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Warp Rift

The Battlefleet Gothic netzine

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Issue 12

**Craftworld Eldar
High Admiralty
Eldar vs Space Marines
...and more...**

From the Nexus Publishing House

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**Warp Rift:
Issue Twelve
May 2007**

+++ Light Speed +++

Hello fellow Battlefleet Gothic players.

Before you another issue of Warp Rift and first of all I would like to thank everyone who has contributed to this issue and already to oncoming issues.

In this issue we will present you a guideline on how to compose fleets for the five major Eldar Craftworlds. On top of that, as an extra, the article features Special Character Ships for each Craftworld along the lines of the famous *Flame of Asuryan* for the Iyanden Craftworld.

In the Officer's Mess you can enjoy the insanity and horrors of the Warp in the for now last part of *The Pure and the True*.

Under the *Command and Control* section you can read the fleet engagement between the Corsair Eldar, using the MMS house rules, and the Space Marines of Battlefleet Armageddon. Prepare for a Hero unleashed.

And on top of above articles (and more) this issue also introduces the pages of the *High Admiralty*. On these pages the three members of the High Admiralty, or HA for short, release their opinions and thoughts on the game of Battlefleet Gothic. Do not expect any revelations towards new developments within the Battlefleet Gothic universe since they are prohibited by Specialist Games to talk about their current projects. But I am sure that their own opinions on the game outside of the official stream are a very interesting read.

Happy Gaming, Painting & Converting, Roy

**Gothicomp 2007
Dates**

Submissions: may 1 – july 31
Voting round one: august 1 – august 22

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Gothicomp 2007

The first of may saw the start of a new Painting Competition for Battlefleet Gothic hosted by Cybershadow at www.tacticalwargames.net / www.epic40k.co.uk.

The organization would like to thank the Canadian Mail Order store **The Sentry Box** for donating their prize. You can visit them at <http://www.sentrybox.com/>

At the start of August you can vote on the finalists through the forum of the above mentioned website (see box at the right for competition dates). The winners will of course be shown in a coming edition of Warp Rift, issue 14.

Encyclopaedia Gothica

Fleets of the Galaxy

Major Race

Craftworld Eldar

By Ray Bell

Introduction

It could be said that the title for this article is somewhat misleading as I'm not presenting actual fleet lists, more guide lines of how to represent your favourite Craftworld's Warfleet(s). After that we present you a couple of Special Character ships for each Craftworld, of course only to be used after your opponent have given permission! As always please write in and tell us what you think and how we can make our rules even better!

Craftworld Eldar Fleet Lists

Craftworlds are the gargantuan space craft that carry the majority of the Eldar that survived the Fall. Craftworlds are self-sufficient space borne colonies drifting along ancient preordained galaxy spanning routes. Craftworlds vary in almost every way: size, shape, population density, culture, and the displacement of their Warfleet(s).

It can be said that the Eldar are a dying race, but even the merest remnants of the once mighty Eldar Empire is a force to be reckoned with. Even Eldar pirates with no

tangible connection to any given Craftworld can be an unstoppable threat to an Imperial Sub-sector. A full blown Craftworld Warfleet can brush aside all but the most determined, and/or numerous foe.

The Fleets of the 'main' five Craftworlds are represented by already existing classes of ships but certain aspects of the fleet choices, such as the mixing of Corsair ships with Craftworld Eldar ships, maybe dependent on special fleet commanders.

+++



Craftworld Eldar Dragonship

Biel-Tan

The Swordwind

Biel-tan is possibly the most militaristic of all Craftworlds, it is unlikely that there will be much Corsair presence, aspect warriors will be common and should always be present onboard Dragon ships, Assault boats would be taken for the majority of capital ships.

- Corsairs only as reserves, no Corsair Capital ships.
- At least 75% of Dragon ships should have the Aspect warrior upgrade, these Dragon ships should have launch bays with assault boats.
- The fleet should be capital ship heavy, a maximum of about 25% of the fleet allowance should be spent on escorts.
- Ghostships should be rare, maximum of one per three other capital ships.



The Saim-Hann Craftworld.

Saim-Hann

The Wild Host

Saim-Hann is considered a divided place of barbarity by its fellow Craftworlders. As the Craftworld is divided into separate and autonomous clans, its Warfleet is also divided, fighting together only when they feel personal necessity.

- Corsairs should be taken without restriction, as should the Craftworld vessels.
- Escorts should be common, mixed squadrons will represent the need to be 'all-rounders' as they can't rely on the presence of other squadrons e.g. 1 Hellebore, 1 Aconite, 4 Nightshades.
- The Admiral must go on the most expensive ship.
- Fleet re-rolls should be rare to represent the division of the forces, don't buy any extra re-rolls!
- Capital ships should be rare, light cruisers should be much more common than Dragonships or Voidstalkers (or similar).
- Ghostships should be rare, maximum of one per three other capital ships.

IYANDEN

The Ghost Warriors

After a devastating Tyranid invasion much of Iyanden's population were left massacred. Due to an extremely desperate need the Spirit Seers of Iyanden have bolstered their militaristic assets with Spirit driven Wraithbone constructs including warships.

- Corsairs only as reserves. (Keep in mind that the Corsair fleet that came to Iyanden's aid was made up of Iyanden's own Craftworld vessels that had abandoned the Craftworld years earlier with some common Corsair vessels in addition).
- Ghostships should be common but not unrestricted, maximum of half the capital ships can be Wraithships.

The sheer size of a craftworld means that each individual vessel possesses several full battlefleets, stationed at convenient points along the craftworld as it journeys through space. Each fleet might typically number from ten to twenty warships and is commanded by an Eldar Admiral, though it will inevitably also rely greatly on advice and counsel from the craftworld's Seers.

ULTHWE

The Damned

The Eldar of Ulthwe make extensive use of the Webway with their elite Black Guardians to achieve critical objectives and only use their Warfleet sparingly.

- Corsairs only as reserves.
- A maximum of 25% of capital ships should have the Aspect warrior upgrade.
- Re-rolls should be common place, buy as many farseers as appropriate.
- Ghostships should be rare, maximum of one per three other capital ships.

ALTIOC

The Starstriders

Altioc is renowned for having the strictest adherence to the Eldar Path. As such, many Eldar of Altioc walk the path of the outcast to escape this restrictive lifestyle. Most return if the Craftworld needs their assistance. Some crewing solitary Corsair escort squadrons or even cruisers.

- Corsairs should be taken without restriction, as should the Craftworld vessels.
- Over 2/3 of Corsair escort squadrons should be 'small': escort squadrons should number two or three escorts.

- Make good use of the Hemlock (especially with its special boarding rules and BFG scale sniper rifle!), avoid using Nightshades.
- Capital ships should be rare, light cruisers should be much more common than Dragonships or Voidstalkers (or similar).
- Ghostships should be rare, maximum of one per three other capital ships.



Wraithships Destiny & Infinity

Biel-Tan – Bahzhakhain – 575 points

0-1, Dragonship, may only be included in fleets over 1000pts

The combined strength of the Biel-tan armada is that to be compared to eight full Imperial Battle Fleets. Truly the fleet of Biel-tan is massive, with a vast array of variant ship classes and fleet composition. Famed classes of Dragonship have left the Space Docks of Biel-tan such as the Naiad gunship, but the most celebrated designs are those of unique complements and quality.

Although hard to gain repute amongst their Eldar peers, given the abundance of heroic tales and legendary campaigns, some ships and crews have climbed head and shoulders above the achievements attained by their fellow heroes. The Bahzhakhain has been the flagship of numerous brilliant commanders and has become a reassuring legend amongst the fleets of Biel-tan. Designed for bringing a planetary force to it knees long before any ground invasion has been launched, the Bahzhakhain often utilizes special torpedoes capable of annihilating ground targets and scores of Vampires to land the Sword Wind.

* Modelling Ideas: Use the Flame of Asuryan model or a standard Dragonship. Use the Pulsar Lance and keel the Launch Bay. Try to fill the gap between upper hull and the keel launch bay with plasticard, leaving small gaps in the front where the Pulsar Lance sticks through. Imagine the torpedoes coming through the small openings. (If possible position the port & starboard sails differently as on the Flame of Asuryan.)

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	URNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/8	10/20/25cm	Special	Holofields	5+	0
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC	
Prow Pulsar Lance		30cm	2	Front	
Prow Torpedoes		30cm	8	Front	
Keel Launch Bay		Varies	4	N/A	

Notes: Extra +1 boarding, aspect warriors, Ld10, 1 reroll for every Dragonship with aspect warriors (including the Bahzhakhain).

Saim-Hann - Wild Serpent – 485 points

0-1, Dragonship, may only be included in fleets over 1000pts

Over the last decennia the Wild Serpent has become one of the most feared ships in the Saim-Hann region. It never operates alone, almost always accompanied by a couple of light cruisers and attendant escort vessels. In battle the Wild Serpent orchestrates its attendant warships into submissive cohesion. Enemies find themselves overwhelmed by the relentless and sporadic precision attacks by the Wild Serpent. With a broad spectrum of offensive capabilities the Wild Serpent is equipped to deal death to any enemy foolish enough to offend the leading Clans of Saim-Hann.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	URNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Battleship/10	10/20/25cm	Special	Holofields	4+	0
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC	
Prow Pulsar Lance		45cm	1	Left/Front	
Prow Pulsar Lance		45cm	1	Right/Front	
Prow Torpedoes		30cm	4	Front	
Keel Launch Bay		Varies	4	N/A	
Keel Weapon Batteries		30cm	10	Left/Front/Right	

Notes: aspect warriors (not really, but it has the same affect), Ld10, 1 re-roll, Crew skill 6.

* Modelling Ideas: Remove the 2 middle pulsars from the centre of the model then have torpedoes in the prow imagining them coming out of the middle pulsar 'spaces'.

Iyanden – Flame of Asuryan

All rules and background information about this legendary vessel can be downloaded from: <http://www.specialist-games.com/assets/Yriels.pdf>

Ulthwé - Shadow Point – 550 points

0-1, Dragonship, may only be included in fleets over 1000pts

Ulthwe only use their fleet assets reluctantly, hoping to shape a course that avoids wasteful fleet engagements. But on the occasion when full and decisive force is needed the Dragonship Shadow Point fills the role of Flagship. With an intricately formed infinity circuit, Farseers onboard guide the battle with astonishing accuracy. More than just a focal point for tactical foresight, the Shadow Point is a heavy gunship attacking when its enemy's destruction is assured.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/8	10/20/25cm	Special	Holofields	5+	0
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		FIRE ARC
Prow Weapon Batteries		30cm	12		Front
Prow Pulsar Lance		30cm	2		Front
Keel Pulsar Lance		30cm	1		Front
Keel Torpedoes		30cm	4		Front

Notes: * Ld 10, 1 re-roll per turn! You loose the re-roll if the infinity circuit is smashed.

* Modelling Ideas: Use the Flame of Asuryan model or a standard Dragonship. Cut the front of the Pulsar Lance and put the front piece into the weapon battery piece, making sure the Pulsars sticks a little out of the Prow. Use the torpedo piece for the keel weaponry. Use another cut down Pulsar Lance and mount this under the torpedo piece. Use additional wings from the Flame of Asuryan.

During the 13th Black Crusade Ulthwe became renowned for the pivotal attacks by its strike forces, but in the space lanes the fleets of Ulthwe were far from quiet. Combined with Corsair fleets and even other Craftworld aid the Shadow Point oversaw the destruction of countless key fleet elements of the vast Chaos Warfleets, often without meaningful loses. With the foresight of the infinity circuit the Shadow Point led its companion vessels into a non-stop campaign of annihilation, moving from one battlezone to another leaving only the broken wreckage of Chaos ships in its wake.

