



Blunt, Green & Mean

Ork Tactics in Battlefleet Gothic
By Stefano "Soulstone" Breviglieri

Orks are sometimes considered a "joke fleet" by many players. Most vessels in the fleet are slow, cumbersome and lightly armed. This, coupled with their legendary low Leadership, means that Ork players around have a hard time when dealing with other, more specialised fleets, such as Eldar and Necrons. Things aren't as bad as they seem, however. This article focuses on the pros and cons of the various Ork vessels and provides all budding Ork Warlords around with useful tips on how to tackle the different foes in Battlefleet Gothic.

WHERE TO START

The fleet list published in Armada is way better than the raiding fleet of the Rulebook and is the only list you should consider for your fleet. Being able to take battleships, battlekroozers, Hulks and Roks really gives the fleet an extra edge, so I recommend you get hold of a copy of Armada before you start whining "hey, Orks are rubbish!" or something like that.

Truth be told, the vessels you find in the Blue Book aren't that exciting. Apart from the brilliant Brute Ram Ship, they all have a speed of 20 and turn 45°, so Ork players find it very hard to chase Chaos, Eldar and Necron vessels. Moreover they are somewhat undergunned; most Ork weapon systems have a random value and/or are short ranged, which makes planning coordinated attacks very difficult. If you compare a Kill Kroozer (155 points) with a Chaos Slaughter cruiser (165), you'll quickly see the difference.

So, how do you create an efficient Ork fleet? You have to consider two very important facts. First of all, you're going to lose a lot of vessels during the game. While an Eldar player can afford to hug the table edge and stay out of range all the time, you have to cover the distance and bite the bullet for the first part of the game; moreover, Orks are good at ramming but they can still damage themselves while doing it. Second, Ork leadership is poor; this means that your tactics should involve the minimum number of special orders and that you should avoid cruiser squadrons.

These two factors suggest having a big, tough fleet with lots of weapon batteries and very few wonder weapons. I'm not saying you shouldn't have launch bays and torpedoes, but a strategy based on torpedo runs and assault boats is best suited for Space Marines and Dark Eldar, not for Ld5 carriers!

MY SHIP'S BIGGER THAN YOURS

Brute Ram Ship

This little beauty is one of the best tricks up an Ork Warlord's sleeve. For Ork standards it is fast, manoeuvrable and it can also shoot if need be. With its speed of 25 it's also the only escort in your fleet that can have something in range when fighting Eldar. The most important thing, though, is its very low point value. A squadron of 5 only costs 125 points, has a respectable firepower 10, will give your opponent a pitiful 31 victory points if you manage to save just one escort from his guns, and - should you actually get to ram something - can cripple a cruiser with little effort. Every time there's a cruiser nearby, you should consider ramming it as an option since there's no way you can fail the Ld check to hit it on one die, provided you don't have Ld5, that is! The easiest targets are Chaos, Tau or Imperial vessels, as you score a damage point for every 5+ rolled (unless you ram an Imperial ship head on, of course). Don't bother against Necron and Eldar, though. 3-strong squadrons are also very good, since you can afford to sacrifice them most of the times. Got a massive bomber wave heading towards your Kill Kroozer? Just ran into it with a Ram Ship. It will be blown to bits, but the Kroozer would have hardly had better chances...

Ravager Attack Ship

A very good escort at 35 points, combining as it does firepower 2 and 1d6 torpedoes. As I've already said, you shouldn't base your fleet on ordnance, but having some actually helps. You should bear in mind that they are one-shot weapons - failed command checks and Brace for Impact special orders will probably stop you from firing those torpedoes more than twice in an engagement.

Ravagers work well both in "pure" destroyer squadrons (although they can't combine salvoes) and in mixed squadrons with Onslaughts. 2 Onslaughts and 1 Ravager come at 125 points, have firepower 2d6+4 (more than any vessel in the fleet apart from the Hulk!) and a very handy torpedo salvo. In the first turns you should try and get them in a good position, using the torpedoes to disrupt your opponent's moves if you get a big salvo, or just sending it against enemy ordnance markers if you roll a 1, then cross your fingers and Lock On.



Savage Gunship

This is probably the poorest design at your disposal, which is a shame as the models are brilliant. Unfortunately the game mechanics of the heavy gunz, that get the negative modifiers on the gunnery table due to Blast Markers but don't get the positive ones due to range, mean that the amount of dice you roll will be hardly worth the stress. Add the fact that you won't be able to fire a single shot against fast fleets because of your short range and average Ork speed, and it's quite easy to understand why they are replaced with more Onslaughts by the vast majority of players after a few games. On the contrary, they are useful when you start very close to the opponent, such as in a Surprise Attack scenario.

