

# Everyone's a Winner at Warhammer 40K (or, at least not a loser)

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### ABSTRACT

Warhammer 40,000 (W40K) is a non-digital strategy war-game involving the tactical manoeuvring of miniature figurines on a 6' by 4' tabletop. These figurines are painstakingly assembled, painted and often modified by players to accord with the game's backstory. Our research explores the ongoing success of W40K in the face of ubiquitous and pervasive computer technologies and presents the results of post-match interviews with players. One element of the W40K experience that we found striking was the capacity for players who lost matches to rationalise their failures into a narrative of success, one that underplays the importance of winning and prioritizes other aspects of the W40K experience. Drawing on Paul's (2012) notion of rhetoric, wordplay and games, we argue that the modelling and painting, time and money constraints, engagement with W40K's themes and narratives, and the battle itself can be linked to the post-match accounts given by players in which they construct narratives of success and portray themselves as 'winners' even though they lost the battle.

### Keywords

Warhammer 40,000, Post-match accounts, Hobby, Balance, W40K, WH40K, Tabletop, Winning

### INTRODUCTION

Our research explores Warhammer 40,000's (W40K) ongoing success in the face of ubiquitous and pervasive computer technologies and the seemingly unstoppable digitization of leisure in society. The research that does exist has concentrated on the digital augmentation – and 'improvement' – of W40K (see Hinske & Langheinrich, 2008; 2009). In this paper we contribute to understanding W40K, non-digital and digital games more generally by identifying and understanding the pleasures of playing W40K and through an examination of the post-hoc narratives of enjoyment and success used by players to account for their failure to win battles.

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## TABLETOP GAMES

Although not often explicitly acknowledged, many tabletop board games, war games, trading card games and role playing games have significantly influenced the design of numerous popular digital game genres. However, these tabletop games remain understudied in recent times, as Woods (2009) has argued, the primary reason is “perhaps due to the inaccurate perception of the genre as a niche in decline” (p. 2). However, this is an erroneous perception. Modern tabletop games are an established game form that has resisted obsolescence. By tabletop games, we are broadly referring to the many and varied non-digital/computer games that are typically played by two or more players sitting around a table. As indicated above, this included board games such as *Monopoly* and *Go*, war games such as *W40K*, trading card games such as *Magic: The Gathering* and role playing games such as *Dungeons and Dragons* and *Rune Quest*. We also distinguish these games from structured play such as *tag* or *rope skipping*, and by noting that tabletop games typically have defined rules, structures and playing materials such as boards and pieces supplied and dictated to the players by a third party such as a game publisher or the World Chess Federation. In our loose definition we also distinguish tabletop games from sports such as *football* or *tennis*. Tabletop games typically rely on interactions between material tokens such as *playing pieces* and *cards* rather than the physical interaction of players’ bodies. Games like *Twister* are an interesting hybrid; but, as is well known, arriving at a precise and accurate definition of games that encompasses all and excludes none is akin to herding cats. Many tabletop games share design elements, mechanics and processes with modern digital games, often as a consequence of their entwined histories, and hence, the study of tabletop games is an important activity for the ‘deFragging’ of game studies.

There is a limited but interesting collection of research on tabletop games that echo this potential. Zagal et al (2006) argue that the study of board games can contribute significantly to game studies because their gameplay is “fairly constrained and their core mechanisms are transparent enough to analyse” (p. 24). Consequently, not only are the relationships between game mechanics and emergent gameplay more visible and amenable to analysis, but the accounts players give of their actions allows for a near complete audit in relation to the game. For example, the claim of the cause of a match loss as being the result of bad game design can be checked against the actual numbers and mechanics in situ. Similarly, Costikyan and Davidson (2011) argue that board games offer better opportunities for learning about game design. Costikyan and Davidson (2012) argue that the development and evolutionary lineage of the digital game industry can be better understood by including the study of tabletop games. This contribution of tabletop game scholarship is particularly evident in Patrick Crogan’s (2003; 2011) examinations of historical and strategic wargaming. In his review of Crogan’s *Gameplay Mode* (2011), Ian Bogost states that game scholars “should embrace the many traditions that intersect with digital games” (2012), and commends Crogan’s emphasis on the role wargaming has played in the development of digital games.

