

# WARGAMER: FRITZ



## COMPETITIVE WARGAMING

## ANALYSIS | ACTION PLAN | TRAINING

BY FRITZ

## **What is competitive wargaming?**

The hobby known as “wargaming” has many facets to it- some of us play to recreate a historical battle or futuristic narrative. Others enjoy painting, building, and collecting terrain along with the process taking that from start to finish. And then there are those who enjoy wargaming from the competitive standpoint of winning in a tournament or gaming event such as a convention.

For many the idea of playing competitively vs. enjoying a narrative game seems to be at odds, when really they are an extension of the hobby that is there to enjoy if you are ready for it.

Participating in a competitive event EX. a tournament WILL make you a better play for the experience, it will expose you to a new gaming environment and open up new hobby opportunities even if it is not your main reason for wargaming.

We are going to talk a little about this in this PDF, as I believe it is an important experience to have in the hobby, but primarily we are going to focus on how to WIN in a competitive setting.

Some of us are competitive by nature, and truly it is an exhilarating experience to play a number of games in a tournament- hard fought, well won, to then be called up to the front and be acknowledged by your peers for your tactical winnings.

There is a kind of validation in that- all the time spent building, playing, and learning.

As the reader I don't know what has called you to glory, or why you are now looking to compete, but I do know that you want to win and in this

guide we are going to explore the strategies and training outlines to learn to give you the greatest chance of winning.

My aim in this guide is to expose you to what I have learned over the years in playing Warhammer 40K, and later X-Wing Miniatures to cut down your learning curve.

If it would take you a dozen or so tournaments to learn this stuff on your own, then my goal is to give you that experience in one reading of this guide.

Literally in your next (or first!) tournament I want you to place-meaning take 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup>, place.

Ready to take that step and get started.

Let's do it!

## Tournament Pre-Fundamentals

Before we take a look at the strategies we are going to use in a tournament, and the training outline to prepare for it, there are some pre-fundamentals I'd like you to be aware of. Think of this as a knowledge checklist to have in order before you enter your first tournament...

Your first step as a competitive wargamer is to understand the rules and tactics of the system you are playing. Know how the game works, why certain units and combinations are as powerful as they are, and how to both use and defend against those combinations.

The best way to learn the rules of your wargaming is of course to just go out and play some games- keep the feeling casual and relaxed even if your intention is to move into competitive play.

When a person is relaxed it is easier to learn the rules and understand the how and why of your game.

Additionally I find that when I am learning a new gaming system- recently Judge Dredd Miniatures or working on a new list- my Eldar Harlequins for Warhammer 40,000 it is best to adopt the attitude and feeling that your first few games don't "count".

What I mean by this is that even if you are the ultimate beer-and-pretzels gamer we all keep track of winning and losing. Winning is important within the framework of good sportsmanship and the rules.

But, sometimes on the way to winning it's easy to lose scope of some really good learning opportunities- opportunities that will serve you very well as you move into the competitive tournament scene.

Also, at this point, by being concerned with winning at the start of learning your game there is the very real chance you will get burnt out or dejected which is not cultivating the mindset you will need- cool, collected, and ready to analyze and take action in a game.

Always play a game till the end- never quit mid-way through even if it seems hopeless. Part of this is because one should have a proper gaming etiquette in that both you and your opponent(s) have agreed to set aside some real life time to play and enjoy a game- and just as you would enjoy winning and crushing your opponent and expect the game to play out, likewise if your opponent is winning and crushing you, let them have their fun.

However, you SHOULD be using the rest of the game to then experiment with the units you still have and see what you can do with them. Likewise by never giving up, you allow yourself to see if you can gain the momentum back in the game if your opponent makes a mistake or has a bad round of dice.

When you lose those first few games, and the dice are down, rather than packing up and leaving, take a few moments to ask your opponent what they would have done different if they were playing your army or the mission. Ask about their thought-process as they moved through the rounds of the game and what they were doing and thinking that allowed them to win over your plans.

GET this insight.

Outside of a tournament setting, with every game that I personally play there are three aspects that are always in play for me- the first is a social theme- I'm there to have fun with my gaming buddies, rolls some

dice, push around some miniatures and blow stuff up. Second I'm there to push the limits of my tactical command, and third I'm there to get after game feedback- what does my opponent think- in preparation for tournaments.

Learning from your losses is not some cliché, but a VERY powerful tool if your ego can look past the immediate moment of winning, and the need to win every game you play regardless of the cost.

Be kind to yourself and remember we are training for eventual tournament and miniature wargaming domination so your first ten games or so don't count to any self-imposed win/lose ratio.

So now we have the "rules" down and you are on your way to becoming a solid player with a good command, and an action plan on how to handle your next few games- so let's talk about the mindset of a competitive player...

It all begins with a plan and the application of that plan in the face of resistance, and this is where we are going to start.

Take a moment and ask yourself what kind of wargamer player are you- be it Space Marine Commander, Imperial Navy Pilot, or Street Judge.

Are you an active player or a passive player?

Allow me to offer my definition of the two first...

A passive player is one that waits to see what happens. They set their models up on the table and don't really have a direct plan to win the game; instead they react to what their opponent does. Using Warhammer 40K as an example- if a Land Raider moves out, they

intercept; a unit goes down, they reinforce; an objective frees, up they take it.

Passive players react to the army and player across from them, THEN the mission or tournament goals they are playing.

On the other hand, an active player knows what they are going to do – they have built their army to perform as an overall machine with each unit having a function creating form.

Active players don't care what they opponent does since their army will counter every move; and they are playing to the mission/tournament goals first and foremost and NEVER the other play or opposing army.

