White versus red

**Blood & Roses**

The Wars of the Roses were fought in England during the period of 1455-1485 between the house of York (white) and the house of Lancaster (red). It is only since 1829 that these wars are called this way, because both houses used the rose as their symbol.

As a boardwargamer I usually play games that are WWII themed, but I am also interested in WWI, modern conflicts, the Napoleonic wars, and the American Civil War. I do enjoy learning more about earlier eras, but I hardly ever get to play a game based on those themes. At times it can be fun to try and take a look at an era in warfare that I am not familiar at and see what happened and why. And while doing so you can be in for a nice surprise.

In the Men of Iron game series by GMT Games, three games have already been published: Men of Iron, Infidel, and Blood & Roses. At the moment of writing a fourth title, Arquebus, is under development. I only know the Wars of the Roses by name. Because I had already seen a couple of raving reviews on Blood & Roses, I decided to take a closer look at this title myself.

**The game components**

Blood & Roses contains seven battles from this turbulent English era: 1st St. Albans, Blore Heath, 2nd St. Albans, Towton, Barnet, Tewkesbury, and Bosworth. You receive two double-sided 16” x 34” maps. Each hex covers fifty yards of terrain. There are 2½ countersheets with units and markers which are colorful and show miniature soldiers of the various arms. An infantry and cavalry counter represents around 250 men, in the case of ‘archer’ units this is around 150 men. The rule and scenario books are clearly written, and together with the player aids (with terrain effect chart) you can start playing this game quite quickly. All the scenarios contain a wealth of historical information and several variant rules are presented there too. There is also an extensive and nicely illustrated example of play showing you how a battle is resolved. The game makes use of two d10 dice.

**Gameplay**

The game series is being advertised as easy to learn and quick playing. And I can only confirm this here. The first scenario, 1st St. Albans, is easy to set up. I had only skimmed the rulebook, and by following the Sequence of Play I decided to see how things played out and what would happen. The game uses a so called activation system. The first player picks a part of his army, a ‘battle’, and activates it. An army is divided in a number of ‘battles’. Next he checks to see if the units are in ‘command range’ of their leader. This determines if any restrictions are in play and then the units can move and fire. When performing combat it will become painfully clear that the ‘longbow’ is a really potent weapon. These bowmen will make you shake with fear. Next ‘shock attacks’ and charges take place. Shock attack happens between two adjacent units. Charges are obviously performed by units that are riding horses. When a unit is being fired upon or the target of a charge, the unit can react. Using a matrix on the player aid card one can easily establish which units can use shock attack and which can charge, and which die roll modifiers apply. Easy and effective.

During combat, players need to take into account what type of units are involved, numerical superiority, terrain, position (flank or rear for example), leadership and status. The rules describe the procedures in a clear and easy manner. Next the players try to reorganize and recover their forces if they were damaged during combat or retreated after combat. Each battle has a standard, and if units have to retreat, they need to move to this rally point. If a battles loses its standard, you have got a problem on your hands…

**Activation**

As mentioned before, the game makes use of an activation system, which makes the game really interactive. If a battle has performed its action, the player can try and activate again. To do so, he needs to
pick another battle, and determine the ‘activation rating’ of the battle’s leader. If the die roll is equal to or lower than this rating, the player gets to activate this battle. If the roll is higher, the opposing player gets a ‘free’ activation, and can activate a part of his army. It is possible to pass, and let the opposing player do an activation instead. The activation system makes for a solo friendly game too.

There are also chits that can be used to influence actions made during the game or grab the initiative. This way both players need to keep focused and involved during game play.

Text: **Hans Korting**

**Rating:** ***** ***

**In short:** Fun and not too complicated, interactive, game system, good production value, containing lots of historical background information.