

Just before Christmas I spent some time talking over Jervis about his latest set of Epic rules, Epic Armageddon. While I've only had a limited amount to do with this latest development (pretty much limited to saying "this or that name is rubbish" and other helpful stuff like that) I've been fascinated by the new system and I think it looks really, really cool. I'm just going to burble on for a few paragraphs about why, I think there's a bigger point to all this but I'll tell you when and if we get there.

Epic, or rather Adeptus Titanicus was what got me into Games Workshop games. I played a little 40K beforehand but duking it out with Titans was what got me playing weekly with my good friend Ritch as we battled through a campaign with our respective Titan Legions. When I got a job working at the Games Workshop studio it was on the strength of an Adeptus Titanicus article and pretty much my full time job at first was writing army lists and articles for the game in White Dwarf magazine.

In between writing articles Jervis introduced me to a view different variants of the Adeptus Titanicus game he was developing. One, called Heresy, emphasised large forces and multiple Titans, another whose name I don't recall (it was a long time ago alright) was more of a board game using a square grid. Jervis and Rick went on to create the next incarnation of the Epic scale series, Space Marine. This put the emphasis on really big battles compared to Adeptus Titanicus, with whole companies of infantry and tanks participating. It was still a pretty detailed game though, with a lot special weapons and detail for individual vehicles. All in all it was very satisfying. I was brought in to write additional supplements for Chaos forces, Orks, Squats, Tyranids and a host of additional unit types for all races.

As such I contributed to and was a part of what I later came to understand as the development curve of the game. Or, more simplistically, the arms race. It works like this, as more units and armies get designed for a game the dynamics of what works well on the battlefield become better understood by designer and players alike. The things which known to be most effective are used en masse more and more, ineffective or over/under costed ones appear less frequently in newer lists thanks to increased feedback from players. Eventually the original game becomes warped in its development by the additional material hanging from it. Interactions of unit special rules became increasingly difficult to cover without pages of notes and exceptions ("what happens if my shock attack gun hits a Chaos Daemonic Primarch" and such).

What really brought it home to me was reaching the point where players were fielding armies that could defeat an opponent in one or two turns. The battlefield had become so lethal that they had found ways to seize the initiative so thoroughly that they could pin down and slaughter an enemy before they had a chance to retaliate. There were a myriad of ploys and counter-ploys. This was fascinating and sometimes infuriating for existing players but could make the game seriously obtuse for beginners.

In Titan legions things reached a head as the game teetered under the weight of additional rules for Emperor Titans, flyers and a veritable multitude of different weapons and units. With the original miniatures range and plastics looking distinctly dated the decision was made to totally revise the Space Marine game, giving rise to the Epic 40,000 system. We had a great time designing Epic 40,000 – myself Jervis and Gav had a radical concept to get our teeth into, using the core of Jervis' old Heresy game to go for a big scale, fast playing battle.

We're all very proud of the lean, tightly coordinated rules we created from our experiences with Space Marine. We cut down on weapon and unit details and threw the emphasis onto them as components used in creating personalised detachments, each of which would equate to the size of forces used in 40K games. Epic 40,000 produced fine, sprawling battles and permitted the easy integration of Titans and flyers into an effective all-arms force. The game was really enhanced by good concepts for army morale and the blast marker system, making games a real nail-biter from start to finish.

However, reactions to the new system were mixed. Many veteran players missed the character of Titan Legions and Space Marine. We had created something with all the clean lines and abstract qualities of modern art, beloved of games designers and German board game manufacturers. But a game for the tabletop needs the grit and detail to really have soul. How strongly this was felt with the development of Net Epic, a crossbreed of the systems created by a body of players on the web. As head fanatic Jervis has now carried that big old Epic torch further with Epic Armageddon and its future supplements. I really love the game he's come up because it has taken the best of those predecessors into a gritty but dynamic new game.

A wise man once told me that all ideas move through transition as they develop. You begin with a thesis that becomes so prevalent that it eventually it creates its own antithesis. The pendulum of ideas swings towards the antithesis and a rejection of the old thesis. In time the antithesis reveals its own shortcomings and the original thesis is reappraised. Then you get synthesis. Personally I'm looking forward to unlimbering Burzuruks Gargant big mob and Borzags blitz brigade to synthesise some Impy humies into slave runts.