MANDATE ARCHIVE

Bruxelles-Class Battlecruiser

For Use with *Stars Without Number*

The only thing you cannot do with a bayonet is sit on it.
                                                    - Tallyrand

In the decades before the Scream, the *Bruxelles* class of battlecruiser was a common sight on the borders of the Terran Mandate's core worlds. Whereas most fleet cruisers struck a balance between armor, range, and weaponry, the *Bruxelles* class was intended for extended cruises along the periphery of Mandate space and occasional strikes outward into some unruly sector of the frontier. Much of the advanced armor and ECM systems that protected other ships of the line were sacrificed for greater speed, endurance, and weight of fire. The *Bruxelles* was intended as an implement of discipline, a tool to correct those border polities or alien invaders who imagined that the insular Mandate was unable to defend its interests.

By the time of the Scream, the *Bruxelles* class was no longer a cutting-edge warship. Its armament, engines, and shielding systems were over a century old, and many of the cruisers had been in active service for almost as long. Still, even their dusty guns could wipe the sky clean of any civilian ships turned raider and smash the defensive orbitals of hostile frontier worlds. A single *Bruxelles* was amply able to enforce the Mandate's peace on any stellar polity that lacked military-grade pretech shipyards. The fragile battlecruisers wouldn't last long against a modern Mandate dreadnought, and still less could they withstand the experimental mindships that the forges of Old Terra were fashioning toward the end of the Second Wave, but they were sufficient to deal with border rabble.

The Scream caught many of these ships far from port. No one can be certain how many thousands of these battlecruisers were left to die in vain attempts to reach the dead worlds that were their homes, or how many were made into candles of metallic vapor by the blind rage of Terra's autonomic defense grid. Even those who managed to find shelter on some frontier world soon found their precious ship stripped to her deckplates for the priceless pretech parts she contained. A few polities tried to keep their prizes running long enough to plunder their neighbors, but in the end, virtually all of these ancient guardians were torn to pieces and scavenged for parts that young worlds could not hope to craft.

Still, every so often, a *Bruxelles* is found deep in the cold void of a system's outer rim or hanging silently in orbit around a dead world. Most of these ships are crippled in some way, either wounded in battle or worn down too far to make drillspace under her own power. Her crew is almost always long since silent in the perfect preservation of airless, icy night, and her engines are dead or sleeping the long sleep of centuries. But with the right parts, the right help, and the right mad ambition, these ships can rise again to cut a red road through the stars.

Operational Parameters

The external hull of the *Bruxelles* class occasionally varied from shipyard to shipyard, particularly as the design aged and the Terran Mandate began to fit military components into salvaged and retrofitted civilian hulls. Without the omen shields and bleedplate standard to more balanced Mandate warships, the *Bruxelles* class could afford to use the softer-skinned shells of civilian craft, and budgetary constraints increasingly pressed on the later run of battlecruisers.

The original *Bruxelles* was approximately three hundred meters in length, seventy meters in depth, and fifty meters in width, the shape forming a rounded wedge with blisters along the ventral side for her planetary bombardment armament and shuttle docking bays. Three hundred personnel formed her standard complement of crew, though her life support systems were rated for up to sixteen hundred before her atmosphere and consumables started to fail under the strain. Gengineered plant and fungal life was designed to maintain the ship's complement indefinitely while under way, with biological atmosphere scrubbers and edible force-grown organics that could be cycled for years before needing an infusion of external biomass. The *Bruxelles* could theoretically stay in space with sixteen hundred humans aboard for up to five years without resupply. In practice, even pretech maintenance technology could not keep a warship flying that long under combat conditions without some sort of repair. Those captains who pushed their ships to the limit usually found themselves dead in space, alone and helpless in a frontier system unable to provide the necessary parts to revive a crippled warship.

The *Bruxelles* was intended to be a fist, and while its armor was weak by pretech military standards its enormous weight of gunnery could make it a threat to any ship of a comparable class. Engaging a *Bruxelles* was a bad exchange for even the most bloodthirsty frontier raider or alien invader. While it might be possible to cripple the human battlecruiser with sufficient firepower and gunner's luck, any attacker was very likely to be mortally wounded as well. Most troublemakers found it better to seek softer prey in a different system, assuming the *Bruxelles* didn't run them down first.

