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Books I've Read:

Road to Barbarossa: Soviet-German Relations 1917-1941
Wars of the Roses: People, Places and Battlefields
Kitchener and the Dardanelles Campaign: Vindication
Russia's Five-Day War: Georgia 2008 (Elite 250)
Bounty HM Armed Vessel 1787: ShipCraft 30
Forgotten Heroes: WWII Hungarian Aces
100 Greatest Battles
South China Sea 1945: TF 38 - Air Campaign 36
US Destroyers vs. German U-Boats: Duel 127
Assault on the Gothic Line 1944: Campaign 387
Soviet Tanks in Manchuria 1945: New Vanguard 316
Nambu Pistols: WWII Handguns Japan - Weapons 86
The Ark (sci fi)
Invasion: Book 1 Contact (sci fi)
The Stars Now Unclaimed (sci fi)
Dark Waters, Starry Skies: Solomons Mar-Oct 1943
Panzer III North Africa 1942-1943: TankCraft 40
Panzer Reconnaissance
Through Bitter Seas (WWII novel)
Dictionary of Fortifications: Illustrated



Far left: 25mm Whimsical Hobbit cavalry by Keith.
Left: Sean's 3D printed 6mm robot hot off the plate.

Raabid Combat: Shako II 1809 Wargame

by Russ Lockwood

One of my favorite wargaming photos is of a six-person *Snappy Nappy* game of the 1809 Battle of Raab at Historicon long ago. It was taken by Ed and showed the battle on a 2.5x5-foot table in 15mm. Smiles all around the table, folks relaxed and gaming, and the image oozes fun.

Shako II scenario map.

Another fond "Raab game" memory I have is a basement game some 25 or 30 years ago. Sadly, I don't have a photo of it, but I wish I did. Every "maybe I can come" gamer showed up and Dan umpired a 13-person *Empire II* game in 15mm on a ping-pong table. It was the first time I truly appreciated *Empire II* for its hyper-detailed take -- flowcharts and all -- of Napoleonic warfare.

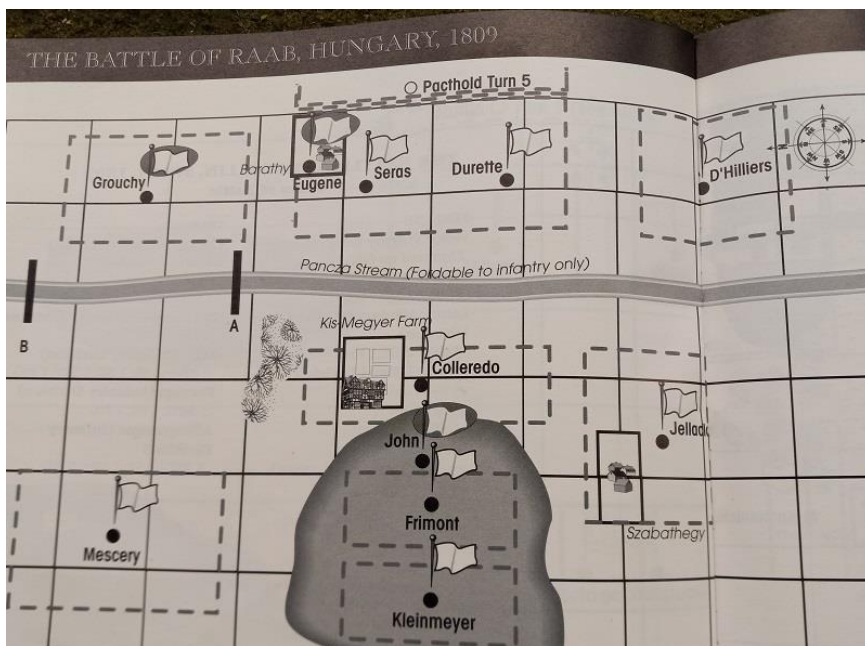
Raab scenario at start. French to the right of the stream. Umpire Dave gives us all his "Don't give me no lip" look.

I don't remember what side I was on or who won, but I do remember that Dave (leading a French command) won a low-odds assault on the Kis-Meyer farm. All congratulated him on being able to capture the place. The Austrians immediately counter-attacked and tossed his troops out...and in a single, teeny-tiny, itty-bitty percentage chance, eliminated Dave's commander.

The farm with my lads defending and C-in-C Phil's troops behind on the hill in support.

Someone commemorated the moment by cutting out a one-inch tall man-shaped figure from a piece of paper and impaled it on the "pointy roof" of the farmhouse model. We snickered. We howled. We pointed. There "Dave" remained, impaled and flopped on the roof of the farmhouse for the rest of the battle...and for the rest of our collective memory for however long such may last.

Ah, but tonight Dave was the umpire for our *Shako II* game.



The Setup

As per usual, we each rolled a die to determine the sides. We ended with four French players: Mike, Marc, Sam, and Dave W, in line from my left to right. Mike commanded the cavalry while the other three had infantry commands. All started on the opposite side of the stream.

The French (left to right): Mike, Marc, Sam, and Dave W.

And we had four Austrian players: Troy, Phil, Jay, and me. I drew the straw of defending the farm, which was a major victory objective. Phil was the archduke stacked behind the farm. Jay was the cavalry commander on my left and Troy had an infantry command on my right.

The Austrians sorta (left to right): Umpire Dave, Troy, Phil, Jay, and French cavalry commander Mike.

All us Austrians were under Defend orders, although C-in-C Phil wanted Jay to attack before the French could cross the stream. Jay's cavalry was too far back and left my farm flank open. The woods were my only cover at start.

Dave M. was the umpire.

There I am (at right). Troy in red and Umpire Dave in white. Photo by Mike.

Wrinkle at the Ford Ironed Out

Mike had to roll a 5 or 6 per unit to "find" a ford so his cavalry and horse artillery could cross.

Mike proceeded to roll almost nothing but 6s. Just about the whole French cavalry found the river's widest ford in history.

Austrian Cavalry Wrinkle

To change orders, Phil had to send a courier to Jay. I'm not quite sure of the roll, but he needed high and had two rolls per turn.

He proceeded to roll snake-eyes (two ones) on Turn 1, snake-eyes on Turn 2, and a 1 and finally a 5 on Turn 3. Jay remained rooted to the spot for a time as Mike crossed the stream and headed deeper into our Austrian left flank.

Mike rolled so well, five of seven units crossed on turn 1! Photo by Mike.



Marc's French Arty Party

Marc thought his French cannons should perform counter-battery fire against my artillery battery. Only a six would hit. He rolled his 2d6 and rolled boxcars (two sixes). My battery only put one hit on one of his infantry units.

Then Marc moved up skirmishers and fired. Only a six would hit.

Oh. Oh! Oh, no.

Marc rolled a six.

Man! I've seen this "Only a 6" movie not minutes before!

Three hits on my battery and an artillery battery only takes three hits. The game wasn't 10 minutes old and there's an area of blank tabletop where my battery once stood.

About mid game. Unhindered by any artillery fire from me, Marc advanced to the very walls of the farm. He also brought in reinforcements.

Sam's French Arty Party

Sam, not to be outdone, rained artillery shells on one of Troy's infantry units. In two turns, the Austrian unit broke and ran off the table.

But there is a rule that a commander stand within 3 inches has a chance of being hit. Troy's commander was three inches away. All Sam needs is a roll ... of ... a ... six.

Oh. Oh. Oh, no.

Sam rolled a six.

Troy's commander dies a horrible death from a cannon shot.

Man! Us Austrians are in a horror movie!

Early in the game. Sam cross the stream behind a wall of skirmishers.

Dave W Storms Across the Stream

While I backed up my infantry units outside the farm to refuse the right flank, Troy was having none of that. He stormed forward to defend the stream. He was half right.

Half his troops had to fall back after melees with the French while the other half repelled the French. Alas, the gap between me and Troy was only lightly held and Sam poured troops through the gap.

Dave W rallied his troops and they charged anew, this time sending the Austrian into retreat. Troy hung tough, making a division morale roll to stay on the field.

Why Did the Jay Cross the Road?

Over on our left flank, Austrian cavalry commander Jay finally received word to take the fight to the French. A road crossed his section of the battlefield, so Jay crossed it. Why?

To get to the other side...

Hey! I heard that! Your comment was uncalled for. Now, let me finish.

To get to the other side...quickly.

We called it Jaycharging, which is much faster than jaywalking.

OK, that comment was justified.



The Crash and Bash of Cavalry

I was rather occupied by Marc's troops swarming across the stream and trying to infiltrate into the woods on my left and sweep around my flank on the right.

Jay (right) shuffles the cavalry around while awaiting Phil's order to switch from Defend to Attack. Meanwhile, Russ (hey, that's me!) starts to refuse his right flank. The brown line is the road. Photo by Mike.



But I saw Austrian Jay charge the French and drive back Mike's cavalry and eliminate a fair amount, too. I guess all of Mike's explorer rolls of 6s to find a ford turned into 1s in combat. His mustangs became pintos and blew up.

Jay was on top of the world. Mike? Edsel.

Ba dum bum. Easter egg season isn't over yet, folks.

Early on. Caught in the act: Austrian C-in-C Archduke Phil rolls yet another snake-eyes in a vain effort to change Jay's order. Frenchies Sam (left) and Dave W. and Austrian Troy (red shirt) await the results.



Farm Swagger Into Farm Stagger

The walls of the farm were tall and strong (-2 to firing and melee in *Shako* lingo). So, there sat three battalions of my regular troops (Morale 4 in *Shako* lingo) behind the walls. Outside the walls were my landwehr (lower rated at only 3 morale).

Behind me, Phil backed up my front line with elite troops (5 morale). Nothing could go wrong. Marc could only hit me if ... he ... rolled ... a ... six...

Oh, no. No, no, no.

His regulars rolled up to the drive through windows. Worse, he had wormed another unit around the corner of the farm. It wasn't much of a worm, but it turned just the same. He unleashed three 6s and a not-6 out of four rolls. All three of my front line units were now disordered ("Staggered" in the game's vernacular). My return fire hit one, missed two, and I only needed a 4. From my perspective, this movie's only getting a one-star rating.

During the command phase, I was able to roll a 6 myself to shrug off one of the disorders. But which one? I decided on the unit in the corner that was facing a pair of French infantry.

Marc launched an all-out attack to storm the walls of the farm.

Turn 8: The game has mesmerized all (clockwise left to right): Phil, Umpire Dave, Jay, Mike, Marc, Sam, Dave W., and Troy. Well, maybe not Troy, who is in a scrum trying to defend the streambank.



Eins. Eins. Vier. Wunderbar.

My defensive volley was two thirds of a disaster: I rolled two ones and a four. When charged, but only by infantry (not cavalry), a defensive volley that does not hit (50-50 roll) generates a "Failed Volley" and a -1 during the melee -- i.e. You just shot yourself in the foot. Why a failed defensive volley against cavalry does nothing but a failed volley against infantry gives your guys the shakes is beyond me.

In one game a couple years ago, to avoid said chance of a failed volley, I said I refuse to fire, but the rules said I must. Oh yeah, I got a failed volley that time.

Anyway, farm wall or no wall, Mark won two of the three melees. You can guess which two. One of my two retreating units failed the subsequent morale check and fled off the table. The other stopped behind Phil's line of elite troops. My third battalion held on and retreated Marc's battalion.

Landwehr Tough

Outside the farm on my right, my right-most Landwehr (militia) unit was attacked by two French units from Sam. My Landsers were made of such stern odds-defying stuff. They repelled the assault, sending one of the two French battalions screaming towards Paris.

Sam tried again. And again my Landwehr rose to the challenge, shooting with accuracy and flinging back the French horde to wrack and Rouen.

My flank all of a sudden became a vista of open fields.

My landwehr may have a white casualty cap, but they demolished two of Sam's battalions, leaving breathing room. Bottom right corner: One of Sam's skirmishers takes a pot shot. The red marker indicates staggered (disordered).



French Reinforcements

Next thing you know, a couple of regiments showed up for Mark. It included the Italian Guard battalion and presumably more French. It would be a race between their entry into battle and the end of the 12th turn and thus the end of the game.

French Flank Attack

Dave W and Sam double-teamed Troy, who put up a magnificent delaying action until the very last when his big roll for division morale ended with a rout. Far fewer sausages returned to Vienna than originally left.

But his valiant efforts siphoned troops from Sam that could have swirled around my flank and he delayed Dave W so long that the French could not march fast enough to get into the Austrian rear by game end. Some skirmishers, true, did harass the Austrian artillery, but Austrian skirmishers soon evened the firefight.

Troy stymies Dave W's crossing...for a while.

Why Did the Jay Cross the Road?

He was being chased by the revived French cavalry.

I'm not sure what happened, but Mike turned the tables on Jay and drove almost all the Austrian cavalry from the field. I could only surmise Mike rolled a considerable number of 6s that allowed him to remove staggered markers and hits. Somebody yell "Cut!"

I figured this out when Marc inched a full battalion into the woods between farm and cavalry battleground and Jay's cavalry was nowhere to be seen.



Grenadiers to the Rescue

Back at the farm, C-in-C Phil picked his moment for a counter-attack. In went the Grenadiers and out went half the French. The one Frenchy that had hit the corner of the farm stubbornly remained in control of the corner.

Turn 9. Marc's French grab the corner and middle of the wall. My other battalion, though staggered, held on. Phil's troops at the back of the farm prepare to counter-attack.

End Game

And that's where we ended it. The 12 turns had come and gone in about 3 to 3.5 hours. Us Austrians still held all but one corner of the farm.

Turn 10: Phil's counter-attack shoves half the French back over the wall, but Marc still holds the corner. Lots of staggers (disordered) all around and some casualties, too.

My Landwehr battalion had cleared the immediate right flank, but all Dave W. had to do was turn a bit and I'd have to make a right face to make sure I remained at the end of the line. I was already being peppered by skirmish fire.

Frenchy Marc had a considerable number of battalions in play. I only had one in reserve and Phil had only three. It's a bit of a precarious position to be in.

On our left flank, it was all Frenchy Mike. How he managed to come back from certain doom must have been an amazing set of odds-defying die rolls.

Had the game lasted a half dozen more turns, I'm not sure the Austrian army would remain, or worse, stand long enough for both out flanks to collapse like a Cannae.

Yet, given the time constraints, it was an Austrian minor victory and we'll take that.

End game positions after Turn 12. A field empty of Austrian cavalry, a contested farm, and a sweeping French flank attack.



Checkmate

One last item: Umpire Dave asked for the most valuable player. As I still held the line, and more importantly most of the farm, so I was nominated. Mike did a better job grasping victory from death, but as the Austrian won a narrow victory....

Umpire Dave awarded me a Napoleonic chess piece. Someone cited the line, "Men are led by baubles." Chuckles all around.

Alas, the piece was French, not Austrian, chess piece. But a major award is a major award. At least it didn't say "fra-jeelee."

Thanks, Dave for hosting and umpiring.

Another trophy for Russ. Photo by Mikes.



The Unpredictable French Cavalry: Raab

by Mike

The game looked great and played well. *Shako* is, for sure, very bloody and hard to predict. Each die counts!

I really didn't know what was going on in and around the farm and nothing at all with respect to the far left (where French Dave W squared off against Austrian Troy). My focus was on the right. This is what happened there.

How did this turnabout happen?! Photo by Mike.

The language in the scenario that dealt with the French's cavalry's search for fording and crossing the river was incomprehensible, so Dave asked me to write a protocol that would have the French cavalry Division across in three turns. So I did: Six stands including artillery, each rolling a D6 for 5s and 6s to cross when touching the terrain piece. If unsuccessful, a +1 DRM in next turn. A +2 DRM in the 3rd turn and a +3 DRM in the 4th turn. Probability the Division was across in three turns, but it would be in a staggered fashion.

However, I told Dave that unless the French was across in full and ready to receive the Austrians, they would get butchered. The distance from the Austrian Division to the river was 26 inches and with the enemy moving 18 inches, well, you can do the math.

Umpire Dave wasn't concerned; my protocol was fine. Three turns it was ... and I would command the French!

So I started the game with the conviction that I was on a "Mission Impossible." I knew Jay and his cavalry command was ready to pounce as soon I either got within 18 inches or he received Attack orders from Phil. I could stay outside the 18 inches, but....



Waiting until turn 4 and bringing the whole Division across in line was an option, and the safest approach, but when I rolled a 6 for initiative, got a brigadier, and then a 6 for my first unit searching for a ford, I decided "Why not? Let's go!"

Stupidity and élan were true to history and we were only playing 12 turns.

A Phenom Is Born

I was beyond blessed with phenomenal die rolling: a string of five 6s and one 5 straight out of the starting block. That was matched by Austrian Phil rolling six 1s that prevented Jay from receiving orders to attack! You do the math for that happening too!

Jay then generally bettered my die in the melees to follow, had a couple of 2-on-1, but I rolled another four, count 'em four, 6s for the initiative and could remove that number of hits. I did have to do a Division check, but rolled a 5 and got another 6 firing canister at one of Jay's already reduced stands. That loss made Jay roll for a Division check. He rolled a 2. The Austrian cavalry Division was gone and the cavalry battle of Raab was over.

I didn't see it happening until pretty much until it did!

And I expect that will never happen again, so next time we play Raab, I will bring my Division across on turn 4. I will never be this lucky again with the dice.

Mike -- Feel free to be that lucky again, but may I please provide you with a list of alternate victims for your prowess? -- Jay.



End of game. Photo by Mike.

Return of the Jedi: I Fly The X-Wing Again

by Russ Lockwood

Dave has a grandson who apparently is a *Star Wars* fan, so at the show, Dave picked up a goodly number of *X-Wing* fighters. A decade ago, I had played pretty extensively, so I went up to help Dave learn the basic game ... and relearn it myself.

So, we set up the basic game: two TIE fighters (Dave) vs one X-Wing fighter (me).

Dave's happy after this head-on pass...

