Normans had barely any men left and were unable to continue the attack on the town.

On the other side of the river the Vikings were making a comeback, but for every attack they were losing a few more men. The Welsh made several counterattacks that blocked the bridge for several

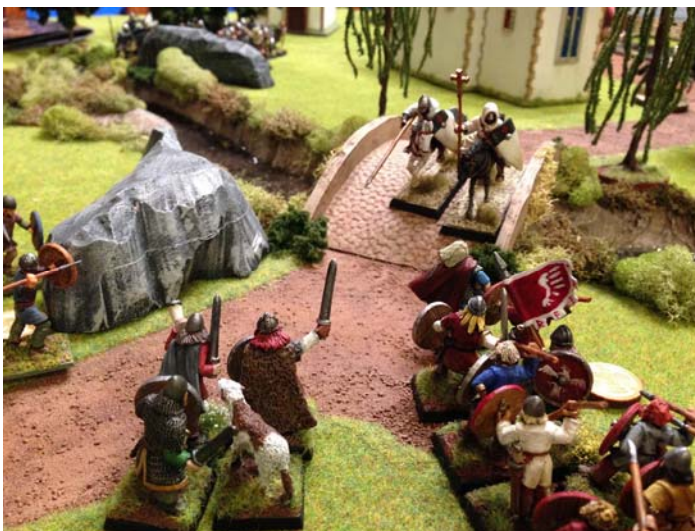
vital turns and prevented the Normans and Vikings from linking up for an attack into the town. Both sides were using their special skills for combat, which seemed to ratchet up the casualty rate considerably. In fact, managing these special abilities and activating units once combat starts is a real challenge.

After a few more turns it was apparent that the Vikings were running out of steam and the Normans were spent. There was little hope of either of them getting to the village, let alone sacking it! With that admission the game was called as a Teutonic and Welsh victory.

Everyone had a positive view of the rules and how the game played out. With set up, rules explanation, the game itself, and some post game discussion the entire

affair was under three hours, which is pretty good for a first time game. Luck certainly plays a role in the game, especially with the orders die rolls. There were several times that I almost scored a Yahtzee and couldn't do much more than the basics. While primarily a two player game it seemed to work well with four, but I could see where adding more than that could create some serious down time for those waiting for their turn.

Overall, our first play of Saga was a good experience and we recommend these rules to anyone interested in Dark Ages skirmishing. There's quite a few choices out there for figures and terrain, so we won't get into that here. There's also rules supplements and a wide variety of periods that could be converted.





# WMM: The Road to Syria

# Battle Report



Crusader army is moving into Syria to deal a heavy blow to the Saracen forces in that area. They had been moving forward on the main road in that area and have come to a Syrian village where the Saracens have decided to make a stand.

The Saracen army was made up of the usual suspects, mainly a large number of average spear units backed by several units of Gazi, or fanatic

In regards to strategy it appeared as if both sides had the same idea, namely to hold on one flank, look for a stalemate in the center, then crush one flank with the best units of cavalry that were available. However, both sides chose the opposite flank for their attack, which was pretty interesting! Both sides finished their set up (we chose to set up by brigades to save time) and the first turn began.

The Crusaders charged out from the start, but only about half of their units were able to move. The Saracens tried to implement their plan, but the village in the center, which was thought to be an

We've finally reached the point where we can field over 2500 points each of Saracens and Crusaders for our Warmaster Medieval battles. Having that many units is a sizeable achievement as that represents quite a lot of painting, not to mention the financial investment! However, it can also be a curse as this game was to prove.

The first problem was that due to various reasons we had to play at the local game store, which unfortunately closes at 9pm on Fridays and we don't usually get finished with dinner, then over to where we're going to game until about 6:30. This means with set up, game play, then take down, we have a little over two and a half hours, which is not a lot of time. Naturally, we compounded the problem by trying to do a little over 2,000 points per side on a 6 x 4 table!

The basis for the scenario was that a

infantry. The cavalry was a good mix of heavy, medium, and bow armed units, with the heavy cavalry providing the main striking power. Since this is not a fire-power based army, there were few bow armed units. The leaders aren't bad, but there are a lot of troops across a wide frontage and at least half of the leaders have a very average command rating of 7.

