

LORD RHAMIREZ'S MASTERCLASS

Fleet Tactics

by Liam (who never sent us his second name!)

Welcome back to Masterclass all you budding admirals and ship captains out there. OK, so John Lambshead did a similar tactics article not long ago, but I think some of the tactics that he gave us are good in principle, but a little rigid. The tactics I prefer are those which make for fluid moves and dramatic encounters – not rigid lines of ships moving on a steady heading. I've tried to put down tried and tested tricks and hints, which have worked well for me. Hopefully they'll work for you as well.



"Greetings, recruits. I am Lord Admiral Rhamirez, commander of Battlegroup Retributor. You may have heard tales about my... unorthodox methods. But then, you have probably also heard stories of my success. You've already met Lord Rethmon and heard his opinions upon the tactics utilised by the sector Battlefleet. I will state now that I do not agree with them. This lecture will concern the manoeuvres which I have developed in real combat situations. Some have called me a dangerous free thinker, but my record speaks louder than any critic!"

Assembling the Fleet

'Contrary to what you may have been told, a fleet will do well no matter who is in command, provided its component vessels are the right ones for the job.'

Here is a common enough mistake amongst fleet admirals – taking a fleet with the minimum number of cheap cruisers he can, taking a small number of escorts to fill a few spare points, and then depend upon the biggest battleship he can get his hands on. (NB Chaos players have been really going to town with this 'strategy', since the Planet Killer was released.) Then the player using this horror wonders how he lost. He thinks: I've got this awesome battleship, loads of guns, and I totally smashed what I shot – so what happened?

What would Rhamirez say about this? Probably something along the lines of:

'It is vital to have a balance of power and speed, combined with strength of numbers.'

Fairly obvious I think you'll agree, but it still surprises me that so many players are making this mistake.

Also remember who you'll be fighting – against Eldar, go for massed batteries rather than lances or torpedoes, and max out on the carriers. Against Orks, nova cannons (if you can hit with them) might be a good idea. Against Chaos, anything goes... up to a point.

OK, I'm going to go through each section of the fleet list, and tell you my method of selecting a fleet. Oh, and if anyone's wondering, I personally use a fleet of 1,000 –1,500 points in my games, depending upon my opponent, so you will need to adapt these pointers if you play with 3000 points a side!

Escorts - Fast and Deadly

'The smaller the ship, the easier it is ignored – Escorts are the bane of every commander who does so.'

I use as many escorts as I can – particularly Cobras. All escorts can be quite useful, even against larger foes, if used in medium or larger sized squadrons and in the right way. Cobras are, quite frankly, the best escort class available to you – fast and very deadly indeed. I use squadrons of four: bunched together and launching torpedo salvos off as often as possible. The Firestorm is also good in force – use them with a Dauntless and you've got enough lances to rip through just about anything. The Swords I favour less, but used in support of larger vessels, they can still earn some respect. Plus, Firepower 4 batteries for 35 points can't be all that bad, especially against Eldar whose holofields make the other escorts' weapons look like a bad joke!

Never ever forget – escorts die like mayflies – especially if they go off alone. Escorts should keep together, and stay out of trouble.

Cruisers - Workhorses of the Fleet

'The noble cruiser, the most versatile vessel a commander will ever attain.'

I never go into battle without plenty of cruisers. At bare minimum, half of your fleet's points value should comprise of cruisers.

The next thing to think about is 'which one?' There are eight different classes of cruiser, battlecruiser and light cruiser open to you – each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Everyone has his or her own likes and dislikes so just choose whichever ships you love the most. So what if they're not the most powerful you can have? Mind you, for defensive purposes it's always worth getting one ship with launch bays. Leave them at the orbital

docks and you'll see what I mean. Those who like the idea of having their fleets ripped apart by assault boats can feel free to ignore this warning.

My own fleet has my two clear favourites – the Lunar class and the Dominator class, but I also have a Dauntless, a Mars and a Dictator. This way, I've got some attack craft, plenty of gun batteries and a good few torpedoes and lances. As a bonus, these also happen to be the models that I like the most.