Quick Overview

Each fighter has a pilot, with different pilots having different skill factors. The lowest-rated pilots move first, followed by the second lowest and so on until the highest rated pilot moves last. Then comes shooting, with the highest rated pilot shooting first and all damage takes effect. Then the second highest rated pilot shoots and so on until the lowest rated pilot shoots -- if he or she or it is still around.

I picked Luke Skywalker and Dave took two middlin' TIE pilots. Luke was the highest rated.

For movement, you twist a dial in secret to the desired maneuver. When all players have picked, the maneuvers are revealed. Different custom ruler shapes are slugged to each maneuver. Find the ruler that matches the maneuver, put it against the front edge of the model stand and move the model so that the back edge of the stand touches the end of the ruler. Easy peasy.

Combat is a number of dice to hit vs a number of dice to save. Hits take out shields first and then hull. When the number of hits equals or exceeds the hull rating, KA-BOOM!

There's more, including special abilities, special cards that add more weapons or defenses, and other mechanics, but those are the basics.

In fact, I misremembered the "Target Lock" mechanic, which is a re-roll mechanic, not a "need before firing" mechanic. Sure, I was rusty around the edges. Obviously, I was using the Force.

Lucky Luke

Ah, but Luke was really lucky. In the first game, I managed to roll four dice for four hits while Dave rolled three dice for no saves. KA-BOOM! went a TIE. The second one took longer and had to shake Dave off my six.

In the second game, I offered to trade sides, but Dave was getting the hang of TIE fighters and stayed Imperial. Then, I did it again ... four for four with no Dave Saves ... and TWICE! In Yoda speak, "Used the Force, I did." In Russ speak, "KA-BOOM! KA-BOOM!"

Dave was obviously flying DIE fighters. Oooo. I'm gonna pay for that one at the next Dave game...

The games were quick. I suggested that at first, Dave might just start the kid off with learning to use the pilot ratings for movement and firing order, then advance to moving a ship around a 3x3-foot mat via the secret dials and different shaped rulers, and finish off with simple roll hits and saves.

He can gradually add all the extras after they get familiar with the sequence.



Battle of Red, Battle of White: War of the Roses Tonight

by Russ Lockwood

Dan's annual War of the Roses: King for a Year event proved sparsely populated. Only four of us appeared tableside. By random pick, it was Mike and Dennis against Dan and The Lion of Stockton (hey, that's me!).

At start: Dennis (left) ponders his move, Dan (right) consults a point in the rules, and Russ (The Lion of Stockton) takes a photo for posterity. Photo by Mike.



Why am I called the Lion of Stockton? Because I wear a Lion livery shirt. It looks an awful lot like a Brisbane Lions shirt because it *is* an official Brisbane Lions shirt that came all the way from Australia. I used to watch Monday Night footie (Australian Rules Football) rebroadcasts on some obscure cable TV channel until it went away. Exciting game, but I don't think I've drunk a Fosters since MNF left the channel.

The troops of The Lion of Stockton aka William Neville, Lord Fauconberg before the cardboard fog (top of photo) dissipates.



Get On With It

Anyway, I selected my usual Fauconberg (see the 4/27/2022 for last year's battle) and opted to have my commander dismount for a completely foot command. I always wonder whether I should "trade in" some archers or billmen for some cavalry or knights, or even some woods-friendly troops, but that would weaken my main line. As slow-moving as my force is, I need it to hold fast to grind away at the competition. I also have a couple of spear and a foot knight unit.

At start: Dan (left), Mike (middle) and Dennis deploy troops in secret behind the cardboard fog.



This knight unit is a little over the top for me. It has patched a hole in my line in the past, so I keep it around. It's also good against pike.

My force may not work all that often, but when I pull my archers from the front line, I have a semblance of a reserve -- as long as the pips can last.

*And we're off for the 2023 running of wannabe kings...
Photo by Dan.*



Dan chose Stafford sporting some new handgunner figures that he had painted up. He also had crossbowmen, longbowmen, and a cannon kicker along with some billmen and skirmishers.

The crafty Burgundian Michael the Bald brought his pike and crossbow army, also with a cannon kicker, and some light horse, knights, and skirmishers. As I learned last year, he has some speed in his command.

Dennis of the Short Hose brought his pike and longbow force, augmented by a number of sword-wielding barbarians and a couple skirmishers.

Field of Forest Guardians

Our combined forces met on the Field of the Forest Guardians, where a patch of forest formed the left side and another patch the right side of the battlefield. The locals called them the Guardians.

In between was the Field with a road going right down the middle between the two patches of woods. Our canny opponents also had a gentle hill on their side. It was a natural choke point.

*The ends of the battlefield world were the outer edges of the forest, so the woods were in play. End of Turn 1.
Photo by Mike.*



Dan drew up his troops on our left and I on our right. Michael the Bald faced off against Dan and Dennis of the Short Hose faced off against the Lion of Stockton.

What to Do About Trees?

I have exactly one unit of treehuggers -- the skirmishers. Everything else is open field troops -- billmen, spear, and knights lose their considerable advantage in combat power when they enter woods. My skirmisher went to the right to go into the forest. I stuck the two stands of spear on my right as well. Then I stuck the foot knights on the right, too, but far enough away so that the enemy's eco-troops had to come out and dance.

Get the idea I saw the woods as a weak spot?

The rest I put into the usual longbow in the front line with a backing of billmen. It's a compact formation with enough striking power for most situations.

Fog Up. Fog Down.

Up went the cardboard fog so that we could set up in secret. When the mists cleared, Dennis was heavy on my right and looked likely to overlap my right. Michael had skirmishers and his light horse on our left to dance against Dan.

I move my lone skirmisher unit into the woods to stymie Dennis' skirmishers. But look at the archer block trying to figure out whether to go into the woods or around the woods. Meanwhile, our noble main line clears the fields while the main line of the usurpers holds the crest of the gentle hill.

The woods would be the keys to cracking the enemy. I didn't like the looks of the mass of Short Hose troops lined up with the forest.

Dan and I won the initiative toss, so we went first. After that, the sides alternated Igo-Ugo style.

We moved up as much as possible, hoping to get the battle started with some missile fire. Our foes held back on the crest of the hill, sending out flanking forces. Michael sent his dancing fellows and Dennis put all his longbowmen behind his skirmishers and headed into the woods.

To the Green Woods In Between

Woods present a special challenge.

Far be it for me to question anyone's tactics, but there is no shooting in the woods unless a stand is at the edge looking out into the fields. Dennis did not remember that rule, mostly because as a top-notch *Art de la Guerre* (ADLG) player, he was using ADLG rules, not the *De Bellis War of the Roses* (DBWR) rules. They are different.

Worse, only Skirmishers can use linear "group moves" for a pip in the woods. All other troops are limited to column group moves. Thus, if you have three non-SK stands across, you need three pips to move them as individual columns.

Dennis bends his line trying to keep his troops in the woods within command control.



And command and control only extends six movement units (300 paces in *DBWR* vernacular) if a unit is inside the woods. If beyond 300, it costs two pips to move a unit.

Sending bowmen into the woods to turn my flank was going to be a long process.

I sent in my only skirmisher. I kept just out of charge range, backing up and backing up turn after turn until I ran out of woods. Then, I turned and charged.

Granted, I was outnumbered two superior Short Hose Skirmishers to one ordinary Lion skirmisher, but me rolling a 6 and Dennis rolling a 1 ended up with a triumphant Lion roaring over the shredded bodies of Short Hose skirmishers.

Dennis tossed in his re-roll chip. A re-roll chip is used to force a re-roll by both sides. Results may be better or worse. On the second roll, I bounced off his line, but to force the use of a chip for a skirmisher was a morale victory for me.

Up top, Dan (Stafford – orange tags) pushes past the flank of Mike (Michael the Bald – orange tags). At bottom, Dennis pushes his troops deeper into the woods as I refuse the flank. End of Turn 6.



Meanwhile at the Lion's Nose

Dennis sent skirmishers in front of his main line of pike and swordsmen. My longbow shot 'em up and sent them routing to the rear.

On the left, Dan's missile troops, including his cannon, traded shots with Michael's missile troops. Slowly, Dan drove them back, bending back Michael's flank and opening a hole. Michael's skirmishers and cavalry danced, but were falling backwards, opening up the flank of his main pike line.

In essence, my refused right and Michael's refused right were turning the battle into who could turn whose flank first.

Michael the Bald made a slight mistake in setup. He placed his crossbowmen in front of his pike. The pike could not get to Dan's mainline because pike cannot pass through the crossbow and visa versa. They were stuck.

Indeed, when I sent the billmen to the front, I refrained from attacking one crossbow unit -- he was far less dangerous shooting at me than me going toe-to-toe with the pike behind him. I needed my line intact to give Dan time to turn the flank.

Turn 8: Dan begins to turn the usurpers' flank. I face off against Dennis' woods troops, but look at the gap facing Dennis' intact line.

Alas, in keeping up with Dan, my nose was a bit more forward than I wanted. I should have staggered the advance more, but breaking up a line takes pips and I was spending



a number of them foiling Dennis' ramble in the bramble on my right flank.

He launched his swordsman and pike at my line. I defeated his first pike attack, but his swordsmen were squarely ready to turn on my main battle line at the same time Dan was prepping to turn Michael's line -- although Dan had lost four or five stands, including his new handgunners.

That'll teach him to paint them so nice. Those parade-class troops often perform the worst in a battle, right?

Concession

Dennis perceived the battle turning against them and didn't see a way to speed up my annihilation. I lost one unit while Dennis lost two skirmishers -- an equal loss since skirmishers only cost a half a breakpoint point while my unit cost a full point.

In any case, Dennis conceded. Like a chess master who sees some combination of moves, he didn't see a quick conclusion. The game was 3.5 hours old and likely would have gone on an additional hour or more -- one of those rare games for me where I can spend five or six hours. He plays *ADLG* games in 2.5 hours tops.

I had a bad gap in between my front line and my refused flank. It was going to take me a couple turns to sort that out, but I thought I could hold on without losing too many bowmen.

It might have bought enough time for Dan to shoot the gap in Mike's line and start rolling it up. It would've been close.

Thanks Dan, for hosting. I guess we'll have to do rock-paper-scissors to see who is king for the year...

My flank is open. I've pushed back the pike, but swordsmen are infiltrating around me. I start to form a second line. The game ends about here. I should have snapped a photo showing Dan's movement around Mike's flank...Alas...



Fantasy Battle: Simple *Field of Glory*

By Dan Burkley

When a *Traveller* RPG session was canceled, I suggested an alternative game, which included doing a fantasy battle using my modifications to *Field of Glory (FOG)*, which I call “*Simple*” *FoG*. Three players embraced this idea and two of them brought their own armies (Elves and Goblins/Orcs).

As the name suggests “*Simple*” *FoG* includes a number of simplifications to the standard *FoG* rules and play-aids, several which I’ll describe:

1. Formation Change and Maneuvers converted from a dice roll to loss of movement, based on training and troop type.
2. Points of Advantage (PoA) charts were converted to a matrix. Cross-reference the attacker and defender to determine the starting PoA with a very short list of other potential modifiers.
3. Troop labels include movement rates, troop type, armor rating, and weapons, which make it easier to find, follow, and adds some “fog or war”.
4. Play-aids consolidated and color-coded for movement, shooting, and impact/melee, with larger fonts.

Expanding into the fantasy realm adds some complications: adding new troop types, magic items, spells, and then trying to come up with a point system to balance it all. While the new rules are in place and appear to work well, coming up with a reliable point system for all the fantasy stuff is still a work-in-progress.

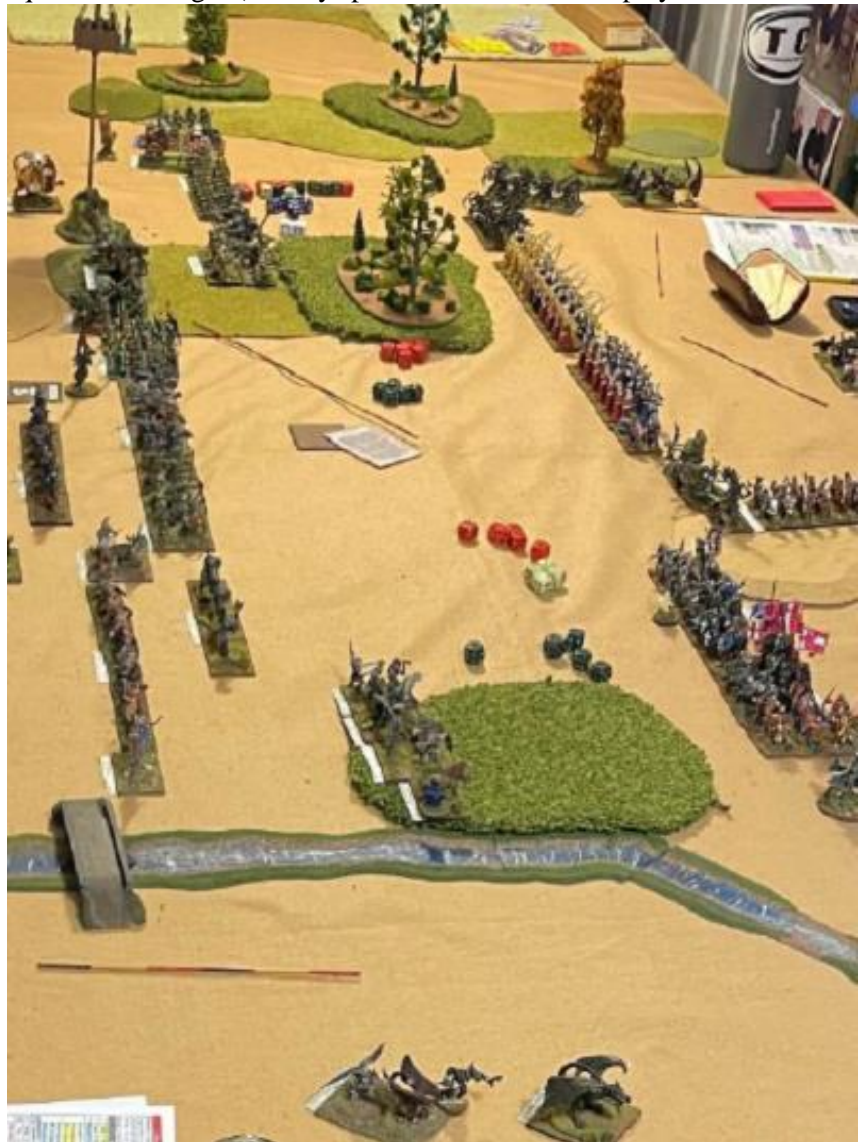
I prepared 4 commands of estimated equivalent strength (I always pick last after all other players have selected a command). Ed and Fred brought their figures (Elves and Goblins / Orcs, respectively) and I helped them organize their commands.

Today’s game would be a coalition of the Men of Bramwald and Elves against the Goblin/Orc hordes of Iuz, supported by trolls and other monsters. Keith was the Bramwald command, which has no magician but features the legendary Count Fabreezi with a magical sword. I chose the Uruk-Hai command, featuring some very old figures from Archive Miniatures that based their sculptures on the Hildebrand Tolkien calendars from 1978. It would be my first game playing the “bad guys”.

After Turn 1: Goblins/Orcs on left, Elves and Men on right side.

The coalition of Elves & Men got the choice of table side to set-up on. Dividing boards were placed across the centerline and both sides deployed their armies, after which the dividing boards were removed. The side of Elves & Men won Initiative and went first.

The Elves anchored their battleline on some woods on their right, while the Men of Bramwald deployed most of their cavalry beyond the stream on their left. Fred’s goblins/Orcs anchored their left flank on the same change of woods and brush that the Elves had, while I anchored my right flank on the stream, but left a



Dragon, Manticore, and Gargoyle just to the right of the stream to intercept anything on that side of the stream. I deployed in two lines to provide support for the front line. That +1 modifier for a supporting line came in handy when units in the front line were required to take a Cohesion test...

There have been many a game that inspired players to paint-up a new unit, and this was no exception: Keith had constructed a Goblin Balloon Riders unit for his dad, so we had to play with it. "It is balloon!" The Balloon Riders were treated as a Flyer with a movement rate of 3-3-3-3 and equivalent to 2 stands of Goblin Archers that round up for shooting due to their height advantage. Only opposing Flyers and missile fire could engage it.

Fred and Ed deployed most of their archers on the same flank, which turned into a shooting contest. I had one unit of Orc archers and a bolt shooter in the center, while Ed had some Ents (equivalent to Giants and mobile artillery) and Keith had a stone-thrower in the center, but Keith had his crossbowmen and longbowmen behind the woods and stream. They would not be doing a lot of shooting today.

"It is balloon!" The Balloon Riders were treated as a Flyer with a movement rate of 3-3-3-3 and equivalent to 2 stands of Goblin Archers that round up for shooting due to their height advantage. Only opposing Flyers and missile fire could engage it.

Sorcery and Spells

Three of the four commands had Sorcerers that functioned as a Tactical Commander but could cast spells. 30 spells were created, printed, and a sub-set of these were sleeved to create eight "spell decks" of 10 spells each, plus a "dummy" spell. Some spells were unique to a side. All decks were balanced to include some "attack" spells, terrain-affecting spells, illusions, morale-influencing/rallying, dispel magic, etc. – but each was different enough to not be sure what each Sorcerer was capable of. SpellCasting was added to the Sequence of Play as the first Phase of each turn and is a mutual Phase (meaning both sides participate). Players choose one Spell card (or the "dummy" card) to place face-down. Once all players have decided, reveal and resolve.

I normally play the "straight" army (usually the Bramwald command), so this was my first time using the spell deck. The first spell I looked at, Flood, definitely had a role to play.

On The Flanks

The flanks become engaged before the center, due to the heavy amount of missile troops on the one end, and the "fast" troops present on the other. A Goblin Chariot and Elvish Cavalry engage as the arrows fly in each direction. The combat is brief: both sides score the same number of hits, but the chariot is removed from the "death roll", revealing a weakness for fielding small units, three surrounding Goblin units become "Disrupted" from seeing the Goblin Chariot eliminated.

