

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Cruiser Squadron Tactics

By Alex Aimette

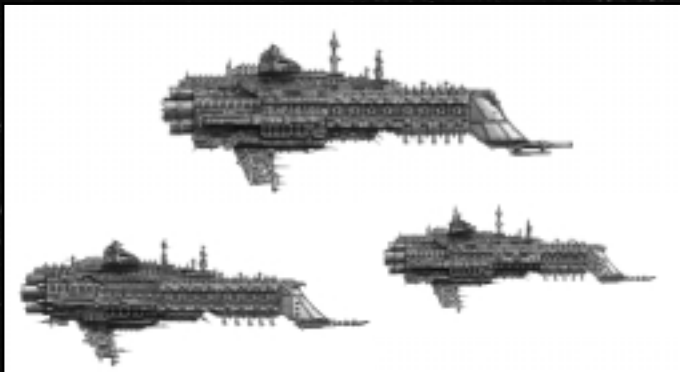
Half of winning an engagement in Battlefleet Gothic is to know your ships and then translate this knowledge into a game plan. In this article, Alex Aimette discusses one way of thinking of your fleet – as organised groups of squadrons that can be structured ahead of the game for specific tasks in any given scenario.

The use of squadrons is an advanced rule that allows you to combine two to six ships of the same type, either escort, cruiser or battleship. Here, I'm presenting squadron ideas for the most common ship available, the cruiser. Not only is the cruiser the most easily obtained model, but it is the mainstay of Imperial and Chaos Fleets, and Ork and Eldar fleets as well unless they are only on a raid. A cruiser can take a lot of punishment before it is crippled or hulked, and dish out a lot of punishment along the way. Most battles will be won or lost by your cruisers, not your escorts and battleships.

The use of cruiser squadrons enables you to shoot more effectively, combine ordnance, make command checks more easily, and help your ships to stay alive under heavy fire. While I have only used these tactics with the cruisers of my Imperial Fleet, Orar Passage, I believe they will also work well with Chaos and Ork

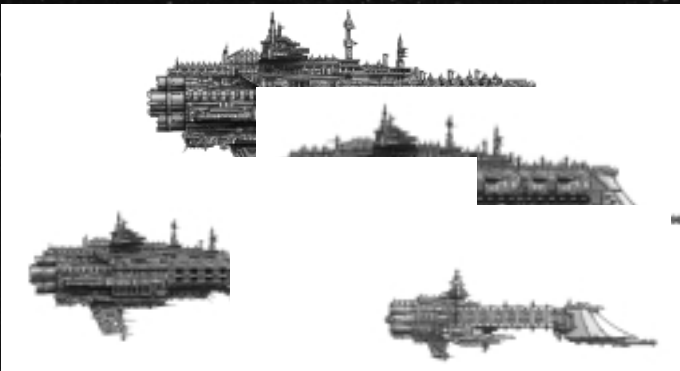
cruisers. Eldar and Tyranid fleets are so different, that I do not feel safe commenting on them. The Tyranids seem like they would also benefit from the close support of a cruiser squadron, but until I've faced them with the new rules, I will only encourage those players of the Hive Mind to try these out and write back!

Remember that squadron rules are part of the advanced rules section of the BFG rulebook (on p.37), so it is perfectly possible that you will occasionally play games without using the rules for squadrons. Even without the actual squadron rules, these ideas will still help you to mentally organise your ships before you fight a battle. I do recommend that you use the advanced rules as these give you a lot of interesting options for Battlefleet Gothic.



Bombardment Squadron

- 1 x Dominator Class Cruiser
- 1 x Lunar Class Cruiser
- 1 x Tyrant Class Cruiser



Ordnance Squadron

- 1 x Dictator Class Cruiser
- 1 x Lunar Class Cruiser
- 1 x Gothic Class Cruiser
- 1 x Dauntless Class Light Cruiser



ADVANTAGES OF THE CRUISER SQUADRON

Putting cruisers into squadrons gives them several important advantages. The first is enhanced control of all ships in the squadron, since a squadron uses the highest leadership value of any ship in the squadron for all Command Checks (BFG p.37). Since the squadron attempts all Command Checks as one group, you pass or fail together. By attempting Command Checks as a single group, you also get greater uniformity of result among the three to five ships in the squadron. This makes it easier to control their movement during the battle. For example, passing or failing a special order like All Ahead Full together means tighter control of ship movement. If you fail, you stay in formation. If you pass, you make only a single 4D6 roll for the entire squadron, meaning it moves in unison.

