



# TYRANID TACTICS

By Owen Barnes

Since first appearing in *Battlefleet Gothic Magazine*, the Tyranid fleet has undergone a number of evolutionary leaps until at last arriving in its finished form in *Armada*. Those of you that have followed this journey will have no doubt evolved your playing styles, as I have to match the varied nature of the hive fleet. This article covers my own experiences using Tyranids in *Battlefleet Gothic* as well as lessons I've learned using this very versatile and unique race.

## TYRANIDS IN BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC

Of all the fleets that battle between the stars of the 40k universe none are quite like the Tyranids. Perhaps the most significant difference is that unlike the other races of the 41st millennium Tyranids are a void dwelling species, only approaching planets to feed and then continuing their long hunt through across stars. Rather than the huge technological constructions of most races, Tyranid ships are themselves living vessels, ranging from small organisms to mighty hive ships, vast creatures that have been grown rather than built. In *Battlefleet Gothic*, this living, growing fleet is reflected in the variety and choice players have, when not only constructing their ships for play but also in creating their own unique models. While other fleets are limited with ship types and classes, a Tyranid player can tailor their ships to face their opponent or to suit their own style of play. It is this ability to create your own hive fleets that characterises the Tyranids and defines them as a potent force to both play and face.



The fighting style of Tyranids throughout the 41st millennium makes them ideally suited, closing with their foes and tearing them apart in close quarters, and hive fleets in *Battlefleet Gothic* are no exception, armed with an array of nasty short ranged weaponry such as bio-plasma, feeder tentacles and massive claws. These factors combined with special rules, such as doubling their boarding value and adding +1 to their hit-and-run attacks make them all in all arguably the deadliest of the races when it comes to close ship to ship combat. Their relatively slow speed and poor manoeuvrability can seem at odds with the ability to close and catch enemy vessels. As we will examine below, however, when your vessels are amongst the enemy, the slower speeds of Tyranid ships can be a valuable asset.

We begin our look at the hive fleets by examining their organisation and how they differ from those of more 'mundane' races. We will also go through the building blocks of the fleet list itself, coving weapons, vessels and bio-upgrades. Finally delving into tactics, we will look at the fleets strengths and weaknesses as well as how they fair against the different races of the 40k universe.



## Fleet Organisation

While Tyranids are essentially a single galaxy-spanning organism, in *Battlefleet Gothic* they fall into two distinct formations: The Hive Fleet and the Vanguard Fleet. While they share many of the same special rules and several ships, these two kinds of fleets are different indeed, offering their own range of strengths and weaknesses. The hive fleet, which could be considered the main kind of Tyranid fleet, is what we will mostly be exploring in this article. This kind of fleet offers the complete range of Tyranid vessels, from the largest hive ships to the smallest drone escorts, as well as the broadest array of tactics and options. The vanguard fleet on the other hand is just what it sound likes: a scouting fleet consisting of those ships that the Hive Mind sends forth to find fresh sources of food. This kind of force is very different to that of the main fleet and as such we will have a look at its tactics as well as some tips for creating balanced vanguard fleets later on.

Tyranids are also unique in the way their fleets are organised. Whereas the fleets of other races must work from the bottom up, meeting a required number of cruisers to allow them to take battle cruisers, grand cruisers and battleships, Tyranids are limited instead by the amount of hive ships they field. This structure means that when constructing your fleet, how many hive ships you choose and how many points you decide to spend on them becomes very important. It might be tempting to put all your faith in a massively expensive hive ship, bristling with weapons and bio-upgrades, however, as we'll take a look at in the tactics, this kind of one-trick pony can prove very limiting and lacking in versatility. I have found the key to constructing Tyranid fleets is always versatility, creating not so much a fleet of ships as a single organism designed for a single purpose: destroying your enemies.

