

the Ganesha Games Irregular Free Webzine

Free issue

Hack 5



Previews, Reviews, Errata, Battle Reports, Designer's Notes

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New Games

Since last issue, Ganesha Games has published three new titles: **Flashing Steel** for your pirate and musketeers fans, **Mighty Monsters** for giant monster combat, and **Drums and Shakos Large Battles** for divisional-level Napoleonic gaming. All are available as \$8 PDFs. DSLB is a 44 page full color book but the PDF download comes with an ink-saving version with all the decorative borders and period illustrations removed so it won't eat up your color ink cartridge if you print it at home.

FLASHING STEEL written by Andrew Boswell and Greg Hallam brings a quasi-rpg feel to your swashbuckling scenarios. It uses a point system to design your characters one by one, although in this issue of *Free Hack* we added a few "standard" troops you may want to use to play larger games or when you are in a rush. Because of the acrobatic and cinematic nature of swashbuckling combat, *Flashing Steel* works best with small numbers of figures (the game recommends 8 to 15) and with lots of scenic items. You'll need tables to leap over, chairs that can be picked up and smashed on the head of your foes, and all kinds of obstacles to create improvised weapons and trip your characters.

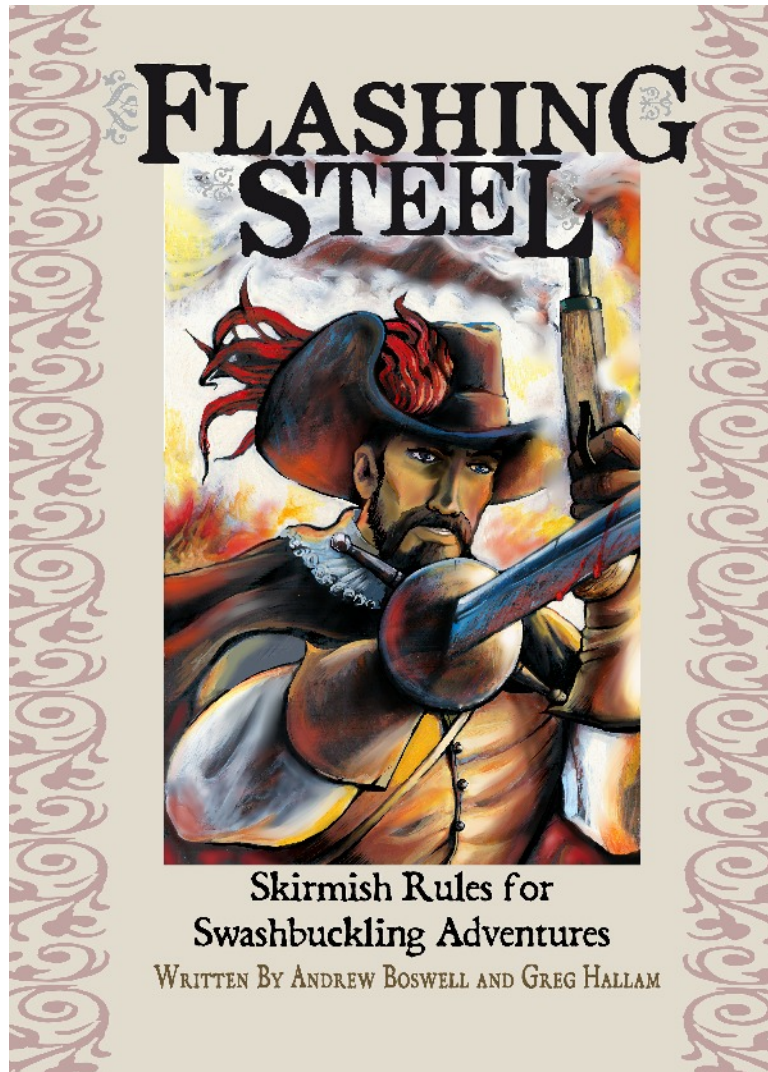
While *Flashing Steel* is more than sufficient to play Musketeers and most pirate scenarios, pirates are insanely popular these days, also thanks to Hollywood, so we immediately bought a few *Ainsty Castings* ships (<http://ainstycastings.co.uk/>) to be used as backdrops for our pirate scuffles. This gave us the idea of a pirate campaign supplements with lots of additional details about boarding actions, treasure, scenarios, and so on. We'll see how quickly we can put that together. As usual,

we are at the whim of the local playtesters and their fleeting wargaming interests.

In addition to this supplement, Andrew Boswell is working on a larger version of *Flashing Steel* called *Forged in Blood* for larger historical battles in the same period (still at the one figure equals one man scale) and on a *Scarlet Pimpernel* campaign set during the French Revolution and based on Baroness D'Orczy's classic books.

Back to the rules: A fan has taken Ray Forsythe's javascript warband builder and

has modified it into a *Flashing Steel* builder. You can download it on the Song of Blades Yahoo! Group and on www.ganeshagames.net in the builders section.



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An interesting feature of *Flashing Steel* is the way scenarios are generated. A series of tables coupled with a dice roll give you the who, what, how, why and where of the battles you are going to fight. This system is obviously optional as not all players will have time to play a series of games, but the system (used with a bit of common sense) comes with the highest of recommendations. The tables assume one player will run the “good guys” and the other player a variable opposition. For best results, of course, at the end of the mini-campaign you should reverse roles and play some more until a victor is determined.

Like it happens with new games, we managed to slip in quite a few mistakes in the final edit of *Flashing Steel*, so in this issue of *Free Hack* there are errata, clarifications, and designer’s notes.

From floppy hats and rapiers to nuclear breath, warty rubber suits, and gigantic claws that can fell skyscrapers: a recent addition to the Ganesha stable is **Mighty Monsters**, our miniature game of giant monster combat. Given the size of some of these “miniatures” we use to play, maybe the word is a misnomer!

In typical Ganesha Games philosophy, *Mighty Monsters* may be played in many different ways. You could play a simple one-on-one duel, with two players each controlling a giant monster, or do the same with one player controlling a monster and the opponent controlling the army. Or you may (this is our favorite play style) have each player controlling 3-4 monsters and fight an all-out, titanic slugfest and destroy the city. As cheesy as the B-movie source material is, we tried to make the game tactical and engaging.

Monsters are designed with a point system. You buy the Quality and Combat scores of each part of the monster’s body, e.g. Arms, legs, torso, head. You then apply special rules (some of which come in levels) to every body part, or to the monster as a whole. As you might have guessed, designing a monster is much like designing a warband or squad in other Ganesha Games rule sets, with the monster’s body parts being the warband members. During the game, you activate the body parts you want to act with. So for example if you have a monster with three pair of arms and



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want to punch your opponent, you could activate the first pair of arms, punch, then activate the second and punch again, and finally activate the third pair of arms to deliver the ultimate haymaker to your opponent. Activation, like in other rulesets, may cause a turnover, so a monster with many appendages is not necessarily at an advantage unless the player is really good at dice rolling.

The rules encourage players to design creatures just like the ones seen in the movies and TV series of the Japanese giant monster genre.

Unlike other Ganesha Games rule sets, combat in *Mighty Monsters* is NOT a simultaneous roll off. One monster attacks, choosing a maneuver from a list of many options (such as claw strike, bite, punch, body slam, tail sweep, and so on) and the target of the attack defends. The dice roll + Combat results are compared and an effect is determined based on how much the attacker managed to beat the defender by (e.g., beaten, doubled, tripled etc). In certain cases, if the attacker fails badly (e.g., his Combat roll is doubled by the defender's roll), the defender gets to perform a free counterattack to that move, or something equally annoying for the attacker happens. For examples, flying kicks are powerful but may send your monster sprawling in the floor if they fail badly.

Attacks that hit cause an effect (such as knock back or knockdown) and/or a certain number of wounds. As you may have guessed if you know our other rule sets, here at Ganesha we are not big fans of book-keeping and avoid it whenever possible. So how do we record the many "life points" that a monster has, and which are a genre staple? And at the same time, how do we create the uncertainty which is so typical of our rule sets when you have a playing piece that can withstand a hit from an ICBM?



Monsters (and other large things like spaceships) use a system of colored dice to keep track of their health conditions. A monster begins the game with three white dice. These are simply the dice used by the player to roll for the activations of the monster's body parts. As the monster receives wounds, his white dice become yellow or red. Yellow dice are "annoying" and red dice are "dangerous". Basically, every time the monster rolls a 1 on a yellow die, he must roll on a "bad stuff" table (there are actually three tables, and the monster rolls on one or the other based on his current number of yellow or red dice). The same thing happens every time the monster rolls a failure on any activation roll on a red die. So, the player of a slightly wounded monster may want to roll less dice (rolling only the white ones) but if he overexerts, bad stuff might happen... Things like the monster losing its balance or being stunned or losing the use of one of its appendages... This process continues until eventually the accumulation of red dice and activation failures knocks out the monster.

So, uncertainty is created because you never know when your monster will succumb to its wounds. At the same time, the dice used for activation (which must be on the table anyway) are used as damage counters, so there's no need for

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writing down stuff on a play sheet or cluttering the table with extra markers.

This issue of Free Hack has a few photos by Andrea Sfiligoi showing how he built his Monster Island which was a huge success at *Lucca Comics and Games* (Italy's most famous geek con and the largest of its kind in the world in terms of attendance).

Also a few pictures show how to build rubble counters (destroyed buildings) with scrap materials.

Drums and Shakos Large Battles is Sergio Laliscia's ruleset for divisional level Napoleonic battles. Playable in any scale in under three hours, this set is aimed at experienced *grognards* wishing to re-fight historical battles. It is also easy enough that relative newcomer may learn it in a few games, however, if this is your first Napoleonic game, we recommend learning the rules with counters (or using a friend's collection of figures) before committing to painting a large force.

We think Sergio did an excellent job with these rules, but we are biased: we saw him working on them and tweak them for almost three years, testing them at home at the club at any convention Ganesha has attended in the last two years. The rules have gone through many incarnations, and every time Sergio was hitting a snag in design he was always wondering "how can I make this part of the game more exciting?" or "how can I do something which satisfies the detail-loving Napoleonic enthusiasts yet remains playable in a couple of hours?".

Drums and Shakos Large Battles uses the standard Ganesha system of Q, C, special rules and activation rolls. However, these rules put the player in the role of the Commander in Chief, so turn-overs are somehow

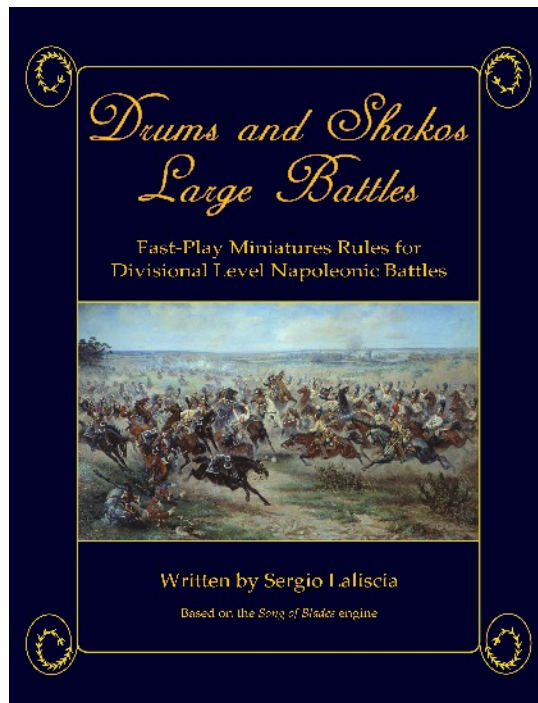
mitigated. Failing activation rolls causes Reactions, which is a new concept in Ganesha rules unless you already play *Armageddon Hour*. Basically, every time you fail a roll, you are giving the opponent a chance to react with one of his units. Reactions are limited (a unit may react only once per turn) but as they happen in the acting player's turn, they often wreak havoc with his plans...

Combat is another innovative part of the rules. First of all, combat is divided into two distinct phases, Approach and Contact. Approach represents the moment when a unit launches an attack and starts shooting from a distance, while Contact represents close quarter fighting and point blank shooting. How a unit performs in the Approach phase affects the Contact phase. Will the unit "lose steam" and be repelled as the men realize their fire is ineffective, or will they gain enough impetus to close in for the kill?

Instead of a simple dice roll off like in our other games, **Drums and Shakos Large Battles** uses a "bunch of dice" approach. Dice rolled are not totaled. They are compared one by one, in order from the highest to the lowest scoring, with the dice rolled by the opponent, and this comparison tells you the story of that clash. In **Drums and Shakos Large Battles**, you can win but take losses as you do so, cavalry may perform a breakthrough, unit may lose

ground, and so on, all with a simple comparison of the dice. Modifiers to the score of troops are always added dice.

