

# SALUTE



# 2011



# WARLORD GAMES AT SALUTE 2011

BY ISAAC ALEXANDER

On the weekend just gone I was fortunate enough to attend the excellent wargaming event 'Salute', at the Excel Exhibition Centre in London. Normally a shameless powergaming Warhammer Fantasy player, my presence at a largely historical wargaming convention might seem unwarranted, perplexing and possibly even offensive ("get yer dragons out of my Western" etc.), but I was there at the behest of Warlord Games. I had offered my services to the historical wargaming behemoth in the weeks leading up to the event, seeing how frenetically busy they were in their preparations (I work in the same business centre that they are slowly but surely claiming as their empire), and seeing a pair of extra, gullible hands on offer they wasted no time in setting me to work.



*A close-up of Battlefront's spectacular Gallipoli board. Word on the street is that they used actual sand from Turkey to create it. Maybe.*

My good friend Andrew Chesney is one of Warlord's prime minions, and my first task was aiding him in creating a 4'x4' scenic WW2 board designed for both display and gaming; the latter showcasing Operation Squad, the new set of WW2 skirmish rules stocked by Warlord. The display element was filled nicely by Warlord's very own Bolt Action figures, and we had no less than six different forces fighting over the ruined town we created: US Screaming Eagles, German Infantry, Italian Paratroopers, Ze French, Red Devils, and none other than the deadly Waffen SS.

In addition we featured over a dozen pieces of resin terrain made by Architects of War, including foxholes, a bombed house, a shanty, a ploughed field and several stone walls. Also included was a German Halt Checkpoint (painted in suitably gaudy colours, of course) and several resin vehicles which we may or may not have pinched from Warlord only to turn them into smoking wrecks!



*Isaac and Andrew with the finished product. Handsome devils, eh?*

The remainder of the storm before the storm passed in somewhat of a blur. The Warlord team worked like steam-powered robots (ooh, actually, I'm not supposed to mention those), hiring vans, wheeling glass cabinets to and fro, packaging all of the stock, loading box after box after box, dashing off to buy last minute essentials like window cleaner, black backing cloth, tape, Red Bull and chocolate. Lists were written, scrapped, amended, checked, double-checked, triple-checked. At last, at the crack of dawn on Friday the 15th of April, we were ready to set off from our headquarters in Nottingham and make the trek down to London.

I was in the 'cool kids' van with Mr Chesney and our capable driver Gareth. Over the course of the two-and-a-bit hour drive we managed to put all of the world's problems to rights – but unfortunately then stopped at Burger King for lunch and had our minds erased in a storm of greasy, meaty goodness. Mind you, I'm still not convinced we made the wrong decision...



We got to the Excel Centre in London nice and early, just after lunchtime. We thought we'd been utterly ingenious and missed the inevitable rush of traders turning up at the same time, but unfortunately the guys in charge of vehicle co-ordination wouldn't let us in until 1:30! Half an hour of idle queuing ensued, as two score other rent-a-vans arrived. We passed the time easily, with Andrew and Gareth wandering around and catching up with the other traders (who they have known, presumably, forever). I on the other hand didn't really know anyone, so instead spent my time teaching my phone's predictive text naughty words, taking photographs of passing birds and trying to sign up to the London Marathon which had its registration in the Excel Centre's main hall.



*Approximately one third of the Warlord sales stand. Yes, they make a lot of soldiers!*

With everything prepared, it was off to the hotel for some much needed dinner. The Premier Inn was a pleasant four minutes walk away, and we arrived to discover that every other wargamer in England was also staying there! A wonderfully boisterous night of food and drink followed as old friends reunited and mingled. Highlights from my point of view included chatting with Mr Army Painter, Jonas Faering, over dinner, seeing my roommate Dave neck a full glass of red wine (ugh), eating waffles (obviously) and unwinding with a nice cup of tea, chatting nonsense and watching bad television\* with Andrew.

\*Lethal Weapon, for the record. Whoever got Danny Glover into acting needs to be hunted down and eviscerated.



*So much for beating the rush - and this was just the early birds; there were still more than double this number of traders to come yet!*

Finally we got inside and began the process of unloading the vans. Between our team of six we managed to get the whole Warlord Games area set up and fully furnished in just under two hours; and mighty spiffing it looked too! We had one of the largest areas at the show, and managed to wrangle enough space for our 4'x4' WW2 board, our 4'x12' (yes, 12'!) Antonine Wall board, showcasing the debut release of the brand new game Hail Caesar in a classic Romans vs Celts siege game, a table for all of the wonderful Army Painter products, an enclosure (or 'dugout', if you will) for resident sculptor Stan and resident goofball Paul to strut their stuff and take questions from their fans, plus the mightily impressive three-sided trade stand itself which boasted pretty much every Warlord product ever, in addition to the six glass cabinets full of \*staggeringly\* well painted miniatures. I'm not usually one for historical miniatures, but I was instructed to go back and re-clean the Prussians' cabinet after I'd been standing there for 20 minutes drooling and fogging up the glass.



*Clockwise: Steve, Paul (has just sat on something), Dave, John, Rick, Stan, Gareth.*

The sun rose and hateful alarm clocks all over the hotel chimed the day to life. The showers were throttled into overdrive, and we made our way downstairs to find the bossman himself Mr John Stallard taking full advantage of the 6am breakfast kickoff. With a big day ahead of us we made sure to ingest as much bacon and as many croissants as possible; we reasoned there would be no use going into battle on an empty stomach. Oh, and coffee. Lots of coffee.



