

The Way of War – Necrons

Hello again and welcome to the second in this series of tactics articles; The Way of War. In this article we'll address an army we all love to hate, the Necrons. Firstly, however, an apology.

Recently I've been a bit busy with university exams and (more importantly at the moment, and the cause of my recent inactivity) moving house, so I had to miss last month's issue. Sorry about that folks. Fear not – I should be back to normal in a few days. At the moment, I have to endure the horrible keyboards at the campus, but the wonderful, wonderful internet should be in my house by the end of next week. In any case, these articles won't stop getting written, so there should be no further late issues.

The Necron Threat

I like to consider myself a fair and unbiased person, and I like to think my style of play reflects that; I don't build armies to win all the time in an unsporting way (to wit: "Cheesy" armies), but try to make armies that capture the flavour of a Tau army. To this end, I have grown into the belief that 95% of the time, a Tau army of any reasonable content has about a 50% chance of beating another army if both commanders have the same tactical knowledge. There are two times, however, I have been forced to admit that I'm just as opinionated as everyone else; Kroot and Necrons.

The Kroot, I won't go into at the moment – let's just say I'm not a fan of them and leave it at that. The Necrons are the problem in this article. Both commanders being equal in experience and knowledge, there is about a 75% chance that a Necron army will beat a Tau army. This article probably won't help you win every game, but hopefully it will help you on the first paths to conquering the Necron menace the Tau way.

The Rundown

So, what does a Necron army have that a Tau army dislikes? Let's have a look:

- **Solidly built core troops;** like Space Marines and their Chaos counterparts, Necron front-line troopers have a high toughness, good combat potential and a great armour save, not to mention superior ballistic skill. They may be a little slower than the marines in an assault, but that doesn't really matter to us; we're Tau. Also, the Necrons don't have many upgrades (indeed, the troops get only one upgrade, and that is rarely taken), so the fact they cost 18 points each doesn't make much difference to them – a squad of 10 is cheaper than a space marine squad of the same effectiveness.
- **Effective specialist units;** I'll cover all of these in more detail as the article progresses. Flayed Ones are an effective infiltrating combat unit, good at drawing your fire as the bulk of a Necron army gets closer to you. You have no choice but to shoot at them, or else your lines will be demolished in combat a turn after. Destroyers and Heavy Destroyers are insane shooting units, being able to move 12" in a turn and fire the equivalent of a Heavy Bolter or a Lascannon, or move 24" to grab terrain or get into a better firing position.

Immortals are a better version of the bog-standard warriors, and (of course) Scarabs are a cheap points-filler that just happens to be an excellent disrupting/tank killing unit if left alone.

- **Useful supporting units;** The Necron Lord, in particular, shines out of the list as an immensely powerful support for a Necron Army. Not only can he be a monster in combat and nearly unkillable, he makes the rest of the army nigh-on unstoppable at times. The Monolith is another such unit, being nearly indestructible and augmenting the Necron army repair itself at an insane rate. Tomb Spyderys are a great unit for allowing Necrons to get back up even when they are on their own (not to mention their awesome combat strength).
- **Gauss weapons;** The Gauss weapons toted by Necrons always glance a vehicle on an Armour Penetration roll of a 6, so even the lowliest Necron Warrior is able to down a Hammerhead if it gets lucky. Most Necron models have Gauss weapons as standard, and even close combat units (such as Flayed Ones and Scarabs) can be upgraded to use this ability in close combat (via the Disruption Field upgrade). Because of this special rule, the Necrons don't use many low-AP weapons; they have a lot of AP4 instead. This is obviously bad for a Tau army.
- **We'll Be Back;** The biggest advantage the Necrons have over any other army is arguably WBB. In essence, any Necron warrior who dies gets back up next turn on a roll of a 4+ on a D6. Instant Death negates this, but only if there is no Lord (with Resurrection Orb) in the vicinity. WBB is just about the most demoralising thing you'll ever come up against – your shooting phase downs 15 Warriors, and you are rewarded for the impressive dice rolls by watching 10 stand back up again! It is this tenacity (among other factors) which makes the Necron army so hard to beat.

