

40K TACTICAL MISTAKES



BY FRITZ

Introduction

It can be said that 40K is ultimately a game of mistakes with the player who makes the fewest generally winning- and in many ways this is true.

Take a moment and think about WHY you lost your last game.

Sure it could be you lost due to the crushing power of your opponent's army, and sometimes the dice ARE against us, but I'm pretty confident that what helped speed along your loss was a series of mistakes.

Some mistakes in the game we can recover from, a lost unit or two, a bad tactical decision, while others we cannot- and then there is the most FATAL mistake of them all- making one and not even being aware of it after the fact.

My motivation in writing this PDF guide is to not only help speed along your 40K learning curve, and improve your game by NOT making these mistakes, but also to point them out so you can be aware of them for when your opponent makes them- mistakes made that you can exploit to leverage victory.

Are you ready?

Let's get started!

Active VS. Passive Players

First we need to look at what creates mistakes- so we can both avoid them ourselves, and again create them in our opponent. Many players think mistakes come from not remembering the rules, or forgetting what a unit does, and these are mistakes of a sort, but the mistakes that cost you the game- either directly or indirectly come from making the wrong tactical decision each turn or in the moment.

So how do you avoid this?

Become an active player, and use this to force your opponent to be a passive 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 Warhammer 40,000 player you are?

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, rather they react to what their opponent does. If a Land Raider moves out they intercept. A unit goes down, they reinforce, objective frees up they take it. Passive players react to the army and player across from them and 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 is 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, time to throw that out the window and redefine yourself. If you are already naturally active, 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 them, 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 me 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 this one step behind allows my opponent to dictate the game, and 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 40K, 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, honestly 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...

Let's start looking at the mistakes we want to avoid.

Mistake #1: Planning For Only Half The Game

In understanding this mistake we are going to look at two visuals as an example of the mistake in action. Many times during the game we only look at or take into account our own units- often seeing just this:



Instead of THIS:



What is the difference in the two pictures?

Perspective.

In each game turn- movement, shooting, and assaulting we plan out what we are going to do before we do it, sometimes in great detail, and other times, just a quick action.

BUT

Do you then ask yourself what your opponent is going to do in their turn?

I'm sure something like this has happened to you before- You run your chaos lord on a juggernaut up the table to attack a weak unit and put

pressure on the flank, everything looks good, and you are half way there, when suddenly three vendetta gunships zoom on the table and las-cannon punk your lord.

Frustrated you then declare that your lord sucks and you look for a new HQ choice.

Well, maybe not, but I'm sure you can understand the illustration.

The mistake is only focusing on your own units, developing an almost tunnel vision with what they are going to do this turn, without asking what your opponent has to move, what they can move, shoot, what they have to shoot, etc. that could hit you in their game turn.

MANY units are lost this way and that is a mistake.

Know what you are going to do with each of your units (active player) but always look at what else is on the table or can come on the table and ask yourself, what or how can they impact my unit.

Even when you are focusing on a single unit or segment of your army on the table (first picture) be sure to step back and look at the entire table (second picture).

This is mistake #1 because many players make it- while you are waiting for your turn, you are thinking about what you are going to do, getting excited at what your models are going to do on your turn, that when it is your turn, you leap into action.

WHEN it is your turn, before you do ANYTHING, take a moment and step back from the table and take a look at everything in play or possible play on both sides, THEN make your action.

Seems like a silly mistake to make, so make sure you don't make this mistake.

NOW, on the opposite end, we want to ask ourselves how we can force our opponent, or at least lead them to make this mistake- give them tunnel-vision on the table, get them to focus narrow, rather than see wide.



The picture above is my maulerfiend punching some Lemn Russ tanks, he was waiting like a caged animal to pounce...

You get your opponent to focus narrowly on the table, but having something “scary” suddenly happening- you need a fast moving, hard hitting unit and some bait.

Here is an example from the picture above- a group of punisher Leman Russ tanks were across the table, supported by a vanquisher Russ and generic Russ.

Running my maunderfiends out would have been obvious, and MAYBE they could have made it into the ranks of the tanks with their hull points, it will not die, and daemon saves...maybe...

