

WARP RIFT

THE BATTLEFLEET GOTHIC NETZINE



S. H. 08

ISSUE 19

HORIZON

FROM THE NEXUS PUBLISHING HOUSE

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

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+++ THE MAELSTROM +++

Welcome to a new edition of Warp Rift.

Since last issue there hasn't been any major development regarding the official status of Specialist Games and/or Battlefleet Gothic. The announced forum move is bound to happen on August the 18th.

At the moment this issue of Warp Rift goes online there are only a few days left to get your entry in for Gothicomp 2008. We are happy to see that the number of entries has grown a lot since last year. The voting rounds will start at the beginning of August, keep your eyes out on Tactical Command or any of the other Battlefleet Gothic related forums.

This issue Warp Rift features three articles coming from the Anargo Sector Project. All dealing with the Navis Mercantilis of the Imperium. First we start off with the introduction article which is followed later on by a conversion and scenario about the Merchant fleets. (*Note: thus very different from the Rogue Trader list we presented you in Warp Rift 17*). In the Tactical Command section Reg Steiner gives another approach towards the core mechanic of Battlefleet Gothic, making movement, action and reaction more 'realistic'. The Showcase shows the Marine fleet of our own Reg Steiner and the story, High Anchor, is the start of a three part story.

Happy Gaming,
Horizon

+++ WARP RIFT BLOG +++

You can check out our blog at the following location:

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

+++ WARP RIFT FORUM +++

Hosted at www.tacticalwargames.net Warp Rift featuures 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/forums/index.cgi?act=SF;f=89>

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NAVIS MERCANTILIS

BY CELS [ANARGO SECTOR PROJECT]

The Imperium of Man is the greatest galactic empire of its time, spanning from Ultima Macharia on the very edge of the western rim to the shrouded Eastern Fringe almost a hundred thousand light years away. Uniting its million worlds is perhaps the greatest weapon and resource available to Man: the Imperial Fleet, controlled by the powerful bureaucracy of the *Adeptus Administratum*. The Imperial fleet can be broken down into three primary components; the *Navis Militares*, protecting the Imperium with its great warships, the *Navis Mercantilis*, handling the flow of tithes and trade in the Imperium, and the *Navis Civiles*, whose ships are owned and controlled by noble lords, guild masters, free traders and other privileged citizens.



Of these three fleets, the *Navis Mercantilis* (or Merchant Fleet) is by far the greatest. In most Imperial sectors, the Merchant Fleet will be ten times bigger than the military and civil fleets. The



name of the *Navis Mercantilis* is actually somewhat misleading, as free trade makes up a relatively small portion of the traffic between Imperial worlds. The primary purpose of the Merchant Fleet is arguably the collection and distribution of tithes under direction of the *Departmentos Conlatio* and *Auctus* of the *Adeptus Administratum*. Due to the high degree of specialisation of Imperial colonies, there are many worlds that are utterly dependent on external supplies in order to survive. Forgeworlds and industrial worlds are some of the most valuable types of Imperial colonies, but these would be almost worthless if not for a steady supply of food from agriworlds and ores from mining worlds. It is the function of the *Navis Mercantilis* to drive this circulation, in many ways acting as the blood of the great body that is the Imperium.

While the flow of the tithes is nominally controlled by the *Adeptus Administratum* through the use of

the *Navis Mercantilis*, the name of the Merchant Fleet evokes a part of its original function. Because ships with warp drives are so very expensive, trade would be all but impossible on many worlds if not for the services of the *Navis Mercantilis*. By providing a public transport service to sanctioned commercial organisations, the *Navis Mercantilis* is able to stimulate economic growth. Trade cartels that cannot afford building or purchasing their own ships may rent space onboard the vast merchant vessels of the *Navis Mercantilis* as they pass by on their scheduled routes. Many interstellar trade syndicates and cartels have started out by conducting business via the *Navis Mercantilis*, eventually gathering enough wealth over the centuries to purchase their own vessels in the *Navis Civiles*.



The Merchant fleet in battle

Few vessels in the *Navis Mercantilis* are entirely defenceless. In a galaxy filled with hidden dangers, xenos raiders, renegade fleets, pirates and warp-spawned behemoths, even ore carracks and trading galleons are equipped with ranks upon ranks of weapons to deter attackers and deal with miscellaneous dangers such as asteroids or minefields.

Against dedicated attackers, the ships of the *Navis Mercantilis* are extremely vulnerable and so must avoid enemy contacts at all costs.

The ships of the Imperial Navy and *Adeptus Astartes* are ever vigilant, constantly patrolling and guarding Mercantilis trade routes to ensure the

safety of unprotected merchant vessels. In regions threatened by war, all non-military traffic is ceased immediately, so not to sacrifice the vulnerable and valuable Imperial merchant vessels. Some trade convoys however, must reach their destinations at regular intervals no matter what enemies lay in their way. From the heart of Segmentum Solar, enormous trade fleets fill their cavernous holds with vital cargo and set out to central locations around the Imperium, sailing along the major trade lanes with huge military escorts. To these Solar Merchant fleets, reports of xenos raiders and pirate ambushes are acknowledged with stoic determination, as billions of lives depend on the arrival of their precious cargo and future generations depend on their safe return back to the Segmentum Solar.

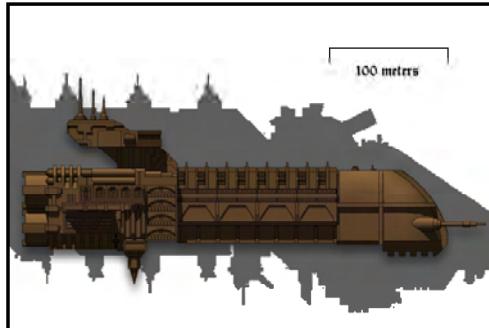


[Above: A *Navis Mercantilis* convoy in transit]

Author's note:

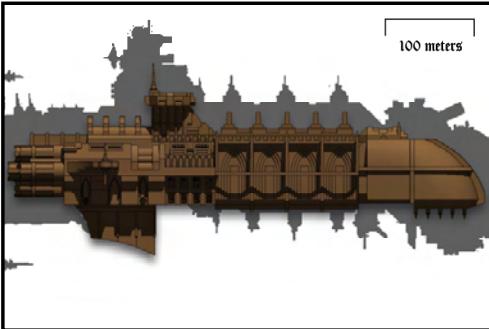
Below, you will find rules for merchant vessels in BFG and a special BFG convoy scenario. The reason I have made additional rules for using transports in BFG is twofold. First, it's a great excuse to convert and paint a whole bunch of new ships for a BFG fleet. Anyone can just slap together a new type of battlecruiser, but building a tugboat or sprint trader is a different kind of challenge. Second, while the trade convoy is one of my favourite scenarios for BFG, I find that it doesn't really work on a grand scale. The nervous tension of trying to avoid discovery by a squadron of enemy escorts isn't quite there when you're cruising forward with two battleships on each flank. The rules below allow for greater battles involving bigger merchant vessels, allowing people [like me] to find a use for their newly converted super-heavy barge.

Caravel transport.....(transport capacity: 1)



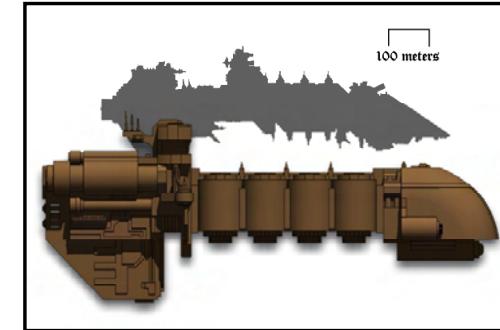
Caravels are represented by an ordnance marker and counts as ordnance to all intents and purposes. If a caravel marker comes in contact with enemy attack craft (fighters, bombers or assault boats), roll a D6 for each enemy attack craft in contact. If any of the attack craft score a 4 or higher, the caravel is destroyed and removed from play. Caravels may be attacked with long range weapons like other kinds of ordnance, using the normal rules. Caravels have a speed of 10 cm, allowing the ship to move 10 cm per ordnance phase (i.e. 20 cm per turn)

Clipper transport.....(transport capacity: 1)



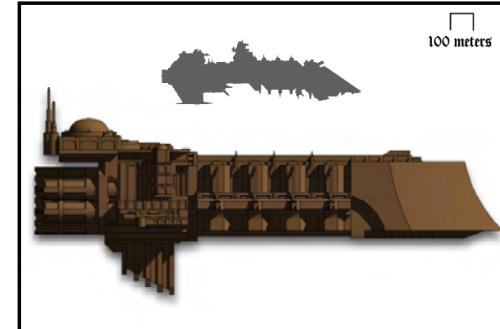
TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	15 cm	45°	1	4+	1
ARMAMENT					
Port Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	L	
Starboard Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	R	
Dorsal Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	L / F / R	

Freighter transport.....(transport capacity: 2)

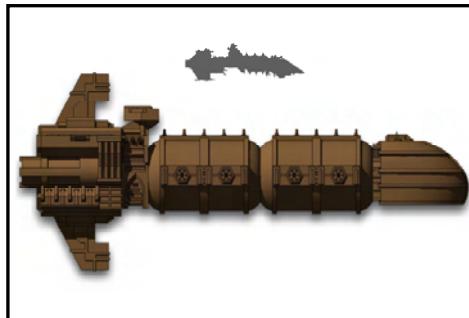


TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	15 cm	45°	1	5+	1
ARMAMENT					
Port Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	L	
Starboard Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	R	
Dorsal Weapons Battery	15 cm		1	L / F / R	

Galleon transport.....(transport capacity: 4)

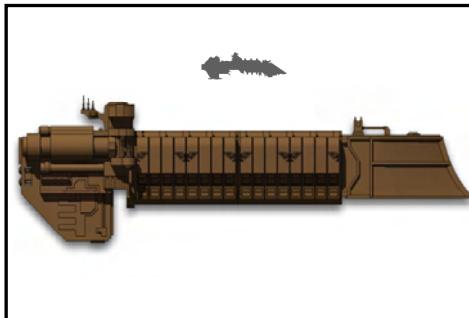


TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/1	15 cm	45°	1	5+	1
ARMAMENT					
Port Weapons Battery	15 cm		2	L	
Starboard Weapons Battery	15 cm		2	R	
Dorsal Weapons Battery	15 cm		2	L / F / R	

Carrack transport.....(transport capacity: 6)

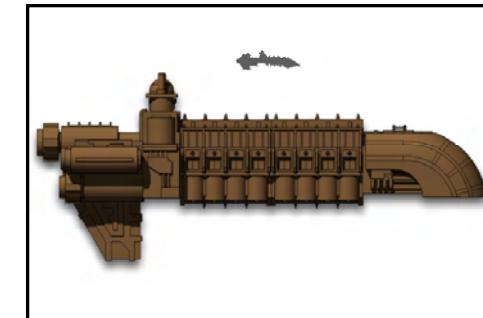
TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/6	15 cm	45°	2	5+	2

ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC
Port Weapons Battery		15 cm	2	L
Starboard Weapons Battery		15 cm	2	R
Dorsal Weapons Battery		15 cm	2	L / F / R

Barge transport.....(transport capacity: 8)

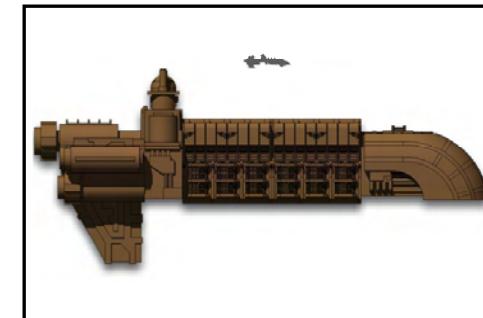
TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/8	15 cm	45°	2	5+	2

ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC
Port Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	L
Starboard Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	R
Dorsal Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	L / F / R

Heavy barge transport.....(transport capacity: 10)

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/10	15 cm	45°	2	5+	2

ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC
Port Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	L
Starboard Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	R
Dorsal Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	L / F / R

Super-heavy barge transport.....(transport capacity: 12)

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELD	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/12	15 cm	45°	3	5+	3

ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR	FIRE ARC
Port Weapons Battery		15 cm	4	L
Starboard Weapons Battery		15 cm	4	R
Dorsal Weapons Battery		15 cm	3	L / F / R

Merchant vessels

The ships of the *Navis Mercantilis* are generally not built with the same advanced technology as the *Navis Militares*, the Imperial Navy. In addition to their inferior defensive capabilities, Merchant vessels are often more sluggish, lacking the powerful engines used by the Imperial Navy, which makes them harder to manoeuvre and slower to accelerate. Naturally, the officers and crew of Merchant ships are rarely as skilled or experienced in dangerous situations as those of Navy ships and most sailors in the *Navis Mercantilis* may go their entire life without seeing anything like combat, in many regions of the Imperium. Merchant fleet ships using All Ahead Full orders only add +3D6 cm to their speed. They also reduce their randomly rolled Leadership by one, so they will have a Leadership value of between 5 and 8.

