

WARP RIFT

THE BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC NETZINE



FROM THE NEXUS PUBLISHING HOUSE

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+++ SUBMISSIONS +++

All types of article are desperately needed, to keep this publication alive. In some cases, submission includes inclusion on the web site at: www.epic40k.co.uk, or through www.tacticalwargames.net. Please include a note with your submission if you would like this clarified. Submission via e-mail implies approval for publication.

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+++ CRITICAL HIT! +++

Uh oh, last issue I forgot a very important thank you. I hope this isn't too late and the person in question will appreciate it.

I'd like to express utmost thanks to Aaron Dickey, we mostly know as member Vaaish on the various Battlefleet Gothic forums. He gave me as editor some very extensive feedback on the layout (and such) of Warp Rift. Some ideas I may not have taken at all, some a bit and some almost completely. I think he himself will notice what changes can be more or less related to him.'

Gothicomp 2008 is going full steam and by the time this issue appears online you will be voting on the entries in the Grand Finale. GothiComp2008 has already been a huge success this year. The gallery consists of a wealthy 93 submissions. Check out all entries here:

<http://www.epic40k.co.uk/lib/comp/gothicomp08/index.html>

In this issue's Showcase you will find all submissions which made it to the Grand Final this year plus the ghostly Legion of the Damned fleet.

In this issue you will also find the two submissions we received for the Tau Shadowsun Scenario Competition. Let us and the authors know what you think about them.

Of course there is more but space to type as well!
Enjoy!
Horizon

+++ WARP RIFT BLOG +++

You can check out our blog at the following location:

http://www.players.tacticalwargames.net/tiki-view_blog.php?blogId=10

+++ WARP RIFT FORUM +++

Check out the Warp Rift forum at:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/forums/index.cgi?act=SF;f=89>

+++ WARP RIFT WARMASTER +++

“Greetings admirals out there, I am honoured for the opportunity that Roy and Warp Rift staff have given me to contribute at the expansion of this fantastic webzine. First of all, my goals for Warp Rift are to create a new Battle Report section, where you can read of adventures and wars of others in our magnificent Battlefleet Gothic Universe. Then, we are going to expand the Tactical Center with some *Masterclass* from the brave admirals out there and with deep analysis of manoeuvres. I am glad to serve in the ranks of Warp Rift, and hope that you and the Emperor (or other deity) gonna love my works. See you in Immaterium. Class Dismissed “

Davide 'Kratz' Ferrari

Send your battle reports at:

Davide@epic40k.co.uk

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JOINT OPERATIONS

MULTI-PLAYER GAMES IN BFG – RULES AND TACTICS

BY STEFANO BREVIGLIERI

What's so good about it then?

Almost all of the great naval battles described in the world of Warhammer 40k feature many fleets on each side. At Schindlegeist, the decisive battle of the Gothic war, Eldar and Navy ships formed a temporary alliance to stop Abaddon once and for all; the battle for the Ilithrium Belt was fought by two Navy fleets against the might of the allied Chaos fleets, and the list goes on.

A multi-player game requires some planning and a great deal of free time, for 3,000+ point engagements are likely, but is definitely worth the effort. New tactics to develop, new lists to try out and a lot of bickering among the admirals of the losing faction ... I'm confident all of you will find multi-player games highly rewarding.

How do the rules change from a normal game?

My thoughts on multi-player gaming were sparked off by the latest 40k supplement for big battles, Apocalypse. In that book only minor tweaks are made on the rules, and yet Apocalypse games don't get bogged down by the number of things to do during each turn. In BFG the same thing should happen. Here's a list of suggestions I've made for a multi-player game in BFG, but feel free to change them to your tastes:

- Do NOT get a bigger table, unless you're playing 5,000+ points per side. The harsh truth is that tables bigger than 6'x4' tend to favour those fleets that try and avoid getting stuck in, such as the Navy and Eldar. You don't really want to spend a long time planning what turns out to be a shooting gallery for one of the teams and a hell of an annoyance for the other. A 6'x4' table will make sure everyone has a chance to claim a couple of kills at the end of the match.
- Count both fleets as a single fleet as far as Special Orders are concerned, but each should have its own Fleet commander, i.e. if a ship from Fleet A fails a Command Check, no other ship, including those from Fleet B, can attempt to go under Special Orders, but that ship can only use a re-roll from its own Fleet commander, not Fleet B's. This prevents people from allying with Orks to get "re-roll reservoirs" and ensures the game is decided by clever manoeuvring and firing, rather than one trick ponies powered by lots of Special Orders.
- By the same token, capital ships from different fleets shouldn't be able to squadron together or mass turrets. Fighters launched by a fleet should still be able to protect the other fleet, and boarding torpedoes should ignore the allied fleet's ships as they do with their own.

- When using alternate deployment, instead of placing one ship/squadron have all the players in the team do so, to make sure small, elite fleets aren't forced to lay down their cards too early when facing allied "hordes" (Tyranids come to mind).

- As for the rest, the battle should work pretty much in the same way as a 1 on 1 game. Although some people might think it would be more fun to forbid players to give advice to their allies, we all know that "advice" in this case would be something more like "send your escorts in a suicide run at that battleship or it'll break through my line!" than genuine tactical wisdom, so let them speak if they want to!



What to field

As long as the point total is the same for both factions, the fleets forming the opposing teams don't have to be equally sized. In a 3,000 point game, if Team A comes with two 1,500 point Navy lists, while their opponents field a 2,000 point Chaos fleet and a 1,000 point Dark Eldar one, it's not much of a problem really.

The real decision comes next: do you both pick the same fleet or choose 2 different forces to face the enemy, provided the figures are available? Each choice has its upsides and downsides.

If you go for a "single fleet" approach, your tactics will be very similar and most of your vessels will work together to win the game. What's more, if you can't take everything you want you can ask your team mate to do so. An Armageddon and Gothic fleet alliance is a perfect example of cooperation: the Armageddon fleet brings in multiple Mars battlecruisers, the Gothic fleet has the Swords and Dauntlesses to deal with faster opponents.

If you go for the "two fleets" approach, you have to be more careful. One might think taking Dark Eldar allies for a Tau fleet (pah! These Kor'Os must be gullible guys indeed!) is a really good bet for their extra speed... then as soon as the battle commences, the nasty pointy ears are already hurtling towards the enemy line, facing a fleet twice their size, while the Explorers and Merchants slowly crawl across the table. It is essential, then, that players fielding forces from different lists think very carefully of what their respective weak spots are and what the other fleet can do to help them. For instance, Ork carriers are very poor, while Chaos Devastations are among the best carriers there are, so if the Chaos player went ordnance-heavy the Ork one could do without it altogether.



Forces of Order

As far as I'm concerned you may well want to field Tyranids with Space Marines, but for the purposes of this article I'll stick to the more conventional (and likely) alliances.

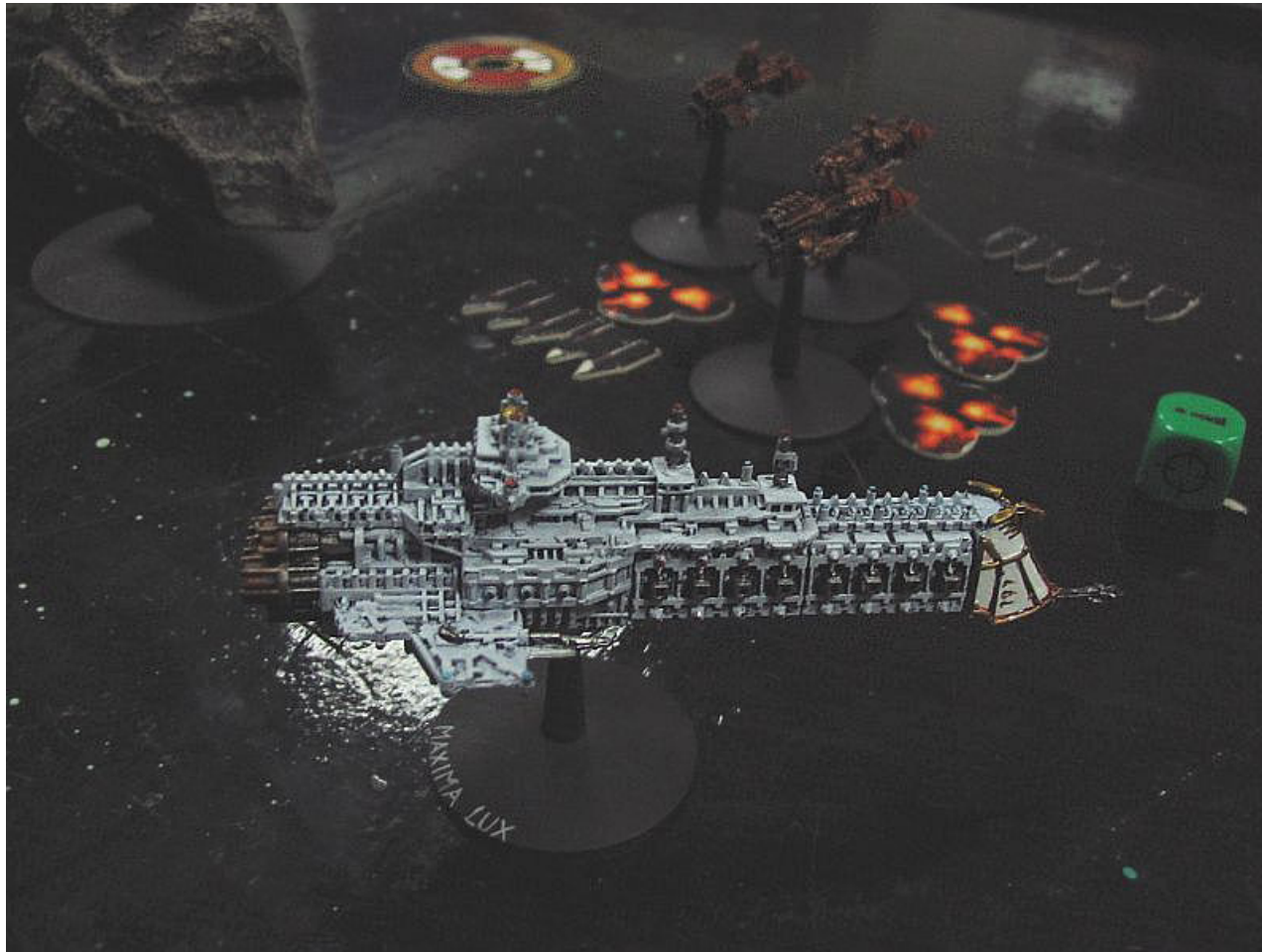
Space Marine, Adeptus Mechanicus, Tau (don't flay me for having put them in the Order list, please!) and Navy fleets really work well in a joint operation. Their speed values are rather similar, ranging from 20 to 25 for most vessels, and they fulfil different tactical roles. The Navy provides the team with Nova cannon-armed ships, cheap escorts, strong cruiser squadrons and lots of torpedo markers. The Tau give impressive ordnance coverage and

their Heroes can be used in a "steamroller" tactic alongside Navy ships. A couple of Orca squadrons would make a very fine, and cheap, addition to Space Marine fleets due to their appalling lack of lances, while Space Marine escorts are fast and shooty enough to deal with anything that gets close to the Explorers; on the contrary, Defenders become rather redundant if your team mate can field Cobras or Hunters, so see less of those. Space Marines can focus on Battle Barges and escorts in such a game, since someone else will be forming a better cruiser line with his ships than with Strike Cruisers. I'm not too fond of Adeptus Mechanicus ships, but an Ark accompanied by TWO Battle Barges would be an impressive sight. If your opponents aren't playing Eldar, that is. Be careful if you take an Admech fleet as an ally, for you're going to be outnumbered against almost any other foe.

