Warning Order

Issue #43

In This Issue

Beyond The Saale
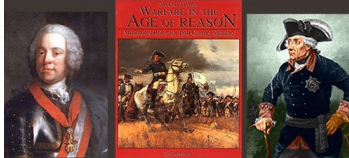
A fictional Seven Years War Campaign for Warfare in the Age of Reason

WASATCH FRONT HISTORICAL GAMING SOCIETY

Warning Order

Sci-Fi Wargaming: Past, Present, & Future

In hobby terms, science fiction wargaming has always been the red headed stepchild compared to its historical and fantasy wargaming cousins. The reasons for this are quite varied and science-fiction gaming has had its ups and downs over the years, ranging from barely being noticed to the crazy days of the first batch of Warhammer 40K rules and models being introduced. It has seen some lean times and then can suddenly explode when a new game system arrives.

When I first got into the hobby in 1976 science-fiction gaming was hardly even noticeable. There were a few SPI games like Stargate and Starsoldier, but after that pickings were slim. Meanwhile there were stacks and stacks of WW2 board games, micro-armor was really taking off, and ancients were the prevalent part of the wargaming hobby. D&D was just getting going and there were a surge of fantasy miniatures coming out. I was in a quite large gaming group at

the time and I can't recall any sci-fi being played other than the odd board game every so often. Even when Traveller debuted there wasn't that much interest in that part of the hobby.
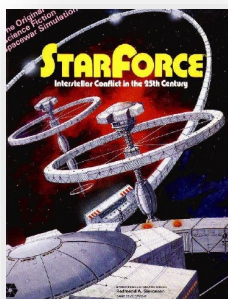
This began to change when I moved to another city and a joined new gaming group. At that time McEwan Miniatures was still in SLC, Utah and there were mini-conventions and gaming days at their facility where I was introduced to Starguard. Not only that they had tons of spaceships and figures to go with their systems or any other set of rules. Slowly and surely more companies started coming out with science fiction gaming rules and figures such as Martian Metals, Ral Partha, and more. There was the Star Fleet Battle Manual by Lou Zocchi, but Star Trek gaming would not hit its stride for a few more years.

As we moved into the 80s there wasn't really anything that you could consider the pre-eminent sci-fi system other than Superior Miniatures Starfleet Wars. Every hobby magazine had ads for their line of starships and each Saturday I would see a crowd of young gamers descend upon the local gaming store and buy their ships. The miniatures were pretty good at the time, but the rules left a lot to be desired.

Most sci-fi gaming was using figs for Traveller or Gamma World games, skirmish games with the Ral Partha miniatures using homegrown rules, or converting WW2 rules and using sci-fi figures instead of Russians vs, Germans. Sci-fi gaming wasn't dead, but it wasn't going any-

where in relation to fantasy gaming,

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Seven Years War campaign for AOR.*
- *Battle reports for TSATF, Battlegroup Panzergrenadier, WMA, En Garde, and Saga.*
- *Two new Engagements scenarios.*
- *Print N Play project: Magic Realm*
- *All of the regular features.*

Sci-Fi Wargaming: Past, Present, & Future (cont.)

(cont. from p2) which at the time was threatening to overwhelm pretty much anything else in the hobby. That, however was about to change due to two gaming systems.

The first of these was Starfleet Battles put out by Task Force Games. At the time when it came out there were several board games from SPI, GDW (Imperium is still an all time favorite), and Avalon Hill. Compared to fantasy at that time, however, these were slim pickings indeed. Metagaming had a run of success with Ogre/GEV and a line of micro-games, but there wasn't a dominant system out there in the early 80s. It's hard to explain now, but at the time Star Trek was still extremely popular with gamers, despite the success of the Star Wars franchise.

So this digest sized game comes out and things start to change almost immediately. There were large battles 2-3 nights a week, gamers were buying up the ships (even the old Gamescience versions), and waiting for the next item in the series. Each supplement, Captain's log, giant hex map, miniature, etc., was eagerly looked for and quickly integrated into our games. Sci-fi was back and in a big way! D&D, Traveller, Gamma World, Runequest, and pretty much everything else was dropped for a few years while everyone we knew played Starfleet Battles.

At some point all good things must come to an end and so it was with Starfleet Battles. A captain's edition version of the rules which made Advanced Squad Leader seem sane and the need to carry around a suitcase of stuff killed the desire to continue on for many gamers. All of a sudden sci-fi gaming seemed to be back where it was before Starfleet Battles, which was an interesting fringe of the hobby. Many of us still played games like Imperium, Stellar Conquest, Ogre/GEV, and so on, but as the 80s wore on sci-fi gaming was at a standstill.

Once again, however, there was a momentous shift when Games Workshop (formerly Citadel Miniatures) came out with a set of sci-fi rules called Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader. This was Starfleet Battles all over again, with gamers rushing out to buy the rules, packs of miniatures, White Dwarf issues, models for conversion, and more. At this time it wasn't geared towards teenagers, so you had a great many adult gamers getting into this new set of rules.

It was definitely one of the most exciting times in gaming that I can remember. Armies were built up, campaigns were run, gamers met new gamers, and all of a sudden sci-fi gaming was back on top. Each week you would drive down to the local store, look at the racks of miniatures, check out any of the new boxed sets, talk with other gamers about their WH40K projects, and probably play in a game or two. For awhile it seemed as if there were WH40K games running continuously day and night as there was that much interest.

When each issue of White Dwarf started to get more and more off the rails in terms of new factions, more expensive miniatures, etc., it was shrugged off at the time as growing pains with a very popular franchise. Also, there were several other related products that took up your time, attention, and money all at the same time. The first of these was Adeptus Titanicus and later Space Marine. This was the 1/300th scaled mass combat version of the WH40K universe. Overnight this game system started to take over our gaming sessions and the money spent on WH40K was now going to this new scale.

What followed should be no surprise to anyone as we had seen a similar pattern with Starfleet Battles and Rogue Trader. Adult gamers with money to burn pouring a sizable chunk of funds into boxed sets, packs of miniatures, terrain, and more with no restraint. Huge six player slugfests became the norm and battles raged across tabletops from stores to homes for the next few years. Just

when you thought that the Warhammer franchise couldn't go any further they released what would be one of their most popular games; Space Hulk.

By this time sci-fi gaming was at the top of the hobby world. Fantasy, which was mainly based upon role-playing, had experienced a mass desertion of gamers and no real good fantasy set had emerged (Warhammer Fantasy was still struggling to find its footing). There were really no other competitors in the sci-fi arena and anything that did come along was quickly crushed by the GW juggernaut.

Space Hulk was an incredible game (now in its 4th Edition) and was an instant success. The additional supplements and White Dwarf articles only increased its popularity and it was hard to find anyone who had a complaint about it. The funny thing was that when we stopped, took a breath, then looked around we realized that WH40K had not only changed, it had morphed into something that we didn't care for.

The endless supplements, changing rules, price increases, and more drove many gamers, including myself away from GW. Even in the epic scale they couldn't resist fiddling with the system and pretty much forced you to buy more stuff to continue playing. At this point many gamers and I gave up on GW, which sadly has continued to this day, almost 25 years later. Adult sci-fi gamers were no longer their target audience and once again there seemed to be a lull in sci-fi gaming, even though GW has never really gone away.

Some of our best Warmaster Ancient games involve the Successors against Romans, which always seem to go right down to the final turn. Whether it is the travelling circus type army that the Successors employ, with their elephants, pikes, light cavalry, cataphracts, etc., or the steadfast legions of Rome, the game not only looks good, but it has a "no quarter" type aspect to it.

We only had a few hours for this battle as we had to play at a local store and got out of dinner late, even though we ate at a place only a few blocks away. Our goal was to do a 2,000 points per side contest and get it over in a little over 2 1/2 hours, which in the end proved to be close, but not close enough. Even though we are all experienced players, 2,000 points is quite a few units and it does take time to do all the melees, so that is something to think about whenever we get

pressed for time in the future.

The Successors went with what would term a "heavy" list, meaning that a lot of points was spent on armored forces that would hopefully prove their worth. That is the one thing about Warmaster Ancients that we find particularly interesting about the game in that there are a large number of choices and things balance out nicely. Will the elephants do well and crush everything before them or will they completely fail and you could have purchased 3 or 4 units in their place?

The Successors went with six pike units, two imitation legions, two medium infantry units, several archers, two skirmisher units, and several cavalry. The cavalry were a mix of both light and heavy, with the heavy cavalry having one unit of cataphracts. The Successors also went with two units of elephants, which is a big trade off in numbers of units. That was 400 points that could have been used to purchase anywhere from 4-8 other units, which would have pushed up the break point.

The Romans went mainly with legions up front, backed by auxiliary infantry and a few archere units scattered in between. The Romans, never very heavy cavalry oriented anyway, deployed their few cavalry units on the flanks. The standard Roman strategy of advancing in a solid front to grind down their foes while the flanks hold just long enough, seemed to be the pre-

vailing strategy during their setup. The Successors, meanwhile, decided to focus on the Roman center with the pike units, then use elephants and the cavalry units to keep the Roman flanks busy so that they could not reinforce the center.

As is usual with WMA (and one of the reasons that we like it so much) is that everyone's plan goes out the door at some point during the game with a few failed command rolls! The Successors plan worked well until they reached the center of the board where some badly timed command rolls and traffic jams on the Successor right stopped all forward movement. The Successor plan was still pretty intact and it looked as if it might have a serious shot of going all the way to victory, but it was not to be.

For one, the Romans on the Successor right flank refused to cooperate! After a few failed command rolls they counterattacked, driving back the enemy skirmishers and creating a stalemate with the cavalry by literally destroying the units of both sides. The legions on that flank drove forward, crumbling the Successor medium infantry and archers in a wave of attacks. The Successors reeled back and finally had to send in the heavy cavalry to stem the tide. By the middle of the game both sides on that flank were down to a handful of stands. As it is in most of the Successor vs. Roman games it comes down to stopping the legions, usually by sacrificing several units. If both sides were going to win the game they would need to look at the center or other flank for opportunities.

(cont. from p. 4) In the center the legions advanced and ran headlong into the Successor pike units, starting a multi-turn battle that saw attack and counterattack. Entire units got chewed up in the melees, which included several successful flank attacks by both sides. The archers of each side continued to add to the slaughter and within a few turns there were few fresh units to feed into the front lines as both sides had pretty much committed their reserves. The center for the rest of the game was a no mans land as the main striking force for each side was severely chewed up, but the Romans ended with the upper hand.

On the Successor left the Romans had a bad time just getting going, with more than half of their forces on that flank still sitting at the start line by the middle of the game. Some forces did get moving and they were quickly engaged by the Successors, which ended up as a series of swirling cavalry melees. A few legions and archers shook themselves loose from the start line and pressed forward, ready to add to the success of the Romans in the center.

However, the Successor elephants, which never seem to do much, elevated their status to "always take some in your army list for future games!" They crashed into the Roman infantry and archers, obliterating the front lines and penetrating the Roman defenses. The first Roman counterattacks failed and a renewed attack by the elephants got almost to the Roman board edge before they were forced to redeploy. Their attacks had made a mess of the Roman flank and there was now no way that the Romans could finish off the Successors quickly.

It was at this point that we needed to pick up, which was definitely a shame. Both sides had taken serious casualties and were closing in on their break points, If we had another 30-60 minutes I'm confident that we could have finished as one side or the other was going to break in the next turn or two. Both sides had played very well and it was a close game throughout. The Roman success in the center had been offset by the Successor victory on their left. Overall, a very fun and fast moving game with two very equal opponents.

