THE HONEST WARGAMER

WORKBOOK

Welcome to The Honest Wargamer Workbook

Dedicated to everyone on Twitch and Patreon who made this possible.

What is this?

Initially, this is a man called Rob's attempt to standardise the language with which we all talk to each other in wargaming and to make you a better gamer. Incredibly egotistical of me and a gross overestimation of my writing ability, but here we are. Personally, I assume there are better gamers and informers, but I've been flirting around this idea for 4 years of producing content, from Bravery One, creating Warhammer Live and now The Honest Wargamer. I hope you find this useful; you read through the book and work through the questions and hopefully arrive at a better way to approach the game.

This isn't finished, this is version one (my ego's defense for the inevitable internet diss fest). Working with a small group of people to get this together. If you think it needs improving then let me know. I want to collaborate, I want to make this definitive, I want nothing more than to improve what I hope is this groundwork. It's freely available, steal parts, review them, improve them, criticise how it's wrong and show better work so the community improves. It would be lovely if you were to reference this.

Part 1 - Pre army

What are your aims with the army?

I know this seems like a simple question and the answer is to crush all peoples, armies and bunnies before you, but for some people winning isn't the only goal. The workbook is primarily focused on making you a better gamer and to increase your skill level through making you practice and prep, but that doesn't mean you have to do it in the cold mechanical way competitive wargamers are often described. There are several paths to victory however, ultimately getting better as a gamer is what this is book is for. Maybe in future iterations we can do a version for narrative gaming too or telling a timeless tale.

So let us answer this for you, your aim, fellow wargamer, is to beat your personal best, do better and challenge everyone around you; your aim, courageous combatant, to win games and one day lift a trophy to the heavens.

What type of gamer are you?

However you are you. Different from I, a fact I'm sure you are happy about. This means we are different gamers. Truth is, I've met very few gamers who play this tumultuous battle of wits in the same way as each other. So the first question I need you to answer is what type of gamer are you? Now you may be new to wargaming and not know the answer to that question, and that's ok. It may take you months or even years to figure it out. Also, certain armies only play certain ways so you may be hampered by that and not know that you can play the way that best suits you. So here is a summary of some player archetypes and ways that I feel they play, and how they feel to play as or against.
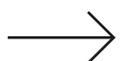
Controllers
"So because of all those debuffs, you can't hit me"
Cool, calm collected and they wake up in the morning hoping to make it rain on your sunny day. The aim of these players is to make you not play your army the way you want to or had planned to. While this is a very viable tactic, it's frustrating to play against and we imagine a sick delight to play as. Just be aware it won't get you many favourite game votes and knowing what units to control will require a lot of planning ahead of time and some good system mastery.

Movers
"Movement is the key stat in any wargame"
The quote of every gamer who fits this profile and also one I use often. Having great mobility lets you make decisions about when to engage. Lets you correct mistakes you may have made at deployment or during engagements. It's useful to people who want to pivot mid game, and can be used to be deceptive and not where your opponent expected.

Quickies
"I alpha strike, then I either win or I hit the bar"
Some players just don't want 2.5 hours of intense tactical decision making, to see every dice roll as a key part of a rosetta stone of decision rubrik and that's totally ok. You want a fun game and a low impact weekend. All the gamble of this playstyle happens in army selection. You go for the win in the early turns.

Wombo combo bambinos
"CCCCC- C- C - COMBO BABY"
Armies that use an overriding trick, like huge summoning, stacking command abilities or stratagems. Again, this is an army you build or refine/polish/plan in the list phase and requires some mastery of the system, but means you go into the game trying to do a thing. It's quite rewarding, especially if you count that as your own personal win objective. Almost always the trick happening means you are in a favourable position.
There is also the downside of the trick finding its hard matchup or it just not working which can be disappointing. Sometimes, it can be as small as a character's trick or maybe the whole army is set up to do one specific thing.