## TYRANID WEAPONS

To understand how the Tyranid fleet really works the best place to start is to get to know their weapons. While some of the Tyranid weapons are comparable to those of other fleets, they are all different enough to warrant some close examination and will be important when it comes to deciding how to best use your vessels in battle. Each of the Tyranid's weapons has its own merits and flaws. Some of these weapons are highly specialised in their application, excelling at a single task; while some are so different to those of other fleets they are totally unique to the Tyranids themselves. Here we take a look at each of the weapons and their varied uses:

### Bio-plasma

The Tyranid version of lances comes in the form of short ranged but deadly bio-plasma. While bio-plasma only has a range of 15cm, its ability to ignore shields can be devastating when used in large numbers, either from the massed spines of a hive ship or a large shoal of escorts. Bio-plasma is also well suited to destroying escorts, where its bypassing of their shields robs the small ships of half their durability. It can be tempting to take as much bio-plasma as possible in your fleet, especially after seeing what it can do in the right circumstances; this will probably mean you will spend a lot of your time trying to get your vessels into range and a decent firing arch, and invariably not doing a lot of shooting. Bio-plasma is defiantly something to include in your fleet, but not at the expense of having a variety of weapons.

### Pyro-acid

This weapon is, more than anything else, the mainstay of the Tyranid fleet, offering the equivalent of most other races' weapons batteries. The real value of pyro-acid to Tyranids is its range, 30cm on most ships and 45cm on hive ships, granting the fleet the ability to compete with most other ships of the line. Tyranids can also take prodigious amounts of pyro-acid in their fleets making

up for their lack of truly long range weapons batteries with volume at close range, something the Tyranids excel at. Pyro-acid is also characterised by its ability to inflict an additional 'Fire' critical when inflicting a normal critical. This ability can seem subtle at first, but enemies will underestimate it at their peril, especially when Tyranids target damaged ships where those few extra points of damage caused by a 'Fire' critical can mean its destruction.

### Feeder Tentacles

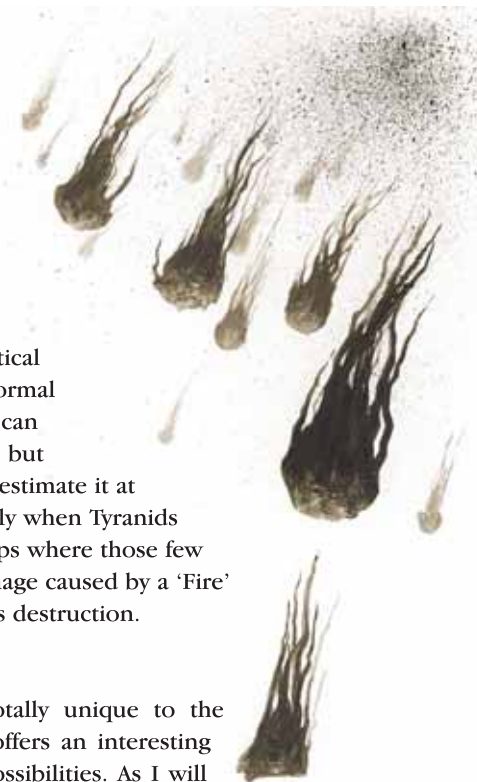
This weapon is totally unique to the Tyranid fleet and offers an interesting range of tactical possibilities. As I will talk about later, often you will want to get in extremely close to your enemies with Tyranids and feeder tentacles are a weapon that encourages this. Their ability of a vessel armed with feeder tentacles to deliver hit-and-run attacks as well as score damage by touching an enemy ship's base during its move is among the most reliable way to deliver damage, destroy escorts and knock out key systems on larger vessels. When used on fast and manoeuvrable vessels like vanguard drones, this weapon becomes a true terror to face.

### Massive Claws

Another weapon exclusive to the Tyranids is massive claws. Once again these weapons require the Tyranids to get into base contact, making them tricky to use on the larger less manoeuvrable vessels like cruisers and hive ships. However they make the perfect compliment to boarding, where the extra damage caused by the claws reduces the enemy's boarding value as well as offering the chance the Tyranid vessel with latch on, allowing it to continue consuming its enemy in successive turns. Kraken especially can be effective when armed with claws, where their speed allows them to chase down escorts and other small vessels, brushing past their prey and literally eating them!

