

# A WORLD OF PAINTING: THE ANALOGUE HOBBIES PAINTING CHALLENGE



Noel Williams tells us about an online gathering that encourages hobbyists from around the world to get through their painting backlog.

**Photos by Curt Campbell, Dave Docherty, Tamsin Piper, Sidney Roundwood, and Yorkshire Gamer.**

There's a man who lives in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Let's call him 'Curt', which is only polite as that's his name! When not up to his armpits in snowdrifts, this kind-hearted man has, for the last eleven years, inspired wargamers across the world as the creator of the Analogue Hobbies Painting Challenge.

Between 21 December of the year-we-do-not-name to 21 March 2021 (the duration of Winter as officially defined by the gods of chilblains and pessimism), 84 participants from 17 different countries took part in the eleventh year of the AHPC. Curt set them a mission - to paint - and paint they did! People from Japan to the Czech Republic, by way of New Zealand, Belgium, Russia, and Finland, all wielded their brushes over the three months.

As his name suggests, Curt (some of his figures shown to the right) is a man of

few words. Here's his account of how the whole thing began:

"In 2010, a group of close friends here in the prairies had a painting contest to help keep us motivated. I had such a great time that I decided to try something similar, opening it up to people I had met through blogging.

"I wanted to create an event that was pointedly not a painting competition, meaning I wasn't interested in people's

skills being judged. Don't get me wrong, I really enjoy those types of events, but, by necessity, they place participants as adversaries. Instead, I wanted to create something a little more approachable, perhaps holistic in nature, a friendly place where hobbyists from around the world, irrespective of their skill level, could gather and work towards their own goals, and yet also be a part of something bigger than themselves. That is essentially what the Painting Challenge is about."



*Above: Figures painted during the eleventh Challenge - Yorkshire Gamer's Italian legion.*



HOW DOES IT WORK?

It’s a simple but brilliant idea that I’ve been lucky enough to participate in for the last four years. Each participant declares a target ‘points value’ of figure painting that they aim to reach within the three Winter months. If they manage to fit other things into those three months - family, work, sleep - they’re allowed to, but their focus should be on painting those figures!

Before the December start date, figures may be prepared for painting (assembled, undercoated, and based) but no paint must be applied. Points are then scored during the Challenge for all figures and terrain fully painted and properly based. The points are not according to a ruleset or game system, rather they follow the AHPC’s relatively straightforward tariff.

Scale	Foot	Mounted / crew served weapon	Vehicle
6mm	0.5	1	2
10mm	1	2	3
15mm	2	4	8
20mm	4	8	15
25/28mm	5	10	20

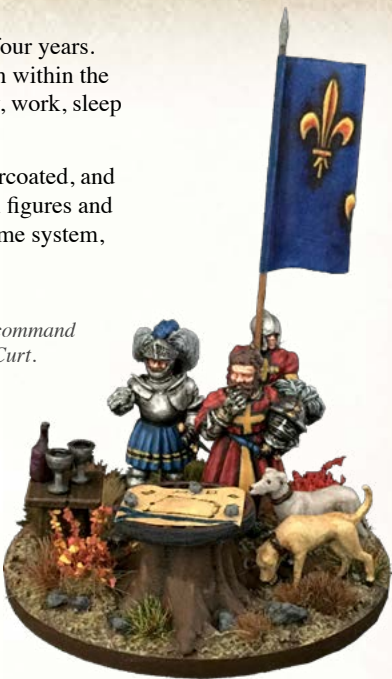
That deals with the figures (more scales can be seen on the blog), but terrain is a little different. It is scored by its volume. You’ll get 20 points for a ‘block’ of terrain filling a 6" cube.

This means that a participant who declares a target of 1,000 points might aim to paint 100 x 28mm foot for 500 points, 40 x 28mm cavalry for 400 points and five blocks of terrain for 100 points.

It’s a somewhat systematic approach but done with an eye on leniency and rewarding extra effort. Clearly terrain doesn’t always fit easily in cubes and vehicles and monsters come in many shapes and sizes. Here’s where we will guesstimate the points. All sorts of bells and whistles - ship rigging, flags, or fine detailing, for example - might earn extra credit. The primary goal of the points is to encourage and record progress.