Onslaught Attack Ship

The Onslaught really is the workhorse of the fleet. Firepower 1d6+1 is great for Ork standards (a Kill Kroozer only has 1d6 on its port/starboard gun decks!) and, with a bit of luck, you can get impressive offensive capacity for your money. Of course, if you roll poorly when calculating the firepower, you'll find them outrageously expensive, but then again, they're Orks! Combine them with ravagers for an extra tactical edge (see above), or get a pure 5-strong Onslaught squadron - pricey at 225 points but, as I've said, you'll lose ships way before you get to use them and piddly little squadrons quickly lose their effectiveness once one escort is destroyed.

Kill Kroozer

A Kill Kroozer only has one purpose in the fleet - namely, soaking up hits. It has a very low firepower for cruiser standards, as three weapon hard points are fitted with heavy gunz batteries which will only come into play when you're very close to the enemy. It was designed to be a tough ship, but any bomber wave of significant size will waste it because of the single turret and 4+ rear armour. In any trade-off with enemy vessels, it will be the underdog. So, why should you include one? Well, first of all, because it's big and gives few VPs to your opponent. People should always use Kill kroozers in an aggressive fashion, to act as fire-magnets; since it's the escorts that do most of the work, you have to make sure that they are reasonably intact when they get into range. A Kill kroozer is relatively harmless but, once it gets close, it can use the heavy gunz, ram or - even worse - board. Having one or two of these is essential, then, but you have to make sure they avoid the stacks of ordnance that will be heading for them.

A quick note on squadroning capital ships here: the whole logic behind the use of Kill Kroozers lies in their threat potential. If you put two of them together, not only you're giving one less target to your opponent, but you're also making it easier for him to counter them; any attack of relevant entity will force you to Brace for Impact, thus depriving you of special orders and firepower in the ensuing turn for both vessels.

Terror Ship

Definitely not the best carrier around. A more expensive version of the Kill Kroozer, it swaps the side heavy gunz batteries with launch bays. It wouldn't be that bad if Ork ordnance was just as good as anyone else's, though. Unfortunately, Fighta-Bommas are slower fighters and poorer bombers, suitable only against escorts. Assault boats are very useful when dealing with escorts, but blowing big ships to bits is what Orks have problems with. Still, unless you want your entire fleet swamped by Ordnance markers, you'll have to have at least one of these.

Hammer Battlekroozer

This ship is the missing link between the humble cruisers and the mighty Ork Battleships. It has two shields, up to three turrets, launch bays and a fearsome prow weapon array, combining respectable firepower and either torpedoes or bombardment cannon. The catch is that you have to Reload Ordnance before you shoot with the latter, so once you're in the thick of it, you'll have to choose between reloading and Locking On. Still, a good vessel for large engagements, but for 1,500 point games I'd rather have one of the following as my flagship.



The Fab Four

These legendary ships are what the Ork fleet needed the most: powerful, tough ships with good Ld (they get the best crews around!) and lots of guns. The best of the bunch is Dethdeala of course - basically a souped-up version of a Hammer with more firepower and a regular bombardment cannon for just 20 points more (once you factor in the extra turret). With a Warlord and an Extra Power Field, this is a perfect flagship for a fleet of any size and I recommend you get this in any engagement unless you want to field a Hulk.

Next comes Gorbag's Revenge. It's more expensive than Dethdeala, but you gain the launch bay capacity of a Terror Ship for the loss of just 2 points of firepower from the side batteries. Given its battlefield role, it can stay away from the real fighting and lend support where needed. The fact that it can launch up to 8 Ordnance markers a turn means that you won't have to waste points on Terror Ships.

I love Slamblasta's background and concept. However it comes at 20 points more than Dethdeala, but it's slower (no Soopa Enginez!) and overall less shooty from the prow (2 lances vs Bombardment cannon). Its only bonus is the fearsome broadside weaponry with 1d6+6 port/starboard guns.

Kroolboy is the worst of the four. It costs 5 points less than Dethdeala, but you get prow heavy gunz (and let's say it, if you wanted those you'd stick with Kill Kroozers) and meagre broadside firepower (1d6+2, just as a Hammer that costs 15 points less). There is no reason to take this instead of Dethdeala.

Rok

Roks are so slow that they'll never keep the pace of the rest of the fleet, and that's saying something. Moreover they're difficult to control, because turning with them is not an exact science and they might just change course when you don't want to. To cap it all, they're nowhere as sturdy as you might expect; weapon batteries will tear through them with ease, but what you should really watch out for are assault boats. Since any critical hit on a Rok will cause one damage point, and you only have one turret, once a-boats are in range you can kiss your asteroid goodbye. Roks only work when taken in large numbers, but in 1,500 point games I'd rather have three more Ram Ships instead of a single Rok.

