

Selvache Reconnaissance

A Battle Report for the Starship Troopers Miniatures Game

IAN BARSTOW &
CHRIS ALLEN



The protagonists pose with their models of choice.

This month's battle report sees a 2,000 point engagement between Ian Barstow's Mobile Infantry and Chris 'the Mekon' Allen's Arachnid horde, as they struggle for dominance on the beachhead of Selvache III, third moon in the Selvache system and destined soon to be a celebrated battle planet.

Following on from Matthew's introductory game against Ted in S&P 23 we thought you might like to see what a bigger game looks like, with multiple troop types and units. With that in mind, we introduce you to Blackie's Blackguards, Ian Barstow's Mobile Infantry company who will do battle against the dreaded bug menace, fronted this time by Mongoose's own resident alien, Chris 'the Mekon' Allen. Over to Ian...

IAN: When Matthew told me he wanted me to feature in this month's battle report I knew right away this was a great opportunity to introduce the world to my own beloved MI company, Blackie's Blackguards. Anybody familiar with the original book will know that the

'Boots and braces, people, let's make this happen!' The commanding voice belonged to Sergeant Weintraub, senior NCO of Blackie's Blackguards, and the man in command of the Blackguards' spearhead platoon.

A few grunts of disgust mixed with the sound of hydraulics powering up betrayed how ready Weintraub's platoon was for action. The fact that to a man Weintraub was universally detested didn't stop the Mobile infantry cap troopers from gearing up for action. There was a settlement within two miles of their bivouac and Captain Blackstone wanted his advance guard there ahead of the bugs.

Sergeant Thornton, in command of the Marauder squad buzzed Weintraub on his comm link. 'Powered up and ready to go, Rube,' he barked, bouncing across the small camp as he spoke.

Weintraub thought about castigating his fellow NCO for such casual radio chatter, but it was on the command channel so he let it slide. It didn't make Thornton any better a squad leader, he thought to himself. Still, it was nice to have Thornton and his Marauders along. Rumour had it that the whole company was being earmarked as a Marauder outfit, but those sort of stories were as common as Zegema Beach rotation tales, and happened about as often.

Weintraub's thoughts were broken up by the urgent static coming in on the general platoon channel. 'Bugs in the ville, sarge! Heaps of 'em!'

'Dammit!' Weintraub muttered, half to himself and half to this backwards moon that he found himself on. Now he'd have to take the settlement off the bugs or else blot an otherwise perfect copybook, and that would never do.

'What's the plan, Rube?' questioned Thornton on the command channel.

'We settle down here and let them come to us,' replied Weintraub. 'Deploy in front of the ammo dumps and get ready for action. He thumbed at the M-908 Plasma Munition he always carried, taking comfort from it's raw power.

'Multiple tunnels incoming!' advised Thornton. 'Light 'em if you got 'em!'

Blackguards feature in the story, and as Studio manager I thought it seemed fair to take what I like to think of as an 'historical' unit and put it on the table.

In the classic tradition the Blackguards will become an all Marauder company, barring a few novelty support items just for variety. But that is for the future. Right now, I am fielding a 2,000-point mixed force.

The table was to be the standard 6' by 4' and the Mekon was sent to set up the terrain while I did some proper work. Selvache III is a nasty, barren little moon with few inhabitants so once more my desert terrain was brought into play. I was hoping it would bring me luck. As we were playing 2,000 points I took the opportunity to field two separate platoons (you can field one platoon per 1,000 points in your force). For the first selection I chose a standard M-1A4 Power

BLACKIE'S BLACKGUARDS

M1-A4 NCO, trench sweeper, M-908P Plasma Munition, *Heroic Surge* trait

M-1A4 Squad, 1 x Sgt., 4 x troopers, two Triple Thuds

M-1A4 Squad, 1 x Sgt., 4 x troopers, one Triple Thud, one Javelin missile launcher
M9 NCO, Blizzard Pack, Inferno Flamer, *Stay Frosty* trait

Marauder Squad, 1 x M8 Sgt., 2 x M8 troopers, 1 x M9 trooper with Blizzard Pack, Twin .50s and Utility Claws

2 x Ammo Dumps



Suit platoon, based around an NCO and two five-man squads.