Forces of Disorder

Finding a suitable reason to justify a Tyranid/whatever alliance has always been terminally difficult in any game. BFG is no different. The wisest thing that has come to my mind so far is "your admiral tries to take advantage of the destruction caused by the coming of a hive fleet". If you can cope with that, you'll find that siding with Tyranids is a very clever move. You just have to make sure your opponent takes a couple of Ld improvements/re-rolls to avoid having the Special Order phase gobbled up (literally!) by his Instinctive Orders checks. Apart from that, Tyranid ships are very scary, hard to kill and you can rest assured they won't disengage when the going gets tough, leaving you high and dry.

With Necrons it's quite the opposite. Their ships are just as scary, hard enough to kill for my liking, but for unknown reasons almost every Necron



player I've faced was so paranoid about losing a vessel that he'd flee the field as soon as I was about to score some serious damage, even if that meant drawing the game when he was winning. This temperamental attitude can make them even less reliable than the pointy-eared gits (more about them later). If your team mate doesn't flinch in the face of fire, however, you have an unmatched ace up your sleeve. Scythes are fast enough to keep pace of Slaughters or Dark Eldar Tortures, and a mixed group of those will be able to wreak havoc upon almost everything. A Tombship screened by Ork

or Tyranid cruisers is virtually indestructible and can provide both these fleets with an unhealthy (for your opponent) amount of lances. The humble Dirges can slip past the enemy line and deliver a crippling blow to any carrier, such as Explorers and Emperors, reducing the disadvantage of having an ordnance-less ally. The opportunities with Necrons are truly endless.

As is the case with Space Marines, Dark Eldar work better with an allied force than on their own, since they can actually make opportunity attacks while

their allies engage the enemy battle line. An ideal candidate for the allied fleet could be either a long-ranged (with lots of Devastations and Carnages) or a fast-as-hell (with at least 3 Slaughters) Chaos fleet.

In a multi-player game, Orks can consider dropping the Hulk and go for a "swarm" approach. If they don't want to (and who can blame them?), the Hulk will be positively ignored since the opposing faction will surely find another worthier, and easier, target. An interesting tactic for the Hulk would be making it hold an entire flank by itself. The enemy will be both wary of getting close to it and reluctant to waste fire on it, so it will roam unchecked, pouring a stream of ordnance and harassing the enemy with long-range fire.

Self-preservation and Eldar Admirals

As most seasoned players will know, it's very hard to enjoy a game against Eldar, even when you win. Their tactics rely on staying out of range, out of sight, or preferably both, of enemy ships, then pouncing, scoring as many Victory Points as they need to win the game, and slinking out of sight once more.

While it is true that Eldar, being capricious and self-serving, make for excellent allies for any fleet in the game fluff-wise (apart from Necrons), it goes without saying that no Admiral/Warmaster/Hive mind/whatever who has decided to throw his lot in with them is likely to be thankful for such a behaviour. Sure, even the most coward Eldar Prince will make his fleet's weight felt during the Shooting phase, hordes of pulsar lances being one of the few things that scare 6+ armour battleships and re-rollable torpedoes being both deadly and plentiful. However, when the time of retribution

comes, chances are only the other player will be targeted. What's more, no coordinated attack is ever possible with Eldar allies, as they don't like to follow predictable courses. This means that the other player has to commit his ships on their own, then hope the Eldar player joins in when the first strike has been delivered.

In a nutshell, Eldar and Craftworld Eldar are very powerful allies on paper. However, due to their utter lack of resilience and willingness to engage the enemy in a prolonged attack, any team including them will conduct two "parallel wars" rather than a concerted engagement.

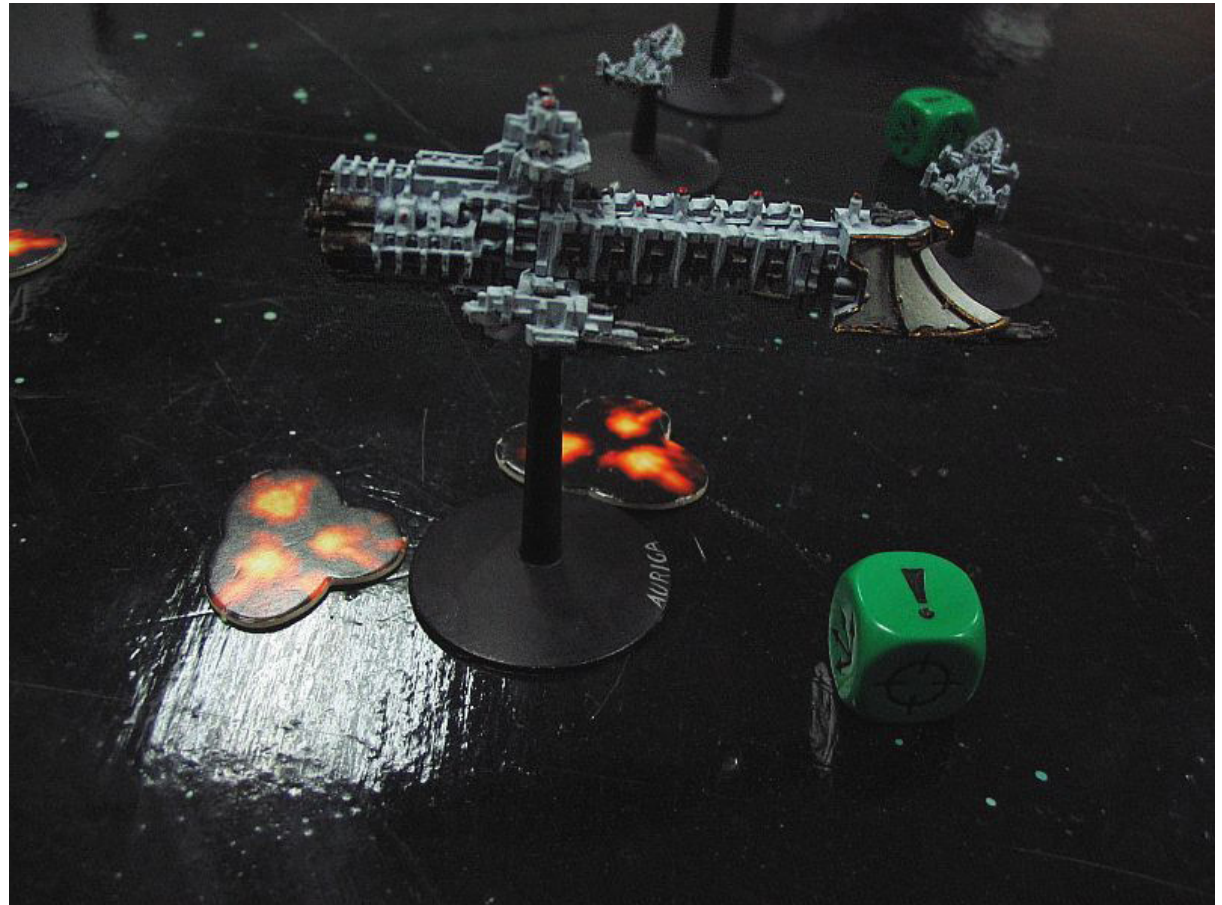
Putting my mouth where the money is...

... I arranged a multi-player game with a few friends of mine, using these guidelines for a 3,000 point Fleet Engagement. My Space Marine fleet would side with the Navy against the overwhelming forces of Ork and Chaos ships.

And overwhelming they were indeed! They went for an escort-heavy approach, taking 34 assorted escorts between them, 6 Chaos cruisers and a mighty Space Hulk. Unfortunately for them, they made really lousy Ld rolls, something that was bound to have dire consequences in the game.

The forces of Mankind were more than ready to face them, though. With 2 Battle Barges and an Emperor battleship spearheading the attack, backed up by as many firepower-heavy and torpedo-armed escorts we could afford, and with a strong trio of Nova Cannon armed ships, our joint forces were ready to meet the incoming tide.

During the Deployment phase the Chaos player made 2 critical mistakes. He squadroneed his



2 Devastations together to make the most of his Warmaster's Ld value, heedless of the Nova Cannon barrage he was going to face. What's more, he placed his 4 Slaughters on the left flank trying to brush aside the -very- flimsy opposition we could mount there (a Dauntless, 2 Hunters and 5 Gladiuses) and then slip past our line. However, the pesky light cruiser would become a nut too hard to crack!

The opening moves of our opponents, much to our surprise, featured a very slow advance of the whole fleet. The Ork player had foreseen the risk of being left behind by the Slaughters' blind charge towards

the enemy lines and had personally threatened the other player to prevent it! Both players preferred not to launch ordnance.

During our turn, I manoeuvred my Gladius squadrons on the left flank, hoping to get a clear run at one of the Slaughters, while the battleship trio made a slow but steady push towards the table centre. Our fire was less than impressive, however. Most hits on the Ork escort shoals were saved by BFI rolls; the Devastations were thoroughly suppressed with Nova cannon fire, although no actual damage was caused.

In the ensuing turn, everything went rather well

for our opponents. Not only did my flagship suffer 5 hits from the Hulk and braced Ramships, but our return fire was even worse. I managed to inflict only 2 damage points on a Slaughter with 20 battery dice from my escorts, and my ally's 5 locking on Swords weren't able to wipe out a 3-strong, closing Infidel squadron. His Cobra squadron also had to flee the field, having been pounded by enemy fire, but at least the Devastations were kept braced and unable to reload ordnance.