Math-hammer-istas
"I see only numbers"
You are the matrix. You know the average performance of every unit, the likely results for charges and casting. You do a lot of prep work (more than even this workbook). More than likely you are a cautious player, sensible, steady and focused. You plan ahead and would like to think you can predict the flow of events. It can also be hard to read you, guess what you are doing and you have a good poker face. This is a great playstyle and is usually what the gamers who perform consistently well become over time. The direct enemy of any Mathammeraneer is the Gambler. Gamblers will not play sensibly and are usually new or insane.

The Gamblers
"If I roll a 6 then 2 6s then 10 4+s I'll win the game"
Risk vs reward is a key element to Tsports (Tabletop) and all gaming, and the Gambler sits laughing in the face of odds and the dice gods. You are a crazy out of control cat and you make predicting what you are going to do very hard. Building armies that allow you to take these high risks can range from fairly simple to deeply complicated depending on how far you go, but knowing that you can is important. Knowing that you want to is great fun too. It certainly does mean you can spend a tournament full of confidence because you are trying to roll against the odds.
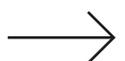
Hero Hammerers

"By Grabthar's hammer I shall be avenged"

You've read the stories and now wish to be the champion. You love the background and like the characters and want to make them work in game. Living vicariously through the haughty power of gods and miniature men. You could also be a creative hotspot and like to craft a story for your own characters that stretches through tournaments, games and editions. Lastly, you could be someone who wishes to tell their own tales: "this unit has eaten 17 bigger units over the course of the year and good luck to you noble traveller". This can usually mean your army choices are not as efficient as some may like and may reduce your overall chance of winning, but never let that stop you and if you follow the work book, you'll do better than if you didn't.

The Money

"What's the biggest thing you got?"

This one is simple, you got the cash and you want your army to be unique, in either looks or composition. You could also have less money, but have a lot of time and therefore create a magnificent project off your own back. Usually, armies from someone like this have a very expensive set of models or the same unit taken several times to a degree only a mad bitcoin investor would feel is ok, but don't let that hold you back. If this is you, you be you. It usually creates insane armies that no one can predict will attend an event and can give you a tactical upper hand.

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Obviously you can have some, if not all of these traits, but knowing you want games to be over quickly or you want to move a lot of models around can be helpful before you decide on an army or to get one/another one.

What's your budget in money and time?

Is the tournament soon?

Are there painting requirements?

What you need to know is how long it will take to make and produce the army and if it's in your financial scope. Now the key at this stage is practice. Skipping ahead, you'll have to make a list and play it several times before you know it's exactly what you want to play at a tournament. Not knowing how the list performs before you buy it can be problematic. So there are 4 avenues to take: Practice with it using blank bases. SHOCK horror. Don't let anyone criticise you for this, this is dress rehearsal and a perfect time to find out how the army does, while hobbying in the background. There's nothing worse than buying, building and having to paint before you find out if your units are how you want them to be or any good at all.

Read List/Unit Rundowns on TheHonestWargamer.com. Smart players around the world will have distilled their advice into List/Units and how to take them and play them. Invaluable.
Watch batreps. The quality and voracity of these can vary wildly especially for current tournament gaming.

Watch live coverage. Again, the armies you see won't be exactly the one you want to play, but the advice on how each game is won and lost may be valuable.

Will it have to travel?

If it does? Is the army small or very big? Is it fragile?

This can have an impact before you choose your army.

What is the availability of opponents and armies?

Do you know someone who has the army you want and can you just borrow it? Does that mean you should spend your hard earned cash on a different army to mix up the local pool of available armies?

How many gamers do you have locally?

Is it a small amount?

You are gonna have to travel for practice and also grow them numbers baby.

Do you have a large pool of players?

Play them all, learn all you can.

Can local gamers be encouraged to play practice games and work to make you all better?

Can you form a team?

Make a team, practice with each other so when you venture beyond your local group you go as one. Better yet, form 2 teams and compete locally so as to encourage some top tier play. Team sports are amazing, get a club, get some T Shirts. As one example here in the UK, there's a group called WS10 and they go as a group and it's so cool. They all back each other up.

Do you want to have a unique or rarer army?

See what's popular and do something different. Popular usually means successful though. To check out what's used most to least currently you can visit The Honest Wargamer website for coverage.