On the other end, the Dragon breath on the Knights, but the Knights are unphased and charge home. The Dragon's bite is worse than his breath and a Knight stand is removed, but they fight on. The Manticore and Gargoyle receive the charge of the Mounted Sergeants and recoil them.

The Elven riders attack the Goblin archers next and between the Impact and Melee, break them. The Goblins flee past the Manticore, who holds firm and receive the Elven Riders converted charge. The Orcs sneaking through the woods are not dismayed and continue forward.

In the center, the Orc Giant hurls rocks at the Elvish infantry, who calmly stand. The Ents, in turn, hurl rocks at the Uruk-Hai, who grunt as they start to advance. The Elvish wizard Lightning Bolts the Orc Giant, who fails his Cohesion test, but survives the 50/50 "death roll" and lives. The "sneaky" Sorcerer that cast the Flood has moved back to survey the center and sees a column of Knights approaching. Timing his spell perfectly, he casts Goad on the



Knights at the start of the “Good Guys” turn, forcing them to charge the trolls while still in column. This gives the trolls a local advantage during melee, allowing them to count the overlaps against the column.

Not So Fast! Keith started to move some Bramwald troops to the steam to support his knights on the other side during Turn 1, so at the start of Turn 2, I cast Flood, which made the stream impassable for one full turn. The turn after it becomes “Difficult Terrain” for movement, including the fords. Then it becomes normal again. That delay allowed the engagement of my Dragon, Manticore, and Gargoyle with the Knights to be uninterrupted.



The Knights survive the ordeal, losing a stand and recoiling, before finally expanding. The Bramwald foot knights finally catch up to help, but the mounted Knights have had enough and break.

The Dragon, Manticore, and Gargoyle vanquish the Knights and Sergeants without loss, but their role in the battle is essentially over. By the time they reach the rest of the battle, it’s been decided. In the nearby woods, the “monster brigade” of Bugbears and Gnolls have encountered the Bramwald longbowmen in the woods. After a brief volley, the monsters close, driving the archers out of the woods with loss in Cohesion as well as stands. The archers then break, causing some distress in the Bramwald ranks, but enough keep their composure to deal with the monsters – but my “sneaky” Sorcerer still has a trick up his sleeve, casting Rock to Mud to trap the Black Horse Foot Knights to prevent them from charging the “monster brigade” in the flank. This buys some time, but the Bramwald spearmen are up to the task by themselves and hold up the “monster brigade” long enough for some help from the Bramwald crossbowmen, who charge the monsters in the flank, turning the melee from a stalemate into a victory, and one turn later the monsters rout.

Now we’re in it: Its “crunch time” as both battlelines close across the battlefield. The flanks become a sideshow, but each unit eliminated or broken counts towards “Break Point”.

Hard Fighting

Meanwhile the Trolls battle the Bramwald foot Knights in a long engagement, killing off a stand each round and eventually routing them, but take a loss themselves from Count Fabreezi’s magic sword. The Bramwald Billmen engage the Orc archers, who desperately hold on despite being outmatched, passing three Cohesion tests before finally failing one (thanks to supporting ranks and the Orc Banner), then in



an apparent fit of frenzy, they out-dice the billmen and win a melee, driving them back with loss.

As the Uruk-Hai advance, they take a loss from the Ents, who advance to cover the gap between the billmen and Elves. Not liking the odds, the Uruk-Hai charge, rolling 6 dice to the Ents 12 during Impact, the contest is surprisingly close (4 to 5), but the Uruk-Hai recoil in good order and manage to cut down an Ent as their “death roll” was a ‘1’, while the Uruk-Hai escape a loss when their “death roll” is a “6”. The melee round is much more favorable to the Uruk-hai, who now enjoy overlaps. Another Ent falls, and the end is near for the lone Ent remaining.

Before the collapse: Keith (right) is taking a beating, but finally has some victories as well by the time his command reaches “Break Point” once the Foot Knights break, taking the Billmen with them. Ed is willing to end the game at this point, even though he is at 4-5 points versus Fred.



The Goblin “pikemen” have a checkered past under Fred’s command, but often perform beyond expectations. Onward they marched to face the “mace elves”. Despite being evenly matched, they were bested twice with loss, but held firm. Fred’s Sorcerer summoned some skeletons to help the “pikemen”, and they did, fighting the Elves to a standstill.

In the far woods, Fred’s Orcs finally attack the dreaded 10-stand Elvish Swordsmen, who have a reputation of beating back anything sent against them. Their reputation stands firm, as do they, but the Orcs put up a good fight and not all of them run away. The hold-outs pin the Elves in place and hang on for a couple more turns before being beaten back themselves. This allows the larger unit to safely escape for possible rallying.

And on the far flank, the Elvish Riders are defeated by the Manticore, causing some distress among the Elves on that flank, along with some archery and “artillery” fire from the Orc Giant. Fred manages to rally his Goblin Archers, which recovers 2 points from “Break Point”. The “Balloon Riders” make their presence felt, earning the attention of the Elvish archers, who distress the goblins, but never quite bring the contraption down.

“Break Point” is equal to the number of units in the command. Keith’s Bramwald Command had 11 units. Each broken or eliminated unit count 2 points against the “Break Point”, while “Fragmented” units count 1.

Fred and Daniel each had 7 points towards “Break Point”, while Ed had 4-5 points. It was a close game where a dice roll one way or another could have changed the pace of the game, but good use of spells and tactics certainly play their roles as well.

Still Learning

We don’t play *Field of Glory* often, but we like how “Simple” *FoG* plays out. There is still much to learn and much to appreciate. While a few players are convinced “big units” = good, “small units” = bad, I believe each have their advantages and disadvantages, and players need to be mindful of them to avoid the disadvantages within your own army while making the most of the advantages. Bigger units have greater staying power, but are less maneuverable, while small units are just the opposite. Smaller units are more prone to elimination, causing Cohesion tests, so they need to find “safer” combat situations, like latching onto a flank or rear, or acting as a line of support – but there is no guarantee of finding such situations, so sometimes you have to embrace “Lady Luck” and duke it out the hard way.

Once you try FoG without the silly rolling for maneuvers, you’ll find your troops behave like they should and the game moves faster. -- RL

Who Needs a Doctor: Starter Set

by Russ Lockwood

I enjoy the TV series *Dr. Who*, although calling me a fan is a little bit of a stretch. I started watching during the Tom Baker years. Imagination and interesting storylines overcame the low-budget sets. Eventually, I lost track until the reboot under Matt Fritch and David Tennant, which I also enjoyed, then faded with the newer doctors.

In any case, I have a distinct vision of what Dr. Who does and how, so I looked forward to popping open the card game and seeing how the mechanics would interact with the universe of a Time Lord.

In a word: Underwhelmed. You might as well be playing a variation of the old card game *War*.

The "Doctor" player cards have positive points. The "Dalek" player cards have negative points. Each side plays a card in one of three different locations. Most cards provide points while some cards do special functions like get rid of a card or cancel an opponent's card.

This is a point-counting game: play a card and tally the points. When the Daleks reach a -1,000 on their "Enemy" location, tally up all the points in all three zones. If the total score is negative, the Daleks win. If positive, the Doctor wins.

However, the Doctor can play a 'gambit,' which tallies points from three cards and includes a die roll for more points. If the gambit scores 800 or more, the Doctor wins. If less than 800, the Daleks win.

Points counting in the three zones.

Well, to be kind, that's underwhelming.

The cards have lovely photos from the Capraldi-era shows.

And there's nothing wrong with the card mechanics per se. Certain cards get placed in certain locations. For example, "Quips" can only be played in the Companion zone and "Threats" in the Enemy zone. You can play a "Plan" to delete the enemy's "Plan" card. Other special cards shuffle cards around or delete them or do something.

However, change the images and you would have a Whos down in Whoville card game.

I don't think Dennis or I missed anything -- the rules are really short. But where's the tension? Where's the storyline? Where are the threats that actually do anything except tally negative points. Where is the clever use of the sonic screwdriver to get out of jams?

Nope, just play cards for points. There is no narrative, just soulless point counting for a show that thrived on storytelling.

The card game is in need of a doctor. For all the numbers, both of us found the game pointless.



Face The Nation: Die Tosses of Fate

by Russ Lockwood

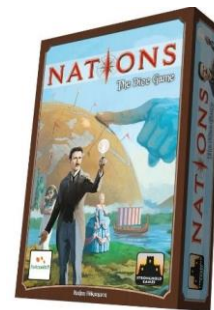
After the War of the Roses miniatures game, Dennis brought out a dice game called *Nations*. I had played this one-on-one last year (see the 6/29/2022 AAR) and thought it a clever little resource game. Now we get to try it as a four-player game.

Simple game: Toss five custom dice looking for symbols that can help you buy tiles that often offer some benefit: special dice, free re-rolls, extra swords or food, and so on. Meeting criteria that changes turn by turn, you pick up Victory Points for holding onto certain tiles and resources. Most VPs win.

There's a little more to it than that, but much depends on your die rolling. Icons sometimes play hard to get.

Mike and Dan had never played. Dennis and I had.

Left to right: Dennis, Mike, and Dan ponder which tile to purchase.



Turn 1

We groped our way to a strategy. Mine was to see if I can go first in each turn (by rolling and keeping the most swords). Mike went after VPs. Not sure what Dan and Dennis did. I went dead last.

The reason I want to go first is that the one bugaboo in the random tile placement mechanic is that while the placement is random, the cost per tile is fixed. Valuable tiles often were priced cheap and vice-versa. If you go first, you can pluck the choicest tiles at the cheapest prices.

The end of Turn 1 for my mighty Roman Empire, er, Nation. I picked up a red die and a re-roll personality. Note that I would go second in the next turn.



The rest is allocating your icons. At the end of Turn 1, Dennis led with 6 VPs, I was right behind with 5 VPs, Mike had 3, and Dan 2.

The end of Turn 2 for me. I picked up a yellow die and the Easter Island Heads, but blew my chance to actually build it had I paid attention to my resources. Note that I go first in the next turn.

Turn 2

Alas, I could only go second. Good enough and nothing I could do about it.

The die rolling and icon shuffling proceeded as we all tried to match conditions and prerequisites. For example, I needed two food icons to gain 2 VPs and



three sword icons to gain 2 VPs. I was lucky enough to roll those and sat on the dice until the end of the round to cash them in.

At the end of Turn 2, I led with 11 VPs, Dennis with 7 VPs, Mike had 6, and Dan 4. I did make sure I had the most swords, so I went first in Turn 3.

Turn 3

Now, that's more like it. Many of the tiles we took gave us extra dice with multiple icons per face instead of just one. I made a slight error when I could have built a cheapee building, but botched the resource use. I ended up building Versailles instead, but the previous building was a waste of resources.



End of turn 3 of my beloved Rome. I would go first in the next (i.e. last) turn.

Once again, we schemed to maximize resources rolled and tiles bought.

At the end of Turn 3, I led with 15 VPs, Mike had 14, Dennis with 10 VPs, and Dan with 7 VPs.

Turn 4

Last turn. I calculated things out as best I can, but I noticed that Mike had purchased the Eiffel Tower tile and was on his way to roll enough stone icons to build it. Yes, I know it's made out of steel, but the icons used to erect buildings are always stone. That was worth 10 VPs. I had nothing comparable.

I sorted through the "books" VPs, but wouldn't be able to catch him. I ended up taking the low-hanging VP fruit tiles. It wasn't enough.

At the end of the game, Mike jumped to the win with a whopping 41 VPs, I came in second with 30 VPs, and Dennis and Dan tied for third with 21 VPs.

Clever Game

The game took about an hour and a quarter or so. I expect if you play it enough, you'll recognize the higher valued tiles in terms of more benefits or VPs. In the meantime, you poke around the best you can. Clever game worth playing again.

The basic game we played had every player civilization the same. For example, I played Rome, Mike was Persia, Dennis was Greece, and Dan was Egypt. Dennis also has the "Expansion" pack that has more player civilization boards that are different from each other.



End of game. I bought VP tiles, but it wasn't enough to overcome Mike's fourth-turn surge of building.

Historicon 2022: Attendee Number Correction

by Russ Lockwood

In my Cold Wars 2023 recap, under the Friday Night Rite section, I mentioned that Historicon 2022 attendance was 1,850. ConOps VP Joby e-mailed that the actual final number of Historicon 2022 attendees was 2,098.

Fall In! 2022; ConDir After Action Report

by Scott Landis, Fall In! 2022 Convention Director

Here's the Fall In! 2022 convention director's report about the convention. Note that this is about Fall In! 2022 (not Cold Wars 2023). My Fall-in 2022 Convention Recap is in the 12/01/2022 AAR. As always, all the official news about HMGS is at hmgs.org -- RL

This belated overview of Fall In! 2022 allows readers to understand some of the details that each Convention Director considers before, during, and after each convention. Fall In! 2022 was dedicated to the former Fall In! Convention Director, the late Dan Murawski, whose passing has been a great loss to the hobby.

I want to thank each and every Attendee, Game Host, Wally's Basement Dweller, Exhibitor, Hobby University Artist/Instructor, War College Lecturer, our heroic Volunteers, and all of our fantastic support network of friends and family that help us make our hobby, businesses, and conventions possible. Thank you, everyone!

Fall In! 2022 By the Numbers

Total Attendees:	1,541		
Partners / Children:	77 / 68		
Exhibitors:	50		
Number of Events			
Games:	332	Game Hosts:	203
Kid Friendly Games:	54		
Tournaments:	21		
War College Lectures:	18	Presenters:	14
Hobby U. Classes:	33	Attendance:	125
Boardgames:	40		

HMGS Convention Awards Program

The HMGS Convention Awards Program is a continuing effort to recognize those Game Hosts that go "above and beyond" to present outstanding and entertaining games for all of us to enjoy.

The program is supported by volunteer Judges -- many of who are prior Awards winners -- who seek out games that best represent the artistry and fun of our hobby. Games are selected for Pour Encourager Les Autres (PELA) Awards during major game slots (Morning, Afternoon, Evening) each day of the convention. PELA award winners are eligible for special awards: Best of Show and Best Theme Game. Each award recipient receives a trophy and a voucher that can be used in the Exhibit Hall and at food concessions.

Congratulations to each of our Award winners and thanks to all of our volunteer Judges.

Best of Show: Michael Konwinski: Sitting on the Dock of the Bay

Best Theme Game: Adam Wine: Brazen Chariots: The First Battle of Klin

Our PELA Award Winners:

Lou Valenti and WAMP: Battle of the Bulge

Mark Morin and the HAWKS: Raid to Satisfy Huitzilopochtli

Pete Landry: Zeppelin!

Greg McNally: Hell in a Very Small Place – Battle of Dien Bien Phu

Miles Reidy and Little Wars TV: Stalingrad Campaign #2

Mike Lung and HMGS Next Gen/Teachers Program: Gnome Wars – Relief of Kaboutersberg
Michael Konwinski: Sitting on the Dock of the Bay
Christopher Palmer: Wars of Ozz – Attack on the Emerald City
Kaleb Dissinger: Orders from the Fuhrer: No Retreat
Tony Morano and Little Wars TV: Stalingrad Campaign #3
David Hill: The Yamashiro and the Sea Redux
Jeffery Wasileski: Zagloba vs. Pluck – Robbing Madonna 1655
John Breslin and NUMS: Gettysburg July 1st, Blocher's Knoll and Forney's Fields
Marvin Veeder: Arnold's Good Leg – September 19, 1777
Mark Huml and Lard America: We Can No Longer Win this War, but we Cannot Afford to Lose It!
Robert Schaible and the Yellow Worm Gaming Society: Hail of Fire – Escape from Orsha – June 25, 1944
John Spiess and HMGS Next Gen: Battle of Tetten Hall
Tom Uhl and the DelVal Gamers: Pegasus Bridge

Tournaments

HMGS' Tournaments program spans all periods past, present and future and involves a dedicated crew of gamers and volunteers to engage folks throughout the convention. There were 21 Tournaments run throughout the course of the weekend.

Art de La Guerre 25mm - Theme: Armies of the Year Zero
Art de La Guerre 15mm - Theme: Armies of the Year Zero
Art de La Guerre 25mm - Open
Art de La Guerre 15mm - Open
DBM 3.2 25mm - Theme: Chariot
Triumph! 15mm - Classical Tournament
Triumph! 15mm - Open Tournament
Triumph! Fantasy - 15mm Open Tournament
Warrior - Open
Warrior - Mini Open
Battlefront's World of Tanks - Open
Battlefront's Flames of War - Late-War Doubles
Bolt Action
Warhammer Historicals - WAB 2
Middle Earth Strategy Battle Game - Open
Wargods
Epic Armageddon
Warhammer 40K - Kill Team
Blood Bowl - Coldest Dayz
Warmaster Revolution
Blood & Plunder Sea Battles - Fallen Masts

Hobby University

Our Hobby University program continued its outstanding history by teaching 33 classes across a broad palate of the artistic side of our hobby, including: making complex buildings and terrain, making and assembling figures and models, 3D printing fundamentals, airbrushing techniques, and the finer points of painting detailed miniatures of all sizes. 100 people took advantage of these offerings, with another 25 participating in the popular "Paint & Take."

The Hobby U. folks expanded their campus to include a focus group for Fall In! 2022, our Teachers Program, and instructing the folks building our next generation of the hobby.

Here is a list of just some of the Hobby U classes:

Terrain:

- Wire Trees
- Foam Shipwrecks
- Farm/Old West Buildings
- Gardens

Painting:

- Weathering
- Paint Color Fundamentals
- Shields
- Skin & Faces
- Speed/Army Painting
- Air Brush Techniques
- Painting Instruction for all levels of experience

Teachers' Program Introductory Classes:

- 3D Printing
- Painting
- Airbrushing
- Making Game Cloths
- Kitbashing and Painting Figures/Models

Hobby University receives many of their miniatures for classes through generous donations. We'd like to thank Reaper Miniatures, Michigan Toy Soldier, The Wargaming Company LLC, and Gaddis Games.

