

You're listening to Chapter Approved, a biweekly podcast for casual Warhammer 40K fans. I'm your loyal host, Tibbs.

Before I get to the long interview series coming soon, I wanted to get another 'opinion' episode out there for you to digest. It's nice for the listeners to get a sense of who I am before you hear me chatting with other people. And again, I do welcome feedback of all kinds, including what you want to hear more or less of. Don't be shy. The easiest way to get ahold of me is to hit me up on Twitter @chapterapproved.

Today, I want to talk about something I love about this hobby. It's become so large, you don't even need to play the game to take part anymore. I have firsthand knowledge of this because, as I've gotten older and life has gotten more complicated, the game itself often ends up as a back burner item, yet I never feel like I'm not involved or it's hard to stay up to date.

I could have said this episode is about a balance between the hobby and your family, but it extends beyond that. Jobs, housing situations and life in general can get in the way of what's at the root of 40K: playing the game. We all have our own reasons, but anyone who's played long enough knows that there are times where you just can't get a game in. I stopped worrying about it years ago, because the rest of the hobby keeps me busy and fuels my imagination.

I always think of the game, even though I don't play enough. When I'm building my armies, I try very hard to buy models and units that will be of some use in the game, instead of just getting whatever I want to. I'm not really sure why, though. I paint way more than I play, and I rarely play. I did make a conscious choice a while back to not worry about painting fast, since I really have no reason to hurry, but there are times where I just don't paint at all and I still feel like I'm involved in the hobby, though I haven't touched my dice in months.

Now, I anticipate some resistance to the idea that you don't have to game, since the hobby is based around a tabletop game and building and painting the models, but hear me out. I don't think it's a bad thing to attract new people to the universe and lore, regardless of their thoughts and desire to play the tabletop version. Some of them may go on to play the game, but not all. It's happened before when Warhammer picked up a lot of interested people who came to shops for comics, Magic the Gathering, board games, roleplaying games and other 'hobby shop' stuff. I think the added exposure only helps. The more people are aware of the brands and intellectual property, the more Games Workshop, companies that license the IP, and affiliates will see value in the universe. Basically, the more people know what a space marine is, the more likely we are to get an amazing Warhammer 40K movie. I personally don't buy the argument that these things dilute the hobby in any way. Even the lamest mobile game can be an asset. Who cares if you don't want to play it yourself. It may not be FOR you.

As for myself, I've been happy to explore some of these fringe aspects of the hobby over the years. Books, games, whatever. I like it all for the most part. I appreciate it even more right now as I have a lot of family commitments since the birth of my baby, on top of working my usual 40-hour work week. So much to do, so little time. And the game itself is the easiest thing to give up, for me. It's side stuff or nothing for me right now, and 10 years ago it probably would have just been nothing.

Since I have a new baby at home, this topic has really been on my mind. I'm able to watch painting videos, recorded games and battle reports, read supplements, books, the updated White Dwarf, look at pictures and videos of new releases... The list goes on. I found that when I was giving my baby a bottle of milk, Duncan Rhodes' daily painting videos were about the perfect length to squeeze one or two in. While he was napping with me I would occasionally watch longer videos on YouTube, and now Warhammer Live provides another option. In a time that could have been a real hobby lull, I've able to keep up just fine with the crazy release schedule and my excitement level never really waned.

New releases come out every single week, some of which I want to buy. Most of it I just want to look at. Teaser and release videos always make me excited no matter which category they fall into, but at some point it occurred to me that it might actually be too much for active gamers to take in. Does anyone really have time to watch everything on YouTube, Twitch, read the posts on Facebook and Warhammer Community, AND game on top of that? Very few, I think. So Games Workshop is giving us many options and allowing us to stay in touch however we choose. And again, who can really complain about having too many options? I think just one is enough to get most of the news, but the more the merrier for folks like me that can't get in a game and even struggle to find time to paint. Plus, if you don't like to read a lot you no longer need to. Busy people, or those with severe reading disabilities are able to keep up now. That's got to be good for the hobby as people can get and stay involved more than before. I like to soak in all this media because it's exciting and fun and it's about all I've got at the moment. Maybe some day it will wear off, but it's all still novel to me, still. I also try to find time read a bit more than a blog here and there.