Are the models you wish to buy for the army available?

We need a best buy practice to be here, but ultimately this will have to come at a later date.

There are several articles on this all over the internet, but here we are writing another one. Read your whole army book and the core rules and then start your list. Also, come up with a catchy name, naming lists and making them catch the imagination is just a great addition to the hobby and we all thank you for it.

What are the unique or strong factors of your army?

List them, discuss them. Reevaluate them. The rules and how you perceive the army to play can be at odds, so you must attack this issue several times until you are comfortable you know what the strong factors are.

What does it do well?

What are the inherent strengths of the army

What does it do badly?

What are the inherent weaknesses of the army

Which units are good for the role you need and/or do you want to use?

Are those units optimal for how your army performs or do they benefit from synergy with other units?

Do you have or need redundancy to achieve the win condition of some or all of the missions?

Can you protect from being alpha striked?

Losing before you have a go is a mistake. You need to avoid that happening and plan for someone trying it.

What are the prevailing threats?

This is where your research is important. Being aware of frequently taken units or armies is a great resource so as to avoid not taking the correct set of tools. Even knowing you can't deal with threat X means you can plan for that, but you need to know ahead of time. Putting units into your list to deal with those threat ROLES is important.

What do I want the list to do?

Win, of course, but now we come to how.

There are two paths to victory on the tabletop and they aren't opposing ideals. Sometimes they go hand in hand, but in some cases, games or missions, one may be more heavily in favour of one of the options.

Thanks to Carl von Clausewitz, and Danger Mouse.

Total War:
Conflict of unlimited scope in which a belligerent engages in a mobilization of all available resources at their disposable whether human, industrial, agricultural, military, natural, technological or otherwise, in order to entirely destroy or render beyond use their rival's capacity to continue resistance.

Kill everything to win. Most armies can do this, but some can,t, and whether or not you can achieve this may actually depend on your matchup and mission.

Limited War:
"A limited war is one in which the belligerents do not expend all of the resources at their disposal, whether human, industrial, agricultural, military, natural, technological, or otherwise in a specific conflict. This may be to preserve those resources for other purposes, or because it might be more difficult for the participants to use all of an area's resources rather than part of them. Limited war is the opposite concept to total war."
- Wikipedia

In wargaming terms our strategy is, to quote my dear friend, to *"get the gold"*. Killing is secondary and gaining objective points is the route to victory. This is usually coupled with killing all your opponents units as in total war, but sometimes losing all your models, but getting all the gold is still a win.

So the question is, do you want to kill everything or score objectives or both?

Can your list do that?

Which lists can your list do that against and which can't it do it against?

Matchups, matchups, matchups!
You have to win every game, so anticipate out how you can build that plan in. If you have some very hard matchups, you gotta plan ahead on what you are going to do to try to beat them.

Army Archetypes
Now, some armies fit an archetype and you may be consciously building a list into these broad terms. Some lists may span more than one, but it's helpful to know and also helpful to help categorise the enemy armies you face.

Types of armies

Castle
A defensive type of positioning on the board. Either made from strong wall defensive units or cheap chaff designed to slow the enemy's advance and protect valuable units.

Alpha Strike
Striking in the first turn so effectively that the opponent can't recover.

Finesse
Delicate, usually highly mobile, but ultimately unforgiving if mistakes are made.

Hordes
Large model count, great at holding objectives. Sometimes so extreme the opposing army couldn't remove it all in the gametime allowed.

Elite
Low model count and usually very good output/defense per wound in a unit.

Mobile
High speed and a big threat radius.

Static
Low movement, static doesn't mean immobile, but usually more focused at deployment because they wont be going very far after.

Mechanized/Monster mash
A polarized build consisting of almost solely high toughness and/or good saves meaning you need the correct tools to deal with them.

Attrition
Does damage and can take damage over the whole game, designed to outlast the opponent's army.

Combined arms
A mixture of profiles and abilities meaning you have a toolbox of tactics at your disposal. The opposite of a polarised list.

Polarised/non all-rounder
A list that is very heavily oriented around doing one thing, shooting, combat or magic. The opposite of a combined armed list.