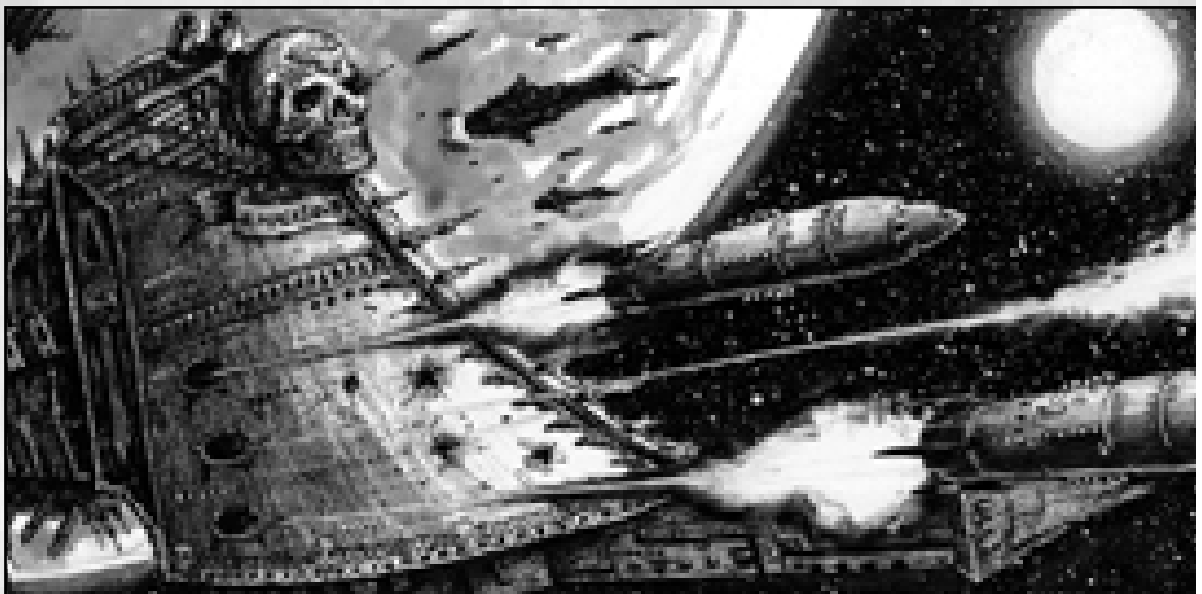
There is one cruiser in particular that's worth a special mention – the Gothic class. These are 'fleet support ships', surely – designed to back up other ships? Four lances per flank is fine, but on average only 50% of those will hit – that's only two points of damage, which a cruiser sized vessel will shrug off with its shields. If you take a Gothic class, think carefully about its role within the fleet. I would attach it to another ship as direct support.

Battleships – Hand of the Emperor

'The battleships are the naval equivalent to the artillery gun – slow and cumbersome, but with terrible firepower.'

In my opinion these really aren't as good as everyone seems to think. They're too expensive to be worthwhile in small fleets, and in larger fleets they'll probably end up in flames with a flotilla of enemy vessels at their tail. Having said that, I have found them useful on occasion. I mean, all those guns! Just think what damage you can do to the scum you're fighting... ahem!

Do not use a battleship just because you like the model – I would recommend them only for



larger fleets, ie no smaller than 1,500 points, and ideally 2000 points plus. If you do use them, do it properly and get at least two escorts for them. If you can, two squadrons might be a good idea – one deployed ahead, one behind.

I own a Retribution class, but it's only ever seen about a dozen outings. It's done OK in the engagements it's been deployed in, yet it still doesn't quite live up to the hype about battleships. Cool model though, and all those guns...

Thinking Tactically

'If you want to win, you need to use the right tactics. Any questions?'

(Now tell us something we don't know!)

'What, exactly, are the right tactics? Of course, that comes down to who is in command!'

All right. This bit is really simple and patronising, but it has to be said. There's no point in watching your friend play and then just copying his style. More than likely (unless you're clones or something) his favoured tactics will just not 'feel' comfortable. It's difficult to explain, but all I can say is that you must play the way you want to play. And, of course, gut feeling is always a winner (provided it's not just wind you're feeling!).