Drums and Shakos Large Battles uses casualty figures or disorder token to mark attrition on units. The rule book shows several ways to do this, but we found that the least obtrusive way



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to mark losses is to use a colored chit using a traffic light color progression (green, yellow, red) to show different degrees of attrition.

An appendix also gives you guidelines to use the rules at even larger level (we did playtest it at corps level using 6mm models).

As we type this, we are play testing in house *Song of Spear and Shield* (ancient skirmish rules), *Power Legion* (superhero rules), *Song of Armies and Hordes* (large scale fantasy battles) and *Samurai Robot Battle Royale* (our giant robot combat set, a standalone book which will be compatible with *Mighty Monsters*). Additionally, we are working on two sets we are writing in collaboration with some of our favorite miniature manufacturers.

We are doing these sets because we like the figures and the manufacturers have agreed to work with us in a collaborative, cross-promotional deal. There is no exchange of money involved. We sell the rules, they sell

In Playtest

the figures. It's simple as that. Ganesha is NOT abandoning their "play with any figures you have" philosophy. We just like these figures because they are the ones we use in our games.

One is **Apocalypticum**, a *Mutants and Death Ray Guns* variant written for the excellent line of 28mm post apocalyptic miniatures manufactured by Lead Adventure (www.leadadventure.com). This will be more "realistic" than MDRG and will be set against the backdrop of a bleak central/Eastern European city infested by mutant rats the size of dogs, and human scavengers who are much, much worse than their animal counterparts. Neo-communist warlords, police forces, primitive survivors, tunnel raiders, zombies, scientific exploration teams and bands of veterans complete the picture.



Some of our favorite figures from www.leadadventure.com

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This will be a full color, 48 page book with pre-designed factions. The profiles are built with the usual Javascript troop builder so you may tweak them if what we put in the book doesn't really fit with your plans. This is going to be a *shooty* game (nearly all figures come equipped with firearms) with a campaign system and vehicle rules. **Apocalypticum** will be playtested by some of the fine gentlemen of the Lead Adventure forum.

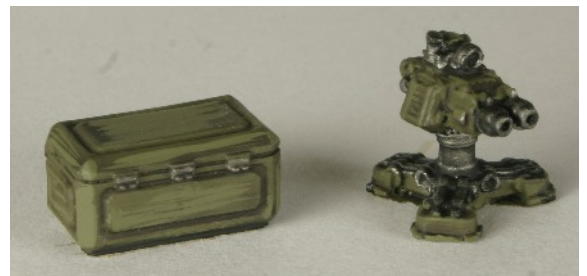


The other ruleset inspired by a miniatures line is **Swatters**, a large scale bug-hunting science fiction game inspired by the Khurasan Miniatures 15mm models. Troops move and fire as units (fire teams or swarms of bugs). This is designed to be played with plenty of figures on a large table (6x4' is possible, although most of the testing is being done on a 4x3' or a 4x4'). Twelve scenarios and two ready to run army lists (plus a point system to create more) are included in the book.

The rules are very simple. They are not meant for players who love a lot of detail. Weapons are abstracted into general classes and effects, you won't see a bonus for high caliber or the like. The idea here is to play a large battle to a conclusion in one hour or slightly more, nuke bugs from orbit and clean up infested planets.

Figures represent one man or bug each, and move using mini-CD as cohesion distance trays. Models fight as whole units (I.e., one die is rolled for the whole unit, and the unit has a Combat score equal to the number of active, non-flinching figures on it). Leadership is represented by the ability to recover those flinching models and bring back the units to full combat efficiency.

Work in progress logo for SWATTERS

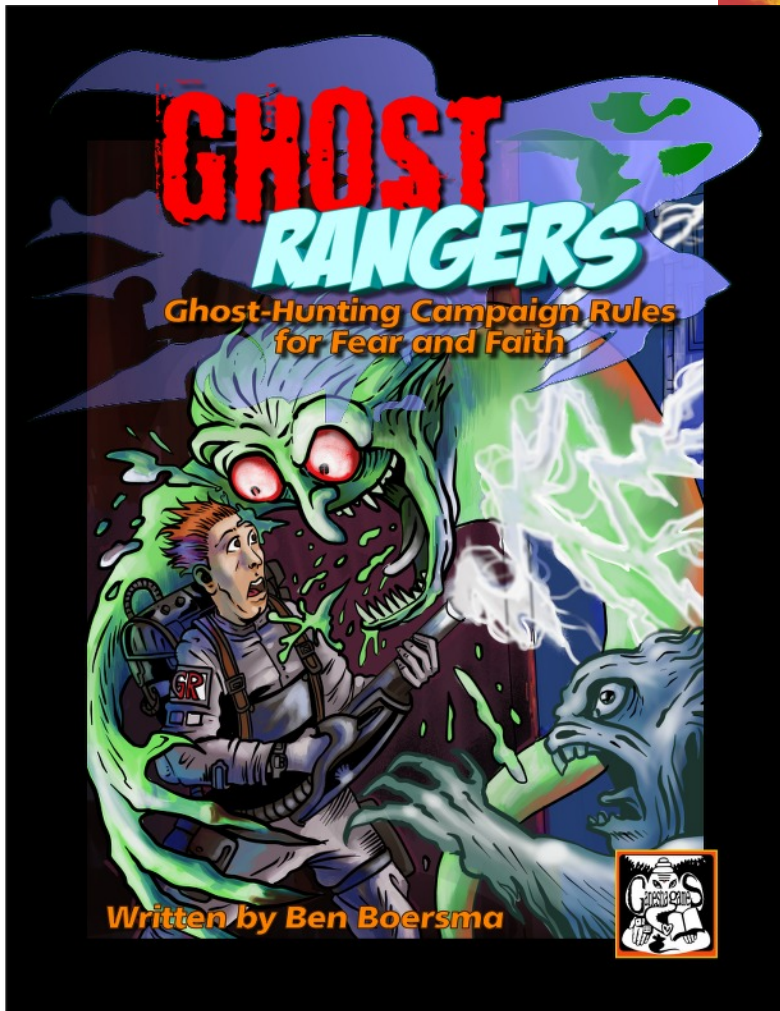
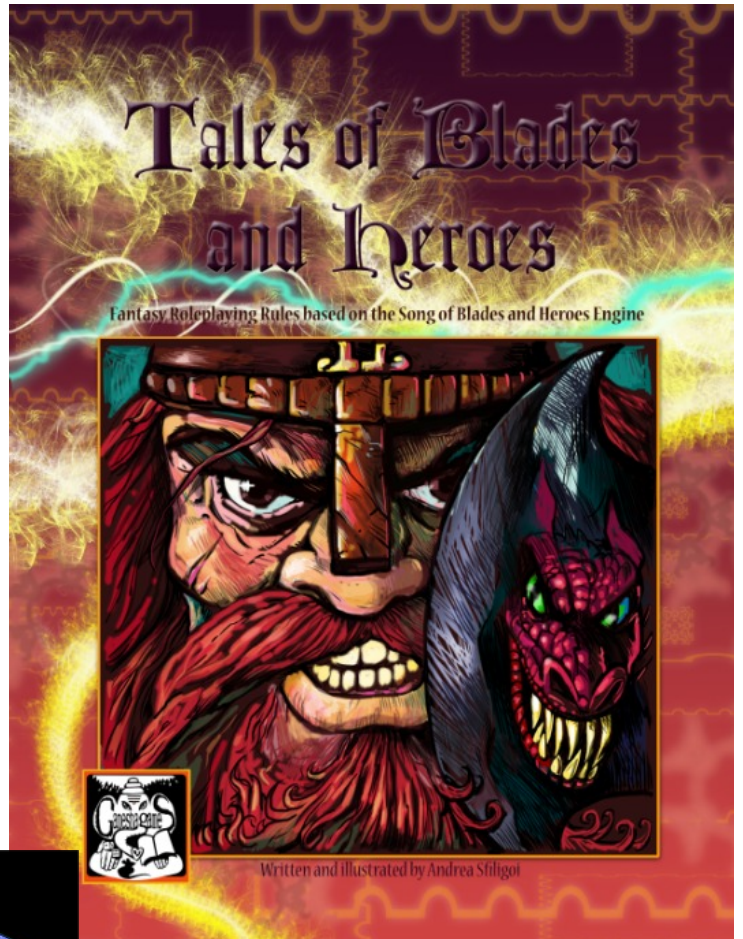


A few SWATTERS figures from Khurasan

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Available Soon

The two books closest to publication date at the moment of writing are **Ghostrangers** (Ben Boersma ghost hunting campaign supplement for *Fear and Faith*) and **Tales of Blades and Heroes** (Ganesha Games generic fantasy RPG, a book for players and Gms of the roleplaying game, soon to be followed by the GM's book/monster compendium *Tales of Beasts and Perils*. Both should be available before the end of February, 2012 if the gods of layout and editing assist us.



Battle

Report

The 95th Rifles' Song of Drums and Shakos

Originally appeared at

<http://wargaming.info/2011/the-95th-rifles-song-of-drums-and-shakos/>

By John Moher at Wargaming.info
(<http://wargaming.info>)



I've been giving some thought to skirmish gaming over the last year or so – it started with Fantasy, as I was looking for something to do with my collection of classic D&D (Dungeon's & Dragons) RPG figures that I've collected over the years (which are quite a mix with some dating from the early 1980s, others being more recent 2000 acquisitions prompted by the release of the 3rd Edition D&D rules which had tempted a (very) brief revisit to the Pen & Paper RPG world. However the idea rapidly spread to Napoleonics (as I wanted to use my assorted surplus figures from my larger Lasalle armies for smaller games), and eventually the early New Zealand Wars, and ultimately the 18th Century F&IW (French & Indian War)

I was looking for something simple, fast, and suitable for fairly small forces (and if possible that could cover multiple periods), and that would be great for quick 1-2 hour games on small tables when there wasn't opportunity to play full sized games, and perhaps incorporation into campaigns for minor actions... My original thoughts were to use Sharpe Practice as I'd heard lots of good things about it, so I purchased these and several supplements and while promising one thing that

struck me is there's a lot of focus on larger games so it's not really a true 'skirmish' set, as it's designed for you to run anything from 30-150 figures a side...

However meanwhile at the Auckland Wargaming Club (NZ) a couple of the guys had been trying out **Song of Drums and Shakos** (SDS) and they had been finding them fast, easy to play and enjoyable, and they were much more focused towards games of around 6-24 figures a side. What's more, in addition to Napoleonic's they'd ideally suit and be easily adaptable to small scale actions of the early New Zealand Wars (i.e. the Wairau Affray, Flagstaff War, Hutt Valley Campaign, & Wanganui Campaign over 1843-1847) and obviously F&IW games too. What's more they already had the fantasy stuff covered I mentioned above with the original Song of Blades and Heroes (SBH)! So I quickly picked up both SBH and SDS and several supplements including the latter's expansion More Drums and Shakos (MDS).

I soon organised a game with my regular opponent Kieran, who is a big fan of the rules, and set to work organising a force – I always only want to play historical games (as I just can't stand

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anachronistic opponents for some reason), and had hoped to use my force of Perry's dismounted French Dragoons (who are redundant from the Perry Plastic Dragoon units in my Lasalle French Army), however as Kieran had only French ready to use (actually a Polish Regiment – the French 6th Ligne I believe) I opted to use some of my British skirmish figures – the choice being either the 95th Rifles or some Highlanders. I opted for the former and quickly worked out a 'standard' 400 point force (okay well actually it was 401 points). My force consisted of Lieutenant Richard Sharpe (of course), "Chosen Men" Patrick Harper, Daniel Hagman, and Francis Cooper, and Riflemen Isaiah Tongue, Ben Perkins, and Ben Harris (all being characters out of the books and/or the TV series) – although Patrick Harper

couldn't be made an NCO due to lack of points! However all 7 men were rated with Élan, Light, & Rifle armed, while the three "Chosen Men" were also Marksmen and Lieutenant Sharpe was also obviously a Leader and rated Sword as well as Rifle armed.

Kieran meanwhile had a detachment of fairly average French Ligne Infantry, okay well actually they were Polish, so in real life a bit better than average, and his force included an Officer, NCO, Porte-Fanion (Standard Bearer), Drummer, 3 Grenadiers, 3 Voltigeurs, and 3 Fusiliers – 13 men in total! The 95th would be outnumbered nearly 2:1. However they had minimal special ratings, the Grenadiers obviously being rated Strong (so a *mêlée* bonus) and the Voltigeurs rated Light, but otherwise

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their muskets had less accuracy than the 95th Rifles Baker rifles, while the Officer had only a Pistol & Sword, and the Drummer was unarmed (his benefit being the ability to transmit orders further than voice range). Quality-wise all the troops were similar with both sides Officers & the Polish NCO, Porte-Fanion, & Drummer all being better (3+) than the remaining troops on both sides (4+); however as the 95th Rifles all had Élan they effectively were one better again for motivation/initiative (i.e. they were easier to activate to take actions than the



French/Polish). All except the Polish Drummer (+1) had the same combat rating (+2) when it came to mêlée, shooting, and such (the difference for shooting being the Baker rifles of the 95th).

