

FABRIC OF THE IMPERIUM

The Merchant Fleets of Mankind by Matt Keefe & Nate Montes

In this article Matt and Nate turn their attention on the Merchant and Rogue Trader fleets of the Imperium.

It is a given fact that through the might and valour of the Imperial Navy, the raging tides of foul aliens and vile heretics that infest the galaxy have been stayed from overrunning the millions of worlds that over the millennia have come under the Emperor's beneficent rule. While these hulking, powerful warships are the most visible representation of Mankind's command of the stars, it is actually through the millions of humble merchant freighters, lumbering heavy transports and sleek fast clippers that make up the vast majority of Mankind's interstellar spacecraft by which its vast domain is held together. Only a very small fraction of the incalculable worlds which make up the Imperium can truly be called self-sufficient, and many rely on a steady stream of foodstuffs and raw materials to maintain their productivity and way of life. With the Navy constantly stretched thin defending its many worlds from grave threats both without and within, it falls to the slow, ill-equipped and poorly-armed merchant vessels to keep the lines of commerce and communication open in a vast, uncaring universe filled with many dangers to both the bodies and souls of Man.

Just like the Imperial Navy itself, the Merchant Fleet falls under the auspices of the Adeptus Terra, who rarely countenance private ownership of interstellar vessels. This is expressed in the form of charters, which grant varying rights and freedoms to the trade guilds, syndicates and merchant families that own and operate merchant vessels and fleets. These charters are granted by the Adeptus Terra, allowing their bearers to form part of the Merchant Fleet, and be registered through the Segmentum Fortresses and numerous other Administratum departmentoes and officios throughout the galaxy. Though they can be revoked at any time by Imperial authority, in some cases they date back hundreds or even thousands of years. Nearly all of the more lucrative trade routes are also managed through route licenses, purchased by merchant vessel operators for unrestricted or even exclusive rights to handle shipping to a particular world, system or small group of systems. The most valuable (and expensive) of these govern operation over long-established and highly profitable routes between primary worlds, and it is not uncommon for several competing consortia to operate simultaneously on the busiest routes.



Under escort, a rogue trader approaches a Tau outpost

Trade Routes, and their attendant fees, while effective for hundreds of years in some cases, can be wildly exorbitant and firmly out of reach for many smaller operators. Some of these are fortunate enough to acquire less profitable licenses to operate between the more sparsely populated secondary worlds of the many thousands of sub-sectors scattered throughout the stellar main. Still other small corporations, mercantile families and individual Free Traders operate under charter but without a route licence at all, forced to eke out a livelihood operating one or, at most, a very small number of vessels carrying whatever cargo they can, heading to dangerous or remote locations in the hope of generating enough income to recover the heady expenses of operating interstellar craft. If that were not enough, merchantmen could at any time find their ship and its cargo conscripted by an Imperial Navy task force needing logistic support, an Inquisitor or other such notable individual requiring transport, a passing inconvenience considering they may just as easily blunder into a rampaging pack of Ork pirates, Eldar corsairs or the foul minions of Chaos, never to be seen again, suffering fates far more terrible than the grim comfort of mere death.

Many merchant captains never veer far from their established transport routes plied over generations, reluctant to take on assignments that entail great risk for dubious reward. Such masters elect to remain where profits may be slim, but the course is well travelled and at least as relatively free of danger as can be expected from the stellar void. There are some, however, who after a time reject this meagre existence, choosing instead to embark on grand quests through wilderness space to seek out new worlds ripe for colonisation, to boldly go where no man has gone before. While many of these intrepid adventurers are never heard from again, the annals of the Imperium's long history is replete with stories of merchant captains and their crews coming across worlds teeming with indescribable riches beyond compare, lush prairie worlds suitable for agricultural harvest, or worlds inhabited by Man lost to the Imperium for millennia, ripe for re-indoctrination into the Imperial Creed as a ready workforce of willing servants of the Emperor. Still others bring back tales of encounters with alien races and strange new technology, rare and precious artefacts presented to the Adeptus Mechanicus for bountiful reward. These brave souls with the courage and wherewithal to undertake such adventures and live to tell the tale are known as Rogue Traders.

