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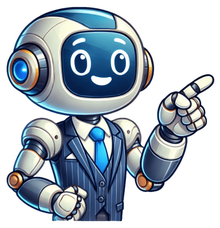

This is the latest set of rules from the Osprey 'Blue Cover' range, authored by Boyd Bruce and released just a few days ago, it puts Napoleonic warfare onto the tabletop, with army commanders, corps commanders and individual divisions at the heart of the game.My initial feeling was that this was not a level that I wanted to game at, preferring battalions, squares, column of attack etc so I bought them!And I have to say that I am glad I did. I have only just received them and not had a chance to put any of the mechanics to the table, but a full reading has left me with some impressions that this post can share for those who may be thinking about buying.Please use the read more tab for the rest of this post.Absolute Emperor is a 64 page, well illustrated and well presented volume, just as we have come to expect from Osprey. Mark Stacey is the illustrator and much of the artwork comes from the hand of Peter Dennis, being the copyright of Osprey Publishing Ltd.I suppose to best describe the ethos behind the rules, it helps to take three quotes from the authors introduction;The best part of an old fashioned Napoleonic wargame is the masses of units on a massive table. The downside is spending three hours to set up, eighteen hours of playing without conclusion and three hours to clear everything away. It makes the game more work than play and that is the overkill.Absolute Emperor is designed for the busy, multi - time - period enthusiast who wants a good Austerlitz in the morning, a cup of tea in the afternoon, then perhaps some football on the TV that evening. A perfect Saturday."The rule set is designed to encourage Napoleonic Wargaming with minimum rules anxiety and maximum period feel"He goes on to say that 50 - 100 figures should provide for a playable army! For some, that is an attractive headline, though an underestimation of where I would want to be and the Eylau scenario in the book is perhaps a more representative sized 'army' game - more of which anon.So the first thing to discuss is the army. DONT REBASE YOUR TROOPS, well the author saw fit to put that in bold, so why shouldnt I! Figure count and the number of bases dont matter, what he wants is that unit frontages are standard across both armies and to this end he suggests 6 for infantry in line and 8 for cavalry in line if 28mm are being used.For his own infantry, the author has based with four figures on 40mm x 40mm bases in a 2x2 ranking, so he will use 4 such bases (16 figures) for a unit and in this game a unit is a division (you can down size . again more anon on such bath-tubbing goings on!).Units operate with a 4 space to their front and 1 to their flanks and rear. This abstracts the space that small guns, skirmishers and detached battalions would operate in. So during movement, a unit would stop 4 away from an enemy unit - but, there is a separate charge phase later in the turn, in which units can charge 4, so infantry intending to charge could move in the move phase and in effect add 4 onto that movement in the charge phase to make contact.Ordinary movement (for 28s) is 4 for line infantry and 6 for attack column. There are measurement conversions for smaller and larger scales.The Peter Dennis artwork brings aninspirational element to the book.The sequence of play is joint and semi - simultaneous. The player with the lowest Elan will go first in each sub-phase, so they will move first, which allows the player with higher Elan, to then respond to that movement. The same for the fire phase, but the actual casualties / effects caused are not implemented until both sides have fired.The Sequence of play is Command, Movement, Shooting, Charges, Combat and the rules are set out in that order, which is helpful.Fighting is D6 based (no saves :-)) and a D8 can be used to register casualties. At 5 casualties the unit is exhausted and drops a status level (i.e. from Seasoned to Conscript - this just means it is harder to do things) and at 8 casualties the unit is removed from play.I casually threw in the Elan word above, but it is an important concept of play. Each leader has an elan rating and this rating is an allowance which can be spent throughout play to re-roll an activation score, recover a unit (i.e. go from disordered to halted), change orders or re-roll an attack dice.Elan can be gained or lost by circumstance in battle, such as capturing an enemy eagle, but if a commanders elan ever drops to zero, then it is deemed that he has lost control and his divisions are automatically given retreat orders.There I go again, incidentally slipping the orders word in - yes that is important. Every corps has an order based around attack / hold / defend / flank march (and the one you dont want . Retreat!) and the divisions must comply with this. Commanders will have to spend their Elan allowance to change these orders, which is all part of the Command and Control aspect of the game.Pages 8 to 33 hold the basic rules, 34 to 42 the advanced rules, 42 to 44 discusses army building and tournaments, 45 to 55 scenarios and 56 to 61 an after action report.I would be happy for scenes like thisto occupy my tableThe scenarios are interesting. The first three are linked starter scenarios and are rather like the scenarios that Don Featherstone has in his Battles with Model Soldiers book, in which the first scenario has a couple of infantry units, then the second adds cavalry to the same setting and the third just has a bigger order of battle, all on the same landscape.These are the attractive graphics used forthe scenario maps.Then the biggies! Eylau, Wagram and Waterloo. Taking Wagram as an example, this interests me because I have unpainted Austrian and French forces that need some motivation to get built up. The French need 20 infantry divisions, 5 cavalry divisions, 5 artillery pieces. The Austrians need 16 infantry divisions, 3 cavalry divisions and 6 artillery units. The Eylau scenario is less demanding, but you can see what I meant at the start of this post, that 50 - 100 figures might give a game, but it does not give what the author envisages for the army game, but interestingly it is a hint at the possibilities of dropping down a few levels to a tactical