For the NCO, Sergeant Weintraub, I chose the *Heroic Surge* trait, along with a Trench Sweeper laser upgrade to his Morita and a M-908P Plasma Munition. I had a cunning plan for Sgt. Weintraub and his plasma. The two squads were pretty much identical, with one squad having a Triple Thud and a Javelin missile launcher and the other with two Triple Thuds. I'm a big fan of the Triple Thud but I wanted to try out a Javelin as well. The long range means that at least one of my troopers can fire in the first turn even if the bugs are well away.

The other platoon is my dry run design for the final look of the Blackguards. Another NCO, Sgt. Thornton, upgraded to an M9 Chickenhawk, commands the platoon, which consists of a single squad containing three M8 Ape suits plus another Chickenhawk. The M8 suits have a standard fitting, and for the squad M9 I chose the SW-490 Blizzard missile pack and MW-5050 Twin .50 Autocannon/Utility Claws combo. Although a one-shot weapon, the Blizzard packs a great first round punch and is worth taking in order to start as you mean to go on. The autocannon and claws make for a great support suit that can hand out some serious damage when the going gets tough. For Thornton's M9 suit, I had no intention of letting him get into any hand-to-hand fighting so went for a Blizzard pack plus the vicious Inferno Support Flamer. Just to make sure I got value from all 12" of its range I picked the *Stay*

Frosty heroic trait, allowing Thornton a reaction range of 12" rather than the usual 10". I thought this would also provide a nasty surprise to the Mekon the first time it got used!

To round things off I chose a pair of Ammo Dumps. This would mean that I would have to select *Defend* as my tactic but against the bugs, that's no bad choice anyway. Plus it meant my troopers wouldn't run out of ammunition during the hectic reactions phases I could expect to face.

CHRIS: So, I'm to pit the ravaging hordes of Arachnids against Ian's MI on the desolate moon of Selvache. I know Ian is a fan of Marauders and from the way he is desperately clutching his army list to his chest and refusing to let me see it, I suspect he has a few tricks up his sleeve too – possibly even battlefield atomics! This should prove interesting...

The MI have a mountain of options for equipping their power suit and Marauder squads to fulfill specific roles on the field, whereas Arachnids simply bring a whole new species to the table. I knew the bulk of my army (classified as Anubis Swarm by Military Intelligence) was going to be warrior bugs as they are fast, tough and lethal in close combat – once the blister and blaster bugs are released it will be possible to build an Arachnid army with a heavy shooting element but for now my force is going to be based around the idea of closing with the foe quickly and tearing them to pieces. There are some tempting options for warriors too – do I take the Warriors

& Workers downgrade and get hordes of cheaper but frailer models or perhaps the Endless Tide and a Bug Central to keep recycling them close to the battlefield? In the end I plumped for seven units of ten normal warriors each, giving me a solid and numerous core to the force.

Now came the fun part – selecting the specialist species. Searching through the display cabinets, I was able to muster up ten firefries, three hoppers and one tanker bug. The firefries should give me a greater threat with their ranged attack and special jump move – I'm not going to outshoot the MI with one squad of ten but the d10 attack gives me a bit of extra punch against tougher targets like Marauders and the Flame trait will help if I end up facing enemies sitting in cover. I've seen how effective hoppers can be and have high hopes for these fellows – they are excellent at making hit-and-run attacks on power suit squads and taking out troublesome command models and troopers with special weapons. They also hit remarkably hard against targets such as Marauders with their d10+1 close combat die but will quickly wither away under heavy fire – I would prefer a larger unit but these bugs are costly to field and I can bring ten warriors to the battle for the cost of three hoppers!