Variants

There are many types of merchant ships in the Imperium beyond the categories based on volume and cargo capacity. Sprint traders, frontier traders, armed merchants, jump tenders, bulk traders, fuel carriers and void cruisers are the most common types of specialised merchant ships, though there are also other common variants including fuel carriers, ore carriers and passenger ships. The large convoys plying the major trade lanes of the

Imperium will usually have a mixed composition of such ship types, depending on the needs and demands of the *Adeptus Administratum*, but occasionally strategic considerations will prompt a request for sprint traders or armed merchants specifically.

Sprint trader

Sprint traders are a class of merchant ships with tremendous speed at the cost of cargo capacity. They are expensive vessels, with advanced engines that approach the capabilities of Imperial military vessels, and their services are available only to the richest and most privileged citizens and adepts. Sprint traders are used for a variety of purposes, but most commonly carrying luxury goods, important personnel, fresh food or valuable lifeforms. Sprint traders are also sometimes commandeered by Inquisitors travelling incognito and by smugglers or rogue traders looking to bypass Imperial or xenos blockades.

A clipper, freighter, galleon or carrack may be upgraded to a sprint trader at the cost of 5 points per each transport capacity point. (A freighter with transport capacity 2 must pay 10 points.) This gives the ship a +5 cm speed bonus and also provides a +4D6 cm speed bonus when using All Ahead Full order instead of +3D6 cm. Sprint traders have half the original transport capacity of their ship type.

Armed merchant

Armed merchants are simply merchant vessels that have been either constructed or refitted with military grade weaponry, the likes of which are usually reserved for the Imperial Navy. While most Imperial transports are equipped with a small battery of weapons to discourage pirates and raiders, they are easy prey in a real battle. Armed merchants are often sent to warzones or frontier worlds together with Imperial Navy escorts in situations where enemy raids are not only possible, but almost certain. Not all merchant ships are normally refitted in this way, however. The smallest caravels would be practically useless as transports if equipped with massive military grade weapons, and the largest vessels such as super-heavy barges are so valuable that they usually have dedicated Imperial Navy escort squadrons instead.

A clipper, freighter, galleon or carrack may be upgraded to an armed merchant at the cost of 5 points per each transport capacity point. (A freighter with transport capacity 2 must pay 10 points.) This gives the ship a 50% increase in weapon battery strength, with no additional range. For example, a freighter with strength 2 weapon batteries will have strength 3 weapon batteries if upgraded to an armed merchant ship. The upgrade is made to each battery (port, starboard and dorsal). Armed merchants have half the original transport capacity of their ship type.

NAVIS MERCANTILIS - BUILDING MERCHANT VESSELS [DRY DOCK]

NAVIS MERCANTILIS - CONVOY BATTLE [VOID STALKER]

ANARGO SECTOR PROJECT [WEBSITE]

SIMULTANEOUS MOVEMENT AND COMBAT RULES

BY REG STEINER

Introduction

I set out to make a rather substantial change to the BattleFleet Gothic rules because of a minor problem, that became a major concern.

Too many of the game players around, disliked having alternating turns, and being forced to lose a game simply because they didn't fire weapons first. Forced to take terrible damage, without any ability to get off their own strike, the damaged ships now had a huge reduction of power with which to strike back. That is the minor problem. The major concern became how many players 'moved on' to other games because of this problem.

I believe in keeping things simple. Therefore, I put together this method for simultaneous movement and combat by making as few changes as possible. The big change is in the tactics players will use to resolve the contest of fleets. No longer will fat, slow bombers 'fly around' stationary fighters because the fighters take the second move in that ordinance phase, for example. Now damage 'takes effect' after both sides have fired. I believe the **Reaction** and **Initiative** aspects of these changes make the changes particularly attractive. I invite the reader to try a small game, or two, with these methods. Be ready to change your tactical thinking. Maneuvering to get the first shot is no longer of primary importance in the opening moves. The

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

Movement



1. The first phase of a player's turn is to place 'Special Orders' such as 'All Ahead Full'. Now 'Routine' movement orders are added. If no special order dice are being placed next to a ship or squadron, place a face down counter indicating the 'routine' order the ship will be performing. The routine orders are 'straight' or 'turn'. If a Special Order does not affect movement, such as "Lock On" or "Reload Ordinance", a routine order marker is also required. (For Lock On, the straight arrow serves as a reminder.)

a. I made my counters out of wood discs from a hobby store. Cardboard squares work too. Print a straight arrow, or a bent arrow, on one side of each counter. I made fifteen of each to start.

Check out [The Forge](#) section for ready-to-cut-out markers.

2. Turn over counters after everyone is finished placing their orders. All players move their ships as per special orders, or 'routine' orders, at least the minimum distance required. The straight arrow means that vessel must move straight, and the bent arrow means that vessel must make a turn. The direction of the arrow is unimportant, it only means a turn in either direction is to be performed. Players should move ships opposite each other, to take advantage of the 'Reaction Rule'.

a. Any 'Special Order' that fails a leadership roll, requires a 'Routine' order counter to replace it. Suggestion: Make all attempts for 'Special' orders first, then place and flip over 'routine' counters, and move.

Reaction Rule

When a player places a face down marker next to a ship indicating a turn, or straight ahead movement, that is what the ship must do. However,

as an opponent moves opposite vessels, players may realize that their vessel is moving into a disadvantageous or dangerous position. That player can roll against that vessel's 'Leadership' value, and if successful, can change the move from the order marker. In other words, move straight instead of turn, or vice versa. Only that ship's Leadership can be used - there's no time for a Fleet Admiral to notice from another ship, and yell a warning! If the Leadership roll is a failure result, the vessel must continue with the turn or straight maneuver originally ordered. Even into a dangerous position. Too late the danger was realized! The opposing player can also attempt to react, as outlined above. No ship can attempt more than one reaction per movement phase.

b. Ordinance Second Move: Now move any ordinance launched in a previous turn. Both opponents move a partial move, usually half, sometimes less is needed, as a means to project where an interception may occur. If no interception is obvious, move full move. Resolve attacks and damage.

3. Gunnery Combat is resolved exactly as in the base rules. Except that effects of damage are not applied until all ships have fired all guns that can. Ordinance still launches after all gunnery and damaged is resolved. This means that if a ship becomes crippled from gunnery damages, that ship's ordinance IS affected as per base rules.

Initiative Rule (Optional)

An exciting, and even scary option, is to roll an 'Initiative Die' during gun combat resolution. Often opposite ships 'duel' one on one, or two on one, etc. Roll a D6 for each ship just before firing

gunnery attacks. If two vessels are firing on one opponent, a D6 is rolled for each, NOT one D6 for the squadron. The high die winner fires all weapons first, AND APPLIES all resulting damage immediately. If a

ship is crippled, or suffers a critical hit, all such effects are applied prior to that ship's return fire. For example, in the case of two ships against one, there could be three different initiative values, so each would be applied separately, in turn. Any tied



initiative results mean all damage is applied, after ships that had matching initiatives, have fired all gunnery. If this optional initiative rule is used, do not modify the die result with factors like: ship or crew quality, racial traits, or other factors that can be 'reasoned' to apply. Keep it simple to avoid player conflicts over 'what applies' or just don't use this optional rule. Remember: Roll a D6 for each ship's initiative during combat. Even fleets with over a dozen ships per side often find opponent's ships "pairing up" with one or more of their own ships. This can be the easiest way to resolve combat. Start on one flank and work your way across the fleet. Once a vessel begins firing, it must fire all weapons that can. No holding back until another ship fires first, before the first ship fires its dorsal guns, for example. Complete one ship and move on.

4. Launch ordinance following base rules.

Ordinance still has the same movement rate and distance. The only change is with simultaneous player/opponent moves, intercepting courses now mean a slight change is needed. For most ordinance movement, a partial move of half a move, followed by opponent's moving half, then both completing moves, will suffice to limit confusion. Often it is apparent that two ordinance forces, or 'waves' are going to collide - since 'flying around' stationary opponents is no longer possible - so simply place the two waves in contact, and remove counter for counter, or base for base, etc., as outlined in base rules. Don't forget: Ordinance previously launched, however many turns ago, move again now, as well.

Of course, any ordinance that reaches an opponent in this phase, has those attacks resolved now, and damage applied immediately, following base rules. Eldar second move, if possible for that vessel, must be taken prior to moving ordinance.

5. End Phase. Accomplish all end phase repairs, etc. now.

That's it!

A few minor re-arrangements of when to do certain tasks, and add a pair of 'routine' movement counters, and you are set for simultaneous movement/combat for BattleFleet Gothic. After you try this a couple of times, you may find you prefer this method. Many of our group do.

See the Summary on the next page. Use this as a speedy reference sheet on the game table.

SUMMARY SIMULTANEOUS MOVE AND COMBAT RULES

1. Place ‘Routine’ movement and ‘Special’ order dice next to ships.
2. Roll dice vs. ‘Leadership’ for ‘Special’ orders. Replace with ‘Routine’ marker for failed command check. Reveal movement orders and move ships per orders.

Reaction Rule: Players must roll a command check against ship’s native ‘Leadership value’. No Admiral’s re-rolls allowed for this check. If successful: deviate from original ‘Routine’ order to turn or move straight ahead. ‘Special’ orders cannot be changed this way. Failed command checks mean movement orders must be followed, to minimum movement distance, at least. Opponent also may attempt to react. *Only one reaction attempt allowed, per ship, per movement phase.*

- a. Make all ordinance **second** moves now. Attack craft do not **have** to move, but torpedoes must. Resolve attacks and damage before moving on to gunnery.
3. Gunnery Combat. Resolve as per base rules, however, apply damage results *after* all ships that can fire have done so, from both opponents. Because ordinance is launched after gunnery combat, ordinance is affected by gunnery damage, critical hits and crippled effects apply.