The action would be an encounter, with two forces moving to occupy a small farm. A French detachment was out foraging for their regiment, and happened across a British patrol watching the flank of a larger British force. Lieutenant Sharpe on observing the approaching French deployed his men in 3 teams of two, each led by a “Chosen Man”, positioning himself with the centre team. The plan was to secure the farmyard’s flanks with two of the teams and then personally lead the central team to the decisive position as needed. The Polish

meanwhile approached the farmyard either side of a low rise in 2 loose groups, one heading for the farmhouse (led by Lieutenant Koslowski and Officer portant le fanion Gryzbowski) and the other the barn (led by Sergeant Adamicz). The 95th Riflemen had the advantage of the ground and were first to the buildings, the two flank teams quickly moving alongside both buildings while Sharpe’s team moved into the centre of the farmyard.

Meanwhile the Poles advanced somewhat sporadically – not showing the same urgency as the Riflemen. In fact Kieran was being a bit more cautious, as the Polish were a bit harder to activate (not having the Élan of the Riflemen), so he wasn’t risking rolling 3 dice per figure for actions (as failure on 2 or more dice immediately handed initiative back to the enemy). Consequently the Poles were only conducting 1 or 2 actions to the 2-3 of each Rifleman. The Poles however had some readymade cover immediately in front of them, as both groups had some convenient linear obstacles (stone walls or hedges) they could gain cover from once they advanced – the Riflemen’s only equivalent being to occupy the farm

buildings if able. While Patrick Harper & Ben Perkins investigated the farmhouse on the left flank, “Chosen Man” Francis Cooper on the right began engaging Sergeant Adamicz’s group on the British right, from the side of the barn, his first shot knocking one of the Poles off his feet. In the centre Sharpe was uncharacteristically indecisive and led Hagman and Tongue forward somewhat cautiously (he was attempting group moves and getting dreadful activation rolls despite only needing 2+ due to his Élan)...

There followed a period of intermittent fire and cautious maneuvering – on the British left Harper & Perkins got into the farmhouse and Harper finally (after great procrastination) began

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sniping (very ineffectually) from the 1st floor window, supported by Perkins from the front doorway (also very ineffectually). On the British right Cooper was much more effective, his fire forcing the Poles off their feet or back a couple of times, but not able to get a telling hit. Harris was in support but only managed to get off one shot the whole time. Both groups of Poles meanwhile continued to advance slowly, moving up close behind the stone wall and hedge respectively... The Poles were also sporadically returning fire once they got into range, but their muskets were not as accurate as the Baker rifles – however out of the blue a Voltigeur got a lucky shot off at “Chosen Man” Daniel Hagman that ripped through the poor rifleman and instantly felled him with a serious wound! That was then promptly followed by one of the other Poles getting a near-miss on Isaiah Tongue that knocked him off his feet.

and combined with the other Riflemen occasionally losing the initiative before Sharpe could even attempt to take an action it made his group incredibly inert). In fact things weren't going that flash for the British generally, and the much vaunted 95th Riflemen weren't hitting much with their rifles at all! This ineffectual firing and maneuvering had now been going on for some time.

The Poles however were getting into a stronger position as the fight progressed, most of their men were in cover now, and many were able to snipe back (albeit at long range) at the British. What's more most of the British were in the open or at least in a position that only provided cover from some of the enemy. About this time Patrick Harper abandoned his upstairs window to move downstairs to rejoin Perkins – the intent being to join up with Sharpe and Tongue for an assault on the group of Poles behind the stonewall (in a combined group move led by Sharpe).



This seemed to impact Sharpe quite critically – despite repeated attempts to advance and engage the Poles he just refused to do so – losing all motivation and able to only fire off a sporadic shot at the closer group led by Lieutenant Koslowski (in fact activation rolls for Sharpe were pretty dreadful for the entire game – he seemed to be a magnet for 1s on the dice

Sharpe was still decidedly indecisive and numbers were starting to build up against the riflemen – on the right Cooper and Harris were in serious danger of being hit and in fact were dangerously close to being charged, so they began withdrawing to the rear of the barn. Harper finally emerged

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Do you have a blog? If you write battle reports of games based on our products, please send them to us for inclusion in the next issue of **Free Hack**.

from the 1st floor into the farmhouse's kitchen to join Perkins (obviously having been first waylaid by some "Enlisted Man's Shopping" within the farmhouse – actually he rolled poorly for a couple of activation attempts)...

It was by then apparent the Riflemen were going to struggle to overcome the Poles – as the ranges closed the Polish numbers would start to tell, and the Riflemen's superior accuracy and motivation (although there had been little actual evidence of either so far in the game) were going to be neutralized, so there was no choice but to begin a withdrawal, and after the initial moves of such at which point we called the game over; with a nominal winning draw to the Polish (as we agreed the Rifles would be able to make a fairly clean and prompt get away from their current positions due to their Élan). As a first game of SDS it had been an interesting experience and highlighted the need for some planning in your actions,

and the old maxims of concentration of force and simplicity! With the way the SDS mechanics work it was a key difference for the Riflemen to be able to throw 3 dice at times with a reasonable chance of getting 2-3 actions and not losing the initiative, but still highlighted the need not to rely on such things continuously. While Kieran was reduced to throwing 2 and often just 1 dice for actions to minimise the risk of losing the initiative too easily, and/or keeping his chaps close to their leaders to facilitate 'group moves' for similar reasons! So generally a positive first outing with some obvious subtle effects and in some respects a similar style of game to Arty Conliffe's Crossfire with the initiative and variable bounds (which also augurs well as I rate the latter very highly). So I will be looking forward to another bash in the near future, and then hopefully a fantasy game or two with SBH... And first impressions of SDS are "Highly Recommended".

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A Behind the Scenes Look at Power Legion

By Paul Turner

Look! Up in the sky. It's a bird, it's a plane, It's Power Legion! This is how all super hero skirmish games should start. I recently saw where Power Legion, Ganesha's SOBH super hero offshoot needed some play testers and with a horde of unused Hero Clix figs, I was game. As I offer a few thoughts on the game, let me be clear, I received a rough, unfinished version, hence the play testing, but even a rough version played with the strength of the Green Muscle Dude. I began statting up my teams, both villains and heroes. There is a learning curve here that is different from other Song engine games, because you have to have a power to act, and every ability has a cost. Once you learn this, you'll be pro character creator in no time. The villains I chose were lesser-known villains to see how they played, and I was not disappointed. I have changed the names of the heroes and villains to keep in compliance with trademarks, but you are free to guess their real names. My villains were :

Ball and Chain

Mind Spell

The Aussie

Total Points: 925

And six Mooks to help out and be hero punching bags if nothing else. The Heroes I chose were

The American Shield

Red Devil

Eagle Eye

Crazy Claws

Total Points: 1500.

The point difference was largely due to one hero who had a bunch of qualities you could not leave off as to be true to the character. In fact, both teams were pretty even when we started, but I had to add some abilities as I went because I would say things like, "Well he should be able to do that." But, don't let the point difference fool you; this was a tough battle. You can find the battle report on the Yahoo Message Boards.

What I liked:

Authenticity

This game played like a comic book battle. Because of Ball and Chain's tough skin and Armor 2 rating, Crazy Claws would often cause him to recoil. He was not taken down until I could get a few heroes over there to help out.

Varied Consequences

The damage table adds a fun twist to the game because of the increased knockbacks and the potential for being K.O'd. or thrown off the table. You can be hit and still battle on but you may be stunned, groggy, or exhausted from the battle.

What I struggled with:

Like I said earlier, this was a rough copy of the game, which made it a little difficult in the explanation department. You

can't over explain something to me, so I look forward to more examples, and clearer definition in the complete package.

In the end, you should dust off your cape, shine up those boots, and get your eight bucks ready, because this is another great product coming from Ganesha Games.



Sample Characters for Flashing Steel

Swordsman/ Swashbuckler Phillippe

Q3 C3 Rapier Pistol Panache, Blur of Steel, Danger sense, Hero, 103 pts

Swordsman/ Swashbuckler Diego

Q3 C3 Rapier, Main-gauche, Panache, Dashing, Elite, Multiple foes, 92 pts

Swordsman/ Swashbuckler Gustav

Q3 C3 Rapier, Pistol, Panache, Impetus, Follow on, Great defense, Hero, 107 pts

Guardsman Alphons

Q4 C2 Rapier, Pistol, Polearm, Guardsman, Bodyguard, 35 pts

Guardsman Ettiene

Q4 C2 Rapier, Main-gauche, Polearm, Guardsman, Gang, Eager, 54 pts

Guardsman Jean

Q4 C2 Rapier, Light musket, Polearm, Guardsman, Gang 54 pts

Soldier Hans

Q4 C3 Sword, Pistol, Double pistols, Second In Command, Steady under fire, 52 pts

Soldier Claus

Q4 C2 Sword Heavy musket, Brawler, Quick reactions, 55 pts

Soldier Pieter

Q4 C2 Sword, Pike, Danger sense, Murderous, Steady under fire, 53 pts

Highwayman Thom

Q4 C3 Sword, Pistol, Double pistols, Fear, 47pts

Highwayman Harry

Q4 C2 Club, Pugilist, Slippery, 30pts

Highwayman Dick

Q4 C2 Light musket, Knife, Leader, 47 pts

Militia Francois

Q5 C2 Light musket, Guardsman, 19 pts

Militia Herman

Q5 C1 Sword, Guardsman, 12 pts

Militia Oscar

Q5 C1 Club, Guardsman, Eager, 11 pts

Assassin The faceless one

Q3 C3 Acrobat, Fearless, Knife thrower, Rapier, Follow on, Firelock musket, 81 pts

Assassin Herr Schwarz

Q3 C3 Sneaky, Sprint, Wall climber, Maximise weapon, Multiple foes, Firelock musket, Murderous, 86 pts

Assassin Doktor Tote

Q3 C3 Dashing, Leader, Panache, Passing strike, Rapier, 90 pts

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Thug Boris

Q4 C2 Club, Strong, 23 pts

Thug Eric

Q5 C2 Sword, Brawler, 35 pts

Fanatic Dominic

Q4 C3 Fanatic, Sword, Impetus, 47 pts

Fanatic Francisco

Q4 C2 Hatred, Main-gauche, Dashing, 31 pts

Fanatic Alessandro

Q4 C1 Fanatic, Pistol, Double pistols, Follow on, 39 pts

Gypsy Esmeralda

Q4 C1 Acrobat, Climber, Sneaky, Physician 20 pts

Gypsy Marko

Q4 C1 Light musket, Hawkeye/poacher, Forester, 26 pts

Gypsy Saphira

Q4 C1 Blur of steel, 23 pts

Civilian Otto

Q5 Co Club, Passing strike, 16 pts

Civilian Helga

Q5 Co Leader, 16 pts

Civilian Michel

Q5 Co Polearm (pitchfork), 11 pts

Aristocrat George

Q3 C3 Rapier, Main-gauche, Duellist, 60 pts

Aristocrat Louis

Q4 C3 Rapier, Pistol, Duellist, Mounted, 61 pts

Aristocrat Heinrich

Q4 C2 Sword, Mounted, Duellist 38 pts

Pirate Long John

Q4 C3 Brawler, Great defence, Murderous, One leg, Sea legs, Parrot, Sword 73 pts

Pirate Old Tom

Q4 C2 Acrobat, Club, Lucky Tattoo, Drunkard, Sea legs, 31 pts

Pirate Captain Foot

Q3 C2 Acrobat, Dashing, Duellist, Leader, Main gauche (hook), Sea legs, Rapier, 76 pts

Pirate Toothless Bill

Q4 C1 Acrobat, Pistol, Double pistols, Gang, Drunkard, Sea legs, Monkey, Sword, 38 pts



FLASHING STEEL

Flashing Steel Background and Designer's Notes

By Andrew Boswell

The period of 1560 to 1660 marks the final transition between the medieval and the modern. Before, there were kings and aristocrats (robber barons made good) who conducted their wars as personal vendettas using their populations as disposal pawns. After, came the ideas of scientific discourse, the rights of man, the responsibilities of government and the equality of all mankind.

