

The Bolter & Chainsword



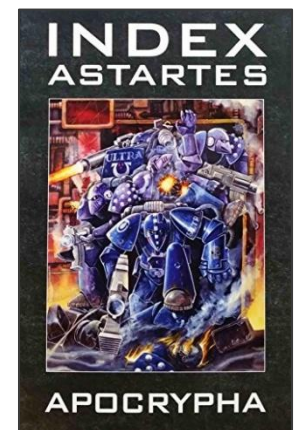
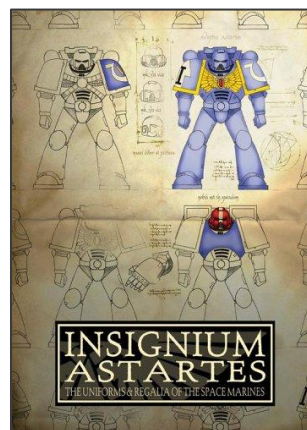
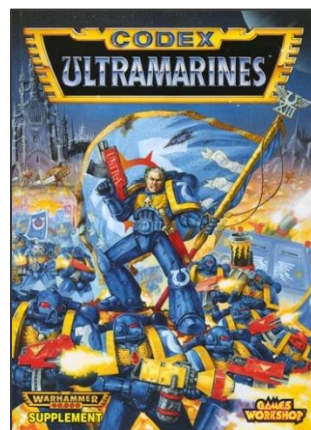
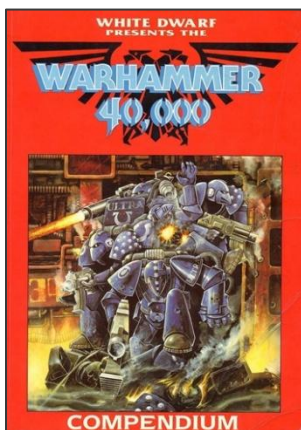
Adherence/Compliance With and Divergence From the Codex Astartes

By Brother Tyler

The Codex Astartes is the masterwork of the Primarch of the XIIIth (Ultramarines) Legion, Roboute Guilliman, defining every aspect of the Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes created from the Legiones Astartes in the wake of the Horus Heresy. While many Chapters have endeavored to faithfully adhere to the dictates of the Codex Astartes, none but the most careful and reverent have succeeded over the millennia, for the Codex Astartes has been subject to interpretation, translation, and modification. Indeed, some Chapters eschew portions of the Codex Astartes, preferring their own traditions.

*They are the Defenders of Humanity.
They are my Space Marines...
...and they shall know no fear.*

The Codex Astartes as we understand it today was first presented in the 2nd edition of the Warhammer 40,000 game, notably in *Codex: Ultramarines*. The concepts were later solidified in *Insignium Astartes*, which was published during the 3rd edition of the Warhammer 40,000 game, providing the definitive version that hobbyists understand today (albeit, with minor modifications over the years and editions). Interestingly enough, the Codex Astartes didn't exist during the 1st edition of the Warhammer 40,000 game ("Rogue Trader"). Instead, it was the Codex Imperialis that served as the official order of battle for all Space Marine Chapters at that time. This was presented in an early Index Astartes article in White Dwarf Magazine, later republished in the *Warhammer 40,000 Compendium* in 1989 (and republished in *Index Astartes Apocrypha* in 2016).



From left to right: *Warhammer 40,000 Compendium* (1st edition, 1989), *Codex: Ultramarines* (2nd edition, 1995), *Insignium Astartes* (3rd edition, 2002), *Index Astartes Apocrypha* (1st edition reprints, 2016)

A recurring topic among Warhammer 40,000 hobbyists is whether or not different Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes qualify as being either adherent/compliant with or divergent from the Codex Astartes. Debate covers a variety of issues, including how Chapters with known divergences from the Codex Astartes can still be considered adherent/compliant in the official lore. The most famous of the Chapters that adhere to the Codex Astartes are the Ultramarines, though other Chapters are said to be equally (or more) compliant. Such Chapters include the Imperial Fists and Black Consuls. At the opposite end are those Chapters that are well known for ignoring the Codex Astartes, or at least vast portions of it. These include the Space Wolves and Black Templars. The rest of the thousand or so Chapters are scattered in between, though many such as the Blood Angels, Dark Angels, Iron Hands, and Salamanders are considered to be compliant with the Codex Astartes despite known divergences. Debate, then, typically focuses on how Chapters with known divergences can be considered adherent/compliant, and where a line, if any exists, might be drawn to demarcate the point at which minor deviations from the Codex Astartes result in a Chapter being truly “divergent.”