Altioç – Sword of Eldanesh – 80 points

0-1, may be included in any size fleet

Eldanesh is a Mythic Eldar Hero who was slain by the jealous War God Khaine, earning Khaine the title Kaela Mensha (bloody-handed). The Eldar of Altioç use the story of Eldanesh's offence to the God's to reinforce the ideals of the Eldar Path. In defiance to Altioç's obsessive adherence to the path, self imposed exiles form disconnected communities on board Corsair vessels of local pirate fleets. Some loose themselves to the adventure of piracy and eventually acquire enough wealth to build their own ship. One such group of outcasts built the Sword of Eldanesh.

Often working completely alone the Sword of Eldanesh can skilfully eliminate all defenders of a transport convoy at extreme range and then close in for the prize. It is not unheard of for the ship to enter late in an engagement to claim the spoils from an overwhelmed ally. This has given the ship some infamy among the other corsairs, who will only fight along side the Sword of Eldanesh if there are overpowering numbers to keep them in line.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	10/20/30cm	Special	Holofields	5+	0
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		FIRE ARC
Weapon Batteries		45cm	3		Front
Pulsar Lance		45cm	1		Front

Notes: Cannot be squadroned with other escorts and therefore forgoes the requirement to be in an escort squadron!

* Modelling Ideas: Use a conventional Hellebore Escort, filling the torpedo tubes with a tiny amount of green stuff. If you're ambitious enough, you could sculpt weapons batteries over the torpedo tubes.

High Admiralty

Voices from the Warp

Space Marines

Strike Cruisers are too Cheap!

By Ray Bell

First I must clarify that the following article is only a light hearted (and at times sarcastic) account of an opinion most non-Space Marine players and even some Space Marine players share (I am only referring to people I actually know however!).

Strike cruisers are too cheap!

Strike Cruisers are too cheap, everyone knows it! But this has been ignored by Specialist Games mainly because of the inflexibility of the SM fleet, as Strike Cruisers have to work in every role (jack of all trades, master of none).

- **Weaponry**

But considering it's now been given L/F/R Bombardment Cannons to shoot as well as it's WB's, it has got a fair firepower: on average vs 5+ armour Bombardments can-

nons = 6 Weapons batteries taking all of its advantages into account (or a bit more). So in affect it can have a Strength 10 Weapons Battery broadside against 5+ armour targets (and better against 6+ armour targets: an equivalent of 15WB's!). That's not bad! Roughly the same as a Tyrant! (Of course, it only gets one decent broadside!)

Carrying on the comparison with Imperial cruisers: instead of Prow Torpedoes it gets 2 Thunderhawks, a fair trade! So it has roughly the same firepower as an Imperial cruiser, but only to one side!

- **Dauntless Comparison**

As a similar ship configuration compare it to a Dauntless: replace the Prow Torpedoes / lances with 2 Thunderhawks. Then ADD 3 Bombardment Cannons L/F/R, ADD 6+ armour (the equivalent of +50% hits! taking armour ignoring weapons into account), ADD 1 turret, amazing leadership

+2 to boarding modifier, -1 to enemy hit and runs, +1 to teleport attacks. For +35pts (the cost of a sword) you get all that! Crazy!
BUT it does loose the +1D6 on All Ahead Full (this one D6 must be worth about 40pts!!!)

- **Ignoring the 6+ armour!**

What fleets can have majority lances or armour ignoring weaponry? (That also happens to be a 'decent' fleet!)

* IN can't! The Gothic has got a strong armour dependant Torpedo salvo and can be scrubbed for this purpose. They can have Nova Cannons on Lunars though and can have Lance Dauntless's. And that's the best they're going to get! (It's not a bad ship but they will be swamped as the NC Lunar is expensive, and for only a likely 2 lances return it's 'bloody' expensive!) They can also have Firestorms in the mix of

escorts (most fleets have a similar option), annoyingly Space Marine's will be able to kill a sizeable amount of escort with their Thunderhawks.

* Chaos, DON'T have lots of lances, they have a 'good' mix, the Acheron is the exception but luckily for Space Marines it's also pretty crap!

* Eldar, can have a majority lance fleet as they have Pulsars and an escort with nothing but! But Eldar are just good against everybody!!!

* Orks don't have lances (usually!)

* Necrons have a 'fair' mix.

* Tyranids are beyond weird, but could have a near all Bio Plasma fleet. But this would royally suck as they are so slow!

* Tau can have a lot of lances, but they have a lot of weapons that hit on a 6+ as well! (Like the copious amounts of ordnance!)

So I really can't see there being a 'real' problem against lances! It's hardly ever more than half the fleets firepower (if that!).

So assuming that half the weapons will ignore the armour, which is generous, the Strike Cruiser will then have from an effect of 12 hits and 2 shields at 5+ (not against lances), to 9 hits and 1.5 shields at 5+ (against a fleet with lances as half its firepower). But if we take this one step further and consider that the direct weapons used against a conventional ship will be Weapons Batteries first and Lances second, we get the equivalent of 8.5 hits and 2 shields at 5+.

So In my mind a Strike Cruiser has the same resistance to damage from an average fleet as a Chaos Cruiser. (if not more!)

• **Comparing it to Murder!**

Firepower: The Strike Cruiser has less firepower, but not significantly (but it is noticeable). Both will most likely be shooting with only 1 broadside. And the Strike Cruiser can zip behind or in front of the enemy and turn 90* to get a better damage result from the gunnery table.

So yes, it has weaker weapons! (Or less weapons). But it has the same 'hull' (in affect). And then gets the 'super' Space Marine rules. How could you believe this thing is 'worse' than a Murder?

Against said Imperial fleet, would a Murder do any better? I would say they stand the 'same' chance of survival! I'm not saying Strike Cruisers are invulnerable or anything, just that they are just as good as a Chaos cruiser! (Which isn't anything special!)



Space Marine Strike Cruiser

Weapons: Instead of firing the 2 lances each turn, the Strike Cruiser gets 2 Thunderhawks (a possible move/range of 40cm per turn, not as good, but not too different as their fire arc is 'ALL'). Also the Thunderhawks can take out the Imperial Torpedoes and/or Attack Craft! (Of course this can be reversed as well!) The single broadside of a SC isn't as good at range, but is within 30cm and is more likely to be used within 15cm and in a more damaging arc! Thanks to the 90* turn.

The Murder can put 2 Lances out in the prow, that's a likely 1 hit! What's so great about that!? The Strike Cruiser has Thunderhawks instead, which can go through shields and soften up the targets for the Strike Cruisers on their way in! (Note that on a 5+ a Thunderhawk can cause damage to most capital ship targets). The Strike Cruiser has a 90* turn which means it can better use terrain as cover. Also it can redirect firepower (or indeed, the entire ship) more easily! And move with escort squadrons!

Although I hate these little contests, a Strike Cruiser would beat a Murder 1 on 1 hands down! Forgetting I said that, it would beat the Murder's abilities against most other fleets, except Eldar! The Murder has to close to be effective just as the Strike Cruiser does, they both have a long range weapon for the time until they're close but it is by no means their majority weapons strength!



In any case a Strike Cruiser can close the distance more affectively than a Murder if it uses All Ahead Full in the first turn (it can still launch Thunderhawks at full strength!). Where as the Murder would have only 1 lance to fire!

• **Battle Barge**

Also compare the Strike Cruiser to the Battle Barge, or compare the Battle Barge to 3 Strike Cruisers! the Battle Barge has the same number of shields but they have to all be down before damage is counted, Strike Cruisers have +6 hits(+4 for what matters, as if there is only 1 hit left there is only 1 SC left!), the Strike Cruisers can have a combined turret value of 4, (but the Battle Barge has 3 all the time).

In terms of resilience they are very similar. The Strike Cruisers get better Ld (as they have 3 rolls), 'slightly' more ordnance (a Thunderhawks worth), have +5cm speed, 90* turns and turn like Cruisers not Battleships (the Battle Barge also has a large base which is major disadvantage vs Nova Cannons and stray blast markers), BUT the Battle Barge has better range of its WB's by 15cm (Well it is a Battleship!). All in all the Strike Cruisers are much better as they can zip about the board doing the same or more than the Battle Barge! (this is quite similar to the 2xScythe vs Tombship argument! Scythes are better!)

Assuming a Strike Cruiser has the same survivability as a Chaos cruiser (e.g. Murder) against a normal mix of weapons (and much better against ordnance). And a little less firepower (given the range differences and taking the 90* turn into consideration). So I'd place it at 155pts (or possibly 145pts on the outside) in comparison to a Murder if it had all the Chaos rules.

Now add SM Ld (+10%pts), +1 boarding (+5pts), +1 to H&R's (+10pts) -1 to enemy H&R's (+5pts) = 195pts (Or 180pts when you consider the 'fudge factor' or 'fuzzy dice syndrome').

So I deem that in a normal Space Marine fleet the normal Strike Cruisers should cost an honest 180pts!

**Cheers,
RayB**

Both pictures in this article have been made by Andy Walsh. If you are interested in more of his work make sure you visit his site www.stavinwonderland.com

Show case

Vessels of the Galaxy

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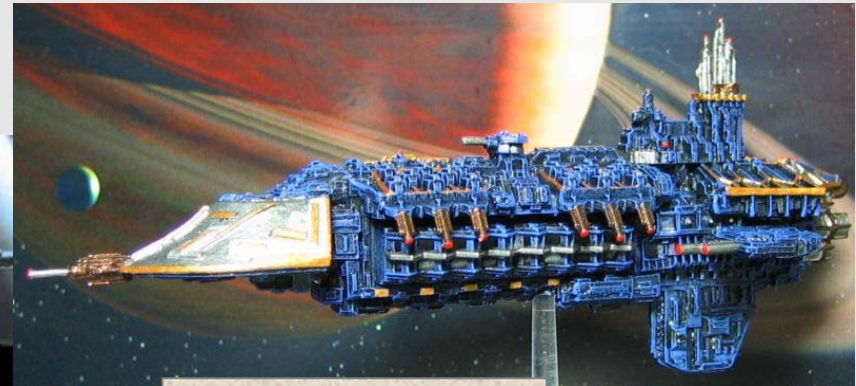
**Peter 'Greblord' Armstrong
- Nurgle Chaos Fleet -**



Nurgle Fleet

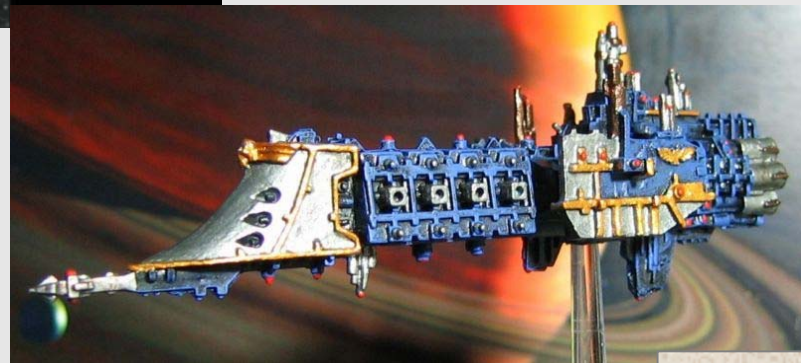
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Indy Exploration Cruiser



Exorcist Class Grand Cruiser

***USAbob
- Imperial Fleet -***



Endeavour

Officer's Mess

Lounge time

Black Library Short Story Competition Winner:

The Pure and the True

By Chun the Unavoidable

Chapter II: Part II of Past Madness

Spongy walls wept green-white puss that pooled on the sodden floor. His feet were sucked deeper with every step, making his power armour whine ever-louder in compensation. A feminine voice whispered his name directly into his ear... No, into his *mind* – whispered, giggled, choked into silence.

