

Recordatio Peregrinorum

LEGEND OF THE RANGERS

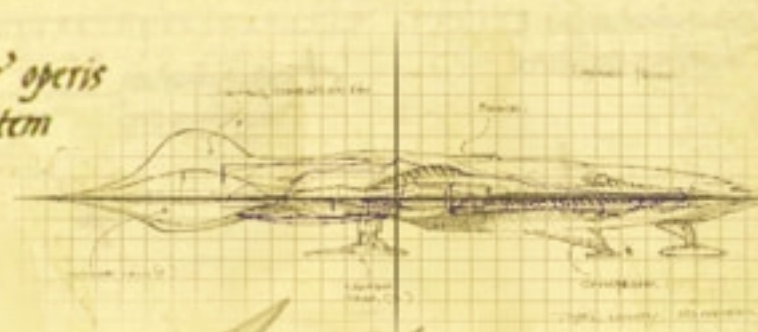
BABYLON C. WARE THE ACTION GROPOS

Roma; & Fluminis, & uicinarum ductus, & lineamenta, atque
etiam templorum, publicorumque operum, et portarum, et Trophaorum situs,
atque etiam area, quae tecto ad habitandum operata sit;
utque per ista haec tempora cognouimus: ex mathematicis instru-
mentis diligentissime adnotauimus: atque ex cogitatione quo pacto, qui
mediocri ingenio praeditus, bellissime et comodissime pingere
quoniamque uoluerit in superficie possit, Hoc ut facerem, inducere
operati: quorum studiis, fruendum censeo. Ex tota re quae
collegimus, haec sunt. murorum ueterum nulla usquam uestigia apparere:
atque etiam perpaucas haberi integras: tum a centro urbis, hoc est,
a Capitolio, portam distare nullam plus, cubitos sex, et centum quadraginta
quinta. murorum ambitum adstructorum, stadia non excedere septua-
genta. Haec ita esse ex portarum dimensione, atque ex ipsarum
fuerit, apparet:

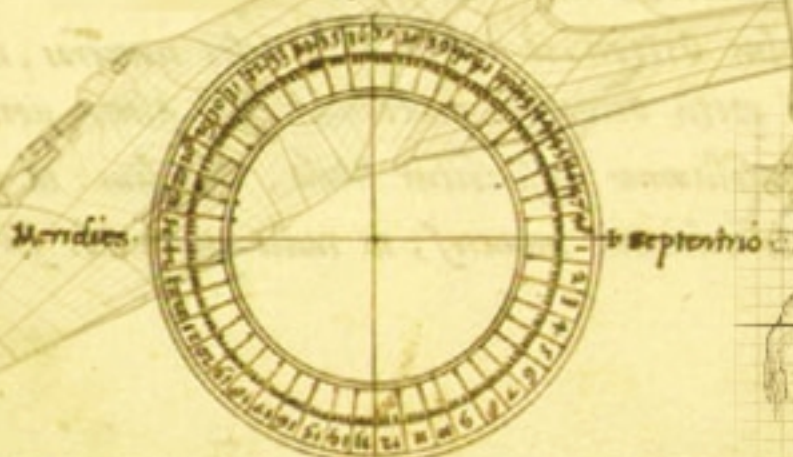
Principio quatenus fore operis
ad eius amplitudinem Orientem
apparet, reclusum, quo urbis pictura,
huius Orientis ambitum
sint octo et quadraginta



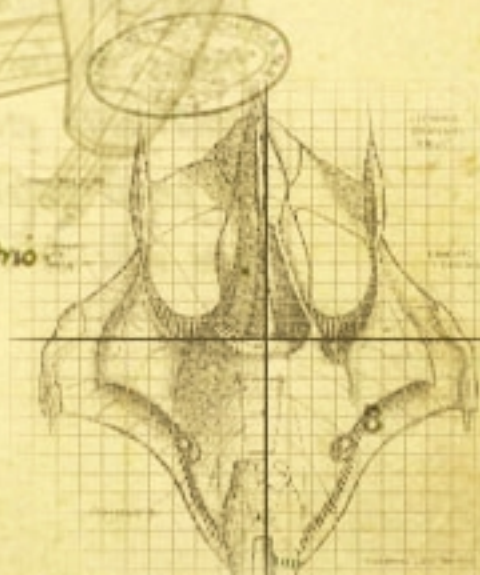
Capitolium Urbis
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Are you part of the 'new, broad' SciFi target audience?

Comment: By DIOGENES

SCIENCE fiction is in crisis. Indeed, it is struggling to survive. 2002 saw an extraordinary number of cancellations of television shows belonging to the genre. It also saw an extraordinary number of very poor decisions about the direction of the survivors.

It appears television executives have decided to insult existing audiences in pursuit of a "holy grail" - that of a "new, broader audience".

Like the holy grail, that goal is proving insubstantial and mythical.

Like those who pursue the holy grail, the powers that be simply cannot comprehend they may be wrong.

Story arcs are evil. Character development is evil. Introspective plots are evil. Space is evil.

Sexy young chicks are in. Sexy costumes are in. Hero poses are in.

Oh, and don't strain the audience's limited intelligence, they watch sci-fi, afterall...

Any show that doesn't conform to this new ideal has to go. The list of sci-fi carcasses - including Farscape (one of the highest rated sci-fi series for years), Dark Angel, Roswell - is long and morbid.

But even more disturbing are the names now questing for this holy grail. Star Trek. Andromeda. Stargate.

Trek and Andromeda are classic cases of television industry executives being completely out of touch with their audience.