Hulk

Ladies and gentlemen, this is what Ork players have been waiting for. It has a staggering 40 hit points and your opponent won't get VPs for crippling it, so unless you're playing against a Hulk-buster fleet (i.e. Chaos with 4 Carnage cruisers), most opponents will just ignore it and concentrate on the rest of the fleet. This is great, because if you don't have Blast Markers in base contact you can actually pass Command checks to make full use of its devastating weaponry. Every time you Reload Ordnance you dish out 2d6+4 markers - just what you needed should you face large bomber waves (taking fighters) or many escorts (taking a-boats). If your launch bays are already full or you have too many markers still on the table, just Lock On - you have so many weapons around there's no need to turn. Of course, it has some downsides; it's very slow and turns every other turn, meaning it isn't a wise choice when you play scenarios based on speed or manoeuvrability, such as Blockade Run or Escalating Engagement. Still, playing with it (not to mention building it!) makes for a very different game and any Ork player worth his salt should give it a try.

FLEET LISTS AND TACTICS

Here are two different all-round lists for 1,500 point games. The tactics below will be roughly based on these lists.

Dethdeala, Ork Warlord, 2 extra re-rolls, Extra Power Fields 380
Kill Kroozer, Ork Warlord, extra re-roll 215
Kill Kroozer 155
Terror Ship, Prow torpedoes 185
5 Ram Ships 125
3 Ram Ships 75
5 Onslaughts 225
2 Ravagers 70
2 Ravagers 70
Total 1,500 points

This fleet has a substantial amount of torpedoes, and might look in contrast with what I've said before. However, you shouldn't use them to attack the enemy, but just to force him to use fighters to remove them. Having two Terror Ships in a 1,500 point game is a big waste of points, but most people will have at least 10-12 launch bays while you only have 1d3+5, so you have to deal with the rest in some other way.

Dethdeala is the rally point of the fleet - having three cruisers to choose from in case you roll poorly for it, chances are you'll roll a 4-5 on the Leadership table, so it will have at least 7 (if not 8). A good Ld value is essential for this ship as it's the most dangerous vessel at your disposal and, although you have 5 re-rolls, failing a Command Check with it can be very frustrating.

Hulk, Ork Warlord, 2 extra re-rolls 680
Kill Kroozer, Ork Warlord, extra re-roll, Extra Power Fields 240
Kill Kroozer 155
5 Ram Ships 125
3 Ram Ships 75
5 Onslaughts 225
Total 1,500 points

If your fleet includes a Hulk you are bound to lose your numerical advantage, being the most expensive vessel in the game! It is such a good carrier and sports so many long-ranged guns, though, that this fleet is just as effective (if not more so) as the former.

Chaos, the Imperium and the Tau

These fleets are the most common opponents you're likely to find as they are a favourite choice for beginners. This doesn't necessarily mean that your opponents are beginners, though. The good thing about these fleets is their low Attack Rating value, which will let you choose the scenario most of the times. As they have either long ranged guns, nova cannon or tons of launch

bays, you have to get them as soon as possible; Surprise Attack is the best choice, as the enemy deploys in the middle of the table and most of his ships will stay idle for a turn at least.

No matter the scenario, though, your priority is to make sure you still have ships by the end of turn three, as the first half of the game will be little more than gunnery practice for your opponents. Keep your ships close to each other, go on All Ahead Full every time you can and use every available trick to make their carriers Brace for Impact - Tau Explorers in particular should be shot at whenever possible since, every time they brace, you're preserving a significant portion of your fleet from a horrible death by bombers. Once your ships are in range, you can make use of heavy guns and boarding actions, and this should give you a fighting chance, especially against the Navy and Tau - the Warlord-led Kill Kroozer will make a mess of any cruiser nearby. Chaos fleets are the trickiest of the group as they are not only very shooty, but fast as well. Your best bet against them is getting any easy VPs there are (i.e. escorts) with assault boats and then forcing them to get close to you and make full use of their racks of weapon batteries. Sure, this is going to hurt your vessels, but if you keep your fleet huddled together, you will be able to fight back with the rest of your ships. If you're using the Hulk, your opponents will probably ignore him, but if they don't, the rest of your fleet will be relatively unscathed when it's your turn to strike back, so tempt your opponent to shoot at it by boasting about its massive point cost. You really shouldn't worry about the safety of your Hulk until it has 15 HPs remaining. By the way, never Brace for Impact with a Hulk unless you're facing something very scary, i.e. two Carnages or suchlike.