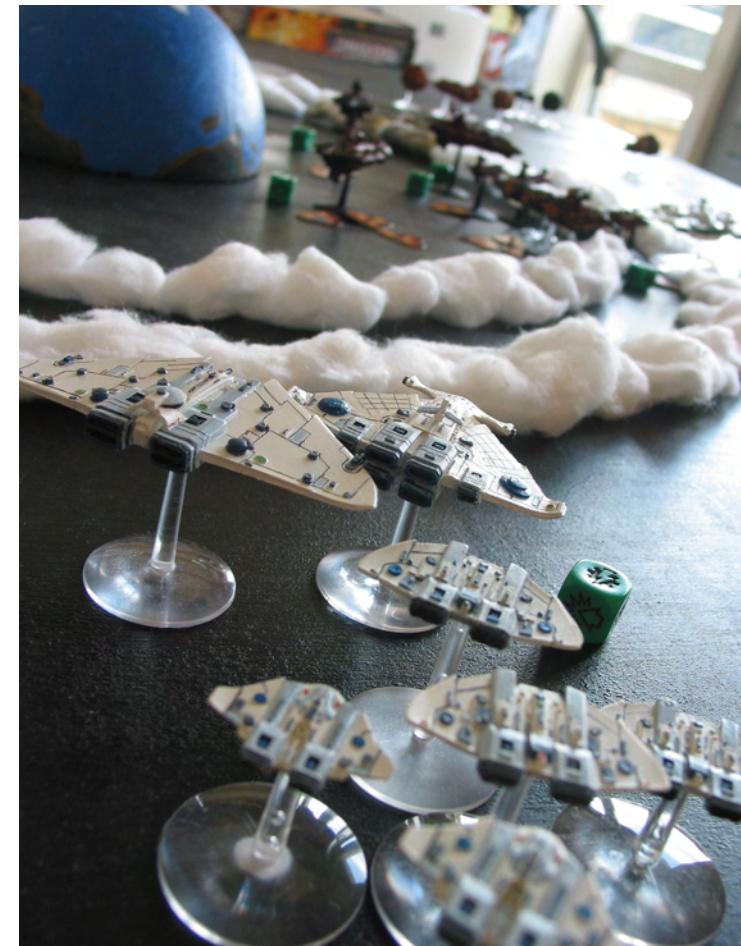
Initiative Rule: (Optional) Roll one D6 per ship about to fire weapons, and match against opponent’s die roll of a D6. High die wins, damage is applied from gunnery before opponent’s lower rolled initiative weapons fire. Effects from critical hits and crippling DO take effect before lower rolled initiative weapons fire. Do not modify initiative die roll for outside ‘traits’, use actual number rolled. Or do not use this optional rule.

4. Launch any Ordinance. Because of simultaneous moves of ordinance, a partial move, then opponent’s partial move, and finally complete ordinance moves. This will help resolve interceptions of ordinance by ordinance, if such interceptions are not readily apparent. Resolve interceptions, and ordinance attacks on targeted ships in base contact, as explained in base rules. Make second move for Eldar ships able to do so, prior to moving ordinance this phase.

5. End Phase. Accomplish all end phase tasks, such as attempted repairs.

Repeat these steps for each turn. Refer to earlier expanded explanation where needed. Refer to base rules for combat and movement operations not changed or explained here.

Routine movement counters need only be marked with a turn arrow, or a straight arrow. The turn arrow direction is unimportant, it only indicates a turn must be made in either direction. The routine counters can be used for a squadron, as well as individual ships. Routine Order markers must be placed with any “Special Orders” that do not affect movement.



SHOWCASE

MISFIT SPACE MARINES

BY REG STEINER



HIGH ANCHOR - PART ONE

BY RICHARD SWAN

Omicron Septimus, high anchor
07.231.M41

ONE

His aide de camp, Grechte, had been on station for only eighteen minutes when the ship's night cycle abruptly ended. Illumination panels and wall lights in the surrounding corridors flickered reluctantly into life, and the Imperial anthem *Glory of the Emperor* warbled on the municipal address system, more to annoy personnel from their sleep than for any rousing purpose. The splayed brass horn above Fleet Admiral Grant, commander of the Segmentum Pacificus 701st Battlegroup, however, stuttered for a precious few seconds, fuzzed with static, and died. Grechte's shoulders slumped slightly as his relief manifested itself, rather more overtly than Grant expected he'd intended.

"*Glory of the Emperor* not for you, then?" he asked, smiling. Grechte looked slightly embarrassed for a second, squirmed in his starched, midnight blue navy uniform, and finally stood to attention. Grant shook his head slightly, and decided against rolling his eyes. The wide hemispherical bridge of crewman and console banks faced him directly, and it wouldn't be good to be seen snubbing his own equerry. He supposed all new aides would be frustratingly tense for their first few weeks in office - but the man just wouldn't relax.

"You know you don't have to be frightened of me," he whispered out the corner of his mouth. "I won't bite."

Grechte nodded, but Grant could see his words had had little effect on the man's nervous temperament. Seeing the vastly armoured bulk of the Fleet Admiral, hardwired through interface tubing and thick bio-electronic cables directly into the ship's mainframe, had certainly taken its toll on the young equerry.

It probably hadn't helped that Grant had told him to leave the first time he'd seen him, mistaking him for a rating that had no business on the bridge. Grant could break out a fearsome temper when he was provoked, and when that temper controlled a million ton, nine-kilometre Mars-class battlecruiser, precious few people sought to provoke it.

He broke from his musings and turned his terawatt attentions back to the bridge. Holographic screens depicting the current fleet encounter flashed on in front of his sallow face, and he dismissed them.

"How's our engagement going? Has Fulden destroyed them yet?" he shouted into the amphitheatre. When they were holding high anchor over a Chaos-held world, keeping abreast of every minute event was paramount.

"All quiet again, sir," replied his First Officer, a short, swarthy man by the name of Mulbern. "Last contact 03:40 Imperial. The *Glory* says they've lost 'em, sir."

"What do you mean lost them?" Grant cried. "They were only here five minutes ago! How can an Imperial battlecruiser lose a bloody Chaos frigate in five minutes?"

"Disappeared sir," his Senior Vox Officer said. "The *Glory* reported battle damage at 03:39, before astropaths lost the enemy frigate on the auspex. They've jumped outsystem, sir."

"Is that so?" Grant asked, bringing a mighty gauntlet up to massage his chin. "Engagement time?"

"Latest encounter was thirteen minutes, sir, although Captain Fulden said it was at least fifteen. Whatever it was, they're definitely getting longer."

"Yes," Grant said slowly, "they are."

Chaos ships had been jumping insystem for the last hour, probing their naval strengths with hit and run attacks, testing their formations. The twelve Imperial ships holding anchor were preparing planetside troop deployment, and the duration of the enemy attacks was increasing, probably in anticipation of such a mass disembarkation of Guard. If they could knock out the 701st's ground element in one fell swoop, they could render the entire battlegroup impotent. Grant just hoped the Archenemy didn't know it.

"Alright," he said, "keep vigil, and prioritise the long range auspex. I want to see exactly what they're hiding out there."

"Aye aye, sir," Mulbern said.

"And get me Fulden on the line," he said, turning to his SVO. "I want to speak with that despicable bastard myself."

* * *

The *Divine Glory* was by no means a large ship - indeed, at five kilometres it was the smallest cruiser in the 701st Segmentum Pacificus Battlegroup - yet it was regarded by many to be as formidable as its sister ship, the *Titan Imperial*, which the Fleet Admiral himself commanded. This fact was widely acknowledged as due to the Captain of the *Glory*, Marcus Fulden, a large man with an even larger personality. Known for his bold and sometimes crass tactics - often involving ramming smaller ships to almost unacceptable detriment, he had earned the contempt of the Fleet Admiral on more than one occasion, and the war for Omicron Septimus had proved to be no different. In fact, if Fulden hadn't been so annoyingly successful in the Imperial Navy, Grant would have thrown his hide in the stockade four months beforehand at Farrax-Carthage Naval Port.

The very rumour that the *Glory* may well be as formidable as the *Imperial* was not unknown to Fulden, and he liked to remind the Fleet Admiral on their occasional encounters, whether in person – a very rare opportunity indeed, and one that required deliciously veiled insults – or more frequently on the long range vox, which required much less tact.

This occasion, however, appropriated neither of these methods. As soon as his SVO patched the link through, Fulden knew that the Fleet Admiral was in no mood for his subversion - and he was in no mood to dish it out.

"My Lord, to what do I owe this pleasure?" he asked helplessly, as his Damage Control Officer tried desperately to seal off seventeen separate bulkheads down their starboard flank. He waved the amphitheatre of crewmen quiet as solar static washed across the already weak long-range vox.

"Fulden, where in the name of the Emperor is that damned frigate?" came Grant's voice over the link, thick with pending anger. One wrong word and Fulden would feel the brunt of the Fleet Admiral's wrath like a bolter round to the sternum.

"My Lord, they translated outsystem faster than I could get her to broadsides..." the Captain said, his eyes flickering to the short range auspex in front of him, "... and took a good portion of my starboard flank with them. Our shields are shot to sh–"

"By the Throne, man! What are you playing at? Fifteen minutes of contact and you can't bring a cruiser to broadsides?"

"My Lord, there were...complications with our engines, entire power stacks locked down. I think the Archenemy used some kind of electronic warfare pulse to knock out our power core –"

"They locked down your power core!" the Fleet Admiral asked, utterly incredulous. Fulden knew how flimsy the excuse was. He felt his usually sharp tongue dry up in apprehension, and a bead of sweat trickled down his spine. It slowly soaked into the top of his cream breeches.

"My Lord, it won't happen again, I promise. A temporary electronics malfunction, nothing more. I have the adepts working on it already."

The Fleet Admiral said something that was erased by another wash of static, but Fulden knew whatever it was, he was treading on thin ice. No Chaos electronic pulse, no matter how strong, could shut down an entire cruiser's power core, and they both knew it.

His DCO gave him a thumbs up, and a holo-schematic of the *Glory*'s starboard flank wavered next to Fulden's face. He cancelled it irritably, and readdressed the vox.

"My Lord, I–"

"Shut up Fulden, for Throne's sake," the Fleet Admiral snapped. "My astropaths

tell me you're straying from formation. Realign at once, and get your gear together, or you'll be headed back to Carthage stockade faster than you can say 'yes sir'. Understand, Captain?"

"Yes sir," Fulden replied lamely. "Very good sir."

The line went dead.

"Signal terminated," his SVO said. The bustle of the amphitheatre resumed, and the starboard schematic reappeared. Fulden reviewed it, and thanked the DCO.

"Engines, get us back to formation, double time," he shouted to the crewmen. "First Officer, a word."

His First Officer, Dolgen Aleksi, left his dais and crossed the short space of metal grilling towards the Captain.

"Yes sir?" he asked, his face awash with anticipation.

"Has the problem in the power core been taken care of?" Fulden whispered feverishly. He looked at the faces of his crewmen, glancing at the pair of them like conspirators.

"Yes sir," Aleksi replied, glancing to his left, "but it's a mess down there sir. Casualties are on the medicae level now sir, but the apothecaries say they won't pull through. Tainted, sir."

"Alright," Fulden replied, after a long pause. He decided against swearing - there were too many people watching him. "As you were."

The Captain watched as the First Officer strode back to his dais, and exhaled, removing his cap and revealing a sweaty mop of black hair. He fiddled with the rim nervously, feeling his fingers tremble.

Fulden was prepared to die in many ways for the Emperor, but the list did not include being annihilated in high anchor by an Imperial ship, for having been tainted by a Chaos Spawn in his power core.

TWO

Grant smirked as the signal terminated. It was about time he put that damnable man in his place.

"The *Glory* has returned to formation, sir," his SVO shouted.

"Good," Grant said, tapping his fingers on the huge steel throne that supported him. The ringing of metal on metal hammered out through the bridge.

"Auspex, any news?" he asked, reviewing the latest status reports on the holoscreens whirling around his head. He plucked them from the air with a thought, and read and dismissed them with superhuman speed.

"Nothing sir. Not so much as a whisper."

"Alright," the Fleet Admiral said, "I think it's about time we got this show on the road. Any longer and there won't be an Omicroni civilian left to save from these Chaos bastards."

There was a murmur of concurrence with the Admiral's angry tenacity, though he could tell not everybody entirely agreed with him. Deployment required they move to low anchor to reduce the distance between them and planetfall, minimising the time their Guard landers were in flight. A mass shift of formation to such a state would not only render their reaction times to an enemy attack dismally slow, but it also meant that the deployment would go ahead despite the battlegroup being on Quick Reaction Alert. And the Chaos fleet holding outsystem had proven to be quite the deft foe. If they had them mapped on long range auspex, all they had to do was translate insystem in the ten or so minutes it would take the 701st to reposition, and engage them at will. It would be like attacking a single man armed with a pistol with a battalion of Space Marines.

Like he gave a damn what any of them thought.

