Talking about photography
What I've learned about producing 'eye candy'
By George Arnold

Now that the change-over to an all-digital format for *Lone Warrior* has been completed, this might be a good time for a few words about photography, that is, photography as it will continue to appear in the all-digital issues.

At the very beginning, let me assure readers that this will not be a technical article full of photography jargon. So please bear with me. My intent here is simply to describe my own attempts to provide better photographs to illustrate the articles I write for *Lone Warrior*. I am by no means a professional photographer. I'm strictly an amateur. But I've discovered an excellent resource for the point-and-shoot photographer that I've always been, a resource that has enabled me to shoot better looking photos of my minis than I've ever achieved before. My hope is that a discussion of my own experience will encourage others whose photo-taking skills could stand some improvement to take some fairly easy steps to "up" their game. (Those of you who are already skilled photographers may be excused from further reading at this point. You won't find much new here. But do keep providing your photos to *Lone Warrior*!)

First of all, what does photography have to do with solo wargaming, which is what this journal supports? That's easy. Wargamers like "eye candy." They like to see photos of others' work, whether that means photos of miniatures games in progress -- board games too -- even displays of scratch-building models for gaming, such as Marvin Scott provided in No. 192. The possibilities are as numerous as the soloists' approaches to wargaming, which are varied indeed!

Second, the conversion to an all-digital journal means that the opportunity for more and better photographs of our gaming endeavors has just increased. Back in the hard-copy days, photos on those pages were limited, as far as number and quality go, by the limits of the printing reproduction process. Even good photos did not always reproduce so well on paper. Generally, what the reader saw on the printed page was not as good as the actual photo itself.

Once the digital version came along, any accompanying photos reproduced much better. What the reader now saw on a computer screen was indistinguishable from the original photo.

I could see all this in my own photography efforts. The photos I submitted that ran in the print edition were, well, usable. But when they began to appear in *Lone Warrior's* digital version, my photos tended to come out darker than I wanted and not always as focused as I would have preferred. Unfortunately, that was about the best I could do with my standard point-and-shoot technique. So I began searching for a way to take better photos.

For years, I've used the same digital camera. It's a Canon PowerShot A520, relatively inexpensive and – I'm sure –much improved upon by later Canon models. It's an automatic camera, meaning the camera itself takes care of most of the settings. It's possible to get nice

photos of non-wargaming subjects, such as family snapshots, travel photos and the like with this camera.

It's not so good at taking photos of miniatures in automatic mode. The camera does have a close-up function that is activated by pressing a button. This allows me to zoom in on small objects, like a stand of miniatures, for example. This close-up function can only focus on a few items, however. If I'm trying to take a photo of, let's say, a solo game in progress, a few of the figures on my table will be in focus, while the rest will be blurred.

The flash is automatic too and that's another limitation. In shooting a wider shot, like a game in progress, the flash provides adequate lighting for a part of the table, but it isn't powerful enough to illuminate the resulting photograph's entire frame.

Finally, it doesn't take much movement of the camera in my not-always-so-steady hands to further blur the picture.

Early efforts at improving my photography involved acquiring a pair of small studio lights and a tripod, none of which was pricey. But those small changes in my technique had immediate effects on the quality of the photos. The lights did much to brighten up the whole frame of my photos. And the tripod provided the steady base for the camera that my own hands didn't always provide.

So, the result? My photos of my miniatures looked better and would reproduce better in *Lone Warrior*. But despite the additional lighting, there were still some heavy shadows in my photos and, in my wider shots, only part of a photo would be sharply focused. I seemed to be stuck again.

Then, just a few months ago, in looking over one of the gaming/miniature sites that I routinely keep an eye on, I stumbled across that most helpful resource that I mentioned earlier. It's a tutorial on photographing miniatures, written for the amateur photographer, such as myself. The author is a fellow who goes by the name of "Garfy," who's described as an award-winning figure painter with a side hobby of photographing his miniatures. I've found other tutorials before, but somehow they never seemed to address my particular questions. Garfy has done so.

He addresses lighting, although he takes a minimalist approach. And he addresses such topics as shutter speed and depth of field (getting everything into focus) while explaining how to use the features on an automatic camera that allow you to move beyond the automatic settings. With a few of his tips and some practice, I've already seen a very satisfying improvement in my photo capabilities.

Garfy's tutorial is located at this web address:

http://taleofpainters.blogspot.com/

Go to the web site, click on "Garfy" on the list of painters on the left side of the homepage, then scroll down to his entry for January 14, 2015. That's his photo tutorial.

Or, get to the tutorial the way I did, from a link on The Miniatures Page (TMP). On the TMP home page, go to the Forums category on the left side of the page, click on "Message Boards," then on the "General" board, then scroll down to the "Photography of Miniatures" board and, once there, scroll down to an entry for February 22, 2015, which includes a direct link to Garfy's entry: "Tutorial: Beginners Guide to Miniature Photography."

