



CLUB FOCUS

SPALDING WARGAMES CLUB

The trials and tribulations of the SWC have been balanced by plenty of fun in the fens, as Spalding's "accidental" local club celebrates its first birthday.

Spalding - you are perhaps reaching for your maps to work out where that is. That's no surprise; it is a small, rural town in the fens of Lincolnshire in the UK. It's perhaps not a hotbed for wargaming. Nevertheless, the town has a new, thriving club and we are welcoming new members.

ABOUT SPALDING WARGAMES CLUB

Where do SWC Gamers meet?

The Vista
Spalding
PE11 2RA

CLUB MEETING DATES & TIMES

The club meets at 7.15pm to 10.45pm
Every Wednesday. First/trial session free.

CONTACT

Any enquiries, please contact
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Spalding Wargames Club was formed by Martin Jackson and came about almost as an accident. The fledgling gathering of gamers reached its first anniversary at the end of 2018, prompting Chris Peat to speak to Martin about how it came to be and what challenges and tribulations there are running a club in a quiet market town.

Like many gamers, Martin started his hobby at a young age, but had a lull in his teenage years. He broke out the paints and dice again in his mid-20s. It wasn't until a few years later that he met Craig Jackson (no relation), his co-conspirator in forming the club. The mutual love of wargaming went unnoticed by both for the first few weeks of knowing each other. It wasn't until Martin noticed a Games Workshop app on Craig's phone that he realised their shared hobby. Delighted at this discovery, Martin said: "I just went: you're one of us! He knew some other people who played and introduced me to some totally different games I didn't know, like Bolt Action. We just thought, there must be other people in town who were playing in their garages like us too."

ALMOST BY MISTAKE

The forming of the club was, in a way, accidental. Martin explained: "I tried to set up a message thread on Facebook between me and Craig. I jokingly called it Spalding Wargames Club and thought it was a private group on Facebook. I then left it, I had to go to a meeting. Craig took it as a green light to put the word out. I got back and my social media account was going mad with messages. Turned out it wasn't a private message. Then it was just a case of, yep, I guess I'm going to have to start a wargames club."

There were three main challenges when setting up the club, the first being finding the venue. Martin said: "Any good, cheap venue is full all the time. You're going to be paying over the odds for a church hall. Another hurdle was devising a time for putting it all together and making it viable. Then there's getting the tables and terrain."

"But we solved all three. The venue, my in-laws were stewards at a Methodist Church, which I knew could be hired. The

scenery, I begged and borrowed; it gave us some basic terrain. I posted a thread up on a closed group on Facebook for all of us interested to meet in a pub; the idea being that people turn up and talk and schedule some games. I thought it wouldn't be as daunting as us turning up as strangers for our first game. Nine people turned up to the pub and after some beers, we were all best friends. Two weeks later, we were meeting up in a church hall throwing dice together."

The group meets weekly on Wednesday nights, 7.15pm until around 10.30pm or often later if a game takes longer. Afterwards, many of the club-goers head to the pub to celebrate their victories or lament their defeat over a pint with their fellow gamers.

After a positive start with a good turnout, the hunt was on for a bigger, cheaper venue. Martin said: "Craig called all the halls, bars and clubs in town."

Eventually, the Vista Hall, near Spalding's historic Ascough Hall, proved an ideal space. "Now we have a cheaper deal with the owners and it's more financially viable," Martin explained.

It also has a lock-up in the basement, where the club's collection of scenery, gaming boards and miniatures are kept. The terrain and board collection has grown, through investment by the club and kind donations by its members. Fostering a community spirit, club-goers often take home pieces of terrain to paint, improving the club's provisions for all.

The club enjoys a healthy turn-out considering its location in a small town, but attendance has understandably flagged occasionally. For instance, January and Valentine's Day saw poor attendance.

GAMES SYSTEMS

Anyone turning up can be assured of a friendly handshake and welcome from Martin. He is keen to ensure attending the club proves a friendly experience.

Those turning up play various systems, with all wargames welcomed.

Games Workshop's products are well represented. *Warhammer 40k* is perpetually popular and the new, small-scale version of it, *Kill Team*, has no shortage of fans. The now discontinued *Warhammer Fantasy* is kept alive at the club with several games of it played sporadically. There was a splurge of *Mordheim*, the skirmish game based on Fantasy, played this summer.

Games of *Warhammer Ancient Battles* have been planned too, with *Dark Ages* conflict a

favourite. Vikings, Saxons and Anglo-Danes rage across the battlefield in Tomahawk Studio's *Saga* as well.

Starship combat is represented, with *X-Wing* from Fantasy Flight Games proving popular. Ian is the club's connoisseur for this system.

Oathsworn Miniatures' anthropomorphic skirmisher, *Burrows and Badgers*, has gained interest. Karl McMichael has fuelled this, bringing his gorgeously painted miniatures to the club. He is the resident painting expert.

Karl has also been running a few games of *Frostgrave*, interestingly using 15mm figures rather than the usual 28mm for this system. It seems to scale down nicely and is proving popular.

One of the uniting systems between almost all club members is Warlord Games' *Bolt Action*, with Russian, British, Japanese and German armies regularly battling. Another system from the same manufacturer taking a grip on the club is *Test of Honour*. Martin was keen to show me the samurai he is currently assembling and painting for it.

A *Blood Bowl* league is in the works for January 2019.

It has been a relentless drive to keep the club moving, according to Martin. "I put a lot of work in. There's a lot of emailing and messaging. We handed out fliers at a local comic convention. That's what has kept us healthy. That and the boardgames here."

Also attending club nights is Jonathan Rowe, the local boardgame aficionado. Not only does Jon bring a gaggle of his own boardgamers to the fray every Wednesday, the presence of a game anyone can jump-in on means wargamers who have not got a game organised can still come and enjoy themselves. Martin said: "It means if your opponent cancels, you can still turn up and will have something to do."

Jon is also a veteran role-playing gamer; even having his own campaign settings published. He has been Games Mastering for the club's *D&D* campaign.

Right: *X-Wing* action.
Below: The club (steampunk style) storage area.

As the club ticks over to its first year of weekly gaming, how does Martin feel about how it is all going? "I didn't expect it to take off, to be honest. The first couple of months went really well; I was excited. Then real life takes over and mid-week became difficult for people. I said I'll give it three months and if it doesn't take off, it's still mission accomplished. I still did it."

UNITING THE TRIBES

The club did indeed take off and there are aspirations to push it even further. Martin explained: "The dream is to become bigger still. I would like to get to the point where we could run a joint event with other clubs in the area. Club versus club, tournament-style events; that's what I would like to be the next step."

He notes there are a lot of little clubs in neighbouring towns, but the wargaming scene in the area is a sparse one. "Our nearest stockist of Warlord Games has recently closed," lamented Martin.

This is a reason why he would like to see the local clubs get together for an event. He envisions a large games-day. "It would be good to get together a couple of really big, large-scale games; something to get more people talking. The clubs over here tend to be really insular. But I think it would be so much better if we all think of it as one territory."

Taking a moment to think about the impact the club has had on him, Martin said: "When I moved here, I knew two people, including my wife. Obviously, you expand your circle of friends, but now I have a large group of people I throw dice and drink together with; we're very social. It's been absolutely brilliant. Every time someone comes in, they're welcomed; there's no cliques."

A benefit of the club is how it has opened up new games to attendees. Martin said: "People come down and they will give games they perhaps have never played before a go. Now I play absolutely anything."

