



BFG TACTICS

By Adam Brown

Of all the races in the 41st Millenium, the two most common adversaries of all are without doubt the Battlefleets of the Imperium and the treacherous warfleets of Chaos. The fleets share much in their approach to space warfare, though also rely on their own strengths whilst overcoming their own individual weaknesses. Here, Adam Brown presents a players overview of the fleets, their ships, their strengths and weaknesses, along with some important tactical notes for budding Admirals.

OVERVIEW

Unlike their Chaos counterparts, Imperial cruisers are not designed to win wars by themselves. The Imperial fleet is a slow, methodical monster. Each cruiser is but a piece of the whole. Conversely, Chaos commanders can afford to have their fleet split apart to some degree. The long reach of their batteries allows their ships to still back one another when separated. Chaos ships are also designed with a solo bravado in mind; each self-obsessed, ambitious captain trying to outdo the next with a torrent of heavy firepower.

Not so the Imperials. To get the most out of your cruisers, look at them in pairs at the very least. Gothic & Lunar class cruisers are a waste of points on their own. They cannot keep up with, say, a Slaughter class cruiser in a gunfight. But pair them up with a second Lunar, take on two Chaos cruisers of the same displacement, and the Imperials will come to the fore *so long as the Imperial ships work in tandem with one another!* Boasting 12 torpedoes and an easy spread of either heavy firepower or lance decks, the Imperials can bully their way through the worst of the Chaos shooting and hit home hard.

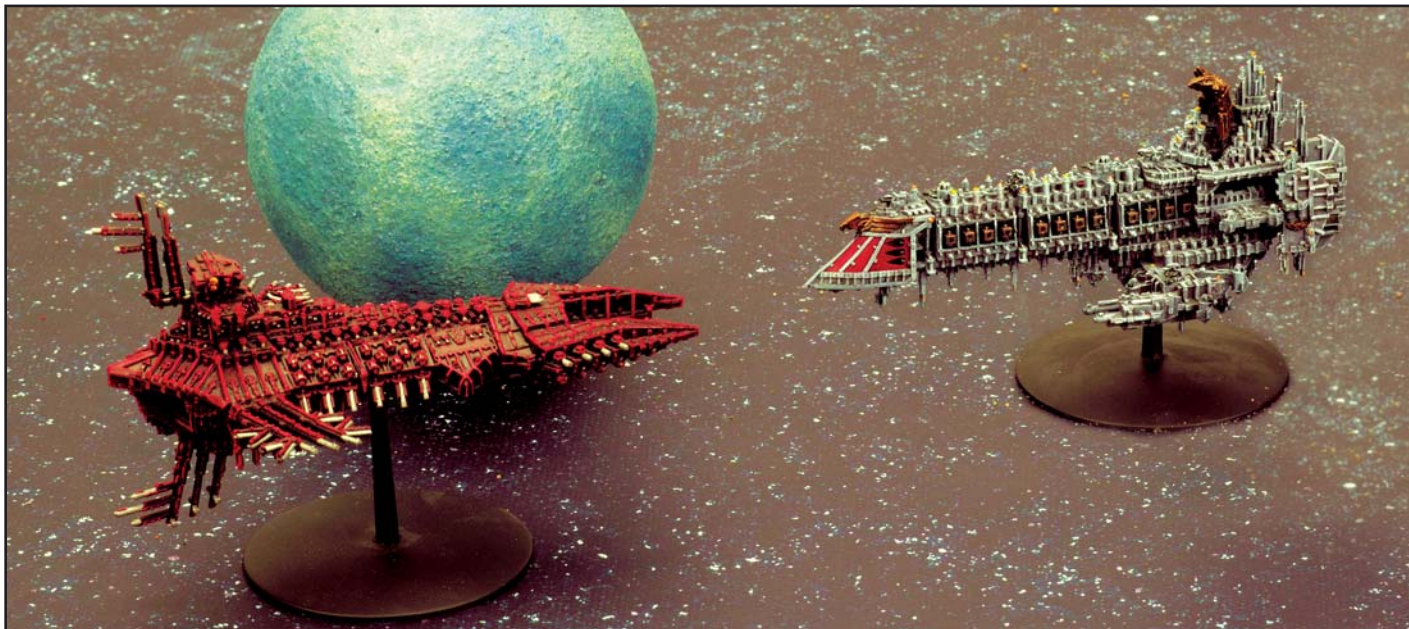
IMPERIAL CRUISERS

Dictator Class Cruiser

Strengths: easy to build, excellent turret rating, heavy ordnance output.

