

## **PART TWO**

Last time, I covered table coverage and layout limitations. This time, I'm going to examine each type of terrain.

### **Terrain Size**

Last week, I made it pretty clear that it's very hard to achieve 25% coverage while maintaining 8 inch spacing when using 8" x 8" terrain. While the rules allow for smaller pieces, I generally suggest avoiding smaller terrain. Generally, all this will do is create a large area with basically no terrain.

That said, if you use small pieces (like 6" x 6") I suggest you ignore the 8 inch spacing rule for these pieces...

### **Terrain Impact**

The closer terrain is towards the center, the more impact it will have on the game. The easiest way to determine how terrain impacts the game is to place it directly in the middle. Most of the following is based on that experience.

### **Asteroids**

Probably the most iconic space terrain you can have, even though it is basically unrealistic (from what we can observe in our solar system). It impedes and/or blocks direct fire weapons, and is dangerous for anything to enter. Generally, no one enters an asteroid field unless they have to... In other words, every asteroid field creates a section of the board no one will enter.

In addition, if the field is big enough, it will completely block line of sight. LOL-blocking terrain is generally bad for everybody. It is for these two reasons I have found asteroid fields should not be too big. The ideal shape seems to be oblong, not round. The short side should be less than 6 inches across, while the long side should be more than 8 inches across.

This creates a LOS-impeding area, with limited and specific LOS blocking areas. While it strongly discourages movement, it's generally feasible for any ship to completely transverse it in on turn.

All that said, some of my best games have featured a 12"x12" Asteroid field smack in the middle. This creates a huge LOS-blocker everyone must deal with.

### **Comets (and Comet Tails)**

I have played with at least one Comet in about 70% of my games, yet they always seem to

surprise me and hurt me. Like Planetoids, the bigger, the better. A maximum-sized 6" diameter comet showing up and blazing across the table, trailing 12" of Impeding LOS, will always throw a wrench in someone's plan (usually mine). Even a "medium" 4" Comet with an 8" Tail has a table presence.

The problem with Comets is they never seem to show up... I don't know how many games I've played where none of the comets (yes, 2+ Comets) showed up until the game was decided, and it didn't matter. They're also a bit annoying to move around every turn.

My suggestion, when you use Comets, is to house rule one Comet will arrive at the end of every Even turn or every Odd turn. This will give at least one Comet time to reach mid-table by Turn 5, where it will actually matter.

### **Debris Field**

Similar to an Asteroid Field, but so very different. They can only Impede LOS, and are not nearly as dangerous as Asteroids. They can even be beneficial, completely protecting models lurking within 1/3 the time.

1/3 of the time, though, they can be devastating, especially for Small ships. However, the damage is limited to only one model in the squad, and the squad owner can choose where to put the HP or CP loss... It can even impact a model outside of the Debris Field.

Because of all of this, I think a Debris Field can be just about any shape or size. In fact, the game would still be playable if the entire table was a Debris Field. Granted, Indirect Weapons and SRS would become crucial, and races with larger squad sizes would have an advantage, but it could still be done. You could not say the same for Asteroids...

### **Gas Clouds**

This terrain ruins my plans more than anything else. It always seems like a good idea to enter a Gas Cloud for how it impacts your opponent's shots, but then you fail a Disorder Test, and your squadron becomes useless.

The Rules say these can range from 3"-12" across, but a 3"x3" gas cloud is essentially useless. A cluster of small Gas Clouds, on the other hand, has a similar impact as a 12"X12" Gas Cloud, while offering less places to hide.

That said, I don't find much value in a huge gas cloud, because it does nothing to LOS. The biggest impact from a Gas Cloud is creating a space on the table where LOS is completely open. A 12"x12" Gas Cloud creates a rough 28"x28" zone where LOS is not altered in any way. Factions with very strong, long-range, Direct Weapons love this; their opponents do not.

This is why I think Gas Clouds should be about 8"x8".

## **Gravity Well**

First, I don't consider this Terrain, because it has no impact on LOS, so I don't count it towards the 25%. Second, the main thing a Gravity Well does is boost movement, so either both players need to benefit from this Turn 1, or neither should benefit. If only one player receives the boost, then it creates an unfair advantage for this player. Thus, I prefer placing Gravity Wells on the Short Edge, except for an Escalating Engagement, where they should be in a non-deployment Corner.

Something I have yet to determine is if a Gravity Well should contain any Terrain. One side benefitting from the movement boost might balance out if there's nothing to protect you in this zone. And if this does create an exclusion zone, what's the best way to handle terrain placement and the 25% coverage.

My instinct is to ignore the Gravity Well during terrain placement, and then completely remove any terrain completely within the Well. This way, the rest of the table will have normal terrain dispersion, instead of trying to cram 25% coverage into the remaining space. I usually just set up terrain, ignoring the Gravity Well, and it seems to work out ok.

## **Ghost Ship/Station**

At first, this seems like a great thing to have in the game; it's a neutral unit that fires indiscriminately at nearby models. But in reality, it's completely game breaking, but for different reasons.

First, a Ghost Station is worth +3 Battlelog to whoever destroys it. At 5/9 and 6HP, it's somewhat resilient, but they generally don't last through Turn 2. Here's why.

If the Ghost Station is placed near someone's deployment zone, or even in it, it seems like it will deny deployment area... But it really doesn't, because you can easily control what unit it shoots. Further, because it's right there, and your opponent is still too far away to effectively damage, it makes sense to shoot it and go for the Battlelog. Even if a player fails to destroy it with their entire fleet (unlikely) they'll probably damage it enough to reduce the Range Band 1 weapon to a mere 5-4AD, and PD to 2-1. This basically neutralizes its one attack, and makes it completely vulnerable Turn 2 to Boarding.

If the Ghost Station is placed near the middle, both players are given the following options:

- \* Shoot my opponent, and probably do no damage
- \* Shoot the Ghost Station, do damage, and try to gain Battlelog

Worst case, one player receives +3 Battlelog, for free. That is a potentially game-breaking amount of free Battlelog for basically zero cost. Best case, the Ghost Station is crippled, then ignored.

So, my recommendation is to simply not use Ghost Stations. I've written some house-rules to make them influential and dangerous like other terrain, starting by changing their weapon to Cyber Warfare. If you do use them, at least put them midway between both players.

### Planetoid

Everyone loves Planetoids, for fairly obvious reasons:

- \* Easy to make with a foam ball
- \* Blocks LOS
- \* +4 to Mv

I've found its best to go big or go home with planetoids, as it makes everything good about them better. My only advice is to place your Planetoids at least 4" from the table edge. This way, none of their Movement-boosting area is lost, and they're more likely to block LOS.

I do have a warning about Planetoids, though... Just like Gravity Wells, ensure access to the Movement bonus is balanced. If one player has Turn 1-Turn 2 access to a movement boost, and the other does not, it gives one player a distinct advantage. While not as obvious an advantage as destroying a Ghost Station for free Battlelog, it's still a tangible advantage.

So that's all seven types of terrain. Next week, it's time to start building the "perfect" table... Or at least the first draft for play-testing.

-Ryjak