

WARP RIFT

THE BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC NETZINE

ISSUE 18



HORIZON

From the Nexus Publishing House

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+++ Changer of Ways +++

Changes. Yes, last couple of months, weeks, days things have changed in the universe of Warp Rift. As you can read on this page Warp Rift opened a weblog and aquired a Warp Rift specific forum. Read them for more information.

Another thing which will have caught your eye should be the new lay out of Warp Rift. Not entirely different but improved, at least in my opinion, to make the articles look better. Feel free to give feedback on the changes of design. Be it positive or negative. Do you think the lettertype is bad? Please say so. Do you like the new headers? Please, tell me as well.

In the world of Battlefleet Gothic it is good to see that the missing escort ships, like mentioned in the previous issue of Warp Rift have returned to the new Games Workshop online store. Only two are still missing (Cobra and Iconoclast) but I am of good hope these will return as well.

The new Games Workshop website also means changes to Specialist Games. As we can read on the homepage of Specialist Games their site will be abandoned. The main Games Workshop site now is going to feature the Specialist Games and have resources available to download.

The forums of the Specialist Games site will be moved 1:1 to a new location.

Running out of space as I type. This issue features some real cool articles. Ranging from the first part of the Legendary Traders, over the Tyranid Q&A trough alternative campaign rules ending with the Divine Intervention. Check them and the other great articles out and give feedback on them through are new forum!

Happy Gaming,
Horizon

Warp Rift Blog

Since a few weeks Warp Rift also keeps its own weblog. On this weblog I will post news items, updates or other Warp Rift related information.

On this blog I will also upload revisions of previous published Warp Rift articles. Or extensions of certain articles which did not fit into a regular issue of Warp Rift.

You can check out our blog at the following location:

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

Warp Rift Forum

Hosted at www.tacticalwargames.net Warp Rift features a separate forum.

This forum is mainly intended to discuss the feautered articles in Warp Rift. But it also gives you the oppurtuniy to comment on Warp Rift itself and gives ideas, tips or otherwise to improve this Ezine.

Direct Links

If you are reading Warp Rift in Adobe Acrobat Warp Rift enables you to click on the header of an article and take you directly to the relevant thread in the Warp Rift forum.

Some articles have threads of their own, while others fall into the general discussion area.

For people who are reading Warp Rift in another programm or are reading it from paper I will give the internet link to the forum below:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/cgi-bin/forum/ikonboard.cgi?act=SF;f=89>

Issue Eightteen – Contents:

Encyclopedia Gothica	
Legendary Traders pt.1.....	4
Anargo Sector Project.....	8
High Admiralty	
Official Tyranid Q & A	13
Showcase	
Khorne Fleet of Chaos.....	15
Gothicomp 2008	16
Officer's Mess	
Reaper's Toll.....	18
Void Stalker	
Alternative Campaign Rules.....	32
The Forge	
Minefields.....	36
Personal Ship Lexicon	
Divine Intervention.....	38

Rogue Traders - Legendary Traders pt. 1

by Yuber Okami, Roy 'Horizon' Amkreutz, Yannic, Christian Schwager and Frank 'Xisor'O'Hanlon

On the following we will show you a couple of Legendary Traders who roam the galaxy. These Infamous captains and or their ships can be added to any Rogue Trader fleet.

the Angelic Captain Maros Grey

History

The Warrant of Trade was bought with a lot of money that Artelus Grey inherited from his deceased parents. His father was governor on Tellen IV, located in the Segmentum Pacificus, a wealthy and flourishing planet. But unfortunately wealthy people attracted unscrupulous people, at the age of eighteen Artelus his parents got assassinated, leaving all their money and wealth to Artelus, their only child. Artelus never knew who was responsible for the murder.

The following years Artelus lived an isolated life in the family mansion, spending his time thinking on what he should do with his life. At one evening, from a drawer in his father's study room, he found a diary and some reports regarding his great grandfather Uwerton Grey. Uwerton Grey was a so-called Rogue Trader, captain of the revered Venidictus, a re-commissioned Dominator class cruiser. He led many expeditions far into the unknown reaches of the Eastern Fringe. Discovering backwater human colonies and bringing the Light of the Emperor to them. His encounters with various alien races varied from brutal battles to peaceful negotiations. Uwerton Grey's last mission was a venture into the realm called Gates of Varl. Since then no one heard of him. The last transmission from the Venidictus made report of an ambush by alien forces.

Despite the ending of Uwerton Grey Artelus was intrigued by the life of a Rogue Trader. Seeing it as an escape from Tellen IV and possible the same fate as his parents he started to unfold his ideas for a venture into space. From his father's neglected planetary defence force he took the Angelic, the former flagship, a refitted Merchantmen of the almost forgotten Aegidius Design, remarkable because of its extensive sensor arrays, the only ship left in good enough shape to take on inter stellar journeys, as his ship. After recruiting the necessary crew and required servitors he departed for Kar Dunias. A planet from which he could venture into various regions through trade. With his final goal to build a small trade imperium of his own. But all that changed the very moment Inquisitor Horatio Luvern came aboard the Angelic.

From the moment Inquisitor Horatio Luvern came aboard the Angelic the history of this vessel becomes shady. From what can be gathered the Inquisitor and Artelus Grey commanded the Angelic into the mysterious Khareshi Expanse, located somewhere on the Eastern Fringe. It is assumed the vessel stayed for almost six months within the Expanse before it returned to known space. The ships log on this time period has been sealed by the Inquisition and captain Artelus Grey has never spoken about the venture into the Khareshi Expanse. One can only guess on what has happened.

It is rumoured that the Angelic has a strange, possibly alien, protection device. Standard

sensors seem to experience problem when they try to scan the Angelic. For the Angelic this means that enemy vessels can hardly target this vessel. This way the Angelic will only sporadically receive damage to lucky shots. The closest reference to why and what this protection is has been given by Inquisitor Luvern: 'Why do you ask? For as we know it is an Angelic vessel and Angels do have a divine protection.' With that he dismissed further questions.

The Adeptus Mechanicus has shown slight interest in the vessel but not to such an extend to invest to much time into it.

After Artelus Grey retired from active Trading and he resided to his mansion on Lanioor Prime. The Angelic re-



mained in dock for a few years, untouched by anyone and protected by the local Guard from curious eyes. Artelus children did not want to follow the same path of trading as their father. It was Artelus his grandson, Maros Grey, who took on command of the Angelic in 995.M41 at young age. Inheriting all prosperous trade privileges from his father, who on his account got these through the Inquisition, Maros quickly formed a decent transport fleet. But the fact that the Angelic went into active service again

did not go unnoticed. Very soon Maros received a visit from Inquisition Luvern. This time the Adeptus Mechanicus showed more interest for shrouded reasons and on orders of Magos Explorator Inachus Tynton they ordered a single light cruiser to accompany the Angelic for further investigations. Maros Grey and the Angelic have been on trade routes between various Lucrative Imperial Worlds and

up startling Tau colonies. Reportedly Inquisitor Luvern went aboard once again and now the Angelic left the trading to other vessels belonging to the Grey Mercantile. Its current course unknown. Yet is believed Maros Grey, just like his grand father once, took on the path of a Rogue Trader.



'Why the Angelic you ask? As you might now from ancient religious stories Angels are beings sent forth by God. Divine and blessed beings. This ship, the Angelic, had been chosen by our Divine Emperor to guide me on my voyage into the Khareshi Expanse. And you captain had already been blessed with the Angelic, I do not know how you attained the Angelic, but a blessing it was. And because of your blessing it was very clear to me that we both should venture into the Expanse. Guided by an Angel sent forth by our Emperor!'
Inquisitor Horatio Luvern

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Merchant/6	25cm	90°	1	5+	2
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		FIRE ARC
Dorsal Lance Battery		45cm	1		L/F/R
Port Weapons Battery		30cm	3		L
Starboard Weapons Battery		30cm	3		R
Prow Launch Bay		fighters - 30cm	1		-

The Angelic.....**150 points**
 Captain Maros Grey, Leadership 8, 1 re-roll.

Special Rules

- **Improved Sensors Array** (as in Rulebook, +1 Leadership)
- **Khareshi Expanse Legacy – Divine Protection**
Enemy vessels must take a Leadership at a –3 modifier test before they can fire at the Angelic.

The Angelic can take the following passenger aboard:

- **Lord Inquisitor Horatio Luvern**.....**+25 pts**
When the Inquisitor is aboard the Angelic the ship receives an additional re-roll (ship only) and the attack rating of the fleet improves by +1 (to a maximum of 3).
- **Adeptus Mechanicus Interests**
 Very recently Magos Explorator Inachus Tynton has shown interest in the Angelic. Believing it to be a design similar to the ancient Aegidius design. To this end he ordered an Adeptus Mechanicus Light Cruiser plus a few attendant escorts to investigate the vessel. For the time being with a passive stance.

A fleet led by Maros Grey and the Angelic may include the Adeptus Mechanicus Endeavour Class Light Cruiser ‘Protector of Knowledge’ (gift = energy emergence reserves) and two Adeptus Mechanics escorts.

The Comet

Captain Mura

The Eastern Fringe in the Ultima Segmentum is home to a wide variety of custom built ships, owned and operated by just as wide a selection of individuals and organisations. The Comet is one such ship and has gained quite a reputation for itself and its various captains over the past millennia.

Built from the salvaged prow of the Repulsive Class Grand Cruiser Valedictus, which was decommissioned at Kar Duniash after sustaining heavy damage in M.38, the Comet originally was an experimental navy design. Utilising the original weapons battery arrays (which can still be seen on the outside of the hull) the light cruiser was designed to be a fast gun ship.

The design, however, proved unsuccessful as the reactor capacity was not enough to effectively power both weapons systems and engines. The layout of the ship was also unsuitable to house as many crew as were required to operate the ships extensive weapons systems. The project was abandoned and all the core systems and weapons were stripped from the ship.

In late M.39, the Comet was acquired by an influential merchant family who controlled several mining colonies near the borders of Tau space and was refitted into a freighter/blockade runner. The original weapons battery power supply was re-routed towards the rear of the ship. Two powerful weapons battery turrets were installed on the superstructure. These cover the broadside and rear fire arcs of the ship. This considerably decreased firepower allows for more power to be diverted to the engines, making the Comet one of the fastest ships ever built in the Imperium of mankind.

After completion of the Comet in early M.40, the Villani family sought to employ the vessel to tighten their grip on the mining colonies in the Solitudo Sector, near the borders of the fledgling Tau Empire. Since then, they have entrusted the ship to their most experienced captains and

have gained much wealth from their exploits into far away territories.

Some of the ships former masters, and thus the ship itself, have gained fame and sometimes notoriety for their actions. Especially since the expansion of the Tau has begun in earnest, therefore contact, and also conflict, with various alien races has become more and more frequent in the area.

Adolphus Taranto was the first of the Comet's captains to establish contact with the Tau and was reported to have traded goods and technology with the aliens on several occasions. The imperial administration didn't take lightly to this news and Taranto was convicted and executed for consorting with aliens. All the goods and technology that could be recovered were confiscated by the Administratum, but after a lengthy trial the Villani's were cleared of any active involvement.

These events, however, did bring the Comet to the attention of the Inquisition and henceforth the ship was frequently requisitioned by the Holy Orders. Of these missions, little is known. Official records are only accessible to members

of the Inquisition itself and the ship's crew were not allowed to speak of them under pain of death.

The last known captain of the Comet was Alta Mura. He was appointed to command the ship some eight years before the outbreak of the Litesh War, otherwise known as the Damocles Gulf Crusade.

Captain Mura had already encountered the ever more aggressive Commerce Protection Fleets of the Tau a number of times. When the war started his experience with the Tau and knowledge of the area proved invaluable to the crusaders. During the course of the crusade the Comet was pressed into service on several occasions, but Mura would only reluctantly operate under Imperial Navy command.

The Comet mysteriously disappeared just before the end of the conflict. Although there have been several sightings around the Eastern Fringe since its disappearance, the exact location of the vessel and the fate of its captain and crew remain a mystery.





The Comet - Blockade Runner.....115 points

Special Rules

- **Reserve Engines:** Due to the Comets exceptional reserve engine capacity it automatically passes all leadership tests to go on All Ahead Full special orders. No roll needs to be made.
- ***Optional Torpedoes:** The ship's original torpedo tubes are still fully functional, although the reduced crew numbers result in a lower rate of fire. Torpedoes use up a lot of space and extra crew, so carrying them will reduce the ship's transport capacity by half. If the ship is not equipped with torpedoes it counts as a normal transport and will score 2 assault points for every turn spent in low orbit. If it does carry torpedoes it counts as half a transport and will score 1 assault point for every turn spent in low orbit.
- **Xenotech Systems:** The ship's engineers constantly seek to upgrade the systems on board and experiment with all the alien technology they can get their hands on. Often systems conflict and cannot be used simultaneously. To represent this constant work in progress use the Xenotech Systems table from the Rogue Trader fleet list to find out which system is operational.

The Comet is a unique ship, specifically modified to fulfil the role of a blockade runner. It was built from the prow and engines of a derelict Repulsive Class Grand Cruiser and later refitted for civilian service. However, it still resembles a warship more than a civilian vessel.

The Grand Cruiser prow provides some solid armour for the ship's hull and the enormous engines make the ship one of the fastest ever built by man. The Comet is well shielded for it's size, but only lightly armed.

The ship is unique in that its main weaponry covers the rear of the ship, with only little firepower to the sides and none to the front. It is assumed that the Comet will usually be in front of its pursuers.

At times when more firepower is needed, however, the vessel can also be equipped with torpedoes. The Grand Cruiser's original torpedo tubes are still fully functional, but a lot of extra crewmen are required to operate the weapon system.

The extra space needed to store the ordnance and extra crew reduces the Comet's transport capacity by half.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/6	30cm	90°	2	5+	1

ARMAMENT	RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC
Port Weapons Battery	30cm	3	Left/ Rear
Starboard Weapons Battery	30cm	3	Right / Rear
Prow Torpedoes*	30cm	4	Front



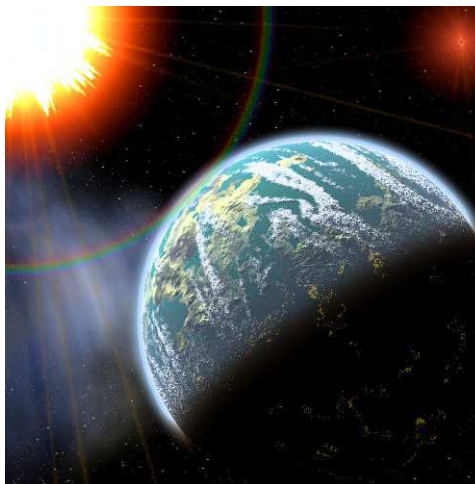
The Anargo Sector Project

by Kage2020

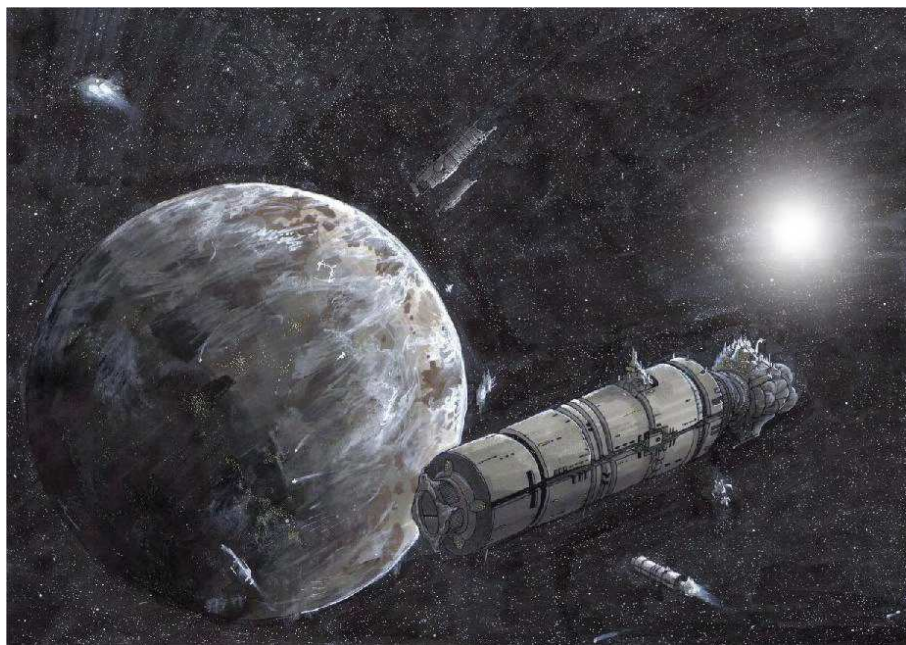
An Introductory Article for Warp Rift. Want to get involved: <http://anargo-sector.net/>

What is the Anargo Sector Project?

