

A Review of Number one in The Braveheart Chronicles

Rebel by Jack Whyte

Reviewed by Derek Clark

Wargaming has many pleasures beside playing the game.

There is the setting up of the game perhaps using a random system or following a scenario. Before that is the making or purchase of terrain and decisions about realism or representation. Personally I like seeing model railway style scenery: beautiful hedges and drystone walls, trees in copses that at three foot distance look as though you could walk in and shuffle your feet through the falling leaves except that it is always Spring. Fields of wheat made from coconut matting that almost shivers in the breeze but not under the tank that is stalled halfway across the field sitting on top of the stalks.

Choosing the little chaps is another pleasure. Finding particular figures to fill blanks in sections, companies, regiments or battalions. Choosing a scale for a particular historical period to give a feel for the strategy and tactics of that army and era, and only the other day I decided to go to 10mm for 5th century Romano Britons versus Pictii to get the broad sweep of battle on a reasonably sized table top. I promptly bought 31 figures of 28mm because I thought the paintwork looked good in the eBay photo! I told the memsahib that they are for inspiration.

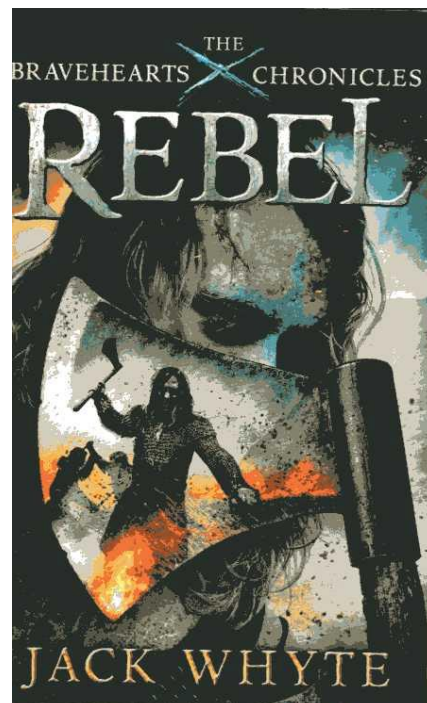
Before any of that though, is the dreaming. A little worm in the head that says isn't it time you looked at (insert own nagging inner voice into this space). For me that nag was the Scots Rebellion or Scottish War of Independence if you view those days past from North to South. I'm not sure why that should be because I have no Scots ancestry that I have found while searching back to the early 1600's on two lines and the 1700's on others. We Clarks have a tartan though because we are a sept, or some such, of a bigger grouping.



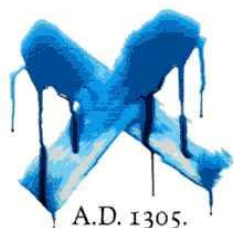
My main problem with the period is that I don't like plate armour. It seems to me that it was developed to nullify the arrow as fired from an English or Welsh longbow and that is too much like men of wealth putting the lower classes back in their place. Besides that, chainmail is quicker to paint and that's another pleasure of wargaming for many folk, if not for this one.

Anyways, my dreaming time included reading the Osprey MAA 151 (always good starters), buying Border Fury by Sadler and Scotland's First War of Independence by Crome. Other less weighty tomes are on the bookshelf including the magnificent trilogy of novels by Robert Low that I have read several times and not yet tired of.

Some time last year, however, I came across a novel by Jack Whyte called Resistance from his Braveheart Chronicles. I realised it was the second in the series so I put it to one side and resolved to find the first in the series: Rebel. That I found while dragging a reluctant 6 year old grandson around a pop up bookshop just last Monday, and today I finished reading it.



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ADVENTURES



It starts well and the scene is set as described on the back cover.

My paperback version is a 584 page book with wonderful characterisation of the various people - the English are dim and nasty and the Scots are folksy and manipulative – but there is little action (although often suitable for a skirmish scenario) and when there is it lacks the descriptive sweep and gore of a Bernard Cornwell or Robert Low.

This is the first time that I can remember getting to within 50 pages of the end of a book and finding myself unbothered about finishing it. I persevered for you good people but to be perfectly honest if I had spotted the author's note at the end of the story before starting I wouldn't have bothered reading any more. He treats Blind Hary as a reasonable source for Wallace and seems to find the Braveheart film satisfactory.

Not a terrible novel but not much for the wargamer to get his teeth into, I'm sorry to say.

This will go to the charity shop probably accompanied by the second of the series that I haven't read.