### Tyranid Ordnance

One of the undoubted strengths of the Tyranid fleet is its ordnance. The ability to send out clouds of fighters, assault boats and boarding torpedoes means that their enemies will often be struggling to cope. Tyranids also have the ability to purchase ordnance before the game,







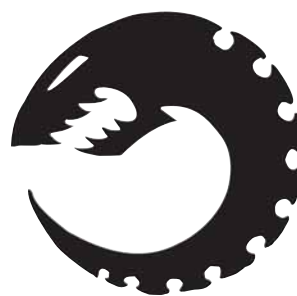
further boosting the numbers they can field. The only downside of Tyranid ordnance is its slow speed, however when you consider the relative speed of the Tyranid vessels as well as its endless supply then this becomes of less importance. The first two kinds of Tyranid ordnance, boarding torpedoes and assault boats are geared toward destroying escorts and crippling larger vessels with hit-and-run attacks. As such, the best time to use them is in close once they can make it to their targets in a turn or two. Tyranid ordnance that is forced to crawl across the board will inevitably be either avoided or destroyed. Something that is worth remembering is boarding torpedoes can be used to destroy both normal and other boarding torpedoes, useful when no fighters are handy.

The other kind of ordnance available to the hive fleets is fighters. These are very important if you're going to be facing any kind of enemy ordnance, which invariably you will. Early in the game is the best time to spawn fighters, using your hive ships to pump them out in swarms as you close the distance. As Tyranids are not limited with the amount of ordnance they may have at one time, as other races are, you can create a thick cloud of fighters to shield your ships. Slower than other kinds of fighters, Tyranid fighters are best suited to staying close to their own ships, either in contact, or close enough to form a wall against incoming torpedoes, bombers and assault boats.

Two of the things lacking for the Tyranids ordnance arsenal are normal torpedoes and bombers. The absence of these weapons is not really much of a disadvantage for the hive fleets. Bombers favour longer range engagements, something Tyranids are not ideally suited to. While normal torpedoes can become as much a hindrance for their own side as the enemy when battle lines become enmeshed.

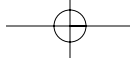
### Spores

While not technically a weapon, spores are worth a mention due to their ability to inflict damage. As both shields and turrets spores are a mixed blessing for Tyranids, offering the ability to defend against bombers and torpedoes in the same turn, but conversely becoming weaker when reduced by Blast markers. However their least used ability would have to be that of inflicting damage to unshielded ships in base contact. Of most use against the Eldar and Necron fleets, it allows a squadron of escorts to swarm around an unshielded cruiser or battleships dealing significant damage without rolling a single dice. Even against shielded vessels, smaller Tyranid vessels can use their spores to knock down the enemy's defences for their larger cousin's volleys or give them extra bonuses in boarding.



### TYRANID VESSELS

Because of the Tyranids' ability to pick and choose their ships' weapons it is difficult to make a comprehensive list of all the possibilities and their uses. However, regardless of their weapons, Tyranid ships tend to suit particular roles in the fleet. There are also a number of common weapon combinations worth mentioning for each of the major vessels.



**Hive ship**

Without question hive ships will form the heart of any Tyranid fleet, offering the broadest range of weapons and bio-upgrades combined with their innate toughness and synapse node ability. Hive ships are also the only vessels in a Tyranid fleet capable of taking launch bays. As such I always make sure I take at least one or two on each hive ship. The other 'must' weapon I find for hive ships is pyro-acid, offering the longest ranged firepower available to the fleet at a respectable 45cm. Weapons such as feeder tentacles and massive claws are less useful on hive ships simply by virtue of their sluggish movement. I would also always advocate spending a little extra on hive ships by adding a bio-upgrade or two. However, be careful that you don't spend too much on any one of your hive ships, especially if by saving a few points you could include a second hive ship as, after all, two hive ships are better than one.



happily hurled into the fray. Two of the specialised roles which I've found cruisers can excel at are as either a rammer and a boarder, armed with a set of massive claws, using All Ahead Full orders to hunt down enemy cruisers, or alternatively as a torpedo boat, armed with twin Strength 4 torpedoes laying down a curtain of ordnance. Cruisers are also useful for drawing fire away from your hive ships, as you enemies will often overestimate their effectiveness.

