

THE ANTARES INITIATIVE



ARTICLE BETA 0.03 / NOV 2016

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NOV 2016

PLANET: DEFOR

ARTICLE BETA 0.03

LOCATION: DETERMINATE



BEN KOCHSKAMPER



ISORIAN COMMANDER

Month three into Antares Initiative and it has been an epic journey so far, my 500 point force is coming along slowly, and whilst not quite finished yet, I'm pretty happy with how it's looking. Progress on painting was stalled due to my decision to change the way I was doing things and although this meant a delay in completion, the final result should look a lot better.

The group have a dedicated painting day booked in for early December and I'm sure between that and the couple of hours throughout the week, I will have the 500 points completed in no time.

The alterations I made to the paint scheme consisted of changing the helmets from white to blue and the way I was applying paint to both the armour and vents. This has made the process for efficient meaning my force will be ready to go sooner! So far the painting has been good fun and it's been great painting something a little different to what I would normally as I am, for the most part, a fantasy gamer. I have had a bit of trouble here and there with a couple of minis that I feel haven't quite come out of the mould/cast correctly, but I think I might be able to disguise this.



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Let's move onto the juicier topics of this month's article, the rules:

I have played a wide range of wargames in my day, and after the first read through, I felt like I'd picked up a Warhammer Fantasy Battles rulebook for the first time. It was rather daunting initially but after a second read through I was to pick up a lot of the items I missed during the first pass. I personally found the rulebook a bit "wordy" but it's better to be thorough than leave us guessing as to how it all works.

Learning the rules in full is quite a big task, and to be honest, we are still referring to the book quite regularly. I tend to think the reference sheet needs to be a little more comprehensive, and I'm glad Ben Rantall found a slightly better version online which has helped. Although we're learning new things with each game, I feel we still need to get another 20 odd games in before we don't need to stop and check rules every 10 mins.

In our first couple of games we all just played a kill mission so that we could get our head around the rules and mechanics of the game. A straight up fight is usually the easier way to learn as you don't need to think too strategically while your brain absorbs the rules.

With just playing Kill missions though, we found the games to be very one sided, and we weren't sure why. Maybe it was lack of experience, being unsure how other units worked, maybe it was the point level, or maybe it was the lack of balance between our 500 point forces that we selected. As we played more games, they lop-sidedness of the results started to level out a bit, but was still far more swingy to one side or the other than we're used to.

At the 500 points level, it felt like as soon as one player lost a unit or even most of a unit, they couldn't recover. In the name of science, we have since increased the points level to 750 and 1000 to see if that made any difference (using proxies to fill gaps). Our first 1000 point game was also a little one-sided but I think that come down to someone having more order dice in the bag than the other.



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Initially I thought the dice bag was a great idea, however thanks to a run of poor luck, I'm currently not so sure about it. I'm now feeling that if one player gets 3-4 orders in a row at a crucial time they tend to crush the opposition. The trend now within our group is to maximise the amount of order dice in the bag rather than taking bigger, punchier units. Perhaps it's just our "mini-meta" and maybe that will change as we get to larger games with more variety in army composition.

Our latest game (750 Ghar vs Isorians) was a much closer battle - it came down to one dice roll essentially: My Isorian sniper needed to run, declare a sprint order and then a roll a 1 for the extra movement... and would you believe it, I rolled a 1. This game had it all: Ghar battle suits causing my units to go down and a combination of my phase squad, sniper and Tsan Ra units stopping Matt's battle suits from activating with pins.

I have had fun learning this game so far and while I'm still super excited to see what the future holds for Antares, the game has its ups and downs. Technically speaking, I can see what the game is trying to do, but I'm yet to have that 'brilliant moment' that hooks me. I also think that there is a big gap between some of the armies as far as released vs unreleased units go. I understand it's a new game and that this all takes time, but some armies seem a lot stronger on paper with their released units than others. I guess it's just a little frustrating when the things you want to take in your force don't yet exist physically, so you have to settle with what's available, which may not be very competitive. I want more, Warlord! More! :p

Next time we play we are planning to build armies with both the miniatures we have and units that are yet to be released for sale. This will give us the opportunity to truly customise the army to fit our play style. This will also give us the chance to play around with unreleased units - I'm gagging for Isorian pulse bikes *wink, nudge, wink*.