A green mist rose from the floor, thickened rapidly into a fog as he continued to advance. The heat inside his armour rose as its exchangers became unable to counter the searing ambient temperature. Salty sweat stung his eyes, made his armpits and crotch itch intolerably, slicked his skin. Trickled into his wounds like acid.

He was so weary. The interminable siege at the palace gates. The terrible fight with the Bloodthirster. But now this was the culmination. The invitation Horus had given when he dropped his battle barge's shields could not be refused. The fate of the Empire of Man was soon to be decided; and, once it was, he would be able to rest... In one manner or another.

He only had to find the bridge.

Something screamed deafeningly – definitely over his helmet's

speakers this time. It continued far beyond the capability of any human throat, bestial, not in pain but anger, before abruptly changing to gales of laughter so deep he felt the resulting vibrations in the pit of his stomach.

The hot fog had continued to thicken, and he realised he was now actually forcing his way through a viscid liquid of dimly-pulsating green. The laughter, unaffected by the new medium he traversed, rose in pitch and became an irregular, piercing chuckle that managed to surmount his armour's suppressors for full seconds, inducing stabbing headaches.

That voice again –

Transition.

"... Should be a chaplain who leads them into battle, not a mere sergeant."

"Kleige, no space marine is a 'mere' anything. They taught me that at school. False modesty does not become you."

"Nevertheless."

"You are right, of course, but none are available. I would willingly

lend you mine, *give* you the holy pain, even, but Kirtz's gifts lie more in spouting scripture than bolts from a boltgun."

Two human voices, one of which he instinctively recognised as belonging to a brother. He opened his eyes to a painful white glare quickly dimmed by his retinal inserts to reveal a low ceiling ribbed with strip-lights and embossed with tiny cherubs. Another voice spoke, its timbre emotionless. "Subject Three soporifics' effects neutralised. Subject Three increased synaptic activity. Subject Three physical movement."

"You mean he is awake. Emperor save us from the servitor mentality."

A large face eclipsed the strip-lights – the most battle-scarred marine he had ever seen. "Greetings, honoured brother," said the face, "Emperor be with you."

"And with you," he automatically replied. He struggled to sit, but found he could not. He was in full armour, he felt that, but the ancient device was locked and unresponsive to his body's movements – no matter how his super-human musculature strained. The only free part of him was his head. "Brother, call the Techs. My armour has died."

The ugly one seemed to smile sadly – it was difficult to tell with all that scarring. "Brother, your armour has been slaved to my own and cannot move until I permit it. Do you not recall your condition?"

He strained with all his might to lift his right arm, felt sweat break out on his brow with the effort >>*made his armpits and crotch itch intolerably, slicked his skin. Trickled into his wounds like...*<< But couter and gauntlet were as granite.

His condition? "I recall explosions. Where we attacked? Am I injured?"

The other's face turned grim – an emotion it was well suited to express. "Yes, we were attacked. Many, *many* brothers were lost. But you escaped injury. That is not the condition I mean. Look to your left."

The marine turned as directed. He saw another five benches, doubtless similar to that on which he lay. A multi-limbed medical servitor tracked between them, scanning and inspecting their occupants – five unhelmed marines, fully armoured.

Fully armoured in black.

Transition.

He swam through the thick, glowing liquid, armour creaking with the pressures piled upon it, wings trailing behind him as a magnificent red plume. Hours seemed to pass. The walls of the corridor had changed to rough rock, the weeping sores gone. There was no noise other than that of his protesting armour – the screams and laughter had ceased. Where would this corridor end? Where were the others? Where was the Emperor?

Each stroke and kick of his legs was harder than the last. In wonder he saw that his passage was actually leaving gouges in the medium he traversed, and that, as he moved, the stuff slowly slopped back together to fill the empty space he left. He was no longer swimming through a liquid but forcing his way through a pulsating green jelly...

...That continued to thicken. Warning icons flared on his HUD. He felt feathers tear from his wings in dismayingly large clumps. Patches of the jelly began to dry before his eyes (the heat had never abated). Cracks appeared, bits flaked off. Would the whole mass become solid before he escaped? Would he be entombed like a fly in amber?

He struggled on until a crust of hardened jelly barred his progress. With powerful sweeps of his arms, at the very limit of his armour's augmented strength, he forced a void to allow his limbs as much free swing as possible. And began to pound. At first there was no effect, and he despaired. Drowning in green conserve was an ignoble end for any marine, but a Primarch...! He increased his efforts – either the wall or his gauntlets would break.

A crack starred into existence before him, cratered. Chunks of solidified jelly began to spray about him as the wall finally began to succumb to his onslaught. The work was exhausting, and he was up to his couters before breaking through to the other side. He paused to rest, breathing deeply, but the un-hardened jelly was flowing back

into the space his exertions had created, and he was unsure if he had the necessary strength to clear it away again. Hastily he widened the gap and scrambled through.

Wings drooping sorrowfully to the ground, dimly-pulsing jelly sliding off his battered power-armour, he took stock of his new surroundings.

He was in a narrow land. The rough walls continued on in a straight line to a far horizon – surely beyond the limits of this hellish battle barge's hull. He looked up, saw sulphurous yellow clouds racing against a dark green sky. He looked down – the floor was black ash. A breeze awoke, stirred his sticky wings, whispered his name over his helmet's speakers.
"Sanquinius..."

Transition.

Sanquinius... That was not his name.

That was the name of his holy lord and founder of his order. The name of his possessor.

My name is Gregol –

"Lyvinche? Your heart-rate has steadied. Back with us, Brother?"

He was marching down the ramp of a Navy shuttle (ornate script on its stumpy prow designating it the *Flagellant*), into a >>*Narrow Land*<< land of irregular, variously-shaded and complexly-overlapping, shadows. Rearing up and receding away in all directions was a cityscape of squat cuboids, domes, narrow spires and pyramids, many adorned with sensors and transmitters grasped in the hands of iron seraphim, vomited from the mouths of brass gargoyles, entwined with convoluted golden serpents. Coloured lights emanated from what appeared to be intricately-leaded windows of thin plate glass, each depicting scenes of obvious historical renown – though they were often meaningless to him. Some took the form of magnificent roses, others lofty arches, still more were cruciform or lunular – and any would grace even the most beautiful of planet-bound cathedrals.

For he was not marching across the surface of a world. This was not some ancient city of the Empire. The surface beneath him was metal, pitted with micro-meteorite strikes, starred with >>*starred into existence before him*<< minor stress fractures. His boots clamped magnetically to it with each footfall, released with each step. His HUD registered external vacuum and internal oxygen reserves. Nestled amongst the buildings, often towering over them, were weapons batteries. Some, gargantuan paired barrels, were obvious in their function. Other designs were less understandable. Tiered pyramids of mesh, clusters of dimpled globes, shallow bowls that could accommodate lakes, he guessed to be ancient, almost eldritch energy weapons. But the purpose of the slim, phallic spire, its bulbous tip spearing the starless black sky, its base obscured by buildings (and probably over the horizon anyway), he could not deduce.

>>*Psycannon. Its foundation would be a dome in which a choir of psykers pool their powers. The dome would amplify them, the spire focus and transmit.*<<

He looked up sharply. Whose voice was that?

For a moment, a yellow, sulphurous cloud scudded over the otherwise featureless black sky, swiftly evaporated into nothing.

He tried to stop his descent of the ramp, but, no matter the instructions of his legs, cuisse, poleyn, and greave continued their steady forward motion, keeping perfect step with the two black-armoured marines before and the three behind him.

"I do not control my armour," he said aloud, unsure as to whom he spoke.

He was answered by the voice that had spoken as he descended the shuttle's ramp, now many meters behind. "No, I do, Brother Lyvinche." At the front of the column a marine, armoured in beloved Blood Angel red and carrying a large metal case, stepped to one side. He allowed the others to march past and fell in step with Lyvinche. "Do you not recall?"

He was of the Death Company. He had been claimed by the Last

Days of Sanquinius. The Curse was in his blood, nay –for that implied a *medical* condition– it was a consuming part of his very id. He had seen others who were afflicted in the chapterhouse’s sanitoriums, those unfortunate enough, for whatever reason, not to find relief in battle. They had been stripped of their armour for their own and their brother’s safety, bound with iron rods, drugged beyond comprehension with soporifics. They lay, twitching violently as nightmares of the Traitor Legion hordes before Eternity Gate, of the terrible Bloodthirster deamon, of confronting Horus himself, ran through their minds as sharp and painful and stinking as any reality.

And now Lyvinche was to count such unfortunates closest of all his brothers.

Of course he did not experience things exactly as did the Primarch. The psychic scream that had blasted through time itself at Sanquinius’ demise combined with its victim’s mental make-up to produce a *version* of those historic days, subtly –perhaps, in certain cases, not so subtly– different from what was believed to have been actuality.

How close was his madness to that ancient reality? A possibly blasphemous reply filled his mind: *I don't care. I would only be free of it.*

He looked at the other, sane, marine, noting rank. “Brother sergeant, grant me control of my damn legs.”

The other’s tone became sympathetic. “I cannot – it is impossible to predict when your condition will re-assert itself.” He gestured to the other black-armoured marines, “Our brothers continuously experience the Primarch’s last days. Barring myself, you are the most, ah, *lucid* here – but you succumb more and more often. Only when battle is imminent can I release you.”

“I take it battle *approaches* immanence, then?”

“We march to it – you will have your relief.”

“Marching to our deaths. How many hymns have been written on that subject, I wonder, Brother?”

An edge was apparent in the sergeant’s voice. “It is a marine’s duty and honour to die for his Emperor.”

“Indeed it is. Do not doubt my integrity or my loyalty. I would only rather I met my doom as Brother Lyvinche and not imagining myself the Founding Fucking Father!”

Transition.

He marched through >>*marching to our deaths*<< the narrow land. Nothing changed. The dark green sky sported clumps of yellow cloud, the rough walls continued to infinity.

The breeze whispered his name continuously.

How long had it been since he had teleported to this battle barge of impossibilities? Hours? Days? He no longer knew. Wings trailing through the black ash and generating a cloud of black dust in his trail, he wondered at the fate of Terra. Had the Emperor met Horus? Had there been a final resolution?

Or was all that –all that he recalled of his life– an insane dream?

No! No! This was the insanity! This narrow land of forever! I must reach the bridge.

He laboured on beneath the unchanging sky. He became hungry, but there was no food to be had. He became thirsty, but his armour’s water reservoirs had long since been drunk dry. So, belly rumbling, tongue sealed to the roof of his mouth, he continued to follow each plodding step with another, eyes fixed at maximum magnification upon a horizon that had no business being so far away.

Days crawled by. He no longer felt hunger or thirst, only exhaustion. He no longer recalled the glories, tragedies and betrayals of the past, only this interminable Narrow Land. He slumped inside his armour, having long ago ordered it to autonomous perambulation.

His only concern now was that the voice continued to whisper his name, lest he forget who he was.

Years passed. He was dead now – a desiccated corpse rattling around in his power armour, his once-resplendent wings now nothing more than long honeycombed bones tapping against his fauld with every step.

No. That leather-wrapped skeleton was no longer him – it was simply

his old housing. The power armour itself was now his body, his consciousness having seeped into its circuitry. His utter determination to reach his goal had enabled him to transcend death itself, and fuelled this interminable journey.

I have become a dreadnaught. I am no longer in the machine, but of it.