Toys for Tots

One of the special events we host at Fall In! is the annual Toys for Tots auction, raffle, and donation. The two raffles and auction raised \$7,478 and a box full of new toys was collected for donation to Toys for Tots. We had 50 raffle items and 40 items for the auction. All auction items sold with a high bid of \$550 for the "highest priced" item. Thanks to the Exhibitors for their donations for the Raffles and to the Members who built, painted, and donated the awesome items for the auction.

Teachers Program

The Teachers Program instructs teachers, parents, and others on how to create lessons for students on how to build, paint, and run a game while connecting the lessons to class curricula. This emphasizes critical and abstract thinking and learning in an entertaining and fun way.

Jim Stanton led the program with support from Mike Lung and Eric Jacobson. More than 10 teachers participated in the program, which included Hobby U. classes, lectures on designing and conducting games, and actual game participation.

This was the first time that the Teachers Program cross-pollinated with the HMGS NextGen program. So to show not only what is possible when Students not only received an introduction to miniature gaming, they ran games for the Teachers Program participants and all attendees.

HMGS NextGen

HMGS NextGen continues to support the development of programs at schools, libraries, summer camps, colleges, and elsewhere. The fruits of this program could be seen in the multiple games and events designed and led by NextGen participants. Games were led by high school- and college-age students and featured NextGen clubs that have developed over the past few years.

Working directly with the HMGS Teachers Program provided an opportunity to exchange ideas with some of the attending teachers who can connect their students to NextGen programs. A Win-Win!

War College

As HMGS' "Institute of Higher Learning," our War College provides some of the best lectures and presentations in military history from ancient time periods to the modern day. A wide variety of distinguished speakers, game hosts, historians, authors, and battle participants provide information and insight into a multitude of topics. With 18 different lectures on an array of topics, the War College should be added to your next convention wish list.

Exhibit Hall

The Exhibit Hall is a first stop for many attendees and a big part of our conventions. A wide variety of 50 different exhibitors provided everything you need to make your gaming possible -- including figures, terrain, paints, brushes, dice, tools, and rules -- to enable you to game in every period and in every scale. We continue to see a variety of new and returning exhibitors who are constantly working to bring you the best the hobby has to offer. The exhibitors help make our conventions possible and your support keeps them coming back to our shows.

Boardgame Library

For a number of years now, Anthony Dewall has been bringing his extensive Boardgame Library to our conventions. As the popularity of this addition continues to grow, we'll keep bringing him back. Attendees come and peruse the hundreds of games available for free play. Whether you are winding down from a hard day of battling it out in the trenches or looking to kill some time between games, the Boardgame Library provides a place to relax with open gaming and socialize with friends new and old.

Fall In! 2022 was our second convention where the Boardgame Library scheduled events, running 40 games/mini-tournaments. Based on their popularity, we plan to expand these events at future conventions.

Convention Director's Final Thoughts

I want to thank all of my Fall In! Volunteer Staff, who worked tirelessly before during and after the convention to make this "Gamers' Convention" a success. I want to also thank the HMGS BoD for having the confidence in me to run a show. I couldn't have done it without their support, especially ConOps VP Joby Miller and HMGS President John Hollier.

All of us hope that you had a great gaming and convention experience. We continue to collect feedback from folks to help improve all HMGS Conventions in the future. Speaking of the future we look forward to seeing all of you across the gaming table at our next Conventions, Historicon in July 2023, and Fall In! is in November.

Thank you again everyone and Happy Gaming!

Cold Wars ADLG Tourney: More Recaps

by Russ Lockwood

Phil writes up some photo-heavy, and oft humorous, recaps of his *Art de la Guerre (ADLG)* tournament games. His blog contains a number of recaps of his Cold Wars tournament games.

<https://philonancients.blogspot.com/>

Balkans Gambit: More Info

by Russ Lockwood

Brian Train appreciated my book review of *Cominform Crisis: Yugoslavia 1948-1954 (Europe at War 24)* in the March 2023 AAR. He notes:

"Years ago I designed a game on the Allied invasions of the Balkans that weren't -- i.e. deception operations like Operation Mincemeat but they come true. *Strategy and Tactics* magazine # 298 had *The Balkan Gambit* wargame along with a lead article by me on Allied deception in the Med.

One thing I cooked up but was not included in the magazine was a 1950 invasion scenario of Yugoslavia by the Cominform satellites and the Soviet Union. It used counters from the original game but you could perhaps make up a new set of counters based on the OOB in the [Cominform Crisis] book."

If this interests you, take a look at Brian's blog:

<https://brtrain.wordpress.com/2016/03/16/balkan-gambit-the-rest-of-it/>



AHIKS: Battle of Midway Analysis

by Russ Lockwood

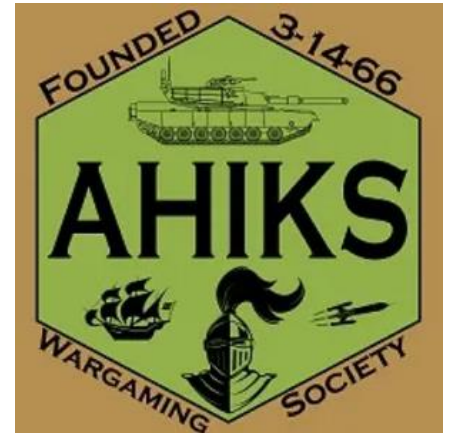
The February 2023 issue of AHIKS' newsletter *Kommandeur* about boardgaming contains an interesting article about the Battle of Midway and some of the top books written about the battle. I've read the ones listed in the article and find Bruce Geryk's analysis on target. The other articles in 'the K' are game-specific and interesting to read as well, although if you don't have the game, perhaps a little less so.

Take a look at the Midway article (starts on page 11):

<https://ahiks.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/K58x1.pdf>

For the AHIKS home page: ahiks.com

And give a welcome to the new AHIKS editor: Bruce Geryk.



Clash of Carriers: ATO Mag Wargame Release

by Russ Lockwood

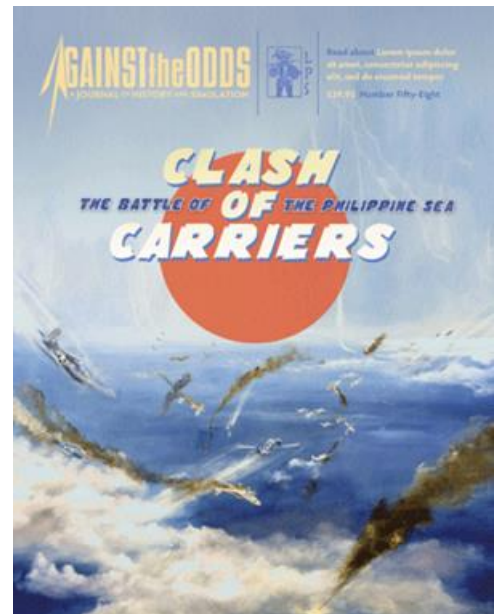
Against the Odds magazine just released *Clash of Carriers: The Battle of the Philippines Sea* hex wargame. You may know it by its nickname: Marianas Turkey Shoot, in which US Naval aviation crushed what was left of Japanese Naval aviation.

Individual ships (destroyers in squadrons), "hidden" Task Groups that allow players to (legally) exaggerate or minimize TGs' compositions, a fantastic air-sea battle mechanic that includes CAP, AA, and bombings, submarines, streamlined surface combat if it ever gets to that point, and a few optional rules to examine what-if situations and more historical attributes.

Full disclosure: I was the Staff Developer on the project. There are a lot of moving parts within a design that streamlines carrier battles in WWII Pacific. Q&A are already on Boardgame Geek and ConSimWorld.

Plus, you get an excellent main article in the magazine by Designer and Historian Mark Stille, the usual outstanding "On Guards" article about elite forces (this one about US Submarine force), Kamikaze offensive, and more.

Website: www.atomagazine.com



Accurate Simulations: New Wargame Company

by Russ Lockwood

I was contacted by Accurate Simulations, a new wargame company. First product (from website):

Desert Storm: The Hundred Hour War simulates the 1991 Persian Gulf War as a military conflict and also as a political contest prior to and during Operation Desert Storm. Better yet, the rules allow alternative Iraqi strategies that may have theoretically disrupted the Coalition invasion, but similarly allows for alternative Coalition strategies...which includes the possibility of a Coalition advance to Baghdad to remove Saddam Hussein from power. Highly researched and accurate, this game is a complete presentation of the Persian Gulf War on the land, in the air, and sea. Price: \$64.00 plus shipping.

I asked a couple more questions.



Product Information:

Complexity: Low
Map Scale: 10 miles/hex
Units: divisions, brigades, some battalions, individual air wings.
Players: 2 players
Solitaire: Medium
Playing Time: 4 hours

Components:

1 Unmounted map (22x34 inches) of Kuwait and Iraq up to Baghdad.
1 Countersheet (9/16" punch-out type pieces) of 120 counters
1 Rulebook
2 Six-sided dice
Box and Lid



The designer noted that the game covers Desert Storm, but not only Desert Storm. The Iraqis can attempt some different strategies, and see if that works better, and the Coalition player can, if he wants to try it, drive directly to Baghdad (obviating the need for the 2003 invasion), or just simply go for liberating Kuwait as occurred historically.

April Special: Buy a Copy of *DS* and automatically receive two free flag markers sets added to your order.

Details on the website.

<https://www accuratesimulations.com/>

Follow Up *DBWR*: *Roses Renewed*

by Russ Lockwood

Dan dropped by On Military Matters to compare and contrast OOBs with Dennis between *DBWR* (*DB War of the Roses*) and *L'Art de la Guerre* (*ADLG*). As I recall, Dan's 130-point *DBWR* contingent was 104 *ADLG* points. Pretty close.

They played on a 3-foot wide mat, not the 5-foot wide table, so they were at arrow range almost immediately. It was looking bad for Dan, who was being outshot by Dennis in the beginning, but rallied to do some damage himself.

Then came the melees. Both gave as good as they got. In the end, Dan lost 7.5 points of troops towards his breakpoint and Dennis lost 8.0 points of troops towards his breakpoint.

They left it there as Dennis sorted through *ADLG* lists to get 16 points into Dan's force. I recall Dan eventually added another cannon and a unit of elite longbows, but don't quote me on that. They were sorting through units as I had to leave.

Top: Dan (left) and Dennis meet again.

Bottom: Close up of troops.



Brax Extracts Artifacts: More *Traveller* RPG

by Russ Lockwood

The sensors showed the ugly fugly buglies aboard the megafreighter lay dead to the 'verse. The Crimson Permanent Assurance Company (CPACO) had thwarted the diabolical plot by Git'erdone Co.

"Maybe they're only stunned," Karlsbad suggested. "Ugly fuglies stun easily."

"Not a chance. You could push four million volts through it and it wouldn't move," Brax retorted. "They are dead. They are deceased. Expired. Exist no more. Consigned to oblivion. They joined the choir invisible. These are ex-ugly fuglies."

GameMaster Sean reviews notes at the start of our new Traveller adventure.

The clean-up on all aisles and in every nook and cranny took a week. Brax took photos, sensor logs, and other data of the ugly fuglies just in case documentation would be needed in the future. Then they disintegrated the bugs and vented the gas.

Brax Ruttlles sang as he worked.

"You say, Grawz,
I say, Hi,
You say, Mwarz,
And I say Die, Die, Die
Oh, my!

You say Grawz-erf, and I say Die-Die,

Die-Die, Die-Die,
Don't know why you say Grawz-erf,
I say Die-Die.

Meanwhile, Anton, Wendell, and Karlsbad evaluated the damage done to the megafreighter. First thing they noticed was that it was not 20,000 tons, but only 15,000. Sheesh, it's the incredible shrinking megafreighter. It started out at 50,000 tons, fell to 20,000 tons and now was even smaller.

Brand new, it would cost a cool three billion credits. In its current state, it was worth maybe half, or maybe even less. But it was still a big, relatively intact ship with a cargo bay full of goodies. Unfortunately, it needed a quarter of a million credits in monthly maintenance. I think we'll let it drift a bit.

The interior of the ship itself was heavily damaged, although Computer, Life Support, and the Power Plant still functioned at 50% efficiency. Maneuver and Jump drives? The ship was going nowhere anytime soon. They reported that extensive repairs, more than likely beyond their capacity, were needed to get the drives back online.

Where's Scotty when you need him? Sure, he'd complain about the wreck of his 'pur bairns,' but he'd manage to get them all running. And he doesn't even need a sonic screwdriver. Sheesh.



The SOS Message

When us CPACOers were finished, we talked about that distress call that howled into the ether for a bit. We were initially paranoid about someone immediately showing up, but I pointed out a few things:

First, the ship had been lost for five or six years and Git'erdone Co had already been paid the insurance money, so if, and that's a big if, the company still cared, five or six years with nary a word from the freighter likely meant it was so far down the priority list, there might not be anyone even listening for a SOS beacon. Maybe not even AI-controlled software would care.

Second, since it was a covert operation, the SOS frequency is likely not using the common SOS channel. In fact, it should be really obscure because who wants the local authorities or news orgs responding to such an embarrassing problem as gene-engineered ugly fuglies running amok. Rabid gene-engineered ugly fuglies at that.

Third, no Faster-Than-Light comm signals. So, any signal would be contained within the system. It might be piggybacked onto another signal that is hopping a FTL message drone. That will take at least a week to reach another system. And it would be coded with the same unbreakable code that Anton experienced in the captain's quarters.

I don't know how fast FTL comm drones move between solar systems and I don't know if they are direct or use a plotted course to stop at each system to drop off and pick up comms. Depending on the route, it might take up to nine or 10 stops, which equates to nine or 10 weeks.

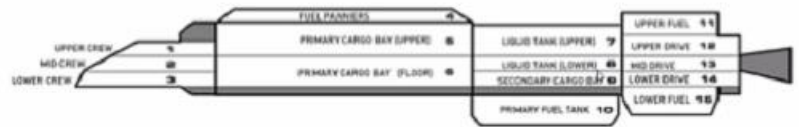
Then someone or some AI (see first point) needs to take action. It might take another month or two for a five-year-old missing covert op to even come up for discussion. Or maybe more. Then, whatever action decided upon needed to be taken, which is another delay in sending orders to a local force or shipping in a new force.

Fourth, pirates and scavengers might, repeat might, get a lucky pick up of the SOS. As the megafreighter was left alone for so long, I discount the notion, or assign it winning-the-lottery-like odds.

So we had time.

Our megafreighter.

How to Keep the Megafreighter



We couldn't take all the cargo. The megafreighter had almost 10,000 tons of cargo space and we had a total of 30 tons between the newfound scout and our *Harrier*.

The Megafreighter stored a damaged, but functioning 200-ton Free Trader in one of the holds. That gave us 80 more tons.

Gaines wondered why a big freighter had a baby freighter on board. It turns out that while not exactly a common practice, it was also not an uncommon practice either.

Still, the hold was crammed with petrochemicals, biochemicals, polymers, advanced machine parts, and an assortment of ground and grav vehicles. It also had a small shuttle that could go into the atmosphere.

To be specific: 4,800 tons of Spices (cat-nip), 1000 tons of Polymers, 1000 tons of Advanced Machine Parts, 400 tons of vehicles (wheeled, tracked, other from TL 10 or lower), 1000 tons of Petrochemicals, and 1000 tons of Biochemicals.

Best of all, the ship's safe contained 3 million credits! Ka-ching! We took that first. I could feel the *Harrier* already being rebuilt.

What's So Important About The MegaFreighter?

In the back of my mind, I was a bit uneasy about this megafreighter. There must be something more about it other than killing off the ugly fuglies and indirectly doing a good turn for Aslans and by extension humanity.

I thought about our predicament. I wanted to create a mobile base, but given its condition and uncrackable security, we may not to be able to keep it.

We couldn't fix up the megafreighter to fly. We couldn't call in local-system AAA repair service because a fabled lost ship would generate lots of publicity. We don't need the fame, we need the fortune. We could always blow it up, but that seems like a waste.

We could sell its location back to Git'erdone Co, but that would just cause all sorts of problems once they discovered we exterminated their experimental critters, which might make us targets for extermination. We could sell the location to another company for a finder's fee based on the scrap value.

We could donate it to a system in exchange for most favored pirate status. The only one within range is this agricultural system.

So, I asked if we could move it. Use the three spaceships to grapple with the megafreighter and shove it on some outward bound arc past the Oort Belt that would avoid Imperial entanglements. And local ones, too.

Our astrogator made a heckuva roll, our engineer completed the boosting, and the megafreighter slowly drifted away where only CPACO could find it. A gas station and warehouse all in one. Not the mobile base I wanted, but maybe enough for us to use in the short term.

Cover Our Tracks

Now the devious part. We grabbed the body of the captain and placed it in the shuttle. From our investigation of his megafreighter cabin, we knew he committed suicide rather than succumb to the ugly fuglies. We included the gun, wiped off our prints, and put the gun back in his hand. We laid in a false electronic flight path and trail that came from nowhere near the arc our newly moving megafreighter was taking, and left the shuttle adrift with depleted batteries in the original megafreighter spot.

Such a tragic story. After the rigors of a freak FTL trip, and within spitting distance of safety, his fuel and battery power ran out and the captain committed suicide as the icy hand of slow, agonizing suffocation descended upon him. Brings a tear to your eye.

Balance of Funds

Now, we had to figure out what to do next. We loaded up our *Harrier*, the newfound scout, and the newfound free trader with goods. Two things of higher value were the atmospheric-orbital capable anti-grav "aircars" (four tons of space each) that could carry six people and up to 1.5 tons of cargo. An SUV to the stars, literally.