BUT, that would have been obvious and not narrowed my opponent's focus.

The punisher tanks were a big deal to my opponent, it was obvious he took them to chew up infantry, and I was confident that if I gave him such infantry he would take the bait.

So I moved up a group of cultists (expendable fodder) so they were just out of range of the punisher's main cannon- which means on the next turn if the tanks moved up 6" they would be in range to shoot the cultists with the main gun.

THIS would bring them 6" closer to my 12" maunderfiend move, and well into assault range. The tanks took the bait, and in one turn my maulers were in punching tanks- which you can bet grabbed my opponent's attention and narrowed it to that point of the table.

Now not every player falls for every type of 40K bait- some see what you are doing and smile, others don't see it and pass it up- but if you but out a few bait units each turn, something will bite.

Many players will take specifically focused models which they think will give them an advantage to win the game- these are the models you want to give the bait against- put something out there playing right into what your opponent wants to do with them, and then counter!

Mistake #2: The Game Ends



The second fatal mistake you don't want to make, and you want to encourage your opponent to make is not being ready for the game to end.

If the game is random game length, it COULD end at the bottom of turn five, if the game is a set standard, say six turn then you know it is going to end at the bottom of six.

So why are players surprised that the game ends and they are not in a position tactically to win?

The game ending should never take you by surprise.

Ever.

Let's talk about how this mistake is made.

It's easy to fall into the trap of calculating if you are winning or losing each turn in an objective based mission. Many players will move to take and hold objectives right away, and as soon as possible, and sit on them for the entire game.

So, if on turn three, my opponent has four objective with their scoring units and I only have one, then they are winning right?

WRONG!

The game is not in a position to end since it is not turn 5 or X so nobody is winning.

As soon as you lock your mind into winning turn by turn you begin to miss out on tactical possibilities on the table, and slip every closer into making mistake # 1 and before that becoming a passive player over an active player.

If you are sitting on an objective in your deployment zone with a tactical squad on turn 1-4 then you are missing out on some tactical weight.

What can you do at best?

Fire off a las-cannon, missile, or other long range heavy weapon?

You are missing out on all those bolter shots and plasma/special weapon shots for a few turns- more than a few turns!

Move them to the mid field to support, and then as turn 4 starts rolling around start moving back to take objectives, OR as the squad takes loses and gets reduced to five or so models to the point where they no longer have any significant shooting to add, THEN move back with them to take the objective.

Be in a place to win the game when it ends, not before.

If you hold back with parts of your army just to hold objectives throughout the game, then effectively you are only using 60% or so of your army against 90+% of your opponents.

You wouldn't play a game where you have 1000 points and your opponent has 1500, would you?

Well, essentially that is what you are doing.

Time for the opposite example- how can we get our opponent not to be in a position to win the game when it ends?

How can its ending take them by surprise?

Let's dig through the Fritz 40K YouTube archive for a PERFECT example.



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNBivZI_l8U

This video is from 2008 when I was playing my Saim-Hann Jetbike Army (back when Eldar were CRAP) at Games Workshop USA Grand Tournaments. I picked this video because not only does it perfectly illustrate the converse concept, but it also shows that these mistakes are not 40K edition or codex dependent- they were costing us the game years ago, and still do if you allow them.

A bit of backstory to understand the video.

In 2008 Tyranids were a very viable tournament army, a tier I codex if you follow that model. You took six dakka carnifexes, two winged dakka tyrants, and then filled out the rest of the list with genestealers. The list was hard to kill, put out a massive amount of shots (for the time), and 'stealers were mad scary.

The first day of the GT for the pairings it was random (or so we thought) and I faced off against this list with my Eldar.

It was an objective based mission, and I knew there was no way I could hold them all, as I needed to remain mobile, trying to get and make cover and armor saves from the shooty 'fexes while avoiding the stealers.

My opponent, played quite well, certainly knowing what his army was going to do- it was evident on the first turn when he moved into the center of the table with his nidzilla bugs and just stayed there both shooting, and keeping me at bay and range with a huge radius from his big bugs since if I got close he would assault.

The mistake?