The *Bruxelles* was a particular threat to hostile space stations, orbitals, and asteroid bases. The Ramrod weapons system it carried was optimized for penetrating the hulls of stationary, drill-incapable targets. Very few frontier worlds had access to the sophisticated omen shields necessary to nullify such a bombardment, and still less did pirates and border raiders. The *Bruxelles* could crack the shell of the toughest renegade orbital, and after the sky had been cleared of defensive stations there was little to stop an orbital bombardment beyond the few surface defenses and braker guns the world could manage to muster. These simple defensive arrays were no match for the grav-shear munitions the *Bruxelles* carried, massive bombardment missiles capable of cutting through the defensive screen of braker guns and AA lasers sported by most worlds. A single hit was sufficient to erase a city.

The Culture of the Ship

Unsurprisingly, the presence of a *Bruxelles*-class cruiser in a frontier world's star system was unwelcome to most locals. A few border polities had the strength to keep these Mandate enforcers outside of their claimed space, but most frontier worlds were forced to simply tolerate the presence of the ship and acquiesce to any demands the Mandate might make through it. Mandate rules of engagement theoretically prohibited the planetary bombardment of civilians, but in practice, any border world that dared to present a serious threat to the Mandate could expect to find its population centers reduced to ash and bitter memories.

The officers and ratings of a *Bruxelles* were often separated from the core worlds of the Mandate for years on end, and the Mandate Navy went to exceptional lengths to select dedicated, loyal men and women for the crew. It was not impossible for such ships to be years away from the nearest naval base or significant fleet support, and the crew had to be capable of maintaining the Mandate's interests even when far outside the reach of its mandarins. In many cases, this dedication curdled to a kind of blind chauvinism, a contempt for the savage "colonials" and a casual indifference to the lives of frontier dwellers. Fellow crew became precious reminders of the more civilized worlds they had left behind, and the preservation of the ship and her crew became infinitely more important than the lives of a few hundred thousand half-feral colonists.

Some such ships became indistinguishable from the pirates they were intended to combat. They levied "Mandate taxes" on the worlds they encountered, skimming the best the planet had to offer to keep the ship in fighting trim and fill her holds with plunder for their distant masters. They razed military shipyards and flattened "excess military construction" in order to ensure that the world could not trouble its neighbors or the Mandate, and if such exactions left the planet vulnerable to raiders or aliens, it was a regrettably necessary price to pay for interstellar peace. These ships often made contact with remote Perimeter agencies, taking on their enigmatic spies and operatives to strike at some well-hidden maltech development lab or burgeoning abomination. They scourged the worlds that they passed.

A few *Bruxelles*-class ships followed a different path, however, captained by officers with more sympathy to the frontier or crewed by men and women more willing to see the primitive colonials as equals rather than sheep to be sheared. These ships often became the unofficial arbiters of peace in frontier sectors, ensuring peaceful trade and diplomacy among their charges and defending them against outsiders who would seek to prey on them. Some of these ships gradually passed out of the reach of the Mandate navy entirely, reliant on unofficial parts requisitions and friends at headquarters to obtain vital spares and taking on new generations of crews from the local worlds. So long as their sectors remained quiet and a reasonable flow of taxes came in to the nearest Mandate collection depot the brass were willing to let certain unorthodoxies pass without comment.

Ship's Complement

A *Bruxelles* could be flown with as few as fifty spacers, though only a desperate captain would take her into battle with such a minimal crew. Three hundred spacers filled out its complement under ordinary conditions. For further details on the organization, crew, and daily operation of a warship and its departments, a GM may consult the *Skyward Steel* supplement for naval campaigns.

The ship's commanding officer was usually an O-6 Captain, and the executive officer was commonly an O-5 Commander. During the waning years of the Second Wave, these ranks sometimes lessened a grade as the Mandate grew stretched for manpower and experienced officers.

Each department was headed by an O-4 Lieutenant Commander, with an O-3 Lieutenant department executive to help oversee the crew in the department and to season the lieutenant up for their own eventual department command. The senior enlisted in each department usually qualified as an E-7 Chief Petty Officer at the least, though on very long cruises it was not unknown for warrant officers to serve in the more technical departments.

