

Thoughts from the armchair

The musings of the inimitable Mr Siggins

by Mike Siggins

FORM AND CLASS

I hope I am not alone in experiencing wild swings in my painting ability. Ignore those occasions where you just don't engage with the hobby, and never want to paint dolman lace again. I am talking that odd occasion when you are keen to do an hour's painting, have a project and target in mind, but you simply cannot paint for toffee. I find this is most annoying when one is half way through a unit; you are using the exact same colours and technique that you did for the first dozen, yet the progress or the outcome is so poor that you just have to abandon. Indeed, walk away. What is causing this? Circadian rhythms? Tiredness? Alcohol? I suspect it is related to that rare sport phenomena when every shot you hit is sweet-spot perfect and you see a golf ball like a melon. I certainly notice those mornings when I sit down, put on the freshly cleaned painting glasses, and everything is – for once – razor sharp. Probably down to age, like everything else!

PLASTICS

Pundits are fond of the term 'mature market'. I was recently wondering if we have yet reached that point with hard plastics. I would say no, not yet as there are still innovations to be seen. While we have had advances in quality in some areas and several companies trying their hand, I still see plenty of scope for higher standards, cheaper prices and, perhaps, small scale figures. But while we consumers enjoy the bounty, there can be little doubt that each new release leaves us with fewer products to look forward to. I know there are clamours (and jokes) requesting Pathans or Spanish Grenadiers or Abenaki Indians, but one would hope that the manufacturers will realise that they could go one box too far, an obscure project may not sell, and that will likely be the one that halts further production. I don't mind this, as we will have most of our realistic desires by then. I therefore expect to see a time when the market slows and even stops for some.

One of the great successes of this sector is Plastic Soldier Company. I admire the way they have developed a smart business plan and rolled it out with ruthless efficiency and speed. But surely a company working through the tanks of WWII will have plenty to look forward to? Possibly not. Again, you can sell endless bread and butter Pz IVs and Shermans, but I am watching Minairons closely to see if they can survive on Spanish Civil War/early WWII kit alone. The answer, I suspect, will be to use crowdfunding techniques or subscription pre-payments to determine demand and to lay off the risk. If I had any real faith in crowdfunding, I would be singing its praises, but at the moment I think it is an accident waiting to happen.

Meanwhile, we are rather spoiled for choice. On my workbench this month I have had PSC T34s and Bren Carriers, Minairon PzIs, S-Model PzIIs, Perry Ansar and Napoleonic Russians, and Victrix Middle Guard. In truth, I cannot really fault any of them, except that I have had to return to white Humbrol

enamel undercoat to give them a consistent surface and colour for paint. Lose the grey, guys. Othwerwise, they are all excellent examples of plastic technology.

THE FUTURE

I had a quiet Christmas and so had a lot of time to sort The Mountain, paint and think. For once, I came up with some answers.

I have that basic 'nice' problem in life. There is a lot of capacity for hobbies, if not much money, but each one demands time that aggregates to a shortage overall. And as we all know, painting takes more than most. Elsewhere I am doing more game design, more writing, and a little more boardgaming. Plus, I am permanently on the cusp of starting back into model railways. This is a difficult decision whether to throw myself completely into 'house as a hobby venue', or to try to maintain some semblance of normality when people visit. I have locos and stock, and quite a few trees (!), but no track set up. Sadly my local clubs are not that local so home seems to be the only answer. I will probably start with a test track and see how I go.

Simply put, I can't do figures and models and trains and all the other stuff I want to do as well. Let alone my other hobbies. Crucially, I think I know in my heart that I am 'tailing off' on painting. I have projects I want to do, but in truth I paint them, base them, and they go into lever arch files. I don't get to game with my 30mms much, as my much of my gaming is done in London in 15mm, and my 40mms stalled long ago. So I am drifting into a 'display case' hobby and that seems distinctly pointless in a hobby that can be a bit too pointless at the best of times.

So my plan, coupled with eyesight concerns and related age stuff, is that I will aim to complete what periods I want to – perhaps only a token unit in some cases – and then sell off the balance of The Mountain. And, resistance over, some books must go as well. Then I can get the space back and take stock. Does that sound pessimistic or realistic? I am not going anywhere yet, and have several hundred figures to go, but just planning, you know.

AND FINALLY

So, it seems we shall next meet in the livery of *Miniature Wargames*. This happened to *Scorcher (& Score)* and *Whizzer (& Chips)* when I was a youngster and to *Military Modelling (& Battle)* when I was less impressionable. Unlike these mortifying disasters, I think the merger makes sense and I very much look forward to the new, expanded magazine. Before we go over there, I would like to remove my staff hat and thank Henry for everything he has done for the hobby in the shape of *Battlegames* – a much needed breath of fresh air in a stagnant market, and whose style is likely to leave a significant footprint for years to come.