I want YOU to be an active player, so if you are more passive it's time to throw that out the window and redefine yourself. If you are already naturally active, it's time to refine that into a razor like edge.

Passive players are ultimately at a huge disadvantage simply because we can't read minds yet – I'm working on that! I can attempt to understand what my opponent is doing based on the function of the units in their army and how they are moving and shooting, but can I ever really be sure?

AND, even if I am sure, by playing the game in this manner I am always one step behind.

For example: my opponent has a Land Raider full of terminators and it moves out heading towards an objective I'm holding with some warriors. We can pretty sure guess what it is going to do – let those terminators out, and assault with a sweeping advance. By being passive, even if I guess correctly I'm already one step behind since I allowed my opponent to move out the Land Raider. Being one step

behind allows my opponent to dictate the game. Keep in mind we never really know what is happening or what the real plan is.

On the opposite side if I am an active player, my army moves out to accomplish the mission, forcing my opponent to react to ME with our Land Raider example, making sure they are a step behind, and can never really know what I am doing.

So far so good?

Mistakes are another important part of wargaming, as games are lost based on who made the most mistakes in the game, and who had the worst dice. While it is true that sometimes the dice go against you, and they will be your downfall, over the course of a game it is mistakes on the table that make or break the win.

The goal here is to force your opponent to make mistakes, and when they make those mistakes and weaken the position of their army it only magnifies the power of your army. Mistakes are opportunities you can capture, turn, and punish your opponent with.

Examples of mistakes?

Moving the wrong unit at the wrong time, using a specialized unit for something it is not intended, etc.

As an active player your chance for mistakes has been sliced down to as small as possible. You know what each unit is going to be doing, and what course of action it is going to take. You have a plan for what to do if the unit wins in shooting or the assault, and what to do if it loses and gets wiped out.

There is no hesitation on your part, no using a specific unit for a function it was not intended for since all your bases are covered...

A passive player is mistakes waiting to happen. Being one move behind, guessing and reacting to your opponent means you are forced to adapt to the unfolding game with units that might not be equipped to handle the changes.

Worse yet, as the game unfolds and your mistakes compound the pressure will grow and become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Things will start falling apart for you on the table more and more, making securing the “win” more difficult.

Becoming an active player means knowing the rules of your army first-what each unit can and can't do, and then slotting those units into an army template and following how that template unfolds on the table-stick to the plan, and let the units of your army go to action as a whole-each has a job to do in winning the game!

A final word on being an active player, don't become intimidated when facing a strongly skilled player or if you have lost to an opponent before and are having a rematch. Don't get psyched out, every game is new and different, so don't let past losses carry over into future games.

Easier said than done of course, but it is very important none the less...

Your next pre-tournament assignment is to start playing your games as an active player. Build your army or skirmish team, lance, or attack-wing so it has a plan and execute that plan on the tabletop!

They KEY action point here, again, is that when something goes off plan such as losing a key unit to shooting or the wrong move, keep playing the game out according to the plan and what you intend to do.

Get your opponent to “blink” first, take the momentum of the game with decisive action, and NEVER give it back.

Now we are going to look at our last pre-game fundamental- being aware of the flow of the dice and how to control it.

One of the key strategies we are going to use to win tournaments is to control the random elements of the match-up and game process.

Competitive gamers don't like “random” in a game because it means you can do everything correct tactically, play like a champ, and still lose the battle because the dice rolled some “1”s instead of a “6”.

That said, dice, and the random they create are central to every wargame- be it a D6, D10, or some dice with some funny lines, and explosion symbols on them.

Dice simulate the fog of war in a wargame and help realistically assign odds to a certain action happening in a game. If I'm shooting at a tank with an anti-tank weapon I might get to roll five dice which in the rules simulates the better than average success of the weapon destroying the tank, while if I was shooting at that tank with an infantry unit I might only get one attack die- representing the chances of blowing off a track or swarming the tank with ptrol-bombs or something.

Either way the dice are going to help or hinder me.

In general we want the dice to work with us, and more so in a competitive environment.

The first way of controlling the dice is looking for if and how your gaming system allows a chance to re-roll any dice.

As an example in Warhammer 40K many weapons have a twin-linked special rule which through their targeting system or mass-of-firepower allows them to re-roll the to-hit dice.

A land raider tank has two of these twin linked las-cannons which means that when they shoot and normally need a 3+ on a D6 to hit a target in range, if you miss, you can re-roll the dice to hit.

In X-Wing Miniatures certain ships and cards allow you to re-roll and failed misses- The TIE pilot Howlrunner, gunnery pilots, and the like.

Both selecting units that have the abilities and making sure they are in position to use them when you need them is a major way to take the random out of the game.

Check your rules and your system and see what adjustments you need to make in your list or collection to get these models in.

(Second to this are certain upgrades like in Battletech which will give you a +1 or +2 to your dice roll to see if you hit.)

The next step is understanding how layering of the dice contributes to your success or failure in taking an action each turn- all this cuts down and control the random factors found in dice based games to as best an attempt as possible.

Let's look at the process from the perspective of the Warhammer 40,000 game, and consider this a process to apply to the Wargaming system you are looking to compete in.

In this scenario I have an advancing unit of infantry that are now in range to shoot at an opposing unit of infantry- success will be determined by how many opposing infantry I can “kill” and get removed off the gaming table.

My ten infantry are armed with boltgun- a type of mass explosive machine guns which fire two shots each a turn.

So in shooting them I get 20 D6 dice to start- 2 for each infantry soldier holding a boltgun.