Each department had its own complement of ratings, usually leavened with a few O-1 Midshipmen getting in their training cruise. Given the very long tours that most *Bruxelles*-class ships encountered, their midshipmen tended to be those unlucky enough to draw the ire of their academy instructors or those reckless enough to crave the excitement of the frontier even if it cost them four or five years of humble rank.

COMPLEMENTS	
Department	**Crew Minimum/Normal**
Administration	0/10
Astrogation	1/12
Chaplaincy	0/1
Communications	8/21
Deck	21/88
Engineering	8/21
Intelligence	0/6
Marine	0/25
Medical	0/15
Science	0/6
Supply	0/6
Training	0/6
Weapons	10/60

Minimum crew totals give the absolute minimum necessary to pilot the ship through a spike drill or fight her with all weapons firing. Only absolute necessity will force a captain into operating with such a feeble crew, however, as casualties during a hot battle or difficult drill can render his ship utterly unable to drill or defend herself. Even without battle losses, attempting a seven-day drill with a single amphetamine-pumped astrogator is not something conducive to a ship's good health.

Using The Ship

For a GM, a *Bruxelles*-class cruiser is largely useful as a macguffin. Included here are a number of different groups who might all be eager to get their hands on such a ship.

Expansionist planetary governments would be ecstatic at the chance to get a cruiser capable of smashing their neighbors' defense orbitals and bombarding their population centers. The braker guns and defensive lasers used in the post-Scream era are no use against the *Bruxelles*' grav-shear munitions, so a world with one of these cruisers in their fleet is an unstoppable threat to any but the most powerful and advanced polities.

However, the spare parts and replacement munitions for the *Bruxelles* are probably unavailable to any such expansionist group. Combined with the enormous cost of keeping the cruiser flying on postech spares and maintenance, this means that any such would-be conqueror must use the ship quickly, before it breaks down or exhausts the world with its maintenance costs. The longer it takes for the ship to subdue a foreign world, the bigger the chance that something irreplaceable will break down and render the entire war machine useless as anything but spare parts.

Governments that intend to use a *Bruxelles* for conquest also cannot afford to let their neighbors realize what's going on until the ship is ready to attack. While the cruiser can effortlessly crush most ships that a post-Scream polity might field, it remains vulnerable to treachery and sabotage. If enemies can get agents into its staging base or worse still, aboard the ship itself, the entire warship can be taken out before it's had a chance to fire its first shot.

Ambitious researchers would all love to get their hands on a *Bruxelles*, even one incapable of combat. While most of the pretech components of the ship cannot be replicated by postech engineering, enough remains to fuel decades worth of examination on most technologically advanced planets. Even the hope of being able to reverse-engineer a device into components that could be built using local resources is enough to set scores of local academies and universities off on a race to obtain the ship.

Not all of these researchers are going to be inclined to share. Particularly with those institutions controlled by a world's government, there is going to be a powerful inclination to ensure that no one else gets access to the ship's technology. Even an ostensible shared research expedition is going to be colored by schemes to get exclusive access to the juiciest technology.

Beyond this, what happens if these researchers discovery that they can repair the *Bruxelles* and get it into fighting condition? Not every scientist is going to be willing to lead a pinch-credit existence of wrangling for grants and laboring in obscurity when such a marvelous tool of social control is placed within their grasp.

Zealous separatists or religious extremists are also going to be eager to seize a *Bruxelles*. These groups are liable to have even more difficulty keeping the ship running than would a full-fledged planetary government, but few of them have any interest in foreign conquests. They're more likely to use the ship as a threat, demanding concessions from the local government and using the ship's guns to coerce

obedience. Simply keeping the ship in orbit around a world leaves minimal maintenance demands, and what local ruler can afford to test the ship's condition when a single grav-shear munition could wipe out his capital?

These extremists tend to be vulnerable to infiltration and sabotage from below. While many such groups have led clandestine existences long enough to have good internal security against ordinary infiltrators, they aren't spacers, and they don't instinctively understand the thousand and one ways that a warship can be reduced to so much scrap. Properly-trained saboteurs can hope to get close enough to something vital to disable the ship's weaponry and leave it vulnerable to boarding attacks from local naval forces. Of course, such saboteurs must then stay alive long enough for the cavalry to arrive.