Space Marines, Tyranids and Orks

These three fleets have quite a few things in common. First of all, they all can field a big, resilient ship you have little chance of hurting (Battle Barge, Hive Ship with lots of extra spore cysts and hit points, and Hulk). Moreover, their weaponry works best at close range and they quite like boarding as an option. This makes for a very close game.

If the opponent is fielding the "big nasty" (and, Gork forbid, you aren't), then you just have to harass it with the least effort you can. Even a single Blast Marker will prevent a Hive Ship from turning, and it will lower the Ld value of the other two. If you are in a tight corner, try Ram Ships against the Battle Barge or the Hive Ship - the risks involved might tempt your opponent to Brace for Impact (once I didn't, and suffered 5 hits from 3 Ram Ships). In the meantime, you can concentrate on the rest of the fleet. Cruisers are the best targets around this time - either they are less tough (i.e. they have fewer hit points) than usual or are less shielded. Strike Cruisers are both, but are also more



An Ork fleet charges a Carnage class Cruiser

armoured, so they're no easy meat anyway. Try with Heavy guns though - you need only two hits with them to cripple one. Otherwise, pummel them to space junk with Dethdeala's prow bombardment cannon. Having a Hulk around, however, really smoothes things down, as you have superior firepower and lances to counter your opponent's best ships.

Eldar, Dark Eldar and Necrons

These are an Ork's worst nightmares. They're faster, more manoeuvrable and better armed than your vessels. Oh and Necrons are even tougher. To cap it all, they also have a higher Attack Rating, so they will pick a scenario that suits them best. To put it bluntly, you have to rely on a significant amount of luck when facing these opponents. Not the best advice I guess, but if you chase an enemy ship for 3 turns and then roll a "1" when determining firepower, there is no way you can deal with them.

Against Eldar and their dark kin, speed and range are essential; the problem is you have none of both. As a consequence, your safest choice is to clump as many ships as you can within 5cm of the hulk and then hold station, so that they'll move along with it. This has two effects. The first is that your opponent's ships will have to enter the Hulk's gun sights to use 30cm ranged weapons, and if the position of the sun favours you, they might not be able to move away enough to get out of range. With Dark Eldar it's even easier as they can't move in the Ordnance phase, and you have aft guns, so there's no place where they can hide. The second is trickier, but also more interesting. As they're transported in the gravity field of the Hulk, ships can turn freely before they move, then break orbit and chase any vessel that could be in range. This tactic can be only used once in an engagement and requires very careful planning, but there are very few other ways of dealing with pesky pointy-eared admirals, you have been warned!

If you're facing Necrons, get ready for a hard time. Apart from all their frustrating tricks, the key feature of the Necron fleet is its ability to deny a lot of VPs to the opponent by fading out. If you score 8 damage points on a Scythe cruiser, you'll get 550 VPs at least. If you score 7, and it disengages, you'll get 69. That's a really big difference, and Ork weaponry being temperamental, you'll be lacking the firepower needed to score that fatal hit quite a few times. So, how can you snap out of it? Choosing the right target is the key. If there is a Shroud on the tabletop, then it has to die, no matter how far it is or how many ships you have to counter it. It has 4 hit points, and it's almost the only Necron vessel that can go down in one turn. Its destruction will give you enough points to secure a draw. If your opponent isn't fielding one, then your only choice is to board a Scythe with as many capital ships as you can, because by the time they reach it they'll be already badly damaged and you really need all the help you can get. Besides, if you manage to hulk a cruiser by a boarding action (and your opponent isn't clever enough to shoot at his own hulk) you'll get so many VPs you won't have to worry about anything else. This is no easy feat to use an understatement, however, so have a backup plan ready. Whatever you do, anyway, don't shoot at the Tombship. It will never Brace for Impact (against weapon batteries and torpedoes, having 6+ armour and 4+ save is statistically identical to having 4+ armour and 2+ save) and you have no chance of even crippling it, so train your guns elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

Playing an Ork fleet really makes for a fun game, both for you and your opponent. While Eldar admirals are so concerned with the safety of their precious ships that you might never get to roll some dice during the game, a match against Orks will surely end up with massive explosions, ferocious boarding actions, hilarious moments and you'll probably run out of Blast Markers by the end of turn two. What more could you ask for from a fleet?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name's Stefano Breviglieri, I've just taken my degree in Foreign Languages and I've been playing GW games for 10 years. Although I'm very good at devising powerful army lists, I always end up using less than competitive armies, because I'm more interested in having a fun game than winning. My Battlefleet Gothic games usually end with a handful of models on the table, and both players in stitches.