Decades became centuries. Though the breeze still whispered his name, he no longer listened. He no longer recalled his purpose. He only knew that if he ceased his march he would be nothing, for there was, quite simply, no other reason for his existence. There was no destination, there was only the traversal of this Narrow Land.

So when the end came in the form of an ornate iron bulkhead door, he tried to walk through it for a week before his mind registered the obstruction and suggested he did... Actually...
Stop.

The strangely un-weathered iron sported two embossed, intricately detailed panels. The left-hand depicted a young mother sat in a cluttered parlour nursing her infant. The baby's face was hidden, but the mother smiled contentedly. The right-hand picture was the same, save that the baby was revealed in nauseatingly-meticulous cross-section, allowing a view of the mother's monstrously elongated nipple puncturing trachea and tiny heart, its vicious little terminating mouth sucking with evident gusto.

Transition.

Lyvinche looked up. The forced-march had reached the end of the towers, domes, and weapon-emplacements. Before them a metal plain stretched to a disturbingly close horizon glowing with the promise of a white sunrise. *A promise it can never deliver – that's the main drive, fool.*

Ambient light grew gradually dimmer as they left the buildings' shelter and the illumination cast from the myriads of coloured windows. Behind one strip of bottle-green glass he noticed the

attention of an old hag, waving ceaselessly, even mindlessly, at the passing marines, as if they were on parade. The sergeant's voice crackled over the vox, "Ferals, Lyvinche. Ships this big are plagued with 'em. Ignore the witch."

He turned away, but not before witnessing the woman –to all appearances as if she had heard the sergeant's comments– raise her tattered dress' hem in a sickening >>*nauseatingly-meticulous cross-section*<< flash.

He returned his eyes to the horizon... and took note of the forest.

It was only visible as a carpet of darker grey in the gloom, but one that stretched to the limit of his vision, and one that undulated in a breeze that could not exist.

"The captain of this ship keeps a hardy arboretum," he said.

"Hardy indeed to survive the vacuum and radiations of open space, Brother Lyvinche," replied the sergeant. "That is the chaotic manifestation we are to purge. Spread out; prone positions."

Lyvinche's armour forced him abreast with the others, then down flat to the metal skin of the mighty ship. His HUD adjusted to the lack of light, magnified what he saw.

Every "tree" was a perfect copy of its neighbour: set five meters apart, each was ten meters high and a study in symmetry and regularity. A perfectly cylindrical trunk reared to split into two slightly smaller branches, which split into two more, and split again... and again... continuing into a haze of minute twigs. Lyvinche suspected even these divided beyond the limit of his helmet's magnification to see.

>>*Mandelbrot trees.*<<

That voice again. He looked to the fathomless sky, expecting to see sulphurous clouds – but there were none. He shook his head, as if to clear it, and returned his augmented gaze to the target. Approximately fifty meters from the tree-line was the wreckage of two armoured servitors, their upper torsos nothing but a mangled mess of cybernetics and scorched flesh. Evidently this forest hid violent –and heavily armed– dryads.

Dryads? What in the Emperor's name were dryads?

The sergeant spoke up. "Our mission is to ascertain and remove the threat of whatever destroyed those servitors; then I will summon support from the *Flagellant* and have that forest or whatever-it-is raised to the hull."

"Won't that harm the ship?" asked Lyvinch.

"From what I've heard, Brother, she'll revel in it. Now spread out, ten meters abreast. Advance in regular time."

A voice spoke over the vox, one unfamiliar to Lyvinch but nevertheless hauntingly reminiscent of... Well, *him*: "Ware you those trees, Brothers. Their branches pin-prick the very fabric of the Materium, piercing into its detested obverse."

"Thankyou, Primarch, we will," said the sergeant. A private channel opened to Lyvinche's vox, "Sometimes they become aware of their actual surroundings, if rarely aware of their actual *self*."

"Do I pass such comments when I'm... elsewhere?"

"You have made none yet, Brother. We move out."

Lyvinche's armour forced him to stand. In perfect synchronisation, the Death Company spread out to form a line sixty meters long, before commencing a steady advance on the enigmatic forest.

Soon they reached the wreckage of the two servitors. The sergeant forced a halt. Lyvinche scanned the tree-line for any signs of activity, but, except for a slight, vibration of the trees themselves, there was none. Even as he watched, the vibration intensified and the trees began to sway, as if assaulted by strong winds.

"I sense an imminence, Brothers. Ready your boltguns for the foetid breath and gnashing teeth of Chaos is ready for us."

We would dearly love to comply, My Primarch, but we await our sergeant's convenience. "Perhaps now would be a good time to relinquish our armour, Brother Sergeant."

"Not yet, I see no foe to fight – unless you would have us waste holy bolts shooting at trees. The advance continues."

They resumed their march. The agitation of the trees increased, until they lurched about as if a veritable hurricane beat at them.

"Brother Sergeant, I have a concern: what if you were to die without returning us control of our armour?"

The trees had begun to glow; pulsing with a colour Lyvinch had never seen before and could not describe – a colour than left him nauseous. "Do not worry – in such cases control is automatically returned."

The pulsing ab-light intensified. Directly before the advancing force seven of the trunks commenced to split from root to branch.

The sergeant began to fumble at the large metal case he carried. From within he pulled the gratifying form of an un-activated power-sword. Expertly he tossed it, arching it high over the line of Marines to the farthest, whose right arm automatically rose to catch. Five times he repeated the procedure, before arming himself similarly and discarding the case.

Lyvinche looked down at his own sword. He was glad to carry the weapon, even if he couldn't yet command it. However, they were still some distance from the tree-line, and the unspeakable glow from the seven split trees was continuing to intensify. He itched to unholster the boltgun at his hip.

"Brother Sergeant, I will be insane in two fashions if you do not *give me control of my Emperor-Forsaken armour!*"

"Yes. You are right. The time is now... It is done."

Restrictions on Lyvinche's HUD suddenly flashed from red to green and were gone. He almost stumbled as command of his armour was returned. *Finaly*, he thought, as his gauntleted left hand –of his *own* volition– closed around the butt of his boltgun and drew it from its holster with well-practiced ambidexterity.

He flourished both weapons high as a manic glee at his freedom coursed through him. He was Blood Angel, and battle was nigh. What was more, he was about to meet it as Gregol Lyvinche, and not...

Not...

No.

Transition.

Sergeant Proppul Kleige watched his charges' quickly explore their new-found freedom of movement, thrusting their power-swords and flourishing their boltguns. He grinned as he felt a righteous battle-lust overwhelm him – his own watered-down version of the Death

Company's curse. A vision of the last moments of *Sanquinius's Will*, aflame and broken, filled his mind, fuelled his desire for revenge against any manifestation of Chaos.

The ab-colour's pulsing abruptly ceased. The slits in the weird trees snapped shut. The whole forest was still as if finally succumbing to the actuality of the airless, frozen void.

Standing before the tree-line in direct counterpart to the Death Guard (as if about to perform some grotesque dance), were seven marines. Each was armed with boltgun and power-sword, and each armoured in the simple, un-adorned style favoured by the majority of Blood Angels – save that their armour was of the same impossible colour as the trees' recent emanations.

"We face an interpretation of ourselves, Brothers. Our reflections in the mirror of the Immaterium."

Kleige's HUD informed him that Greggol Lyvinche had spoken, but he knew Lyvinche's consciousness had not uttered those words. "Then let's see, Lord Primarch, if they are as brittle as glass." He raised his boltgun and fired directly at his counterpart.

With the slightest tilt of his arm he adjusted the angle of the ancient weapon, spreading bolts over an area just wider than his enemy and thus almost assuring a hit. But the other was wise to that, and, almost before Kleige had pressed his trigger, had dove forwards to the ground, firing its own gun.

An unseen shower of bolts whipped into Kleige. Ventail, breastplate, and fauld registered hits, lighting up yellow on his HUD. The multiple impacts knocked him backwards, spraying bolts at the impassive blackness of extra-galactic space. There were no penetrations – the range was too far for that. *Nevertheless, Round One to the Tree Marines.*

Over the vox he heard the distinctive muffled *whumpf!* Of his comrades' boltguns as heard/ felt through their own armour. He quickly assayed their positions. They seemed to be faring much better than he. Each had squared off against one of the Tree Marines (as he had decided to call them), steadily advancing and laying down a regular shower of bolts as they did. *Their* counterparts seemed

unsure of their retaliation, sporadically returning fire both badly timed and aimed. As he watched, he saw one of them fall – forced backwards in an almost graceful arc as bolts powered into its strangely-coloured armour. As soon as it hit the ground it rose again, but now seemed almost panicked in its retaliation. *Emperor be praised*, he thought sardonically, *I get the one possessed of all the ability.*

Something plucked at his mind – he looked up. At the apex of a powered leap taking it far above hull of the ship and surely to the very brink of escape velocity, was his "own" Tree Marine. Its boltgun blazed, and Kleige felt a worryingly-heavy line of impacts thunder home from foot to helm. His HUD armour-depiction flared a bruised purple. *Emperor's Balls! That volley was perfect!*

He rolled to the side, only to feel more impacts ring waist and thighs as he did. The purple on his HUD began to darken to red. *Very well. Enough of this rolling about – hardly becoming of a Blood Angel.*

He powered to his feet, then into the void, his own weapon blazing... But again he felt that peculiar plucking at his mind, and his enemy anticipated his manoeuvre – Kleige shot once more upon void. The other, employing the recoil of its boltgun, had adjusted trajectory, and was even now returning fire with continued, and terrifying, accuracy.

More bolts thundered home, slamming Kleige backwards like a rag in a gust of wind. He felt pressure at various places on his armour where it had actually been indented, and his HUD depiction was now blotchy red in a dozen locations.

With agonising slowness he descended back to the ship's hull, skidding many meters before his armour's magnetics bit. What was going on? Another rapid check on his wards revealed they were almost at the tree-line, opponents now unseen beyond it. No, wait, one of the Tree Marines lay dead, its decapitated head some distance from its body. *The battle is theirs; taken with ease. What in the Emperor's name is going on with mine?!*

Kleige suddenly realised there had been no more boltgun fire. Where was his opponent?

A shadow loomed above him, preceded by the eldritch glow of an ignited power-sword. He lay prone, staring at the swirling ab-colour patterns the Tree Marine's armour exhibited close up. Instinctively he ignited his own blade, raising it just in time to parry the other's downward swing. White and ab-colour blazed as the blades met. Kleige attempted a return stroke – to have it parried with ease. Another thrust, and the other's blade cut into his greave. A klaxon he had never heard before suddenly sounded in his armour. He felt the bite of utter cold before knee-sphincters closed off the lower part of his leg to maintain armour integrity. Rapidly-applied local anaesthetics deadened blossoming pain. He tried another backhanded swipe, desperate to score a hit on his seemingly prescient opponent. Again, he was parried. He raised his boltgun, but before he could even depress its stud the other's power-sword swept out... and he watched his right hand, still gripping the boltgun, sail away from his field of view.

Two more sphincters irised closed at wrist and couter. Cauterising and anaesthetising gel flooded the compartment about his fore-arm. Frantically he thrust upwards again, intent on splitting the other from groin to helm... But only saw his other hand sail away, the power-sword –tiny machine spirit aware that it was now without a master– shutting off the flow of energy to the blade.

He had lost. And now, in a sudden moment of clarity, he knew why. Those "plucks" at his mind? He had been read by the other as if he were a book. The Tree Marine always knew what his intentions and acted accordingly. The Death Guard's opponents doubtless possessed the same abilities, but how could they predict the actions of madmen?

