

# DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Near future combat

By John Treadaway

## INTRODUCTION

For those who saw the Salute pull out with *issue 433* I was involved with writing a short piece on the preparations for a game called *Dark Side of the Moon*. The game began 'touring' at **Hammerhead** in 2019, hit **Salute**, **Colours** and **TTG Live** and will end sometime in this 'show season' after appearing at both **SELWG** and **Warfare**.

The game is organised by a South London Warlords team and I've had the privilege to help out with some elements of it although – as with all such efforts – it's very much a team project. Key to this were a couple of club members Peter Merritt (who wrote the core of the rules and sourced some of the materials like the excellent cloth from Tiny Wargames) and Ivan Congreve who did a lot of scratch building on the 'moonbase' (more of which later). We also had help from a number of manufacturers including **Ground Zero Games**, **Scotia Grendel** and **Brigade**.

This article will cover the very basic rules we use in the open day game which is a 'stripped down' version of a larger and ongoing set but can be very much used as a tool box for adding ideas onto. It will also cover some of the scenery and painting aspects of the game.

## BUILDING THE MOON

We wanted a rolling moonscape and – having spent too long humping scenery boards about – we thought the best approach was a printed cloth. Peter contacted **Tiny Wargames** who – although they didn't have a suitable one for the moon (it not being a very popular wargames location) – did have a nice photographic one for Mars. With the colours leached out and all redness banished, a photo-realistic grey, cratered surface was printed onto a 12ft by 6ft cloth for a very reasonable price.

The next thing we needed were craters. There are many different approaches to this and we took a couple of routes. Small craters were supplied by **Scotia Grendel** who do a very nice range of resin items called *Lunar Craters* (distinct from their *Blast Craters*) that simply require a paint job and this was done in greys with a black wash and a dry brush to match in with the cloth. So far so good and they worked well in a *Trompe-l'œil* fashion as it is often hard to see which craters are which are resin and which are simply printed.

For some bigger scenery craters I bought some black foam. This is like blue foam (beloved of wargamers for a while) but it's... well, it's *black*. I purchased some from **Amazon** and found that the colour change gives a couple of benefits: specifically an ease of painting and a resistance to chips and damage.

My Craters were made by cutting the blocks with a hot wire cutter into roughly 200mm square by 80mm thick chunks and – using my extractor in my painting spot and wearing a breathing mask – I attacked each piece with a blow torch. This led (with a couple of misfires) into nicely dished craters (and a fair amount of melted foam...)

Scotia Grendel and Brigade supplied various domes to use on the lunar surface – the latter in 15mm (the chosen game scale) but the former in what (when I first reviewed them for **Fantasy Facts** three decades ago) were small even *then* for '25mm'. So ideal for 1/100th!

## THE BASE

As we all love the Anderson **UFO TV series**, we wanted to make a moon base for that and Brigade make some fabulous geodesic domes in 15mm as free standing buildings. They also make some structures that happen to be very close to the balls we needed for our moon base so Ivan set to work. With five of those domes along with lots of electrical conduit, plastic card and several **Dapol Girder Bridges** for the launch ramp it meant we had a pretty good likeness for the TV series lunar base as our central objective. This was mounted on a large sheet of MDF although all of the other domes buildings were stuck to EPVC bases.

Finally I added the three Interceptor launch bay craters, again from blow-torched foam with some blank CDs as the platforms and three pre-finished Interceptor models by **Konami** in Japan.

## FIGURES

Figures for the range are all from **GZG**. The game calls for three forces: the *Chinese* (who have taken over Moonbase); the *US* forces who are attacking them; and the *British* forces who have recently evacuated the base, are hiding in domes around the outside and who will attack one of the other forces – US or Chinese – depending on our scenario.

All of the figures are from their 1/100th scale **Moongrunt** range and they are a great set of models with lots of figure and weapon choices. The US and Chinese forces have a real ‘near future’ vibe about them and are wearing suits and back packs that wouldn’t look too out of place right now (assuming that we ever go back to the moon, obviously...). They all have large back packs and sizable helmets and carry rifles, carbines, heavier weapons and rocket launchers: all the fun stuff! The Brits are slightly different as I really wanted some figures that reminded me of the suits they wore on the UFO TV series. So although they are supplied with back packs, I chose to leave them off and went with a complimentary paint scheme, which I’ll cover in a moment.