Spain enjoyed its peak and then decline as the world superpower. Gold from the New World made it rich, but its feudal economy had it teetering on the brink of bankruptcy at the same time. Spanish Tercios ruled the battlefield until surpassed by the more agile Dutch and Swedish formations.

France was home to the semi-mythical Musketeers that Dumas wrote of. It was torn apart by religious war between the protestant Huguenots and the royal Roman Catholics. When Louis the XIII came to the throne as a child he had Cardinal Richelieu, a dedicated statesman, to assist him. The Cardinal reduced the power of the aristocracy – always the bane of French politics – and centralised it around the king. He made few friends.

Protestant England was an unregarded secondary power until the unprecedented victory over the Spanish invasion fleet in 1588. It was if a flea had toppled an elephant. Elizabeth I ruled till 1603. Shakespeare died in 1616. The English Civil Wars started in 1642 in the first of what was to become a long list of revolutions across

the world where the divine rights of kings were stripped away.

Germany was a geographic shorthand. Instead, there were hundreds of countries and principalities in what was called The Holy Roman Empire. The Empire was prosperous and powerful, led by the Austrian branch of the same family that ruled Spain. When the Reformation came and different countries chose what faith to follow, the administrative structure of the Empire was unable to cope and as a result it fell into the devastating 30 Years War.

Flanders, or what we now called The Netherlands and Belgium flew into revolt against its Spanish masters in what became the 80 Years War. Lower Flanders remained Spanish (now Belgium) and the upper part remained unrepentant and heretic.

This was also a golden age of Piracy. Spain's world supremacy depended on its control of the sea-lanes. England, France, and the Dutch actively challenged the Spanish at sea, where they were unable to directly hit on land. This is the age of Sir Francis Drake.

On the periphery of Europe, the Transylvanians, now finally subdued by the Turks, invaded the Empire on several occasions. Ottoman Turkey itself had started its long decline from greatness, but still mounted several assaults on the Empire. The adventures of Baron Munchausen occur just after this

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period. The dreaded Polish Winged Hussars were at their peak. Sweden surged from being a vassal of Denmark to being the pre-eminent Baltic power, and then withered away again.

Outside of Europe, China was enjoying the rule of the Ming Dynasty, and Japan was wrapping up its Sengoku Jidei civil wars and settling into a period of isolation.

WEAPONS AND TACTICS

This period is generally referred to as the Pike and Shot age. The armoured knights of previous centuries became too expensive to maintain, and the twin power of trained professional infantrymen armed with long spears (pike) and muskets cut them down.

Command and control on the battlefield was extremely limited. The best a commander could do was organise his army as it formed up, and then hope that this carried the day. Training made the difference, along with initiative at the lower ranks. It was a peculiar time of professionalism mixed with individual heroism.

THE SWORD

The weapon of choice for the late Renaissance gentleman was the rapier: a narrow bladed cut and thrust weapon that used advanced steel making techniques to make it as light as possible. It was often paired with a secondary short sword to parry with.

It should not be confused with modern competition fencing swords, which have been reduced to ballet proportions and are designed to prevent injury.

Other swords were utilised for their heavy power: the Zweihander and Claymore (two handed swords), their cheapness to produce for common infantry issue, or for other reasons such as ease of use in the saddle.

Every man of substance was expected to be armed at all times in Renaissance Europe. Fights for honour or revenge were everyday events. Offences to face or dignity were expected to be remedied quickly, and with blood.



THE GUN

The standard musket of the period was muzzle-loaded and fired by bringing a smouldering saltpetre-soaked cord into the flash pan.

Heavy, or regular, line infantry at the start of this period were armed with large and cumbersome muskets that fired a ball of half an inch or larger (remembering that there was no such thing as 'factories' producing these things. Every one was hand made, though

standardisation was a desirable outcome). These large muskets required a rest in order to keep the muzzle pointed in the right direction.

Smaller and lighter muskets were developed to allow greater mobility, right up to models for use on horseback.

The firelock, or flintlock, musket was a high-tech development that ignited the main charge by striking a flint against steel. Though technically no more lethal than matchlocks, they were cheaper to keep in the field as troops did not need to be

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supplied with matchcord, and they were undoubtedly safer to use. The basic pattern developed by the end of this period was more or less the same as those that carried by Napoleon's troops to glory.

Pistols were usually wheel locks, expensive and complicated pieces of machinery that had clockwork mechanisms to throw sparks into the firing pan.

BIG GUNS

Conspicuous by their absence in these rules are artillery pieces. At the time, cannon were hugely heavy and drawn by large ox teams (with the exception of the few specialist types). They were beloved by technology-loving rulers and this fascination fuelled experimentation. In time their reducing weight made them practical tactical weapons. But in the Late Renaissance, cannon were predominantly immobile on the battlefield and more significant in siege actions.

This should not prevent you from modelling them in your games. They make excellent objectives for raiding parties.



DESIGNER'S NOTES

The core engine was already complete with *Songs of Blades* and *Heroes*. The system was so generic, so streamlined, that it provided a strong foundation for this work.

What we wanted to do was incorporate the successful ideas that came out of *And One For All* from Eureka Miniatures: the free wheeling swashbuckling pace of Renaissance combat.

Pace is what it is all about. A Renaissance musket was not the same as a Napoleonic musket. It was slower to load, for a start. It was also fired using a live, burning matchcord, which made it even slower for safety reasons. But it was the terror weapon of the age. Make no mistake, if you were hit, you were in a lot of trouble. It was the musket that ended the reign of the armored knight.

On top of this, Europe had been at almost continual war for over a thousand years. Nowadays we associate the words 'martial arts' with Eastern practices. But Europe was awash with martial arts schools, teaching every conceivable way of killing and maiming your fellow man either with or without a weapon. The fact that the Europeans lost these arts is a historian's tragedy. It is a testament to Asian sensibilities that they preserved theirs in the face of technological redundancy.

So, the goal of these rules was to slow down the pace of gunfire, but increase its relative lethality, while at the same time increasing the pace of close combat to reflect the dynamic professional environment.

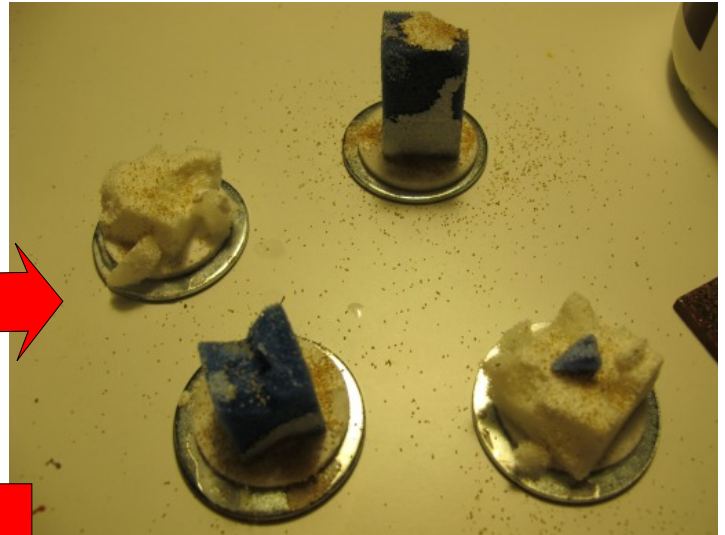
And also, of course, we wanted to allow the kinds of dramatic, cinematic action that we enjoyed when we watched *The Three Musketeers*. It may have been fantasy, but it was good fun. That's how we like to imagine our history.

Stomping Grounds

Building scenics for *Mighty Monsters* with scrap materials, by Andrea Sfiligoi

Destroyed Buildings

I had some leftover pieces of foam in a box. Actually, these are the pieces you pull out of a miniature-carrying case. They are the right size to model some destroyed buildings to go with my 40-70mm gashapons I use for my *Mighty Monsters* games. So I white-glued them on heavy steel washers and added a little grit on top...



I added some polyfilla on top to create flames and let it dry for a few hours. A big gloop of polyfilla may take the whole night to dry. Add it straight from the tube, creating a flame-shaped swirl as you do so. Smaller drops may be used to model smaller flames on the sides of the buildings.



Spray them black, then paint. Gray for the still intact parts of the building, yellow and red for the flames. Here's how they look next to plastic buildings and gashapons. I use a square piece of MDF as a play area.

Gashapon figures by BANDAI.

Plastic buildings from MONSTERPOCALYPSE collectible game by Privateer Press.

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Monster Island

This was my big project for the launch of the Italian edition of Mighty Monsters at Lucca Comics and Games, quite possibly the geekdom's largest get-together. It had to be large enough to catch the eye and hold a sizeable amount of monsters, so visitors could recognize their favorite critters from a distance. My modeling skills are limited at best and I had only two days to finish this. This is how I did it.



Take a 3x3' piece of very thick foam core (polystyrene sheet used for insulation) and cut the island shape with a hot wire cutter. Sand it to give it a rough finish (use fine grain sandpaper). Make sure you sand it outside – the polystyrene “dust” is not something you want on your clothes, lungs, or house. Wear some work clothes and vacuum them when you're finished.

With patience and a bit of elbow grease, I created a depression on one side to represent a beach.

Also using the hot wire cutter, you can cut away a small section and the lift it, leaving it in place. This creates a cave. Maybe this makes little sense from a geological point of view, but looks good on the table. Plus it's a nice flat surface that a monster may use to gain a height advantage.



Paint it all with acrylics. Use a flat color base (do not use spray cans as the solvents will melt the polystyrene and cause noxious fumes), then dry-brush with a lighter color so that the rough texture of the ground shows.

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I also created a volcano (similar to a layered cake) and boulders/rocky hills with the extra foamcore. All is painted with the same basic browns and left to dry.

Here's how the island looks .



More texture can be added to the island by sprinkling train-modeling grit, sand etc over patches of white glue/PVA. Be careful with other glue types as they may cause a chemical reaction with the polystyrene (I do it on purpose with spray glue when I want to create a weathered look but please do it outside as the fumes are really noxious .

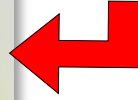


Dry brush the surface with a much lighter color to bring out details. I scored some crevices and holes in the ground using nails, blades and ballpoint pens, painted the inside black, and then dry-brushed the edges of the crevice with a light gray/tan color.

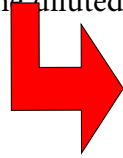
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I added sand on the beach. This is not real sand but extra fine modeling grit from Gale Force Nine.



These crevices were made by hitting the foam with a hammer and then pouring some diluted ink in the cracks.



It's now time to add flock to create patches of green. Other forms of vegetation (shrubs, trees) are best kept removable (i.e., do not glue them on the island) so you can easily change the layout of the island for a different scenario.

Use white glue/PVA for the flock.

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Small trees can be modeled by taking small nails or bits of copper wire, rolling one end into a gloop of semi-hard white glue/PVA, then rolling the gloop into a jar of flock. Let them dry overnight. If one end of the wire is pointed enough, you can drive them through the foamcore and place them where you need them.

Here I used white metal leftover spears from 28mm *Song of Spear and Shield* figures. Nothing goes to waste!



Here's the finished island! Place on a dark blue felt mat to represent the ocean. I used fluorescent red play-doh to model the lava flowing from the volcano. This is not truly recommended if you plan to reuse the lava, as the play-doh cracks when it dries. If you keep it in its plastic container, though, it will last a few games.



Drums and Shakos Large Battles Review and Playtest

By Dale Hurtt

Originally posted on Dale's Wargames on <http://daleswargames.blogspot.com/>

Review

Well, I've been waiting for this one for a long time: Ganesha Games has finally released the English edition of Drums and Shakos Large Battles (DSL B)! And only for a mere \$8 as a PDF. So what do you get for your money? A full-color version of the rules (meant for an e-book reader), an ink saver version of the rules, separate front and back cover pages in color, and a Quick Reference Sheet (QRS).

In case you have not been following the progress of these rules on the Song of Blades Yahoo forum or the [author's blog](#), DSL B is "designed for Divisional-level battles where each player controls two to three Brigades and a small reserve".

Units are represented by bases of multiple figures, rather than individually based figures. (I am sure you can use movement trays to solve that issue, however.) An infantry unit is a battalion of four bases, cavalry a regiment of two bases, and artillery a battery of 2 bases. The number of figures on a base is irrelevant and the preferred basing is:

- Infantry bases with a frontage of 1.5:1 to 2:1 to depth.
- Infantry and cavalry bases with the same frontage.
- All players using the same basing scheme.

Free Hack is a house organ magazine, but we ask for bloggers' permission to "reprint" their reviews of our games. No real edit has been done other than by the original author on the text so any criticism of the game is left unchanged. We think that this could help us make better games in the future! If you have any detailed reviews, please submit them for inclusion in the next issues.