Star Trek: Enterprise was conceived from the outset as a "groundbreaking" revitalisation of the Trek franchise. It was to do this by appealing to a whole new audience - by ignoring the traditions, themes and morals established over the previous three decades. Not to mention the catchy new tune.

It abandoned the old audience in pursuit of a poorly defined new market.

It failed. Enterprise opened to less than Trek-standard ratings, and has fallen continuously since then. In the past year, 70 per cent of its viewers turned off.

Andromeda went so far as to sack its chief scriptwriter - the man who developed much of the concept and universe behind the series - for committing the heresy of developing a plot arc and not focussing enough on Kevin Sorbo. His cartoonish scripts were too hard to follow, executives declared.

Season three was a bold new experiment for Andromeda. They made changes, changes that irritated the old audience, in pursuit of... someone else. They dumbed down the scriptwriting even further. Oh, and Kevin got many, many more opportunities to do his patented Hero Pose™.

Surprise, surprise, the ratings do not show this

mysterious "new audience" materialising...

Then there are the shows that almost got there...

Battlestar Galactica - the version proposed by the makers of the Matrix - was canned only a fortnight before shooting was due to start.

Dragonriders of Pern - one of the most original and intriguing concepts in years - was canned only days before shooting was due to begin.

Why? Because their producers and scriptwriters refused to make them remakes of Buffy.

Oh. Buffy.

Perhaps this is what television executive's see as being the epitome of sci-fi. It is a series that has done well. Very well. But, after seven seasons, it's ratings have begun to fall as the actors, writers and material get tired. It most likely won't be back for season eight. The spinoff Angel has been haemorrhaging ratings this past year. It probably won't be back either.

But what of the "new breed" of sci-fi? The Buffy wannabes? The shining examples of what television executives say sci-fi should be? The ones full of sexy chicks, hero poses, snappy costumes?

Firefly - the shining light that was to leave Dark Angel in the gloom - flickered out after a few shows.

Haunted - the replacement for Roswell - slipped into the afterlife after only seven episodes.

Birds of Prey soared - for all of three episodes. Did it even get a chance?

Legends of the Rangers - The Sci-Fi channel got their sexy chicks and young cast on top of an established audience. But it wasn't good enough. Besides, the Sci-Fi channel wants to move away from space shows. They want a new audience.

Then there's the future... what little there is.

Battlestar Galactica - the Sci-Fi channel's "re-imagining". A mini-series has been given the green light. But it reads like a script from Beverly Hills 90210: the dysfunctional crew of a warship giving lip to their senior officers, engaging in sex acts with cylons, swearing prolifically and running about in sports-bras... Forget Starbuck. He's a she. "Stardoe", perhaps? In fact, forget the whole original series. Nothing's the same - except some names. Why? They want a "new" audience...

Afterall, it's out there... Some television executive has seen it - in a dream...

Of course, all these failures are not their fault.

It's the fault of the sci-fi audience - for not seeing how brilliant the new work is.

Hang on - wasn't the point of these exercises to find a "new" audience to replace the "old"? Why, then, blame the old?

Perhaps someone, somewhere, hasn't thought this through very clearly...

* * *

From Agent One to a mongoose with a mission

Babylon 5 is alive! Legend of the Rangers may not have got up. Agents of Gaming may not have impressed Warner enough to keep their license. The books may have fallen into a hole... But there is some good news from the rim: The Babylon 5 RPG is about to materialise.

IT'S been a long way since the early days of Agents of Gaming. Almost a decade and dozens of products later, it is over. Babylon 5 may be a loyal market, but it is a niche marketed nevertheless.

Now Mongoose Publishing is attempting to exploit that niche. And they are eager to utilise the collective knowledge of the complex Babylon 5 universe already in existence.

In December, Bruce Graw - formerly Agent 1 of Agents of Gaming - was approached by Mongoose to become a freelance contributor.

He accepted.

"Well, right now I just needed a paying job," Bruce said in an email interview with Babcom. "I was hunting for work, and they contacted me looking for help with the RPG project. I was selected because of my B5 knowledge, background, and writing skills. Oh, it also helps that I love the show, too. I wouldn't be enjoying this nearly as much if I weren't such a fan."

But taking on the task did not come without a little frustration.

"In fact, they made me sign a non-disclosure agreement prohibiting me from even mentioning the existence of the RPG up until about last week, when they finally made the public announcement about it," Bruce said. "I actually completed one entire book and got partway into the second one before I could even tell anyone else what I was doing!"

But, as well as helping put food on the table, Bruce says he is rediscovering his enjoyment for the subject. "I'm enjoying this a lot more than I ever did with B5 Wars. 90% of my day at AOG Inc. was managing administrative chores and

crap like that. Now, I just do what I like most, and what I think I'm best at - writing!"

Mongoose has revealed it is launching into Babylon 5 with a series of source books and adventure books that follow the year-by-year developments of the television series. Bruce Graw took on this challenge in his first project.

"The first one, now completed, is an adventure book entitled Fiery Trial," Bruce said.

"This 128-page book will allow a B5 RPG Game Master to take his players through the entire first season of Babylon 5. There are four adventures and numerous side plots, and the whole thing is tied together into a single ongoing arc, just like the show."

Bruce is currently working on another project, a 200-page hardback volume entitled: the Earth Alliance Sourcebook. "My main problem with this is cramming all the requisite material into a "mere" 200 pages, but I'll do my best," he said. "I've played RPGs since I was in grade school and done my share of module-writing, so that was easy. The main problem with "Fiery Trial" was remembering that this was a campaign now, where the results of a battle carried over to the next scenario and that events that occurred were like pieces of a puzzle for the players to uncover. That's a lot different than developing statistics for a laser cannon or designing a new ship variant. As far as the Earth Sourcebook goes, so far it's not much different than some of the main race books of B5 Wars, except there's a lot more details and a lot fewer stats."