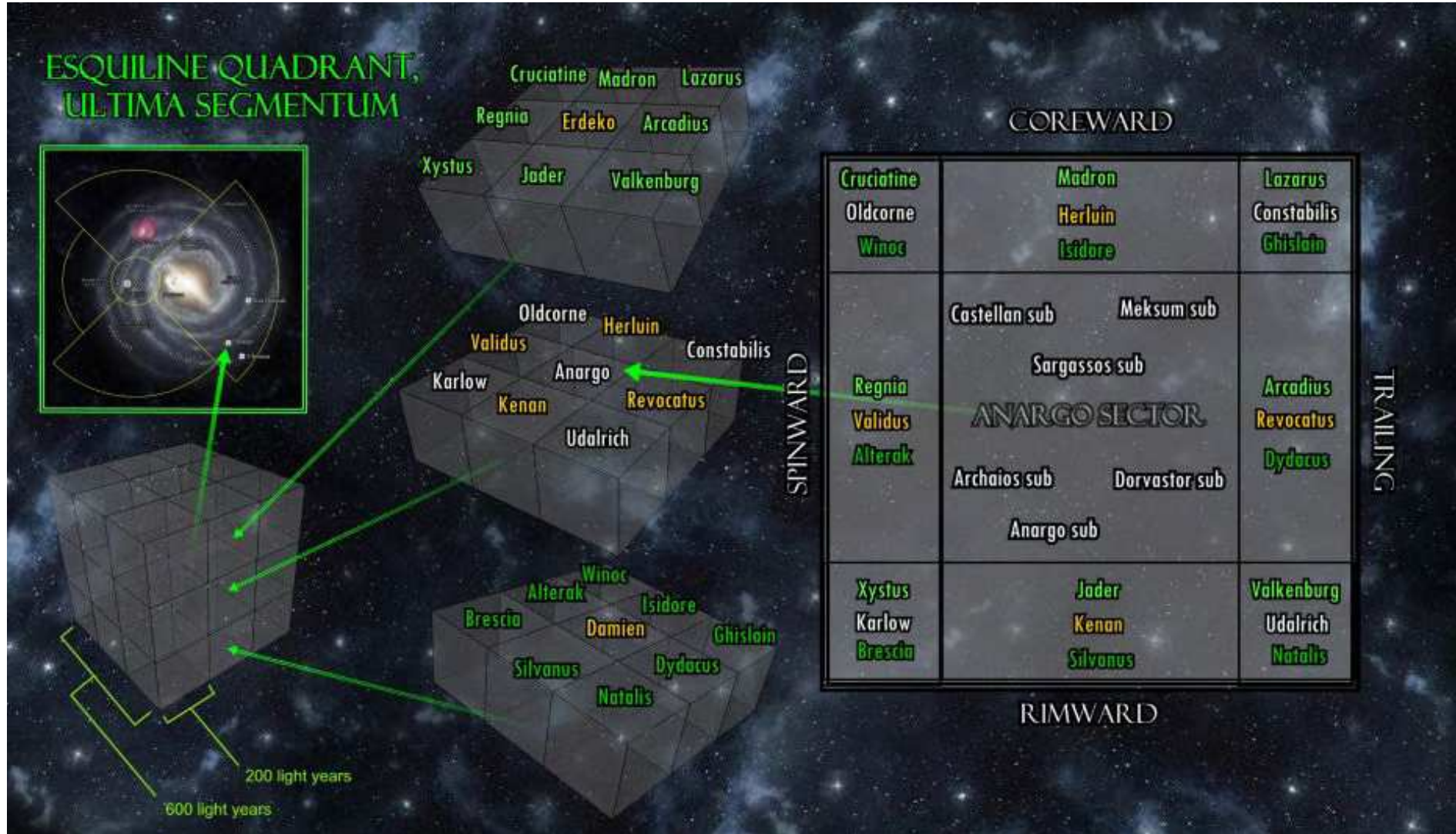
Well, that's a good question. The project originated on Portent, a BBS that has subsequently been recreated as Warseer, something like five years ago. At the time the forums were suffering from a hiatus of discussion, so the creator of the project (that would be me) came up with the idea of creating a complete sector, then "colonizing" it in a plausible fashion. While the initial premises have changed – now focused on a more thematic approach to the creation of the subsectors – the project is still creating a vast amount of fan-based material that explores, develops, and generally shapes an interpretation of the Warhammer 40,000© universe that has few peers in the hobbyist community.



It is, however, through the time of our various contributors, whether writer, artist, roleplayer or wargamer, that the project truly shines. While still a young and relatively unknown online project, with the forthcoming release of the **Explore** website – the public face of the Anargo Sector Project that will present the creations of the project members to the wider 40k hobbyist community – we're sure that the project will become wider known.



The focus of the project has even been to create the "average" subsector, yet over the years we've added a few embellishments to make it a tiny bit special. The Heart of Anargo, or the Anargan Abyss, is just one of those items that allows us to draw upon the meta-story of the Warhammer 40,000© universe. More of that later on in this introduction, and perhaps in subsequent articles offering details of the Anargo sector to readers of *Warp Rift*.



The Sector...

Located in Segmentum Ultima, and a part of the Esquiline Quadrant, the Anargo Sector forms a cube approximately 200 light years on an edge and contains approximately 21,000 systems. In 470.M41, the initial setting for the Anargo sector, there are six Imperial subsectors, each designed to evoke one of the themes of the Warhammer 40,000© universe:

- Anargo, the subsector capital that wrested power from

Hespera in the Age of Apostasy;

- Archaios, a forgeworld of the Adeptus Mechanicus that was settled during the Dark Age of Technology by the Martian fleets;
- Castellan, once the location of bucolic agriworlds, but now heavily fortified along the axis of the Pendulum Tide, protecting the sector against the periodic "green tides" of Ork invasion from the neighbouring Cruciatine sector;
- Dorvastor, the spiritual heart of the Anargo sector and the Esquiline Quadrant;
- Meksum, the economic sleeping giant that many feel

will rise up and become the preeminent subsector in the Anargo sector; and

- Sargassos, the Cursed Subsector and former capital subsector, which only now in the Dark Millennium begins to come out from the shadow of its despided history.

Throughout the sector there are numerous stellar phenomenon, from rogue planetoids to stellar nebulae and more, but the most interesting is hidden underneath the layers of reality in the Empyrean itself: the Heart of Anargo.

THE HEART OF ANARGO

Also known as the Anargan Abyss on star charts of the Anargo Sector and the Esquiline Quadrant, the Heart of Anargo is a tumultuous and disconcerting area of the Sea of Souls. Few have travelled into the Anargan Abyss and even fewer have returned. Those few crews that have returned have babbled incoherently of an area of space that twists upon itself, where the material and the immaterial bleed over into each other. What rumours circulated were quickly squashed, the ships crews disappearing under Inquisitorial seal never to be heard from again.

What Imperial scholars know for certain is that the major warp route through this region of the Segmentum Ultima, the Flavonian Course, is broken by whatever phenomenon exists within the Heart of Anargo. Scattered and broken like water over the rocks of a series of rapids, random currents merging across the Shallows and Depths of the warp, as well as the stilled area of the Sargassos Gulf that makes warp travel in that subsector all but impossible. No course has ever been found to successfully navigate the Anargan Abyss, and none of the ships that have found their way out of the Abyss have ever done so in anything more than a wreck.

Unknown to those Imperial scholars, and what it is only suspected by the Eldar hidden on their colony world of Tir'asur as they watch the beating Heart of Anargo, is that the Abyss hides within its depths one last, desperate attempt by the Old Ones to bind and destroy the Necrons in the War in Heaven. Through the creation of a vast proto-dimensional runes through the warp and weave of reality, the Old Ones hoped to remove a Necron tomb world into the warp and, from here, destroy it utterly — unmake it and scatter it in the currents of the Æthyr.

And now, in 470.M41, human eyes filled with the challenge and glory of finding the first trans-Abyss route, or of solving the conundrum of the Abyss, turn towards the Heart of Anargo...

The Subsectors...

Each of the Anargo subsectors represents a microcosm of social, economic, and political reality through the Imperium of Man. While there are obvious exceptions, as an “average” subsector Anargo provides an excellent model for what might be occurring on the Eastern Fringe or even in the most developed heart of Segmentum Solar.

ANARGO

Named after Gaius Anargo, the first Lord Anargo raised after the Age of Apostasy and the overthrow of the Anargan Theocracy, Anargo Primus is an important trade hub visited by thousands — perhaps tens of thousands — of ships each year as they pass long the Flavonian Course on their journey between the Segmentum Solar and the Eastern Fringe. The mainworld of Anargo Primus, fourth world from the central star in the Anargo Primus system, is both the sector and subsector capital, and as such is the location of the Imperial Conclave, a vast citadel occupied by the Adeptus Terra. It is through the Imperial Conclave, a city of five hundred million Adepts, that the Imperium's interests in the Anargo sector are maintained.

Anargo Primus' importance in the Anargo sector is also maintained by the far companion to the Anargo Primus system, or Anargo Secundus. This fairly young forgeworld of the Adeptus Mechanicus is the current base of Battlefleet Anargo and is a major hub in the Anargan Trade Spine, which consists of highly productive industrial and civilized worlds within

the Anargo subsector. Anargo Secundus is also the pre-eminent ship yards of the Anargo sector and the Esquiline Quadrant.

Perhaps one of the more unusual aspects of the Anargo subsector is a widespread decrease in the popularity of the Adeptus Ministorum. While the Imperial Cult remains important, the specific trappings of the Ecclesiarchy have been marginalized by a tradition that extends back to the overthrow of the Anargan Theocracy. As one might expect, political relations between Anargo and Dorvastor are ever strained.

ARCHAIOS

As one of the first regions of the now-Anargo sector to be colonized in the Dark Age of Technology, the Archaaios subsector is primarily composed of old and established worlds. The most significant of these is the forgeworld of Proteus, whose Priests of the Machine Cult are spread across the Anargo sector and the Esquiline Quadrant. Many of the worlds in the Archaaios subsector have been greatly influenced by the presence of Proteus, developing into advanced industrial worlds or being claimed and shaped by the Adeptus Mechanicus into Knight Worlds.

The bonds of Archaaios to Anargo maintain a great deal of strength in the current political climate of the Anargo sector,

partially borne out of the popularity of the Machine Cult that was so threatened during the Age of Apostasy. This is regarded by many as somewhat ironic, given that the Archaaios subsector was once home to Saint Sistina, one of the most influential forces in the sector's history.



CASTELLAN

Castellan is a subsector torn by a series of wars that have lasted for three millennia. Originally a peaceful and small cluster of agriworlds, with the threat of the orks that traverse the Pendulum Tide from the Cruciatine Sector this has changed. Now instead of a breadbasket serving the needs of the other subsectors, Castellan is a chain of heavily fortified Imperial colonies, forming the rocks upon which the ork attacks are broken and the bastion from which counter-invasions are launched.

Central to the defence of Castellan, and the source of its vulnerability, is the Pendulum Tide. At the edge of the Castellan subsector, caught within the Pendulum Tide, lie a number of contested worlds in a nearly constant struggle between the Imperium and the forces of ork warlord, Morskragga, whom the Departamento Munitorium has begun to call the “wily greenskin warlord.”

DORVASTOR

The capital of the Dorvastor subsector, cardinal world Dorvastor, is not only the spiritual heart of the Anargo sector but also the Esquiline Quadrant and its twenty-seven Imperial sectors. Each year countless millions visit the Dorvastor subsector on their journeys of pilgrimage, providing the local diocese with a substantial income. Surrounding the cardinal world are several Shrine worlds forming a network of pilgrimage-routes and a tourist trade focused on religious goods and artefacts.

After suffering a great blow in the Apostate Wars, Dorvastor has slowly been rebuilding, using its considerable wealth to launch missions across the sector in order to restore the dominance of the Adeptus Ministorum over the Imperial Cult. It is rumoured by some rogue Imperial scholars – named heretics and apostate by Dorvastor – that the Cardinals of Dorvastor support the Anargo-Meksum economic conflict, as well as the various raiders that harry the borders of Anargo and Archaois.

MEKSUM

Often described as a sleeping giant, the Meksum subsector consists of a large cluster of highly populous and product words formed around its capital, hiveworld Meksum Prime. Benefiting from a near-constant economic growth for the last three millennia, Meksum is the hub of interstellar travel and trade that all but exceeds that of



the Anargo subsector. Imperial scholars have suggested that it is only a matter of time before Meksum Prime supersedes Anargo Primus and, from there, takes on the mantle as the sector capital.

The influence of Meksum’s large trade guilds and corporations can be felt across the entire sector and, to the frustration of Lord Castellan, it is likely that the combined political power of these organizations will draw more ships of Battlefleet Anargo to Meksum in the near future.

SARGASSOS

Known as the Cursed Subsector since its fall from grace at the end of the Age of Apostasy and the Gaian Revolt, a featured reinforced by the stilling of the warp currents and the formation of the Sargassos Gulf that encompasses much of the subsector. These regions, now forbidden

space and rumoured to be tainted by Chaos, the Imperium has begun the painstaking effort of restoring the subsector and colonizing new worlds. Central to this effort is the new subsector capital, hiveworld Theta Corionis, one of the most productive and highly populated worlds in the sector.

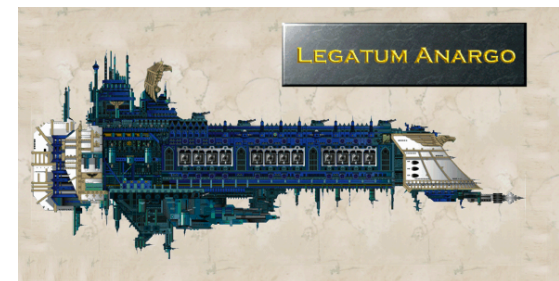
While few sailors dare to stray too far from the established trade routes in Sargassos, this subsector offers the only possible route into the heart of the sector — the Anargan Abyss, a dangerous and unpredictable route at best.

The Xenos...

The Anargo sector is a part of a continuing narrative, which means that over the next few years the very shape of the sector will change, whether socially, politically or economically. Will Meksum triumph over Anargo and become the sector capital, or will Lord Anargo manage to maintain his power base? Will Castellan be able to hold off the Green Tide of Warlord Morzkraga despite the political and economic power plays in the sector? Or will that tide break through the Castellan Line to shatter the Anargan Trade Spine?

These are the questions that will be answered by the contributors to the project. At the current point in the history of the project what this does mean is that not all of the iconic races of the Warhammer 40,000© universe are present within the Anargo sector. In time? Again, that is for the contributors to determine as they develop the narrative story of the sector over the next few years.

What races are present in the Anargo Sector Project?



THE ELDAR...

Each of the cultures of the Eldar have a place in the Anargo subsector. It is even rumoured that the mysterious and feared Crone World Eldar operate in the forbidden realms of the Sargassos subsector.

Tir'asur

A colony world in the Uuranor en'Vesta (trans. "Land of the Phoenix") system on the very edge of the Heart of Anargo, Tir'asur maintains close ties to the founding craftworld of Lugganath. While still a fairly small colony, it is stable and well protected, home of a hundred-thousand or more Craftworld Eldar and an unknown number of Exodites. Still being terraformed by the Clan of the Phoenix, Tir'asur is a beautiful world despite its proximity to the Anargan Abyss. And, while it is still young for an Eldar colony world, it remains a force to be reckoned with.

Eldar Raiders

Eldar Raiders, whether the decadent Dark Eldar or those that serve the needs of the Craftworld Eldar, are known to operate in the Anargo sector. The history of some worlds have been shaped by the presence of these Raiders, but very little is known as to the specifics of their disposition. Learned Imperial scholars suggest that a Kabal of the Dark Eldar operate within the sector, one that is distinct from Craftworld Eldar operations, but there is little evidence to support this theory.

THE NECRONS...

Unbeknownst to the Imperium, a Necron tombworld lies at the Heart of Anargo. Trapped within the ancient prison of the Old Ones the Necrons are silent; quiescent; asleep. Only the questing of human explorers and the stray thoughts of the observant Eldar threaten this stasis.

THE ORKS...

Ever a constant threat, the "Green Tide" of the orks is constantly battering against the shield of the Castellán subsector. While the orks have not yet been able to break Castellán, forcing their way through to the Anargo Trade Spine beyond, there are rumours of splinter forces that have

managed to get beyond Castellán.

THE TAU...

In 470.M41 no Tau have been found to be present in the Anargo sector.

THE TYRANIDS...

In 470.M41 no Tyranids have been found to be present in the Anargo Sector. There are, however, several investigations of possible Genestealer infestations by the Ordo's Hereticus and Xenos within the sector.

OTHER RACES...

The Anargo Sector is home to a number of other races, from the mysterious Aoideans to the ancient Mezzan and their descendants. What impact these races will have on the Anargo sector is up to the contributors. Will they die out to be never heard from again, or will the Imperium hunt them down and purge them from the annals of history?

Gaming in the Anargo Sector

At present, the Anargo Sector Project is a setting. In that it is little different from, say, the Calixis sector that Black

Industries created and which Fantasy Flight Games (FFG). The primary difference is that the Anargo sector is designed to be a part of a narrative, or a story that will develop and change the Anargo Sector Project.

As such there are a number potential ways that 40k hobbyist gamers can shape the Anargo Sector Project:

- **Roleplaying.** A number of the original, core members of the Anargo Sector Project come from a roleplaying background. Kage2020 (moi!) continues to work for a GURPS interpretation of the 40k universe, while Earthscorpion works with and develops the setting for a Dark Heresy campaign. In the end, however, RPG scenarios offer one means by which the narrative can be shaped. Care to join us? (For those interested in Earthscorpion's endeavours, please click [here](#). (For those that want in insight into the thoughts of the creator of the Anargo Sector Project, then [here](#) is the place to click.)

- **Wargaming.** This familiar part of our joined passion will make the first contribution to the Anargo Sector Project narrative. The Pendulum Tide is one again turning and the orks of Morskragga's empire are soon to be beating against the line of the Castellán subsector. Will the valiant warriors of the Imperium and their sometimes allies be able to turn the tide, or will the orks break through Castellán into the Anargan Trade Spine?
- **Fiction.** We are all storytellers. In the Anargo Sector Project the storytellers have a special place. They are the ones that determine what is going to happen with our narrative, and how the Anargo sector is going to change. Will that change be for the better or the worst? Well, that's something that only the contributors to the project will be able to decide.

Be you roleplayer, wargamer, or even just a fan of the background you most definitely have a place in the Anargo Sector Project. What mark will you leave?