ROGUE TRADERS

To limit the moral pollution caused by contact with alien and non-Imperial cultures in millennia past, the Adeptus Terra outlawed trade and dealings beyond the Imperium. Only those individuals with Warrants of Trade or similar documents are allowed to explore planets not yet under

Imperial control, encounter alien civilisations and regressed human societies, and claim barren worlds rich in minerals or other resources. Such men are the Rogue Traders. Operating beyond Imperial control, they are a law unto themselves. Some are highly pious individuals, bringing the Emperor's light beyond his rule; others are nothing more than glorified pirates and scoundrels. Not all who claim to be Rogue Traders actually are, while many Warrants of Trade are centuries old – handed down through family generations, exchanged in gambling dens, stolen from their rightful owners or have otherwise fallen into the hands of those who might abuse the power they bestow.

Rogue Traders exude confidence, they are highly charismatic, often charming and roguish, skilled diplomats (some would say confidence tricksters) and hardened killers when the situation demands.

Rogue Trader Fleets

Rogue Traders travel by a variety of means – as passengers aboard military vessels or as the guests of distant, non-Imperial cultures, but most of all they enjoy the freedom to travel of their own free will. Rogue Traders must journey vast distances, and hence are granted their right to maintain their own vessels, and on occasion entire fleets. As befits their maverick nature, the Rogue Traders employ an incredible variety of vessels. Rights of Requisition allow many Rogue Traders to acquire Imperial Navy vessels, while others use their vast wealth and power, or other dubious means, to acquire vessels from a variety of sources – custom-built vessels, refitted merchant ships, captured vessels or even craft acquired from non-Imperial worlds. Rogue Trader vessels are unique, exotic things, often exhibiting many signs of their colourful histories, subject to constant adornment, much of it ancient, or even alien in origin.

Though their business is their own, from time to time a Rogue Trader may be accompanied by, or even granted command of, an entire fleet at the behest of the Priesthood. Likewise, though a Rogue Trader himself maintains no army, he may well be granted Imperial Guard, or even Space Marine forces, if it is felt that his mission warrants it. On such occasions the Rogue Trader will turn his business to battle, leading the armies of the Emperor to worlds unknown, bringing war to the enemies of Mankind, even beyond the reach of the Imperium itself. Few Rogue Traders do so altruistically, however, for even in war and death a canny Rogue Trader will find profit and prize.



A rogue trader comes under attack from an Ork raiding fleet.

USING ROGUE TRADER VESSELS

Any fleet, except Necrons or Tyranids, may include a single Rogue Trader cruiser (and accompanying escort squadron, as described later) in their fleet. Tau and Imperial fleets (NOT Space Marines) may include up to one Rogue Trader cruiser for 1,500 points or part of their fleet.

Each Rogue Trader cruiser may also be accompanied by a single squadron of 2-6 escorts, chosen from the vessels in this article. A Rogue Trader may also be accompanied by any number of squadrons of armed cargo ships, but only one of its attendant escort squadrons may include the other vessels described below (ie, xenos, recommissioned and auxiliary vessels).

Sub-Plots

Rogue Traders are far from altruistic. Their presence in a fleet indicates that they have something to gain by forming a temporary alliance. Whether their own goals actually benefit their erstwhile comrades any is open to debate. If you use a Rogue Trader vessel in your fleet then you **MUST** use a sub-plot for the game. The sub-plot can be imagined as representing the Rogue Trader's own vested interest. Because of this, if you fail the sub-plot, the opposing player receives Victory Points as though the Rogue Trader's cruiser (but not any escorts) had been crippled. If the Rogue Trader cruiser actually was crippled as well the opponent receives Victory Points as though the vessel was destroyed.