Another important study of tabletop board games is Woods’ (2012) recent study of *Eurogames*. Woods argues that one of the principle forms of pleasure derived from these games is the sociability of play enabled by the setting, and sitting of the tabletop environment (p. 173). This work raises interesting questions about how players give accounts of why they found an experience pleasurable in relation to the entrails of a match just played face to face and making accounts of their choices with reference to the models and terrain just used. Both Zagal et. al. (2006) and Björk et. al. (2001) argue that tabletop games offer accentuated social experiences compared with digital games. This is

not due to an increase in sociability through the necessary co-location of players, but due to the way these games are designed *for* social interaction. As game enjoyment is commonly linked to social interaction this facet of their design further suggests the potential contribution that the study of tabletop games can have on game design. The design of W40K is now explored in depth as a starting point for our analysis.

## **WARHAMMER 40,000**

Warhammer 40,000 is the most popular tabletop war game in the world and Games Workshop, its producer, is currently the dominant force in the tabletop and board game industry. W40K is a global phenomenon, and since its release in 1986, has become one of the most commercially successful non-digital games. W40K is set in a dark dystopian future where humans wage war against many exotic races and forces of chaos from across the stars. Play occurs as a series of turns with each player making manoeuvres and attacks with the units in their army. Each unit consists of a number of models, or “minis”, and can range in size from a single hero or battle tank to a massed horde of dozens of infantry. Games end after 5-7 turns as determined by a dice roll. Play occurs on a tabletop battle field typically strewn with ruins, fortresses, dangerous terrain and mysterious forests. The recommend tabletop size is 6' by 4' (182.88cm by 121.92cm) although other sizes can be used.

Each army is made up of a number of units that the players select before the game in an “army list”. There are currently a dozen or so different armies in the W40K universe such as the hardy ‘Space Marines’, the hordes of green ‘Orkz’, and the corrupt ‘Chaos Demons’. Each of these armies has dozens of different units that players can select from to use in their army list. The size and composition of a player’s army list is limited by a ‘points’ system and a series of other rules. Each model is given a points value based on factors such as its attack power, toughness, manoeuvrability and so forth. Players may select models for their armies up to an agreed upon maximum. For example, a tournament might set the maximum army size at 1200 points or 1750 points. Army composition is constrained by other rules, such as requiring at least one “HQ” and two “troop” units to be selected. Other specialised units such as the number of “elites” or “heavy support” choices are limited to a maximum of three. Units typically have a minimum and maximum size. For example, a squad of Space Marines can number between 5 and 10 models. In addition, many other special rules associated with particular armies or “characters” such as HQ units must be considered. These various rules make drawing up an army list a complex and intricate affair. It results in a huge variety of different army compositions, within this variety there are stronger and weaker army lists. Many players spend considerable time pondering the best combination of units to deal with their likely adversaries, something we will return to in our exploration of post-match accounts of wins/losses.

Each unit in a W40K consists of a number of models. These models are painstakingly assembled from sprues of plastic components, fine cast resin and/or metal parts. Players often modify their models using modelling putty; the component parts of other models; or suitably sized and shaped found-objects to create their own unique figures. Many players make the effort to construct their models in suitably aggressive or victorious “poses”. Models are also usually meticulously painted with an undercoat, one or more base colours, and then details such as eyes, guns, badges, insignias and claws are crafted. Models are often finished using various washes and dry brush techniques to give shading and highlights. The bases of the models are also often decorated with grass, sand, rubble or similar in a process called “basing”. Although not all players go to this much effort,

most tournaments require that all models are painted with at least three colours and are properly based. Often players construct and paint their models to accord with the game's detailed and prestigious backstories. A medium-sized W40K army can often cost in excess of \$1000 USD and take hundreds of hours to assemble and paint.

W40K has a series of sprawling narratives and backstories set out in over 120 novels. There are hundreds of unique characters each with their own backstory. Each army is supported by a codex (a set of special rules for that army) that also contains dozens of pages of history. The main rulebook itself has a hundred pages of backstory. These narratives do not necessarily have much bearing on the rules of play, although the abilities of characters and units will be reflected in these narratives and vice versa. These narratives, that provide background to the armies and characters used in W40K, have been continuously explored and expanded since its first edition.

To say that the current incarnation of W40K has mountains of depth and complexity for methodical analysis is an understatement.

