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Roll to Hit: Unofficial History of D&D

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Inspired Enterprise: NASA, Smithsonian, Star Trek

South Pacific Air War: Volume 6

Battles for the Channel Ports: Then and Now

Colonel William Prescott: Bunker Hill

In Strange Company: Iraq 2003-4

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12 Years With Hitler: Secretary to the Fuhrer

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Bio of a Space Tyrant: Vol. 1 Refugee (sci-fi novel)

Bio of a Space Tyrant: Vol. 2 Mercenary (sci-fi novel)

Bio of a Space Tyrant: Vol. 3 Politician (sci-fi novel)

Patton Versus the Panzers: Arracourt Sept 1944

USMC Tank Markings in the Pacific: WWII

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Renaud declares victory....after only Turn 1. Given my armor losses, no wonder he was feeling groovy.

Runs, Guns, and Huns: WWI Trenches

by Russ Lockwood

I've been enamored with WWI for a couple decades. Most gamers might say what's the point -- it's all trenches. To a large extent, trench warfare was indeed the staple on the Western Front. The Eastern Front, with wider areas, not so much. In any case, I played in a nifty WWI trench game at Historicon.

So, I was quite pleased to see a WWI trench set up complete with tanks on both the British and German sides. The 15mm figures were PSC Great War figures painted by the Fernando team of Sri Lanka -- nice job, by the way. The tanks were not painted, but had decals applied.

View from the German rear area trenches.



The rules were Renaud's universal rule set *RUSE*, slightly altered from last time as playtesting revealed faster mechanics. The big differences were eliminating the 1-in-6 save rolls and the use of a new Shock (morale) mechanic based on figure loss at the time of loss instead of tracking what had been called Scares.

View from the British center.

The 1 to 1 Attack

By random roll, I was British and Renaud German. I was to clear the trenches and get to the German artillery line. That would be a tough order: It was basically a 1 to 1 attack.

My Brits fielded seven tanks, two of which were 6pdr-armed "male" Mk IVs, two were MG-armed "female" Mk IVs, and three MG-armed Whippets. The Germans had two A7Vs with a 57mm gun up front and two MGs on each side. We both had HMGs, trench mortars, and 10-man squads of troopers.

The Germans had a pair of 77mm guns, good for killing tanks and firing high explosive. I had air support that would come in 50% of the time and also a 10-man squad of stealth engineers who could pop up anywhere 6 or more inches from a German unit.

In total, the Germans had 20 units and the Brits 21.

The Cards

Each player can select numbered cards so the total of the numbers on the cards amounted to 20 for the Germans and 21 for the Brits. The number would indicate how many units can be activated for the phase and the lower number would go first (ties were a dice off).

I hadn't thought much about this at first, but as the game progressed, it became clear that we had a little bluffing going on over what number would be played. Do you play a low number, like a 1, to go first, or do you play higher numbers and concede first strike to the enemy but get lots of activations to respond?

About halfway through the game, I began to mumble about "good tension" in the card selection -- and that's a good thing. By the three quarters mark in the game, I was proclaiming "great tension" -- and that's a great thing.

I don't know how this would play out in a multiplayer game with four or so players on a side, but for 1 on 1, that's a clever card mechanic.

Artillery Barrage

This game assumed that a big gun creeping artillery barrage had crept beyond the two trench lines. The German front trench was rather thin of troops, although a couple snipers were up and available. Also, the pre-game barrage had punched enough gaps in the barbed wire so not to impede troops. However, the moonscape meant troops crossing No Man's Land could roll 1d6 for inches of movement and then fire, or, roll 2d6 movement and not fire.

Punch A Hole

I looked upon the German array of MGs and said, "Tanks to the front! Advance!"

WWI tanks were slow and vulnerable. If they weren't suffering mechanical breakdowns or "ditching" (getting stuck), their thin armor was especially vulnerable to guns bigger than a MG -- and even HMGs could cause problems.



All I can say is, the tank duel between Germans and British pretty much was a one-sided affair in the German's favor. I lost five of seven very quickly.

My tank graveyard, as documented by the smoke.

An A7V punched one out. Two were lost to the 77mm artillery guns. One was lost to an errant mortar that drifted off target and landed smack dab in the middle of the top of a Mk IV. And I lost the fifth tank when a gallant German engineer snuck up and tossed a satchel charge with unerring precision -- and then I rolled a real low defense die and Renaud rolled a really high offensive die and the Whippet cracked open like an egg hit by a sledgehammer.

My 6pdr managed to pop the A7V on my left flank.

Meanwhile, my mortar shells were flying everywhere but where I wanted them to go. My regular soldiers made up for it, at one point slaughtering half a German squad defending in a trench. Usually, it was picking off one-sie, two-sie, but roll enough dice and you'll occasionally get these high-low results.



My left flank. The A7V is knocked out (top left of photo), but my Whippet is also knocked out. The square base of the infantry indicates a leader or special figure.

It happened on both sides, so neither of us could blame the dice. Well, we still whooped with joy or groaned in amazement as the dice rolled. The dice had rounded corners, so sometimes they wobbled around a bit in the tray, adding to the anticipation of the roll.

And in a first, Renaud managed to roll a die that balanced upright on a rounded corner. We nodded and then rapped on the table with our knuckles to see which way it would fall. It didn't. We did so again, harder. It stayed balanced on its corner. What a chuckle! Re-roll.

Air Superiority

Us Brits had air superiority and I called for a strafing run on a particularly effective trench mortar.

"Nicht so Schnell!" Renaud thundered, and tried to activate a HMG group in a nearby shell crater. He made his 50-50 roll. We used the same die-rolling system with this combat as any other, with the caveat that one "hit" would abort the plane and two hits would shoot it down (and remove its card from the game).

The abortive attack on the German artillery.



The German HMG hit once and my pilot became spooked and flew away without firing his guns. That, by the way, was the last I ever saw of the plane. I never made the 50-50 arrival roll again...

Staying Under Cover

To me, it made no sense to leave the heavy cover I was in to advance into the clear open spaces of No Man's Land while a pair of HMGs stared me down. I eventually shot them out of existence. I took out the three snipers, too.

End of Turn 2. The start of the advance. Blue dice indicate number of activations performed by the unit. The black die is the number of shots taken by the mortar unit (bottom right corner).



A fresh German squad came from the right. This is the one with the engineer who won an Iron Cross for taking out my Whippet tank. I shot them up until only a pair of Shocked soldiers remained.

And then, to my amazement, I managed to drop a mortar in the trench atop a reinforcing German squad. I had seen what a German mortar had been able to do on my troops. This time, I returned the favor, eliminating eight of 10 soldaten with a single mortar attack.

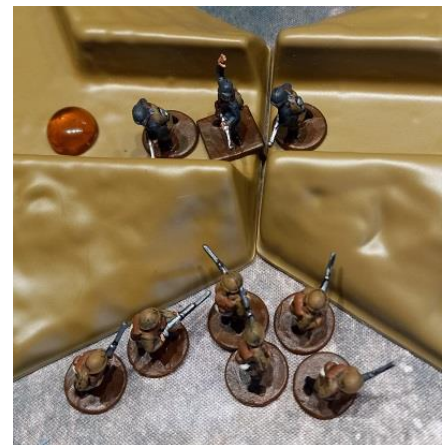
I loosed my stealth squad in No Man's Land upon the Germans. They shot up a German squad to extinction.

Alas, return German fire obliterated every member of my stealth squad. Every one... Remember what I feared about sending troops into the "open" of No Man's Land? Well, that fear came true.

But at least the center trenches were now cleared of Germans and ready for the taking.

I shot and shot and shot at the German squad on the far left and far right flanks, eliminating them or whittling them down to a couple figures.

My British squad is in good shape versus the outnumbered and Shocked (amber bead) German squad in the trench. After a victory, my squad took the trench and then defeated a German counter-attack. The squad had but two soldiers left, but it also held the trench.



Over The Top

The first squad I sent over the top on the far right led a charmed life until the A7V shot it up.

The other squads I sent into the now wide-open center were shot up by long-range MG fire, mortars, and artillery. Two squads on the left were down to two soldiers each. The squad in the center right made the first trench line, meleed and caused the one German squad to flee and then meleed and caused a second German squad to flee. Although down to half strength, they now had the trench section. Alas, they were shot up from every side and were down to two soldiers as well.

End Of Game

And that's where we ended the game. We did three turns in about four hours, including a little bit of rules discussion for things like hits on the airplane, tank guns' fields of fire, wave attacks, and a couple other points.

This was a big game with 20 units each and it takes a bit of dexterity to move each figure, especially in trenches. I think the Samurai game we played had about a dozen or so units per player.

I liked the changes that put Shock into play -- less bookkeeping. The lack of the 1 in 6 save roll was fine, too. I didn't miss it.

The distance from the British start line to the first German trench could go either way. Avoiding the really bad terrain (shell holes) meant a 2d6 average of 7 inches per movement. That meant about three turns to get to grips. I rolled really well to get some units attacking the German trench in two turns. The stealth lads only lasted the turn they entered.

I suggested some sort of squad flee rule, or squad surrender rule, or something to remove the squad when it got down to two figures. On the other hand, remnants of historical units were often decimated and still held on or intermixed with reinforcing troops. I need to do some research on losses.

If a unit was already in Shock and received a second Shock, it fled a full move back to its baseline. That happened to two German squads and is a good rule to show broken morale. If it was in melee, I'd say the broken morale troops should surrender.

Win, Lose, Or Draw

I'd have to give the Germans a minor victory here. I only took some of the first trench, although all the German front-line trench squads were shot to pieces. I couldn't believe four hours went so fast -- a testament to the game keeping my attention.

On my right, I had one two-soldier squad in the trench facing off against a single-figure German squad with two more two-figure German squads fleeing. All four units were in Shock. The A7V was in pristine shape.

In the center, I had a two-soldier squad in the trenches not in Shock. I had a full squad and a four-soldier squad moving into No Man's Land.

On the left, the Germans had a two-soldier squad in Shock with a fully intact squad racing to reinforce. I had two two-soldier squads (one in Shock) in No Man's Land and an eight-soldier squad in heavy cover ready to advance into No Man's Land.

My supporting mortars and HMGs were largely intact, as were the Germans'. The two German artillery units were intact, but virtually impossible to fire upon until I reached the first German trench.

This was a nice upgrade to *RUSE* rules and an entertaining game filled with great tension.

Well done!

End of Turn 3 and end of game.



Sa Battalla

Sa Batella: Obscure and Curious Wargame

by Daniel

Russ and I have been playing a number of older wargames that don't hit the table much, but this time I offered him a game I ran across a number of years ago that interested me: *Sa Battalla*. It is a wargame of the Battle of Sanluri on the island of Sardinia on June 30, 1409.

Dan consults the rules just before we start the game. Photo by Russ.

This game is based on another game series called *Guelphs and Ghibellines*. Both have been out of print for years and are very difficult to find. The rules come with an English version and an Italian version of the rules. We used the combat charts from *Guelphs and Ghibellines*. The game system has a lot of mechanics that remind me of the *Great Battles of Alexander* by GMT.

The unusually colorful counters with excellent illustrations of all the different troop types involved proved a big attraction to me. Each unit represents 150-200 knights or cavalry, 500 foot soldiers, or 1000 militia. A hex represents 100 meters. Movement ratings are absent on the counters, but all infantry have a movement factor of 3 while all mounted and leaders have a movement rating of 5.

The units are organized as *Battaglia* (battlegroup) under a leader. Each leader has a Command Capacity, which is represented by a second counter for each leader on a separate roster. Leaders also have a Combat Bonus rating (which does **not** influence any Cohesion test) and a Command Radius.

The game system emphasizes the progressive deterioration of command, control, and fatigue during the battle and tries to simulate the entropy on the field of battle and its effects on the chain of command and the "victory perception." I found the game to be successful on all those counts.

Russ took the army or Arborea under Guillaume III (four *Battaglia*), which had the advantage of being on higher terrain. I had the invading army of Aragona under King Martì el Jove (five *Battaglia*). We tried the historical set-up with respect to where the opposing *Battaglia* were located, but allowed their units to be set-up anywhere within command radius of the leader of each *Battaglia*.

Colorful counters.

The Burden of Attack...

After an initial uniform advance to the foot of the hill unopposed, Russ uses his Genoese crossbowmen against Pere de Torrelle's *Battaglia*, disrupting the entire line. I respond with a Reorganization command (only allowed if no units are adjacent to enemy) and attempt a *Continuum*, which succeeds. Torrelle's *Battaglia* attacks, impacting parts of two opposing commands (Brancaleone Doria and Guillaume III) at the seam. The Genoese crossbowmen are shoved back, but the Provenza knights of Guillaume III's *Battaglia* hold firm.

Russ responds to the Aragona attack, effectively dishing out as good as he got. I never activated Torrelle's *Battaglia* to continue the attack for the remainder of the game. Instead, I activated King Martì el Jove's *Battaglia* to attack the center and see if I could dislodge those Provenza knights stalling Torrelle's *Battaglia*.



Command Capacity

Any time a leader is activated, attempts a *Continuum*, or attempts an *Interruptio* (successful or not), that leader drops one Command Capacity (CC) level. Among the four Arborea and five Aragona leaders, the CC ratings at the start of the game range from 11 to 7. When a leader's CC drops to 5 or less, a Recovery Order will restore 2 points of CC.

Russ reacts to the initial Aragona attack by Torelle's Battaglia.

When C-in-C's Meet...

The King's *Battaglia* is the strongest with the best units in the game and the impact of the *Bacinet*s charge forces Guillaume III's whole line back, including some militia on the right. Guillaume's three *Lieros* cavalry units attempted countercharges, but all balked (meaning Russ needed a 1-4 to countercharge but rolled a 5 or 6 three times when testing) and all recoiled against the *Bacinet*s. After King Martino attempted and succeeded a *Continuum*, Russ attempts an *Interruptio* with Guillaume III, which is successful.

The opposing C-in-Cs...

Russ summons Guillaume III's reserve cavalry on the hill to redress the mayhem threatening to disintegrate his front line, but the Aragona *Bacinet*s are not driven back, although several are disrupted. Guillaume III attempts a *Continuum*, which succeeds. I contemplate interrupting, but decide not to, as

Guillaume's command does not have many fresh units left and the King's command is still in pretty decent shape. The Arborea counterattack does seem to stabilize the situation, but Russ has lost four units at this point, while the Aragona army has lost none.

Russ' crossbowmen bend, but a series of unfortunate countercharge rolls disrupt and doom Russ' center versus the King. Photo by Russ.

The King activates his command once more and gets all his units into the attack, routing two more Arborea units and capturing Guillaume III. Capturing the opposing Commander in Chief is not an automatic victory, but Russ has seen enough: He has a significant hole in his battleline and no easy way to correct that.

Historically, our game was similar to what actually happened.

Impressions...

The rules were a little tricky at first, but functioned well once we got familiar and went through each step. There is really only one "Turn" to the game, as leader activations go back and forth continually. We both went through each Missile and Shock combat together to make sure we both understood how combat works and to ensure all appropriate modifiers were applied. Since the number of units involved in any activation is often 5-10 units, the number of combats per activation ranged from 1-6, which is quite manageable.