Then there was the anti-grav "racecar" (three tons of space) that sounded like just the thing when we needed something splashy. Combined with my previous purchase of King Obladee-Obladah's ceremonial military fancy dress, sword, sash, and decorations, it could make an impact at some soiree.

As for the rest, we loaded up with cargo, dropped down to the system starport, and sold it all off. Then, we had to figure out what to do with the Scout. Three ships may be a ship too far given our 9-member Fellowship of the Stars, so we agreed to go to Torpol.

But first, we headed back to our megafreighter, which we found in its slow-moving arc into space, and loaded up again with more cargo. Whaddaya know? This base idea worked. With goods aboard, now we headed to Torpol.

Scout Ship Sale

A new scout ship costs around 37 million credits. Ours was slightly used by a little old lady, only on Sundays, going to the local gas giant platform for cat food. Hey, that's the story and we're sticking to it.

The government of Torpol offered us a measly 1 million in cash and 19 million payable over 10 years with a 3.5% interest rate. Our broker Gaines conjured up a wee bit of a scorn and argued for a better deal, noting we had just replaced the quantum plugs, filled the viewport reservoir with wiper protons, vacuumed the interior, and hung pine-scented fuzzy dice off the rearview holoprojector screen. The government raised its offer to 5 million credits up front and 15 million payable over five years with a 1.75% interest rate.

That was still too much of a long game for us, so we bartered anew. They then offered 15 million credits straight up cash, or, 5 million credits up front, 7.5 million payable over five years with a 1.75% interest rate, and "Haven" status.

Oh-ho?

Haven status means a safe port. We had a couple systems where we had done a good turn -- a good turn for the system and a good turn of profit for us -- to get a favorable status. I started dredging up those names from memory. Sort of.

"It was at...at...at those two systems," I stuttered, then snapped my fingers. "One was Clarke and the other was...was..."

Dan interjected, "Gable."

"Yeah, Clarke and Gable ----- Doh!" I slapped my forehead with my hand.

Got me good, Dan did. Credit GM Sean for drawing me into the game play. Good GMing, that.

We took the Haven status deal. And for the record, the other system was Torpal.

High Finance

That left us with a pile of cash and basically a promise for more. I suggested we sell that promise to a bank for a smaller amount of cash. We negotiated some more and came to a deal.

All totaled, we earned 12.9 million credits for our efforts, of which 1.29 million went for King Obladee-Obladah's tithe. Oh happy monarch. We paid off maintenance costs which we forgot to do previously.

Then we got to repairs. The newfound 200-ton trader got all its systems maintained and all its hull damage repaired. That was about half a million credits. Fred wanted to name it the *Shark*. John objected because it sounded too aggressive for a trader and suggested *Tuna*. I think we temporarily named it the *SharkTuna*.

The Harrier.

Then we got back to the *Harrier*. We repaired the hull from 63 to 96 out of 100 hull points. It's nice to fly in a ship that isn't swiss cheese. We also upgraded its software.

We repaired the missile turret so that it was indeed a 360-degree swiveling turret. We had eight Standard missiles remaining in the 12-missile magazine, so we bought four pricey specialty missiles: one Long-Range, one Decoy, one Fragmentation, and one Multi-Warhead.

John tossed in some of his personal fortune to install a gourmet auto chef, an auto bar with robot bartender (ala *Passengers*), and two waterless auto washer, dryer, cleaner laundry units so our quality of life would improve.

Dan poked around and bought a Fabricator 10 (40 inch x 40 inch x 40 inch 3D printer capable of inorganic and organic printing). That got installed.

Personal Funds

We altered the CPACO agreement among us nine Fellowship of the Stars members.

We still gave the King 10% off the top.

With what's left, we put 50% into the ship fund for repairs and maintenance.

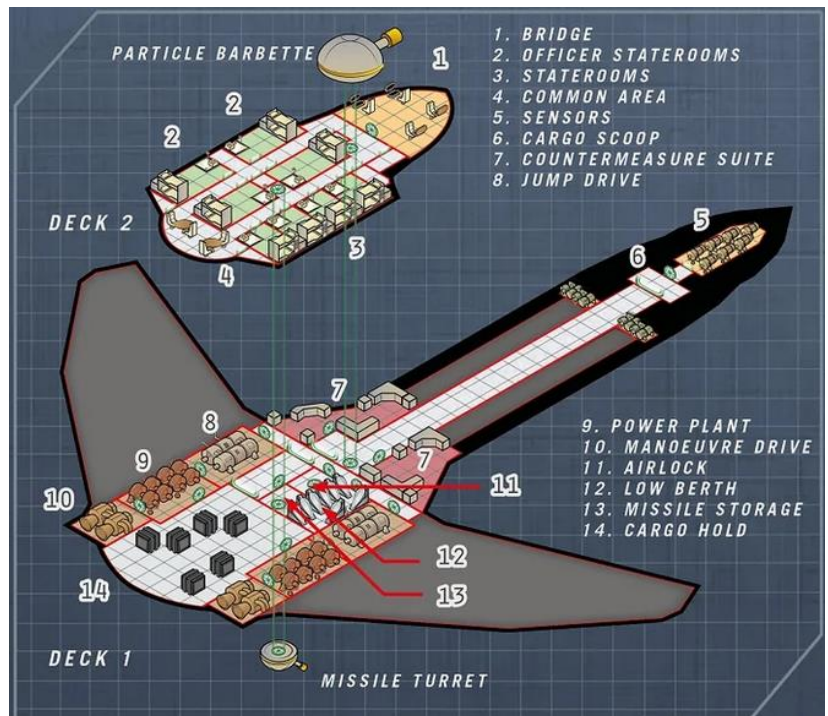
Of the remaining loot, we added a 10th position: Slush Fund. When you need that little extra in cash, we could tap it. It's also easier to divide the loot by 10 instead of 9.

We all went shopping, for we each had about 580,000 credits burning a hole in our pockets.

Anton bought a Combat Armor Improved suit to use in known combat situations. It was a distinct improvement over his Combat Environment Suit. He also decided to get a second suit that was less conspicuous and would pass restrictions placed on Type 4 Military suits. He bought a Category 1 Standard Lightweight Polycarapace and added a Dispersion suit accessory for extra protection. He added to all armor types: Coolant Rig, Environmental Reader, Life Support & Extended Life Support (for a total of 24 hours), Eye Protection, Hands-free Cuff, and Helmet Lights.

Gaines and I duplicated his efforts so we have a number of suits suitable for all occasions. We could go out in the afternoon for heavy duty extermination, then switch to evening wear for elegant mayhem. Suits for all seasons and all occasions, that's us.

Gaines used my contacts to buy a 160,000-credit set of power armor. I upgraded my power armor with another 75,100 credits worth of extras such as chameleon camouflage, self-sealing suit skin, internal auto-medkit, external lighting system, psionic shield helmet lining, extended life support, and smart fabric.



Ed (Gaines) points to our next destination on the starmap as Russ (Brax) looks on. GM Sean (left) checks the hyperspaceside attraction list and Universal atlas. Photo by Dan.

What To Do Next?

Gaines performed a deep ongoing review of current business opportunities:

“It is important to remember that a core tenet of successful corporate operations is remaining true to one’s central purpose, skill set, and direction. We are a hard-hitting organization, expert in hostile takeovers of competing organizations. While we also proceed with tacit long-term goals in mind, our business activities need to remain focused in order to achieve those long-term goals.

To assist with strategic planning during the next business quarter, here is a list of business activities that fall outside our core competencies:

We are not a refit and refurbishment company. While ongoing operations require maintenance and repairs, activities in this area that fall outside our core business focus should be handed off to entities with expertise in this area.

We are not a freight-handling or cargo-transshipment company. We aren’t staffed to provide personnel to such a purely commercial endeavor. The legal aspects of our core business are such that adding employees to carry out such endeavors and accumulating vessels intended to serve in a freight-handling or cargo-transshipment role leave us open to law enforcement activities.

We are not revolutionaries, political agitators, or otherwise out to make a statement in this area. Our work delivering weapons should be undertaken with an eye to our primary core business focus and also to our longer-term goals.

This position represents a good reminder for today. If our organization wishes to reshape itself, then that is a business decision we should discuss and resolve. While some business models reward a static business and corporate model and concept, success in our field requires constant agility and flexibility. However, it is important that we not flex only in response to external and temporary environmental factors. The end of that path leads to a business model evolved to suit entirely arbitrary circumstances.”

Outstanding Opportunities

As the Fellowship of the Stars digested Gaines' analysis, we found ourselves confronting a number of possibilities.

The Mysterious Bunker: King Oleb provided the party with a golden baton he claims is a key that opens a secret Rock of Ages Still a Rollin' bunker on Paale. It must contain treasure as the other ones supposedly did, right?

The Revolution on Acrid: A workers uprising is being organized on Acrid to fight back against the Quartermasters of Pax. The rebellion needs lawyers, guns, and money. Ah-wooo.

Git'erdone Co: Why did it bioengineer ugly fuglies and send them straight for Aslan space?

The SOS Broadcast: We moved the megafreighter, but should we hang around to see who, if anyone, might answer the distress call?

Shiver Me Steelpanelers: Go back to piracy against the Imperium or Aslan or both to help King Obladee-Obladah fulfil his expansionist dreams?

Hmmm... What to do? What to do?



CPACO Democracy

We all get to vote, but only those attending the meeting get to vote. I mean, as a mercenary group, we're really more of an anarcho-syndicalist commune.

Half the Fellowship of the Stars (left to right): Ed (Gaines), Fred (Wendell), John (Karlsbad), and Dan (Anton).



We take turns to act as a sort of executive officer for the week, but all the decisions of that officer have to be ratified at a special bi-weekly meeting by a simple majority in the case of purely internal affairs, but by a two-thirds majority in the case of external affairs.

My vote was a trip to Paale for a look for the bunker. Meanwhile, a little intel research on Acrid might be worth investigating to sound out which side would like our logistics help and which would be more likely to join the Drinax "Empire." It might be that the Quartermasters were not exactly the oppressors the workers made them out to be and the workers were nothing but a bunch of Commies.

We all thought Paale was a good idea, so we hied off on an uneventful trip to Paale. We did run into one problem: the system had a "no weapons" policy. Not even a knife could be brought in. So all our firepower had to be left behind on the *Harrier*. Half the party stayed on the *Harrier* in stealth mode performing overwatch of our 200-ton *SharkTuna* trader. Apparently, pirates infested the outer orbits beyond the military's reach. We waited our turn and the *SharkTuna* docked without a problem at the orbiting spaceport.

Research Group

Gaines came up with the idea of posing as a research group investigating the flora and fauna of this blasted wilderness of a world that needed security. During the Aslan war, it had been smashed with orbital bombardments and left for dead. So, we sent Gaines and Wendell to see what they could discover about a locale named Gourmand -- apparently known for its home cooking, fastidious manners, and old bunkers.

They found a local who directed them to a hotel, where they took three rooms: one for each and an entertaining room. Local customs, you understand. At 1,000 credits per room, plus a 50-credit tip to the concierge, it got them an interview with the local hetman.

Gaines and Wendell got nowhere in terms of procuring security, but did gain some information.

Gourmand had been a small city a few hundred miles north of the main city at the end of a railroad line. I say had been because the locals said Gourmand was one big ruin. The RR line had been discontinued long ago about two-thirds of the way there.

No worries. We had an aircar.

Ah. Of course. The system also had a stupid "no aircar" rule as well. We don't have a shuttle and none of our ships are atmosphere capable. Everything has to go through the orbital starport and the planetside downport. A missile system enforced the rules.

It turns out the big chief on planet controlled three cities with a total population of about 20,000 with an anti-grav tank. That's it? One grav tank?

Wendell quipped, "In the land of the blind, the shotgun is king."

Maybe we could steal it? Or disable it? And who the heck runs the so-called missile system?

Our dilemma was solved with good old fashioned bribery. We learned that everyone on the planet was exceptionally greedy. I mean that hetman offered to sell us a slug-throwing hunting rifle for 25,000 credits. Like we're going to pay for that. I wonder if the big chief would let us rent the grav tank?

Anyway, we forked over 50,000 credits for a sealed pod to be transported from the starport to a warehouse. Inside was the aircar and a reduced version of our firepower. I left my power armor and laser rifle and brought the slug-throwing assault rifle and modified combat environmental suit. The others were armed relatively lightly like me.

The Flight

I flew our aircar nap of the earth at night and made a wide detour to avoid the one village we saw. We parked the aircar on a small hill for recon. Our resident animal expert noted the local birds suffered from radiation poisoning to a lesser or greater effect. He biopsied a couple birds and recorded the results, plus secured some sample tissue for later analysis. Hey, you never know...

The Aslan before they became feral. Image from web.



Our only interruption was a feral cat that apparently was a young Aslan, that cat-like race we had run into before, that had been warped by the radiation. At least we think it was radiation. We put it out of its misery. Nasty kitty. Nasty feral kitty. Biopsy and sample recorded. Hey! I said, you never know...

We found a small collection of huts with power being supplied by a malfunctioning nuclear battery spewing radiation in all directions. Looks like it was hit by a raid, but no Aslan were around. It had a low wall around it, so we called it the Aslan fort. We left quickly, our suits keeping us safe from the limited exposure to the radiation.

We swept the area by aircar, searching for anything that might look like a bunker complex. A few false trails, a few feral Aslan lions flitting among the ruins, and we eventually found what looked like the entrance tunnel inside a ruined palace on a hillside. Now that's more like it.

A village sat by the entrance with about 60 humans milling about. We set the aircar down a bit away. I hopped out off to the side, Wendell stood on lookout behind us, and Gaines offered a greeting to a grand dame with two bodyguards armed with swords.

The negotiations played out and we settled on a 10% tithe to her village or 5% if we killed the feral Aslans lurking about. On cue came 38 feral Aslan cats. Gaines sheltered in the tunnel as a last gasp defense while the rest of us took off in the aircar. We rained fire upon the ferals. We counted 342 kills.

The 342 equals 38 dead Aslans times 9 lives each...

Ba dumbum. Thank you very much. I'm here until paid. Remember to tip your mercenaries.

The Bunker

Anton inserted the rod in the keyhole and Open Sesame, the doors creaked apart. As we peered inside, the barrel of a shotgun swung oh so slowly in our direction until it got stuck. The servos whined in protest as the barrel pecked at some invisible obstruction.

I sprinted behind a wheeled security robot and pushed it over. Anton quickly pressed the deactivated button.

Well, whaddaya know? A 200-year-old security robot armed with a shotgun and in need of considerable maintenance. A little touch-up paint, rust remover, and reprogramming by Anton and we would have a new crewmember.

"Score!" Brax shouted.

Anton gave it the once over. "We'll call it Robbie the Robot."

Brax shrugged. "OK. But we need to up-gun his armament with something more than a shotgun. Maybe a gatling gun. A rotary grenade launcher like Wendell carries. Oooo. How about a mini-gun?"

Gaines objected. "Might not be the smartest thing to use defending the ship in space or at a starport."

Brax shrugged anew. He furrowed his brow and thought tremendous thoughts. "How about we also install a sensor that links to a voice response?"

"Like?" a skeptical Anton queried.

"Like if an enemy approaches, Robbie waves his weapon and blares, 'Danger Crimson crewmen! Danger! Danger!'" he offered. "Or perhaps, it says 'I am Robbie-3PO, I am fluent in six million rounds per minute.'"

Anton rolled his eyes and sighed. "I'll take charge of the robot's programming."

"OK," Brax agreed. "But maybe Robbie needs a theme song." He broke out in another Ruttles tune.

Robbie the Robot,
Wheelies as your feet.
Wonders how you manage to make ends meet.

Who finds the credits,
When your ammo's out,
Did you think that credits fall roundabout?

Friday night's for battling like a corsair,
Sunday morning mending miniguns.
Monday's job was upgrading the software,
See how he runs!

Robbie the Robot,
Fix the A-I fritz.
Wonders how you manage not to call it quits.

The Inventory

The rest of the bunker yielded a full machine shop, forge, 200 tons of industrial steel, barrels of lubricants, a ton of gold, a ton of silver, 10 tons of some sort of valuable crystal-steel, and lots of inedible crumbling rations and other organic material of no use.

In other words, it was a practical bunker of great use to the locals, but less so to a bunch of space-going mercenaries. Still, it was a worthwhile pursuit.

We went back to the Aslan fort and poked around. We found cases of regular, current-day ammo and carbines. Well, that's strange. The ferals must have forgotten how to use weapons. I pinched a case of ammo for our combat rifles. We gave the rest to the humans so they could defend themselves against any feral that moved into the area. If you thought the humans were happy when we slaughtered the ferals, their eyes really lit up with the idea of their own weaponry.

Now, what to do?

We had good relations, so our 95% share of the bunker was safe. The reactor after a few hundred years was failing, so our electrical engineer genius Anton fixed the nuclear battery, hauled it into the bunker, and hooked it up to the bunker power. That would last them a long time.

We could leave the steel, but we really wanted the 10 tons of special crystalline-steel. Alas, our aircar could only hold 1.5 tons. We loaded the ton of gold, the case of ammo, and the robot named Robbie.

Gaines volunteered to stay behind as we arranged for another sealed cargo pod with our aircar, robot, ammo, and gold to be delivered from the warehouse to the orbiting spaceport.

We left in the *Harrier* and *SharkTuna* and landed back on Drinax.

Now, all we had to do was figure out where to get 2.2 million credits to make the *Harrier* atmosphere capable. We returned some of our shares of the spoils to collect the credits and upgrade the *Harrier*.

We also put together an order for agricultural supplies (10,000 credits), 10 medical kits (5,000), and one field surgical unit (1,000) to bring back with us to give to the 60 humans.

Mutiny About The Bounty

While in Drinax, we learned that the Aslan Empire has placed a bounty of 60,000 credits on an unknown *Harrier*-class spaceship conducting pirate operations. Amazing how those traders knew about a TL 15 ship.

The Fellowship of the Stars was appalled at the idea of a 60,000-credit bounty on our heads. That's only 6,666.7 credits each.