## **METHODS AND APPROACH**

This research is based on multiple ethnographies of different W40K tournaments in Victoria Australia, with the bulk of data coming from the largest annual friendly tournament. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews were conducted with players prior to, during and after these tournaments. During tournaments, matches were observed before and/or after interviewing a player (depending on participant availability), allowing us to access their accounts immediately and often in situ. In total, we interviewed 36 players and several non-players (such as games wholesalers and self-described “long suffering” spouses). With the fast-paced and intense nature of the tournaments, interviews typically lasted around 25 minutes. Some interviews that followed a crushing match-loss lasted more than 40 minutes, as participants found themselves with unexpected extra time on their hands. When possible, follow-up interviews were conducted, usually on the second day of a tournament. Only one player participant was female, however, this reflected the gender ratio of the tournament entrants. Data from informal social gatherings where W40K was played was also gathered on a more ad hoc basis.

The researchers had varied prior exposure to W40K. Carter had nearly a decade of experience playing the Warhammer games in one form or another. Gibbs engaged with the game at local Games Workshop stores with his son. While Harrop was only introduced to the game at the start of the study and purchased a starters pack (*Warhammer 40,000, Assault on Black Reach*) that included introductory rules. Harrop later gave these away, thus fitting the somewhat traditional mould of the dispassionate observer researcher. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using a grounded theory informed approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). All names used in this paper for research participants are pseudonyms.

## **WINNING WITH “MAN DOLLIES”**

The ‘Assault on Black Reach’ (AoBR) rulebook and ‘Read this First’ booklet are the earliest documents many players encounter in their W40K careers. In the ‘Read this First’ the players are initially given a taste of the fiction of the W40K universe:

*In the 41st Millennium, the galaxy is a war-ravaged battlefield. Untold thousands perish as cities, empires and even whole worlds are torn asunder in the*

*maelstrom of battle. Blood is the only currency and victory the only goal. AoBR, "Read this First", (p. inside cover)*

An interesting element of W40K culture is the prevalence of what we, the uninitiated and uncultured, would term as heavy-metal music. We therefore apologise to anyone knowledgeable about metal music genres and sub-genres for the following sentences. At both the tournament and Games Workshop stores, bands like *Black Sabbath*, *Tool* and *Metallica* are pumped on high volume speakers to the majority long-haired, scruffy, heavy-metal band t-shirt wearing attendees. The fiction of the W40K universe aligns well with this broader contextualisation within heavy-metal culture. This kind of bleak uncaring introductory text (of which there are volumes) and broader fiction at first glance appears to prime players for bleak and uncaring play where rule sticklers take every advantage to win battles. However, the introductory material takes a turn after a few pages:

*You will have realised by now that Warhammer 40,000 differs from normal games. There are unlimited possibilities and players must be prepared to expend time and effort collecting, assembling and painting their models and setting up their battlefields. If all this sounds like hard work, you're right – it is! Glory on the battlefields of the far future is not won lightly. AoBR Rule Book (nd., p iii)*

Hence, victory is not really the only goal suggested. It is the individual figurines that players are channelled to be uncaring about, not their opponent. The book primes us further for willingness to not take the loss of a single model so seriously:

*All of these instances can lead to arguments, so it is important to remember that the rules are just a framework to create an enjoyable game. Winning at any cost is less important than making sure both players – not just the victor – have a good time. If a dispute does crop up then work out the answer in a gentlemanly manner. Many players simply like to roll off and let the dice decide who is right, allowing them to get straight back to blasting each other to pieces. AoBR Rule Book (nd., p 2)*

We can take this idea of the rules being just a framework for an enjoyable game to a different level of abstraction. What we argue in this paper is that the game and hobby, instead, is just a framework for an enjoyable experience. As we found in interviews, there are as many ways to gain enjoyment from losing as there are from winning in the enjoyment of W40K.

W40K has a multitude of terms for different enjoyable aspects of the game. 'Fluff' is the term that describes the narrative elements and backstory to the many characters and armies in the game. While 'Cheese' describes the player practice of finding gaps, or over interpreting the rules, in order to allow uncharacteristically or unfairly powerful units or actions. As Participant Barry explained:

Fluff in my mind is a really themed army. So it's a list that is not looking to win, it's looking to look good and stick to its theme really well. I've tried to be fluffy with my army and a lot of people will interpret it as Cheese because of what it is... because of the [Barry describes parts of his army in technical detail] and because it's really hard, at least I'm trying to be fluffy by having the whole Nobz themed army. [...] But some people interpret it as Cheese. Cheese is just an over-

powered [army] list, or being – like you said, broken combos and stuff.