based game.There is a section that allows the player to down scale the game. In effect a division become a battalion and a corps commander is a brigade commander. Essentially the game looks exactly the same, but there is a different emphasis. To help this along, skirmisher rules are introduced, cavalry can use their carbines and dismount and artillery gets a fire arc to show the tactical ability to track.In some respects this does not seem a lot to convert army scale down to divisional action, but the system is already using the concept of squares and columns of attack. That can seem strange for a set of rules in which the author is essentially saying that the player is the army commander and ones influence in the game extends to corps commanders. So for the player to deliberately decide whether a unit (division) should be in line or attack column, seems to miss the point of command focus being with the army commander - however, it does place the rules in a middle ground that allows for an easy cross-over between big battle and small battle experiences, or bath-tubbing in old wargamer language. There is a page that give some national characteristic pointers and these are mainly the obvious ones such as, British cavalry that win a combat cannot be recalled or Austrian troops 1797-1809 cannot use attack column.There isn't anything there that stops the British using attack column, but if the British are in line, they get to re-roll one unsuccessful hit roll when shooting. That combined with more fire dice being used for anything in line, might be enough to persuade the British to prefer line.There is of course plenty of content that I have not nailed down here, but it was only meant to be an overview based on an initial read, plus a bit more digging. Conclusion:The proof of the pudding will be in the playing, so whatever I say here is missing that essential element of the conversation.However, within those limits, I am glad I bought the rules. They are a well integrated and nicely presented and look like they will give the sort of game that suits me. I actually quite like the idea that they can flip-flop from grand tactical down to tactical if the player wants that and certainly those at the start of their collections can use that to their advantage.I like the look of the modifiers that cover that relationship between the various arms and also that deal with situations and environments on the battlefield.The AAR at the end of the book is a nice touch.As with several of these Osprey books, they are just nice for their own sake, whether played or not (Rebels & Patriots I am looking at you!). Well done Mr. Bruce for bringing the big game to my small table, I like what you have done.EDIT - I have come across a YouTube of an AAR that has the author present and advising on the rules - see Resource section below.Complexity -Overall, I would rate this as sitting somewhere between a low to mid complexity game. The rules are well written and thorough, so I imagine it just needs to be played a bit to get the routines down and things to become second nature, only then will the true nuances reveal themselves. There are a couple of one liners tucked away that can be missed or not remembered, such as a unit taking two casualties in the shooting phase become halted and 4 hits are disordered, so I will write myself a cheat sheet to catch these. An oversight in my view is the lack of a quick reference sheet, I shall make one, though it must be said that it is very easy to navigate the rules. Despite the 'low complexity' sales pitch and the connection with some old style gaming, there are some modern elements here under the bonnet that I think will give some nuance and depth without the large rules overhead that can often go with such things.Size -the rules start from the perspective of writing on behalf of 28mm figures on a 6x4 or larger table. Conversion to small scales essentially involve halving measurements (and doubling for 54mm fans). It is certainly a useful set for getting bigger figures into a smaller setting and 6" unit frontages will be a 'useful' feature for many in their home settings. The rule booklet is small and self contained so no extra purchases are needed or shelf space taken.Solitaire -I am hoping in play that this is a solitaire friendly set. I can't see anything immediately that jumps out as not being. Unit orders can be hidden in face to face games, so I suppose solo loses that, but solo players are used to such things. There is a rule that allows units that are out of sight of the enemy, such as behind a hill or BUA, to be marked with a blank, to maintain secrecy, but I can't see that being a biggie to a solo player.Time -The author is saying 2 - 3 hours for a throw down game and an evening for any of the three major battle scenarios that he includes in the book. It is clear from his introduction that the author intentionally wants to remove barriers to players getting their figures to the table and to that end he embraces small collections as well as large and sees his rules being usable across the entire gamut of what resources players have to hand. In that respect, his cross-over between tactical and grand-tactical wins hands down.Resource Section.A YouTube ARR withthe author present and advising, it gives insight into the system. LINK sister webspace COMMANDERS is being re-configured to showcase various figure and boardgame systems that I am enjoying and give a flavour of where current ongoing projects are up to. Link. Page 2 Page 3 Instead of posting single Napoleonic rules reviews for all the sets I own, this post aims at a more comparative approach among sets which share the same scope. Therefore the list is categorized by scale and then by alphabet. My current recommendations are listed at the beginning of each category. My aim is not to give in depth reviews about the mechanics of each rule set but rather a short summary of how it plays and what are its high and low points in contrast to other rule sets. With new rules coming out and my focus shifting I will add and modify the list. The version history below will give a brief overview for returning readers. Are you interested in a rule set and my thoughts about it thats not on the list? No problem, just write a comment. But please keep in mind that Im not interested in skirmish games, overly complex, or very simplistic rules. As this is my hobby Im also inclined to do what I like and may not come around your wishes. Such is live. Version History 2023-04-28: Added Piquet and Field of Battle. 