That's a long list of advantages the Necrons have over Tau. Let's compare it to Tau advantages over the Necrons:

- **Cheaper units;** Tau generally have cheaper units than Necrons, and so can feasibly outnumber them every match. Whilst not game-winning, this little advantage can sometimes put you into a very good game position if you have a lucky first turn.
- **More mobile units;** Aside from a few units, the Necron army is a very slow machine, and Tau can outmanoeuvre it with relative ease with the use of jetpacks and grav-tanks.
- **Better weapons;** The Necrons may have access to Gauss technology, but the Tau have better weapons in terms of strength, penetration and range. Normally, this huge advantage would iron out the Necrons' big strengths, but WBB foils even this strength of the Tau at times.
- **Flexibility;** This is the advantage Tau players are going to have to rely on if they want to stand a chance against a Necron force: the Tau are infinitely more flexible than the Necrons, and the army lists echo this fact. By playing on it, you are more likely to outlast the Necrons than if you stand still and let them come towards you.
- **Phase Out;** When 75% of all *Necron*-designated models in a Necron force are dead, the rest of the army automatically follows suit and disappears from the table.

So, now we have the very basic points covered, we'll move into the murky waters of Necron tactics... or *tactic*, depending on your point of view.

The Phalanx

The most popular (and arguably only) Necron tactic is the Phalanx. It's a strange looking and sounding name, but here's what it really is: a great big block of troops. The purpose of the phalanx is simple – to keep as many Necrons inside the range of the Necron Lord's Orb or the Monolith as possible. The formation then moves slowly down the board, sending out quick flanking units like Wraiths and Scarabs to pin down the enemy and then gunning down the rest or engaging on combat. The Phalanx is (thanks to WBB and the other advantages of the Necrons) a devilishly difficult tactic to beat, simply because the Necrons keep getting back up. A Typical Necron Phalanx Army is composed of 3 or 4 squads of Warriors, a smattering of Destroyers and Heavy Destroyers, a Lord and some Scarabs, and a Monolith at higher-points games. Since all of these save the scarabs and Monolith are *Necron*-designated, the phase-out point of the army is incredibly difficult to get to.

You know all of this already if you have faced Necrons before, since the phalanx is virtually the only tactic used by every Necron player – indeed, I haven't yet seen a Necron game where the player has NOT used the phalanx. But, what can you do about it? Here are the key points that I have found in my games against the Necrons:

1. The Phalanx is slow

The most popular formation of Necron combat is incredibly slow and ponderous as it plods its way down the table towards your battle-line. Most Necron players will have a little something in their army to try and keep you occupied until their forces come into range to open up on your models; Wraiths, Scarabs and Flayed Ones. Alternatively, he will be quite happy to forgo flanking troops and lay into your lines with Destroyers, Heavy Destroyers and the Monolith if it Deep Strikes. In any case, you are looking to get rid of these flanking units if you have the chance – it gives you more time to concentrate fire on the Necron Warriors making up the bulk of his force. Also, taking away the key elements of his army will severely cripple the Necron player; he depends on those first waves to get him through the early game.

2. The Phalanx is inflexible

The whole point of the Phalanx is to keep the Necron-designated elements of the Necron force safe, by keeping them near the near-obligatory Lord with Resurrection Orb or the monolith. Ultimately (after many games and victories), this leads to a particular mindset in a Necron player; the phalanx rarely loses at all. This makes him reluctant to break up his formation, even if it would be detrimental for him not to do so. You have the means to force him into making this game-turning decision in the forms of infiltrating and deep striking units, as well as the more mobile elements of the Tau army. Often, breaking up the phalanx is a sure fire way of making a Necron player make a tactical mistake – in all honesty, many Necron players have little to no experience making tactical choices if Necrons are their first and only army. Once a unit leaves the 6" "Safe Zone" around the Lord, it is susceptible to instant kill (which denies a Necron it's WBB save). The phalanx itself is too slow to react to sudden changes in game pace; play on it.

