# Dux Bellorum: Arthurian Wargaming Rules AD367–793
By Daniel Mersey; illustrated by Jose Daniel Cabrera Pena
Osprey Wargames 1 (2012)

Review by Paul Le Long

Regular readers may well know that there are three things that I like: Osprey ±blue bookørules; Daniel Mersey; Arthurian games. So it will come as no surprise that I love these rules.

These are different however to the authorøs other Blue Book games. Lion Rampant, Dragon Rampant and The Pikemanøs Lament are all essentially the same ruleset, just for different periods and The Men Who Would Be Kings, while a bit different, is clearly a close cousin, focussing on colonial wars. Dux Bellorum is definitely different, although it does share the authorøs lightness of touch and old-school sensibility.
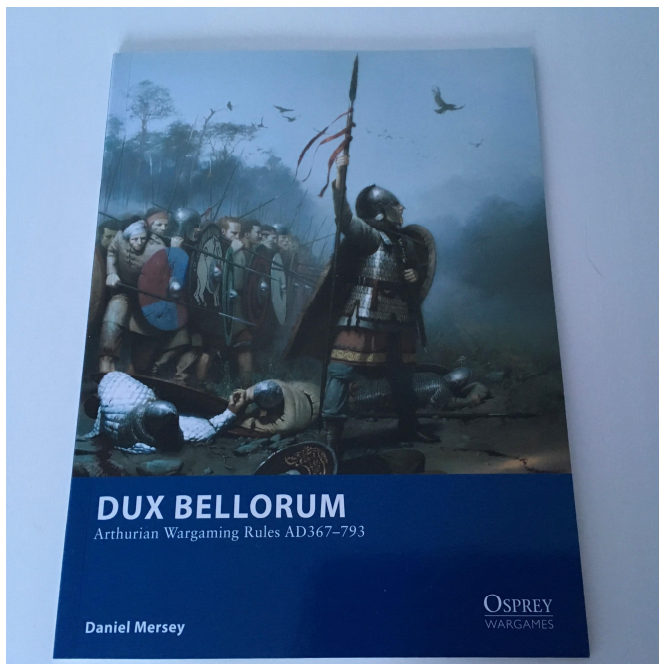
The book is broken down, more or less into the basics, rules, special rules and extras, sample armies and scenarios. Your force will consist of 32 points with each unit costing between 1 and 6 points, averaging around the 3-5 mark. So about 8 units will make up your army. Battles in this era tended to be small ó this is not Cannae. As with many of Dan Merseyøs games, the emphasis is on confused, messy fighting rather than serried ranks of Frederick the Great-style automata marching in cadenced step. This is about hairy barbarians rushing about pell-mell trying to stab you. There are no neat lines, rather units tend to bundle in like a rugby scrum. I did in fact think that one could use the rules as written to replicate a modern-day riot.

Troop types are bows, skirmishers, companions (the leaderøs bodyguard), shieldwall (close-order troops), warriors (open-order troops) and riders. Further subdivided in many cases into noble and ordinary. Leaders are there mainly to influence the fighting by using Leadership Points to do things like boost the aggression of friendly troops (come on boys, follow me), cancel hits (close up, close up), boost morale, steal initiative and so on.

Combat is simple – you roll a number of dice based on your unit's Aggression score and you are looking to beat on each dice the target's Protection score. Hits are taken from a Cohesion score (hit points basically) and when Cohesion is down to zero the unit is destroyed. Simple but it works well, especially with Leaders influencing the fight; there is quite a bit of tactical depth here.

There are 7 scenarios. Sample armies are: Late Roman, Romano-British, Welsh, Irish, Pict, Saxon, Land Raider and Sea Raider. The Welsh, Saxons and Picts have warrior and shieldwall variants as well, depending on the period.

You will not like the book if:
    i.   You want big formal battles
    ii.   You don't like the Late Roman period
    iii.   You want a very serious, rules-heavy, tournament style approach

You will like the book if:
    i.   You like small games with about 8-10 units on each side
    ii.   You like scenario-driven encounters
    iii.   You want to represent the scruffy, low-scale warfare of the Dark Ages
    iv.   You want a simple (but elegant) game that flows quickly without getting bogged down in detail but that does accurately represent Dark Age warfare

Highly recommended.