Now to hit the opposing infantry I need to score a 3+ on each D6 which represents the skill of the shooter.

Out of 20 dice let’s say I do better than average and hit with 15 of my shots.

With this dice pool I now have to roll to see if my hits caused any wounds- representing a successful fatal shot.

Based on the strength of the round I will now need a 4+ on a D6 to score a wound, and in rolling those let’s say I do about average and score 7 wounds.

Now, we have to see if any of the infantry make their armor saves, which represents the shot being stopped by the power armor they are wearing in the game- a 3+ on a D6 stops the wound.

Take those 7 wounds and with an average roll 3 will make their armor saves and 4 will fail and be removed from the table as “kills”.

20 > 15 > 7 > 4

Based on the dice and the gaming system to attack it took about twenty dice to cause four models to be removed.

Now, understandably the number could be higher if my rolling was hot, or lower if cold, but this is the concept of dice layering.

We start with a pool of dice, or target number we have to re-roll and it decreases per action.

As you take action on the table you want to increase your dice pool or modifiers depending on the system to the greatest effect so as they pass through each “layer” you will have the most dice possible of giving you a good result.

In our example, what if I shot the infantry squads with heavy bolters, which cause a wound on a 3+ over a 4+, that would make a huge difference.

What if I had some sort of targeting or spotting equipment that let me re-roll my failed hits from the very first set of rolling?

HUGE.

Look to navigate through these layers and throw these layers up when it's your opponent's turn.

OK, so now that we have touched on the pre-fundamentals it's time to start your competitive gaming workout plan!

## The List



Out of all the miniature wargames that I enjoy playing- Warhammer 40K, Battletech, X-Wing Miniatures, Ancients, and Judge Dredd Miniatures my most “successful” army is my Warhammer 40,000 Saim-Hann Eldar Army.

I have played this army essentially unchanged since 2007 through numerous army list updates and edition of the Warhammer 40,000 game- 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and now 7<sup>th</sup>.

While it does have some powerful units in the list, it by far isn't a “powergamer” army, so what is the KEY to its success?

Familiarity.

It goes back to being an active vs. passive player and the ability to free your mind in a competitive game from the mechanical thinking of rules, and how things work, so you can take advantage of tactical openings as they happen.

Truly in competitive play the winner is often the person who makes the least amount of mistakes. We want to do our best to limit our mistakes on the tabletop while encouraging our opponent to make the most mistakes- and when they do, we need to be in a place that we can punish them for that.

This begins with the list- the models, and units you are bringing to the game be they infantry, battle-robots, or spacecraft. You first competitive gaming task is going to be familiarizing yourself with your gaming list so it becomes beyond second nature.

What this means in getting in enough effective (more on this in a moment) practice games so you know how the army works and plays on the tabletop without you having to check rules or ask yourself what to do next.

You need to be so familiar with it that nothing your opponent will bring against it will take you off guard. By being free of the mundane bookkeeping aspects of your army you can focus on tactics and taking advantage of the openings your opponent give you.

As an example with my Saim-Hann Eldar I have a number of jetbike models- think of a futuristic flying motorcycle.



As I play them each turn if I have to keep looking up how far they can move on the table, what is the range of their guns and how they work, and what their armor save is, or other special rules like jink, then this is where my mind is going to be every turn- rules details over being able to see how the jetbikes flow on the table since I can see how and where they can move.

How you get to this point is NOT by memorizing rules, but rather playing practice games over and over, and using that time to naturally look up the rules as needed. Gradually your flow will get better, the key here is to find the list you like and stick with it- learn it, become proficient in it.

Which leads us to the next part- an all takers list vs. a specialized list.

One of the great things about miniature wargaming is all the variation in units and models you can have on the table, pulling from not only various army factions depending on your system, but also the variations in that army itself.

We can both play Battletech and in your list you bring all mechs, while in mind I bring a combination of mechs, tanks, and infantry- both are correct and “legal” to use, yet present different tactical options.



That said, in many competitive gaming lists there tends to be one of two builds- all takers list vs. a specialized list.

An all takers list has a little bit of everything to handle any situation that might arise on the tabletop. You have something to deal with infantry, tanks, and air support. You have a good mix of shooting and close combat- speed and durability. Your army isn't the BEST in any one area of the game, but it at least can put up a fight against all phases of the game.

The idea here with this kind of list is that at the start of the game, when you are spending a few moments looking at your opponent's army/list and asking the question of just what they are planning to do with their army and you take note of any weakness in that list you are now ready to exploit those weaknesses when they appear on the table.

As an example, let's say your opponent has a weakness of anti-air option in their army, well in that case your air support units are going to be an important focus in the game since they will be difficult and require more dice layers (from before) for your opponent to effectively stop.

You are going to use your flyers/air support to really aggressively act against your opponent and push that to them in the game- and while they are busy dealing with it, that will allow the other aspects of your army to pull ahead.

With an all takers list you look at all the phases of the game and have units that can do something in those phases.

The second list is the specialized list which is hyper focused.

With a specialized list you dedicate all of your points, credits, or whatever you use to buy units in the game towards one action in the game.

As an example let's say our wargame has a movement phase where we move stuff, a shooting phase where we shoot guns, and an assault phase where we charge into close combat and settle things face-to-face.

An all takers list would have a few units that can move really fast/well, a few that shoot powerfully, and a few that can sweep in the assault.

A specialized list puts it all into one- all the units can move fast primarily, with shooting and assault ability secondary.

Or shooting is first.

Or assault is first.

By building a list to hyper-focus on one game phase you are looking to overwhelm your opponent in that phase so they can't react to it.