The trick to beating the phalanx is taking out the specialist (fast) Necron units first, and then breaking up the phalanx to deal with the rest. If you can pull that off, you should be on firm standing to finish the game off how you started.

Unit Overview

I'll finish this month's article with a quick run-down of the Necron army list, with the strengths and weaknesses of each unit type. Enjoy:

HQ

Necron Lord

Strengths: The lynchpin of the Necron army, the Lord is incredibly difficult to kill himself. Not only does it gain benefits from being an "independent character", it also has a massive toughness of 5 and a 3+ armour save. It can be upgraded with 100 points of special wargear (although 60 points of this limit is invariably tied up in a Resurrection Orb) which can give him an invulnerable save, make him even tougher or allow him to get back up after dying with all his wounds left. He is a solid melee combatant, and also good at shooting if the Staff of Light is given to him.

Weaknesses: Like many other Necron units, the Lord is slow without the Destroyer Body. He is also one of the most inflexible units since most Necron players adamantly refuse to move him from the centre of the phalanx, no matter how crucial his intervention may be to a situation. A Lord can also cost up to 210 points, making him a large investment in a Necron army. Killing him (hard) can be a game winning move.

How to deal with it: Don't. Kill all the other Necrons instead, because you aren't really going to have a good shot at the Lord. If you do, hit it with Railguns and strength 6-7 weapons for the best chance of wounding, and hope he fails the WBB save.

C'tan

Strengths: The presence of a C'tan on the field is enough to speak for itself; stronger, tougher, scarier and nastier than any other single choice in the game, the C'tan is the very definition of squished Tau. Not only are they impossibly tough melee foes, they are very hard to kill via shooting too. Both flavours of C'tan have game-shifting presences, although the Deceiver has more of a chance of messing with your game plan than the Nightbringer does. Fortunately, most Necron players are content to mess around with the phalanx. C'tan are literally gods on the battlefield.

Weaknesses: C'tan are cripplingly expensive and slow to boot; most armies can just play around them. Also, their armour save (whilst invulnerable) is only 4+, giving you a better chance to inflict injury after wounding.

How to deal with it: Play around the C'tan like you would around a Lord. If you have nothing better to do with your Railguns, take a few pot shots – they may come off. Otherwise, let Phase Out do its work.

Elites

Immortals

Strengths: Immortals are beefed up Warriors. It really is that simple. They have an extra point of toughness and an ASSAULT 2 Gauss Weapon. As with Warriors, they

are also *Necron*, benefit from WBB and contribute to Phase Out. They normally come in units of 5 Immortals, sometimes backed up by a Lord with the Veil of Darkness for teleporting the unit around the table. A truly scary elite component of the phalanx.

Weaknesses: Immortals are expensive at 35 points per model, and they are therefore few in number. Also, since you only have to down 5 of them to get them off the board (in smaller-points games that is) they are easier to kill than Warriors at times. Immortals with a teleporting Lord leave themselves (and the Lord) open to return fire when it isn't their turn.

How to deal with it: If you get a clear shot at this unit, take it when you can – it is quite rare that more than one unit is on the table. As with most priority shooting, shoot everything you can at the unit until it is dead. Plasma Rifles, Railguns and Ion Cannons are excellent for wiping Immortals off the table, particularly if you used Pathfinders to mark the targets first.

Flayed Ones

Strengths: Flayed Ones *Deep Strike*, so they can appear in the middle of your lines, forcing leadership tests to shoot the phalanx and threatening your flanks. They are a powerful dedicated combat unit; the Necron equivalent of the Space Marine Assault Squad. If ignored, they will tear a hole in your battle line from the outside in. Flayed ones are designated *Necron*.