The game requires several markers: disorder 1-3, battery fired, proximity violation, and successful reaction. For measuring sticks they now use: Very Short, Short, Medium, Long, 2 x Medium, and 3 x Long.

As with previous variants with the Song engine, a unit has a Quality and a Combat score (although artillery only has Quality). In addition, a unit tracks its Disorder level, which is from 0 to 3. The more you are disordered, the more dice your enemy will roll against you in combat. Further, disorder affects your unit's ability to approach the enemy and to count for victory purposes. An important note: once a unit is disordered (DIS1 or more), it can never rally back to DIS0. Finally, infantry units will have a Skirmish (SK) value, represented as singly based figures.

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As with most Napoleonic rules where units equal battalions, the infantry can form in Line, March Column, Attack Column, and Square, cavalry can form in Line or Column, and artillery can be Limbered or Unlimbered (deployed). Unlike some other rules, you do not have to be behind a unit's front edge to count as being on the flank; if an enemy unit starts wholly outside of a unit's front arc (which is basically straight ahead), it is considered on its flank or rear.

Command span for Leaders has changed from 1L to 2M and is not affected by line of sight. There is now a Commander in Chief, which is a Leader of Leaders (much like the Captain in Sixty-One Sixty-Five) who has a Command span of only 1L, but it allows a Leader within range to re-roll 1 failed activation dice.

The heart of the Song engine is the activation roll and the resulting number of actions. In DSLB the player still chooses to roll one, two, or three dice and compares each die to the unit's (or Leader's) Quality to determine if it is a success or failure. As with other Song rules, two or more failures is significant; however rather than ending your turn, you simply end any more chances of activation for that specific Brigade. What differs from the other rules is that a failure now allows your opponent to try a Reaction.

For each failure in activation, your opponent can throw 1D6 to attempt a reaction by one of their units. There are a number of restrictions to reactions, but suffice it to say that the primary one is that a unit can only successfully react once per turn. Reactions, however, can be performed either before the acting unit's actions, in between its actions, or after all of its actions are completed. What is slick about this reaction system is

this is how cavalry counter-charges, defensive fire against charges, evasions from charges, first volleys, etc. all occurs without complex reaction rules. Granted, it takes a failure on the part of your opponent, and then a success on your part, to pull off, but it is elegant.

Group orders are handled much differently now. Issuing the group order uses an action by the Leader, as before, but now the activation by the group is made against the Leader's Quality, not the lowest Quality value within the group. This means that a good Leader can lead poor quality troops around rather effectively. Group orders cannot be used, however, to get within Approach (1S) range.

DSLB treats the Reserve specially. First, let me state that it is good to see rules that call out a Reserve and have a definition and a function for them. In DSLB they are essentially a pool of units under the care of the Commander-in-Chief, who doles them out to other Brigades. Units in the Reserve do not move until they are assigned out.

(Remember though, this is a Divisional Reserve and the Commander-in-Chief is the Division Commander, not Napoleon or Wellington!)



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Movement in DSLB is handled a little differently than in 61-65. In the latter rules you move a specified distance, but had a limitation on the number of actions that could be used for moves, based on your formation. In DSLB you can move for as many actions as you rolled, but the formation dictates how far each move is. To be honest, I prefer the DSLB way, as it is easier to remember. Basically movement is 1S for infantry in Line and 1M for infantry in column while cavalry is 1L. Movement is within the arc of 45° to the front, anything outside of that causes a reduction of one length (e.g. 1S become 1VS, 1M becomes 1S, etc.). Maneuvers allowed are: move straight, move oblique (up to 45°), move laterally, move backwards, wheel (up to 90°), and about face.

There is an interesting rule in DSLB: the Proximity Rule states that a unit cannot end its movement within 1VS of another friendly unit, unless it is Approaching an enemy. The author later explained that this was to avoid jamming troops up against each other, making for a "more Napoleonic" look.'

Combat is represented in three ways: Bombardment, Approach, and Contact. Bombardment is only allowed to unlimbered artillery, while Approach is the range of volleys (although cavalry does get to fight in Approach). Finally, Contact is very short-ranged firefights, cavalry melees, and even the rare bayonet charge.

Unlike other Song rules, DSLB has you roll a number of Combat Dice (CD). Only three of them count, but if you have more, they are not completely wasted. Each side compares its dice, from highest to lowest, to determine how many (and which) wins you achieve. The number of dice you throw is affected type of combat, type of unit, formation of the unit, range (for bombardment), the enemy unit being disordered, and conditions. The nice

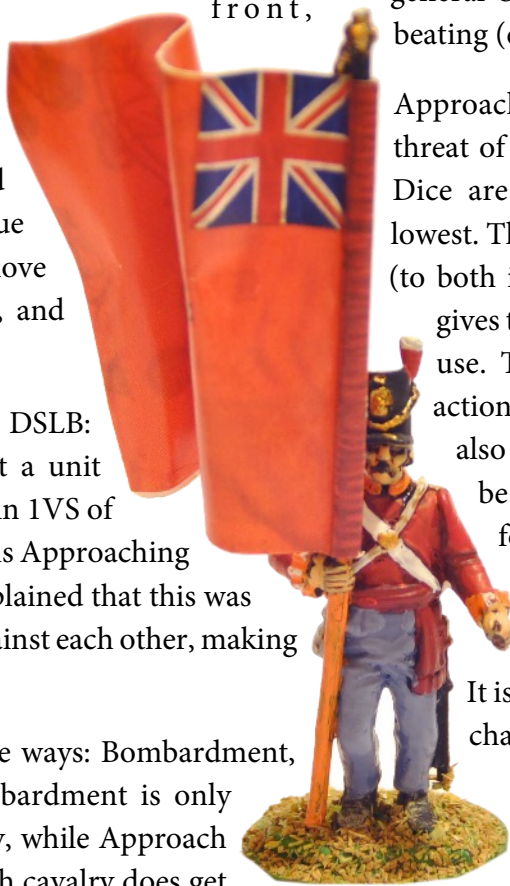
part is that the modifiers add or subtract dice, not modify the die rolls themselves.

For Bombardment, the battery winning the first (highest) die results in the target being Disordered, but winning the second die results in the target retreating, while winning the third die allows the shot to bounce through and hit a target behind. So, as you can see, the opposed die rolls provide more variety than in the general Song engine, which concerns itself with beating (even and odd), doubling, and tripling.

Approach represents volleying and the morale threat of cavalry. As with Bombardment, Combat Dice are rolled and compared from highest to lowest. The first die can inflict disorder on the loser (to both in a draw), but the second and third die gives the winner of that comparison an action to use. Thus the attacker could have 0, 1, or 2 actions from approach while the defender could also have actions. Generally, these actions can be used to move into contact, change formation, back away from the opponent, and even cancel out one action of your opponent.

It is these actions that help represent counter-charging, forming a hasty square in the face of a cavalry charge, etc. that relieves the author of writing a whole slew of special rules to cover special situations. Forming square is simply a formation change, but if you did not do it in anticipation of a cavalry charge and were caught in line when the charge was launched, you had better win one of those actions in the Approach! I like it!

Contact is a consequence of Approach; you must use one of the actions from the Approach combat results to move forward into Contact. Combat in contact is much more decisive (as you might imagine). The first die determines who wins and there are a number of situations in which a loss in Contact means



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your unit is eliminated. Note: infantry not in square against cavalry is one of those situations.

If cavalry eliminates their enemy after Contact, and another enemy unit is within range, they can take a Breakthrough and move directly into Contact with the second enemy unit. Personally, I have always liked cavalry breakthrough moves.

There are rules for Built-Up Areas (towns, etc.), table setup and deployment, grand batteries, worn units, a host of special abilities to represent different units types (Militia, Cuirass, Lance, Impetuous, etc.) and Leaders (Charismatic, Cautious, etc.), some scenarios – both historical and conjectural – rules on making your own force lists, and even an FAQ.

The last item I want to focus on are the rules for winning the battle. The two criteria are: losses and penetration into enemy territory (gaining ground).

Before the game each player calculates their Divisional Break Point (DBP), which is basically 1/2 the number of units. As units are eliminated points are accumulated and once the DBP is reached, the battle is lost. Note that in general each unit is worth one point, but some are worth more, such as Guards, Elites, Heavy Cavalry, Artillery, and Leaders. In addition, which a Brigade is Shaken (has more DIS than units in the Brigade), an additional point towards the DBP is gained.

In addition, penetrating into the enemy's territory (moving units into the enemy's Zone 1, 2, or 3) temporarily creates points towards the DBP. So, for example, a cavalry unit breaking into the rear can have an effect on a Division that might ordinarily hold a little while longer.

If both players reach their DBP in the same phase, penetration into enemy territory is treated as a tie breaker.

Summary

I clearly like the Song engine – although these take them in new and exciting directions, rather than the tried and true – and these build on that foundation. Ross MacFarlane came up with a method of reviewing rules, so I will give that a try here.



Drama – The mechanism for activating – choosing the number of dice to roll and determining the number of successes – always adds tension for the player. It is lessened a bit by having two failures stop activation within a Brigade and not by t h e entire side, which is a good thing, but it is still lessened nonetheless.

Conversely, tension is increased because additional actions can be converted to Combat Dice. That and not limiting the number of movement actions gives the player more of a reason to push the envelope and roll more dice. I definitely like tying one player's gambling to the opponent (i.e. activation failures give your opponent a chance to react and exploit that failure).

Uncertainty – The Song engine is all about uncertainty, as it adds a number of random factors through the rules (activation, combat, etc.). Uncertainty is increased even more, due to your opponent being able to react during your move and to the way combat is resolved.

Engaging – DSLB engages the players with meaningful decisions. One of the features that I really like about DSLB is that a number of special rules are not required for special situations. A good example is forming square. Many rules simply let the player form square if charged by cavalry (some

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may require a roll to succeed). In many cases that takes away the incentive for the player to form square during his own turn, in anticipation. In DSLB you could form square, for example:

- During your own activation.
- In reaction to an enemy cavalry unit's activation failure.
- By winning an Approach action.

Forming square at each of those points has its own set of risks. Forming during your turn may cause the enemy to forego the charge and have them send in the infantry, to take advantage of your vulnerable formation. Forming during a reaction requires an enemy failure and a successful Quality check of your own, but at least you now know the cavalry is committing. But doing it then means your firing during Approach will be penalized. Waiting until winning an Approach action is clearly the riskiest proposition and would likely only occur when the infantry is clearly better quality than the cavalry (or if the player is an unrepentant gambler). Knowing when to take the risks, and knowing that the consequences change is what makes these rules so engaging.

Heads Up – This is the ability to easily memorize the rules, even to the point of playing without a QRS.

This is the area that will require confirmation by playing it a bit, but my gut feel is that the increased complexity of the combat interactions, especially what modifiers come into play in the three types of combat, will lower these rules' score in this area.

Appropriately Flavored – Largely it will be determined by the tables in the back of the rules that are used to build and purchase an army. Flavor is provided by adding combinations of Quality, Combat, and Special Rules and applying them to the units, but there is probably going to be a lot

of objections from the historical purists about how easy it is to produce an "unrealistic" force.

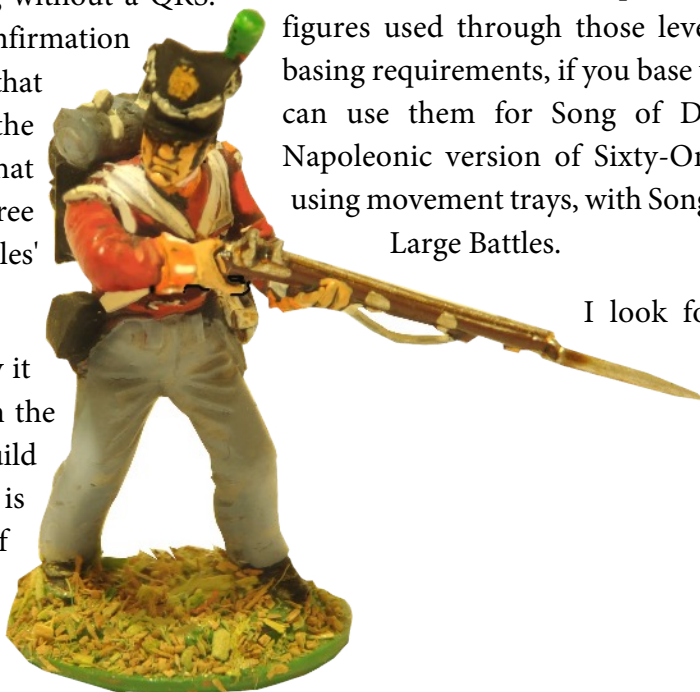
The use of skirmishers looks simple, but effective.

