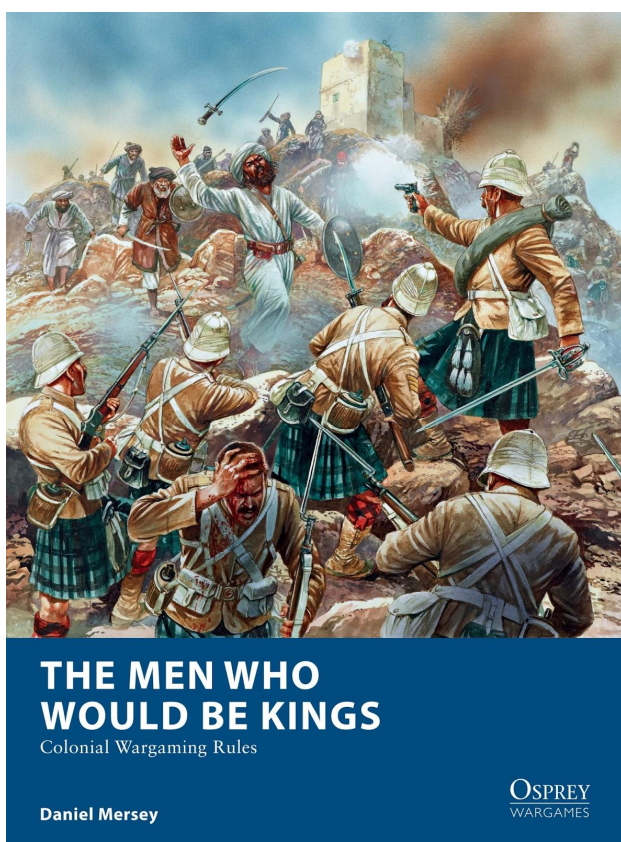


The Men Who Would Be Kings Osprey Wargames 16 (2016)

By Daniel Mersey; illustrated by Peter Dennis

Review by Paul Le Long

The Men Who Would Be Kings (TMWWBK) is a set of rules covering colonial warfare in the 19th century, written by Dan Mersey. He also wrote Lion Rampant and Dragon Rampant ó Medieval and Fantasy wargames rules respectively and TMWWBK owes a lot to those rule-sets. The intent here is to fight small actions in Hollywood style and the book is written in a light-hearted and very engaging way.



As with the Rampants, the focus of the rules is large skirmish ó the army lists at the back of the book give you anything from 36 figures (French Foreign Legion) to 112 (Darkest Africa tribesmen). You are typically fielding three or four units per side with somewhere between 10-16 men in each unit. There are several unit types: Regulars comprising 12 infantry or 8 cavalry figures; these are your basic red-coated professionals -- disciplined, steady shots. Then we have Irregulars ó think Sepoys, for instance ó not bad but probably a bit flaky ó they come in infantry and cavalry too. And then we have Tribal troops (16 infantry or 10 cavalry figures) ó think Zulus, Apaches, Arabs and so on. And you can have crewed weapons too ó cannon and machine guns.

Figure to Man ratio is 1:1 so forget about battalion squares and formations; you are controlling small blobs of men, the equivalent of a platoon of regulars. You are going to be escorting a wagon or maybe searching a village, not leading a brigade at Aliwal.

The rules are simple. Turn sequence is IGO-UGO and you activate one unit at a time giving them various simple orders like move, shoot, (hand to hand) combat and so on. There are variations -- Regulars can fire volleys, Tribals can -go to ground which does what it says on the tin. There are a number of options and some troop types are more suited to some than others which forces you to act in a fashion appropriate to your force's abilities.

The rules for shooting are as follows: For each man in your unit, you roll 1d6 and he hits if he rolls over a given score (5+ for Regulars and Irregulars and 6s for Tribal troops). Long range and cover make it more difficult to hit. Casualties are removed, the victims may become Pinned and if they do they can't do anything until they Rally next turn. It is incredibly simple & like Lion and Dragon Rampant & and, just like its predecessors, it is great fun and it works & you are concentrating on the tactics rather than the rules.

Included in the book are 8 scenarios (the game is very scenario-driven, rather than being a stand-up slog) and 30 sample armies

There are also solo rules & Playing Against Mr Babbage. Again they are simple, the premise being that your opponent, Mr Babbage, is late for the game but has left instructions on how you should play for him. There is a list of loose instructions that Mr Babbage insists you adhere to & for example he likes his shooty units to stay in cover and shoot while his melee units should close quickly. He likes to pick on weak or isolated enemies in preference to strong ones and so on. There are also simple rules for random deployment, reactions and rules for recycling destroyed units as well as instructions on how to play should the regulars be the automated force. Simple but good.

So, in conclusion:

You will like this book if:

- You like 19th century colonial (large) skirmishes
- You want a Hollywood style game
- You want a simple fun game
- You want no more than about 100 figures on the table in total

You will not like this book if:

- You want complex & accurate rules
- You want to fight Isandlwana or Omdurman
- You want a very small man-to-man skirmish with only about 10 figures on the table

The scope of the book is wide & you could use the rules for the Indian Mutiny, Plains Wars, Zulu Wars, Boer War, French Foreign Legion, North West Frontier and much else & pretty well anything in the Victorian era. I also think that it would be easy to adapt the rules to other periods; French and Indian War, Napoleonic Wars, ACW guerrillas and so on all suggest themselves.

Highly recommended.