The Reorganization Order can recover units from Disruption, but not cohesion. Unlike the *Great Battles of Alexander* by GMT, cohesion hits on units cannot be removed, although the leaders' Command Capacity can be restored to a degree through a Recovery Order.

The Command Capacity rules are interesting to simulate erosion of command and control over time. Players will see their units get damaged, fatigued and eventually routed as the game goes on, so keeping a local reserve of fresh units is recommended. The ability of leaders to get a double-move through a successful *Continuum* declines with each activation, unless they can disengage their command to use a Recovery Order (but only if their current CC is 5 or less). This is very difficult to accomplish once the command is engaged, prompting the familiar phrase: "A fine mess we've gotten ourselves into..."

What Really Happened at the Battle of Sanluri

The early morning of June the 30th of 1409 was hot and hazy. Martino the Young, King of Sicily and heir to the throne of Aragon, left the encampment at dawn, leading his army toward the fortified village of Sanluri, about 4 kilometers away. His army of roughly 8000 infantry and 3000 horsemen, together with a siege engines detachment, prepared to seize the village. He began the journey three days before from Castell de Caller (today known as Cagliari) to reconquer the lost territories of Sardinia and to punish the last Sardinian free State of Arborea.

Guillaume III of Arborea assembled his army of maybe 18,000 - 20,000 men at Sanluri, a fortified village on the border between Giudicato of Arborea and Giudicato of Cagliari, a place that due to terrain gave the defender some advantage. This army included Provence soldiers, Genoese allies, Lombards and Swiss mercenaries that, together with the loyal Sardinian militia, could defend the island from the invasion and maybe crush and destroy the Aragona army.

Once informed of King Martino the Young's Aragona army approaching, Guillaume III gave orders to his *Battaglia* to deploy over the hills above Sanluri, trying to hide their presence and numbers to the enemy, hoping to take him by surprise. Most of his troops were composed of militia, not well drilled for war and anxious to return to their normal livings.

King Martino, following the advice of his veteran Marshal Pedro Torrelles, advanced cautiously toward the town with a leading group of 1000 men, followed by a central van of 4000, and then by Martino himself, with all the cavalry, and finally a rear guard of some 2000 infantry. The Aragona army had many professional soldiers and veterans of past campaigns in Sicily quelling local revolts, and reinforced with 100 knights lead by the Pope's nephew, De Luna.

The Arborea army were easily discovered. Guillaume III realized his ploy had failed and he had to deploy for battle. The Arborea army gained some advantage being on higher ground. Martino reacted by placing his cavalry opposite the enemy's cavalry and the infantry on the flanks and rear.

The battle started with an escalating clash between cavalry masses and reported as a really violent conflict, eventually deciding the outcome of the battle. The Aragona cavalry managed to defeat the Arborea cavalry and was consequently free to attack enemy infantry. The Sardinian army was divided in two. Many ran for the river called *Flumini Mannu*, but this blocked their retreat and they were killed in a field that is called even today S'occidroxu (the slaughterhouse). The other "wing" of fugitives made it partly to Sanluri and some others in the castle of Monreale a few kilometers north (Guillaume III was in this group). Eventually the Sanluri defenders were overcome and slaughtered.

Guillaume III 1409: Captured

By Russ Lockwood

My big error was not recognizing that infantry ZOCs do not stop cavalry movement. A hole opened and Dan exploited it. I patched the gap with reserves, but damage was done. The second error was a recalcitrant d6 die that rolled 6s for my main central countercharges – and I needed 1–5s. Thus, I was disrupted at the stand still. You can pretty much figure out what happened next. Efforts to patch that gap also failed due to more rolls of 5-6s when I needed 1-4s.

I tried a left flank attack that had some effect, but Dan correctly concentrated on and shattered my center.

First key move for Dan: Recovering all his disrupted troops from my crossbow fire. Second key move: Crushing the center. Well played.



Mumakils on the March: *LOTR*

by Russ Lockwood

I had admired Renaud's Mumakil models for a bit, so he figured it was time to exercise them on the battlefield. He put together a *Lord of the Rings* scenario of Faramir and friends ambushing a Mumak force.

As Mumakil of the Mountains, all I had to do was move the Mumakils off the opposite table edge. They move at a stately 9 inches per activation. Infantry move 6 inches and Cavalry 9 inches, but unlike these two types, Mumakils cannot double-move in their activation.

Mumakils at game start.

RUSE With A Twist

As for the rest, we used his *RUSE* rules with a small command and control twist. Instead of random cards, each player chose his cards from a deck where the total number of card activations equaled the number of units. I had two Mumakils, two Cavalry, and three Infantry units. I could choose a combination of 1, 2, and 3 activation cards that equaled seven.

Here the decision point became whether you wanted lower numbers that allow for more countering options throughout the turn, or, high numbers to go early and fast. For most of the game, I hedged my bets: a 3, a 2, and two 1s. Each player also got a free leader activation card, but I had no leaders.

Renaud had Faramir the leader, two Cavalry units, and three Ranger Infantry units. Faramir could attach to a unit and activate with that unit, leaving his leader activation card for a later possible additional activation.

RUSE is basically roll to hit and/or scare and roll to save. Unit attributes alter the basic 50-50 percentages. For example, Mumakils and Knights have a 5 armor rating, which means a typical firer needs higher rolls to penetrate the armor to inflict wounds.

The Ambush

The big, fat, and happy mumakils (Louie on the left and Ralph on the right) plodded forward with cavalry screening the right and left and an infantry unit screening the front. Faramir's Rangers popped up on my right flank and peppered my cavalry into immobility (lotsa scares and a couple wounds).

Then another Ranger unit popped up on the left and peppered Louie the left mumak, but his tough skin saved him from grief. My archers atop the beasts did little except annoy the Rangers.

Ah, but my left cavalry spotted the Rangers and charged. Such was my clever formation that I forgot to actually look at their weaponry. The right unit sported spears, but not the left.

Say, what?!



Daggers? No self-respecting ugly-fugly cavalryman would go into battle with less than a curved scimitar! Apparently, I did. I really should pay more attention to the unit stats.

Yet, the Rangers were surprised. Despite defending in light cover, when the melee was over, the Rangers retreated with losses and fear atop a nearly rocky hill. Better lucky than good, of course.

My cavalry charge the Rangers. Blue die is number of activations by the unit. Red die is number killed. Yellow die indicates the number of Scares.

Faramir's Cavalry

Meanwhile, on the opposite bank of a river, Faramir's cavalry searched for a ford in the river. It had been randomly placed pre-game. On the first turn, two searches in the six-section river and two misses. On the third try, success. But it took a fourth move to cross. Double activations failed.

In the meantime, my mumakils kept advancing and the archers on top kept up their ineffective shooting. In a bit of frustrating die rolling, four straight 50-50 chances to get a second move out of the mumakils failed.

Faramir did considerable damage to Louie with bow fire. The Rangers chipped away, too.

One of Faramir's cavalry units headed for the mumakils, but I sent my infantry to screen them among the rocks. The melee saw me in a lucky stalemate and then got even luckier as the cavalry failed its 50-50 roll for a second activation.



The mumakils, escorted by an infantry unit, get closer to leaving the table.

Every time a mumak got hit, it would roll for a possible rampage. The first time Louie failed this roll, his rampage was straight ahead -- exactly when I needed to go. Alas, Ralph was almost at the edge and took a 90-degree right turn into the trees.

Finally, I succeeded in rolling the 50-50 roll for a second activation. Louie the mumak exited. Ralph failed the sixth d6 roll. Really, failing five out of six 50-50 rolls is just pathetic.

Anyway, Faramir and the Rangers shafted the beast, ending the game.

Faramir's cavalry (left) finds the ford and tries to intercept the mumakils.

A Draw

Mama Mia Mumakil,
Woe begone.
One Mumakil off,
And one Mumakil on.

'Twas a draw. A quite exciting draw as it turned out as I watched the mumak's damage increase as the distance to the table edge decreased. Both sides made and failed second activations, any one of which would have altered the game. But, you play what happens, not what could happen.

Thanks, Renaud for an entertaining game.

It's not too early to start thinking about...



LOTR: Adventure Game

by Russ Lockwood

I think this cooperative game is a kid's game. It's a race to get from Rivendell to Mount Doom on a set track. Along the way, the Fellowship battles orcs and Nazgul via cards.

Orcs upper left corner. Nazguls in upper right corner. The Fellowship begins to advance. The cards that will match the die rolls.

As the Fellowship moves almost individually, it's amazing how separated they can become. The key is where the ringbearer is. If it's lagging on the movement spaces, the full Fellowship protects him. Any character behind him does not protect him.

I can't say it was very exciting. Every once in a while a die roll would cause a groan or chuckle. For a grown-up, you don't have very many decisions. I mean, you decide which die rolls to use regarding which cards to activate, but really, there's not much leeway. I had a dastardly turn where I rolled nuthin' but Nazguls. No choice. That was the roll and that was the card at that roll number.

So, it's roll the die until you win or fail. We got as far as Minas Tirith before all the Nazguls were deployed and we lost.

Maybe this could amuse a child learning board games, but for grown-up kids, not so much.

My red setup versus Renaud's blue set up.

Attack: Undeveloped Rules

by Russ Lockwood

I love the smell of torn shrinkwrap in the morning!

I bought the game *Attack* by Eagle Games a dozen or more years ago and finally brought it out on the table. It was the basic game -- no sense using the Expansion if the Basic game doesn't work. It's got thin rules,



cards, specialty dice, hundreds of soft plastic pieces, and a really cool map of North America, South America, Africa, and Europe. The expansion game fills in the rest of the world.

Each player starts in four spaces with 12 infantry, six tanks, four artillery, two planes, and a capital. Each gets a hand of Navy cards -- one battleship, two destroyers, and two submarines. Each gets a hand of four economic cards. With only two players, that's a lot of empty space left on the board.

Each turn, a player gets three actions: move (attack), diplomacy, build, strategic move, naval move, and so on. If you attack a neutral area, you flip over an economic card to generate defense units. If you attack an enemy player area, you fight whatever is in the area.

Successful land attacks and diplomacy let you draw an economic card. These cards generate the revenue to buy more units.

Rules Holes

Now, after all these years, the rules may have errata, but I don't know. We played the rules as included in the game.

First off, a move action allows you to move all units on the board. Great, but do you need to leave at least one garrison unit in an area or can you move all units out? If you conquer two areas in a move (attack), do you gain two cards? If you move all the units out of an area, does the area become neutral again?

Aside from stringing together areas for a strategic move, what's the benefit of holding on to all the areas that you conquer or diplomatically conquer? In *Risk*, you get continental bonus armies. In *Axis & Allies*, each area generates revenue. Here? We couldn't find any benefit.

If you try a diplomatic effort on an area adjacent to one of yours, you need an 8+ on 2d6 for success. If it is non-adjacent, you need a 9+. If an amphibious line goes from one of your areas to a neutral area, is that adjacent? Is it adjacent only if you control the sea? What about areas that do not contain an amphibious line? If you control the sea are these adjacent?

Naval Supremacy

The rules are clear, but they take Mahan a little too far. As far as we can determine, one player's navy gains sea control across the entire board. That can stop any and all amphibious moves (attacks). A naval battle will determine who gains sea control.

I expand out of Norway-Sweden, but the blues have already taken out three quarters of my forces.

The Game

Well, I made an error on setup. I selected New England as my home area (capital) because it had many amphibious attack lines: to Great Britain, to Brazil, and to, um, a third country. My other three areas were Columbia, Morocco, and Norway. I selected them because of the amphibious attack lines.



I built, tried and failed a diplomatic endeavor, and then successfully moved (attacked) Quebec from New England.

Renaud built in Great Britain and then amphibious moved (attacked) New England. He took it with ease.

Losing your capital does two things: you lose the 10 revenue and the opponent gains that 10 revenue.

This put me in a building hole quick.

I sent out my Navy. I came away sinking all his ships but having only the Battleship remaining. His subsequent builds with his advantage in build points overwhelmed my lone survivor.

South America and Asia

Renaud, in Brazil, took the Amazon in a successful diplomatic effort. He gained a card and one infantry. On my turn, I took it with a move (attack). On his turn, his horde from Brazil, suitably reinforced with new builds, stomped my force.

He did the same crunch-time beating with my force in Morocco.

Now, I knew I was on the losing end of revenue. It only got worse. My last big force captured Finland and about half of Russia before two of his forces combined and moved (attacked). Stomped again.

That was the end of the game. Technically, I had two infantry in two areas, but he had such a material advantage as to be virtually impossible to overcome.

An Error

One aspect I kept forgetting was the expanding combat. The first round was a maximum of four units. The next round was supposed to be five units and the next six and so on up until a maximum of eight units fighting per side.

Alas, we only fought four at a time all game. I suppose the rounds would have gone faster since more dice usually equals more casualties.

Thoughts

The Sea Control rule is quite powerful -- lopsided, we said. It is possible that the expansion, which contains plastic ships, will require a ship "garrison" in a particular sea zone in order to control that sea zone. That way, ships in the North Atlantic are not affecting the Indian Ocean.

There has got to be some sort of reason to hold onto an area with a valuable playing piece. I like the abstract nature of the economic cards, but without some sort of benefit, any area is the same as any other and it doesn't make sense to leave one-unit garrisons -- they are easily captured and your opponent draws an economic card from a player's hand instead of the common deck.

So, cool enough plastic pieces roughly the same size as *Axis & Allies*, but rules that have plenty of holes and a big conceptual hole. However, it was good to finally put the game on the tabletop. This probably works better with four or five players instead of two.

7 Ronin: 7 Samurai

by Russ Lockwood

This *7 Ronin* was a cool little game, and I'm going to say loosely based on the movie *The Seven Samurai*. By random pick, I was the seven samurai (technically called Ronin in this game) and Renaud played the 40 ninjas (plus 10 more that can be called upon in certain circumstances). Both of us were playing for the first time.

The main map of the village is divided into 10 areas plus a "non-area" in the center. Each player has their own map plus a cardboard screen to allow secret deployment. Each samurai has a special function and each of the 10 areas has a special function.

The goal is simple: The ninjas need to kill all the samurai or occupy five of the 10 areas at the end of a turn. The samurai need to eliminate all the ninjas. The special functions help in both cases.

The Game

I looked over the special functions of samurai and village. I picked what I thought were good areas to defend, but invariably, three of the 10 areas would be vacant.

The screens lifted and we moved the units from our own secret deployment map to the main map. Note that you don't deploy all 40 ninjas at once -- there is a strict limit per turn as noted on the turn track. So, out came the ninjas and samurai.

The common board (top) and my set up board behind a screen. Each circular piece is a ronin. Renaud has his own screen. Special functions per ronin and per village area are printed on the screen -- helpful that.

The turn order starts with the samurai special functions. A wrinkle is that a samurai must fulfill a condition of either being alone in an area or being with a ninja in a "contested" area before invoking a function. As you might imagine, I sometimes had the wrong condition with a samurai, or maybe the wrong samurai on the right condition. In any case, some ninjas were eliminated while others remained on the map.

Then, in every area where ninja and samurai existed together, each ninja would put a hit on the samurai, who could take from three to seven hits before dying. That would eliminate those ninjas.

Then, if ninjas remained in areas without samurai, the special function of that area would be used.

