

Anteel Strategy Primer

Jasper McChesney

This guide is intended to provide a basis for further strategic thinking about Anteel. It will analyze a few key game elements, and highlight important decisions.

Setup

There are many different aspects to strategy in Anteel. Strategy begins with what ships you buy, and maximizing the number of points you have (that is, not wasting any) is just a small part of it. You should consider what kind of empire your opponent is playing, since he will have strengths and weaknesses which you'll want to avoid and take advantage of, respectively. For instance, if your opponent is playing Empire 4, he will be very good at penetrating armor, and your paying points for heavily-armored ships would not be justified. You should begin to formulate a plan of attack even during the setup phase. If you think a flanking maneuver would be successful, you will need a number of fast, maneuverable ships for example. The ship costs are not intended to ensure absolute balance (i.e. a fair fight) between two sides: if you make a poor selection of ships, the fact that they still sum up to 100 is irrelevant if your opponent was more clever. Ship selection is just as much a part of the game of Anteel as the fighting itself, and just as worthy of strategizing. The rest of this document will discuss the battle however, where indeed most of the strategizing does occur.

Attrition Warfare

Like all naval battles today, Anteel is a game of attrition: the test is to see who can inflict the most damage on the opponent, as quickly as possible. There are no considerations of moral, or cinematics, or terrain, as there might be in a game about foot soldiers. Doing damage, and taking damage, is what Anteel is all about. In one sense then, a battle is really just two great big ships duking it out: each side can take so much damage, and can dish so much out, in a particular way. However, this is obviously an over-simplification, and neglects a lot.

Of course, the most basic unit in Anteel is the ship. Each ship is a small package which contains some of the overall power held by a given side. Ships are also targets for taking damage, and can be destroyed, which is indeed the aim of the entire game. One of the most important aspects of Anteel's attrition warfare though is what we might term "binary functionality." Every ship either exists on the board – with full capability to shoot, move, and maneuver – or it doesn't; it's been totally destroyed. This is important because while there are no partially functioning ships in Anteel, there *are* partially damaged ships.

Concentration of Firepower

This brings up a central tenet of most wargames, concentration of fire. When it comes to be your turn to fire with your ships, you are posed with a question: "How do I direct the fire that my ships provide?" Which is the same thing as "Which enemy ships do I want to damage?" While the huge mega-ship concept described above would suggest that this question is unimportant, nothing could be further from the truth.

Let's look at a simplified example. Suppose your enemy has ten ships on the battlefield, each the same size, and every one of them is a possible target for every last ship you control—they're all in range and in arc. Let's say that enemy ship has five hull points, and you have a total of ten damage to dish out between whatever ships you want (your own ships don't really

matter for this discussion). Consider one extreme possibility for distributing your fire: divide it equally among all the enemy ships, so that each one takes one point. Think of the opposite possibility: direct all of it on one enemy ship. In the first case, no ships are destroyed, while in the second one is. At the same time, in the first example, all of your fire was used (ten points total damage was done to the enemy), while in the second, the all-out attack was over-kill, and fire was wasted (five destroyed the ship, the remaining five did nothing).

Obviously, a better idea would be to choose a strategy in between these two, perhaps directing five damage to one ship, and another five to a second. However, the example, illustrated why the direction of fire is important. In the first example, all of your fire is used, but it does not have any immediate effect on the game. After several rounds of this, you would surely destroy the enemy's entire fleet, but in the mean time, his ships would return fire. In the second example, a more immediate result is sought, and a ship is destroyed. That ship has zero functionality from then on, and thus the enemy's force is weakened, and his chance of victory decreased. A player who pursues the second kind of strategy (neglecting the wasting of fire) will always defeat someone who plays the first kind, because the ability of the first player to inflict damage will steadily decrease. In fact, as more and more of his ships are destroyed, there will be fewer targets for his enemy, and the rate of his demise will only accelerate.

The above example also illustrates that, while concentration of fire is advantageous, there are limits to its use. Oftentimes, you will have to judge just how much fire you are willing to waste in order to take out an enemy craft immediately. And unlike in the example, you will not often be able to target all the enemy's ships with all of your own. If an enemy vessel moves in a way you did not expect, you may have to settle for a lesser target and waste fire in the process.

Maneuvering

Before you can consider the direction of fire, you must move your ships into a position where they can fire at all. Maneuvering means much more than simply bringing your ships close to the enemy while ensuring that they have targets in their firing arcs. Maneuvering means optimum placement to simultaneously avoid enemy fire, and to place as many targets, as surely as possible, within the ship's own arc. This double-goal is what makes ship movement difficult, for you need to always consider the arcs and ranges of every ship nearby, to consider what its capabilities are. Before we address more complex issues involved with movement, let us look at how ships move in the first place, and what their ratings, speed and turn, really mean.

Every movement phase, each ship gets its chance to move to a new location on the board. The locations that are available to it depend not just on speed but on its turning rate as well. In addition, once it has moved into its new location, it can choose a direction to face, which depends also on its turn rate, and on the way it has moved.

The following diagrams will demonstrate the effect of turning on ship movement.. In this case, it is less useful to think about the hexes themselves (which ships are in the middle of) but rather the actual positions that ships can be in. Thus, the diagrams below are in the form of triangular-grids, where each node is a possible position, and each line is a path between positions. At the center of each diagram is a ship, pointing upwards. Every circled node is a position that it *could* locate to in its movement phase. The smaller bubbled around each circle illustrate the different possible facings the ship could adopt once it got to that position.

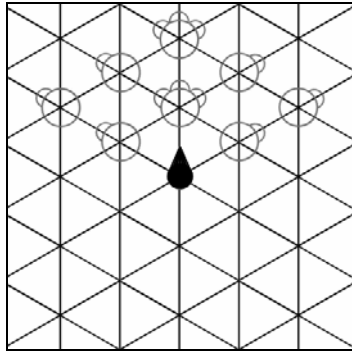


fig. 1: turn = 1.