Weaknesses: undergunned, expensive.

The Dictator is equal in measure to Mars class battlecruisers. Oddly enough, with its prow mounted torpedoes, the Dictator outdoes its heavier counterpart in the total ordnance it launches, being able to launch four fighter or bomber markers as well. Dictators are designed to help an Imperial fleet keep neck-and-neck with Chaos in the ordnance race. Its flaws are more those of the player than design. Many Imperial players pick up Dictators in an effort to match Chaos players with total numbers of fighter-type ordnance. They, of course, lose as the Imperial Navy simply cannot compete with Styx and Devastation class cruisers, especially when backed by a Despoiler. I have often heard Imperial players feeling cheated that way. The Dictator allows an aggressive Imperial player to seize the initiative with ordnance. When the formation of Imperial ships launches its torpedoes alongside waves of fighters and bombers, their opponent



is forced on the defensive to counter the massed waves of onrushing, shield-avoiding attack craft and missiles inbound on their fleet. The enemy must prepare for this inevitable deluge by launching fighters or risk taking a severe beating by a crafty Imperial player.

Gothic Class Cruiser

Strengths: heavy lance decks, inexpensive, easy to assemble, very effective against enemy escorts, firepower not diminished by aspect, damn cool looking.

Weaknesses: ineffective against other cruisers in duels, weak against the Eldar.

The Gothic class is one of two main Imperial vessels. It is in all respects a ship of the line and needs to work in tandem with a sister vessel, such as another Gothic or Lunar, to realise its full potential against enemy capital ships. Its no-nonsense outlook towards combat makes it very easy to use, firing last with its heavy lances. Many Imperial players have had their Gothic ships score impressive kill lists by virtue of always getting the last shots in on a targeted vessel. Overall, the Gothic is a very specialised ship. Use it well and enjoy!

Dominator Class Cruiser

Strengths: Nova cannon, heavy weapons battery armament, improved range options.

Weaknesses: no ordnance, requires 4 weapons batteries to build.

Not a true ship of the line, the Dominator is an odd ship in that it's one of the few equipped with a Nova cannon as standard. True, other ships like the Tyrant and Lunar may be upgraded to bear a Nova cannon, but to do so those vessels must sacrifice their prow torpedoes – quite a loss to an Imperial admiral.



Enemy ships cannot afford to stay at long range against Dominators, as the Nova cannon hammers them. Closing with the cruiser only brings them into range of the massive gun decks of the Dominator, along with any friendly ships close at hand. A favoured tactic is to force an enemy to close with the Nova cannon armed ship and, when they slip inside its range, let loose with all the torpedoes of its sister ships. Because of this, consider squadroning Dominators with a Gothic or Tyrant class cruiser (or possibly both).

Tyrant Class Cruiser

Strengths: long range weapons batteries, good firepower strength, Nova cannon & improved battery options.

Weaknesses: ranged weapons batteries weak.

The Tyrant class appears in many respects to be a variant of the Dominator for players that don't favour the Nova cannon. It provides all the advantage of the former's gun batteries but with added strength. Granted, the Dominator's options allow it to take same range batteries at a higher strength but at a sacrifice of the slightly longer range batteries on the Tyrant. The Tyrant essentially provides some reach for Imperial players that suffer from getting battered before closing with the foe. It has options enough to make it an improved clone of the Dominator but at considerable cost. This makes the Tyrant a rather unspecialised Imperial vessel, able to take on several roles but be master of none.

Lunar Class Cruiser

Strengths: inexpensive, jack of all trades, easy to build, awesome looking, underestimated, Nova cannon options.

