

Bright Crusade

Premise

A 40k battleship approaches the Earth. The players are the crew. Do they destroy the earth? Or do something else?

2-7+ people (one is the GM) 2-4 hours play time.

Setup

First of all, put the badges together. You need the name and picture of the character facing outwards, and the key on a separate piece of card (or folded paper) behind it.

Whether the key or the blank side is showing (well, hiding, since it will face the players shirt) is important during the game, but not before hand.

It would be a good idea to have some drinks and snacks to hand, and some pads of paper and pencils in case the players want to jot down notes or send messages. Not vital, but it can smooth things a bit.

Tell the (potential) players the basic premise. Make it clear that they don't need to know anything about 40k – anything they make up about a giant space empire is fine. Indeed, ideally the GM should have only limited knowledge and be making stuff up on the fly. (When did the Imperium *lose* Terra?) Do **not** try and hide that this is “You get to invade the earth”. The characters won't know that for sure, the players do.

Have the players choose their badges, and then give them the corresponding character sheets. If it can be arranged, then the Navigator and the Priest would ideally go to the players with more 40k knowledge. The Alien and Assassin are also good candidates, whilst the remainder are more self-explanatory.

(Note: If you have fewer than six players, then drop the Alien first, as the most unfair role. If you have MORE than six players, then the easiest thing to do is duplicate some of the roles – make them an assistant.)

Intro

Once everyone is settled, introduce the setting:

You are all bridge-crew of this Imperial Battleship, its great crusade – to bring planets long lost back into the Imperium. You have spent several months lost in warp-space; but have finally emerged (without the rest of the fleet) – approaching a solar-system which strongly resembles the fabled Holy-Terra of legend.

Have them introduce themselves to each other. (Real player names.)
Then go ahead, and read out the game-start introduction.

The bridge is quiet as the technicians sift space for every possible scrap of information. Reverently, the head of the watch passes the holo-scrip to the Admiral. He retires to his ward-room to consider it. The tension on the ship is palpable as you await his decision on what to do.

{beat}

Shortly afterwards, there is the bark of a bolter pistol, as the Admiral removes his responsibility by removing his head. His code key is blinking - the weapon is armed.

At this point – explain how the superweapon works. The Alien has brought it aboard as a fitting tribute to save his world. Once locked onto a planet it will charge up for an unpredictable length of time – it could be hours, or it could be months. (Explain that in Real time – it goes off five minutes before the end of the session.) Then, if the majority of code keys are set to 'kill' (The skull-key showing) the planet is destroyed, no matter where the ship is.

And yes, the Admiral's key is set. And the keys can only have their state changed by the owner, whilst they are alive.

(At this point, the players probably scramble to check how their key is set, and maybe change it.)

If the weapon does *not* blow up the planet, then it will be heavily damaged; and may hurt the ship a bit, too.

Rules

You don't need to explain most of the rules to the players. The one you do need to explain:

If you want some equipment, or minions, or psychic power or want to do something that's not obvious and automatic. (“Can we scan the moon for military installations?” “Can we jam the audio-visual signals?”) then roll a die. The higher the number, the better. (I used a D10, any die will do. If you **do** use a D10, then don't forget to specify whether 0 is high or low.)

The part you don't tell them – if they are acting against an NPC then they can't fail. They either succeed, or succeed beyond their wildest dreams.

If two players oppose each other, both roll. Higher wins – and gets a say in what happens. But the lower can't be killed off. If either player wants to push it, they can roll another die and add it (they don't have to declare until after they see the first set of rolls) – however, once they've done that they *are* putting their life on the line, and if they lose the winner could have them killed off.

The Game

There are, basically, three phases to the game.

Phase One

The battleship glides smoothly towards its destiny. Past the gas giants. Through the asteroid field. Past the red desert planet. And finally into orbit around the inhabited planet.

The players can send out missions, but they are at risk of capture. They should be gathering information and persuading the characters that this is what it seems.

Assuming they're smart enough to look into the military on this planet, they should quickly discover that it has more nuclear missiles than *they* do. And its ground forces, whilst not up to their space-marines are better than their usual troops (of which they don't have many on board anyway)

Try to stay slightly ambiguous about whether or not this actually is earth in the past, whilst (*wink, nudge*) letting the players know that it is. You don't want the characters to solidify their positions prematurely.

Interesting things to give the players here are that the inhabitants appear to have knowledge of aliens (TV shows!), though none that they recognise. But they have very limited space presence. (Plenty of Commsats, a few probes.)

If things start to get slow, have them move to phase two. This segment is to get the players used to negotiating with each other and set the tone.

Phase Two

In orbit around earth, the players get to do... whatever they like. At some point, they make contact – probably covertly at first, and then openly. If they start a war, that's fine – they will win it.