The seven ronin and their hit points.



First Half

Thus, the game is a bit of hide and seek and outguessing your opponent. The samurai try and get rid of the ninjas on the cheap -- i.e. without taking hits. The ninjas try and use the special functions to overwhelm a samurai on the cheap -- i.e. not using ninjas as hits.

The biggest problem for a first-time player is figuring out which token belongs to which samurai -- a head graphic is nice, but putting the names on would be better. By the end of the game I had paired color and name and even (gasp) some of the special functions. I never memorized the village special function icons -- I suppose that will be easier if played often.

So, I was doing fine during the first half. The one thing I never quite got was the center "non-area" -- not quite sure how that worked. I made sure to put a samurai in it after the first two turns -- perhaps not the optimal samurai, but at least one.



Second Half

Well, the accumulation of hits, despite my best efforts as healing a hit, took a toll. One by one, the samurai fell. I was down to three samurai. Renaud was down to the ninjas on map and less than five remaining in his reserve.

He had grabbed four of the five areas needed to win when we realized that one of the special functions he had was to duplicate one function. He chose to duplicate the field function. That gave him two field areas, which in turn meant these two areas counted as three areas. Add in the other two and that made five areas for the win.

Thoughts

Clever. The decision making aspect is quite good. It's even better when the samurai start to fall. I suspect the ninja placement is the same. Like a low reading on your gas gauge, or perhaps a low power reserve in your battery gauge, I suspect watching the ninja reserve dwindle generates some decision making.

This is a deterministic game -- no die tossing. *7 Ronin* offered a positive first playing and worth another go.

HMGS Next Generation: Games

by John Spiess

Medieval Cogs in Larchmont: NY

I was in Larchmont, NY running Medieval Cogs. This was the same game I ran at Historicon, and is turning out to be one of our most popular offerings. Two of the kids (Blaine and Sarah) were also at Historicon, and will most likely attend Fall-In as well.

The Cogs' Crowd at Larchmont.



WWII in Darien: CT

We ran a WWII St. Mere Eglise game in Darien, CT. We had the Next Gen kids game start at 4pm. Then I put my HMGS hat on and ran the same game for adults starting at 6:30pm. Once again, two of the adults (Brendan and John) had attended Historicon and will also be at Fall-In.

The Darien Library director is a big fan of HMGS Next Gen, so adult events will continue to piggy-back off the kids events going forward. She even brought down bottles of Pellegrino and cookies for us. We got a laugh out of that.

WWII gamers at Darien.



HMGS Outreach: ACW

by Charles Sherrange

We ran the ACW Battle of Monocacy using Warlord Games' epic scale figures at the Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hall & Museum, 4141 Fifth Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15213. As part of the HMGS Outreach program, we teamed up with the Soldiers & Sailors Tabletop Gamers Pittsburgh at their monthly meetup. July's theme was civil war, so we ran a little known July 1864 battle.

There are few places you can play games on tables literally next to actual Medals of Honor. Talk to the people there (mostly teens) about historical games, and about the battle and Lew Wallace's cultural impact -- writing the book Ben Hur, prosecuting the Lincoln assassins, and so on.

The game went mostly along historical lines, with the Rebels cracking the line but too late in the day to exploit and move further onto Washington DC. About a dozen were in attendance and gamed, while a few dozen more stopped in for a look. We even made one of the players roll to see if Lew Wallace died. It was a really fun game and everyone playing was engaged.

I also handed out an HMGS flyer, invited gamers to the Fall In convention, and showed off my album of photos from past HMGS conventions.

The ACW table.



WWII in Somers: NY

The Somers Library staff has a senior program on Monday afternoon.

Seniors game WWII.



Since our HMGS Next Generation teenager program is doing well at this location, we told them that we could definitely help out with some programming for their senior patrons. Board member Kevin Carroll lives nearby and helped run the game, which was a recreation of the Airborne Landing in St. Mere Eglise on D-Day.

Walking in, the seniors really didn't know what to expect. I think most of them thought we were just going to use the table as a tool to show the movement of troops in the battle. They didn't think they would actually be participating in a game.

So it turns out that they all had a great time. Bernie and Mary had some great luck rolling all the dice. Fern and Ben worked together, and took all their objectives. April had the most questions, and was really trying to learn the rules in order to make the right decisions. They all did great.

Honestly, these people will probably never get to one of our conventions (except maybe April, who we might have hooked). However, Kevin and I had a fun time laughing with these seniors, and they enjoyed the day.

Starship Troopers game in action.

Shore Leave 45: Celebrity

by Cliff Brunken

Bobby Edoo and I did outreach at a Convention called Shore Leave at the Wyndham in Lancaster, PA, the weekend before Historicon. I know what I was thinking since I was Events coordinator Historicon in just three more days!

We had a fantastic time, as I ran Jousting for bragging rights on the ride home and Edoo ran his *Starship Troopers* game! Well that's not historical you say? The cast members happened to be the guest stars.

I got a great photo of the main star, Casper Van Dien (who played Johnny Rico in the movie) stopping by to see our games. "He offered for us to join his computer gaming group and promote miniature gaming to all of them."

Casper Van Dien (Johnny Rico) stops by.



We offered a paint and take and had one little girl sit and paint. We collected nine people's information and we had a father who said he wanted to pay us since his son had come out of his shell and loved playing our games. I told him no payment needed, "It's what we do!"

Hopefully we will see some of these people at Fall In! The organizers invited us back for Shore Leave # 46 in 2026!

Johnny Rico, played by Casper Van Dien. Image from web.



Connections Conference: Pro Wargaming

by Sean Barnett

I waved the HMGS flag at the Connections US professional wargaming conference in Laurel, MD. I set up a game highlighting modern Russia versus Ukraine.

Russians vs. Ukrainians at Connections.



Summer Camp Miniatures: Variety

by Hayes Wauford

I concluded another wargame summer camp I run in Winston-Salem, NC. This year we did two week-long camps. Each had 12 students ranging from the fifth through ninth grades.

The camp is part of the Summit School Summer program so we also get a phenomenal lunch and time for PE (we do military-themed dodgeball).

Vietnam patrol.



Over five days, the campers played five or six different games, including Dark Ages, Pirates, American Revolution, American Civil War, WWII, and Vietnam. I used *Fistful of Lead* for pre-WWII (the Bigger Battles for some games too), *Battlegroup* for WWII, and modified *Nam '68* for Vietnam.

Also, this year (thanks to Amy's suggestion) I had veterans come speak. We had a USMC Harrier pilot, USAF B-52 pilot who flew over Vietnam, and a USN E-2 Hawkeye pilot. The latter two attended US Air Force Academy and US Naval Academy respectively.

American Revolution game.



Each day we went over the historical context of the battles (all were historic scenarios), details on the troops, weapons, and other information.

It was an amazing couple weeks with a mix of new campers and many who have attended for all three years. It's always awesome to see folks get into the hobby. I am hopeful that for a few of them the interest will continue. I'm planning to offer some standalone painting workshops and game days this fall.

WWII gaming.



Helm's Deep: **A 51-Year-Old Game**

by Russ Lockwood

Knowing Renaud is a *Lord of the Rings* (LOTR) fan, I pulled out a 1974 game by Richard Jordison called *Helm's Deep*. Dan and I played this long out-of-print siege wargame some decades earlier.

I set up the defense -- four units at a breach on an outer wall and the others at Helm's Deep proper. To be fair, I don't remember an outer wall in the book, but as I haven't read LOTR in decades, I can't comment on that, or in the movies.

Renaud clears out my rearguard at the outer wall on Turn 3 and heads for the Hornburg.

The rules, such as they are, are fairly simple, if sometimes perplexing and occasionally not explaining other aspects. We found a copy on BoardGame Geek that helped a bit. It was translated from German, so we had a chuckle when the translation of German "hexsides" was English "witches."

Single Stacking

The rules neglected to fully explain stacking, but we found enough references to discover that the rule was one unit per hex, and, more importantly, a unit is moved individually and cannot stack at the end of its move -- even if the unit stacked upon was going to move.

Think about that. A moving unit may pass through friendly occupied hexes, but must end its move in an open hex. Then the next unit moves and must end in an open hex. And so on. That causes some fancy footwork if you want to shuffle units along the walls. I distinctly remember using the rule that a unit can "jump down" from a wall hex in order to make room for another unit to replace it on the wall.

Yeah, jumping didn't make sense to us either. Must have been a unit of superhero spearmen doing a synchronized superhero landing.

Superhero landing, courtesy of Black Widow. Image from web.

Retreat Conundrum

Our biggest confusion, although it seemed mostly clear, concerned retreats off the massive wall. If the defender has to retreat, but has a legal retreat path, the defender does not have to vacate the wall hex. That's the big benefit of the wall.

Not only do you do some fancy footwork to move onto the wall hexes, you have to do some fancy formations to make sure the wall units have legal retreat paths so the units can stay on the wall.

If you do retreat, you can retreat through friendly units, but if you end the retreat stacked on a friendly unit, the retreating unit is eliminated.

Both of us took advantage of trying to force such retreats. On the other hand, as the good guys, I took advantage of staying on the wall with dogged determination that retreat routes would remain flexible and open. For the most part, it worked.



Of note, while a unit could jump down from a wall, it could not retreat by jumping. The right part of the wall had stairs which allowed retreats, but the other side of the Hornburg did not.

First superhero landing? Anime scene from early 80s Daicon IV. Image from web.

Note that orky ladders also functioned the same as stairs, which is odd for a unit to retreat down a ladder, but that's what the rules said. And, since it is a legal retreat route, the orky unit didn't have to retreat and could remain on the wall.



The Attack

The orcs and Dunlanders entered the board and took only two turns to clear the breach of the outer wall by eliminating three of the four starting units. I ran the surviving exposed bow unit back to the main wall as fast as I could.

Onward past the outer wall breach came the hungry orcs and Dunlender minions, their arrows zipping, banners flapping, and voices singing Hornburg-cabana.

His name was Big Mog,
He was a show orc.
With yellow cutter in his hand,
and ten thousand Minion band,
He would yell orders,
to get banana,
And when he tried to storm the wall,
Lots of Minion lads would fall,

Ladders up for his wish,
He fought for Cavendish.
With an IQ rating of orc dork,
Shoulda asked for fish.

At the Hornburg,
Hornburg Cabana.
The best spot if you want banana.
At the Hornburg,
Hornburg Cabana.
Musa and plantains were always the endgame,
At the Horn-burg...
Deep fried them all.



Wall to Wall Orcs

The orky and Dunlending tide rolled in, but Renaud's good fortune rolled out. Putting up a ladder is a roll of 1 through 3 on a d6, i.e. a 50-50 chance. Renaud rolled so many 6s, the die must have been cursed. Switching the die didn't help. I had far fewer ladders to deal with than odds should indicate.

When he finally had one success near Aragorn, Renaud said he was about to "send a love ladder" to Aragorn. Oooh. Even I groaned, and I like puns...

Aragorn rolled and was able to toss the ladder down. "Return to sender, address unknown."

Oh, yeah. Pure pun-ishment.

To be fair, I only thought of this retort as I wrote this recap, but I wish I had responded pun for pun at the time.

Anyway, the few times I was unable to toss down a ladder (a two-thirds chance of success and one-third chance of the ladder remaining upright), that rule about maintaining a wall hex aided me. OK, I sorted out the most of the units' retreat paths, but so many orc attacks misfired, the dice seemed to be antagonizing Renaud.

Happens. Frustrating, but it happens.

Renaud was finally able to get an orc on the left wall on turn 9, one turn past the Victory Point goal.

Bombs and An Oversight

We couldn't find any rule about rolling a die to explode the bomb at the gate, so we figured it was automatic. The outer gate to the tunnel under the Hornburg blew up.

My oversight was not stationing a unit in the tunnel. Renaud blew the inner gate with his second bomb. Fortunately, I had a unit to at least contain the orcs inside the tunnel. As I understand it, that's what happened in the book -- orcs crawl in the tunnel and the humans blocked them and blocked up the tunnel -- until it was blown open again.

The stream is open to the orcs, who must roll a d6 and get a 1 - 4 to enter the first stream hex under the wall, then a 1 - 3 for the second hex, and a 1 - 2 to exit the stream route into the courtyard.

I was smart enough to put a unit in the stream, albeit it was pushed out and a Dunlending unit was able to push inside the courtyard, where it was attacked by the reserve and slaughtered. A second Dunlending unit met the same fate.

Meanwhile, a second bad-orc unit moved up on my left wall. Getting a unit up onto the right wall took longer.

But the turns passed without much movement. The no retreat necessary on the wall turned the game into a static match. I lost units and so did Renaud, but I maintained enough to keep defending the Hornburg and preventing the enemy from controlling the wall.

The Good And The Bad

Once we figured out the general system, the game moved right along. We did 14 turns in three hours, including rules look up and discussion about the holes we found. Then again, once the siege proper began, there wasn't much movement and I concentrated on eliminating his archer units so that he had only one left.

We bounced back and forth between the first edition and second edition for rules clarifications. We found enough info to make informed decisions on what the rules likely meant. If all else failed, we went to the movie and book -- although the movie performed some shortcuts on the book. We found a happy medium.

After all 14 turns, dawn and Gandalf's force arrived. The Hornburg still held out, with the walls being contested -- the right one moreso than the orc-dominated left. So, from the VP totals, it was a big victory for Theoden.

Thoughts

Both of us agreed 'tis tough for the Saruman player to win. Not impossible, but tough. If the Theoden player pays attention to retreat routes, only a straight-up kill will remove a unit from the wall and that's hard to do without multiple ladders.

And admittedly, Renaud had die roll problems raising ladders.

In an odd moment, due to stacking restrictions, we realized that a worse result such as a 2 or 3 hex legal retreat -- which would allow the defending unit to remain on the wall -- would be better than a defender retreat of 1 hex -- that would result in overstacking and death.

Renaud suggested doing away with "if on the wall, in the Hornburg, or the outer court, you don't have to retreat if you can retreat" -- although it would need to be compensated by giving the defender some sort of column shift whether in ranged combat or melee.

He'd also prevent archers from firing into an adjacent hex -- whether on the flats or up/down a wall. The rules don't have any restrictions on arrow fire.

Renaud also suggested some sort of VP amount for lost units. The current VP schedule provides big points to kill the entire defending force, killing Aragorn, and/or killing Theoden. It's hard to see how such a complete obliteration of Theoden and company can occur. Or perhaps some other battlefield objective instead of the "all or nothing VPs for getting an orc unit on the wall by turn 8." The orcs probably need some VPs for actually making it through the tunnel and/or stream to reach the other side of the wall into the courtyard.

Then again, had the 50-50 roll for raising ladders actually been 50-50 instead of his abysmal rolling of 30-70 or 20-80, the defenders likely would have been far more hard-pressed than they were.

Renaud looked online and the comments mostly suggested a good game but hard for the Saruman player (I call it the Mog player since Mog is in charge) to win.

A rules set in need of some clarifications would make this game easier to learn. And where are the Legolas and Gimli counters? Renaud suggested they are considered incorporated into the Aragorn counter. Maybe they should be separate +1 counters that stack and prevent retreats.

Thanks, Renaud, for the game.