Weaknesses: none appreciable.

Pound for pound, by far the most effective ship in the Imperial/Chaos cruiser arsenal. The Lunar class cruiser is a little miracle. It is unimpressive on paper, but by that very design, forces players to use it cunningly. The Lunar is very direct in its purpose – close with the enemy while firing ordnance, cross in front or behind and let loose with others of its kind. Two Lunar class ships working in tandem provides an awesome 12 torpedoes, 12 firepower and 4 lances to each side. With the option of upgrading to a Nova cannon, this beast becomes a hard-hitting leviathan, forcing enemy ships continually onto the defensive. The Lunar is also very easy to build. Each sprue frame comes with the parts needed to build the ship without encroaching upon another sprue. Very affordable, they should form the bulk of any Imperial fleet over 1,000 points. Any fleet worth its salt has at least one Lunar on its roster, most should have two.

BATTLECRUISERS

Overlord Class Battlecruiser

Strengths: Long range, heavy turret options, good weapons strength.

Weaknesses: expensive, requires 4 weapons batteries to build.

There is no going wrong with an Overlord class battlecruiser. It is a very self-sufficient vessel; something of a rarity in the Imperial list. It can stand and fight unsupported for a turn or two and batter an opponent in a one-on-one duel, something most Imperial vessels struggle to do. Between the Overlord and the Mars, the Overlord is the safer choice, though the Mars provides a gamble many veterans are glad to take.

The only telling flaw of the Overlord is that it isolates itself from the rest of the Imperial fleet with its long range guns. It often wants to begin firing broadsides into the enemy fleet sooner than its shorter ranged counterparts. Up close it fares little better than a Lunar for half again as many points. However, it escorts a Retribution or Emperor class battleship beautifully, as both ships are able to reach out and smash the opponent at range. Against Eldar, it is also equally invaluable, providing a null zone into which the pirates are loathe to send their cruisers until the Overlord is neutralised.

Mars Class Battlecruiser

Strengths: carrier, Nova cannon, improved gunnery option, inexpensive for abilities, excellent ranged weaponry.

Weaknesses: undergunned up close, expensive.

The Mars is everything an elite Imperial commander could want. It has attack craft, it has range, it has lances that allow it to fire while closing and it has a Nova cannon. It is a hard-hitting little monster that, in the hands of an experienced player, is a real tough nut to crack. There's no easy way to take out a Mars cruiser with a conventional fleet. If the Mars has a weakness, it's that it is no better than a Lunar class cruiser up close, as far as gunnery is concerned. Its waves of attack craft will still maul any ship that gets too close, however. Closing with it is a pain under the continual barrage of the Nova cannon and the accompanying lances. Under escort, the Mars often forms the core of a small Imperial fleet and makes an impressive flagship.

CHAOS CRUISERS

Slaughter Class Cruiser

Strengths: very fast, heavily armed, inexpensive, easy to build.

Weaknesses: short-ranged, too fast.

No other class of ship have I seen so often ill used in a Chaos fleet. Many players get caught up in just how quickly the Slaughter can move and halo them with a couple of escorts and go straight for the enemy's throat ahead of their entire fleet. Of course, the Slaughter does an impressive amount of damage and then gets crippled, reducing its effectiveness to something comparable to a slightly damp cloth. I have found that a Slaughter is best used by keeping it behind a Chaos fleet and using it to follow up attacks rather than leading them. Only once the enemy has finally closed with the Chaos fleet does the Slaughter jump into the fray, becoming an immediate mobile reserve. The Slaughter has an impressive amount of weaponry (14 firepower from combined fore and side weapons batteries backed up by two lances) and pouncing on a straggler or jumping an annoying squadron of escorts can be crucial during key turns. They

can also keep harrying the opponent once a ship is finally crippled, racing past sheltering ships to put the deathblow to these wounded vessels.

Murder Class Cruiser

Strengths: long range lances, respectable firepower.

Weaknesses: painfully 'average', requires four gun batteries to build.