(Though if they don't take out Earth's nukes, their ship will be injured. Badly.)

Things to throw in here: They don't have an Emperor myth. At all. They do have some psychics.

If things get stale, disrupt them with some rogue states freaking out, perhaps have some opportunistic soul claim to be the Emperor in hiding.

Really, this segment should be the longest bit, and mainly player driven. It can happily go on until the very end of the game.

Phase Three

If the players have pretty solidly settled on a key setting, and haven't done something crazy (like, say, leaving the alien in charge of the spaceship whilst everyone else is on earth) then have the weapon discharge.

You've got basically two aftermaths to consider. Either Earth went boom, or the weapon did.

If the weapon went boom – then this is visible from Earth. If the players didn't sort out some kind of compromise then they are now in a position of some weakness. They need to negotiate, possibly leave.

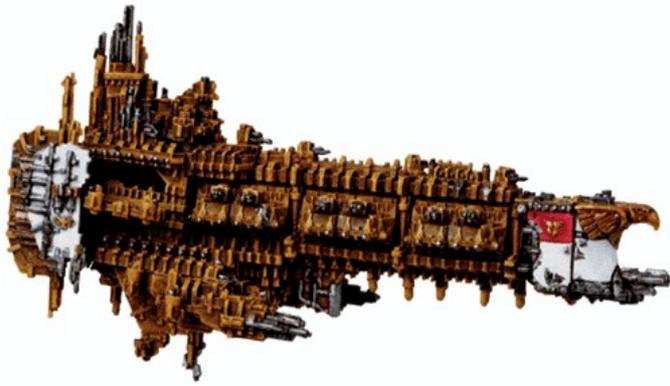
If they join up with Earth, then run some quick montages as they develop it, turn the moon into a giant spaceship, and go forth to conquer the galaxy! Let the players have fun. They should all get something out of it.

Now, if Earth is destroyed, and there's time left in the game, then you've got to find a way to carry things on.

One option is to have the rest of the fleet turn up, and the players realise they have to spin it as quickly as they can (whilst those who objected to the destruction scream for aid in their revenge.)

You can also montage out the ship trying to construct a fleet, and continue on to found a new Imperium on... what principles do the players want?

You are the Master of Armaments of the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



The mission of this fleet is to travel the galaxy and return the worlds of the great diaspora back to the empire. But a great warp-storm has scattered your fleet and your ship has been lost for many years. At last, however, you have emerged into an inhabited star-system and can continue your mission. But there is something strange about this planet...

[Note to the player: I'm not going to gussy this up with too much fancy obfuscation. The planet you are approaching is modern-day earth. Of course, your character wouldn't phrase it that way...].

You are in charge of the distribution of supplies, which includes the weaponry - you hold one of the keys to the main-cannon. As your position is rather important, you have quite a large number of guards at your back and call.

Your main motivation is to loot the worlds your ship discovers. Conquer them if need be, but strip them of wealth either way. If the other want to stay and work with these people (hey, maybe this really is the promised land!) that's fine by you - more time to loot it. You are, basically, in it for the bling.

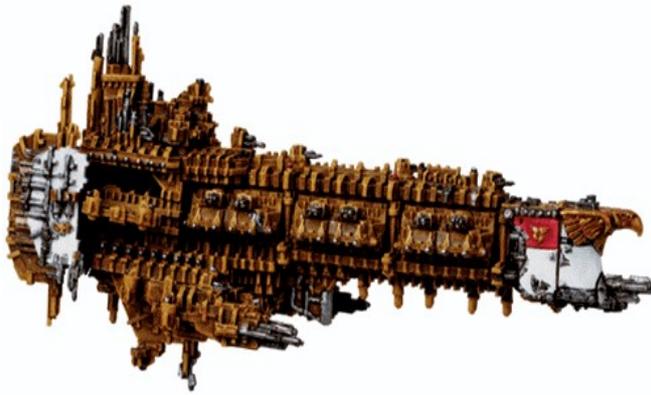
Others

The alien – what a coup! You must be the only battleship to have taken possession of such a creature; and the weapon it has brought! Having such a thing aboard raises your status a hundred fold! You need to take precautions though, the others are very much less happy about having it aboard.

You fear the Marines. They are far more powerful than your own guards and far outside of your chain of command.

Personality: Play the master as a pirate captain. Serious and business-like one-moment, gold and grog the next.

You are the Navigator of the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



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You are the ships navigator. A licensed psychic whose job is to brave the horrors of warp-space and bring the ship safely through. You kinda... messed that up though, didn't you? Best not to mention it, perhaps.

Still - here you are. Approaching a planet that is now the only source of humanity that you can sense. You must either be far outside the known empire, or far back in the past. Either is possible, neither is good.