And now, dear reader, after a thousand words of babbling I can actually tell you about the show itself.

**It's frakking amazing.**



*Disaster! The colourful Celts storm the walls and take the ramparts! Caesar won't be too pleased to hear about this...*

Easily the largest wargames show in the United Kingdom, Salute typically draws an attendance of 4 – 5,000 eager beavers come to look at all the shiny shinies. Add in the 1,000 or so traders who are there to provide the shiny shinies and you have one hell of an atmosphere. One's first thought might be, "Gee whiz, must get crowded", but that's just the thing – it ain't crowded in the slightest. The wing of the Excel Centre that we were in is made up of twenty or so huge warehouse-like rooms. The entirety of Salute was in one of those rooms. To give you an idea of the scale, you could quite comfortably fit a football pitch inside. And a monster truck rally. You could park four airline jets in it. Even the Kraken from Clash of the Titans would be reduced to huddling in the corner and listening to the echo bouncing off the distant walls at it played its lonely ukulele.



*The Phoenix Gaming Club man their outpost; they were charged with running the massive Hail Caesar game throughout the day, and a splendid job they did too!*



*Gripping Beast went for an awesome Saxon board with jaw-dropping amounts of figures and features. Good shape for Tetris too.*

Hundreds of traders made an appearance; I could not even begin to name them all. Anyone who is anyone in the world of wargaming was there: Victrix, Gripping Beast, Perry Miniatures, Studio McVey, RHQ TV, Maelstrom Games, Battlefoam, Trent Miniatures, Wayland Games, Forge World, Freebooter, Beasts of War, Renedra, The Basement, The Army Painter, Battlefront, Mantic, Black Library... and hundreds more that I either didn't recognise or have forgotten after another burger based trauma.

Participation games were everywhere; you couldn't turn around without being roped into playing a round of The Penultimate Mohican, pressganged into a Dystopian Wars coastal assault, swept along in a 10mm scale chariot race, inspired into diving into a huge Napoleonic conflict, handed the remote control to a moving tank the size of a small dog and told to go forth and destroy your enemies, or ordered up the beaches of Gallipoli on the utterly spectacular board that Wargames Illustrated and Battlefront combined to bring to the event, which arrived in a huge reinforced crate like it was the Ark of the Covenant. Oh, not to forget our own games, of course!



*Dystopian Wars - I don't understand it, but golly does it look fun!*





*Chesney, embroiled in one of the demo games, realises that he is being massacred by someone who's never played the game before.*

The aforementioned WW2 board was used to play Operation Squad – a new rules set written by a bunch of crazy Italians and distributed primarily by Warlord Games within the UK. When the rules first came out Warlord bought out the entire first English print run of the game, and sold them all in less than a third of the expected turnaround time. At Salute it was no different, and by 3pm we had the amusing dilemma of having precisely one copy of the rulebook left – which we were using to play the game! Andrew and I were taking shifts to run the participation games, and a lovely French man who played in the final round just before the show finished insisted on taking the last copy off my hands. And who was I to say no, really? Especially seeing as he'd just massacred my brave Screaming Eagles!

Hail Caesar, the new game written by Rick Priestley, was the crown of our entire exhibition. The Phoenix Gaming Club from London were conscripted to run the huge showcase game of Hail Caesar. It took no less than seven of them to run the game taking place on the humungous Antonine Wall board; about a thousand screaming Celts running across the field while hundreds of staunch Roman defenders manned the walls. The first game ended in travesty for the defenders, as a brutal spearhead assault saw the brave Britons break through and ravage the fort's centre before descending on the wings. With the hordes of spectators and eager prospective generals teeming around the table there was little else for it than to reform the battle lines and see if they could be as successful a second time! Hail Caesar flew off the shelves at a rate higher than Operation Squad, if that was possible; largely I suspect due to the lovely promotional figure being given away with each purchase: Centurion Titus Aduxus.



*Centurion Titus Aduxus - the promo model given away free with every pre-ordered copy of Hail Caesar. I'm busily trying to figure out how I can convert him to ride a dragon.*







*Neck and neck in 10mm scale chariot racing.*

Now, having written all that I must admit that I feel I'm gushing a bit. I should point out that I don't actually work for Warlord so don't really have any stake in whether or not reading this inspires you to go and buy their stuff. On the contrary, I'll actually admit to never having purchased any of their figures in my life, being much more of a fantasy buff. However, after four hours of playing with those Screaming Eagles and filthy Italians I have a newfound appreciation for the Bolt Action range, and towards the end of the day had to actually sit down in my chair to stop myself wandering over and buying a box from the trade stand. I also have an unexplainable need to leaf through the Hail Caesar rulebook once a day; I don't yet understand a bloody word of it, but I'm still too busy appreciating the artwork and pretty pictures to give a damn.

5pm came around quicker than I think anyone had expected, and suddenly it was time to pack up and head home. I'd never been to Salute before, and this year I was forced to make an agonising choice between taking the plunge or going to the largest Warhammer tournament in the UK, in Portsmouth. Despite not getting to go and see my friends batter one another with their dragons and wizards, I definitely feel like I made a good decision; my eyes were very much opened to the real world of wargaming. On the long drive home, a single thought dominated my thoughts:

Why the heck was Salute only a one day event? Madness!



*Hmm, apparently this was the boy they were looking for...*