"The nerve! We can do better," Brax suggested. "Red Wet Leg the pirate got the big B, he got the big B, he got the big B of 2.5 million credits and all he did was sit on a chaise lounge."

"It's insulting!" Cormac sputtered.

Others piped in about such a parsimonious bounty. That did it. The Crimson Permanent Assurance Company would go a pirating against the Aslan Empire.

Crimson Go Braxless: More RPG Adventure

by Russ Lockwood

I was unable to make the next session, but here's a summary of the main events gathered from e-mails.

Brax looked for a reputable lawyer to hold onto a package and make sure it got to an old prison buddy -- now a legit businessman -- in the event of his death. It contained copies of all the documentation and samples analysis of the ugly fuglies.

Gaines evaluated our status. With regards to recreating the Drinax Empire, he suggested an initial step would be to get surrounding systems to join an anti-piracy Sector Defense Treaty. He hoped King Obladee-Obladah would appoint an Emissary to do the diplomatic heavy lifting. I suggested that our own Hardcastle would be an appropriate pick, given his lofty status and skill at diplomacy. It may be a snowball effect, where if we could convince a couple of systems friendly to us to join, others will follow.

In the meantime, Gaines suggested our a pirating we go needed an "Acquisitions Procedure" -- a quick standard operating procedure starting with a message saying heave to, no broadcasts, open your airlock, stand and deliver, and no one gets hurt. Then, in and out with the goods (we remember our disguises, of course). They go on their way. We go on ours.

Naturally, if it is an Aslan ship, Gaines recommends playing a bit rougher. Or if we decide we want the whole ship, a different procedure. So long as we have one. Note; this represents a "traditional" pirate caper, unlike some of our earlier "kill 'em all and let the chips fall where they may" approach.

The Marduk Melee

We jumped back into Marduk to witness pirates salvaging parts off our megafreighter. Hey!

Brax frowned. All that planning and skullduggery about hiding the freighter, discounting the SOS, and pirates still found it! Pirates?

Apparently, the SOS was on a common band and enough ships showed up that someone had to find it.

Furious, the Crimsons made contact with the head of the scavengers: Captain Flapjack, subordinate of Admiral Darrelkyn. Captain Flapjack refused to part with the megafreighter. In fact, he said he'd get a promotion to Commodore or Admiral or Senior Spaceboy or something after he turned us into a supernova.

Captain Flapjack...image from web.



Tsk. Tsk. Tsk. The power of positive thinking just edged into the territory of delusion.
Brax thought the taunting deserved a Ruttles tune...

I think he's gonna be sad,
I think it's today, yeah.
Flapjack who's driving us mad,
Is crowing away, yeah.

He's got a ticket to die,
He's got a ticket to die,
He's got a ticket to die,
And we don't scare.

Don't know why he's being a wise guy,
He oughtta think twice,
He oughtta be smart and flee.
Because we'll punch his ticket goodbye,
Not gonna play nice,
Turn Flappy into debris.

Alas, such warnings went unheeded and Flapjack steered his 600-ton Corsair ship at the *Harrier*.

The Corsair... Image from web.

In the battle, the Corsair fielded a lot of weapons, including a pair of short-ranged triple laser turrets, that scared the ex-navy types.

Indeed, our *Harrier* kept its distance, hovering outside of Flapjack's weapon range. Our missiles again did nothing, for the triple laser turrets shot them out of space. Eventually, damage accrued despite regenerating shields and forced Flapjack to call in his ace in the hole -- a 200-ton defense boat.

The *Harrier* worked over the boat pretty good and eventually blew the boat to bits. Captain Flapjack cut his losses and fled. I wonder if losing to us gave him a demotion...

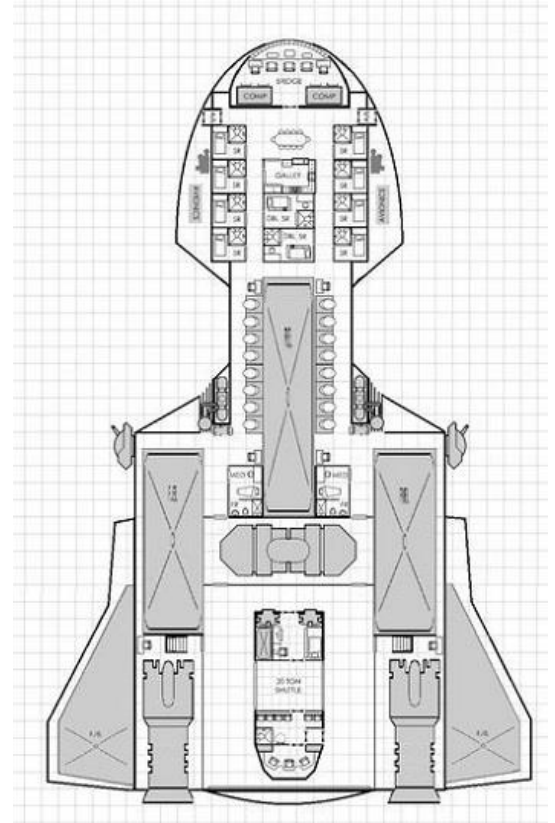
During the space battle, we requested aid from Marduk defenses (Git'erdone's starport). After the battle, company ships showed up. Gee, thanks, fellas.

Captain Flapjack worked for Admiral Darrelkyn. We met the Admiral before and he took offense with us.

For the record, "us" is a bit too all-inclusive. For my part, I had stayed on the ship when the other knucklehead CPACOs decided to pull a bank heist on Darrelkyn's planet. So, in a real and legally binding sense, I am not one of those who were banished for a year from Darrelkyn's pirate haven.

Alas, I seem tarred by the same brush. Certainly, Darrelkyn's displeasure has likely become definitive ... and the Admiral owns a big battleship.

You know, he could have offered to pay us for salvage rights -- remember we had registered for such.



Negotiations

Git'erdone offered us 20 million credits to forget all about the megafreighter. Apparently, Gaines bickered it to 25 million.

Brax was shocked to hear that. "Only 25 million? It's a 3 billion credit ship!" he sputtered.

Admittedly, it wasn't in the best of condition. The little old man who flew it only on Sundays to the hardware store at the nearest gas giant platform had a wee bit of an accident with an ... asteroid. Yes, that's it. Just an asteroid. A small asteroid. A very, very small interior asteroid. Or maybe a few very small interior asteroids. They bounced a bit.

But a 10% finder's fee, even at half value, would be appropriate. Alas, nope. Teach me to be napping.

The company pummeled the megafreighter with missiles and obliterated the ship. There was a significant amount of cargo on that ship. Alas, Brax was snoozing in his cabin throughout the whole ordeal. Upon waking, he just knew Git'erdone Co would have paid more, or at least allowed us free spaceport fuel refills on our birthdays.

Still, 25 million credits is 22.5 million credits. King Obladee-Obladah got his 10% cut off the top.

But how to spend it? Alas, the *Harrier* had taken some damage and the free trader ships needed some TLC and weapons upgrades.

We salvaged some ship weapons and spent about 75% of the big payday bucks fixing the *Harrier*, putting weapons on the *SharkTuna* and the *Mad Medic*, and switching weapons around. We took some advanced parts to fix up Robbie the Robot, but his repair was delayed.

Wendell discretely checked out an assassin's guild to see about taking out the self-proclaimed Admiral Darrelkyn and his other brother Darrelkyn.

To Viverito

Git'erdone Co offered up an invitation for the gang to travel to the Viverito system for the grand opening of a brand new starport that would be held in a couple months.

On the way....

The Crimson Protection Assurance Co dropped off advanced weapons to the rebels at Acrid, which made them friendly but they don't control the planet or system. The rebels want us to help them directly overthrow the government, which appealed to Karlsbad's sense of humor.

The Recycled Hari

On Viverito, a vault opened and Hologram Hari showed up to greet us. Oh, he was to be called something else, but the resulting *Foundation*-ish aspect would be well known to readers of a sci-fi classic.

Anyway, Hologram Hari calculated the odds of the furry ones taking over the systems in between their empire and the Imperium and noted the goal of preventing the crunching of the two Empires. Then he offered the Crimsons a deal: Receive Git'erdone Co's assistance in battling the Aslan cats to resurrect the Kingdom of Drinax, and in exchange, abandon Drinax when the inevitable cat strike occurs.

Apparently, we agreed. I think. We already took the money...

Hologram Hari provides guidance and threats. Image from web.



Walkabout

Being of low status and with some prison cred, I wandered the lower echelons of Viverito society clad in my usual non-distinct garb (and improved combat suit underneath the clothes) on a walkabout among the sketchy neighborhoods. I partook of dive bars, gambling halls, salons of the night, and other rumor hangouts. I bought some drinks, meals, and services, exchanged some "fish gotaway" caper stories, and kept an ear open for rumors about long-lost vaults or other treasures, not to mention likely systems to ambush Aslan traders. A couple thousand credits did wonders.

Then I bought a ticket to a philanthropic gala or two or three. You know, some fete advocating for the arts or save some small furry mammal. I spent big here with 5,000 credits a ticket ... call it 15,000 in total.

I donned my fancy dress, sword, medals, and sash and drove my fancy racecar to the galas. As I was the new and self-appointed Exchequer-General of the Gourmand of Paale, I mingled and gossiped among the upscale crowd, keeping my ears open for unusual rumors, feeding the elites some of the rumors picked up from the lower echelons of Viverito society, and so on. I accepted appropriate lunch and tea invites for follow ups. I had a 15-grand time.

I managed to glean a few **rumors and some innuendo** and noted my reactions:

* **The rulers of Byrni want to build a Highport to control traffic through their system**

As per Gunny, this is probably best left to Git'erdone Co.

***There's an asteroid in the Sperle system that's 90% gold and platinum**

As per Gunny, we're not a mining operation, but maybe we can locate it and stake a claim? Then sell the claim to a mining company?

***The Imperium allows the scientists on Technoworld to experiment with illegal technologies**

We know nothing...nothing. Not our problem unless any sort of illegal tech is aimed or sent at us.

***The legendary pirate Scurrilous Dave buried his treasure hoard somewhere on the moon of Homesteads**

If he is that legendary, say as legendary as Captain William Kidd, Amaro Pargo, Blackbeard, El Diablo of Lima, and Whydah Galley, then the Intergalactic Web should have something on Scurrilous Dave and whatever treasure he supposedly squirreled away. More importantly, perhaps either Homesteads or wherever SD had his pirate base, might have buried diaries and maps of those who interacted with SD. Worth a stop, but not a mining operation like Oak Island.

***There's a lost ruby mine on Paale that was overrun with monsters from offworld**

And we were just there! Rubies are used with lasers, so maybe we can locate said mine, poke a monster or two with lasers of our owns, and claim ownership of the mine...which we will sell off for cash or royalties to our friendly neighborhood bunker people... Maybe we need to bring them some advanced factory machines so they can turn out laser pistols to go along with the Assault rifles.

*The Ghost of Sindal flies an invisible starship. It's got an Ancient cloaking device

Since we already have cloaking on the *Harrier*, looking for Wonderous Woman seems out of our reach, but you never know.

That's when Gaines suggested with a grin that the Ghost ship was our own cloaked *Harrier*! Doh! The GM got me...

Doh! The speed of thought pales before the speed of enthusiasm. Image from web.



Two Million Credit TED Talk

Also apparently, our own Dr. Sparks gave some sort of TED talk and earned two million credits.

Really?

That's A-OK by me.

More A-OK was his willingness to put the two million credits into the general revenue pot.

It was a highly unusual presentation. Sparks arrived wearing a denim tailcoat jacket with the words "Mad Medic" scribbled on the back. People mobbed him asking about research, hobbies, life, and everything else that could be shared on social media.

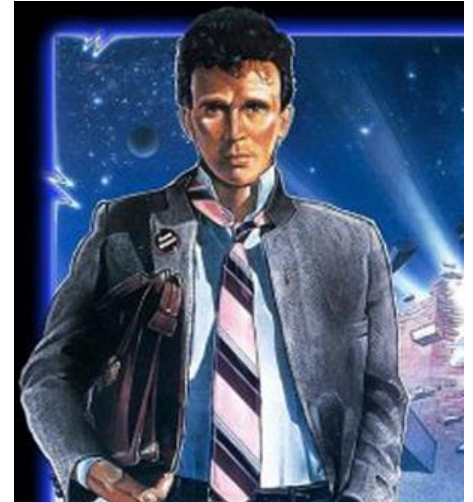
Which one is the real Sparks? Images from web.

While on Viverito, Dr. Sparks was able to share a recent breakthrough in medical research he had (upgrading him to a level 4 doctor). Earlier in the year, using some contagion altered for certain types of DNA, Sparks found a way to alter the genome as a vaccine of sorts to inject venom consuming T-cells.

It's still in proof of concept stage, but when test animals and organs were given high doses of contagion and then popped with new "Mr. T Cells," the virus was consumed in a similar fashion to how Pac-Man consumes the ghosts after eating fruit.

Unfortunately, "Mr. T Cells" have a short lifespan but can save the subject from almost certain death. The cost to produce them is immense, but it's only in early stage experiments. More research is needed before the anti-viral can be mass produced and stored in medical facilities.

Who knows, maybe Level 5 might be NK cells and Level 6 be mRNA engineering. This is *Traveller*, after all.



More Ship Upgrades?

Karlsbad wanted to upgrade the maneuver and jump drives on our ships. That's a good idea, although I'm not sure what else can be done that hasn't been done already.

I had suggested a "Q Ship." This is a ship that looks all the 'verse like a big fat, underarmed free trader, but when attacked by pirates, pops out ordinance like a light cruiser.

Anton suggested adding drop tanks to the *Harrier* so we could jump in, and if the "Danger! Danger Crimson crewmen! Danger! Danger!" gets too much, we can jump out without having to refuel.

Wendell noted that lack of fuel for an immediate jump is just the way space travel works. We were attacked shortly after jumping in before we could refuel from a local gas giant.

Gaines was doubtful the *Harrier* could be altered to get another full stellar jump's worth of fuel on board. He thinks it's pretty fast compared to other jump-capable ships and believes the defense ship was faster only because it didn't have a Jump drive to haul around.

"In the end, we proved to be the better boat, though I admit it sure seemed to me like we were going to get beat up pretty bad there at first," Gaines said. "Our *Harrier* really is a super ship."

Karlsbad was less interested in hoppin' up the *Harrier* than in improving the two traders' maneuver drives. Now that they are outfitted with serious weaponry, he believed they can do some real damage if we can maneuver as a fleet.

Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

Road to Barbarossa: Soviet-German Relations 1917-1941. by Norman Ridley. Hardback (6.5x9.4 inches). 233 pages. 2023.

What a fascinating account of the dealing and doubledealing between Germany and USSR between the world wars. I knew a bit about the negotiations, factories, and training facilities that were set up in USSR by Germany after WWI. The book delves into the topic with detail and frankly, amazement, and how two enemies signed a pact and then shorted the other. The USSR never delivered the fully agreed amount of raw materials and Germany never fully delivered on technical know-how.

The common foe was Poland. It beat the Soviets to ensure a Polish state that the USSR wanted back and it contained the lebensraum that Germany coveted. How both sides endeavored to do while keeping the West at bay proves a lesson in Realpolitik. For the Soviets, the Baltic States were a bonanza that they didn't really expect, but Germany threw the States under the proverbial bus to secure an Eastern counter to Western threats.

The book has 16 black and white photos. One typo: "German" should be "Germany" (p195).

The underhandedness and double dealing efforts of both sides truly is amazing. This two-tyrant love affair was destined to break apart, but for a while, each side thought it was getting more than the other.

Enjoyed it.

Wars of the Roses. by Paul Kendall. Hardback (7.0x9.9 inches). 242 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The People, Places and Battlefields of the Yorkists and Lancastrians*

This is a nifty travel resource to find British sites and monuments associated with the War of the Roses. Sites include battlefields, bridges, chapels, markers, halls, churches, and castles.

The book contains 137 black and white photos, 14 black and white illustrations, and one black and white map.

One typo: "followed by calvary belonging to" should be "cavalry" (p211).

It's a pleasant and easy read as the site is matched to the history. The book unrolls in roughly chronological order. It certainly makes me want to book an airline seat and rent a car.

Enjoyed it.

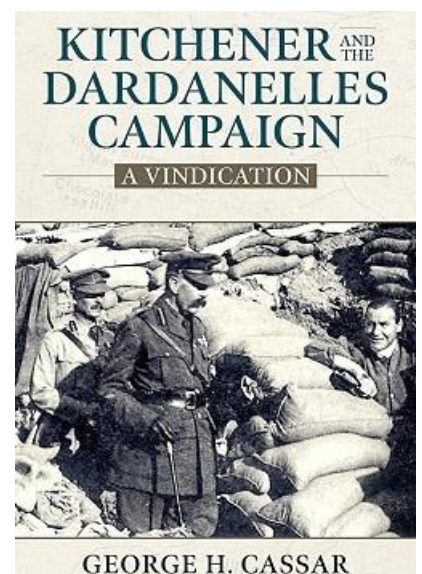
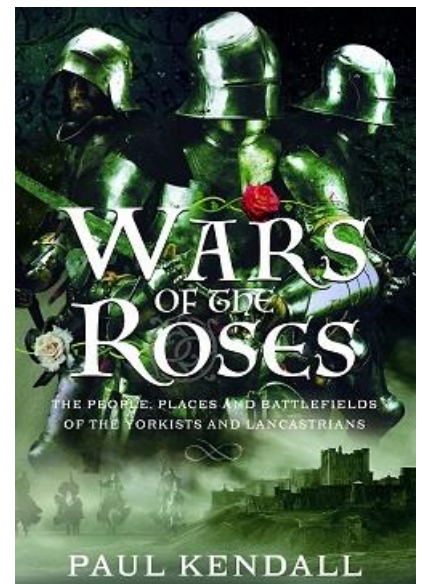
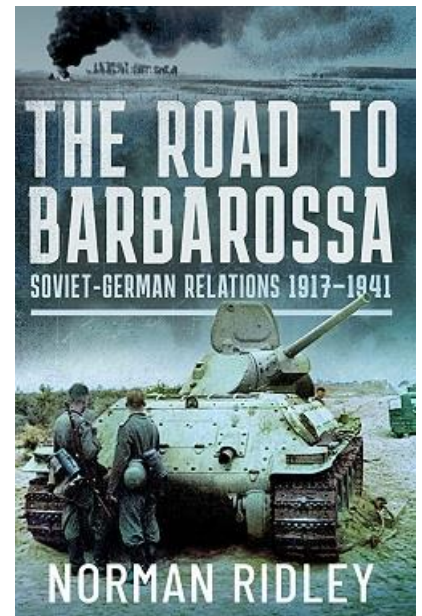
Kitchener and the Dardanelles Campaign: A Vindication. by George H. Cassar. Hardback (7.0x9.9 inches). 217 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *Wolverhampton Military Series No. 38*

As you might expect from the title, this examination of Lord Horatio Kitchener's decision regarding the launching of the WWI Dardanelles Campaign, more popularly known as Gallipoli, considers the background and wisdom of the amphibious assault upon Ottoman territory. As such, much comes to light beyond a simple Allied invasion and repulse.