This world is the one source of psychic energy that you can feel. If it were destroyed you would finally be free from the other voices in your head! But should it not be destroyed, then you must obey those voices and worship the planet and the humans and do everything they desire.

As ships navigator, your role is officially one of great importance and noble bearing. In practice, though the others despise you - you still hold one of the keys to the main-line cannon.

You do have one other source of power – your psychic powers have enabled you to take control of some of the crew. They are not numerous, but they are in position to take control of several ship systems. Of course, if you ever get caught using this power, you will likely be put to death.

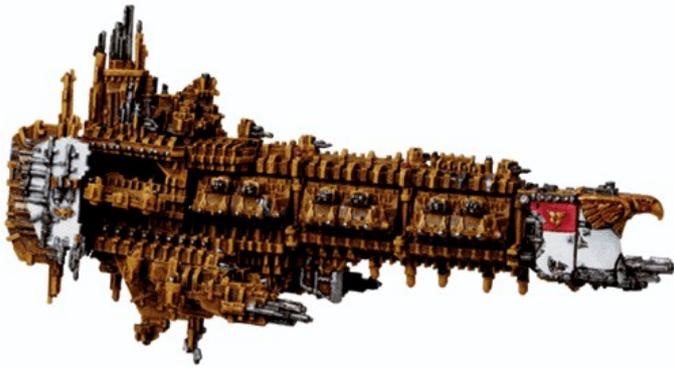
Others

You feel a strange kinship with the alien. Almost as if it were also a psychic. Probably simply because it is also an outsider.

You fear the assassin. You know one of his primary jobs is to kill you if you ever go completely insane.

Personality: You are, frankly, unhinged. Be as goth as you can. You're psychic, those voices in your head really are real. It doesn't make you any nicer to talk to, though. You are also nervous (since it's your fault you're here, at least in part).

You are the Squad leader of the marines aboard the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



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You are the hard-as-adamite leader of a squad of slightly insane honest to goodness space marines - the perfect killing machines - genetically altered to be able to chew iron and shit bullets. Though doing so is rarely as effective as using your bolt-gun.

You believe strongly in the religions of strategy, training and tactics. Whilst you have been taught that your chapter was founded by the emperor, your belief in him extends as far as his being a historical figure with the foresight to create a plan to reunite humanity - and you and your soldiers have their part in this. Naturally, this sets up a certain tension with the priests on board. But they have no authority over you.

Since there's only one squad of you, it would take you several hours to demolish the ship. Even with such limited powers, the fleet admiral saw fit to entrust you with one of the keys to the mainline cannon.

Whilst you're not fanatical about orders, as some are - your mission here is clear. You must unite planets of humans within the empire. This is a planet of humans, it must be made to obey. Destruction would be a waste, but is the only other course of action.

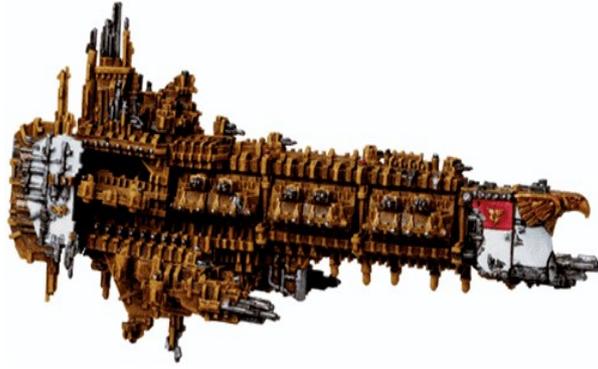
Others

You distrust the priest. His religion is useful for keeping the crew under control, but you know it is completely false and you suspect he is using it for his own ends.

You obey the master of armaments, as the next in the chain of command after the admiral. You aren't stupid enough to tell him this, however you'll do your best to help him, as long as he doesn't do something obviously wrong.

Personality: You're the perfect gunnery-sergent. Shouting, Hoo-Ah, the whole 40km run before breakfast (Nine yards? What kind of a wimp are you!).

You are an alien, aboard the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



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You are a representative of an ancient race, who seek to bargain with this empire of humans rather than warring with them and risking destruction. By law, the humans hate you. And you don't much like them, either.

You now understand why you were sent. You clearly have been transported back in time to a crux of their races development - and you can end their threat here and now by destroying their planet! Though... that might be bad. The humans have, after all, destroyed many of your other enemies. Perhaps it would be best for them to be conquered under this ship, so that you may direct their development?

The main cannon this ship is fitted with is a product of your world, and as such, you have one of the keys.