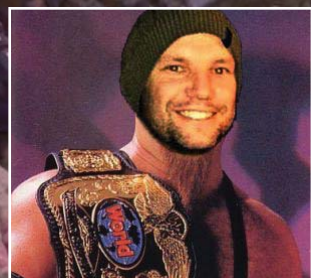
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MAT SELICK



GHAR COMMANDER

It's been an eventful 3 months for the guys of WNW, 500 points in development and painting well and truly in full swing. For me, simply deciding on a paint scheme was the hardest part and thus has caused the longest delay. I eventually settled on a predominantly white base with touches of green, add few washes and highlights then finishing with purple coloured plasma.

Let's get into the thick of The Gates of Antares however and by thick I mean The Rules. The rule book is full of great back stories and information; it was clearly evident that a lot of passion, detail and hard work went into the hard cover book. The trade-off for all of this exuberant passion however, is that at times, it's quite difficult to flick to a page and comprehend a rule quickly mid-game (without trawling through, in some cases, 3 paragraphs). The rules and wording themselves are fine and doesn't leave much ambiguity, which is refreshing – so I'm confident that with more games under our belts the need to refer to the book will reduce significantly.

The dice draw mechanic is something that I really like! While it can potentially lead to a series of dice draws that can turn a game on its head (if the dice gods are against you) the defender can prepare for such an eventuality through use of the Reactions mechanic, allowing more flexibility than at first glance. I'll be the first to admit the reaction side of things is something WNW have not been utilising efficiently, and I'm sure that in the next few games, it will definitely be a focus of ours.

There is only two sections of the rules that I'm currently having an internal struggle with. Those two being the "Close combat" and the "Leader" rule.

I'll start with the leader rule. Re-rolling resist tests for increased "leadership" and NOT failed command tests strikes me as odd and doesn't sit well. This has probably been compounded due to the fact the dice turned against me in my last two games as I failed "easy" tests, as well as not having a Command Crawler available to "spread the love" so to speak.

The close combat mechanic is a tricky one for me; while I'm not particularly a fan of how it plays out, I'm also not sure how I'd adjust it to ensure its fair/even while not stagnating the game at the same time. I guess a few more games will sort this out for me.

What I am enjoying about the game is the shooting, armour penetration and cover system! It would be very easy to convert the shooting mechanic into cinematic experience.



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MAT SELICK



GCHAR COMMANDER

I personally love the options of different shot types, for example, having the choice between:

- Rapid firing the Ghar Scourer cannon, going with the spray and pray method of bouncing projectiles off the surrounding terrain (or if you're lucky into your opponent).
- Alternatively, choosing the stronger, concentrated shot to punch into a tougher opponent.

Still, it's very much a "pin to win" type of scenario, particularly with the leader rules not impacting command checks and not having the needed commanders to assist at low point games.

I'd be very comfortable in saying that both I and the rest of our group have grasped the foundations of the rules well, and we'll be taking the next step into larger games (and importantly, comprehension of the advanced rules). I think these two factors will really reinvigorate the game for me, as at 500 points, games seems to swing very quickly and sharply.

Bring on next Wednesday!



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BEN RANTALL



BROMITE COMMANDER

Let it be known, the Bro-mites are the Lords of Defor. Both as beautiful and terrible as the morning and the night! Fair as the Sea and the Sun and the Snow upon the Mountain! Dreadful as the Storm and the Lightning! Stronger than the foundations of the earth. All shall love them and despair! So in other words, I've done well with the Bro-mites, not dropping a single game yet. But before I go into too much detail about how I maintained such a position, let's discuss the most important aspect of gaming: How a force looks. I.e. the painting.

To be honest, the Bro-mites have been the least stressful figures to paint up, even with deadlines looming over head. All shared a similar palette and the details, the most time consuming aspect of painting, were a breeze. Picking out the edges of all the Bro's scales may seem like a daunting task, but when you get into a rhythm the process powers along at a breakneck speed. With all that said my paint job is far from perfect, but even with a conservative painting goal the Bro-mites have come up a treat. I won't go over the scheme again as you can check out the previous months' article for more detail.