At its core the challenge offers a timescale and a scoring system used to manage lead mountains more effectively. Indeed, any individual painter who wants to monitor their projects’ progress can easily make use of this framework for their own purposes.

Right: A command piece by Curt.



RIP NOEL WILLIAMS

We were saddened to hear that Noel, the author of this article, has recently passed away.

After talking with his family and the AHPC’s organiser Curt we all agreed that this, his final article, should be published posthumously. It stands as a showcase of Noel’s passion for the Challenge and the hobby in general.

Noel has contributed some great articles to *Wargames Illustrated* over the years and he will be missed on and off the wargames table.



Above: Curt’s reinterpretation of ‘the girl in the red coat’ scene in Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*, during the liquidation of the Krakow ghetto.





Above: Figures from Yorkshire Gamer's Italian Legion.

## A PAINTING COMMUNITY

Participants do more than merely paint and keep score, and this is the real beauty of the AHPC. On each achievement they're expected to post a photo-based report to the blog. This documents progress for the painter to reflect on; to act as proof, if proof were needed, of each specific accomplishment. And, like the wonderful pictures in *Wargames Illustrated* each month, they give everyone else inspiration.

Participants are also expected to contribute feedback when others post. This feedback is perhaps the most valuable aspect of the AHPC, and it is positive and encouraging. In the four years I've been a participant, I've never seen a negative word in the thousands of responses that have been made. At a time when social media is so often used negatively, this is a remarkable thing to find and be a part of.

While many of the comments are of the straightforward "That's a great paint job, Jim!" type, such simple remarks can be truly encouraging. After a week of struggle with that devilish Napoleonic strapping a comment-based pat on the back is uplifting and encouraging. Add to that the visual of your points tally climbing, and a wonderful, glowing feeling can send you straight back to the painting table to repeat the experience!

This rather strange little hobby collective has a positive impact on the lives of those taking part, but as one Aussie participant notes: "The AHPC community projects into the real world." Last year, for example, several challengers contributed figures and time to a memorial charity project,

'For Joshua', to support another painter in the loss of his child.

It turns out that belonging to a community like this can change people's perceptions of themselves, provide a wonderful counter to the dark months of winter, help with the pandemic isolation some went through, and more.



Above and below: Beautiful army pieces by Sidney Roundwood.





## KEEPING THINGS IN CHECK

Over the years the Challenge has built a core of repeat offenders - I mean to say, recurring participants - from whom Curt has appointed 'Minions'. These Minions check entries posted, certify claimed points, maintain the public spreadsheet of achievements, lead the feedback, and generally keep an eye on things.

Minions are also a great source of humour, with several of them maintaining blog personae for everyone's amusement. Here's a snippet from Tamsin:

"As we have several new passengers, I should introduce myself. My name is Tamsin, and I am your terrifically British, frightfully fantastic, seriously sarcastic Senior Flight Attendant.

"We are currently cruising at 12,630 points, with a target altitude of 69,600 points. It does look as though someone has been cracking the whip ... no, not me - mine is still in my suitcase ... ermm, that's quite enough of that \*blush\*.

"I would tell you when medications will be handed out, but I'm not sure who has replaced Nurse Docherty for this year's flight crew. However, in the meantime, wax crayons (for insertion into noses and ears) may be found in the mesh pocket under your seat. We generally advise against trying to eat them, but I'm sure that someone (I'm looking at you, Ray!) will anyway."

Minions also have the power to award bonus points where they feel there's justification. Quality of work is not scored, leaving us free to paint to whatever standard we want. However, Minions may award bonus points if they are particularly impressed.

Getting such an award from an experienced peer is encouraging, especially as many of us are prompted by the achievements of others to push our standards. The general feeling is that excellent work should be rewarded, but the Challenge is essentially there to reduce that teetering lead pile, not to compete in producing competition-winning figures.



Above: A convoy by Dave Docherty.