Tactical Advice for Novices

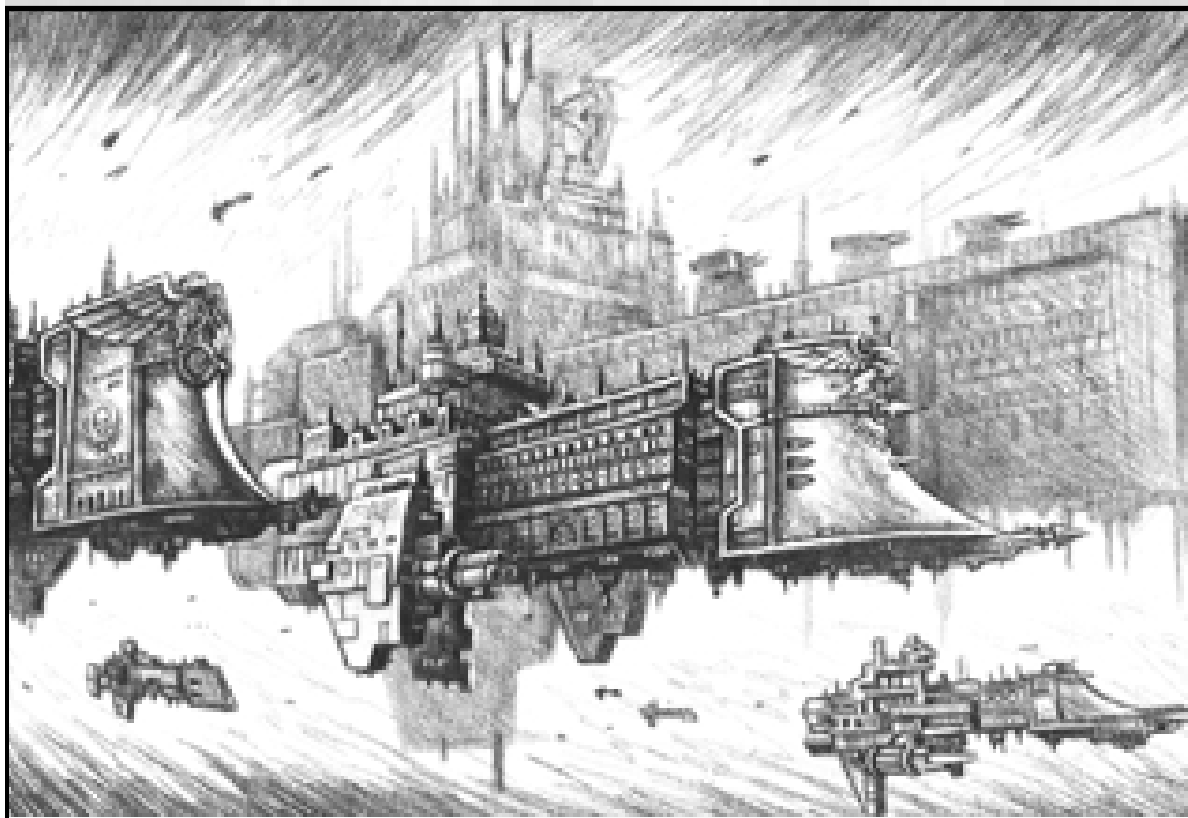
'Your first voyage into the stars should be considered an extension of your study – the subject being your own mind.'

Basically, if you're new to BattleFleet Gothic, how do you know your style of play? Easy – try a few different ideas and tactics, then see which you liked the most (as an aside, some experienced players might also benefit from this). After a few games, you should begin to build up a picture of what are the best tactics you can use.

Scatter Technique

'Put your faith in your prow to protect you from harm, and dive deep into the enemy line in force, firing both broadsides at the closest enemy vessels. Torpedoes will break up formation as you advance, and a Sheer turn will bring you about once your attack run is over. Take care that the return fire is significantly less than your own. Remember, fortune favours the bold!'

A single (suicidal) vessel could try this on its own -- no-one will ever be prepared for that and maybe the surprise will give you the edge you need. Clump your ships fairly close together to get the most out of massed fire.



If you can break up the enemy formation in this way, you'll find it considerably easier to get in close without your prized vessels having new 'ventilation ducts' installed in their hulls.

Line Formation

'This is difficult to sustain, and often you will find yourself in difficult situations as a result. However, the line does give every ship mutual support; most useful against the Eldar Corsairs where the small loss of manoeuvrability is outweighed by the weight of fire which can be brought to bear. Alas, beware of torpedo strikes which move down your line!'