2023-04-09: Added link to my Black Powder Edition N adjustments.2022-09-13: Added texts for Republique and Shako II. Minor corrections and changes to existing reviews.2022-08-09: Added review of Polemos Ruse de Guerre, added Shadow of the Eagles, added links to several battle reports2022-08-01: Added Grand Armee, Republic to Empire, Napoleon at War, Snappy Nappy, Lasalle and Empire2022-07-31: First post Maneuver Unit: The usual size of an infantry unit the player will maneuver around individually. The sizes are based on the French system: Soldier(s), Company, Battalion, Regiment, Brigade, Division, Corps, Army. Note that other unit sizes for cavalry and artillery fall in line with the infantry scale unless otherwise noted. Player Formation: The usual size of a players force, assuming each side has only one player. The sizes are analog to the Maneuver Unit size above. A term like reinforced Division is often used, which means that force compositions of infantry, cavalry and artillery resemble army like quota. Fielding a French infantry corps would otherwise only have very little cavalry. To give a more rounded game it is assumed that the formation has been reinforced with units from a nearly cavalry corps and so on. Note that a size refers to the most common game size. Division or reinforced Division means that the players could play with a full corps per side but this would be a big game for this particular rule set. If Corps is mentioned on the other hand, a corps per player would be an average sized game. Experience: This is subjective view of the amount of time I spend with the game by studying the rules and playing. None shows that I read the rules but didnt play so far. Low means that I ventured forth into a couple of games. Medium means that I play the set from time to time and know what Im doing. Any set I play or have played on a regular basis and for many games receives the High rating. The reason to list experience is to put my thoughts into perspective. I want to talk about rules I have not that much experience without the reader thinking that I necessarily know everything about the set. Battle Reports: I list some of my most relevant battle reports with the rules so you can read about it in action. If you want to find more, you can follow the tags. When used as battle engine during campaigns I linked the first post of the campaign and not the battles as the campaign context is often needed to fully understand some events during the battles or house rules used. QRS: Quick Reference Sheet. Just an abbreviation in the text as I find QRS particularly important to play games in a quick manner. This holds especially true for playing a lot of different games solo. No reviews so far These sets aim at major battles fought between multiple corps (or large number of divisions) per side. Waterloo, Austerlitz, Wagram, Eylau and Borodino come to mind. To achieve these battles or ones of similar size in a manageable time, maneuver units are often brigades. Battalions or Regiments are also possible but require tight mechanics and some sets go as far up as the division but lose quite a bit of detail to bring the period to life. Recommendations: At this level there are two major things you need to ask yourself about the rules: What level of abstraction and what level of friction do I want. If above all else you want a good game with less details and period flavor go for Blcher. If you are leaning towards authenticity Age of Eagles is a good system albeit one that takes time and money to get to work. Big Bloody Battles is the less intensive but very capable alternative. It can also be used for borderline operational games. Last but by no mean least I would like to mention Volley & Bayonet if Brigades are too far up the scale ladder for you or you dont like heavy friction mechanics in your games. The fact that it plays so well and believable with less forced restrictions is a great feat. Author: Boyd BruceManeuver Unit: DivisionPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low-MediumBattle Reports: Eylau An army level game with entire Divisions as units and all this in a 64 page Blue Book Series entry from Osprey. What I expected was a game tailored to this rarely used unit choice. Sadly the rules are more at home in the Corps scale with units being Battalions or Regiments. In no way do the units feel like Divisions. Bathtubbing basically comes with the rules which is a strange decision. Regardless of scale issues it is mechanically sound enough but not written cleary. It also models the period strangely at times. Assault columns are basically useless apart from faster movement rates. Cavalry can charge infantry frontally without closing fire and be at an advantage in the melee. Infantry can charge and countercharge cavalry. Or maybe not. With the rules all over the place it it is hard to know. Target numbers for your dice to roll are hidden in a paragraph at the beginning and not on the downloadable QRS. Movement rates in terrain are hidden in convoluted sentences instead of a table and not on the QRS. Some terrain effects seem to be missing. If you want an easy army level game focused on the action rather than details, Blcher beats Absolute Emperor handily in my opinion without the need of more figures or time investment. The one thing I liked was the Eln system. Commanders have a finite number of Eln points to change their orders and do limited other actions. Losing units and routing enemy units can reduce or increase the score respectively. This marriage of limited command points and formation morale is quite interesting. Though the actions to spent points seem to have low impact (apart from general order changes). And the order system is as much an interpretation nightmare as with most other systems that use the attack, defend, attack in X turns scheme. Author: Bill GrayManeuver Unit: BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low-Medium The basic mechanisms of Age of Eagles, in fact quite a few rule sets, stem from the