Bruce said he was more than confident the D20 system would be able to handle the complexities of the Babylon 5 universe.

"In fact, I can't think of anything better," he said. "There is a lot of discussion out there suggesting that "levels" aren't really appropriate for B5, but these people are judging without reading. In D&D, a 10th level character is 5-10 times as powerful (in terms of spells, hit points, combat abilities, etc.) than a 1st level character. In the B5 RPG, this is not the case. The game focuses almost entirely on skills and role-playing, not combat. Battles are short and sweet. Players don't get a zillion hit points; they start with a few and add maybe 1 or 2 per level. The B5 RPG is all about the STORY."

Bruce emphasised the need for continuity between Babylon 5 products. This is particularly the case for role-playing games. Where Babylon 5 Wars was mostly worried about variances in CGI scale and the flow of interstellar politics, the RPG has to get down to the level of "where, exactly, is Sinclair's office?"

This, of course, is subjective. But it is a problem based on a level of detail any RPG based on a television show or movie has to face. "You can get away with certain things in TV, film and novel, but an RPG comes along and superdetails everything," Mongoose spokesman Matthew



Sprange said. "All of a sudden, little glitches in special effects have to be accounted for, as do plot lines that were axed halfway through execution."

Bruce's experience with this ongoing issue through Agents of Gaming obviously makes him a valuable resource to Mongoose.

"Continuity is always a big concern," he said. "Fortunately, I have a network of resources, first and foremost the Historical Repair Team, who have agreed to help me out. In many ways, getting involved in this project on the ground floor, well after the end of the series and book sets, allows us all to produce products more continuous (is that a word?) than ever before."

Bruce and other contributors are working with Matthew Sprange - the main writer and Line Developer at Mongoose Publishing; Paul Tucker as Senior Editor; Richard Neale on layout; Alex Fennell who handles marketing and Ian Barstow who does the proofreading. These are all full-time members of Mongoose.

Expect to see references - and perhaps even products - drawn from Agents of Gaming's contributions to the B5 universe. "Material published in B5W is canon, ergo, it is part of the established history of B5," Bruce said. "Thus, the B5W product line, in addition to everything else in the B5 Universe, will be consulted when

I'm writing each supplement. As to whether or not there will be RPG books directly based on B5W book, like the Dilgar War one, I have no idea. That's not my call."

Not being the boss does have its own challenges - such as sticking to word count limits and acting upon other people's ideas.

"Mongoose tells me what they want, in general terms," Bruce said. "I then provide an outline, which they approve, usually with a few alterations. They also give me a specific format and product length, in terms of both word and page count. In my first one, I went over on word count by a huge margin, but they didn't mind, although of course I had to get approval for that in advance. Once I delivered, they reviewed it, asked for changes and alterations and once that was taken care of, my job was done."

As for the future?

"After the EA Sourcebook, I don't know. Since I'm not part of the Mongoose development team, I'm not entirely certain what projects will come next. I've expressed interest in continuing as a freelance writer, though, and they've told me I have another assignment coming. From what I've seen, they have a pretty aggressive release schedule planned for the next couple of years and I intend to remain a part of that."

* * *

What Mongoose has to say on the D20 debate

WELL, it will have the d20 logo on the cover! Seriously, we are well aware that two camps have firmly entrenched themselves over the rules system to be used in a new Babylon 5 RPG.

There are those who believe the d20 System, properly handled, will be just perfect. And then there are the others who... don't.

The new Babylon 5 RPG will be d20 - just not as you know it.

We are firm believers that a games system should be bent to fit the genre, never the other way round.

I can tell you now that there is no Armour Class in the game (though players of Judge Dredd could probably have guessed that!). Combat will be utterly lethal on the station. Jeffery Sinclair may be an 8th level Officer (correct at time of writing!) but he only has 22 hit points - a couple of PPG shots is all it would take to send him straight to Medlab as an emergency case... .

Rules for Starfuries, Raiders and Minbari war-cruisers are already in place (and the Minbari are deadly!).

In a nutshell, we have completely disassembled the d20 System and built it back up, brick by brick. If we found something that didn't fit, we replaced it, or chucked it out altogether. When something worked, it stayed.

If you have seen our previous books, you will be aware of how willing we are to bend and mutate the d20 rules to fit what we are trying to

achieve. All I can say is, you ain't seen nothing yet - Babylon 5 will not be D&D in space. It will be its own game that just happens to use twenty-sided dice... .

An 8th Level Officer? Why not go for a class-less/level-less system? The original draft of the new B5 RPG did just this. However, the archetypes in the TV show are so strong (think Rangers, Psi Cops, etc...) that they lend themselves naturally to a class based rules set. Once that was in place, levels followed on rather neatly, especially after we changed a few more of the standard d20 rules.

What this means is that high level characters in the B5 RPG are certainly more capable than less experienced personalities - but, say, an 8th level officer can still be brought low by a 1st level character, either in combat or diplomatic manoeuvring. A bit like real life, really... .

Playing the new B5 RPG is a vastly different experience from playing any other d20 System game we have tried - it has its own unique flavour that is most definitely Babylon 5.

Are the Psionics Handbook rules being used for Telepaths? Definitely not. There is nothing wrong with those rules (they worked well for Judge Dredd) but Babylon 5 requires something of its own. We'll preview this at a later date but basically, the new telepath rules revolve around skills, a few feats and the all-encompassing P-Rating.