By the start of turn 3 the Chaos player couldn't control his "need for speed" anymore and sent his cruisers at top speed towards the helpless Dauntless and 5-strong Gladius squadron. Fortunately for us, when the smoke cleared, the Dauntless still had 2 damage points left and I had only lost 1 escort. Things looked pretty bleak for the Ork/Chaos alliance, as the Hulk had failed to Reload Ordnance and there was nothing stopping our A-boat horde from slaughtering the Savage and Ramship squadrons. 5 escorts were downed by ordnance alone.

Our turn proved to be rather more significant. Thanks to a lucky critical roll, the combined efforts of a Battle Barge and a Mars class battlecruiser brought the Chaos flagship down, earning much needed Victory Points. On the other side of the battlefield, the Swords that had survived a devastating torpedo run launched by enemy destroyers wiped out the Infidel squadron in revenge for their fallen comrades.

Luck deserted the Ork player once more, as the Hulk failed to Lock On. This severely impaired its shooting prowess, which was beginning to show through now that it had targets on all sides. Before that, however, one of the Slaughters performed a disastrous ramming attempt against the crippled

Dauntless. The Navy player wanted to Brace for Impact, but I convinced him not to because the possible explosion would have seriously damaged the tightly packed Chaos ships. He followed my, erm, advice, but the cruiser was just reduced to a burning wreck. Still, the charging Slaughter suffered two damage points in the process. Result! Having survived the enemy turn without a scratch (apart from the Dauntless, that is!), our forces proceeded to mop up the under-strength escort squadrons. The persistent lack of fighters made it very difficult for our opponents to prevent our assault-boats from netting those Victory Points. A Nova Cannon shell badly missed and instantly vaporised an Onslaught escort, which was a few inches away from my own ships!

During turn 5 the remaining Ramships made a desperate prow-on attack against a Dominator cruiser, which not only suffered just a couple of hits, but also destroyed an escort in return! The Hulk let loose again, its torpedoes destroying an escort squadron and inflicting 3 damage points on the Emperor, but it was already too late. My two Battle Barges were ready to sink the second Devastation and before the start of turn 6, our opponents surrendered. Victory to the Loyalist forces, but the Orks will come back – after having suitably chastised the Chaos Warmaster, that is...

The game itself was great fun and everything went well. Despite having on the table 4 fleets instead of 2, it wasn't as lengthy as one would imagine: less than 3h 30' for a 3,000 point game! Having 2 players per side really smoothens things up when you're playing with such large fleets.

Conclusion

Multi-player matches make for very enjoyable games. They have a lot of tactical possibilities to explore for the competitive player and provide an excellent break from 1-on-1 gaming routine for the "easy" player. Enjoy!

differences in ship designs will now be magnified, enhancing playability. The local hobby group was re-invigorated to play BattleFleet Gothic, which was my goal.

Enjoy!



ESCAPE MANOEUVRE ONE

BY REG STEINER

Introduction

During our campaign games, we found ourselves to be less than happy with the disengagement rules, as written.

Normally, when a ship is in a bad way, crippled or worse, that same vessel is surrounded by enemies. Shutting down all systems and attempting to drift out of harm's way sounds okay, but too often all those other enemy ships so close just weren't fooled! I came up with an emergency maneuver to help fellows get their capital ships home. We started with just the Imperium having this modification available, but even with this house rule, enemies still captured ships so equipped. Well, the secret was a secret no more. So any race can now have this ability, at the cost stated below.

Suggestion: If you want to incorporate this rule into your own campaign games, try starting out with the Imperial Navy vessels only having this ability. Let the other race(s), and even Chaos forces learn of it the hard way. By capturing Imperial vessels. Then the secret is out.

Special Order: Escape Maneuver One!

This special, Special Order is only attempted in the End Phase of a turn.

1. Attempt a 'Command Check' using ship's base Leadership. A re-roll can only be attempted if the ship is the one with the Admiral (or other race's equivalent). No time to ask permission!

2. Roll 6D6. Added up equals the movement in centimeters, with the provisions below.

3. Straight line movement only. Collision with ships is not possible for ramming attacks.

4. Full movement rolled must be moved. Collisions with asteroids, ordinance, mines, etc. are still resolved using the base rules.

5. No weapons or ordinance may be fired in the next turn.

6. Normal movement and special orders are still possible on the next turn.

7. In practice, ship captains have discovered potential problems! Battle damage, etc. can interfere!

A. Movement total of 10cm or less = Malfunction! To recover from this malfunction, and make normal movement (No special orders possible!) in the upcoming turn, another command check must be passed. No turns possible. (Not even a Reaction roll - if using simultaneous move rules.) Failure = 10cm move only next turn.

B. Movement total of 11cm to 20cm = "Captain! All engine power was not rerouted in time!" Another Command Check must be passed. Successful roll = normal move/turn possible, next turn. Failure = Straight move up to ship's maximum only, no turns.

C. Movement total of 21cm to 36cm = Complete success! No restriction to move/Special Orders on next turn!

8. This is a one-time-only maneuver. (Once per game.) Any ship captain that tries to order this

escape maneuver any time other than gravest need, would discover that not only is the order not carried out, but that he'll be hanged by the crew! Once attempted successfully, no matter the distance moved, that's it.

Game Implementation

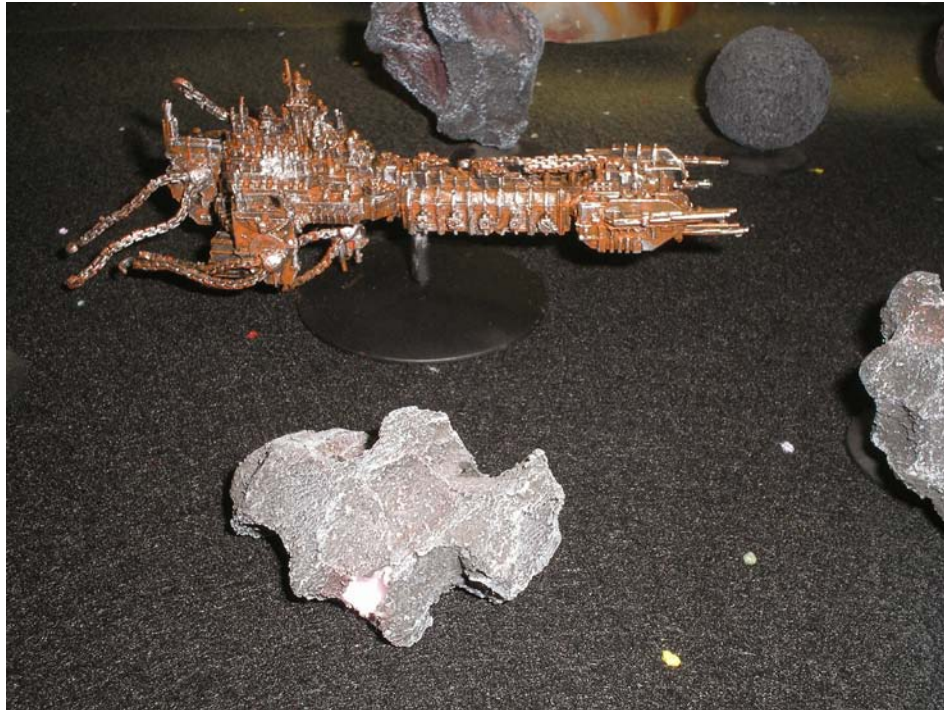
If starting a new campaign, and not letting any player start with this ability, then let players retrofit ships. The retrofit installs the one-use thruster packs that supplement main engines, as well as needed wiring, etc. The retrofit adds 10 points to the cost of any ship. Capitol ships only have this ability. The retrofit also requires the ship be "Withdrawn" as if for repairs at a base outside the campaign's parameters. The ship will return on the next campaign turn. Multiple ships can be withdrawn in this manner, but this decision must be made prior to the next battle, perhaps leaving one in a position of disadvantage! If ships start with this ability, it still adds 10 points to the cost of each vessel.



LEGION OF THE DAMNED

BY ZELNIK

SHOWCASE



Anomalous hulk discovered by Cobra Squadron 634301-1 (a.k.a. Bulwark Squadron), on deep recon in the Persephone system. Scans showed no life signs, when they closed to investigate, the ship disappeared off their scopes. Scans identified the vessel as a space marine battle barge, but the unusual chains (each link the size of a bomber strike craft), that hung from the hull. Suspected chaos influence?

Ghostly vessels discovered hiding in an asteroid belt, shortly before they entered a nearby battle against the forces of chaos. Image taken by damaged strike craft before the pilots death.



Ships discovered drifting in the rings of Syrix IV by Rogue Trader Simon Thule. When he returned to salvage the vessels they had disappeared.



GOTHICOMP 2008 - GRAND FINAL

HOSTED AT WWW.TACTICALWARGAMES.NET



GothiComp 2008 - Grand Final

Here is the link to the voting thread:

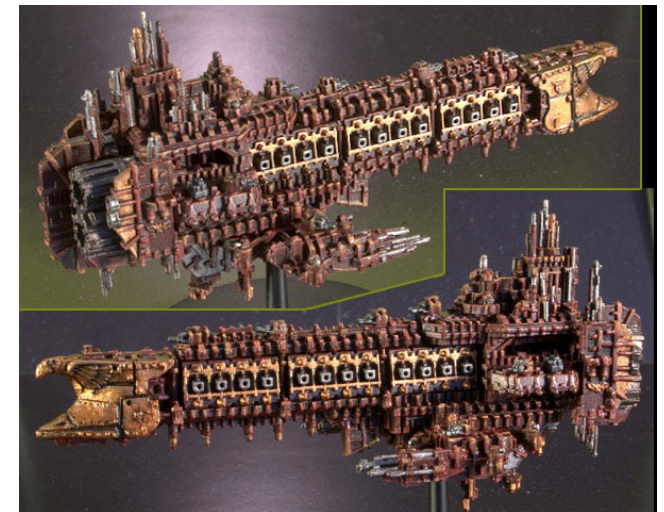
<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/forums/index.cgi?act=ST;f=38;t=13533>

The finalist are:

- Top left: Eldritch Storm - Canucks Fan
- Down right: Eldritch Path - Giullio DDM
- Top middle: Invictus - Canucks Fan
- Top right: Sunderer of Souls - Zhai Morenn
- Down right: Retribution - Vaaish

Voting started at september 15th and will end at september 30th at 4 p.m. UK time.

Make your vote count.



SHOWCASE

HIGH ANCHOR - PART TWO

BY RICHARD SWAN

SIX

Mulbern decided to run down the arrow-straight corridors of the command centre, away from the bridge and out towards the elevators that would take him to the barracks decks and garrisons. Though slightly scared, he couldn't help but feel a thrill of excitement that he would be leading the men into fight whatever filth they found in the power core – and pride that the Fleet Admiral had chosen him to do it, above everyone else.