widely acclaimed Fire and Fury ACW rules. On first glance they are very easy and sound. Complexity comes with the many modifiers and some tables used to simulate the intricacies of period tactics. Although I loathe large lists of modifiers AoE is probably the only set where I can stomach it. Thats because nearly every modifier and difference in firing values is to model Napoleonic combat quite well (according to my reading). I have found no other rule set on this scale which models fighting tactics this well throughout the period. Volley & Bayonet comes close but AoE goes farther categorizing between linear, columnar and impulse (flexible mix of both) tactics. It also models skirmishers and high level command differences between armies effectively. All this means that you have to look up stuff on the QRS constantly like with old school rules (which AoE probably is). You also need a metric ton of stands as units are composed of one stand per 360 men of infantry or cavalry. French at Austerlitz? 200+ stands of miniatures and a big table to fit them all on it. On the upside, brigades can use formations which depict high level organization like a supported line of assault columns. Paired with the many stands it gives a sense of scale and space on a battlefield like few other army level sets. The first time I marched the endless snake of an Austrian division to the front was an eye opening experience. If you have the kit, the time, tend towards a more detailed depiction of army level battles and can live with being glued to the QRS sheet, AoE is at the top. Especially if historical battles are your forte with a number of scenario books, online resources and adjacent period rules available. If you like the direction but are intimidated by the amount of stands or modifiers, take a look at Bloody Big Battles. Author: Chris PringleManeuver Unit: Brigade-DivisionPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Medium-HighBattle Reports: Napoleonics with BBB, Big Bloody Scharnhorst campaign Originally aimed at warfare after Napoleons reign and before World War I, Bloody Big Battles (BBB) nevertheless has all the mechanisms and stats needed for Napoleonics. There are also several house rule documents in circulation at groups.io to bring more Napoleonic details into the game. Apart from that I would describe the rules as intelligently streamlined Age of Eagles (AoE). BBB reduces quite a bit of complexity and loses fiddly details in order to depict even larger battles with less miniatures: 1000 men per infantry or cavalry stand, although I often use 750 and went as low as 500 without problems. When thinking of the biggest battles of the era, AoE would give me amazing detail but BBB makes it actually possible in a manageable time frame. Yes, I have to look at the QRS sheet but less so. As you can see with the aforementioned house rules, Im not alone. People tried to marry the best of both worlds with adding some of AoEs mechanics back into BBB. With these changes complexity creeps back in so Im wary nowadays to modify BBB too much. Among all true army level systems it is probably the best middle ground between playablity and period flavor. This might sound like a compromise, but it is not. BBB stands on its own, and for me among the very top. Author: Sam A. MustafaManeuver Unit: BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: HighBattle Reports: Battle of Asendorf From a pure rule mechanics point of view, Blcher is one of the best wargame rule sets I ever played (regardless of the period). Rules are clean, streamlined, elegant and work really well. This is, in part, achieved by Sam Mustafas clean and concise writing style and organization of the material. The command and control system is a very clever twist of pip rules akin to De Bellis Antiquitatis and the cornerstone of the system. Compared to other army level systems Blcher plays blazingly fast and really puts you in the position of an army commander. The price for all this is period flavor. With so many tactical details of the era filed off the differences in armies and their systems of maneuver, combat, command and control there but superficial. Sometimes when I play games, stories unfold on the tabletop as a village is stormed or a general wounded. With Blcher it has a bit more of a Euro boardgame for me. Good mechanics, tough decisions, fun to solve the puzzles but less flavor. Blcher comes with a pre-game maneuver game (mini-campaign) which absolutely warrants purchase, even if you never play the game itself. It is, simply put, the best way to set up a custom battle I have seen in any rule set. Although it is a game in itself and takes more time than rolling for terrain and flank marches on a simple table. With some adjustments it can easily be scaled up into a theatre campaign as my campaign has proven. Author: Jim Getz & Scotty BowdenManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: None WIP Author: Sam A. MustafaManeuver Unit: BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: None WIP Author: Robert L. Coggins & S. Craig Taylor, Jr.Maneuver Unit: BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low WIP Author: Chris GriceManeuver Unit: Regiment-BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low WIP Author: The War Times JournalManeuver Unit: RegimentPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: LowFreely available here. The fact that Republique is free still astounds me. Make no mistake, this is not a shoddy word document without images. The Republique rules are presented in a proper website structure with links to certain topics, formatting and graphics for explanation. I would describe the overall style as functional, as there are no fancy images, quotes or flavor evoking texts. Maybe this presentation is part of the missing appeal for some. The rules itself are solid and similar to Shako in spirit. Command & Control is done via a set of defined orders and drawing arrows on maps but the quality of a commander is also important to change orders. Other rules are sufficiently far removed for the scale to make the game flow quickly. For example by only representing skirmish fire and rolling musketry and charges into an assault phase. Of particular interest is a simple but thought provoking movement