* * *

FROM THE PRESS RELEASE

What happened to the B5 Wars licence?

Nothing to do with us, I promise you. Yes, I have heard the rumours that the company who acquired the B5 RPG licence paid massive amounts of money to end the B5 Wars licence. Not true. In fact, the news came as much as a surprise to us - I had already partitioned off a section of the rulebook to, potentially, serve as a conversion mechanism between B5 Wars and the spaceship combat system we have in the RPG, so players could use whichever they preferred. I personally view it as a great shame, as Mongoose and Agents of Gaming could perhaps have done great things together - but some things are not to be. We believe AoG set a standard of fidelity to source material that must be matched if the Babylon 5 RPG is to be worthy of the name. We have also been in communication with the chaps behind AoG and are very proud to have Bruce Graw writing a few of the forthcoming B5 supplements.

What will the rulebook be like?

Over 300 pages in length, hardback, full colour throughout. Packed full of stills from the television series and films. For the rest, well, you will just have to wait for the previews... .

There is really too much to list here but rest assured, we have plans to cover the Minbari, Centauri, Narns and Earth Alliance in great detail, epic campaigns, the technology of different races, politics of the League of Non-Aligned Worlds and oodles more. Yes, we will also cover the Vorlons and Shadows - but not right away! We will make sure the Babylon 5 RPG is well supported - what happens next is up to you guys!

Will there be any new, never before seen material? Will it actually be part of the Babylon 5 universe?

Our initial work has been concentrated in representing the television series with the greatest fidelity possible. However, as time goes on, it is inevitable that new ground will be broken as we examine, for example, the innermost workings of the Centauri royal court and Great Houses. That said, nothing escapes the attention of the Babylon 5 Continuity Editor, Fiona Avery and J. Michael Straczynski himself. The Babylon 5 RPG will be true to the setting. It is our intention to make the Babylon 5 roleplaying game the closest representation of the television show that is possible. This is not just another licence to us - this is a licence we worked extremely hard to acquire because we wanted it and knew we could do it justice.

**THE BABYLON 5 ROLEPLAYING
GAME WILL BE AVAILABLE IN
MAY 2003**

B5W TACTICS

Part Two: By Todd Boyce

WHILE the short ranged races can do well by physically moving to the center of the map as described in part one of this series, long ranged races are often ill-equipped to handle close range brawls with more numerous smaller vessels and such a tactic is not suited for them. However, the basic idea is the same. Control the center of the map and through that, control the opponent.

One thing I did not mention in the first article is that to short ranged players, it doesn't matter very much whether they're fighting a long ranged race or a medium ranged race. The tactics remain pretty much the same. This holds true for this article as well. A player using a long ranged race will do many of the same things against either a short or medium ranged race. A future installment will deal with short vs short and long vs long which can impact the strategies employed.

The next method of controlling the center is to make it a place too dangerous for the opponent to want to go. The Minbari, certain Centauri fleet compositions, the Hyach and the Brakiri are the prime choices for this tactic. Here's how it works:

POSITION FOR FLEXIBILITY

(See example 1)

While it is best to keep the range advantage as long as possible, sticking to the edge of the map is not always the best way to do it for two reasons. Without room to maneuver it will become easy to be trapped toward the end of the battle. It is often better to move away from the edge at the start of the game to allow for a wider range of

tactical options. On the edge, movement is much more restricted and predictable, and that makes it easier for the opponent to have control.

The other reason is it brings the guns closer to the enemy. Except for the Hyach spinal lasers, even the mighty Minbari Neutron Laser backed with full OEW will usually have at best a 50% chance of hitting a turtled target on turn 1. Optimum range for -1/4 hex weapons without much fear of retribution is around 20-25 hexes and the longer the opponent can be kept in that range, the better.

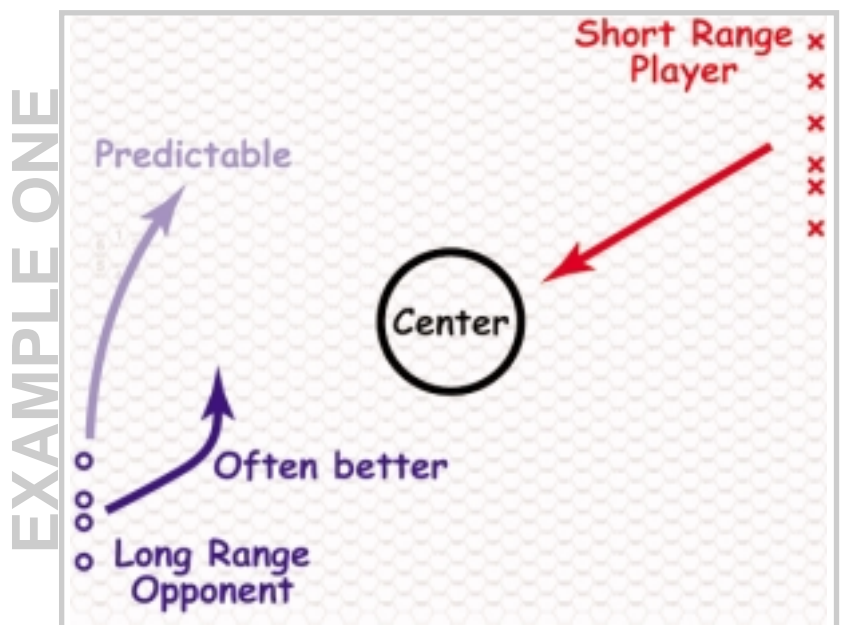
(See example 2)

The idea is that the center is covered by as

many long range weapons as possible at the opening through middle of the game. If the opponent goes toward the center, he will be hit hard. The opponent will likely circle the center to intercept the player's fleet thereby maximizing range penalties while still approaching. However, by doing so he is setting himself up to be predictable and through this predictability comes the ability to control him.