The Crusaders as usual had a good mix of troops, which were based off several units of knights, both mounted and dismounted. These are the Crusader's shock troops and jokingly referred to during our games as "12th century panzers!" There were several units of pilgrims, crossbowmen, medium infantry, and more heavy cavalry to round out the Crusader army.



advantage, had the unfortunate problem of creating traffic jams on the side for the more numerous Saracens. In the next few turns the pilgrims got too far out in front of the Crusader army and attacked the village, being thrown back by Saracen units that had barely reached their defensive positions in time. (cont. on p 25)







(cont. from p 24) The first battles on the Saracen right, which consisted of a swirling mass of Saracen horse archers, light cavalry, Turcoples, dismounted knights, and Saracen infantry. Several of these were to the death, meaning that the units basically wiped each other out in a series of charges and counterattacks.

On the Saracen right the Crusader advance was disorganized as the command rolls left a few units hanging out in front of the main attacking force. This presented an opportunity for the Saracen heavy cavalry to go crashing into the Crusader medium infantry, crossbowmen, and mounted sergeants, doing significant damage in the process. However, they were wiped out in return, but not before doing at least their point total in damage

to the Crusaders.

The Crusaders on that flank then attacked into the mass of Saracen infantry, launching several devastating charges that blew through entire units of opposing infantry. This was not without loss on their own side and several units of cavalry were severely weakened during these actions. However, the Saracen infantry on that flank took close to 75% casualties and ceased to exist as a fighting force.

In the center the Crusaders continued to attack the Saracens holding the village. There were numerous attacks and counterattacks by both sides, but by turn 5 the Crusaders had a foothold in the village, which came at a high cost in units that were destroyed attacking the outskirts. Both sides had few reserves in the center

to send in to either reinforce success or counterattack the weakened units in that sector.

Unfortunately, it was at this point where the game had to be called due to time, needing to pack up, and be out of the store by 9pm. Just as it was getting interesting! The Crusaders were ahead at this point as they had destroyed more Saracen units, but the cream of the Saracen cavalry had yet to come into play, being caught up in traffic jams along with bad command rolls for the first several turns. Overall, this is a great period to game with WMA/WMM as the forces are closely balanced, have some interesting troop types, and the games usually go down to the last turn or two, which is a lot of fun for everyone involved.





## BKC 2: German Mobile Defense in Normandy

## Battle Report

For the world wide D-Day wargaming event on June 6th we had several plans for our Friday night game that all seem to come apart as game day approached. Finally, with only three of available when the dust settled and less than 24 hours to make a decision, we chose to game an initial attempt by British armor and mechanized forces to break out from the beachhead.

British forces consisted of an armor regiment and a mechanized infantry battalion in M3 halftracks, backed by two batteries of 105mm artillery. The German forces consisted of an infantry battalion holding along a road with an understrength PZ1VH company as support and an understrength Stug III company in reserve back at the main village in the area, plus they were supported by two batteries of 105mm artillery off board. The Germans had an understrength Panther company and a Waffen SS panzergrenadier company on alert off board, with their entrance decided by die roll.

There were six objectives on the board, ranging from a crossroads near the German front line to the village center to the various road exits. The British rolled 2D6 to determine the two objectives that they needed to seize, while the Germans rolled 2D6 to determine the objectives that they needed to hold onto by the end of the game (all objectives were kept in secret until the end of the game). This had a really good result of the British needing to concentrate their forces to achieve their objectives while the Ger-

mans needed to counterattack to hang onto theirs. This simple system definitely worked out this time and I'm encouraged to try it in more scenarios in the future.

That the German front line would come under pressure was never in doubt and the first few turns saw the British rolling up and begin to engage the German infantry. The German formations began to shift around to meet the British advances, hoping to set up blocking positions. The first British attempt to flank the German lines was met by the PZI-VHs, which quickly knocked out two of the British Sherman platoons (we play that one vehicle or infantry stand represents a platoon).

The British mechanized infantry, however, delivered a textbook attack into the German positions in the tree line along the road that was parallel to the front lines. The Germans initially held, but were then either forced back or eliminated due to superior numbers along with a healthy dose of British firepower backed by artillery. The Germans now centered their defense on the crossroads, which was one of their objectives, with the British flowing around that position.

The Panthers and the SS panzergrenadier companies now arrived and immediately moved to counterattack. The PZIVHs had been defeated and the Stugs were then committed to hold up the advancing British forces. The British then had a terrible streak of bad command rolls that



gave the Germans hope that the Panthers could reach the front in time and then coordinate with the Stugs.

