EAST MEETS WEST MEETS FAR EAST

DIRTY WORK AT THE CROSSROADS

It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that the Middle East is the crossroads of civilization – where east meets west and north meets south, where the world ocean meets the heartland of the Old World. So, if you’ve opened this page expecting an article about role-playing in a fictional TV Midlands motel, I’m afraid you’re about to be disappointed.

Jerusalem, it is said, “is the navel of the world”. It’s the centre of three great religions and, even today, its possession remains controversial. Back in the Middle Ages, it was an even bigger bone of contention, as Catholic Christian European crusaders sought to wrest control for the ‘true faith’ from Sunni and Shi’ite Muslim ‘infidels’. To these crusaders, all Muslims were ‘Saracens’; and to Muslims, all crusaders were ‘Franks’. Sadly, there’s nothing new about demonizing the enemy, but in the 1200s, there was a new kid on the block – the Mongol Empire, advancing from Central Asia in devastating raids – not to mention the tottering Orthodox Christian Byzantine Empire, looking on from the sidelines.

Yep, I sense a campaign coming, too.

The beleaguered Kingdom of Jerusalem looks to Prince Edward of England and the Ninth Crusade to save them from their Muslim adversaries, who are themselves worried about a Mongol advance. Meanwhile, the once-mighty Byzantine Empire, still an important player, looks on. Who can amass the most territory and conquer the Holy City?

GENERAL RULES

A neutral umpire is helpful to complete the necessary paperwork and arbitrate disputes. Anything not covered below will be decided by the umpire, whose word is final. The campaign is deemed to be over when one player or alliance has destroyed all others and has captured the Holy City of Jerusalem. Where rival forces meet on the campaign map, a tabletop battle will result, with the loserretreating to an adjacent area. All battles should be resolved using suitable figure rules (see below) and ‘big battles’ should be scaled down to allow completion. Alternatively, ‘small battles’ may be resolved by umpire-ruling, to save time.

THE CAMPAIGN MAP

Each province is assigned an economic value. Ownership of provinces needs to be recorded on paper, as these may frequently change hands. Each player should have one provincial capital, where new forces are raised. For simplicity, we assume control of only these at the start of play. These are:

- The Kingdom of Jerusalem – Acre
- The Mameluke Empire – Cairo
- The Byzantine Empire – Byzantium
- Prince Edward’s Crusade – Approach Square (its ‘economic value’ represents funds from well-wishers back in Christendom)
- The Abbasid Caliphate – Damascus
- The Seljuk Empire – Baghdad
- The Mongol Empire – Approach Square (the ‘economic value’ represents reinforcement hordes from back east)

The square blocks on the map represent ‘big cities’, and these provinces cannot be captured without the attacker utilizing siege equipment in a battle and the defender getting walls...
Defenders get the walls for free; attackers have to (temporarily) replace units on a 1:1 basis, to receive siege equipment for another unit. So you’ll need a big army.

**COUNTERS AND SUPPLY**

Each player is given a number of ‘divisions’ as his field force. These are represented by counters that are placed in his capital at the start. Each of these divisions should consist of up to twelve units appropriate to the relevant army list (I’ll talk about these later). These are:

- The Kingdom of Jerusalem – Acre – 1 Division
- The Mameluke Empire – Cairo – 2 Divisions
- The Byzantine Empire – Byzantium – 2 Divisions
- Prince Edward’s Crusade – 1 Division
- The Abbasid Caliphate – Damascus – 2 Divisions
- The Seljuk Empire – Baghdad – 3 Divisions
- The Mongol Empire – 2 Divisions

The changing composition of counters should be recorded on paper and known only to the owning player and the umpire. Divisions of fewer than six units will need to be disbanded and reorganized, or combined with allies. Keeping tabs on forces encountered is either up to players or, for simplicity of play, can be deemed common knowledge. One counter can be used for all forces occupying a province, in preference to multiple counters.

All divisions are considered to be ‘in supply’, providing they control an adjacent province leading to their capital. Those ‘out of supply’ will begin to suffer attrition losses at a rate of 1D5 units per division per season. Disease was the biggest killer of armies before the twentieth century; but, for simplicity, we will assume that all armies are equally and proportionally affected, and that all divisions receive a steady supply of reinforcements, so its effects can be ignored.

**TIMESCALE AND SEQUENCE OF PLAY**

There are three campaign-moves per year: spring, summer, and autumn; there is also a winter turn for rebuilding. The first turn will be spring 1271. In the winter move, forces may be redeployed to any friendly province up to two provinces away, but no attacks into hostile provinces are permitted.

