

Beginners' Guide to Wargaming

By Bruce Quarrie

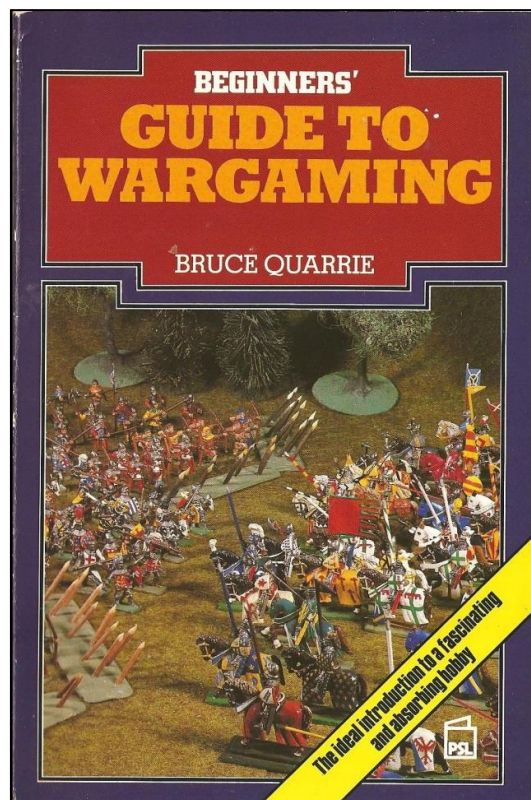
Review by Jonathan Aird

This small pocket-sized paperback is a little gem. It comes with the sub-title "Great Battles on land, at sea and in the air! No previous playing experience required!" and it goes on in 136 pages to fully justify that subtitle. The well-known writer on wargaming and military history, Bruce Quarrie, had already edited the *PSL Guide to Wargaming* and it might be thought that this would be simply a cut-down version of that larger book, but this is not really the case at all. The first line of the Introduction encourages some serious thought: "It is a sobering thought that it is a quarter of a century since wargaming in the modern sense was effectively 'launched' with the publication by Stanley Paul in 1962 of Donald Featherstone's book *War Games*... a great deal has happened in those 25 years." It's interesting to think that Bruce Quarrie wrote those words 25 years ago, and once again much has changed since then!

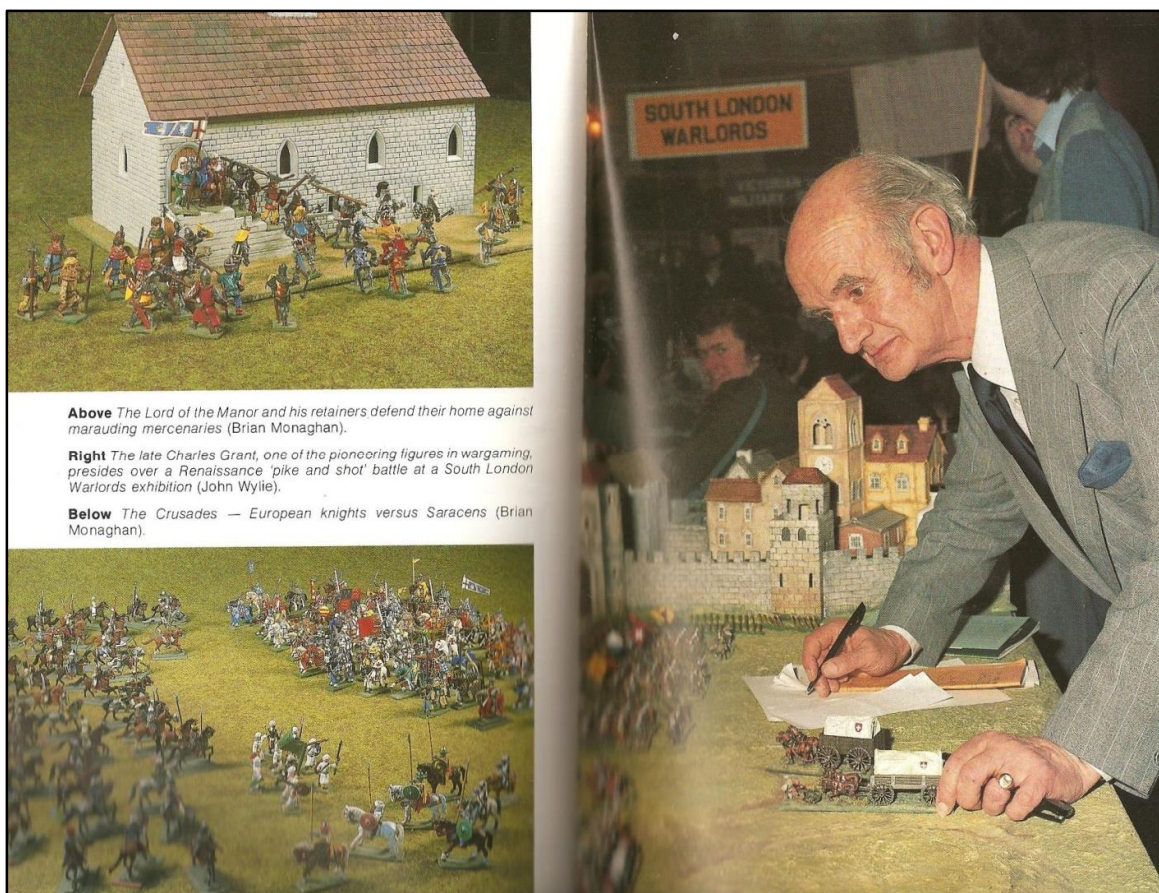
The first chapter gives the obligatory background notes on the history of wargaming, the problems of scale, making a wargame board and so on. The refreshing difference is the tone of brutal honesty the author sometimes adopts. For example, when discussing the gathering of your miniature armies Bruce Quarrie has a few words to say on painting, and quality of presentation: "What is not generally acceptable, and will make you unpopular in club play with members who do care, is slovenly 'get them painted as quickly as possible' workmanship." Quarrie then -- somewhat like the hypothetical club secretary, one feels -- takes the reader aside and points at the painter for hire classified advertisements in the wargame magazines. Pretty strong stuff.