Bearing in mind I had the thick end of 200 15mm US and Chinese to paint, they all got my ‘fast painting’ technique. They were hot glued to tongue depressors in strips of five or so and spray undercoated in a mid-grey. When dry they were then over sprayed with a zenithal highlight from above in white. All of this was done with ‘rattle cans’ from the likes of Halfords. These figures then had details painted on: weapons in black and silver; visors in silver and differing coloured panels on back-packs and so forth. They were then all given a dip in a *Future* floor polish and Ink mix to bring out the detail and then spray matt varnished.

When they were nice and dry (and matt!) they were given glossy highlights: they were given different coloured visors using **Tamiya** coloured lacquers (over the silver base) and – as in the future, we know from science fiction that many weapons will be in a high chrome finish (to avoid vacuum welding, obviously...) I used some special chrome paint. Actually it’s an ink refill for chrome ‘pens’ which I bought on Amazon and – when you squeeze some out of the bottle – it looks like a blob of mercury and shines wonderfully!

The Brits were left in bare metal (silver suits, right?) with (mostly) yellow helmets, various other coloured items and other accoutrement, then varnished and finished in the same way: Blue Tamiya for the visors and chrome for the bazookas!

## VEHICLES

We selected several vehicles. Most were the resin and white metal **Moongrunt** vehicles from the **GZG** range, concentrating on the wheeled ones, especially the 6x6 models. The US ones look slightly more modern and near future but the Chinese ones have a definite 'submarine meets plumbers nightmare' look to them (like something from old Soviet stockpiles) and are all spot on.

We added to them with some purchases from eBay (Pete just can't stop himself...) and the US Rocket sleds we chose to use are some die-cast **Matchbox** 'submarines' which have skids and rocket pods/engines which – with their bubble canopies – looked rather neat. I also bought some current NASA rovers from the same manufacturer that came with a similar amount of clear glazing. There were all taken apart with the rivets being drilled out, painted, seated astronauts inserted, and then sealed back up again.

Painting followed the same 'gray/white/zenithal' approach with more windows in Blue Tamiya and some decals added. All vehicles were then based for use which is pretty *essential* for the GZG ones (being quite heavy with lots of sticky out wheels and legs) but they all needed to be based for reasons I will make clear..

## BASES

The rules needed figures to be based in groups: generally, two men to a missile unit; three figures in a Support Weapon unit; and four men in a rifle unit. This aids with identification on the table top as you can see what a unit is armed with even down the length of a table, assuming you can see how many figures are on the base. All of the bases are circular MDF in 40mm or 50mm (depending on figure numbers) or larger for vehicles. Each base needed to accommodate some tiny dice (I'll get onto that) so each had a crescent of Black **Milliput** added to the back with four dice shaped depressions pushed into it via single dice stuck on a stick or a set of four stuck onto a spare base.

The painted figures were then superglued onto the bases and the texture added. This was my usual home-made basing compound (50/50 Brown paint and PVA glue with that mixture having another third added to it from sharp sand) but I wanted it to be black. So – rather than mix up more – I went again to my 'paint dye' solution and bought a pot of intense black paint colorant from Amazon. I added the dye to a big pot of my brown stuff and turned it into *almost* black ground cover (actually an immensely dark brown).

These bases – along with the moon base and domes – were then finished with some scatter. This texture came from a selection of coal and railway ballast kindly supplied by **Golden Valley Hobbies** as a review sample and it worked very well in this roll. All the bases were dry brushed and... we were done: figures and vehicles with little 'mini-craters' to take up to four, 5mm coloured dice. Why the dice, you may ask?



## RULES

Pete's rules started off with lots of add-ons but had to be stripped for an open day game. The essentials are these but most of this can be gleaned from the downloadable play sheet:

### The Turn

In each turn a hand of cards is dealt to each player. In card order they then have individual figure or vehicle units perform three actions per unit. This is called a phase. At the end of a hand (where everyone has moved and fought with as many figures and vehicles as they can until their cards are depleted) there's a recovery phase where units may be recovered if they've been injured the dust settles (literally) and then a new hand is dealt for the next turn.