He moved his genestealers onto the table and immediately went for all the objectives except the one in the back to my right (a single grey die in the vid.)

The stealers just camped there, since that was the point of the game right? Hold stuff with your scoring units?

By not having that little bit of pressure on me- by not using those scoring units to chase me into the guns of the big bugs since they didn't need to be on the objectives till the end turns of the game, I was

allowed to zip around, taking losses, and then zip in to contest all the objective with my bikes and wave serpent, while holding the one with a group of storm guardians.

Think about how you can isolate your opponent's scoring units and encourage them to sit on objectives and hold them right away, and throughout the game.

All you need is one or two objective in place to take one or two units "out" of the game for a few turns you can use the full force of your army.

Place what you can spread out, place an objective behind a building or other LOS blocking terrain, the perfect place for a unit to hide behind, etc.

Remember that it is easier to take objective then to hold them.

Mistake #3: Deployment Bottlenecks



Not deploying correctly is another big mistake in 40K, and one that already puts you in a position to lose the game before turn one even starts.

So how do we avoid this mistake?

The obvious (or soon to be obvious) points to remember about deployment include setting your units up so they can accomplish the mission goals- ways to get to objectives without going through terrain as best you can, long lanes of fire where you can shoot at your opponent's models without terrain blocking LOS and all that.

The not so obvious mistake is based on the mechanics of your army.

In building your army, how it deploys determines its effectiveness on the table, as soon as you alter that due to your opponent, you are now behind the game.

Here is an example to better illustrate the idea:



Above is the first group of my assault flavored Chaos Space Marine army. This grouping of models is tasked with closing as quickly as possible with my opponent's models and creating as much of a mess as possible before it all gets removed from the table. It is faster than it looks with the maulers moving 12", the spawn moving 12" and the rhinos moving and boosting the extra 6".

When I deploy it needs to be as far forward as possible, with no other models blocking it, ready to roll out- either on a flank or in the center of the table based on the mission.

Now, say I go up against a Tau gunline army, or a situation where on turn one, if I don't get to go first, or there is no nightfight I am going to eat a turn of shooting that MAY cripple my army.

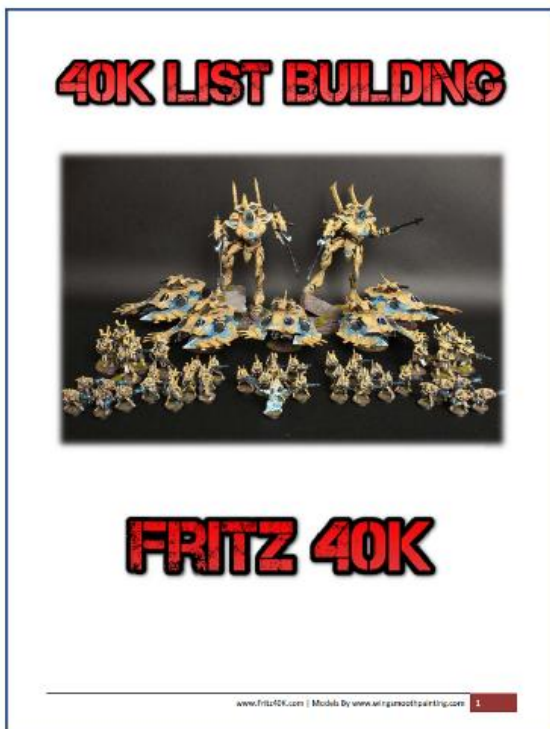
What do I do?

The mistake to make here is switching my deployment based on my opponent's army- if I split my assault group up, spread them, out, hide them, then I am sure to lose since the army won't work as planned.

Always set up your army based on the deployment that compliments it and makes it work.

If I set up as planned, yes it will be a moment of tension, but a lot can go wrong for my opponent- nightfight, bad dice, good saves for me, etc.

You built your army for a plan, always stick to it in deployment.



Of course good list building and unit selection helps and goes a long way to taking advantage of a good deployment. That tactica is a bit out of the scope of this guide, but if you join my mailing list you will be sent a free copy of my list building PDF that you can download and use to examine your army to put you into a good position for deployment- the link is here: <http://eepurl.com/J6GoL>

Mistake #4: Table Analysis

Once battle is joined, 40K is fast and furious!