Of particular note was a plan to land troops at Alexandretta, just about the point on the Turkish coast where it bends from east to south around present-day Syria (p42). The idea was to cut the main supply lines to Palestine and points south, relieving Ottoman pressure on Egypt. Also of note were 1906 and 1911 studies that rejected a landing at Gallipoli as likely to be failures (p50).

The original Dardanelles plan was a Royal Navy operation to bombard the Ottoman forts, force the Strait, and capture Constantinople to knock the



Ottomans out of the war. If the Army was needed at all, it would be to perform mop up to capture or at least drive off field artillery that could threaten the warships. A side effect of victory would be to bring in other Balkan countries to the Allied side. If the naval bombardments proved too costly, the effort would be abandoned and written off as a probe.

Alas, Winston Churchill sent out a press release announcing the operation, after which Minister of War Lord Kitchener and the rest of the War Cabinet decided that Britain would lose prestige if it didn't happen. The Navy never quite got through the Strait, lost a number of ships, and beat a retreat.

Now the British War Cabinet decided that Britain would lose prestige in the Middle East if it didn't keep up the pressure on the Ottomans with a full-scale Army invasion.

Landing at Anzac Cove 1915, by George Lambert (1922). The view is to the north, towards the main range. The yellow pinnacle is "The Sphinx" and beyond is Walker's Ridge which leads to Russell's Top. Image from web.



The invasion and rest of the campaign unfolds to its ruinous debacle as troops were evacuated and sent to Salonika in Greece to save Serbia from annihilation.

The book contains 25 black and white photos and seven black and white maps.

Churchill was the chief supporter -- and a far sharper marketer than Kitchener -- who pushed for and received more and more troops. Churchill gets the lion's share of the blame for the operation, with Kitchener's fears and prognostications about the landings coming true.

Well written and researched, it's an interesting angle on the command, control, and politics of the Dardanelles campaign.

Enjoyed it.

Russia's Five-Day War: Georgia 2008 - Elite 250. by Mark Galeotti. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 64 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Invasion of Georgia August 2008*

Congratulations to Osprey for the **250th Elite series booklet** and on a topic of importance, too. Someone was on the ball in the editorial assignment and marketing department.

Most the hallmarks of the 2022 Ukrainian invasion, good and bad, are here in the Russian invasion of the Republic of Georgia in August 2008. Except in 2008, the Russians achieved their objectives of capturing two Georgian provinces -- Abkhazia and South Ossetian -- and turning them into small protectorates.

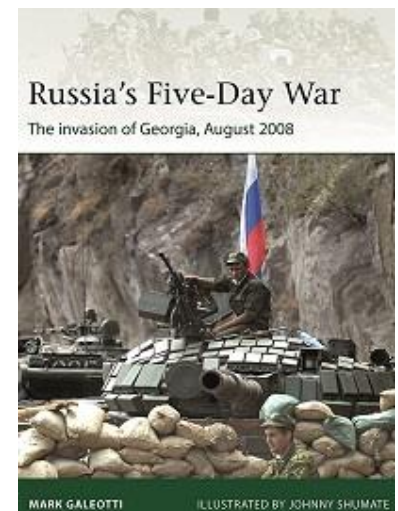
The trigger was the West recognizing Kosovo's independence from Serbia, as Georgia was cozying up to the West at the time. Russian paranoia is all about grabbing turf to keep enemies -- real and perceived -- at bay. The US invasion of Iraq also didn't help make the Russians feel safe, especially because Georgian troops were serving in Iraq.

In any case, the overmatched Georgians proved not to be Ukrainians. Sure, they launched a counterattack designed to recapture South Ossetian. Ineptitude and natural inertia (friction by any other name) halted them. The Georgian collapse occurred when a couple of Russian jets bombed some troops that panicked. And those panicked Georgians troops spread the panic. And the whole mass scuppered back to the capital before being stopped. Put that kind of cascading morale failure in a wargame...

The book contains 54 color photos, one black and white map, and eight plates (24 color illustrations) of uniforms and patches.

I'm not much of a modern gamer, and by "modern" I mean after WWII, but a five-day war gets covered well enough in a 64-page booklet for me.

Enjoyed it.



Bounty HM Armed Vessel 1787: ShipCraft 30. by Kerry Jang. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 64 pages. 2023.

Although my plastic modeling days are behind me, I can certainly appreciate the artistry contained in the *Craft* series of booklets. This one's about the Bounty, as in: Mutiny on the Bounty.

A nice, concise history of the ship under Captain Bligh and mutiny by Masters Mate Fletcher Christian falls on pages 1 to 19, reviews of models and related products are on pages 20 to 40, and modeler's showcase of ship models being built is on pages 41 to 52. Appearances (color camouflage by any another name) is on pages 53 to 57 and a table of mast and spar lengths covers pages 58 to 64.

The booklet contains five black and white illustrations, three black and white maps, 16 color illustrations, 11 color camouflage profiles, and 103 color photos of models, parts, aftermarket offerings, and box art. If you build sailing ships of the era, this booklet and the previous *ShipCraft 29: Victory 1765* will be of interest and use.

Enjoyed it.

Forgotten Heroes. by Csaba B. Stenge. Softcover (6.7x9.7 inches). 446 pages. 2023 reprint of 2019 book.

Subtitle: *Aces of the Royal Hungarian Air Force in World War Two*

All the WWII Hungarian aces get a profile of their pre-war, war, and post-war bios, with the aerial victories receiving the most detail. Indeed, the research is excellent.

The prose burrows along, recounting every aerial victory of each of the ace pilots. This is all wonderful, but it also starts to read alike.

A tidbit: A US pilot was shot down and escaped via the Yugoslavian resistance. Normally, such pilots are prohibited from flying again because if they are again shot down and this time captured, they can reveal details about the resistance (p89).

And another: Hungary built ME-109 G-6s during the war and equipped some of their air units in 1944 with them (p48).

Most of the pilots were arrested by Soviets after the war. Most were imprisoned and some hanged on "espionage" charges.

The book contains 326 black and white photos, seven black and white illustrations, and 14 color photos. Most of these come from family albums.

Depending on your enthusiasm for air combat, this will either entrance you with the details or make you numb from repetition. I made it through about a third of the book and spot read the rest. The prose is fine and you can certainly find plenty of scenarios throughout. Ties to the author for his extensive research.

Enjoyed it.

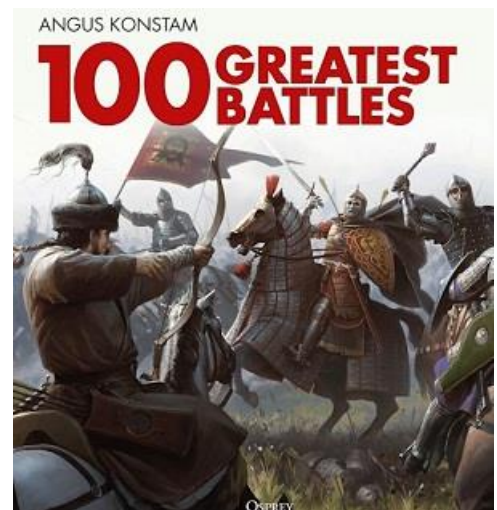
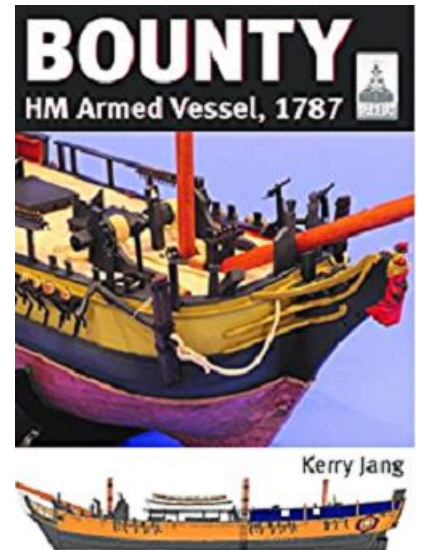
100 Greatest Battles. by Angus Konstam. Hardback (7.75x7.75 inches). 223 pages. 2023.

I like list-style books because the author has to weigh which items go on a list, and then hear all the moaning and groaning about why this item or that item was left off the list. Top battles are no different and many lists have erupted over the years.

The 100 battles listed here, from ancient Marathon (490 BC) to modern (Desert Storm 1991), were selected because they were "significant enough to change the course of a war or campaign" (p5).

As the Indiana Jones movie knight in the cave of the Holy Grail said, "He chose wisely."

Sure, some I may quibble with a few and Asia gets almost completely passed over, but the 100 are both notable and often game changers. The one I would most quibble with is Alexander the Great at the



Granicus. Yes, it allows him to continue the campaign, but other armies appeared. I'd argue Chaeronea, as it allowed Macedon to contemplate an invasion in the first place, or Issus, as that battle cemented Macedonian control over most of the western portion of the Persian empire and port control to neutralize the enemy fleet, or even Gaugamela (Arbela) that pretty much ended Darius and his Persian empire.

See what I mean about moaning and groaning...

Each battle gets 1.3 pages of text and 0.7 page color battle illustration from a previously published Osprey. It's mostly an intro to the battles, who won, and a wee bit of significance. You'll get far more info off of Wikipedia.

Consider this an entry-level book of battles for a kid, or perhaps an object of discussion for adults. No more. No less. Ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.

South China Sea 1945: Task Force 38 (Air Campaign 36). by Mark Lardas. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *Task Force 38's Bold Carrier Rampage in Formosa, Luzon, and Indochina*

The marvelous *Air Campaign* booklets follow the tried and true format of chronology, analysis of both sides' capabilities, campaign objectives and overview, and post-campaign analysis.

This volume covers Halsey's "rampage" up and down the China and French Indo-China coast, Formosa, and Luzon, bombing and strafing Japanese airfields and harbors as he went. By this point in the war, Japan was reeling from one defeat after another as its armed forces were ground down by the superior quantity and quality of US firepower and logistics.

Sure, the Japanese could occasionally do some small tactical damage, but operations like this sweep showed the inexorable march of US forces. Japanese aircraft were either blown out of the sky or on the ground while Japanese shipping, especially a goodly number of oil tankers, suffered fatal attacks.

The booklet contains 58 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, one black and white graph, three black and white maps, two color photos, eight color maps, three color two-page action illustrations, and nine color tactical illustrations.

One typo: referring to "William 'Bill' Halsey" (p4 and 5). I'm sure his friends called him Bill, but his better-known nickname was "Bull."

Another great volume in the series.

Enjoyed it.

US Destroyers vs. German U-Boats (Duel 127). by Mark Lardas. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2023.

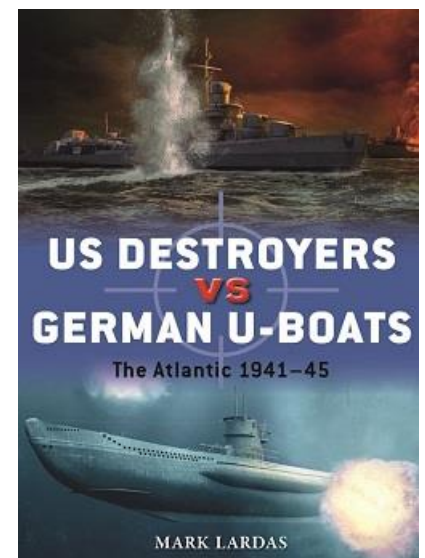
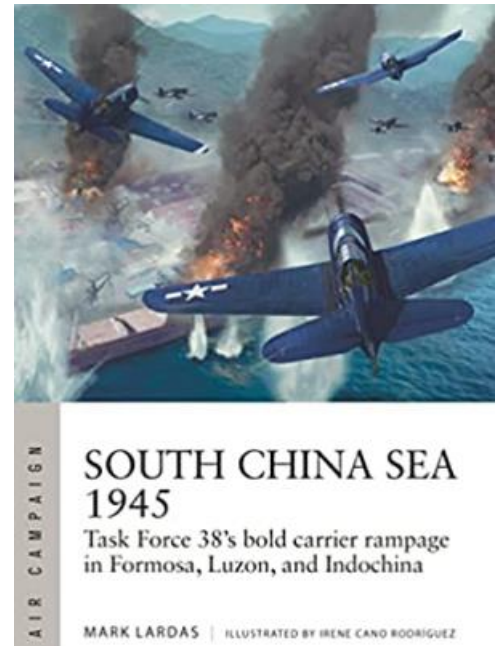
Subtitle: *The Atlantic 1941-45*

Lardas strikes again, this time with a *Duel* book featuring one-on-one accounts of WWII Allied Destroyers (DD) and Destroyer Escorts (DE) versus German U-Boats at the beginning of US entry into WWII.

Development, technical specs, and weapon specs dominate the text and show the strengths and weaknesses of ship and submarine. Indeed, 30 U-boats were lost in training accidents (p51) as both sides emphasized training throughout the war.

What I learned was that US depth charges could be set for a maximum 300 feet at a time when U-boats were rated at 750 feet maximum depth. If the U-boat had the time to dive to depth, no amount of depth charging would deal much damage the submarine. Later, the depth charges could be set for 600 feet, but even then, subs were relatively safe. The hedgehog projectiles kept sinking until it hit something, so depth became less safe (p30-31).

The three main battles are: U-568 vs Kearny, U-85 vs. Roper, U-549 vs Elmore, and U-881 vs. Farquar. Each offers different outcomes, providing information about how scenarios might play out. Those of you who have submarine rules might compare the rules to the actual encounters.



The booklet contains 43 black and white photos, four black and white illustrations, one black and white graph, two color maps, three color photos, eight color maps, one color two-page action illustration, eight color illustrations, and 24 color ship, sub, and weapon illustrations.

Enjoyed it.

Assault on the Gothic Line 1944: Campaign 387. by Pier Paolo Battistelli. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Allied Attempted Breakthrough Into Northern Italy*

The popular *Campaign* series offers an overview of a particular operation and follows the format of: Opposing commanders, orders of battles, and plans; campaign itself; and consequences and current-day travel opportunities.

This volume offers a division-level overview of the Allied drive up the Italian peninsula from September 1944 to January 1945. Two orders of battle are presented down to regiment/brigade level: August 25, 1944 and November 1, 1944. It would be better with troop numbers, but it's a start for those seeking such info. The text often supplies the troop numbers, sometimes at the battalion level.

The Gothic Line (Green Line to the Germans) was less a line and more a series of strongpoints. Kesselring understood the weakness and set up a Green Line II.

The campaign through the mountains protecting the Po River plain proved an exercise in ad hoc German shuffling against grinding Allied attacks on the east (Adriatic) coast with the Brits and Commonwealth troops and in the center with US troops driving roughly from Florence to Bologna.

Of interest was a German counterattack on the western coast of Italy in December. While the Battle of the Bulge gets all the attention, with Nordwind coming in second, the Axis' Operation Winter Storm took the green US 92nd division by surprise and drove forward about 25km (p82-83) before being called off and the Axis troops pulled back to the start line. How about that for a tabletop scenario!

The booklet contains 58 black and white photos, six color maps, 11 color photos, three color two-page action illustrations, and three of the less than useful color 3D maps.

I had to continually repeat myself about *Campaign* booklets, but this is another fine volume. Enjoyed it.

Soviet Tanks in Manchuria 1945: New Vanguard 316. by William E. Hiestand. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Red Army's Ruthless Last Blitzkrieg of World War II*

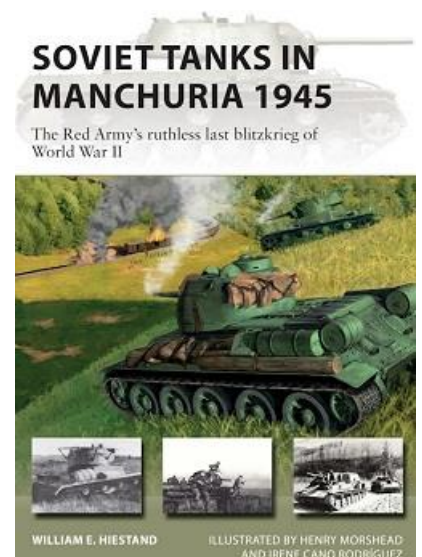
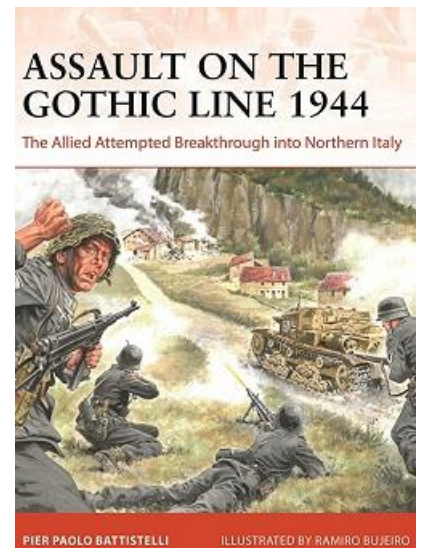
When the USSR's Red Army rolled into the Japanese forces on August 8, 1945, the tanks it used were a collection of pre-war and early-war cast-offs to top-of-the-line heavy tanks that had rolled over the Wehrmacht. Along with the T-34, SU-76, SU-100, and ISU-152, you'll find BT-5, BT-7, T-26, T-27, and T-38 tanks, plus lend-lease Shermans and Valentines.