Another factor that the Napoleonic purists will not like, as they complain about it with other rules, is the generic size of all units. Specifically people like to see large units (Austrians, British Guards, etc.) modeled, which DSLB represents by adding to the Combat factor of a unit, not by adding to the number of bases.

Scalable – Ultimately these rules are targeted at a player controlling a Division of about 16 maneuver units. It is probably not difficult for an experienced player to handle more, but I think 24 would be about the limit. Multiple players per side would allow you to play out Corps-sized battles, but then you start running into problems with timing at the Divisional boundaries (i.e. which Division activates first). The typical method is to gloss over this problem and deal with it when the situation comes up, just so the turns keep moving. But it definitely could be a problem with a turn taking a long time, due to a lot of combat, with one Division, leaving all of the other Division commanders sitting around.

For me the question becomes one not of scaling these rules from skirmish to Corp-level, but that of scaling the figures used through those levels. Given the flexible basing requirements, if you base your figures singly you can use them for Song of Drums and Shakos, a Napoleonic version of Sixty-One Sixty-Five, and, by using movement trays, with Song of Drums and Shakos Large Battles.

I look forward very much to giving these rules a try.



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Playtest

I am wary to completely grade a set of rules on just a reading; so many times I have found what looks good on paper does not always work on the tabletop. I have equally found that subtleties in a rule missed in reading suddenly dawn on you when you get whacked with their significance during a critical moment. I can start by saying that there were no negatives for me, but more than a few whacks on the fanny during the game.



The Scenario

I decided to play the Battle of Eckau (18 or 19 July, 1812 depending upon the source), which is about 6,500 men versus 5,500 men – just the right size to try out the rules. George Nafzinger has a write-up of the battle in his book Napoleon's Invasion of Russia and there is an excellent map on a Latvian re-enactment web site. I also used Digby Smith's The Greenhill Napoleonic Wars Data Book for the order of battle.

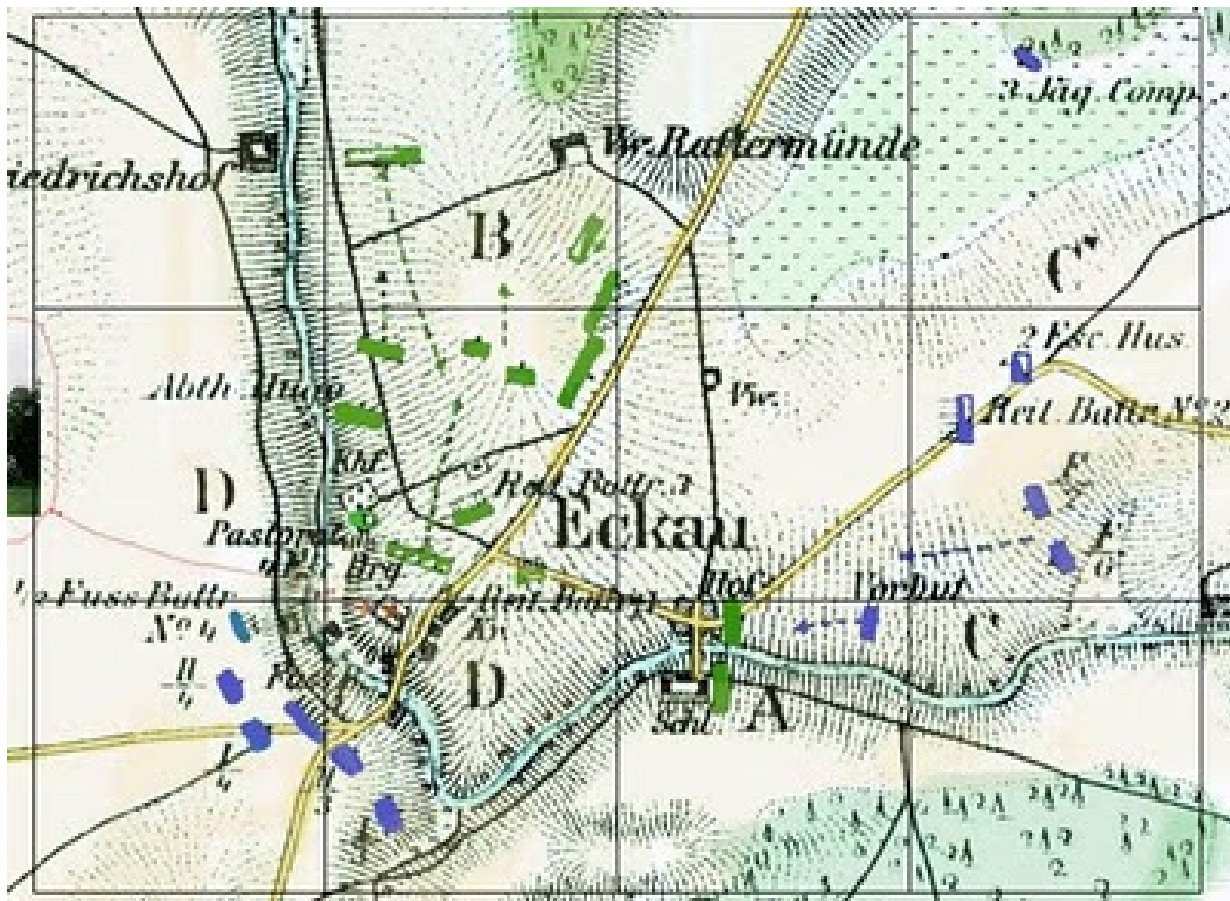
First off, this is an unusual Napoleonic scenario in that it is Prussians attacking the Russians in what is modern-day Latvia (southwest of Riga). The Prussians were part of Napoleon's Grande Armee in 1812 and were on the northern attack route. What is interesting is that there were several engagements and they did inflict casualties on one another. So, why did I choose this? To be honest it was that my French are way too far from being re-based, but my Austrians, Russians, and Prussians were not, so I dug through Digby and up came a battle just the right size. Historically the Prussians won, but the number of casualties was roughly the same (depending on the source) and relatively low.

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Let's start with the map. As you can see, the Prussians (in blue) are attacking from both the southwest and the northeast, with the Russians (in green) in the central position and eventually retreating northward. (By the way, if you want to look at this area in Google Earth – and see how little it has changed – search for Iecava, Latvia, which is its modern name.)

According to the map, the river (creek?) is sunken and the ground slopes upwards away from it.

In translating this map to the tabletop I counted the water as difficult to cross – Nafzinger's description does not mention any particular problems with the Prussians crossing nor with being forced to assault across the bridge. The "town" (built-up area in DSLB) is on the Russian's left flank and includes a prominently large building (a school, I believe). Other prominent features include a hill to the Russian rear and a small knoll by the bridge.



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The Forces

Prussian

| Unit | No. | Q | C | Sk | Special | Notes |
|------------------|-----|---|---|----|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Musketeers | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 | Drilled | Jagers add 1 to Sk |
| Fusilier | 2 | 4 | 4 | 2 | Light | - |
| Jagers | 1 | - | - | - | - | Jagers added to Musketeers |
| Dragoons | 2 | 3 | 4 | - | - | -1 to C for small size |
| Hussars | 2 | 4 | 3 | - | Élan, Scout | -1 to C for small size |
| Horse Artillery | 2 | 4 | - | - | Light, Horse Artillery | - |
| Light Artillery | 1 | 4 | - | - | Light | - |
| Medium Artillery | 1 | 4 | - | - | Medium | - |

The 1st Brigade was composed of the four Musketeer battalions and the Jagers (deployed as skirmishers). The Jager deployment was not historical – it was actually in the woods in the northeast corner – but the map shows a 1/2 Fusilier battalion that is not in Smith's OOB. That combined with the fact that I had not completed painting the Jagers convinced me to deploy them out!

The 2nd Brigade was composed of the two Fusilier battalions, the two Hussar regiments, and the two Horse Artillery batteries. Note that the Hussars are small regiments, two squadrons each, so they are penalized -1 C, as indicated in the rules (page 34).

The Reserve is composed of the two Dragoon regiments, the Light Foot Artillery, and the Medium Foot Artillery. As with the Hussars, the Dragoon regiments are penalized -1 C as they are two squadron regiments.

Given the size of the forces involved, the Prussian certainly seem to possess a lot of artillery, even if it is mostly light.

I intentionally chose to give the Prussians two small Dragoon and two small Hussar regiments, rather than combining both and making two standard sized regiments, as I wanted to see the effect of more but weaker units versus fewer but stronger ones.

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Russian

| Unit | No. | Q | C | Sk | Special | Notes |
|-----------------|-----|---|---|----|---|------------------------|
| Musketeers | 4 | 4 | 4 | 0 | Drilled | - |
| Jagers | 1 | 4 | 4 | 1 | Light | - |
| Militia | 3 | 5 | 3 | 0 | Militia | - |
| Dragoons | 1 | 3 | 5 | - | - | - |
| Uhlans | 1 | 4 | 4 | - | Lance | - |
| Cossacks | 1 | ? | 5 | - | Lance, Light, Opportunistic, Scout, Unpredictable, Wavering | +1 to C for large size |
| Heavy Artillery | 2 | 4 | - | - | Heavy | - |

The Russian 1st Brigade consisted of one Heavy Artillery battery (on the knoll), three Militia battalions, and one Dragoon regiment. This mixture of militia infantry and cavalry is unusual and was only done because of the positions shown on the map. (I now realize that the unit positions may not reflect starting positions, but some unknown point within the battle, which may account for reserves being committed and Brigades intermingling.)

The Russian 2nd Brigade consisted of the Russian jager battalion and three Russian musketeer battalions. The Jagers and one Musketeer battalion are isolated from the rest of the Brigade as they are stationed in Eckau and the school.

The Reserve consisted of one Heavy Artillery battery, one musketeer battalion, the Uhlan regiment, and the Cossack pulk (regiment). Note that at 500 men, the Cossacks are a large unit, so they have an unusually high C. I made them Unpredictable, as the author suggests, rather than giving them a Q of 5. I added a few other special rules – Scout, Opportunistic, and Wavering – as I felt they fit. Opportunistic would offset a Q of 5, but

seems deadly with Unpredictable, which I do not think fits. Wavering properly reflects their reluctance to Approach on the battlefield.

Deployment

Deployment was as indicated on the original map, save that the Prussian Jagers were dispersed amongst the Musketeer battalions, as previously noted, and the Prussian Reserve was allowed to choose whether to appear behind the 1st or 2nd Prussian Brigades. My opponent, Don, chose to put them behind the 1st Brigade, in the southwest corner of the board.

The Russian deployment is a bit muddled on the original map. The 1st Brigade was deployed forward and towards the southwest while the 2nd Brigade covered Eckau and the east. The Reserve was to the north and quite some way behind the lines.

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Here is how the original map translated to the OOB I used from Smith.

The Battle

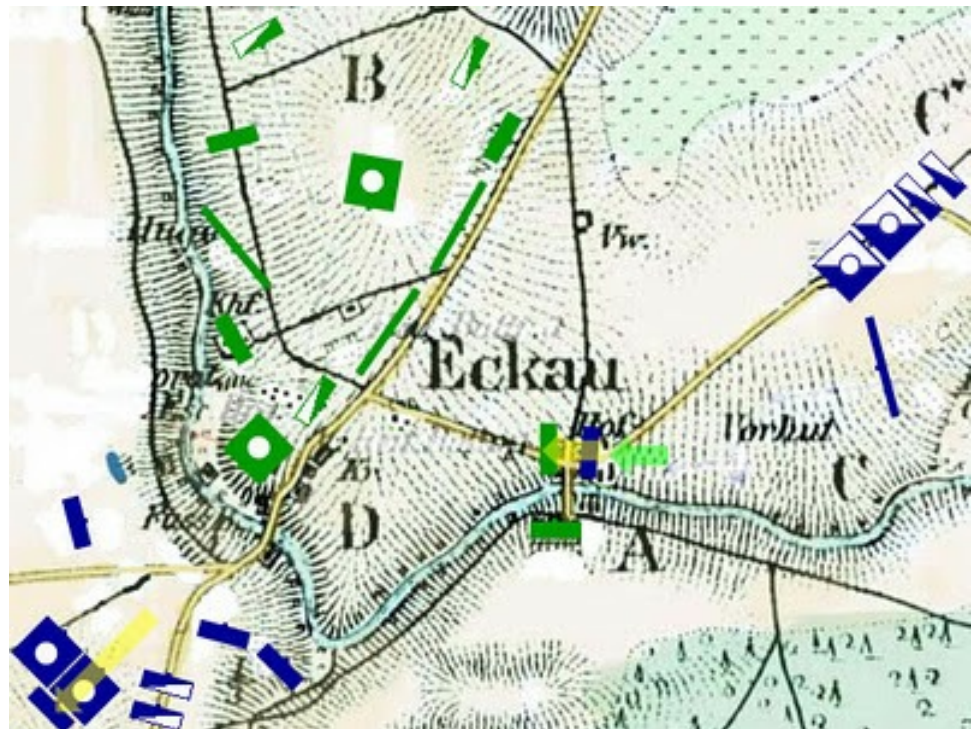
As the Prussians were the attackers historically, and they actually surprised the Russians to some extent, they moved first.