classification. Units either use the Prussian or French movement system, with the former being very rigid. Few other rule sets, Bataille Empire among them, represent differences in movement doctrines. Although the mechanics are easy the wealth of represented period flavor makes the game a bit daunting still. Big battles with skirmisher bases, formations, movement doctrines, morale and attrition (base removal) takes some time to get used to. Therefore I still need more experience with the set. If you like what Shako does but not how it does it or you dont have enough miniatures to field Battalions, take a look at Republique. Author: Arty ConcliffeManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low Big battles with battalions as maneuver units, troop quality, skirmishers, formations, orders drawn on maps, couriers, artillery bounce and more Are you mad enough? Actually the madness you need to succumb to in order to play Shako is more in the area of miniatures. You need a lot. The rules itself have been cleverly reduced to quickly flowing mechanics and quick resolution. Battalions can evaporate quickly and later on entire divisions will quit the field. Playing with a Corps is therefore a rather small battle. As I said, you need a lot of kit to play Shako properly and also table space to deploy everything. Command and control is well done with certain order types drawn on maps of the tabletop. Republique uses a very similar system but Shako does it by representing couriers on the battlefield. Yes of course, you also need models of couriers! Both rule sets provide a lot of insight about commanding an army. Properly even more so when playing multiplayer games. Then again, that is what both games seem to be designed for. Playing a two player game or even solo is a daunting task, for the movement of dozens of battalions alone. I still need more experience with Republique and Shako to give a better feedback but both seem to be proper big battle systems for people who do not want to omit detail but want to cut out unnecessary complexity. A good comparison is Napoleons Battles which uses Brigades as maneuver units but overwhelms the players with detailed unit statistics. Shako and Republique manage to codify units in an easier way and still leave enough details to notice in big battles. Author: Russ LockwoodManeuver Unit: BrigadePlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: Low WIP Author: Frank Chadwick & Greg NovakManeuver Unit: RegimentPlayer Formation: ArmyExperience: HighBattle Reports: Weil Campaign Another older system that is well liked. It is one of the reasons for the Experience category within this post. I needed quite a few battles until I noticed the intricate design and understood how everything worked into a cohesive system. I really disliked it at first for its lack of command friction mechanics and formations. With every battle I noticed that friction actually stems from the way maneuver and combat works and formations are not needed here. It is one of the few system that models the advantages and disadvantages of defense. Being stationary with units grants a significant boost in fighting power. Unless you are Wellington, this usually means that you are getting blasted by artillery, though. You can either take the cannon balls or move and lose your precious defensive bonus. Attacking a position is really difficult and takes a good amount of reserves (as it should). Forfeiting the positional bonus and going on the counter offense is also a good tactic after the initial enemy attack faltered. Apart from the state of individual units, divisional morale is tracked and an important part of reading the battle. Extricating a division from fighting before it breaks is a common and challenging task. At times all you can do is to let it stay in position for its defensive bonus and let it break as retiring would open up even more problems. Other games present you with similar situations but do this by way of command rules and dice to introduce friction. Volley & Bayonet does it by virtue of their movement, morale and combat rules alone. In contrast to other games I think more about what my units can do by themselves rather than issuing limited command points or roll dice for one formation and shift my plan upon the result. Skirmishers, morale and the difference between linear and columnar tactics are well covered without being cumbersome. An easy pre game system spices up the pick up battles. It is by far less time consuming than what Blcher does if you want to concentrate on the battle. It can also be ported to your favorite set of rules easily. The lack of formations and blocky Regiments can detract from the visual appeal of the game, though. This is reflected in the pictures of the miniatures battles throughout the book which just dont do it for me. With Corps level rule sets there is always the option to go a lot bigger and cross the border into the army level. Depending on complexity, big games might take a long while to finish though. Therefore about a (reinforced) Corps is usually recommended. Many of these rules are light on depicting higher level command. Instead it is assumed that you are fighting a part of a bigger battle or that groups of people in a multiplayer game are representing the command structure. Recommendations: For a detailed rules set that plays well and reasonably fast I recommend General dArmee. I personally prefer Black Powder with heavy amendments (see below). Both sets seem very different but games flow in a similar manner and a lot faster with Black Powder. For low miniature counts, quick play but no less interesting decisions I highly recommend 22 Napoleonics. Author: Jon Rigsby, Eric Sprague,Rod HumbleManeuver Unit: RegimentPlayer Formation: Reinforced CorpsExperience: HighBattle Reports: Plancenoit, Peninsular BashAvailable freely here With the rules market flooded, I didnt expect much from a free word document with only basic layout and sparse writing. What I got was a gem. On a 2 by 2 foot table quite big battles can be played with a small figure count. Nothing special so far. The mechanics, however, almost seem alien in comparison to most of the other rule sets on this list. Yet, they are simple and elegant. After the first read you will probably