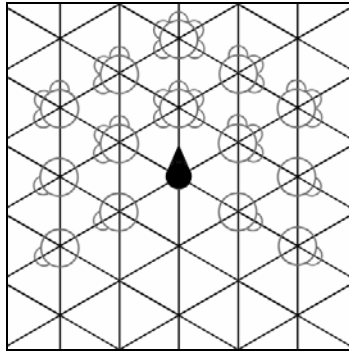


fig. 2: turn = 2.

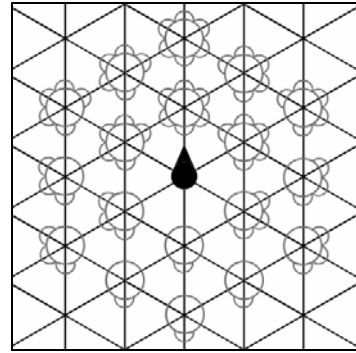


fig. 3: turn = 3.

In figures one through three, the ship has different turn ratings, and a speed of two. As can be seen, turning rate dictates both where the ship can go, and what directions it can face once it goes there. For example, in fig. 1, the ship can move directly ahead two spaces if it so chooses, and once it has done so, it can continue to face forward, or it can turn to the left or right. Alternately, it can move off to the left (or the right for that matter), but this involves turning first, so when it arrives at its destination, it must continue to face in the same direction required to get there, i.e. to the forward-left.

Examining such diagrams, a pattern quickly becomes evident. Relative to its own starting position, there are six different zones that any ship can move into, of four different kinds.

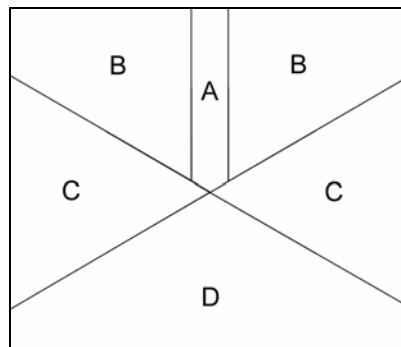


fig. 4: zones of movement.

A column extends directly in front of the ship, and within it, the ship can face the greatest possible number of different directions (zone A). To either side of this are two areas essentially to the front of the ship's initial position which result in fewer possible facings (zone B). Directly to the side of the ship are two more zones, with even fewer facings possible (zone C), and then, directly behind the ship is the last zone (D) which has the fewest. The exact number of facings possible in each zone depends on the turn rate of the ship, and are given in Table 1, below, where t is the ship's turn rating. The maximum value for f (the number of facings) is 6, while the minimum is one. An f of zero indicates that the ship cannot move there at all.

Zone	Formula ($f=$)
A	$2t + 1$
B	$2t - 1$
C	$2t - 3$
D	$2t - 5$

Table 1.

The pattern of facings is such that if there are any facings not included, they will be the ones pointing towards the starting position. The shape of the zones is always the same, as is the entire area into which the ship can possibly move. This second area is itself a large hexagon, with each corner coming out directly along a line from the start position. The distance from each corner to the center, and hence the size of the whole hexagon, is of course equal to the ship's speed. (Note that all of the above neglects consideration of reverse speed. In principle, it is not a difficult addition to make, and is left to the reader.)

It is thus possible to think of a ship's movement not in terms of a linear sequence of actions (ex. "move forward, turn left, turn left, move forward") but rather as a field of possible positions. Each position in turns allows further decision on where to face, with some positions having more options than others, and being thus more or less desirable on this basis alone.

Maximizing Certainty

One of the most difficult things to contend with when moving is anticipating what the game board will look like, or could look like, by the time the firing phase comes around. It is a relatively easy matter to maneuver an enemy into your firing arc, and even to move out of his at the same time, but what to do if that enemy gets to move *after* you do? He move out of your arc just as you moved out of his, if the possibility for him to do so exists. Thus, a good strategy will try to eliminate all such possibilities for the opponent, or at least make them have negative consequences, and simultaneously ensure possibilities for itself. In a round of tight maneuvering, Anteel turns into a delicate dance, concerned endlessly with might-be's. Play becomes a series of trade-offs, where one ship is knowingly sacrificed for another, and doing damage must be carefully weighed against survival. Like in chess, counting on your opponent to make a mistake is usually fatal, so you must be thoughtful above all else, and anticipate what he might do.

The first and foremost element of play that effects certainty and planning is turn order. If a ship is destined to move before your own ship, you have a decisive advantage because it cannot fully anticipate your movement; of two ships with equal maneuverability, the one with the lower order will usually win out. Order is also of great importance in the firing phase, as regards the planning of movement. Often-times a ship could be moved into a location from which it could deliver some damage to the enemy in theory, but in reality various enemy vessels with a lower order would fire on and destroy the ship before it ever got a chance to shoot, thus rendering its movement to that location completely useless.

Because of this sort of effect, small ships are in fact more strategically important than they might otherwise seem to be. It is usually worthwhile to bring at least a few, because to neglect small ships is to hand an entire portion of the phase-order to your opponent. Dominating the fast-craft aspect of the game can be very important: such ships can effectively evade enemy fire, and can form a deadly strike force that can eliminate strategically key enemy vessels before they have a chance to respond. Of course, the disadvantage to small vessels is that they divide your side's hull into many small packages, and as your side takes damage it will lose ships, and effectiveness.

In terms of minimizing uncertainty, arcs are probably the most critical factor after order. The size of a ship's arc, and the distance it lies from other ships, determines how easily they can escape from its arc, and thus escape harm.