TMP's web address is:

http://theminiaturespage.com/

Early on, Garfy provides an example of a photo he took in full automatic mode to demonstrate why he thinks that is something to avoid. His assessment of the result? "Full Auto was rubbish." His example turned out the way many of my photos taken in Auto mode have turned out: not entirely in focus, too dark in certain places in the frame, too dark to make out the finer details of the miniature he was photographing. (See Photo 1 with this article for an example of my own photography in automatic mode.)

I promised not to get technical here, but Garfy does so in his tutorial, although in an easy-to-understand way. He gives just enough information about camera aperture, shutter speed, ISO settings, etc. to explain what they are and why they are important to the quality of photos.

At this point, I should mention another document I found useful in absorbing Garfy's lessons – my camera's user manual. I can't recall ever being asked what I consider the Great Lessons of Life, but if I ever am asked that question, I'd be inclined to put this one near the top of my list: Always read the instructions. So it's been with my camera manual. Garfy tells me *Why* I need to adjust the various settings on my camera; the user guide tells me *How*. So when Garfy tells me why lens aperture is important, the user guide tells me exactly how to adjust that setting.

Incidentally, one of the best things that happened to my photo efforts was when I misplaced my hard copy of the manual, which, of course, came with the camera. (It still hasn't turned up.) But, no problem. In the world of the Internet, such things are always waiting on-line to be discovered and downloaded. I now have a handy PDF version of the user manual saved in my Favorites file. The nice – and unexpected – thing about my digital manual is that it's easier to use than the old hard-copy version. Instead of flipping through pages, looking for Page 45 perhaps, I just check the PDF's Table of Contents, determine the page I need, type that page number in the PDF's control panel, and I'm on that page in a mouse-click.

At that point, I began experimenting with my camera, taking photos with various settings (adjusting them one at a time, to keep from confusing the results), and uploading the photos to my computer where I could assess the changes in the photos. I worked like this over a period of several days and I finally determined which settings gave me the best pictures.



Photo 1: This photo was taken with all camera settings on automatic. On this, I disagree somewhat with “Garfy.” The photo isn’t “rubbish,” as he described his own full-automatic shot. This one is usable, but it does have some shortcomings. It’s fairly dark, with shadows showing. And, while the first line of figures is in good focus, the second line is less so. The far background is even more blurred.



Photo 2: This photo was taken with my camera set to Manual and switched to the settings I describe in this article. The full frame is well lit, and everything is in sharp focus, from near to far. Some slight shadows still remain, and I haven't yet figured out how to eliminate them entirely.



Photo 3: This is Photo 2 again, tightly cropped this time to eliminate any background distractions, ready to illustrate a *Lone Warrior* article or a *Lone Warrior* Blog entry.

In the end, I wound up with these settings that seemed to provide optimal results for me:

- Aperture setting of f8. This sets the depth of field. The higher the number, the smaller the aperture, and the more of the photo frame you can get into focus. My Canon only goes to f8. Other, more sophisticated cameras, like Garfy's Nikon, go as small as f22.

- ISO setting of 100. ISO, as Garfy explains, relates to the camera's internal sensor, which regulates how much light the camera needs to properly expose a photograph. The lower the number, the more light is needed. My 100 setting is a fairly low number.

- One-fourth of a second shutter speed. That's a fairly long time for the shutter to be open, but I need that extra exposure to properly light the photo. At this slow speed though, a tripod is absolutely essential

- Flash set at two-thirds of capacity. My camera has only four settings for the power of the flash: zero (flash off), one-third power, two-thirds power and full power. The default (automatic) is one-third, which isn't powerful enough to light the frame properly. Full power is too much; the flash starts to wash out the photo. Two-thirds is just right.

- Ten-second delay. My Canon has a couple of settings for the delay between the moment you depress the shutter button and the moment the shutter release goes off. I set it at 10 seconds to give plenty of time for the camera to get completely still on the tripod, so there will be no shaking at the moment the photo is taken.

And that's it. Yes, there are a bunch of numbers to deal with in setting the camera up this way, but they're not that hard to adjust once you know what each number is there for and how to set it where you want it. It does take some experimenting, but that gets to be fun when you start to see the improved results.

Photo 2 is what I got with the above manual settings. It's much better lit than Photo 1, and the entire frame – near and far – is in focus. A viewer can pick out some good detail on the figures in the photo. Those are all things I was seeking in my effort to improve my photo-taking ability.

If you enjoy taking photos of your gaming endeavors and, if you have an automatic camera that you're willing to spend a bit of time getting to know better, I encourage you to do so. Photos have become an important aspect of *Lone Warrior* and Rich is always looking for photos to illustrate articles in the journal. For myself, I think I still have more to learn about photography but, thanks to some timely tips from "Garfy," I'm happy with my progress so far.