Engagement 15: Night March & Relief of a Siege

Situation: Red is besieging a city and Blue has received a message that if the city is not relieved by the end of the following day it will have to surrender. Blue has gathered a relief force and will do a night march to launch an attack at first light. However, the units are strung out over a series of roads and there has been little preparation for a coordinated attack.

Period: Ancients to late 19th century is preferable, but with modifications mechanized forces could be used.

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

Terrain Notes: The hills are fairly low, but block line of sight. The two small building areas are farms and they could have fences, walls, adjoining fields, etc. The woods are light woods, but do block line of sight. The river can only be crossed at the two bridges.

Scale: Can be used with any rules, but something where each unit is a battalion or regiment would probably work best.

Red Forces: Most of Red's forces are making one final push to force the besieged city to surrender, so Red has only been able to form a blocking force that could just be enough to delay Blue so that the city falls.

On Board at Start:

6 units of infantry

3 units of cavalry

2 units of artillery

1 unit of light infantry

Set Up: Red's forces can set up anywhere up to the red line. Two infantry or artillery units may begin the game entrenched.

Red Orders: Stop Blue's forces from reaching the road exit with the blue starburst symbol. Where possible counterattack before Blue's forces can get organized.

Blue Forces: Blue's forces are doing a difficult night march in an area with many roads, which is adding to the confusion. Blue has the forces necessary to break through Red and relieve the be-

sieged city, but coordinating an attack after a night march in time will be a challenge.

10 units of infantry

3 units of artillery

4 units of cavalry

2 units of light infantry

Blue Orders: Organize the brigades as they arrive and attack where possible. Break through Red's defense and exit units on the road leading to the blue starburst symbol.

Set Up: Blue must first organize the available forces into brigades of 3–5 units each. Roll 1D6 for each brigade to determine which road it will enter the board at (numbers correspond to the blue on white numbers on the map). Each turn roll 1D6 for each unit of the brigade, needing a 1 on the first turn, a 1 or 2 on the second turn, and so on. All units must enter the board in column.

For example; one of Blue's brigades has three infantry units and an artillery unit in it. On Turn 1 Blue rolls a 5, meaning that brigade will enter on the road marked 5 on the map. Blue rolls four dice for his units, with a 1, 2, and 5 for the infantry, and a 1 for the artillery unit. One of the infantry units and the artillery arrive on Turn 1. The rest will need to roll the next turn and so on until all ar-

rive.

Initiative: Blue is first each turn

Game Length: 12 turns

Special Rules: The night march and deployment for Blue are the only special rules for this scenario.

Victory Conditions: Blue needs to exit at least three units (or the equivalent in units) off of either road on Red's board edge by the end of Turn 12. This will be enough force to make Red break off the siege and save the city.

Variants: There are a large number of variants possible, starting with larger forces and playing surface. Reinforcements could be added to Red to balance out the game, especially if Blue is fortunate where most forces arrive at roads 1 and 6. Troop quality could be adjusted to also affect the play balance.

Another option is to give Red a few more units, but let Blue pick the exit point on Red's side of the board, which would make things more challenging for Red's defense. You could also have no turn limit, but after a specified number of turns Red rolls to see if the city falls. If mechanized forces are used, then the number of turns or how many units Blue gets off the board may need to be adjusted to compensate for the increased movement speeds of the era.

Engagement 16: Delaying Action

Situation: Red has launched a massive attack into Blue's territory, catching Blue still in a state of mobilization. Blue's units deployed on the border must delay Red's advance long enough for the reserves to be fully mobilized and set up a defense in the Blue rear areas.

Period: This scenario would work really well for the WW2 and Modern periods where the longer weapon ranges give the delaying force a better chance to cover all approaches. However, it could easily be used for almost any other period.

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

Terrain Notes: The hills are fairly low, but block line of sight. The woods are light woods, but do block line of sight and would be difficult for artillery or vehicles. The center of the board is dominated by a series of small farms, each which should have walls, hedges, etc., for the surrounding fields.

Scale: Can be used with any rules, but something where each unit is a platoon or company would probably work best.

Red Forces: Red's forces have broken through the border and are now prepared to move into Blue's rear areas and a quick end to the war.

Entering Board at Start:

2 recon units (one at each entry point)

6 units of armor

4 units of mech infantry

1 Anti-tank unit

Off-Board Artillery:

1 unit of mortars

2 units of medium artillery

Red Orders: Break through Red's defenses, seize both towns, then exit as many units off the roads leading to Blue's board edge as possible.

Blue Forces: Red has broken through the border defenses and is thrusting down the main roads into Blue's territory. Blue's forces must delay Red's advance for as long as possible so that reserves further back can be put into blocking

positions and establish defensive lines.

On Board at Start:

2 units of armor

1 unit of mech infantry

1 recon unit

1 anti-tank unit

24" of minefields

Entrenchments/firing positions for one unit.

Off-Board Artillery:

1 unit of mortars

1 unit of medium artillery

Variable Forces

Blue rolls three times for additional units that unknown to Red

Die Roll	Forces
1	No unit
2	1 unit of mech infantry
3	No unit
4	1 unit of armor
5	No unit
6	1 recon unit

Blue Orders: Use your minefields and the terrain to channel Red's attack. Red will not know your true strength until

probably halfway through the game, so bluff and deception can be powerful allies in this scenario.

Set Up: Blue starts the game with all forces hidden and marked on a map, including the minefields. Once Blue is set, Red's units are organized into columns and –placed in line off the board to enter on Turn 1.

Initiative: Red is first each turn

Game Length: 12 game turns.

Special Rules: Red's units MUST enter the board on the roads at the two marked entry points in column formation.

Victory Conditions: Red needs to seize both towns and exit at least four units (or the equivalent) off of the road edges.

Variants: If using pre-20th century forces it might be a good idea to give the defenders more entrenchments in place of the minefields. You can also easily adjust the play balance by either letting Red come in anywhere on their board edge or by allowing Blue to roll more times on the variable forces table. If using more modern forces airstrikes and air defenses could be added to the forces of both sides. Also, players should experiment with giving Blue fewer terrain penalties (knowledge of the terrain) or by giving Red a timetable so that they need to be consistently driving forward.

Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 30

The Next Big Thing?

In gaming, much like the rest of life regarding fashion, entertainment, technology, etc., we always seem to be looking for the "next big thing". Not only that, game companies continually advertise new rules, figures, terrain, and more hoping that it will prove successful. Most people in our hobby have what I call "Gamers ADD", so we seem to be continually looking for new periods, scales, etc., which the game companies gladly prey upon! I thought for this installment in the series that I would take a look back at some of the gaming products that were heavily advertised, but never quite lived up to the hype.

The first was Knights & Magick, which if I recall right came out from Heritage Games at the same time they put out some new figures and terrain pieces. There was nothing wrong with the rules or basic premise as the boxed et was nicely done. At the time Chainmail and D&D were popular, so this system was an effort to replace both with one set of rules. I recall the ads and a lot of talk around the game store at the time, plus we did play a few games with it. In the end, however, it was hard to convince a majority of gamers to give up what they already knew and that , along with the high (at that time) price tag relegated this system unfortunately to the fringes of the fantasy side of the hobby.

A segment of the hobby where the next big thing is constantly hailed was micro-armor gaming. From new companies like ISM who had unusual vehicles and tanks with sandbags, missing skirts, etc., to the endless wave of new rules, 1/285th gaming has definitely had its share of products that have come and gone. Does anyone remember something that I think was called Battle Circus? It was hailed as a major breakthrough in micro-armor gaming and besides the rules they sold terrain

that looked like Monopoly houses that fit on various shapes for forests and towns. This was heavily advertised in all of the gaming magazines and was gone from sight within a year.

Another was Tacforce from GDW. At that time GDW had a reputation for not only being prolific, but putting out quality products. When Tacforce came out we jumped at the first few that arrived and were playing within a few days. For that time it was a slick presentation with data cards, rule books, and overall it was a great product. There were, however, a few problems with it. For one, the cards only covered U.S. and Russian vehicles, the rules weren't exactly simple, and there were really no army lists or scenarios. With the extent that it was advertised and having seen all of the Traveler products, everyone thought that more stuff was coming. However, it never came and the rules died.

GDW also was famous for one of the most talked about controversies in gaming history and that was their introduction of System 7, which used boardgame style counters to fight Napoleonic miniatures battles. Again, a very nice set of rules and counters that won the award for best miniature figures one year! That by itself turned off a number of gamers and GDW reveled in the award, which again didn't seem to help things either. In the end, what could have been a good crossover attempt faded into oblivion.
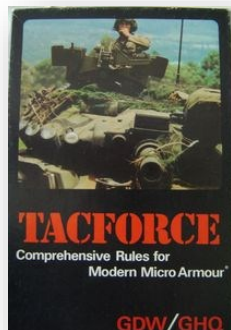
Terrain isn't absolved from this either as there were several attempts to launch lines that were the next big thing. The first would have to be Geo-Hex, which for years had ads in most magazines and became almost the Holy Grail of gaming terrain. I broke down and bought a set, then upon playing a few times noticed that the novelty was going to wear off fairly quickly.

The first reason was that setting up a game took time and you usually didn't have enough

pieces to do what you really wanted. For that you needed to purchase additional packs of terrain. Take down was another issue as trying to get things back in the box, repairing damaged hexes, etc., made

the entire effort a pain in the backside after awhile. Now some gamers still swear by their Geo-hex sets and that's great, but the idea that everyone in the hobby would have a set faded pretty quickly after a few years.

If you think that this was just a trend in the 70s and 80s, then think again. Over the years there have been so many rules, figure ranges, etc., that have been hailed as the next big thing. Simply get rid of everything else and only play the hot item of the moment! With the ever increasing reliance on the Internet and social media this trend is even more exaggerated today. New items come in, are heavily advertised, have a bit of success, then before they can get firmly established everyone is distracted by something else!
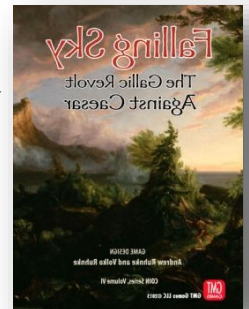
One of the current hot things is the COIN (counterinsurgency operations) from GMT, which features several games in the series that cover everything from Rome to Vietnam to South America. Although they are beautiful games, I've had a hard time coming to grips with them as focusing on your objectives is pretty tough to do. Board game forums are flooded with threads about these games and now you're seeing resistance to them popping up. I'm sure in a few years we'll move onto another trend in our ever changing hobby.

Blast From The Past Pt. 29: Some More Microgames

If you remember a few issues ago I wrote in this column about the wonderful TSR microgame called Revolt on Antares. I think a lot of gamers forget that TSR tried to get into this genre of gaming after the success of Metagaming and they produced several games with what at that time could be considered high quality components. In fact, several companies including OSG, Heritage/Dwarfstar, Steve Jackson Games, and SPI all got into the microgame theme along with Metagaming with varying degrees of success. Naturally, TSR with their empire at the time could afford to put a bit more resources into their products than others. That's not to say all of them were astounding games, but at least you got pretty good bang for your buck!

We'll start with They've Invaded Pleasantville, which is a B movie take on gaming an alien takeover of a Midwestern U.S.A. town. The map of the town and rules are well done, but the counters, while functional, leave a bit to be desired. One player takes the role of the alien commander, trying to subvert the town's citizens until there's enough of them to do a takeover operation by attacking the remaining citizens. The other player starts with a citizen who knows there's something wrong and needs to convince enough people to take action by finding the alien commander.