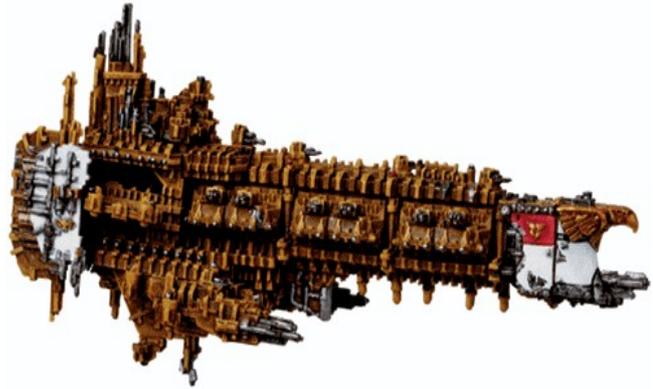
Others

Strangely, you admire the assassin. His singleminded approach to the art of death is almost a redeeming quality for a member of this corrupt species. That one of his primary jobs is to kill you doesn't matter.

On the other hand, you loathe the marines. They are a broken force, believing in insane concepts such as teamwork. Also, they are under orders to not kill you; so you feel free to taunt them.

Personality: You appear haughty. Feel free to use any of the stereotypes of an ultra-advanced alien race. Call the other "Hew-Mon" and so forth. Annoy them as much as you can. Remember that they don't trust you though.

You are the Assassin of the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



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You are a member of the Executive. An important bureaucracy which specialises in discovering things and killing people. As such, your people were amongst the first to find out that this planet is, to all outward appearances, truly the ancestral home of humanity. As such, it will be your duty and pleasure to join with it and be a part of the very beginning of history!

Unless this is a clever fake, of course. In which case it is merely one more planet to conquer.

As no one aboard could prevent you from gaining a key to the main cannon, you were presented with one in a lavish ceremony.

Others

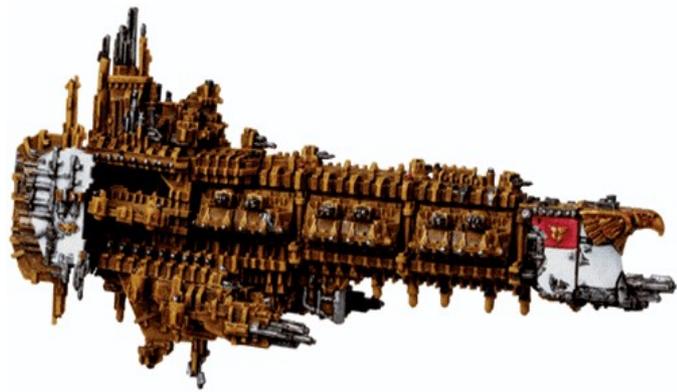
You are, of course, entirely impartial in your dealing of death and have no feelings whatsoever towards your targets.

But you would find it an intense pleasure to kill the alien and the master. They just rub you the wrong way.

The navigator, on the other hand – pleases you. He knows his place, and whilst you have to be on the lookout for him becoming a liability (evil monsters crawling out of his brain cavity would be the first sign) you would prefer that to not happen.

Personality: You are relaxed, appearing languid and bored whilst things go your way. People who interrupt you, or discover flaws in your plans, discover that you have a very angry side, however.

You are the Arch Deacon of the Emperor-class Battleship: Divine Right, flagship of Battlefleet Artemis.



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You are the head of the holy church aboard this vessel - and your religious understanding makes you an important member of the command staff. So far from the emperor, you must trust your own understanding of His laws to guide you to success.

The Emperor has spoken (and you have sacred icons which record his very words) that the birthplace of humanity - Holy Terra - was a blue world, the third from its sun, in a system of eleven planets, the fifth of which was destroyed, those beyond being gas giants; the first with a giant red eye of evil and the second with rings. This star-system, then, must be either test or snare - or Holy.

It must be investigated! If it is truly the Holy Terra of legend, then your ships company must rejoin with it as soon as possible! Yet, if it is merely a trap for the unwary, it must be destroyed lest those of impure mind are fooled.

You have a number of vergers and such who are loyal to you - but your main power is the influence you have over the crew. You could probably incite them to take action for you, even if they are supposed to obey someone else. However, should this be discovered and objected to, you are likely to be removed.

Others

You don't have any influence over the marines - in fact they are somewhat hostile to your doctrine (even the parts of it which make clear that they are the holy swords of the Emperor and must be obeyed)

You loathe the alien. The filthy xenos has no place in the universe, as the emperor has decreed that all nonhumans shall be exterminated. Even using its weaponry, you find distasteful.

Personality: You like to sound wise. Speak slowly, and with many cryptic sayings, make them mean whatever you feel like. "Fools venture where angels fear to tread - that is, we should send scouts ahead of us."

Assassin



Navigator



Vitenka
(GM)

Priest



Marine



Master Of Arms



Alien