A brief acceleration alarm warbled into life for a few seconds, before dying down again. Mulbern ignored it, making sure his footing was good as the G increased slightly.

His boot heels clunked loudly against the metal grilling of the cramped, gothic corridors, attracting the attention of various command personnel – Guard Generals and crewmen in the planning chambers surrounding the bridge – as he continued on his way. The prospect of firing a weapon again sent surges of adrenaline through his veins.

He was just reaching the end of the command centre and entering into the officer's quarters, when Grechte appeared outside a latrine chamber.

“Grechte!” Mulbern called. The Equerry turned to face the First Officer, and to say Mulbern was startled would have been an understatement. The aide de camp was immaculately turned out, his midnight blue tunic and jacket straight and clean, his cream breeches pressed, and his boots polished to a mirror shine. His dark hair was slicked back, his Navy-style goatee trimmed and perfect.

He casually tipped a white glove to his forehead on the First Officer's approach, who now felt decidedly self-conscious about his appearance.

Mulbern stopped just short of the man, out of breath, with a fresh sheen of perspiration marking his brow.

“Admiral wants you on the bridge, ASAP,” he breathed.

“That's just where I was heading, First Officer Mulbern,” Grechte replied, and with a warm smile, turned on his heel and strode towards the command centre.

* * *

An unnerving silence had descended over the *Divine Glory*. Unnerving because, only minutes before, the command centre had been filled with the snarling and snorting of a rampant spawn.

Now it had stopped, Fulden didn't know what to do.

He didn't *exactly* know what a Chaos spawn was – and thus what it was capable of. He didn't know if it could trick him into thinking that it wasn't there, or if it had some kind of teleportation abilities, or had turned invisible – not that it mattered when he was blind. But the simple fact was, the Captain had gone from being insanely frightened and knowing that the spawn was charging towards the bridge with all the speed and fury it could muster, to being insanely frightened and not knowing where the spawn was. And he felt a whole lot worse as a result.

The vox headset crackled into life, and with all the courage he could muster, he scrambled for the controls to try and clean the signal up. He was therefore surprised when the broadcast came in loud and clear.

“Fulden, this is Grant. My SVO tells me you haven't said anything in a while. If you can hear this, then you are on approach in excess of one thousand, that's one-zero-zero-zero, knots. We're coming to board, but you need to stop. We only have one shot at this. If you do not slow down, I cannot come back for another turn, I

must look to the enemy attack. Please acknowledge.”

Fulden felt his heart race at the sound of the Fleet Admiral’s voice, and unglued his lips to respond, but found he couldn’t. Still absolutely terrified by the spawn and traumatized almost beyond repair, the Captain found that he had been struck dumb out of sheer fright. As desperately as he tried to shout back across the vox, his larynx stubbornly remained unmoving.

“Fulden, please acknowledge,” came Grant’s voice again.

Fulden began to experience a sensation not unlike drowning. He tried to shout again, but his throat was sealed. Only in dreams did such things happen.

It was then he realised he was suffocating.

“Fulden, acknowledge son, or we’re heading back,” Grant’s voice came a little more frantically. Soon he would think he was dead. If he didn’t already.

Fulden began to clutch at his throat, feeling his epiglottis locked over his windpipe. The seizure racked his body with pain, and he felt warm blood streaming from his tear ducts and ears.

Khorne.

Fulden wheeled around, gasping for air. He could feel his skin bulging under his tunic. Buzzing once again filled the air, rising in volume. He tried to scream. He tried to weep. But there was nothing.

Only Chaos.

SEVEN

The bridge of the *Titan Imperial* had long since fallen silent at the prospect of boarding a tainted ship, and Grant almost relished in the relative quiet. The fact that Fulden wasn’t responding to the Fleet Admiral’s hails seemed to be having a positive effect on them, however, which he noted with some disgust. He and Fulden hadn’t always seen eye to eye, but he was not about to abandon any Imperial Captain to such a horribly grisly fate on principle, no matter who they were.

A holoscreen informed him that the power level had risen from 89% to 100%, and he cancelled it, satisfied. Mulbern hadn’t been gone long enough for it to have been his doing – Grant doubted that the First Officer had even reached the barracks deck yet. But it was a relief, at least. He knew it had been vermin all along, not a spawn. He would have felt it if there was a spawn on his ship. He still wanted to talk to Grechte – his uncanny link with the power was still to coincidental to be left un-investigated. But he suspected nothing would come of it.

He turned his attention back to the link to the *Glory*.

“Please acknowledge,” he said once more, unenthusiastically, for what would be the last time.

He sighed loudly as the link faded for a second, filling with some kind of buzzing static he wasn’t familiar with. When it resumed, he could hear heavy breathing fill the link.

“Fulden? Is that you?” he asked suddenly, feeling his heart leap.

“Yes Fleet Admiral,” the Captain replied in a perfectly calm voice, “stopping as ordered. Have you my bearing?”

“What? Oh, y-yes, yes I have,” Grant replied, uncomfortably flummoxed. The voice was so calm for a second he thought someone else had come on the link. “Fulden...is everything alright? Are you alright?” he asked cautiously.

“Of course I am sir. Slowing down now sir. Estimated stopping distance at four hundred kilometres.”

“Get on it,” Grant shouted into the amphitheatre. Another chorus of ‘aye’s answered him, and he felt the *Titan Imperial* slow down to docking speed.

“Hold in there Fulden. We’re coming for you,” Grant said, wishing the Captain would sound frightened again.

“I know you are, sir,” Fulden replied, not entirely reassuringly. “I know.”

* * *

By the time Mulbern reached the barracks deck, he was thoroughly out of breath. He came to a clumsy stop outside the bulkhead, which had been daubed in various army obscenities, and held up his signet ring to the passcode slate. The greasy doors slid aside into their magnetic alcoves, and he walked into the wide, arched corridor that ran down a full two kilometres of the ship, each wall lined with hundreds of billets.

The deck was in chaos. Battle stations had meant every soldier and naval armsman had made ready for counter-boarding actions, and it meant a lot of screaming by NCOs, a lot of shouting by troopers, and a lot of swearing on both sides.

Luckily, however, because the Guardsmen had already been on QRA for planetfall, they were all already armed to the teeth. All Mulbern had to do was pick three squads, and he would be set.

But it was proving more difficult than he had originally anticipated. As he waded through the grizzled crowds of Imperial Guard, he found himself attracting a lot of unwanted attention – most directed at his apparent cowardice and ‘fancy uniform’, and all of the comments interspersed with generous amounts of expletives.

“Sergeant!” he shouted to a nearby Guardsman, “Can I have a word with you please?”

He didn’t quite catch the man’s reply, but he was sure it wasn’t ‘yes, of course First Officer’.

He pressed on, heading for the armoury whilst now trying to find any naval armsmen. They would be infinitely more helpful than Imperial Guard, having also to live on a ship and therefore not partial to the same prejudices as the troopers.

He caught the glimmer of a man in grey form-moulded body armour, and instantly made for him. He smiled as he recognised the man – Sergeant Grippen, of the battlegroup’s 6th naval armsman company.

“Grippen!” he shouted. The man turned towards him; grubby, tired and unshorn, he looked positively haggard. But when he saw Mulbern, his face brightened noticeably.

“Mulbern!” he shouted back, and as the First Officer reached him they briefly embraced. “What in the name of the Throne are you doing here?” he asked incredulously.

“I need you,” Mulbern replied, “three squads, possible trouble in the power core. You up for a bit of action? I have clearance from the Fleet Admiral himself.”

“Emperor yes,” Grippen breathed, “I’m getting so sick of this place. What kind of trouble?”

Mulbern hesitated, “look, I’ll tell you on the way. Just get three squads together, and I’ll meet you at the bulkhead.”

“Aye aye, sir!” the Sergeant replied, grinning, as Mulbern moved off through the crowds again. His memory served him well, and he soon reached the armoury – little more than a square hole in the wall preceded by a shelf. He got a lot of angry looks as he pushed to the front of the queue, explaining that he was very high priority; but luckily no-one was stupid enough to start a fight.

He reached the stand, and confronted the quartermaster.

“I need the most lethal shipside weapon you have,” he said in one dramatic exhalation.

The quartermaster squinted at him. He was a fat man, wearing a simple grey smock covered with gun grease, and a cigar poking out his thick lips.

“On ‘oo’s aufori’ee?” he asked.

Mulbern was slightly taken aback for a second by the man’s appalling diction.

“The Fleet Admiral himself,” he said confidently, almost feeling the jealousy behind him. The quartermaster squinted at his proffered identity card, and hustled away to some dingy corner of the armoury. He returned a few seconds later with a bulky carbine of some sort, looking like a stripped-down heavy bolter but with a wooden finish. The man slapped a few boxes onto the shelf as well.

“Medium-range stubbah, subsonic ammo,” he said. “I ‘ope what yer shootin’ at is big,”

"I don't," Mulbern replied, shouldering the deceptively heavy weapon.

He left the armoury shelf, thrusting the ammo boxes into a canvas satchel, and once again pushed his way through the jostling crowd of milling Guard. He reached the bulkhead to see that Grippen had indeed assembled three squads of naval armsmen – something which he was visibly glad about. He couldn't deal with any more snide Guard comments at the moment.

The men Grippen had picked seemed a good bunch – most were noticeably strong, with the traditional buzz haircuts of the naval counter-boarding wing. They carried an array of subsonic ammunition-wielding weapons, to prevent someone putting a hole in the hull and collapsing an entire compartment through explosive decompression, and the standard grey body armour naval armsmen.

"So, you gonna fill us in?" Grippen grinned.

"I said I'd tell you on the way," Mulbern replied, and punched the door release catch.

"That good huh?"

Mulbern laughed out loud, though why, he didn't know.

"Just be prepared for the worst," he said, waiting for the doors to open once again.

Behind him, the band of armsmen exchanged nervous glances, before donning their helmets and following him into the dark corridors of the deck.

* * *

Grant felt the ship slow down as if he himself was slackening the pace after a long run. The massive hulks of the two mighty cruisers slowly approached each other – a manoeuvre one might make to come to broadside – and the irony of their situation was not lost on him.

He wondered if the irony was lost on Fulden.

The man had gone from being completely insane with fear, to completely calm, in a matter of minutes. He could forgive the Captain's fear – alone with a Chaos

spawn was enough to frighten anybody. But the sudden change in his demeanour meant something more, of that he was sure. Fulden had made no mention of the spawn when his temperament had reversed. In his calm – almost lucid – state, it was as if nothing had happened.