The Murder class cruiser is very much like its Imperial counterpart, the Lunar. One's not bad, two working in tandem are incredible. If you have one, get a second and keep them working together, even squadron them if you want (I do!). The long range lances to the fore do not do much until they're backed by a second ship that can reach out that far. A second Murder easily does so, providing the punch of a Gothic class cruiser, but at a 60cm range. If the enemy closes, the combined firepower of 20 that the pair can bring to bear is nothing short of intimidating. The Murder class is a workhorse. It is the master of no art, but it is a very worthwhile vessel.

Carnage Class Cruiser

Strengths: heavy firepower, good range.

Weaknesses: no lances, requires 4 gun batteries to build.

The Carnage class cruiser is a dream to any player that has been frustrated by the Eldar. With the ability to reach out as far as 60cm with weapons battery fire, it seems almost cruel to those pointy eared gits. Up close, the Carnage is absolutely brutal with its potential of 16 firepower to one side. The Carnage, however, suffers from some key problems. The first is that it is yet another Chaos ship that requires the use of gun batteries to build. Second, some Chaos players find them less effective against seasoned Ork and Imperial players, who are less likely to flinch when the gruesome amount of firepower is brought to bear against their armoured prows. A newer opponent might brace, even at extreme ranges, but against high armour values (6+), the Carnage suffers somewhat. It's key to get around to the rear of an enemy vessel and pound them to dust to get the most out of the ship's guns. Still, for those that like a theme, the Carnage is vicious. Downing your first Eldar cruiser will make it all worthwhile...

Devastation Class Cruiser

Strengths: long range lances, inexpensive carrier, excellent turret rating, doesn't require gun batteries to build.

Weaknesses: undergunned at distance the Devastation is comparable to the Lunar class Imperial cruiser in overall effectiveness. Both ships launch a similar spread of ordnance (though the Devastation can boast a more versatile variety), and have similar weapons

displacements. The Devastation is purely a fleet-support carrier; a hybrid that sacrifices considerable distance firing that's so key to the Chaos fleet for ordnance. Just remember what you're giving up when you take a Devastation.

HEAVY CRUISERS

Archeron Class Heavy Cruiser

Strengths: heavy lance output, good turret rating, easy to build.

Weaknesses: undergunned in one on one duel.

The Archeron is a support ship, very comparable to the Gothic class cruiser. At 45cm, its four lances and 6 firepower which can be brought to bear on one flank do not seem like a lot, but it's substantial enough to bear in mind when choosing a Chaos fleet. The Archeron is, simply put, a poor-man's heavy cruiser. There is nothing spectacular about it, but it does provide the Chaos fleet with some badly needed lance support.

Hades Class Heavy Cruiser

Strengths: excellent fleet support ship, good forward lance strength, inexpensive for power.

Weaknesses: requires weapons batteries to build.

Everything that applies to the Murder holds true with the Hades. The Hades is essentially a 30 point upgrade that provides an extra pair of lances with good fire arcs. At range, this equates to some wonderful closing shots with the enemy, particularly if the Chaos fleet takes its time closing the gap. In ship to ship duels, the lances (particularly when locked-on) can provide that nice knock out punch. When backing Murder or Carnage class ships, the Hades shows its worth.

Styx Class Heavy Cruiser

Strengths: heavy ordnance, long ranged weapons, good weapons strength.

Weaknesses: often forced to be Chaos fleet's flagship.

The obvious merits of the Styx are that it allows a Chaos player to launch a large amount of ordnance at an affordable cost. The Styx is a remarkable vessel, with an impressive array of support weaponry with excellent range. This allows it to stay at deliberate range from the enemy while continually launching support elements in the form of either offensive (bombers) or defensive (fighters) ordnance. The only catch seems to be that the Styx is somewhat expensive. The cost may not be so readily apparent at first until placing the Warmaster within the fleet. The Styx is a very obvious target for any opponent, especially one that's keen to cripple the ordnance capabilities of their opponent. It often proves key to remove it as early as possible, and if isolated, the Styx cannot endure a duel with what's sent against it.