This article does not seek to provide a method by which Chapters might be assessed as being either adherent/compliant or divergent, nor does it aim to define where any particular Chapters might fall in such an assessment beyond reiterating conclusions that Games Workshop has presented in official material. Instead, this article merely presents one possible framework by which such an assessment might be made, as well as complicating factors that have to be taken into account. In essence, this article presents a method by which one might *visualize* an assessment of a Chapter’s adherence with or divergence from the Codex Astartes. This is simply one hobbyist’s views on the subject; and other hobbyists might have their own views that are equally valid.

A significant challenge that we face as hobbyists is that we don’t know *exactly* what the Codex Astartes says. We can speculate on multiple elements of the Codex Astartes based on the known information, but we don’t know the full range of information, nor do we know if the information that we do know encompasses the full range of information on any particular topic. Indeed, there might be a delineation between what the Codex Astartes might recommend or prefer, what it might allow, what might be interpretation or addition, or what might be proscribed. For example, we know that company affiliation is most often indicated by the color of the shoulder pad rims, and we know that other common variants include the color of the chest decoration, the color of a kneepad, the color of the helmet, etc. We might draw some reliable conclusions based on the examples in *Insignium Astartes*, but we don’t necessarily know if there are any other options that are within the dictates of the Codex Astartes.

Equally as important, we don’t know exactly what the original Codex Astartes says. The original Codex Astartes was compiled nearly ten thousand years prior to the current era, though its original format is unknown. Copies were distributed in manuscript form, most likely being received by each of the Chapters created in the 2nd Founding. The oldest known copy is thought to be the *Apocrypha of Skaros*, though the *Liber Arcanum of Grand Marshall Tolof*, the *Holo-Record 442/33508*, and the *Gant Manuscript v2* of the Ceris Archive contend for this honor. In addition, the Codex Astartes has been copied and recopied many times, and different organizations, including Chapters of the Adeptus Astartes, have reanalyzed and reinterpreted the document. As a result, different versions of the Codex Astartes might be considered as “true” while being different from both each other and from the original. Roboute Guilliman likely has the original stored in his eidetic memory, and there may be a true copy *somewhere*, but we as players don’t have access to the full original version.

The best that we as hobbyists can do is draw certain conclusions about elements of the Codex Astartes based on the information that has been provided in official publications. Admittedly, there may be some inconsistencies, but a solution for those would be to consider the most recently published information as authoritative, as well as any previously published information that isn't contradicted by more recent information. In this, with the exception of elements of the Ultramarines Chapter that are explicitly identified as being peculiar to that Chapter (e.g., unique characters, units, and wargear), we might use the current rules for the Ultramarines Chapter as the model for the core allowances of the Codex Astartes. We have to keep in mind that a degree of variation is allowed, but the Ultramarines represent the most commonly accepted dictates of the Codex Astartes.

What do we know about the contents of the Codex Astartes? The most readily apparent areas include the organization and livery of a Chapter, as well as tactics and strategies. Moreover, the Codex Astartes provides exact details about the wording of orders, training methodologies, titles, etc. Many of these might be expansive, with broad areas having many subordinate areas. For example, a Chapter's livery might include basic heraldry such as concepts for Chapter badges and how to display them, methods for indicating

company affiliation, methods for indicating squad affiliation, methods for indicating rank, methods for indicating special qualifications and honors, etc. Others might be more limited, with only a few subordinate areas. Some, too, might be more important than others, with divergences in those areas being more impactful with regard to a Chapter's level of compliance with or divergence from the Codex Astartes.

