

Kill your darlings: Getting started with wargaming

Submitted for assessment as Writing Magazine Features Assignment 1, Jul-2019.

--

I've recently discovered *Kill Team*, Games Workshop's 2018 skirmish miniature wargame set in the Warhammer 40k universe. I was looking for a way to help my soon-to-be-twelve-year-old stepson (Ask him. He won't say eleven) to work on his maths without realising it, and we weren't keen on installing yet another app on the iPad. I came across a post by James Kelly on Geekdad.com: '10 Reasons to Play a Skirmish Wargame With Your Kids'. In addition to developing creativity and critical thinking, Kelly mentioned wargaming could help develop kid's maths skills. I didn't need to read any further.

Despite having an okay, if outdated, understanding of miniature wargames—mostly Warhammer 40k, the larger scale, hours-long, and prohibitively expensive tabletop wargame—skirmish games were unfamiliar. Skirmish games take variations of wargame rulesets and turn the scale right down. Instead of fighting with multiple squads to form large armies, *Kill Team* players assemble a single elite squad of three to twenty models, each treated as an individual warrior. And, unlike other Games Workshop skirmish games, like *Necromunda*, *Kill Team* doesn't have specific models to purchase; a squad can be drawn from a wide variety of existing Warhammer 40k model sets and armies. Squads for all available races—16 in the core rulebook—can be put together for \$50 or less and, while you won't have a top-tier team, you'll definitely have something interesting to get you started. The only other things new players need are some 6-sided dice, a measuring tape (in inches) and miscellaneous items to use as scenery. This makes *Kill Team* easily accessible to both existing players, who just need the new rulebook, and new players who might be interested in the Warhammer world but find the idea of buying, building and painting a large army daunting.

This was perfect for us. I had a collection of half-completed armies tucked away in storage, enough for three different teams. We blew the dust off some Tyranids and some Space Marines, and put the Necrons aside for another day. Very quickly, Mr.

Almost Twelve was learning the basics of building plastic models, choosing weapons and customisation options, and working out colour schemes. We soon found ourselves clicking through online sites looking for battleground scenery to build. Getting crafty with ice-cream sticks and cardboard is great, but laser cut MDF kits are our favourite; easy to assemble, easy to customise, and they look great on the table.

The 208-page rulebook is well presented, full of Warhammer flavour and lore, with plenty of photographs to show off the artistic skills of miniature painters. Don't let the size put you off; rules themselves only take up 20 or so pages. The rest is information on missions, races and ways to extend your gameplay. The main rules are simple; each game is played over a certain number of rounds, usually five, and each round consists of a number of phases. Players move, shoot, engage in hand-to-hand combat, and check their team's morale before starting over. Basic rules have been enough for us, although the advanced rules add more flavour and depth for experienced players.

While you *can* get started with *Kill Team* comparatively cheaply—many board games easily cost up to \$100 and over these days, and the low price point entry, combined with the range of team options makes it very competitive—it's easy to fall down the rabbit hole of wargaming. We've started quite a collection. Our three squads have doubled, and there's a number of terrain pieces we're building and painting. We're talking about giving Warhammer 40k a try now that we have the beginnings of small armies. Did it help with maths as planned? Only a little, because the rules are simple enough. His mental arithmetic is getting fast though.

Our creative skills, critical thinking and even interest in reading have all come a long way. We've spent far more time preparing to play than actually playing, and that's exactly what wargaming is. This isn't just a board game; it's a hobby. But it's something we can enjoy together, and keeps us off the iPad.

You can find *Kill Team* at Games Workshop online, or at your local hobby store.

References

Kelly, J. (2018, February 7). 10 Reasons to play a skirmish wargame with your kids. Retrieved from: <https://geekdad.com/2018/02/10-reasons-play-skirmish-wargame-kids/>

Games Workshop. (2018). *Kill Team: Core Manual*. Nottingham, UK: Games Workshop Ltd.