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BEN RANTALL



BOROMITE COMMANDER

Now, onto the game experience of Antares itself.

My approach to learning new sets of rules usually involves playing the game with the most basic understanding. Just enough to get started, then building on top of that. The essentials needed for Antares:

- *understand the order mechanic,
- *understand what each order does,
- *understand how the pin system works,
- *understand how to read the contents pages. If you have a pdf version - understand how to use Ctrl +F.

Although the rulebook is 250+ pages, which is quite intimidating, a quick read of any section will reveal that rules have a lot of meat on them. What I mean is that all the rules have been broken down to cover all possible situations that may appear in-game. While you don't need to read every dot point presented, they're there to eliminate FAQ's. If you do happen to run into a rules issue, so far, I've found that just going back and reading the appropriate rule section carefully has the answer. My only wish was that there was an index of some sort. Navigating the book can be like a Fighting Fantasy novel e.g. I look at a unit entry that states they can take Vorpel charges; no rules with unit entry. Flip to the weapons list. Nope. Flip to grenades. Nope. Get frustrated, open PDF, Ctrl +F Vorpel. Misc equipment. Gotchya (finally)!

The rules, for better or worse, often point to other rules in different sections (in most, but not all cases). Often I'd end up flipping pages to and fro on a regular basis - not easy with a hardback tome.

Our first couple of games were quite basic. Standard shoot 'em up affairs.

With movement and shooting down pat, we added in reactions. Once that was good as gold, we started taking more complicated forces (not just dudes with guns, but dudes with unique rules or special ammo types).

All that's left, for me at least, is to memorise the different terrain rules, which shouldn't be too bad I don't think. While there may be quite the selection, there are resources available that makes this easier, specifically, in the form of small terrain cards that can be placed next to each piece on the board. These cards clearly state their effect on units, reducing the need to rifle through the rule book for the terrain descriptions.