There were only two possible explanations the Fleet Admiral could think of: either the spawn was gone, and Fulden was a *very* adaptable character; or the spawn was in Fulden.

The first scenario, he supposed, was viable, but it did mean that if the spawn had just up and vanished, Fulden had not only overcome the whole ordeal, but overcome it in a spectacular fashion. It didn't make enough sense, and he dismissed it quickly.

The second scenario seemed equally unlikely. Grant had never heard of a spawn possessing someone – as far as his knowledge reached, a spawn was simply a pure manifestation of Warp energy, channelled into Chaos Champions who, for some God-Emperor unknown reason, seemed to think it was a good thing. A physical being could not have possessed his Captain. Besides, the only thing it would explain was Fulden's change of mood. He was pretty damn sure a spawn didn't know how to pilot an Imperial cruiser.

Thus, the second scenario was abandoned.

He would have asked Mulbern were he there, but Grant was tiring of his First Officer's suspicions of sorcery – the main reason why he had had him personally dispatched to oversee the mission to the vermin in the power core. His assumptions of Chaos magicks working themselves into his equerry had unsettled his crew, and the man deserved to be berated for that. But his absence would do for now. He quietly terminated the personal vox link to his First Officer, to give him some peace. Their findings of the state of the power core would have to wait until the party got back.

Which, hopefully, would have been filled with a productive interview of his aide de camp.

"Two kilometres until docking," his Senior Auspex Officer shouted. "One kilometre. Target vessel is stationary and locked down."

"Good," Grant said, "Vox? Inform the garrison, port side."

“Sir?”

“Inform the arms garrison that we will be docking port side,” he snapped again irritably.

“It’s only –”

“I’m not taking any chances dammit!” Grant bellowed, nowhere near as angry as he thought he should be. He decided the next man to defy him would be shot.

“Aye aye, sir. Very good sir,” replied his SVO.

In front of him, the proud grey hull of the *Glory* grew on the holoscreen.

Soon, he thought. *I will destroy you.*

EIGHT

The freight elevator to the power core level was an old, corroded machine that had no business on a working Mars-class cruiser, squealing down the shaft in an unbearable cacophony of metallic, rusty shrieks. It clanked and rocked as it descended the decks, so loudly it almost drowned out what Grippen was shouting.

Almost.

Mulbern wanted to crawl up into a ball and block his ears. But he knew if he had told the Sergeant what he and his men would potentially be up against before, they wouldn’t even have come this far. And he knew that the elevator opened directly into the power core. At least once they reached the bottom, they wouldn’t have a choice but to investigate.

“A Chaos spawn?” the man shouted incredulously. “A CHAOS, SPAWN!”

“Maybe,” Mulbern replied, holding his hands out palms first – the way one does when backing away from a large ugly man wielding a knife. “It hasn’t been confirmed.”

Behind the Sergeant, the eighteen armsmen made the sign of the Aquilla and clutched Imperial rosary beads, reciting various prayers and litanies. They looked absolutely petrified.

“On *this* ship?” Grippen continued.

“Look, we don’t know, it’s just an investigation. Fleet Admiral thinks it’s just vermin.”

“Vermin don’t leak...*Warp energies*,” the Sergeant said in an almost comically low voice, now particularly frightened. “Only Warp energies have the power to shut down a power core. We’ve all heard the stories.”

“It could have been a blown power coupling...” Mulbern said helplessly. He wasn’t even convincing himself anymore. “You know how the rats chew through them all the time?”

“Enough to shut down 60% of a Mars-class cruiser’s power?” Grippen laughed bitterly.

“Look, what do you think the Guard do when they find them planetside? They fight them. They kill them! They aren’t invincible. All we’ve got to do is shoot it!”

Grippen snorted, his chest heaving upwards with the motion.

“You be my guest!”

He gripped the guard rail next to him, turning to address the First Officer in a manner that only foreshadowed imminent matter-of-fact statements.

“We aren’t Guard, Mulbern,” he said dangerously, “*We’re* armsmen. *We* garrison ships, playing bloody *cards!*”

There was a pause, and Mulbern was about to speak when Grippen cut him off again.

“Any anyway, this is a damned flagship! We counter enemy boarders once a year – if we’re lucky! Do you think anyone has made a serious enough dent in the side of the *Imperial* to ever warrant a –”

“Sergeant, *SHUT UP!*” Mulbern suddenly interjected, sick of the armsman’s whining and almost tempted to backhand him across the face. “If there is a Chaos

spawn on this ship, then by the God Emperor we shall find it and kill it, or so help me I'll report you to the Commissars faster than you can say insubordination! Are we clear, Grippen? Enough of your complaining!"

The elevator screeched and ground to a halt, the long line of runes ribbing the doorway blank excluding one glowing red icon.

They had reached the power core level.

"Alright everybody, concentrate," Mulbern said, not in the strong voice he hoped it would be. "We'll be fine."

The Emperor only knew how he had been excited by the prospect of this mission.

The elevator doors slid open.

* * *

It wasn't long now. He could feel the power inside him; hear their voices in his head. They tempted him with promises of riches and glory beyond his wildest dreams. They showed him images of the Lords of Terra paying him homage, of beautiful exotic women, unclothed and beckoning him, images of hoards of riches, precious stones, of sumptuous feasts, of great halls and palaces. All this they could promise him, and more.

His head throbbed with pain, but it was a good pain. The buzzing in his ears had turned into sweet melodies. The mess in his breeches had gone, and his uniform was immaculate.

He was confident, swarthy, astute and powerful. He was a better man than the Fleet Admiral. They told him so.

And he believed them.

It wasn't long now. He could feel the energy of another Anointed nearby – not on this ship, but on another, close to them. The other could sense him also. They could feel each other, taste each other's blood, smell their sickly-sweet odours of pride and arrogance. They shared visions of sweet corruption, of decadence and debauchery. They would become one, soon. When they were closer.

Grechte rounded the corner of the bulkhead, and strode silently on towards the bridge.

* * *

"The garrison has been informed, sir," his SVO said quietly. "Port side, as ordered."

"Docking position reached."

"Engines locked down."

"Shields at defence level five."

"Port side batteries online and loaded."

Grant sat in silence, only half listening to the information being shouted at him from all directions. Of course he already knew all of these things. He knew the *Titan Imperial* like an extension of his own body – which, in essence, it was.

He stared at the external sensor pict images broadcasting directly onto the holoscreens in front of him. The long, crenelated hull of the *Divine Glory* filled more than three of them, and still extended beyond the reaches of the picters. Docking umbilici waited inside the Imperial, their potential energy like adrenaline in his stomach.

Dare he board? He had never been so unsure of something in his long, long life. Every second it took him to think, he knew it was costing the lives of the thousands of crewman under his command currently engaging the Chaos fleet without him. But there was a feeling he just couldn't shake. A dark foreboding, and ominous feeling that deeply unsettled him. If there was a Chaos spawn in the ship, it would be easy enough to destroy. But if Fulden had been tainted – or even worse, possessed – what then would he do? Kill him? And how would he know he even was? His perceptive faculties had abandoned him. Now they were this close to a tainted ship, he suddenly wasn't so sure it was just vermin in the power core. And hadn't Fulden mentioned something about his First Officer assaulting him? Had his First Officer also been possessed and tried to kill him? Because of the Warp energies in his power core? By boarding the ship, he would virtually be inviting the danger in.

He tried to reopen the direct vox link to Mulbern, but found a temporary electronics disruption prevented him.

“Sir?” someone asked. He didn’t know who. He didn’t look up. “What are your orders, sir?”

Grant wasn’t about to admit he had no idea what to do. He needed to get control of the situation and fast.

He thought for another ten seconds, weighing up the pros and cons of possible scenarios so quickly it would have taken a normal man many days to do the same. Once he reached his decision, he knew he was going to have to see it through to the potentially bitter end.

“Vox? Anything on the net?” he asked in a tired voice.

“Nothing sir. It’s deader than a corpse in there, sir.”

Another prolonged silence.

“Let’s move in,” he said, finally.

In the cold gulf of space, the *Imperial’s* docking umbilici noiselessly slammed into the side of the *Glory*.

NINE

The power core level was hot. Very, very hot.

The huge domed chamber was racked with hundreds, maybe even thousands of plasma powerstats, all glowing a fantastic cerulean in their dank metal alcoves. Steam and heat distortion misted the air, vented from a million kilometres of piping, coolant ducts and couplings, and cables smothered and draped the ceiling like a myriad of rainforest vines. Every second there was a crackle and shower of sparks, as the hyper-ionised plasma gasses worked up such powerful electrostatic charges they briefly overshot their containment chambers – but the mighty core was long since used to dealing with such minor occurrences.

The core.

It was simply breathtaking to behold. In the dead centre of the dome, the cables and piping from the uncountable plasma stats converged like the roots of a colossal electrostatic tree, and surged towards the ceiling. The ‘trunk’ exuded frightening amounts of energy – with bolts of electricity like miniature lightning storms flashing across the aperture in the dome’s apex. It almost defied the imagination – yet it made sense how such a mighty ship, a Mars class battlecruiser, would need an equally astonishing power supply.

Mulbern was the first through the elevator door, stubber prone. There was a suspended walkway that led directly to the trunk – yet certain lapses in safety had meant that no signs were visible to warn of the high energy death awaiting anyone who got within a hundred metres of it.

He, along with the eighteen-strong party of armsmen behind him, began sweating instantly. Hair stood absurdly on end as the static charge almost succeeded in polarising their bodies, and hearts palpitated. In the short time it took them to accustom to the environment, electrostatic energies had completely invaded their bodies.

They walked on cautiously, weapon butts to shoulders, eyes on sights. Low energy lasgun barrels swung round in short quick arcs. They flinched with every shower of sparks, with every crackle of power. By the time they reached the halfway point on the seven-hundred metre walkway, they were all torpid and thoroughly out of breath.

“What now?” Grippen asked the First Officer, beads of perspiration dripping off his forehead. He was sweating so heavily it was dribbling through the gaps in his body armour.

Mulbern turned around, his eyes frantic.

“I don’t know,” he said, “everything looks fine here. I mean, I’m no expert on what any of this stuff does…”

The others looked about, thoroughly perplexed. They would need a legion of techpriests to tell them how it all worked. Mulbern hadn’t the faintest clue what it was supposed to look like.

“Let’s keep looking,” Grippen said. “Then at least we can say that we didn’t see anything and mean it.”

Mulbern thought for a second.

“There was something in the power core,” he said slowly, “definitely. It came up on the sensors. A power drain of some kind.” He brought an arm across his brow. “Which means there’s definitely something still in here, because Grant hasn’t told me the power’s come back online yet.”