Now there is some paperwork involved, which is definitely a signature of many 70s and early 80s games, but it's nothing that is overwhelming. Trying to figure out who has been taken over, convincing others that there is an invasion, then trying to stop the aliens is definitely a challenge. Likewise for the alien player where you need to come up with a plan to
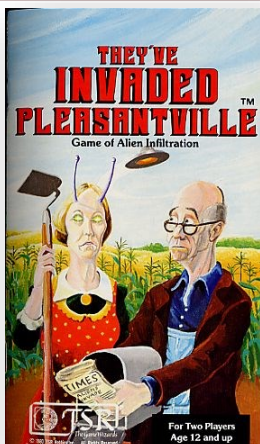
takeover the town and not get too far ahead of yourself or things will come crashing down quickly. It doesn't help either side in that the town citizens have widely varying capabilities! Overall, this is a very clever game that will take a play or two to get it down right, but you can play several times in a few hours.

The next game is Remember The Alamo and if you've been in gaming long enough you know that it is very hard to get an Alamo game right. Either the Texans are too tough or the Mexicans roll over the defenders, it just seems that it is a topic that while interesting, is difficult to do right.

Again, this little gem has a nice map, the counters this time aren't too bad, and the rules can be figured out in under 15 minutes.. The set up is pretty easy and the Mexicans have several choices about where to attack, which is good for replay value. Once you set it up you can easily see that this is going to be over in under an hour, which again, is great for a microgame. The system is fluid, easy to learn, and things come together fairly quickly.
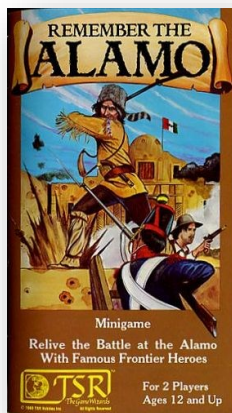
As is to be expected, the most difficult thing for the Mexicans is to get over the walls quickly and disrupt the Texan defense, which sounds easy in concept, but not so much in practice! For the Texans it is that eternal question of how long do you hold out on the walls or run to set up the next defense line? The good thing here is that you
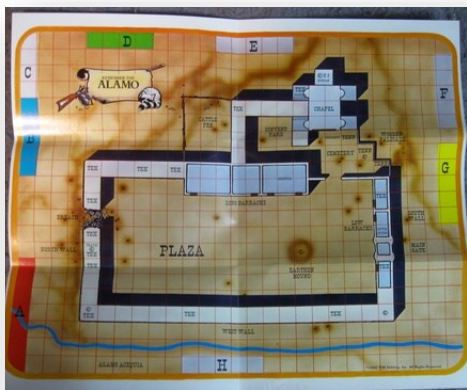
can try out one strategy and try it again quickly as the games don't last too long.

Surprisingly balanced, fun to play, and for those who want a taste of the Alamo, but don't want to play a 3-4 hour game, then this fits the bill nicely. Not only is this a good microgame, it is also in its own right just a good game.

The final game for this article is called Attack Force, but is definitely based upon the Death Star attack in Star Wars! Yes, it is that obvious. One player has a few squadrons of attack fighters while the other plays the defender, who with their defensive turrets and fighters, must hold off the attackers. The map, counters, and rules are all pretty basic, but again and consistent with the other games on this page, were pretty good value at the time.

The rules are pretty easy to get through and it will take a turn or two to figure out what is going on, the best strategy, etc., but this isn't rocket science. The game is designed to be fast and furious as well as being able to be completed quickly, which it accomplishes. Overall, it's not a bad game and deserves a play or two, but it won't be something that you return to over and over.

In the end TSR did a pretty good job with these, Revolt on Antares, plus a few more that I hope to get to someday. At the time they had their appeal in that they were compact, the topics were interesting, but most importantly, you could afford them! It was not uncommon for many of us to go into the game store on a Friday or Saturday evening, plunk down a few dollars for one of these, then take it home and play with friends until the wee hours of the morning. Now that those days are long gone, we still have these games around and they are worth a play. I would definitely like to see some of them redesigned with updated components for today's gamers to try.
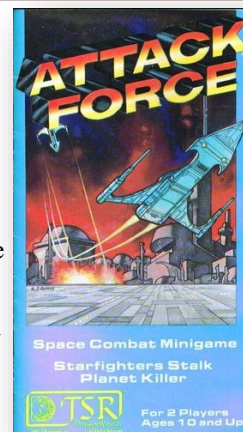
Print 'N Play Extreme: The Magic Realm Redesign

Print 'N Play has been with the gaming hobby for quite some time now. However, it's only been in the last several years that this element of the hobby has really began to expand as the games have become more graphic heavy and professional. I've built a few print 'n play games before, but they've usually been very simple builds, usually with a map, some counters, and then rules with all of the components being done on a standard color printer. I never spent that much time on them as most of these games were to just try out some ideas, see what the designer was up to, etc., and never considered them to be for multiple plays.

Then there are the new masterpieces of print 'n play game design such as Dune Express, Chitin: I, Aether Captains, and quite a few more. These games have professional artwork, are designed for multiple plays, and if done right, will not look out of place sitting next to your other games on the book shelf. One of these is the Magic Realm Redesign.

For those of you who are Avalon Hill fans, you probably remember Magic Realm when it came out or seeing it on the game store shelves through the late 70s and 80s. Even today it is considered to be one of the most complex games ever designed, walking a fine line between pure genius and insanity. The rulebook at that time was just over 30 pages and thought to be incomprehensible by most. After many revisions the rule book today comes close to 300 pages!
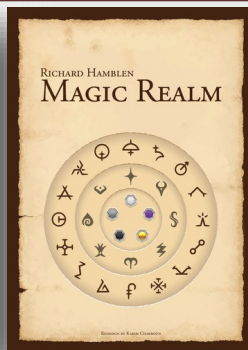
Over the years it has developed a cult like following and goes for a hefty sum on Ebay. After seeing it on a Boardgamegeek geeklist about beautiful redesigns I downloaded the files and thought I would try it. I read through several articles on building it, various options, etc., but I was not prepared for what was to come! In fact, if I had to do it all over again I would have either paid the Ebay price or had one of the game crafting companies do it for me.

After reviewing the files I was a bit hesitant to even start. After all, with so many components such as cards, boards, counters, etc., where do you start? I first had to assemble a lot of tools, which included the following:

- Kyrlon anti-UV and matte sealer

- X-acto #2s and a rotary cutter

- Corner chomper or corner rounder

- Steel ruler and cutting mat

- Spray adhesive

Once you have the tools it's on to the materials and here's where the costs really start to skyrocket. You need something to print the counters, cards, etc. on and I chose some Epson adhesive A4 sheets, which were about $35 including shipping for 20 sheets. When you figure you'll need around 100 of them it adds up fast! However, I was bound and determined to make a high quality version, which in the end might have been a mistake. Each sheet needs to be printed, sealed, then sprayed with adhesive as the sheet's own adhesive isn't very strong, then glued to the materials for cutting. Even though the sheets have marks for alignment and cutting (the designer of these files thought of nearly everything!), it's tough to get it wrapped around the material so that everything lines up correctly.

I started with the spell and treasure cards as my thinking was that it was important to have some small successes to keep myself motivated. The cards came out really well and all of a sudden not only did I have incentive to go on, but it became an obsession to do at least one part of the build each night, no matter the cost. More about that later! The remaining cards were finished along with the character sheets and I started on the counters.

The first sets of character counters weren't that bad and the corner chomper worked wonders with the larger counters used for the various monsters and natives. All of a sudden I had a stack of treasure and spell cards, the large character cards, and a few plastic baggies full of finished counters. Things were looking pretty good! That's when it hit me that I had already spent a lot of money on materials and several hours, but all I had to show for it were a few finished odds and ends. That is the essence of this project in that it is a marathon and not a sprint as most print 'n play games are. To do this thing right requires financial resources, time, patience, planning, and sufficient drive to finish it to the end.

(cont. from p. 10) Next were the hex tiles, which were definitely a challenge. I found a stack of chipboard sold in page size sheets on Amazon, which helped immensely. However, getting the hex sheets to fold over the chipboard, cutting it just right, then edging the hexes with a black Sharpie was tough to do. Two of the hexes had to be redone and I could only do about four per night, so I spent the rest of the time while parts of this dried doing other pieces.

The large boards were also a challenge in that I used the A4 files instead of the A3 ones, which solved a few issues in terms of how to cut things down the middle. Creating the boards, hinging them, and using construction paper on the back and sides is something else that needs to be added to the list of challenges. After that I finished the seasons cards, got envelopes for the character sets, and finished a few of the play aids.

There were a few options for the rules, including printing them myself, having a local print shop bind them, use the electronic version, or have Lulu print them. I decided now was not the time to get frugal and armed with a 25% off coupon I had the nearly 270 page book professionally published, which was still around $45-50. It looks nice and hopefully it will hold up for several years!

Making the confrontation and denizen sheets was pretty easy, but time consuming. Again, it was another order of materials and you could quickly see how this project takes stacks of money and produces a small pile of finished goods. Then it was onto the character counters, where you need to do about 18-20 per character for 16 characters, which is mind

numbing. I worked on finishing four characters per night and in between read the rules. The last thing was the box and that was hard to build. I made some errors, the measurements didn't work out, etc., but in the end it looks OK. It was an odd size and I simply could not find a pre-made one, so you need to build the entire thing from scratch.

Slightly over a month later and well over $200 lighter in the wallet, I had a finished copy of the Magic Realm Redesign. Beautiful to behold, but I can't help but look at it and wonder where all the money went! I'm pretty critical of my work and if I had to do it all over again I would do things differently. For one thing I think I would have chosen lower quality components to keep the price down, plus the thicker items caused a lot of problems. I also think I would have been more patient, which would have helped with the sizing issues, consistency, etc., but once you get going on this it's tough to not want to finish it.

My other motivation is that I don't think that this game will ever be reprinted. After reading the rules and playing it, I think it would appeal to a very small group of gamers, so it's not worth a major game company to invest in a reprint. Today's gamers simply don't have the

time or the interest in something this long and complex.

The big thing is that I think gamers are missing out on what could be termed a cult classic. There is a very rich and rewarding game experience if you can

patiently work yourself through the rules. There is a fine line between genius and insanity, which is what this game is. Basically, it's D&D without a gamemaster, but in an ever changing world. No two games are going to be alike and it can hold up to 16 players, which would be something to see! The BGG entry for this game has a lot of good info, plus all the files and rules are free for this redesign. My advice, however, would be to find the old game or have someone make it for you!

Islands of Destiny by John Prados Book Review
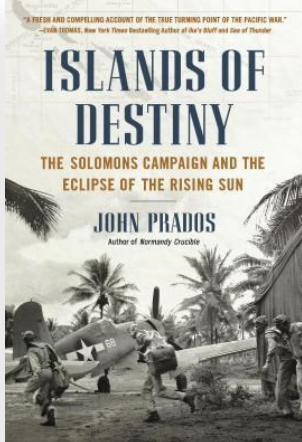
You would think with the tens of thousands of books that have been written on the pacific campaigns of World War Two that there would be very few new and interesting views on the subject. With Islands of Destiny author John Prados goes in a different direction, arguing that Japan lost the war not at Midway, but in the Solomon islands campaign.

Various authors through the years have made a number of claims and arguments about at what point did things turn against Japan. Most of these have some factual basis, but in this book the author launches into a very interesting angle, that not only did the Solomon Islands campaign cost them the victory, but it was the intelligence war combined with the military operations that did. Although most of us have read the account of the U.S. cracking the Japanese code that led to the victory at Midway, this is perhaps the first time I've read at length about its far reaching effects.