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BEN RANTALL



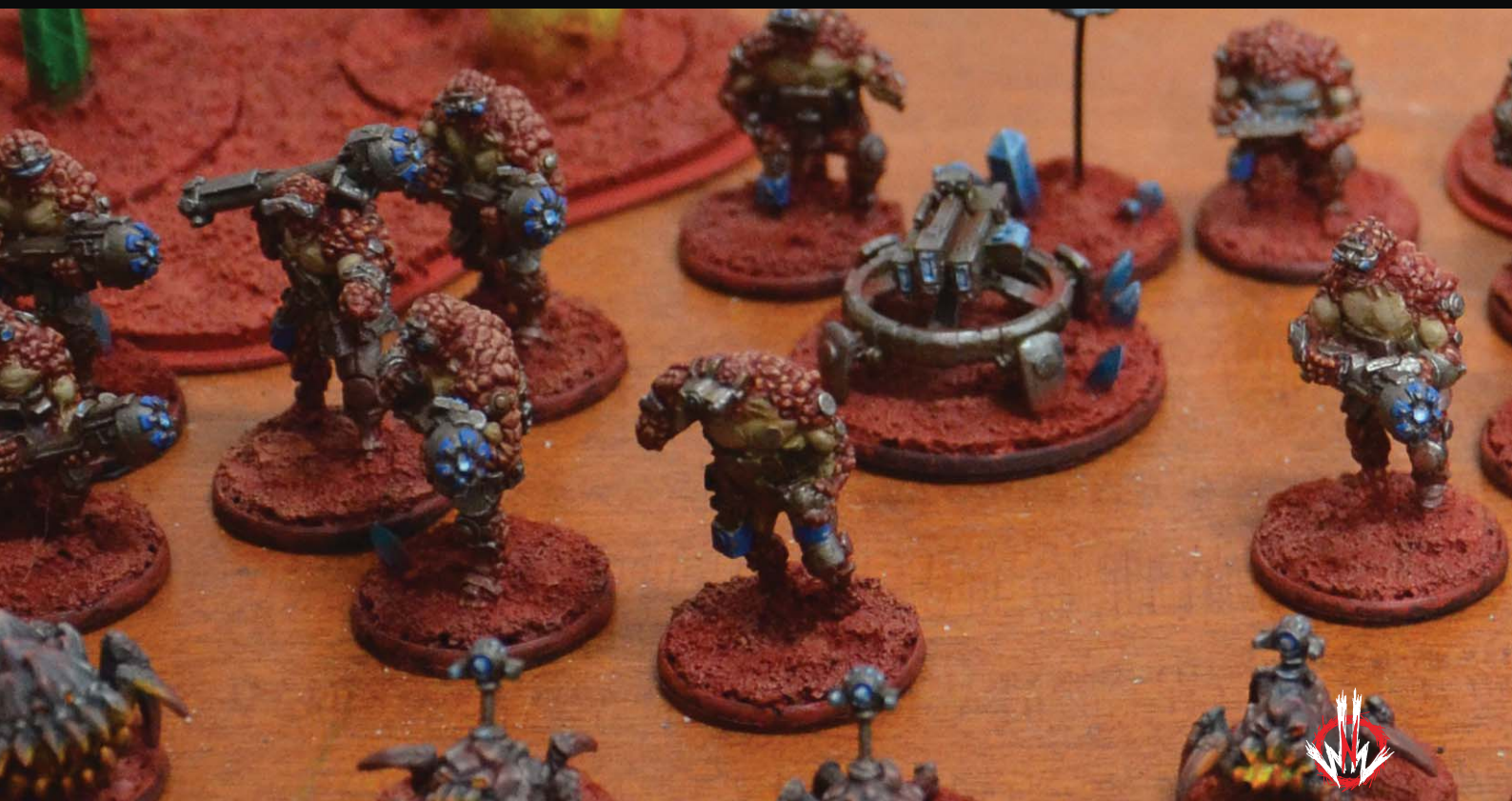
BOROMITE COMMANDER

This is the part where WNW find out that the Bro-mites are super powerful at the 500 points level. Boromites have excellent tactical choices in the guise of work gangs and lavamites - both very hard hitting at close range. That and the fact that smaller forces equals few units the opponent gets to shoot with (not to mention an extra 3 or 4 dice in the bag for the Boromite tactical units are comparatively cheap), closing the gap hasn't been a problem. Boromites also don't have a great need for the more expensive commander units as their command is high from the get go, saving points that can be spent on more lavamites or workers. Excellent!

With the coming months' expansion into larger point games with more varied unit choices, will the Bro-mites maintain their iron-walled defence of Defor?

Probably.

-Bensome



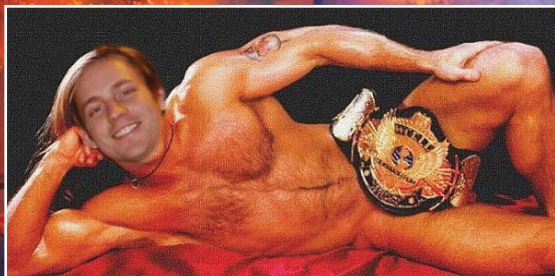
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HUW EVANS



CONCORD COMMANDER

Wargames and Scalability : finding the harmonious ratio between complexity and and choice - by Huw Evans

Hello out there friends and fellow Antares enthusiasts. I would like to personally welcome you to month three of Wednesday Night Wargamers Antares Initiative action!

For my part, painting has been continuing apace. Hopefully by the time you are reading this article I have punched out my first 500 points (I say hopefully, because they're all sitting on my desk at about 80% complete at the time of writing).

After producing my first practice model for the painting guide I wrote last month I chucked everyone else in one long production line of batch painting goodness. Sure, it's not the most fun way to paint, but that's the way I roll and it gets the job done!



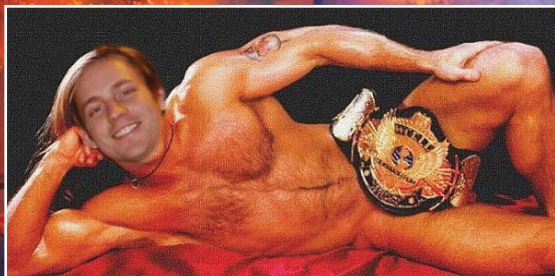
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HUW EVANS



CONCORD COMMANDER

I've got three 500pt games of Antares in so far and I'm sitting on two wins, one loss. I have had success against the Isorians in what felt like pretty balanced if not overly complex missions, but Ben's Bro-mites wiped me off without breaking a sweat! I fired everything I had into those Lavamites. I swear! What a power gamer! *shots fired*

Win or lose, the games left me feeling like I didn't have a lot of agency over what happened on the table. I felt as though it didn't matter much what I brought, because there was relatively little choice in the army list at that points level. Furthermore, if one player has just a couple more order dice in the bag than the other, in these small games they have a huge advantage.