The tanker bug is the centerpiece of the force, a relatively slow but extremely lethal unit. Tankers can make excellent armoured spearheads for an attacking Arachnid force but I'm not intending for my tanker to trundle across the table as a fire magnet – instead, I'll be putting him in

ANUBIS SWARM

11 Warrior Bugs
 11 Warrior Bugs
 11 Warrior Bugs
 10 Warrior Bugs
 10 Warrior Bugs
 10 Warrior Bugs
 10 Warrior Bugs
 10 Firefries
 3 Hoppers
 1 Tanker

Tunneling Assets:
 3 Tunnel Markers
 3 Tunnel Entrances



a tunnel and sending him underneath the enemy lines to pop up and breathe flames down their ranks or assault hard targets like Marauders.

Next on the menu are some tunneling assets, so I can get that tanker underground in the first place. Three tunnel markers and three tunnel entrances put a hefty 300 points into tunneling assets but it means I'll be able to send two warrior units down there too. I intend to place two tunnel entrances during deployment and hold the third one back in case I urgently need to bring a unit to the surface, which leaves me lots of options as to how my tunnellers move during the game.

Finally, the handful of points left over went into adding one bug each to three of the warrior units. All that comes to a nice Priority Two army with a solid core of lots of warriors, mobile support from the hoppers and firefries and a tunneling contingent spearheaded by the resilient tanker bug. I'm choosing the Probe tactic for the force for two main reasons – it maximises the chance of the Battle Line deployment and it lets me hold some of my units off the table if Ian gets to go first, without having to wait until my second turn to bring them on. Battle Line deployment will give Ian less space to retreat and maneuver in, while I intend to keep my valuable firefries and hoppers off the table initially in case Ian brings any Blizzard packs or other long-range artillery to the field that could make short work of these costly troops. I am quite happy for him to expend his firepower on my masses of warrior bugs!

Deployment - Ready For Battle!

IAN: Both forces came in at priority level 2, meaning a dice-off for deployment, which I won. This was important for me as I had a cunning plan to protect the vulnerable front of my M-1A4 squads. These guys are great for firepower but get bugs in among them and it's game over. More of this tactic shortly, as you will see. I chose the Defend tactic (no option as I wanted to use ammo dumps) and the Mekon chose Probe resulting in a Battle Line table set-up with both sides

getting Hold orders for the engagement. This suited me well as I wanted to draw the Arachnids onto my position and I hoped to be able to bounce my troopers forward later in the battle to infiltrate the bug deployment zone and gain valuable Mission Points. The one down side was that Battle Line means deploying across the long table edges, meaning that I had very little space behind my lines in which to manoeuvre. As I had fixed ammo dumps this was not crucial to my plan although it would have been nice to have been able to hold up the Arachnids at long range and move back on a secure defensive position, rather than have my back against a wall. Still, I was more than happy with the situation thus far.



Deployment Map

Having won the dice-off to determine move order, I chose to deploy first and move first. Ideally I wanted to deploy second as showing the bugs where you are is very risky, particularly if tunnelling is involved. That said, I *really* wanted to try out a new tactic with the Plasma device that Sgt. Weintraub had been given. As you can see from the deployment map I chose to position my crucial Marauder squad on the narrow ridge dominating my left flank. From that position they should be able to pour down savage fire into anything coming their way. In the centre, holding the open valley area were the two M-1A4 squads, deployed around the two ammo dumps. Between them was the aforementioned Weintraub, some way ahead of the troopers.

Completing the deployment was Sgt. Thornton in his M9 suit holding the right flank. My intention was to use Thornton's *Stay Frosty* ability to surprise some bugs early on before pulling back to the main force.

Having set up, I waited for the Mekon to show me his hand. He promptly placed two tunnel entrances in very difficult positions for me, one threatening each flank, and both protected by intervening terrain from the centre of my force. Across the front of the Arachnid deployment zone were no less than five warrior bug groups, three with 11 models and two with 10. That's a lot of warriors but nowhere near enough for 2,000 points. So where were the rest? The answer came quickly as the Mekon put down no less than three tunnel markers. That meant at least one tanker bug. I knew Adrian Walters had just finished the Studio tanker and the Mekon was bound to want to use it. The question was, which marker?

