

***Warrior of Rome, Fire in the East* by Harry Sidebottom**

A Book Review by Bob Stewart ©

What's the Theme?

Solo Wargamers are always looking for fiction that will inspire them to expand their gaming horizons, either to take up a new period, or to try something outside of their usual gaming experience. Here we have a brilliant little book on the siege and capture of the town of Arete on the northern part of the Euphrates, at the far Eastern edge of the Roman Empire, circa 255 AD. But the details really lend themselves to Solo Wargaming, and could involve small skirmish-level forces that hold parts of the wall, or attack with siege ladders. And there are lots of other interesting possibilities to explore, like mining and counter-mining (with bitter hand-to-hand attacks in the tunnels), forays to disrupt the enemy at night, some interesting skirmish battles along the river (what with re-supply and enemy attacks), not to mention the occasional spy, and vicious assassination attempts on both sides. Nice gritty stuff, all around.

How Transportable Is It?

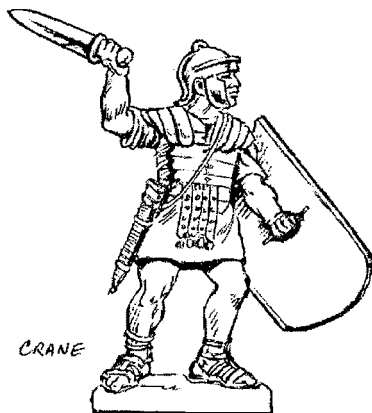
While I like a good action book in ANY period, one of the key things that I appreciate is the ability to take that action, and use it in my OWN preferred wargames period. And this book is a great example of some ideas that could have been used for 800 years either side of the time written about.

The opponents happen to be the Sassanid Persians, under Shapur, King of Kings. And in one form or another, the Sassanids were around (and quite successful) for a very long time. While most wargames concentrate on their use of armored horse and elephants, this particular book has them all essentially dismounted for the siege (aside from a couple of raids). And siege-work was just about the same for the whole period from about 500 BC through to the end of the dark ages. It was mostly long boring grunt-work to get the siege equipment in place (or to build the ramps and walls), followed by a few short hours of desperate struggle to try and breach the walls, one way or another. And we have lots of examples of that in this book.

About the Author

Dr. Harry Sidebottom is a relatively new name in the Historical Fiction field (as opposed to someone like a Wilbur Smith, or a Simon Scarrow), although he has a strong background in teaching military history (and that benefit certainly shows in his writing). There are no anachronistic elements here (at least, none that I could see), like trying to use some out-of-period secret-weapon to overcome long odds. And that level of polish is nice to see. Too often we have authors who are not that versed in whatever-the-current period, and as a result, they end up making some glaring mistakes that tend to sour you as the reader, and break the spell that the book casts.

Even better, once you finish THIS book, then there are 2 more sequels in the "Fire in the East" series to entertain you, with the same protagonist. (And I appreciate that --- another bite at the apple from a top-rated writer).



Copyright date: 2008
Publisher: Penguin Group
Story Line 8/10
Writing ability: 8/10
Availability 8/10 (on eBay, at least)
Solo Wargame Applicable: 8/10

Summary: A real winner