My units are so fast on the table, that I can just avoid you big guns.

Here is an example of a hyper-focused list.

In Battletech I often build my lance (group of mech-robots) from mechs that have heavy auto cannons and PPC based weapons. In game terms a "hit" from one of these weapons causes 10-20 points of damage- a very powerful amount of damage when compared to other mechs that have weapons that deal 5-8 points.

I'm looking to hyper overload my opponent in the shooting phase of the game- meaning while I don't have as many weapons on each mech,

the ones I do have if they hit will cause tremendous damage- damaging heavy mechs and destroying or crippling lighter mechs.

Since I need each shot to hit, to push through the layers of dice I move as fast and close as possible to my opponent and then stand still blasting away to cut down on the dice modifiers in the game which make it harder to hit when moving.

Although by then standing still I make my mechs easier to hit, with the focused shooting of my 10-20 point damage weapons- at least one on each mech, the fight is over pretty quickly before my opponent can strip away my armor.



The power in this lance (list) is that once I close and start stripping off armor with my weapons it is very quick acting- often taking players by surprise and in that surprise they make mistakes.

Or worse they are not even ready for what my list is bringing in the first place.

The challenge with such a list is if by chance your opponent has a way to counter the one area you are hyper focusing in then you are in trouble, because unlike an all takers list there is no second option.

If my heavy shooting lance comes up against a mass infantry list, then it is easy to swarm my mechs, and often there just isn't enough game turns for me to effectively kill everything I need to win the mission.

So which list is better?

Neither, they just reflect different playstyles and you should pick the list playstyle that naturally fits your gaming personality which means it will be easier to learn and play for you- becoming a natural extension of your mind on the table, an avatar of sorts, as quickly as possible.

With an all takers list you patiently wait for your opponent to make a mistake with their units and then you counter on that weakness, while a specialist list looks to overwhelm the opponent so quickly and fast in one aspect of the game that they are unable to counter it effectively.

Now that we have our list, let's talk about training with it...

## **Preparing For The Day: Practice!**

Every competitive game has the following format- a mission that needs to be completed over a limited number of game turns.

A good example might be the winner of the game is the player who has destroyed the most opposing units on the table at the end of six game turns.

And while of course just what the missions are, and what details a game turn will vary depending on your system the training for this is the same.

Your training goal is to set yourself up in a position to “win” the game by the middle of the allotted turns.

So if our mission is to destroy enemy units over six game turns, but the end of turn 3 you want to be in a position where you have destroyed so much, there is now way your opponent can come back over turns 4-6 and tie or win.

You are not looking to “win” the game buy turn “6” but rather by turn “3”. Sure it will be played out till the end, but that end has already been decided.

What this means in your practice games is that you will only be playing them till the middle of the over-all game turns and then stopping to ask yourself- if the game goes on will I win or lose?

Here is the reason for that...

Competitive player need practice on the table, and there is no way around this. If you only have three or so hours a week to grind away at

practice games then you need to get the MOST out of them leveraging quality and quantity.

In the Warhammer 40,000 game if I play a 2000 point army from start to finish in a kill point mission I can reasonable finish the game in three hours if we play it from start to end.

If I play the game to the middle (turn 3 of 6) and then ask, who will win, then I can probably get in 2.5 to 3 games in that three hour period.

More games is more familiarity.

There is also an honesty factor in this, and be honest, while in a casual game there is the social contract of always finishing the game out, how many times have you played a wargame and at about the mid-way point know who is going to win.

Playing it half-way give you the maximum amount of game quantity, now let's look at quality.

Again, go back to an active vs. passive player.

You want to shift your opponent into a passive mindset right away, overwhelm them, get them to be all over the place on the table, bombard their tactical thinking with multiple threats they have to deal with, keep them focused on reacting to your massive and aggressive action on the table.

Get them to BLINK first and they will start to make mistakes.

This aggression on the tabletop needs to be cultivated, which means delivered as quickly as possible to have that overwhelming feeling, which means if you play the game as if you only have 3 turns to "win"

then all your units will be acting and taking action, working as a unified team, and your senses will be sharp and focused.

This forces you to play your best against a self-imposed timer which will breed quality in your games.

When you can start “winning” a game in half the allotted game turns, then you are ready to start dominating at competitive events, which leads us to the next part- finding them, and the pre-planning before the event.

### **Tournament Pre-Planning**

Finding a competitive event to play in (tournament) is easy- just look around on the internet, your wargaming sponsored forum, or local hobby/comic shop where you might play.

The first step beyond the date, time, and any house rules or imposed rules changes are the mission and how they are going to be played. These may be the missions that you regularly play in your miniature system, or they may be some sort of homebrew or club mission.

Get their stats and start practicing them in the win-by-mind game format.

While this is happening you are then going to research the current meta of your miniature system and the event.

Generally speaking there are three types of lists you will face in a competitive event...

The first is the player who brings a narrative list because they enjoy playing it. All wargames have a background to them, and many players

enjoy playing armies that fit the gaming background even through the background rarely translates to the actual rules and battles on the table.

X-Wing Miniatures as an example...

In our club there is a gentleman, a great player and fun guy, they type of guy you want to invite over and roll some dice with each week.

In tournaments, which are more of a social event for him he always plays the Millennium Falcon in some capacity since he is in love with the model and movie history. His list struggles since it is neither take all comers of specialized, and he is more of a passive player.

At any event there will always be a few of these fluff/narrative based lists, and they shouldn't be a challenge against you if you have been implementing the strategies in the guide ruthlessly up to this point.