The options can be seen in the example. As described, option 1 is the safest and the one that many players take. Fast races can even use this option to great effect but that will be covered in one of the future installments.

Option 2 is much more risky for the opponent but in turn it is riskier for the player as well. If



EXAMPLE TWO



the opponent is able to weather the fire, he has a higher probability of putting the player in a sticky position in the end game.

Note however that if the Player fires the majority of his long range firepower in turn 1 in the hopes of an early kill (as I find many players do), the opponent is a lot less threatened due to the recharge time. If there is no threat, there is no risk which means this option quickly becomes the best one for the Opponent and the worst one for the Player. I find what Liburdi said in a post one time sums this thought up quite well; "Games are not won by who strikes first, but rather by who strikes best."

Option 3 is almost always a bad idea. For the opponent to move in the opposite direction of a long range race is maximizing the player's strengths. At times this is ok for flankers but generally not for the fleet as a whole.

In response to what the opponent does, Option 1 for the player is generally the safest course as it provides the most flexibility especially against the opponent's Option 1 but also against Option 2.

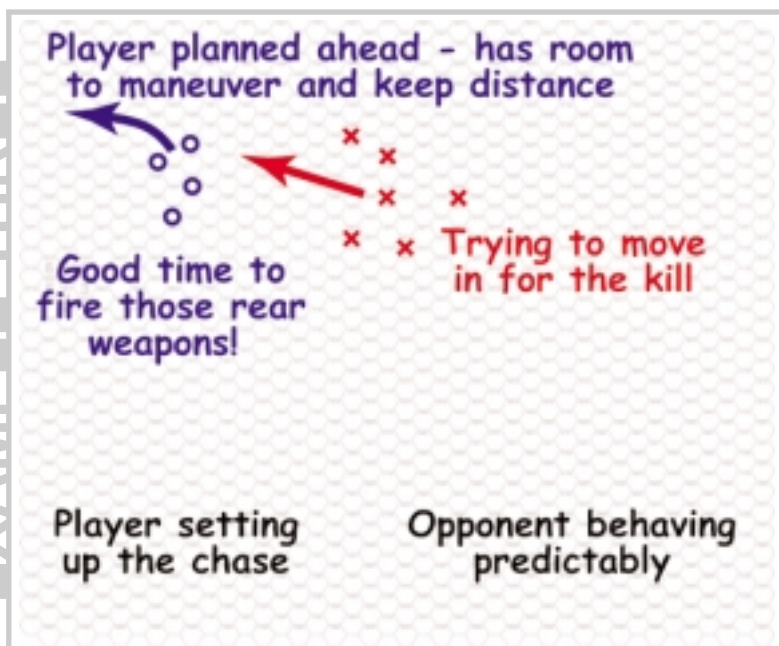
Option 2 for the player is an alternative move, but a riskier one, that is best used against Option 2 of the opponent. It is less flexible but is sometimes a better choice when facing an opponent that is moving quickly across the board.

Option 3 is very offensive and as a general rule should never be used to confront the opponent toe-to-toe unless another strategy is involved.

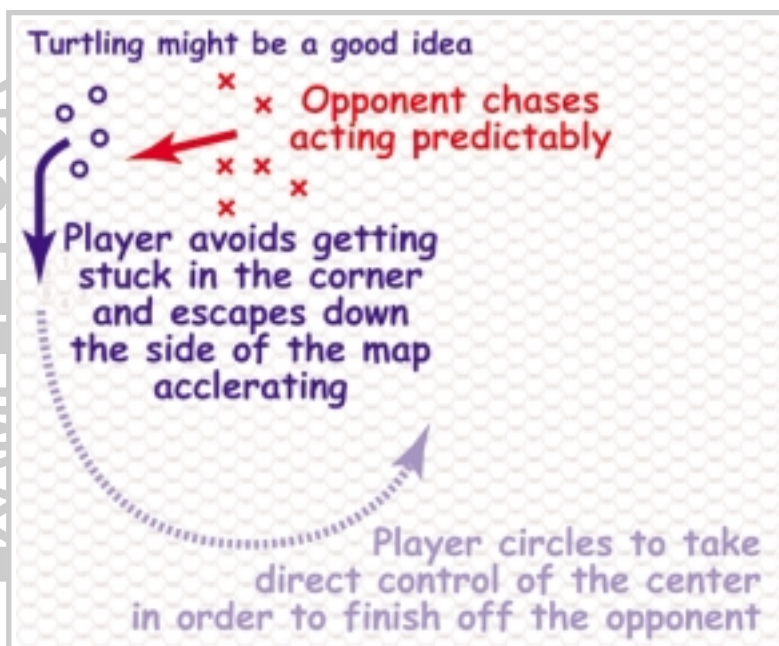
One last thought, most long ranged races have gravitic drives. This makes the ability to point the weapons across the map while moving up the map much easier with the use of pivots and maintaining orientation after making turns. There are some excellent articles in previous issues of Babcom that discuss these maneuvers in detail.