scratch your head about a couple of the rules and modifiers. But with every game another intricate principle of the rules reveal itself. What begins as a jumbled mess will make more and more sense and actually resemble a Napoleonic game. Cavalry, for example seems almost laughably weak but after you carefully positioned and released them into weakened enemy troops they can cut a bloody swathe through the enemy, winning you the game. You learn and keep your cavalry in reserve just as real commanders did. Infantry, on the other hand, bogs down in fire fights and becomes stationary for long stretches of the battle to a point where you need reinforcements to press an advantage. Of course the nods to quick play and small scale come at the cost of some period flavor and shortcuts. There are no higher level formations and armies are limited in size (the latter is easy to fix). Games end rather quickly with a De Bellis Antiquitatis-like victory condition of 5 units routed. but overall it is an absolutely great system that is incredible fun to play. It lends itself very well for solo play as units get increasingly hard to move and turns fly by. Yet interesting decisions are abundant. Author: Herv CailleManeuver Unit: Battalion-Regiment (can scale)Player Formation: Reinforced Division to armyExperience: LowBattle Reports: Plancenoit WIP Author: Rick Pristley, Jervis JohnsonManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: HighBattle Reports: The Allure of Simple Wargaming, Unterphalen Campaign 3, 4, 6 Most people either love it or hate it. For me it is a bit of both. The game as written has a very solid foundation but the Second Edition squandered every chance to adjust some of the problem areas. I am actually quite angry about what I basically see as cash grab edition (and I rarely see it this way with historical wargaming). I would go so far to recommend buying the 1st edition, if it is cheaper. It is still my favorite book of the two. Some of the many source books try to modify problematic rules but then you have a mess of special rules strewn around in several books.Honestly you can easily cut a lot of the chaff away to make it easier, tighter to play and way more believable for Napoleonics. With the modifications I made and borrowed from other players it is the best Battalion/Regimental scale to me. Of course this comes at the tail end of a long list of personal changes done as a solo gamer. I say Regimental because it is easy to upscale (use as is or increase stamina throughout by 1 or 2). The mechanics seem gamey to many but when I did comparison games of the same scenario and forces between different games, Black Powder was always faster, more dramatic and at least similarly believable. The mechanics add a lot of uncertainty into the game which make other games pale in comparison. In many games you know exactly when the enemy is in charge range, how much your troops can take, or that you can react to a flank move. In Black Powder you have way less of this God Factor which leads to interesting decisions and exercises in risk taking. Units dont move at a critical moment or zip around the battlefield changing the tactical landscape. Some units take a beating turn after turn and dont break, others quit the field after the first charge. This is arguably a more believable commanders perspective than in games where the commander knows every measurement and strength point of both sides. As quite a lot of dice rolls are used this is not as chaotic as it sounds. You can carefully balance the odds as a player, they just dont always fall in your favor. With my amendments (Black Powder Edition N) it actually makes sense to fight like a Napoleonic army (much more than before at least). I have done careful maneuvers with the French that approach in ordre mixte (the real one, not the Black Powder formation rule) or rows of assault columns and either soften up the enemy or just smash through unsupported lines. I released the cavalry reserve on a massed cavalry charge to break the enemy. I did careful maneuvering over a number of turns to slowly retire from a difficult situation. And of course I tried all of the above and failed miserably when the unexpected happened. And I did all of this with a look on the QRS at times and the rulebook even less. Author: Alex Testo and Bob CarterManeuver Unit: Brigade (see below)Player Formation: Army (see below)Experience: Low De Bellis Napoleonicis (DBN), as you might have assumed goes back to the wargaming staple De Bellis Antiquitatis (DBA). For the most part DBN is a solid port from DBA pre Version 3 from Ancients to the Napoleonic era. There is an optional rule that introduces hit points to model the attritional nature of horse & musket combat as well. As with all the DB+a letter (also called DBX) rule sets, including the original, the focus is on a quick game, not on authenticity. The artificial nature become even more apparent in DBN, where the close to 12 unit army and command based on big groups of units looks decidedly not Napoleonic. Especially when you take into a account that the single base units actually represent a brigade each. This is also the reason I put DBN into the Corps scale category. It gets better when you play with multiple armies per side and treat units as Battalions or Regiments but the problem remained for me. Another problem is shooting. DBA as such has limited amounts of it for a good reason. Melee is the systems strong point. In DBN I have to mentally square off shooters against each other in opposed die rolls which feels weird. If you like DBA, chances are that you will like DBN and its focus on a good game above all else. For what its worth the rule book is written in clean, understandable English (in contrast to DBA) and offers quite a bit of extra content to add period flavor here and there. Author: Brent OmanManeuver Unit: Player Formation: Experience: WIP Author: Richard Gordon and Brett Preston-ThomasManeuver Unit: RegimentPlayer Formation: Reinforced CorpsExperience: Medium As a spin off from the once popular Ancients set Field of Glory (FoG) the Napoleonics variant (FoGN) shares much of the same DNA. These are so called competition or tournament sets which focus on detail and long watertight explanations of their rules. Especially