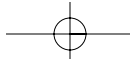
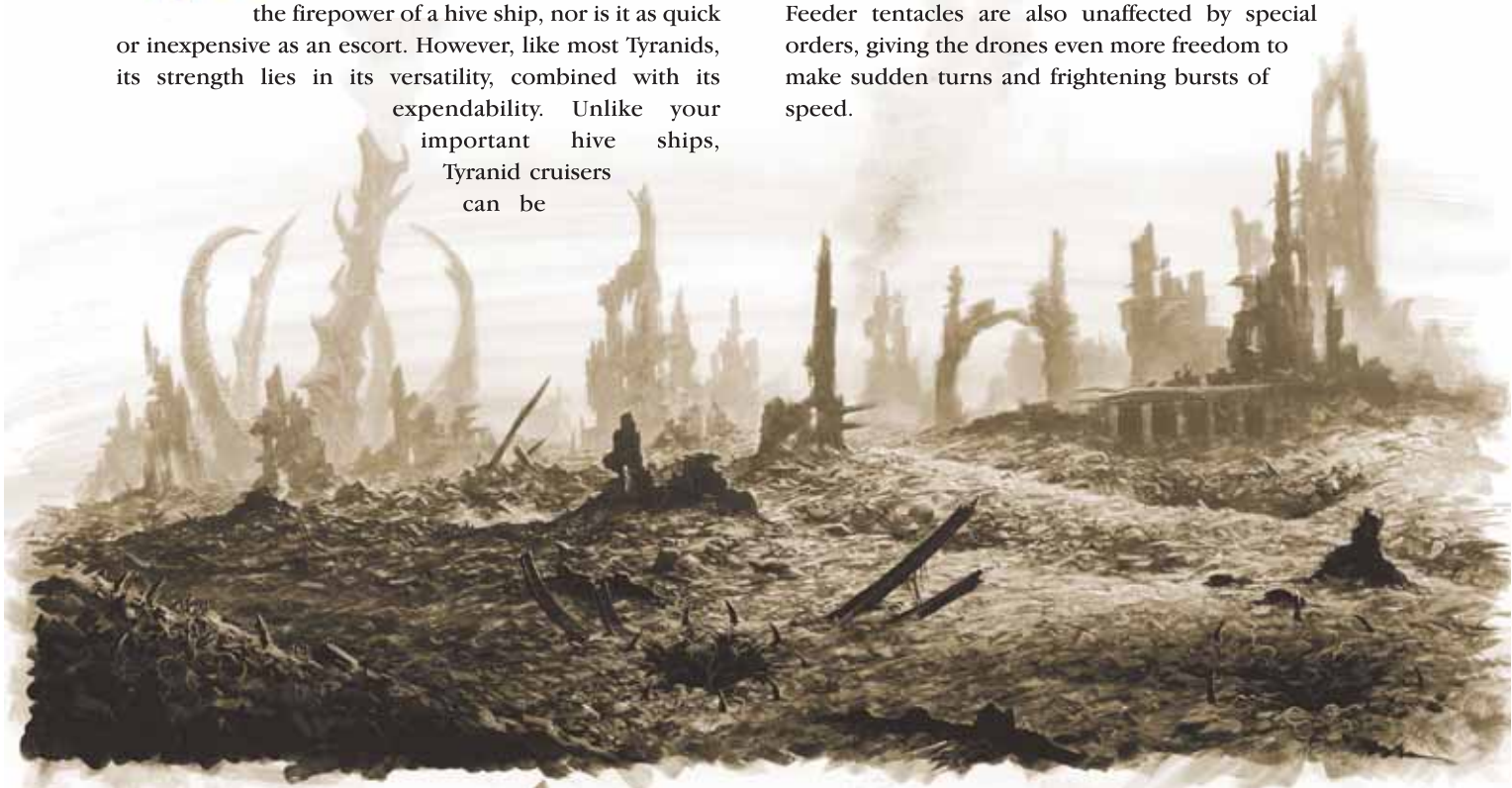
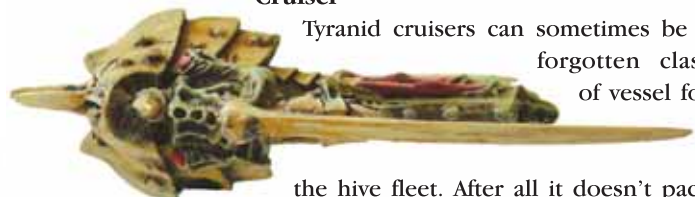
**Vanguard drone**