CHRIS: Watching Ian deploy was somewhat daunting – I had expected Marauders but not a platoon of them! Seeing two Blizzard packs pointed my way just confirmed my decision to keep the firefries and hoppers off the table for now and I set about placing my warrior swarms spread as widely as possible. The advantage of facing the Marauders was that Ian had fewer models and hopefully less coverage of the table so with a line of warriors marching forwards towards the MI, at least some should be able to break through and accomplish my Hold mission, garnering vital Mission Points. The lone power suit NCO was rather suspiciously placed far ahead of his brethren and in close proximity to my central warrior swarms – Ian was up to something, but what?



I placed my tunneller units to pit the tanker bug against the Marauders on the ridge – they were likely to prove a tough nut to crack but if anyone could manage it, it would be the tanker. The tunnelling warriors would be ready to come up wherever they were needed. I felt fairly confident that the lone Chickenhawk on the left side of the table would be quickly overwhelmed and that the real problems were going to be the central firebase with its ammo dumps and the Marauder squad, so I placed one tunnel entrance to either side of the centre of the MI line, hidden from their view by terrain, while keeping the third back for an emergency emergence by any of the tunnellers if the situation demanded it.

Turn 1

IAN: Having banked a great deal on my decision to take the first turn, I was a mite disappointed when my only targets were warriors. Still, they all count and what I shoot now won't be about later, unless Chris picked Endless Tide. Starting with the Marauder squad, only the Chickenhawk was in range so I fired off his Blizzard pack and a Firecracker missile from the Javelin launcher. With a second Firecracker in the other phase, this brought down a total of 9 warriors from the group opposite, reducing them down to just two bugs. This is why Chickenhawks are so valuable, and why Arachnids don't show you anything tasty during their deployment!



2nd Squad only had its Javelin in range but that brought down 3 more bugs with a Firecracker shot. The rest of the M-1A4 troopers just had to sit and wait quietly while Sgt. Thornton's M9 suit brought down another 6 warriors with his Blizzard pack and Firecrackers. So, 18 warriors down as a return for the extra turn of shooting I expected to get out of going first. Let's hope it will make the difference.

All that was left was for Sgt. Weintraub to place his Plasma munition where he stood before bouncing back to the ammo dump using his *Heroic Surge*, loosing off some ineffective Morita fire as he did so. The M-908P charge sat there on the table, looking threateningly sinister. Chris knew what I had done, and I was hoping that it would make him think twice before charging forwards.

CHRIS: So that was Ian's devious plan! With those ammo dumps he could keep on rearming the NCO with plasma munitions and potentially set up a cordon of persistent lethal zones around his firebase, which I would then need to send



my warriors scurrying through if I wanted to reach him...

For now at least, my priority was getting to grips with the MI as fast as possible, plasma or no plasma. With most of my force's firepower off the table or underground, my movement was a relatively simple affair – all five swarms steamed ahead with both actions. Bravo swarm ended up very close to the plasma munition as the surviving bugs in the unit charged straight into the teeth of the enemy firebase – they were almost certainly all dead but they might distract the MI from the rest of the swarms moving out towards the flanks.

With my new plan to hit the flanks hard in mind, I brought on the hopper and firefry units that had been kept off table with my Probe tactic. The hoppers appeared and went sweeping up the left flank to reinforce the warrior swarms there against

the Chickenhawk NCO, keeping as close to the table edge as possible to stay out of the Marauder's heavy flamer range (and, as I found out afterwards, this also kept them out of the NCO's 12" reaction range with his *Stay Frosty* trait!). I faced a trickier prospect with the firefries – with their ranged weapons they could potentially enter onto the right flank and open fire on the Marauder squad there but in doing so they would be very

vulnerable during Ian's turn. Still, the Marauders looked like they were going to be a serious problem with all the firepower they were toting and the ranged d10's of the firefries might be a good chance to whittle the unit down, so I gritted my teeth and sent the fiery bugs forwards. After the flames and smoke cleared, one Ape had lost three hits – enough to wound it but not to take it out of the fight. In retaliation, the reaction fire of that Ape had killed three firefries. Not a bad showing and the Marauders were now softened up a little but I could foresee the entire firefry unit disappearing off the table next turn...