In fact, that is the basis for the entire book in that it was the U.S. military intelligence assets that won not only this battle, but conceivably the war. The reader is treated at great length as to who the players were in the military intelligence community, how things were set up, and the early results of their work. From there these departments grew at a tremendous pace and their results became even more incredible, often knowing the exact date, time, and composition of Japanese forces taking part in various operations around the island. These intelligence snippets are placed throughout the book, seemingly in almost every chapter, which never lets you forget how critical it was to the overall campaign.

Most of the books I have read on this campaign in the past focused on the carrier battles at Coral Sea and Santa Cruz, the ground campaigns on Guadacanal, and the night battles in The Slot. With this book the battles are almost a means to an end, with the direct idea that they were the result that the U.S. knew the time and place of the battle, so the outcome was more or less predictable. This paints a pattern, which is not that far off the truth, that the U.S. was going to grind out draws and victories simply because they knew what the Japanese were doing and would be there to thwart their plans.

Here is where the book, at least in my opinion, gets bogged down at times. Readers I'm assuming want to read about the various battles, but here most of them take less than a page. This is a numbers analysis with intelligence factored in, which can make for some dry reading. I found the information presented fascinating, but it took me at least three times as long to get through this length of military history book than I regularly would have.

Now that is not to say that the author ignores the military operations. Far from it in fact. The amphibious landings, the battles in The Slot, PT boat operations, airstrikes against the airfields of both sides, etc., are all gone over very thoroughly. There is some interesting analysis regarding the air campaigns, operational tempo, etc., that made for some enlightening reading. If you, however, are expecting a blow by blow account of the naval battles or ground campaigns, you will need to get a different book.

Everything presented here is done with the final judgement in mind, namely that U.S. intelligence won the war and the armed forces just needed to be in the right place at the right time. It is a very interesting perspective and with the proof provided in the book it is hard to argue that U.S. intelligence was one of the primary reasons that the Allies prevailed in the Pacific. The impression should not be, however, that the entire book is about intelligence gathering operations.

Even though the battles are not described in detail, the operations that led to them are, which gives this book its second interesting perspective. Again, in most books on the campaigns in the Pacific the authors focus on the forces, the lead up to the actual battle, then a blow by blow account of the action and a summary. This book is much different in that it goes over the reason for the various operations, what both sides were thinking, the intelligence aspect of both sides, the forces allocated, a brief summary of the battle, then what the aftermath meant for future operations.

This is going to be a new experience for many readers and it would be interesting to see this methodology applied to other campaigns. It also has the unfortunate aspect of making the book difficult to get through. By that I mean you are seeing the campaign unfold at a fairly high level, the politics, infighting, discussions over resources, etc., which isn't exactly the most exciting part of military history! It will give you a good idea of why things happened the way they did in the Solomons campaign.

Despite its shortcomings, this is a book that deserves to be on your shelf next to other books about the Pacific campaigns. The information about the Tokyo Express runs, how Rabaul expanded, and how intelligence grew to be a massive part of the Allied strategy provides some much needed insight into what otherwise could have been just another book about night battles in The Slot. While not for everyone, especially since it is at times analytical in nature, it does provide some new and refreshing insight into a campaign that you may have thought you already knew everything about.

En Garde Playtest

Over the last few years Osprey has stormed onto the wargames scene with a tidal wave of rules. Some of these have done pretty well while the jury is still out on many of them. As you've probably seen in past issues we have played Ronin several times, so after hearing about refinements to the system with the latest in the series, En Garde!, we felt it was well worth a playtest.

The only problem is that we didn't have any figures for the 30YW era! Not to worry, however, as this is a pretty flexible set of rules, so we decided to use the Vikings, Normans, and Saxons that we already have. Each player would have a small group of 6-8 figures with an archer or two, plus an objective on a small 4 x 4 game board. Everything was fairly straightforward and after a bit of explanation we were ready to go.

What followed was general chaos, which is what usually happens in skir-mish games! This one was no exception as there was heavy fighting almost from the start. After trying to unsuc-cessfully ransack the village the attackers decided it was time to get out of town while there was still a chance. The pursuit wasn't pushed early, but then the defenders seem to rally and closed the board exits.

This naturally meant a fight to the death as the only way to escape was through the local defenders who were now gaining the upper hand. There was also some poor coordination between the forc-es that started off in the town (most of that was my fault!) so that instead of hit-ting the defensive ring around us with one punch and fighting through it degen-erated into a half dozen or so smaller fights. In the end the attackers were cut down after goth sides took some very heavy losses.

We came away thinking that the rules changes from Ronin to this current ver-sion made the system play better and certainly just a bit faster. I think what is needed are some counters with the skills or modifiers you get in combat or some kind of roster sheet as that is the one part of the game that never seems to get used as much as it should. Overall it was an-other fun "to the death" type skirmish that was finished in around 2 hours.

Save the Future Prince...Nephew...Earl   TSATF Battle Report

We had a great time playing TSATF with the battle that was reported on last issue, so we decided to try it again. In this scenario the Queen's favorite nephew/future prince/the next duke of something/earl of something/43rd in line to throne, etc., known as William, has led his patrol into an ambush on the Northwest Frontier. His platoon has suffered several wounded and they are besieged in an outpost at the end of his patrol area. Knowing the Queen would be extremely upset if something happened to him, a relief expedition has been sent out.

The terrain was fairly standard for the Northwest Frontier, with a small village near a crossroads, an entrance to the valley in the shape of a pass near the British entry area, lots of scrub, and the outpost at the far end. A few trees were also present, but although they are treated as rough terrain, they were not that thick to cause serious movement penalties to either side.

The Anglo-British expeditionary force consisted of the following:

- Two squadrons of Bengal Lancers

- Two platoons of Sikh infantry

- One platoon of British infantry

- One battery of screw guns

The lancers were allowed to set up on the road in double column starting at the pass, with the screw guns directly behind

them. The British and Sikh infantry deployed in open order on the sides of the road to try to get through the scrub as quickly as possible.

Facing this were various Pathan tribes and clans from this area. Their overall plan was to besiege the outpost, but not storm it, waiting either for the British to surrender (taking William hostage) or to ambush the relief force and then take the outpost. To deal with the fact that Pathan plans didn't always work out well, there were a number of special rules for the Pathan deployment:

- Each Pathan player would mark on a map where their units would come in at.

- Each turn the Pathan players would

roll 1D6 and if it equaled the turn number or less they could not hold their men back any loner and they attacked.

- When placed on the board there was a 1D6 roll for direction on placement of each unit (closer or further to the British) and then 3D6 for distance in inches. This would simulate that some chieftains would pick the wrong ambush site or not follow the overall plan.

Two of the Pathan players had three 20 man units while the third player had two 10 man cavalry units and one 20 man infantry unit.

Before we get to the battle it might be best to go over how we play TSATF. First, we use the NWF Action Deck sold by TVAG (The Virtual Armchair General), which definitely adds some excitement to the affair and at the start of each turn we roll 1D6 and on a 5 or 6 we pull an event card from the TSATF Event Deck also sold by TVAG. Even though TSATF is pretty chaotic, both of these decks not only add to the chaos, but are a lot of fun as well. We also let two ranks of close order troops fire if sitting still through the turn and natives can never shoot more than half the unit if armed with firearms.

The Bengal Lancers moved down the road towards the outpost while the remaining forces moved up

(cont. from p 14) in support. At this point it looked too easy and as the scenario designer I was wondering if I started the British too close! Not to worry as one of the Pathan commanders decided to come out of hiding on the first turn, thinking that they could quickly deploy, cut off the cavalry, then shoot at them from long range. As with most plans in TSATF, this didn't survive a turn or two!

First, the units rolled poorly for deployment, meaning that they ended up in the village (rough terrain) and not in the open area. One unit did get off a volley then got hit with an event card where they had to charge the closest enemy! Unfortunately for them a squadron of lancers (we refer to them as Victorian Panzers!) turned to charge at the same time and for all intensive purposes obliterated that Pathan unit. The screw guns unlimbered and began pounding the (cont. on p 16)

(cont. from p 15) Pathans as well, driving two units back into cover. The second Pathan commander decided to come to the aid of the first, but again had poor deployment rolls. Instead of having six units spread out on one side of the board, four of them started in the town, creating some congestion issues!

The Pathans charged one of the approaching Sikh units and it fled, so the second Sikh unit had to change direction to secure the flank. In the center the British infantry and screw guns were definitely in a strategic position, covering all approaches and helping the Bengal Lancers in between charges. The first squadron got up to the outpost, then turned to get back into the fight when the third Pathan player's forces arrived. Again, poor deployment rolls really hurt the Pathans as their one infantry unit on that side came on in the forest. The two cavalry units, however, came on in a great place to launch a charge.

The usual Pathan tactics of standing off, trading shots with the British, whittling them down, then charging with a fresh unit simply did not work in this game. The Pathans were cursed by three event cards that forced them to randomly select units that then had to charge the closest enemy, which usually ran into heavy British fire.

So here was the critical moment of the game. The Siklh infantry were still lost in rallying and the scrub while the two lancer units were engaged in a series of charges. There was on British infantry unit and the screw guns holding the entrance to the pass and the entire center of the Anglo-British position. Two Pathan cavalry and two infantry units charged them. If they charges had gone home, it would have been game over and the Pathans would have easily finished off the rest. Instead, there were a series of events were the Pathans simply would not charge home. Instead they lay under the guns of the British units and get pounded. One Pathan infantry unit did charge the screw guns and part of the infantry platoon, but in a fierce melee they were driven off.

At this point we looked around and realized that the Pathan forces were shattered. Two units had ceased to exist, two more were fleeing and would have to be rallied, and another three were below half strength. The British had suffered some casualties, but they were comparatively light. We determined that the British would finish off the remaining Pathans, rescue William, and proceed triumphant-

ly back down the valley to their fort.

This was actually a pretty close run thing for the Anglo-British side, even though the outcome made it look like a slaughter. The Pathans had bad deployment rolls, several event cards that made their units charge at the worst times, and they rolled bad when shooting. Despite that they had a chance at the end to inflict a punishing defeat on the British, but their charge die rolls failed. Another great, crazy, chaotic Colonial game, which is why we love TSATF!
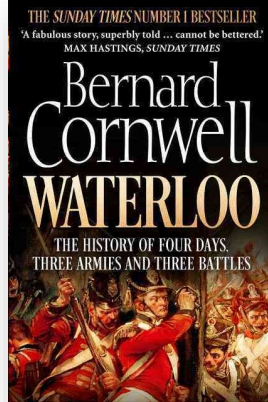
You would think that by this time everything that could be written about Waterloo has been. After books, papers, journal articles, television episodes, a movie, and more, what possibly could be left? Bernard Cornwell, one of the most well known authors in the world and famed for his Sharpe series along with many others, delves into what you would think from the outset is one of history's most celebrated battles.

I have previously read several books on the battle and the campaign, which depending upon the source, are either so dreadfully dry with numbers and statistics that it becomes sleep inducing or so biased that it leads you to question the accuracy of the author's claims. Waterloo, in a nutshell, seems to be bring out the best and worst of writers and historians, often in the same chapter! There seems to be a need to describe the battle in excruciating detail, criticize all of those who were in command, then try to insert some theory or nugget of information that no one else has come across.