Just don't let your ego take over and assume an auto-win and start making mistakes. Crush them like you would the most ruthless list.

The second categories of lists that you will find are meta-powered lists.

These are lists that incorporate a number of units or builds that are currently very strong or overpowered in the moment due to the rules-Warhammer 40,000 is notorious for this, but other systems can suffer from this for a bit when new factions are introduced to the games without proper testing, later resulting in a fix or FAQ to bring them in line with the rest of the game.

With these strong meta lists, the power comes not from the tactics or full ability of the player, but from the rules coming together to make

something (read a certain unit) good/powerful and then this unit is spammed throughout the list.

Generally less experienced players will build a meta-fueled list, but they can also be very dangerous in the hands of a more experienced player who has the power of the meta rules and gaming experience and tactics to try and beat you over with.

Start doing some research online and find out what the current meta units are and what combos you will need to look out for.

Some can be beaten, and some can't be beaten, and this is where the power of them come in.

Players are often overwhelmed by these powerful or crazy combination units that it immediately shifts them into a passive mode at best, or at worst they start freaking out on the tabletop which seals their loss.

By you being aware of them and in what form they exist you won't be surprised if you face such units or a list with them, since you know what your opponent is going to try and do with them.

NEVER go head to head or try and stop such meta powered units- focus on taking everything else in the opponent's army apart and get THEM to go into a passive mode reacting to what you are doing over playing into them being ACTIVE by you reacting to their meta game unit.

Being aware of what people will try and pull will help you deal with these lists.

And then the final types of lists you are going to deal with are ones like yours- focused, refined, and in the hands of an experienced and practiced player.

These lists are the true threat so how do we deal with them?

By doing our best to avoid them of course...

## **THE EVENT**

So now it's the day of the tournament and your models are unpacked, ready to go, and your waiting for the first round assignment.

What's the plan?

Time for another little secret...

Tournaments are not about doing your best and winning each round.

The first few events I played in I was under the assumption that it was a sporting like event- do my best and "win" each round and be number one at the end.

Simple right?

The problem with this, is that as players are eliminated each round and like players are matched with like players (in terms of wins or battle points) this means that if you do flawless for two games in your third game (or final game of the day) you will be going up against equally as skilled and experienced players, why would you want to go head to head with an equally skilled or greater skilled player?

WIN the tournament by setting things up to play less skilled opponents for as long as you can, so you only have to face the most skilled in the very last round if at all.

Here is what I mean by that.

Many tournaments follow 3-4 games over a day, with the first round being a random matchup and then each round after that being matched up by like players.

So what this means is that if you win that first game, in round two you will play an opponent who also won their first game. Likewise if you lost your first game, in round two you will be paired up to play an opponent who also lost their first game.

Following this, many tournaments also have ranges in winning and losing based on battle points and or bonus objectives.

So let's say you win the game and get 10 points for that, and if you also did X, Y, and Z in the game that gets you five bonus points taking your total for the round to 15.

Depending on how you "won" that round you can be facing a player at 10 points or a harder winner at 15 points- there are levels of win/loss.

We always want to be on the lower scale of the win, just till the final round when we go all out- more on that in a moment.

Round one is a random matchup and as much as we have been trying to get away from random screwing us over there little you can control here.

You are going to play your hardest as if you are going to win by turn 3 just as practiced, but at turn 3 take a step back for a moment and assess.

If the random round one opponent is more skilled than you and is crushing you on the table, then let them and be sure they win with the most bonus points or biggest difference.

This might mean moving your units off objectives, or letting him shoot down your last ship by running into his TIE swarm head on.

If you lose at the lowest spectrum, that means in round two you will be paired with a likewise lowest losing spectrum player, making a round two win all the easier.

If you are winning, and can totally crush your opponent gobbling up all the bonus points or getting a win at the greatest variance, then back off!

Win the game, but win somewhere in the middle.

This ensures that in round two, while you will be playing likewise winners, they will be middle or the variance winners.

So Fritz, it sounds like you are saying it doesn't matter if you win round one or not?

It does, winning makes it easier to place 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, or 3<sup>rd</sup> - the promise of this PDF, but in round one you can still come back from a loss and place- a win is preferred, but don't get all down if you draw a bad match and get crushed.

Once of he challenges in a tournament it the mental baggage between each round that tends to carry over. We can become dejected from a loss, or ego pumped from a win, or even pissed off from a jerk of an opponent (more to follow on that for sure!), but when the game is over, it over- don't carry and of the good or bad into your next game.

Keep your mind fresh and reset.

Easier said than done, and competitive play does bring out emotions despite it being a “game”, so what I do after a round and the score sheets have been turned in and my stuff packed up and ready for the next round is to physically take a walk around and outside of the store or event hall for a moment- literally get that breath of fresh air and fill your lungs.

So now we are at round # 2.

If you lost your first game, let it do, and 100% play your best- to catch up and place 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> you are going to need to make up the points, you are not only going to need to WIN the game, but also get any bonus points or scoring variables to put you at the top of that win.

Losing round one means this round COUNTS.

BUT, by facing a similarly losing player your odds are good if you stick to your plan, play ACTIVE, and be aggressive.

Now, if you won your first game you of course want to continue that trend and win the game and get at least half of the bonus points/variables for the round. This will put you at the final top tables, but not against the very best players.

At this point in the event you either need a full win with all the bonus points if you lost round one, or a full win with half the variances if you won round one.

Unfortunately what this means is that if you lose the second round it will be impossible to place in a three round event- four round events means you then need full wins + bonus in the next two games for a chance at placing, but even that is hard.