Magic the Gathering: Lord of the Rings – Campaign Game

by Daniel

I've been playing *Magic the Gathering* since December 1997. I'm not a tournament player, but do enjoy the game as a social event. Russ tried the game, but did not like it much. Soon after I started playing, I formed a "Community Deck League" around a pool of cards I and a few other players contributed to, which allowed several players who liked playing (but did not own cards) to participate and enjoy the game in a specific format. This concept around a fixed pool of cards is now commonly referred to as a "cube" in the *Magic* community.

In 2021, *Magic the Gathering: Dungeons & Dragons* was released and that prompted me to form a new "cube" for the league. These *D&D*-themed expansions introduced "Dungeons" as an adventure path that could impact the game and many of the new artifacts lent themselves to be used as "treasure" that could be found upon completing an adventure. The participants enjoyed the new league adaptations for this series of *D&D* expansions for *Magic*.

Bree: The Game Two Adventure Pathway.

In 2023, *Magic the Gathering: Lord of the Rings* was released and I re-invented the league to build upon the *Lord of the Rings* theme, where "Fellowship"-themed decks are assembled to compete against "Dark Lord"-themed decks. I expanded the "Dungeon" concept to create adventure pathways for each leg of the Fellowship's journey from the Shire to Mount Doom (including possible alternative pathways not taken) and a campaign map of Middle Earth to track the path the Fellowship takes. The pool of cards for this reset of the League was based on the *Lord of the Rings* releases, plus a number of cards from prior *Magic* releases that were consistent with the *Lord of the Rings* theme and Middle Earth.

Where past seasons of the League started with a draft to assemble an initial deck (or start with no deck at all, pulling cards from the 5 Community decks available at each gaming event), this season would start with 10 pre-assembled 100-card decks using the Commander format (only one copy of any card permitted in the deck) using cards from the "Starter" Decks and the four different "Commander" decks available, as well as booster packs. Each deck was assembled around a specific Fellowship Commander (Aragorn/Bilbo, Frodo/Sam, Elrond/Galadriel, Eowyn/Theoden, Gandalf) or Dark Lord Commander (Balrog, Mouth of Sauron, Saruman, Sauron, Witch-King). A couple of "Gear" cards: *Dungeon Map* and *Spare Dagger* are included in each Command Zone with the Commander during set-up and play.

Game The First: Campaign Start

So after months of planning, we started playing. Fred randomly selected the "Sauron" deck and he randomly chose the "Aragorn/Bilbo" deck for me. We started our "campaign" at The Shire and we just used the starting Commander decks to play and become familiar with before allowing use of the Community decks. The Fellowship went first, which soon mustered some soldiers, *Rosie Cotton*, and *Aragorn, Company Leader* within the first 4 turns, while the Dark Lord could only muster a Goblin. The Fellowship was able to do quite a bit of damage before a "plague"-type card was played that gave all creatures in play -4/-4, wiping out the Fellowship's small army while the Dark Lord lost no minions (because he had none in play). The Fellowship continued to bring out some small supporting creatures and *Bilbo, Accomplished Adventurer* while the Dark Lord struggled to muster anything capable of dealing with *Bilbo*. *Bilbo* led the final assault to win the first leg at the Shire.



Game The Second: Bree

Game 2 was at Bree. The Fellowship again mustered *Bilbo, Accomplished Adventurer*, *Rosie Cotton*, *Sam*, and a *Brandywine Farmer*, which generated a number of “Food” tokens (good for reclaiming lost life, while Rosie added a +1/+1 counter each time a Food token was generated). The *Tale of Tinuvel* bestowed one creature “indestructible”, allowing a pumped-up and well-armed *Bilbo* to attack recklessly, forcing the Dark Lord to either let the damage through or sacrifice weaker minions to blunt the attack.

Bilbo the Accomplished Adventurer card.

The Dark Lord was not as hamstrung this game and was able to bring out Sauron (9/9), which also brought out a 5/5 Orc Army and a 9/7 creature from the Graveyard. That gave the Fellowship pause to re-assess the new balance of power, especially after a couple of Dark Lord enchantments compromised *Sam* and *Rosie Cotton* – but the “well-fed” and equipped *Bilbo* (with several +1/+1 counters from *Rosie Cotton*) was still strong enough to intimidate the Dark Lord.

During this stand-off, the Fellowship ventured through Bree, completing the adventure and acquiring a Treasure from the random 3-card Treasure pile of two Level-1 and one Level 2 treasures, finding a *Razorboomerang*. Not quite a game-changer, but able to inflict a point of damage to an opponent without having to attack (returning the boomerang to the player’s hand and having to re-cast and re-equip before using again). *Bilbo* became the Ringbearer and used the Ring’s Level 1 power to become unblockable and deliver the final blow to win the contest at Bree.

Game The Third: Weathertop

Our third game was at Weathertop. The Fellowship deployed two 1/1 soldiers by Turn 2 and equipped them to start dealing damage by Turn 3 as the Dark Lord struggled to find minions to play. *Gimli, Counter of Kills* joined the fight by Turn 5 as the Dark Lord tried to slow down the momentum with enchantments that reduced *Gimli*’s power and prevented soldiers from attacking. A *Haradrim Spearmaster* became the Ringbearer for the Dark Lord and used the Ring’s Level 1 power to become unblockable and attack the Fellowship player without interference. *Arwen, Mortal Queen* joined Gimli, giving an option to have either “indestructible.”

Sauron card.

This prompted the Dark Lord to keep the *Haradrim Spearmaster* on guard instead of attacking as he brought out *Grishnákh, Brash Instigator* (which also brought out a 2/2 Orc Army). As the Dark Lord’s minions grew in number, the Fellowship found a way to sidestep them all. The *Whispersilk Cloak* was brought into play and equipped on *Gimli, Counter of Kills*, who used its “unblockable” ability to slip by and attack the Dark Lord player directly, finishing the game.

After the three games, Fred and I discussed the format and if anything was unbalanced or if the League rules accelerated the game too swiftly (the Community Deck games allow players to draw up to three “marked” random Land cards as part of their starting hand, filling the rest of their hand from their deck or the 5 Community decks as decided by the “Caller of the Game”).

He thought the inclusion of the *Dungeon Map* and *Spare Dagger* in the Command Zone were fine, but no other equipment (such as *50 Foot of Rope* or *Adventure Gear*). He liked the Campaign map and adventure paths made for each site. He said he would definitely reduce the deck size from 100 cards, if allowed – but that’s a requirement of the Commander format. (Ironically, both of us tend to create large 100+ card decks over time in prior seasons from Community play as we find too many cards we like to “improve” our ever evolving decks with.)





Shhhh! We're huntin' liches. Clockwise from lower left corner: GM Sean, Ed, Keith, Fred, Connor, John, Dan, and Steve.

Liches Get Stitches: *D&D* Showdown

by Russ Lockwood

Last we left our intrepid *Dungeon & Dragons* (*D&D*) party, we were laying low in the mansion of Velcro the Vampire after we had liberated the place from Lady Siddhartha the Banshee. We had also defeated a pair of mummy leaders in the City Library and bashed Captain Marcellus Dusk the Skeletal Swashbuckler into oblivion, although he had a spell that resurrected him and another spell than dimension doored him safely away.

Of course, obliterating a few of the undead bigwigs put the City of Undead Dread into a tizzy. That really left only one option: tackle Charis the Big Boss Lich at his central tower.

Our often-shifting lineup consisted of Tazan Rell the Archer, Hammer the Mage, Balien the Wizard-Fighter, the return of Denathan the fighter (and his two goblins), Gavriel the wizard, Cristof the wizard, the return of Nevar the Alchemist, and the return of Henri the Paladin. Per usual, looming over the party was Sean the GM. Bwa-ha-ha-ha.

The Tower

This time, we dispensed with the ruse of being prisoners. Hammer questioned the staff of the mansion and discovered that they had never seen anyone go in or out of the tower except the Dracolich who flew onto the top of it. Our heavily-armed party stuck to the back alleys to get there.

The 300-foot tower sat in the middle of a plaza with 100-foot radius of nothing but open ground. A gateway showed the front door and a giant zombie guarded the gate. No other entry points were observed.

Hammer sent Bruce, his bat familiar, for an aerial looksee. Armed with seeing through Bruce's eyes and seeing invisibility, he learned the tower was built around a 50-foot tall rock...and yet a face down human in a white robe floated 200 feet above the top of the rock.

A series of spells, and a spell inside a bag of holding for me, lifted the party to the barely breathing figure. We applied healing to the unfortunate robed one. His eyes had been plucked out and with gasping breaths he told of being tortured. We floated him down with the two goblins as escort with the admonition to keep out of sight.

Hammer put his bat "on top cover," an amusing thought.

Trapdoor

We found a trapdoor and heard the scrapings of something trying to open it. Quick as a flash, Nevar placed a seal spell on it. Once we cleared the robed one off the top, Nevar undid the seal spell.

Of course, I gave a most dramatic pre-battle speech extoling our prowess at battling undead all over the countryside and in catacombs. Per usual, our group was less impressed with the words than with the extra temporary hit points they generated. Bah! Everyone's a critic.

We entered the tower via the trapdoor.

We weren't quite sure what we saw on the next floor down. The octagonal room seemed unaligned with the rest of the tower. Through an arch, a short stairway led down to another floor with a spiral design. As baffling as an Escher drawing.

Worse, the arch served as some sort of sound deadening barrier that also proved to be a telepathic barrier as well. As Gavriel cast a telepathic communications spell upon all of us, we were quite disconcerted when half the party was cut off. Can you hear me now? No? Can you hear me now?

Enter Marcellus, the Dracolich, and friends.

As more of us passed through the arch, the floor shimmered and Poof the magic Dracolich appeared ridden by our old nemesis: a lance-armed Captain Marcellus. A Dread Knight on a skeletal charger appeared next to them and that zombie giant guarding the front door popped in as well.

Another view of the Dracolich battle. Photo by Ed.

The Spiral Battle

So began our spiral battle. While the wizards cast spells against Poof, I stepped into the arch, targeted the beastie, and loosed a trio of arrows. The thunder from each twang of the bow made for spectacular noise. Hmmm. Come to think of it, I wonder if such thunder would counter-act banshee wails. Nothing like thinking of such two battles too late. I ducked back through the arch and towards the trapdoor.

Our first flurry placed close to 200 hit points on ol' Poof.

That's when the floor literally dropped out from underneath everyone and every beastie in that spiral design. I was still behind and to the side of the archway and so unaffected. In fact, I was hiding behind the arch because if there is one thing I learned, it's that vulnerable archers shouldn't be in the front line. Yup, the role of shoot and scoot artillery is for me.

However, the floor below showcased the throne room of Charis the Lich plus a variety of skeletons, mummies, and Betty the Bouncing Beholder monster.



The second and third flurries of attacks did Poof in, with Cristof using a chain of lightning spell for the coup de grace. The zombie giant went next. I put the last hits to do in the knight, thanks in part to Nevar casting Flame Arrows on my quiver. You never know when an extra d6 makes a difference.

I continued my sharpshooting effort, picking off skeletons as the thunder reverberated in the throne room. That left the wizards free to battle Bouncing Betty the Beholder as well as the real enemy: Charis.

Throne Room Battle

Hammer tossed his patented Flame-Broiled Wall, which singed ol' Betty. Balien tap danced his way to hit Betty, a skeleton, a mummy, and Charis. Charis missed Balien once, but prodded him with a Shocking Grasp. Cristof's fireball singed Betty and fried a skeleton. The mummies and skeletons proved small annoyances, but we knew they could add up.

The Throneroom in the foreground and the upstairs room in the background. The Beholder is in the middle of the Throneroom.



Charis erected a Wall of Force around him and Balien. It was two beings in and only one would come out. The battle swayed without interference for a moment, then Charis tossed a Poison Cloud spell. It didn't reach all the way up to me, but many of our group choked down a bit of damage.

Meanwhile, Marcellus, untangling himself from the bony carcass of Poof, charged through the fire to rescue his master. Marcellus whacked Balien. The tag-teaming worked and Balien suffered more damage and became paralyzed.

I put three sweet arrows into Betty the Beholder -- a nice 100 hit point effort. Betty, not to be outdone, fashioned a Charm spell that all but Hammer ignored. Hammer became paralyzed as well.

Enter Nevar, who unleashed an ice storm using a long-picked up pendant. Bye-bye, Betty. She perished under the icy glow of magic.

Charis was under siege from a growing number of our party, but among the spells and counter spells, the lich unleashed a cloud of fire. It was so large, it even reached up to where I was behind the arch. It singed my tail feathers until I saved myself by rolling out of its fiery confines and guzzled down a long-held Potion of Fire Resistance. It took me out of the fight, but now I was better prepared to last through the battle. When you're a three-hit wonder, you need all the defensive help you can get.

The Buckling Swash

Denathan pounded the lich. That's when Cristof delivered a Psychic Lance spell at Captain Marcellus, who was now hurting but still coming to the aid of his master.

Denathan, Balien, and Nevar pound Charis the Lich (in red) while Henri is struck down. The yellows and clear figure is Gavriel's magic book.



Mummies and skeletons tacked on a few nicks and cuts, although how the mummies managed to remain intact in a cloud of flame is unknown. Nevar conjured up a Frost Elemental to make the throne area hotter than a sauna in Finland.

Charis continued his efforts at paralyzing members of our party as Marcellus slashed anew at Henri.

Now almost fireproofed, I took careful aim at Marcellus. "Thunder, thunder, thunder," I sang. A trio of magic arrow punched holes in him. To our collective surprise and relief, Marcellus the skeletal swashbuckler, our nemesis and dimension door-undead fiend, passed from this plane of existence and left but a pile of dust. Our party's morale soared.

Christof continued with Psychic Lance spells at Charis, starting a parade of hits on the suddenly vulnerable lich. Charis continued to dole out damage, especially to Henri and Gavriel. Charis even unleashed a Finger of Death spell that hit Hammer, who remained among the living.

Balien and Denethan are struck down, joining Henri, but Nevar is still fighting. Hammer sneaks up behind the Lich while Tazan pumps arrows into the Lich from the side. The book remains.

As the cloud burned many of our party Gavriel performed some sort of life transfer of 56 hit points to boost Henri, who rose from the floor and smacked Charis with one final hit.

Charis the Lich exploded, its undead force expended in a pressure wave that blew out the fire cloud. All that was left was a small pile of dust.

Nevar the Alchemist quickly swept up a bit of Charis dust, Poof dust, and Marcellus dust for whatever concoctions needed such. Hammer picked up Marcellus' cursed sword.



Shake It Off

Some healing needed to be done, but not too much. The tower of the lich began to shake like Swifties at a Taylor Swift concert.

Gavriel, Cristof, and Hammer descended the stairs to Charis' bedroom. Three free-standing mirrors seemed like teleport mirrors. Into the Bag of Holding they went.

Hammer picked up a black Robe of the Evil Archmage embroidered with "Windblaze," which could be used by warlocks. As he was a warlock, it was for him. Boy, was Cristof envious. Hammer got a cool black robe while Cristof still wore a red sundress -- that leaked blood. What a mess. Granted, Cristof was pleased at the +2 defense effect, but less sanguine about all that blood dripping about.