In my opinion escorts of all kinds are the lifeblood of any Tyranid fleet. The vanguard drone is very cheap for what it can offer and it's also among the fastest and most manoeuvrable of all the Tyranid vessels. If you arm your vanguard drones with pyro-acid you will probably be using them more for their ability to 'highlight' enemies (allowing the Tyranids to overcome their normal restrictions on targeting ordnance and any by the closest enemies), as the Strength 2 weapons battery is of limited use unless you take large squadrons, which is only really advisable in a vanguard fleet. In a regular hive fleet I would take vanguard drones in single ship squadrons, giving them the greatest possible freedom, and would arm them with feeder tentacles where they can do some serious damage flitting in and out of your enemy's ships. Feeder tentacles are also unaffected by special orders, giving the drones even more freedom to make sudden turns and frightening bursts of speed.



**Cruiser**

Tyranid cruisers can sometimes be a forgotten class of vessel for the hive fleet. After all it doesn't pack the firepower of a hive ship, nor is it as quick or inexpensive as an escort. However, like most Tyranids, its strength lies in its versatility, combined with its expendability. Unlike your important hive ships, Tyranid cruisers can be





### Escort drone

If you are taking hive ships, and if you are using the regular hive fleet then you are, you should think seriously about taking escort drones. Point for point there are few escorts that are better.

For the price of only moving 15cm, something that is of little importance if they are used alongside a hive ship, they can pack a terrifying amount of firepower. I usually include at least 6 for each hive ship, favouring pyro-acid (that's a combined firepower Strength of 24 from just 6 escorts!). Escort drones are also surprisingly manoeuvrable, retaining the ability to make a turn before moving like other escorts. This manoeuvrability means that the above mentioned 6 escorts can effectively use Come To A New Heading to turn 90 degrees and still fire at Strength 12, something that is useful against quick enemies that will try and out flank your slow and ponderous hive ships.



### Kraken

These unusual vessels are another example of the strength of Tyranid escorts. Like vanguard drones, they are often best used on their own unless part of a vanguard fleet. Two of the tasks I have found kraken very effective at is either as escort hunters, armed with pyro-acid or massive claws, or as rammers and boarders. In the latter case a group of independent kraken can gang up on a cruiser, or even better a cruiser damaged by hit and run attacks, and simultaneously ram it, using their massive claws to do extra damage and then boarding in the End phase. Kraken make ideal rammers, with their 6+ Armour and constant Brace for Impact for protection.