If the Rogue Trader vessel disengages and you complete the sub-plot the enemy receives no Victory Points for the Rogue Trader cruiser (regardless of its condition), but if the cruiser disengages and you fail the sub-plot, the enemy receives Victory Points as though the vessel had been destroyed.

The Best Money Can Buy

Rogue Trader cruisers commonly bear refits of uncertain origin. Even the vessel's crew are unlikely to be anything

as straightforward as regular sailors, since Rogue Traders have a knack for acquiring crowds of followers and hangers-on. To represent this, each Rogue Trader vessel has one xenotech system and one crew skill (both rolled randomly).

XENOTECH SYSTEMS

Roll a dice.

D6 Result

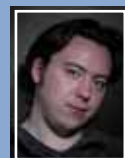
1. **Long Range Sensors.** This doubles the Leadership test bonus for enemy contacts (ie, enemy on special orders) from +1 to +2.
2. **Targetting Matrix.** The vessel counts all targets as closing when using the Gunnery table, and may re-roll a single missed shot each turn when shooting with lances.
3. **Advanced Shielding.** The vessel increases its number of shields by +1.
4. **Ship Defence Grid.** The vessel increases its number of turrets by +1.
5. **Advanced Drive Technology.** The vessel adds +5cm to its speed.
6. **Pick one of the above.**

As well as the ship classes described in Battlefleet Gothic: Armada, some Space Marine fleets may make use of the following vessels.

Authors

Just to scare you a little bit more, here is another picture of Matt Keefe.

Nate Montes is also pictured. Nate can be found hanging out at the excellent BFG Yaboo group.