Meanwhile, tunnel marker one headed straight forwards towards the nearest tunnel entrance, as did tunnel marker three. Looking at the centre of Ian's

battle line it seemed like the tanker bug would be needed to crack open the firebase of power suit squads so tunnel marker two (the tanker itself) went burrowing off towards the tunnel entrance on the left flank, bringing it diagonally across the middle of the table.

Things were not looking too bad – I was expecting to take heavy losses on the way across the table anyway and the imminent death of the poor firefries might buy the nearby warriors enough time to get into close quarters with the Marauders. On the other hand, who knows what further plasma-based shenanigans Ian might get up to?

Turn 2



IAN: Well, I guessed that with Chris having selected a Probe tactic that there might be some unexpected guests, and in retrospect leaving Sgt. Thornton out on his own looked less inspired than it did at the time. Still, he has a 12" head start on the Arachnids and I now faced the choice of whether to have him run or fight. I decided on a bit of both, so he fired off a Firecracker missile and his MW-265 Sixgun into the hoppers, but failed to even hit, let alone force a save! Oops, time to leave, and I scampered him 5" away from the hoppers. Things on my right flank were just beginning to look hairy.

On my left the irritated Marauder squad spent both actions annihilating the potentially dangerous firefries, suffering no damage to the reaction fire. 2nd Squad were all in range now but managed to kill just two warriors – not very impressive. 1st Squad were rather more impressive, finishing off Warrior unit Bravo with their Triple Thuds. It would have been a lot more but they ran out of available targets.





That just left Sgt. Weintraub, who spent his first action detonating his remote plasma munition and the second re-equipping from the adjacent ammo dump. I had guessed that by now Chris had gathered that this was what I had in mind, but I figured it still should give him cause for concern.

CHRIS: As predicted, the firefries evaporated under the heavy fire of the Marauders. Things were looking decidedly rosier over on the other flank where I noted that Ian had left his Chickenhawk NCO right next to a tunnel entrance. Tunnel marker one moved forwards and reached the entrance, five warriors pouring forth to attack (though there were ten bugs in the unit, there is

a limit as to how many can move out of a tunnel entrance each turn).

After some abysmal rolling, Sgt. Thornton was left untouched and his reaction fire promptly killed four of the bugs – heavy flamers are very nasty!

'They're coming out of the ground, people!' shouted Sergeant Mendes, warning the rest of 2nd Squad as a seething mass of warrior bugs surged up out of the blinding light of the plasma detonation, swarming around the figure of Sergeant Weintraub out to their right.

'We're in a whole lot of grief now, sarge,' said Private Mahoney, triggering off a quick burst blindly into the glare.

'Stow that, trooper!' order Mendes. 'If he hadn't flushed 'em out where do you think they were going?'

Mahoney grunted. That was typical of Weintraub. Always bringing the storm down on other people. He turned quickly to his squad mate, Private Larsson. They exchanged a shake of heads, knowing the meaning instinctively. Weintraub. Always goddammed Weintraub.

Suddenly Mahoney had a thought. Here was an opportunity. 'Hey, Kurt! We could do him. Right now.' Even at a whisper with the comm link off he worried that he would be overheard.

Larsson echoed the emotion. 'What, off Weintraub? Are you freaking crazy, guy? He's a Top Sergeant. You wanna dance Danny Deever?'

'He's right in the line of fire, Kurt. Who'd ever know?'

Larsson smiled, and raised his Morita.