Tricky, that last bit. Having all that massed firepower is very good against Eldar, but having ships so close together makes them easy pickings for torpedoes. Not a tactic I'd recommend against anyone, despite what John Lambshead said in his Masterclass.

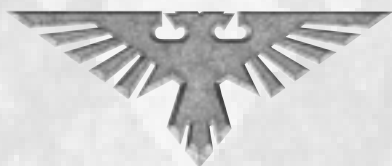
Mind you, I reckon that if you're playing with 3000 points a side, you could use two, mutually supporting lines of vessels – after all, you've got the numbers. I have to admit I've not tried this, so beware.

Torpedo Run

'Successive waves of torpedoes can decimate a fleet, leaving the survivors scattered and surrounded. The downfall of many commanders has been failure to reload ordnance after a strike – a mistake for which you will pay dearly.'

An idea I had given to me recently: – 'this is really good in some ways - just cruise up as close as you can (ignore incoming fire - that's what armour 6 prows are for) and let off all your torpedoes as soon as you get within 30cm. The damage that doesn't slow'em down, then you can reload and manoeuvre for another try.' Oh yes, very good – that is until half your torps miss, half of those that attack are shot down and the enemy fleet starts firing at you...

To be fair though, this tactic is actually pretty good if your opponent goes for the 'Pack Hunters' strategy (see opposite) or if you can catch the end of a line formation. But, as the Admiral points out, fail to reload your torps, and you're asking for a pasting. Oh and don't bother against Eldar – don't ask why, just don't.



Pack Hunters

'Allocate the ships under your command to a specific role, such as pursuit and hunting, and allow them enough autonomy to fulfil these tasks. The enemy commander will be forced to split his attentions between each group, or risk being surrounded. However, if the enemy can bring force of arms to bear on each group in turn, destruction is a much more tangible risk'

Lots of small groups of ships can be a good idea – I use three Firestorms and a Dauntless. Their matching speeds and manoeuvrability mean they can operate together to hunt down enemy cruisers with their prow lances (Strength 6 all told - ouch). And of course this way of thinking requires little effort – you haven't got a formation as such to stick to.

A word of warning here! Put your carriers together like this and you can come unstuck, as the attack craft won't be ideally placed to deal with everything the enemy throws up – they'll all be in one place, not the most flexible of situations. And, as Rhamirez says, if too many enemy vessels catch a group on it's own, it's curtains.

