

TRIANGULUM PRIMER

IMPERIAL WOODPECKER

— *Cadet Gary Carney, HMCS Ontario*

NOTE: This primer is based on the Triangulum playtest data published in Captain's Log #23, the after-action report in Captain's Log #24, and SFB Module E2; changes may be made to the ships and rules involved over time.

The warships of the Imperium are not designed with the concept of an effective alpha strike in mind. Their phaser-equivalent linear accelerators are short-ranged, somewhat variable in terms of accuracy and damage output, and are more expensive to operate than most other phaser equivalent weapons. Alongside this, their primary heavy weapon, the hypermass autocannon, cannot concentrate its total firepower into a single volley.

When given the opportunity to spend Commander's Option Points on an Imperial force, you might consider the advantages of purchasing battle-armor-equipped boarding parties for one or more of your ships, either as a conversion of a pre-existing boarding party or as an added unit. Battle-armor-equipped boarding parties require two casualty points to destroy in boarding actions, and have a 50% chance of surviving the first fatal damage die roll in hit-and-run raids. At a half point per conversion, or one point per additional battle-armor-equipped boarding party, these units can be useful in countering the Mallarans' superior boarding party numbers, the Arachnids' special boarding rules, and the Helgardians' own battle-armor-equipped boarding parties (should they choose to purchase them in turn).

For Imperial ships given the optional Y49 medium-mine-rack refit, the available Commander's Option Points might be mitigated by the extent you wish to fill the rack(s). Each mine rack can hold up to four medium mines, which add five BPV apiece to the ship's cost, counting against the Commander's Option Points limit. Having an explosion strength of fifteen Damage Points, a dropped medium mine may oblige a pursuing foe to reconsider his options, especially if he risks triggering the mine on a weakened shield facing. That said, the premium Imperial ships pay for this privilege, on top of the eight points a given rack costs to install, might make it worth considering how else an Imperial player might wish to spend his points when preparing his force for battle. Imperial mine racks are destroyed only on "drone" Damage Points and not on "cargo, shuttle, or excess damage" Damage Points. [The rule is right; the SSD is wrong.]

The micro-thin neutronium armor banks on each Imperial ship provide a defensive boon, albeit one which should not be overstated. Each bank (FH and RH) soaks up the first dice roll of 2-5 and 9-12 on the Damage Allocation Chart. This is a bonus when facing Mizia fire (since the neutronium armor is more likely to soak up hits on sensitive systems) but less of a benefit when facing larger volleys from enemy units. Neutronium armor is common in the Triangulum Galaxy; bear this in mind when planning exchanges of fire with the Mallarans and Arachnids (who also use neutronium armor) and the Helgardians (who do not, but operate their unique rotary shield system instead).

It is worth keeping the unique properties of Triangulum sensor and scanner systems in mind when facing your opponents, be they locals or visitors. The sensor rating on Triangulum ships is always assumed to be "6" and the scanner rating "0"; neither can be reduced by damage. (The sensor-scanner track on Triangulum SSDs represents how much natural ECM is currently affecting the unit.) Also, ECM generation in the Triangulum Galaxy is affected by the size class of the generating ship, while after the Y154 refit all size class 4 and larger Triangulum units can generate advanced counter-countermeasures from their upgraded fire-control systems (but cannot generate ECCM and ACCM simultaneously). For Imperial ships, the effective use of linear accelerators can depend on how well these factors are balanced; when dealing with opponents, it might perhaps be most

notable when used by the Mallarans to operate seeking-weapon-control channels for their ram torpedoes and suicide shuttles.

Due to the nature of its design (in which each hypermass autocannon box on the SSD represents a separate firing chamber of a common turret-mounted weapon), no hypermass autocannon can fire from all of its chambers in a single impulse; a minimum interval of four impulses exists between each firing. Also, the turret each ship's hypermass autocannon is mounted on (along with much of the ship's linear accelerator firepower) allows for a potentially wide arc of alignment. (The SSDs in *Captain's Log #23* had an error that was corrected in *Captain's Log #24*: the turrets are indeed limited to FX, and can indeed fire into a 120° arc not 60°; the rule is right and the SSD is wrong.) The turrets themselves can be turned 60° every eight impulses; the turrets on size-class-4 units can face any direction, those on larger units can only turn within the ship's FX arc.