"Vox! The following message please, fleetwide," he said, clearing his throat. "This is Fleet Admiral Grant to all ships. Repositioning to low anchor effective immediately. Execute manoeuvre formation 007.143.IP CAD, standard Imperial. You are to report combat readiness to me personally in no less than eight minutes. All Guard units on immediate standby for planetfall. Message ends...03:52

Imperial."

"Message sent and acknowledged, sir," his SVO shouted."

Grant started a timer on the nearest holoscreen to his face, the blinking digits counting down from 07:00, and began the delicate procedure of moving all million tons of the *Titan Imperial* into low orbit, feeling the colossal bulk of the battlecruiser flowing through his thickly armoured body. Schematics of the planet flowed through Grant's head, showing optimal orbit trajectories, geosynchronous anchor and polar anchor, and he remarked quietly to himself how miserable the dusty yellow and brown orb looked from space. Outside the ship, the massive positioning engines vented geysers of propellant into the cold vacuum, and the primary and secondary manoeuvre engines rumbled inaudibly into life. Excess warmth was dumped as the ship began to move, slowly at first, then with more speed as the practiced shift was executed. Heat shields slowly locked down over their eight-hundred gun broadside compliment, to prevent the five metre-wide barrels from becoming clogged with propellant, and sensor clusters recessed into their deployment pods.

The fact that the *Titan Imperial* would be flying blind and impotent for another six minutes was not lost on its three thousand strong crew.

And the sudden cacophony of alarms that signalled an incoming mass of Chaos warships did little to quell these fears.

* * *

The first of the ships to be caught in the barrage was the *Flame of Gandolar*, a frigate of some nine hundred metres with a paltry fifty gun broadside. Stuck halfway through the manoeuvre to low anchor, with its blast and heat shields locked down, it was destroyed piecemeal by the freshly spawned Chaos fleet. Ordered forward by Fleet Magister Pustria, the *Lictor*, crested by an iron halo of eight spikes and daubed with kilometre-high obscenities, fired its forward guns almost immediately after translating insystem.

As Fleet Admiral Grant watched on the long-range auspex, he realised it had fired blind and got lucky. The Imperial frigate listed wildly to port, exposed decking on its starboard side jutting out like a gigantic metal ribcage and leaking molten globules of adamantium into space. But the *Lictor* gave no quarter as it

pressed home the attack, swinging deftly to broadsides and unleashing a full five hundred gun salvo. Violent beams of energy tore into the hull of the *Gandolar* like it was paper, the multiple puncture wounds ripping inwards with hundreds of Gs of force to explode on the port side. Utterly destroyed, the frigate's power core, exposed to the bare void, froze solid, and the ship imploded into a nebula of light.

"By the Throne," Grant whispered, "Vox! Get me fleetwide! Abandon manoeuvre! Attack formation on the double!" he bellowed into the amphitheatre, realised it was perhaps already too late. The Archenemy had amassed with almost twice their number, though many of their ships were smaller.

Except the *False Emperor*. Fleet Magister Pustria's own flagship, it was a huge, lumbering hulk of adamantium, eleven kilometres from fore to aft, with a snarling broadside compliment of one thousand guns. A million, vacuum-preserved Imperial corpses were nailed and skewered on its bloody surface, and eight-pointed stars and ungodly profanities were stencilled down the flanks in sickening abundance. Even Grant, the staunchest, most steadfast Fleet Admiral many Naval personnel had seen, almost wept at such a blasphemy.

The formation of Imperial ships was quickly abandoned, as each re-prepared itself for combat. Now neither in high nor low anchor, they had to remain especially vigilant of their spacing. Collisions were not unheard of in the heat of battle. Blast and heat shields recessed, heat exchangers and sensor clusters extended, and the eleven-strong 701st battlefleet presented arms in a fantastic display of Imperial military might.

"Let's have these bastards in the next hour," Grant growled, viewing the myriad of holoscreens appearing in front of him, documenting the initial longer range exchanges before the Chaos fleet moved in to broadside range. "Engines, full speed ahead, twenty degrees to starboard. I want the Terror,"

The *Star Terror* was only a destroyer, but Grant knew it would be good for morale if they could get in a few easy kills early on.

"Broadsides online sir, loaded and ready,"

The Fleet Admiral nodded curtly. Grechte stood in front of him, having remained completely unmoving since the last engagement, shivering almost imperceptibly. He would have to find a job for him soon, lest the man be driven insane with fear.

OFFICER'S MESS

The streaming images of the Chaos ships seemed to have overwrought an already overwrought man, and Grant almost felt sorry for him.

But now he had a battle to fight.

"Sir, the *Terra* requests aid to our coreward flank. They say –"

"Not now dammit!" Grant roared, cutting his SVO off. "If the *Terra* can't hold on for five minutes I'll not have it in my battlefleet!"

"The *Terror*'s approaching now sir," said his Senior Auspex Officer. "Range in five...four...three...two..."

"Torpedoes fire on approach!" Grant shouted, his attentions snapping back to the amphitheatre. Their first shot in anger. There would be no clemency with the Archenemy, no quarter. Their fore-silos burned violently as the torpedoes shot straight arrow lines through the shortening space between the *Imperial* and the *Terror*, two of the six scoring hits. Blossoming explosions ruptured great seams in the destroyer's aft-port flank, crippling the shields and slamming the ship sideways with the sheer force of it. It was no match for an Imperial cruiser. No match at all.

"That's it!" Grant shouted, his blood up. He took control of the ship himself to bring it to broadsides, feeling it as an extension of his own mighty body swinging round. His stomach would have lurched with adrenaline, had he not long since overcome such human impulses. The shape of the ugly Chaos destroyer grew in his vision, the drab grey and red hulk of sick metal filling his sight. The very look of it was enough to unleash a full salvo of broadsides, even before its own were online.

"Shots away," Mulbern shouted as their heavy guns blasted fresh ordnance into the gulf between ships. "Tracking...tracking...two hundred hits!" he exclaimed incredulously, turning to the steel throne. Grant looked at him disdainfully – as if he'd have scored less.

"I am Fleet Admiral for a reason, you know," he said to his First Officer. Mulbern looked slightly abashed for a second, before another alarm wailed into life and brought his attention to his console.

"Emperor! We're being pincerred!" shouted his Auspex Officer. As the wreckage of

the *Terror* sank into the endless depths of space, two more Chaos obscenities were moving down both their flanks, their prows fashioned like mouths screaming in pain.

"Cruisers," Grant muttered. He hated Chaos cruisers. The two approaching were looted Imperial ships, and the crews had gone to town on disgracing as much of the beautiful archways, statues and spires as they could.

They were also daubed entirely in blood.

"Khorne," Grechte whispered nervously. It was the first word he'd spoken in a long time. And from The Fleet Admiral's expression, he suddenly got the feeling that it would be his last.

"What did you say?" Grant thundered, his voice harmonising with the ship's municipal address system for an instant, broadcasting his rage into every cabin on the *Titan Imperial*.

"N-nothing sir," Grechte replied.

"If you think –"

"Sir!" Mulbern cut him off as another klaxon yammered on, bathing the bridge in pulsing red light. "We're losing power!"

"What?" Grant asked, doing a double take. The two Chaos cruisers were closing them down fast. They may have been a good few kilometres smaller, but if they had no power, they were already as good as dead. The next words Mulbern spoke weren't exactly reassuring either. In fact, their implication was decidedly chilling.

"We've got a power drain of some sort...it's - there's...something in the power core!"

THREE

"Power loss of decks 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 15, 17, starboard broadsides offline, heat exchangers offline, long range auspex offline, long rang vox offline, shields offline...God Emperor we're screwed!" Aleksi shouted as soon as the Chaos fleet

had jumped insystem.

But even before he had, Fulden had known something was wrong. A dull, throbbing headache had started at the back of his head, and was working its way towards his eye sockets. He brought a trembling hand up to his nose, and wiped away a small trickle of blood across the back of his glove.

"Power at 36% and falling," Aleksi continued. "Power at 32%."

"Will you *shut up*, man!" Fulden roared, throwing his hands forward. "By the Throne, if the power's shutting down, stop wasting time telling me and sort it out!"

His First Officer looked at him as if he'd been backhanded across the face, and turned back to his console.

"Enemy destroyers approaching!" an Auspex Officer shouted, "three, converging! One hundred and thirteen kilometres, approach speed! We've got nothing in range!"

"Forward guns to bear, all power to our remaining weapons!" Fulden shouted, more blood trickling from his nose. He wiped it away irritably once more, and it flecked on the dull grey grilling of the floor. A buzzing, like that of insect wings, sounded distantly in his ears, and he shook his head.

"Forward guns online, fifty fore-to-port broadsides online, power at 12% and falling," Aleksi said helplessly. Adrenaline churned through Fulden's stomach. "Power core's almost dry," the First Officer continued, "Warp interference."

"Again?" Fulden hissed.

"Yes sir," Aleksi rounded on him, "or perhaps you'd like me to shut up?"

"What?" The Captain replied, unsure if he'd heard, scanning the amphitheatre. "Get a grip man, we're in the middle of an engagement here! Don't be so-"

"So what sir?" Aleksi said, with pure venom in his voice. "Don't be so, what?"

The Captain looked at him incredulously. There was something seriously wrong if his First Officer was getting upset over Fulden telling him to shut up. Something

seriously wrong indeed.

"Aleksi, what in the name of the Emperor is the matter with you?" he asked, more perturbed than concerned. The damnable buzzing in his ears would not relent, and his nose was still weeping blood – which nobody had deemed fit to acknowledge.

"Fifty-two kilometres and approaching!" the Auspex Officer shouted again.

"Uh, forward guns offline, port batteries offline. Power at 3%," a Gunnery Officer shouted in a surprised voice, when Aleksi did not.

But Fulden wasn't listening. Only the bridge had power now, and the majority of that was rapidly fading lighting. But the Captain could still see Aleksi's murderous expression. His hand crept towards his snub-nosed autopistol, and just then his First Officer began running.

"Throne!" was all Fulden managed before Aleksi's hands found his throat. The autopistol banged loudly in his hand as he shot from his waist, but the rounds seemed to have no effect on the First Officer as they exploded out the back of his navy blue uniform, blood and pellets of flesh slapping onto the cold grilling of the floor.

"Get this bloody madman off me!" he gurgled, his face turning red. More blood ran from his nose, and his ears as well – but its insignificant volume was nothing on Aleksi's, who's very face was a red mask. His teeth leered out from behind the dribbling visor of crimson, and his eyes were the deepest, malevolent black.

"Blood for the Blood God!" he roared in an inhuman two-tone, and Fulden felt his bladder threaten to empty itself. He desperately thumbed on the 'full auto' switch on the pistol, and emptied almost the entire magazine into Aleksi's torso. Broken ribs and glistening gristle buckled outwards until the man was little more than a spine from the base of his ribcage to the base of his throat – yet his hands still tightened around Fulden's windpipe.

It was his Senior Vox Officer, a man by the name of Dannicks, who saved him. Somehow unaffected by the spell that had transfixated the remainder of the bridge crew, he ripped a length of coolant piping from the wall, ignoring the acid burns it gave him, and slammed the end of the pole through Aleksi's head. The brass rod erupted through the First Officer's blackened eyeball, and the man collapsed,

OFFICER'S MESS

almost pulling Fulden down with him.

The Captain choked and coughed harshly as he righted himself, the buzzing almost intolerable in his ears. He spat blood onto the floor, and brought a hand up to his ears, probing the haemorrhaging aural canals.

"Are you alright sir?" Dannicks asked, leaning forward slightly then suddenly recoiling in horror as he looked into his Captain's eyes.

They were in fact, the last thing the SVO saw, before the back of his skull was blown wide open by the last of the rounds in Fulden's pistol.

* * *

"We've lost contact with the *Glory*, sir," his Auspex Officer shouted.

Grant closed his eyes briefly. Fulden may have been an arse, but he was a damn fine Captain.