“What do you mean?” Grippen asked, licking his lips.

“Think about it. Grant’s got a direct vox link running,” he said, tapping the comlink on his epaulette. “Don’t you think he would have said something if the power had come back online? To save us wasting this effort?”

A series of thuds rang out through the ship, and it vibrated for a second. They all instinctively ducked.

“What was that?” one of the troopers shouted.

Mulbern strained to hear, but the throbbing hum of the power core formed some kind of pressure wall blocking his ears.

“Dunno. Sounded like boarding tubes,” he said. “Grant said we’d be heading for the *Glory*. Maybe they’ve found it.”

“And we’re stuck down here,” Grippen said bitterly.

There was a pause.

“Spread out,” Mulbern said to the armsmen after a while, “see what you can find. And for Throne’s sake don’t get too close to the core.”

They obeyed, exchanging further nervous glances before moving off down the walkway. Up ahead was an intersection, and the group split into three squads, covering all the angles. Mulbern and Grippen watched them for a while, before turning back to each other.

“There’s a spawn on the *Glory* as well,” the First Officer said when he was sure

the others were out of earshot, spitting a wad of saliva into the tangle of pipes surrounding the walkway like some kind of thicket. It sizzled and evaporated quickly.

“What?” Grippen asked.

“Yeah, all the crew’s missing. It’s just Captain Fulden left. Last I heard of him he was stuck in the command centre with the damned thing, blind as a serval. Grant’s taken us in to investigate. Nasty business.”

The Sergeant took little time to digest the news.

“Shouldn’t he just be destroying the ship?” he blurted. “If it’s tainted, he –”

“Er, Sergeant? Remember what we’re looking for?” Mulbern said, horrified that the man hadn’t picked up on the obviousness of the predicament.

“Right. Of course,” Grippen replied, slightly embarrassed.

“It’s not one rule for one, another for another I’m afraid. At least this way he might be able to save the Captain and then destroy the ship.”

“But what about this ship?” Grippen asked. “Has anyone been tainted here then?”

“We don’t even know if there’s a spawn yet.” Mulbern replied, squinting into the distance briefly. “Admiral thinks it’s just vermin. But if it was a spawn, there’d be Warp energies all over the place. Especially with interference in the power core. I mean, everything’s dependent on the core.”

“I suppose,” Grippen replied sullenly. “I mean the Fleet Admiral especially.”

Mulbern froze, his skin breaking out uncomfortably in gooseflesh despite the heat.

“What...did...you say?” he asked slowly, rounding on the Sergeant. Grippen was slightly taken aback.

“Well, I mean...well, um, you were talking about Warp energies in the power core, and that because everything’s linked to it, they’d be susceptible to Chaos

taint. All I was saying was that if the Admiral's directly hardwired to the power, if someone was tainted near him – or if he was tainted, it'd shut down the power. Amongst other things. Right?"

Mulbern stared at him, knowledge and understanding exploding through his neural strata like a sledgehammer. Of course, it all made such perfect, perfect sense. He should have seen it before. Dammit! How could he have been so blind!

"There's nothing in here," he said quietly, glancing back to the door. "There's no spawn in here." He was sweating feverishly now, and it wasn't the heat. He looked at Grippen. "Don't you hear me? It's not in here!"

"W-what, it's gone?" Grippen asked, a little too hopefully.

"No you idiot!" he broke out into a jog, a run, and finally a sprint, his boots thudding loudly on the not too stable walkway. "Get the men to the bridge, and fast!" He yelled behind him.

"Why?" Grippen called after him, but Mulbern didn't answer. He hadn't even heard properly. Blood was crashing about in his head, and adrenaline knotted his stomach painfully hard.

The spawn wasn't in the power core.

The spawn was in Grechte.

* * *

Imperial attack pattern one was, as both the Captains of the *Steadfast* and *Varagar* acknowledged, thoroughly doomed. Holding a shaky mid-to-low anchor over the planet, and with a combined shield integrity of less than 50%, even with the imminent arrival of attack pattern two, there was simply no way they were escaping the conflict with their lives.

The mass of Chaos ships – fifteen all told – had finally aligned into working attack formations. Cruisers doubled or tripled into gun lines, escorts in support, whilst the *False Emperor* moved amongst them effortlessly, its obscene bulk gliding through the miniature gulfs between vessels. With attack pattern two still a comfortable eight thousand kilometres away, and the *Titan Imperial* over twenty thousand kilometres distant, Fleet Magister Pustria wasn't so much prosecuting

the Imperials as toying with them. Huge salvos of torpedoes flashed and flickered across the void, their potent plasma warheads exploding with muffled crumps. Energy beams and lances arrowed through space, forming expanding circles of white-hot energy as they punctured defences and melted great sections of hull into slag. Broadships thumped, recoiled; hammered. Fantastical arrays of munitions chattered through the void, blossoming into sprays of miniature blasts and flashes as they thumped into overloading void shields.

Despite the overwhelming odds, Imperial attack pattern two, in traditional 701st form, was determined to make a good account of itself. Using admirable skirmish formation tactics and improvising long-successful attack protocols, they were able to employ their only strength admirably: their size. They were small as a formation, and thus manoeuvrable. Lightning pincers worked best on the medium size Chaos cruisers – the ones slow enough to take two full broadsides without shifting fast enough, but small enough to not carry masses of batteries. Similarly, hit and run on the larger cruisers worked equally excellently. The Archenemy escorts could be simply engaged in a straight exchange, and held at bay extremely comfortably – even rammed.

For the twenty-six minutes of remaining shield integrity the Imperials had, they had destroyed four Chaos escorts and two cruisers. Glowing hulks floated seamlessly through the frozen wastes of space, leaking atmospheres, debris and corpses into the void. The crenelated forms of the two-strong Imperial skirmish formation soared and dived through the cross-grid of lethal fire, avoiding targeting beams, missile locks and the myriad of other volleys. Executing exhilarating turns through the frictionless environment, using inertia to guide them round in mind-bending three dimensional manoeuvres, they powered through Chaos formations, unleashing salvos of high energy death and destruction in their wake, ripping up great sections of enemy armour, decompressing bulkheads and overloading void shields.

But their success was not to last.

As the two ships span around each other in attack protocol 91 – rising from the planet and towards the underside of the battle plain, the *Wings of Varagar* was suddenly engulfed by a volley of purple-contrailed Chaos torpedoes. Usually slow enough to penetrate void shields, the warheads sped greedily towards their target – wargear bioptics relaying their path directly back to Pustria's sickly yellow eyeballs.

But the torpedoes did not pass through. Instead they slammed into the *Varagar's* shields, and spat out thousands of swirling balls of disease-ridden frag directly into the cruiser's voidspace. Unhindered by the vacuum of space, and the shields themselves – designed not only to prevent enemy munitions but radiation, solar winds and particle migration – they tore straight into the observation deck, puncturing three metre-thick bulkheads like they were paper. Crewmen were ripped apart like rag dolls; flayed and utterly liquidated, along with power conduits, electrical piping, coolant piping, and thousands more vital arteries necessary for maintaining the ship. They lanced through the command centre, trailing with them explosively decompressed chunks of debris and meat. The Captain's skull was burst like a watermelon by a lump of polybonded carbon – before the remainder of the bridge utterly dashed him to pieces as it was wrenched out into space by the gaping hole in the port hull.

In the night time sky of Omicron Septimus, the last seconds of the *Varagar* would have been mistaken for little more than another star.

Yet to the *Steadfast*, its utter destruction couldn't have been more damaging. Flares of expanding gas licked upwards from the blossoming supernova of exploding Imperial cruiser and sent the auspex haywire. Hundreds of lumps of hull swarmed the ship's targeting consoles, blurring the obvious distinction between Chaos munitions and hunks of wreckage. Its void shields were bombarded, energy massing to exact counter-force where it was not needed, and sensor clusters simply shut down – most fried by the ionising plasma radiation from the *Varagar's* power core.

Its last message was sent on the long range vox at 04:34 Imperial, and logged in the receiver on board the *Titan Imperial* a full two minutes later.

Spinning blind and out of control, the *Steadfast* was struck square on by the *False Emperor's* prow-mounted quad-power energy lance, and boiled away into nothing.

TEN

It had been quickly decided that the Imperial Guard should board the *Divine Glory*, and not the naval armsmen. Though conflict between the two fighting wings was inevitable, the decision had been made for several very obvious

reasons.

Firstly, the Imperial Guard had been on Quick Reaction Alert for planetfall, and were thus geared up and mentally prepared for combat. Though it had been argued by some that the naval armsmen were in a similar state, the Fleet Admiral had ignored them.

Secondly, they were better assaulters than the armsmen, and undoubtedly had more fighting experience.

And finally, Grant deemed them highly expendable. If they didn't die on the *Glory*, they would most likely die on Omicron Septimus. At least this way, he'd still have his armsmen should The *Imperial* be boarded later.

Thus, three hundred men, from two separate companies of Guard, lined up in ill-fitting pressure suits in the docking tubes, nervously awaiting orders.

At the head of one of these lines was Captain Greeves, a somewhat grizzled veteran from the Corusdor V campaign – a three-year action that had seen him promoted twice, poisoned, shot on several occasions, and gassed. Decorated with the mandatory scarring of a lifetime soldier, the forty-one year old Guardsman was a respected and competent leader, and had been the obvious choice to lead the spearhead into the ship.

Yet right now, he was shaking like a leaf in the wind.

The reason was simple enough. Through his twenty-four years of service, he'd never once – quite strangely – encountered the Archenemy. It was unusual, though not unheard of. A protracted series of campaigns – the longest of which lasting eleven years – towards the coreward flank of the galaxy, had kept him comfortably out of the reach of the Eye of Terror and other Chaos hotspots. Tyranids, Eldar, Orks – all of these he had faced and defeated – or at least retreated from.

But never once Chaos.

Of course, he'd heard of them. He'd heard the stories – the bleeding, the headaches, the obscene symbols that defaced and degraded the Imperial creed and made grown men weep. He knew of the four gods that dwelt in the Warp. He'd heard of the manifestations of the Warp, the daemons, unspeakable horrors, the mutants, heretics, cultists, spawns. He'd heard of their raids of innocent and defenceless

cities, their massacres of civilians, their foul acts of ritual and blasphemy.

Though he had boasted encountering Chaos Marines as a lowly Corporal, fighting off hoards of twisted cultists and mutants in desperate last stands; though he had said he'd seen the twisted and dark energies of the Warp and emerged a wiser man, he had not.

And now he thoroughly regretted all those stories. Because now the men looked to him for guidance. Many of them were young – and though experienced, had yet to face the horrors of the Warp.