The Future of the Anargo Sector Project

The Anargo Sector Project is a collaborative effort. This means that while even while our creator (moi!) has a place in the project, it is one that is also determined by the collaboration of our contributors. In the next month the Anargo Sector Project will be releasing the first part of its **Explore** website. This will entail the release of the Anargo subsector and, shortly thereafter, each subsector of the Anargo sector. This also means that our artwork galleries, our stories and, well, practically everything that we can find will become available...

Does that sound random? Well, perhaps it is so. The future of the project ultimately lies in the hands of you readers. Will you contribute to the betterment of us all? I hope so.

If not? Let us revel in the joy of our joined hobby. We would love to hear from you!

Regards,

Kage2020

Tyranid Q & A

Nate Montes

Just shortly ago the Battlefleet Gothic High Admiralty organized a Q & A regarding the Tyranids. HA member Nate Montes welcomed the community with a few answers on questions asked by various members of the Specialist Games Forum.

Q: For Nids, was it really meant for them to be able to take those upgrades which can be taken more than once (extra hp and spores) yet only counting as one slot?

A: Concerning the Tyranids, multiple spore cysts or reinforced carapace count as a single "slot" for bio-enhancements, though in a campaign you can still only earn these one at a time. Yes, that means a hiveship with a whole lot of staying power can theoretically earn up to +4HP and two spore cysts and still have one "slot" available for one more bio-enhancement. In the end this will be an expensive hiveship, and something this big should also be a pretty cool model to boot! (no rule munchkins- boo hiss!!)

There are a few caveats to this. Escorts CANNOT earn the reinforced carapace bio-enhancements so NO to 2HP mini-cruisers! also, Kraken CANNOT have spore cysts so they cannot use this refit to gain some.

Q: As previously stated, we could use some clarification on bio-upgrades, like can one make a hive ship with 14 hits, 6 spore cysts and another bio upgrade for one-off games? (I imagine that a hive ship can just get progressively more powerful in a campaign, though please correct me if I'm wrong on that assumption)

A: Yes, a Hiveship can gain up to +4HP as a single bio-enhancement "slot", but only two spore cysts can be gained in total. No bio-enhancement can be used more than once so you can't use the spore cyst refit to gain up to two spore cysts, then use another hiveship's "slot" to gain two more. Also, keep in mind that while you can gain up to two spore cysts, you can only gain one at a time. In

other words, after the end of a battle you can gain one, then after another battle you can gain a second and it still counts as a single refit "slot."

Q: How do we handle Cruiser Clash scenarios with Tyranids? Their cruisers are deployed with hiveships and only Kraken & Vanguard are capable of independent operation.

A: Cruiser Clash scenarios with Tyranids has always been the "what if" question, and it has been really hard to incorporate the original scenario rules into a number of the new fleets as they have come to life in the game. You are right- 'Nid cruisers are deployed with hiveships and only Kraken & Vanguard are capable of independent operation.

We did NOT want to change this for the sake of game scenarios because it is integral to their distinctively alien look and feel.

Though p.68 of the rules calls for a cruiser not to exceed 185 points, I would in fairness swap this out with a Tyranid escort squadron (made up of vanguards and Kraken) not to exceed 185 points instead, using the Vanguard fleet List rules on p.90 of Armada. Up to 185 points per escort squadron will buy quite a bit of bug power, and 'Nids can have up to 12 escorts per squad!

You would be VERY impressed to see how well even a fairly inexperienced player does with a mass of heavy bug escorts on the table against a squadron of enemy capital ships, and THAT is very true to the look and feel we were trying to create with the Tyranids.



Q: Coming into contact with Spores is an automatic hit (ignoring holo/shadow fields) and batteries suffer the standard holofield shift, but do any other weapons such as bio-feeder tentacles ignore holofields? (I know it seems pretty clear in the book but a bud of mine was insistent on this)

A: Holofields and Shadowfields work essentially the same way in all respects. They save against ALL strength-based weapons, Nova Cannon shots, any ordnance attacks and any kind of hit and run attacks, ramming and boarding. In this respect, attacks by feeder tentacles do NOT ignore holofields.



Q: What are your thoughts on Nid planetary defenses? We know they only stop at a given planet long enough to consume it, but could defenses be represented by perhaps organisms that are collecting bio-matter from orbit and have defensive attributes? I know this is for clarification on present rules, not new ones, but I thought I'd toss it out to hear your thoughts on.

A: 'Nids are a mostly a raiding fleet and as far as the game rules do not use planetary defenses. To create something like this would essentially be adding to the rules. I would say the simplest solution is when the 'Nids are playing defender in a scenario where they are in the process of consuming a planet, roll for planetary defenses normally and add to the fleet that point value in additional escort drones. If both players don't mind, I guess you can feel free to go ahead and create bio-equivalents to the standard planetary defenses, trading shields for spores and the weaponry for their Tyranid equivalents, keeping all planetary defense costs unchanged but Tyranid weapon ranges as-is. That solution however is strictly unofficial.

On that note, my greatest failing with the bugs was not creating a 'Nid equivalent to the fireship- it's cool and very buggy! My fleet has a number of WH40k 'Nid spores as fireships, using the standard fireship rules and cost but swapping spores for shields. Think mega-spore mines, only bigger!

Q: how many ordnance can they (Nids) have on the table? The current FAQ can be a little confusing on the matter.

A: The new rulebook has eliminated the "ordnance runs out on doubles" rule, changing it for a rule that places no more ordnance on the table than the number of launchbays in the fleet. Using these same rules, the Tyranid player no suffers a hit for rolling a double. It should be noted that Tyranids are exempt from launch bay limitations under the new rules and can continue to launch attack craft every turn as long as they successfully reload ordnance, keeping with the restrictions listed on p.85 of Armada. This is the upside to the Tyranid's significantly inferior ordnance and adds to the "cloud of doom" look-and-feel we were seeking when we created this fleet.

Q: On the 6-12 escorts per hiveship, what does 'escorts' mean, the generic type or the specific class? And is the 6-12 compulsory, or is 0 a valid option as well?

I know most people are actually in agreement on this, but I've seen it confuse new players.

A: Escorts refer to any one of the different escort types, meaning Kraken, vanguards and the generic escorts. Yes, "0" is an option besides fielding squadrons between 6 to 12 ships. By design, the escort drones are MUCH cheaper and weaker than Kraken, as these were intended to be essentially ablative armor for hiveships while Kraken are the fleet's heavy hitters. A particularly thematic fleet would be very heavy on the cheap escorts and rather light on the faster Vanguards and expensive Kraken. Just as in WH40k, the bugs' greatest strength lies in the sheer numbers they can field.



Q: It may be balanced in campaigns, but what about 1 off games? Can hiveships just have +2 cysts and +4 hits and still have a slot if the player wants to pay the points?

And I agree, the cost seems a bit low for those on the hiveship. On the cruiser they seem rightish though.

A: YES, for a one-off game and if your opponent agrees, you can hit the table with a "mother of hiveships" that starts out with +4HP, +2 spore cysts and one other bio-enhancement.

I agree that hiveships are pretty cheap for a battleship-class vessel. However, when it comes right down to it,

most true battleships are capable of laying down great firepower at relatively long range, whereas everything about 'Nids is about plodding along until they can get into a knife fight. Also keep in mind that the very cheapest hiveship you can get with +4HP, +2 cysts and no third refit is 345 points, if I did my math right. That's a respectable battleship cost for any fleet and almost astronomical for Tyranids.

Q: Sorry if I'm being astronomically dense here. Are the hivefleet evolution options open for all-comers one-off games? Or are they specific prior permission by the opponent only?

A: No worries- you are not being dense at all! I'm just happy to finally have a few minutes to be re-immersed into my favorite hobby! The bio-enhancements are published rules so they are indeed official. They are considered campaign rules so can be freely used in a campaign. Unlike other refits, these certainly can be freely used in a one-off game, though as a matter of courtesy, they should be used with an opponent's permission, just as if I wanted to pay the extra points to use extra sensors I already modeled on one of my Imperial Dauntless light cruisers. This being a GAME, I don't see why getting an opponent's permission should be much of a problem when referring to published rules. Sadly, this question comes up more often than not so I guess some people have to deal with more rule munchkins than I've ever had the misfortune to come across.

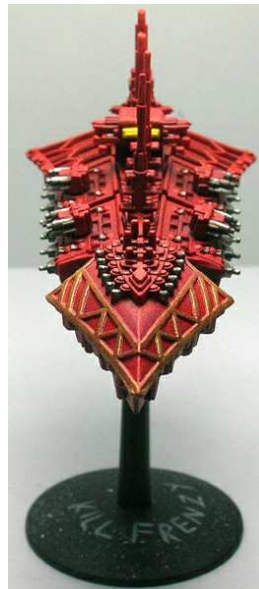
- Nate



SHOWCASE

SHIPS OF THE GALAXY

SHOWCASE



*Chaos
Khorne Fleet
by Napalm*

Gothicomp 2008

4th Annual Battlefleet Gothic Painting Competition.

Hosted by Tactical Wargames (alternatively known as www.epic40k.co.uk).

The Goal

The general aim of this competition is simply to encourage players to get painting and show off what they can do. I encourage people to enter no matter how good or bad their painting and converting skills are.

The Deadline

This competition will open may 1, 2008, and the deadline for submissions is Thursday 31st July 2008, 4pm (UK time).



2005 Painting Winner: Frank Wesner - Despoiler Venerable Barge

The Categories

Generally, there is only a single category and all submissions are entered into this. This will be voted on by the Battlefleet Gothic players. However, in addition, there will be a 'conversion prize'. This will be a token prize for one entry based on the skill and style of any conversion work which has gone into the vessel, in an effort to encourage creativity in modelling as well as painting. This will be judged by a select panel. All entries are automatically submitted into both competitions simultaneously. The judges for the conversion prize are myself, Warmaster Nice and Cybershadow.

The Prizes

There are two available prizes for this competition, one for the painting winner and one for the conversion winner.

The painting prize

The prize for the winner of the painting competition has been donated by Napalm and Reaver, for which we thank them.

Any escort blister up to the prize of 8£/12€/15\$ The order will be placed with Games Workshop and the prize will be delivered directly to the winner.

Plus 8 resin Voss-prows for IN cruisers.

We are still open for prize donations for the painting competition to make the reward more 'beefier'. You can contact me or Cybershadow if you want to donate a prize.

The conversion prize

The conversion prize is a Battleship of the winners choice, or equivalent, up to the value of eighteen pounds in the UK (including postage). The order will be placed with Games Workshop and the prize will be delivered directly to the winner, from Vanvlak, who we thank very much for his donation.



2005
Conversion
Winner:
Rodrigo
Barbera -
Endeavours



2006 Painting Winner: unseelied - Kar Duniash Battleship

The Vessels

Each separate entry should consist of a single miniature to be used for Battlefleet Gothic (however, note that conversions, scratch builds and even vessels from outside manufacturers are welcome). The only exception to this is:

- If the vessel is a light cruiser or equivalent, one or two vessels may be submitted as a single entry in the same photograph.
- If the vessel is an escort or equivalent, then the submission must consist of between two and four vessels in a single picture.

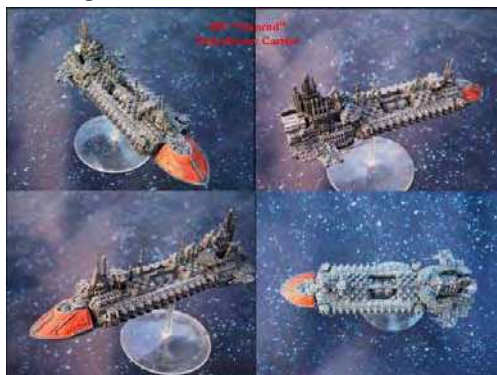
Aside from this stipulation, the entry is largely down to the participant.

The Pictures

You should submit a single picture per entry, no more. Each photograph should be no more than 640 x 480 pixels large, and should remain under 75Kb. This limit is set by

the size of the post on these boards, and is the total size of the post, including pictures and text. Pictures which do not conform to these criteria may be resized or otherwise altered, or disqualified from the event. If you wish, you may submit a single picture which consists of your ship from a number of different angles, in effect a composite picture. However, the normal rules apply to this in terms of size and dimension.

With the submissions being made via the thread on these board, I must request that all pictures which are submitted are actually uploaded to these boards, rather than being linked and hosted off-board. The reasons for this are that the board then sets the size limit of the pictures, and so it keeps all entries equal, and the entries become unchangeable when the thread is locked.



2006
Conversion
Winner:
Redram
- Nimrod

The Submission

To submit a picture of your vessel to this competition, you simply post it in the submissions thread on this board. Note that you must be a member of the GothiComp boards to enter this competition.

We will compile a gallery of the entrants which will be available online. This gallery will remain as a permanent fixture to the site, and so you will be able to browse the pictures in the future. Please note, I am sure that there will be a rush in the last 24 hours before the end of this competition, therefore please don't wait until the last few hours if you can avoid it.



2007 Painting Winner: blackhorizon - Yau Custodian

The Voting

Voting will take place here on these boards. Entries will be split into heats of up to nine entries each. The winner of each heat will go through to the next round until a winner is determined. Please note that entries will be placed into heats in the order in which they are submitted here. Therefore, if you are intending to submit more than one vessel to this competition, it may be in your interest to spread out your submissions, to ensure that you do not have all of your entries in the same category and are therefore competing against yourself (since only a single entry from each heat goes through to following rounds, having entries in multiple heats increases your chances).



2007
Conversion
Winner:
Canucks
Fan - Eldar
Shadow
Cruiser

Additional Rules

All decisions are final, any prizes are non-negotiable and the competition organizers reserve the right to remove competition entries or request that they are resubmitted or altered. We will hopefully never need this stuff, but just in case...

That is it. Feel free to email me with any questions that you may have. Now, what are you doing still reading this? Get painting!

The GothiComp 2008 Discussion Thread:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/cgi-bin/forum/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=38;t=12483>

The GothiComp 2008 Submission Thread:

<http://www.tacticalwargames.net/cgi-bin/forum/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=38;t=12484>

2008 Painting Winner



2008 Conversion Winner



OFFICER'S MESS

LOUNG TIME

Reaper's Toll

by Mark Nutter

Sector: Varseeni

System: Anturii

Vessel ID: Annihilator, Gothic Class

Task Force: Delta-921

For the glory and future of the Imperium of Man

There before him was the beauty of the universe. A veil of dust and planetary debris spread across the heavens, pinpricked with the glowing light of the stars within it. An entire rainbow of colours lay before his gaze and for a moment he was lost in it. All of this wonder had been the reason he had joined the Imperial naval academy - to explore the glories of a universe beyond his cold and frigid homeworld.



"Commander Thuul?"

The voice of one of the ship's junior officers cut through his reverie and drew him back into the present.

He turned to look at the man and smiled slightly as he spoke. "Yes, Lieutenant Yarrin?"

The young officer's expression was serious as he handed Thuul the pict-slate.

"Long range augur sweeps have picked up an anomaly, thirty thousand units off our

starboard, sir. There are residual power readings. The adepts do not recognise some of the trace signatures in the readings. It could be the remains of a vessel, sir."

Thuul regarded the data before him and nodded slightly.

"The initial readings look like Ork vessels, but there is something more to them."

Thuul frowned, and then turned to Yarrin. "Inform Captain Karamov, and give the order to bring the ship to alert status. Alert the Cobras. I don't like anomalies, especially this near to Ork territories."

The young Lieutenant hurried away to carry out his order, and Thuul turned back to the starscape. The name of this region was the Ghoul Stars, and he knew only too well that it was an appropriate description. It was a region infested with greenskins and worse. It may look beautiful, but he now knew it could hide horrors and death that would have been unimaginable to his younger self.

"What did you bother me with this for, Commander?" demanded Captain Karamov, coming to stand alongside him on the observation deck. "I thought I could rely on you to run this ship in my absence."

Thuul looked at his captain and indicated the pict-slate.

"Looks like Orks, sir," he said offering it to Karamov. "And you gave me specific instructions to contact you if we encountered the greenskins."

Karamov mumbled under his breath and regarded the information before him. He couldn't deny giving the instructions, but he was determined to be as irascible as possible with his first officer.

"Looks like a wrecked ship to me, Commander. It's probably some damaged transport ship. Nothing of interest to us. Despatch the Cobras to investigate."

Thuul nodded, and to underline his point said, "Readings indicate trace unrefined fuels that are consistent with greenskin vessels."

Karamov looked at him with dark eyes and said archly, "Are you trying to annoy me today, Gideon?"

For a moment, Thuul thought he might have pushed too far.

"I apologise if I..."

The Captain handed him back the pict-slate but then offered him a broad smile.

"Sometimes, Gideon, I think despite our years together that you don't know me at all."

There was a slightly mischievous glint in Karamov's eye as he turned his back on him and

OFFICER'S MESS

moved to take his seat in the huge command throne at the centre of the deck.

Yarrin, the young Lieutenant returned to his post at the terminal beside Thuul. "Incoming message from the Rapier, Captain," the young officer said, not looking up from the screen. "Putting it through now."

The Rapier was one of the three Cobra class destroyers escorting the cruiser, and its captain was a close friend of Captain Karamov. The Lieutenant's fingers moved rapidly across the controls. For a second there was burst of static and then the clear and accented voice of Captain Lucius Merrill of the Rapier echoed across the command deck.

"..approached the wreckage. It does appear to be of greenskin construction. It has taken considerable damage. I would suggest there may in fact have been up to three Ork vessels here of at least cruiser size and above."

Karamov's eyebrows raised and he looked at Thuul as he spoke. "Cruiser class, you say, Lucius?"

"Yes, Captain. In fact it actually looks like the remains of at least one Battleship, by the mass of debris present. And possibly at least two cruiser class escorts. What are your orders?"