One interesting addition was the presentation of the Chapter Traits rules in the 4th edition version of *Codex: Space Marines*. The Chapter Traits rules allowed players to create Chapters who retained the Codex Astartes at the core of their training, but with varying levels of divergence. The text described three levels of acceptable divergence: minor, notable, and significant. The fact that these levels of divergence are considered "acceptable" means that Chapters that fall within these levels are still considered to be compliant with the Codex Astartes. Moreover, these levels implied two other levels: strict compliance and non-compliance, giving us five general levels along a spectrum. Those levels haven't been repeated in subsequent editions, and the mechanisms for adjusting Chapter rules have varied, but those five levels remain useful in visualizing a Chapter's compliance with or divergence from the Codex Astartes as a spectrum. A notional rendition of the spectrum is shown in Figure 1, below:

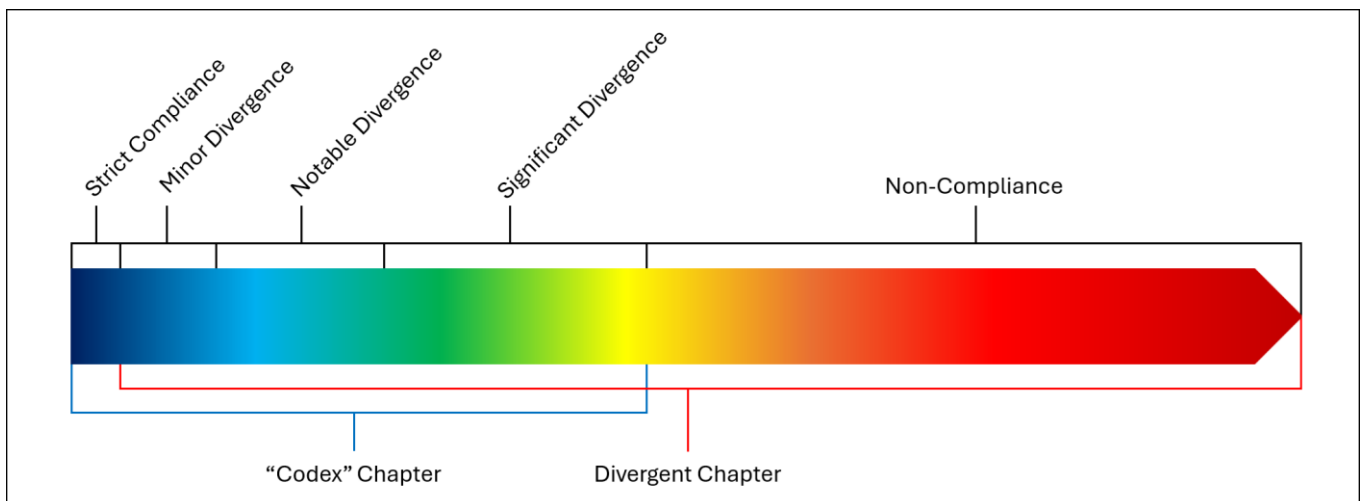


Fig 1. Codex Astartes Compliance/Divergence Spectrum

The different levels are labeled across the top while the assessments of “Codex” and “divergent” are labeled across the bottom. The varying widths of the different levels are based on the theory that the less deviation that is allowed, the less variation there is and the narrower the representation of possibilities. Conversely, the more deviation that is allowed, the more variation there is and the wider the representation of possibilities. As a result, the range of strict compliance is the narrowest (likely more narrow than is represented in the image) while non-compliance is the widest (and is likely open-ended, hence the arrow). Practically speaking, the different levels probably aren’t neatly delineated, but are more likely overlapping.

The most important element of the figure, however, is the portrayal that Chapters can be “Codex” (i.e., compliant with the Codex Astartes) while also being divergent. In the strictest sense, true compliance with the Codex Astartes leaves limited options; and any divergence from the Codex Astartes renders a Chapter divergent. There are varying levels of divergence, however, with many still allowing for a Chapter to be considered compliant with the Codex Astartes. This is why...