What we are aiming for is to have the two or four best players who won every game and every bonus point(s) in the first two games face each other in the final round.

We want them to self-destruct on each other.



*Third round from a recent X-Wing Miniatures tournament- my competitive TIE SWARM list vs. and equal TIE SWARM list on table #2, both lists in the hands of equal players, not where I wanted to be, but DICE and TACTICS (Active Player) are what won the day. My TIE's are always on 3 pegs...*

Often these types of players cannot and will not concede, so they will both lose the round and get no bonus points each- allowing you to slip

right in, because while you are also the “best” due to practice, training, and mindset, you have been trying to play weaker opponents through the pairing system to put you at a weaker opponent for the final game, but still strong enough in terms of points or brackets to win.

That said, in the third game, you need a flawless victory, full win, bonus points, and variables.

Now at this point I make no judgment toward anybody who enjoys tournament play and I’m hoping you don’t pass judgment on me- I’m just sharing my experience and the perfectly fair strategies to give you the best chance to win by avoiding the best players and letting them self-implode over the rounds till you skip in at the very end.

It is still a game of skill, and you need to win and control you level of win, which is done be controlling the random which we talked about at the first part of this guide.

The placement and ladder climbing strategy I just outlined will make it easier for you but you still need to produce and win through good tactics and mental execution.

That said, I would be amiss if I didn’t make you aware of a legal tactic that I have seen used over the years- on me many times when I was at the height of my competitive playing, and by a good friend I know. When done right it is very powerful and will go unnoticed, so I want you to be are of it, and knowledge is knowledge so if you use it, be aware of what it might bring if your opponent is aware of it.

Personally and with full disclosure I have never used it as reputation is KING. The tournament scene for any given are is in reality quite small,

so if you swim in its waters long enough you WILL get a reputation as guys and gals know you.

You don't ever want to be a cheater (I'm just going to assume you aren't and won't be- no insult intended).

And you don't want to be a win-at-all-costs or jerk player- which you might get a rep for if you pull stuff like this.

I want you to be the guy who wins with skill within the confines of the rules, and gets invited by tournament organizers (TO's) to events ahead of time and all the time.

There is a tactics, while "legal" is distasteful and not in the spirit of the game works like this.

If you find yourself playing a game and can see that you are not going to win the game as it moves to its conclusion you start to slow down your play.

Movement takes a bit longer...

When you shoot your units you double measure just to be sure so that your opponent can see everything is in range and "fair" ...

You stall or slow the game with some friendly talk...

(Not saying you should be stone dead when playing, friendly talk is fine and encouraged.)

Basically you start building the pressure of the clock.

Many tournaments will have games on a set timer, meaning that you have X amount of time to complete the game, and when time ends the game ends, regardless of where you and your opponent are.

Now this isn't slow playing, which is the mark of an amateur- player who will get to a point in the game where they are "winning" say by holding more objectives, or having more battle points for the moment, and then they slow down play so much that time runs out and the "win".

You can see this a mile away, plus as an ACTIVE and aggressive player, let them slow play- you are aiming to crush them by round three anyway...

...but they start to slow down slowly to create the pressure of time running out, and then in one final blitz of models they make a massive push, go all out, forget the mission parameters, and try to cause as much damage as possible- taking out your key units, and building the illusion on the tabletop that all of a sudden the game has turned and they are crushing you- which in that moment has the illusion of that if a ton of damage is done in a single turn, but it often still isn't enough to carry the final win if the game plays out.

Then at the end of that turn that pull and say crap like this...

*"Wow, what a great round, I got really lucky taking out your XYZ which you really needed to win, and time is running out anyway, you want to still play the game out or just call it and give me the win."*

You of course then naturally look at the game timer and see that there might only be ten or so minutes left, and in the moment you are reeling psychologically from the sudden and powerful loss of units and it feel like you are losing the game so why not call it.

It a tournament you can naturally concede and yield at any time, and sometimes for valid reasons, and if you surrender to your opponent then a win is a win right?

Don't laugh, when done well there is a power in doing this, and the surrendering of a round has pushed guys to the top tables for another change at placing over losing mid event.

Now don't be paranoid and expect every player to be a jerk- honestly most competitive players are good, honest, and love of the hobby guys, and the ones who are real jerks soon don't get invited to events, but I want you to be aware of it as a possibility.

No retreat, no surrender, no mercy from one of my favorite inspiring movies.

## THE CHEATER

Since we are naturally flowing into psy-stuff let's talk about the cheater and how to deal with them.

Opponents or organized competitive play would have you believe that cheating is rampant wide in tournaments, and while it does exist and you may face it, it is a rare event- again the wargaming community is smaller than many think and VERY self-policing.

So why are we talking about this?

The two biggest hurdles/questions I hear about when players first start thinking about playing in a comparative event is this:

*#1 What if I'm not good enough and just lose every game?*

*#2 What if somebody cheats me, what do I do?*

We are taking care of #1 in the training guide so far, and for #2 we are going to put that at rest now.

Worrying about cheaters and being cheated takes mental energy in a game- energy you need to be focusing on using to win.

The first step is to define what really is cheating.

I'm not making light of the situation but getting caught with loaded dice over forgetting a rule are two completely different things.

When something happens in the course of a game that you feel cheated or that cheating is taking place take a moment and ask if it really is cheating.

Are they really cheating you or is it something else?

Is the person moving their models a little extra because they are excited to play in the moment, or are they trying to pull one over on you.

Did they forget a rule because it favors their army in the moment, or is because they just started playing last month?