This common terminology is learnt by players, creating a shared sub-culture that initiates them on how to take and interpret the hobby in a given setting. Terms such as Cheese and fluff help to teach players how they may maximize their interaction with this framework for an enjoyable experience. It allows players to be able to consider different aspects of the pastime enjoyable and count even the worst loss as win of some kind in the eyes of themselves and other players. Players subsequently employed these terms in their accounts of match losses. For example, the concept of a “broken list”, an army that is disproportionately over-powered or containing too much Cheese was employed in accounts of match loss:

I've aimed to not have a broken list. I've aimed so that anyone else who I believe would pick an army to come here would have a chance to beat. *Bill*

Nearly all participants spoke of an expectation of “balanced” army lists at the friendly tournaments. Accounts of match losses were accompanied by an almost pious sense of having brought a “softer” and less “cheesy” army than their opponent, with more balance than others when considering their own likelihood of winning:

There is a percentage of players, like the majority of players are really very friendly and nice and lovely, but there are some people who are very like, they really want to win, like ‘I just want to fuckin’ win all these games’, and they are very very competitive, and that’s how they have fun and I assume that’s what their friends do as well. *Jerry*

This reflects them thinking of themselves as winners, or at least not losers, because they, unlike “some people”, did not bring an overpowered army list and do not value winning at any cost:

I submarine-d, which is to lose the first game, which is not always intentionally, but you lose your first game and you do that to beat the weaker players later on. It wasn't intentional, I was trying to win that game but personally I don't care either way. Some people do, but I don't.

Jane went on to explain the need for balance in her army:

I personally try to go by fluff. I'm not one of those people who set out to win, set myself on. But it's done with a balance. Yeah you want an army that fits the lore, the fluff, all of it; but at the same time you don't want to completely hinder yourself. It's a delicate balance.

This notwithstanding, one participant in the study, Richard, consciously brought an army which was difficult to master. His Space Marine biker themed army had significantly more mobility than many other armies at the tournament. While this mobility ensured the competitiveness of the army at the tournament, it brought strategic difficulties:

If you win with them, you know that you've had to play really well with them. Very few times do you get a win just because you've managed to just move them around the board and shit just goes your way. You've got to work with them to get the most out of them and I find that quite rewarding.

Thus, W40K as a strategy game provides players with a framework for finding positive experiences in loss through the value of their strategic play, a value separate from necessarily winning the match. By handicapping himself, Richard not only improved his experience when he achieved victory, but also when he lost. At the tournament where we met Richard, he had to play an opponent with what he described as a “*powergaming net list*”, and the ability to contrast his own list – one he had developed over time rather than sourcing online, and required strategy to play with – allowed a moral win in the face of total annihilation.

As mentioned, W40K has a sprawling backstory, referred to by players to varying degrees as ‘fluff’. This concept of fluff helps players find different aspects of the pastime enjoyable and ‘count’ terrible losses as win of some kind. Like strategy, an element of the framework which encouraged players to ‘handicap’ themselves and not bring overpowered armies, fluff has a similar affect which, in turn, allows for ‘winning’ in the face of defeat. Participant Karl, who took the fluff and theme of his army very seriously said:

I read all the Black library and 40K books (or most of them if I can) ... and because I’m big on background and fluff. I come from the publishing industry so I’m very interested in that. So I try to reflect that through the armies so they always have a theme behind them. I try to think about them and what I’m going to put in the army and what will fit the theme as early as possible.... it really shits me when... I just met a guy who has Dark Angel [a W40K race] models everywhere and because Dark Angels don’t work for him or they’re not as powerful, he is running them as Blood Angels [a different W40K race]

Thus, we see how the fluff enters the W40K framework for enjoyable experiences. Rather than simply giving additional content, fluff is impacting the (losing) player experience by adding rhetoric about ‘better’ and ‘worse’, or the ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways to play, which players can selectively reappropriate in the occasions of their defeat. Painting and crafting seemed to operate in a similar manner; with players speaking of the joy of showing off well painted or uniquely put together “man dollies”, as some called their models. The idea that “it is fulfilling once you’ve got a fully painted army and it looks decent on the tabletop” (*Omar*) also appeared in the rulebook for new players:

Creating the magnificent spectacle of a fully painted army is an accomplishment one can be rightfully proud of. Once you’ve taken part in a tightly contested battle between well-painted miniatures raging across fully modelled terrain you’ll be hooked. (AoBR, p. iii)

Various players mentioned luck in their accounts of match wins and losses. This tended to fall in one of two main categories. First, the luck of dice rolls and losing matches because of “rolling badly”, an idea which will not be new to most readers familiar with game studies. The second was “the luck of the draw”, in relation to the relative strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of armies, participant Barry again:

Well I aimed for a mid-range [army list], but I was versing – I was lucky enough, but unlucky enough in the same way to be versing an army that was like my – their paper to my scissors. Really. Like I was using a mid-range list and I was versing a mid-range list but the two lists together... I just go straight over the top. There is no real competition because I have the exact stuff to wipe them out so

easily it doesn't make it challenging. So it's just rock paper scissors, just like that and it doesn't make it challenging. It's like I've got rock and you've got scissors – I win, that's how it went.

This element of the tournament, sometimes referred to by players as the 'metagame' (see Carter, Gibbs & Harrop, 2012), also added another dimension to W40K as a framework for enjoyable experiences. Bringing an army well-tuned to the metagame of the tournament (what army lists others are likely to bring) can offer a player an opportunity to 'win' while still losing the game; 'I had a better metagame' or 'he only won because he played the metagame too hard'. But in either case, the social interactions surrounding W40K injected another domain to the game framework of an enjoyable overall experience.

The social interactions surrounding W40K were somewhat influenced at one tournament by the semi-official motto of "Don't be a dick", highlighting the emphasis of players and organisers on an amiable social interaction:

The best thing about [the tournament] is that if you have a good opponent, it doesn't matter what happens. Last game, perfect example. Brilliant opponent. I lost, I don't care, I had fun. It was close right to the end, it wasn't like a turn around and ... yeah, it's the social aspect of it. [...] so I try to get as best sports [score] as I can with both a balanced army and by being a really nice person to play against. That way they have a good game, even if they lose and you get good comp and good sports [scores] and you feel better about yourself because you weren't an arsehole the whole game. With the Khorne Bezerkers [his previous army] it was a bit hard to not be an arsehole because they are just in everyone's face. Like I think I won four games, lost one and drew one. So that was a really really strong army.

As hinted to in the above quote, the tournament organisers further placed emphasis on an amiable experience by allowing players to score others on the basis of "sportsmanship", with prizes being awarded at the end of the tournament. Other elements of the tournament structure further channelled attitudes to participation with awards for non-match related parts of the hobby. Study participant Danny made a full-scale replica rifle, which stayed by his side during matches:

I actually got funkiest prop for that year so I didn't win any games but I came away with a certificate. So I was pretty happy with that.

The game and hobby of W40K is just a framework for an enjoyable experience where participants can be "pretty happy with that". As this data from interviews with players clearly demonstrates, there are as many ways to gain enjoyment from losing as there are from winning in the enjoyment of W40K. But finally it should be noted in this discussion of alternate forms of winning, that "if winning is not everything, it is something" (Simon, 1991, p. 32).

## **DISCUSSION**

One element of the W40K experience that we found striking was the capacity for players who lost matches to rationalise their failures into narratives of success, underplaying the importance of winning and prioritising other aspects of the W40K pastime, such as the painting and model building. Woods (2012) recent work covered how hobbyists value the

social process of gameplay rather than the outcome of matches. This is in line with our exploration of the idea of the game and hobby being a framework for an enjoyable experience. This idea was pushed by the rulebooks, tournament organisers and players. But Wood's work was limited to the alternate joys to winning found within gameplay, rather than the preparation for the gameplay and how preparation components interrelate with gameplay and post-match accounts.

### **Wordplay 40,000**

Elsewhere (Carter, Gibbs & Harrop, under review) we have explored four interrelated categories of resources that influence the development of a player's W40K army list – the modelling and painting, time and money constraints, engagement with W40K's themes and narratives, and the battle itself. Drawing on Paul's (2012) notion of wordplay, we argue that these four categories can be further linked to the post-match, post-hoc accounts given by players in which they construct narratives of success, where they portray themselves as 'winners' even though they lost the battle.