This was not to be however, and the British moved quickly around the forests towards the village center, forcing the Germans to spread out where they came under fire on several fronts. The panzergrenadiers moved to the counterattack and could have struck a decisive blow, but during the advance they failed a command roll, which gave the British time to adjust their lines and move up units in support. When the attack went in it was met with a massive amount of firepower and thrown back in several close assaults. At the end of the attack the halftracks retreated back to the cemetery area to form a defense on that side of the village.

The Panthers then rolled a double action, but due to bad die rolling only knocked out one Sherman. The British by now had finally got their armor into several firing positions, which knocked out the remaining German armor around the village, thus ending the game as a British victory as they achieved both of their objectives as the Germans had only achieved one of theirs.

Overall, this was one of our best games of BKC2 and both sides definitely had their chances. The Germans tried to launch several counterattacks, but with so-so results, which doomed them at the end. This multiple objective scenario certainly gives me ideas for the future.







*Several images showing the British armor trying to move around the German flank while the Germans rush units from one threatened area to another. The panzergrenadier attack and then retreat in the lower right images was the turning point of the game as up until that point the Germans were holding their own and had a good chance to at least pull out a draw.*





#### **WASATCH FRONT HISTORICAL GAMING SOCIETY**

Meets every other Friday night in the SLC, Utah area. We play a wide variety of games in 1/300th, 10mm, 15mm, and 25mm, including Age of Reason, Age of Discovery, Age of Eagles, Fire & Fury, General de Brigade, Warmaster Ancients, TSATF, Phantoms, Mustangs, BKC2, and more...

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*One of my gaming friends and I were sitting around after we finished a board war-game one evening recently and started reminiscing about games we had played, gamers we had known, and some of our greatest experiences in the hobby. The shocking thing was that really none of these moments were from the last several years! With few exceptions, almost everything we talked about occurred in the distant past. As I was driving home that conversation caused me to think what it was about those days that differentiate them from the current time in the hobby.*

*The first observation I had is that many of the games we talked about were multi-night or all day affairs, which are now difficult to pull off as we don't have a steady place to play and everyone's schedules are so difficult to work around, not to mention drumming up interest for that type of game. The second observation is that there seems to be far more competition for our free time nowadays than there was even five years ago! Finally, there was the thought that maybe we're playing too many periods or getting involved with too many new items that seem to continually appear each day. It seems the last several years that many of us forget about the game five minutes after leaving for home! Whatever it is, trying to get a handle on it seems difficult. You can sense there's a problem, but you're not sure what exactly it is or what to do about it. Gaming to me for a long time now seems to have been about the memories and the social interaction, but maybe that's changing as well. Maybe the answer is to do some massive games or day long affairs to generate some new memories down the road.*

## **Mahdist Wars Source Book 3rd Ed.**

## **Book Review**

While the Sudan remains one of the most popular periods for Victorian Colonial gaming, finding information about the various wars has been problematic at best. Other than War on the Nile, Churchill's River War, and a few Ospreys, the colonial gamer has had to spend a lot of research time for very little gain.

That changed a few years ago when the two volume The Mahdist Wars Source Book was released by TVAG, The Virtual Armchair General (I was unaware that there were two prior editions, always thinking that the one I had was the first!). All of a sudden you had all of the Sudan articles from Savage & Soldier magazine, orders of battle, articles on the various forces and campaigns, and much, much more. The cost of these



books was around \$70 with shipping, but there was easily \$500 worth of research in them!

Since I received them they have been invaluable in the painting and creation of terrain for my 15mm Sudan collection. The amount of detail in the books, ranging from uniform info on obscure units to the various battles sets these books far apart from most material on the wars in the Sudan in the 19th century. Not only did the books cover the Anglo-Egyptian involvement, but there is an entire section on the Italian battles and campaigns as well, which makes for even more fascinating reading.

The issues with the edition I had purchased generally centered around the quality of the illustrations, uniform plates, the cover, and more. Basically, they weren't very good. This didn't affect me greatly as I really owned cared about the text in the book as the infor-

mation was invaluable, but it would have been nice to have been able to see the illustrations a bit better.

Well, the first volume in the revised 3rd edition has reached my door and it is worth every penny. The full color cover, the photographs, illustrations, etc., are all now very well done and this book just screams quality. Several sections have been reworked with new information added and in a better reading format. There is also now a new section showing illustrations of the British ships that were anchored around Suakin, which is something I had not ever seen before.

Overall, if you are into Victorian Colonial gaming and especially the Sudan period you need to order this book right away. The information contained within make this an invaluable resource that you will use over and over again. I would have gladly paid \$100 for this first volume alone and I can't wait for the second volume to be released.