Weaknesses: Whilst Deep Strike is good, there is always the element of randomness associated with it which could spell doom for the unit due to fickle dice. Since they cannot shoot, their only place is in combat, making them a sacrificial unit. Taking Flayed Ones is a bit of a gamble – most Necron players leave them out in favour of more Warriors.

How to deal with them: If they pop up, it probably won't be in very large numbers. Treat them as a priority target, and kill them all. If facing more than one squad, or if more than one threat is present at the time they appear, take the necessary steps to minimise unit damage (move units out of consolidation range, select targets carefully for each squad, and try and get as many units out of harm's way as possible).

Pariahs

Strengths: Pariahs are tough, can shoot well, can fight well, ignore all saves (including invulnerable ones) and have a good armour save. They also make other units fail leadership tests more easily thanks to their ability, and disrupt psykers. On paper, these guys are hot stuff.

Weaknesses: Unfortunately for them, they are in the wrong army list. Any other army would be happy to have the Pariahs in their ranks, but they are not *Necron*, don't get WBB and cost a lot. They are slow, as with all Necron units. About 1 in 30 Necron players bothers to use Pariahs, and only then in specialist situations.

How to deal with it: Plasma rifles and Railguns. No WBB means free points for you, especially with the large investment Pariahs represent.

Troops

Necron Warriors

Strengths: Warriors are tough, have good guns and BS, good WS and S, a great armour save and are *Necron* designated. Need I say more?

Weaknesses: Warriors are expensive, and have few upgrades. They are slow and inflexible. They are also slower in combat than Kroot.

How to deal with it: Deal with the phalanx, and you've dealt with the warriors. Plasma Guns are great as always, since they disallow armour saves. Railguns are not so good if only for their rate of fire. Submunitions can sometimes be a good choice, but for infantry killing the Ion Cannon will always be better for heavy infantry like warriors.

Fast Attack

Destroyers

Strengths: Toughness 5, jetbike-mounted, *Necron* designated models with Heavy Bolters attached. Destroyers are the bane of Fire Warriors, because they can move faster, shoot further and move and shoot up to full range. Most of the time. This amounts to 3 dead fire warriors a turn per destroyer.

Weaknesses: Expensive and limited in numbers. Fortunately, most *Necron* armies will only include a single squad of destroyers, and they are in a small enough number to possibly get rid of on turn 1.

How to deal with it: Long range firepower on turn 1 and 2 should sort out the problem, although against an opponent who tailors his lists to suit the army he is facing, you may want to consider leaving some of your Fire Warriors in the case and taking something with a better armour save. For people who play with lots of Fire Warriors, Destroyers are your bane, and sometimes it may be better to just concede a game if your opponent brings more than 10 out of his case. Of course, cover helps a lot against Destroyers, just as it does with any AP 4 weapon.

Wraths

Strengths: Very fast, equipped with a permanent invulnerable save, great in combat, ignore difficult terrain. *Necron* designated.

Weaknesses: Very small unit size, very fast compared to the main army, expensive in terms of points.

How to deal with it: Shooting with Fire Warriors is the best option – they need to get close to you to do anything, and their 3+ invulnerable save means plasma rifles are ineffective against them. Usually, a single squad of Fire Warriors will get the job done. Normally, a *Necron* player only uses these as a diversion. A free 123 points for a full squad.

Scarabs

Strengths: Cheap, lots of wounds, fast, can take on tanks with the Disruption Field Ability, lots of attacks.

Weaknesses: Not very strong in combat, vulnerable to blasts, not *Necron* designated, poor armour save.

How to deal with it: Scarabs are the kind of unit which is a handy filler for a Necron force when it has reached the point where it needs to fill 70 points but everything else is too expensive. They can quite easily tie up your front line in combat whilst the rest of the army gets close enough to shoot you. Even though they aren't *Necron* designated, they should be a priority target simply for this fact. Submunition shots are very effective against this kind of unit, as are the Burst Cannons of Stealth Suits.

