

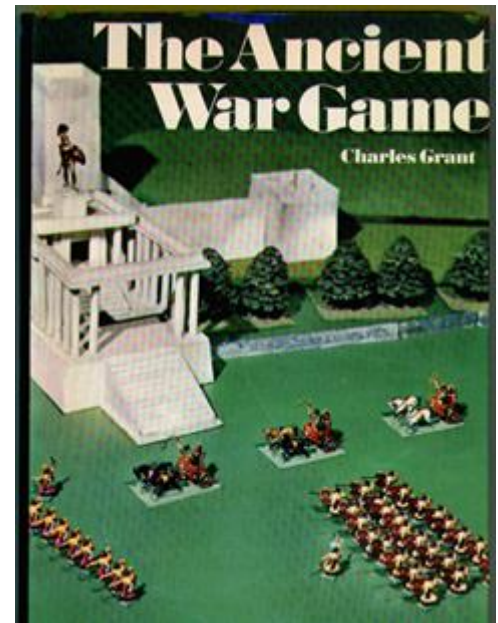
‘The Ancient War Game’

By Charles Grant

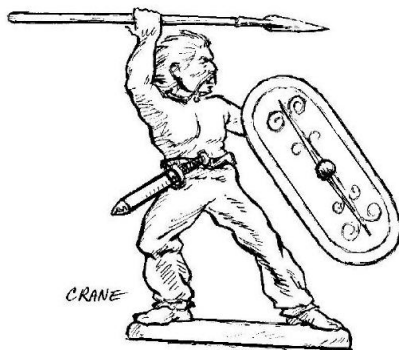
Review by Paul Le Long

A good book this; part “old school” wargaming, part history of ancient warfare. All written in a clear, accessible fashion and with a lot of charm.

We start with an introduction which talks about figure scales, the ancient period in particular, and wargaming in general. Then we have a chapter entitled “First Principles of the Rules,” which concentrates on a somewhat old-fashioned obsession with ground and time scales from which, according to the author, all else (rules-wise) follows. This is followed by chapters on combat and morale. These aren’t rules really, just suggestions on what the wargamer should take into account when conducting a battle or writing rules for that battle – again the usual old school fixation on things like disciplined troops versus irregulars, relative armour, and so on. Experienced gamers reading this blog will learn nothing new here, but when the book was written in 1974 this would have all been clear, useful advice, written in a readable way rather than hedged around with the technical jargon that was beginning to creep into the hobby at that time.



Then we have a chapter describing the warfare of ancient Egypt, followed by another on Assyria. These are short chapters so there isn’t an immense amount of detail but what there is, is good. This is followed by a fictional battle between an Egyptian and an Assyrian army which is an entertaining narrative in its own right and serves to illustrate the tactical points made in the previous chapters.



We repeat the formula over the next chapters – one describing the art of war in ancient Greece, followed by a chapter on the Persians which is in turn followed by two chapters on the battle of Plataea – one the background, the other the battle. Then we have a chapter on the Macedonians and another on the Successors. This is followed by a chapter on Rome and Carthage and the whole lot is summed up with a chapter on the battle of Pydna which pits legion versus phalanx in a test of those two tactical systems. Finally, we have a discussion on

Romans versus barbarians and a wargame of the battle of the Sambre.

I think this approach works very well, first a discussion on the methods of warfare used by this or that people, a similar examination of their enemies then a description of a wargame where these armies face each other, which serves to describe how various tactical systems or weapons systems fared in practice and on the wargames table.

Following a brief conclusion, there are a few appendices: a gladiator skirmish game, terrain, a few words on the WRG rules which were the dominant rules in the 1970s, the Society of Ancients and availability of figures.

The book has a broad brush approach, short and therefore light on detail – either on history or wargames rules – but rather takes the route of giving general advice and providing an impressionistic overview of military history from Egypt to the late Roman period. What it lacks in detail I think it makes up for in charm – it's a very unpretentious book that is clear, interesting and entertaining throughout. In 1974, it would have been informative too, but modern readers will not find it so. Nevertheless, the idea of examining, for example, ancient Egypt and Assyria and then condensing that information into a wargame to test and illustrate the conclusions is an excellent one. And I think this goes to the heart of wargaming – we all read military history, draw our own conclusions from the analysis and write rules and fight battles based on our conclusions, just as the author has done here.

Recommended for its straightforward, no-nonsense charm alone, but don't spend the ludicrous £28 that Amazon dealers are currently asking for it.

Details:

- **Hardcover:** 160 pages
- **Publisher:** A & C Black Publishers Ltd; First edition (6 Jun 1974)
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