REGENTS OF THE FLEET

There is nothing, but nothing, that can stand up to the massive power of a battleship in Battlefleet Gothic. Over several turns, anything but a rival flagship will be pounded into dust. Their shields and armour and turrets are proof against almost all forms of single attack. Only en masse can they be brought low by the enemy ships. Their appearance is inspirational and frightening all at once. Their timely presence can easily turn the whole course of a game.

Admittedly, they aren't without cost, though it's strangely affordable. For the price of two cruisers (and the support of three others) a battleship can be fielded. This usually



limits their use to games of 1,500 pts or more. In smaller games they, like Titans in Epic, either dominate or never do enough to earn their keeping, making them a risky use of points. Ideally, at 2,000 pts or more, a battleship should be fielded though it isn't necessary to do so. They make spectacular flagships and always make their presence felt. Many players include at least one, if only as a centrepiece model. Like a Lord on a Monstrous mount in Warhammer Fantasy, they don't always hit the field, but they're available now and again.

So, without further adieu, the big ships:

Repulsive Class Grand Cruiser

Strengths: good armament, heavy torpedo salvos, good turret rating, low cost.

Weaknesses: slow, low shield & armour ratings.

The Repulsive is a dueling class of ship. Though lacking the defensive strength of a true battleship, it has the hitting power of most ships in that class. The Repulsive is a hunter of cruiser-sized ships, dominating them in size and strength. With a small 10 point upgrade, all of its gun systems have a 45cm range that can be brought to bear. It has the hitting power of a Slaughter class cruiser but with an additional lance. The impressive torpedo array to the fore gives them an ordnance threat, easily forcing an unwary opponent to brace for impact or risk losing (on average with most fleets) two hits from their ship.

Vengeance Class Grand Cruiser

Strengths: excellent gun range, strong shields.

Weaknesses: unimpressive armament, slow.

The first of a group of grand cruiser variants, the Vengeance is overall an unimpressive and unimaginative vessel. It is a workhorse style grand cruiser, very much a ship of the line rather than a definitive flagship. For those seeking a ship that won't overshadow their commander's vessel, the Vengeance is an excellent choice.

Retaliator Class Grand Cruiser

Strengths: well armed, well shielded.

Weaknesses: expensive, short ranged, small carrier capacity.

The Retaliator is essentially a shorter ranged Styx class heavy cruiser with better defensive capabilities at the sacrifice of carrier bays. The Retaliator is fully able to engage other cruisers in gun duels while launching its attack craft, its heavy shield and turret ratings providing proof against cruiser-sized armaments. However, it is an expensive ship and is unspecialised in its role.

Executor Class Grand Cruiser

Strengths: very heavy lance armament, good shields, inexpensive.

Weaknesses: relatively short ranged, underarmed in cruiser duels.

On its own, the Executor suffers all of the same problems as a Gothic class cruiser. With only lances making up its armament, it cannot damage enemy ships fast enough in protracted duels. Its short range means that it needs to get in close to ensure that its damage is telling. However, when the Executor is paired up with another Chaos ship, its weaponry becomes very formidable, allowing it to either knock down shields before the rest of the fleet opens fire with gun decks, or allowing it to get the killing blow on stricken vessels.



Desolator Class Battleship

Strengths: good lance armament, long range, very heavy torpedo strength, fast.

Weaknesses: undergunned, unmaneuverable.

The Desolator is the poorer choice of the two Chaos battleships. Unspecialised, its biggest advantage is the very long range of its guns and lance decks. Its speed allows it to keep the enemy at very long range while continuing to punish its advance. There should be little reason for it not to be on lock on orders from the get go, providing a continual barrage at the earliest moment. When the enemy finally closes, the Desolator can let loose a frightening amount of torpedoes which can cause even the most stalwart of players to swerve to avoid them. The Desolator is best backed by at least a squadron of escorts to provide some extra short range weapons battery fire and to prevent it from being swarmed.

Despoiler Class Battleship

Strengths: very heavy lance armament, very large launch bay capacity, good range, inexpensive for power, torpedo options.