Karamov tugged at his bearded chin.

"I suggest you bring your ships back, we need..."

"Excuse me sir," said Yarrin, cutting through his captain's sentence. Thuul raised his eyebrows at the young officer's bravado.

Captain Karamov offered him an annoyed glance, but nodded for Yarrin to continue.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir, but augur sweeps have detected another cluster of wrecked vessels on our port side. They are exhibiting similar trace readings as those currently being investigated by Captain Merrill."

"More Orks?" said Thuul, crossing to the station to look at the readouts himself. "Looks like someone did us a favour out here."

"We have more, sir," said the Lieutenant with a frown. "There's another cluster of them ahead of us, sir, at six hundred thousand units."

Thuul looked at the readouts and turned to his Captain.

"Someone hit the greenskins hard here. Very hard. I wasn't aware of any Imperial activity in this sector? Other than our own?"

"Perhaps it was the Eldar?" offered the Lieutenant.

"I do not believe it would be," said Thuul. "They are raiders. They hit small groups and fade away. They do not like to engage in large scale battles."

Karamov got up from his command throne and walked towards the edge of the viewing pulpit. He stared out into the dusty nebula and seemed lost in thought.

"Do you wish us to return to our escort pattern, Captain?" asked Merrill, breaking the silence.

"Yes, come back to us. Keep your eyes open though. I don't like this."

Karamov turned to his officers.

"What is the distance to our rendezvous with the attack group?"

"We are still at least twelve hours from our rendezvous point at present speed, sir," said the Lieutenant.

"Best speed then, Lieutenant. Let's see if we can shave off some of those hours."

The Annihilator slid slowly into formation slipping alongside the Admiral's Retribution class battleship, the Glorious Conqueror. The immense battleship at the heart of the fleet dwarfed even the bulk of the Gothic class Annihilator. It was an ancient vessel, and had survived thirteen captains, outliving them all, surviving countless battles with the foes of the Emperor. It was now host to Admiral Karter and the flagship of this fleet.

Thuul took a moment to look at the vessels that made up the escort fleet for the massive Imperial ship.

Off the port bow and slightly ahead of the Annihilator was the Mars class carrier Purity's Flame. The Imperial carrier edged majestically through the void, all the while concealing a belly swollen with deadly attack craft, fighters and bombers.

Below the Conqueror in a loose wedge formation were the three Firestorms of Celestial Squadron, and in their midst the recently refitted Dominator class cruiser, Sons of Terra. Its gleaming hull shone in the weak starlight and made a stark contrast to the Conqueror's battle-scarred bulk.

To the rear and flanked by the Cobra destroyers of Blade squadron was the final member of the fleet, the Gothic class cruiser Agitator, sister ship to the Annihilator. This ancient vessel had seen battle throughout the Imperium in its millennia of service and its grizzled captain, Andruss Gelt was a living hero to many of Battlefleet Ultima's other captains. It was his face that looked out at the masses from the posters within the recruitment centres of Ultima Segmentum. It was his exploits that filled the bulletins of many news services on countless planets, and it was his ship that every young officer wanted to serve on. As Thuul looked at it, its pockmarked hull spoke of centuries of warfare, and a dogged refusal to die.

One day, he was certain he would have his own ship, but for now he was content where he was on the Annihilator. Content to be the right-hand of Anteus Karamov. He had served with the Captain for nearly ten years, rising through the ranks, until the death of the previous exec at the hands of an Ork raiding party had placed his star in ascendancy and granted him the position he now held.

"Where are those damn transports?" demanded Karamov, cutting through his reverie.

"The fleet is still awaiting their warp space transitions, sir," he replied. "Astropath Ullian reported contact with them prior to their final jump."

At that moment the voice of Admiral Karter echoed across the fleet channel.

"Gentlemen, we are still holding our position here for the transports. When they arrive I want to make rapid progress to the target. Blade squadron will assume lead, Annihilator and Agitator, will guard those transports. Captain Karamov I am leaving command of them to you. I know that you will get them into formation as soon as humanly possible. All ships will then proceed at best speed towards the target. Karter out."

The channel clicked off and Thuul looked to his captain. Karamov was angry he could tell that immediately. For a few minutes he let him mutter and curse under his breath.

"Any sign of them?" Karamov demanded at last barely concealing the irritation and impatience in his tone.

Thuul shook his head.

"Well they had better get here fast or I swear I will leave without them, Admiral Karter be damned!"

Thuul ignored his captain's grumbling. The transports were as vital to the fleet's mission as the warships themselves. Ahead of them lay the sparsely populated greenskin world of Vaspar, and their target in this endeavour. The transports would be carrying the 334th Yeshan Mechanised, an Imperial Guard unit that was tasked with recapturing the former Imperial colony. Assisting them was a penal unit, the 422nd Hadren Penitents and a rookie unit, newly raised from the agricultural world of Ushin Secundus. If the transports did not turn up then there was in fact no mission to undertake.

As if called into being by his thoughts, the first of the transports emerged from the warp on the edge of the cruiser's scanning range. The second, a sleek-looking Rogue Trader vessel that had been pressed into service transporting the penal troops emerged not far from the first. The final ship, an altogether bulkier and scarred vessel, the Hope of Yeshan, emerged roughly twenty thousand units from the fleet.

Karamov muttered a curse from his command throne, and then waved a hand irritably at Thuul.

"Well at least one of the damn navigators can pilot his vessel with some form of precision. Give my compliments to the captain of the Hope, and order the other two to get their ships into formation as soon as those sorry excuses for captains can manage it."

"Aye sir," replied Thuul with a grin.

"How long to orbit?" asked Karamov, not looking up from a pict-slate that Lieutenant Yarrin had handed him.

"Approximately thirty hours, sir," replied Thuul. "I can relieve you if you wish to get some rest, sir. You have been on station for the last fifteen hours straight."

Karamov looked up and raised an eyebrow at him.

"Are you trying to get rid of me, Gideon?"

Thuul paused before replying.

"Not at all, sir. I just thought it would be prudent for the ship's captain to be as fresh as possible when the assault begins. Besides, I'm sure I can handle the transports for you sir."

Karamov half-smiled. "Far be it for me to ignore the good advice of my executive officer."

The fleet was roughly six hours out from Vaspar, and the small pinprick of light that had been the planet had now resolved itself into a fist-sized crescent. Thuul and the other senior officers were gathered about the huge strategium, a vast horizontal plotting table at the far end of the command deck.

Karamov was currently away from the bridge in his private suite, in conference with the other ships captains as they and Admiral Karter discussed the planetary assault and how they would deal with the inevitable greenskin response.

In the meantime Thuul was encouraging the officers around him to discuss their own strategies.

"I believe a straight forward run on the Ork ships will devastate their attack lines and leave

us able to pick them off piecemeal," said Lieutenant Grisson, one of the new officers the Annihilator had taken on board during their last supply stop. He had replaced one of the three officers lost in the cruiser's last combat mission against the Eldar.

"Nonsense," said the ship's Commissar to his left. "If there's one thing a greenskin will respond to that is a direct assault. They thrive on war and if you shove it down their gullets then that just makes them happy. They have crude but effective weaponry and a lot of it. If you just charge at them you are handing them the advantage."

"I would have to agree," said Thuul acknowledging the man's assessment. "We've fought Orks on many occasions and we need to employ guile when dealing with them. They are cunning, brutal beasts, and we need to be smart to defeat them."

Commissar Krowl nodded in agreement.

He was as imposing as any ship's Commissar that Thuul had encountered, sharing the trait that seemed common amongst that ilk – eyes as dark as the void between the galaxies and a gruff and superior manner. Krowl had a gaze that could cut through adamantium bulkheads and every member of the crew was terrified of him.

All except one man that is.

Captain Karamov approached them his expression unreadable.

"Have you prepared your grand plan?" he asked taking up a position between Thuul and Grisson.

"We were still discussing the merits of various strategies," said Grisson, puffing out his chest in self importance.

"I see," replied Karamov regarding the new Lieutenant with irritation. "And did you have a plan for what will happen to this fleet if we get to the planet and there is no grand strategy?"

"I would imagine such a plan would involve this fleet being destroyed," said Krowl with his usual grimness.

Karamov nodded in agreement. "Then before I tell you the Admiral's plan let me hear what you came up with."

Thuul stepped in at that point. "I think the best strategy we had agreed upon was for Blade Squadron to sweep forward with the Sons of Terra and to draw the greenskin fleet out with their long range weapons. The Orks are eager to engage at the best of times, so if we offer them a target it might bait them a little. They would then withdraw and bring them towards the rest of the fleet."

Karamov nodded and Thuul continued, "The Conqueror and the Purity's Flame would defend the centre, whilst the Blades and the Annihilator come around from the cover of the third moon hopefully into their rear. The Agitator would close the pincer from the other side."

The Captain regarded the strategium and the icons representing the basics of Thuul's plan, and then nodded slowly.

"I am impressed gentlemen. You are not actually far off what Karter has planned for us. The Blades and the Terra will act as bait to draw out the greenskins. The Conqueror and the Flame will hold the centre line and the Agitator and the Cobras will indeed come around by the third moon."

"And where will we be?" asked Grisson, letting his eagerness for battle get the better of

him.

Karamov looked at him with a stern gaze. "We Lieutenant will be nursemaiding the transports."

Thuul raised his eyebrows in shock.

Karamov continued, "We are to escort the transports around the largest moon, and under the cover of the attack we are to guide them into orbit and protect the planetary assault."

"But sir that cannot be right? Are we not going to engage the enemy in the battle?" said Grisson, his disappointment obvious in his voice.

Karamov raised a hand to silence any further comments. "Those are our orders, now please carry them out. Commissar please detail the section leaders to prepare the ship for any boarding actions. I want to be ready for anything. Greenskins are devious bastards and I've no intention of being made to look a fool by a walking fungus."

At that he turned and took his seat in the command throne. The other officers paused for a moment, unsure, but then dispersed and began to carry out the necessary duties to fulfil their orders.

Thuul approached his captain and spoke softly so that none of the others present on the bridge might hear him. "Sir, might I ask why we are being relegated to this duty?"

Karamov looked at him and sighed. "Politics, Gideon. Politics."

"Politics, sir?" Thuul was genuinely surprised. "I would have thought that this ship's record in past engagements would demand its presence in the main battle line."

"Would that it were that easy, commander."

Karamov leant forwards to speak even softer still.

"It would appear that Gelt's reputation has yet again placed him in the enviable position of being able to influence the Admiral's strategy. Karter needed someone to look after the transports and we are it. He cannot risk a greenskin attack wiping them out, and he also needs to get those troops planetside as soon as possible."

Thuul nodded in understanding. "And Karter needs the fighters and bombers of the Flame and the nova cannon of the Terra to complete his mission. So it was down to ourselves or the Agitator and politics won out?"

"That's right Gideon." Karamov looked his executive officer in the eye. "Gelt has a reputation. An image that the Imperial authorities can use in their propaganda. So he can hardly be relegated to convoy duty if he is to fulfil that purpose."

Thuul shook his head. "But you, sir. You are a fine and courageous captain. You have been decorated countless times..."

Karamov smiled and cut him off. "I thank you for your loyalty, Gideon, but we both know I have never been one for playing politics. That cutthroat pastime is where Gelt feels most at home. Our duty is to protect those transports and the countless soldiers of the Imperium that are within their bellies. Now let's just leave it at that and do our best to fulfil our role."

The Dominator class Sons of Terra surged toward the Ork forces arrayed in a defensive screen around the planet. Off the cruiser's port side the four sleek Cobra destroyers formed into a line abreast formation and drew alongside.

The Ork fleet consisted of three large cruiser class vessels, interspersed with several smaller gunships and escorts. In the very centre was a single huge amalgamated mass, formed from the wrecks of many vessels – an Ork Hulk.

That was the target of the first Nova Cannon shot released by the Terra. A short few minutes after the projectile erupted from the front of the Imperial cruiser, the Cobras of Blade Squadron fired their torpedoes as one.

The blast of the Nova Cannon shot impacted on the side of the Hulk and mushroomed outwards, hurling debris and wreckage out into the void. As the boiling mass of plasma fire expanded it engulfed several of the smaller vessels, triggering secondary explosions that further added to the carnage.

Even as the seething ball of devastation receded, the torpedoes launched by the Cobras slammed into the Hulk, breaking it apart with a quartet of catastrophic explosions. The two halves began to spin apart, one of them ploughing into the side of one of the cruisers and causing even more carnage.

The surviving Orks now seething with rage at the devastation wrought upon their fellows, surged forwards, desperate to strike back at the Imperials.



The Sons of Terra began to turn, and head back out of the system, intent on drawing the Orks with it. The faster Cobras released another cluster of torpedoes and then they too turned and withdrew.

On the command deck of the Annihilator Captain Karamov smiled broadly at the ruination the fleet had already caused.

"That Cannon shot was the luckiest I have ever seen," said Thuul at his side. "The Emperor

was truly watching over the Terra when she made it.”

“I prefer to think of it as the skill of the Terra’s gun-crews, Commander,” replied Karamov pointing at the strategium. “We have dealt them a crippling blow. Now we just need to finish them off. The Annihilator and her escorts are making their move.”

Thuul watched as the icons representing the Gothic class cruiser and the Firestorms moved out of hiding from behind the planets third and largest moon. In response to this new threat one of the Ork Kroozers and several of the gunships altered course to starboard and charged headlong at the Imperials.

“All ahead full, Commander, let’s get these transports into orbit as soon as possible,” said Karamov indicating the mass of Ork vessels sweeping out towards Admiral Karter’s battleship.

Thuul passed on the order and the cruiser shuddered as the main engines roared into life, propelling it forwards and towards the planet ahead.

“The Conqueror is engaging them,” said Karamov indicating the display.

The battleship launched a full spread of torpedoes at the onrushing Orks.

The missiles streaked out ahead of the ship hurtling through the blackness towards a Kill Kroozer. When they struck the target the huge greenskin vessel disappeared behind a rapidly expanding cloud of vapour and debris that receded into nothing in moments. The Ork Kroozer continued towards them.

“Emperor’s teeth!” muttered Lieutenant Grisson at the side of Thuul. “Did they even damage the thing?”

The Captain nodded. “They damaged the ship alright, Mister Grisson, as you will see if you check your readouts. However the greenskins are not easily destroyed. They are more than happy to continue to fight even if you punch dirty great holes through their vessels.”

He indicated the onrushing Kroozer. “If you want to stop the Orks you need to destroy them utterly.”

“Fighter and bomber launch from the Flame, sir,” reported Lieutenant Yarrin.

“Good. I would expect a similar response from the greenskins once their carrier gets within range.”

Thuul nodded in agreement with his captain. “Let’s hope it keeps them occupied whilst we sneak towards the planet.”

Karamov turned to Grisson and tapped the power-cutlass at his side. “And you should prepare yourself, Lieutenant. The damned greenskins have a knack of turning up when you least expect them. They’re particularly good at finding the bridge when they do get onboard.”

Thuul watched the young officer pale at the captain’s words.

It would only be a short while before the captain’s words proved prophetic.

Another explosion echoed in the corridor and Commander Thuul took cover behind a bulkhead. Grisson was at his side, his usual pristine uniform dishevelled and his eyes wide with adrenaline and fear.

“Are you holding up okay, Lieutenant?” he asked concerned that the battle was proving too much for the new arrival.

“Aye, sir!” was Grisson only reply.

An Ork bellow echoed in the enclosed space and another swarm of greenskins surged along the corridor towards the entrance to the bridge. The unit of armsmen gathered with the Commander fired their shotcannons, scything down the front line of greenskins, and Thuul added his own laspistol shots to the carnage.

A second wave followed and these too were taken apart by the disciplined fire of the Imperial crewmen.

The third wave broke through and a close and bloody melee ensued.

Thuul found himself facing a massive greenskin brute, wielding a wickedly sharp axe, which it proceeded to hammer towards his head. He deftly turned aside the blow with his power cutlass, but the sheer force of it sent him to his knees.

The greenskin bellowed triumphantly, and raised the axe again. For Thuul the moment stretched out. He knew he would not be able to raise his sword in time to deflect the second blow and he began to brace himself for the feel of the cold, hard metal of the axe sliding into his body. He looked up into the hideous and brutal face of the invader and saw an inhuman joy there. A joy in killing and blood-spilling.

That same face shattered a moment later and the massive body tumbled back into the melee behind.

Spattered with greenskin blood Thuul looked round to see Commissar Krowl leading another group of armsmen towards their position, smoking bolt-pistol and gore-stained chainsword in hand.

Grisson leapt forward and helped Thuul to his feet, as the final Ork tumbled in a heap of limbs at the foot of a pair of surviving crewmen.

“You looked like you needed assistance, Commander,” said Krowl as he approached.

“I won’t deny it,” replied Thuul wiping the Ork blood from his face. “I was certain they were through that time.”

Krowl kicked one of the Ork corpses aside and looked back down the corridor in the direction he and his unit had come.

“I believe that was the last of them. We have destroyed the assault boats that they landed in, and I think the crew has rid us of the survivors.”

Thuul nodded, “Then let’s get back to the bridge.” He turned to the surviving crewmen and pointed at the entrance to the command deck. “I want you to guard this hatch in case a few of the greenskins escaped our cleansing operation. There will be time to mourn our losses once the battle is over.”

They acknowledged him and the officers pushed through the hatch and onto the bridge once more.

The scene beyond was one of chaos. Smoke from the ruins of terminals and the stench of scorched and burning hard-wired servitors filled the massive space. Crewmen rushed from one end to the other carrying fire-suppressors, desperate to prevent the conflagrations from spreading.

In the centre of this chaos was the one island of calm.

Captain Karamov bellowed orders at his officers and crew, directing the fire-fighting with one hand and the massive ship’s manoeuvres with the other.