"I want the Chaos son of a bitch who destroyed it," he growled, quite forgetting they had a power core lockdown and were slowly being outmanoeuvred by two smaller cruisers. "And I want them n-"

"Oh no sir, sorry sir, he's not dead. We've just lost contact with him. Long range vox is down sir. Our own power loss certainly isn't helping."

Grant gave the man a look that would strip paint off a frigate's hull, and erased all sentiment about Fulden from his mind. If that damnable man didn't have the decency to get himself foolishly killed in battle, then Grant sure by the Throne wouldn't spend any more time thinking about him.

"Alright, Mulbern! Full power to engines, hold it there and wait for my signal. If these Archenemy bastards want to play dirty, we'll give 'em dirty."

"Yes sir, I would sir it's just the pow-"

"Just stick as much of our bloody remaining power into the engines, and hold it there!"

"Aye aye, sir, very good sir," Mulbern said – but slightly too sullenly. The Fleet

Admiral's rage hit him like a Baneblade on a Sunday.

"Listen to me, and listen in good," he snarled, in such way that only a lengthy monologue could ensue. "I am the Fleet Admiral. I worked long and hard to get where I am today. I am a *better tactician* than all of you – even the *bloody* tacticians. I *know* my own ship. I know what it can and can't do. Now if I tell someone- *anyone* – to take our remaining power, *however little there might be left*, and hold it in the engines, that man will obey my orders, or by the God Emperor Himself, I'll rip out his larynx through his arsehole and strangle him with it! Is this clear?"

It certainly was clear. In fact, it was the clearest thing anyone had ever heard.

"Yes sir," Mulbern said, perhaps not as taken aback as he should have been.

"Yes SIR!" Grant echoed, finally leaning back into his steel throne and letting the blood drain from his face. "Damnable crewmen," he muttered.

"Enemy cruisers one hundred and forty-nine kilometres and closing, approach speed," shouted Auspex nervously.

It was at this point in time Equerry Grechte risked a glance back to the Fleet Admiral, saw he was no mood to be asked questions, and instead decided to leave the bridge without permission.

He got three steps.

"Where...are...you...going?" Grant asked him, slowly, yet with so much anger he threatened to implode the ship.

The horrified aide de camp faltered. "I was j-just, uh, going to organise a, erm –"

"Enemy cruisers at thirty kilometres, slowing to attack speed. Ranging..."

"Organise a what?" Grant thundered.

Grechte was horribly aware that everyone on the bridge was watching him. Sooner or later, someone was going to notice the patch of bloody urine seeping into his breeches. And there was nothing in the Imperium of Man that would make him ask to go to the toilet. Not in the heat of battle.

OFFICER'S MESS

"A team of, uh, men to—"

"Twenty kilometres, attack speed," Auspex shouted, as hopelessly and dejectedly as any sane human would have thought possible.

"God-Emperor, man, be gone," Grant said with a flick of his gauntlet. "I have two Chaos cruisers to prosecute."

"Power at 13% and stable," Mulbern shouted. Grechte quickly and quietly exited the bridge. "Uhm, power rising...at 28% - 36% - 40%!"

"What?" Grant asked.

"Ten kilometres, attack speed!" Auspex shouted with a little more enthusiasm.

"Power rising sir, and fast!"

"What about the power core?" the Fleet Admiral said, surprised, "I thought you said there was something in it?"

"There still is!"

"SIR!" Engines shouted, as the Chaos cruisers overlapped them.

"Throne!" Grant bellowed, as the first Archenemy broadsides hit the void.

"Hard down! Hard down now!"

* * *

Fulden gasped and struggled as his throat tried to open as fully as was considered normal by the apothecaries. He was still on the bridge – he guessed, judging by the various hummings of consoles and electronics stacks – but that was about all he could guess.

For now he was hopelessly blind.

The attempt on his life by his Chaos-possessed First Officer had been shocking, yes, and a million questions circulated his brain. But even more troubling was that he had killed, he now suspected, the man who had saved him, thinking he

was another Khorne heretic.

"Status report!" he shouted through a bleeding mouth. No answer. His cracked lips split open, and he spat out a chip of tooth enamel. "Someone!"

A lone, dull alarm wailed into life – an alarm Fulden knew better than any other, and an alarm he dreaded more than anything.

He was being mapped – probably by the three destroyers his Auspex Officer had told him about.

"Emperor save us..."

He guessed he was in the same position he had been in upon his attack, and taking his bearings from there, ran to the helm, his boot heels echoing loudly off the metal grilling. He felt the polished wooden wheel in his blood-slicked fingers, though where the helmsman was, he had no idea. He then thrust a hand out to his right and gripped the pitch lever, jamming it forward. His stomach coursed with adrenaline as the Glory swung downwards, nose first, towards the planet below.

The alarm abruptly stopped, and he could hear the dull crump of muffled explosions above the ship – where he had been less than ten second before.

With both hands, he gripped the pitch lever once more and heaved back as hard as he could, trying with all his might to haul the cruiser out of its nosedive, gasping with the effort. The cacophony of alarms that had warned him of his plunging also abruptly ceased.

It was only then he suddenly realised that the power was back on. And the damn buzzing in his ears had stopped.

"What the...?" he breathed to the frighteningly empty amphitheatre. God Emperor, but he wished he could see. Not only were all systems inexplicably back online, he also had no idea where he was in relation to the rest of the fleet. Throne knew how far he'd gone down – a hundred kilometres for all he could guess.

And then a thought struck him; if he could find the vox, he could take his positioning off another ship.

Tearing across the floor once again, his hands outstretched, he found the First

Officer's dais by falling headlong into it, almost shattering his skull on the metal railing, and headed left to the communications centre. He snatched up the headset and scurried over the dials to find the 'autotune' function. He toggled it upwards, feeling a crackle of static in his bloody ears – that was another thing. His facial orifices had ceased their bleeding.

"Wings of Varagar, go ahead Glory," a nasal voice, made metallic by the nature of the long range vox, sounded in his ear.

"Mayday, mayday!" he shouted in a hoarse voice, pulling the mouth piece away as he coughed. "I am flying blind, I repeat, I am flying blind, request ship status and positioning!"

"One second sir," the Vox Officer replied.

Fulden let his head collapse into his arms in relief. The vox crackled back into life twenty seconds later.

"Divine Glory, you are 32 degrees coreward, plus twenty degrees vertical pitch on a bearing 224-716-2803, speed eleven hundred knots,"

Fulden did a quick calculation. He was heading upwards, away to the galactic west of the battle, very, very quickly.

He threw the headset down, running back over to the helm. He grabbed the pitch lever, and eased it down twenty degrees. Incoming torpedo warnings wailed into life as soon as he did so.

"Brace for impact!" he shouted on impulse, wheeling the helm round. Without Engines to cut the power, he would be travelling in a huge thousand kilometre arc. He began to weep as the hopelessness of his situation dawned on him.

It didn't help that the buzzing in his ears had started again.

* * *

The battle above Omicron Septimus was moving, and it was moving fast. Already two ships down, to the enemy's four, the 701st Imperial battlegroup desperately sought to unite in attack formation – cruisers to form the gun line, escorts in support; but they were scattered to the wind. Fleet Magister Pustria may have

been an abomination of Chaos filth, but he certainly knew what he was doing. As soon as the initial insystem salvo of torpedoes, he had arranged his fleet into a speartip, splitting the manoeuvring Imperials into two groups – one of four, one of six, and chasing them up with almost admirable attack formations of his own.

Almost.

Their one weakness was the Chaos escorts' reluctance to leave the *False Emperor's* side – understandably. The ship was more than a match for any Imperial vessel, and the very sight of it could strip a cruiser of morale faster than an axe of flesh.

But it meant that instead of following standard exchange lines between cruisers, the Archenemy were leaving the bigger ships to go it alone – meaning the Imperial formations, where they could make them, could pick them off one by one.

Of course, the more sensible cruisers doubled up and pincered; but with typical Khorne bloodlust, the remainder did not.

And the 701st were making sure they paid for it.

FOUR

Hard down was not a pleasant manoeuvre to undergo. It involved sending the ship in question plunging nose first into the endless depths of the void, at high speeds, in order to avoid being crippled. It was an emergency move, invented by whoever decided that mass red-outs and vomiting were good things, as well as putting an immense strain on the backburners for the subsequent inertia shift.

But for Fleet Admiral Grant, it was currently the best feeling in the world. Twelve kilometres above them and counting, the two pincering Chaos cruisers, unable to do anything but accept their fate, exploded as masses of heavy ordnance slammed into the side of each one. The lack of oxygen meant that the flames were only able to expand as far as the ships' internal atmospheres would allow, but it was still an impressive sight, as the foul hulks of the Archenemy disintegrated into streamers of slag.

"Alright!" he shouted, licking his lips. "How're we doing, First Officer?"

OFFICER'S MESS

"Power at 89%, sir," Mulbern replied cautiously, still not having forgotten his master's virulent temper.

"You were telling me what was happening in the power core?"

"Yes sir, erm, I was just thinking...maybe we should talk in private?"

Grant laughed out loud as the *Titan Imperial* swung back up far enough away from the fight to give them some breathing space.

"And where would you like me to go?" the Fleet Admiral said, indicating the steel throne. "Helm! Get us back to formation!"

"Which one, sir?" the crewman asked back. "We have two operational formations."

"Whichever's closest," Grant snapped. "What's on your mind, Mulbern?"

"Well sir," the First Officer said, stepping forward out of the dais and walking up to the Fleet Admiral's command chair. His head only just reached the top of the man's kneecaps. "I'm...certainly no expert, but...well, it's just it looks like..."

Grant saw the man hesitate, and felt his frustration build again. "Tell me man!" he exclaimed.

"It looks like *Warp interference*, sir."

"In the power core!" the Fleet Admiral scoffed. "Don't be ridiculous Mulbern, this ship isn't tainted!"

"Well sir, it's not only that sir – it's just when your equerry left, sir, I saw him bleeding,"

"And?"

"Well there are stories, sir – the stigmata of the Archenemy, the bleeding and things, sir. They're all marks of...well, of *Khorne*, sir."

"Careful First Officer," Grant warned, his face darkening. "You sound too learned of these things, for a naval crewman."

"No sir!" Mulbern said, genuinely taken aback. "I'm not, I've just heard things sir, stories and such."

"Rumours, nothing more," Grant said dismissively. The First Officer looked unconvinced, and he sighed.

"Mulbern, I want you to...put these things from your head,' he said eventually. "Concentrate now, on the task at hand. You're a damn fine officer, and I can't have you paying any heed to these...silly ghost stories."

"Of course, sir," the First Officer replied, reluctantly. He turned to leave, but he couldn't contain himself.

"Sir, at exactly the same moment as when Grechte left the bridge the power level rose again," he blurted.

"Hm," Grant said with an unconcerned gesture of his hand, now hopelessly preoccupied with the holoscreens in front of him depicting optimal trajectories to join the formation in front.

"But what about the power core, sir?"

Grant sighed – and somewhere on the ship, several steam grates vented.

"Vermin of some kind, probably chewed through a power conduit. I'll send an adept ASAP. Now please, Mulbern, put it from your mind and get back to your station."

* * *

Fulden wept desperately now, the tears salty to the taste, as he heaved the helm until it locked to starboard. The buzzing in his ears was unbearable, causing him to chew completely through his lower lip. Blood ran from the fresh wound in bitter rivulets down his chin and soaked into the top of his sweat-soaked navy uniform, and his neck had broken out in deep purple and grey bruising.

Despite his injuries, however, in his time alone he'd had a chance to think – that was, after three Chaos torpedoes had thumped into his port shields and sent him off his feet – and pieced together the situation as best he could.

The spawn in his power core must have returned with the translation of the Chaos fleet, thanks to the freshly channelled Warp energies. The very nature of Chaos itself would have made Aleksi, in his embittered state, an easy target, and the abomination in the centre of his ship would have only strengthened his First Officer's resolve to mutiny. But now that he was dead, the power had come online again. And that, Fulden couldn't explain. The bridge contained no major power supply for the ship – only the power core contained enough energy to, when disrupted, shut down entire control systems. The death of his First Officer shouldn't have made a difference to the electronic systems of the Glory.