The Prussian Fusiliers attacked into the town of Eckau and drove out the Jagers from the first BUA sector with some hot die rolling (and a misinterpretation of the rules on my part). The horse artillery unlimbered are started bombarding Eckau from long range with little effect.

This was largely due to my having not completely read the rules on Built-Up Areas, so the Jagers yielded the town much too easily.

On the opposing flank the Prussian attack immediately stalled when the Russian heavy battery opened fire. One Prussian battalion took heavy fire as did the limbered reserve artillery behind it.

The Russians were able to bombard in reaction and then immediately reload and bombard in their turn. The dice for the Prussians did not help either. The battalion quickly accumulated DIS and with bounce-throughs and the retreating infantry, one battery to the rear accumulated DIS2.



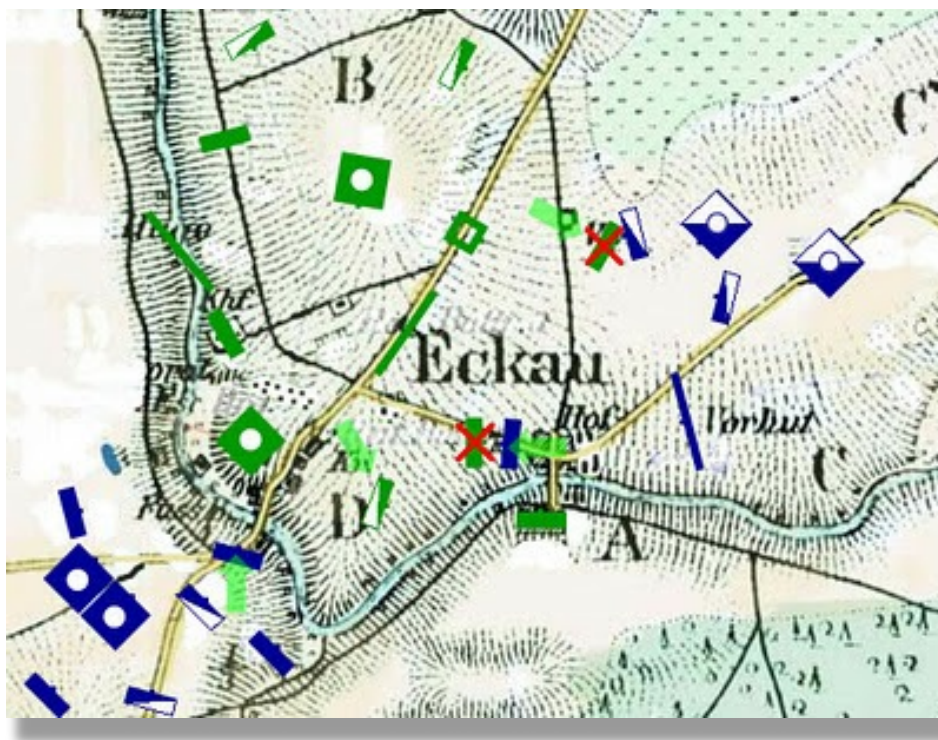
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The Russians, in turn, were able to move the Uhlans up from reserve while advancing their 2nd Brigade towards the bombarding horse artillery batteries.

One quickly finds out just how far cavalry can charge if they get a good roll. One Russian musketeer battalion had been sneaking up on a horse artillery battery (with a successful reaction roll) when the Prussian Hussars charged and rolled over the infantry, caught in attack column.

DSLB is pretty unforgiving of infantry caught in the open in line or column by cavalry. They stand a chance (less so in attack column), but the odds are against them, even if they have taken no DIS.

With a battalion of regulars quickly lost, the Russian left flank enters square in the face of two Hussar regiments. Unfortunately, this is also in the face of two horse artillery batteries (though at long range). In the 1st Brigade, the Dragoons move to try and flank the Fusiliers moving to secure Eckau, but it is too late, the Prussian Fusiliers chase down the Russian Jagers and drive them off at the point of a bayonet. The Jagers rout.



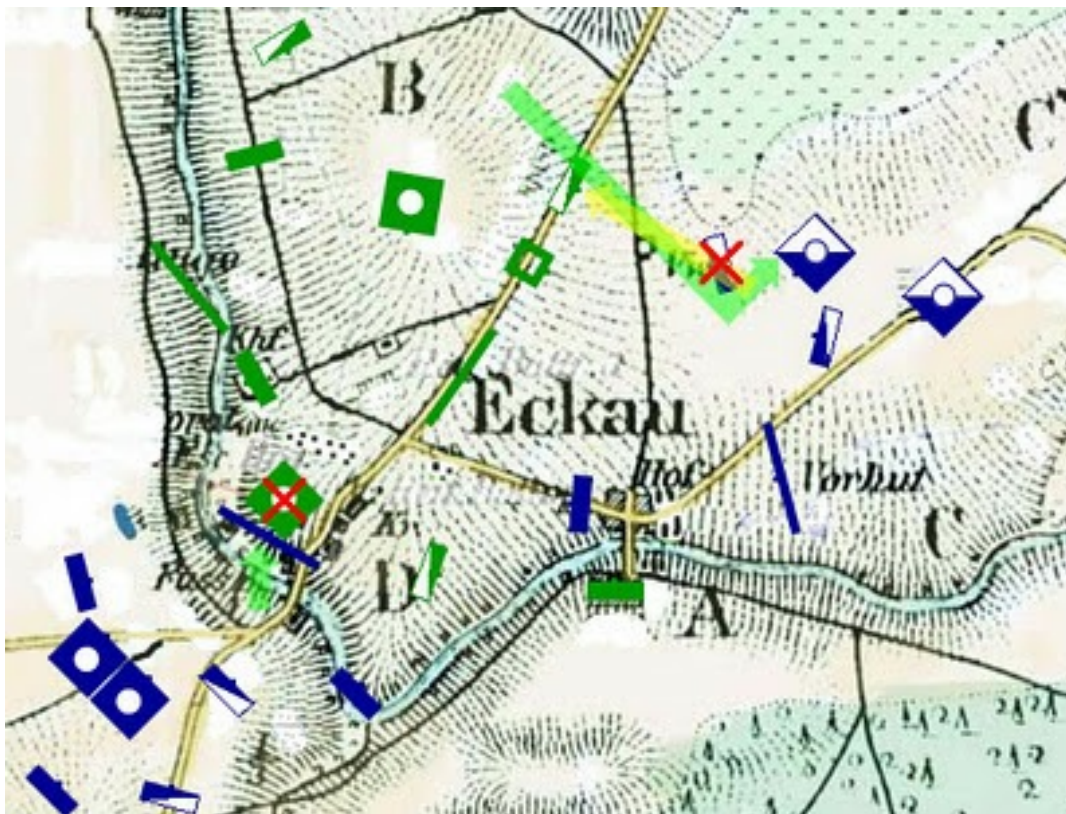
Suddenly, with a roar the Prussian infantry pushes up the hill and attacks the unloaded Russian battery on the knoll. With little effort they overrun the Russian position, ending up with their right flank behind the Russian Dragoon regiment. The Russians quickly react and turn their unit around, ready to charge the Prussians in the flank ... but somehow the Russians cannot muster the courage.

This is one of those "oh boy" moments when you have a great move and the dice just will not co-operate. The Dragoons, with a Quality of 3, and within Command Span of their Leader, need only a 2 or better to activate. I grab three dice and roll ... three 1's! The Dragoons and the whole Brigade stands frozen.

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On the left flank the Russians realize that if they do not remove the cavalry threat their squares will get torn apart by the horse artillery. The Uhlans charge the first Hussar regiment and ride it down. In their breakthrough they charge the closest horse artillery battery, but are told off by canister.

Technically, a cavalry breakthrough puts the cavalry unit directly into Contact, bypassing the Approach, but my dice failed me and not my opponent's so it sounds better that I was told off by canister than to admit that my troopers were beaten by ramrod-wielding men!



As the Uhlans were recalled in great disorder, the Cossacks were finally committed to that flank in order to stop the remaining Hussar regiment from wreaking any havoc on the infantry. At this point the Russian 2nd Brigade is shaken. I only have a single heavy artillery battery in reserve now.

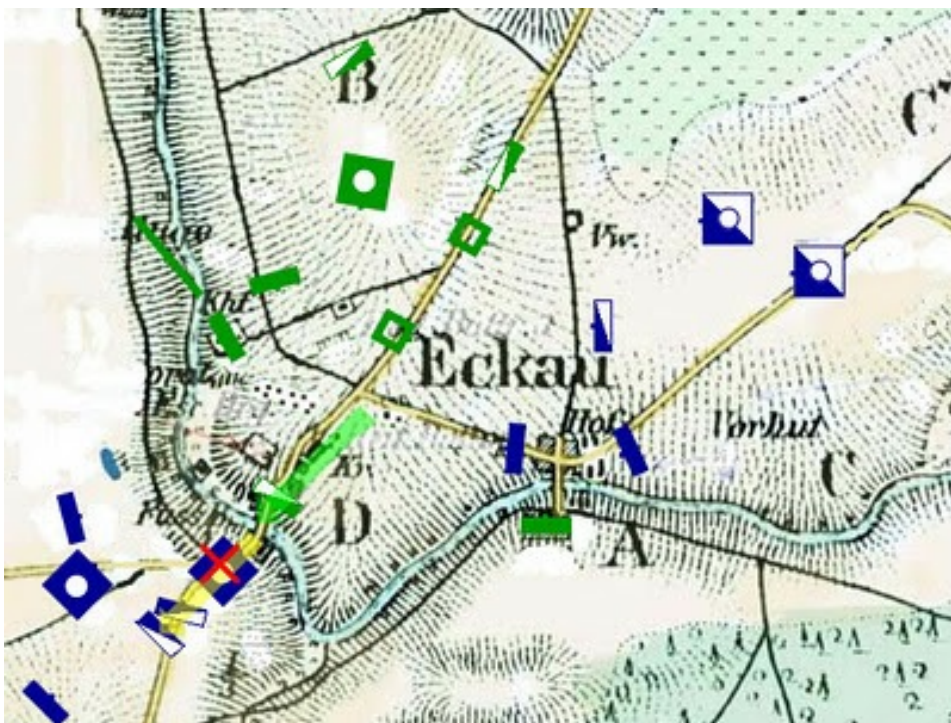
The Prussian advance at the bridge continues, with the Dragoons leading. The Russian Dragoons finally receive their orders and charge the still-exposed flank of the line infantry on the knoll, destroying them. The Russian Dragoons are then recalled to a position behind the knoll just as the Prussian artillery starts to site the position for fire.

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The Prussian Dragoons stall at the river (they cannot use the bridge as they are deployed in line) while their artillery limber up and move towards the bridge. The Russians know that if the Prussians get past the bridge the position will be lost. The Brigadier orders the Russian Dragoons to charge, and save the command.

The combat between the Dragoon regiments is hardly a contest as the Russians have the upslope and the Prussians are caught in the water and a smaller regiment. The Russians cut through the Prussian Dragoons, forcing them to retreat, then breakthrough into the limbered artillery on the road directly behind them, destroying them. However, the Russians are recalled in great disorder, which confuses the Russian militia into thinking that the Dragoons are routing and a general panic ensues. The entire Russian line retreats, ending the battle.



Note that a recall cannot cause a rout, this is just literary license. What happened was that I had pushed the Dragoons into one combat too many and they were recalled with DIS3 on them, which tipped the Brigade over the edge and caused it to be Shaken, which tipped the Division over the edge and caused it to reach its Breakpoint. I lost because I won. How ironic!

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Summary of the Game

I really enjoyed the game even though it felt a bit slow at first. I attribute that to our not being used to the rules, the unusual setup (surrounded on two sides, split commands versus interior lines, etc.), and to getting used to the Reaction rule.

Let's start with that rule. Essentially, in Ganesha Games designs the player gambles by deciding whether to use 1, 2, or 3 dice to activate, then rolling them against a target number to count successes and failures. In DSLB every failure is significant in that the opponent gets to roll a number of dice equal to the failures to see if he can activate to react to the opportunity of your failure.