- ...the Dark Angels can have Company Masters, Interrogator Chaplains, the Deathwing, and the Ravenwing...
- ...the Blood Angels can have the Death Company and the Sanguinary Guard...
- ...the Ultramarines can have the Tyrannid Hunters and the Victrix Guard...
- ...the Salamanders can be organized into seven companies...
- ...The Red Scorpions accord their Chief Apothecary a senior leadership role...
- ...each of the clan companies of the Iron Hands is responsible for its own recruits...

...and each of these Chapters can be considered as compliant with the Codex Astartes despite their obvious divergences.

How might a Chapter be assessed to determine where it falls within that spectrum, however? The Chapter Traits rules based the levels of divergence solely on rules – game play. Other aspects of the dictates of the Codex Astartes such as livery, training methodologies, formatting of orders, titles, etc. were not included. To develop an accurate assessment of a Chapter’s relative compliance/divergence, we would need to examine every aspect of the Chapter. Since we don’t know exactly what the Codex Astartes dictates on every area, and since we don’t even know what all the areas are, however, we are unable to develop accurate assessments. At best, we can speculate. We might use the criteria for the different levels as provided in the Chapter Traits rules as guidelines, but we must keep in mind the fact that those were limited to rules and didn’t address other areas in which a Chapter might diverge from a strict interpretation of the Codex Astartes. It might even be fair to speculate that any Chapter that requires a codex or codex supplement other than *Codex: Space Marines* is at least notably divergent. For example, the Blood Angels might fall into either the notable or significant divergence levels. Meanwhile, the Black Templars, Grey Knights, and Space Wolves clearly fall into the non-compliance level despite the fact that each draws upon elements of the Codex Astartes. The Ultramarines, despite their divergences, most likely fall into the strict compliance level, though some might argue that they belong in the minor divergence level.

At the most basic level, and solely from the perspective of rules/gameplay, it could be argued that any Chapter for which there are rules (e.g., Chapter Tactics, Stratagems, unique units not counting named characters, etc.) outside of the core *Codex: Space Marine* rules is divergent to one degree or another. A key exception to this is Chapters that use the Chapter Traits of the Ultramarines, which represent their adherence to the tenets of the Codex Astartes. Likewise, there may be other Chapters whose special rules render them exceptions.

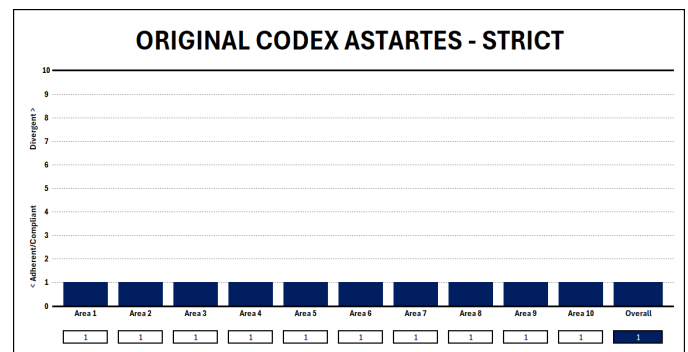
Rules, though vitally important for game play, aren't the sole determinant of whether or not a Chapter diverges from the Codex Astartes. For example, rank names and squad badges may differ from those prescribed in the Codex Astartes. Such divergences may range from inconsequential (e.g., a different rank name without any other changes in responsibilities or roles) to non-compliant (e.g., Chapter Approved heraldry that bears no resemblance to the systems described in the Codex Astartes). Other divergences may be difficult for hobbyists to measure. For example, while we know that Roboute Guilliman included explicit instructions on the format of [some] combat orders, we don't know what those formats are, whether or not formats were prescribed for the full range of orders that might be issued (assuming the Ultramarines Primarch could foresee all of the possibilities), and what degree of flexibility was incorporated into the Codex Astartes in this area. Lacking this important information, we are left to guess at how the aggregation of such divergences might affect any attempt to classify a Chapter along the spectrum of compliance/divergence.