The second big advantage is with shooting (BFG p.38). The vessels in the squadron get to combine battery fire as though they were one ship. This has the very desirable effect of preventing blast markers from decreasing the effect of fire from subsequent ships at the same target. Furthermore, the squadron can concentrate fire on one target ship or escort squadron per fire arc (right/left flanks, and forward). This can be the closest enemy vessel, or you can attempt a single leadership test for the squadron to pick on any other target in the fire arc. The great advantage to this is that the game's mechanics reward you for

concentrating firepower on a single ship, overwhelming its shields, rather than taking weaker shots at multiple vessels that will be absorbed by their various shields.

Third, you gain the option of combining ordnance together (BFG p.39). Squadroned ships that are in base-to-base contact may combine torpedo salvos or bomber waves into larger salvos and waves. This may aid you in overwhelming the turrets of larger cruisers, battleships or system defenses. Some ships are tough nuts to crack, and this might help you do it.

Finally, keeping your ships together in a squadron helps you to rescue ships that are crippled or about to be crippled. I simply cross the weakened ship into the middle of the formation, and manoeuvre a fresh ship so that it's now closest to the enemy. It sounds tricky, but it isn't that difficult if you are thinking one turn ahead. Besides, you already know that whichever vessel you have closest to the enemy ships is probably going to take a pounding – plan accordingly. If your opponent isn't using squadrons, then he'll have to pass a leadership test with each ship he wants to fire at your cripple – and he won't pass them all. If he is using squadrons, at least you're making him take one test. It's much easier to force a test in this manner than to try and manoeuvre a lone damaged cruiser away from the enemy, or to get it behind escorts. If he fails it and has no re-rolls, you've saved a valuable cruiser!

The Cruiser Squadron Formation

First, you need to visualise the formation. Set it up on the table or use the diagram below to organise your thoughts.

I usually fight with ship A as the front ship and ship D as the rear ship in a diamond formation, but you could also fight with a square formation. As you manoeuvre, if you continually duplicate all ship movements, the formation will turn anyway and become a square or diamond in relation to the enemy. It's still easier than trying to coordinate several ships on different courses! If you have a grand cruiser, I would put it on the side closest to the enemy to take advantage of the larger number of shields and hits, letting it soak up damage and spare the cruisers. Since victory points are almost always based on ships crippled or destroyed, this helps keep your point losses down. You could also put a battleship between the squadron and the enemy to soak up enemy firepower while the squadron unloads massive amounts of broadsides or ordnance into the enemy ships!

The distances between each ship are marked as being greater than 3cm because 3cm is the size of a blast marker. Since any blast marker touching your ship's base takes down a shield, you do not want blast markers to be placed so they hit two ships. The distance should be about 3.5cm between each ship. You want to be close together so that ships have good battery and lance ranges to enemy vessels past the opposite flank ship of the formation.

You can have three ships or five ships in the squadron instead. For three ships, simply eliminate one ship; I recommend removing a flank ship when engaging enemy to flank, and a front or rear ship when fighting enemy to the front or rear. This helps prevent just one vessel being on point and nearest the enemy. For five