Weaknesses: slow, awkward lance placement towards prow.

The Despoiler is a dream come true for most Chaos players. It is incredibly heavily armed and comes backed with a massive carrier output. At a glance, it loses one lance at 60cm to the Desolator, but gains an extra four towards the front at 30cm. Though these weapons have questionable use on a carrier, in the right hands, the Despoiler becomes a line breaker like the Slaughter. It is almost guaranteed that whatever vessel slips within 30cm

of the Despoiler will be smashed apart should the battleship bring its lance armament and attack craft to bear on the offending ship.

ESCORTS vs ORDNANCE

Escorts look wonderful on paper. They are fast, highly manoeuvrable ships that, when squadroned together, can provide devastating volleys of gunfire. They are also small targets, difficult to hit with even the potent gundecks of a cruiser. Concentrated bursts from a single capital ship might smash apart a single escort caught unawares. It might take the guns of the whole fleet to successfully wipe out 200 points worth of escorts bent on absorbing as much gunfire as possible. Then why do we not see them very often in numbers? Where are the Swords and Iconoclasts that lurk in the wake of enemy capital ships, picking apart their shields so that the gunline can smash the stricken vessel apart? Where are the Cobras and Infidels with their torpedo salvos, forcing apart fleet formations and isolated scattered individuals?

They are put on shelves, in lieu of a preference towards attack craft.

Almost everything an escort can do, a bomber wave or assault boat can do just as well, if not better. Attack craft are harder to hit (last column on firepower chart and requiring 6s to hit with everything but bombardment cannons). They can do catastrophic amounts of damage, bypassing shields, upsetting weapons systems and eliminating the competition in one fell swoop. Escorts die in droves when facing their adversaries, the bombers and assault boats of the enemy. This makes them a better

defensive unit too, able to use fighters to counter torpedo ordnance or launch as attack craft to see off marauding destroyers and frigates. The only ships proof against attack craft are battleships, and then only just.

The ultimate argument in favour of attack craft, though, is cost. Though carriers do pay a premium for their arsenal of versatility, 250 points of escorts seldom matches up to a single Devastation class cruiser. A failed attack run with your escorts costs you Victory Points. A failed attack run with attack craft is just a test of the enemy's defences and will likely be followed up shortly.

When designed, carriers were never meant to dominate Battlefleet Gothic. It was hoped and intended that a fleet that was dedicated on attack craft could meet and engage any other fleet with considerable competitive success. Such isn't the case. When space-superiority is handed over to an opponent, invariably the rival fleet will spend most of the game on Brace for Impact orders, is paralysed to counter the fast moving escorts as its own are vaporised in turn. The line of gunships is forced into a defensive formation and they are picked apart by enemy firepower at leisure.

There has been talk for some time on how to bring the power of the gunships back into the game without overly damaging the core ordnance rules for Battlefleet Gothic. The main aim was to make escorts a viable choice for the various fleets (other than Eldar). Eventually, an experimental rule has taken shape, as published in the Battlefleet Gothic 2002 Annual. The fleet may have only as many attack craft ordnance markers on the board as it has carrier decks. Take Bill's fleet as an example. With a Styx



and two Devastations (6 decks on the Styx, and 4 on each of the Devastations), that gives him a total of 14 launch bays. This means that in any point in time, he may only have a maximum of 14 fighter/bomber/assault boats active on the board.

This prevents carriers from building up impossible to counter waves of attack craft, making the game degenerate into an arm's race where one side hopes that the other will roll doubles on a Reload order. Anyone that has faced an Eldar carrier fleet of doom knows the dangers inherently of entering that pitfall. It becomes a slow game of trying to keep capital ships from moving, keeping distances apart while launching wave after wave of markers for one final, crippling assault while still keeping the hitting power of attack craft in the carrier's arsenal.