Of course, novels, codexes and campaign books are coming out all the time so there's never a chance to run out of new material, no matter what faction you play. I only actively play a couple armies, and only 40K, but even so I'm always interested in the other armies. I read a ton of stuff, and I really enjoy the new enhanced editions you can get for Apple devices. I was pretty floored to see that Black Library stuff is available on Amazon now as well! While not hobby-specific, technology makes reading so much more accessible. It's easy to toss a digital copy of a book on my phone and read when and where I find it convenient. No more lugging around the Big Red Book and your codex just to check it out on your break at work.

Speaking of reading, the new-format White Dwarf is awesome. It's a return to a lot of what people used to love about the magazine. They don't have to promote the new models as much because they've shifted some of that duty to all these new sources, like YouTube. That allows the editors to bring in some unique content that works best in print, like Jes Goodwin's sketches, ongoing columns like Tale of Four Wargamers, Paint Splatter articles, etc. There's so much content I literally struggle to read it all in a month before the next one comes out. It's a good problem to have, and there's not very much overlap between the magazine content and the stuff you find online so it still seems essential. I feel like a teenager again, getting all pumped to check the mail around the beginning of the month.

But I guess White Dwarf is for 'insiders' unless it starts showing up at Barnes & Noble or other non-hobby shops. I used to hear about people randomly picking one up here and there, and getting into the hobby from that. I hope it does get carried at regular newsstands but the diminishing role of print media means it will never have the reach it used to. But what about the

folks who are exposed to fringe aspects of the hobby or even dabble them, and just never get into the tabletop hobby at all?

It sometimes amazes me that there are 40K fans who've never painted a model or rolled dice in anger. Some legit fans have simply been radicalized by the wealth of material Black Library is producing on a monthly basis. This is especially true of the Horus Heresy series. It's incredible popularity has funneled a lot of people into the games, but frankly it's also taken on a life of its own. For better or worse some people's first exposure to our hobby isn't the Grimdark at all, but the more accessible fall from the hope and logic of the Great Crusade. Reading that series puts a lot of 40K into perspective, so it's probably a good way to get into things. That way, when you hear about the craziness of the 40K setting you kind of understand how it came to be that way.

I think 40K has always been hard to explain to new folks or non-fans. My friends have all gotten the speech from me about how messed up it all is, and they try to apply logic to it and ask questions that aren't easy to answer without blocking out 6 hour seminars. The novels, at least, sometimes present the universe in a way that encourages people to suspend their disbelief and get into the story. When it comes down to it, the fiction is interesting because of the characters that somehow manage to operate in this bizarre setting. Series like Eisenhorn and Ravenor make it clear there's a whole universe of regular folks living bleak lives in the midst of a government that's been on Total War footing for thousands of years. My friends ask me why nobody can remember how to build grav plates, and I tell them we have no idea how the Egyptians built the pyramids. Even history from the 1800's can be a bit thin if it isn't well documented or things have been lost or destroyed. The people who read Black Library fiction sometimes have a more comprehensive view of 40K than even some longtime tabletop veterans. After all, if you only play the game and read the codexes, you ONLY learn about war and battlefields. There are dozens of Eldar paths besides the warriors, for instance, but you wouldn't really know what many of them are. Yes, there is only war in the grim darkness of the far future, but think about how terrible that is for civilians of the Imperium or the slaves of the Chaos Space Marine legions. The fiction stands as probably the oldest way to enjoy 40K without playing the game. It's a solid pasttime with its own fanbase.

Books aren't the only fringe hobby that's taken on a whole new fanbase. The same could be said about the many video games that are available these days. Ranging from casual mobile games like Freeblade, to bigger console and PC titles like the newer Space Hulk: Deathwing or Dawn of War 3. I've heard a lot of whining about the quality of some of the more casual titles but frankly I've found them all fun in their own way. I haven't tried them all, but they seem to be covering a wide range of genres and commitment levels. Some people are just not core gamers and I'd put myself in that category these days. I do believe video games can bring people to the hobby, but these days they don't even need to. They could theoretically stay in the digital realm. I have a pretty good friend that only really interacts with games like Total War: Warhammer and Space Marine, but he knows a fair bit about the lore and he really likes it. He still has no interest in the tabletop version, but he will play the RPGs from Fantasy Flight and play 40K-themed board-games.