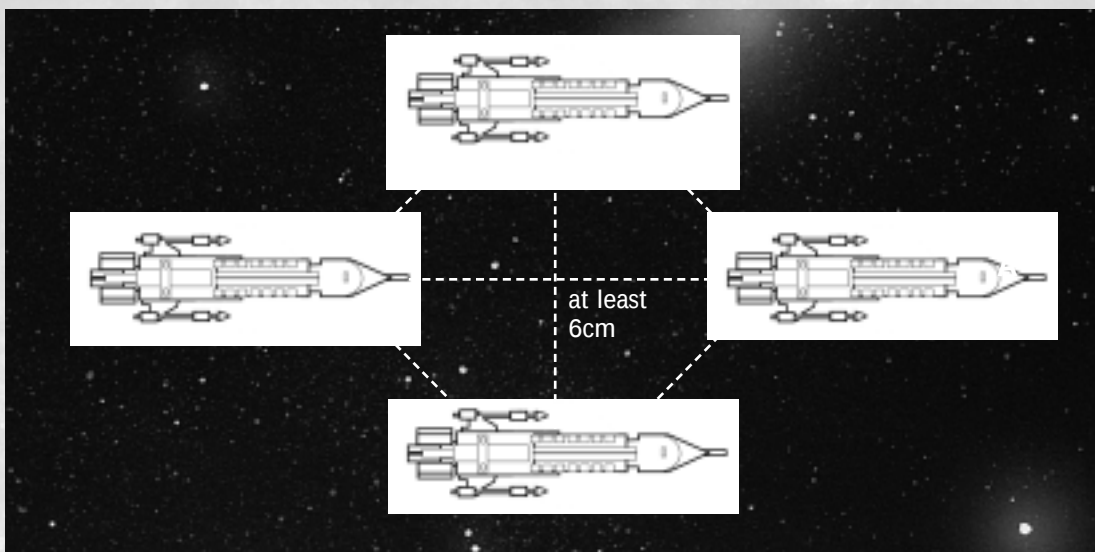
ships, add one to the centre, being careful to keep the 'more than 3cm' distance between all five ships.

The front, flank and rear spaces below are to maximise the firepower of the entire squadron in those fire arcs. This helps you to remember what the squadron's capabilities are at any given moment and angle to the enemy. Clarity of thought during the engagement can mean the difference between victory and defeat, and this will help you to remember what your squadrons are supposed to be doing, even in the heat of battle. I always write down a small diagram of the ships on a flashcard, just like below, with the firepower totalled up. This helps me remember to fire all possible weapons each turn.

Some important measurements to remember on the table are:

- 1) A blast marker or average ship stand = +/-3cm
- 2) Short range for Batteries = 15cm
- 3) Bomber move = 20cm
- 4) Fighter and Torpedo move = 30cm

If you keep your ships at the same interval through a battle, it's easy to remember distances and guess for Nova Cannon range. If your front cruiser fires a Nova Cannon forward at 50cm, and your ships are at the proper intervals, you know that the rear Nova Cannon has a shot of about 59cm, measured from the ship's base. If your left flank cruiser fires batteries at 5cm to the side, the right flank cruiser will have a range of about 14cm. It's the same with ordnance. If you want to fire one torpedo salvo 30cm, you will need for the front ship to be 21cm from the target, and then the rear cruiser will be 30cm away.





Squadron Leadership

Now that you have the formation you will use, let's try and plan effective squadron engagements. The rules state that squadrons make Command checks based upon 'the highest leadership value in the squadron' (p.37). This means that if you have one ship with leadership 9 and three with leadership 6, not uncommon in campaign games, the squadron has an effective leadership of 9! If they fail, they may use one re-roll for the whole squadron. This really helps make those expensive re-rolls count! So you should intentionally group one high leadership cruiser into the squadron to give it a high leadership.

Squadron Types

I usually play two types of squadrons. One is a distant bombardment squadron, the other an ordnance squadron. The first uses long-range fire from Nova Cannons to damage critical enemy vessels and to force the enemy to close. Once they are within 30cm, under the Nova Cannon's range, the squadron has adequate firepower to handle a close engagement. The second uses high leadership to reload ordnance and hit the enemy with tons of torpedoes and bombers as they close, preferably in combined bomber/torpedo attacks (to overwhelm turret defenses), then use concentrated firepower to finish off crippled ships and cripple other enemy vessels at close range.

The Distant Bombardment Squadron

This one usually has three cruisers with Nova Cannon and a light cruiser. I use one Dominator with one Lunar and one Tyrant, both upgraded with a Nova Cannon (p.110). This formation is very dangerous at long range, and still affordable at 705 points. The light cruiser guards the rear, using its greater speed and 90 degree turn to help keep enemy escorts away if necessary. I also keep another friendly

cruiser between it and the enemy at all times if possible. Being furthest from the enemy enables the light cruiser to survive while still adding decent firepower to the squadron. Note: My gaming group uses the new experimental Nova Cannon rules (Annual, p.45). These decrease the effectiveness of the Nova Cannon a little so this formation is not overbearing.