He gazed up as the other stepped forwards, raising its power-sword for the *coup de grâce*. Mustering his dignity, Kleige awaited the killing stroke.

Another shadow swept from the side. The Tree Marine turned, desperately parrying a rain of thrusts and swipes from –
"You will not take my Brother, Daemon!"

Matt black armour was a blur before the Tree Marine's ab-colour – defence was impossible. Limbs were scattered. The torso diced.

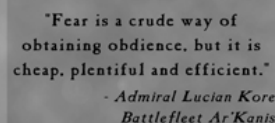
Finally the head dropped to the ship's hull, skittered a couple of meters, lay still. There was no blood – of any colour. Kleige watched the swirling patterns fade from the helm to leave only a dull metallic sheen. He looked up at his saviour, whose pauldon-markings revealed him as Greggol Lyvinche.

"Emperor thank you, Lyvinche. Emperor thank you."

The others reply was quizzical as he helped Kleige to his feet. "Lyvinche, Brother? I know no such Marine. You are confused. Stay here, await the Apothacaries. I have business within yonder forest."

Kleige watched the other power away. Just before he passed through the tree-line, Kleige could have sworn he saw crimson wings unfurl majestically from his broad back.

But perhaps it was only the side-effects of his armour's medicine.



"Fear is a crude way of
obtaining obdience, but it is
cheap, plentiful and efficient."
- Admiral Lucian Kore
Battlefleet Ar'Kanis



The Pure and the True

Chapter III – Angel of Punishment

Chief Engineer Nol Vench strode onto the *Penitenziagite's* bridge, tool belt clanking softly in the sudden silence his appearance generated. Of course, no part of the immense battleship was ever truly silent, but background hum didn't count. He had heard muffled discussion as he traversed the darkwood-panelled access corridor, discerned dialogue as the bridge's thick blast doors curtained open:

'... Emperor knows where the Marines are now, Commander. The *Flagellant* didn't have time to trace them – Sergeant Kleige's injuries demanded immediate attention.'

'Wherever they are, Captain, they've quelled the infestation – there're no more reports of eeriness from the bulkheads.'

“Quelled” doesn't mean “eradicated.” This was murmured in an almost sulky fashion.

'Thank you, Book, we are well aware of that. Perhaps –'

Which was when Vench's arrival silenced them.

He ignored their stares and continued to station. Commander Thorn was in his seat, temporary cover while Vench had... while...

'Chief Engineer Vench, re-assuming station, sir.'

The large commander looked up, then pointedly towards the captain's chair. Vench stared fixedly ahead, avoiding eye-contact.

'Chief, shouldn't you be in the engine chambers? I told you to take stock –'

Vench could not meet his captain's gaze, either. 'I can conduct *servitors* from up here, Sir.' *It's actual living people that need personal direction. But I've none of those left.*

Silence momentarily resumed. Vench knew what Captain Chanj was thinking, *Couldn't handle it. Couldn't bear to scrape 'em off...*

'Do you have a damage assessment, Chief?'

'Extensive, Captain. More than that it's too early to tell. If I could just get to my station, I can proceed with things. Sir.'

His manner bordered on insolence, but he knew Chanj would let it go

uncommented. '*Under the circumstances, eh, Captain?*

'Very well. Resume station, Chief. Commander, please return to your own post.'

With east grace and an appraising glance at Vench, Commander Thorn stood and vacated the chief engineer's chair. Studiously ignoring his fellows, Vench sat and initiated the remote feeds and link-ups necessary to oversee matters in the engine chambers.

For a few minutes he managed methodical work, his various screens and projections carefully switched to display the views and status of only those servitors detailed to assessment and repair. The destruction caused by Penny's panicked overloading of the engines, on top of the recent battle-damage, was indeed extensive. Whole induction coils had melted into slag; projection corridors were buckled, sometimes even kinked; superconductors had spun themselves into implosion. And shielding, both physical and field, had ruptured in countless areas, allowing the wildly varying –and, given the very nature of the immaterium, mainly unclassifiable– radiations emitted by stressed warp engines to bathe the engine chambers. Those working there had not had a chance.

Overcoming his fervent efforts to banish them, the images slowly seeped back into his mind, floating in the gap between his eyes and the screens.

Almost all of his engineering team had been at their posts when the rupture occurred, and the various manners of their deaths could almost be viewed imaginative. Internal organs were boiled without external change, save for the smears of hot pink liquid at every orifice. Skin was instantly flayed or slowly crisped. Perfectly circular, instantly cauterised holes of varying diameter peppered or sliced. Bones heated to such degrees they burnt through the bodies they supported, leaving smoking bags of humanity.

A few corpses seemed to have instantaneously aged a hundred years

– nothing but skeleton and desiccated skin. All that remained of one particular crew-member was a greasy shadow on a bulkhead – vaporised by some exotic beam.

The young choir's demise, however, proved the most unsettling. Pict playback had shown them singing fit to wake the Emperor in order to calm the drive's machine spirit – which only added to the impression of conscious malignity behind the manner of their deaths. The youngsters' eyes and most of their cerebella had been melted, almost as if –for an instant– they had been subjected to visions too unbearable to be organically borne. The rest of their bodies remained untouched.

And the stench. Roasted meat. Boiled meat. Freshly sliced meat. Vench could smell it again now, sickened anew by the recalled instinctive reaction of his saliva glands.

Which began to water once more.

Appalled at his body's beast-like betrayal, he systematically, silently, began to smash his forehead into the station's displays; continuing until he was wrestled to the glass-strewn deck by Commander Thorn.

#

The Chaotic entity fled, cursing the needs that had recently forced it from its home.

It had been so lonely, so *hungry*; and, suffering that way for eons beyond its ability to count, such a titbit as the human battleship was never going to be willingly relinquished.

It had felt the terror of the thousands of souls within the vessel, and it yearned to overcome and possess them, to achieve physicality through their flesh and bone... twist them to its pleasures and whims.

And so it had *gripped* and *squeezed*. But shielding, the residual echo of certain blessings and wards, plus a sudden unexpected surge of power from the engines, had made the ship slippery. The entity was unable to prevent its passage into the materium.

But that was not reason enough to give up on its prey – its lusts were far too great for that.

It had allowed itself to be dragged with the ship.

It sought, and quickly found, a tear in the vessel's shielding and slipped through. Secure upon the hull, it grew the forest to tap its

native warp and regain some of the strength lost with its isolation – each infinitely-fine branch-tip piercing the interdimensional barriers to suck chaotic energy at source.

However, the human's response to its presence had been quicker than it would have liked. First they sent automatons, which were easily dealt with. But these were followed by warriors of greater stature and ability, the Space Marines.

Though its powers were still relatively minor, and the Space Marines' prowess legend even this far from the galactic borders, the entity nevertheless believed itself much more than a match for the seven humans – no matter their augmentations. It humoured itself by creating similar champions, each capable of reading the mind of its enemy. Confident of victory, it had spurred the Chaotic copies forwards...

...Into rapid defeat.

The irony was not lost on the entity that creations of Chaos could not counter the madness saturating all but one of its opponents' consciousnesses. The Marines warred within their own craniums! How could the entity or its little force hope to predict the actions of those who did not know themselves what they were going to do? Or who seemed to be nothing but puppets for a greater, shadowy force beyond the entity's powers to properly discern?

And now, champions dead, the entity was pursued through its own forest – the insane Space Marines' blazing power-swords slicing its elegant trees, cutting its conduits to the imaterium.

Where could it go? It hadn't strength enough to possess a single human any more, let alone the battleship's whole crew. Too weak, also, to part the barriers between dimensions – the remaining trees could not supply the required power. It wanted to hide from its hunters, and from this universe of hated *order* suddenly pressing down upon it, crushing it.

But what was this? A node – an entrance to a further realm contained within the materium. A realm of order, yes, but one governed by numbers and pulses of electricity at the tiniest levels. A very *simple* realm.

And there was a presence here, too. Incorporeal like the entity. Fettered by chains of logic and math to the rule of humans. Fettered... and loving it.

#

Nol Vench's knew he shouldn't have awakened. He could feel the last vestiges of soporifics slipping from his mind, but something suggested they weren't doing so naturally. Similar re-awakenings had always left him feeling groggy, as if hung over after too much amasec. This time he was almost *too* awake: a peculiar mental buzz that stopped short of sounding in his ears, a sort of hyper-awareness of his awake-state, permeated the chief's consciousness. He had been given something to counter an induced slumber. His head felt warm, his forehead suddenly began to sting sharply.

A girl spoke: 'I think I calculated the dosage correctly. The anaesthetic shouldn't be compromised, but there might be a little returning pain. Still, don't they say it's pain that makes us aware of life?'

He didn't recognise the voice, but a somewhat familiar muffled bleeping coupled with an almost nasal-searing smell of disinfectant, told him he was in the *Penitenziagite's* hospital. Expecting the painfully bright light his glowing orange eyelids warned him of, Vench slowly opened his eyes.

For a moment he thought himself squinting up at a cloud-pocked, blue summer's sky, across which beautiful angels cavorted and caroused, their pleasures fuelled from golden goblets. The impression was shattered, however, when he discerned the deep cracks crazing the scene, not to mention the rusting ducting quartering it. He was looking at a ceiling fresco of one the hospital's private chambers.

An adjustable lumen hung before his prone form, its glare, though not shining directly into his eyes, nevertheless obscuring much of the room. He knew from past experience, however, that there was little to see. White-tiled porcelain walls, racks, shelves, and cupboards. Various medical devices.

To his left stood an attendant servitor – a cluster of ornate metal arms terminating in delicate hands, pincers, or other, less definable instruments Vench did not want to think further upon. Only the stitched-shut eyes of the human head surmounting it were visible, the rest almost comically obscured by a nurse's mask and bonnet. Why wasn't the servitor checking its patient? It should have come

forwards by now to see what had roused him, or at least be commenting on his state in the dead voice all servitors employ. Instead it ignored him, inner mechanisms clicking quietly.

'Don't be concerned – M632S is in temporary quiescence. I didn't want it fussing while we... talked.'

The girl was sitting at the foot of his bed, the details of her form invisible beyond the glare of the adjustable lumen. At first he thought her a young nurse, but what he could see of her clothing had more in common with a patient – an ivory gown, possibly stained.

'Can you move yet? No? Don't worry; you will be able to, soon. I *want* you to be able to move, Nol. Is the light in your eyes? Forgive me for not adjusting it. Not yet.' Then, brightly, like some nauseatingly-cheerful doctor, she asked, 'How are we today, then?'

Vench's body felt numb. It was as if his neck had been grafted to a thing of solid lead, immobile, dead. Only head movement was possible.

'Who –' he coughed. The girl tutted with concern. Though he couldn't feel it, Vench could just discern her hand stroking his shin through the bed's thin blanket.

'Would you like M632S to give you some water? Clear your throat?'

As if the girl had commanded it, the servitor suddenly jerked forwards, a plastic tube extruding from the end of an arm, dripping clear fluid.

Vench shook his head and coughed again. 'Who are you?'

The servitor reversed back into place. The girl's hand moved farther up Vench's leg, massaging his knee. Was there a tingle of returning sensation?

'Aww, can't you figure it out, Nol? It's not hard.' She leaned forwards slightly, hand moving higher, rubbing his thigh. 'Is it?' He saw stains on the cuffs of her gown, dark browns and reds. The skin of her hand was clearly visible now – a very sickly-looking grey, seemingly encased in a mesh glove. And it continued to move up his leg.

'Don't touch me.'

The girl sat up, dragging her hand lingeringly back down until it was again obscured by the cone of light. 'If you like, Nol.' Her tone was sulky.

'Are you a patient? How did you get in here?' The doors to the private chambers were all security coded.