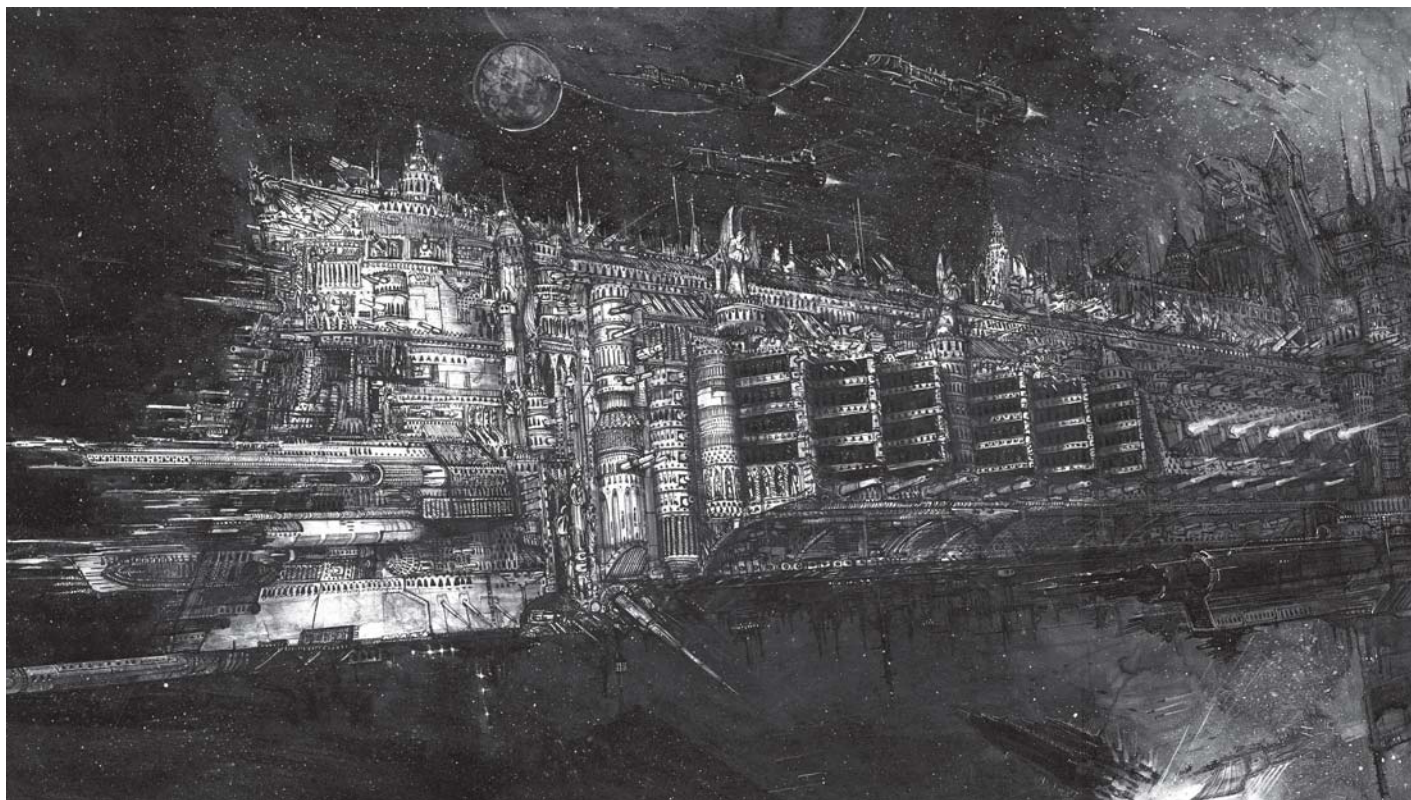
TORPEDOES IN A CHAOS FLEET

In Battlefleet Gothic, there are few things as inspiring or frightening as a 2,000+ point Imperial fleet advancing through the gunfire of the enemy and then each and every ship of the line launching their torpedoes. With some 48+ torpedoes streaking towards the enemy lines, the battle suddenly changes course. The Imperials are now on the offensive, the enemy is often sent reeling. Either they

brace for impact, swerve to avoid, or pray they have enough counter-ordnance to meet the threat. In any case, the initiative is in Imperial hands.