As Paul (2012) has recently argued, games and accompanying texts introduce players to gameplay and how the game works, thus "socializing" them to play properly. Paul explained wordplay, the ways in which videogames persuade and circulate meaning through words, design and play. Wordplay at a player's first encounters and beyond encourages certain kinds of play. For example, Paul examined EVE Online (2012, p. 34-38), where new players are socialised to see the play of EVE as involving a 'free-wheeling survival of the fittest mentality' through the frequent advice of "trust no one", the descriptions of a "bleak" future where individuals "cling to the brink of extinction" and the uncaring unforgiving in-game tutorial. Contrasted to EVE, in the results section we saw the wordplay of the W40K narrative of the bleak distant future ("*In the Grim Darkness of the Far Future there is Only War*"), socializing players to not take the loss of a single figurine to heart. This was coupled with the descriptions of the game rules in book and tournament rules ("Don't be a dick"), priming and socializing players to be relaxed about interpretations of the rule system for the benefit of, as Woods would say, the social process of gameplay.

However, this represents only the wordplay from the game developers, in so much as tournament organisers can be considered developers. Players used their own wordplay in their own ways to persuade others how to play properly. For example, some armies may contain Cheese. Players talk about Cheesy armies just like Cheesy puns: okay in some situations, but in other places it is bad form, unless others are making them too. "Broken lists" have a negative connotation that can also be employed in the event of a loss to inform others that a loss was a win after all. The words used at W40K tournaments are characteristic of the contradictions that fuel a sense of balance and tradeoffs that players work within to provide their accounts of match loss. Armies shouldn't be too hard or too soft. Soft armies are sometimes soft because they are fluffy. Losing because your army was fluffy wasn't really a loss because you like fluff and others have been socialised to understand and accept fluff as a legitimate to pursue and value. But you shouldn't be too fluffy or you won't be hardcore enough to win occasionally. Metal is not fluffy. Metal is hardcore, cold and uncaring in a cold and uncaring universe. But you shouldn't be a dick. Losing because someone was a dick is not really a loss and explaining that someone was a dick with a hard list is easier when others have been socialised to accept such terminology and associated justifications.

Paul (2012, p. 144-158) covered the notion of balance and how it is used as frequent

appeal to what is important in videogames. Paul saw balance as a key component of videogame discourse; mainly in the sense that equally skilled players have an equal chance to win, despite having different options and choices available to them (e.g., different character classes in MMOs or kinds of armies in W40K). However, Paul also spoke of less dominant discourses present in game design where all player choices are balanced to be equally fun to play. W40K tournaments are structured closer to this second kind of balance, yet with elements of the former. The wordplay of W40K allow for post-match accounts where players can claim a win through fun, victory or the complex *balance* of all the aspects of the hobby we have explored.

### **Crafting a Win**

The post-hoc rationalizations of success we have discussed are based on a number of rationales that, just like trading card games where deck construction is crucial to success, a battle of W40K can be won or lost by the choices made when constructing an ‘army list’ (a list of the units in the army). Rather than building armies with ‘over powered combinations’ many of the players emphasized other factors in their choice of army, such as the narrative ‘fluff’ of the army; aesthetics appeal; craftsmanship; creating a fun battle for one’s opponents as well for one’s self; as a strategic challenge; lack of time and money; and as a demonstration of skill on the game board rather than the ability to write, or find a strong army list online. Excellence or creativity in crafting is one of the ways in which players come up with their own personal victory narrative. By spending time and effort crafting an army and employing the language used frequently to describe such activities, they were in essence crafting a win for later months before a tournament.

In the literature section, we outlined how authors such as Zagal et al (2006) argued that the transparency of the mechanics of tabletop games makes them more amenable to study. We have certainly found this to be the case, as we have been able to audit the accounts of wins/losses of participants back to the game mechanics and rules. Nowhere was this more apparent than in accounts or observations when players spoke of the luck of rolling and/or luck of the draw – the transparency of the rule set and underlying mechanics allowed us to see when accounts were factually accurate or when players were simply employing shared terminologies to justify that they had fun and thus won.

In this paper we have contributed to the understanding W40K, non-digital and digital games more generally by identifying and understanding the pleasures of playing W40K and through an examination of the post-hoc narratives of enjoyment and success used by players to account for failing to win battles. At the beginning of this paper, we detailed how the study of tabletop has been lacking and we hope that this paper at this digital games conference has gone somewhat towards addressing this.

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