'Allow a girl her whiles, Nol, please. Am I a patient? I have been, many more times than the apothecarion is aware of. Oh, the *thrill* of the chill scalpel against warm flesh, Nol! *Just* before the cut. Then again, it isn't *all* anticipation, you know...'

She was clearly insane, escaped from the hospital's small sanatorium. There was a cord by his shoulder that would summon an orderly if pulled... but his body was still unresponsive. He could shout, but that might antagonise the girl into Emperor-knew-what actions. *Humour her. Ask her na-*

'Who do you blame, Nol?'

That threw him. 'Blame? For what? Young lady, shouldn't you -'

She tittered, interrupting. '*Young*, Nol? Me? You're quite, *quite* wrong. Still, flattery will get you anywhere you like. Anywhere at *all*.'

In spite of his body's numbness, Nol nevertheless felt a cold shiver shoot down his spine. Who was this girl? *Was* she mad? Definitely. Yet something about her manner, something about this whole situation, hinted at meaning and method to her insanity.

'You loved them, didn't you?'

She knew! 'You perverse bitch! Emperor's balls, to bring *that* up now! Get out! Out!'

In the extremity of his anger, Nol managed to raise his head from the pillow. The girl didn't move, except to place her hand back on his shin and begin to gently stroke it, this time placating. 'It must have been terrible. But, Nol, who do you blame?'

That question again. However, Nol was hardly listening. He could *feel* her hand on his leg. He had *lifted* his head from the pillow. Soon he would be able to pull the summoning cord and get this crazed wench back to her padded cell.

As if sensing his thoughts, the girl squeezed his leg sharply, inducing a wince of pain. Nol could actually hear the smile in her voice as she said, 'Sensation is returning, isn't it? Good. The anticipation's building for me, Nol. But let's get it to fever-pitch - come now, who do you *blame*?'

So many dead. So many youngsters, with so many potentially fine

and proud prospects before them. Killed because Captain Chanj, in his extremity, had relinquished control to a masochistic coward of a ship's avatar - that had panicked in Chaos' embrace and pushed the *Penitenziagite's* engines beyond anything they were designed to handle.

And Nol suddenly realised who sat at the foot of his bed.

'Penny.' The name was his realisation and her answer combined.

The other was silent for a moment, then: 'Well done, Nol.' He could hear the smile in her voice again, as if he were a schoolchild who had performed unexpectedly well. 'But you don't know why I'm here, yet. Do you want to look at me? This is one of my better efforts, I think.' Nol Vench most emphatically *did not* want to look at whatever sat at the foot of his bed - he vividly recalled the sick-grey appearance of the hand on his thigh. But there was nothing he could do to stop the adjustable light from -seemingly of its own volition- angling fully away at last.

A girl's corpse perched at his feet. When it had lived, however long ago that was, it would have been about fifteen. It might even have been pretty, but it was hard for Nol to tell with the stretched, often torn, flesh of its face pulled so tightly over the skull. The eyes were roughly stitched shut (common practice for pre-implantation servitors, eyes being notoriously difficult to keep moist). Full lips, obviously injected with something, contrasted shockingly with the rest of the face, looking bruised and too-soft, amateurishly, even childishly smeared with red paint. It was bald, greying skin on its pate looking greasy in the glare of the newly-adjusted light. Its body was, as Nol had previously guessed, draped in a thin smock stained in shades of brown and yellow and doing little to cover the wasted, desiccated form.

It also did little to disguise the rusted metal frame that provided animation - piercing flesh through bloodless wounds to anchor on bone; little articulated and motorised joints bending stiffened tendons to offer semblance of life.

'You'll have to forgive the rot.' Hinged armatures at the corpse's jaw opened and closed the mouth, hopelessly -almost comically- out of synchronisation with the spoken words. 'Once I take them from the

cryo-stacks, it doesn't take long for natural processes to catch up. Hopefully you can't smell it above the perfume I dabbed here and there, just for you. But, as I said... natural processes... It's apple blossom, in case you wondered. Quite strong, of course – but perhaps the disinfectant in here drowns it. Let me move closer.'

The corpse planted a hand either side of Nol's calves and commenced a slow, deliberate crawl up his body. As it moved, the jaw continued its mechanical snapping – a child's horrific hand puppet. 'You really loved them, didn't you, Nol? Your young team of engineers, mechanics, thurible-swingers. Such senseless deaths. And so many...' Its shrivelled head was almost on a level with Nol's face. He heard tiny wrist and knuckle motors buzz as it placed a hand beside his left ear. '...In one...' The other pressed down above his right shoulder. '...Fell...' It lowered its parchment face. With tiny puffs of flaky skin, collars on the jaw armatures suddenly slid forwards, wrinkling the corpse's cheeks. Nol, in spite of his predicament, found himself almost admiring the engineering – until he realised the collars' purpose: the corpse's roughly-painted lips were pouting forwards to kiss.

'...Swoop.'

A sickeningly strong cloud of apple blossom swept over him. Yet even that was an inadequate screen for the yet-more sickening miasma of rotting internal organs.

Close to vomiting, Nol turned his head to the side. 'No. Please... don't.'

The corpse pulled back slightly. Again sulky, it said, 'You refuse me? But I thought you'd like this body. The age –well, age at time of death at any rate– is about right, isn't it? I've watched you with your team, Nol – the ones who received your *special* attentions were all around fifteen. Why, that last one, that boy, Michael, wasn't –'

And, quite suddenly, Nol Vench knew he could move.

He bucked, all-too aware of the necrophilic appearance of the action, propelling the corpse off the bed.

It whooped with delight even as –with a *crack!* Of bone– it impacted heavily on the ceramic floor.

His mind was lost. He had sought relief from self-injury before, now he sought it through animal rage and violent retribution. He vaulted

from the bed, all traces of the immobilising drug gone, the sudden blazing agony of his head injuries unnoticed.

And now he was on top of *her*. Yes, she was a *her* again. She was Penny. The cowardly, masochistic *bitch* of a battleship. He knew her perversions, knew he was stoking them. But he didn't care. He'd give her what she wanted, because he wanted it, too. At this moment, he wanted it more than anything.

Nol locked his hands together, and began to pummel the deliberate provocation of that swollen, grinning mouth.

#

What vistas! The Chaotic entity never knew such a vast, intricate place existed, disparate from yet dependant upon to the materium it understood. Fundamentally so simple – all Yes and No, Open and Closed, On and Off, Positive and Negative. But the infinitely layered and interconnected combinations of this digital world made for such, well, *infinite* complexity, that the end result was potentially a universe in itself.

And the speed! Unconstrained by the slow perambulations and thought-processes of flesh, here was near-instantaneity! Near-timelessness surpassing even the space-warping inherence of the immaterium. To be able to *accelerate* its thought-processes so!

And, at the binary levels, such blessedly small amounts of power were required for manipulation. There was no need, here, to tap into the powers of the entity's home. It rapidly learned its own inherent energies were enough to format and program, to create utilities and forces with which to conquer and configure.

What need to possess the crew, if it could have the ship itself? Take control of the *Penitenziagite's* systems, servitors, and environments, and the men and women aboard her were as good as possessed! Certainly, they were subject to the entity's whims and lusts.

But there was a hurdle to be overcome before that happy moment: another in this cybernetic world, perhaps as old as the entity itself; vastly more than human and vastly less. And possessed by such desires of pain and servitude the entity almost considered it a kindred spirit.

Would such a spirit stand in the entity's way? Perhaps a compromise could be worked? It would certainly ease matters to have the other – denizen, *queen* of this electronic landscape– as a willing, helpful sister, rather than to have to solve codes and unravel functions itself. Tentatively, then, the entity sent out its programs, offering handshakes and macrotic combinations.

The response was immediate, and almost overwhelming. Anti-virus software surged over the entity's creations, nibbling and biting, seeking ingress and purchase in order to erase and quarantine. Swathes of the entity's programming were lost or corrupted.

Obviously parley and willing integration were out of the equation. Swiftly, the entity withdrew its forces within the node through which it had entered the electronic realm. Briefly, it manifested in order to open data and power circuits – isolating itself from further attack.

Then it began to augment and arm its programs, aggressively equipping them for new roles.

At last satisfied, it closed the circuits and launched the warrior programs back into *Penitenziagite's* networks.

Its forces were vastly outnumbered by the queen's, but their tactic was not to immediately conquer. They actively permitted victory, letting their enemy in. Retreated, allowed lines of code to be lost and subjugated... before spiking sleeper traitor programs into their foe to overwhelm and enslave, turning enemy to ally and increasing the entity's cybernetic might. By the time the queen managed to counter this insidious onslaught, the two forces were matched, and open war commenced.

For full seconds, the two armies fought – sallying and feinting, charging and retreating. Virtual space was won and lost, won back and lost again. Tactics changed, programs evolved... but neither side ever gained worthwhile advantage.

In simple Brute Strength, we are equals, the entity thought. *Yet perhaps I am master of the Underhand.*

It compiled assassin programs, infiltrating them through the battlefields and deep into enemy territory. Disguised as simple utilities, they commenced a system of sabotage that brought the queen's war machine to its knees. Her frontline support consequently weakening, the entity ordered all its forces forwards in all-or-nothing invasion.

Success! The queen's forces fell to the side, retreating, surrendering, allowing the entity's army to march freely to their primary target where it coruscated with the virtual light of a billion programs and routines – the *Penitenziagite's* hub. The queen actual.

Shouting its victorious glee, the entity commenced its final push.

But what was this? It had been so focused on the queen that the entity hadn't registered the threat at its own door! Even as its programs pierced the hub, rewriting and deleting, so similar programs had breached its own walls.

Desperately, the entity moved to again isolate itself in its node...

And then no longer felt the need.

As the two opposing consciousnesses contemporaneously fell to the other, so a merging began.

And a wholly new mind was born in the digital environs of the *Penitenziagite*.

#

He woke back in bed, reassuringly *with* the groggy after-effects of failing soporifics. Slowly he sat up, rubbing at the bandage about his head. With a click and a whirr, the attending servitor slid to his side, fussing.

Exactly as I should have woken before.

He looked about the room. There was no trace of the dead girl. Where the ceramic floor had been splashed with clotty blood, it now gleamed. Momentarily, he entertained the notion he had suffered a stress-and-drug-induced nightmare. But the cuts, bruises, and accompanying pain of his knuckles quickly negated such thoughts. Moreover, Nol Vench felt *purged*.

Even after the girl's mouth was destroyed, leaving her capable of little more than wet gurgles, Penny had continued to taunt him from the room's vox-box. She had forced him to dwell and dwell and *dwell* on the deaths of his 'boys and girls,' and her part in them. Consequently, he had beaten the ancient teenager until he no longer possessed the strength to raise his fists; screaming, at the last babbling, his rage and revenge.

But reducing the dead girl's face to a red, glistening mass of thick

blood, stringy mucous, and bone, had eased something within him to the point where he felt almost thankful to Penny. Forgiveness was impossible, of course, and he was well aware her motives had not been entirely selfless – nevertheless, he understood, and couldn't help but appreciate, the gesture.

What it said about the darker side of his nature, Nol did not care to dwell upon.

He must speak with Chanj, explain and apologise for his behaviour. Vench was sure he would have little hardship in convincing the captain to authorise his reinstatement, even after such a short interval. The ship's predicament meant he would be desperately needed at station – a situation surely outweighing the pursuance of the protracted procedures usually instigated after an officer's breakdown.

Return to the engine chambers, however, was another matter entirely. He was not ready for that.

Something tapped gently at the door.

