

The Tony Grippando Heresy

By Nicholas Welp

@40ktoday

Competitive Warhammer 40k inherits a friendly style of play from prior editions, loaded with many undeclared rules and regional manners of play. An example from 7th Edition is how the community regarded Drop Pod doors, which was in no way inline with what the rule book said. We have another concept we often use and of late discuss called “playing with intent” and sometimes use other contrivances like using a Chess Clock while having no clear written declaration on what the power of the Chess Clock is or the consequences of its use.

The best thing in 40k is the universe; 2nd best are the models; and 3rd best are the rules. The universe is complicated and varied; the models concretize that. The rules make actionable what would otherwise be a battle of wits. Rules are made out of words that are written and shared so that the whole community can use the same rules. Yet rules and words are not so easily interpreted, the proof being the financial security of a Law School degree. Money has some value imparting the judgement of reality; we live in a world where even Communists print money, divorcing labor from its production and betraying Marx’s philosophy.

The total value of the NFL is \$74.8 billion. The total market capitalization of Games Workshop as recently as Jan 26th 2018 was \$1.13 billion (USD). This discussion of money is to raise awareness that Warhammer 40k is not some sideline game with a super tight community where social norms safely regulate activity and a shared history of friendship is enough to guarantee gamesmanship. Instead it is the most important war game that exists today and is the biggest war game that has ever existed.

The volume of factions, units and rules in Warhammer 40k create an amazingly complicated game that towers over Go, a game that has more possible board positions than there are particles in the universe. Therein lies the exciting richness of 40k. You have to think on your feet; you have to think in advance. You have to take action and enjoy the rewards and suffer the consequences.

It is with all this in mind that I say, Tony Grippando was right, and has nothing to be ashamed of. Except for misplaying his Shining Spears, he can be ashamed of that. Tony Grippando makes 40k better. This argument has two paths. One is for spectators, based on congruence with other high stakes games and creating real tangible drama. The other is the primacy of rules as written over a soft culture of permissiveness and taksie-backsies.

“Playing with intent” is a trap. Just as solipsism cannot be dismissed, we cannot guess at the motivations and intents of others. Players who do not say what action they are taking should be assumed to be taking no action. This is a game constructed out of words and the words have power. Furthermore, this is a game people watch; we watch it on streams, battle reps, etc. If you do not verbally declare the action you are taking, you are bilking the audience. Failure to speak and say what you are doing should be considered a great rule breakage -- you’re making bad television, or developing terrible habits that could lead to bad television at a later date. This addresses the title game at the LVO.

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Sans television, failing to use words and the name of the rule you are invoking denigrates the narrative which is inherently words. If you are fluff player, and want an exciting narrative, that narrative is built on words. Playing a game of 40k silently is like listening to Heavy Metal silently. It doesn't work.

Regarding deployment from deep strike at the end of the movement phase, and how that led to Alexander Fennel ending his movement phase, this is important. If narrative and storytelling matter, then deploying, undeploying, redeploying rends the suspension of disbelief. It is anti-dramatic. In real life mistakes happen. Battles are lost for the dumbest reasons. But in our community we want to play with intent. Intent is a poison to quality game play.

If we're going to allow out of sequence events, why not rearrange the order of turns? Not only is this a slippery slope, forgiving out of sequence events, but since there is no discernable boundary to its limit we cannot tolerate its transgression. We cannot allow players to play plastic with the rules, when the game only exists when the rules are rigid.

Playing With Intent wrecks the narrative, makes the game unwatchable, engages in too many presumptions, and allows the world's best 40k players to play sloppily.

Just as sloppy American Football is unwatchable, so is 40k. We should expect more out of our best players playing at the world's biggest event. That there had to be a watershed moment in 2018 is fine. Be more precise, expect more out of yourself.

Poker is a game, maybe you've heard of it, they play a lot of it in Las Vegas. In competitive poker, which is at its pinnacle in Texas Hold'em, everyone knows the same math and odds. Every player at a good table knows the same math and reads the same charts. The real substance of the game comes from tells, hiding your tells, faking tells, and reading other people's. Deception inline with the rules and manipulation is not shameful: it is awesome. This does not advocate cheating -- god save you if you're caught cheating at poker. You don't want to be the first person murdered at a 40k tournament either.

Deception is essential to success in the NFL as well. Audiences love fake reverses, real reverses, play action passes, the statue of liberty, the annexation of Puerto Rico, fake punts, and you're doomed if you're guessing at another team's intent and guess wrong.

Why would wargaming be different? It is not different and it should not be. Playing a hand of cards with the wrong sequence of actions is unthinkable. Why should that be allowed in 40k? Again these are some of the best 40k players in the world, and they came out on top of over 400 people. We should hold those players to a higher standard.

Then to the chess clock. It is bizarre that two players (Sean Nayden and Tony) would ever contemplate stapling on additional rules that are written nowhere and no one else in the world can see. Again the primacy of words is reasserted, but even more so, the vain attempts of

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Hammurabi to create sempiternal that which lived in his present revives. That two top players would use rules that only exist in the ether of their minds for an important game is unconscionable. And as came apparent, one player interpreted the phantom chess clock rule differently than the other. Those two players likely could not phrase whatever rule they may have imagined in identical fashion had they tried.

In sports opposing coaches don't make verbal agreements regarding rules that no one else is privy to before the game. If that happened at a major sporting event the FBI might even get involved in a point shaving scandal. Don't do this stuff. Play by the rules that everyone can see, and play with precision.

Was it manipulative of Tony to allow Sean to believe the clock was important, when Tony clearly did not? First off how is Tony supposed to know what Sean thinks. Sean has a mysterious mind. Second, if it is manipulative, why are we not applauding it? Manipulating someone in a wargame is awesome. Play within the rules to the limits of the rules. The most important rule, 'everybody have fun,' can't always coexist with a competitive setting.

In poker and sports, deception, manipulation, and 'gotchya!' moments are thrilling. Meanwhile in 40k we're trying to keep the training wheels on our bike.

Why should 40k be different? It is not different. If you want to push the upward boundaries of your playing excellence then hold yourself and your opponents to a higher standard.

- Say what rule you are invoking every single time
- Do not use rules that are not already a part of the tournament
- Do not allow take backs or out of sequence play from yourself or others
- At the top of the most competitive 40k event in the world, don't grant a pass for sloppy play

40k is televisable. We already watch streams and in time that viewing experience will get better. Out of sequence plays and take backs make for bad watching experiences. A constant stream of communication and rule declaration make watch the games engrossing. Precise playing by two great players can make the game great.