But then again, maybe it hadn't. God Emperor knew how long he'd been out cold for after the attack. Maybe the power had only come online a second before he'd regained consciousness.

He snorted.

"Stupid," he found himself saying aloud. It didn't matter now – all his crewmen, as far as he could tell, were dead or missing.

If the power had come online a long time after Aleksi had died, then the only other explanation was that whatever had been in his power core had since vacated it.

Which could only have been a good thing...

Even before the Chaos spawn had smashed through the thick bulkhead of the outer command centre, Fulden was running towards the vox console as fast as his legs would carry him, emptying his bladder as he went.

* * *

"We've reached the first formation, sir," Auspex shouted as the spired and crenelated forms of two cruisers, three frigates and a destroyer holding Imperial attack pattern one at mid-anchor filled the main holoscreen in front of Grant's face.

"I'll take us in," the Fleet Admiral said, feeling the slightly diminished power from their primary plasma core filling the direct neural interface. Images of the inky blackness of space filled his vision, studded by a million-star veil and the distant red smears of Chaos ships. The ferocity of their attack seemed to be concentrated

on the second formation, the rest lurking around the *False Emperor* like maggots over warm meat. The 701st had punished them cruelly for not taking adequate formations, and Fleet Magister Pustria had evidently decided to reform.

The *Titan Imperial* slowly glided upwards, propelled by its secondary thrusters, and Grant took it along the curved predicted trajectory lines of the flight computer perfectly. It cut back speed, countering the ascension with a few bursts from the reverse thrusters, and held steady fifty-four kilometres coreward of the *Wrath of Termina*, a Dauntless class light cruiser.

"Attack formation protocol seventeen initiated," Grant said to the ships of Imperial attack pattern one, and received a smear of overlapping acknowledgements. "Now, let the Chaos bastards come," he growled.

* * *

Fulden scrabbled desperately at the vox controls, finding the ribbed tuning dials with his trembling fingers. He half screamed as another crash echoed through the ship. The thing was getting closer, and he retched in fear, the chunky mess slapping onto the grilling next to his boots – not that he cared.

He pulled the headset on, trying to find the Fleet Admiral through the channels. With all the inter-ship vox chatter, it was proving to be extremely difficult. Solar static wasn't helping either.

Crash – another bulkhead torn aside. The horrifying roar of the spawn washed through the command centre.

Fulden was weeping violently now, out of sheer terror. The fact that he couldn't see the spawn was perhaps even more terrifying. His bowels loosed and adrenaline ripped through his system uncontrollably, making his movements shaky and difficult.

"*Wings of Varagar, go ahead Glory,*" said the same nasal voice again – but much, much fainter. "Do you want me to position you again sir – that's a wide angle you've got. I recommend course change – you're going to overshoot attack pattern 2 and head out for open space."

"Patch me through to the Fleet Admiral!" he screamed as the thought of open space hit him, "Patch me through NOW!"

* * *

Fleet Magister Pustria, frustrated with the lack of progress its cruisers were making, decided to move the *False Emperor* in to battle. Surrounded by a cloud of swirling escorts, it headed for Imperial attack pattern two – a group of one Lunar-class and one Dauntless-class cruisers and another frigate holding mid anchor over the planet. The *Divine Glory* still continued on its wide, eleven hundred knot parabola, and seemed to have been overlooked by the Chaos fleet.

The first engagement lasted only twenty-two minutes – with the Lunar-class cruiser, the *Steadfast*, firing off its lances too early and shooting wide of the incoming rabble holding skirmish formation, and the *Wings of Varagar* having to desperately compensate with a salvo of torpedoes whilst both ships could manoeuvre to broadsides.

But despite these base mistakes, the forward attack party of Chaos destroyers taking the brunt of the cruisers' wrath were punished cruelly, and withdrew after three were destroyed outright, their severed hulks leaking fluids and atmosphere into the void in great geysers of vapour. Whilst spent batteries reloaded and shields recharged, the frigate, the *Imperial Hunter*, chased down and destroyed another Archenemy escort, soaking up its weak shields with light ordnance before landing a torpedo in its starboard engine. The vessel blew into smithereens.

It seemed to have the desired effect on the Chaos speartip, which broke off and bunched to defence formation – that was, until the *False Emperor* utterly smashed aside one of its own escorts out of sheer frustration, and the fleet reformed into attack pattern. Forward batteries of Pustria's flagship made light work of the *Hunter* as it struggled to get back to formation, and the fifteen-strong Chaos fleet advanced inexorably onwards Imperial attack pattern two, amidst vast chunks of the *Hunter*'s architecture.

Which left the two remaining cruisers no option but to sell their lives as dearly as they could.

FIVE

"Sir! I have Captain Fulden on the line, a secondary patch from the *Varagar*. He

says he has an urgent message for you," Grant's SVO shouted, clearly perturbed by the state of the man on the other end of the line.

"Municipal, please," the Fleet Admiral said, reviewing the holoscreens in front of his face. "I don't have time for private conversations."

"Aye sir," the man said, and a brief crackling and wash of static played across the municipal address system.

"My L-lord? Sir is that you?" came a gibbering, sorry excuse for a voice from the link.

Grant suddenly abandoned the holoscreens and turned his undivided attention towards his SVO. Never had he heard such a seasoned Captain as Fulden sound so damned...*frightened*. He almost felt revulsion at the entirely alien emotion.

"Clean that signal up," he snapped.

"I can't sir, it's over two thousand kilometres away!" the SVO protested.

"What in the name of the Emperor is he playing at?" the Fleet Admiral growled, before depressing the 'transmit' button on the top of the arm on his steel throne. "Go ahead Fulden. This had better be bloody good."

"Oh G-God Emperor!" Fulden suddenly screamed at the sound of his master's voice. "Sir there's a s-s-spawn on my shi...ou have to help me! My First Officer...d me, he's dea...! My whole crew's miss...!"

"For Throne's sake *somebody* get me a better line!" Grant roared. "Fulden, calm down son, what's happened? My Vox tells me you're over two thousand kilometres away,"

The sounds of Fulden's violent sobbing preceded the next broadcast, and an utterly terrifying, multi-tone roar stabbed across the link, making many of his crewmen flinch. The Vox Officer's console briefly lost power with the Warp interference, and one of the astropaths cried out in pain.

"My wh-whole c-crew's dead, lord! My First Officer ...ned on me, I h-had to kill...! S-spawn fed off the plasma in the power...ore! It was in my power core!"

OFFICER'S MESS

Grant's superhuman blood ran cold. His eyes locked with his First Officer's.

"Fulden, listen to me and listen carefully," he said. "You need to bring the ship around. I can only help you if you head back for formation."

"It's too late sir, I'm blin...I-I'm flying by myself..." another loud crackling threatened to sever the link entirely.

"We're losing signal," Vox shouted.

"I've got him!" Auspex shouted triumphantly. "He's eighteen hundred kilometres galactic northeast, heading 197 degrees spinward, vertical pitch plus zero-point-one degrees on a bearing 101-997-003, one thousand n' three knots,"

"Throne," Grant whispered. "Fulden, can you hear me?"

"...PEROR, PLEASE HELP ME!" came the Captain's strangled cry, before the link crackled with static, and a low monotone hum filled the municipal address.

"Sir! Both the *Steadfast* and *Varagar* request immediate aid! Attack pattern two outnumbered! Estimated remaining shield integrity at twenty-six minutes and falling!"

A surge of adrenaline churned the Fleet Admiral's stomach. He ran a thousand event scenarios based on their current situation through his head in the blink of an eye, and decided on a course of action.

"Alright, everybody's attention, now!" he bellowed into the amphitheatre. "Vox! Prioritise the *Glory*'s signal, no excuses! Transcribe everything you hear and report back to me." Grant swivelled his head to the left of the amphitheatre. "Engines; make ready to move, full ahead by full. Helm! Set course, bearing 016-798-302, 3 degrees spinward, vertical pitch plus 0.1."

A chorus of unquestioning 'ayes' answered him.

"Vox, the following message please, Imperial attack pattern one; all ships to move in support of attack pattern two, skirmish formation, protocol four. Command delegated to Rear-Admiral Winchester for the time being, on my authority. I shall be with you all ASAP. Always remember! Every ship lost is ten thousand souls to the Emperor's halls! And whilst the honour may be great, I think we could all put

them to better use in this life!" he paused. "The Emperor protects."

His SVO gave him the thumbs up. "Message sent and acknowledged sir."

"Excellent," Grant breathed. "Engines, full ahead by full, you have your set bearing."

"Aye aye sir,"

Grant paused, seemingly deliberating his next words. The power core still hovered at an annoying 89%, and Fulden's words had chilled him more than he'd been ready to admit. There was definitely something bad going on. His mighty, directly-hardwired bulk could feel it.

"First Officer!" he said after a short pause, his mind made up.

"Yes sir?" Mulbern turned to the Fleet Admiral from his dais, gripping the rail in front of him with sweaty fists.

"Take two squads of armsmen," he paused again. "No, three, take three." He exhaled loudly. "As quickly as you can, investigate the power core. I'll be on the net if you need me."

Mulbern gulped, but his face was one of resolve. "Aye sir. Very good sir."

"And Mulbern?"

"Yes sir?"

"Find me Grechte."

* * *

It was silent inside the latrine cubicle block. Dank, grey metal panels, dripping with foul fluids, formed a rank of ten, each with rusting basins piped with some very dubious plumbing skill on the wall opposite. Vermin ran freely over the flooring, and everywhere was the stink of faeces and urine.

Equerry Grechte, aide de camp to the Fleet Admiral and naval crewman of ten years, sat on the tarnished steel latrine seat, breeches round his ankles, and

OFFICER'S MESS

groaned. His stomach lurched violently this way and that, and his head hammered with an intense headache, a terrible buzzing filling his ears.

"Urgh," he moaned, saliva drooling from his flaccid lips. He retched, twice, three times, but nothing but bloody bile was left, the stinking crimson mess dribbling down his chin. Blood also trickled from his nose in intermittent gouts, and he wiped it away when he wasn't concerned with clutching his heaving guts.

"So much...blood," he mumbled to himself through cracking lips, "so...much blood,"

A horrible convulsion saw something soft and red slap into the toilet bowl, followed by a series of sickening and inhuman sounds. His stomach did another somersault, and he retched again. Beads of perspiration were dripping from his forehead as his brow screwed up in pain. More blood trickled from the corners of his eyes. His uniform was in such a mess already that he no longer cared what fluids were sprayed onto it. There was only pain. Blood and pain.

Acceleration warnings briefly sounded over the municipal vox – or at least, that is what he took them to be. He couldn't hear properly with all the buzzing in his ears.

Khorne.

Grechte snapped his head upwards, wishing he hadn't when his stomach felt like it was attached to his chin by a rope.

"Who's there?" he asked, beginning to cry. "Who said that?"

Silence.

He whimpered, feeling thoroughly sorry for himself. He cried out in pain as another convulsion racked his body, fiery tendrils spreading out through his blood vessels. His heart was going twenty to the dozen, and it felt as though it would burst out of his sternum at any second.

Khorne.

The damned noise again! "Who's there?" he shouted through the pain barrier, clenching his teeth as the inevitable aftershock washed through his system.

And then came his answer.

In front of him, a great incision appeared in the fabric of space and time, light pouring through the extra-material dimension despite the rift remaining impossibly black, and Grechte shielded his eyes. The pain became so intense he retched again, more blood splashing over his tunic. The tear was growing wider and wider, encapsulating the cubicle, surrounding him. He could hear a million voices all in his head at once, and a buzzing so loud it threatened to burst his eardrums.