### BIO-UPGRADES

The Tyranid bio-upgrades offer a range of modifications to add to your ships. Most of these modifications are best suited to the hive ship, such as reinforced carapace and extra spore cysts for creating incredibly tough, 14 hit, 6 spore monsters, or solar vanes, adrenaline sacs and more discharge vents for increasing the speed and manoeuvrability of these behemoths. Tyranid cruisers can often benefit as well from some of these upgrades, especially an extra spore cyst or hit. Escorts I would probably never give upgrades, simply because in most cases the escort is worth as much as the upgrade itself. The only exception to this would probably be kraken, which benefit from any of the upgrades that increase their speed as well as the mucous membrane upgrade for protection against bombers. The drone link upgrade is worth a special mention as it offers a left shift on the Gunnery table for pyro-acid batteries, something that can be very significant when you consider the large amount of firepower hive ships can have at their disposal.

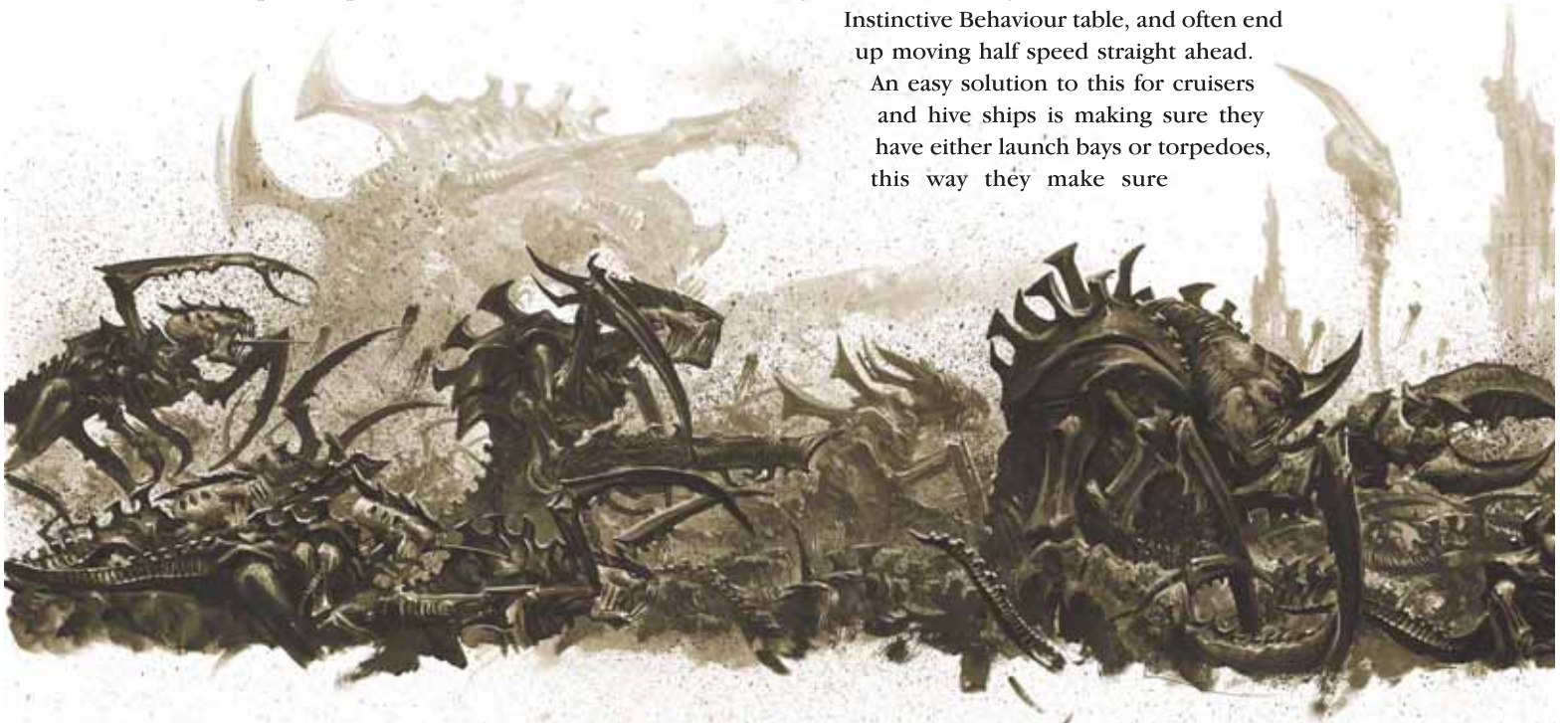
### TYRANID TACTICS

#### Instinctive Behaviour and Synapse Control

The first thing that any new Tyranid player needs to tackle is how to deal with synapse control and instinctive behaviour. These two factors are what makes Tyranids unlike any other fleet in the Battlefleet Gothic game. The first thing I realised after playing a few games with a hive fleet is that instinctive behaviour is actually more of a benefit than it is a drawback. Once you understand how your ships will react if you either fail to control them with your hive ships, or choose not to, you will find that you can get them to go onto the special orders you want. Until you get quite close to your enemy, however, the odds are you will meet very few of the conditions on the

Instinctive Behaviour table, and often end up moving half speed straight ahead.

An easy solution to this for cruisers and hive ships is making sure they have either launch bays or torpedoes, this way they make sure







they fire off their payloads each turn and can happily be left to instinctively reload the following turn, leaving them free to move and shoot as normal.