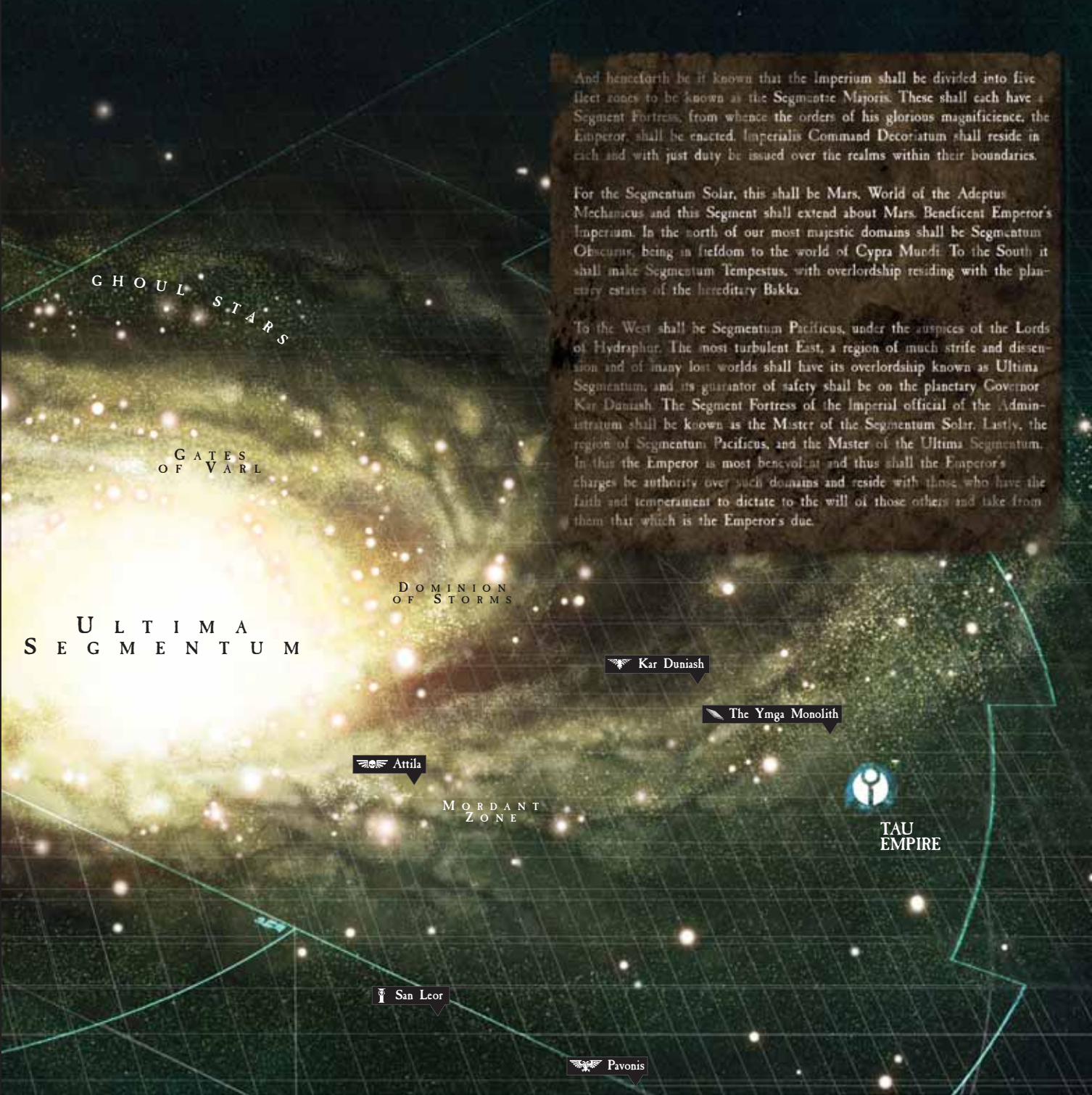
Further Information

More BFG

Websites

See the How to order section for information on purchasing the Rogue Trader ships.

Turn to page 80 for Privateer
www.BattlefleetGothic.com



And henceforth be it known that the Imperium shall be divided into five fleet zones to be known as the Segmentae Majoris. These shall each have a Segment Fortress, from whence the orders of his glorious magnificence, the Emperor, shall be enacted. Imperialis Command Decoratum shall reside in each and with just duty be issued over the realms within their boundaries.

For the Segmentum Solar, this shall be Mars, World of the Adeptus Mechanicus and this Segment shall extend about Mars. Beneficent Emperor's Imperium. In the north of our most majestic domains shall be Segmentum Obscurus, being in fiefdom to the world of Cypra Mundi. To the South it shall make Segmentum Tempestus, with overlordship residing with the planetary estates of the hereditary Bakka.

To the West shall be Segmentum Pacificus, under the auspices of the Lords of Hydraphor. The most turbulent East, a region of much strife and dissension and of many lost worlds shall have its overlordship known as Ultima Segmentum, and its guarantor of safety shall be on the planetary Governor Kar Duniash. The Segment Fortress of the Imperial official of the Administratum shall be known as the Master of the Segmentum Solar. Lastly, the region of Segmentum Pacificus, and the Master of the Ultima Segmentum. In this the Emperor is most benevolent and thus shall the Emperor's charges be authority over such domains and reside with those who have the faith and temperament to dictate to the will of those others and take from them that which is the Emperor's due.

