A review by Eamon Honan October 2008

The Duke of Wellington once said, when asked how he had beaten the French, said that the two military machines were like teams of horses all pulling towards a common goal. The differance he said was that the French made their plans out of harness and therefore were helpless when the harness holding any particular horse broke. He on the other hand, made his plans out of rope, so that when a part of the team broke loose, he could simply tie the two ends of the rope together and carry on.

This is a book containing a great deal of rope, from which any wargamer worth his salt will be able to fashion any amount of harness.

Physically, what you get for your money is a slim perfect bound paperback of 156 pages, with a glossy colour cover and illustrated within with black and white. The print quality is about standard for a print on demand publisher like Lulu, so that while the text is perfectly readable, some of the black and white photographs are a little muddy.

In these 150 odd pages, the author offers a short description of the history of wargaming, a discussion of model soldiers and where to get them, including some advice on how to cast your own using plumbing lead, organising a campaign, creating terrain and three sets of wargames rules covering ancient warfare, the horse and musket era and moderns (in this context the Second World War).

All this will be very old hat to the experienced wargamer, but the beginner looking for a book to start off with, this is an embarrassment of riches.

Take the Horse and Musket section for example, compromise only eight pages and are very simple. There are no complicated command rules here and the sections on melee combat and morale simply refer back to the Ancients set of rules decscribed in the previous chapter. They are however, surprisingly playable and accompanied by "Action in the Plattville Valley", a blow by blow account of a small engagement as played through by the author. The account has worked examples of several key parts of the rules, morale, fire and melee combat.

I often wonder when I read accounts of war game battles, whether the game described actually occurred, not so with "Action in the Plattville Valley". It is neither neat or simple and there is a definate ring of truth about it. The same goes for the rest of the book, which is full of sentences like this; "Wargamers Warwick Hale and Peter Pringle of Chatham have worked out a simple, but highly effective means of reproducing hidden troop movements..." or "It must be confessed that the question of how to fight a successful action with natives against disciplined troops has yet to be completely solved by the writer." All the suggestions, the advice and the rules in this volume are the result of years of experience on model battlefields, straight forward and firmly grounded in what is possible.

This is all good and useful stuff, but what really distinguishes "Wargames" from other books of the sort and which makes it attractive to the elder gamer who knows his way around campaigns and terrain construction and all the rest of it, is the sheer breathless enthusiasm of the piece. I challenge any gamer to read Donald Featherstone's description of Lionel Tarr's Second World War game, his musings on table sizes or his thoughts on the fun of campaigning without feeling the itch to get back into the game.

"Wargames" is a book of suggestions, advice and inspiration. There are three workable sets of rules in it, but as the author says in his introduction there are about as many rule sets as there are wargamers and the only person you have to please is yourself. I really don't think Donald Featherstone cares if you play Ancients or Moderns or Napoleonics or what ruleset you play, so long as you enjoy your game and it's that healthy and inspiring attitude to the hobby that struck me again and again. Featherstone's love for war gaming oozes from every page.