When you get close to your enemy you will need to be much more aware of what you want your ships to do, though in most cases the ones you want to lock on will, while the ones you want to innate boarding will as well and you can save your Leadership test for those that aren't doing what you want them to. Taking Leadership upgrades for your hive ships as well as re-rolls and even Hive Mind imperatives offers some defence against instinctive behaviour, however, once you get the hang of making instinctive behaviour work in your favour, I would say these are points best spent elsewhere. The final thing I would suggest when dealing with instinctive behaviour is to choose the order of your Leadership tests wisely, as after all each might well be your last for that turn.

### ENEMIES OF THE HIVE MIND

The adaptability of the Tyranid fleet allows you to tailor your force to face your enemies more easily than many of the other races. Here we will touch briefly on some things to bear in mind when fighting different fleets.

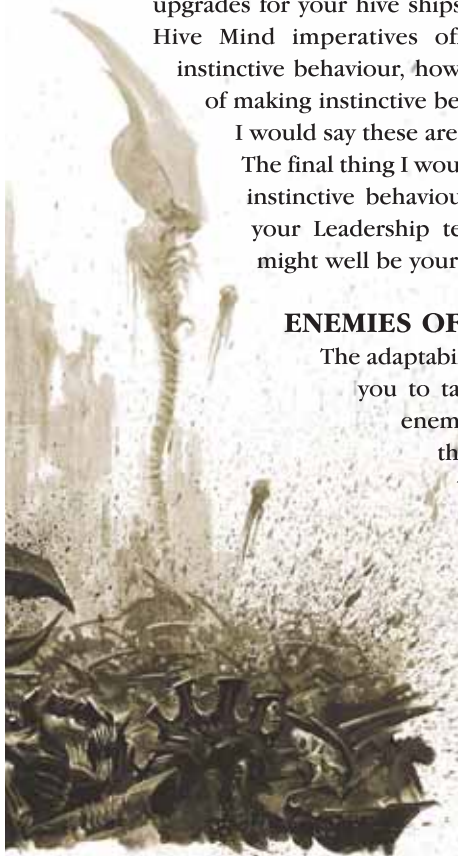
#### Imperials, Space Marines and Chaos:

By the standards of the Hive Mind these fleets are fairly similar and form what is pretty much the 'standard' type of fleet to face. The core

tactic of getting in close and using Tyranids close range nastiness to tear the enemy apart works equally well with each of these foes, though there are a few points worth mentioning. When facing Chaos fleets, if they try and use their superior speed to outflank your vessels don't be afraid to use All Ahead Full and Come To New Heading to chase them down as it is always better to sacrifice a few turns shooting to get into optimum range. While with Imperials, I would say be careful of massed torpedo waves. Always have a fighter or two handy as these can really do some damage, especially at short range. The only thing I'll say about Space Marines is don't underestimate their hit-and-run attacks or their bonuses in boarding, of all the fleets you might face these will give you the strongest opposition if you want to set foot on the ships.