(See example 3)

EXAMPLE THREE



EXAMPLE FOUR



As the endgame approaches, the opponent will attempt to make an attack run. This is often the deciding moment who will win the battle. The long ranged player has anticipated this attack run however and has already prepared for it by moving away from the edge early in the game. As the opponent approaches, the player's fleet simply heads back towards the edge making it difficult (and often times nearly impossible) for the opponent to close to near-point-blank range. This also opens up the opportunity to fire the rear weapons.

(See example 4)

Once the opponent has committed to his attack run, the player simply escapes by slipping away down the map and circles the opponent to gain control of the center. The opponent, who's effectiveness has been degraded by long range fire, will have difficulty around the edges where

he will have to go to give chase. Chasing the player puts the opponent in a very disadvantageous position and very much under control of the player.

This is all fine in theory but the reader is probably wondering how to make the opponent feel threatened. Simply having weapons pointed in that direction aren't necessarily a threat after all. Well, here's how...

ELECTRONIC WARFARE MIND CONTROL

Typical short range player EW adjustments are simply turtle until close then full OEW when shooting. Long range opponents must be more subtle in electronic warfare manipulations because often the short range player has the maneuverability advantage. Where the short ranged player controls a long range opponent through fleet maneuver body language, tricks, and traps, the long ranged player controls his opponent through his EW and surgically selective damage.

As the opponent crosses the map he will usually alter his formation and his strategy based on these things so that he is in the best position possible when he makes his attack run. It is not so much in the weapons being in arc that the long range player can threaten the center, it is more in how the EW is applied to make the weapons a threat. Both are equally important.

When the player targets a ship, the opponent will likely turn the ship targeted such that damage is received on an area he is less concerned about or in an attempt to maximize the range penalties. Once the opponent does this, then the player can determine if it is worthwhile to shoot or not. The player might never have even planned on firing but use the EW to manipulate the opponent's movements in this way. If the opponent is trying to maintain a formation, this will delay his progress across the board and give the long range player more time to study his strategy and the best way to defeat it. This is of course in addition to making the opponent's actions more predictable.

The opponent may be centering his strategy on the actions of one or two ships, a strategy that can be ruined by identifying them and surgically striking them first. If the opponent has a ship or two that are obviously going to be used as flankers, targeting and/or destroying those ships will seriously mess up the opponent's plan. Likewise if the player has fighters and the opponent has centered his fighter protection around several anti-fighter ships, damaging or destroying those ships with long range attacks will likely make him panic when the player's fighters approach. If the opponent has his forces strung out across the map, destroying a link in the chain can isolate a ship or two providing the opportunity to divide and conquer.

Seeing the opponent's plan, picking the appropriate targets and gauging his reactions is the

most difficult part for the long ranged player. It is why this section is a little more vague than other sections. Not every opponent will react the same way but for this installment, it gives the reader something to think about and something to start observing.

Analyzing an opponent's motivations and strategy is a lengthy subject that will require its own installment in this series.

PLAYER'S YIN, OPPONENT'S YANG

It's common sense that if a player hits the opponent harder than the opponent hits him in return, every turn, that the player will win the battle. It's surprising then that many people don't do the things that are necessary to accomplish this goal.

The short ranged player mostly turtles until he gets close then usually targets fully to hit hard. The long ranged player in theory should do the opposite, at long range target fully, at close range mostly turtle. It is surprising then that many players don't do this. They target fully at long range and then target fully at close range as well leaving defense up to interception and in the case of the Minbari, the jammer.

Long ranged races typically have much higher sensor ratings than the shorter ranged races, however their defensive values often aren't the same proportion larger. This means that a long range ship that's turtled will be fairly hard to hit even at close range. Many players believe that when their ship is going to be attacked at point blank range that there's no point in going defensive. This is wrong!

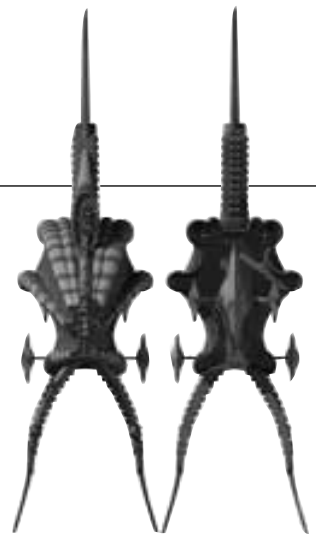
For Example: A Pak'ma'ra Urik'hal attacking the side of a Minbari Sharlin at point blank range: 19 Defense +6 OEW +3 FC -13 DEW -3 Intercept = 12 to-hit at range 0. Attacking from the front, the to-hit number becomes a 8, only a 40% chance! (note: sensors pumped by shutting off recently fired long range weapons in anticipation of point blank attack)

Meanwhile the Sharlin attacking back with no OEW needs: 14 Defense +3 FC -2 intercept = 15 to-hit

If there were three Urik'hals firing at point blank range and the Minbari player did not put up as much defense as possible, the Sharlin would be dead long before the last weapon hits. This way the Sharlin still has good chances to hit and is far more likely to only lose its side and then fire again the next two turns safely as the opponent recharges.

Maneuvering to allow flexibility is more important than maintaining range and should form the basis of the strategy. EW usage and attacks should be a part of this overall strategy, not simply be looked at as cycling opportunity fire as quickly as possible.

Here ends Part Two. Part Three will cover controlling the center with medium ranged races.



Minbari Sharan War Cruiser (Sharlin Rare Variant)

By STEVEN CROSS and HYPERION

THE Sharan was designed to test bed the new Heavy Neutron Laser. After seeing the performance of the Hyach Spinal Laser, the Minbari wanted their own spinal weapon, which would fit well with the Minbari doctrine of long range dueling.