*Khorne, the rift said, followed by a terrible crescendo of;
BloodfortheBloodGodBloodfortheBloodGodBloodfortheBloodGod!
BLOOD FOR THE BLOOD GOD!*

The chanting reached a terrible climax, but just when Grechte reached the cusp of sanity, it stopped as suddenly as it had started, and an uneasy silence ensued.

He opened his eyes. The Warp rift had gone, and something had definitely come through – he could feel its presence in front of him.

"Who's there?" he whispered, for what would be the last time, despite the pain gnawing at his innards. He wept bitterly as the invisible presence moved towards him, its breathing clearly audible, echoing in the cramped cubicle.

Grechte began to scream as two blood-red, deeply malevolent eyes appeared in the air in front of him, shortly followed by a great, leering mouth swarming with flies.

"Blood for the Blood God," It whispered with a grin.

Grechte screamed as it tore into his flesh.

TO BE CONTINUED....

BUILDING MERCHANT VESSELS

BY CELS [ANARGO SECTOR PROJECT]

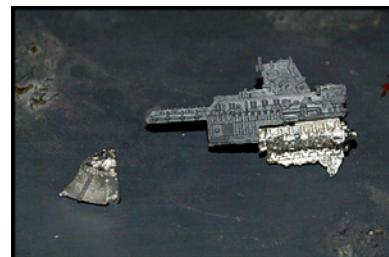
To play battles with the Navis Mercantilis in Battlefleet Gothic, you're going to need miniatures to represent the merchant vessels, of course. As it happens, Games Workshop and ForgeWorld produce a lot of lovely models already. The basic 'freighters' from Games Workshop could easily be used to represent clippers or freighters, while 'system ships' can be used to represent caravels. The 'heavy transports' sold by ForgeWorld can be used to represent galleons or carracks. If you want bigger transports, or if you want some more variety in your merchant fleet, you're going to have to convert some miniatures!

Example 1: Galleon sprint trader

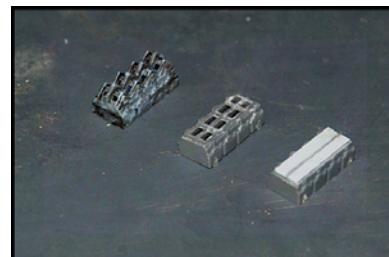
You will need:

- 1 Monitor ship (sold by Games Workshop)
- 1 Imperial cruiser hull and 2 Imperial launch bays
- 1 Chaos cruiser bridge and antennae
- 2 Cadian pattern lasguns from Warhammer 40,000

Assorted plasticard and bitz for decoration and gap-filling.



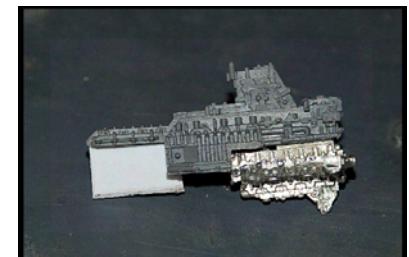
Step 1: Use the bottom half of the Imperial cruiser hull. Cut the monitor ship in half, using its hull as part of the cruiser hull and keep its prow separate.



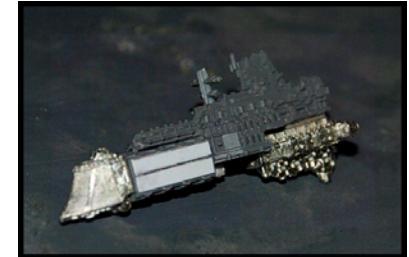
Step 3: Cut off the spiky bits on the launch bays and cover the empty holes with plasticard.



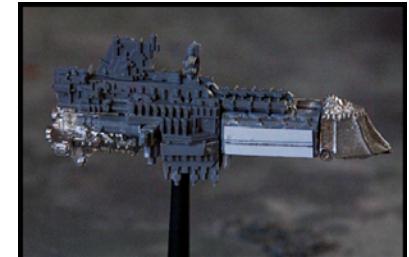
Step 5: Cut a Cadian lasgun into tiny pieces. Cut away some of the dorsal fin and insert a bridge for the ship.



Step 2: Insert a 2 mm plasticard plate in the center of the Imperial cruiser's plastic hull. It should fit perfectly.



Step 4: Glue a launchbay on each side of the center plasticard. Attach the prow.



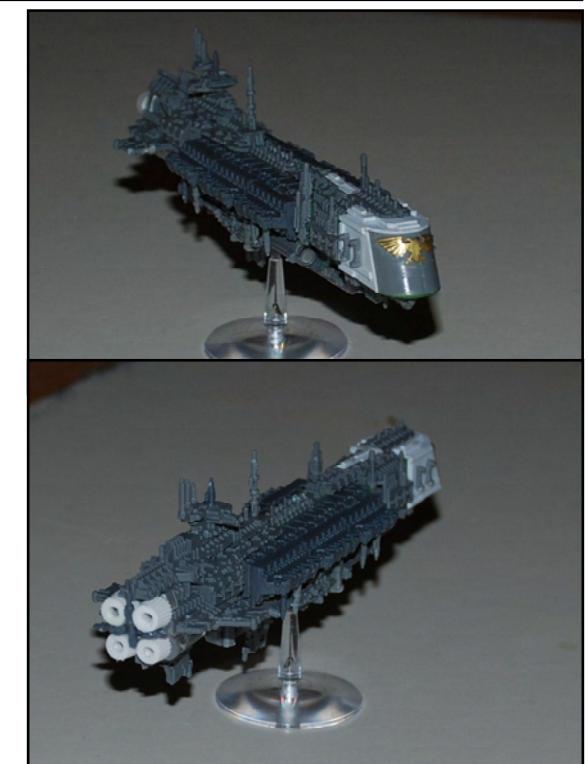
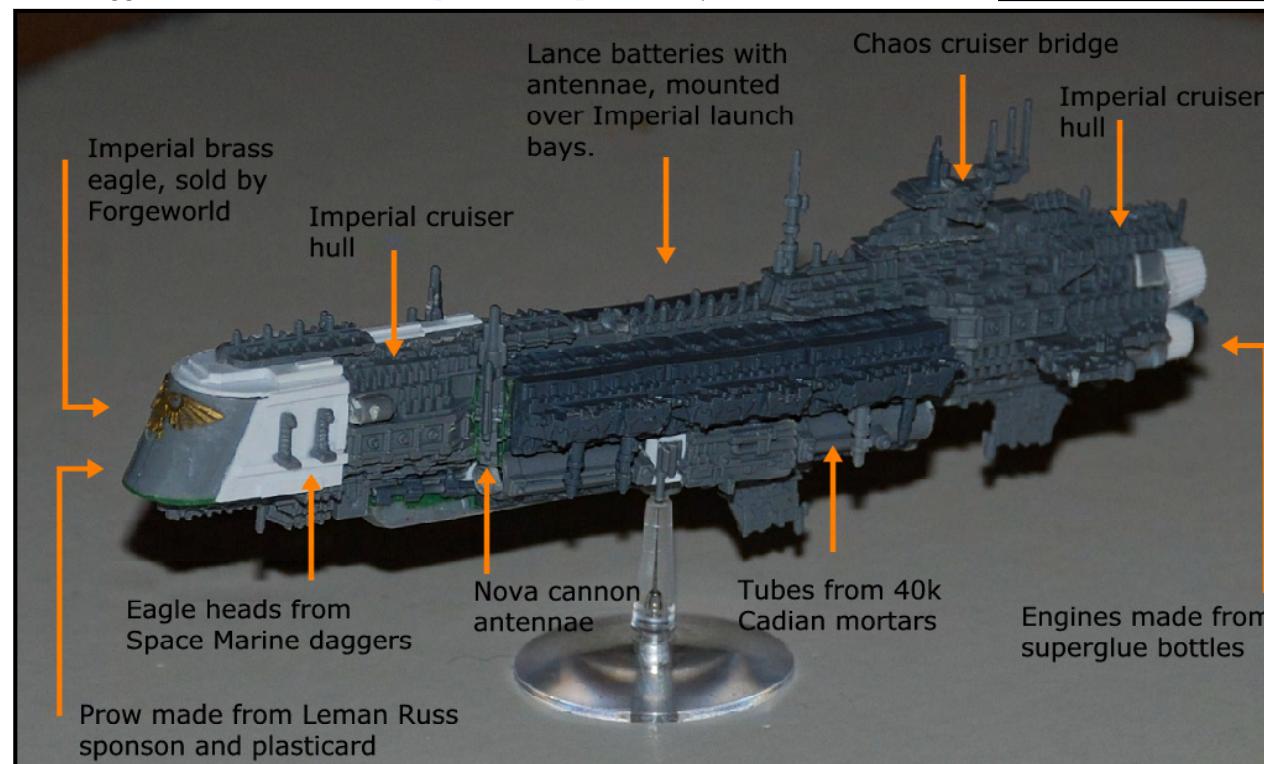
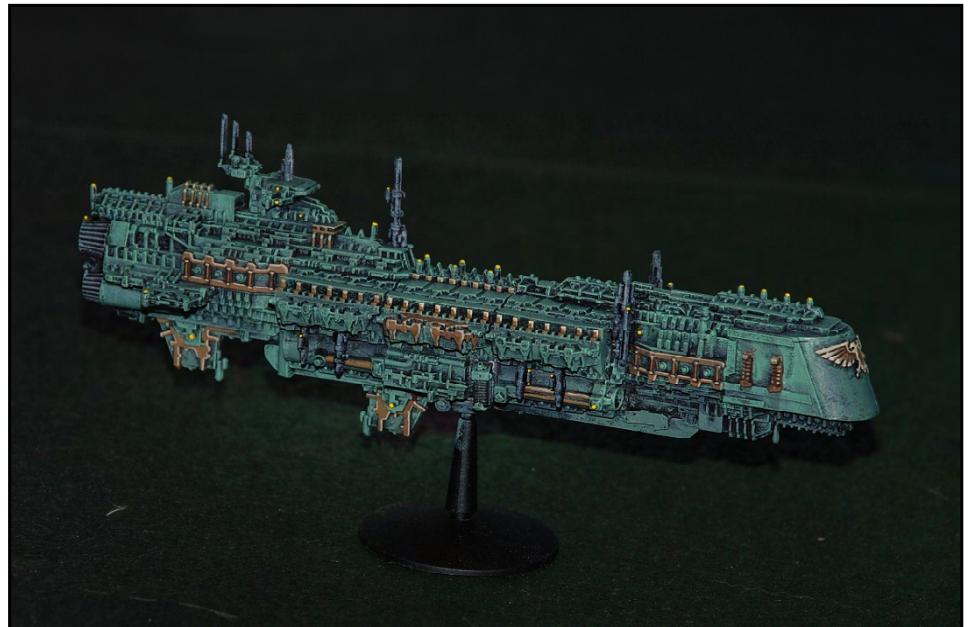
Step 6: Insert the lasgun bitz in the gap between the monitor ship hull and the Imperial cruiser hull.

Example 2: Super heavy barge

You will need:

- Plasticard of different thicknesses (e.g. 2mm, 1mm and 0.5 mm)
- 2 standard Imperial cruisers
- 6 Imperial lance batteries, 6 Imperial launch bays (but preferably 12)
- Bridge from Imperial or Chaos models.
- Lots of various other bitz!

The process of converting this ship was incredibly complicated, so doing a step-by-step guide would require four or five pages. Furthermore, it would probably be pointless because such large conversion projects are always going to require a fair bit of creativity and improvisation anyway! Thus, I present these few images as a simple example of how one can create a super-heavy barge, a gargantuan merchant vessel bigger even than the battleships of the Imperial Navy!



CONVOY BATTLE

BY CELS [ANARGO SECTOR PROJECT]

In this scenario, an Imperial merchant convoy is en route to its destination, carrying enormous amounts of valuable cargo, when a large enemy fleet appears and begins to engage. While initially trying to avoid battle in order to protect its cargo, the Imperial convoy is eventually trapped and must defend itself. The attackers must destroy as many Imperial transports as possible before the battle is over.

