

# EDITOR MIKE AND THE DICE BAG LADY



The creative talent that is Annie Norman gives us at **The Wargames Website** an exclusive insight into life as **The Dice Bag Lady**.

**So, how did you get into gaming and is it just miniature wargames you play?**

It was actually my mum who started the whole thing – and she's not even a wargamer. She is, however, pretty cool. She found a huge stack of White Dwarfs for next to nothing at a second hand place and brought them home thinking (rightly so!) that they'd be of interest to my brother and myself. I think I was about 10 or 11 at the time, my brother went straight to the Space Marines,

my younger gothy self, went, of course, the Vampire Counts, and so it began!

Mostly miniature games is what I play, as I do really enjoy the anti-social painting hobby half of it, which you just don't get with games like Magic. I've started to get into board games recently, but working the amount of hours I have been, my brain has been struggling with anything too complex, so I've got massively into pick up "pub friendly" card games like Gubs, Kittens in a Blender and Have at Thee. I stay around five years behind with videogames so I can afford them, but like many things, it's taken a backseat since I set up The Dice Bag Lady!

**You mentioned the social side of it, and given that hobby is mostly male dominated, have you found that being a female gamer has meant you have been treated any differently to how you see males treated?**

I've been playing competitively for about 4 years now (mostly WFB) at tournaments all over the UK, and found the scene to be extremely welcoming. It's not been without incident, and a few people being... firmly put right, but these sort of people are the minority. I quickly found the stereotype of wargamers being gross, socially inept beasts, to be mostly incorrect, and have made a crazy good group of friends out of it. There'll always be the odd comment and cliché people will come out with, but then far more people are there to tell them they're being a dick.

**Does that mean you are a competitive gamer or do you also play laid back and relaxed games?**

Haha, I'm a laid back, relaxed competitive gamer! The last couple of years the huge majority of my games have been at tournaments purely because I've moved around so often and been so busy in the week that it's been hard to get casual games in. It really has been all work and no play, so a tournament weekend is a great excuse to squeeze in a decent number of games and socialising. Now I'm back living in a great gaming city (Cardiff) I'm hoping to change this, as tournament gaming gets a bit repetitive after a while (in the same system anyway – copy and paste lists sort of thing!), I miss playing around with ridiculous lists and "what if" scenarios.

**It sounds like The Dice Bag Lady is keeping you busy, how did it all come about?**

Definitely. I'd just returned to the wargames world, and just needed something to keep my dice in, and was already pretty nifty with crochet (not knitting!), so knocked myself something up. A couple of friends thought they were cool and bought some, then they slowly spread through the LGC (Firestorm Games), and then pretty quickly exponentially grew through different gaming scenes and all over the world! Through this, the requests got more and more complex (the early ones were very simple dice images or skulls) and pushed me into making each bag more impressive than the last. It's all a bit crazy, in a good way.

### **What is the most unusual request you had?**

It's hard to define really! Perhaps the various genitalia shaped bags, a nudie woman in a "situation" with an amorous plant, or the severed otters head (with shiny blood droplet beads)... of course I made them all! I do enjoy a bizarre challenge now and again, obviously there's a few things I flat out won't do, but usually "Bear with me, this may sound strange at first.." is a good email opening for me!

### **And do your own armies/factions/forces have their own bags?**

Some do! Any time I make anything bag related for myself I feel guilty as there's usually customers waiting for theirs, so I end up starting, then going and finishing somebodies order instead! I've been using my own bag since almost the start (it was the MK2, MK1 I quickly realised was too small for big army battles!) which I'm quite fond of. It reminds me of a grungy teenagers backpack with all the patches and badges it's acquired. It even has it's own bottle opener!

I get a lot of photos of my bags sent in, and frequently there are some with the army displayed, and the matching dice bag alongside which looks really cool. So now my work-in-progress wood elves and Saga Normans have their own themed dice bags, dice, as



well as clip in mini token holder, with matching gems, and it is very satisfying! I need to work on a Mutatawwi'a bag for The Crescent and The Cross when I get a spare minute! I missed the opportunity to make a really garish bag for the famous Chaos Gnomes, but they're going into hibernation for a bit now.

### **Clips, Tokens, Gems, do you sell those too?**

I do! The online shop is just under a month old but bringing me much excitement. At present I stock dice, gems, tape measures and markers as well as mini bags and template bags, and Dice Bag Lady merch such as badges and...bottle openers! I have plans in the works for more gaming accessories to come very shortly, and am feeling very enthused about the possibility of expanding! It would be cool if as well as dice bags, I was seen as a one stop place for all your gaming accessory needs.

### **How hard is it running The Dice Bag Lady shop?**

The site I built up myself using a tonne of HTML..bearing in mind I had little experience of HTML before this, that was pretty hard! Running The Dice Bag Lady as a whole is extremely time consuming and heavy work on my brain – as well as my hands. Just under two months ago I suddenly had to stop creating bags as an RSI injury absolutely crippled me. It's slowly improving, but was a wake-up call that I needed to start doing other things - such as selling products I don't make myself. So I work blooming hard, all of the time, which is difficult being self-employed and working from home when people think you sit in your pyjamas eating crisps and watching Jeremy Kyle all day.