Beta strike/counter punch
An army that either counter attacks against an alpha strike or striking so effectively in the 2nd turn the opponent can't recover.

Denial/tank
An army designed for limited war to win the gold by being defensive and winning through objective play. Also an army that's focused on debuffing the enemy.

Specific
An army designed to work a certain way and do a certain job outside of winning. Could be an army designed just to topple the stronger armies.

Just keep asking yourself questions,

So you've written a list and asked yourself loads of questions about it, so now it's time to practice.

It's homework time and I'm proud you made it this far 'cause the next part is my least favourite part, but it will be the most rewarding. Like daily exercise and eating your veg, this part is vital for going from winning 3 - 4 games to 5 at a tournament.

So we got our army list. Let's practice.

Read the pack for the tournament
K, you are going to a tournament and every T.O. is as beautiful, but different, as every rainbow, therefore read the pack. Take notes.

> - What missions will you be playing?
> - What are the secondaries for victory?
> - What are the painting requirements?
> - Are there any house rules?

- What missions will you be playing?

Right, there's no way to say this, there's no way you can be over prepared for this. First off, write the missions down individually:

- What are the win conditions? Learn them and know them.
-What will you do if you go first?
-What will you do if you go second?
-What will you do if there's a priority roll and when's best to try to get the double?

What are the deployment maps?

> **Exercise 1.**
> Deploy your army in each of these missions. Not in a game, at home, practice. Do it as many times as you can.
>
> - Which units do you deploy first and why?
> - Can you do dead drops or fake drops?
> - Are your characters in range for buffs?
> - Can you get to to objectives in turn 1?
> - Can you screen against an alpha strike?
> - Can you mitigate against AoE damage into your army?
> - Do you need to get across the board?
>
> Obviously, none of this factors in your opposing army, but it will give you a solid grounding of how you best want to prepare, and then every time you face your opponent you can make changes. Practicing how to screen or bubble wrap should not be done live, do it at home or your local gaming club with friends. Work to better each other and ask for pointers. Wargamers will give you an opinion 'til the eroding of the mountains. Take that advice. Take photos of your deployments and discuss with friends and look at them on the bus or train to work.

Exercise 2
Get off book

Learn all of your rules and stats off by heart. Have recall and command of your army. You can do this in practice without impacting important games. Of course it's great to have references to hand (more on that later), but it's vital you spend your time on the table thinking and making decisions. So we gotta get off book, we need to be like Rainman in his finest hour (this was a poor reference cause of the rampant autism I should probably revisit this) and speak with the confidence of every battlefield sergeant.

Get your partner/parents/close friends/old people with nothing better to do to help you revise. I'm sure there are numerous videos on youtube to help with memory etc.:

- It will speed up your games.
- It will help you make better decisions.
- It will give you an aura of confidence that your opponent must worry about.
- It will help you make better decisions about lists.
- You got this. I believe in you and want the best for you.

Excercise 3
Make a cheat sheet.

The more work you do here, again, the better. Everyone has different versions of cheat sheets for themselves, but I'm going to make some suggestions for you to consider.

Make a list of your units and all rules for your army in quick readable format for reference.
If you have a complicated set off buffs/spells or combos to do at some point write them down and then get off book.

Analyse your units and give them a roll:

- Which units punch through good armour saves?
- Which units are fast and get objectives?
- Which units clear through hordes?
- Which units are chaff and expendable?
- Which units need protecting?
- Which units are bait?

Now again, some of this is contextual versus different matchups, but a unit being able to go through good armour saves is not contextual so you can plan, and when it comes to deploying later you can work out your matchups.

Analyse the missions/realms/pack etc.
You should already have made notes about the missions, but a quick refresh at the start of each game is important. You should have expressed to yourself how you plan to win these games, but include it in your cheat sheet so you arrived prepped by your earlier self.

Matchups
Here is where you make good and bad matchups and notes on what they are and what to do about them. No army is unbeatable, but trying to work out how to do it as you arrive to the table is a little much to ask of yourself. Look through the stats to see which armies are common. How do you beat
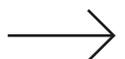
them. See which armies are doing well. How do you beat those? Quite handily, there now exists a website where people are writing guides on how armies work so you can read for hours to prep. You'll know which are tough matchups and which are less tough matchups and you should play with that knowledge in mind.