For those of you who have experienced this with anything on the subject of Waterloo, this book will be a refreshing change. In fact, while reading this I was continually reminded how similar his style is to Cornelius Ryan, the famed author who wrote The Longest Day and A Bridge Too Far. The book at times almost seems like a work of fiction, where the author lays out the story rather than a detailed look at each other with constant references to various units or commanders. The author intersperses historical accounts and quotes from various participants throughout the book which gives the reader the feeling of being there amidst the action.

The book begins with Napoleon's escape from Elba and his return to France. In what will become a pattern the author assumes that you know nothing about the situation, but he will only give you just enough information to carry you through to the next chapter. It is an interesting way to present things as things aren't skipped over, but there not gone over with a fine tooth comb either. There is then a brief discussion on the current status of Napoleon, Wellington, and Blucher once it is clear that France has yet again embraced Napoleon's rule.

With Napoleon's amazing skills in organization and operations an army is created quickly and moved to the border with Belgium, catching the Allies off guard. Napoleon's plan to split and then defeat the Allies in detail is seen as a brilliant masterstroke, but then here is where things go wrong. The Allies mobilize quickly as well and move to intercept Napoleon, but are still badly out of place. This leads to the dual battles of Ligny and Quatre Bras where the first parts of Napoleon's plan start to break apart. The Prussians are beaten, but the pursuit is fouled up and they live to fight another day. At Quatre Bras Ney completely misinterprets his orders and D'Erlon spends most of the day marching back and forth between battlefields where his presence on either would have been the killing blow that was so desperately needed.

From this point we move into two parallel stories. One is the setup and beginning of the Battle of Waterloo with the second story being Grouchy's pursuit of the Prussians. Considerable time is spent on the disposition of troops, the command structure, and what the battlefield looks like. Every now and then there are several paragraphs about where the Prussians are and the French pursuit leading to the battlefield.

Naturally, a good part of the book is taken up by the battle itself. Here the author spares no words, describing in detail the opening bombardment, the English cavalry charge, D'Erlon's attack, and more which leads to the Prussians arriving at the battlefield. Time and time again the reader is struck by just how close the battle was, which is different from many other accounts that I've personally read. The crisis in the center of the British line, the French cavalry attacks, then the final assault by the Imperial Guard is explained in such a way that you can't turn the pages quickly enough!

Finally, there is a chapter on the aftermath of the battle and what happened to several of the major participants. I think it is here that I think the author could have gone on even further by exploring some "what if" scenarios had the French won or taken a different set of options.

The one thing that struck me during the reading of this book was the author continually reasserts the claim that not much is really known about much of the battle. Things like what time it actually started, who gave certain orders, etc. are all pointed out. Seeing how this is one of history's most celebrated battles you would think most of these things would be buried with excruciating detail. The author goes to great lengths to explain each of these items by going over the issue first, pointing out inconsistencies, then explaining why no one for sure knows what really happened in certain circumstances.

Even if you know nothing about the Napoleonic period the author takes time to explain line vs. column, skirmishers, cavalry charges, artillery tactics, etc., in a very informative matter without losing track of the original story about the battle. Overall, this is a book that is essential if you know nothing about the battle or period, but have some interest. You won't be treated to a reference work on Prussian tactics or British cavalry doctrine, but you will come away with a very good understanding of what occurred at Waterloo.

WMM: Saracens vs. Teutonic Knights   by Rob Coleman
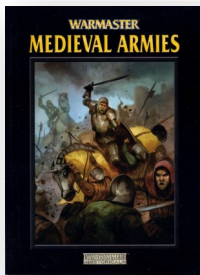
Our numbers were down a bit this Friday as several members were out for various reasons. So we decided to keep it simple with something we all knew and played a 1500 point per side Warmaster Medieval battle. I've been working on getting some Teutonic Knights built up and this was a good chance to get them and some of the terrain that I've worked up on the table.

Even though it was a snow battle (most Teutonic Knight campaigns were in the winter as the lakes/rivers froze over enough to enable serious incursions to be run. In the summer the area was too boggy and marshy to support any serious mounted campaigns) we tried to keep it semi thematic and fielded Saracens vs Teutonic Knights (aka Crusaders). As the knights were active in Southern Eastern Europe for a while this worked out okay. The Saracen force was of course larger, and like the knights they put their infantry in the middle and tried to run down the flanks with their cavalry. Ideally the Teutonic Knights can keep their cavalry close enough to support their pavise equipped infantry, flanking foes or striking from behind in classic crusader fashion (suck the enemy into the infantry, close enough to enable a devastating charge). It worked pretty well at New Years (where we had our annual WMA club tournament that was in the last is-

sue), but not so tonight.

The Saracens had some uncharacteristically good command roles and got moving early while the knights ground to a quick halt. Stellar shooting by the knights early seemed to indicate that the Saracens were in for a rough time, quickly going up through some wicked crossbow fire while the pavises did their job blunting Arab shooting.

Finally the Saracen commander went all in on the center, and initially the Teutonic sergeants held, but then finally succumbed to waves of Saracen infantry. On the right flank the knights could get no traction and only managed a few charges, one of which proved quite costly to them loosing two stands for three Saracen (and who could predict that).

On the left the knights fared better, destroying each Saracen cavalry unit they made contact with, but command rolls kept this from becoming a total rout. In the end the Saracens had crushed the Teutonic center, but their flanks were in dire trouble of absolute collapse leaving the knights to mop up the center. The game was called when the knights finally reached their break point. Overall a very fun and close game, with some spectacularly bad dice rolling at key moments for each side. Next time heathen dog, next time!

This was a well fought battle that showcased the strengths and weaknesses of both sides. Yes, the snow covered plain looks a bit out of place in these pictures, but we kind of

had a mix up on what era we were going to play! The masses of the Saracens, who went with a heavy dose of infantry backed by fanatics, did their usual thing. Namely, they just keep charging and wearing down their opponents. If a unit gets wiped out while taking one or two enemy stands with them that's great as there are more where that came from!

The issue with that strategy, however, was apparent on the flanks where the superior Teutonic Knight cavalry utterly destroyed the Saracen heavy and light cavalry posted on the flanks. In WMA/WMM knight charges are what we jokingly refer to as "Medieval Panzers!" The Saracen heavies did their part by slowing them down for a turn or two, but by mid game the Saracen flanks were gone and there was nothing in the way of a seeming Teutonic victory.

That's where the WMA command and control system comes in, however, and on this night it completely ruined the Teutonic victory celebration as their units came to a grinding halt and could not get going again. This gave the Saracens their chance in the center where all they needed to do was weather the storm of crossbows, which they did despite tremendous casualties. Once they got into the Teutonic infantry they exposed the one weakness of that army and that is that they have few infantry units that are very average. With enough units to afford suicidal tactics, the Saracens broke through and ended the battle.

Several images of the battle where the masses of Saracens prevailed in the center, but were getting crushed on the flanks. The striking power of the knight units completely obliterated several Saracen units that were in their way. In the end the Saracens had just enough to break through in the center and force the Teutonic forces to withdraw. A Saracen victory, but at the cost of about half of their army!

Sci-Fi Wargaming: Past, Present, & Future (cont.)

(cont. from p. 3) In the late 90s, then from 2000 to about 2010, sci-fi wargaming was almost back to where it was in the 70s and 80s. WH40K was still going strong and from time to time GW would release other games based upon that universe, but by this time it had become its own section of the hobby. I think at this time I should also define what I mean by sci-fi wargaming and not just sci-fi gaming. The wargaming element to me has always meant starships, futuristic armor/infantry, etc., slugging it out in battles where strategy and tactics are employed that would be very similar to WW2 or Modern era battles. Playing the space version of Settlers of Cataan is sci-fi gaming, but to me it's not sci-fi *wargaming*!

So, where are we now? Depending upon your definition of sci-fi gaming we're either at the golden age of this segment of the hobby or we're definitely approaching it. From Firestorm Armada to Dropzone Commander all the way to Star Wars Armada, there is something for everyone in every kind of scale that you can imagine. Multiple ship combat systems, ground combat, board games, and more are now lining the shelves of every gaming store and your only limit is how much money you wish to spend.

In fact, that is the number one over-riding concern of today's sci-fi gamer in that with the cost of the games, you pretty much can only support one. When you compare what was available for a set of rules in the 70s and 80s, then compare it to something like Gates of Antares, it fairs poorly. Well produced rulebooks, incredible artwork, miniatures that are

state of the art, online support, and more is now at your fingertips. Again, the only thing stopping anyone is how much one wants to spend as these games and their accessories do not come cheap.

GW and WH40K are still a strong presence in the hobby and in fact have released a 4th edition of Space Hulk along with numerous boxed sets. WH40K has undergone a number of evolutions and seems poised to do it again, which is what in my opinion forces gamers to not stay with them for long periods of time. They are, however, moving a lot of product, and have a fairly large fan base. Again, WH40K could almost be thought of as its own hobby rather than part of the sci-fi wargaming hobby.

Then you have a large of amount of board games, some of which are true sci-fi wargames such as Space Empires and Talon. Then there are others, most notably Eclipse and Twilight Imperium that while considered 4X games, are sort of a bridge between true wargames and what are termed Euro games. Finally, there are a large number of sci-fi boardgames and card games such as Race for the Galaxy, Star Realms, Quantum, Space Alert, and more. Science fiction board gaming is in great shape, although the number of sci-fi wargames is still pretty low.

Finally, we get to the debate about whether or not games like Star Trek Attack Wing and Star Wars Armada are sci-fi wargaming. There is no denying that these are two of the most popular sci-fi games to have come along in quite some time. Both games have beautiful components, colorful rules, and you can continue to expand them forever as long as the companies keep putting out products. I'm kind of on the fence on this one after

having tried Star Wars Armada. That there is space combat there is no doubt, but there so many Euro style processes and simplified mechanisms that at times it felt like more of a family game than what I would consider a wargame.

So what does the future hold for sci-fi wargaming? Will there ever be another WH40K coming over the horizon? I think the answer to this is no and that we're going to see more of the same. There are many reasons for this and I'll try to delve into it briefly.

First off, today's sci-fi gamers don't have time for true wargames. Sitting down with a group to play a 6-8 hour game of Space Empires (which BTW is a great game!) is difficult enough. Gamers want pretty bits, fast set up, lots of action, and to be done with it in under three hours. That criteria alone makes it tough on the sci-fi wargaming part of the hobby. Games like Eclipse, Star Wars Armada, etc., may be here to stay as they combine just enough combat with beautiful components to get a game in under the criteria mentioned above.

The second and third things seem to go hand in hand. That is painting a lot of sci-fi military miniatures seems to be beyond the reach of most gamers today. Painting up two squads for Gates of Antares is one thing, but painting up a few hundred vehicles and infantry stands for Future War Commander is something else entirely. On top of that you have the problem that very few gamers agree on anything relating to sci-fi wargaming, which has always been a huge issue. If I want to do an army in 1/300th for Future War Commander, but someone else wants to do it in 15mm for another rules set, that creates problems.

I don't believe sci-fi wargming is truly dead, but it's never going to rise to prominence in the hobby again. There's some good memories here, but the hobby has moved on. There will always be some demand for it, but the majority of the hobby has spoken and the new games you're seeing on the shelves now are what they want.

Military Sci-Fi Books: A Short Primer

To go along with the article about sci-fi wargaming I thought it might be a good idea to talk about some of the best books of the genre to provide inspiration for getting into this part of the hobby. While I read a lot of science-fiction, when it come to military sci-fi I like the stories to be realistic, i.e., reflect military organizations, deal with military operations, etc., so I can be pretty picky at times. Naturally, there are so many individual books and series that could go into this article that it could be well over a 100 pages! Here are a few of the best if you're looking for reading material to go along with your sci-fi games.