Each campaign move consists of the following events:

- All forces move/reorganize/fortify to written orders (in a winter move, they may redeploy instead of moving)
- Any voluntary retreats are made and sieges declared
- Any resulting combats are adjudicated
- Any provinces changing hands are recorded and economic values adjusted
- In a winter move, any reinforcements are allocated to divisions and any training is completed
- Any ‘out of supply’ and ‘siege’ attrition is adjudicated
- All changes in the status of divisions are recorded
- Diplomatic activity may take place
- Time moves on to the next turn

**MOVEMENT**

All forces move simultaneously to written orders, one province per move. Those wishing to make sea-crossings must roll equal to or less than their ‘naval skill’ on a D6, or they lose 1D5 stands from each division moved. Naval skill will be 4 for all players, except the Mongols, who have a naval skill of 2 (I don’t think they’ll mind).

There is no stacking limit of divisions to a province. Any unordered divisions may defend themselves. Instead of moving, divisions can be ordered to reorganize/combine or to fortify. Fortified areas receive 1D5 items of fortification per division at any battle that occupying forces have to fight.

**COMBAT AND SIEGES**

Any land force may elect to refuse battle and retreat to an adjacent friendly province instead; this may involve a ‘naval skill’ roll. Any force entering a province is immediately detected by those occupying it. The terrain of any resulting battle should conform to the historical geography of the area. During a battle, a force may elect to retreat to its camp...
and thence off the table. It must then retreat to an adjacent friendly province. The winner occupies the province.

Instead of fighting for a province or retreating from it, a player may elect to ‘stand siege’. He is assumed to be holed up inside the province’s cities. In a siege, both sides suffer attrition at a rate of 1D5 stands per division for the besieged and 1D6 -1 stands per division for the besieger.

**REINFORCEMENT AND TRAINING**

During each winter campaign move, each player adds up the value of his provinces. The total is the number of points he has available to build with. All points must be spent each turn, but can be used as part-payment towards a future item, in which case, this item must be stated at the start of the construction process and cannot be changed. Prince Edward's Crusade and the Kingdom of Jerusalem also each receive 1D5 additional foot units, representing volunteers from Europe.

No new division of fewer than six units can be activated. Until this total is reached, they are assumed to be still building. Reinforcements may instead be posted to existing divisions that are ‘in supply’ and not ‘under siege’. Umpires will need to convert these ‘incomes’ into suitable amounts with which to purchase troops, using their chosen army list points system. Players will, no doubt, have their preferences for this.

For example, for Hail Caesar, 1 Point might translate into 100 army points. For WAB, 1 point might equate to 200 points of forces from the equivalent list. For DBA, a point might equal one element. The surviving forces in a division at the end of the winter campaign turn should pay a maintenance cost equal to half their points. This must be paid first before new units can be purchased.

**DIPLOMACY**

Players may freely negotiate between themselves. Any level of duplicity, bribery, treachery, loyalty, disunity, self-sacrifice, or the lying down of one’s allies for oneself is permitted to add realism. Written agreements may be drawn up and made public, kept secret, adhered to, or broken, as required. Deciding whom to trust is part of the game!

**CHOICE OF MINIATURE RULES & LISTS**

Now this is where it becomes a matter of personal choice. You’ll need a set of rules with points systems and army lists that you’re all happy with. In the actual campaign, we used my Blitzspiel rules set, which is simple and fast-playing, with involved element-like ‘stands’ (and it’s still available). As an alternative, WAB (Warhammer Ancient Battles) is now fairly venerable, with tried and tested rules and lists, but it’s liked by some and loathed by others. War and Conquest is the new kid on the block; many at my club swear by it (and a few swear at it). One of the great things about WAC is that its lists are free online, which is a bonus. Hail Caesar is similarly well resourced for rules and lists, and De Bellis Multitucidinis (DBM) and De Bellis Antiquitatis (DBA) spring to mind as equally useable. Another excellent option is Fireforge Games’ new Deus Vult rules, specifically designed and tailored for the crusades.

Ultimately, the rules selected are a matter of personal choice, but the key thing is to pick a set that everyone is happy with, and to keep the campaign mechanics simple, so that they generate interesting tabletop battles and off-table alliances. **WS&S**

**So that’s the crusades campaign. Good luck in smiting infidels and heretics and establishing the true faith … and in the process, amassing the riches of the world for your earthly life!**

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