Now I know this seems like a lot of work before a tournament, but it's invaluable work that many gamers who do well either write down or obsess over. Going as far as to start podcasts, YouTube or Twitch shows. It's a game of obsessive compulsives overthinking everything and it's awesome! Join in, wow people with how prepped and real you are. Give even experienced gamers a challenge on the tabletop.

Get movement trays
Move units faster, deploy faster. Spend more time trying to win the game and less time moving. So easy it hurts me to have to say it, but we gotta do it. They are cheap and available the world over.

Exercise 4
5 practice games is the minimum I'm gonna need from you before you go to the tourney. Some people will proudly say, *"I haven't even practiced this list and I won 4 games"* etc. Well bully for them, I've been that person by the way. No longer. I'm with you and I will make public all the times I failed this hurdle. I've done this recently and it's informed my games so so so much and helped me win tournaments. If everyone else isn't practicing and you are, you will do better and that's what we want. Good journey noble traveler.

Box up that army, pack your cheat sheet and lets get going and play some games.

So you've arrived at the table, you've read the mission win conditions and now you've seen your opponent's army.

Ask yourself this for every game:
- What's the longest charge they can do turn 1 and which units can do it?
- Can they deep strike/outflank/scout/infiltrate?
- Which units can do the above and what do you think your opponent will use them for? Grab objectives? Create screens? Alpha strike?
- Can they debuff your army in turn 1 and at what range?
- What's the effective shooting range (movement + range of weapon) of their units?
- Do they have any abilities which give them out of sequence abilities such as shooting in the charge phase?

Once you've asked these questions, you need to ask:
Who is the beatdown?

Here, we get to the strategy of assessing and playing games, so bear with me as it's tough to do a general rule of thumb for a complex, but thrilling game I'm totally in love with.

Wargames are a lot more like Rock Paper Scissors than they are like chess.

Almost always, one army and therefore player has some kind of advantage and some of these are vast, but if you've done your prep, hopefully not too vast. The advantage may be due to the scenario win conditions or because they have units that are too fast or tough to deal with well. It's down to you to assess who has the advantage, or the beatdown, and it may be in your favour which is great, but make sure you don't get that wrong (yeah sounds easy Rob, I'll just be a genius all the time). So you have assessed who is the beatdown and now you need to act on that information and devise a plan.

You are the beatdown
This is now your game to lose and your opponents game to win, they might know know they are in a tough spot and may make moves that seem odd or risky. They should be looking to bait you and tip the advantage back in their favour. Your job here is not to make mistakes, play the game as your natural strengths versus their weaknesses allow.

Example 1
They have an elite army of good quality rerollable saves.

You have a couple of units that do excellent mortal wound output and on average over 3 turns will basically wipe them out.

Your job is to protect the mortal wound outputting units while at the same time enacting the win conditions for the scenario.

Their job is to get to those units ASAP as they know they are in the weaker position if they don't. The mortal wound unit is your pivot, the lynchpin, the key winning element of your army.

They are the beatdown

Get ready, cause in my opinion, this is where the fun begins. Play safe and you are gonna lose. You are gonna have to take risks and use bait and dead drops and get matchups your opponent should not allow. This is where you must push the game and create pressure and opportunity. Your opponent may play safe 'cause they know they are in an advantageous position, but they could play too safe, they may also not and over extend.

Example 1
You have an elite army of good quality rerollable saves.

They have a couple of units that do excellent mortal wound output and on average over 3 turns will basically wipe you out.

Your job is to kill the mortal wound outputting units while at the same time enacting the win conditions fo the scenario.

Your job is to get to those units asap as they know they are in the weaker position if they don't. The mortal wound units are your target

Example 2
They have a horde style army and you have a tank style army. Both armies are designed to play a limited war style game, but in different ways. They however have greater movement and can go first. Their job is to move onto objectives ASAP and score all the gold for as long as possible. Your job is to stop them in anyway you can and bring some if any of your damage units into effect. Maybe convince them that going first is a bad idea, the list of strategies is far too long to put here and can be found, and are still being discovered, on THWG and the world over.

