

Star Wars Miniatures: Rebel Storm

Wizards of the Coast

A Review

By Tony Watson

The new line of WoTC Star Wars miniatures offers gamers a mixed bag. On the one hand, the first set, “Rebel Storm”, offers decently sculpted and pre-painted plastic minis of some of the characters and troops that make up the Star Wars universe during the time of the Rebellion (Episodes IV - VI in movie terms), and some straightforward, if a bit simplistic, rules for combat on a man to man scale that allow you to get into the action relatively easily. On the other hand, there’s the whole collectibility aspect to the game, something I’ll get to in a bit more detail later on.

The Miniatures –

Rebel Storm, the first series of miniatures, comprises 60 figures, 20 each of Imperial, Rebel and Fringe. The latter are a kind of neutral class that can be added to either a Rebel or Imperial force, and are made up of characters like the bounty hunters from “Empire Strikes Back”, and various aliens, including an Ewok and a Wampa snow beast. The characters in this faction include Lando Jabba the Hutt and cult favorite Bobba Fett. The Imperial line includes lots of stormtroopers: three versions of the basic trooper, a snowtrooper, elite snow and stormtroopers, as well as a scout troopers on foot and a speeder bike. The named, unique characters for the Imperials include two versions of Vader, General Veers, Grand Moff Tarkin, Emperor Palpatine and Mara Jade (the set’s nod to the post movie trilogy universe). For the Rebels we have various troopers from all three movies: the guys who opposed the Imperial boarding party in A New Hope, some Hoth soldiers and some Endor commandoes. The name characters include two versions of Luke (Jedi and non), two of Leia (one version being the famous metal-bikini clad captive of Return of the Jedi), Han Solo and Chewbacca and the two droids. While it’s easy to quibble about characters and figures that were put in and left out, it’s a pretty decent mix. It should be noted that some of the figures are large – the Wampa ice creature, Jabba and several figures mounted on speeder bike or dewback.

The miniatures themselves are roughly 25mm scale (the scaling seems a bit off with a few of the figures), made of soft plastic, and pre-painted. For the most part the sculpts are good, with only a few questionable poses, the figures durable and the paint jobs fine. Unlike other miniatures games, there are no record keeping devices on the base of the miniatures. The simple rules and stat card for each figure eliminate the need for that.

What You Get –

The miniatures are sold in starters (\$19.99) and boosters (\$12.99), terms which will be all too familiar to those acquainted with world of collectible card games. In a starter box you get a set of illustrated rules, a 32” by 20” folded printed map (one side depicts various Death Star locales, the other is a blank grid for custom terrain), a small sheet of record chits, 8 variant terrain tiles and 10 figures and their stat cards. Two of the figures are fixed (that is they are found in every

starter and only in starters): Luke Skywalker in his early Tatooine farm boy incarnation, and Darth Vader; the other figures are random. Boosters contain seven figures and their stat cards. You will need only one starter, though you’ll probably have at least two boosters to go along with it to provide a bare minimum of figures for interesting play.

How It Plays –

While I can hardly call myself an aficionado of miniatures rules systems, I’ve been around enough to recognize that the rules for this game system are on the clean and very simple end of the spectrum. Each figure has a stat card, which lists: hit points, defense rating, attack rating and the damage it causes when it hits; some figures have special abilities, which also appear on the card. During a round of play, each side dices for initiative with the winner deciding whether to go first or not. They then alternate activating two characters each, a somewhat odd mechanic when one side has many more figures than the other, as that side will be able to move all its remaining figures at once at the end of the round. When activated, a character can move 6 squares (diagonals cost double, as does moving through covering terrain), and attack once, either before or after moving, or move 12 squares without attacking. Combat is handled simply. The attacker points out his target and determines whether there is a line of sight to it and if the target has cover. Then a 20-sided die is rolled and the attacker adds his combat rating. If the result equals or exceeds the target’s defense factor, which can be modified by cover, the target takes the hits equal to the attacker’s damage rating. Figures with damage equal to their hit points are eliminated. Damage tokens are placed on the card to keep track of wounding. I’m happy to report that true to form, rank and file Stormtroopers keel over with a single hit from every figure I’ve seen so far.

There are some quirks with combat more experienced players may scoff at. Range, for example is not a factor (and on the scale depicted here a reasonable argument can be made for that decision). There are basically just two ranges: adjacent, required for figures that can only melee attack, and any other distance. The cover rules are very simplistic, in that there is only one degree of cover, there is no effect for wounding a character, and no rules for covering fire or pinning a target. The emphasis, which many will enjoy, is on simplicity.

