

## **In the downtime – war gaming**

**By Michael Hughes**

I was lucky enough to attend the Canberra Games Convention held in the nation's capital over the Australia Day weekend earlier this year. The convention is a gaming Mecca - not computer games, but rather board games, war games, and pen and paper games.

War gaming in particular is a huge hobby, with 500 people coming to play at CanCon alone. It is a hobby enjoyed by many in Defence, some of whom perhaps get their first taste of it in tactical and operations planning learned early on in their uniformed career. However, of course you don't need to be a khaki-whitey-blue to enjoy such games, and they can be enjoyed by any and all.

I caught up with Nigel, Colin and Aaron, all long time war gamers, who discussed their hobby with me. That is after Colin and Aaron creamed me at the new board game Dust, which is akin to the classic game Risk but set in a world where World War II keeps on ticking thanks to the added fun of alien technology.

### **So, where are you guys from?**

*Nigel, Colin, and Aaron: Sydney!*

### **War gaming – how did you guys get into it?**

*Nigel – I started war gaming back in the late 70s. I ran a club in Sydney for many years - computer games, war games, role playing games, play by mail etc.*



*Dust features models of factories. Which means there exists a factory that makes miniature models ... of factories*

*Colin - A friend of mine had games at uni and we started playing them. Through that we met other like-minded people.*

*Aaron – I got into war gaming through the Battletech game\*.*

**Did you guys have all-nighters playing games at college?**

*Nigel, Colin, and Aaron – (laugh) Yes.*

**So, what do you get out of war gaming?**

*Nigel – For me it's an intellectual exercise in comparing forces, playing against other players, much like chess. But the idea behind most war games these days is you have to have the element of chance. So it's a case of comparing strategies against what the other players are doing, then figure out a way to beat them.*

*Colin – I think there's two aspects to it. A lot of people get fascinated with the technology. You see a lot of kids running around learning about the technology, fiddling with tanks and guns. And why that's fun, for me games are about figuring out how you're going to do it with a limited number of resources.*

*Aaron – I think it's the putting the army together. All the pros and cons of what you think will cope with other people's armies. Probably even as much as actually playing it.*

**Is it an expensive hobby to get in to?**

*Nigel – It doesn't have to be. It's a matter of which part of the hobby you choose to participate in. You can get into board gaming very cheaply and there's lots of gaming clubs where you can go and play without spending money at all. But if you get into the miniatures side and want to play in tournaments with higher level players, then you've got to buy the figures and paint them, and you can spend a lot of time and money on them. It all depends on how invested you are and the sort of income you have.*

**Are you members of a club up in Sydney?**

*Nigel – I'm a member of a miniatures club but there's a group of friends I get with to play on a regular basis.*

**Are there war gaming clubs across the country that people can join?**

*Nigel – Very much so. You will find them in every capital city and in major regional ones as well.*

**So if you wanted to find a club, and you went along to your local gaming store, they probably would know who to talk to?**

*Nigel – That would be a terrific place to start. Your local gaming store should always be the place that you support to the best of your ability because they're a rare breed and need all the support they can get.*

**Thanks for the interview guys.**

\* **Ed's note:** Battletech is a war game where giant pilot-controlled robots, packed with more weaponry than an Abrahms and F111 combined, face off against each other.