Heavy Support

Heavy Destroyers

Strengths: As with Destroyers, except Heavy Destroyers tote the Heavy Gauss Cannon, basically a Lascannon. Anyone who has seen the stats of a Lascannon can testify that the concept of placing one on a jetbike (which can therefore move and fire the weapon in the same turn) is obscenely broken. GW in their wisdom did it with Heavy Destroyers.

Weaknesses: At 50 points a model, they aren't cheap. Also, they have a squad size of 1-3. However, compare this to an imperial Dreadnought – the twin-linked Lascannon option is 50pts... I'm still trying to work out why this hasn't been rectified.

How to deal with it: During the first couple of turns of the game, use your long range firepower (mostly Railguns for this job) to take down the destroyers before they make a mockery of your tanks and battlesuits. It is imperative that you keep as many of your suits alive to keep up the volley of fire that is needed to tackle a Necron army. Alternatively, keep your suits and tanks out of line of sight if you can, and take your shots as they are presented.

Tomb Spyderys

Strengths: Tomb Spyderys keep the rest of the Necron army alive by providing a "bridge" from one unit to another – as long as there is a unit within 12" of it, any other unit of the same type within 12" that gets destroyed can still make a WBB roll as if there was a Necron model within 6" of it! A powerful support indeed. Usually seen in the middle of 2 squads of 5 Immortals, just in case. They are Monstrous Creatures in combat, and have a high toughness. They can also produce scarab swarms to help themselves out in combat.

Weaknesses: Tomb Spyderys are not *Necron* designated, and they are reasonably expensive. They do not have a good weapon or ballistic skill. This means that they are only normally used when there are two or more Immortal squads on the table. Consequently, the amount of other units is limited by the combined cost of the Spydery and the Immortals. Only seen in higher-points games.

How to deal with it: Don't kill them unless you really need to. If you do, use plasma rifles and Railguns, along with similar high power, low AP weapons. Mass firepower from Fire Warriors can help too.

The Monolith

Strengths: The Monolith is both an extremely useful support and a deadly war weapon. It can deep strike without fear of dying, can help raise warriors that failed their WBB rolls, can teleport reserves onto the table and can unleash a S 10 AP 1 Ordinance blast. It has an armour value of 14, making it as tough as a land raider, and unlike most skimmers it does not crash if it is immobilised. Fusion Blasters within 6" don't get their extra D6 of penetration.

Weaknesses: The Monolith definitely isn't *Necron* designated. Fortunately, its ordinance weapon is short ranged, at 24". It is, of course, slow and usually accompanies the phalanx. The Monolith is a huge points investment for a Necron player, and putting it out of action can cripple his army.

How to deal with it: Railguns. During deployment, try and position your troops so his own warriors are in between the Monolith and you. That way, there is always a chance (no matter how small) that any ordinance blasts it fires will scatter back into the phalanx. No other gun you have can kill the Monolith; the Railgun is the only way to destroy it. Nevertheless, it is not a turn 1 priority; it becomes a threat in the midgame.

Wrapping it up

As a final few point about facing the Necron threat, it is important to designate your targets and kill them in the order of threat posed to your troops at any given moment. For a typical phalanx, a valid shooting order is this:

Turn 1: **1st Priority:** Destroyers, Heavy Destroyers
2nd Priority: Scarabs, Wraiths, Immortals, Monolith
Turn 2: **1st Priority:** Scarabs, Wraiths, Immortals
2nd Priority: Monolith, Warriors
Turn 3: **1st Priority:** Monolith, Warriors
2nd Priority: Lord, Tomb Spyderys, etc

Looking at your opponent's army before a game and making a mental note of what the key threats are is a vital part of your victory – don't be afraid to think before a game as well as before it.

Well, that concludes my look at Necrons; as before, any comments, suggestions to my writing style and requests for future tactics articles should be posted on the message boards or PM'd to me. Your suggestions are an important part of this article! Without them, I don't know what you want me to cover, so I may end up covering a topic that is completely out of touch with what you need. With that said, this is Omega signing off once again – Happy Necron hunting!