

Judging - a professional approach

This year's Salute has prompted me to think again about judging at wargames shows. Not, I hasten to add, judging of competition games... no: I mean the judging of painting competitions and of the games themselves.

I have long thought that the judging of these things needs some rather less 'ad-hoc' guidelines than the ones that seem to re-evolve themselves year after year and this year's results has made me reconsider things and identify a few problems.

These snags – as I see them – are as follows, with my 'solutions':

Painting Competition

- Who judges it – and with what "qualifications".

The number of times I've had people say to me that, whilst they can't paint worth a damn themselves, they "know a good painted figure when they see it". I think, with very few exceptions, that's largely crap. If I want to get my bike engine fixed, for example, I'll speak to a mechanic rather than the bloke up the street who, whilst he hasn't ever worked on an engine, once saw a box of crankshafts. On telly.
- 'Solution'

Get the best figure and vehicle painters at the Club to judge this (providing they didn't enter anything themselves, of course). I'm not really interested in anyone else's opinion. As it is at the moment, there is a degree of anonymity about the entries – ie they don't have the entrant's name plastered all over them so their shouldn't be any accusations of bias (well, not any that'll stand examination).
- How the classes are split.

This depends on how big a painting competition we want to run. Once upon a time the competition at Salute was bigger than it is now: it had more classes and more entries. When the entries started to dwindle we reduced the classes and then reduced them some more. Once upon a time they were based on wargames 'periods' like "Horse & Musket" and "Modern". But since any such 'categories' are both 'moveable feasts' and, frankly, rather spurious, a few years back (when we reduced classes the first time) I suggested basing these on painting styles – like "khaki" and "non-khaki" rather than arbitrary time slots. But is this right?

- *'Solution'*

I'm not sure about this one. There probably ought to be separate classes for vehicles, cavalry and figures. There has to be a miscellaneous class (for administrative headache relief, if nothing else). And there probably ought to be a "pre and post khaki" split. Lots of people want to see a Historical versus Non-historical split, as well. Any thoughts, anyone?

- How do we encourage people to enter (and should we bother?)

Well, I think we **should** bother – especially for next year at Olympia. I think we should have some nice **tasteful** gongs or something similar (and – until we run out - the mugs as well [they were, after all, my idea]) and perhaps a cash prize and possibly sponsorship. Traders might like to contribute something for a prize with their name on it – a voucher for use on their stand, perhaps - though traders can be awfully mean. However, this idea also runs the risk of any voucher only being redeemable 'at the show' and – as it's given out at, say 3.30 – all that will be left is on the trade stand after five or six hours of solid trading are 400 Wesh-wesh axemen. Not a pleasant thought.

- *'Solution'*

Like I said above, gongs and cash. But to restrict the cash to as small an amount as possible, we should go for a grand Best of Show £100 and runner up of £25, rather than cash for all winners, I reckon.

Games

- What should they be judged on

Well, at the moment we have the categories: **Best Participation**; **Best Demonstration**; **The Bill Brewer award for Best Painted Army**; **Best Scenery** and **Most Innovative game** (which, for next year, I'd really like to see as the **Robin Hunt Award for Most Innovative game**). On top of that we have to good old **Salute Challenge Shield**. Are these categories okay? How do you judge twenty brilliantly painted 54mm modern skirmish troops in drab fatigues against 1000 Napoleonic infantry and cavalry in all their (inaccurate, non campaign dress) finery? How do you judge ten scratch built buildings against 40 resin, shop bought ones, that are immaculately painted? Well some of that is down to who you get to judge (see later), but that isn't all of the problem.

- *'Solution'*

*Now, it has been said that the standard of games is going down at Salute. I don't think that's necessarily true but... let's just say it ain't going up much. Perhaps they need an incentive? So, the first thing I'd do is give a cash prize of £100 to the winners of the Best overall game: the Salute Challenge Shield (plus any other bonuses from traders we can come up with, as I mentioned above). This would **not** be open to Warlords games as, even I can spot that the public might think that we'd award it to ourselves and save the Club £100. Next I'd add a category for Best Scratch Build in a Game. This would require judges with the ability to know what is scratched and what ain't, so **experience** is the key – see below. Oh, and lastly, give nicer gongs, and ones that **DONT HAVE A 15 YEAR OLD OUT OF DATE BADGE ON THEM, JOHN MERRITT.***

- Who should judge them

Pain in the arse as it is to achieve, it probably needs around four judges. The Warlords President usually does it (though I was tied up on a game this year [for the first time in a decade, I might add]). The president is meant to be elected, after all, as a person with a fair degree of experience, and anyway, someone has to herd the judges round and organise everything...

The other three judges must **not** be members of the Warlords but they must come from different back grounds and have different interests. I hate "personality" judges in things like this as it looks tacky, I think. Traders run the risk of being biased ("they're not using my figures so sod em..."). I'd prefer to see three members of visiting clubs who are canvassed to have different gaming interests: ie a fantasy player, an ancient player (those that aren't at tournaments, of course...) and – say a WW2 enthusiast. Lastly, they've got to have run games in their own right and or paint figures worth a damn. Games need to be judged by their peers.

- *Solution*

Well, the above, really...

And – for both games and painting competitions...

- Professional or non professional

And here's a hoary old one: what's a professional paint job and what ain't?

Is it 'professional' if it's painted by someone who earns their living at it, but not if they only do it part time but still charge money?

Is it 'amateur' if the person who painted it does make a living at it but didn't charge any money for the job? Or if – nowadays – they've given up painting for a living. Or only paint for cash on alternate Sundays.

Is it 'professional' if the models are painted at a factory in China by people being paid bugger all?

Is it 'amateur' if the models were painted for money but the judges **know** about it because a) they didn't think to ask and had no prior knowledge, or b) they **did** ask and the gamer lied about it.

Is a computer presentation for a game discarded in the assessment because it was produced by a professional, or is a game that uses 'home-grown' rules - even if they're pretty average – rated higher than one that uses an off the shelf 'professional' system?

It all rather reminds me of the old "gentlemen and players"

You can probably see where I'm coming from here. You might have detected that I have a bit of an axe to grind. You might be right.

- *Solution*

*It is my opinion that judging should be carried out on a **level playing field**. You can't – as a judge - know if scratch built scenery was bought or built. You cant know who painted what and how much of their income is obtained from the end of their paintbrush. And – as anyone who has bought painted figures from the majority of 'professional' figure painters – some of them are toilet anyway, so who knows? So if the playing field is to be levelled, it has to be flat through enforced ignorance and the assumption of innocence.*

*In short, painted armies have to be judged on what they are: **painted**. And if you painted them with a brush or with a credit card, or if you emotionally blackmailed a superb ex-professional figure painter to do them for nothing, they should still be judged on merit alone, I believe, because – on a flat, level playing field – merit should be all that counts.*

I will certainly be pushing on committee next year for these kind of 'judges guidelines'. Anybody else care to chuck their two-pennorth in?

John Treadaway