This "reaction to the opportunity of your failure" is abstract, however. The unit testing to react does not have to have any relation to the unit failing. For example, it does not need to be the unit or Brigade acted against, within a certain distance of the failing unit, or even within line of sight. It is not even restricted to reacting to the unit that failed. Simply put, the acting player gambled and lost, and the reacting player can take some action in consequence. It is a simple extension of the risk versus reward decision that the player has to make every turn for every unit acting.

The reason this rule is significant is because it makes game play very fluid. Most activations, unless lucky or using few dice, fail at least once, giving your opponent something to do (if only to pick a unit and roll). This made it feel much less like an IGO-UGO game. All that said, my opponent definitely did not like the rule, at least not the aspect that the reaction could be taken by any unit anywhere. In correspondence with the author, he indicated that some of his "old school" gamers initially objected to the rule too, but eventually saw the utility of the rule and accepted it.

Final Analysis

Naturally, with any new rules you need to get used to them. The second game will generally always be better than the first as you will in all likelihood play the rules more consistently as you correct your mistakes. This was the Heads Up rating given in the initial review.

So, to review my review let's go down the points I raised and the final ratings.

I've discussed the reaction rules above and I think my initial assessment was correct in that this solves more problems than it creates. It saves the author from writing, and the player from remembering, a rash of special rules to deal with the problems of a traditional IGO-UGO turn sequence. The Lasalle rules addressed this by turning the traditional Move-Fire-Melee turn sequence on its ear; DSLB shows that there is another, more elegant method. (Now all I have to do is convince my opponent of the superiority of it without diluting its effectiveness too much by adding house rules limiting its use.)

Movement is an area where the players must be scrupulous in execution, otherwise the game is thrown off. Oblique moves maintain facing, wheels only turn the front and have no straight movement, and pivots simply change the direction faced. If you move 'sloppy' like the free movement with a DBA element, you essentially blur the distinction between a line and a column, thus giving the line a tremendous advantage. This is especially true of the Approach and Contact moves; these must be straight ahead only, so if a unit is not pointed 'dead on' you must burn an action pivoting or wheeling to line up correctly. This can make the difference between a successful charge or not, but can also often negate the cavalry's ability to overrun skirmishers (which must be done in the first action).

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Combat - Bombardment, Approach, and Contact - went very smoothly. Once you understand the basics, and the number of Combat Dice to throw, you really don't need the reference charts. The number of modifiers are few and are easy to remember. That said, I still had not gotten the hang of what winning the first, second, or third die meant by the end of the game. Probably in another game I will. What makes for some issues are the special cases: Cavalry automatically takes a DIS after contact if it did not acquire one during combat, who retreats how much, infantry takes the position on winning but cavalry does not, etc. Eventually it will become second-nature, so let's just call this a learning curve. Not at all steep, but one nonetheless.

Design Choices

I noted in the initial review that I wanted to discuss the Proximity Rule with the author, and here is what he wrote:

"I made some design choices, to reflect what I consider to be a "wrong" way to play, and is allowed by all rules out there. The Proximity rule is about this. All players I know - when they attack or defend - cram every single square inch of the table with units, so that sometimes you cannot tell one unit from another. I've seen people overlapping one base with another in order to fit both in the same space. That is not what happened on the battlefields. If you want (as I wanted) to avoid this you have no other way than to write an easy rule that plainly says that players can't do that. That's what I did. By the way, many Italian players who have played the game told me that the table looks "more realistic" and "orderly" with this rule. In all, they say it's more "Napoleonic"."

In other correspondence with the author he shared some of his design choices with me, which might help you determine if DSLB has the right historical flavor for you.

Attack Columns – it is the author's opinion that the proper method of attack should be using the attack column for speed, switch to line and then approach to weaken the opponent, before going in with the bayonet. If the opponent is sufficiently disordered, the attack column formation can be maintained, allowing them to keep their momentum for a minimum number of actions used.

The French predilection for close combat is modeled with the Determined special rule, which allows a re-roll of a die during Approach. This is not restricted to a particular formation.

Cavalry versus Infantry (Not in Square) – Put simply, the author believes that cavalry, especially battle cavalry (dragoons and heavy cavalry), should be greatly feared and that infantry – even those units that are fresh, in line, and facing the charge – should get into square or face destruction. The math is such that only an exceptionally lucky infantry unit can stand in line in face of a battle cavalry charge; all others will be destroyed.

As I reflect upon other rules, this is also generally the result, so it is not an unusual perception. Perhaps what struck me is that: 1) the odds are greatly in favor of the cavalry in DSLB while it is less so in other rules; and 2) the potential distance that a cavalry unit can charge from 3L plus 1S or 62 cm, where an "average" move is 12 cm. That is a charge five times the distance of an infantry move in column. (Please note that 62 cm is an exceptional roll, but I was caught by the equivalent of a 44 cm charge, as was my opponent.)

So, I need to add a new factor in rating rules: Fiddly Geometry. This is a rating where small measurements or angles play a role in whether some action succeeds or not. A game like Pirates of the Spanish Main rates Very High; DSLB rates Above Average. Why? Whether a charge is lined up perfectly to 'clip' a unit or an artillery unit is lined up to bombard can be by a few degrees simply because there is no 'arc'; it is straight ahead or nothing.

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This is why I say that playing with 'sloppy' movement actually hurts the game. As it is relatively easy to roll two successes with heavy cavalry, burning one action to pivot and 'line up the charge' means a difference of 18 cm that the unit has to use for charging.

By the way, one other comment my opponent made was: "this might be a good game to convert to hexes." That would certainly solve all of the the Fiddly Geometry issues.

Final Grade

So, how do I rate DSLB overall? Easily four out of five stars for me, as I like the level of tactical decision making that the player is presented with, which have definite risks and rewards; no decision is without tangible consequences. The sole detraction was the Fiddly Geometry rating, which has always been the bane of my gaming. I think the fiddly nature of bombardments can easily be solved: allow a battery to pivot up to 45° when performing a Bombardment action.

As for stopping the long range cavalry charges, well, I think you just have to be a stickler with those angles. Having to burn one extra action to line up makes a world of difference. The best solution – one that will lead to the fewest arguments – is to declare your intentions. If you intend to be lined up with a unit at the end of your move, declare it as such and ask your opponent to verify. If the enemy unit does not move during its turn, gently remind your opponent that you were lined up as you roll three successes with your Cuirassiers!

Will I game with DSLB again? Absolutely. (In fact, I know I am going to be playing this very scenario over again, as it seems like an interesting one, and one that would play differently now that I am used to some of the rules and their impact on tactics.) Given the options available, it is not a game easily taught to new players. You will probably have to figure a way to ease players into it. The rules complexity is on the lower side of Intermediate. The real draw is the uncertainty and excitement generated from activations and reactions. It takes the standard Song engine to a whole new level of decision making.

And that is a Good Thing.



Ganesha Games Errata and FAQ

Where we try to cover up our blunders and bloopers

FEAR AND FAITH

What is the Huge rule and how does it work in FF?

Huge in FF works like in our other games. A Huge figure gets +1 in melee vs other figures, including Big ones. However, the Huge figure is targeted at +1 by ranged attacks.

What is the Unique rule?

The explanation of this special rule is in the campaign rules. Unique means that the character can't be replaced if he dies. So the rule applies only to characters in campaigns. It should have an entry in the special rules for consistency.

KOOKY TEENAGE MONSTER

HUNTERS

The profile for Giant Scary snake originally includes two profiles separated by a slash, but they got mixed up. There are two versions of The Giant scary snake

Snake 1
Points 32 Quality 3+
Combat 3
Special Rules Animal, Big, Forester, Poison, Slow

Snake 2
Points 20 Quality 4+
Combat 3
Special Rules Animal, Big, Forester, Slow

FLASHING STEEL

The following errata are for people who bought the print version. The PDF version of the rules has been updated so if you login on the Ganesha site and download it again, you are good to go.

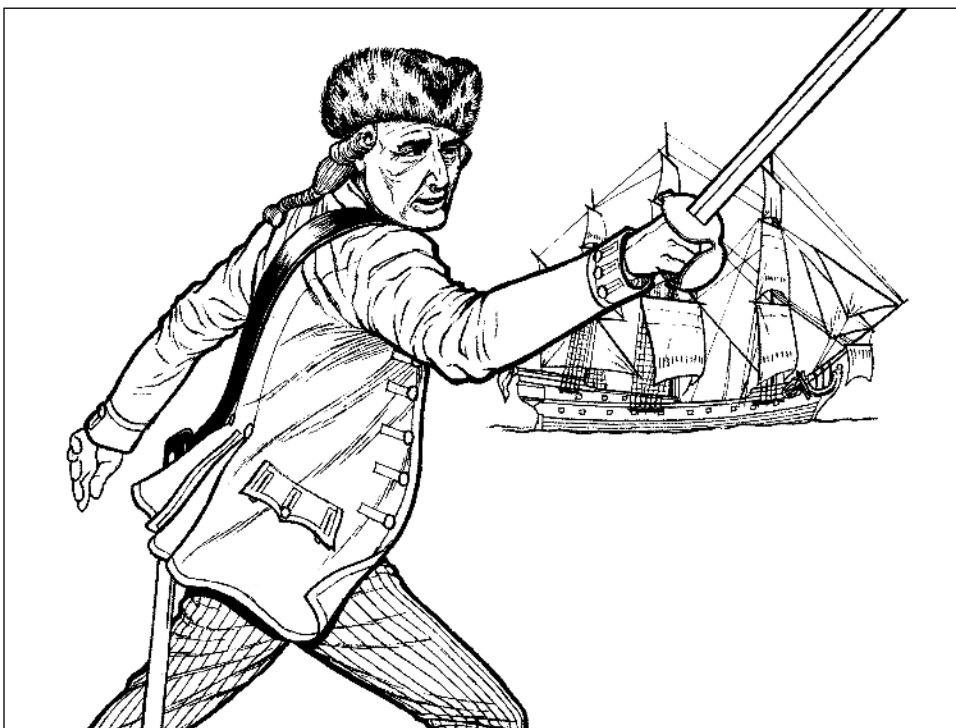
Double Pistol ability should state that you need Pistol ability to take Double Pistol.

Great Defence should state that it can be used once per game. Just in case you are wondering, it doesn't work against gunfire - you can't parry bullets.

Ranged Combat section: the wording may not be clear to new players, so we state it again: both players roll a d6, add their Combat Value with the firer adding any applicable modifiers, and then compare the results and consult the Combat Results of the Close Combat Section.

The gypsies entry in the campaign section mentions a Tough rule, ignore that.

Ignore references to Gruesome kills - they were



removed from the final version of the game.

The concept of "range bands" isn't explained or defined in the Ranged Combat section (or anywhere else for that matter.) Yes, range bands are mentioned in the special rules for various weapons and the combat modifiers are listed, but nothing is written about how these range bands are determined.

All ranges in the game are measured using the sticks. Every iteration of a stick is a "band".

The knife thrower special rule states: "This model has practiced with throwing knives and can throw these either with a C+1 combat bonus over the normal range, or can extend the range by one band without penalty (but not both.). What exactly is meant by "normal range"?

Range of thrown knives is Short.

Follow up questions on the Knife thrower special rule.

a) Since this ability talks about improvements to a standard position does this mean that everyone can throw knives (but "Knife Throwers" throw them better) or that only characters with "Knife Throwing" can throw

knives. I assume the latter is the case.

b) I presume that one gets Knives to throw for free when you buy the Knife Throwing ability. (so in this case the ability does come with a free set of steak knives!)

c) In genre I reckon that each character would only have a single throwing knife. Would it be worth making Knife Throwing a once per game option- similar to Great Defence.

To clarify: anyone can throw a knife by picking it up from a dead opponent or from a scenario. Models who paid for the skill have an unlimited supply of throwing knives on a bandolier or hidden in their clothes, because we do not want to count them during the game.

MIGHTY MONSTERS

The Bite attack description has been rephrased for clarity as follows:

Bite

Only monsters with the Fangs special rule may Bite. Bite attacks represent attempts to mortally wound your opponent with body weaponry like fangs, spines, horns, or sharp appendages. Bite attacks can cause only Wounds (not knockback). A

bite is performed spending one or more Head actions, using the Head's C score +1 against the target's Body C score.

In the QRS on page 40, the modifier for a Maim attack must be -2, not -1. The QRS is wrong.



P. 11 Close Combat Modifiers: "Attacking an Entangled or Knocked Down foe". It is not clear if this applies when you are defending against a KD foe who is attacking you?

No it doesn't. the verb "attack" has been used because the modifier applies only when performing an attack.

Can a knocked down monster be knocked back?

Yes it can happen. The monster remains on the ground but is pushed away.