### **Do you sometimes yearn for a regular 9-5 with a steady income?**

Occasionally, for about five minutes! When I say it's taken over my life, it really has! There are few moments I'm not thinking about work! Even when gaming, the brain is whirring at the back looking at the symbols on my opponent's army or eyeing up their tokens, envisioning a lovely bag! Or glaring at their Tupperware pot! But it's definitely worth it, it is such a rewarding job.

Sometimes I think “what is going on, it’s the middle of the night and I’m still working, and I need to be up soon, to work!” but the work might be chatting away to an overseas customer about their bag design (which frequently derails into the subject matter of the design!) or sketching Baggy the Bag (TDBL mascot!) firing arrows, or researching WW2 insignia. There’s plenty of “you know what, my job is really cool” moments. So that is far more preferable to the 9-5 misery dirge, I just need to slot in enforced breaks to stop myself going crazy occasionally. It’s just those relatively early days of business where there’s always something to do, and when your bedroom is also your office and storeroom, it’s all too tempting to just carry on until you crash out!

The support I get from the community is phenomenal. When news got out that I’d buggered my hands, my inbox was going mental with kind messages (and really good advice) from customers, supporters and various other wargames companies. It’s times like that you realise you must be doing something right!

### **What happened to your hands?**

I was crocheting one day and suddenly just had to stop because the pain was unbearable. I’ve been pinballed around various doctors (some exceedingly unhelpful and rude!) but finally have a decent one, so I’m on a million different painkillers, and on the list for physio. I’d managed to give myself a repetitive strain injury from overworking!

It’s a lot better than it was, but I keep being lured into thinking “it’s ok, doing some crochet”, and then ending up with pulsating hands for the rest of the week, so it’s very frustrating.

On the plus side, being unable to make the bags gave me the kick I needed to expand the business such as stocking other items in the shop and seeking out helper minions. I have been experimenting with machine embroidery too though, which is a “watch this space” thing...

### **Going back to the community, do you find the internet has helped the business grow?**

Completely. Until my break into trade shows this year (Salute!) I had only operated via the internet. I only set up the website around March – it was pretty much through Twitter and Facebook. So word of mouth and the internet. I’ve had so many people at shows this year assuming I’m a brand new company when I’ve been about for years, which has spurred me to doing a lot more. I’ve always been a bit of an avid forum user, so that combined with the tournaments, I’ve got quite well known in the community, but until this year it has mostly been the Warhammer bubble, so I’m starting to peek out and invade other “worlds”, namely historical! It’s all a natural growth though, having really got into Saga massively this year and eyeing up Bolt Action and Dead Man’s Hand.



I’m basically exploring the worlds I’m getting into personally. If that makes sense. I really like being a part of the wargaming world and using my own products (out of genuine enjoyment and need, rather than “because I have to”) rather than being sat on the side trying to sell a product based on things I know nothing about. You could be the best “bagger” in the world but I think what sets my products a bit higher is the proper love and understanding for the hobby. Ramble. Gush.

Annie with some members of the Oxford Gaming Club

### **Would you indeed have a business were it not for the web?**

I don't think so. Well not one I could make a full time living from anyway. It'll be interesting to see how it goes next year "year of the trade shows" as "ready to purchase" standard dice bags become more available. But the custom orders are currently, and have always been the bulk of the business. About 90% of these come to me via email (the rest in person at events). I ship so many abroad, without the internet – how on earth would these people have seen my dice bags (other than Wargames Illustrated, plug plug) In short – I love the internet.

### **So, what does the future hold for The Dice Bag Lady?**

More and more dice bags...

### **Do you have any plans set in stone or will you just react to the market and see where you end up? Or something else?**

It's kind of fluid and situational. I've had so many ideas floating around in my head the last couple of years; it's been finding the time (and money!) to implement them. The last few months I've been jolted into them because of the injury so hopefully I'll use this to motivate me to continue with making the rest of the ideas a possibility. A lot of it is "I think this is really cool, but will enough people buy it to make it worthwhile?"

I'm working on some exciting projects with a few different companies at the moment, involving resin, lasers and printing. It would be great to have all these established before Christmas – although the trade show "Crisis" (1<sup>st</sup> Nov) is my hopeful deadline for the first two.

So in a nutshell I'm hoping to expand the range of products I sell in the shop, so I'm a place to get all gaming accessories from, not just dice bags, attend more trade shows, widen the range of dice bags (eventually have lots more "ready made" in the shop) and just keep on rocking in the dice bag world.

### **Printed Baggy Dolls??**

The sky is the limit! It's really not the limit, because after that is space, and that's pretty cool too. There is no limit!

**Ha ha, well on that positive note I will leave it there.**

**Thank you very much for your time and do you have any final words for the readers of The Wargames Website?**

Cheers sir, I guess just to go over to the website while you're all pumped with TDBL excitement and check out some of the bits and pieces mentioned above! Or poddle over to my online living room – the Facebook page, or my online pub – Twitter! Have a splendid day, and hope to see you at a show or tournament somewhere soon!



**Check out The Dice Bag Lady!**

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