in the Ancients scene there is nothing wrong with that but I have a feeling that competition play far less important to Napoleonic players. It is at least less important to me, which makes FoGN rather clunky to understand and play. It has many tables, modifiers and extra rules to cover intricacies of the period but also to keep your nose in the rulebook at all times. A QRS of several pages length that doesnt even help in 60% of times speaks volumes. As the title says the rule set is currently in its second edition which did a very good job in terms of layout and explanation. It also added a cool and impactful setup phase where both commanders decide on battle plans which then regulate set up and certain advantages for each side. Nevertheless, most games I played I didnt finish because everything takes so much time to do and Im never feeling in the flow of the game. This problem might incline oneself to get a deeper understanding of the rules but only if there is a certain draw to them. Sadly, there is not. FoGN is more detailed in the minutia of maneuver and combat than most sets on this list but nothing stands out as particularly eye opening or different in a positive way. Command goes through a clunky table of situations, firing goes through several tables to figure out how many d6 to roll against which number and what the outcome is. Morale is handled by yes, more tables. Even an old fast play version to try the rules is only a couple of pages long but contains 10 tables. Many of which have to be consulted frequently. Going by the rare occasions I find coverage of FoGN games I think I am not alone. A shame really, considering the good production values, deep army list resources and clean writing and layout of the books. Author: David C R BrownManeuver Unit: Battalion Player Formation: Divisions to CorpsExperience: Medium GdA brings being a corps commander to live really well with its command and control rules. Your limited focus can shift the odds to act in a manner you want significantly at one place but this comes at the cost of leaving more things up to chance at the other places of the battlefield. Though the choice of weighing your influence is yours and that gives a great period feel and generates interesting decisions. Where GdA falls down the ranks a bit for me is the rest. You can control formations and skirmisher screens, there are many different status effects for troops. It plays elegantly apart from the somewhat convoluted fall back rules. It just has a lot of mechanics to go through all the time. In some other rules systems these are baked into other mechanics, here you have more tables, details and management. This gives believable battles and forces the use of period tactics but is a bit too much for me to spin on the plate at the same time. To be honest, I think a big part of the problem stems from playing solo. GdA seems a tad too detailed for doing that. Although I know a part or two where streamlining wouldnt hurt in a 2nd edition (Im looking at you rout / fall back / fire discipline). If you take this personal view out of the equation, GdA is a Corps level set I can recommend for players who know the period and are looking for a well designed, well presented and more detailed but not cumbersome set of rules. Author: Sam A. MustafaManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: Low WIP Author: ngel SaqueroManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: None WIP Author: Neil ThomasManeuver Unit: Probably Battalion or RegimentPlayer Formation: A task force or a Reinforced DivisionExperience: Medium Some books are just treasure troves. One-Hour Wargames (OHW) falls into this category. Its nine variations of the same basic rules cover anything from Ancients to WWII it very coarse grained detail. These are beginner rules or for people who are not into the hobby that much (which is totally fine). I quickly learned that they are missing way too much flavor and details for me personally. But the 30 scenarios can be easily adapted for other games and are an invaluable resource to spice up non historic pick-up games. They also thought me a lot about scenario design in general. Part of marriage between the rules and the scenarios are random force tables. As every army fields at most six units it is practical to randomize the types of units player get somewhat. This makes the scenarios much more replayable and takes agency from the player in a believable way. Generals have to use what the got to pursue their goals. No more shopping for troops in points lists. Polemos does something similar but more detailed and geared to Napoleonics. Author: Bob jonesManeuver Unit: Player Formation: Experience: WIP Author: Chris GriceManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced CorpsExperience: None WIP Author: Glenn PearceManeuver Unit: Battalion or RegimentPlayer Formation: Reinforced CorpsExperience: LowBattle Reports: Elchingen To be clear, Ruse de Guerre (RdG) is not intended for Napoleonics but all the mechanisms are there to play the period, apart from different cavalry types. This can be fixed with grading heavy cavalry as more or less experienced. Although not necessarily similar to 22 Napoleonics both games omit some details (like low level formations) in order to have easy to memorize mechanics and modifier lists. Going through the motions is quick and easy without losing too much flavor. Apart from solid rule mechanics to manage movement and combat, the command and control rules are the most important aspect of the rules. Command points regulate the actions of a commander and his troops like in the De Bellis Antiquitatis games family. But in RdG the process is much more involved in a good way. Players start a bidding war with their points each turn instead of a simple initiative roll. Consequences of winning or losing a bid can be high which is a much more involved and thorough representation of battlefield initiative than most other games on this list achieve. As usual, such competitive elements are less suited for solo play. Formations (like Divisions) tie nicely into the command point rules. In systems like Black Powder and General dArmee formations are groups of units which move, fight and break together. The move together aspect is stressed in RdG