The Mass Effect: Tactics project began as a tabletop RPG for the Mass Effect universe.

My fiancé and I are both fans of the series and wanted a way to experience our own Mass Effect story together with friends. Having recently played Fantasy Flight’s *Edge of the Empire*, I was inspired by how they’d managed to create emergent narrative via their dice mechanic.

I knew this would supply a solid base for narrative actions that are key to the ME universe, but I was not satisfied with how it would handle the combat. In my experience I tend to find tabletop RPG combat systems nebulous and unsatisfying. Player narration can be exciting and there are always a multitude of actions available to perform, but it tends to come down rolling dice until your opponents hit points reach zero. To better emulate the feel of the combat in the Mass Effect Universe and give the players more choice, I wanted to take things in a different direction.

I also like that not only does this give players more decisions to make, but it gives the group of players problems to solve together like a co-op board game.

The concept of the players moving and fighting together as a squad to solve a problem immediately led me to XCOM. I knew as a cooperative tabletop game and knowing my audience I didn’t want it to be as complicated or punishing, but I definitely wanted to emulate the experience of engaging in a firefight and making use of each players unique abilities to resolve the situation.

Knowing most non-combat systems would be handled by the narrative dice, I began by writing up a scratch spec (a high level design document that focuses on a single system / mechanic) for combat.