So that hadn't worked out, but I still had some tricks up my sleeve. The hoppers readied then swooped in at the Chickenhawk, performing a hit-and-run attack that left them around 6" away from their target at the end of the move. This time luck was on my side and three dice rolls later, the flying Arachnids had torn Thornton's Marauder to pieces. So, the left flank was now mine – time to concentrate on the centre and right flank.

The units facing the Marauders moved forwards as a swarm, trying to minimise the reaction fire they would receive from the MI. Still, the sheer number of dice that Ian was rolling killed some ten warriors, for which I finally managed to pull down the M8 that had already been injured by the firefries. The

remnants of Echo moved forwards as well (they had been too far away from the rest of the bug units to take part in the swarm) and were all gunned down by reaction fire. Suddenly my entire right flank had been reduced to a scattered handful of warriors and all I had achieved was killing a single Marauder. With virtually nothing left in their path, I began to worry that Ian might just bounce the squad forwards into my deployment zone – which would have a huge penalty on my Mission Point total.

Given this swing, I realised I was sending the other two tunnel markers off in the wrong directions. With the left flank of my force hopefully about to roll into the firebase, the tanker would probably be overkill whereas the warriors would just meet the same fate as the other units if they popped out of the tunnel entrance



next to the Marauders. This resulted in the tunnel markers crossing over one another as I sent the tanker over to deal with the Marauders and the warriors off to reinforce the attack on the firebase. With any luck I'd be able to tunnel them right under the power suit squads and dig up by using my third tunnel entrance that I was holding in reserve.

Turn 3

IAN: Well, Thornton's demise taught me a lot of lessons. Firstly, standing too



close to a tunnel entrance isn't a clever thing to do. He was very lucky to survive the warrior attack coming out of the ground, but he really got hammered by the dangerous hoppers. I hadn't faced these before in anger and I already have serious respect for them. Clearly this was

the key moment of the battle, and unless I did something drastic there would be bugs streaming out of holes all over the place.

Firstly, the Marauder squad comfortably finished off the handful of warrior bugs in front of them, leaving the whole flank devoid of Arachnid life. That was the good news.

I decided that Sgt. Weintraub would throw the plasma charge right at the nearest tunnel marker. I guessed this would not be the anticipated tanker, which I assumed was the one now heading for the Marauders, but right now I had to do something. Directly targeting the tunnel meant I would be rolling six D10s, and as it's a Killshot attack any successful hit would be an instant breach, flushing out the tunnellers who would then take a D10 damage attack each. Rolling six D10s and just needing one 8 or higher gives a high chance of success.

Two 10s and an 8 later 10 warrior bugs were swarming all over Weintraub, although four were promptly killed by the plasma. I have to say I was hoping to kill a few more, but beggars can't be choosers.

2nd Squad then had to decide whether to shoot into this new bug threat, as Weintraub was going to be in the fire zone. Looking at the six surviving warriors, it was clear that he was in big trouble anyway, so I decided this was a no-brainer. Shortly after Weintraub and one warrior lay dead, meaning five angry warriors were left unattended. This was not good. The bugs reacted by charging into 2nd Squad, killing the Triple Thud trooper and one other, before losing three more to the second fire action. However, they kill the squad sergeant in turn. This gives a very good example of how the reaction system can make for savage carnage once the action gets close, and you certainly have to think hard before just firing off wildly.

Having lost Thornton this left me with a wide open flank and an unprotected 1st Squad who now had to change their facing to adjust to the new threat. For their second action they fired everything they had at the hoppers, bringing down all three plus a nearby warrior thanks to some excellent dice rolls with the Triple Thuds. The downside to this was that the two surviving bugs from the Weintraub Incident were now in reaction range and charged into 1st Squad, killing two troopers.

Things are looking bad.

CHRIS: Normally, having a tunnelling unit torn out of the ground by a plasma munition would be a bad thing. In this case, it was actually more of a benefit! Since Ian had not acted with his power suit squads before breaching the tunnel, the surviving warriors had been able to get reactions to their actions and did an impressive amount of damage. I was pretty certain that the two remaining warriors were not going to survive very long but they might as well go down fighting.

