

A sneak peek at Longships from Peter Pig

GOING A-VIKING!

Longships is the new game from Peter Pig's rule series. When we were invited to a secret playtest in Ilchester, naturally, we jumped at the chance. What better place to playtest a Dark Age rules set, than in the grounds of an old Roman town?

Peter Pig are famous for their 'Rules for the Common Man' (RFCM) sets, which include such classics as *AK 47*, *Pieces of Eight* and *PBI*, to name but three. Their latest set is for the Dark Ages, specifically the ninth century, and is expected to be released in June 2013. The provisional title is *Longships – Vikings of the ninth century*. The rules were partly inspired by Bernard Cornwell's *Last Kingdom* series, and will primarily focus on Britain, with the Vikings being the main protagonists. Peter Pig are supporting the rules with a new range of Dark Age miniatures. Rather tasty they are, too!



Play gets under way in Longships.

THE GAME

The army lists are pretty comprehensive, consisting of Vikings, Saxons, Irish, Carolingians, Welsh, and Scottish armies. An army list will consist of 400 points, with an armoured base being worth 13 points and a levy 3 points. There are two basic types of scenario: the raid and the battle. The rules include a number of innovative ideas and mechanisms. All games are of the attacker/defender type, and there are no even pitched battles, but victory points reflect this imbalance.

The basic *Longships* force consists of five units, each with eight bases plus a general. A typical army unit represents



The opposing armies close, the Saxons led by 'Grey Men'.

the crew of one long ship and will consist of a mixed crew, some armoured warriors, some unarmoured, some levy, and possibly a berserker base, if the army lists allow. The figures are based up on the normal Peter Pig 3cm x3cm bases. The average army will require about 120 miniatures to be painted.

Players decide if they are playing a raid or a battle. Each has a simple pre-game. For the raid, this represents a voyage across the sea, which translates into potential bonuses for the game. For the battle, there's a simple but effective system to determine bonuses and who is the attacker and the defender. For this, players have a pool of seven dice that can be rolled on the table; the higher the dice-roll, the better the bonus. However, if the player rolls over 14, the dice are wasted (potentially giving the advantage to the other player). Who wins these pre-games determines who is the attacker (with all his forces) and who is

the defender. The defender gets some advantages in setting up the terrain, but then has some of his army held back as reinforcements.

Terrain is pretty important to the game and there's a lot of it! The on-table game requires a 5' x 3' area, divided into 6" squares, much like *Square Bashing*. In the battle game, some terrain can be double-stacked, so two woods would become a 'wildwood' – particularly difficult for troops to pass through. While the defender chooses scenery, the attacker can attempt to move some of it.

In the raid game, terrain is decided more equally amongst the players. The defender decides what type of plunder is up for offer, while the attacker can decide when to end the game (hopefully, with some loot off the table). The defender's job is to rally his reinforcements and then attempt to prolong the action.



None shall pass! Vikings hold the summit of the hill.

ACTIONS

The most innovative part of the game involves the actions. Each unit starts with a pool of six dice for actions, modified by the quality of the unit and by the fatigue or negative morale the unit has suffered. Each action has a target number; so, for example, to change formation is a 3+, to move one square is a 4+, and to attack is a 5+. If a fresh unit wants to move forward, roll all six dice; if one or more succeeds, the unit moves. Remove one successful roll at the end of the action. The unit now has five dice for its next action. And so on.

A player may risk as many actions as he likes, up to the total number of dice. But, as a successful action removes a die each time, success gets less likely the more actions are performed. Also, if ever an action fails, the turn for the entire army ends. This is a very neat system, as it's likely that your units can achieve something in a turn; but more risky manoeuvres can mean that the rest of your army cannot move. It also means that units suffering from adverse morale or fatigue are unlikely to do anything except recover in that turn.

SHOOTING AND COMBAT

Shooting is simple, but fairly ineffective. Each full-strength unit generates two dice of shooting, hitting on a 5+ (a 6+, if the shooter is in shield-wall). If the target is in shield-wall, they may take the hit on an unarmoured or levy unit and treat it as armoured, saving on a 3+. While not amazing, shooting

actions are worthwhile to soften the enemy before close combat.

Combat is pretty simple. Add up the number of bases in a unit and add or subtract a number of factors, including terrain, the superiority of the unit, whether the target is in shield-wall, and supporting units (not engaged in combat). The enemy is hit on a 5+. With typically a 4+ save for an unarmoured unit, players should choose carefully which bases are in the front rank. You generally want your best troops 'up front'. The difference in casualties determines if a unit is gaining ground or is just still in the push-and-shove. Each casualty generates a dead marker, which will affect the morale of a unit. Morale failures will result in a unit becoming hesitant (losing two dice off its next set of actions), fatigued (four dice off its next action), or routed off-table.

There are additional rules for challenges (a good way to remove unit leaders, but not without risk) and for berserkers (who, with a little luck, can break shield-walls).

Overall, the whole feel of the game is very 'Dark Agey', taking into account the factors you'd expect. The game does involve a fair amount of counters, but these are necessary to remind players what units are in shield-wall and are suffering from fatigue.

We took the opportunity to try out Martin's claim that the rules would work

just as well with 28mm. I asked James Oram, a dyed-in-the-wool veteran Viking player, to try them out with me. We did this by simply adopting one 28mm model to represent one base. While a little sceptical at first, James soon warmed to the game and we had a cracking time. Just when the poor Saxons were losing ground, James risked his general in a challenge, only to get himself killed! The mixture of men in a unit felt right and the mechanics worked well.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the rules are written in the friendly and fun style we've come to expect from RFCM sets. They are generally clear and concise. One thing that impressed me was the sheer number of playtesters and how keenly Martin listened to their feedback. This is a game that has been thoroughly tried and tested before publication, which can only be a good thing.

Longships will be attractive to those gamers who want to try something different for their Dark Age gaming experience. The fact that it can be played equally well at 15mm or 28mm scale with no major adaptation is a bonus – it could definitely be adapted to other scales, as well. It is also a straightforwardly historical game, with none of the more fantastical elements that other games have. No *Ulfhenedahr* or unbreakable *Godi* characters here. If you're tired of the run-of-the-mill Viking games, give *Longships* a try.

We would like to thank Martin and the RFCM team for inviting us along for a most enjoyable day.