Bruce Quarrie then goes on to discuss the history of Land Warfare, dividing military history up into the familiar terms of Ancient & Medieval, Pike & Shot, Horse & Musket and finally Rifle & Machine-gun. Having discussed the different forms of warfare in each period -- armour, weapons and tactics -- he then proceeds to develop a set of wargame rules to cover all four historical periods, with regulations of movement, melee, distance fighting and morale. A supplementary section adds in the necessary detail for using tanks in "modern" warfare. Whilst fairly simple, the rules do have a slight WRG feel to them -- it will be the rare reader that doesn't recognise the abbreviations for troop types, the combat resolution tables and the morale rolls, with a not overly long list of modifiers. This, though, was very much the style of rules at this time and the rules are very clearly presented and easy to follow.

A shorter section derives a generic naval warfare set which will take the player from galleys to aircraft carriers. By necessity, this is a very simplified rule set, but recall that this is a book for



the complete beginner. There is a split beyond the Age of Sail to allow for fleet battles of the 20th century -- ships are allocated damage points over key components and hits cause damage evenly across all components. This does mean that the sudden catastrophic hit cannot occur, but does allow the player to see when it is time to retire a vessel from the action in a fairly predictable manner (damage does include a random element). An even shorter section covers aerial warfare, and admits its reliance on the work of Mike Spick in his book "Air Battles in Miniature," and makes it clear that if air warfare is your thing then that book should really be the reader's next stop.



There are many B&W photographs – and eight pages in colour.

There is a short and in some ways somewhat dismissive chapter on fantasy wargaming -- it's not really wargaming is Quarrie's assessment. However, it is also noted that it can be a lot of fun and should be given a go -- Bruce Quarrie had clearly enjoyed the games of Dungeons & Dragons that he briefly describes playing in. And with that, every aspect of wargaming has indeed been addressed, and the book concludes its job done.

The "Beginners' Guide to Wargaming" is the kind of book that would still make an ideal first primer for a new player interested in historical wargames and, since this is what it set out to be, it can be judged as a complete success. For the experienced gamer, the main attraction is likely to be the lavish illustrations -- both black and white and colour photographs. Many of these may induce *deja vu* as they have been culled from other PSL wargaming books, and also

from magazines such as *Battle for Wargamers* (at least one photograph was a cover shot for that magazine!).

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The Beginners' Guide to Wargaming is currently out of print, but second-hand copies can be found on Amazon UK for around £12.