No one is the beatdown

Someone will be, but the game is so complex sometimes it can change from decision to decision by the players. The key is positioning. That's what you are vying for. Better positioning means more options and avenues for victory. You can create better positioning through one of 2 methods Aggressive or Defensive actions.

Agressive is making better positioning for yourself.
   Aggressive Actions/Strategies:
        Bait/trap
        Alpha Strike
        Pincering
        Tagging
        Pinching
        Gunline

Defensive is not allowing your opponent to make better positions for themselves.
    Defensive Action/Strategies:
        Castle
        Defence in depth
        Bottleneck
        Screen
        Bubble wrap
        Board control

Positioning, as an analogy, is like a room with many doors: as you get greater positioning, more doors will become open to you and as you get worse positioning you obviously get less. Getting more doors and giving your opponent less is the goal. There is an art though, in making your opponent choose the wrong door or not see doors available to them.

Now I know that's alot to think through when you first get to a game and we haven't even got to deployment, but you've got time and a willingness to practice and prepare on your side to get off book on these ideas. I'm sure more will need to be added and people all over the world have their own ways of talking about this already. The purpose here is to make a common language and systematic approach so we can all understand the momentum of a game. Learn to recognise swing moments in games beyond a bad dice roll and how the decisions we make, or force our opponents to make, might help us win games. It also gives me a framework for talking about games which I've done professionally for over a year. When done well at the top tiers of gaming, there is a beautiful nuance to the ebb and flow made by each decision. Risks being taken or faked risks which are baits.

Finally, before you deploy you need to ask yourself, are you playing a total war or limited war strategy. I'm sure you normally do one, but is your opponent's army making you have to reconsider this? Are they even expecting that. It's worth one last thought before you commit.

Deployment

We know who the beatdown is and we have a methodology, whatever the result may be. Next up, we need to deploy and we've already decided what units we want to match against which and now it's time to find out where. You should have a plan for your drops, either dead drops 'til you see the weakness you wish to exploit or simply matching your strong units versus the units you want them to fight. Taking into consideration threat range and the buffs and utility of your army which you've already practiced like until you become a well oiled machine.

Key questions are:
- Do you think they'll try to alpha strike you?
- Can you defend against it, better yet set a trap?
- Are you trying to alpha strike them? Can you make it seem like you aren't?
- Do you need to get to objectives before them?
- Are all your units set up for the buffs they need during turn 1, and once they've moved in turn 1, leading into turn 2?

Again there are loads of deployment strategies that need covering, but they will be added separately or later in the interest of keeping this work modestly small. Deployment is a game all of its own and it's true that you can win and lose games right here. You have a plan, get to it.

Take a photo of the board

Turn 1

Enact plan, consult cheat sheet.

End of movement phase you need to ask:
- Are my pivot units vulnerable?
- Am I near objectives and buffs next turn?
- Can I counter attack when they attack?

From this point on, it's as wild as any plan before a battle, but keep asking yourself the above questions and also:
- Do I need to engage or can I just score the gold?
- What are my goals this turn?
- Is the momentum on my side?

Part 5 - Analysis

As soon as the event is over and it's possible for you to do so, write down everything you learned from your games. Look at the photos of the games and see what you did that you liked and didn't like.

They key here is not to focus on dice or changing your army right now. Ask yourself what decisions you made and what would've been better decisions. Replay the game over in your head and plan the other 1000 ways you could have played the game. Even if you won, there is only getting better.

Write it all down and maybe share your experiences by doing a list rundown on The Honest Wargamer site. Go through the process of understanding the knowledge you've learned from these games and sharing them.

Then go back to **Part 2**

Thanks for reading this, as stated: a work in progress. I'm hoping once in the wild, I can collate a lot of contributions from the community to make this the most thorough document available to all. Good luck and thanks to everyone on Twitch and Patreon who made this possible.

If you want to give feedback or to give a testimonial about how this helped then please email:
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