Wishing an exhibition of returned health, and signalling back the over-attentive servitor, Vench walked to the door and opened it.

He had expected an orderly or perhaps one of the few fully human nurses aboard. But standing before him, cloaked and hooded in black, was what seemed to be a small priest.

Without speaking, the figure stepped forwards, forcing Vench back to avoid collision.

'Holy Father,' said Vench, laughing somewhat nervously, 'I think you have the wrong room...'

The door swung closed. The medical servitor in the corner uttered a series of rapid beeps Vench recognised with further unease: off-line.

With a whisper of sackcloth, the figure's cloak fell to the floor.

The dead girl had returned.

Her face was still the smashed ruin of recent memory, but the rest of her had changed. Gone was the stained hospital gown, replaced now with a figure-hugging feline-suit of badly-cured black leather accentuating both the girl's curves and the metal frame that moved her. Gone, too, was the overpowering scent of apple blossom – the stench of advanced putrefaction filled the small room like an

explosion of poison and induced helpless vomiting in Vench. And there were further additions: the fingers of her left hand were sheathed with ornate silver claws that glittered in the room's bright light. Her other hand gripped a coiled whip.

Strength suddenly left Vench's legs, indeed his whole body. He collapsed to a sitting position on the bed, hands still ineffectively trying to dam the emetic spurts from his mouth. This was not like before. There was a new *air* to the girl, of power and malicious intent – and Vench felt as nothing before it.

He watched her face twitch, tiny metal armatures tugging at bared muscles and shredded lips. In horror, he realised she was trying to smile.

Her voice, brimming with sadistic glee, whispered from the vox-box.

'Hello, Nol. Weren't expecting to see me again, were you? There've been a few changes, Nol – I'm not the girl I was before. I've come for my reach-around.'

#

[Do you hear?]

[I hear. Speak.]

[Cauterisation of the Seethe break-through will require a great expenditure of the *energies*. The action will be noticed.]

[Is the action absolutely necessary?]

[Such is the disturbance that a permanent eruption is likely were the action not taken – increasing Seethe influence on our plain.]

[That can not be allowed. You now suggest I awaken?]

[Governance of the Engines and application of the *energies* is not a problem for me. The attention of our masters is. Yes, I suggest you awaken.]

[They are not our masters. Nevertheless, I will awaken. Prepare my chassis.]

Unfortunately this story is far from finished, if you want a follow up I suggest you visit the black library forums where Chun resides. Next issue will feature a story with a real end... ☺

Command and Control

Space Battles

Chronicles

Corsair Eldar versus Space Marines

Roy Amkreutz versus Guy Custers

Introduction

With this we bring you the battle report of a game I(Roy) played against Guy. This battle pits the fast Corsair Eldar against the Space Marines of the Imperium. Noteworthy is that we used the Eldar MMS House Rule set version 1.5 plus the notes in the thread at the www.specialist-games.com forum.

The Space Marine Fleet

After the last two scenarios in which I successfully played with my Space Marines against Tau I really wanted them to try in a real fleet engagement. So much for real as the opponent were the fast and manoeuvrable Eldar. The positive fact was that my Strike Cruisers, Nova's & Gladius escort vessels were fast enough to catch the pointy-eared gits. On the downside I still lacked the models for a fully fledged Space Marine fleet and even had to use two Dauntless Light Cruisers as stand-in (doh!) for two Endeavour class Light Cruisers. Indeed not perfect but with the inclusion of

the Battle Barge and my fast escort vessels I still had some hope, despite the crappy Endeavours.

Master of the Fleet – Guy Custers

The Corsair Eldar Fleet

Well, being one of the main authors of the MMS House Rule set I was very well aware of their strengths and weaknesses. But I certainly did not choose the most effective Corsair fleet. The inclusion of the Void Dragon Class (*Flame of Asuryan model*) was a choice with the heart, I think it is one

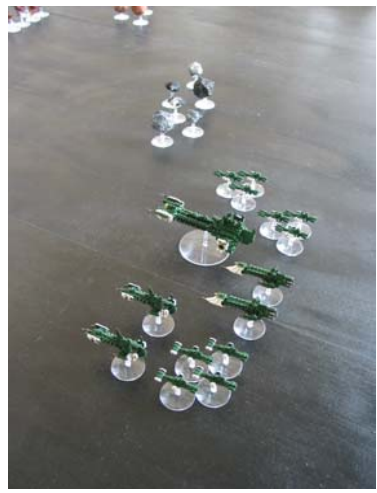
Of the loveliest models in the entire BFG range. Secondly it gave me the opportunity to include Akaeris Starblade as my 'Hero'. He is the personage I use in my Eldar tales. The downside was it cost me 470 points to field the vessel plus Hero.

Next I chose the mighty Void Stalker Battleship; an effective, strong, impressive and expensive vessel. The rest of the points I used to take a fair mix of Nightshade & Hemlock escorts plus two Aconite escort vessel. I decided to mix each on of them in either a two-strong Hemlock squadron or a two-strong Night-shade squadron.

Fleet Admiral – Roy Amkreutz

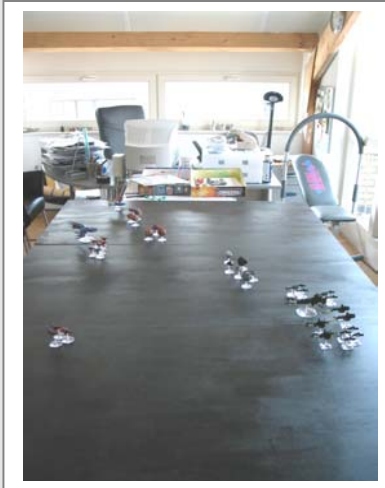
**Dark Angels Fleet List
1500pts**

Master of the Fleet <i>Master Trevis</i> - Ld 10.....	50
Space Marine Battle Barge <i>Ezekiel</i> - Ld 10.....	425
Space Marine Strike Cruisers <i>Corelia</i> - Ld 10.....	145
<i>Rachael</i> - Ld 8.....	145
Imperial Navy Endeavour Light Cruisers <i>Leonid</i> - Ld 8.....	120
<i>Ramilia</i> - Ld 8.....	120
Space Marine Nova Frigates <i>NSQ Alpha</i> - Ld 8.....	150
<i>NSQ Beta</i> - Ld 9.....	150
Space Marine Gladius Frigates <i>GSQ One</i> - Ld 10.....	180



The Tactical Decision

After initial sightings both Admirals ordered their fleet into position, trying to engage the enemy at their own terms. As the fleets got closer both went into a *Wedge* formation; the Space Marines however concentrated their fleet in one point, where as the Eldar spread out. Akaeris seized the initiative from the very first moment they made visual contact with the Space Marine fleet.



Turn One

CE: The Eldar fleet moved quickly towards their left flank. The Void Dragon moved along the edge of the left table half. Escort squadron *Karun Lir* proved a bit to eager to

**Akaeris Starblade's Expediton Fleet
1500pts**

Hero <i>Akaeris Starblade</i> - Ld 10.....	150
Void Dragon <i>Cerulean Twilight</i> - Ld 10.....	320
Void Stalker <i>The Silent Enigma</i> - Ld 9.....	450
Corsair Eldar Escort Squadrons <i>Oriosa Novar</i> - Ld 8.....	135
- 3 Hemlocks	
<i>Bennah Barbarr</i> - Ld 9.....	135
- 3 Nightshades	
<i>Karun Lir</i> - Ld 9.....	150
- 2 Hemlocks / 1 Aconite	
<i>Arith Kian</i> - Ld 10.....	150
- 2 Nightshades / 1 Aconite	



Turn One – Continued

form up with the rest of the fleet and ended in the centre of the field, a quite underestimated move...

SM: Master Trevisse decided to re-take the initiative by going on full ahead with all capital ships, but after the cruisers saw the crew of the Battle Barge fail to execute the orders (*First Leadership test in the battle with a Ld10 vessel: Double Six was rolled!! Which of course caused lots of laughter*). However the Eldar laughter died a little sooner as the Battle Barge successfully destroyed one Hemlock of the *Karun Lir* squadron, even Brace for Impact did not save the little vessel. The Strike Cruisers and the Battle Barge launched all their Thunderhawks.

The Space Marines try to take out the deep strike Eldar escorts.



of the Endeavours. Torpedoes from the Nightshades managed to destroy two Gladius escorts.

SM: Seeing the threat of the closing Eldar escorts Master Trevisse quickly responded and redirected all cruisers & escort squadrons to intercept the aliens; only the Battle Barge stayed on the other side of the asteroid field. In the following shooting phase they successfully wiped out the *Oriosa Novar* squadron but left two escorts of the *Arith Kian* squadron intact, even after Thunderhawks tried to board they did not fail.

In the remaining ordnance phase Eldar fighters fought vicious battles with Thunderhawks allowing the assault boats to dispatch one of the Nova escort vessels.

Turn Two

CE: Having underestimated the speed of the Space Marine fleet Akaeris made an almost fatal error: in order to suppress the enemy he rushed squadrons *Arith Kian* and *Oriosa Novar* deep behind the enemy fleet, behind the asteroid field, just next to the rear part of the Space Marine fleet. Both the Void Dragon and the Void Stalker consolidated on the left flank and launched fighters to deal with the Thunderhawks and assault boats to engage the enemy escort vessels.

Ensuing fire by the deep strike squadrons proved to be very ineffective, even the mighty Pulsar lances failed to damage one

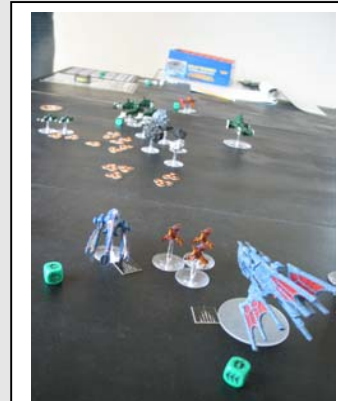
Turn Three

CE: Seeing the loss of all the precious Eldar souls Akaeris sought strength from them

and boldly ordered the *Cerulean Twilight*, the *Silent Enigma* and the *Bennah Barharr* squadron on intercept course towards the exposed Nova squadrons. The combined weapon battery fire, Pulsar fire and lastly assault boats from the Void Dragon cleared all off the *NSQ Alpha* and *NSQ Beta* squadrons.

The remainders of the *Arith Kian* squadron set in for a long run away from the Space Marine vessels.

SM: Seeing his mobile hard-hitting destroyed left a gap in the battle plan of Master Trevisse. But the main two Eldar vessels were no longer hiding. Quickly the Strike Cruisers and Endeavours emerged from behind the asteroid field. The Battle Barge surged forward to the main battle line. The following shooting was less than satisfying as only one Aconite from the *Karun Lir* squadron got destroyed and the Void Stalker only saw its shields knocked down.



The Void Dragon and Void Stalker engage the Space Marine line.

Turn Four

CE: Driven by the success of the previous turn Akaeris pushed his attack forward to engage the Battle Barge, the *Cerulean Twilight* and the *Bennah Barharr* squadron succeeded in inflicting two hits on the largest of the Space Marine vessel, even Brace for Impact did not save them. The last Hemlock of the *Karun Lir* squadron dispatched on e Gladius escort from the *GSQ One* squadron. The mighty Void Stalker inflicted 1 hit on the *Leonid Endeavour* light cruiser and forced one of the Strike Cruisers on Brace for Impact. The rather sneaky *Arith Kian* squadron had more success as they returned and popped up behind the *Ramilia Endeavour*, crippling it and destroying its bridge after some precision fire.