**Eldar and Dark Eldar:** Once again these two fleets are pretty much the same from the Hive Mind's point of view and can be dealt with in the same fashion. Don't bother with bio-plasma, as you will seldom be in range to use it and when you do holo or shadow fields with most likely negate it. Assault boats and fighters can still be useful but don't put too much faith in them. The real bane of any Eldar is pyro-acid. A single hit or two with its special ability to inflict a fire critical (on a 4+ against Eldar) will put paid to most of their ships. As for closing, wait until you have their fleet between your ships and a near table edge and then All Ahead Full. They shouldn't be able to move completely out of range and even at half strength your pyro-acid will be able to do its work.

**Orks:** This fleet can be a tricky one to face by virtue of the fact that their effectiveness is so random. However, the basic tactic of closing, hammering with firepower and then boarding is still sound. I would only say as a word of caution, don't try and board a space hulk unless it is almost destroyed, as even Tyranids will find this a losing battle!







**Necrons:** There are two simple tactics I have found to work against this ancient race, the first is to target a single vessel or squadron at a time, pouring on fire until it is crippled or destroyed. Necron players tend to get a bit nervous as soon as they lose a ship or two, no doubt thinking about all the Victory Points you have just scored on them. The second tactic is to shower them with assault boats, as without ordnance of their own they must rely solely on their turrets to protect them. This is another thing that seems to make Necron players nervous and they

will often waste valuable firepower shooting down your assault boats and boarding torpedoes.

**Tau:** When facing the Tau you will find a fleet that can match Tyranids, pound for pound, with ordnance. Tau bombers especially can be a significant threat, especially in the large numbers they are produced. However the one advantage Tyranids have over Tau is they can start the game with ordnance already in play by purchasing from the fleet list. This is often a good idea as it can be all the







edge you need to win an ordnance race (especially if you start with 20 fighters already protecting you from those pesky manta bombers!). Once you close with Tau you will also be pleasantly surprised to discover they halve their boarding value making it even easier for you to consume these little blue-skinned aliens.

**Tyranids:** Well all I can say about this is it is very, very messy, especially considering spores don't stop Tyranid ordnance.



### TYRANID TACTICS

If you are using the scenario modifications for Tyranids presented in Armada you shouldn't run into any significant problems as, with the changes, these all work pretty well. The one scenario that you will find Tyranids excel at of course is planetary assault. Next to Space Marines this scenario more than any other showcases their abilities.

### SUMMONING THE SWARM

When building your fleet there are a number of things worth noting, depending whether you are making either a vanguard fleet or a regular hive fleet. If you're making a vanguard fleet you are restricted to only a handful of weapons, two types of escort and no fighters or assault boats what so ever. As a result you will need to make sure you have a lot of escorts. As such I would say steer completely clear of bio-upgrades, and limit the more expensive weapon options such as torpedoes and pyroacid batteries on your kraken.

If you're building a hive fleet the first thing you will need is of course, hive ships. When constructing hive ships I generally try and avoid going over board. After all, making



your hive ship Leadership 9, adding a re-roll, four extra hits and an extra spore is worth 120 points, for which you could have 6 escort drones armed with Strength 4 pyroacid each, which I feel is sounder protection. Extra vessels also always add extra options for you during your game, something that can literally make the difference between victory and defeat. After hive ships I always fill up on escorts, making sure each of my hive ships has an escort screen and then adding the odd kraken or vanguard drone for good measure. Finally I include a cruiser or two, though seldom more than the number of hive ships I have.



Well I hope that some of the information presented here will give Tyranid players a few ideas they can use in their games, or if you've never played with the hive fleet before perhaps the incentive to give it a go. The final thing I will say is: The best way to master any fleet is to play with it a lot! Once you know what your own ships are capable of and what to expect from them once they engage the enemy, the rest is not all that hard.



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