“We repelled the assault, Captain,” reported Thuul as he approached him.

"Excellent Gideon. Now if you would return to your duties here we should be able to finish off that damned Kroozer."

Thuul acknowledged his captain and took his station at the strategium. Krowl and Grisson joined them.

Lieutenant Yarrin looked at them aghast, appalled by their appearance, but they simply ignored him and quickly took in the situation and dispersal of the fleets.

The Ork Terror Ship had caught them unawares emerging from the cover of a massive asteroid orbiting the planet. It had launched a devastating attack on the Annihilator hoping the destroy or disable it and leave the three transports vulnerable. The Orks, however, had not counted on the tenacity of the Imperial ship's crew or the ship's ability to soak up damage. The first wave of Ork assault ships had been all but wiped out by precision firing from the ship's gun crews. The second fared little better, and by the time the third was ready to launch from the greenskin vessel's fighter bays, the Annihilator had closed and delivered a devastating close range broadside with its starboard lance batteries. The damage had reduced the Ork ship to a drifting hulk as precise and powerful shots melted the hangar bays, then punched through into the shielded reactor at the rear of the vessel. An internal explosion had gutted the Ork ship and set it tumbling towards the planet, all but destroyed.

"What's the fleet's status?" asked Krowl, as he stared at the screen.

"We have lost the Falcata," said Karamov indicating the wreckage of one of the Cobra destroyers. "Ydain was sloppy and one of the greenskin ramships skewered him through the starboard side. It was a short battle. I believe the Orks made it to the engine room and detonated the reactor." He looked genuinely sorry to have to report that, but continued, "The Orks, however, have suffered significantly at our hands."

Lieutenant Yarrin indicated the wreckage of another Ork Terror Ship. The carrier that had launched fighta-bommas and assault boats at the Admiral's flagship earlier in the battle. "The Conqueror took out the carrier, but sustained some damage. She is currently engaged with three Onslaught class ships."

"What about the Terra and the Flame?" asked Thuul.

"The Flame has suffered significant damage to its portside hangars and engines, but remains operational. The Terra has fared much better."

"I don't know how Gedrik is doing it, but that ship of his seems to be dancing through the weapons fire like the Emperor himself is commanding it!" said Karamov with a smile.

"Admiral Karter has the Firestorms out causing as much mayhem as they can for the smaller Ork ships and has left one Kroozer for the Conqueror to deal with."

Thuul looked at the battle display and picked out the huge bulk of the greenskin ship. It was damaged, having suffered under a full broadside run against the Conqueror, but the alien vessel showed the usual orkish refusal to roll over and die. It was currently manoeuvring to bring itself around for another pass at the battleship.

"Helm! All ahead full!" bellowed Karamov, watching the Ork vessel beginning to turn.

"Let's get these transports to the planet and get ourselves into the fight."

"Sir! Ravager attack ship coming in on our port side," reported Yarrin indicating one of the smaller Ork vessels as it surged towards them.

"All hands brace for impact!" bellowed Karamov as the Ork ship fired.

The shots slammed into the armoured prow of the Imperial ship, and along the first quarter of the ship's superstructure. The Annihilator lurched under the assault.

"Helm, hard to starboard!" yelled Thuul. "Gunnery officer, let them taste the lances!"

As the huge Imperial cruiser swung about the Ork ship launched a pair of crude Ork torpedoes. They missed the target by some considerable distance.

"All weapons fire!"

The lance batteries opened up, bracketing the greenskin vessel and skewering it with blinding energy beams. Explosions pockmarked the Ork ship's hull and great mushrooms of debris burst outwards into the void.

Thuul watched the Ork ship's readouts registering significant damage, then with a flash it disappeared.

"Target neutralised," reported the Lieutenant Yarrin.

"Good work," said Karamov. "Give my compliments to the gunnery crews."

He looked to his readouts and asked Yarrin a direct question, "Status on the transports?"

"Two have suffered minor damage, sir. The Hope considerably more. However all three are still making good progress towards the planet."

"Continue to scan the immediate area for any more Ork surprises. I don't want to lose any one of those ships."

The Annihilator's officers, now almost free of immediate threats to the transports regarded the strategium and the dispositions of the rest of the Imperial fleet and their continuing fight against the Ork vessels.

The Conqueror was squaring up to the final remaining Kroozer, whilst the Purity's Flame limped away from the main Ork force, having suffered under the combined assault of Ork gunships and fighta-bommas.

The Sons of Terra was engaged in a protracted cat and mouse game with three of the larger greenskin escort vessels, but still remained relatively damage-free.

The Agitator as usual was in the thickest of the fighting surrounded by a swirling mass of smaller Ork ships, battling valiantly for its survival. Thuul could imagine Captain Gelt bellowing orders to his crew as explosions tore into his ship.

Karamov pointed at the Kroozer engaging the Conqueror.

"Do you see it, Gideon?" he asked indicating the cogitator readouts for the enemy vessel.

Thuul frowned. "I do sir."

Karamov looked up, his eyebrow raised. "I meant, Gideon, do you see the damage she has sustained to her reactor shielding?"

The Commander looked again. There, the tell-tale indications that the damage to the Ork vessel was more significant than they thought. The heat readings were dangerously high.

"That ship is in trouble," continued Karamov. "Those readings are off the scale. I would say that she has an out of control fire within the entire engine section."

"That is not good news for the Conqueror," muttered the Commander.

"I'm sorry, sir," said Grisson. "What difference does that make?"

Karamov looked at the Lieutenant and shook his head. "Do they not teach you anything at the Academy these days?"

He pointed at the ship. "That ship is dying, and I would bet my left arm that its captain knows it. Greenskins are brutes, but they are far from stupid."

Grisson looked at his captain still uncomprehending.

"It means, Mister Grisson, that he has no intention of trading blows with the Admiral's ship."

"He intends to ram it?" said Grisson at last understanding.

"Yes. Or even detonate his engines in close proximity to them. He's hoping the Admiral will come alongside for a broadside and then he'll turn in on her. He's still more manoeuvrable than the Conqueror. It's a suicide run. Or at best it's a final desperate attempt to board them."

"Does the Admiral know?" asked Grisson, the blood draining from his face.

"That is what we will find out," replied Karamov. "Yarrin get me the Admiral as a matter of urgency."

A few moments later Admiral Karter's voice echoed across the ship's comms system.

"What is it Captain, we are a little pre-occupied." Karter's voice was strained as he spoke, and the noise of battle could be heard in the background.

"Admiral, I just wanted to make sure that your crew had noticed the reactor shielding on that Kroozer you are about to engage with."

There was a pause and then Karter responded. "I see it, Captain. Thank you for the heads up."

The linked severed with a distinct click and Karamov turned to Lieutenant Grisson.

"We have done all we can, Mister Grisson. Let us see how the Admiral deals with this knowledge."

The officers regarded the strategium and watched as the Conqueror suddenly swung its prow to port and surged away at a forty five degree angle to its original course.

Almost immediately the Sons of Terra swung about from her position to the battleship's starboard flank and directed her massive nova cannon barrel at the Ork vessel.

"They aren't going to be far enough away..." Grisson began to say, but Karamov raised a hand to silence him.

The Ork had reacted to the Conqueror's turn now and was trying to manoeuvre to give chase. Its engines flared as the greenskin captain ordered his ship forwards.

"Emperor knows how they are doing it!" muttered Grisson as he watched the alien ship accelerate. "The damage..."

"The Terra is firing!" reported Yarrin silencing Grisson's musings.

"Throne be with them!" muttered Krowl, revealing a rare moment of vulnerability.

The nova cannon shot missed the Ork ship, but detonated near enough to the Kroozer to catch it in the midst of the blast wave. The explosion rolled the Ork ship, buffeting it with shrapnel and plasma fire. The effect was immediate. Whatever alien gods had kept the vessel going suddenly withdrew their protection. Explosions mushroomed out across the vessel's hull and with a final surge forwards the Kroozer detonated and was consumed by the boiling plasma nova.

The Conqueror was on the edge of the blast radius of the explosion. It disappeared momentarily in the blast, then the strategium cleared and it limped away from the wreckage of the Ork vessel.

"It could have been worse," admitted the Karamov, turning to his executive officer. "Pass my compliments to Gedrik. A fine shot."

"Has she suffered much damage?" asked Krowl.

Thuul regarded the readouts flashing across the terminal and shook his head. "Nothing too severe. I would say by the change in output that they have suffered an engine failure. Probably a capacitor short-out. Perhaps some structural damage. Nothing too debilitating."

The fleet channel opened and Admiral Karter's voice returned.

"My thanks to Captain Karamov for his crew's observational skills. We have suffered only slight damage, but we have crippled the Ork fleet in the process. All ships concentrate on cleaning up the remaining greenskin ships. We need to keep them from the Annihilator and her mission. Wipe them out. Every last one of them."

The battle with the Ork fleet was over, and the last few stragglers had fled the system, with the surviving Cobras in pursuit. The remaining Imperial vessels took up station around the planet, and stood guard whilst the massive Imperial transports began to unload their cargo onto the greenskin infested world.

Thuul watched as Mechanicus shuttles emerged from the hangars of the Hope and dropped into the cloudy atmosphere below. Thousands of Imperial Guardsmen would soon be battling the Orks for possession the world. Thuul watched as clouds of smaller vessels emerged around the ships, some plummeting straight down into the atmosphere to form the initial strike force.

As he regarded the invasion a huge lifter-shuttle emerged from the belly of the Lady Justia and began its descent. This was easily recognisable as a Titan transport, carrying one of the God Emperor's mightiest war machines to rain death on the Orks below. He'd seen Titans in action only once, but the image was burned into his mind. The greenskins would not know what had hit them.

The background bustle and noise of the command deck suddenly changed tone and he looked around to see a cluster of tech adepts gathered around one of the smaller augurs that was scanning the outer reaches of the system for contacts.

They quickly passed on their findings to one of the Ensigns who immediately went to Lieutenant Yarrin with the report. Thuul watched with interest as the young Lieutenant accepted the report and glanced at it.

Almost immediately he rushed to Thuul's side.

"Commander," he said approaching and handing him the pict slate. "We have anomalous readings at the edge of the system."

Thuul glanced briefly at the report. Something struck him about it, and for a moment he couldn't put his finger on it. He read it over and suddenly there it was, as plain as day.

"Lieutenant, look at the resonance readings on that anomaly. Do they look familiar to you?"

Yarrin regarded the report and frowned. "No sir?"

"Think Mister Yarrin. Where have you seen them before?"

Yarrin looked at his commander uncomprehending for a moment, and Thuul thought disappointingly that he would have to explain, when suddenly the light of realisation lit

up the Lieutenant's face.

"The wrecked Ork fleet," said Yarrin triumphantly.

"Exactly Lieutenant, contact Captain Karamov immediately, He will want to see this."

The Annihilator moved away from the planet at flank speed, racing towards the area of space in which the augurs still registered the anomaly. The surviving Cobras accompanied it, forming into a wedge formation off the cruiser's port bow.

The command deck of the Imperial vessel was alive with activity and Thuul and the other officers gathered around the strategium with their captain.

Karamov scratched his chin as he regarded the display.

"How did you persuade Admiral Karter to allow us to check out the anomaly?" asked Thuul.

"It wasn't easy," admitted Karamov, "but the fact that we had already encountered the anomalous reading at the wrecked fleet and probably because he was feeling guilty at leaving us out of the party with the Orks helped our case somewhat."

Thuul grinned. "Good to stretch our legs, sir," he said.

Karamov nodded.

The anomaly was somewhere in the vicinity of the fourth planet out, a huge orange gas giant, with deep brown and yellow striations. It was currently about thirty thousand units off one of the gas giant's smaller moons, and holding position.

Thuul looked at it on the strategium and wondered what it could be.

The signal point suddenly disappeared.

"Where is it?" demanded Karamov rounding on Lieutenant Yarrin. "Get me that signal back now!"

The young officer rushed across to the augur station where the anomaly had first been detected and began issuing orders to the robed priests as they scanned the frequencies to bring back the signal.

The anomaly reappeared on the strategium.

"We have it again," called Karamov. "Helm alter course to match the anomaly's change in position."

The anomaly had reappeared much closer to their current position.

The Annihilator came hard to port and there was a brief sensation of weightlessness as the artificial gravity generators were slow to compensate.

"Officer of the Watch, please sound ready stations. All hands to ready stations, Mister Gorren."

The three deep chimes announcing ready stations to the crew echoed across the ship's inter-deck vox-callers, and Thuul knew that below decks the crew were rushing to their ready stations.

Karamov turned to Commissar Krowl. "Perhaps you might assist in motivating the gun crews, Commissar?"

The impassive officer nodded slightly and moved off to the vox station to offer suggestions to the crew section commanders. Thuul listened to the first few sentences then was glad that Lieutenant Yarrin approached him with a data-slate detailing the crew readiness by section. He was certain that the gun crews would be particularly motivated by Krowl's

suggestions.

"I'm glad I'm not on the receiving end of that," said Yarrin, attempting some levity.

"Indeed," agreed Thuul, secretly hoping that Krowl could not hear him.

"Anomaly lost again," said Lieutenant Grisson.

"Get it back now!" demanded Karamov, frustration driving him into a fury.

"Each time it reappears it appears to be closing on us," said Thuul looking at the display thoughtfully.

"Yes," agreed Karamov. "And I don't like it one bit. Mister Gorren issue battle stations please."

The deep and sonorous chimes echoed twice more across the vox-casters. Two chimes was the signal for the crew to be in place, and ready for combat. For those unlucky few who were not in place it could mean severe punishment or even execution within the brutal and dark depths of the lower decks of the cruiser.

The Annihilator and its escorts were now some considerable distance from the rest of the Imperial fleet, and passing by the orbit of the third planet. That world was a rocky, airless orb, with a pair of small and odd-shaped moons in orbit. To Thuul's experienced gaze they were recognisable as large asteroids, that had been captured by the planet's gravity well.

Even as he looked at the larger of the two asteroid-moons, a flash of green phosphorescence lit up the side of it.

"Anomaly detected!" cried one of the Ensigns.

"Location?" demanded Karamov.

"There!" called Thuul. "In orbit of that moon."

"Increase magnification of the augurs," said the captain. "I want to see what we're up against."

On the strategium, the image of the asteroid-moon expanded and there briefly was the anomaly, in cold, harsh detail.

It was a relatively small vessel, crescent shaped and glowing with an eerie green tinge. Even as the display focused on it, it faded out of existence.

"We've lost it again!" reported Yarrin.

"By the Throne, what was that?" said Grisson.

Thuul looked to his captain, and saw the same shared look of cold horror creeping across Karamov's face. They both knew what it was and it made their blood run cold.

"Mister Gorren sound the final chime," said the captain quietly. "Commander Thuul, get me the Admiral immediately."

The final chime echoed across the vox-casters and the crew braced themselves for battle.

"Yes captain Karamov?" The Admiral's voice was calm, relaxed and just a little irritated to be disturbed.

"We have closed with the anomaly Admiral. I recommend you put the fleet on immediate alert status. Augur scans have identified it as a Necrontyr vessel, sir. Dirge class."

There was a long pause.

"You are quite certain, captain?"

Karamov's answer was temporarily drowned out by static as the Necron vessel materialised

just over twenty thousand units from the cruiser's starboard bow.

"Utterly certain, Admiral!"

Arcs of coruscating green lightning spilled out of the alien vessel and played across the Annihilator's shields. Explosions rocked the Imperial ship, hurling the officers across the command deck.

One of the servitor terminals exploded and damage control teams rushed forwards to fight the blaze.

"Damage report!" bellowed Karamov over the sound of warning klaxons and alarms.

Thuul picked himself up and dragged himself to his feet using the strategium.

One of the tech priests turned to the captain to offer a report.

"Minimal hull damage, captain, but our shields are dangerously low on the starboard sector."

"All batteries commence firing!" said Karamov. "Give them a taste of Imperial firepower."

The Annihilator's lance batteries opened up as one, and blinding spears of plasma energy slammed into the side of the Necron ship. Tiny explosions rocked the smaller vessel, but it emerged from the ferocious broadside relatively unscathed.

It moved with incredible speed to bring itself below the Imperial cruiser and unleashed another burst of lightning, splashing it across the Gothic-class ship's underside.

Deep explosions again rocked the Imperial ship and Karamov bellowed out an order to bring the ship about and away from the Necron vessel.

Even as the massive Imperial ship turned, the three Cobra class escorts rushed to its aid.

A trio of torpedoes swept out towards the Necron ship, two missing as the alien moved again. The final one slammed into the armoured hull and detonated in a huge explosion that staggered the ship for a moment.

"You saw that," called Karamov. "All batteries fire at will! Concentrate fire on the damaged section."

In revenge for the torpedo attack the Necron ship suddenly changed course, hurtling towards the three escort ships.

The Rapier and the Spatha veered aside, but the final ship, the venerable Khopesh was too slow. Incandescent lightning bracketed the small vessel, stripping its shields in seconds. Explosions danced across its hull, now exposed to the raw power of the alien weapon. Chunks of hull and one of the ship's stabiliser wings span away into the void as the lightning gouged massive grooves through its armoured side.

The Khopesh rolled onto its side, spewing tails of debris, but the alien was not finished with it yet. Another caress of the lightning arc weapon smashed the vessel in two and this proved too much for it. The Cobra's reactor overloaded in a spectacular explosion, that consumed the rest of the vessel and sent the shattered prow spinning away into the void.

"We've lost the Khopesh!" cried Grisson.

"I have eyes, Mister Grisson!" bellowed Karamov. "All batteries fire! Burn that bastard!"

The two surviving Cobras and the Annihilator poured fire onto the small Necron ship, but it danced out of the way of the majority of the salvo.