To facilitate visualizing how a Chapter's compliance/divergence can be assessed, the following model is provided. The model assumes that tenets of the Codex Astartes can be broadly categorized into multiple areas, and that each area has multiple criteria. For the sake of simplicity, neither the areas nor their criteria are being named. In addition, ten areas each with ten criteria are being shown. The scope of the Codex Astartes is known to be vast, so it's likely that an accurate application of this model would require more than ten areas, that each area would have a varying number of criteria, that some criteria might have sub-criteria, that some criteria (and sub-criteria) might intersect in multiple areas, and that different areas/criteria/sub-criteria might have different weights. Each criterion is assigned a value from 0.5 to 10, with 0.5 representing strict compliance with the Codex Astartes and 10 representing non-compliance. The more divergent the Chapter is in that

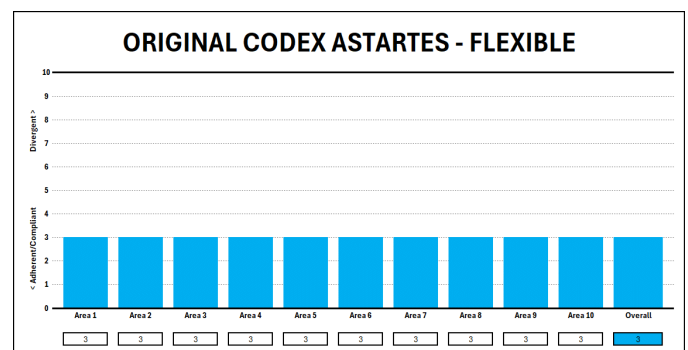
criteria/area, the higher the number. The value for any area is the average of the values for each of its criteria, and the overall value of a Chapter's compliance/divergence is the average of all the values of the areas.

An added complication is the subjectivity of assessing a Chapter's compliance with or divergence from the Codex Astartes. Inevitably, a Chapter may judge itself based on how faithful it is to its own version of the Codex Astartes. As has already been pointed out, however, the Codex Astartes has been copied, re-copied, reassessed, reinterpreted, added to, taken away from, and otherwise modified throughout the millennia, and the "Codex Astartes" that one Chapter has may be very different from that which another Chapter possesses.

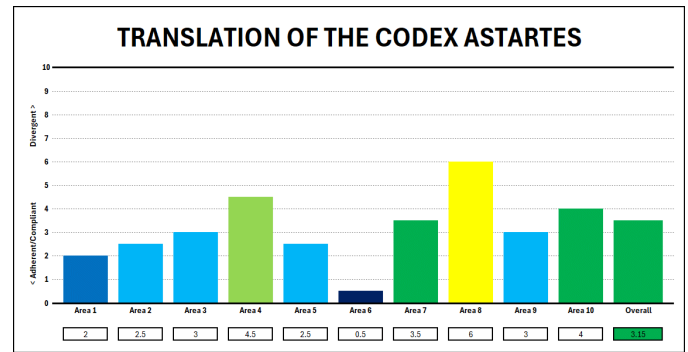
For the purpose of this article, it is assumed that any assessment is based on a comparison of the Chapter in practice against the original Codex Astartes – an objective assessment. A strict representation of the Codex Astartes might resemble:



A more flexible representation of the Codex Astartes, on the other hand, might resemble:



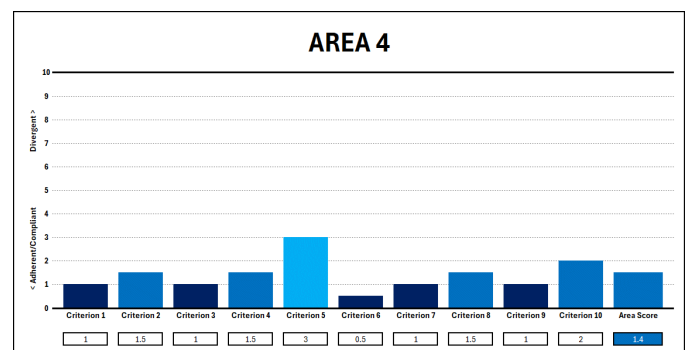
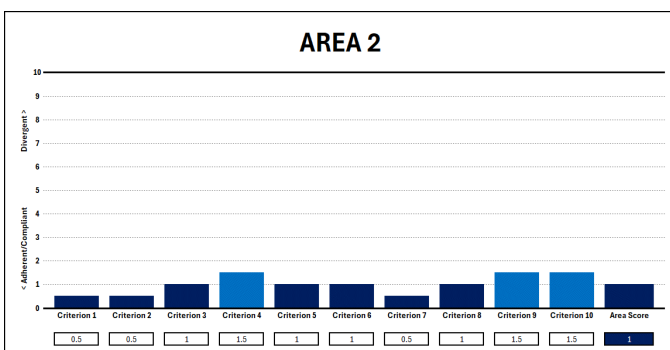
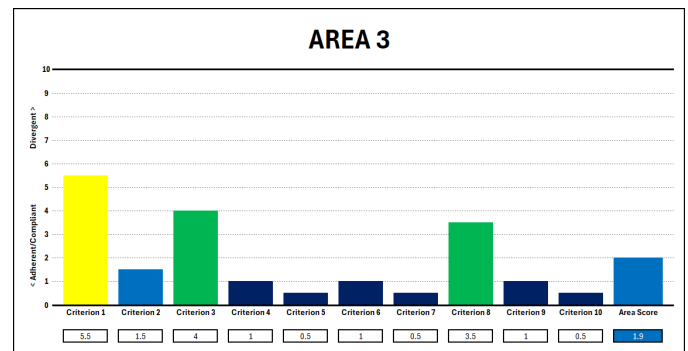
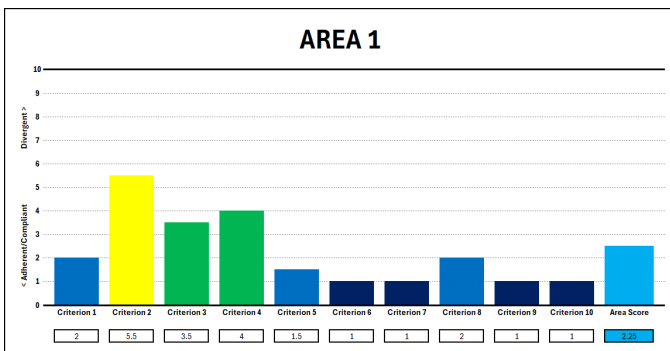
Conversely, though a Chapter believes that its version of the Codex Astartes is “true,” there are bound to be differences compared to the original Codex Astartes. The inevitable translation errors, additions, preferences, and incorporation of the Chapter’s own warrior cult will create divergences. The variance of that version from the original might be represented to resemble:

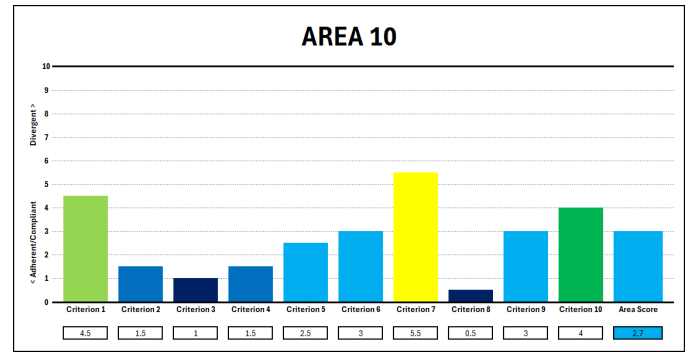
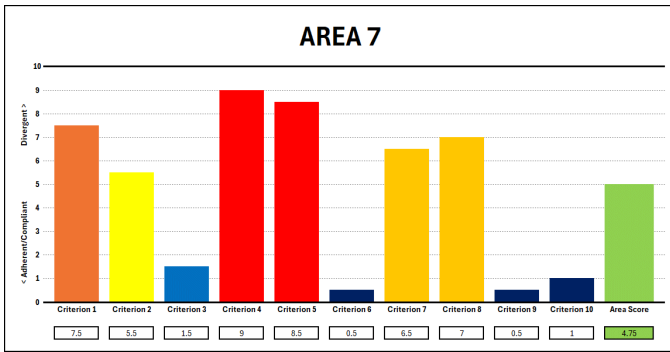
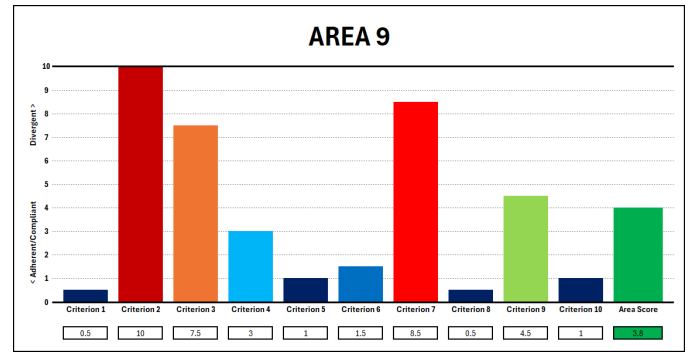
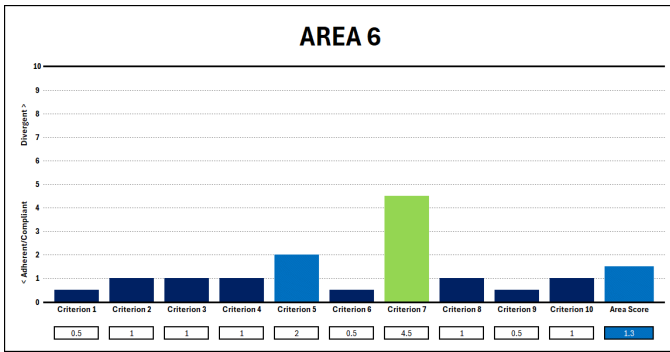
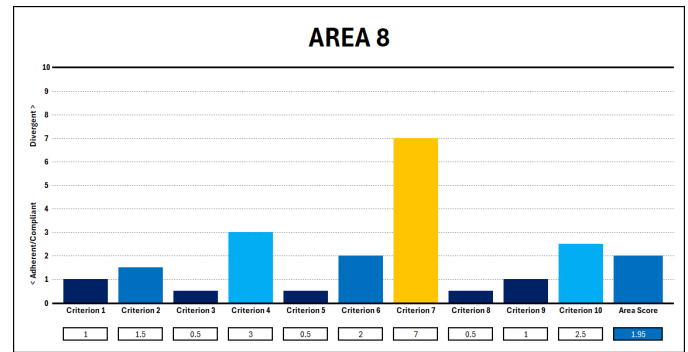
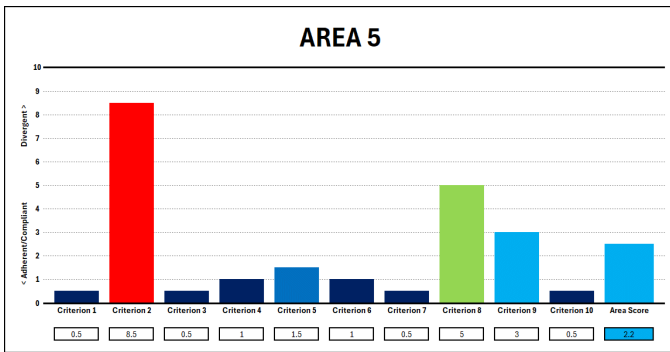


They shall be pure of heart and strong of body, untainted by doubt and unsullied by self aggrandisement. They will be bright stars in the firmament of battle, Angels of Death whose shining wings bring swift annihilation to the enemies of man. So it shall be for a thousand times a thousand years, unto the very end of eternity and the extinction of mortal flesh.