KAR DUNIASH: TRADER'S HAVEN

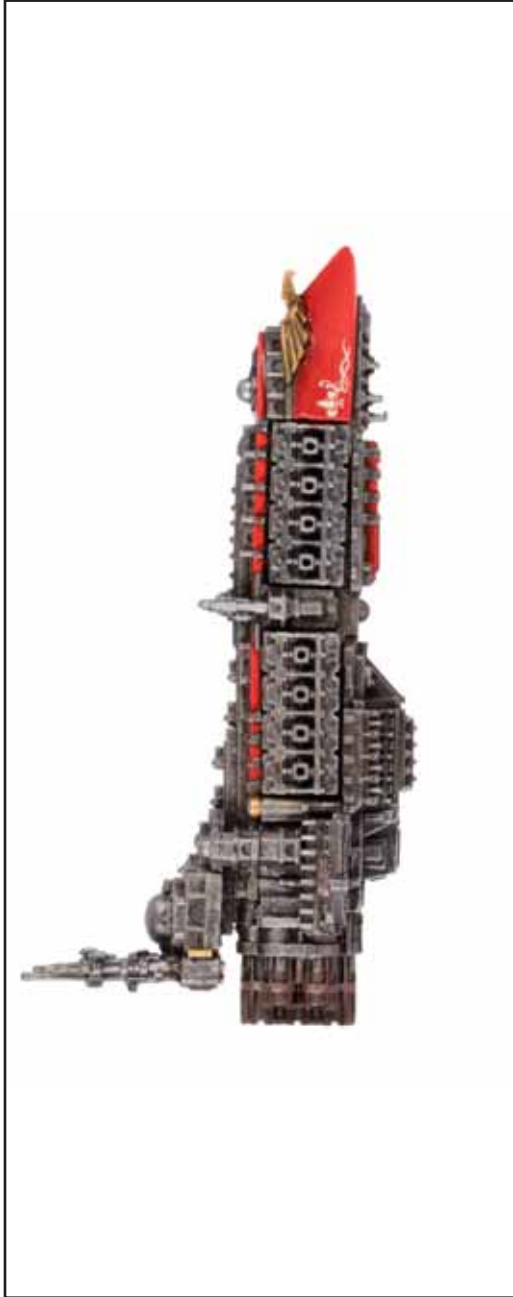
As the Segmentum Fortress for the Ultima Segmentum, Kar Duniash is the departure point for countless voyages to the Eastern Fringe. Accordingly, it is also the return location of many traders once their business in the Fringe is complete, and as such is something of a welcome haven to exhausted traders who may well have been beyond Imperium-controlled space for many years.

The Eastern Fringe is an understandably popular location for Rogue Traders in particular, and many being their journeys from Kar Duniash. A thriving and populous world, Duniash is also the source of many of the provisions Rogue Traders require when

undertaking lengthy voyages, and its shipyards provide a great number of vessels to the Rogue Traders.

Kar Duniash Pattern Cruisers

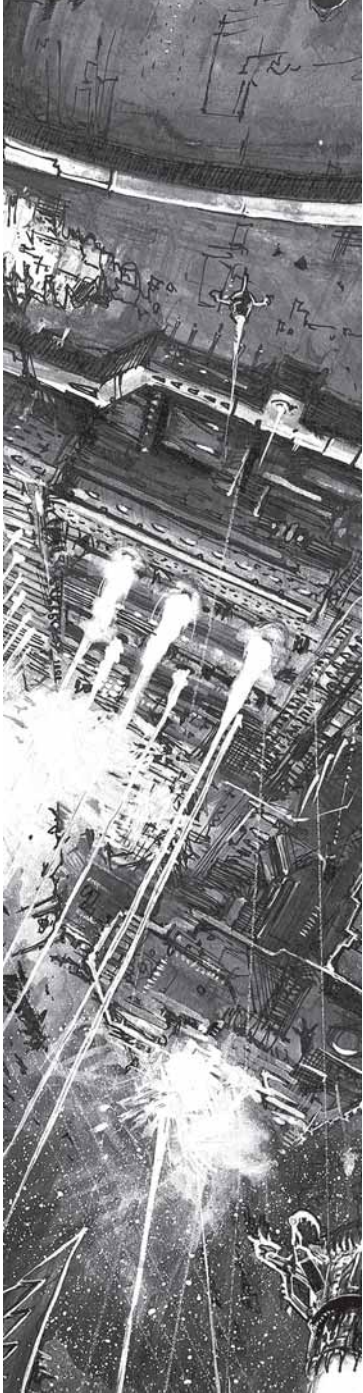
The Rogue Trader model available from Games Workshop is based upon a Kar Duniash pattern cruiser, meaning the model is rather versatile and can be used to represent any class of Imperial Navy cruiser. Our painted example has been equipped to represent a Rogue Trader cruiser, but by replacing the weapons with the appropriate combinations of Imperial broadside batteries it's possible to create a Gothic class, Lunar class, Tyrant class or whatever.