Given the limited experience gleaned from these first few games I found that we picked up the rules as a group surprisingly quickly. The rulebook is intimidatingly large and wordy (as is often the case with wargames), but the system runs smoothly and I found it very intuitive. I particularly like the height based line of sight rules and the simple res system.

However, what really makes the game sing is the dice bag activation order mechanic (which players of Bolt Action will know and love). For me personally, the addition of reactions is a really positive, fun and tactical way of getting around the potential problem where one player gets lucky and gets to activate lots of units in a row.

During my second game with reactions I found myself activating units in a different order, because of taking these new possibilities into account. Knowing for example that a unit with no pins that I only wanted to give a "run" order could easily do that as a reaction if it was shot at (and furthermore, the shooting unit might waste their action), meant that I would activate another unit with something more vital to do first. I could talk about reactions all day, but suffice to say that I love them! More on them in a future article for sure.

While we were learning the rules, these simple and small games worked perfectly fine, but I think if I was to play 500-1000 point games in the future I would write a complex narrative scenario, including pre-set forces for each side. I say this because the games felt like they didn't have much depth or balance. The balance in particular being a problem between the different races. This phenomenon is far from exclusive to Antares and is actually a problem for most "army" or "semi-skirmish" sized wargames. I don't think it reflects poorly on the game either, but rather I find myself looking forward to larger games where the tactical depth inherent in the rule set will get more of a chance to shine.

This brings me to what I wanted to talk about in this article – Wargames and "scalability."

The problem of scalability is simple: When you have a largish army on a battlefield (let's say 15 units) you can't include a huge amount of complexity and rules interaction for each unit, as it would bog the gameplay down too much and each game would take an untenably large number of dull hours to play. Most wargames do this – you move, shoot or assault and that's about it. Antares is like this in that you have six options for any given unit, but usually only one or two of those is really a choice.



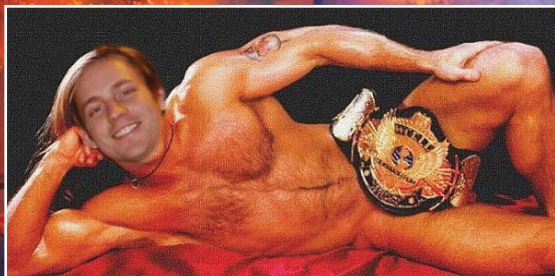
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You can however add much more complexity of choice and options for a small skirmish game with seven or eight units per side. Malifaux is a good example of this, where each model has a wide range of interactions and possibilities, not only with itself and other models, but also with the mission objectives themselves. In fact, this is necessary, because without that complexity the skirmish game in question would be overly simplistic and just as dull as a complex army game.

Given that we have relatively few different options for each unit each turn in Antares, equally there needs to be a relatively large number of units (and preferably objectives) on the table to give players choice and make the overall flow of the battle feel strategic. If a player feels as though they have agency to affect the outcome, the game is much more enjoyable. After all, if that wasn't the case, we would all just paint our armies, leave them on the shelf and play Yahtzee instead.

For this reason I feel as though Antares is going to be a much better game at larger point levels. Then we will see the differing types of units coming into play (fast units, tanks, etc) and there are enough units per side on the table to allow for more freedom of choice and more dynamic games. I think some of the more complex missions in the book will also add some more difficult choices, which will increase the fun factor for me even further.

No wargame can truly escape the problem of scalability. Sure, you can play the game at almost any points level, which is great, but my gut feeling is that Antares is really going to shine at 1500-2000 points. Luckily, I have already acquired a few extra models to test this theory out... Tune in next time to find out if I was right or wrong!