Now beyond that what if it isn't an understanding and the person is a cheating.

Call the tournament organizer (TO) or rules judge over and let them deal with it.

That is what the TO is there to accomplish.

Keep your reputation intact and let them confront and resolve the issue.

## **Break Time**

I know I've told you to be present in the moment during a tournament, but at the same time with the present event you are already using it to prepare for you next event.

Two points of action during each event are to build up your list database and make sure you network with your fellow gamers.

During a break, take a few moments to walk around the gaming hall and see some of the other armies that other players have brought to play. Make some notes and take some pictures so you know what is in each list, and then later on after the event when you are playing your practice games and refining your list ask yourself how you would beat one of the lists that you took a picture of.

Maybe there are some units or combination that you saw which you can really use?

Perhaps a new way of thinking?

This kind of question asking is very important since it represents the real type of lists and build in your area, not somewhere off on YouTube or an internet forum.

Tournaments are great because they bring in all kinds of players outside of your regular gaming group or immediate circle of friends, and these are informational resources you can use for an advantage.

As an example, during the lunch break I tend to take pictures of each army on display, and then at the end of the event when the winners are posted I can cross check it with the images to pull out the top 10 lists.

I then use that as an exercise later to see if it is a specialized list or an all takers list, how it works, and what the “language” of the list is trying to do- how and why does it play? What combos make it work? What rules is it trying to leverage to win?

Very REAL recon since there is a good chance that if I play in a similarly local even next month I might be literally facing one of these lists on the table.

Pictures are also a great way to capture awesome paint jobs and conversions on models- literally pulling in dozens of armies on display for you to see to get inspired by to work on your own army with.

Networking is next.

As much as you might want to take a break and decompress at lunch or in-between rounds, use that as a time to network and talk to your fellow gamers. As cliché as it sounds to make friends, and the social aspects of the community, if you are serious about competitive play then meeting and building a relationship with some like-minded tournament driven players could lead to a person to work and train with to help improve your game.

### **Tournament Soft Scores**

Up to now we have been focusing on placing in a tournament though hard scores- battle points and victories on the tabletop and for many competitive systems such as X-Wing Miniatures this is the only requirement to place.

However, other more local events might also include sportsmanship or army painting points into the final score to see who scores on the top over all.

For the most part sportsmanship and paint are a small part of the overall score and you still want to focus on your primary battle score/points, but in events that do have them, earning the best you can in both sportsmanship and painting is important- even if it is only 10 points out of 100 total, with the other 90 being battle points those 10 may make a difference at the final top tables.

Let's talk about sportsmanship first...

Often used by TO's as a way to put some pressure on potential out of control players sportsmanship points are very difficult to enforce and quantify.

If I'm a good sport during the game I get a few points, and if I wasn't I don't get any points- as assigned by my opponent and what they think.

Sportsmanship is very subjective, but if we are going to work within the system then we want to give ourselves the best possible chance at getting those points from our opponent.

Of course the simple answer is don't be a jerk during a game and you will get them, but there is a little more to it than that.

Players tend to give you a bad sportsmanship score (known as *chimpunking*) when either they feel they are being cheated or never stood a chance of winning in the game. One is a natural defense reaction and the other is punitive.

Besides not cheating yourself in the game (obviously) as you play take the time to explain what is going on, and let your opponent see what is going on. You might be aware of all the rules going on, but they might not.

If I'm shooting my Battlemech into yours and I just pick up 2D6 and roll an 11 and say "hit", you might not understand what happened thinking I shouldn't have hit due to range or some rule.

BUT if as I shoot I say *"OK, base 4+ to hit, modified by +2 since I moved, and +1 for long range, means I need a 7+ to hit your Battlemech"*...and then roll the dice.

It's also a good starting point in general when you meet your opponent at the table at the start of the game and are setting up to hand them a paper copy of you "list" with the units and options/upgrades/wargear or whatever you call it on them.

Make it a point to ask them if they have ever faced XYZ army before and if there is anything that needs to be explained ahead of time- like the fact that each of my 'mechs are packing an AC 20 which means if I hit you take 20 points of damage- which if my opponent might not know, it will take them by surprise and might lead to me being considered a "cheat" by not warning them.

Second to this, in light of rampant cheating always give them the benefit of the doubt with the rules if they forget something- win on your skill level and honor, not on rules lawyering or loop-holes.

The second biggest reason to get tanked in sportsmanship is if somebody loses to such an extent that they feel like they got rolled. Maybe you are a good player, maybe their list sucked, maybe the dice gods did not favor them that day, its easy in a moment of emotional rage to blame the player and use sportsmanship to take it out.

So when that starts happening and you are crushing them on the table, give them something to feel good about. If I have a unit that I don't need to win the game in that moment, and it won't affect any bonus points or variables I might need then send it out and let your opponent trash it, let them blow some models up and kill "stuff" so they don't feel powerless at your tactical onslaught.

Outside of these two factors I've found that you can't influence sportsmanship beyond much else.

Now let's look at paint scores.

Clearly painting miniatures is an important part of the wargaming experience and even systems that come pre-painted such as X-Wing

Miniatures has guys ever tinkering with custom paint jobs and other effects on their models.

They are two sides of the same hobby, so even if you are not a “painter” you are going to want to be improving that side of the hobby if you are interested in picking up those paint points from a competitive point of view.

As noted some events have a “best painted” army award and many players enter events just to win that prestigious spot. If you consider yourself a “painter” first then you can still use these strategies to also win on the battle side of the event.

For the rest of us however we need to think of painting like tactics- something we constantly work on and improve over time.