Adding up that squadron's firepower according to the chart above, we get a forward firepower of three Nova Cannon and one strength 3 lance battery (from the light cruiser). To the flank, the formation has battery strength of 32 (!) and strength 5 lances. To the rear, the formation has no effective firepower. The only hope if challenged from the rear is to use special orders such as *Burn Retros* or *Come to New Heading* to manoeuvre the enemy off the rear, or to turn the light cruiser to engage the enemy. However, if you respect this formation's role on the table, you will be engaging from a distance at the scenario's start. By the time the enemy closes with you, they should have lost a key ship or two, be a little spread out, and vulnerable to those 32 strength flank batteries.

Considering those batteries, this squadron has a brutal amount of firepower. Typically, with a 32 battery, you'll at least score 11 dice for a capital ship abeam, 22 dice for a capital ship closing, and 6 for escorts. This is followed up with five lance shots. On average, that's 4-7 points of damage on a Chaos capital ship and two points on an escort, with another 2-3 points from the lances. Generally, you will cripple a capital ship a turn and destroy two to three escorts. If you manoeuvre carefully so that you close at the optimum time and fire with squadron *Lock On* orders, you will re-roll all the misses, gaining another three to five battery hits and one to two lance hits, thus destroying a cruiser or an escort squadron per

turn.

The Ordnance Squadron

This usually has a Dictator or two, with any combination of Lunar or Gothic class cruisers, and one light cruiser to guard the rear. I use one Dictator, one Lunar and one Gothic, personally, since that's what I have available in my fleet, Orar Passage. I back them up with either an Enforcer light cruiser (has 2 launch bays, Annual p.55) or a Dauntless class light cruiser with the strength 6 torpedo option (my fleet happens to have one with Ld 9), thus maximising the available ordnance.

Note: Since my BFG group uses the optional Ordnance launch limits rule, (Annual, p.44), the effectiveness of launched fighter/bombers is greatly reduced, thus minimising the effectiveness of Dictators. If you aren't using this rule, however, I recommend two Dictators for a WWII-style carrier fleet. Be mindful that High Lord Admiral Andy Chambers says that he envisioned a WWI-style fleet with minimal launched fighters/bombers, NOT a WWII style fleet with tons of fighters and bombers on the table in multiple waves. Because of this, we figure this is going to be a definite rule in the future and are already using it. (*Interesting logic, is this what other players think?* - Matt)

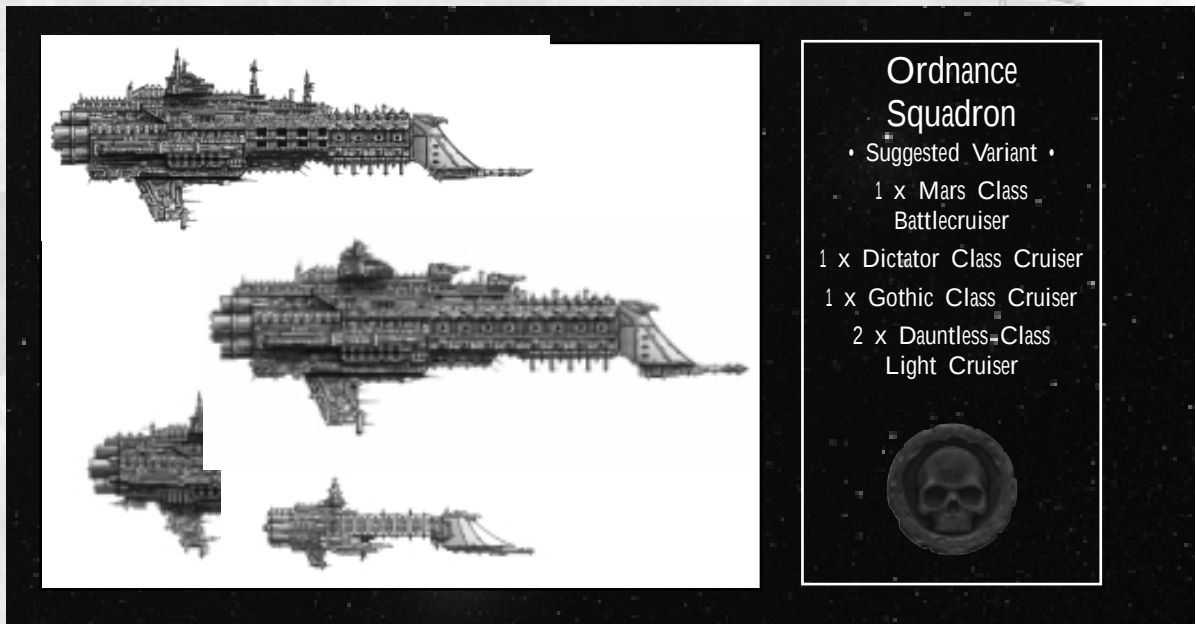
Anyway, going with one Dictator, one Lunar, one Gothic and one Dauntless with the torpedo option, the squadron costs 690 points. For this, you get a front firepower of 24 torpedoes, flank firepower of 16 batteries and six lances, and all-around firepower of four launch bays. This is a tough squadron on the table for the price. Even upgrading to a second Dictator for the Lunar only costs 40 more points at 730. With that you would get eight squadrons at the expense of four lances. You could make it ten launch bays with an Enforcer light cruiser replacing the Dauntless. It's easy to find the right blend of torpedoes and bombers for a given mission when you are