First off, you need to start with two of the all time classics, which are Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* and Joe Haldeman's *Forever War*. Both of these books were way ahead of their day and although written decades ago, they are still timely. Both are classic stories of futuristic warfare where the individual soldier on the ground is the focal point of the action in well written military operations.

Next up are two classic tales of armored warfare, *Hammer's Slammers* and *Bolo*. *Hammer's Slammers* would eventually grow into a series of books that deal with a mercenary armored unit in the future and their campaigns. While some of the books in the series are hit and miss, the first book, which is broken into several short stories, is a classic tale of future armored warfare with very believable technology. *Bolo* is similar, being a book of short stories about giant robot tanks with artificial intelligence. This book would become so popular that it spawned an entire series of books, which again like *Hammer's Slammers*, can be hit or miss at times. However, both of these first books in the series are fantastic military science fiction.
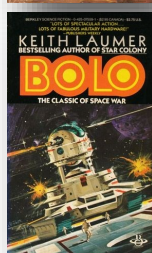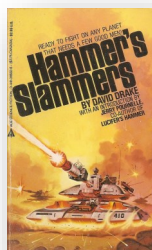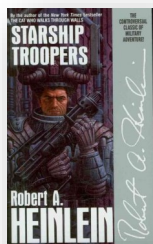
Although it may be considered heresy by some, an even better book than *Starship Troopers* is *Armor* by John Steakley. Actually two books in one that tie in at the end, *Armor* takes the "drop troops" of *Starship Troopers* and goes a bit further. The combat operations are well done and the story of one man's experience in an intergalactic war makes for riveting reading. Like *Starship Troopers*, which it is compared to often, the focus of one man in a massive system of ships, uncaring officers, and endless operations makes this a classic science fiction tale.

For those who basically like WW2 in space, I would recommend Rick Shelley's *13th Spaceborne* trilogy is as good as it gets. The first book deals with the "Lucky 13th's" combat drop on an enemy planet as part of a system wide counterattack. The details of the drop zones, artillery, fighter support, etc., are right out of military history books like A Bridge Too Far.

Starfist is another very successful series of military sci-fi books that has now grown to over a dozen titles in the series. *Starfist* tells the stories of a future Marine Corps that engages in a variety of missions throughout known space. I thought the first few entries in the series were very well done, but then like most series as it goes on some books aren't as good as others. As with many of the other books listed in this article the military operations are done as realistically as possible with mission parameters, support, the organization and weapons are discussed, and more. The stories are believable and the technology is not so fantastic that you have a difficult time wrapping your head around it.

When it comes to space combat I'm pretty particular as well, meaning that I'm not interested in Star Wars type combat, i.e. X-Wings flying around, etc. I'm looking for realistic weaponry in space,

the problems that fighting in a vacuum presents, how to plan campaigns across a galaxy, the travel time issues, and more. One of the best series that deals with these matters is the six book series by Jack Campbell called *The Lost Fleet*.
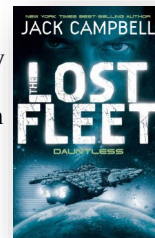
Basically, one side is losing in an almost century long war when they awaken a leader thought dead in the past. His lost knowledge of fleet tactics, military protocol, and so on becomes the catalyst to a seemingly improbable victory. The fleets here are massive, the combat situations are fascinating, and the discussions about the speeds at which the fighting occurs, formations used, tactics, weaponry, and how fast light travels to produce an accurate portrayal of the situation is very well done. There is an additional series after this as well as a spin off series that all tie in together, which as mentioned earlier with the other books here can be hit or miss. However, this first six book series is outstanding.

Another series that I'm just starting is called *Warship*, which is book one of the *Black Fleet Trilogy*. Once again, there are very good passages about weapons, military operations, the time factor, and what happens when a civilization hasn't fought a war in centuries. It is a very good start to the series and I'm looking forward to finishing it.

I've probably missed a few books or popular series here along the way, but as I mentioned earlier, there are just too many out there right now. While this is a small subset of the sci-fi genre, there are a lot of books that could be classed as belonging here. I've read far more than listed here, but many of them have unbelievable settings (yes, I know that it is sci-fi!), technology that is too fantastic, or there's plenty of plot holes. These books I've listed here also have one thing in common in that I've read them multiple times, which at least to me is the sign of a good book!

Beyond The Saale
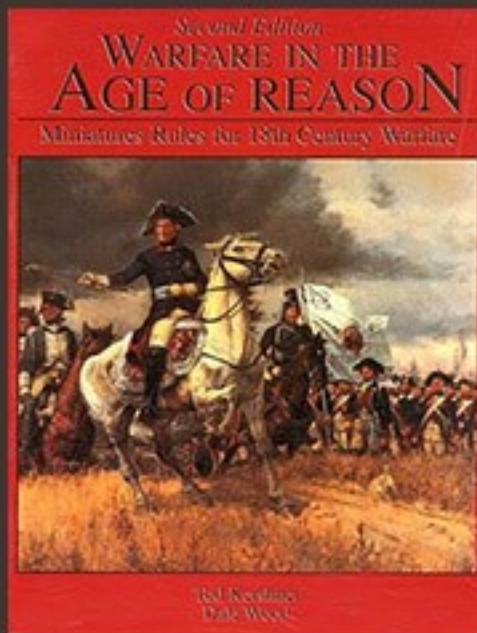
A fictional Seven Years War Campaign for Warfare in the Age of Reason

Russians Crushed At Zorndorf

The titanic battle of Zorndorf has ended in a decisive victory for the Prussian army under King Frederick II. In a bold move General Seydlitz led his cuirassier brigades in a flank attack that broke the back of the Russian army and the remains of the army were run to ground by Prussian hussars a few hours later as they tried to escape. It was then announced that the Russian army requested terms just 48 hours later, which were accepted by Frederick. The Russian army, shattered and demoralized, has completely vacated all captured territory in East Prussia. Under terms of the agreement the Russian army was allowed to keep its weapons, flags and horses if they gave back all captured territory. Russia is now essentially out of the war and can turn her efforts to Sweden and the growing Ottoman Empire.

The Prussian army, although bloody and battered, can now turn its full attention to the Western theater of operations. Already orders have gone out from the King to assemble the army and prepare for a force march. All cavalry units have been remounted and supplies have been brought in to sustain the army over the next few weeks. Hanoverian troops have already taken up new positions based on the King's orders and are awaiting the arrival of the first Prussian forces. The war in Europe will possibly be decided in the next few weeks in the Saale river valley and will shape the continent for the next generation.

Large French forces have crossed the border into West Prussia and appear heading for the Saale river valley. Reports of Saxon and Austrian units moving into the area suggest that the Allies have a new strategic plan. With the collapse of Russia the Allies have decide to combine their might and strike now before the opportunity is lost. Even with the defeats at the hands of the Prussians earlier in the war, the Allies are confident that they have the numbers to hammer the Prussians into submission. Possession of Halle and Leipzig appear to be the goal as they would block access into Northern Prussia and seal the fate of Frederick's allies for the duration of the war.

Introduction

Beyond The Saale is a fictional Seven Years War campaign that depicts a drive into Prussia by Austrian and French forces in an effort to keep Prussia off balance after they knocked Russia out of the war. While fictional in nature, the commanders and force strengths represent what would have been available for a possible campaign.

Although designed to use the campaign system in the Warfare in the Age of Reason supplements, gamers could basically use any campaign system that they want. The forces are given in terms of strength points, which could be used to represent units for the set of rules that players choose to use. For those familiar with the Age of Reason army lists you simply convert the forces (given in strength points or SPs) into the percentages shown in the army lists.

This is a unique campaign in that both sides will know where the French and Austrian forces are entering from. At this time in the Seven Years War both of these armies were not exactly know for their rapid movements, but once on the campaign map they could strike in several different directions. The French and Austrian armies will have the advantage in numbers during the early stages of the campaign, which is offset by the Prussian movement and tactical ratings of the commanders.

With multiple paths to victory the campaign has pretty good replay value and our gaming group has already played it twice over the years. In the end, it tries to do what most miniatures campaigns do and that is to provide unique and interesting battles that you would not ordinarily see on your regular gaming night.

The Map
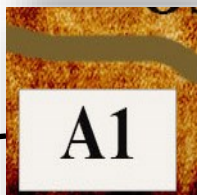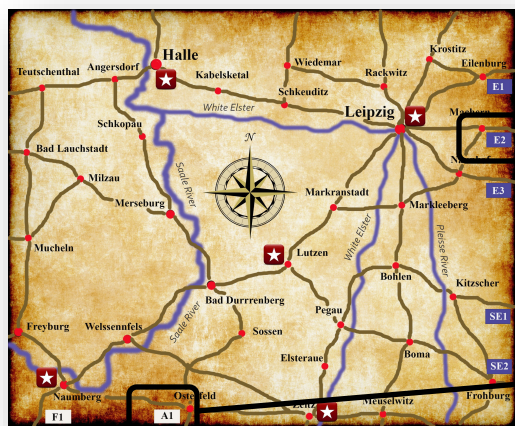
All of the Prussian entry areas are marked by a blue box with a letter and a number. The E is for reinforcements notes as arriving from the East and the SE is for those arriving from the Southeast. The numbers are just the optional entry areas, so reinforcements listed as arriving in the Southeast can come on at either SE1 or SE2.

A1 and F1 are the entry areas for the Austrian (A1) and French (F1) forces. These are the only entry areas allowed, so for example, Austrian forces cannot enter at F1 as that is only for the French forces.

The map represents the area where the Beyond The Saale campaign will take place. The map features several towns marked by red dots (movement spaces) connected by roads which regulate the movement of the various armies. There is a planning map at the end of this supplement and a larger version can be found at the WFHGS web site.

Leaders

All units/strength points must be assigned to a leader in Beyond The Saale. Each side has a number of leaders that are used to both designate a group of units/strength points and their position on the map. Refer to the rules in the Age of Reason supplements for how leaders are used in the campaign system. Each leader also has three ratings:

- Rank-When two or more leaders are in a movement dot, the leader with the highest rank is the overall force leader and his stats are used for any functions.

- Initiative-The number or less that needs to be rolled on 1D6 to move that turn.

- Tactical Rating-Used in miniatures battles.

Operational Situation & Special Rules

With the Russian army having sued for peace your forces can now deal with the Western theater. Already your units have force marched into the area around Leipzig while the Hanoverians are moving to link up with you. The French and Austrians have combined their might for one last push to gain the upper hand when peace negotiations begin. If your forces are able to defeat the Allies Prussia will be the dominant power in Central Europe for the next 50 years.

Hanoverians

The Hanoverians are allies of the Prussians and will be serving under Prussian generals for the duration of the campaign. The Prussian players can freely choose between units of both forces (and should be encouraged to do in order to give the campaign some flavor and the chance to use a unique army) to make up their army for tabletop encounters. Hanoverians are to be treated the same way as Prussians except for the following:

- No free Oblique movement

- Change formation according to their morale grade.

- No special firing rules.

- Hanoverian line are grade 2 and grenadiers are grade 3. The cavalry follow the grades of the Prussian forces as well as the artillery.

Prussian Movement

All Prussian leaders/forces are allowed to move two spaces per turn. Reinforcements always get one free move when they enter the map.

