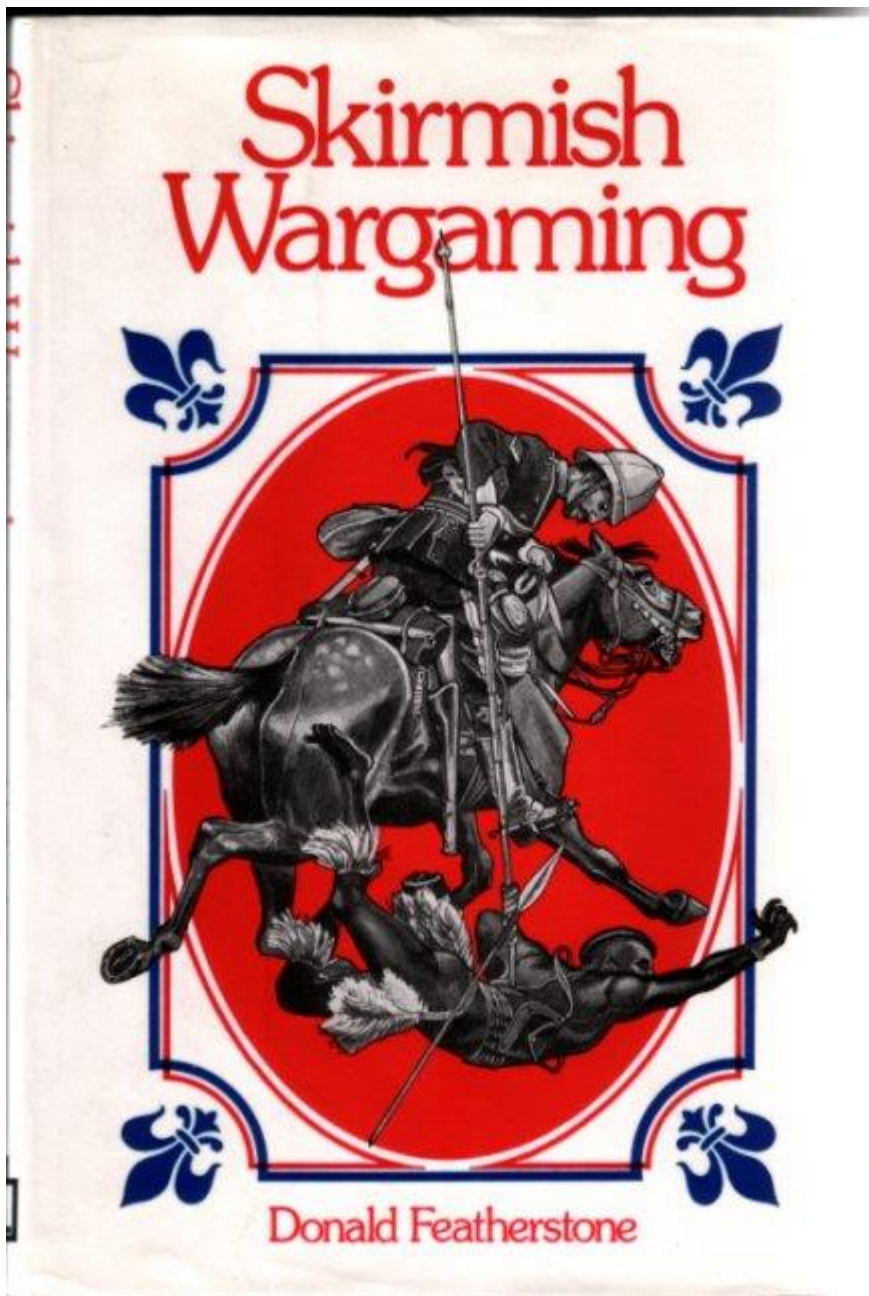


'Skirmish Wargaming'

By Donald Featherstone

Review by Paul Le Long

This book came out in 1975. What I'm reviewing here is the Time Rover edition from 1995 ó I'm not sure if the two are identical. I do remember borrowing the original from the library a long time ago and there are no obvious differences. There is also a John Curry reprint ó but since I don't have that I can't tell you how it differs from the original.



Anyway, I love this book, one of Featherstone's best in my view. It's an unusual book in many ways. It starts off traditionally enough with a set of rules but then we move on to chapters which are essentially battle narratives presented as wargames scenarios. I'll describe them in more depth below.

The opening chapter is all about the history of skirmish gaming which is nicely written and interesting. Then we move on to a set of rules for skirmishes. The rules are simple and I think very good. Essentially, if you are shooting you have a percentage chance to hit; if a hit is scored you read across on a table from the dice roll which tells you whether the target is killed, wounded and so on. In hand-to-hand combat, we have

another table that takes into account the skill of the combatants and the weapons they are using. Once you get the hang of the rules, they are rather elegant.

The heart of the book is the battle narratives/scenarios of which there are ten. We start with a Viking raid, then Hundred Years War, English Civil War, pirates, Peninsula War, French Foreign Legion in Mexico, Zulu War, Wild West, WWI, WWII.

Let's take the Peninsula War chapter as an example of the way all chapters are set out. We start with a cast list for both sides (British 95th Rifles) and their French opponents. Each cast member is named and given a rating (ranging from novice to veteran) and the weapons they carry are noted. In this scenario, both sides have seven men. They are joined by a third force of nine Spanish guerrillas. Then we have a seven-page narrative starting with an overview of the campaign setting, the men, equipment, historical context and so on. Then we move to a narrative of the action or presumably as it turned out on the author's wargames table. Essentially, it's the Spanish against everyone else or honourable regulars standing together against barbaric irregulars or you know the drill. There's also a line drawing of the terrain set up which is quite evocative.

Each chapter ends with a few scenario specific rules or usually this just covers the specific weapons used in the scenario or obviously the WWII scenario which features sub-machine guns and grenades is going to be radically different from the Viking scenario. Nevertheless, the generic rules are never strained, just added to with period specifics.

The battle narratives themselves betray a slightly old fashioned outlook or very old-school derring-do. But that works well in this format and there is plenty of personality injected into the cast of characters which is an essential element of this kind of game.

Will the modern reader learn anything from this book? Probably not. But I think the rules are good and unless you already have a set of skirmish rules that you're happy with, I think you could do much worse than these or they do everything you need them to without being over-detailed or burdensome which some skirmish sets can be. And the narratives are entertaining and evocative. Overall the book has an indefinable charm and would be a good addition to anyone's wargames bookshelf.

Details:

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