He felt a lump in his throat, as fear took hold. He wanted to cry. He gripped his medium-power lasgun harder and harder, feeling his body tense up. In front of him – less than three metres away – the pressure-suited adepts worked to clear through the melted lump of the Glory's hull blocking the end of the docking tube, where the heat exchangers had welded the umbilicus to the ship's armour plating.

They were working too quickly. They would have the blockage cleared in the next minute. And then it would be up to him to lead one hundred and fifty Guardsmen into the cramped confines of the Imperial cruiser, locate the bridge, secure Captain Fulden and any surviving crew members, and withdraw them to the medicae level for extensive testing.

They had been warned of taint. The Litany of Warding should prevent the infections of the Warp permeating their pressure suits. The priests had seen to that. Should any man succumb, however, he, along with the Commissars accompanying them, had been ordered to terminate with extreme prejudice.

They had also been briefed on the course of action to take when encountering Chaos spawns – not spawn, *spawns*. That had seen Greeves' stomach turn somersaults.

“Shoot them,” the CO had said, “shoot them long and hard. With medium-powered lasguns, it'll take longer than it would planetside. But with sustained fire, they'll die like anything else.”

Brilliant, Greeves had thought.

Some of the men had been eager. Eager to engage the Archenemy. He didn't want

to disabuse them. If anything, he wanted to be eager. But he was just filled with dread, and a dark foreboding.

He was nothing more than an impostor and a coward. A true Guardsman feared nothing. He should have only to think of the Emperor's Halls, the Great Feast where merriment was eternal and tales were exchanged with His audience and blessing, and his fear should melt away.

But it didn't.

“Keep your movements tight,” he whispered over the comlink, “and keep your eyes peeled. You never know what these Chaos bastards have in store.”

Of course he didn't know. He'd never fought them. But, pleased with his encouragement – it did after all, give the impression he wasn't afraid – he raised his lasgun prone, and trained it on the door.

The blockage was finally cleared with another slice of the energy-cutters, and a thick, circular slab of metal *thunked* onto the floor of the docking tube.

“Let's go! Go go go!” Greeves said, running headlong through the hatch.

* * *

Grant watched on the holoscreen in front of him as the boarding party of Guardsmen charged headlong into the *Divine Glory*, a nervous anticipation gnawing at his stomach.

“So it begins,” he whispered.

“Sir!” his SVO shouted, “Message from the *Steadfast*, high priority.”

“Municipal, please,” Grant said. The link filled with solar static for a few seconds, before the message began, hundreds of alarms sounding in the background and almost drowning out what the speaker was saying.

“This is Captain Ourne of the Steadfast, 04:43 standard Imperial time, seventh day, two hundred and thirty-first year, forty-first millennium. Our sister ship, the Wings of Varagar, is gone, Lord, and I fear we're not much longer for this life. We've made as good an account of ourselves as I feel possible, true to the oaths we took on the

founding of the 701st battlefleet. It's been an honour serving under you, sir...the Emperor pro-"

The sound of frantic shouts and crackling blasts filled the link, before it terminated.

"Message ends," his SVO said quietly.

There was a pause whilst all eyes turned to the Fleet Admiral. He could feel them watching him. Feel them doubt his command. They should have gone to join attack pattern one, they all thought. Then the *Steadfast* and *Varagar* would not have been destroyed. Instead they were out here, investigating a tainted ship which would have to be destroyed anyway. Their unspoken blame and hate stung him deeply. He felt himself flush red with embarrassment and anger.

"It is regrettable..." he began, but faltered. Did they dare mutiny against him? A Fleet Admiral of the Imperial Navy? A man who had dedicated entire centuries of his life to its service? "Those that perish in the service of the Emperor are..." his words failed him again. What was wrong with him? His abilities of speech seemed to be abandoning him. His vision briefly blurred, and was then restored. The holoscreens in front of his face wavered and crackled. He could hear a distant buzzing over the municipal address system.

"Can...anybody else...hear that?" he slurred, a line of drool running off his bottom lip and onto his breastplate.

"Hear what, sir?" a crewman asked – though it was distant, and though being said from a thousand kilometres away. He could hear his breath ragged in his ears, and blood pulsed painfully in his arteries.

"What's...happening...to...me?" he asked slightly more urgently, the buzzing increasing in volume. He could hear the shouts and cries of his crewmen – some inquiring as to his wellbeing, some uttering profanities as the ship lurched slightly to the side. His direct interface with the cruiser's hardware was jumping on and offline, his spasming hand sending the vessel to starboard and port. Though the docking tubes holding them to the *Glory* were flexible, there was only so much punishment they could take.

"Power...failure!" he mumbled through his lethargy.

His vision failed completely, and blood drooled from his nose. Hundreds of warning graphics about his ship support powerstats and interface piping flickered across his vision. Pain like no other crippled his left hand side.

"Sir? I believe you wanted to see me?" asked a familiar voice.

"Whosaidthat?" Grant blurted.

"It's me, sir," the voice said again, infinitely more malevolent. "Grechte."

* * *

Mulbern was still sweating nervously, willing the elevator to speed up. It trundled through the decks, ascending in typical ramshackle fashion, the runes lining the side of the door documenting its progress from the bowels of the ship to the upper decks. There lay the command level, containing the higher-ranking officer's quarters - huge staterooms with luxurious dining halls, decorated with expensive furniture and fitted with exquisite bathrooms – and the command centre and bridge, nearer to the observation deck and upper embarkation level. Only those with the right clearance could make it into the command level, as allowed by various biometric scanners implanted on all the elevators.

"Come on, come on!" he shouted. Only rusty shrieks answered him.

Followed by the complete cessation of movement - a power failure.

"Throne," Mulbern whispered. His microlink remained silent, alive only with static. "Dammit! Dammit dammit *dammit!*" he cried, each time kicking the doors as hard as his foot would tolerate.

It wasn't too late, he told himself. There was still time. He thought for a precious few seconds. There had to be another way out of the lift. He looked around desperately – there! The maintenance hatch!

He crouched and leapt upwards with all his might, grasping hold of the two handles flanking the hatch that allowed access to the roof of the elevator. Years of press-ups and crunches in his quarters had served him well, and he found that with a few acrobatics, he could swing himself upwards with enough force to hook his feet over the rim of the opening.

He gasped with the effort, hauling himself up in his uncomfortable, sweat-drenched uniform, until his hand found the winch cables on the top of the elevator, and he hoisted himself out of the cramped confines of the carriage and into the musty, stale air of the shaft. Looking up, the long atrium stretched away from him, dark and dank, with small lights marking the progression of decks.

“*Emperor*,” he breathed. It would take him an age to climb the ladder that ran the length of the shaft. And even longer to climb the winch cables.

Grasping the descent counterweight cable, and aiming the stubber, he fired off a stream of clumsy rounds, loud reports echoing off the metal walls of the shaft. The hawsers snapped and flickered all about him, and Mulbern, narrowly missing evisceration, cried out in pain as the cable yanked hard on his shoulder.

“Sorry Grippen,” he said as the lift fell away, and he was pulled inexorably towards the command level.

* * *

The corridors of the *Divine Glory*, they all agreed, had a strange smell to them. It was a pungent odour, and not an obvious one, though none of them could get used to it. It persisted, clinging to the nostrils, a constant, smarting scent that reminded Captain Greeves of rotten alcohol – not that there was such a thing.

The ship was also eerily empty. He wasn't entirely sure what kind of ship it was – a Dauntless maybe. But he did know that some of these ships could have in excess of three thousand men just to crew it, and countless thousands more in garrison and in transport. Thus, despite their size, it was fairly common – particularly if it had been on action stations – to see ensigns and ratings rushing about the corridors, or armsmen loitering, waiting for orders.

On the *Glory*, however, the only sound to be heard, as they sped through the corridors, was their own boot soles thumping on the metal grilling of the floor. That, and the terrible grinding of the docking tubes as they threatened to snap under some immense and unknown strain.

“Something's not right, sir,” one of the Guardsmen behind him hissed.

Like he didn't know it.

“Well this *is* a tainted ship,” he hissed back over his armoured shoulder. His brown-smudged, yellow ochre armoured shoulder. Perfect for the desert terrain of Omicron Septimus. Decidedly useless for the drab grey interiors of a ship.

He had long since decided, as they covered the first few kilometres of decking, that he would conceal his utter cowardice with an absurd combination of bravado and generally being an arse. This involved getting angry at the most innocent of questions to make it look like he'd heard them all countless times before – and answered them; and running a lot, throwing caution to the wind.

He was fully aware that he was jeopardising the lives of his company; but if it meant they thought he was brave – and, above all, he had defeated the Ruinous Powers before, then he just didn't care.

He suddenly held a fist up over his right shoulder, and extended a flattened palm towards the decking. The men behind him stopped and crouched low.

Greeves sidled up to the wall, and inspected the ship's schematic bolted to the metal.

“If we're here...” he breathed to himself, “then we need to go...hm. We could take this...right, I see, so that leads up...there.” He turned to his men – though to call all of them men wouldn't be entirely accurate. There was a healthy sprinkling of men – mostly officers. The rest were boys. Seventeen, eighteen. Too young to see what he had lied about seeing. Probably.

“Alright,” he said, “we need to keep moving down this corridor. At the end, there's a stairwell that leads up to the command centre. That's where Captain Fulden should be. Everybody understand?”

The men nodded or grunted their assent. He didn't think any of them suspected he was a coward. That was good.

“OK, let's move out!” he shouted, spinning on his heel and charging off down the corridor again.

TO BE CONTINUED....

FALL OF AR'CIANR

BY EHLIJEN

Background

When the 3rd sphere Colony Ar'Cianr fell under Tyranid attack, the wisest Aun'va decided that time was right to demonstrate to both these strange invaders and the population of the inner sphere colonies the strength and resolve of the united Tau Empire. It was hoped that a show of force would make the Tyranids decide to either finally answer the requests for negotiation or at least convince them to bypass Tau space. To this end Commander Shadowsun, the latest hero of the Empire, was tasked with liberating Ar'Cianr...