It now came about and targeted the Spatha, spewing lightning across the aft end of the

retreating Cobra. The void shields flashed out in the first blast, leaving the Imperial ship's engineering section exposed. As the deadly weapon fired again, an explosion span the Cobra forward, sending it into an uncontrolled tumble, its power systems fluctuating as it rolled away from its tormentor, unable to respond.

"Spatha is down, sir," reported Thuul. "Looks like damage to power conduits and relays. She's helpless."

Karamov slammed his fist onto the strategium. "Let's get that damned ship's attention then. Torpedoes away, Mister Thuul."

The Annihilator spat twin torpedoes from its armoured prow, and they rushed across the void towards the alien ship as it moved after the disabled Cobra. One of them missed the target, but the other slammed into its rear, blowing out a massive chunk of its portside wing.

The green glow emitted by the alien ship faltered, flickering and stuttering. For a few moments the alien ship seemed to drift out of control.

"Bring us about and let it have our lances!" the captain snarled, determined to destroy the attacker.

The Annihilator swung to starboard exposing the Necron ship to the cruiser's portside batteries. As it did so, the Rapier fired its own weapons batteries blasting holes into the strange alien hull. The Gothic-class ship's lance batteries speared out, punching into the Dirge and engulfing it in plasma fire.

When the batteries ceased their destruction the alien vessel was a cloud of shattered hull fragments and glowing embers.

"Alien ship destroyed!" reported Thuul, and brief cheer echoed across the command deck.

"Get me the Admiral," said Karamov looking at the strategium for other targets. "And get the augurs up to maximum. I want this entire system scanned."

Admiral Karter's voice echoed across the intership comm-net.

"You have eliminated the threat?" he asked.

"We have, Admiral, but we lost the Khopesh, and the Spatha is severely damaged."

"Can she be salvaged?"

Karamov looked to Thuul for the answer. The commander stepped forward and spoke.

"Yes Admiral, it looks like only minor damage. The Necron weapons scrambled their systems. I believe they should be back in action within the hour, sir."

"See if you can assist, Captain Karamov."

"We will, sir, I..."

"Anomalies detected!" The cry from Yarrin cut through the captain's words. "Multiple targets. Closing on the Admiral and the fleet!"

Thuul and Karamov looked to the strategium. Six new anomalies had materialised within striking distance of the Imperial fleet.

"Helm hard to starboard," ordered Karamov. "Takes us back to the fleet."

"Negative Captain Karamov," said Karter across the comm net. "Stay where you are and defend that ship. We will handle these ships."

"But Admiral..."

"Anomaly detected!"

Karamov rounded on the Yarrin. "What now?"

"Single anomaly heading for our position, captain!"

"As I said, Captain Karamov, you have your own problems. Defend the Spatha as best you can. God Emperor be with us all."

Karamov turned to his officers, and indicated the new anomaly rapidly approaching their position.

"Get me information, gentlemen. Urgently. I want to know what it is, and what threat level we are facing. And most importantly I want to know how to kill it."

The command deck bustle increased at his words.

Commander Thuul approached his side.

"The main fleet is engaging the Necrons, sir," he said indicating the shifting icons on the display.

"What are they facing?" asked Karamov. "Ship classes?"

Lieutenant Yarrin quickly brought up the display.

"Three Jackal-class raiders, two Shroud-class light cruisers and one Scythe-class, sir."

Karamov paled and Lieutenant Grisson muttered a curse.

Thuul indicated the strategium display. "The Jackals are going after the Purity's Flame. It looks like Admiral Karter is directing the Firestorms to assist. The Flame is launching her fighters and bombers."

Multiple smaller icons flashed up around the carrier as the Imperial navy pilots took their tiny fighters and bombers out into the void.

He indicated the Dominator class ship on the display. "The Shrouds appear to be focusing on the Sons of Terra. I guess they want to silence her nova cannon."

"It looks like the Agitator is going to assist," said Yarrin.

"Which leaves the Conqueror to face the Scythe," said Grisson pointing at the icon indicating the Admiral's vessel.

"Well if there's one ship that could match that thing for firepower, it's the Conqueror," said Karamov, sounding less convinced of the fact than he would have liked.

"Captain, we have a reading on the anomaly approaching our position, sir," said Yarrin, indicating the far off blip on the strategium that was heading towards the Annihilator's current position. "Augur scans indicate another Scythe class, sir."

Thuul's blood ran cold, and for a moment Karamov was silent. When he spoke it was with resignation and cold determination in his voice. "Well if this is what the Emperor has decided our fate will be, then all we can do is our duties and try and send that damned ship back to whatever hell it came from."

The officers around him spoke their agreement and were about to get back to their stations when a brief tone from the strategium drew their attention.

"By the Throne," muttered Grisson. "They've taken out the Flame."

The icon representing the Imperial carrier winked out of existence.

"Enhance the display for grid nine," demanded Karamov, indicating the area around where the Flame had been.

As the screen cleared they could clearly see the shattered remnants of the carrier. It was split into three pieces, the prow spinning lazily away from a cloud of debris. The three Jackals clustered around it like wolves around their kill, and as they watched the aliens

turned their attention to one of the Firestorms.

"They're going after the Demos," said Yarrin.

One of the Jackals moved quickly after the Firestorm. Green lightning fingers reached out to caress the fleeing ship, sparking against the frigate's void shields. The Necron ship fired its weapons again and those same shields collapsed, allowing the cold and deathly light to play across the ship's hull.

In the display the crew of the Annihilator could plainly see the damage being done to the Imperial ship.

The other two Firestorms moved to assist their fellow, skewering the attacking Jackal with their prow mounted lances. Incredibly their shots hit home and the Necron vessel tumbled away, powerless and inert.

A ragged cheer went up on the command deck, but Thuul and the other officers knew better.

The other two Jackals closed on the stricken Demos, pummeling it with their lightning arcs. An explosion tore open the side of the frigate and with a last desperate attempt to flee the cruel assault the ship surged forwards, engines glowing brightly as they flared. A moment later the frigate disappeared in an expanding ball of flame and debris.

The Jackals instead of turning on the other two faded out and were gone.

"Where did they go?" demanded Grisson.

"Never mind them," said Karamov. "Prepare yourself for our own problems. Get me Captain Merrill."

A moment later the voice of the Rapier's captain echoed across the command deck.

"Do you see our little problem, Lucius?" asked Karamov in response to his friend's acknowledgement.

"I do. That thing outguns your ship and mine together. Just how do you plan on us taking it down?"

"I'll be honest with you, old friend," replied Karamov as he looked around the faces of his officers. "I think we just charge right at it and pound the thing with the Emperor's guns. Nothing fancy, just raw and righteous fury."

Merrill chuckled. "Not like you, Anteus. You're usually more subtle. Still, under the circumstances I can understand. I concur. And let's hope the Emperor is watching over your weapons crews when we go up against that thing! Rapier out."

Another explosion rocked the Annihilator. Something deep within the ship groaned, and Thuul grasped onto the edge of the strategium table with whitening knuckles.

"Damage report?" demanded the captain.

The adepts consulted their instrumentation for what seemed like an age, then offered their report to him.

"Quintus engine is destroyed. We are reduced to two thirds of standard, sir. We have suffered several large hull breaches on the starboard side of decks twenty to twenty four. The compartments are open to the void. Casualties are high..."

Karamov raised a hand to silence the adept and turned to his officers.

"Where is the damn thing now?" he demanded, wiping aside the blood that was running down his forehead from the gash at his hairline.

"Augurs are down, sir" reported Yarrin, holding his broken arm against his side. "That last hit caused some damage to our power regulation units."

"Get them back now!" the captain bellowed. "I can't fight a battle if I'm blind!"

Thuul indicated the strategium screen as it flickered back into life.

"There!" he said pointing at the display. "It's going for the Spatha."

Karamov snarled as he spoke, "Discourage it then, Mister Thuul. All batteries fire at will!"

The Gothic class ship turned to port, bringing its undamaged lance batteries to bear on the Necron vessel. Lance fire stabbed out, flashing across the alien's aft and starboard sides, scorching the hull and rewarding the Imperials with several small explosions on the surface of the ship.

The Necron vessel ignored the hurt being caused it and focused solely on the crippled Cobra. As it closed on the destroyer a thin beam of coruscating energy snapped out from its forward superstructure and tore into the Imperial ship.

Where the energy ribbon struck the Cobra it melted clean through the hull, neatly slicing the ship in two.

The Rapier rushed forward, torpedoes launching before it came hard to port and swept away from the Necron vessel. The two missiles slammed into the side of the alien ship detonating in colossal mushrooms of flame and debris, gouging out two sizeable chunks of the hull.

The Scythe ship at last turned to face its attackers, its prow slowly rotating until it was aimed directly at the Annihilator.

Karamov and his crew watched the alien ship turn towards them in silence.

Thuul was the first to break it. "Launch torpedoes. All tubes. And brace for impact!"

The Annihilator shuddered as a quartet of torpedo missiles surged out of the tubes in the prow of the Imperial vessel and rushed headlong at the Necron ship.

As the titanic missiles neared their target a surge of green energy pulsed out of the ship, and three of the missiles detonated short of their targets. The final one continued onwards, striking the Scythe under main hull, where the crescent shaped prow met the main body of the ship. The explosion tore the prow away and it tumbled into the void. For a moment the energy reading dropped and the Imperials dared to hope.

Then the alien ship surged forward with renewed vigour drawing alongside the Imperial ship and delivering a broadside of lightning arcs that stripped the final remaining void shields in one powerful barrage.

"Shields are down!" cried an adept monitoring the Gothic cruiser's defences.

"Then we are finished," muttered Grisson, his face stricken.

Karamov rounded on him. "Never say die, Mister Grisson. This ship will fight to its last crewman and its final power cell. All batteries fire!"

The lance batteries tore into the Necron ship, and the alien hull seemed to recoil from their touch. Chunks of hull and glittering metal melted from the superstructure, but still it continued to close the gap between them.

As it drew closer the terrible alien weapons fired again. Lightning caressed the portside of the Gothic cruiser, blackening the hull, and gouging ragged lines into its surface. The rearward lance batteries exploded, rolling the ship over a little, before the inertial systems

compensated.

The alien fire next tore into the main hull just fore of the engineering section. Huge gaping rents opened in the metal spewing combusting atmosphere, doomed crewmen and machinery in equal measure.

On the bridge the officers tumbled to the deck once more and screaming alarms wailed. Several of the cogitator terminals burst apart, the feedback from the attack shattering them and melting the servitor crewmen hardwired into them. A great metal beam tumbled from above, crushing a chanting choir of tech priests as they sought to soothe the Imperial vessel's wounds.

Captain Karamov scrambled to his feet, wiping aside more of the blood that ran now in rivulets down his face, whilst Thuul crawled to the side of Lieutenant Yarrin who was now unconscious beside the strategium table.

"Is he alive?" asked Grisson appearing beside the commander.

"I believe so," replied Thuul, testing for a pulse on the young Lieutenant's neck.

"Leave him for now, Commander," said Karamov offering his hand to help his executive officer to his feet. "We have more pressing matters at hand."

The final attack had pushed the Annihilator away from the Necron vessel, and just out of the immediate arc of its attack.

"How badly are we hurt?" said the Captain regarding the strategium display.

Thuul assessed the reports coming in and reported to his captain.

"Lance batteries Sextus through Octus are destroyed, sir. Severe damage to the hull on the portside. We are venting atmosphere on decks five, twelve, thirteen and nineteen. Engineering section reports heavy casualties in the lower decks."

"So we aren't dead yet then?" said Karamov his eyes wild. "Bring us about and we'll ram the bastard if we have to!"

The Annihilator's great prow slid slowly round bringing it back into broadside range with the alien ship.

The Scythe fired its weapons again, and green arcs of power stabbed into the Imperial ship's defiant heart. Explosions blossomed across the surface of the ship, shattering the remaining portside lance batteries. Explosive feedback from their destruction burst open power conduits and plasma relay pipes all along the weapons decks, spewing forth boiling clouds of superheated plasma that incinerated the thousands of crewmen manning those decks.

On the bridge Thuul was thrown across the deck and slammed into the side of one of the cogitator stations. Stars flashed across his vision and he felt a huge lump and gash on his scalp. Cries of pain echoed around him and as he sat there trying to clear his head he spotted the inert form of Captain Karamov.

Scrambling to his feet he rushed to the captain's side.

Thank the Throne! He was still alive, but unconscious. He looked around for one of the other officers, but could not immediately spot anyone.

At last he saw the dishevelled shape of one of the junior ensigns, picking himself up from beneath a collapsed screen. He looked up at Thuul's call and rushed to his side.

"Get a medicae immediately," ordered Thuul. "He's alive, but injured."

The young officer nodded furiously and rushed off into the chaos.

Thuul quickly made sure that the captain was in a secure position and not in any immediate danger, then clambered to his feet and to the strategium table.

Where was the alien ship now?

There! Moving like a circling shark out away from the Annihilator, yet still within striking range. How long did they have before it closed for the kill?

As he looked for the Rapier he glanced at the disposition of the rest of the fleet.

To his horror he spotted the wrecks of three more Imperial vessels tumbling in the void. The Firestorms were all now destroyed or disabled. The Sons of Terra was a lifeless hulk drifting beside the wreckage of one of the Shroud class Necron ships. At least they had taken one of the damn aliens with them.

Commissar Krowl appeared by his side, his uniform unkempt and a piece of machinery sticking out of his shoulder.

Thuul looked at him with raised eyebrows, but the stoic Commissar simply raised a hand and said, "I will be fine, Commander. We have more pressing matters."

He indicated the strategium.

"The battle does not go well," he said.

"Perhaps an understatement, Commissar," said Thuul wiping sweat from his eyes.

"The Conqueror is under assault."

Thuul nodded. "It is, but there is little we can do to assist in our current predicament."

Krowl nodded, "I concur. It is perhaps best if we concentrate on the immediate threat before we think of rendering assistance to our comrades."

Thuul brought up the display on the alien ship.

"That thing is severely damaged, but if these readings are correct it is repairing itself."

Krowl frowned. "Is that possible?"

Thuul nodded. "I have heard of such things where the Necrontyr are concerned."

"Where is the Rapier?" asked Krowl, searching for the last surviving Cobra on the display.

"There," said Thuul spotting the destroyer. "It looks like she is getting ready to attack the Scythe once more. Comms officer!"

The smoke and blood splattered Lieutenant responsible for the ship to ship communications acknowledged him.

"Get me Captain Merrill, if you still can."

The Lieutenant turned away. A few moments later a wash of static echoed across the vox casters.

"Anteus?" The captain of the Rapier called out his friend's name.

"No, Captain Merrill, I am sorry, but Captain Karamov has been injured. This is Commander Thuul commanding, sir."

"Yes, I remember you, Thuul. What can I do for you? We are a little busy, Commander."

Thuul brought up the display of the Scythe again.

"The Necron ship appears to be regenerating, sir. I think now would be the best time to strike at it if we can."

"Are you still able?" asked Merrill, his words washing in and out.

"We are severely damaged," admitted Thuul. "Portside weapons are destroyed along with two of the torpedo tubes. We do still have fifty percent of the starboard batteries. We can

at least offer some resistance."

Merrill grunted in acknowledgement. "We're in a pretty big mess then," he said with a dry chuckle.

Thuul smiled half-heartedly. "I would say so, sir."

"Alright Thuul. Let's do what we can. We will try and tempt the big bastard to chase us towards you. Prepare your gunnery crews. Merrill out."

Thuul turned to the Commissar, and Krowl nodded already in motion. He moved off towards the few remaining officers of the Ordnance crew.

Thuul looked around him, spotting Lieutenant Yarrin moving through the chaos towards him. In his wake the young ensign he had sent to find medical assistance was returning with a pair of ship medicae in tow.

"There, be swift," said Thuul indicating the captain's still inert form. "Get him to the infirmary."

Yarrin approached the strategium table and swayed a little against it.

"Can I assist, Commander?" he said shakily.

Thuul looked at him. He had been out cold when he last saw him. He was clearly injured. His left arm hung limply, and a piece of bone was protruding through his sleeve. He had also somehow received gashes to his legs, and his uniform was cut and bloody in several patches. However, his eyes were clear and he seemed to have all his faculties.

"We need manoeuvring power, Lieutenant. Can you rustle up some officers and get a message to the engineering decks?"

Yarrin nodded. "I'll do my best, sir."

He moved off gingerly to carry out his commander's orders.

For a moment Thuul was alone with his thoughts. For the first time since the battle had begun he had time to pause and actually think about what had happened. He felt a crushing despair threatening to engulf him and fought it back. He focused only on the job he had to do. His duty. To the Imperium and to the God Emperor on Holy Terra.

He looked once more at the surviving fleet. The Conqueror was in trouble. That much was obvious. The second Scythe ship was trading blows with the battleship, and a pair of Jackals were harrying its flanks. They were wearing down its shields and armour and would soon overwhelm even that mighty vessel's defences.

As he watched the Agitator, his vessel's twin was rushing to the Admiral's aid. By the look of it that valiant ship and crew had finished off the second Shroud, but had taken some considerable damage in the process. He could even now imagine Captain Gelt, the hero of the Patalene Gap Crusade, on his command throne, hurling orders and curses in equal measure at his crew.

As the Agitator drew close to the melee of ships the Jackals peeled away to deal with it. The vox casters burst with static and Captain Merrill's voice echoed across the command deck. "We got their attention, Commander. We're reeling them in."

Thuul regarded the strategium and spotted the icon of the Rapier rushing back towards the cruiser, with the Scythe in hot pursuit. He watched the smaller vessel move and suddenly realised that damaged as the Imperial ship was, the Necron cruiser would catch them before they could entice the alien into Annihilator's line of fire.

"Yarrin!" he called across to the Lieutenant. "We need those engines!"