Nevar picked up a Ring of Fire Immunity. Handy, that will be, especially because it had a Stirling crest and could only be worn by a descendant of Lord Stirling. Will wonders never cease? Guess we have to call him Lord Nevar now.

I looked around the city ruins. "Nice place you got here, Lord Nevar." I said. "Bit of a fixer upper, though."

For some reason, Denathan picked up a chandelier. I guess he wanted to remodel the ballroom at his Hilltop mansion.

I found nothing of importance to pick up. Wizard's chambers are usually of little use to fighters. Besides, I had all the magic items I could use -- attunements the mages call it.

Escape

We escaped the same way we entered, via the top of the now crumbling tower. Indeed, the entire pocket plane seemed to be shaking. We hurried to the magic portal. Sadly, we had no time to rescue any of the humans at Velcro's -- nee Siddhartha's -- mansion. Through a rapidly closing portal, we teleported back to the ruined city of Stirling.

Now, here we had a bit of a disagreement. Velcro the Vampire still inhabited the city's catacombs. The teleport portal was severed, so he had no way to get to the liberated mansion he wanted. Or, for that matter, to move up in the pecking order of undead.

I suggested we live and let live. He did us a solid and we should do the same. We could make some sort of new deal. The others said they didn't want a vampire and his ghoul and skeleton underlings waylaying passerbys.

In the end, I was outvoted and the party cleaned up this patch of undead. Well, what do you expect from a group that cut off a cultist's thumb to make him talk and knifed him when he didn't? Bloodthirsty lot, these wizards.

Pity. You never know when you're going to need a vampire around to boss around all the other undead wandering around. Bet they didn't think of that...

Deal

We dimension doored back to Hilltop. We still had this problem of Charis the Lich -- when obliterated, lichs resurrect themselves around a little bit of their essence locked away in a secure place. So, we needed to find and obliterate this piece of Charis to permanently end his existence.

We had no idea where. "Shadows" was our only clue.

So, the party decided to visit our enslaved demon in the Library under Hilltop.

Oh, you got to be kidding me. Talk about a deal with the devil. I wanted nothing to do with it. I knew it would eventually involve me, but I planned to live a long and happy life without demonic commitments. I headed to Denathan's mansion to claim a room and then down to a nice tavern for a quaff. That's dungeon speak for "Beer me!"

From what the party told me, some bigger demon named Orca held Charis' essence in a vault on the 333rd level of the Abyss. I have no idea what that entails, but you can bet that means Tazan Rell the archer really shouldn't be in the middle of a wizard's war.

But then again, you never know. We need to hold off for a time. I hold a conch containing a powerful genie and I have a feeling we will need all three of his wishes to survive such a quest.

SpaceBase: Quick Game

By Russ Lockwood

Dan and I played a game of *SpaceBase*, a clever game of resource management involving cards and die rolling. We included the *Shy Pluto* dice and cards because we rather enjoy the extension they provide to the basic game.

We bought spaceships to expand our trading empires. Dan concentrated on the low numbers. I stacked up lots of ships in the 7 and 8 slots. We were about even, although I perceived Dan was pulling ahead because low dice on a 2d6 roll occur all the time (as you can treat the roll as two separate die rolls or one big die roll). He also did not roll 7s and 8s on his turn, depriving me of resources and Victory Points. At one point in time, I had VP cards in the 6 through 11 slots and kept rolling 5 or less on 2d6. Odds, schmodds, to my chagrin, I kept rolling real low.

And then the 2d6 rolls changed. He started banging on my 7s and 8s and I started rolling something higher than 5s. The VPs accelerated with every roll until I reached the magic number 40+ for the win. It's nice to see the dice break my way every once in a while.

HMGS Web Site and Book Reviews

by Russ Lockwood

The HMGS website is undergoing a dramatic overhaul as the aging YM software is being superseded by contemporary WordPress. This necessitates a lot of behind-the-scenes work.

As far as the current 1,811 book reviews, apparently YM only allows the laborious transfer of one review at a time. Some experimentation has been done and maybe there's a way to be found for a faster transfer. In the meantime, getting to book reviews from the main HMGS.org home page is limited. YM is still running and all book reviews are accessible, but you need to use a search engine.

Use the following terms:

BOOK REVIEW Lockwood

and also include a topic or title.

For a Google example,

BOOK REVIEW Lockwood Solomons Air War: Volume 1

This returns the link: <https://hmgs.site-ym.com/blogpost/1779451/493175/BOOK-REVIEW-Solomons-Air-War-Volume-1--Guadalcanal-August-September-1942>

Clicking on the link gets you my original YM book review blog. Clicking on the "View All (1811)" link gets you to the latest of all 1,811 reviews. The YM search engine still remains active.

I'll be getting more guidance about how to upload new book reviews and copy over the existing ones to the new website. It seems silly to add to the 1,811 if they need to be pulled back one at a time, so I'll work with the IT gurus on how to proceed.

To get to all 1,811 of them, use this link to get to an individual review and then click on the link for all 1,811. It's convoluted, but it works. The search engine still works, too. Not sure when a full changeover will occur.

So, please be patient. Upgrades always seem to take longer than expected.

Thanks,

Russ

Books I've Read

by Russ Lockwood

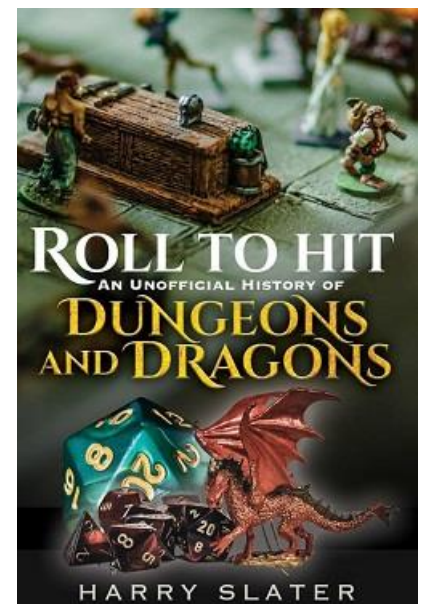
Roll to Hit: The Unofficial History of Dungeons and Dragons. by Harry Slater. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 205 pages. 2025.

As you can gather from my recaps of *Dungeons and Dragons* (D&D) sessions, I've gotten back into RPGs the last year or so -- after a pretty long break since the early 1980s with the occasional session in the 2000s.

D&D came from wargaming. Gary Gygax and Dave Arneson bonded over the Avalon Hill game *Gettysburg*. They were members of the Midwest Military Simulation Assn (MMSA), where they were introduced to a 1960s Napoleonic game called *Braunstein*, created by MMSA member David Wesley. Players were single figures in a town and soon interacted amongst each other for one purpose or another -- an early form of RPG. *Braunstein* was supposedly an offshoot of a game called *Strategos* from the 1880s.

The 1973 Gygax and Arneson variation was set in medieval times, took on a Tolkien-esque tinge, and was refined to a point. In 1973, they went to Avalon Hill, which declined to publish D&D. Hindsight about the companies that passed on creative works is always wonderful -- for example, a host of publishers declined to publish *The Hunt for Red October* and *Harry Potter* novels.

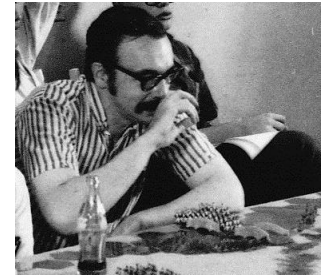
In any case, the two found a money partner in Don Kaye, formed TSR in 1973, and published an ECW set of miniatures rules *Cavaliers and Roundheads* that didn't do well. Brian Blume came in as another money partner and TSR published 1,000 copies of D&D (p25). It took a while to sell out, but they printed another 1,000 copies. In 1975, they published the two main personal campaigns, *Greyhawk* and *Blackmoor*, as supplements with more rules. Alas, they took



on too much of a Tolkien tinge and had to rename some of the names: hobbits became halflings, ents became treents, and the Balrog became Balor.

By the late 1970s, the three manuals were released, Arneson sued over royalties, and small companies popped up to publish RPGs and supporting materials. The biggest rival was/is Paizo *Pathfinder*.

Top: E. Gary Gygax in 1969 at GenCon. Bottom: Dave Arneson. Images from web.



And so the history highlights continued through the pages. I found some chapters, especially the business mismanagement and infighting, fascinating, but wanted more. The layers of rules as *D&D* went through a variety of versions was equally interesting. I recall once playing 3.0, then the next session was 3.5, and now it's 5.0 –so living the text. The back and forth over open licensing permissions from TSR to Wizards to Hasbro was enlightening.

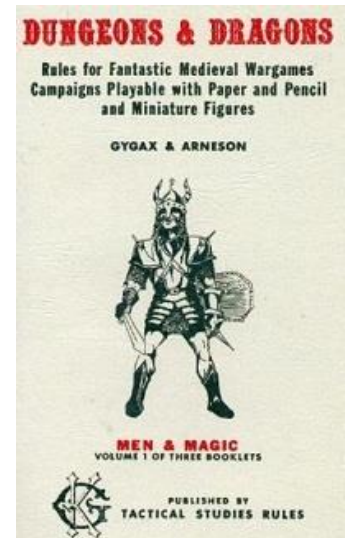
I have a few quibbles: one minor, one major, and one annoying.

The minor one revolves around the mediocre selection of black and white photos. Just about all are generic Shutterstock images. Here you have a full history of the most popular RPG on the planet and the center photo section is a bunch of uninspiring, generic, and often blurry photos. Rolled a “1” on the photo section.

The major quibble: the book is pretty much info from internet sites. For example, the *Braunstein* info comes from the Wikipedia page, including the reference to *Strategos*. Sure, it's an excellent spot to start, but with all the people who worked at TSR, Wizards of the Coast, and Hasbro, I was expecting a lot more original research from interviews. Yes, a few interviews are listed from magazines. Some books are listed, too. But the bulk seems to come only from the internet. A missed opportunity, indeed. Rolled a middlin’ “10.”



Original cover for one of the booklets.. Image from web.



The annoying quibble: constant amateurish insertions of "teasers" as in: "we'll get to (insert topic) in an upcoming chapter." If you need these to pull a reader through the text, you need to reorganize the progression of information. I can't say this is the first book with such annoyances, but if this is a trend, editors should demand better organization to eliminate them. Rolled a “7” here.

One possible bit of confusion: Gygax's *Chainmail* rules were "co-written with a hobby shop owner named Jeff Perren" (p27), but later, "*Chainmail* co-creator Steve Perrin" (p34). To Wikipedia: The *Chainmail* entry had mentions of "Jeff Perren" and "Perrin" (no first name). Popping Steve Perrin into the search engine finds he is the designer of *RuneQuest*.

In any case, *Roll to Hit* provides a compiled version of the origins and expansion of *D&D*. It lacks primary research (interviews), or at least none is listed in the bibliography, but the prose flows well enough from highlight to highlight. The nostalgia factor is high and my newfound adventuring attests to the longevity of the concept, no matter how many times the game system has been revised. Overall, rolled a “16.”

Enjoyed it.

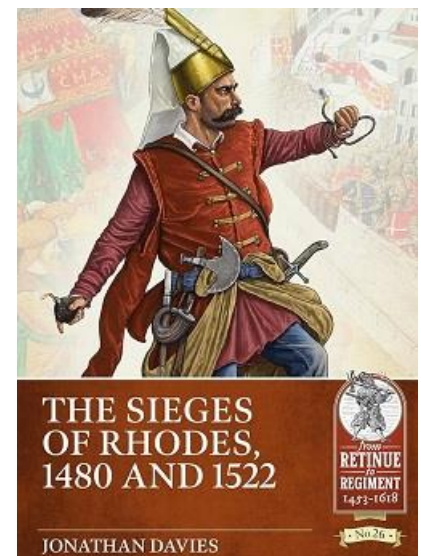
The Sieges of Rhodes: 1480 and 1522. by Jonathan Davies. Softcover (7.2x9.7 inches). 246 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *From Retinue to Regiment No. 26*

After the Muslim armies kicked the Hospitallers out of the Middle East, they conquered Rhodes and consolidated power. Situated just seven miles off the Turkish coast, their raiding in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea proved annoying enough that the Ottomans sieged the island twice in the 1400s and once in 1522.

The first siege, hastily arranged and carried out, resulted in an Ottoman retreat. This book offers an overview.

The second siege, in 1480, proved far more extensive in preparations and prosecution, but also resulted in an Ottoman retreat. This book extensively covers the siege, especially the failed amphibious attack on the Tower of St. Nicolas and the slightly more successful breach against the wall around the Tower of Italy. The former never fell and the latter was defeated thanks to a desperate knight



counter-attack. The siege techniques, forces involved, and the impact of leadership are well explained.

The third siege, under the personal supervision of the Sultan, ended up a draw even as it was continued into the winter season. This time, the Ottomans ignored the St. Nicolas tower and concentrated on the wall. However, in the intervening years between 1480 and 1522, the Hospitallers carried out extensive improvements to the fortifications to mitigate the effects of Ottoman cannon fire. Again, the siege techniques and events receive excellent coverage and explanation.

A treaty allowed the Hospitallers to leave and they eventually ended up in Malta ... and another siege by the Ottomans. But that's another book.

Siege of Rhodes 1522. Image from web.



Factoid: A well-handled ship of the time could sail 100 to 150 miles per day. The Hospitallers often had a ship slip through the Ottoman blockade to bring fresh supplies. It wasn't enough to bring much, but served as a morale boost.

One typo: "in1500" (p81) needs a space. Also, the same black and white photo appears twice (p99 and p178).

The book contains 72 black and white photos, 60 black and white illustrations, eight black and white maps, six color photos, nine color illustrations, 16 color illustrations of flags, and five color illustrations of knight coats of arms.

These twin sieges of Rhodes are well-written, well-told, and well-illustrated. It's another marvelous volume in the From Retinue to Regiment series. Well done, indeed.

Enjoyed it.

Inspired Enterprise. by Glen E. Swanson. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 288 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *How NASA, the Smithsonian, and the Aerospace Community Helped Launch Star Trek*

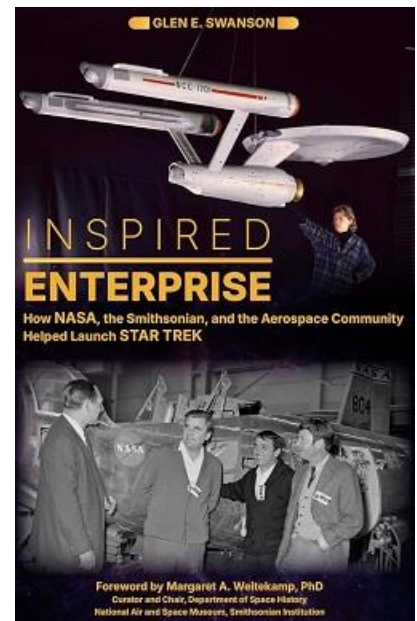
What an interesting delve into Gene Roddenberry's efforts to bring the 1960s scientific community into supporting *Star Trek*. He enlisted the aid of Kellam DeForest's DeForest Research Service to fact check the scientific basis of each show. Not every fact checked out, but so many did that *Star Trek* received a reputation for putting the science back into science fiction.