One of the things I enjoy about the game is the tension that it created leading up to action between your models. You take your toys out, line them up on the table, move out turn one, and then battle is joined!



After a few turns the table is a real mess of model, movements, and assaults....and that is where the next mistake starts to happen- **not working from one side of the table to the other.**

In each phase of the game- moving, shooting, and the assault, after you have assessed the situation (See mistake #1), go from the right or left side of the table and activate each unit.

This way you will not forget to take action with a single unit/model on the table.

One side to the other moving.

One side to the other shooting.

One side to the other assaulting.

And throw some psychic powers into the mix.

Now, this SEEMS very simple, almost not even warranting making the mistake list, but it IS very important. In the rules once you are done with a phase you can't go back- a few casual players might allow you, or in a friendly pickup game, but in tournaments? The rules are the rules.

In the chaos of the models, it is easy to forget, or get caught up in an exciting moment of the game- a particular assault, or critical shooting attack, and then move onto the next phase and you forgot to assault or shoot with another unit.

This mistake more than the other can, will, and has cost me the game.

Enjoy the game, laugh at the entertainment, but don't hamper yourself by missing out on each models/units activation.

Mistake #5: Trying To Kill What You Can't (For Now)



My Dark Angels were holding as best they could- with terminators from the 1st company taking a lead position as the tacticals supported from behind. My losses were mounting as more and more Chaos Space Marines advanced under the command of Cypher, but I was determined to hold the center of the table at all costs.

Dig in, roll those dice, and leave it to the will of the emperor.

Then a group of Dark Mechanicus heldrakes made their attack run...

We plan the best we can for our games, but sometimes a situation arises where we are faced with a unit or models that we can't reliably

kill in the moment, we know this, you know it, I know it, but why do we sometimes still try?

In the picture from that game my Dark Angels were tasked with holding the center as my Grey Knight and Minotaur allies swung around. The team figured the saves of my termies and resolve of my tactical could hold, but against heldrakes vectoring my termies and templating my tacticals?

When you are faced with a situation where an opposing unit is going to do some significant damage, or should I say the possibility of significant damage since dice ARE involved, it is natural to try and stop it by shooting it off the table.

But as you calculate this, you have to not be swayed by what it COULD do to your army, but rather, what are your realistic chances of stopping it, and making sure you don't stop it at the expense of your army- often leading to more losses overall from the rest of your opponent's model assets than the model itself.

In the example above the heldrake needed to be stopped, but realistically I couldn't stop it- shooting an assault cannon and a few plasma guns at it, needing "6"'s to hit, and then getting past a daemon save, and blowing it up, well wasn't going to happen.

Worst case is I wasted all my shots, best cast I do somehow blow it up, but now have not been shooting my units into the advancing Chaos Space Marines, hitting them with bolters, plasma, and assault cannon shells.

Focusing on the heldrake loses either way in the moment.

So I had to let it go.

NOT get caught into its trap.

Better to lose a squad from the heldrake and take a vector strike then to lose half or more of my army from not dealing with the CSM on the table.

You may need to stop something, but if you can't let it go and deal with the results as best you can.

Thoughts for encouraging your opponent to make this mistake?



Prince Xor of the World Eaters, left hand of Angron...whose only job it to fly around and get shot at...

Based on the models in your army and what your opponent has, is there a unit in your list that you can zoom around and get your opponent to shoot at, with good or better than good odds of them not killing it in a turn?

Can you get them to waste shots with that model, allowing your other models more room to move and shoot, causing more damage than the single model itself?

Conclusion

As we wrap things up here in this guide I'd like to thank you for supporting this PDF with your time and effort spent on my 40K mailing list and the feedback you give me.

I'd also like to invite you to continue the discussion on my 40K forum-

www.thewarmaster.com

I welcome any questions or comments on this PDF (or any of my 40K stuff) and I hope it has given you some ideas for your next step in 40K.

Hopefully we will meet on the table one day at a gaming event or tournament!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fritz" followed by a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line extending to the right.

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