"The Challenge has become my favourite hobby related activity. I organize my challenges around completing a big project - typically painting and building terrain for a large series of participation games. I find the community within this band of pigment warriors to be very engaging and supportive as I grind away on whatever silly project I have. The other participants in this challenge are all superb painters and I find their contributions really inspiring, especially for someone like me who pretty much just paints with their fingers."

Miles

Work from Tamsin (left) and Curt (right).



"Taking part in the Challenge for the last 10 years has provided a rhythm to the painting year for me. I finished first while knocking out a large amount of 28mm stuff for my Sudan project, and I won various votes for my 54mm cowboys, which was great because they were judged by my peers. Being a Minion over the years has helped me make new friends and established friendly rivalries. This has expanded with online painting, chats, and Zoom games going right through the year now. I look forward to the next one where I will be painting while retired ... be scared!"

Dave D.





## PAINTING WITHOUT BORDERS

The AHPC is a truly collaborative exercise, not a competition, and an international one at that. Whilst each painter can see how they are doing in relation to everyone else, they are all engaged in the same collaboration: reaching across borders to encourage each other to hit that elusive target. My feeling is that many other online wargaming forums could learn a fair bit from AHPC communications!

The AHPC deals with two of the biggest problems faced by most figure-painters: isolation and motivation. We're sharing our projects, our aims, our (hobby) difficulties, our plans, and often our skills, knowledge, and experience across the world. When our motivation flags, in the dark days of mid-January, there's someone in Finland or Australia who'll shout out encouragement. We're not isolated: we're reassured in knowing there are so many people across the globe who are as excited by gaming and figure-painting as we are and who, in their turn, find our work helps theirs too.

This happens because Curt has evolved a convivial, supportive way of doing things, and gradually peopled it with enthusiastic, able folks of good will and good nature. One example of that is the community's welcoming of Arthur, the youngest participant. Spurred on by his father Sander's contributions in previous Challenges, Arthur took up figure painting himself, aged 6, and this year returned to join the fray for the fourth time. He posts some great little pieces, encouraged enthusiastically by everyone in the community, in exactly the same way as the most grizzled old Groggnard. The hobby needs more Arthurs!

I've never met Curt, but it's clear that he's an affable, encouraging, courteous, and considerate human being, as well as

being a very capable yet modest figure-painter himself. He is affectionately referred to as 'The Snowlord'; he's a kindly authority who puts a great deal of energy into keeping the whole thing ticking over. He also has a benevolent matriarch sitting beside him, the Lady Sarah, who



*Above: Challenge XI had subterranean chambers that participants could theme their entries to.*



*Above: Sander and Arthur hard at work!*

sometimes contributes wise words for the challengers, and who, all the evidence suggests, keeps him carefully in check!

## THEMING THINGS

The AHPC has evolved, extending the challenges participants face. In Challenge X, for instance, Curt introduced Challenge Island. This was a set of locations, laid out like a pirate treasure map, with selected routes between them. Each location contained a specific painting challenge nominated by a long-standing member of the community.

One such challenge, for example, was Cook's Crevasse: "Entries must have a geology theme. This can be any figure armed with a rock or rock throwing device, any miner or engineer type, or any figure on a rock." Another was Mudry's Mesa: "Any figure bought because of someone else's submission last year (must include a link to last year's submission and what drew you to it)." Bonus points were awarded for the incidental achievement of these esoteric tasks. Participants could ignore the map, of course, and simply do what they wished, but many of us found ourselves delving deep into the forgotten foothills of our lead mountains and the labyrinths of our imaginations to respond to these extra challenges. Some found them inspiring; some, truly challenging. I'm a man of a somewhat literary bent, so I instantly felt the narrative pull of the treasure map. What was designed as a set of separate painting tasks became an opportunity for storytelling; I found myself spending almost as much time writing my posts as I did painting figures, trying to tie all of my posts together into a continuing story. I was so excited by my journey across the island that I not only did every task, but once I'd completed them, retraced my steps in reverse order to do every task again. Some called this madness, but if making your painting life as difficult as possible,

for no other reason than it makes a good story, is madness in your eyes then I say maybe you are the mad one! As a result of this intense focus, over three months I tackled 36 different painting challenges and completed over 600 28mm pieces along with 500 more in other scales.