Prussian Order of Battle

INITIAL POSITIONS

Naumberg 10SP Keith

Lutzen 10SP Wedel

Zeitz 10Sp Moritz

TURN 1 Eastern Map Edge

10Sp Henry, Lehwaldt

TURN 2 Eastern Map edge

15SP Frederick, Bevern

TURN 2 Southeast Map edge

10SP Schwerin

TURN 3 Eastern Map edge

10SP Winterfeld

TURN 4 Southeast Map edge

5SP August Wilhelm

Prussian Leader Info

	R I T
Frederick	1 5 3
Schwerin	2 5 2
Keith	3 3 2
Bevern	4 4 2
Henry	5 4 2
Winterfeld	6 4 2
Aug. Wilhelm	7 1 1
Moritz	8 3 2
Lehwaldt	9 2 1
Wedel	10 3 2

R = Rank

I = Initiative

T = Tactical

Operational Situation & Special Rules

Despite suffering several reverses in the last year, your forces have conquered many outlying areas of West Prussia. With Frederick victorious in the East, he will certainly turn his attention to recapturing his lost territories. All countries in t his alliance have pledged troops, weapons, and supplies to the French to carry out this operation. The Saale river valley must be denied to Prussia and force concessions in other areas upon Frederick.

Austrian/Saxon forces

When creating an army for use on the tabletop both Saxon and Austrian units may be selected to bolster the French strength (and this should be encouraged as the Saxons represent the many varied smaller forces that were attached to the French and Austrian forces). Except where Austrian and Saxon forces are listed separately as a distinct force, they may be used in any percentage. Where a force is listed as having only Austrians/Saxons, the Austrians must make up at least 60% of the strength points.

Austrian & French Movement

All Austrian and French leaders/forces can move one space per turn and on a roll of 4, 5, or 6 on 1d6 can move a second space that turn.

When French and Austrian forces are in the same space the leader with the highest Rank rating is assumed to be in charge of the total force and must use his Initiative rating when rolling for movement. In case of a tie, the players can determine who is in overall command or it can be determined by the roll of a die.

Austrian/French Order of Battle

TURN 1 Enter at F1

15SP Richelieu, Chevert

TURN 1 Enter at A1

15SP Browne, Lacy (Austrian/Saxon)

TURN 2 Enter AT F1

10SP D'Estrees

TURN 2 Enter at A1

10SP Picolomini (Austrian/Saxon)

TURN 3 Enter at F1

10SP Clermont

TURN 4 Enter at F1

10SP Soubise, Contades

TURN 5 Enter at F1

10SP Chevert

TURN 6 Enter at A1

10Sp Daun, Laudon (Austrian/Saxon)

Austrian/French Leader Info

	R	I	T
FRENCH			
D'Estrees	1	4	2
Richelieu	2	2	1
Clermont	3	2	1
Soubise	4	1	1
Contades	5	3	2
Broglie	6	3	2
Chevert	7	3	2
AUSTRIAN			
Daun	1	4	2
Browne	2	4	2
Picolomini	3	2	1
Lacy	4	3	2
Laudon	5	4	2

R = Rank

I = Initiative

T = Tactical

Victory

Victory points will be awarded for the following :

Capture of Terrain Objectives

◊ Leipzig 50/15 points

◊ Halle 35/10 points

◊ Naumberg 10/20 points

◊ Zeitz 5/5 points

◊ Lutzen 10/10 points

The first number is the value to the Allied forces and the second is for the Prussians.

Victory points will also be awarded for the destruction of enemy forces and the capture/death of enemy leaders as follows:

• 1 victory point for each enemy strength point destroyed (based on 12 figure units).

• The initiative value of each leader killed or captured (does not apply to brigade commanders).

*If at any time Frederick is killed or captured the game ends as the Prussians will have to sue for peace.

Total the Allied victory points then subtract the Prussian victory points for a total, then compare this number to the levels of victory shown below. Any number below 0 is a Prussian victory.

DRAW 0-20 points more

TACTICAL VICTORY

21-40 points more

CELEBRATED VICTORY

41-60 points more

TRIUMPHANT VICTORY

61-75 points more

HISTORIC VICTORY

75+ points more

Game Length: 12 turns

Optional Rules

Beyond The Saale and the Age of Reason system are flexible enough that a large amount of optional rules can be added to the campaign without adding too much complexity. Most of these have to do with the command and control aspect of the campaign as well as hidden movement/ Players should remember that these are only optional rules and that they all of them can be added or only a few.

Weather: This is probably the easiest option to add to the campaign. Roll 1D6 at the beginning of each turn:

Die Roll	Result
1	Rain/Mud
2	Rain
3-5	Clear
6	Clear/Heat

Rain = All forces can only move one space per turn.

Rain/Mud = Each force must roll a 4,5, or 6 on 1D6 to move one space that turn.

Clear/Heat = All forces can only move one space that turn. If any battles are fought that turn, after turn 6 on the battlefield all forces subtract one dice from their shooting and morale.

Operation Centers & Dispatch Points

Instead of rolling for initiative for each leader to see if they can move that turn, the concept of Operations Centers (think command staff) comes into play. The highest ranked leader on both sides is assumed to be the Operations Center for their army. Each turn a D6 is rolled with the result being the number of Dispatch Points that are available that turn. These represent messengers and staff operations for the army in the field. Frederick gets a +2 on the roll each turn. To move forces, including the hex the Operations Center is in costs Dispatch Points.

Hexes Distant	Dispatch Point Cost
Same Hex/1 space	1
2-3 spaces	2
3+	3

Leaders that receive Dispatch Points do not have to roll for initiative that turn and can automatically move. Those leaders that do not receive any can still roll for initiative. *Ex. Frederick has 6 Dispatch Points this turn. He uses one for the forces in his space, two for Schwerin who is 3 spaces away, one for Keith who is one space away, and two for Henry, who is two spaces away. These forces can automatically move this turn, but all of the other Prussian leaders will need to roll versus their initiative ratings.*

Dispatch Points can be accumulated from turn to turn, but no Operations Center can have more than 10 at any time. Prussia, Austria, and France all need to roll for Dispatch Points each turn. If the highest ranking leader is killed or captured, the Operations Center transfers to the next highest ranked leader with a one turn delay, meaning no Dispatch Points are generated that turn.

Hidden Movement

There are several ways to have hidden movement in Beyond The Salle. The first is to do map movements by each side and if a force ends up or crosses the same space as another force a battle ensues.

The second option is to do some kind of initiative system where the leader counters are upside down on the map, so that each side can only see a force or group of forces on the map. Each player rolls D100 to generate a number for each leader. Then starting out at 100, players count down each number and when a leader with number is read, that leader moves if they have dispatch points (if playing with the optional rules) or they roll for initiative and move if able, then you proceed to the next leader in order of their rolls.

This goes by much faster in practice and creates a semi-simultaneous movement system where players can react to the forces that are moving around them. You could also do the same system, but players do not have to have their leader counters on the map (keep track on a separate map). Players can declare forces each turn by putting a leader counter upside down on the map, or moving them as an undeclared force. This gives the oppor-

tunity for some strategic and operational surprises, but it should come at a cost. However, should any declared force move into an undeclared (hidden) force, the undeclared force should have to roll for SP losses (consider it an ambush, poorly deployed for battle, etc.)

Scouting & Vedettes

This system takes a little more work and the players would need to come up with their own house rules. Basically, you would get so many vedettes or cavalry screens per strength point that would then act as their own force, moving on the map each turn. These would serve not only as scouting forces, but dummy forces as well. A chart could be drawn up for cavalry screen/vedette combat and the winner gets a favorable die roll on a table to determine the size of an actual enemy force. There are several of these full hidden movement systems in By The Sword on our web site that could be used for Beyond The Salle with a few modifications.

Designers Notes

This is the third version of Beyond The Salle that I've done, each time tweaking a few things here and there. I really need to come across someone who can do professional looking maps, because that is the one thing that all of my supplements and campaigns really lack!

So why a fictional campaign? Most of the Seven Years War campaigns are well documented and when done with miniatures they tend to play out the same or close to the actual results. Both sides have forces know to each other, there's few options for movement, then there's a few large battles closely followed by everyone losing interest and the campaign falling apart!

By taking the fictional route I was able to create a fluid situation with scattered forces and plenty of options for both sides. This will hopefully give the campaign some replay value (we've tried

it twice already) and being fairly simple in nature if it falls apart everyone doesn't feel that they've put months of labor into the campaign.

The Austrians and French have the advantage of being the larger force, they can concentrate quickly, and have multiple paths to victory. This is offset by the leadership of the Prussians, their faster campaign movement, plus their tactical advantages in the rules. As to whether or not the campaign is balanced or not, that is a subject for some other time!

Beyond The Salle to me accomplishes a few things. First, it is an excuse to do a Seven Years War campaign which is always a good thing. Second, it will hopefully generate some unique battles that you would not ordinarily see on your regular gaming nights. Finally, campaigns are simply the high point of the hobby. The strategy sessions, unequal battles, last stands, surprises, etc., greatly increase the social aspect of our hobby.

Saga: Normans vs. Saxons

Battle Report by Rob Coleman

Saga, as a system, has great core mechanics, and if you are willing to dabble can be made into a robust system for any small scale unit action. Case in point, the fens and swamps that Hereward the Wake's soldier's used surrounding Ely after demise of Harold and most of the ruling elite in England. Now this could be played straight up, with no twists but we decided to add a little wrinkle. Hereward was the leader of Saxon resistance after William had conquered Southern England. He withdrew into the fens around the town of Ely (with the backing of the bishop there), and made repeated sorties out to run a guerrilla war upon the Norman invaders. The fens posed a problem in both attack and defense. Large bodies of troops were difficult to move through the territory, and both sides spent time looking for paths in and out to enable or deny successful conquests.

We used a standard scenario from the book, where both sides started with 6 points and then bid to see who would defend. The lowest bidder defended the 'town' while the other team attacked. As the fens were notorious for shifting pathways, fetid swamp, and thick gorse any unit that wanted to move would have to roll a D6. On evens they could move as normal, on odds foot soldiers moved short (instead of medium) and mounted troops moved very short. The attacking player had to find a pathway off the table, while the defenders had to stop them. We used simple stones to delineate good and bad paths across the board. Blue stones meant solid footing/clear land while red indicated muck/swamp/other slowing troops down. Anything within very short of a path counted the same as the path, meaning a player could moved successive units up a path and branch off in new directions depending on how things went.

The Normans underbid the Anglo-Danish (Saxons) and thus the scenario was the Normans guarding a known farmstead on the outskirts, attempting to keep the Saxons bottled up inside the fens while the Duke prepared his soldiers for the assault on Ely. The Anglo-Danish had to get their soldiers off the opposite table edge. For a full victory they needed a continuous path while for a slim victory just getting off the board would do. The Norman player took two units of Mounted Hearthguard, a unit of crossbows, and a unit of foot warriors. The town would count everything within medium as firm ground with no rolling needed to move.

The Anglo-Danish spread out across the table and started a slow slog across it, with only moderate success for mobility. The Normans likewise slowly trudged out to counter at a few key points on the table. At several points the pathing meant both sides failed to get into combat. In particular the Normans failed on a few key charges, and the Anglo-Danish we able to slog across slowly but steadily. The Norman crossbow shooting ensured the 'Saxons' did not go unmolested however. In the end though, the Anglo-Danish order countering ability saw a single unit of Anglo-Danes get off the table, though not with any connecting paths. By that point the Normans had been whittled down, but the Danes couldn't get the job done for a full win.