Imperial cruisers are vast constructions, most of them centuries or even millenia old. Those few which are constructed anew are often the result of years of toil by the population of an entire world – gigantic shipyards which might produce just a single vessel every few decades. Such gargantuan efforts are beyond the ken of even Rogue Traders, and so few possess a vessel of their own design or making (although a few particularly brilliant individuals may, on occasion, rise to the point where they control an entire world and hence turn that world to building a vessel in their name). Rather, most Rogue Traders rely on vessels built (and often owned) by others. Many cruisers are in fact part of the warrant of trade itself, an undeniably powerful aid gifted to the Rogue Trader by the Administratum as a gift to their agent abroad. Other vessels are loaned to Rogue Traders more temporarily, perhaps being themselves Navy vessels given over to a Rogue Trader for a time where Imperial command thinks it beneficial. Under such circumstances, a Rogue Trader may even be called upon to lead an expeditionary force with a full attendant fleet, perhaps numbering several dozen vessels. On such missions a Rogue Trader's authority is all, beyond the bounds of the Imperium where any could bring censure to them and in places so alien, so unknown that their uncanny leadership must be followed to the letter if any of their number hope to survive.

Rogue Trader vessels are unique, exotic things, often exhibiting many signs of their colourful adventures. Although typically based around the hulls of the more common Imperial cruiser classes, Rogue Trader vessels are subject to constant refit and adornment, much of it alien in origin, creating truly unique vessels. The business of a Rogue Trader can take him all over the galaxy and, while his vessel's class may be common in its sector of origin, it may be virtually unknown in the regions to which he travels, meaning even a relatively standard cruiser may stand well apart from its Imperial Navy counterparts. Drawing such flamboyant attention to one's self is something most Rogue Traders hardly seek to avoid.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Cruiser/8	20cm	45°	2	5+	2
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		
Prow Weapons Battery		30cm	4		Front
Port Weapons Battery		30cm	4		Right
Port Weapons Battery		45cm	4		Right
Starboard Weapons Battery		30cm	4		Left
Starboard Weapons Battery		45cm	4		Left





Contact with alien races is without doubt the habit for which Rogue Traders gain most notoriety. Their trading missions necessarily take them to regions of space beyond Imperial control, regions where there is every chance of finding thriving alien cultures, even alien empires. Rogue Traders can gain much of value and interest from these races, and are certainly not above employing them as mercenaries when the situation demands.

Far from home, where the protection of the Imperial Navy is but a hopeless dream, many Rogue Traders instead hire out alien vessels and their crews for protection. These vessels often provide much needed local knowledge, as well as the ability to overcome cultural or linguistic barriers along with a healthy dose of firepower where required. Particularly bold Rogue Traders will, from time to time, journey back to Imperial space with their alien employees still in tow, perhaps keen to make continued use of the exotic weaponry which their vessels provide. Rogue Traders typically favour vessels which make use of alien energy technology, since the huge power supplies and impossibly difficult upkeep needed for the Imperium's own laser and lance weaponry generally makes them unusable by Rogue Traders, isolated, as they often are, for years at a time, far from Imperial docks.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	25cm	45°	1	5+	1
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		
Weapons Battery*		30cm	2		Left/front/right
Lance Battery*		30cm	1		Front

Special Rules: The profile above represents a whole variety of alien vessels which might be found in a Rogue Trader's personal escort. Since Rogue Traders tend to choose vessels for certain specific purpose, many of the xenos vessels employed as mercenaries will be very similar, though never entirely identical. For this reason, a single ship profile is used, but to better represent the variety of vessels encountered in the 41st millennium, each xenos vessel also has one randomly chose xenotech system, as in the Rogue Trader special rules. This is included with the vessel at no additional cost.