### Unit Definition

Figures and vehicles are mounted and moved on individual bases, two, three or four figures (or one vehicle) to a base.

### Quality levels

There are three levels of quality: Elite (like the US) get 5 Attack Dice and are dealt five activation cards (from a standard, shuffled card deck). Veterans (like the Chinese) get 4 Attack Dice and four cards. Trained (if you have any) get 3 Attack Dice and three cards.

### Activation

Each turn, the teams are dealt their required number of cards. We tend to run two US teams (five cards each) and two Chinese teams (four card each). Each turn is divided into a number of phases where players move some of their units in the order of card play. Each phase, the players chose one card from their hand and play it face down. When all cards are played they are then revealed. Players then activate a unit in priority order of the card 'face value' for that initiative suit (with the ACE as high). In the event of a tie, go in 'suit' order (i.e. Hearts, Clubs, Diamonds, Spades). Repeat these phase steps until all players have exhausted either their available units or card supply.

### Actions

Each unit can take three Actions per turn, choosing from the following: **Move, fire, Close Assault, Support, Mount/dismount, Recover damage** (with infantry). Activated units (and dragged units – *see below*) are all marked with a yellow dice. No more than **two** actions of the same type may be performed in one turn. These actions may be taken in any order (eg: **Move, Move, Fire**, or **Recover, Move, Fire**, or **Move [inc a FREE close assault], Close Assault, Close Assault**) but they must be nominated in advance.

### Moving



Check out distances on the movement (and firing) chart on the play sheet. To make measuring easy, we use coloured dowels (sizes yellow: 10cm; blue: 15cm; red: 20cm; white: 30cm, and black: 45cm) but a tape measure can be used instead. Moving may incur a blue movement dice (or dust markers for vehicles). This makes them easier to target when moving fast not harder (on account of the huge plume of dust behind them! When moving, units may drag other similar units less than a base width away with them. They get the same number of blue dice as the activated unit. These dust indicators carry over to the next turn, reducing one pip (or dust cloud) per turn. Again, check out details of movement on the play sheet.

### Combat Resolution

Either using ranged shooting or close assault the same system is used. Attackers dice (5 for Elite, 4 for Veterans etc) are bowled versus the Defenders dice. These are 'paired off' (with any over's re-rolled). Each attacker dice which is higher than defenders results in a hit.

## COMBAT RESOLUTION EXAMPLE

### Veteran attack Veteran Defence

 **V**  = 2 hits

Generally rifles do 1 damage per hit, heavy weapons 2 damage and missiles 1D3 damage per hit but check the play sheet for details. You get more dice for dust clouds or blue dice when you shoot and you get fewer if you have red dice hits marked on your base.

If an infantry base accrues a red indicator dice two points higher than it's quality level (so 6 in the case of veterans, for example) it is immediately removed. If it chooses to spend actions during it's turn to bowl it's Attack dice to recover some of those - or, at the end of turn, manages to remove any - then they may still survive if they can get their red dice 'hit indicator' down to less than their quality level, they may yet get to fight in the next turn.

Vehicles take damage that gets through an armour level and a damage roll is made on a separate chart (*see the play sheet*).

### **End of turn housekeeping**

At the end of each 'hand of cards' - each turn - players remove all yellow and green dice (the green dice are nominated support dice) and attack dice are rolled to reduce any damage. Reduce blue dice or dust by one pip or dust cloud as it settles!

## **CONCLUSION**

And that's largely it: the rules are simple and more detail can be found on the play sheet. Like I said earlier, you should view this rule set as a tool box of ideas around which you can build other components (tech rolls to achieve things, science rolls to detect things, all of which can be added into a more complex scenario) and we use the same opposed dice racking system when we do this. However, the show game is largely about storming the moon base and shooting stuff!

## **LINKS**

Ground Zero Games: [gzg.com](http://gzg.com)

Scotia Grendel: [scotiagrendel.com](http://scotiagrendel.com)

Brigade Models: [brigademodels.co.uk](http://brigademodels.co.uk)

Tiny Wargames: [tinywargames.co.uk](http://tinywargames.co.uk)

Golden Valley Hobbies: [goldenvalleyhobbies.com](http://goldenvalleyhobbies.com)