In any case, the tendrils of at least a coating of science followed the series into the aerospace industry, not to mention bringing TV celebrities to otherwise usual events. For example, Leonard Nimoy was invited to tour NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center and was a speaker at the annual dinner (p122-123).

The Smithsonian became involved when it launched a *Life in the Universe?* exhibit in the mid-1970s at the new Air & Space Museum. It requested and received the original 11-foot long starship Enterprise model from Paramount.

The AMT plastic model kit sold over 1 million copies in its first year of release in 1967-1968 (p61). Round 2 LLC sells a version (\$50.00) of the original starship as well as other kits.

Also of note is the *Starfleet Technical Manual*, a series of blueprints of spaceships from the imagination and technical drawing brilliance of Franz Joseph Schnaubelt. Cleverly, he never mentioned *Star Trek* and his contracts with Ballentine specifically banned the term (p144). Thus, Paramount had no legal claim to the ship blueprints, which helped



Stephen V. Cole with the artwork for the wargame *Star Fleet Battles* (p145). The *Starfleet Technical Manual* was a best seller for several weeks and *Star Fleet Battles* remains in play today.

One typo: "Wehrner von Braun" (p131) should be "Wernher."

Of an odd note, Kellam DeForest was the son of landscape architects Elizabeth Kellam and Lockwood DeForest jr. – Who is this guy named after? Of course, the actor Gary Lockwood is also mentioned.

The AMT model kit cover. Image from web.



The book contains 106 black and white photos and 78 color photos.

Star Trek remains a cultural classic, including its many spin-offs and movie reboots. Here's a fascinating look at the influences of science organizations on *Star Trek*.

Enjoyed it.

South Pacific Air War: Volume 6. by Michael Claringbould and Peter Ingman. Softcover (6.9x9.8 inches). 220 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Wau to the Bismarck Sea: January to March 1943*

When a series is excellent, I don't mind repeating myself: The *South Pacific Air War* series is excellent. There was a publication gap between *Volume 5* and *Volume 6* because the authors did an equally excellent three-book series about the Solomons (Guadalcanal) air war.

Per usual, you get an almost airplane-by-airplane recap of air operations by both sides. The numbers will surprise you. While the Allied air forces in Europe routinely launched hundreds of bombers against Germany, here in this corner of the Pacific, a dozen planes constituted a major raid. When a 100-plane Allied raid went after a Japanese convoy from Rabaul to Papua New Guinea, that was scraping underneath the bottom of the barrel.

By the way, both Japanese reinforcement convoys would make for cracking good scenarios -- maneuvering ships and their AA, escorting Japanese fighters tangling with Allied bombers, and escorting Allied fighters tangling with the Japanese fighters. You can even include both sides' submarines for extra suspense.

Also per usual, an analysis of claimed kills versus actual losses proves interesting. First, the Japanese were still potent enough for roughly equal battles. Second, claims wildly exceeded losses. For example, in one air battle, US pilots claimed to have shot down 84 Japanese planes and claimed another 36 as probables (p79). The actual Japanese losses? 10 Oscars and six Zekes (Zeros).

Also surprising is the numbers of Allied pilots reporting they repeatedly strafed Japanese soldiers in the water after the transport sunk. You generally hear of Japanese strafing Allied soldiers and pilots, but not the other way around.

One typo: "previous four volumes" is really "five" (p214).

The book contains 39 black and white photos, two color photos, six color maps, one black and white illustration, 13 color illustrations, and 20 color aircraft profile illustrations of camouflage and markings of great interest to modelers.

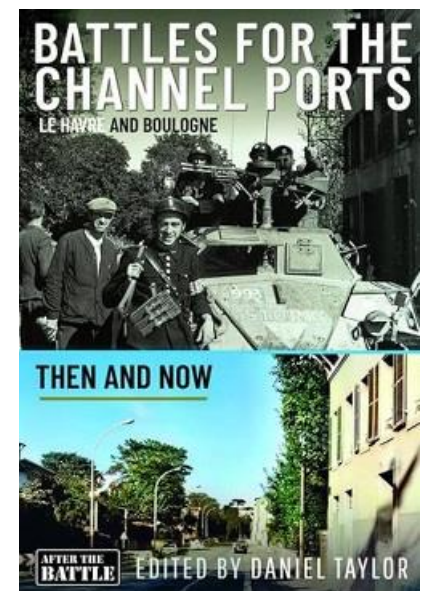
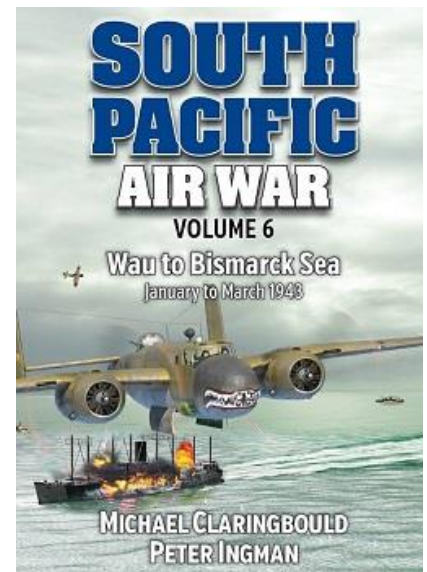
I certainly look forward to more volumes to continue the series.

Enjoyed it.

Battles for the Channel Ports: Then and Now. Edited by Daniel Taylor. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 136 pages. 2025 reprint of articles from 1994 and 2008.

Subtitle: *Le Havre and Boulogne*

The two articles come from the *After the Battle* magazine, which recounted battles and combined period photography with current photography --



current being 1994 and 2008. Books created from articles have been created recently and must sell well enough to keep the series going.

The articles are well written, containing considerable eye-witness accounts and general operational acuity. The photo comparisons age well, although the 1994 and 2008 are not up to 2025 date. The maps showing the attacks can be used as the basis for a couple tabletop scenarios with OOBs and numbers pulled from the text. An appendix shows TO&E of British tank formations.

Of note in the case of Le Havre, the 10,000-man garrison surrendered rather quickly in what wargamers would call a 1:2 attack. It turns out the garrison didn't have many anti-tank weapons, so the German order was resist until tanks show up. When flamethrower and petard-tossing tanks made it to the bunkers, the German soldiers inside the bunkers surrendered. That sounds like a special scenario rule in any tabletop game.

The book contains 148 black and white photos, seven black and white maps, and 20 black and white illustrations of British vehicles which were reproduced lots of times for the TO&E charts.

A good tactical look.

Enjoyed it.

Colonel William Prescott: A Patriot's Life. by Donald R. Ryan. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 260 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Heroic Commander of the Battle of Bunker Hill*

This biography paints a positive picture of the exploits of William Prescott at the outset of the American Revolution. In charge of a militia unit, he was put in command of the American militia that fortified Breed's Hill and stood against the British. The battle has come down in history as Bunker Hill, the slightly larger hill behind Breed's Hill, but by any name you wish, Prescott proved a brave and capable commander.

Besides his early life, he tried to answer the call at Lexington and Concord, but the 20-mile hike took a while and by that time, the British had withdrawn back to Boston. Nonetheless, he was assigned to Charlestown area with Bunker Hill.

One factoid I was unaware of was that the Americans started digging at night without a good idea of the lay of the land. A discussion about where to site the redoubt ended up at Breed's Hill in advance of Bunker Hill. A thin line of troops bent back and then extended to the Mystic River, with a series of obstructions in front. These were later reinforced.

The battle is well told, including Prescott urging his troops to stand fast in the face of less than effective British ship bombardments. The British attacks and repulses, the lack of apertures for American cannon, the initial lack of British cannon, the slow exhaustion of American powder, and lack of speed at getting more powder all play out in detail.

Post battle, Prescott served around New York City on Governour's Island and then at the Battle of Saratoga (although apparently not in the fighting), but ultimately left service to run his farm. He later came back to serve again.

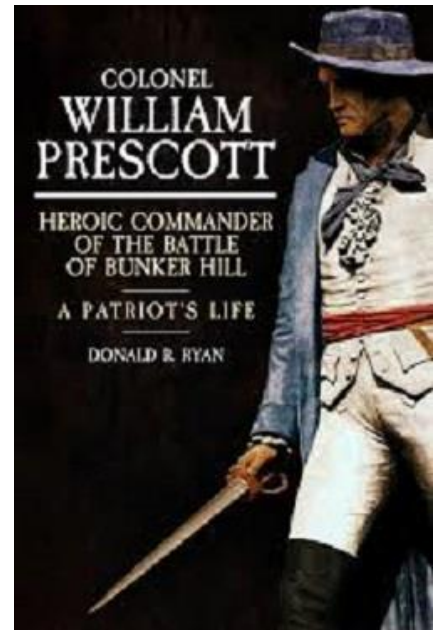
The book contains three black and white photos, 12 black and white illustrations, and one period black and white map. I would have liked a bigger and better Bunker Hill map as well as a detailed OOB, but this is a biography, not a book about the battle.

A nit: I also find the intrusion of authors into the historical text a bit annoying. If you want to talk about interacting with park rangers, historians, librarians, and other experts, not to mention car trips with the wife, please put that in Acknowledgements or at best an Appendix. Such interruptions are fine for a friendly blog or AAR, but I find it off-putting for a scholarly book -- and make no mistake, he put in the research big time.

An interesting point: "Would the outcome of the day have been different if the redoubt been built on Bunker Hill?" (p86). I immediately screamed, "Wargame!" Sure enough, Ryan mentions that game theory could examine decision making (p118). FYI: The British casualty rate was about 45% while the American casualty rate was about 25% to 30%. Hmmm. May have to consider the morale consequences of high casualties.

Anyway, we owe Prescott a big thanks for his efforts that day. And he is still important today -- at the HMGS Historicon 2025 convention, a 25mm Prescott miniature figure was given out to attendees while supplies lasted. Now I know the history behind the figure.

Enjoyed it.



In Strange Company. by Col. Roland J. Tiso jr (Ret). Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 401 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *An American Soldier With Multinational Forces in the Middle East and Iraq*

This memoir covers Tiso's assignment to US Central Command for the Middle East as well as direct liaison to a Multinational Division consisting of Ukrainians, Poles, Spanish, Hondurans, El Salvadorans, Fijians, and others, including creating an Iraqi battalion.

On the one hand, you're rewarded with an in-depth examination of his efforts to placate all these non-US interests while trying to get them to patrol and stabilize the country. The various competing national instructions complicates efforts, as does trying to set up a logistical supply line that will provide everything the US promised to each contingent. Sorting all that out dominated his time, from attending formal (National holiday) to informal (goat grab) ceremonies to prodding patrol actions to actually going on patrol.

On the other, his tone is relentlessly optimistic, which masks what must have been utter frustration. Every officer he meets is a hard-working, excellent soldier, well, except for the Spanish commander, who seemed to operate under national restrictions in the deployment of his troops, and the Iraqi recruits, who seemed in no hurry to learn military discipline. The plan called for 10 divisions of Iraqi troops but he had enough problems standing up a battalion.

Tiso offers considerable praise to the Ukrainians and Poles, who often veered from standard US procedures when it came to patrolling and closing the border with Iran.

He does note that all his efforts in the mid to late 1990s to plan for Operation Iraqi Freedom was ignored, the force necessary to stabilize a conquered Iraq was shortchanged, and political decisions to dissolve the Iraqi Army proved shortsighted. The result was an escalating series of insurgent attacks and border infiltration by Iranians. His service time came to an end and he departed back to the US, laden with accolades from non-US contingents and good relations with most of the allied commanders.

The book contains nine black and white photos and three black and white maps.

If you are looking for a terrific account of liaison soldiering, with all the political sensitivities required, here's your book. Just understand it comes across a little too diplomatic and rosy.

Enjoyed it.

Hitler's Collapse in the East. by Dmitry Degtev. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 206 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *A New Analysis of the Catastrophic Campaigns of 1944*

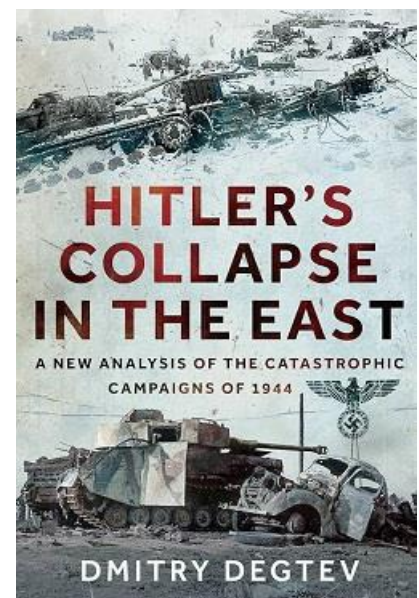
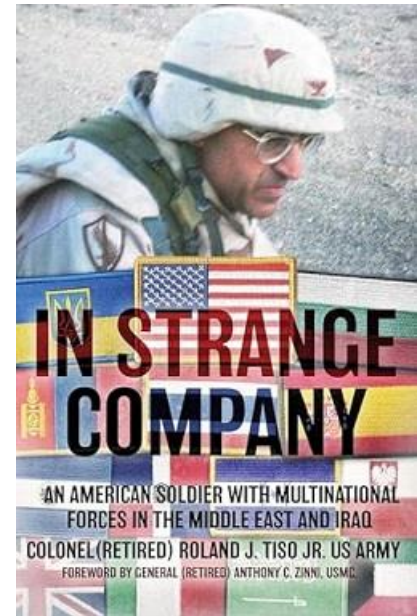
This fast-reading operational overview of various Soviet offensives that hammered the Germans through 1944 offers a varying degree of "new analysis" depending on how many books you read about the WWII Eastern Front.

To me, the salient points were: Soviets used tactical air strikes much more extensively; German transfers of units to plug gaps created weak spots that were subsequently attacked and exploited; Hitler's no retreat rule made such exploitations worse as the Soviets learned to pocket and seal the pockets of German troops -- not every time, but enough to cause German losses in men and material; Soviet sappers would infiltrate German minefields at night and bury Soviet mines -- just before an attack, the Soviets would detonate mines and set off chain reactions of German mines, clearing paths for the attacking Soviet troops; and USSR used cavalry to increase mobility and exploitations during muddy seasons -- helping disrupt rear areas and pocket even more Germans. German counterattacks to relieve the pocket are included.

This type of analysis is embedded within the historical narrative, which is a nice way to emphasize certain aspects of the Soviet way of war.

Couple typos: "heavy Tiger tanks" (p16) is duplicated; "troops occupied a square ledge about 100km wide" (p21) is off -- perhaps "wedge"; and "largets" (p93) should be "largest."

The book contains 32 black and white photos and seven black and white operational-level maps without a scale. Enjoyed it.



Prince Rupert of the Rhine: King Charles I' Cavalier Commander. by Mark Turnbull. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 282 pages. 2025.

This biography of Prince Rupert, heir to lost German Palatine lands and King Charles I's nephew, concentrates on the politics surrounding his life. Dispossessed of his ancestral lands, he landed in England as a cavalry commander in support of his uncle's throne. While battles famous and skirmishes obscure weave throughout the text, the emphasis is on the preparation and results of the battles. A tactical primer this is not. An operational examination it is.