by the costs of command points as it is in DBN. But where DBN uses straight forward command point costs, RdGs costs are tied to winning or losing the initiative, as well as the actions which are about to be performed. Where I had problems with DBN, the mechanics of RdG result in a more believable handling of a Division on the table. Instead of waiting for a good die roll for command points, a player also wants to win the initiative and can still only commit a limited amount of units to the assault. But losing the initiative can also come with a lot of command points, which represents phases of high activity and lulls in battle nicely. It is this command system which will either make or break RdG for a player. All the other rules are in place to facilitate its strength in a fast flowing way, omitting some details to achieve it. Author: Mark Sims StoneManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: Low An interesting rule set that is quite easy and generic to play without using period specific rules (of there are some in the rule book). Everything works with bases and casualties eventually remove bases. In this sense it is similar to Age of Eagles with Battalions instead of Brigades. But it does not feel like it, especially as there is virtually no command friction. It actually reminded me of a more deterministic Black Powder in a sense that players always know that troops will move, how much they will move (apart from retiring) and how much they can take before quitting the field. The comparison goes as far as some modifier lists, which read very much the same as Black Powder (printed later). From the limited experience I have with Rank and File, I can say that I didnt like it. Not because it was bad in any way. Because the other sets have more of the flavor and uncertainty. If you are in the camp of Black Powder haters due to its uncertainty, you might want to take a look at Rank and File though. With its base removal it also has a decidedly old school feel. Author: Barry HiltonManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: None WIP Author: Keith FlintManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: None WIP Author: Neil ThomasManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: LowBattle Reports: Simplicity in Practice with Adjutant IntrouvableOnly available online in Battlegames Magazine issue 23 Neil Thomas wrote Simplicity in Practice (SiP) as proof of an argument: That rules can be very simple to understand but intricate and interesting to play. His design notes also give a great insight into the thought processes of these rules. As a magazine rule set of about 2 pages SiP is missing all the extra bits you get in rule books like set up rules, army lists, advanced rules, rules explanations and clarification for corner cases. Still SiP manages to prove the point, mostly. The melee rules pile up amounts of d6 instead of modifiers to rolls. Whoever scores the higher sum wins. Now this is a bit novel but also problematic. The modifiers are absolutely punishing for the attacker unless the defender can be whittled down by simple attrition. This can be read as the necessary 2:1 advantage an attacking force needs to have according to the rules of war. But it doesnt feel that way on the tabletop. It seems like you are sending your units into suicide missions or just dont melee at all because it seems unwinnable as attacker. Apart from proving the point, there is nothing in SiP I find particularly interesting in comparison to other sets. I would consider it an upgrade for One-Hour Wargames if one wants a bit more but not the complexity of rules of many other sets on this list. Author: Jervis Johnson, Alan Perry and Michael PerryManeuver Unit: BattalionPlayer Formation: Reinforced DivisionExperience: None WIP The following category is for non-tabletop games that are noteworthy. Author: Richard BorgManeuver Unit: VariablePlayer Formation: VariableExperience: High Wargaming is not about the spectacle of miniatures for me and therefore historical block & card games take up a big part of my board game collection. Command & Colors Napoleonics (CCN) is a game I often use as a gateway to tabletop gaming. With so many rule sets and battles to choose from, Analysis Paralysis sometimes makes it hard to decide on anything to play next. CCN give me a treasure trove of scenarios (which can be accessed online as well). I can just open a box, pick a page in a scenario book and go for it. I never have to worry about figures, terrain, rules, table size and all that stuff that makes tabletop games so flexible but also far less approachable at times. As said on the Heres no great matter blog, the experience of Command & Colors Ancients was not after all playing out an engaging alternate history, but the thrill of how you handled your cards, positioned your units, rolled your dice and bluffed and outwitted your opponent. The same holds true for CCN. Arguably, this is the reason why it works so well to invigorate the interest in the history and bigger tabletop projects. I can just play and have a good game but then I want to know more, play a more believable game or just pack it away and focus on other things. CCN can also bridge to gap to people who are less interested in the period or tabletop games. Although I made the experience that it takes a bit getting used to. Games can get one sided rather quickly if one player has way more experience with the system. This can be solved by handicapping the experienced player with less command cards. On itself CCN is a very good game. One Im happy to own with nearly all expansions. On spectacle and authenticity it cannot compete with my favorite tabletop games. On the other hand, being a hex boardgame, none of the listed tabletop sets can compete with CCN on clarity of rules and the very engaging and quick make decision -> see outcome cycle. Bonus Tip: The blocks and terrain from CCN can be a wonderful alternative to miniatures (as seen in this battle report). They are well scaled for playing on smaller tables with sizeable enough armies and are easy to stow away. Thats actually 50% of the reason I bought CCN in the first place. This page is intended to provide a permanent location for complete rule sets written over the years by contributors to