I promptly pounced them on the nearest power suit troopers, 1st squad, killing two more MI and leaving only one man before one of the two survivors in the other squad killed a bug with reaction fire. The last warrior then charged over to the sharp-shooting trooper but the human made all his saves and promptly killed his alien opponent! More bugs poured out of the nearby tunnel entrance and all the warriors on my right flank went swarming over the few





remaining MI in the centre – only to lose yet another bug to the tenacious Morita-wielder in 2nd Squad...

So the right flank and the middle of the MI line had been destroyed (except one stubborn trooper) but the Marauders on the left were still holding out. The tanker bug was now in range to surface through the nearest tunnel marker and attack the Marauders but I was slightly wary of just how much damage the heavily armoured troopers might be able to do to my prized unit. On the other hand, I needed to delay them somehow or else I'd find them in my deployment zone – which would be bad given the Hold mission that both of us were on. Eventually throwing caution to the wind, the tanker came surging out to attack the M9 Chickenhawk in close

combat – Chickenhawks have a pile of weapons that are rather good at dealing with the high Target value and good armour save of the bigger Arachnid bugs so killing it was my priority. In short order the Chickenhawk had been reduced to scrap, with the reaction fire from the two remaining M8's inflicting a single hit on the tanker.

Turn 4

IAN: Suddenly I didn't have a whole lot left, and from a position of comfort at the end of Turn 2 I have very little left on the table. With both my NCOs gone and the squad sergeants dead as well, the remnants of the two leaderless squads can do nothing but await their fate. The



two surviving Ape suits don't have the firepower to seriously trouble a tanker, so I decided to bite the bullet and charge in, hoping the 2 x D10 damage they inflict each might be enough. They did cause two more wounds on the behemoth but that wasn't enough to cripple it.

CHRIS: My fifteen surviving warrior bugs rolled over the remaining power suit trooper, killing him. This was just a sideshow to the real event though – the tanker bug and the Marauders. The tanker managed to crush the M8 sergeant but its attacks bounced off the armour of the last Ape. Fortunately for me, reaction fire from the M8's Ape Specials and Triphammer just bounced off the tanker's carapace. With the squad leader down, the sole surviving MI was going nowhere fast.

Turn 5

IAN: With the death of the Marauder squad sergeant, I just had one leaderless M8 suit on the table, so he gritted his teeth and awaited the onslaught...

CHRIS: While the warrior bugs continued to mill about in the centre of the table, the tanker once again struck at the last Marauder. The thick armour of the Ape saved its pilot gain and the reaction fire this time was more effective, inflicting another hit and leaving the tanker bug with only two hits left. With that, the game was over and hopefully the surviving units I had managed to get into Ian's deployment zone would pull his Mission Point total down enough for me to win a decisive victory.

Mission Point Totals:

Blackie's Blackguards: 825

Anubis Swarm: 2130

Conclusion



IAN: Well, that certainly shows how a game can change and why you can never rest on your laurels in Starship Troopers. At the end of Turn 2 it looked like I was in for an easy victory. Then a few crucial decisions turned the game. First off, in retrospect I should have made use of the two power suit squads before breaching the tunnel with the plasma charge. Having six warriors within reaction range meant that although it was my turn the casualties I suffered before the Arachnids even had their turn were enough to turn the tables.

In the space of a turn I had also lost all my power suit sergeants, meaning that as I had elected not to use points on corporals they were leaderless and could do nothing except wait to die. This reliance on a solid chain of command is very much the Achilles' heel of the Mobile Infantry. The bugs just get on with things regardless, but lose your chain of command and all those expensive power suits and weapon options are just so much junk metal. It also means that rashly positioning your officers and NCOs is a dangerous business. Sure, they can do some devastating damage with things like the plasma munition, but it can leave them very vulnerable.