The constant bickering and backstabbing, especially by Lord George Digby, proved disconcerting even as Rupert secured victories and malfeasance for Rupert's losses. This political battle among cliques affected reinforcements, gunpowder releases, and even the King's movements. That's no way to win a war against Parliamentary forces. Sadly, Rupert only learned to be more diplomatic later in life with the restoration.

Of surprise to me was that Rupert was a naval commander, both in exile as a semi-pirate who ranged into the Mediterranean Sea, along the coast of Africa, and over to the Caribbean before returning to France. In the restoration, he became an Admiral of a Squadron and then Fleet against the Dutch. His famed rashness and disregard of his own safety extended to naval tactics as well. Interesting.

The book contains 24 black and white photos, of which 21 are of paintings of Rupert and various personalities mentioned, and eight black and white maps.

If there's one nit to pick, it's the insertion into the text of some task the author performed. This seems to be some sort of trend of late, which the editor should remove from the main text and place in an Acknowledgement or Appendix. Perhaps it is me, but I find such to be jarring interruptions in an otherwise nicely written biography.

With the bulk of the book about his service to the King during the English Civil War, you get an excellent sense of the trials and tribulations he confronted when off the battlefield.

Enjoyed it.

Twelve Years With Hitler: Secretary to the Fuhrer. by Albert Zoller. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 189 pages. 2025 translated reprint of 1952 reprint of 1949 book.

This easy read offers Christa Schroeder's memoirs as secretary to Hitler. It covers a wide range of topics, with observations on his moods, health, management style, art, and personal relations. You'll get a better sense of what makes him tick. This has likely served as a source for many a Hitler biography, but it's always nice to read the original.

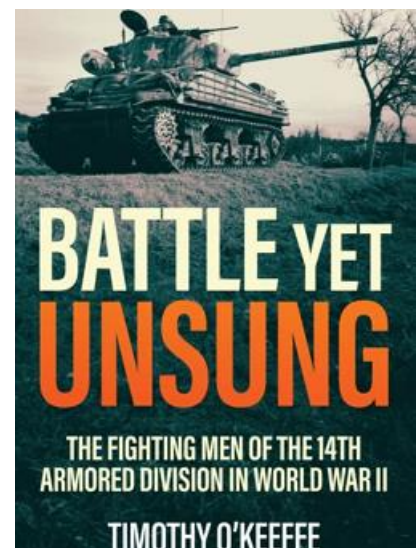
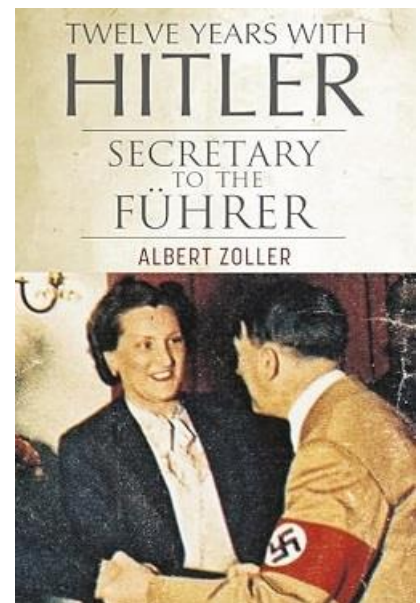
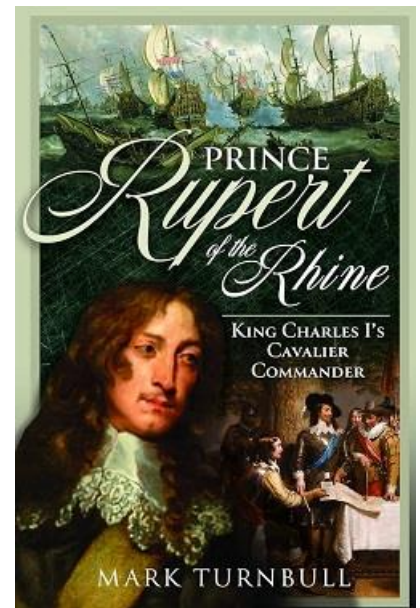
Of interest: Hitler rejected any sort of afterlife consequences of his actions. In his mind, there were no circles of hell and his mentions of God were calculated only as appeals to the more religious citizens of Germany.

The book contains one black and white close-up photo of Schroeder. The color photo on the cover is clearer.

Enjoyed it.

Battle Yet Unsung: The Fighting Men of the 14th Armored Division in World War II. by Timothy J. O'Keefe. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 336 pages. 2025 reprint of 2011 book.

This unit history borrows heavily from the Division History and the 68th Armored Infantry Battalion history. No bibliography, but notes mention diaries, interviews, and some original reports. This seems almost entirely from the US side -- German observations seem few and far between.



Yet the unit's progress into Germany and the German counterattacks offer considerable detail for a tabletop scenario -- Battles of Hatten and Rittershofen are two off the top of my head. You can pull the details from the text and the maps are sufficient enough.

Couple typos: "l4" (p51) should be "14"; "towns a kilometer or so part" (p108) should be "apart"; and "m1" (p183) should be "M1" (as in rifle).

The book contains 24 black and white photos, two black and white illustrations, and five black and white maps.

The recounting of events offers good coverage, but I wouldn't say this was scintillating prose. It seems a tad too sterile, as if it is just a recitation of facts in an outline. Excerpts pop up frequently, many interesting if interrupting the narrative flow. Part of writing is knowing when not to include factoids and other research. Still, ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.

Battles at Annapolis: Two Remarkable Football Games in the Army-Navy Rivalry. by David Gendell. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 307 pages. 2025.

Are you ready for some football?

Before the NFL held sway in our collective TV sets, college football reigned supreme -- and that included the service academies. Although this concentrates on the 1893 and 1942 Army-Navy games, you get some background into the evolution of the popularity that ultimately spilled over into Army-Navy gridiron contests.

The key here was that these games represented two different eras of US society and football rules. Both were played at Annapolis instead of a "neutral" field such as Philadelphia or New York City. The players, many with mini-biographies, stand tall as you understand their backgrounds and actions on and off the field.

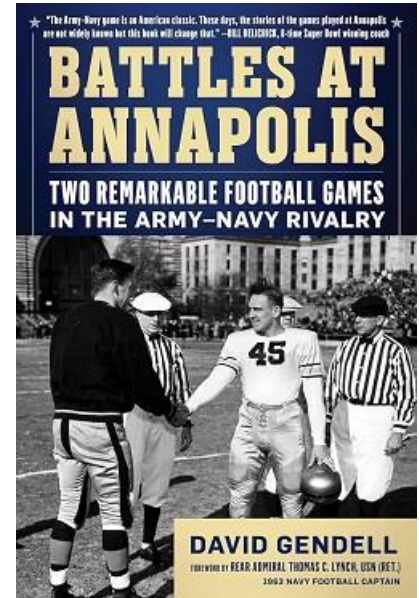
If I have one complaint, it's that the rules, especially in the 1893 game, needed a bit better explanation. For example, it wasn't until page 120 that I learned for sure that a touchdown was four points, not today's six points, and the "extra point" kick of today was worth two points in 1893. I had guessed previously (p40), but was never sure.

That said, when the games are actually described, they can be quite exciting -- the very best parts of the book. Sadly, I wished they were longer, but understandable given that a play-by-play recap back in 1893 is probably impossible to find. The bibliography seems well researched through a wide variety of newspapers and such.

One typo: "and on reeled off yardage" (p199) should have the "on" deleted.

The book contains 41 black and white photos, seven black and white illustrations, and one black and white map. Nicely done.

Enjoyed it.



Ride to the Sound of the Guns. by Theodore C. Mataxis jr. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 272 pages. 2025.

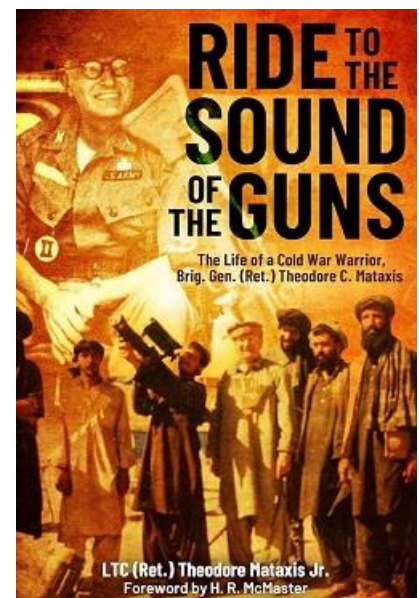
Subtitle: *The Life of a Cold War Warrior, Brig. Gen. Theodore C.*

Mataxis (Ret)

This biography offers a quite positive look at the life and career of Brig. Gen. Theodore C. Mataxis. Of course, you might expect that since it was written by Lt. Col. Theodore C. Mataxis jr. -- his son. In case you're wondering, there is a Theodore C. Mataxis III, also making a career in the US Army.

Mataxis attended the University of Washington, where all fit male collegians were required -- by law -- to enroll in ROTC for freshman and sophomore years (p13). He graduated in 1939 as a second lieutenant in the reserves and soon became regular Army. Interesting that in WWII, the Army would spin off a cadre of an almost fully trained division to form the basis of another division. That happened to Mataxis a couple of times. He finally made it to Europe in 1944, where he commanded an infantry battalion.

He also was in Korea -- a little by hook or by crook initiative on his part to be assigned to front-line duty. This time, he took over the 17th Regiment of the 7th Division for a limited time during some of the offensives around Pork Chop Hill.



He bounced around in various Army positions. The assignment to attend the India Command College seems an odd course for a US Army officer, but off he went. He even was part of STAG (Strategic and Tactical Analysis Group) that did computer wargaming of various scenarios from 1962-1964 (p132).

Eventually, and by working his contacts, he found himself in Vietnam as acting commander of the 23rd Infantry Division in II Corps area. Again, this was only temporary, but involved action against VC and NVA. Another posting found him off to Iran as an advisor to help build the Iranian Army. He was also sent to Germany and Cambodia.

In retirement, he also advised the Afghan mujahireen, helped enhance the Singapore military, taught courses, and served as head of the Valley Forge Military Academy.

Most amazing is that his wife and kids (and a dog named Roscoe) followed him from US Army posting to posting. She deserves a book all her own.

The prose wobbles from time to time, sometimes repeating some event. One point that had me wondering: "first as acting commander of the 23rd Division and then as acting division commander" (p184). A few pages later, this was cleared up: "deputy commander and acting commander of the 23rd Infantry Division (Americal)...then assistant division commander of support" (p187).

One typo: "fld duffel bag" (p136), which could be field or filled.

The book contains 96 black and white photos and six black and white maps.

Mataxis certainly had a varied career filled with attention to duty and valor. In his eyes, the US may have had a draw in Korea and a loss in Vietnam, but ultimately triumphed in the Cold War.

Enjoyed it.

Given Up for Dead: America's Heroic Stand at Wake Island. by Bill Sloan. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 422 pages. 2003.

If you ever wanted a book as a source for a WWII tabletop scenario on Wake Island, here it is. With attention to detail about postings, and a fantastic map on the inside cover, every action major and minor floats across the page with well-written prose.

Much of this comes from lots of interviews with veterans who made it through the two Japanese invasions and subsequent prisoner of war camps. He was also fortunate that a post-war quarterly newsletter among survivors recorded a wealth of information.

Only about half the Marines due to garrison the island were on the island. Another 1,000 or so civilian contractors were building the installations and airfield. That the Marines turned back the first invasion was amazing. That they sunk Japanese destroyers and other warships, as well as damage cruisers, is more than amazing. Had the US Navy commanders in charge of the relief force been more offensive minded, Wake Island may never have fallen -- then again, with two Japanese carriers supporting the second invasion and US carriers as part of the relief force, the Battle of Coral Sea may well have been fought around Wake Island.

Ultimately, enough Japanese landed and lack of communications generated fear in the US Navy Commander Winfield Scott Cunningham, who ordered the surrender. Major James Deveraux, architect of the defense and the vicious coastal batteries' gunnery assault on IJN warships, objected to the order, but carried it out nonetheless. It also seems that a Major Paul Putnam deserves an assist for the successful initial defense.

One typo: "Hanna with his .30-cal machine gun section" (p220) is later described as "Hanna's .50-cal machine guns joined" (p223). Not sure which is correct, but several times I found what I believe are .30 and .50 switches, but sometimes I'm not exactly sure. Regardless, the MGs proved deadly to Japanese troops intent on bayonetting US defenders.

The book contains 53 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, and one black and white map with scale and positions of guns and units.

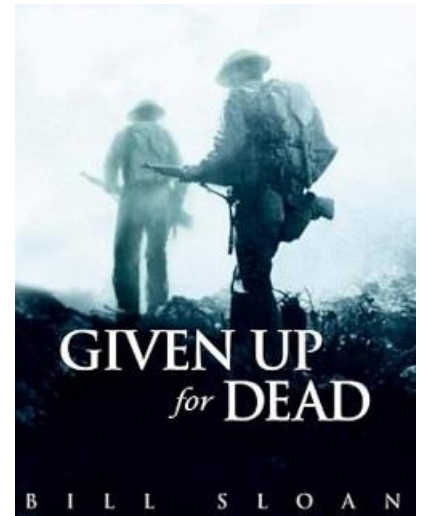
Well done.

Enjoyed it.

From Stalingrad to Italy: Von Senger's War. by Andrew Sangster. Hardback (6.3x9.4 inches). 168 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The German General Who Defied Hitler*

The subtitle makes it seem as if Gen. Fridolin Rudolph von Senger und Etterlin



was part of an assassination plot, but he was not. Instead, he was a devout Catholic who served in WWI and WWII and refused to enforce orders from Hitler that clashed with his Catholic beliefs. For example, Hitler ordered the execution of Italian generals who followed the example of the government and joined the Allies in 1943. Von Senger refused to allow the order to be carried out. Likewise, after the failed July 20, 1944 assassination attempt on Hitler, he refused the order to praise Hitler for his miraculous escape from death.

Despite the threat of executions of senior commanders, he was never arrested, although his promotions came slowly. He was considered unreliable, and was sent to a Nazi indoctrination course after being decorated for heroism under fire.

His record as a defensive specialist kept him in command. Specifically, he did well in France 1940 as many did, but also outpaced Rommel and captured Cherbourg. He came close to pushing his way understrength Panzer Division to relieve Stalingrad, but also managed to extricate it with what little equipment he had left.

As he spoke Italian, his days as a liaison to the Italian Army served him well later in the war as he crafted escape plans for German forces in Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica. He held the Casino line far longer than expected before being forced to retreat.

Von Senger visited front line units, often two and three levels below his responsibility, to get a first-hand look at the terrain and to gauge the morale and positioning of his units (p145).

One interesting factoid: von Senger said the Allies often used helicopters in 1944 for surveillance and observation (p81). I had not heard of this before, although helicopters were not unknown in WWII.

He often spoke frankly about Hitler and the Nazis, opining among trusted officers that only an Allied victory could remove Hitler from power and that when staring at defeat, the proper political move would be to negotiate a peace.

The book contains 17 black and white photos and one black and white map.

As von Senger left a memoir, this book is more a commentary on his memoir than a straight up biography. Yet if you have not read the memoir, this will do nicely as a biography.

Enjoyed it.