thinking of the squadron's firepower as a whole.

When I engage the enemy, I usually perform two ordnance attacks. At about 60-80cm, I launch a full round of torpedoes at the closest concentration of enemy ships or into their movement path. This is to force the enemy to break formation and spread out. And if they are busy shooting and moving because of torpedoes, they probably aren't attacking my cruisers. At the same time, I launch my bomber waves but keep them close by the cruisers. I then reload ordnance on the next turn – if I miss the command check, I spend a re-roll. This isn't very likely since I have a cruiser with leadership of 9 or 10 in this squadron, but since the timing is critical, I am certain to have a re-roll up my sleeve. At this point, I'm probably about 30cm from the enemy with my rear cruisers. I launch a combined torpedo and bomber assault against enemy cruisers in order to overwhelm the turrets. Note that the bombers had to be launched a turn earlier to get a head start on the torpedoes since they only move 20cm compared to the torpedo move of 30cm. With this ordnance, two cruisers can be crippled or destroyed in such an attack.

Simultaneously dropping 4-10 bombers along with 18-24 torpedoes onto an enemy cruiser or two will almost always cause serious problems for the enemy fleet. A strength 12 torpedo salvo alone against a 2-turret cruiser should cause 3-4 points of damage to the ship, maybe up to 5-6 if combined with a bomber wave. After the ordnance attack, you close rapidly with your batteries and lances, *Lock-On*, finish off the cripples and cripple another. This depends on luck, enemy fighters, etc, but you are still concentrating your attacks and maximising your chances. Not to mention demoralising your opponent! As soon as the enemy begins to disengage ships, your victory is almost secured.





Combing the above two squadrons on the table, you have a fleet worth 1395, in two groups. I lead with the ordnance squadron as the bombardment squadron hangs back, crippling or destroying a key enemy vessel or two (maybe their only ship with launch bays, or a cruiser that's in the centre of his formation). As soon as the enemy fleet gets close, the bombardment squadron comes in to support the ordnance squadron, using *All Ahead Full* if necessary. So far, this tactic has worked well, but there will certainly be scenarios that demand greater variety of ships, or less specialised, more integrated, cruiser squadrons. A good example of this is in scenarios with smaller fleets.

Squadron Variations

Naturally, you have to play with what you own – you may not have eight cruisers to play with just yet. However, mixing a fleet of diverse cruisers into a squadron can also be very dangerous to the enemy. I have used a mixed

squadron to good effect.

When I started, all I had available for a defence against Chaos in scenario #4, Surprise Attack, was one Mars battlecruiser, one each of Gothic and Dictator cruisers, and two Dauntless light cruisers on standby in orbit. Grouped together, the squadron of three activated cruisers had front firepower of one Nova Cannon, a strength 2 lance battery, 12 torpedoes and a broadside firepower of 12 batteries and six lances and four launch bays all around. With these three ships alone (and the light cruisers virtually useless) I engaged the Chaos onslaught of five enemy cruisers and managed to destroy one cruiser with the Nova Cannon and cripple a second as the Chaos closed with me. Then I pushed into the middle of the enemy fleet, hulked the cripple and crippled a third. My opponent's ships were spread out with me in the centre, so he disengaged to fight another day leaving two hulks on the table. My fleet only disengaged one light cruiser that was crippled in the initial surprise attack. A huge





Chaos Cruiser Squadron

2 x Murder
Class Cruisers
2 x Carnage
Class Cruisers



Chaos Cruiser Squadron

Suggested Variant
4 x Carnage
Class Cruisers

victory for Fleet Orar Passage and the Emperor!