These challenges don't just stimulate participants' painting glands, there are spin-off benefits too. An obvious one is that submissions from one gamer affect projects by another. You might come across a period, theatre, manufacturer, or approach that you've never before encountered. For example, in my four years I've learned about non-metallic painting of metals, zenithal priming, photographing figures, 3D printing, and have been introduced to manufacturers such as Footsore and Empires at War.

"I have deployed multiple times, been to some pretty harsh places, and seen things I probably could have done well with not experiencing. I never thought about PTSD, but .... it does make being social very difficult.

I still have some bad days, and crowds are a bit rough, but I never would have stepped out to a convention like Adepticon if it wasn't for the Challenge. I can relax in that crowd a bit easier by reminding myself that Curt and the rest of the International Challenger Family may very well be among them, enjoying the same hobby I do.

It is a constant road and miles to tread. I may have destroyed, but now I create. Human beings are social, and the wargaming hobby is social. Past experiences and political, religious, or national beliefs are not as important as having fun with a game. Soldiers that fall will be up again for the next battle."

Dave B (Sgt)



## A VISUAL TREAT

Participants in the AHPC produce some wonderful gaming pieces, a smattering of which appear in this article. I think they show the range of work and the high standard it can reach; these are just a handful of examples.

Amongst my favourites from this year are Yorkshire Gamer's Italian Legion (a complete army for the Punic Wars), Curt's Dark Denizens of Breughel-Bosch (which simply can't be described, but are based on the paintings of those two artists), and just about every one of Sidney Roundwood's 17th Century pieces.

We also had wonderful Ottomans, classic Minifig Napoleonic, revived Heroquest figures, 15mm Italian Wars, 6mm AWI, and Macedonians. From the past eleven challenges there are at least two thousand tags in the blog - thousands of illustrated posts on every period in almost every scale. If you browse the AHPC blog, you'll find many good ideas for your own collections, and many which are simply inspirational.



*Above: Curt's Dark Denizens of Breughel-Bosch.*



*Above: One of Sidney's finely painted bases of figures.*

"I returned to painting toy soldiers about 15 years ago as a cure for a bout of depression. It worked, but I spent eight or nine years as a solo painter and occasional gamer. Then I entered the Challenge and it totally changed my wargaming life.

"I found a global supportive community and they opened my eyes. I learned how to paint better, found new sources of figures, new periods, and most importantly a new set of friends. All my wargaming buddies were met in the Challenge or are friends of these friends. I am now in a club, have laid on games at shows, and even helped to make an HBO show in Paris.

I now have a huge collection of toys and generally have a brilliant time with my hobby. It is no longer a place where I hide from the world but a passport to explore it."

Martin C



*Above: Some painters would be happy to paint an army like this over three years but it is just part of what Yorkshire Gamer painted over three months!*



*Above: One of Tamsin's projects, which shows bold painting and some excellent pops of colour to make figures stand out on the tabletop.*

## COUNTING THE COST ONCE SPRING HAS SPRUNG

This year 61 of 84 participants achieved their targets, delivering 82,619 points of painting. That's equivalent to a massive 16,523 28mm figures! One Minion, Miles, has a statistical turn of mind (misguided as it may be), and using metrics (which are not in any way questionable!), calculates that the value of this collective effort to the wargaming industry was 1.6 million dollars.

Challenge XII kicks off around the time this magazine hits the shelves; Curt keeps the numbers restricted to around 80 participants and those spaces will already be filled up. However, you'll find much to enjoy on the blog through the Winter months. Perhaps it will spur you on with your own work, and inform you of a new technique, period, or project. Maybe you'll decide to start up a Challenge of your own and spread the painting fun even further!

Check out the Challenge at:  
**[thepaintingchallenge.blogspot.com](http://thepaintingchallenge.blogspot.com)**