Forces

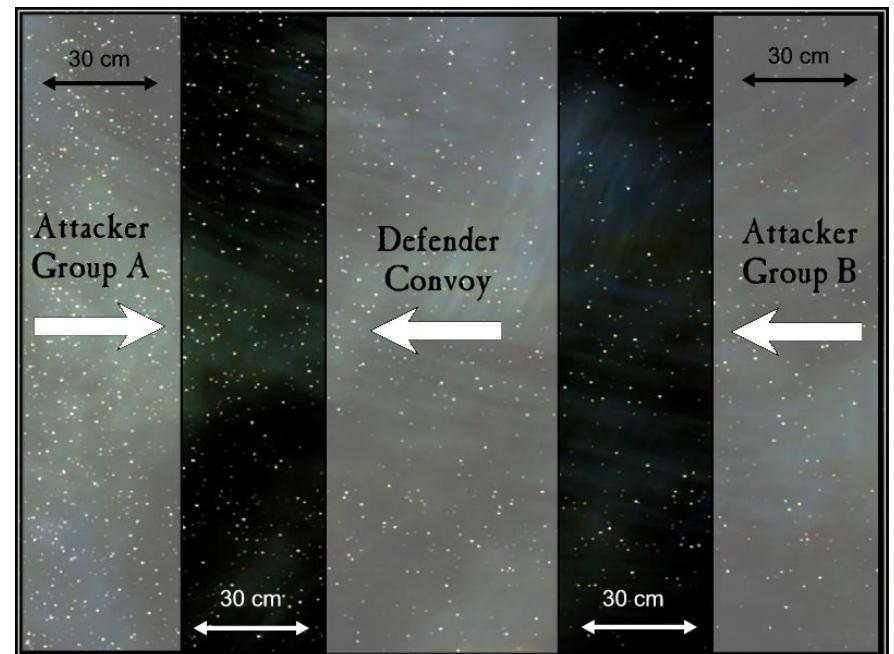
The Imperial convoy may have any number of transport ships, each with a different transport capacity. However, for every 100 points of military vessels (using the Imperial Navy, Adeptus Astartes, Rogue Trader or Adeptus Mechanicus lists), the convoy must have 1,5 transport capacity points. For example, in a game of 2000 points, the convoy must

have 30 transport capacity points divided between its transports. These 30 points could be divided amongst fifteen freighters, three heavy barges or a variety of other selections. Any upgrades made to the transports count would be included in these 2000 points. The attacker has an equal amount of points as the defender, the Imperial convoy.



Battlezone

The convoy may be attacked anywhere, even in orbit of its destination or point of departure. Often, convoys will be attacked in deep space, just as they emerge from the warp. Any method for placing celestial phenomena which can be mutually agreed upon by the players is acceptable.

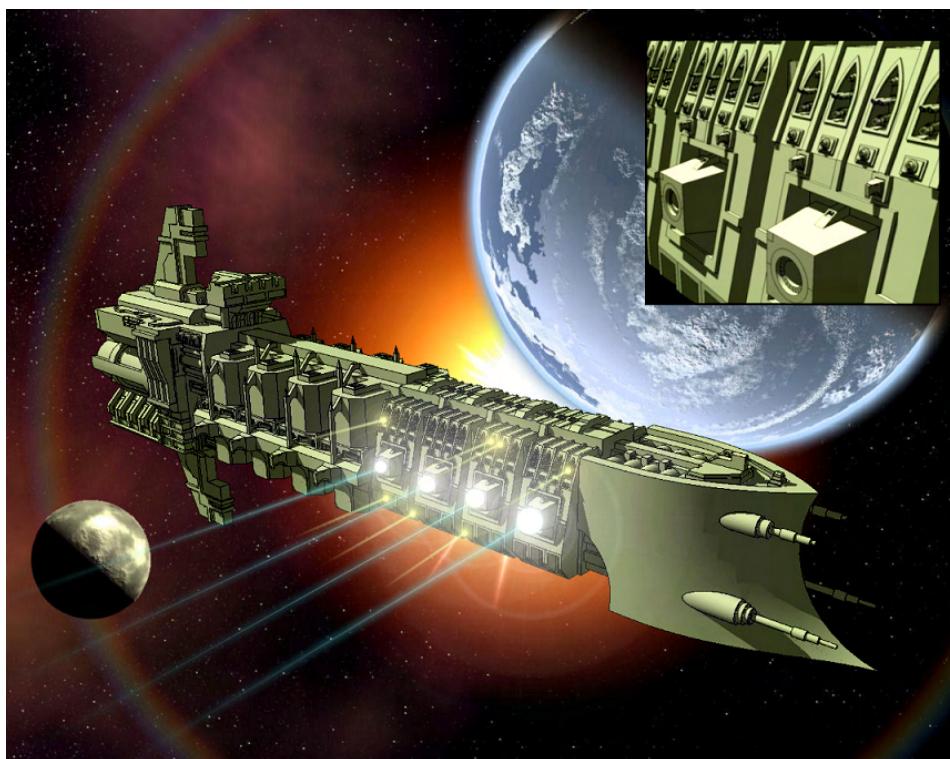


Set-up

The attacker must split his forces so that between 25% and 50% of his fleet (calculated in terms of point cost, not number of ships) belongs to attack group A and the rest belongs to attack group B. The attacker first deploys attack group B, then the Imperial convoy deploys and finally the attack deploys attack group A. Note that all ships in each deployment zone must face the same direction, as indicated in the deployment map.

Attack group B and A may be deployed up to 30 cm from their short table edge, and the Imperial convoy may be deployed anywhere on the tabletop, but not within 30 cm of the enemy.

The set-up represents attack group B chasing the convoy into the jaws of attack group A.



First turn

Each player rolls a dice and the player with the higher score may choose whether to go first or second.

Special rules

In this scenario, the attackers have successfully brought the Imperial convoy to battle. Some attacking ships are kept in reserve at a distance, hoping to hunt down any fleeing transports that have disengaged and split away. Knowing that their best chances for survival lie in maintaining formation, not even the captains of the Navis Mercantilis will disengage from this battle unless forced. To represent this, the transports in the Imperial convoy may only disengage if they have been crippled. If able to disengage successfully, it is assumed that they have made it to safety (see Victory conditions). All other ships on either side may disengage as normal.

Game length

The battle continues until either fleet has disengaged or been destroyed.

Victory conditions

Naturally, the success or failure of the convoy depends on how many transports survive the attack. Calculate the percentage of surviving transports based on transport capacity points. Crippled transports count as having lost half their cargo (i.e. transport capacity points), rounding down.

0% survival – The entire convoy has been annihilated, and the defeat is a major blow to the Navis Mercantilis and the many Imperial worlds, armies and fleets awaiting supplies.

30% survival – Most of the convoy is destroyed, but the Imperial fleet is able to drive away the attackers. The attackers are victorious, though perhaps not to the extent that they had hoped.

60% survival – While some ships have been lost or significantly damaged, the Imperial escorts are able to avoid disaster and defend their vulnerable transports. The convoy will reach its destination with most of its supplies intact.

90% survival – The convoy is virtually unscathed, despite the ferocity of the attack. The attackers have suffered a critical defeat, as their ships have been either lost or badly damaged and the Imperial convoy has not been stopped from reaching its destination. The Emperor protects!

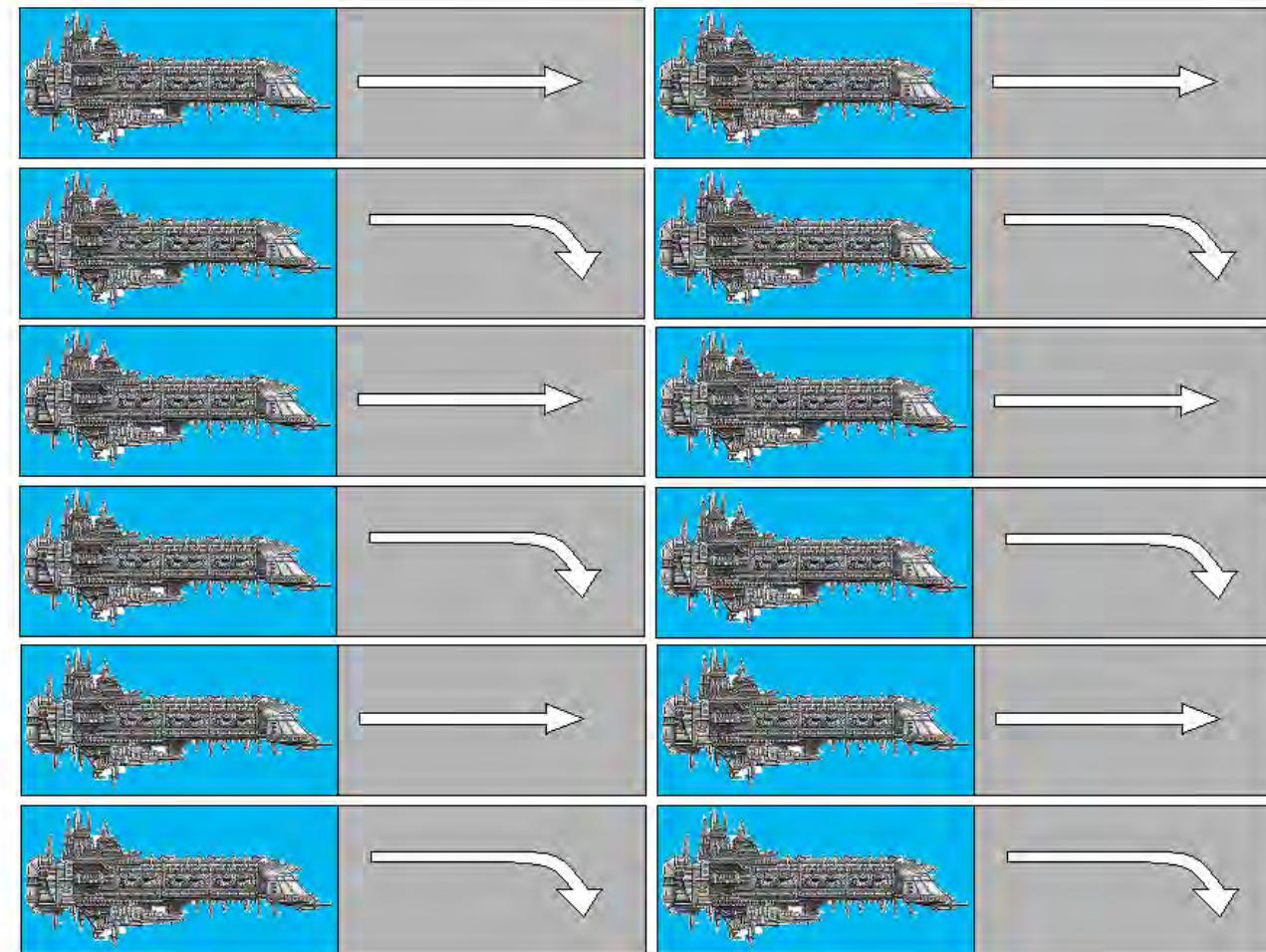
+++ THE EMPEROR PROTECTS +++

+++ WWW.ANARGO-SECTOR.NET +++

SIMULTANEOUS MOVEMENT MARKERS

BY REG STEINER

cut out markers, fold on black line, and glue



Lance

Lances are a class of massive energy weapon. To classify as a 'lance' a weapon must be capable of firing a sustained blast of energy at long range sufficient to cut a gash in a capital ship or cut an unshielded escort in two. Lances are generally dorsally mounted in massive turrets so their power may be directed to the enemy irrespective of their orientation.

Lasers are the most common lance weapon as the Imperium has an exceptional understanding of the theory and application of laser-based weaponry. Like the Rapier-laser destroyer support weapon, laser lances typically focus a number of beams at a single point, as at long range even the best lasers begin to dissipate. This creates an overlapping point of extreme energy capable of cutting through even the heaviest armour.