It would also be easy to replace the light cruiser in either of the above squadrons with an escort squadron serving the same function. I haven't used any escorts yet, but I think it's a good option and plan to try it. I have two squadrons of five that were just recently commissioned, with the first nearly ready for deployment in our next campaign game.

Chaos Cruiser Squadrons

For Chaos cruisers, I would divide my ships into close attack ships for under 30cm and long-range attack ships for 30-60cm. I would then try and close with the 30cm squadron and keep the other one shooting at longer range. Good ships to squadron for close range fighting would be four Slaughters. At 30cm, this squadron would have a frontal firepower of 24 batteries, broadside firepower of 32 batteries and eight lances with none to the rear. And this squadron would only cost 660 points!

If you substitute in two Devastation class cruisers, you would add fifty points but still only be at 710. For this you would get front firepower of 24 batteries, flank firepower of 16 batteries and eight lances, and eight launch bays all-around.

For the long range squadron, I would group together Murder and Carnage class cruisers. Two of each would give you front firepower of 12 batteries and four lances at 60cm! Flank firepower would be 20 batteries at 60cm, and 52 batteries at 45cm. This squadron is the perfect raider fleet or fire-support fleet. They should even be able to take care of Nova Cannon-armed Imperial vessels, closing with them in a turn or two of quick movement, and this squadron only costs 700 points. Personally, I am planning to make a Chaos raiding squadron dedicated to Tzeentch. This will have four cruisers and six Idolator escorts. Its express function will be to engage at long



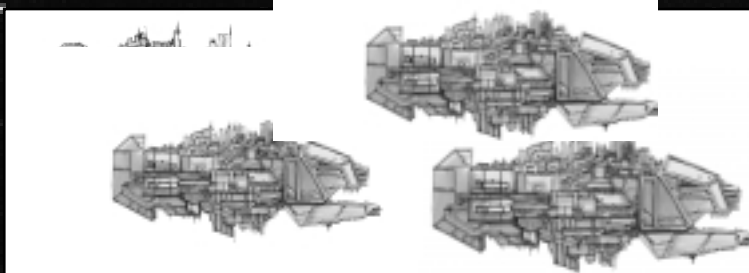
Chaos Cruise Squadron

- Suggested Variant
4 x Slaughter Class Cruisers



Ork Cruiser Squadron

- 3 x Kill Kroozers
1 x Terror Ship



range, then disengage if enemy ships get too close. The cruiser I would pick is the Carnage. Four Carnage cruisers have excellent ranged fire for only 720 points. The front firepower would be 24 batteries at 60cm, the flank would be 40 batteries at 60cm and 64(!) batteries at 45cm. With their excellent speed, this force should be a severe danger on the table in most scenarios. If it works, I'll try and report it in a future article.

Ork Cruiser Squadron

Having recently purchased a small fleet of Orks to be pirates in the battle for the Bhein Morr sub-sector, I thought I'd give an example of their cruiser capabilities. With their '-1' leadership modifier, they will need a cruiser squadron if they want to fight the Imperium! With four cruisers, you get four chances at their highest leadership, (an 8). If you combine three Kill Kroozers with one Terror Ship, you end up with front firepower of 4 x D6+2 prow gunz, and 24 heavy gunz. Flank firepower is 4

x D6 gunz and 12 heavy gunz, with four launch bays for all-around attacks. Since the heavy gunz do double hits, this is quite a bit of damage for only 650 points! Again, this will have to wait for a future article since we're just preparing the Orkies for battle.

Conclusion

I believe there is a strong reason to use cruiser squadrons. They help you organise your thoughts and prepare for a mission. They take advantage of rules that help you to control them with special orders more easily, concentrate firepower, combine ordnance, and keep cripples alive. If you keep fixed distances between your ships, it will be easier to guess multiple Nova Cannon shots, torpedo and bomber ranges, and protect your ships with your own fighters. In short, this is a tactic that the astute commander of Imperial, Chaos or Ork fleets should consider. Let me know how it works for you!