The spice of the game lies in the special abilities of many of the characters, which allow them bonuses, special attack or movement. These run a wide gambit – characters that can attack twice or have an augmented attack if they don’t move, commander affects which work on other figures on the same side, and, for a select few characters, of course, Force powers. All of these that I have seen are perfectly in keeping with the standard rules of the game, and perhaps more importantly, with the stylized cinematic combat they are attempting to depict.

Appropriately enough, the focus of the game is on the main heroes and villains. Along with generally better (and considerably better in some cases) regular stats, they tend to have the lion’s share of special abilities and Force powers. Luke, Leia and Han will dodge and outshoot squads of Stormtroopers and Vader can wade through a throng of any unfortunate Rebel soldiers who get in his way.

Scenario and Battles -

The basic scenario in the game is for each side to pick 100 points worth of troops, starting at the opposite ends of the Deathstar map and having at it. There is also a more thought out “Rescue the Princess” rescue scenario based on the first movie; but you’ll need the specific characters to make that one work. Actually, the game will need more of these kinds of situations to remain interesting, but that is something gamers can come up and disseminate on their own, and Wizards has put a few additional scenarios up on their web site.

As mentioned above, the map that comes in the starter displays locations on the Death Star; it doesn’t take too much imagination to see the map as any sort of generic base for both sides, and the terrain tiles can be overlaid on the map to change things a bit. The other side of the map is a blank grid, facilitating do it yourself maps, but personally, I would have preferred a pre-printed second map of a different setting. Given the nature of the figures, a chunk of the Mos Eisley spaceport, some of the ice field and the Rebel base on Hoth, or the forest on Endor - all would have been appropriate and added considerably to the game’s versatility. Anyway, scouts on speeder bikes flitting around Death Star corridors seem a bit silly to me.

Collectibility -

I’ve not had any experience with any of the collectible miniatures games on the market. Frankly, the advent of another would have been meaningless to me – except that the theme here is Star Wars. That’s the hook, and one that Wizards is using to reel in a lot of gamers who are fans of the movies (guys like me). And they are using it a bit cynically in my estimation.

The sixty figures in the Rebel Storm are broken down into four rarity levels: sixteen common, sixteen uncommon, sixteen rare and twelve very rare. Any named character (Luke, Leia, Han etc) from the movies all fall into the rare or very rare categories, while generic troopers, officers and aliens make up the common and uncommon categories. Each starter contains the two fixed versions of Luke and Vader (so while they are considered rare, they are easy to obtain) and eight random figures, two uncommon and six common for \$20. Each booster contains one rare or very rare figure, two uncommon and four common for \$13. I’ll note here that the Rebel Storm line contains fewer figures per box for the same price than Wizards’ very similar D&D line of miniatures.

Simple arithmetic indicates that even with extraordinary luck, one would need to buy a starter and twenty-six boosters to get all the rare/very rare figures – no small investment. Of course, many players won’t care if they have all of the figures, but presumably, fans of the movies will want at least the major figures like Han, Leia, Chewy, Obi-wan and the droids. (I mean really, can it be Star Wars without Han Solo?) These characters should be more easily obtained, but then WOTC wouldn’t be selling as many booster boxes, booster boxes that increasingly are going to fill your collection with many, many of the common figures, minis that you might not even be interested in. This strikes me as wasteful, especially so when you consider that once you do get any of the named figures, additional copies are useless in game terms. If you’re fortunate to have a large group playing the game, then trading may help you to get the miniatures you want for your doubles.

However, at essentially \$2 a figure, and you aren't able to select the pieces you want, it's hard for me to see this line as a good value, or a rational way to buy miniatures. A distribution system that works fairly well with card games seems considerably less appropriate here. I'd much prefer be able to purchase exactly the miniatures I wanted for the scenarios I had in mind, particularly at these prices. While I know some enjoy the collectible aspect of certain games, in my opinion gamers would have been much better served had Wizards taken the tack adopted by their parent company Hasbro with their “HeroScape” miniatures game and offered up very complete starter sets followed up with non-collectible, non-random expansion packs.

What “Rebel Storm” does have is the appeal and excitement of the Star Wars setting, a not inconsiderable draw for some people. If you want to acquire some decent plastic minis from the Star Wars universe, and don't mind or can suffer through the collectible aspect, this may be just what you're looking for.