Seeing some of the big A-list computer games showing up in regular geek culture still sort of amuses me. References to space marines actually have some traction in the right video game, and even board game circles. Maybe soon Wil Wheaton will play Gorechosen on his YouTube

Tabletop show. How cool would that be? The Space Marine video game was a really cool moment for me personally. I had already played the Dawn of War series (which actually brought me out of a very long hobby hiatus) but PC games back then seemed much more insular. But seeing something on consoles, with those sorts of amazing graphics, was a watershed moment. I imagine a lot of people picked it up, and in my opinion it was a very solid introduction to the epic scale of the 40K universe, the concepts of marines, chaos marines and orks, and just the grimdark in general. It was a blast to play and really cemented 40K as a viable game franchise in my book.

I think it would be a shame to not at least mention the fantastic roleplaying games produced by Fantasy Flight Games until recently. I have run Dark Heresy and Rogue Trader games with groups that know nothing about Warhammer, and the source books are absolutely fantastic for many of the same reasons I mentioned about the novels. They allow you to explore topics that are hinted at or glossed over in the tabletop wargame. Some of the art and text in those books shaped the way I understand Warhammer, period, and I am very sad to see the partnership between FFG and Games Workshop come to an end. There are potentially thousands of people that have played these games, and once again they may or may not have any interest in the so-called real game.

That sort of blows my mind, but I love the idea of it. Let it soak in... You do not need to play Warhammer to be a Warhammer fan. Which is good, because it also allows a lot of folks who don't want to get into the scene or hang around in shops to enjoy it in their own way. Introverts, people with disabilities or who might be struggling with anxiety, new parents... There are tons of reasons why gaming itself just might not be feasible or even interesting to you.

Up until now I've been skipping out on talking about what the hobby community usually just calls 'hobbying' — Painting and modeling. Of course, this aspect of our hobby extends way beyond Warhammer, and in fact is far larger than our wargame-specific niche.

That said, I've also seen a big upswing in people who enjoy assembling and painting the models who never really play. Whether they're like me, and just don't have time for it anymore, or people who have never been interested in the game itself and just like the art and aesthetic of the models. It doesn't matter. Many of these folks do meticulous research before deciding what colors they're going to use, and while their depth of knowledge might be different compared to a veteran player, they still know enough to make great-looking models. Of course, some of them are professionals that either paint on commission or paint for prizes on the tournament circuit. The latter is probably the oldest version of the hobbyists who don't play, but the stigma against it is well and truly gone, I think.

YouTube videos and Twitch have exposed a lot of people to painting that view that as a complete hobby in and of itself. Which is awesome, I think. This crowd tends to be a lot more experimental in terms of both color palette and techniques, and sometimes come with a wealth of experience in scale or military modeling. It enriches the community, in my opinion. I think a lot of the very vibrant Inq28 community is based on folks who rarely game. Or maybe they fall into the more casual gamer crowd, or folks who just don't have a lot of time.

Let's focus on Twitch a little bit. I've noticed quite a few painters on there that are either

commission painters, or just creatives that are looking to find a special niche. Since mini painting is something new and different, it's become a rapidly-growing category. I good many of these folks do minis from all across the hobby spectrum from Chibi figures and board game pieces, to Malifaux and Kingdom Death. Pretty much all of them paint Warhammer models at some point, though. It's just such a big cross-section of the miniature hobby that I don't think it's avoidable for someone who paints a lot. Some of these painters were clearly already big into the hobby for years, but some of them seem quite new to it and they also bring a unique perspective. At any rate, judging from the comments on the streams, a lot of people tune in and sort of seem to get hooked watching the painters. It's soothing in a way, like Bob Ross's old show.