The weapon itself is very powerful, but to mount such a weapon on a Sharlin hull meant that there would be sacrifices in firepower for the ship.

The two forward NLs, and both EP Guns were removed and their power rerouted to the HNL. Whilst the HNL was very powerful, it lacked the firepower of two Neutron Lasers and had a slow rate of fire, which was not liked by many of the Warrior Caste. The weapon became type-cast; Warriors saw it as a weapon for taking out bases, or orbital bombardment and nothing else.

After a dozen or so ships were converted, the programme was cancelled, with most of the hulls going to the Religious and Worker Castes. The Warriors kept three for trials and experimentation, but they are rarely seen. The class's moment of glory came during the 3rd Space Crisis. When a Sharan helped the Army of Light breach the alien artifacts shield with a sustained HNL salvo. The cruiser survived the battle, but was heavily damaged. It was proposed to be converted back to a Sharlin, but this proposal was dropped after reviewing the ships performance in the fight.

Other possible uses for the HNL are being looked at, the Workers want to upgrade the Norgath Starbases by fitting one of these weapons on each section (as well as other improvements), whilst there is a design study underway to experiment with a Neshatan mounting three of them in place of all its forward mounted Neutron Lasers.

(SCS in the attachments folder)

Severed timestreams



Alternate History Fiction: By BRUCE GRAW

"Come on, John, you're going to have to do better than that." Commander Fisher looked down the length of his angular nose at Sheridan, the corners of his mouth turning up in a smile that tried very hard to be friendly. "You show up here, in a ship like nothing anyone's ever seen before, and all you can tell me is you need to see some guy no one's ever heard of?"

"Well," John answered, sipping at his coffee and trying not to enjoy being so mysterious, "I have to admit, some of it is confusing to me, too. I should be dead now at the hands of the Minbari, but these...aliens...rescued me. Their price was to help them out, so how could I refuse?"

Calvin Fisher sighed and leaned back in his chair, regarding his friend warily. "This isn't like you, John. How do I know this is really you I'm talking to? I mean, these aliens could've taken over your body or something like that."

Sheridan snorted. "If you want to get paranoid, go right ahead. God knows I've seen enough crazy things in the universe to believe damn near anything. How can I prove to you that I'm really John Sheridan? Go ahead, ask me whatever you want. Try me."

Fisher shook his head and let his eyes roam around the office before finally coming back to rest on John. "No, I don't think that'll be necessary. What am I supposed to think, though? The ship you came in is completely alien. I had some techs go down and take a look at it. Did you know it can change its surface texture? And it has some sort of electrical field set up around itself that no one can penetrate. I admit, we haven't really tried all that hard, because you asked us not to so nicely and all, but I've got people down there with itchy trigger fingers. I'm afraid of what will happen if they try to cut into that ship's hull."

"Yeah, I don't think that would go over too well," Sheridan replied with a grin. "Bob wouldn't like that too much. You should've heard what I had to tell him to get him to agree to come inside."

"Bob?" Fisher raised an eyebrow. "Who the hell is Bob?"

"You might find this hard to believe," Sheridan answered, "but he's the ship."

"What do you mean, he's the ship? Some kind of computer?"

"No, no, he's the actual ship. That ship is alive. There isn't any crew at all. The whole ship is one sentient being."

Fisher started to reply, but clamped his mouth shut. Amazingly enough, that answer actually made sense. The hull of the craft in the base's docking bay didn't look like any kind of metal he'd ever seen. In fact, it really did look like skin. The surface could actually move around too, and several times sent out tentacles that seemed to be examining people and objects nearby. If the craft really were some kind of creature, that would actually answer a lot of things, but it also opened up all sorts of avenues for new questions.

"All right," he agreed, "I guess I can buy that. So these aliens gave you your own living ship and told you to look for this guy Sinclair. Before I tell you where he is, can you explain why he's so important?"

"I don't know. Bob just told me he is. It's a real mystery. Sinclair must know something. That's the only thing I can figure out."

"Know something about what?"

"I'm not sure." Sheridan hung his head for a moment as if in thought. Finally, he looked up at his friend once again. "Look, these aliens told me something terrible is coming. Have you ever heard of a race called the Shadows?"

Fisher cocked his head, obviously drawing a blank. "Sorry, no," he answered. "Why? Should I have?"

"Well, apparently, they're the ones responsible

for the Minbari."

"What do you mean by that? Did they bring them here or something?"

"Not exactly. Apparently the Minbari used to be powerful, but the Shadows defeated them handily. You've seen Minbari tech. Remember how we always wondered how a bunch of pirates got such powerful weapons? Well, I think they built them, back before these Shadows attacked. You can imagine what they must have been like if they had such a technological base to work from—and these Shadows beat them anyway. I have to wonder if we'll be any kind of threat to them at all."

"Yeah." Fisher's smile was gone now, and his mouth was drawn into a thin, grim line. "I can see how that might worry you. Thanks for brightening up my day, John. I still don't know what Sinclair has to do with it, though."

"Maybe if I knew who he was, I could figure that out."

"All right, I'll tell you," said the base commander, "but I don't think it'll help. It took a while to find him, but I did. He's on the Rock."

"What?" Sheridan was aghast. The Rock was another name for Ceres, the asteroid prison in the Sol system. "Please tell me he's a guard!"

"No such luck," replied Fisher. "It gets better. I tried to pull his file, to see why he was sent there, and all I got was a security block. Red level."

"Red?" John sighed. "Great, just great. He either did something so heinous no one wants anyone else to know about it, or he's so important that they put him there to keep anyone else from getting their hands on him. Whichever way it is, I'm not going to get to him all that easily, am I?"