Hostile aliens can also find use for a *Bruxelles*. Some races still nurse old, bitter grudges against humanity for their centuries of dominance in this section of the galaxy, and others are younger races who see no reason not to push these hairless apes back from stars that ought rightfully to belong to them. What better irony than using one of their own warships to drive them out?

Very few alien races were as sophisticated as Terran humanity before the Scream, but those without substantial numbers of psychics often weathered the disaster better than mankind. These surviving alien polities can sometimes muster the sheer volume of resources necessary to get a *Bruxelles* back into fighting trim, making up on volume and excess what they lack in refined technology. Such ships are an ungainly mass of accretions and secondary systems crusted over the original hull and are usually much more vulnerable to enemy ships. Still, they have the guns to serve their purpose, and neither orbitals nor planetary settlements can withstand their ancient anger.

While alien crews are usually impossible to infiltrate in the same way human extremists might be deceived, their ignorance of human engineering often opens up vulnerabilities in the ship's systems. A group that manages to lay hands on the refit plans and modification specs for an alien-restored *Bruxelles* can often spot flaws that are susceptible to a boarding attack or a deep-space hull sabotage strike by a team in shielded suits.

Interstellar pirates, perversely, have less use for a *Bruxelles* than many other possessors. Using such a ship as a commerce raider is a losing proposition, as there is no hope of seizing enough plunder to actually keep the ship flying. Precious few pirate kings have enough wealth and technical expertise to actually keep a pretech warship in fighting trim, and trying to hold on to it for long would simply invite the desperate attention of every stellar polity within drill range of the pirate base.

For some raiders who stumble across such a ship, they have no intention of keeping it flying for long. They'll ride the ship like a suicide boat, slashing apart the local navy and defensive orbitals in a blaze of blind violence before the ship finally stutters to a halt or is crippled by a lucky shot. After they've torn loose the more valuable salvage inside, they'll flee in their old ships, now with a fresh, helpless system to plunder at their leisure. Like all their parasitical kin, they have no interest in building anything better. They are glad to burn down the past for the sake of a little temporary warmth.

The Ship's Interior

The interior of a pristine pretech-maintained *Bruxelles* is a smooth, elegant space of white passageways with colored and patterned wall striping to indicate departments and other technical information. Compartments are square-cornered and neat, with holographic control panels and smart seating that both conforms to the user and automatically bubbles them in a pressure field that will maintain air and temperature even if exposed to raw vacuum. Additional kinetic and thermal dampers protect against shrapnel and flame, subtracting 1d10 damage from any such incoming peril.

Life support is distributed throughout the ship in "green lines" of gengineered plant life and fungal colonies that purify and recycle the atmosphere and water used aboard the ship, with solar inputs and waste recycling feeding stocks of edible fungi. While several devices in the ship's galley exist to turn this putty-like, flavorless mass into more palatable forms, it can be eaten raw at necessity. If severe atmospheric poisoning or strain kills off this plant life, new colonies can be cultured from stocks within four to six weeks. In the meantime, the ship will be forced to rely on conventional stores and a backup mechanical system that can sustain no more than four hundred crew at a time.

Hatches are plasteel irises that clamp shut to deny access to boarders or contain damage. Passing a locked hatch on a pretech ship requires a properly-coded acknowledgement from a Net implant. As no one has been wired with implanted Net technology for approximately six hundred years, modern crew are often forced to leave the hatches unlocked simply to move through the ship. Individual hatches can be locked and unlocked from the bridge, and passing through one without the correct implant code requires either an hour with a laser cutter or a multitool, one round and a successful Int/Security test at difficulty 9. Failed checks can be re-attempted after fifteen minutes of further effort, but checks failed by more than 2 points will light a warning on the bridge.

Much of a *Bruxelles'* command system is reliant on Net implants. A fully-operational ship allows its Net-wired captain an almost living awareness of everything going on within the hull, and allows him or her to perceive any point inside or on the surface of the ship with no more than a moment's focus. Individual crewmembers share this awareness in the zones of their own responsibility. Engineers physically feel the rightness of their fusion plants, and astrogators can sense the heat and strain of their spike drive components. The holocontrols and duty stations are simply backup tools in case of systems failure due to battle damage or mischance.