Many events have a score sheet for paint points awarded and some of the point categories are VERY easy to earn.

Sometimes in such a rubric you will see easy points to get such as if you models are all based you get +3 paint points, if you have a display board +3 points, squad markings +3 points- easy stuff you can do to your army in a weekend with minimal effort.

Check and see what you can quickly earn.

That said here are three YouTube links to three painters in the Warhammer 40,000 community that I think very highly of and have some great tutorials to help inspire you and check out- in addition to the painted army pictures you took during a break in the event.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/jawaballs>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/awesomepaintjob>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCTfnfIY3Kyxcv8sWck4sxvQ>

## Bonus: Display Board



*My gaming buddy Jawaballs builds the BEST display boards...*

As a bonus to competitive gaming you are going to want to build a “display board” for your army- and not just for the extra paint points it may provide you, but even if your gaming system doesn’t have paint points.

It will help you game.

Here is why.

Besides making your army pretty to look at, it provides a solid and quick way to transport things from table to table in-between gaming rounds.

Consider this- you arrive at the event and unpack your army for your first game/round one.

The game ends and now you have ten minutes to move to the next table and start the next round. In that ten minutes you now have to pack your army back up in its case, or at least half-pack it, find where you are going, unpack your army and gaming stuff- tokens, tape measure, dice, books, etc. and then repeat that every round.

Likewise when a model or unit dies or is destroyed you are going to want to put it back in your gaming case so it doesn't break or get lost- all that takes time, and in this case direct game time when you should be focusing on the game.

Now, if you have a display board right there, then when you arrive early for the event you can unpack and set up your army and as models die put them on the board and in-between rounds effortlessly move your army without packing and unpacking.

This removes the stress of moving stuff each round, and more importantly it frees up sometime for you to chill for a moment or take a walk in-between game rounds.

Making a display board can be as easy as grabbing a large picture frame or cork board, adding some texture/basing, paint and some scenery or advanced as elevation and sound/movement effects.

It may not seem like much but it WILL make a huge difference.



*My Space Marines on the left for the day...packing and unpacking...*

*Vs.*

*My Tyranids on a display board and name poster ready for the day...*

### **Bonus: Doubles Tournament Strategies**

If I had a choice, my choice of the ultimate “competitive” event, it would be a doubles tournament or team tournament for me.

I love the social aspects of wargaming, and such events combine the best of both for me- playing and winning with a teammate friend against other teams.

The strategies we have outlines so far also apply to team and double tournaments only with a slight addendum.

That said, if you are still on the fence about jumping into competitive play then a team tournament is a great way to start! It can be a bit intimidating for your first tournament experience to go at it alone, so if you can bring a friend and play with a friend even better.

So what are some things to keep in mind to layer over everything else we have just looked at?

Often with such a format each player will have half the amount of points or battle values to build their list and then will play together as a team.

So if the tournament is a 2000 point event, each player will have 1000 points to build a list, and often they must be different army factions over just taking one 2000 point army and cutting it in half to 1000 points each.

The key is to take and build two complimentary lists.

Based on the models/units that you and your friend have, and your playstyles you each are going to assume one of two roles.

One will be the “attacker” in the tournament, and other the “defender”.

The attacker builds their list with one goal in mind- total aggressive destruction. They select units that can kill opposing models and cause as much chaos as possible. The attacker on your team doesn't worry about winning the mission or stopping the other side- they go out and keep the other side busy by destroying them and forcing both players on the other team to deal with their models.

If done correctly, most likely by the end of the game the attacker on your team won't have a single model left as they were all expended and aggressive interaction with the opposite side.

The idea is to keep both opposing players so busy dealing with what the attacker has, that it takes up all of their focus and game resources and they CAN'T play to the mission.

The hard part as an attacker is the EGO- can they stick to their assigned role and mission plan and go out and get wiped out off the table, while their partner hangs back and does nothing.

There can be no deviation from the plan.

On the opposite side the DEFENDER on the team builds a list that focuses on winning the mission while supporting the ATTACKING team members advance.

They are there to stay alive and be in the right place to win the mission objective when the game ends- not to engage the enemy, while at the same time support and help with shooting or other long range stuff which allows them to stay safe.

The DEFENDER has to control their desire to help their team-mate out, and stick to the plan of being in place when the game ends.

An example?

My best Warhammer 40,000 doubles team mate is my gaming buddy Brother Captain James. It's without bragging that we have placed at least 3<sup>rd</sup> place in every doubles event we have played in.

Besides being good friends, and controlling out egos enough, James enjoys playing an aggressive all-out attack game, while I tend to prefer a more sneaky/indirect playstyle.

He builds his Space Marine army with terminators and drop pods full of veterans and sternguard marines. Right away on turn one the pods land in our opponent's deployment zones and get out blasting away as the terminators move across the table putting pressure on and engaging. If

you are facing that kind of aggression you have to deal with it, and often James doesn't survive past the fourth round.

While that is happening my Saim-Hann Eldar of jetbikes and vipers are hanging far back adding some long range shooting in support, weaving and zipping around to stay safe, only to break just before the game ends to hold objective points on the table or claim table quarters.

Why does this work so well and win games?

Well, for starters it allows each team member a known assigned roll ahead of time, and it has allowed them to optimize their list to do that- all of their 1000 or whatever points/battle values are put into doing just that and are not scattered over different tactical options.

Its power also comes from coordinating the team as one- rather than two spate armies both trying to mesh together in the moment, with both players trying to attack, defend, win the mission, and figure all that out in the moment- as the opposition will be doing rather than staying focused and ACTIVE vs. PASSIVE