Moments passed and with a sense of inevitability he watched as the Necron ship opened fire on the destroyer.

Discharges tore across the void shields of the small vessel, before they winked out and the lightning played across the hull. Explosions rocked the small craft, before it suddenly rolled over and began to drift, lights flickering and engine flare stuttering.

"They've got her," muttered Krowl, who had returned to his side.

Thuul nodded, a cold weight in his gut, as he watched the Scythe thunder towards the crippled destroyer.

At the last second when he thought it would strike out and reduce the Imperial ship to atoms it instead ignored it and surged past, intent only on the Annihilator.

Krowl looked him in the eye.

Thuul sighed. "All hands brace for impact! And may the Emperor watch over our souls!"

The Scythe suddenly came within range of the ship's lances and a cry came up from one of the Ordnance officers.

"Fire damn you!" yelled Thuul. "Give them everything we have!"

The Imperial ship shuddered as its lance batteries fired, spearing the Scythe with incandescent pulses of energy. The lance beams played across the front of the ship and it disappeared in a blinding explosion.

A cheer rang out across the deck. Thuul held his breath.

A moment later the Scythe reappeared from the explosion and his heart sank. They had not destroyed the alien ship, but they had at least wounded it. One of its wings was tumbling aside on a trail of glowing embers and the eerie green lights flickered across its surface as if it was struggling after that last blow.

"Fire at will!" he bellowed.

The Scythe moved, dancing out of the way of the lance strike with inhuman manoeuvrability and then began closing the distance with the Gothic-class ship with frightening speed.

"What does it take for these things to just lay down and die?" demanded Thuul, watching helplessly as the Necron vessel drew alongside the Imperial ship.

"Emperor damn them!" cried Thuul in exasperation.

The Necron fired its weapons, and Thuul was thrown onto his back as explosions shook the cruiser from stem to stern.

The vox caster crackled into life.

"For the Emperor! For Battlefleet Ultima!" came Jerrill's bellowing warcry awash with static.

Thuul looked out of the massive glasteel viewing ports and spotted the small silvery dart of the Rapier rush into view across the Annihilator's bow. The Necron ceased firing on the cruiser and switched to the destroyer with terrible swiftness. Lightning clasped the Cobra in its shimmering vice, but it could not prevent its headlong rush.

The Imperial ship slammed into the main hull of the Necron vessel, piercing it to the heart.

A second later the two ships burst apart, transformed into an incandescent ball of boiling flame and debris. The elongated tail of the Scythe span upwards and away from the explosion, the only remnant of the Necron ship.

Of the Rapier there was no sign at all.

A long silence fell on the bridge of the Annihilator and Thuul took Krowl's proffered hand and clambered onto unsteady feet.

"I guess He was watching over us after all," said Krowl archly.

Thuul shook his head. "No, Commissar, it was the courage of the crew of the Rapier that saved us. That is all."

He turned to look for Yarrin.

"Can we get the engines online?" he asked.

"We believe so, sir. We should still have three quarters of standard, sir."

A deep bass rumble shook the ship as the main engines once more grumbled into life. The Annihilator swung her massive, battle-scarred prow about and began to head back towards the rest of the fleet.

A blast of static heralded a new voice on the vox caster.

"Captain Karamov, this is Admiral Karter. Respond."

Thuul unconsciously pulled his uniform down and brushed dust from his lapel before he spoke. "Admiral, this is Commander Thuul. Captain Karamov is incapacitated. I am in command of the Annihilator."

"I see," replied Karter, his voice fading in and out. "I want you to turn that ship about and make for the warp jump point at the edge of the system."

Thuul looked at the Commissar with a frown.

"I don't understand, sir, we are..."

"I don't have time to repeat myself, Commander. Get the Annihilator out of this system, now. Report what happened here to We... little chance of surviv... Severe damage. Captain Gelt is likewise..."

The vox transmission cut off abruptly.

"We've lost the transmission," reported Yarrin.

"Enhance grid six-three! Now!" Thuul looked at the readouts scrolling across the strategium and felt horror settling in his gut.

The image on the screen shuddered and faded in and out of focus, but it was clear that the Admiral's vessel was in severe trouble. A huge explosion burst across the lower decks of the battleship, near the engineering section and the portside wing span slowly away into the void. Tiny flashes of incandescing atmosphere venting into the void marked the spots where it had once joined with the main hull.

"You heard the Admiral, Commander," said Krowl suddenly, cutting through their horror.

"Turn this ship around and carry out his orders."

Thuul looked at him still dumbfounded.

"Another anomaly, sir!" cried Yarrin spotting a new target on the strategium. "It's closing on the Conqueror's position."

"Quickly, Lieutenant, what is it?"

"By the Throne," muttered Yarrin as the answer appeared. "Cairn-class, sir."

The words slammed into Thuul like a torpedo strike.

"A tomb-ship? Here?"

Krowl grasped Thuul by the shoulders turning him to face him. "We have limited time, now, Commander. The Admiral is right. They are lost to us now. We have a duty to

the Imperium to get out of this system alive and take back word of this to Battlefleet Command.”

For a long moment Thuul was silent, then shrugging off Krowl's hands he nodded.

“You are correct Commissar. Helm hard to port. All ahead full. Get us out of the gravity field so that we may attempt a warp jump. Warn Navigator Sulian that he will need to make an emergency jump.”

The Annihilator groaned in protest, as she swung about once more and headed out of the system.

Thuul and the others stood and watched the strategium. The Agitator somehow had managed to finish off the Jackals, and then damaged, still venting atmosphere and crew through myriad holes in its hull, it had moved to assist the Conqueror in destroying the Scythe class ship. Between them they succeeded.

The Tomb-ship swept in on them from beyond one of the planet's moons.

It swooped down on the Agitator, as Captain Gelt bravely placed his ship between the alien and the Admiral's vessels. Almost the entire hull of the Tomb-ship seemed to come alive and pulsing fingers of green energy lashed out, savaging the venerable ship. Under punishment of that magnitude, even that ancient and powerful vessel could not survive long.



Agitator broke apart in a series of explosions, great fragments of hull spinning away into the void. Captain Gelt, hero of the Imperium perished with his ship.

“God Emperor!” muttered Yarrin as the Tomb-ship swept aside the wreckage of the Gothic-class cruiser and concentrated at last on the Conqueror.

Particle whips lashed the battleship, cutting into the massive hull like a hot knife into tender grox-meat. Huge sections of the hull simply tumbled away, excised from the whole

by the power of the Necron weaponry.

The battleship responded, blasting the Tomb-ship with a furious broadside that smashed apart several of the pyramid-shaped protuberances on the alien ship's hull.

It was a one-sided contest, however, that the Imperial vessel, already wounded, could never win.

Inevitably the end came swiftly. Particle whips bored into the battleship's engineering section, tearing off the command tower in one sweep and then igniting the vessel's reactor in another. A terrible, boiling ball of fire, like a miniature supernova, burst apart the rear of the great ship. The remainder tumbled end over end into the cold vacuum of space and the Conqueror was no more.

“You did the right thing, sir,” said Lieutenant Yarrin as they watched the destruction of the Admiral's ship.

Thuul nodded. “I know that. But it still feels like we are turning tail and fleeing those bastards.”

Krowl spoke quietly beside him. “There is no shame in retreat if to remain would simply waste the Imperium's limited resources on a lost cause. We must choose our battles more wisely than that, Commander.”

Thuul nodded.

“We are approaching the warp point, Commander,” reported Yarrin.

“Tell Sulian to engage the warp engines as soon as he is ready.”

Yarrin nodded in acknowledgment and went away to pass the order to the ship's Navigator.

Moments later the ship rumbled, and the massive warp engines came online. As the battle-scarred vessel surged into the warp Thuul took one last look at the strategium and saw the Necron Tomb-ship making its way towards the now helpless Imperial transports. He thought of the Guardsmen below on the world, already laying their lives on the line for the Emperor against the greenskins. Both sides did not know yet that Death had come to the world and each and every one of them would soon look the Reaper in the eye.

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Alternative Campaign Rules

by Stefano Breviglieri

Quick and easy campaigns for large numbers of people.

Guidelines

Battlefleet Gothic has a very well written ruleset, which has stood the test of time way better than most other games. No rule creep has affected it and every fleet has fair chances of beating almost every other foe.

My main gripe with the system has always been its campaign section. The rules provided are created to support groups of no more than 10 players, with a degree of randomness and improvisation that can be accepted when all of the players are close friends and know each other's fleet.

Their main weakness, though, shows up when you try to expand your gaming community. All of a sudden the lack of official refits table for many fleets, coupled with the increase of less than fair matchups and "non-stand up and fight" scenarios becoming less and less suitable (try beating Necrons defending in Blockade Run if you dare!) all can add up and seriously hamper the enjoyment of the campaign.

On the other hand, standardisation has its limits and most of the amendments I've made to fleet lists and scenarios will scare the hell out of many a veteran gamer. Of course, these rules aren't set in stone and have actually evolved with the passing of time. If you want to make suggestions/criticism on them, feel free to do so on the Specialist Games Forum Website.

When I devised these rules, there were a few main points I had to bear in mind. The first was simplicity. Simplicity allows even less experienced players to take part to a campaign, and the more people there are in this kind of campaign, the better. I have managed campaigns with up to 22 people, playing between 6 and 8 games, lasting just a couple of months, without much effort. It can be as big as you like really, provided you have the resources to make it work—i.e. viable venues, plenty of tables and celestial phenomena and the occasional "NO PANIC" alarm when a player doesn't turn up at a previously arranged match. There is no point in having 30 players if you can have only 2 people playing at a time! Don't overdo things or you'll leave players with less-than-enthusiastic feelings about the campaign, which will make them think twice before they sign up next time you ask them to take part to something. Simplicity, then, had to be enforced on the system to make it work. I quickly found out that the two areas that were more easily dealt with were the Renown system and the Refits charts.

The former involved exaggerate book-keeping and created lots of grey areas in the victory conditions. What happens, for instance, if you roll a "Desperate Mission" during an Escalating Engagement and the target ship never shows up? It would be very unfair to your opponent to treat it as "mission accomplished". So the Renown and Subplot rules were removed for a simpler Win/Draw/Loss chart, mainly

related to Victory points and set game turns (6 or 8, depending on the scenario).

The latter, on the other hand, soon turned fleets into "space caravans" whose ships had so many special rules that one forgot about their weaponry. Monstrosities such as Emperors sporting Reinforced Hulls, going to 16 Hit points but being entirely unable to turn unless using Burn Retros, and useless pieces of junk,

such as Lunars with Turbo Weapons, whose batteries wouldn't suffer a column range when firing past 30, if it weren't for the fact that they can't fire past 30 anyway, had to go. Upgrades were standardised, so that they could apply to each and every fleet, but "levelling-up" was made a tad more difficult, to make sure games were won by good players, not by having 8 re-rolls and the like. Having fixed the Refits, I realised why they were so easily



WARP RIFT



obtained in the Blue Book: destroyed ships were destroyed and that was it. Getting replacements wasn't very difficult, but I wanted to stress the importance of keeping your fleet together, so I created a post-game damage table to see what had happened to game casualties, and a point-based Resource system that favoured game-winners but didn't leave the other player high and dry. In this way, the loss of a ship is more keenly felt, but its chances of survival much higher (especially for escorts, which seemed to die in droves).

The last, and most controversial, amendment I had to make was on fleet composition. Every gamer has his own ideas of what is "balanced" and what is not. Since these campaigns are expected to attract less experienced gamers, I took pains to devise a system that did not grossly penalise fleet lists as a whole, but prevented players from taking list that made it impossible for the other player to enjoy the match.

One of the biggest flaws in the original BFG ruleset was the preponderance of launch bays. Although the efficiency ratings of attack craft have been reduced with the latest rules, having to face 48 bombers from an all-Explorer Tau fleet would have still been a less than exciting prospect for any new gamer. I cut down on launch bays then, although I let fleets that are renowned for their large numbers of small craft a higher allowance to make sure they weren't too severely impaired by my decision.

Another hot topic has always been the inclusion of escorts in a fleet. Although they are, from a background standpoint, both essential and plentiful in any fleet, it is universally acknowledged that some fleets can actually do without them altogether, while others still have to rely on them. Having escorts in every fleet left good opportunities for interesting twists in scenarios (such as "if you opponent hasn't got any escort on the table when the game ends you get +150 VPs") so I decided it was mandatory to have at least 2 escort squadrons. If somebody doesn't like escorts, he can just field two squadrons of two escorts and will still have the points to get up to seven cruisers, which is good enough for 1,500 points!

A cap was put on the number of battleships available, although this only affects Tyranids and the Tau, because no other fleet could get more than 2 of them anyway. Surely Tyranids with only 2 Hive Ships will have a hard time against a few foes, but the prospect of letting them field 5 fully upgraded "flying fortresses" wasn't very exciting since almost no fleet could secure a win against them. Another cap was put on the number of Nova cannon armed ships, but most Imperial players have already realised that fielding more than three was unnecessarily harsh on your opponent.

Okay, now it looks more complicated than it actually is. Here's the ruleset:

1.1 – Rules, fleets and restrictions

All official fleets and rulesets (i.e. the BBB, Armada, Rogue Trader vessels, and Craftworld Eldar) are allowed. You have to draw a 1,500 point list according to the following restrictions:

- 0/2 battleships
- 0/12 launch bays (Tau and Tyranids can have up to 24; random launch bays count 1d6 as 4 and 1d3 as 2)
- 0/3 Nova cannon armed ships (Imperium only)
- 2+ Escort squadrons

This is your basic list which you will be using for the campaign.

In addition, you have 500 points to form your "Reserves". Reserves are extra ships that can be used to replace damaged or destroyed ships. Only Cruisers (not heavy/battle/grand cruisers!) and Escorts can be included in this list. Ships belonging to this list don't need to follow the restrictions above, but once they enter the fleet this will still have to be legal in all respects, including its point value.

Example 1:

My 1,490 point Imperial fleet features 2 Dominators, a Mars (3 Nova cannon) and 2 Gothics. I can take a Dominator in the Reserve list, however should one of the Gothics be sunk, I wouldn't be able to replace it with the Dominator because I would have too many Nova cannon.

Example 2:

My 1,490 point chaos fleet loses a Murder. My Reserve list is composed of a Carnage, a Devastation and 3 Infidels. I can replace the lost Murder with the Carnage, because my total list doesn't go over 1,500 points, but not with the Devastation for the same reason.

1.2 – Number of games and scenarios

The campaign lasts 6 campaign rounds, then the 4 best players in the league play semi-finals and final. Players will be playing different, pre-determined scenarios according to their fleet and results (i.e. winning a game might mean playing a different scenario than someone who lost). Not all scenarios will be played with the full list. If you are forced to play with fewer points, the ships you're using don't have to follow the usual fleet restrictions (for instance, you might want to play a 1,000 point game without escorts).

Winning a game is worth 2 league points, losing 0, drawing 1. A game is drawn when the Victory Point difference between the players is less than a tenth of the game's point value (i.e. in a 1,500 point engagement, you have to score 151+ Victory Points more than your opponent to win).

2.1 – Post-game sequence: damaged ships

Keep track of damaged, destroyed and disengaged ships during the game. At the end of every game, every capital ship must roll 1d6 on the following table:

0: Destroyed. The ship has exploded, is lost in the Warp, or has been otherwise lost. Cross it off the roster.

1: Beyond repair. The ship is useless after the extreme damage suffered, but many systems are still working. Cross it off the roster, but you gain half of its point value in Resources (see later).

2-3: Heavy damage. While having taken a real pounding, in time the ship will return to its former self. The ship has to miss next match. If it doesn't, it starts Crippled and the opposing player earns the usual point value for having Crippled it if it isn't destroyed in the game.

4+: Fighting fit. A lick of paint and the ship's ready to fight once more.



Use the following modifiers for the table:

- 1 if reduced to Blazing or Drifting Hulk during game
- 2 if destroyed by a Plasma Drive overload
- 3 if destroyed by a Warp Drive implosion
- 1 if Disengaged
- +1 if Crippled
- +3 if Not Crippled

Notice that some of these modifiers can be applied at the same time: an uncrippled ship that disengages has a total +2 bonus.

Escort ships do not roll on this table. Roll a die for each escort in the squadron that was Destroyed during the game. If any of the dice is a 1, remove a ship from the squadron. This means that no more than 1 escort can be lost from each squadron after a game (the scrapped escort can be used to repair the others).

2.2 – Post-game sequence: Experience

The Leadership of your vessels will remain the same throughout the campaign unless it improves. Warships are massive constructions; crew loss and lack of maintenance make it very difficult for a ship to improve during a conflict, but it can still happen.

During the game, keep track of the ships your vessels destroyed or crippled. At the end of every game, every capital ship must roll 2d6 on the following table:

- 2/10:** No improvement.
- 11:** New skill. Roll on the table below.
- 12:** +1 Ld. Mark the change on your roster.
- 13:** +1 Re-roll. It can only be used for the ship that earned it.



Use the following modifiers for the table:

- +1 for every Cruiser Crippled or Destroyed by the ship (of course, a crippled, then destroyed cruiser only counts as +1)
- +1 for every Battleship Crippled
- +2 for every Battleship Destroyed
- +X according to the victory conditions of the scenario (if any)

If you totalled up an 11, you may roll on this skill list. Roll 1d6 and mark your skill on your roster. Each of the following skills can only be taken once by a ship. Escort ships do not improve in any way.