Now this can be connected for a future game, in which the 'Saxons' are attempting a break out, but due to the slim victory the Normans might have an ambush lined up and ready to go. A simple mechanic, in this case to represent boggy/marshy ground, made for a very different version of the standard scenario, where no one could be certain of how things would play out.
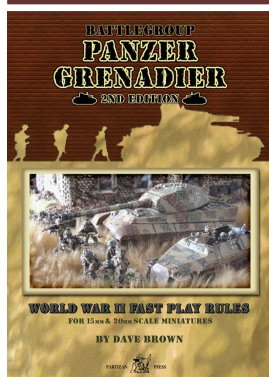
By this time I'm sure that many long term readers of this magazine are wondering why we can't stick to one set of rules for each period. This question perplexes us as well! For 1/300th scale my preferred set is still BKC2, but for the rest of the gaming group this can ebb and flow. Case in point would be Battlegroup Panzergrenadier, where it started off as a 15mm project and has now morphed into 1/300th as well!

This was going to be our first attempt at using these rules with the smaller scale and after a quick refresher we were ready to go. BGP is an interesting set of rules for those not familiar with them as there are elements of command and control, but it's nowhere near what Command Decision used to be. The firing and morale systems are fairly easy to grasp, so once you've played a few turns all you need is the charts from that part on.

For this scenario,, set in 1944 during one of the Russian drives to the German border, Russian recon has failed miserably. Not only did they list the town in the center of the board as being much smaller, there was no mention of the river behind the town or the German defenses which were deployed in depth. For game purposes only the units the Russians

could see were deployed on the board and the river was nowhere to be seen along with only one town block. This naturally gave the impression that the board was wide open and the Russian forces could pretty much go where they pleased.

As far as the Russians go, they had a pretty powerful force. There would be two armored spearheads of T-34 companies along with Su-122s and SU-76s mixed in for support. There were multiple companies of infantry that were acting as tank riders, plus there were several more platoons of T-34s in reserve off board. A very powerful force, but there were a number of factors that would hinder it, including the quality of the troops and only one company of T-34/85s. The Russian force also had air and artillery support on call.

The Germans had a good defense in depth set up with the first layer being a platoon of PZIVHs along a small ridge that overlooked the road. There was a platoon of Stugs along with an infantry company dug in on a hill outside of the town, plus a Panther platoon in reserve. The Germans had an infantry company in the town with a platoon of Hetzers in support. Two other infantry units defended farms on the left hand side of the road. The Germans did have some Tigers

and Jagdpanzer IVs in reserve that would be called upon in case of a Russian breakthrough.

The Russian plan was to clearly advance along two routes, overwhelm the German defenses, then pour the remaining forces through the hole for a victory. The Germans went for a defense in depth, hoping to attrite the advancing Russians and then commit the reserves at a critical point in the battle. Both sides had sound plans and with what the Russians knew about the terrain, their initial attack made a lot of sense. The Germans were concerned about their armor being spread out too far and trying to cover too much area, which might let them be destroyed piecemeal.
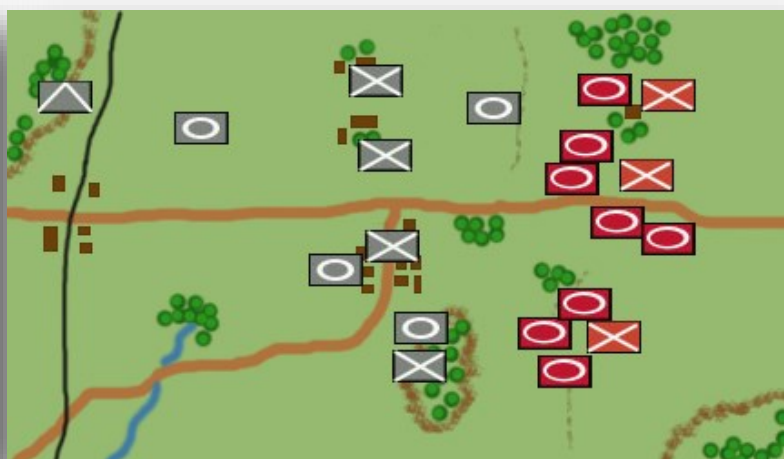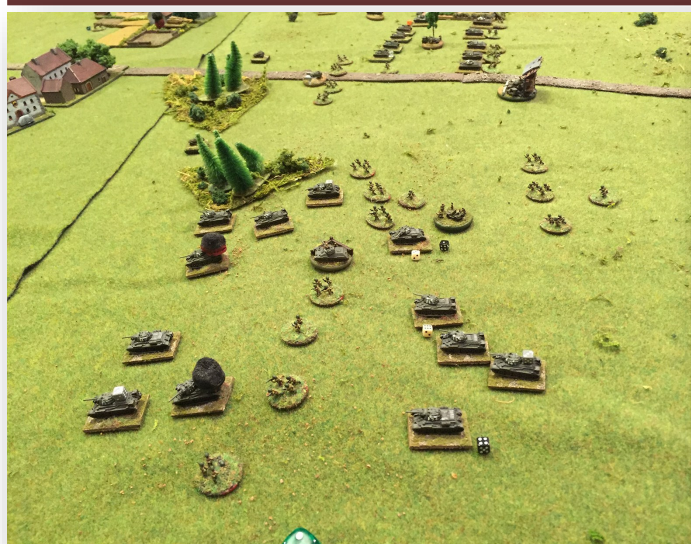
(cont. from p 30) The game began with a virtual horde of Russians moving onto the board and they spent the first few turns getting their columns organized. The Germans responded by moving up the Panthers to the second ridge to offer long range fire support. The battle truly began with the PZIVHs on the first ridge opening fire at the advancing T-34/85s, setting a few of them ablaze. This started a several turn armor firefight that ended up with the PZIVH platoon destroyed and the Russians resuming their advance.

With things not looking good for the Germans after the first few turns the Russians came up against the small hill on the outskirts of town, defended by German infantry and Stugs. This would prove to be the anchor of the German defenses as they refused to give ground. The Russians lost most of a company of armor during this fight for the loss of two Stugs. Time and time again the Stugs would oen fire, be forced back, move to different positions, then open fire again with devastating accuracy.

In the center the Russians tried to take the town on the march with a quick attack, but it was thrown back. The Russians then brought up SU-122s and SU-76s, which began pounding the defenders. The Russians then attacked the town, section by section until they had taken all of the town. At this point the Germans were barely hanging on, which included the defense of a farm on the far German left. The Russians had taken the town in the center and were poised for a breakthrough.

The Panthers had moved up and engaged the advancing Russian armor, which began a 7-8 turn slugfest that left most of the Panthers burning along with double the number of Russian tanks. The Russian air and artillery support, which could have been crucial in delivering the killing blow, was still nowhere to be seen. In fact, it only showed up one turn during the game! The German artillery wasn't much better and I can't recall a single time that it was ever used!

The Germans used their infantry reserves and launched a fierce counterattack that re-took one of the town sections. By this time the Russian and German infantry in the center had been decimated. The Russians began bringing in their reserve armor, hoping to make one final push at the hill. The Stugs, however, hung on defiantly, not giving up one inch of the hill and they continued to inflict tank losses on the advancing Russian forces

(cont. from p 31) The Russians made one final attempt at a breakthrough, but ran into fire from a German 88mm at the rear of the German positions and overlooking the rail line. The Russians looked around for fresh units, but they were down over 35% and were scattered across the board. With more German reserves still available the game was called as the Russians had run out of steam and would not be able to break through, even though the Germans were over 25% losses themselves.

It was a two night game that including set up and take down, went for about 8 hours. Most of that was due to the large number of units on the board along with all of the firing, but it definitely had an "East Front" feel to it. The Russians got no help from their air or artillery support, which could have been decisive at a few points in the game. The defense of the hill also deserves mention as the Russians were funneled into the center of the board, making things a bit easier for the defenders. If the Russians had broken through in that area the Germans would have been in dire straits.

The change to 1/300th scale after playing these rules a few times in 15mm deserves to be commented upon. I thought for the tank actions the smaller scale played and felt right, which is definitely an issue with 15mm where the ranges and models sometimes look weird. The infantry were another matter. While the system worked and we had some incredible battles at the town, the small size makes them easy to overlook and it's hard using them with the built up terrain. Nothing that can't be overcome, but it was noticeable by a few in our group.

Overall, it was a very good battle and the rules seem to work well for late war Eastern Front. Although there were a large number of things on the board, the firing system never felt clunky or time consuming, which is good in large, multi-player games. The morale test for having one side quit the battlefield felt a bit simplistic, but in the end it worked out. Probably not everyone's cup of tea as the command system can take some getting used to, but the results seemed realistic and it is definitely worth the effort. Someday we'll do this again, but maybe a few years earlier on the same front!
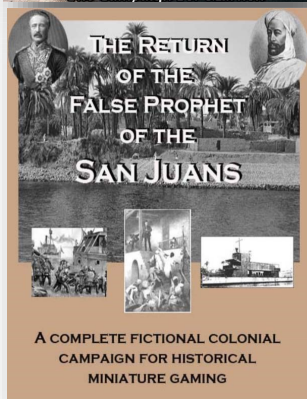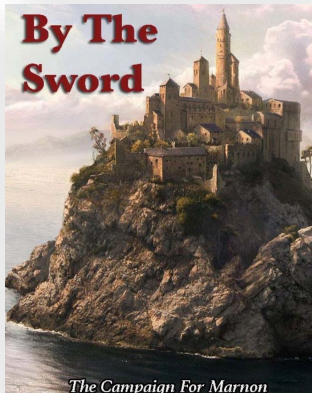
Be sure to check out our various campaigns for rules such as WMA, TSATF, and BFE II on our web site.

One of my long time gaming friends and I recently went on a visit to the local (OK, it's about an hour from our homes) gaming store together, which we do from time to time. We're blessed with a really good store in our area that has historical miniatures, sci-fi/fantasy, Ospreys, paint/supplies, terrain, rules, etc., and we spend quite some time looking though the various offerings. Could we purchase most of this online? Certainly, but it's fun to look through the store, see the items in reality, and purchase something that we need and to show support for a physical hobby store. Call it a wave of nostalgia for what we did on Saturdays back in the 70s and 80s, but it's still fun to do. We did however, spend quite some time talking about our visit on the long drive back home, which touched on several things:

- *Who was playing all of the rules that are for sale now? There must have been well over 100 sets of rules for various periods on the shelves, ranging from Flames of War to Fields of Glory. However, we never see anyone in our area playing but a few of them and I couldn't even recall seeing battle reports or comments about many of them on the sites I regularly visit online.*

- *The cost of the Games Workshop stuff is bordering on insanity. Kudos to them if they're getting people to pay for their products, but there's a reason why both of us got out of the GW hobby awhile back and one of the reasons is paying $250+ for a boxed set with a few figures in it!*

- *The hobby, which has always been decentralized, is even more so now and common ground is nowhere to be seen. I can remember going into similar stores in the 70s, 80s, and 90s where we talked about WRG, Empire, etc., and even if you hated those rules you could at least get in on a conversation about ancients gaming, ACW rules and formations, etc. Today, it's like everyone is speaking a different language. I overheard a group playing at a table while I was there talking about new rules systems for various games and as each person brought up something new not one other person owned or knew about what the other was talking about.*

- *The Golden Age of the hobby is here now in front of us. Everything you could ever want is at your fingertips and the amount of items that tempted me to start new projects was staggering! However, this little voice kept asking me the same questions over and over, "Who are you going to play with? Who else is interested in this set of rules? Can you get others to commit to a new period for even a week before they're distracted by something else?"*

Definitely some food for thought about where things are heading.