This article doesn’t seek to address the debate over the differing views of the rigidity/flexibility of the Codex Astartes. For the sake of simplicity, it is assumed that any value of 3 or lower (blues) is within the tenets of the Codex Astartes. Values higher than 3 represent some level of divergence,

with values higher than 8 (reds) representing significant divergences. If a Chapter were to be assessed for its adherence to and divergence from the Codex Astartes in ten areas under this model, it might look like:

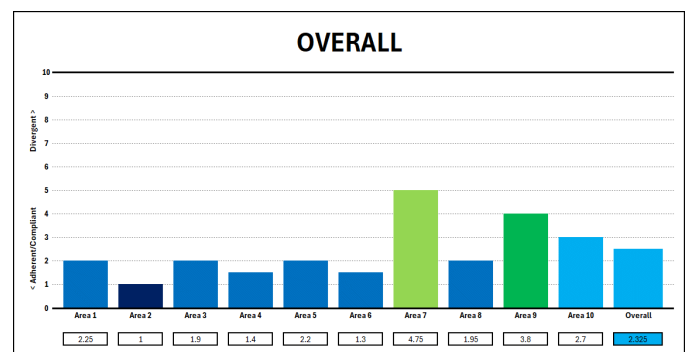




Again, what each area and criterion covers is irrelevant. One area might address the overall organization of the Chapter, with criteria covering the companies, the reclusiam, the librarium, etc. Another area might address the system of heraldry used by the Chapter, with criteria covering company affiliation, squad affiliation, rank identification, etc. Yet another area might address tactics, with one criterion covering siege warfare, another covering orbital assaults, etc. The key here is that a Chapter's compliance with and divergence from the Codex Astartes involves a complex assessment of diverse criteria.

In this theoretical Chapter, most criteria remain within the broad tenets of the Codex Astartes. There are numerous criteria, however, where some level of divergence is noted, including

several criteria where there is significant divergence. Despite these divergences, however, most areas average within the allowances of the Codex Astartes; and the few areas in which there are significant divergences remain close to the acceptable levels of the Codex Astartes. If we were to average all of the areas to get an overall assessment of the Chapter, we would have:



Despite a Chapter's divergences, it can still be assessed as being compliant with the Codex Astartes. And if this theoretical Chapter's version of the Codex Astartes closely resembles the version depicted in the Overall image, it might even consider itself to be in strict compliance. Chapters that are uncompromising in their views of the Codex Astartes and who have something more closely resembling the original might look upon our theoretical Chapter with some level of disdain, and from an objective perspective they may have some merit in their views, but the fact that the "true" Codex Astartes is not available (except insofar as the returned Roboute Guilliman might endeavor to make it happen) means that we are largely left with subjective assessments of Chapters.

An interesting development has been the revelation that Roboute Guilliman has taken issue with the Codex Astartes since returning to the Imperium. The antecedent to the Codex Astartes was the Principia Bellicosa, which formed the guidelines for the Legiones Astartes during the

Great Crusade. Over time, each of the legions incorporated changes based on their experiences and the influence of their respective Primarchs. In compiling the Codex Astartes, Roboute Guilliman drew upon the Principia Bellicosa and the changes wrought by each of the legions, including those that turned to Chaos. In determining that his masterwork was insufficient, not least because the introduction of the Primaris Space Marines (a project of his own devising) compelled a reassessment of the tactics, weapons, and wargear of the Adeptus Astartes, Roboute Guilliman has turned to updating, expanding, and improving his guidance in writing the Codex Imperialis to supplant his previous work. The lore in the game setting is now bringing us full circle with the real world since the Codex Astartes replaced the Codex Imperialis in the real world with the transition to the 2nd edition of the game.

When the Codex Imperialis eventually replaces the Codex Astartes, however, there will inevitably be adherence/compliance with and divergence from the strictures of the new guidance.

CONCLUSION

Though the method depicted in this article doesn't purport to be the method by which a Chapter's adherence/compliance with or divergence from the Codex Astartes (and eventually the Codex Imperialis) might be assessed, it serves as one possible way to visualize such an assessment. More importantly, Games Workshop has made it abundantly clear that Chapters can have divergences while still being considered compliant with the Codex Astartes (i.e., it's not an either-or situation).

How do *you* envision assessing a Chapter's relative adherence/compliance and divergence from the Codex Astartes?



Brother Tyler has been a member of the Bolter & Chainsword since 1999 and has been involved in the Warhammer 40,000 hobby since 1987. His first assignment as a moderator at the Bolter & Chainsword was in the Codex Astartes forum, which developed into the Ultramarines forum. This article represents his own views.