- 1: Brilliant strategy. If you field this ship during a game, you may re-roll your own die to see who starts the game.
- 2: Damage control. The ship always rolls 2 extra dice when attempting to repair damage, even when Crippled.
- 3: Improved thrusters. The ship gains +5 speed. Eldar ships only add +5 to their top speed.
- 4: Nerves of steel. The ship may re-roll Ld checks to avoid shooting at the closest target.
- 5: Fighting crews. The ship gains a +1 boarding modifier when defending in a boarding action. The bonus can be added to already existing modifiers.
- 6: Close range targeters. The ship may roll 1 extra die when using turrets (it does NOT have an extra turret). Eldar ships with this skill may re-roll a single "1" per turn when attacked by ordnance markers.

2.3 – Post-game sequence: Modifying the roster and expanding the fleet

After having rolled for damage and skills, you'll have to adjust your roster. If you lost a ship, you can replace it with a vessel coming from the Reserve list. You CAN replace a non-destroyed ship (such as one that suffered Heavy Damage) with one from the Reserves. Cross the existing ship off your roster (!) and replace it with the new vessel, rolling for Ld as usual.

Escort vessels coming from Reserves may be formed in a squadron, rolling for Ld as usual, or they may be added to already existing squadrons, retaining their Ld.

Now you'll have to calculate your income. Each fleet gains +1d6x10 Resources after each game, adding the following modifiers:

- +10 if you won
- +15 for each Hulk on the table if you Held the Field during the game
- +10 if this was the second, third etc game against the same race
- +10 if the most expensive vessel in the enemy fleet has been Destroyed
- 10 if your Flagship (if any) was Destroyed

If you have enough Resources to buy new vessels you may do so. Add any new vessel to your roster and roll for Ld. Since the mission states the point limit for the game, having more vessels only leaves the player more choice, which isn't an overwhelming advantage.

Warp Rift Scenario Contest

In the latest Tau codex there is a story about Commander Shadowsun leading a Tau fleet defeating a Tyranid fleet without having a single loss in her fleet.

The contest is to develop a cool scenario on above scenario where it should/could be possible for the Tau to defeat a Tyranid fleet without a single loss (or as few as possible). Originality is praised and no-brainers won't last (eg 100 Tau ships vs 1 Nid ship).

Mail your entry or questions at: horizon@epic40k.co.uk

Scenarios

Having dealt with fleet lists and campaign rules, it was time to take a look at the scenarios. For the campaign I wanted to have a narrative approach, creating a natural progression from one gaming session to the next. It makes more sense to play Surprise Attack after having played Conquest (even more so if you force the winner of the latter to be the defender in the former!) than the other way round. Apart from that, minor amendments were made, such as set turns. I used a few brand new scenarios, such as one that used "secret deployment" (fielding blip counters that represented ships) or another with a big nasty space

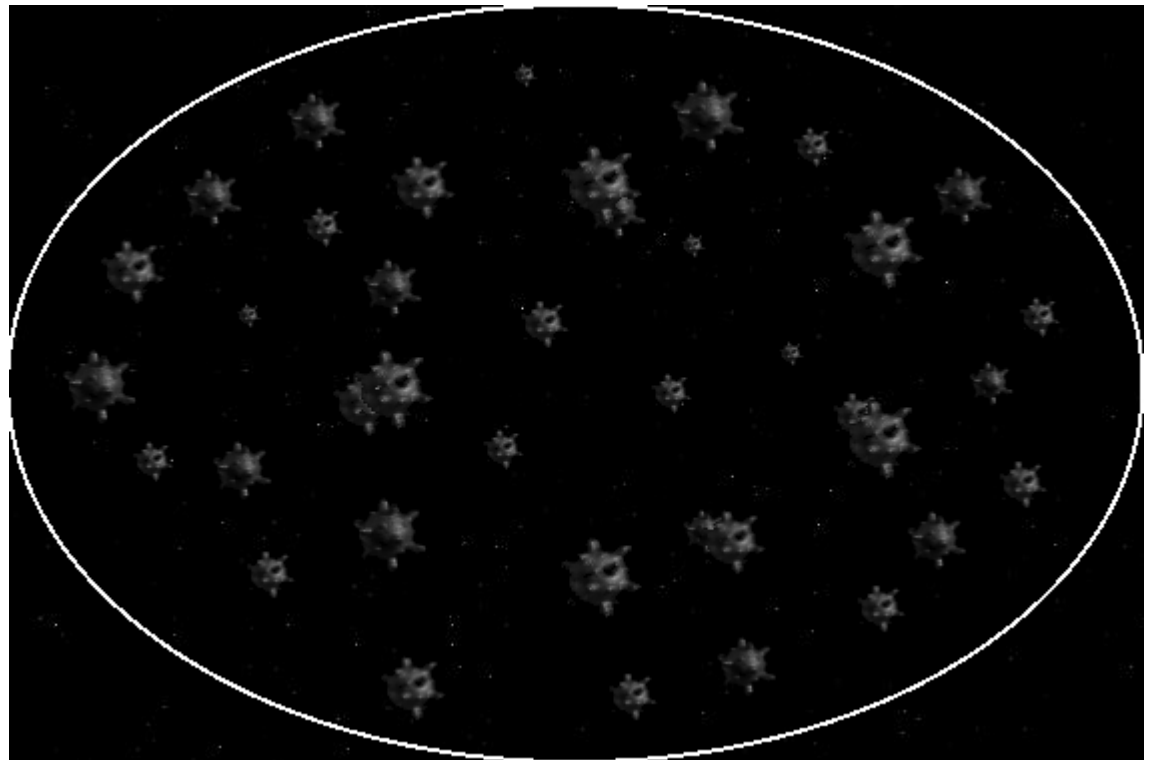
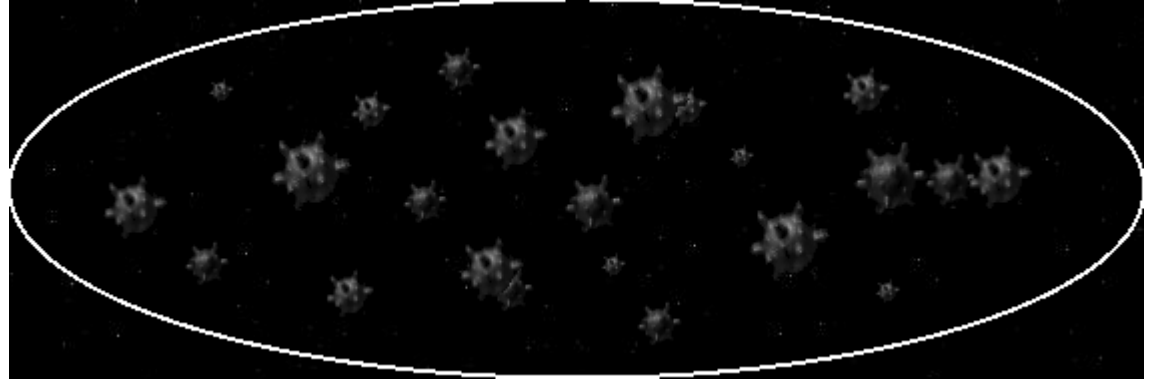
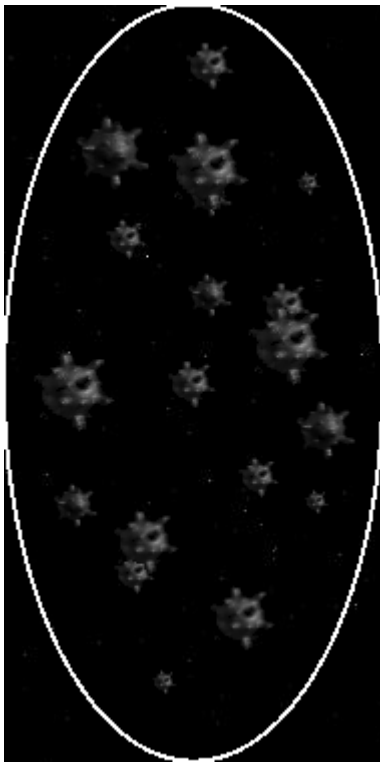
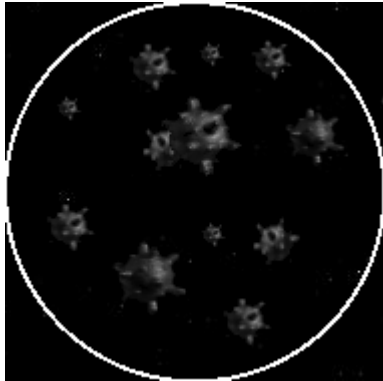
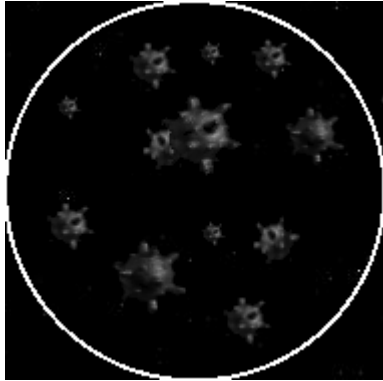
fortress in the middle of the table, which indiscriminately fired at both fleets! Don't overdo with that, though, because special scenarios tend to interfere with the fleets' special rules (i.e. a scenario in which solar flares happen every turn will single-handedly destroy Eldar fleets, even before opponents fire at them, while leaving Necron fleets entirely unaffected).

Happy gaming

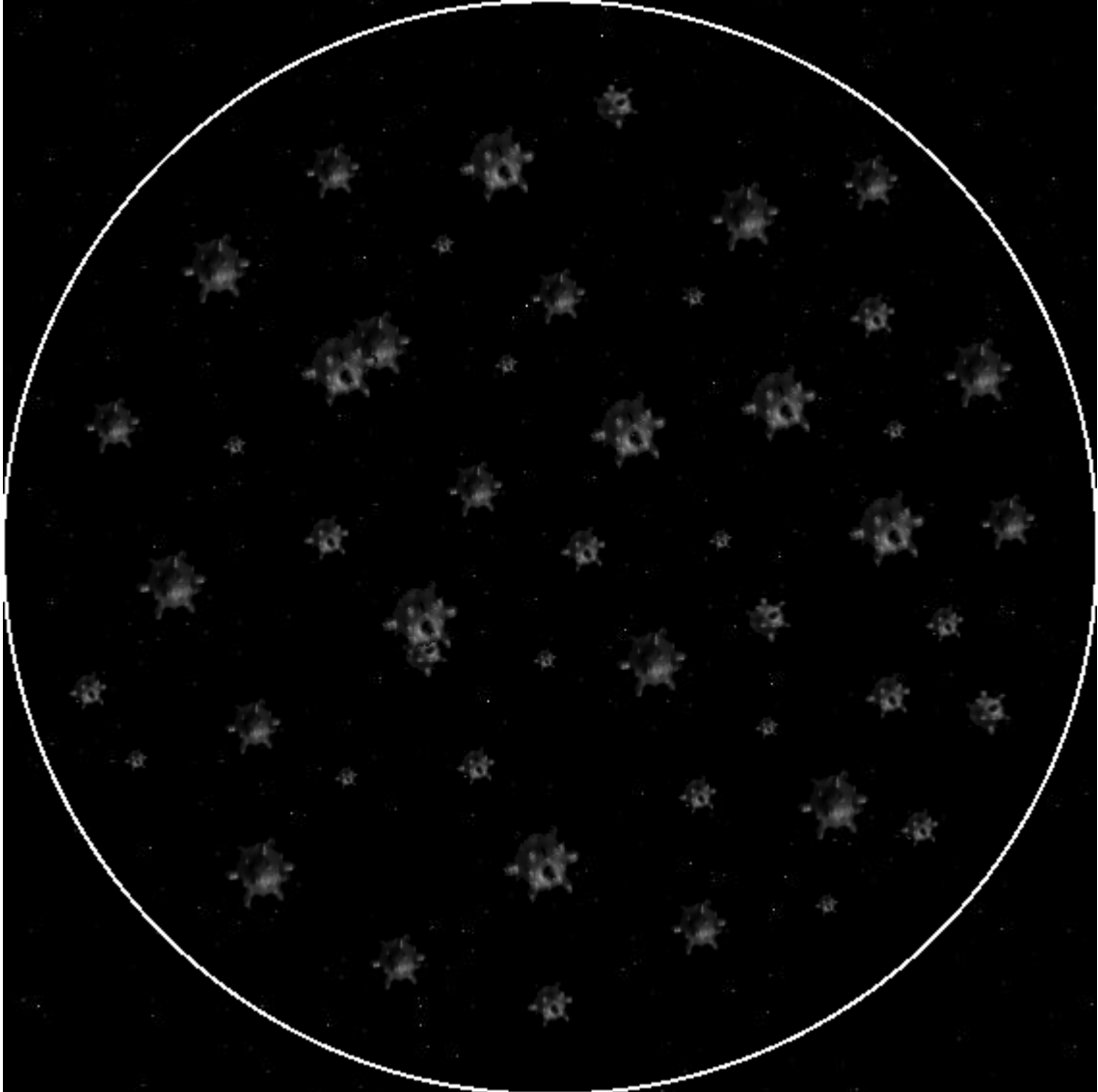


Minefield Templates

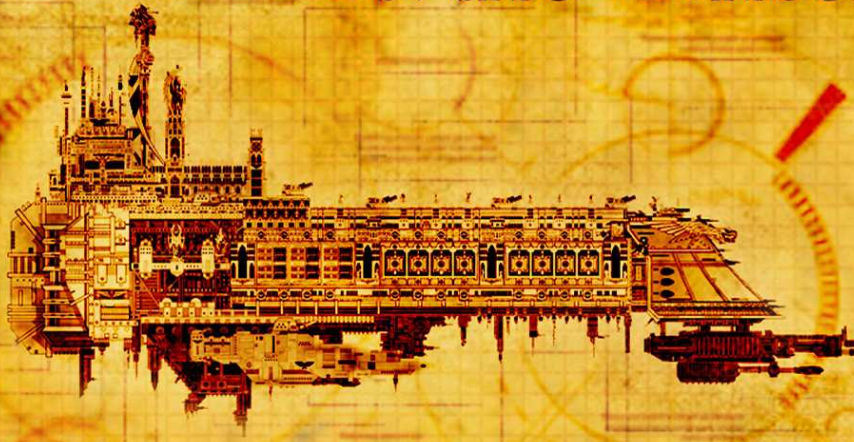
by Shapeshifter



THE FORGE



Divine Intervention



RACE.....IMPERIUM OF MAN
CLASS.....RETRIBUTION {MODIFIED}
NAME.....DIVINE INTERVENTION
CURRENT COMMANDER.....LORD ADMIRAL FLAVIUS SESAR REED
ASSIGNED TO FLEET.....OMEGA DRACONUM / SPECIAL ORDERS
LOCATION.....SEGMENTUM ULTIMA / ANARGO SECTOR
COLOR SCHEME.....WEATHERED STONE TAN

HISTORICAL:..... THE DIVINE INTERVENTION (D.I.) WAS ONE OF THE FIRST OF THE NEW RETRIBUTION CLASS BATTLESHIPS TO BE COMMISSIONED IN 725.M36. IT AND IT'S CREW WERE LOST TO THE WARP SIX YEARS AFTER IT'S MAIDEN VOYAGE ONLY TO REAPPEAR NEARLY 5 MILLENNIA LATER. THE D.I. WAS FOUND TO HAVE BEEN ALTERED WITH EXTREMELY ADVANCED ALIEN POWER SYSTEMS PROVIDED BY {CLASSIFIED} AFTER AN ENGAGEMENT WITH BOTH CHAOS AND NECRON FORCES WITHIN THE WARP. AFTER FIVE YEARS OF RETROFITTING THE D.I. WITH HANGER DECKS AND A NEW WEAPON DESIGN THAT COULD TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE ALIEN POWER CORE AS WELL AS AN INQUISITORIAL PSYCHIC MANIPULATOR THAT WOULD ENHANCE THE SHIP WITH AN ADDED TACTICAL OPTION USING PSYCHIC PROJECTION, THE D.I. BECAME THE FIRST IN A SERIES OF INQUISITORIAL EXPERIMENTS UTILIZING PSYCHIC WARFARE IN NAVAL COMBAT. THE D.I. WAS THEN ASSIGNED FOR DUTY IN THE INQUISITORIAL FLEET AND GIVEN BLACK SHIP "STATUS" AS A MEANS TO DEAL WITH OPPOSITION IN PLACES WHERE THE REGULAR IMPERIAL NAVY PRESENCE WAS NOT DESIRED AND WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAME.

TACTICA.....IDEALLY THE DIVINE INTERVENTION WOULD HAVE USED AN OBERON BATTLESHIP HULL AS THE INQUISITION WISHED FOR A STAND ALONE VESSEL WITH THE ABILITY TO UTILIZE ATTACK CRAFT AS WELL AS PACK ENOUGH PUNCH TO FIGHT IT'S WAY OUT IF NEEDED FROM ANY ADVERSE SITUATION IT COULD NOT HANDLE DIRECTLY, BUT WHEN THE D.I. REEMERGED FROM THE WARP WITH IT'S UNDECIPHERABLE ALIEN POWER SOURCE HARDWIRED DIRECTLY AND INEXTRICABLY TO THE SHIP THE WISDOM OF THE INQUISITION WAS TO CAPITALIZE ON THIS VESSEL AS OPPOSED TO DESTROYING WHAT WAS CONSIDERED AN ALIEN INFESTATION. THIS DECISION HAS PROVED ITSELF TIME AND AGAIN AS THE D.I. HAS LITERALLY APPEARED OUT OF NOWHERE ON MULTIPLE OCCASIONS TO COME TO THE AID OF IMPERIAL VESSELS UNDER ATTACK BY ALIENS OR PIRATES AND SINCE THE D.I. HAS NO STANDARD INQUISITORIAL ICONOGRAPHY SHE CAN PURSUE A MORE OPEN PROFILE ACHIEVING IT'S USUALLY SECRET AGENDA IN SERVICE OF THE EMPEROR.