I made another mistake leaving Sgt. Thornton in his Chickenhawk unsupported on my right flank. I placed too much reliance on his *Stay Frosty* trait surprising Chris and taking down a lot of bugs. When he missed the hoppers that was really a signal of what was to come and then I compounded the matter by retreating him too close to the tunnel entrance, allowing the warriors to spill out and charge straight into combat.

It had been my intention to bounce my Marauder squad forward towards the end of the game to help with my Mission Points (having that strong a unit in Chris's deployment area would have been a real bonus) but the arrival of all his tunnel markers at the same time forced me to stay on the defensive and the fearsome tanker really lived up to its reputation.

On the plus side I was very pleased with the ability of the M-908P Plasma munition to breach tunnel markers. This is a tactic that bug players are going to have to watch out for. In future I can see me making regular use of this weapon whenever possible (it's a shame Marauders can't carry them!) and it also has the potential to either destroy a tunnel entrance or pollute the area over it with

a sheet of persistent plasma, making life exciting for any bugs who want to exit through it.

Well done to the Mekon for making very good use of the units available to him. His clever use of the Probe tactic's special rule allowing reserves to be kept off table at the start, plus the intelligent placing of his tunnel entrances meant that he had the right bugs in the right place at the right time.



CHRIS: Well, those mission point totals don't really give a good representation of just how close that battle was! At the end of Turn 2 things were looking rather grim and I was ready for even more of a pounding in Turn 3. I was fairly sure I could take the centre of the MI line with all the hoppers and warriors over on the left flank but as it was, the emerging tunnellers managed to tear the power suit squads up quite effectively, disrupting the chain of command and leaving just the right flank as a problem.

Marauders are *hard*. Much harder than I had originally given them credit for – they mowed through the insufficient force of firefries and warriors I had pitted against them and it was only the tanker that saved my bacon on the right flank. You can't send troops piecemeal at M8's and M9's – the loss of three warrior bug units and the firefries for a return of just one Ape proved that quite clearly. Go for the Chickenhawks first – they carry the bulk of the firepower but are much frailer than the Apes and have less ability to get themselves out of trouble. When the M9 was taken out it left the M8's with few options for dealing with the heavily armoured tanker.

The warriors did their job (except for on the right flank) – roll forwards, suck up fire and tear apart whatever is left when they get there. The hoppers too

did well, killing the Chickenhawk NCO before inevitably attracting heavy fire from the power suit squads that wiped them out before I could do more with them. As it happened, the rogue warrior unit from the breached tunnel performed the job I had in mind for the hoppers originally, slicing up command models and causing mayhem. The firefries were somewhat disappointing but I think I probably wasted their potential throwing them ahead of the warriors and into the teeth of the Marauders – they did some worthwhile damage but the D10 shooting attack is probably best against power suit troopers where you have a good chance of getting a Kill result. In the case of both firefries and hoppers, it turned out that keeping them off the table during deployment was a good idea as the Blizzard packs tore my swarms up quite badly. The tanker was definitely the bug of the match, eating through the Marauders and soaking up an incredible amount of return fire – it is just a shame I took so long to get it out of the tunnels and onto the field, because if I had supported the warrior and firefry attack with the appearance of the tanker the Marauders would have fallen much more easily.

I was very thankful that Ian didn't use the fabled mobility of the MI to the full – his dedication to his devious ammo dump/plasma munition ploy ended up tying him down somewhat and as a result I managed to keep the initiative and keep on the offensive. If the power suit squads had moved forwards aggressively after destroying my central warrior swarms and the Marauders had advanced as well, there would have been a large number of high-value units in my deployment zone and pulling down my Mission Point total. On the other hand, the plasma tricks certainly caught me by surprise – I had never thought of tunnel markers as being particularly vulnerable before but clearly I'm going to have to revise that opinion! Ian set up an impressively defended firebase in the middle and it was only the incompetence of Weintraub that broke it open for me. By the end of the game, all I had left was a dozen or so warriors and one badly injured tanker so it was a victory bought at great cost with Ian fighting determinedly every step of the way.