Now who wouldn't want to get a piece of this? I maintain that Imperials aren't played very often because they really come into their own in larger games, where there's the promise of just too much ordnance for the enemy to counter. Letting a 2,000pt Imperial fleet get within 30cm of your main gunline is a recipe for disaster. Most opponents know it and are wary of it, again passing the initiative to the Imperials in these larger games. Throw in a couple of Nova cannons and you make it impossible for them to stay out of torpedo range.

This is probably where the appeal comes from for Chaos players. The option of torpedoes, after seeing how effective they can be for their Imperial counterparts, often makes them look at their own fleet list and see where the options lie. For the Chaos fleet, there are four main classes that can provide the torpedo support they are looking for. Three are in the larger ship classes: Desolator and modified Despoiler class battleships and the Repulsive class grand cruiser. The last is an escort option, the Infidel class raider. Because of the cost and requirements of fielding such large vessels, usually only the Repulsive will join the fleet list with any regularity. The Infidels are, thus, the easiest choice for Chaos players aspiring to add an extra bit of ordnance to their fleet.





A wave of two torpedoes costs 40 points with an Infidel. To match the Imperial equivalent, that's at least three escorts (120 points for six torpedoes). This adds up to about the same as a Dauntless class light cruiser – overall not too bad a price. There's a catch, however. Though the escorts have but one hit less than the Dauntless (more or less: 3 shields and 3 Structure Points total in the squadron, vs 1 shield and 6 Structure Points for the Dauntless), weaponry fired their way is invariably always more telling, but that's the usual plight for escorts. Thus, through the Infidels, it's easy to include torpedoes in a Chaos fleet, but there are some catches to getting the most out of them.



Torpedoes work best against Chaos, rather than for them. Their 5+ armour rating from every quarter makes them ideal targets for torpedoes. Against their enemies, they have questionable uses. Imperials and Orks have 6+ armoured prows. The Space Marine enjoy the same rating all around as do the Necrons. Tyranid spores are proof against torpedoes. Eldar annoyingly skip out of the way with their 2+ save. So how can a Chaos player make them work for him?

Here's the ideal tactic: Wait until your opponent swings his ships to bring his side batteries to bear and then punish him with short ranged torpedo strikes. Infidels are thankfully quite quick and you needn't wait for this opportunity. However if they're isolated they will be picked off in short measure. It's best to wait for the opponent to begin to swing his guns to bear and then race your Infidels to the end of his gunline. Slip behind the last

cruiser and then fire torpedoes up his exhaust ports. If they don't strike that cruiser, they will strike the exhaust ports of the next, and then the next, and so on. With luck, you might induce that one ship to brace for impact or even damage it severely.

Chaos battleships and the Repulsive grand cruiser also enjoy torpedoes. I have found that this is usually an afterthought to their weapons batteries. Unfortunately, I have seen their ordnance used ineffectively, launched at extreme ranges only to be easily avoided or snuffed out by a single fighter counter if it was well placed. The ideal use of their torpedoes occurs when the battleship bullies its way into the enemy gun line. While its dual broadsides wreak havoc, it launches torpedoes at a third enemy vessel caught to the fore. With a little luck, it's possible to damage three ships at once.

There's one thing to keep in mind: The Chaos fleet is based around long range guns and ordnance. With torpedo craft lurking within your fleet, that is one more special order that needs to be taken care of. In smaller games, you will not feel it so much. However, when your entire fleet has demands, the torpedo ships can often be left waiting in favour of assault boats and fighters, lock on orders and manoeuvres.

Author

Adam Brown works for Games Workshop Canada and is currently a staff member at the Battle Bunker in St. Laurent, Ottawa. Any of our Canadian readers should pop in and say hi. Adam is a keen player of all Games Workshop games, and has been an enthusiastic Battlefleet Gothic admiral since the game's release.

Further Information

Interested about Battlefleet Gothic? More can be found in Battlefleet Gothic: Armada, whilst the full range of BFG is available from Games Workshop.

More BFG

Turn to page 14 for the second part of Doom of the Eldar.

Websites

www.BattlefleetGothic.com