Rather than focus on a single impulse's worth of firing, there may be ways to get the most out of the weapon over a sustained period of attack. One can approach an opponent and fire each hypermass autocannon chamber every four impulses towards the end of one turn, then repeat the procedure immediately after the turn break. Note that hypermass autocannons are single-turn-arming weapons, but that the four-impulse delay carries over from one turn to the next; for example, firing on Impulse #31 of Turn #2 leaves a delay until Impulse #3 of Turn #3.

In the case of the Imperium heavy cruiser, its four hypermass autocannon chambers allow for a total of eight consecutive four-impulse firings; a positional challenge helped somewhat by the heavy cruiser's Turn Mode of B. In the case of published smaller Imperial vessels, the three hypermass autocannon chambers on the destroyer, and the two each on the light cruiser and frigate, make for a maximum of six and four firings respectively.

Of course, if the firing opportunities are an issue, you could wait for a fifth or sixth impulse before the next firing; do remember to keep the turn break in mind.

If the range and power levels allow, it may be worth using as many overloaded rounds as possible; against most targets, the weaker, but more accurate, burst mode is a better choice than the powerful, yet inaccurate, single shot mode.

Each turret also carries other direct-fire weapons, namely an array of medium linear accelerators; given their short range and varying accuracy [and the arming cost of 1.5 points of power, which cannot be mitigated via down-firing (EN103.15)] it may be best to ignore them altogether, unless firing within the hypermass autocannon's overload range.

When finished with this stream of attacks, it may be worth increasing the distance between the Imperial vessel and its opposite number, then waiting until the latter half of a subsequent turn to re-commence the attack. (In a sense, this would treat the hypermass autocannon as a kind of two-turn-arming weapon, while lessening the load on your hulls' inadequate non-turret linear accelerator arrays.)

This tactic may perhaps be most useful to consider against two of the Imperium's closest rivals: the Arachnid Worlds of Unions and the Mallaran Empire. Arachnid ships can enhance their hellfire and hellblazer torpedo warheads the more turns they are able to arm them, putting a premium on obliging an opponent to maintain a more constant stream of pressure. Mallaran heavy weapons arm over two turns, so engaging over the most favorable arming cycle should be considered; especially if the chance presents itself to take out any Viper fighters not hiding behind active blur devices.

Helgardian ships pose a greater challenge, especially prior to the Y120 refits, when Helgardian warp engines were superior and hypermass autocannons could not be overloaded. They become more of a challenge again after Y154, when their graviton beams can fire even more often than they can hitherto. At least the particle shotgun is a two-turn-arming weapon, although a Helgardian captain may choose to counter an Imperial ship pressing too closely by alternating the firing of these weapons over

subsequent turns. Plus, the Helgardian cruiser and heavy cruiser each share the Imperium heavy cruiser's Turn Mode of B, and can make use of their rotary shielding to help maintain their defenses in certain shield facings.

Applying such a tactic can be even more challenging during an Imperial civil war (of which there were a few) since the opposing vessel could just as easily follow the same tactics. An interesting dynamic might be to test the differences that the use (or absence) of various refits might make to such an encounter: for example, a light cruiser with the Y120 refit that skips the medium-mine-rack refit of Y49 versus a mine-equipped heavy cruiser with no other refit.

While no published data confirms their presence in the Triangulum Galaxy at this time, a visitor from the (relatively) nearby Andromeda Galaxy might call for use of the single-shot mode. Despite the increased risk of missing the target altogether, the hypermass autocannon's power absorber panel interaction under (EN109.53) puts a premium on scoring as much damage as you can in each firing opportunity, although it might be worth sticking with burst overloads in volleys shared with linear accelerator fire. Engaging closely on turns when the Andromedan tractor-repulsor beams are armed may not be wise; keeping enough spare warp power for a High Energy Turn might be useful if there is a risk of displacement. (The outcome of being displaced might make it difficult to re-orient the turret to face its business end in a more useful direction).

In short, as a commanding officer within the Imperium, try not to go with only one battle pass at a time; rather, use your hypermass autocannons to peck-peck-peck-peck-peck-peck-peck-peck your way through your opponent's defenses.