

CLUBS

The Tin Soldiers of Antwerp are a well established wargaming club who host one of Europe's largest events in the gaming calendar – Crisis – which happens on November 4th this year. When WJ was invited to roll some dice at the club the offer was just too good to turn down.

When the invite came in to go and visit a wargames club in Belgium called the Tin Soldiers of Antwerp (TSOA) I figured that as I'd been working so hard (theft of a fun trip was also muttered by certain parties in the office) I'd best go. A crazy 1,200 mile road trip around France and Belgium had been planned and finishing it off on a Friday night at a wargaming club rolling some dice seemed a fantastic idea.

Based not far outside of Antwerp town centre the TSOA is one of the best equipped and friendliest wargames clubs I've ever been to. I'd been driven there by Johan Van Acker and upon arrival got to having a good old nose around. The main gaming area is about 80-90 feet long by 20 feet wide and in this are numerous purpose built gaming tables, the four largest of which are 10' x 6' for the 28mm gamers in the club.

At the opposite end of the room are 6' x 4' tables that are more for science and fantasy skirmish games and there is also a purpose built 'space' table that caters for Babylon 5 'A Call to Arms' games. At the far end of the building is a set of shelves that contains more TSS 2' x 2' tiles than I have ever seen – not sure I'd even seen that many on the shelves of the company itself at shows!

"We like the TSS tiles - very useful and they allow us to set a game up very quickly," explained Johan, TSOA club



The club was well equipped and a wide variety of games were being played. The game at the front was home to a weighty number of Front Rank Napoleonics ...

secretary. "We bought a lot from the company and we even convinced them to make us some custom tiles, large multi-tier hills. We're still working on getting them right and we also modify a number of the other tiles to improve them, mainly the ones with water so we can make them look more 'real'."

As I'm chatting to Johan a number of people start to arrive and I'm surprised to see a 'family group' turn up. Johan obviously spotted my reaction and added, "We want the club to be open to anyone. So families come - wives and children - to enjoy the time together."

Within 30 minutes of me being in the club a good 40 people were busy sorting out games ranging from a 28mm Napoleonic battle in Spain to a WWI board game with more counters than I think I had ever seen. The game was based on the Somme and had been played for 'many months', seeming to have moved about as quickly as the Somme itself. Perhaps they were playing it at 1:1 with counters as men and in real time? I didn't want to ask so I moved on.

Now it was time for Willie Bogaerts to arrive, the club president. A short man with a fantastic moustache, Willie B could have easily been a Prussian General in another life. He summed up the club: friendly, humorous and accommodating.

Chatting to Johan and Willie about the club I ask how the membership breaks down and I'm told that roughly 63% of the 150 members are historical, 28% fall into the board-



You have to love a wargames club with a well stocked bar! Johan shows he's not only a dab hand with a tape measure and some dice ...but also as a barman!



Some helpful painting tips being handed out ...

gamers category and 9% are science fiction & fantasy gamers. I was surprised by the number of board gamers but a quick look around identified a good number of tables populated with board games.

One that caught my eye was 'Shadows over Camelot' which has an English language version coming out later this year at the Crisis 06 wargames show in Antwerp, which moves me neatly to the event that is organised each year by the TSOA.

I've never been to Crisis, this year will be my first visit, but I keep getting reports about what a great show it is. Dave Bodley, owner of resin company Grand Manner told me, "It's a wargamers show. I know this sounds a daft thing to say, but it's got loads of really nice games to look at.

People can come along and buy stuff and then be inspired by the games. The TSOA lads always look after you, help you set up and usually buy you a beer – what more can you ask?"

Dave was in attendance at the club to talk to people about new projects (models) he was making and to also find out what models the members would like making. It wasn't long before pen and paper were out and Dave and Willie B were planning an Indian Wars fort.

"I find it helps to talk to the likes of Willie B and Johan as they always have an opinion and they've been gaming a long time. A lot of the time it isn't always possible to create what they ask for, but a lot of what I make comes from customer requests," added Dave.

By 9.30pm the club was buzzing, an atmosphere infused with people having a great time gaming, talking, painting and generally socialising. The age mix was impressive and any club that hears its members talk about 'no new blood' could learn a lot from the TSOA. As for the older crowd, well I'm sure the fully licensed bar had nothing at all to do with keeping them happy ...

Sadly I never got a chance to roll any dice that evening but I did manage to talk to some very interesting people for whom wargaming was a passion. I'm looking forward to my next trip to Antwerp when I get to experience Crisis 06 first hand and I'm hoping to get another invite to the TSOA club.

It isn't that often that you see spaceship games being played within a wargames club. Here the Babylon 5 gaming system from Mongoose Publishing is put through its paces. Apparently the Minbari Fleet were winning against the Dilgar Fleet ...a great looking table that was played on all night.