Conquest: The Chronicles of the Invaders. by John Connolly and Jennifer Ridyard. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 433 pages. 2014.

A \$1 bargain bin find follows the invasion of Earth by the Illyri, who cure all ills and bring peace to the planet in exchange for submission. Earthlings tend to have a dim view of subjugation and the revolts start relatively quickly as pacification efforts slaughter the rebellious.

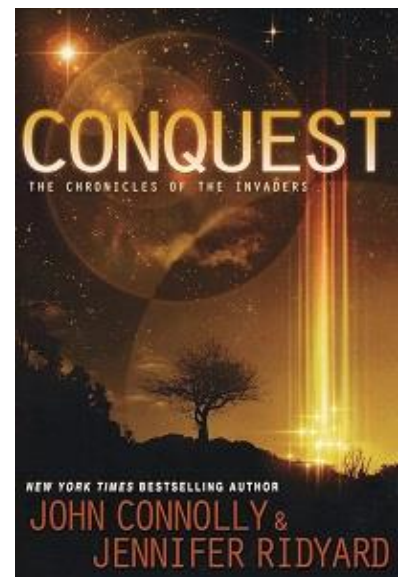
The story follows Syl, the teenage daughter of the new Illyri Military President of Earth, who sneaks out of Edinburgh Castle HQ and wanders among the natives with her friend Ani. Two human teenager brothers, both part of the Resistance, save them from a bomb, and so begins the forbidden fraternization.

Alas, the human terrorism brings in two other Illyri factions: the equivalent of the Gestapo and the Sisterhood. The power struggle between the military and the other two revolve around using humans for experiments of some sort. Meanwhile, the two brothers get captured, the two teenage Illyri free them with the help of a super-spy, and everyone goes on the run while trying to figure out why the Sisterhood wants human bodies.

The book starts out slow, but if you hang in there, you'll come around when the Scot Highlanders get involved. Some interesting ideas about pacifying a planet with technology and troops.

Ties got to the authors.

Enjoyed it.



Forts and Roman Strategy: A New Approach and Interpretation. by Paul Coby. Hardback (7.2x9.9 inches). 257 pages. 2022.

What a marvelous systematic plotting of Roman forts and Roman roads in Wales and Scotland. Better yet, the forts are specified by size, and hence, troops assigned. All this gets rolled into an analysis of Roman success or failure in conquering Wales and Scotland.

Five case studies form the core of the book: Scapula's Failed Conquest of Wales, Gallus' Containment of Wales, Frontinus' Conquest of Wales, Agricola's Expeditions in Scotland with later abandonment, and recapture of Scottish Lowlands to Antonine Wall with later abandonment back to Hadrian's Wall. In each one, Roman strategy receives a dissection of success and failure, in part with construction of forts of varying sizes and capabilities.

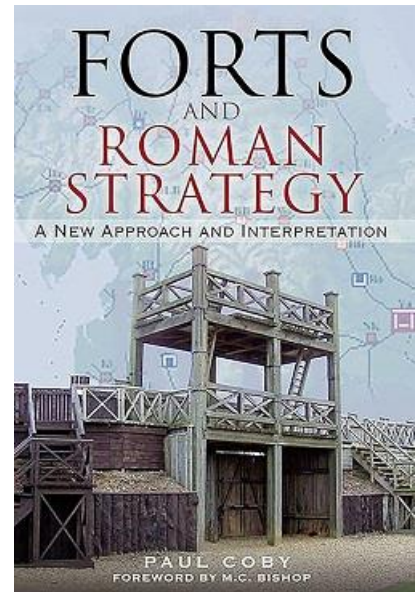
The second half of the book discusses the database and cartographic plotting methodologies that generate the interpretations and speculations of Roman strategy. These British fortification efforts are then compared to other Roman efforts at conquest across the Empire. Most of the British forts are located about 30km or so apart, or about a day's march.

One typo: "north the nall" (p161) is likely "north of the wall."

The book contains 17 color photos, 17 color illustrations, and 64 color maps with many repeats in the summary section at the end of the book.

You don't build and hold an empire without some proven military practices and policies. These procedures were common and used throughout the empire. Complete pacification would take generations, but as the five studies showed, the commander's ability and clear Imperial support affected the success of subjugation. It's all neatly done.

Enjoyed it.



Designing Video Games. by Stuart Maine. Hardback (9.6x11.9 inches). 215 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Great Games*

The author 27-year (p15 -- or in a back cover typo 28-year) track record as a video game designer merits a close read by wannabe designers of video games or paper games.

What astounded me was that more than 14,000 computer games were released on Steam in 2023 and something called Itch.io had over 200,000 games by 2019 (p65). So, how do you make your game stand out? Read on about creating content, adding human psychology to game conditions, and appealing to the nine types of gamers.

I was intrigued by the discussion of puzzles vs problems in game play. It initially sounded the same to me, but to advance in a game, Puzzles require one (or sometimes more) specific solutions while Problems can be solved in multiple ways, including ignoring them.

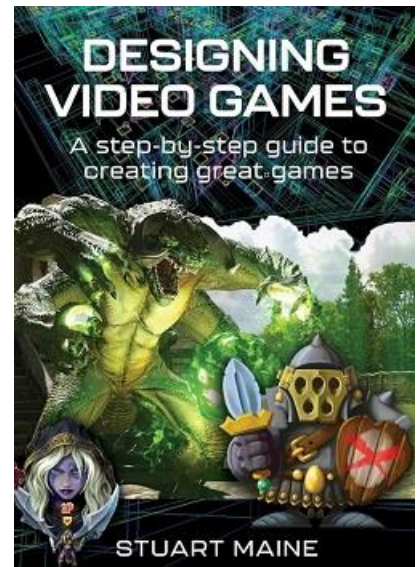
The same top-down design decisions also apply to zero-sum (simplest is one player gains resources while another loses them) and win-win (all players can increase resources) approaches.

There are far more examples. The flip side of this is that most of these considerations are overviews. The nuts and bolts are a bit skimpy at times, but enough is mentioned to at least get the prospective designer thinking about what to include or not include to create a great game.

Other aspects touched include "opportunity costs" -- the time, effort, and money required when adding features -- and the "edge cases" -- consequences that must be tested arising when adding options. The latter is a bugaboo in miniatures rules. If you add "x" mechanic, then y, z, aa, bb, cc, and more are affected and must be ruthlessly playtested to see if it's a game breaker.

In terms of effort, 20% of a designer's time will be spent on ideas and prototyping, 50% on creating content and coding, and 30% on playtesting and debugging (p90).

The book contains 102 color images, with the vast majority being in game screenshots from a wide variety of video games.



Starting with the basics, including motivations and ideas, through the prototyping, coding, playtesting, and marketing stages, he does indeed offer step by step considerations about creating video games. Yet I found the steps also applicable to boardgames and miniatures rules. Well done!

Enjoyed it.

Bio of a Space Tyrant: Volume 1 Refugee. by Piers Anthony. Paperback (4.2x6.9 inches). 312 pages. 1983.

I realize I am way behind my time reading this series -- five books as far as I know. This first one sends young Hope Hubris and his Hispanic family on a desperate voyage with other refugees fleeing Callisto to a different and less caste system of Jupiter's moons. Alas, their defenseless "bubble" (spaceship) was attacked by armed pirates multiple times on the voyage with all the pirate plunderings of women and loot and outright murder until only Hope remained at the end -- only to be denied immigration status.

All this pirate activity became rather repetitious. Sure, sometimes they fought back and won, but the next pirate rinsed and repeated the plunderings. An excursion to an outpost for asylum was turned away, but secured some supplies. An interception by a Jupiter spaceship warned them from proceeding and then left without providing asylum or aid. In the end, Hope escaped into a lifeboat alone and motored on.

Meh. It took me a long time to crack open *Volume 2: Mercenary*. The only reason I did was that Hope's dead fiancé was a courier for a criminal syndicate called Kife and Hope retrieved the item being carried. But what to do with something he has no idea about?

Bio of a Space Tyrant: Volume 2 Mercenary. by Piers Anthony. Paperback (4.2x6.9 inches). 312 pages. 1984.

Young Hope Hubris had little choice: Join the Jupiter Navy or be sent back to Callisto. He joined, and despite the prejudice against his Hispanic heritage, did well. He personally vowed to exterminate piracy and slowly built a team and a command to do so...then he did.

Here is a far more interesting and clever plot, complete with battles against pirate spaceships and Jupiter bureaucracy. And the Kife organization kept trying to bribe Hope to hand over the courier item from *Volume 1 Refugee*. When that didn't work, assassination attempts were tried.

The struggles against Navy bureaucracy and prejudice, the pirates, and Kife form a powerful trifecta of plot.

Enjoyed it.

Bio of a Space Tyrant: Volume 3 Politician. by Piers Anthony. Paperback (4.2x6.9 inches). 312 pages. 1985.

Well, this was a schizophrenic volume with chapters ping-ponging between being held in an interrogation cell and leaving the Navy to run for public office. Why this doesn't follow a chronological order is beyond me.

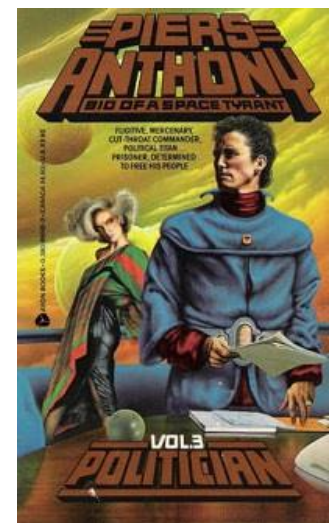
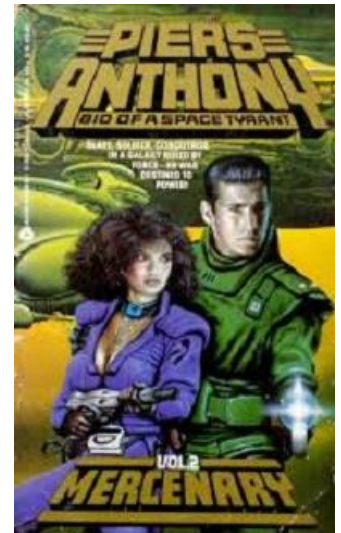
After creating an A-Team of advisors, the political machinations lead Hope to run for minor office and lose. That's often the story in real politics. Candidates with reform on their minds run for office and lose, but gain name recognition. Then they run again and often win.

Meanwhile, on a "national" level (assuming Jupiter's collection of colonies on moons equals states), a toxic do anything for power politician, named "Tocsin," begins to erode standards to keep himself in power -- even launching a political coup, complete with court rulings, after losing the election to Hope. Written in 1985.

But two can play the coup game and Hope's team engineers a gimmicky constitutional convention win. As he is a Naval hero who annihilated the pirates and various criminal gangs, the Navy backs him and enforces the constitutional convention vote to put Hope in power.

So, I didn't like the chronological ping-ponging, but appreciated the plot. Ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.



Patton Versus the Panzers. by Steven Zaloga. Softcover (8.0x10.0 inches). 270 pages. 2025 reprint of 2016 book.

Subtitle: *The Battle of Arracourt, September 1944*

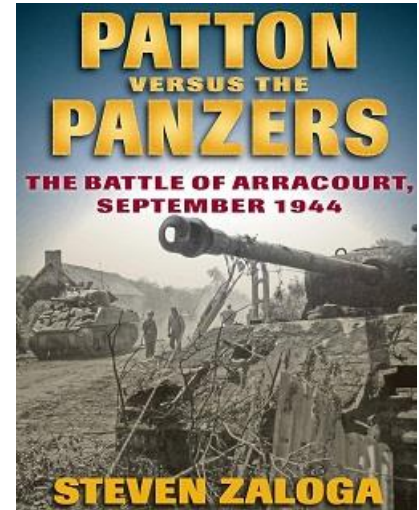
The title is a bit of a misnomer, as the battles covered are more than Arracourt. These include: Maisy, Epinal, Luneville, Jurelize, and Arracourt. They all involve the attacks of the new Panzer Brigades, which were ill-trained, lacked artillery, and roughly handled by US forces.

I don't want to say "vintage" Zaloga, but you get his gold standard of opposing forces and equipment overview, situational analysis, and battle recaps. Every one of these chapters could be a scenario. Overview maps are included, with scale, but if you squint enough with a magnifying glass, you can make out the terrain features that would be the basis of a tabletop.

The book contains 238 black and white photos, eight black and white illustrations, and 16 black and white maps.

This is a well-written, well-done book.

Enjoyed it.



USMC Tank Markings in the Pacific: Casemate Illustrated. by Romain Cansiere. Hardback (8.2x10.3 inches). 160 pages. 2025.

Most wargamers are not too worried about exact markings on their tanks, but I suppose that depends on the scale. A 28mm tank would look great with every marking. At 6mm? Not so much.

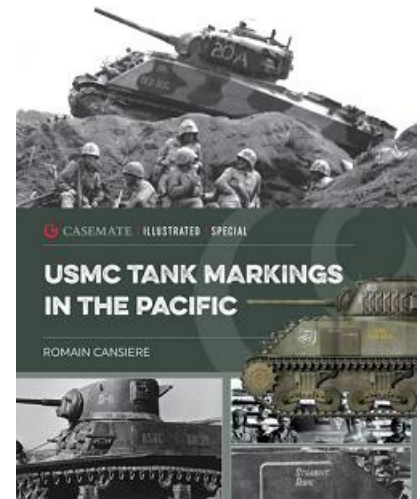
But modelers, well, that's a different story, especially with 1/35 scale. I suspect most 1/35 kits nowadays come with a selection of decals, and perhaps less so at 1/72 scale -- been a long while since I glued plastic together.

Yet, if you want a photo book of USMC tank markings, camouflage, and other standard and custom details, this *Casemate Illustrated Special* is exactly what you need. The six tank battalions receive a chapter each, followed by two independent tank companies, and three Defense platoons. Most of the book is photo captions, which often includes color interpretations of photos, but brief overviews of various Pacific War operations are included.

The book contains 215 black and white photos, 22 color photos, 60 color profile illustrations of tanks, one color map, 14 color TO&Es, five other color illustrations, and nine color profile illustrations of turrets.

Modelers will enjoy pouring through the pages to find just the set of markings they want for a USMC tank in WWII Pacific theater.

Enjoyed it.



US Army Tractor Trucks and Semitrailers: Casemate Illustrated. by Didier Andres. Hardback (8.2x10.3 inches). 160 pages. 2025.

Oh sure, the US Army's WWII deuce and a half truck gets all the public relations, but plenty of tractor trailer and other trucks helped win the logistics war behind the front lines. Covered are flatbeds, covered trailers, and a multitude of specialty trucks and trailers including laundry, machine shop, tanker, wreckers and tow trucks, pontoon and aircraft carrying trailers, and lots of others.

Many main truck designs receive overview text about its shape, mechanics, and evolution. Shape is about its form factor, like number of wheels and weight. Mechanics cover the tech specs. Evolution cover variations. Specialty designs receives shorter descriptions, sometimes only a paragraph.

The book contains 360 black and white photos, five color photos, one color illustration, and seven black and white illustrations.

For the tractor trailer buff, here is a magnificent overview of them all in a *Casemate Illustrated Special* book.

Enjoyed it.