Of course, since Net implants are now impossible to acquire, modern possessors of the ship are forced to make do with these backup controls. Internal awareness and security tends to be extremely patchy as a consequence, and intruders who keep to the machine spaces of the ship or stow away in little-used nooks might well escape the notice of even an attentive and professional crew.

Modern owners are also often forced to make repairs with postech components and equipment, often marring the elegant simplicity of the passageways and compartments with bulky support gear or ungainly, ozone-crackling patches. These obstacles can crop up almost anywhere in the ship as some vital coupling must be bodged together or some ancient pretech equipment reinforced and coaxed back to half-adequate life.

In most cases, the interior layout of the ship won't be vital to a GM's adventure. Setpiece engine rooms, bridges, living quarters, or other important areas can simply be sketched out as the adventure is likely to require, keeping in mind the ship dimensions of 300m x 70m x 50m and about five decks running the length of most *Bruxelles* hulls.

SHIP STATISTICS AND WEAPONRY

BRUXELLES-CLASS CRUISER

				Power: 120/13 free		**Mass:** 65/0 free

Cost:	Priceless	**Hit Points:** 60	**Crew:** 50/1,600	**Speed:** 3	**Armor:** 20	**AC:** 4

Weaponry — Implosion Field Projector (+4 to hit/4d20+2, AP 25, Phase 2), "Ramrod" Warp-line Gun (+4 to hit/2d20+42, AP 25), "Antaeus" Siege Missiles (Special),

Defenses — Hardened Polyceramic Overlay

Fittings — Spike Drive-4, Armory, Lifeboats, Cargo Lighter, Ship's Locker, Workshops, Hydroponic Production, Fuel Bunkers, Fuel Scoops, Extended Life Support x3, magazines for 15 Antaeus rounds and 600 tons of cargo space.

Operating Cost — 65,000,000 credits a year to feed the ship the enormous amounts of postech maintenance necessary to keep it flying. Worlds without significant shipyards and experience in astronautics may have to spend even more.

These statistics represent a perfectly functional pretech warship, with the original parts and effective maintenance. Very few *Bruxelles* will be found in such a state. Even leaving a ship to float untouched in the void of the outer rim for six hundred years can result in a craft unable to spin up its spike drives or fire its weaponry without extensive maintenance work. Letting a battle-scarred or travel-worn ship rot in the dark will result in even less cooperative behavior.

Imperfect Flight

Almost every *Bruxelles* is going to be found suffering severe limitations on its successful operation. Millions of credits worth of repair work might be necessary before the ship can even take flight. Beyond that, however, there are likely to be serious maintenance issues that can't be resolved simply by throwing credits at them. These problems will require specific spare parts from pretech naval bases and other long-lost caches, and it's not impossible that PCs or other adventurers will be tasked with acquiring them.

To determine what serious flaws exist in a given *Bruxelles*, roll one or more times on the adjacent table.

	SHIP FLAWS
Roll	**Problem**
1	The Ramrod weapon system is nonfunctional
2	The spike drive doesn't work, though the ship can maneuver normally in-system.
3	The armor has been compromised; effective Armor is 0.
4	Maneuver jets are offline. Speed 0.
5	The implosion field projector refuses to fire.
6	All life support systems are crippled, with a maximum crew of 75.

STARSHIP WEAPONS

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Power	Free Mass	Hardpoints	Min.Class	TL	Special
"Antaeus" Siege Missiles	*	Special	15	5	3	Cruiser	5	*Ammo 5*
Implosion Field Projector	*	3d20/Special	15	10	3	Cruiser	5	*AP 25, Phase 2*
"Ramrod" Warp-line Gun	*	2d20+40	55	10	3	Cruiser	5	*AP 25*
* These weapons are priceless. Anyone who finds a functional weapon system or Antaeus ammunition can expect the nearest planetary government to stop at nothing to confiscate it for their own benefit.								

Starship Weapons

"Antaeus" Siege Missiles: Each siege missile is equipped with a sophisticated array of grav-shear technology designed to shake off the grip of conventional braker gun defenses. Standard ECM from any orbital station or spaceship is sufficient to put the missile safely off course, but against planetary targets, a few kilometers of wobble means nothing.