The specs of all the popular tanks are well covered. Unfortunately the specs for the "odd" tanks T-27 and T-38 are not included. The Soviets has about 50 of each. I think that was a couple of missed opportunities.

As such, this might be an unexplored area of fun skirmish-level wargaming. For large-scale gaming, the Japanese had too few tanks and AT guns to confront the Soviets and didn't make particularly bright use of them, either. Not that they had much to oppose the Red Army -- the Japanese had 1,115 tanks versus the Soviets' 3,704 tanks and 1,852 self-propelled guns (p5). You don't even want to know the disparity of artillery, but I'll tell you anyway: 4 to 1 advantage Soviets.

The infantry edge of the Soviets was small: 1.5 million to 1.2 million (p5). The Japanese fielded 31 divisions, of which 26 were formed in 1945. However, the Japanese rated the lot as worth about eight full-strength divisions (p22). The campaign played out as you might expect or know.

The booklet contains 36 black and white photos, 10 color tank profiles, two color two-page action illustrations, and one color map.



One odd factoid struck me: The Soviets lost 20,000 of 22,600 tanks during the first six months of Barbarossa. By January 1942, the Red Army fielded 7,700 tanks, including 600 KV-1 and 800 T-34 (p8). That sure seems like a lot of lost tanks.

In any case, the booklet lays out the tank superiority of the Soviets over the Japanese in 1945 and makes for a good, quick guide to the last Soviet major offensive of WWII.

Enjoyed it.

Nambu Pistols: WWII Japan - Weapons 86. by John Walter. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *Japanese Military Handguns 1900-1945*

Per usual in the Weapon series, the Nambu receive heavy coverage of research, development, and technical specs. I wasn't familiar with Nambus, so all of this was news to me.

Apparently, the pistols had a light recoil and reasonable accuracy, but used a lighter bullet with less stopping power than German and Allied pistols.

Earlier models were subject to misfires due to firing pin spring eventually losing its spring. New models fresh from the factory worked fine, but the longer a pistol was in the field, the more prone to misfires it became. A partial fix was instituted in 1939 and a better fix in 1942. If you are doing interwar back of beyond skirmish scenarios, keep that in mind when a Japanese officer or tanker or pilot levels a pistol and prepares to fire...

The booklet contains 23 black and white photos, 44 color photos, three color two-page action illustrations, and six color cutaway-pistol illustrations.

The original Nambus were made in 1894, but after WWII, they were replaced by Western pistol models. The story of the pistol is well told, with emphasis on the technical aspects.

Enjoyed it.

The Ark. by Christopher Coates. Softcover (5.5x8.5 inches). 284 pages. 2019.

I thought this book was the basis for the recent TV show. Apparently not, but it offered a good read.

It mixed elements of the movie 2012 and like the book *Wool* (see my 1/31/2021 AAR) as the Earth faced imminent doom. Here, a comet was on its way with a tail full of radioactive rocks. In three years, most life would be extinct on Earth, so the US devised a plan to house 10,000 essential world rebuilding personnel in cryogenic chambers underground and 100,000 more in dispersed underground shelters. Of course, all of this is kept secret to prevent panic and some unfortunate astronomers need to be kept quiet as well.

The sleepers would be in suspended animation - drug-induced comas for 20 years, protected by automated systems. The shelterers would be awake, but have food and water for 20 years.

The set up and construction portions of the book are generally well done, if a bit of an exposition dump from time to time, but you know it's sci-fi because the only thing to go wrong is a clothes dryer fire. Seriously. It's like the Big Dig in Boston, which took from roughly 1991 to 2006, to actually hit the original target completion date of 1998 with only a bent nail as a problem. Well, it was a sci-fi military construction project with unlimited funds.

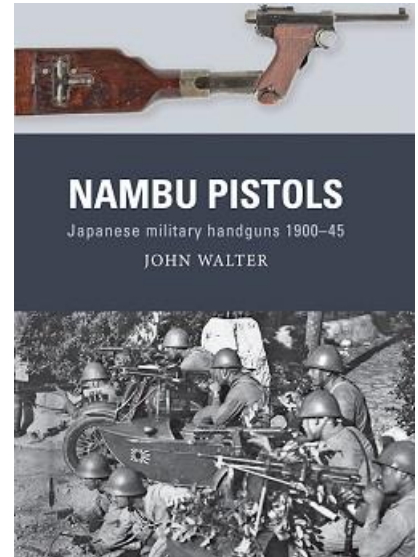
Then came the time when the 10,000 had to wake up. Chuckle. Chuckle. Nicely reasoned, that.

In any case, the book kept my attention.

Enjoyed it.

Invasion: Book 1 Contact. by David Ryker. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 350 pages. 2018.

I love a good alien invasion plot, especially if it involves a Pearl Harbor-like beginning. This was less Pearl Harbor and more like walking into a gunfight between



two advanced high-tech aliens and us humans only brought a knife.

When frontier human colonies go dark, the old fleet commanded by a wise experienced admiral heads off to learn why. They discover that the Exiles are in a running laser battle to escape the Symbiots. The Symbiots love to assimilate the conquered space races, not unlike the Borg of *Star Trek* or the Skitters of *Falling Skies*. Ah, the wonders of organic matter conversion.

Fortunately, the humans send a real fleet under a real zero -- a complete idiot -- who promptly loses most of the ships in a battle with the Symbiots. The humans provide additional ships and fodder. The Symbiot has one big mother of a mother ship. Ah, but the wise experienced admiral is on his way back.

The Machiavellian twist involving blackmail of the Exiles proved neat, even as the old fleet with human and alien allies heads off the Symbiot fleet.

Parts of the novel are inspiring and other parts lackluster. It may be uneven overall, but it has spaceship battles and that tilts it in favor of the author.

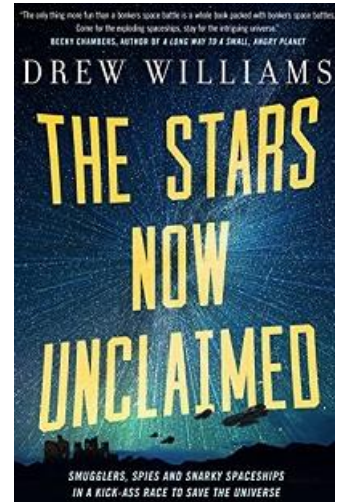
Enjoyed it.

The Stars Now Unclaimed. by Drew Williams. Paperback (4.1x6.8 inches). 515 pages. 2018.

The first book in a trilogy. It was hard for me to read this book. The prose was just fine, but something about the plot didn't grab me.

A special ops agent snatches psionic children for training at a secret society at a secret system before the Imperial Pax can get them. It had enough derring do, but somehow, I didn't connect with the action. I liked the AI-run ships, but the whole idea of the society creating and sending the Pulse throughout the galaxy to burn out high-tech infrastructure seems more like a villain move than a heroic move. If it wasn't for the Borg-like assimilation of the Pax, I'd be rooting for the Pax.

However, the last third of the book proved the most interesting as you finally get to the secret HQ and the showdown with the Pax fleet. It should have come about 100 pages earlier. Still, it triggers at least thinking about the second book.



Dark Waters, Starry Skies. by Jeffrey R. Cox. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 528 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Guadalcanal-Solomons Campaign March-October 1943*

The first two books of his trilogy were brilliant, but this third book less so. The research is spot on and woven in a nice, generally chronological order. You get a real feel for the campaigns, strategy, and action.

Yet...

...the prose veers off into snarky lines of mumbled trash talking that interrupt the narrative and detract from the analysis. A little bit is fine, but an overabundance is distracting. I mean, one joke about feet during Operation Toenail would be OK, but a barrage of them just gets annoying.

The bloating gets worse. I started to lose interest in an otherwise fascinating tipping point in the Pacific war during a discussion about Japan's D4Y Suisei (Comet) aircraft's oscillation problem: "the oscillations could continue increasing in amplitude -- making the wings flap, which in aeronautical terms is called "flutter" -- until the wings finally break off. Which, when an aircraft is in flight, can be a very bad thing. While the Japanese were trying to fix that whole flapping wings thing, they had pressed the few Suiseis into service..." (p217-218).

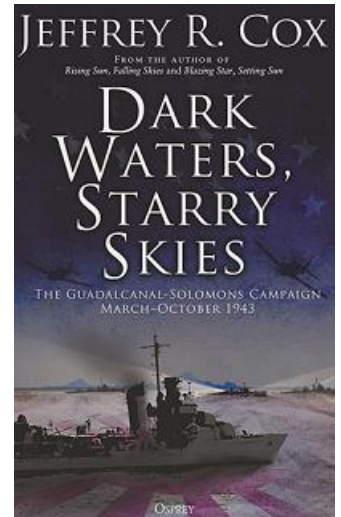
Or how about...

"Harrison dropped three depth charges, each filled with 250lbs of Torpex, which sounds like a prescription drug about which you should ask your doctor, but is actually an enhanced blend of TNT." (p223)

The book is riddled with these, or what I might label "conversational condescension." It may be amusing in a pub, but not a book. I ran into this awkward style before and I sure hope this is not a trend. It's amusing until it isn't. And I was less than halfway through the book when I reached my limit on page 223.

There's even a Monty Python "Easter Egg" straight out of the ballad of Sir Robin: "When danger reared its ugly head, Capt. Kanaoka turned his tail and fled." (p265)

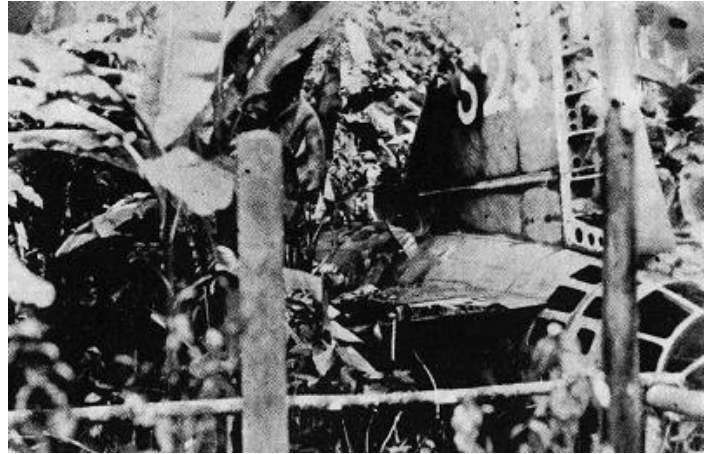
The editor, and I have my doubts there was one, was way off his or her game letting so many through.



A couple typos: "a true samurai does not wear parachutes" (p128) and a ship opened fire with a "12mm deck gun" (p221) that should be 120mm as correctly noted later.

A couple interesting tidbits: The US tried to bomb a volcano in hopes it would erupt and wipe out the nearby Japanese air base (p126) and General Yamamoto may have been posed after he died in a plane crash, for he was found sitting in a seat holding his katana (p180), one of several variations of his final repose examined.

Yamamoto's crashed bomber. Image from web.



The book contains nine black and white photos, one black and white map of the Solomons chain of islands, and four color maps of tactical naval battles. The maps were from Osprey's *Campaign 326* booklet. More maps are needed.

I should go back and look at his previous two books to see if he always wrote that way, but I don't remember such jarring and unnecessary prose. He doesn't need to use it. Cox's prose is sweet enough without this condescension. The editor needs to pay more attention to eliminating such conversational condescension. The book edges into "ties go to the author" territory.

Enjoyed it.

Panzer III North Africa: TankCraft 40. by Dennis Oliver. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 64 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *German Army Light Tank*

Subtitle: *El Alamein to Tunis 1942-1943*

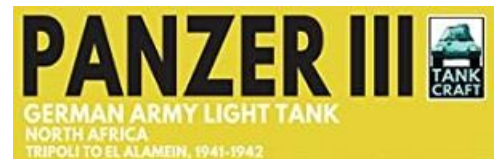
Although I no longer build plastic models, I can certainly appreciate the artistry that goes into their construction and painting. The larger the scale miniature you are painting, the more useful the information within these pages. As the features models are 1/35 scale, that roughly translates to 54mm in wargame scale.

The technical details and history of the Panzer II are from pages 1 to 16 and then from 49 to 64, with pages 59 to 63 being visual TO&Es of various units. The color camouflage section runs from pages 17 to 26 (two tanks per page plus various markings and details).

The model section runs from pages 27 to 48, with 27 to 44 being the quartet of 1/35-scale models being built and painted, and 45 to 48. Much of it showcases boxed products and aftermarket products available.

The booklet contains 40 black and white photos, one black and white map, five black and white tank illustrations showing off modifications per letter variant, one color period photo, 20 color camouflage profiles of J, L, M, and N variants, 25 color illustrations of markings and details, and 84 color photos of models, parts, aftermarket offerings, and box art. Another *TankCraft* winner.

Enjoyed it.

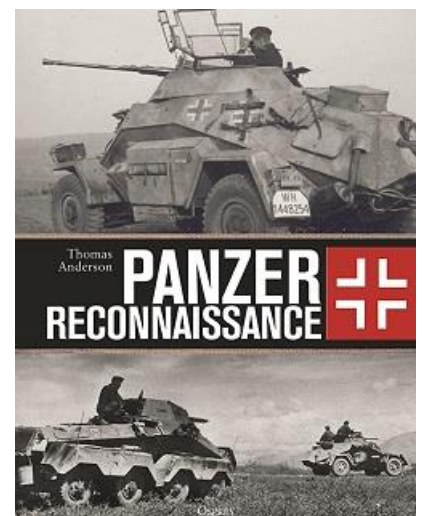


Panzer Reconnaissance. by Thomas Anderson. Hardback (8.0x10.0 inches). 288 pages. 2023.

The creation, organization, and vehicles of the German reconnaissance battalions of WWII gets receives a thorough examination.

Highlights include 237 black and white photos of the four-, six-, and eight-wheeled vehicles, with the occasional tracked and half-tracked vehicle added for a complete look at the force. A pair of black and white illustrations shows results of firing tests of 20mm cannon against T-26 and T-35 tanks.

A total of 39 black and white visual TO&Es of various formations offer insight into what you can put on the tabletop. It would be nice to translate the



TO&S and not just copy and paste them into the text. Yes, a key to symbols is on page 75, but more English translations of what often appear as hieroglyphics would be more helpful. To be fair, some of them do have specific number of the vehicle type added, but most appear as dropped in pieces of larger visual TO&S. It's my only knock on the book.

The purpose and "rules" of reconnaissance come out of the manuals and the rules changed as the war went on. Although light armored cars are no substitute for tanks, a considerable number of field reports showcase the dash of the troops in seeking out the enemy and exploiting gaps to procure even more information.

The chapters roll out the history in roughly chronological order as changing technology impacts the missions. There's even a chapter on German use of captured armored cars and other vehicles, such as the Panhard 178, BA-10, BA-20, and others. Nicely done.

Enjoyed it.

Through Bitter Seas. by Phillip Parotti. Paperback (6.0x9.00 inches). 243 pages. 2023.

This is the third book by Parotti featuring the US Navy in WWII and all are stand-alone books.

Through Bitter Seas follows a heroic USN ensign assigned to a tugboat in the Mediterranean Sea as the tugboat *ATR-3X* rescues damaged ships and pushed cargo ships in and around ports in North Africa, Sicily, and Anzio.

Who knew you can make tugboat ops so interesting? The wartime romance is still sudden but happens before Ensign Hal Goff heads off to war and the battle scenes, especially around Anzio, are quite good.

The first two (see my reviews of *Splinter on the Tide* in the 5/21/2021 AAR, *In the Shadows of Guadalcanal* in the 6/29/2022 AAR and up on hmgs.org) are virtually the same book with the names changed. Yep, snarky, but more truth than you might think. Sure one is in the Atlantic and the other in the Pacific, but both feature anti-submarine warfare, quick wartime romances, and heroic endings.

Parotti's prose is getting better. It certainly kept my attention. I read this in two sittings.

Enjoyed it.

Dictionary of Fortifications. by Jean-Denis LePage. Hardback (7.2x10.0 inches). 340 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *An Illustrated Glossary of Castles, Forts, and Other Defensive Works from Antiquity to the Present Day*

It may have taken me hours just to read the lengthy subtitle, but it is accurate. Term after term, and many I had never heard of before, rolled across the pages in alphabetical order. Quite often, one of the marvelous 419 black and white illustrations accompanies the definition.

Think about it. That's 419 drawings in 340 pages. Overview drawings, close-up drawings, sections, and even weapons receive a visual reinforcement of the text. Not every term gets an image, but enough of them do. I didn't count the duplicates. For example, "Blast Pen" (p74-75) and "Pen" (p253) use the same Spitfire in a pen drawing. But duplication is exceedingly rare.

I can't say I read it in one sitting. I read a bit, put it down to read something else, read it some more, and so on until I reached the end. Like any dictionary, you'll likely look up one term at a time and be able to tell the difference between a Bishop's Mitre (or Priest Cap) and a Hornwork with Crownwork.

Enjoyed it.

If you are into Vauban fortifications, I suggest looking into *Marshal Vauban: Defense of Louis XIV's France* (see my 3/29/2021 AAR review or up on hmgs.org). This book will help explain the era of classic fortification that is covered in composite parts in this dictionary.

Michael the Bald's castle. Scratchbuilt by Mike.