Forces

Tyranids:

Force 1:

Hive ship ld 8, no upgrades, up to 100 points of Weapons

Hive ship ld 8, no upgrades, up to 120 points of weapons

2 Escort drones

2 Escort drones

Force 2:

Cruiser, no upgrades, up to 50 points of weapons

Cruiser, no upgrades, up to 40 points of weapons

3 Vanguard drones

3 Vanguard drones

2 Kraken Drones

Force 3:

Hive ship, ld9, up to one evolutionary upgrade, one reroll, up to 120 points of weapons

3 Escort Drones

3 Kraken Drones

Tau

Fleet:

Custodian Aspiration – *Commander Shadowsun* (ld

10), *Aun'va* (two extra rerolls)

3 Wardens

Protector Starsong – ld 8

Protector Destiny – ld 7

Hero Long Reach – ld 8

Explorer Progress – ld 8

3 Orcas

3 Defenders – ld 8

4 Castellans – ld 7

Defenders:

3 Planetary Airfields (Mantas and Barracudas)

Convoy:

5 Transports

Alternative forces:

Tyranids:

Force 1:

Hive ships and escorts up to 750 points



VOID STALKER

Force 2:

Cruisers and escorts up to 500 points

Force 3:

Any up to 400 points

Force 1 and 2 may be considered 1 force for composition restrictions, 3 must meet any on its own.

Tau:

A fleet of up to 1750 points using both ECF and CPF ships.

Up to 3 planetary ground defences.

5 transports.

Battle zone:

Place the planet (medium size) in the centre of one short table edge 150 cm from the other short edge. Generate other celestial phenomena as for a Primary Biosphere battle zone.

Set up:

The Tyranid player deploys force 1 no more than 20cm away from the planet, facing away from the far short edge by at least 135 degrees. He also deploys force 2 on the low orbit table facing no more than 45 degrees away from the planet. Force 3 will move on from a random long edge later.

The Tau player then sets up the Fleet and convoy up to 30cm from the far short edge, staying at least 120 cm away from the planet. The defenders are set up on the low orbit table and represents the last planetary defenders.

First turn:

The Tau fleet has first turn if the Fleet commander passes a 1d test; otherwise the Tyranids have first turn.

Special rules:

At the start of every Tyranid turn, roll a d6 for every planetary ground installation: on a 4+ they have been overrun by Tyranid ground forces and are removed. The Tau player can stop this by landing troops. For every assault point he has scored, he passes one such roll per turn.

For as long as a hive ship remains stationary in high orbit, it is assumed to be in synapse range of all ships on the low orbit table.

Any ship on the low orbit table that reverts to instinctive behaviour and has to approach the planet does not have to approach the planet any further but may hold station. They also will always consider enemies on the low orbit table closer than those that aren't and all enemies not also on the low orbit table to be in their side arc.

If the Tyranid player starts a turn with at least one ship crippled, he may call in his force 3. He places one contact marker on each long board edge and rolls a d6 at the beginning of his next turn and any subsequent turns until successful. On a 4+ he randomly picks one of the contact markers and

moves on Force 3 from within 15cm of this point.

Any ground defence still present at the end of the game contributes one assault point for the Tau player.

The Tyranid player has already landed all troops and is in the process of setting up digestion pools. He may not attempt to gain any further assault points. Tyranid ships may only disengage of the far board edge.

Game length:

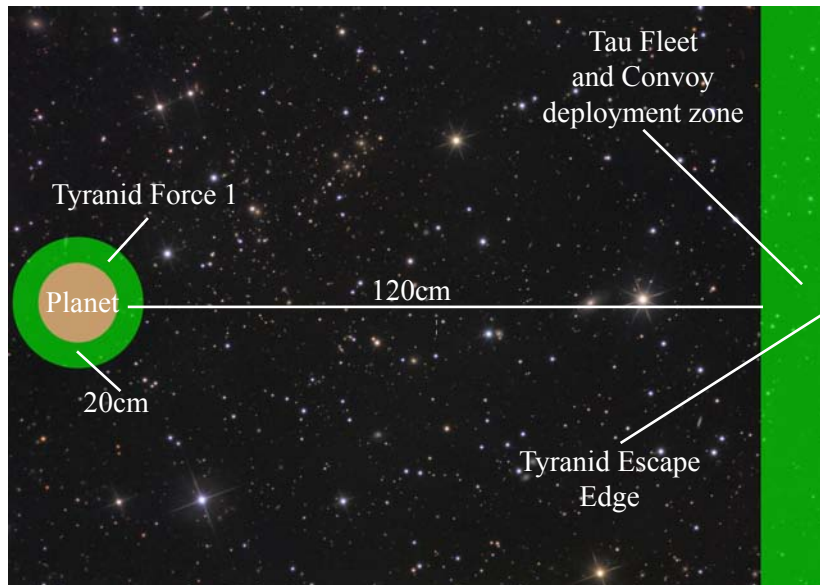
The game lasts until the Tau player has achieved two objectives or cannot achieve any more for any reason. The Tau player may not withdraw any ship unless the Aspiration has been crippled. Such an act of cowardice would be unthinkable in the presence of Aun'va.

Objectives:

The Tau player must achieve two objectives in order to win. If he achieves only one, it is a draw, otherwise he loses.

The objectives are:

- Do not lose a single Tau capital ship until all Tyranid ships are destroyed or disengaged. If Forces 1 and 2 are destroyed before Force 3 arrives, count this objective as completed until it arrives.
- Deliver at least 10 assault points to the planet (ground bases only count once the game has ended through other means)
- Do not let a single Tyranid capital ship from Forces 1 and 2 escape.



UNKNOWN WEAPONS

BY VOLANDUM

Background

The Tau view the incursion of a new splinter fleet as a major threat to their expansion in a sector, and seek to take advantage of the sluggish nature of the Tyranid fleet to defeat it in detail, as they understand that they cannot effectively confront massed Tyranids, and conventional hit-and-run tactics would swiftly become ineffective - information from captured Imperial crews informs the Tau of how quickly the Tyranids might develop countermeasures.

To date the Tau actions have worked, though not consequentially - raids on Tyranid vanguard elements have largely wiped them out, but there have been no ventures against bigger Tyranid units. As the Tyranids approach inhabitable systems where they may replenish their forces, the Tau recognise that more aggressive actions will be necessary.

Guided by the tactical wisdom of Commander Shadowsun, they endeavour to strike a Tyranid Hiveship group.

Fleets:

Tau:

may field any standard Tau fleet, and if they wish gain twice the number of gravity hooks on each ship with them, as they are close enough to inhabited space for shunting of escorts prior to the battle.

Tyranids

may field a Tyranid hive fleet with the following restrictions: Vanguard Drones and Kraken are not allowed, and no evolutionary mutations may be taken (the Tau effort of denying the Tyranids information on the adaptations which are appropriate has been successful, and Tau actions have severely cut down the mobile elements of the Tyranid fleet).

It is recommended that the Tau fleet be 1.5 times the size of the Tyranid fleet.

Deployment:

The Tyranids deploy in the centre of the table, and Tau ships are deployed pointing inward at any points on the table edge - in contact with the edge. The Tau player takes first turn.

If terrain is desired the outer reaches are recommended as the zone.

A 200 cm by 200 cm table is ideal - in which case the Tyranids are expected to deploy in the central 100 cm by 100 cm.

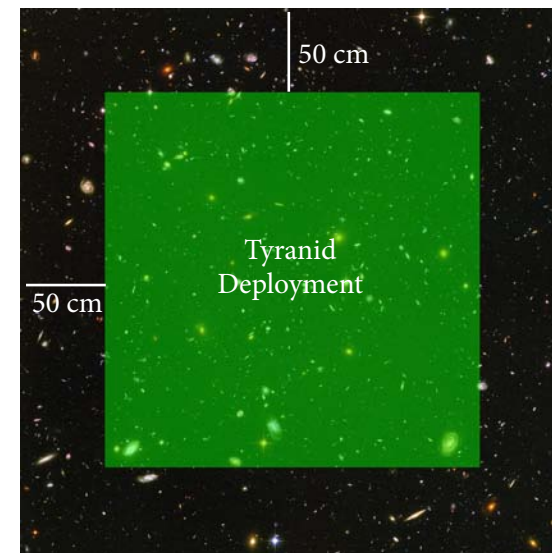
Scenario Objectives:

Tau:

The enemy must be swiftly destroyed and not permitted to escape. Destroy the Tyranid fleet within ten turns.

Tyranids:

While the Tau conventional weaponry is matched by the weaponry normally at the Hive fleet's disposal, it is imperative that an understanding of Tau ordnance be improved, so that accelerated adaptation may take place. Destroy a Tau carrier, and the ship or squadron dealing the final blow to the carrier must disengage. Only units disengaging for this objective may attempt to disengage - ships which leave the table are considered destroyed.



Outcome:

If the Tyranids achieve their objective, they are considered to have won. If not, and the Tau achieve their objective, the scenario is a Tau victory. Otherwise it is a draw.

3D BLASTMARKERS

BY ADMIRAL DADDE

*Good day cadets,
today we gonna spend some time transforming your
standard blast markers in something better and
cooler.*

STEP 1 : EQUIPMENT:



you are going to need the following equipment

- _Wire
- _Cotton
- _Hard glue (like "Attack" or similar)
- _Water+glass
- _Colours you need to make an explosion
- _Soft liquid glue (like "vinavil",you gonna mix it with the water)
- _Blast Markers (optional)
- _Scissors
- _Phon (optional)



STEP 2 :WIRE SUPPORT

Take the wire and the scissors.
Cut the wire for 10 cm ,then
roll it around a pencil,making
the support group for the whole
structure. REMEMBER: keep the
wire a bit long! You gonna lose 1/2
cm with the cotton-explosion.



STEP 3: 3D EXPLOSION

Take the Soft Glue and mix it with water in the glass. Add Glue until you feel with your fingers that the mixture is dense as milk. Rip a bit of cotton, but remember that the explosion must be proportioned to the ships.

Put the cotton ball in the glue mixture, then create with your finger a similar explosion. The cotton will become durable in hours, so take your time to create your cotton explosion.

OPTIONAL: When you finish, you can accelerate the drying process with the phon.

When you think that the cotton explosion is durable, paint it! Everyone got his style for the colours of an explosion, but I think that bright colours are best: remember that you gonna play on a black table!


**STEP 4: CONCLUSION**

Take the wire support that we made in STEP 2, put some hard glue on it. Quickly, take the cotton explosion and put it on the wire support.

When you think that all is assembled, put more glue on the support. It must be very very resilient. If you want, you can glue the whole structure on an original blast marker: in this way, you gonna respect the BFG rules. With this 4-step process, you can make thousands of explosions in no time!

Next time, we gonna make some 3D asteroids. See you in space, cadets. Class Dismissed





+++ Accessing pict file 88A01/F/470/m41
++ Attached description:
- Ship identified as NM-AN-4917 'Incandescent'
- Encountered in the Carmina Wale nebula
- No response on Mercantilis or Civiles comm channels
- Search crew sent to investigate. Did not return.
- No sign of damage.
- Lost contact with the ship in the nebula.
++ Recorder: Second officer Richard Herring
++ Note: Imperial Navy dispatched to investigate.
+++ Pict file read only. Copy failed.