The siege missile is an air burst weapon that tears a brief metadimensional hole over the target zone, subjecting it to a lethal barrage of heat, impact, and radiation. Every civilian structure within fifty kilometers of the impact point will be flattened and any hardened military bases within ten kilometers will share their fate. Only deeply-buried bunkers hardened against orbital bombardment will survive.

Implosion Field Projector: One of the more common pretech cruiser-class weapons, the implosion field generator briefly inverts certain cosmological constants at the focal point of its triple alignment beams. Any frigate-class or smaller ship struck by an IFP must have the pilot save versus Tech or be instantly destroyed.

"Ramrod" Warp-line Gun: A relative of the implosion field projector, the Ramrod system sacrifices the precision and agility of an implosion field to create a much larger conversion zone. Ramrod systems function only against orbital stations or immobile asteroids, as their range is insufficient to harm planetary surfaces, and any ship with a Speed rating can get clear of the inversion zone before it breaks open.

Ship Plot Seeds

Careless explorers power up a *Bruxelles*, only to discover that this particular ship was equipped with large banks of concealed cold sleep pods in which the crew awaits rescue after a serious drive failure. The explorers might be PCs, or the PCs might be in a position to negotiate with the *Bruxelles'* captain to bring him necessary spares from long-lost naval supply caches. Alternately, the captain might be able to cannibalize the explorer's ship to get the *Bruxelles* back in action, and now plans to carve out his own restored Mandate from the surrounding worlds.

The PCs discover a half-ruined *Bruxelles* in an remote sector of space. The ship shows signs of horrific damage, but likely holds a king's ransom in salvageable tech. Yet the crew appear to have vanished, and there are no worlds within lifeboat reach that they could have reached. What happened to them? Were the crew taken in a boarding operation? Did they flee in the lifeboats even without hope of a safe landing? Did a horrific alien contagion drive them all into a madness of sabotage and murder? And will the ship continue to hold together as the PCs salvage it, or will that last component's removal set off a chain of collapses certain to slaughter them all if they can't escape the crumbling passageways in time?

A crippled *Bruxelles* maintains orbit around a dead world, its engines worn out and its guns scavenged by the crew. Inside, the last inbred remnants of the crew have divided into warring factions, each department a tribe of its own with traits ranging from cannibalism to tech-worship to religious zealotry. Outsiders will be hailed as "the relief" by the first tribe they find, but will be expected to lead them to ultimate victory over their hated foes and the restoration of the ancient ship. The natives have only a ritualized grasp of the technology of the ship, but several ancient pretech weapons still remain functional in each tribe.

On a remote lost world, the PCs discover a primitive native culture focused around the ancient wreckage of a crashed *Bruxelles*.

Much of the ship was scavenged by the first survivors- including the powerful pretech armor and weaponry used by the culture's rulers- but there still remains a priceless trove of salvage within for any advanced postech society. The natives, however, revere the ship as their ancestor's salvation and will not tolerate any meddling with it. Some among the natives are willing to be less doctrinaire about letting the strangers into the hull, provided the PCs give them the help they need to become the new ruling class.

What appears to be a perfectly intact *Bruxelles* orbits around a remote, airless world in a minor backwater system. Countless polities have sent expeditions to seize the ship, but boarding parties immediately lose contact with the outside world as soon as they enter the hull, and those that don't pull back are never heard from again. Every few years a new batch of rebels, raiders, or adventurers try to take the ship, but none of them emerge again. A few polities have tried to destroy the cruiser rather than risk letting it fall into other hands, but the first signs of violence bring a withering answer from the ship's implosion field projector. What is lurking inside the ship? Is it some vengeful alien life form, seething in the dark amid the ship's active self-defense protocols? Is the ship infested with a maddened AI, at war with itself and its terrible urges to destroy? Or could it be some ancient arch-psychic, the last survivor of the crew driven mad by the Scream and the relentless press of years on his artificial longevity?

The PCs never believed the old prospector was right, but he was paying up front for this wild goose chase. And now here they are, deep inside the hull of a crippled *Bruxelles* out in the asteroid field, a king's ransom in tech around them. It's a shame about those pirate corvettes that picked up their ship on the way in. The PCs have 24 hours to get the *Bruxelles* into fighting trim, overcoming the cargo of hostile security bots and dealing with the lethal dangers of a half-dead warship. If they don't, they'll be facing the pirates in a struggle to the death in the depths of a dead engine of war.