Representing Xenos Vessels

There are any number of alien races spread across the galaxy, some of them virtually unknown to the Imperium, others frequent raiders whose names have come to be cursed by sailors the galaxy over. This incredible variation means that you can represent xenos vessels in pretty much any way you want. Xenos vessels provide an ideal opportunity to convert or scratchbuild vessels to your own taste. With each new vessel you build, you should make a name for the alien race, and perhaps a little bit of your own background. In casual games, you might even like to agree with your opponent that you can choose which xenotech system the ship possesses to allow you to represent it more accurately on the model and write some background explaining why the race in question possess the particular advancements that they do.



Rogue Traders necessarily make use of a wide range of freighters and other cargo ships to transport their wares back to Imperial space. Such is the danger which Rogue Traders face on their journeys into wilderness space, or even beyond the Imperium's borders, that they will commonly upgun their cargo ships where capacity permits. Such alterations are rarely permanent, and Rogue Traders will often abandon some of their escort's weaponry to make space for more lucrative cargoes as and when they chance upon it, but where a Rogue Trader's business calls for him to actively engage in combat, armed cargo ships are likely to be a common feature of his personal escort.

An incredible variety of different vessels are used as armed cargo ships, but such is the limited space, power supply and support systems of the vessel that no matter what their original design most are likely to bear the same simple arrangement of weaponry, turrets and shields. In fact, the crew of an armed cargo ship are likely to be the same merchant sailors responsible for its operation even when unarmed, and so the weapons with which the vessel can be equipped are limited to those which the crew can hastily be trained to use.

Representing Armed Cargo Vessels

Armed cargo vessels represent a variety of specialised merchant transports with upgraded engines and modified armament. You should feel free to use any freighter or clipper type ship with a few additional guns stuck on it to represent armed cargo ships.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	25cm	45°	1	5+	1
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		FIRE-ARC
Weapons Battery		30cm	1		Left/front/right

Notes: An armed cargo ship reduces its cargo capacity to carry bigger guns and reactors. It therefore counts as only half a freighter in scenarios that involve them. Round fractions down at the end of the game. Therefore, if only one armed cargo ship and nothing else escapes a Convoy scenario, you lose.

In scenarios involving transports, armed cargo ships earn 1 Assault Point for each turn it spends within 30cm of the planet edge.





Rogue Traders being the opportunistic individuals they invariably are, it is not uncommon for them to 'acquire' old Navy vessels which have either been de-commissioned or relegated to a segmentum's reserve fleets. Such vessels are typically in rather poor condition, though it is well within most Rogue Traders' means to refit a vessel (sometimes using systems and technology quite unlike the vessel's original components) and restore it to service.

Recommissioned vessels are especially useful to Rogue Traders since they often provide access to torpedo tubes (a weapon system rarely found on other vessels available to a Rogue Trader). An experienced crew is needed to man a true warship such as this, and so to utilise a recommissioned vessel a Rogue Trader will find it necessary to hire mercenaries, retired sailors or even deserters and mutineers.

TYPE/HITS	SPEED	TURNS	SHIELDS	ARMOUR	TURRETS
Escort/1	30cm	90°	1	5+	1
ARMAMENT		RANGE/SPEED	FIREPOWER/STR		
Weapons Battery		30cm	2		Left/front/right
Prow Torpedoes		30cm	2		Front



Rogue Traders will commonly ask for the use of a fleet's vessels as part payment for their services, and on occasion may even retain the vessels permanently. Most admirals are more than happy to have a ship or two of their own acting in concert with any Rogue Traders in their employ, not least because they are likely to trust their own escort crews rather more than they trust the Rogue Traders.

Notes: Up to half the escorts in the Rogue Trader escort squadron may be vessels picked from the Escort section of your own fleet list, at the normal cost. So, if you include a Rogue Trader cruiser in an Gothic Sector Imperial Navy fleet, up to half the Rogue Trader escorts (up to 3, basically) can be chosen from the same Gothic Sector Imperial Navy fleet list, at the normal points cost.