

NOVA OPEN

TABLETOP WARGAMING CONVENTION

INTERVIEW WITH GAMES WORKSHOP'S DAVID SANDERS, DESIGNER OF WARHAMMER UNDERWORLDS SHADESPIRE

FEBRUARY 1, 2018



One of the most exciting parts of NOVA Open 2017 was the opportunity for attendees to play Warhammer Underworlds: Shadespire, the company's competitive miniatures game based in its Age of Sigmar setting. In the game, players use warbands of small units from the setting's different factions and special play cards to complete objectives. Aside from picking a warband, players must build card decks of the play and objective cards, giving every player the opportunity to fine tune their warband's fighting abilities and goals for winning the game. In order to learn more about the game, NOVA Open interviewed David Sanders, the game's designer after completing a demo at NOVA Open 2017. Read below to learn more about the game's development as well as his experience writing rules for Warhammer 40k 8th Edition.

NO: How's your NOVA Open 2017 experience been?

DS: It's been a blast, it's been so much fun coming and really glad that I did it. My main reason for being here is promoting Warhammer Underworlds: Shadespire, which I wrote. But I've also been checking out what's been going on in the tournaments and seeing everyone's armies, just chat with people about what they think about the state of our games at the moment. And it's been amazing, everyone's been really positive. It's just been really great to meet so many people who are so enthusiastic about our games.

NO: What's been the most memorable thing you've seen at NOVA this year?

DS: I would probably have to go for one of the armies I saw in a tournament which was an absolutely beautifully painted Grey Knights army with some just fantastic looking Dreadnoughts. It's something else.

NO: So you're here demoing Shadespire. Tell us what is happening with that.

DS: So Warhammer Underworlds: Shadespire is a new game and a new kind of game for Games Workshop. So it's designed to be fast paced, tactical, and competitive, so it's been designed from the outset for tournament play. It plays pretty quickly so you can get through a game in 30 minutes when both players know what they're doing and it's played between warbands of three to seven miniatures. The core set comes with Liberators and Blood Reavers, three Liberators, five Blood Reavers. And you use the same models in the warband the same time, so it's always those three Liberators and those five Blood Reavers.

A really big part of the game is deck building. So what you get in the starter set is a starter deck for each one of the warbands, which includes your objectives, 12 objectives that you're trying to achieve during the game and 20 power cards which you'll use to upgrade your fighters and play plays to make it easier to score your objectives. You also get a set of extra cards and once you're familiar with how the game works you can start changing out your decks, so you can work out which objectives you don't like, switch those out and try new ones. And it means each game can be completely different.

NO: So walk me through the design process. What was the thinking that came into designing this game? Deck building, if you play board games, you play an LCG or CCG, that's a core component of a lot of these designs, so it's interesting to see this element in a Games Workshop game.

DS: It's the kind of game that we've been wanting to make for quite a while actually, and we just needed the right opportunity for it. The inspiration, as with most things, from the miniatures. So whenever we're doing roles in Games Workshop, we start off with the miniatures that we're given by the miniatures team.

So what they've done, they designed these fantastic warbands, these little packs of Liberators and Blood Reavers. Originally these were going to be available as little blisters, so you just buy those extra five Blood Reavers and add them to your existing unit in Age of Sigmar. But when we looked at the miniatures, we were like "these are way too cool for that!" So it looked like it was a skirmish kind of game and we wanted to make a competitive game, so it was just the perfect reason and the miniatures for it.

NO: What has the reception been like here at NOVA?

DS: It's been great, people pick up the game really quickly. It is easy to learn and generally you've been talked through just the first round, kind of runs itself. And people seem really excited for it. I'm really excited for it.

NO: You have Stormcast, you have Blood Reavers, you also have Iron Jawz. So it looks like there will be a lot of expansions.

DS: Yeah, so each warband has its own character. The Liberators have got their sort of heroic and solid and devastating character. The Blood Reavers are fast, fragile and very violent. And the Iron Jawz and Sepulchral Guard, again they've got their own character and it comes through the fighting

cards that describe how strong each fighter is. It also comes through the objective cards that are unique to each faction and the power cards unique to each faction. So Liberators have a different set of tricks to Sepulchral Guard.

But there is also universal cards that can be used by any faction and with each new warband, you also get new set of universal cards that can be used for any faction. So even if you want to play Blood Reavers until the end of time, you still might want to pick up those expansions packs for the extra deck building options.

NO: And there will be organized play, correct?

DS: Yeah, we're really excited for that. The first tournament happening in the US is the Las Vegas Open. And there's a tournament happening in the UK at Blood and Glory. So it's going to be happening pretty soon.

NO: And you're also here checking out other Games Workshop games, right?

DS: Because I'm part of the rules team, so I work on all of our systems so I wrote rules for 40k and Age of Sigmar. So it's really useful to find out how people are finding the game. Things that aren't working quite right, things that they really like, things that they want more of. Just really a chance to actually engage with the people who are playing the game as much as possible.

NO: The community has obviously been a really important with Warhammer 40k 8th Edition, you've guys have been doing the FAQs, the Livestreams, as a player, it's been really great to have that interaction.

DS: It's been fantastic for us. There's been a shift and the reaction to it has been amazing, it's great for us to be able to respond in a way that we can now. Obviously, we've got the General's Handbook and Chapter Approved has just been announced, they're going to let us keep on making adjustment to the game as necessary to make sure it's good as can be.

NO: What's been the most rewarding thing for you writing the rules for 8th edition?

DS: So there were loads of things. So writing the Index books was loads of work and my whole team was working really hard on that but it was also hugely rewarding. So I did the rules for example Orks and Tyranids and getting to look at those factions again. So what we did for each one was we actually got the whole miniatures range out and lined them up, smallest to biggest, like getting to work out how the characteristics, what their stat lines should be, that was amazingly satisfying.

NO: And with the Tyranids, for instance, the flavor. Genestealers are actually scary, in the fluff they're absolutely horrifying. And it's been really interesting seeing that in the game, they are genuinely scary.

DS: So with every issue, we're really trying to do the miniatures justice and the background justice, just trying to find the way to express each unit. And 8th Edition it was a unique opportunity to do that for every unit without necessarily having baggage basically.

NO: What's a random tidbit from 8th edition rulebook that people may not know of?

DS: There's a photo of me in it, I'm with three other guys from Warhammer World on the table trying to punch out some towers. [Laughs]

NO: What factions do you play?

DS: So in 40k my biggest army is Orks but I've got half a dozen enclaves. Eldar, Dark Eldar that's just getting off the ground. All the Eldar armies and I've started some Primaris Space Marines. In Age of Sigmar, mostly Death.

The NOVA Open thanks David Sanders and Games Workshop for their continued generous support. You can learn more about Warhammer Underworlds: Shadespire on their [website](#).