



Mortem et Gloriam, Battles of the Great Commanders, 1. Age of Attila

Author: Richard Jeffrey-Cook
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Reviewed by: Roy Boss

I was quite engaged to be given this book for review. From the title I surmise that it is the first in a series. It is an interesting concept and is really three publications in one.

Firstly it is a military history from the arrival of the Huns in Europe to the fall of their empire, with profuse illustrations of the quality that you would find in one of the monthly wargames glossy magazines.

Secondly it has sections on how to run a wargames campaign and thirdly three illustrated work-throughs of the battle of the Catalaunian fields where Attila fought Aetius.

Let us look at each theme in turn. The style of the narrative is quite positive, it does not have footnotes and does not engage with scholarly debates about the nature of Hunnic tactics, or the numbers of barbarian armies, or whether the leaders of the Ostrogoths were Huns. The author states his opinions and gives his reasons without equivocation. So the interpretation of Vandal numbers goes to 10,000 warriors rather than the more conventional 20,000 and the forces at the Catalaunian plains are quite low estimates. Frankly the history is so involved that clarity demands that the narrative be uncluttered.

The historical section is an easy read and covers some interesting topics, such as the Invasion of Radagaisus and his Goths in 405, the career of Uldin the Hun, the rebellion of Constantius, the rivalry between Bonifacius and Aetius.

There are few areas that I would disagree with Richard and most of those are topics where both views are tenable, though I do feel that it is likely that at the battle of the Nedao where the Huns subjects rebelled against them that the Ostrogoths were on the Huns' side!

I would say that the history is aimed at the ordinary wargamer and would give him enough background to understand a complex period with many actors moving across the stage. To read and enjoy the historical survey would not need any acquaintance with the MeG rules.

The sections on running campaigns interested me most. Structures are given for Aetius' campaigns series of campaigns in Gaul (a solo campaign), the Hunnic invasion of Thrace in 447 and in a final section of the book a map for Aetius and Litorius against the Goths in Southern Gaul in the 420s and 30s and a campaign involving logistics which shows how the Attilanic invasion of Gaul was dictated by the needs of the Hun army to forage and take towns in order to secure enough to eat and supply their horses, whilst the superior Roman logistical train gave Aetius the ability to intercept his foe.

It would have been interesting to see that campaign integrated with the actual movements of the armies in so far as we know them. It would possibly make a lot more sense of why Attila was where he ended up, in Central Gaul.

Finally we have the three refights of the Battle of the Catalaunian Plains using three versions of *Mortem et Gloriam*; 'Maximus', 'Pacto' and 'Magna'. I am no stranger to size based variants of rules: *Armati* has three variants one with single base width per unit, one with a double base width per unit and the last with extra depth.

In MeG, Maximus is the norm 15mm version played on a 6 ft by 4 ft table, Pacto uses half the number of figures on a cut down table of 3 ft by 2 ft. Magna uses 28mm figures on a table 6 ft by 4 ft. I have played Maximus a couple of times and so have a basic understanding of the mechanisms. Command and control is through a card pack, in effect the expenditure of pips to allow units to make manoeuvres, with it being easier to move drilled (but more expensive) troops.

There are a number of movements which are particular to MeG, particularly the ability in this case, of Huns to form flexibly and thus use pips (cards) to convert from an open skirmish order to a closer fighting order without having to change figures. But don't get into needing to convert without sufficiently high cards.

The card system also manages the ability of skirmishing horse to shoot and then evade or perhaps be caught, so there are risks associated with the possible benefits. The MeG dice system uses a scaled range of symbols to determine casualties...be sure to roll skulls. One of the dice faces is an S which gives special results.

The three demonstration games are worked through very thoroughly using pictures of the figures and diagrams and the explanation of the actions would give any reader a good idea of how the systems work. There are full army lists provided for both sides in each reflight which is very useful in interpreting the pictures of the battles, though the explanatory copy is very full.

The rules generate many 'moments of excitement' and the example games do bring that tension out. If you are a wargamer looking to try MeG, do not have experienced players nearby and had bought a set of the main rules the work-throughs in the Attila book would be immensely useful in getting to grips with the rules.

I would recommend this book if the reader is a newcomer to the period and wants to get a comprehensive and clear overview of the history with an intention of wargaming it with any set of rules. I would definitely suggest it to a club member looking to set up a campaign to generate tabletop games.

Lastly I would suggest this volume to anyone who is 'getting into MeG' or wanted to get a feel for how the rules worked. In a way, Richard Jeffrey-Cook has nailed his colours to the mast here, by claiming that MeG gives a good historical feel and a decisive result and then running three simulations for the reader to evaluate.

The book is priced at £25 and is available from the PSC Games website.