To revisit YouTube, I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the sort of cult of Duncan Rhodes. I'm not immune to it, as I've been watching his videos since Games Workshop first uploaded them. I really enjoyed his upbeat, yet even-keeled tone, and his painting was and is accessible in a way the 'Eavy Metal crew could never be. He still does fine work, but he makes it possible for you to achieve similar results. What's cool about this is new hobbyists have an easy entry-point to rapidly acquire the basic toolset of skills they'll use for years to come: drybrushing, shading with washes, thin coats, edge highlighting... The list goes on. A 'new' painter can come into this hobby and literally within a year get results very close to what Duncan pumps out on the regular. That's pretty cool. His style also gives us veterans a great example to use when teaching new painters, which is something many of us do at some point. Now, I enjoyed the few videos GW produced with Em, the woman who briefly joined the crew. I had already seen her on Twitch and she's gone back to that now, pretty successfully I might add. The weird cult of Duncan seems to be a double-edged sword. I rumor goes that the fans liked Duncan so much, they just didn't want to see anyone else in the vids. A shame, I think, as her skills are easily on par and at least she brought a bit of variety to the videos. That said, I can't complain about getting daily painting tips. I mentioned earlier that I watch them when I'm feeding my boy. At a pretty young age, maybe 4 months old, he started recognizing the videos and smiling when Duncan came on screen. My wife and I took to calling him Uncle Duncan and it's a fun little inside joke for us. He's become incredibly popular, even more so now that he's on Twitch as well for Warhammer Live. It seems relatively harmless but I'm sure it's weird for him, and it'll probalby get old for a lot of us hobby veteran.s

Spurred on in no small part by the depth and growth of some of the fringe hobby categories, the entire hobby has a sort of vibrancy and excitement that's been missing for many years now. The game has seen some ups and downs, of course, and many of us have been through them or taken extended breaks like I did. I think it's fair to call this a new golden age, though, and it just wouldn't be without all these new folks, even if they're not even players. The cultural awareness of the lore is at an all-time high, and of course there will always be purists and grognards that simply don't care for, understand or even want the extra fans. I'm not one of them. Bring them all on, I say, and let's keep pushing until Hollywood takes note (as long as Guillermo Del Toro or someone agrees to direct it) and we can all skip the lengthy 'well, you see, I play a game with these little toy soldiers that I collect and paint' conversation we've endured for decades. Will our hobby ever be as big as comic books? Naw, probably not, but it will NEVER be if we try to constrain it to just the gaming halls and hobby shops. I myself don't really like to frequent hobby shops for the simple fact that I'm not into competitive gaming with strangers. If you listened to my 'Funhammer' episode this will come as no surprise. For the same reason, I've largely avoided big national tournaments as well. Except, for a lot of the same reasons I talked about just

now, these have become real conventions that are about so much more than gaming now. When I got my tickets for Adepticon, I don't think I signed up for a single game event even though I considered it strongly. I'm doing a lot of hobby seminar stuff, and I really just want to go and check out the vendors, meet fellow hobbyists I talk to online all the time and just hang out.

I applaud the efforts of big convention organizers here in the US, and they also show the game itself is growing right now, so surely at least some of the folks who found us through side stuff like video games are coming over to the real deal. The Las Vegas Open tournament attendance just had its biggest year ever and Adepticon is looking to be huge this year. Sure, there's more going on than gaming but participation in the games is still way higher. I wonder how many of the people attending will be totally new to the game itself, and are just coming because they've heard of it or have friends who are into it.

How about you? Do you know about someone who's into an offshoot of the hobby? Are you? Have you noticed your interests shifting over the years? Let me know with some feedback. If you're not too busy, please consider writing a review on iTunes or your favorite podcasting app. Share it around with some of your friends and let's get a conversation going.

The more people we have talking and providing feedback, the better the podcast will be for everyone. I've had a really positive wave of comments on the first 3 episodes, but I know they've been a bit rough. I'm still tweaking the way I do this show, so I'm super eager to hear what you think so far. This show is for you guys and gals. I don't like to think I'm just talking into thin air. If you like it or hate it, please let me know.

In two weeks I'll post the first portion of my fantastic interview with Mr. Pink from Modern Synthesist. The podcast is now on iTunes, Stitcher, Soundcloud, Google Play Music and a whole heap of other podcast apps. If you're looking and can't find me, let me know! You can also visit chapterapproved.com to stream, download the episodes and leave me comments. Subscribe today or look us up on Twitter or Facebook so you don't miss an episode.

Thanks for listening and I'll leave you with this thought for today:
Every man is a spark in the darkness. By the time he is noticed he is gone forever. A retinal after-image that fades and is obscured by newer, brighter lights.