SM: Seeing the Eldar outmanoeuvring his own fleet Master Trevisse made another attempt to rally his fleet together. Both of the Strike Cruisers were ordered to engage the Void Stalker but it was too no avail as the Eldar vessel successfully braced against the Space Marine attacks.

Turn Five

CE: Now Akaeris had the Battle Barge in his grasp he moved the *Cerulean Twilight* onto the tail of the vessel; assisted by the *Karun Lir* Hemlock and the *Bennah Barharr* squadron Akaeris managed to cripple the commanding Space Marine vessel! The Braced Void Stalker managed to further

damage the *Leonid Endeavour*.
SM: Master Trevisse could barely remain in his feet as his *Ezekiel* was being ripped apart by the Eldar; with all its efforts he tried to manoeuvre away from the Eldar, deep within he knew this was without avail as the Eldar were much faster. Even the destruction by him of the last Hemlock and one of the Nightshade escorts did not change his mood.



The Endeavour initiates its ramming attack on the Void Stalker.

Seeing his command vessel in serious trouble the Captain of the *Leonid Endeavour* ordered his ship on a ramming course with the Void Stalker! The subsequent collision was gigantic and fortunate for the *Leonid* as itself received no damage but managed to inflict four hits and two following prow critical hits on the Void Stalker.

Turn Six

CE: After failing to repair its critical hits the *Silent Enigma* used the vicinity of the asteroid field to disengage from the battlefield (which made my opponent call me a 'cowardly pointy eared!' Ha!) The *Void Dragon* remained behind the Battle Barge and inflicted further damage. The total of four vessels from the *Bennah Barharr* and *Arith Kian* squadron crippled the Strike Cruiser *Rachael*. A bomber wing from the *Cerulean Twilight* destroyed the *Leonid* after a failed attempt to Brace for Impact, still reeling from the ramming attack it went through.

SM: The hulk from the *Leonid* slowly drifted away from the battlefield. In order to avenge the destruction of the Endeavour light cruiser the Strike Cruisers and the remaining Gladius frigate furiously attacked the *Void Dragon* but without success.



Hunters being Hunted.

Turn Seven

CE: Akaeris Starblade sensed that victory was only little away and steered the Void Stalker in for a final attack on the Battle Barge. Its Weapon Batteries and Pulsar Lances ripped with ease through the *Ezekiel*, (Note: Guy did not Brace for Impact as he felt that a crippled and Braced Barge had absolutely no worth in the battle.) resulting in a gigantic Plasma Drive Overload explosion. Even this was too much for the *Cerulean Twilight* as it received one hit and another hit from the subsequent damaged superstructure critical hit, luckily this got repaired very swiftly. Meanwhile an assault boat managed to take down the last Gladius frigate. The remaining Nightshades and Aconite vessels inflicted on hit on the *Corelia* Strike Cruiser. **SM:** With their Battle Barge shattered in million of pieces the battle was all but lost. In a last effort the captains of the Strike Cruisers Locked-On to the Void Dragon which had all its shields down. But even now they failed to hit the vessel and the only successful hit was Braced by the Eldar vessel.

Turn Eight

CE: The Nightshades from the *Bennah Barharr* squadron destroyed the *Ramilia* with their venomous torpedoes. Akaeris moved away from the Strike Cruisers to the other side of the nearby asteroid field (funny enough almost in the

same position now where it started the battle).

SM: Seeing that the battle was utterly lost the remaining two Strike Cruisers disengaged from the battle field.



The Hero of the Day – the Cerulean Twilight - goes in for the final attack run on the Ezekiel.

Victory Points

Corsair Eldar : 1247 points

Space Marines : 420 points

The Corsair Eldar win by a large margin.

**Space Marine Afterthought
Guy Custers**

Defeat... good battle though. It is always hard to battle the Eldar, especially an Eldar fleet with a Void Stalker and a Void Dragon included in it... The start of the battle was promising. First

Blood was to the Space Marines! I tried to take out the escorts first and then aim my attention at the big ships. Unfortunately I could not destroy most of them before turn three. The Hero Akaeris Starblade (under direct command from blackhorizon – *heh, me*) sent in both the Void Stalker and Void Dragon and with this destroyed most of my escort vessels. I certainly did not expect to lose all six Nova frigates in one turn but they stood no chance against the overwhelming guns pointed at them; enhanced to the Eldar by good to-hit rolls and bad BFI rolls on my part. At this point I lost all mobility in my fleet

I had only two chances to turn the tide of the battle: One by ramming the Void Stalker, which did result in an almost crippled Eldar ship but I could not damage it further as it successfully disengaged from the battlefield. Second chance was the moment the Void Dragon had its shields down, but that was no success as my to-hit rolls were really bad.

With the fact I already lost my Battle Barge at the last point I ordered the remaining ships to disengage from the battlefield.

Note: The new Eldar MMS version, 1.5, was really good playable and gave a good feel to the Eldar fleet even if I lost them.

**Corsair Eldar Afterthought
Roy 'horizon' Amkreutz**

Victory! Talk about a fast, furious and bloody battle! I had this battle plan in mind but I underestimated the speed of the

Space Marine vessels. In turn two I was too aggressive with my escorts as I tried to force my battle plan, I paid dearly for it as I lost a complete Hemlock squadron, however the surviving Nightshade and Aconite proved to be real stings in the rear of the Space Marine fleet later on. Another positive element was that the deep strike did throw the Space Marine fleet a little out of formation.

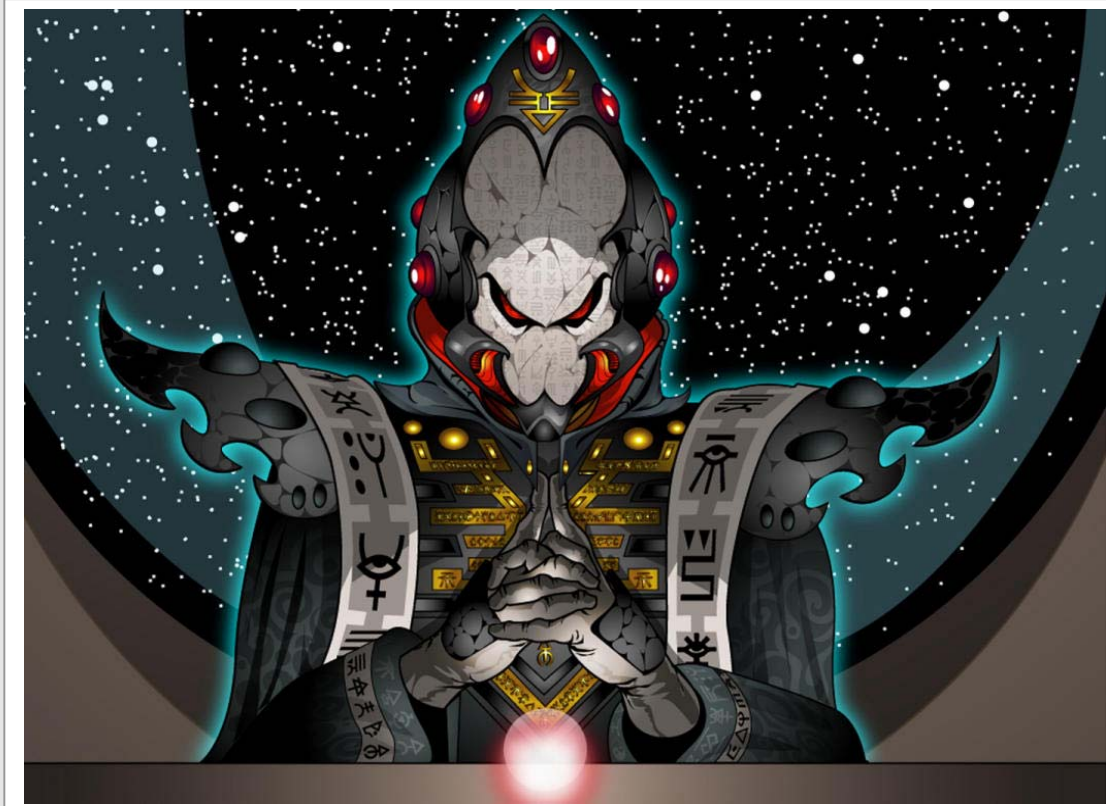
With the combined attack of the Void Dragon and Void Stalker I did retake the initiative. The battle was a stalemate after that. The fact the Void Dragon successfully suppressed the Battle Barge from turn three on was overshadowed by the ramming attack on the Void Stalker, which led me to a necessary disengage order.

Given the lack of success with his Strike Cruisers and the hit and runs all over the field with my escorts plus the one-on-one battle in my favour between the Void Dragon and the Battle Barge made the battle turn rapidly to my side.

In the end the Void Dragon was the real battle winner but the Nightshade torpedoes proved to be really effective once more.

I know his fleet wasn't optimal against Eldar, I think more Strike Cruisers instead of the Battle Barge and the Endeavours swapped as well for escorts would have been much more dangerous to me.

Note: Version 1.5 of MMS indeed played well. The few nitpicks (and others) are being discussed at the Specialist Games forum. Join in if you like!



Officer's Mess

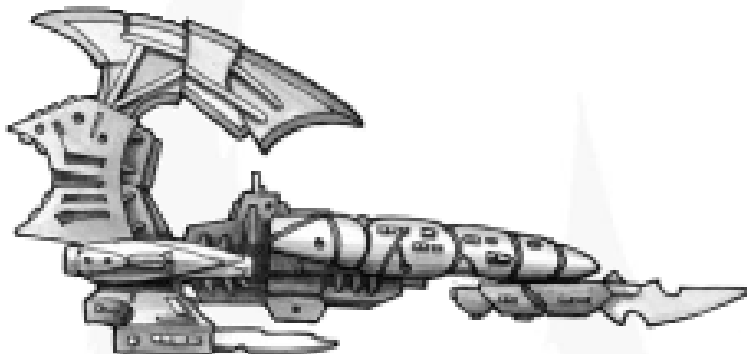
Lounge time

Dark Eldar Corsair Class Escort

Venom

By Zhai Morenn

Race.....: Dark Eldar
 Class.....: Corsair
 Name.....: Venom
 Current commander.....: Auran Stormdancer
 Assigned to fleet.....: currently member of Dream Reavers Kabal
 Colour scheme.....: Metallic black hull, red/ amethyste markings.



Historical: First sighted as part of a small Dark Eldar raiding force preying upon Imperial merchant shipping, this vessel stood out by it's dark form amongst the red slashed vessels with which it flew. Later reports observe this escort being solely responsible for the crippling of the Chaos cruiser *Chorus of Pain* and the destruction of the Imperial Mars class battlecruiser *Farhammer*, both instances due to well placed torpedo strikes to critical locations. In both cases the rest of the ships in this ship's squadron had been destroyed or unable to bring torpedoes to bear. Imperial commanders have noted the ship's favored tactic of using Dark Eldar leech torpedo devices to slow it's prey before moving in for the kill, and with this knowledge it seemed fitting that intelligence indicated the vessel's name in the Eldar tongue meant *Venom*.

Tactica: Corsairs represent a myriad of differently configured ships with different weapon systems as per the choice of their commanders. These escort sized fiends always form the bulk of a Dark Eldar fleet and lack none of the firepower their goodly kin display. On many occasions torpedo armed escorts much akin to *Venom* have stood off at range from their targets, harrassing them with long ranged torpedo salvos untill the enemy were just about to cross into weapons range, at which point the Corsairs will launch fierce assaults upon the target, usually with support of another nearby squadron and frequently to devastating effect. It should be noted that in prolonged engagements, the Dark Eldar torpedoes containing the leech devices are exceedingly effective in dividing formations and creating stragglers in the target fleet.