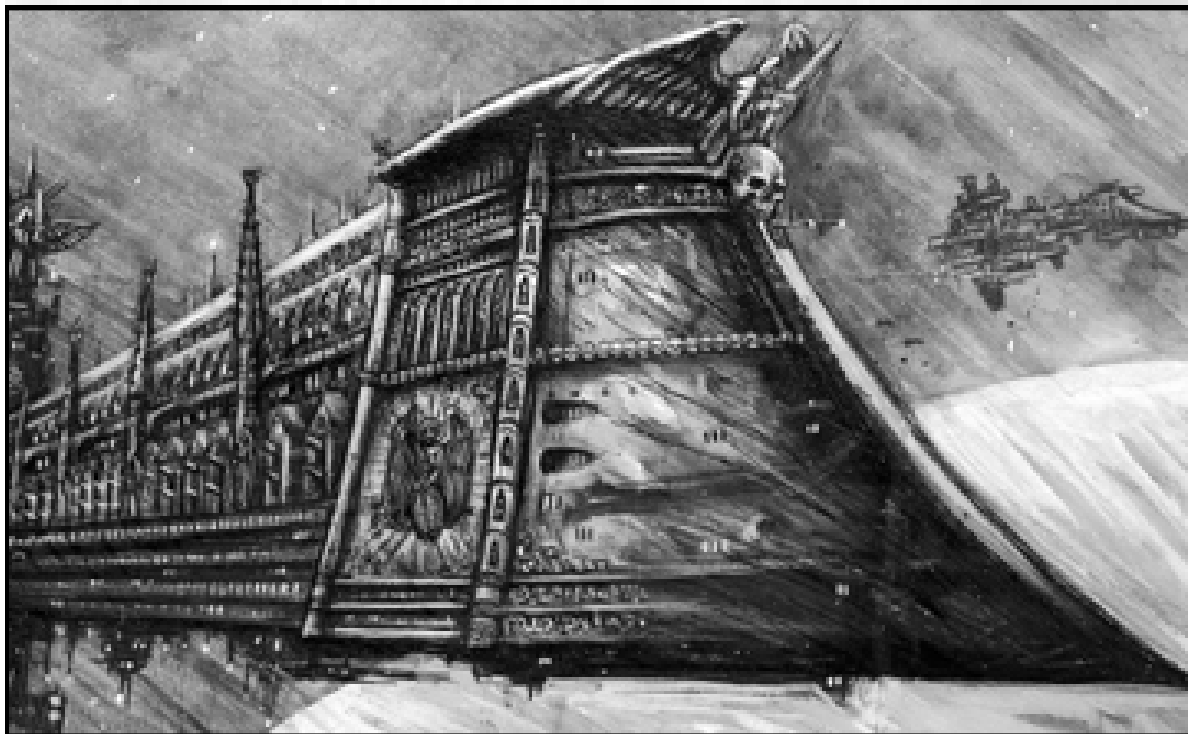
Engines of Destruction

'How to use your weapons to the best of their capabilities will always be the thought at the front of any commander's mind. There is no set answer, it is simply something you must learn for yourself.'

Okay, to summarize Lord Rethmon's Masterclass, he says torpedoes aren't all that spectacular, and that carriers are the best thing since the invention of warp drives. Well, I come from a different school of thought.

Torpedoes are great, provided they are used correctly. Get in close before you launch, ideally within 30cm so your torps will hit before your opponent can get away. If you can, get two or three ships (the more the merrier really) to go for it at once. In a best case scenario, you'd also have a few waves of bombers to attack first to overwhelm his turrets.

Carriers have their place, but with an Imperial fleet they're best used to give you fighter cover for defence rather than offensive hitting power. Of course, it is a valid tactic to take three or more carriers and let fly with waves of bombers, but you need aerial protection from the hordes of Traitor assault boats (which all Chaos carriers have!) and Eldar bombers (more annoying than a swarm of gnats, and infinitely more destructive).



On Ramming

How many of you Imperial commanders think of ramming as a Chaos or Ork trick? Most, probably. I agree with you. Ramming is great fun every now and again, and I enjoy the odd 'RAMMING SPEED!' bellowed at the top of my voice. But don't ever think it'll win you battles. The thing about ramming is that it's horribly destructive to the enemy, but tends to rip a gaping hole in the side of the attacking ship. Plus, a canny opponent will *Brace*, making your head-on collision more damaging to you than your opponent. A ram is best used by a crippled vessel, facing overwhelming odds, as a final show of defiance and to take with it as many enemy as it can!

Oh, and I think the rulebook should state the following: "When preparing to ram, you must declare your intentions by shouting 'All ahead full! ramming speed!' or 'Perhaps it is a good day to die...' just before rolling for the Command check."

Formation Break

'Unlike Admiral Rethmon, I, amongst many others, believe that formation is mere theory. Breaking formation should be done whenever the situation warrants it. Staying on a head-on course for a more powerful or numerous foe merely to maintain formation makes little sense.'

All I want to say is don't let your formation restrain you. If you want, need, or simply feel like breaking up your carefully planned

arrowhead, do it. Go on, just do it. After all this isn't the Olympics, and you won't win any victory points for artistic interpretation.

Also break if the celestial phenomena around you make it advantageous to do so. That is, if there is a handy planet (*probably a medium sized, blue-green planet orbiting a disregarded yellow sun somewhere in the western spiral arm of the galaxy!*) off to starboard and you want to make a nice sharp turn to lose your pursuers, go for it!

Having said that, it's really obvious to me that no-one in their right mind wouldn't break in these circumstances. But there we go.

Final Shots

'In final, I would like to remind you that in order to win a naval engagement, it is not necessary to destroy the most ships, but out-fight the opponent on every level. You must out-gun, out-manoeuver, out-run and out-think your opponent. Don't ever forget that. Class dismissed.'

Well that's that, a few snippets of my tactical knowledge put down on paper. Hopefully, you will find some of it useful. Anyway I'm off, time to take Battlegroup Retributor out of dock and into war. Ho hum! Another twenty-four month tour of duty with no leave, here I come...