"Probably not. I'm not sure they'll take too kindly to some alien ship showing up at their doorstep, either. You should probably take one of my ships."

Sheridan grinned. "So you have more time to

look Bob over, eh? Well, I'm afraid not. I'll have to take my chances."

"You aren't planning anything rash, are you?" asked Fisher concernedly. "That ship may be impressive, but I doubt it can stand up to the Home Fleet!"

"You're probably right, there." John took another sip of his coffee, considering that for a moment. "Bob might like the opportunity to try, though. I don't think he gets out much. Anyway, I'm not going to fight anybody. I don't believe I have to break Sinclair out of prison or anything like that. I just want to talk to the guy."

"If he's got a red block, they won't let you."

"I know. But I have to try. If what I know about the Shadows is true, it's worth the risk."

Fisher nodded. "I agree, John, and I wish you luck. I'd come along, but I have this base to run, you know."

Sheridan sucked down the last of his coffee and stood. "Thanks, Calvin," he said amiably. "I appreciate the help. I'd better be going, though. When this is all over, I'll see if I can arrange to have you meet Bob, all right?"

"That'd be great. Now go on, would you? You're disrupting my base, you old troublemaker!"

The two men shook hands and said one final goodbye, and then Sheridan left the office without looking back. Fisher watched the door slide shut and waited about ten seconds, then stepped over to his desk communicator. Pressing a button, he said, "Get me Earth Central. Now!"

* * * * *

Sheridan looked out at the shifting red swirls of hyperspace, brow furrowed in thought. Just above the viewscreen, words suddenly flashed across the skinlike surface of the Vorlon ship's interior. "What are you thinking about?" Bob asked.

"Just worried about what's going to happen when we get to the home system," John replied with a sigh. "They aren't going to like an alien ship popping through the jump gate, you know."

"Why not?" asked Bob innocently. "Don't your people explore space specifically to meet other species? Isn't the purpose of the base we just visited to support such efforts?"

"In theory, yes," replied John. "We like to meet alien races out there in space, though, not at home. At least not without some kind of arrangements or treaty planned ahead of time. A lot of the races we meet are hostile, too. The Minbari are just one. I don't even want to talk about people like the Dilgar-if they're really people at all. More like monsters."

"Why do you say that?" asked Bob. "Are their forms that hideous?"

"No, no. Actually, they're humanoids, and a lot prettier to look at than some of what we've met out there. It's the way they are. Do you know how many races they've exterminated?"

"No," replied Bob. "Tell me about these Dilgar. I have never heard of them before."

"All right, I guess we've got nothing better to do," said Sheridan. "Where do I start? Well,

everyone just thought they were a minor power at first, but then, about thirty years ago, there was this war. Out of nowhere, the Dilgar attacked all their neighbors, and were on the verge of reaching our borders, too. All of a sudden they just stopped, though, and pulled back. Turns out they were just after a new home system, because a couple of years later they abandoned Omelos just before the sun blew. The rest of the systems they conquered were just gravy for them. They kept what they took, though, by wiping out all the indigenous people. Total genocide!"

John sighed and shook his head at what was indeed a dark day in the history of the Galaxy. All those races, bottled up behind the Dilgar lines, one by one became the focus of attention from the entire enemy fleet. Abbai, Hyach, Drazi, Brakiri-how many others had the Dilgar totally wiped out, or turned into slaves? If only Earth Central had intervened-but then, they might've lost, too, and now the human race might be just as extinct as the Yolu and Vree.

After a moment, he renewed his explanation. "There was nothing we could do," he explained, sadness clearly evident in his voice. "By then they were too powerful for us to attack. The Centauri wouldn't intervene, because they had their own problems. At least after they reconquered the Narns, they signed a mutual defense pact with us, or we might've been next on the Dilgar list. So, now, you have us, the Centauri, and a couple of unreliable minor races on one side and the Dilgar on the other. Tensions are always high, so I think you can understand why a strange alien ship dropping out of the Io jump gate will be cause for concern."

"Io jump gate?" asked Bob. "What is Io, and why would we go there?"

Sheridan shrugged. "Io is a moon of Jupiter," he answered. "You have to go there first. It's the only way into the Sol system from hyperspace, unless you want to come out far beyond Neptune's orbit. There are jump suppressors all over the place. The only opening is at the transfer point on Io."

"I understand," Bob said. "This Io location is sure to be well guarded, then?"

"Yes, very much so," John agreed. "In fact, I'm sure most of the fleet will be there. I don't believe for a minute that my old friend Calvin Fisher would keep our pending arrival a secret from Earth Central. In his place, they'd be the first people I called. I doubt he even waited for me to leave the station."

"Well," said Bob, somehow managing to seem smug despite the fact that all he was doing was writing letters on the wall, "I do hope your people are indeed at Io when we arrive. That will give us more time to find Jeffrey Sinclair."

"You mean to tell me you can get through--?"

"Yes, I can," Bob replied. "They are not a concern. In fact, I believe the proper expression is, 'I laugh at your jump suppressors.'"

Sheridan chuckled. "Well, in that case, take us to the Rock!"

* * *

News in brief

Trek Future Unsure

STAR Trek Nemesis executive producer Rick Berman told SCI FI Wire that several factors likely contributed to the film's lackluster box-office performance, and he added that the future of the film franchise remains uncertain. "There's no way of telling what happened," Berman said in an interview. "I'm convinced that we made a very good movie, and I'm also convinced that the movie was promoted properly." Berman added, "I thought the trailers and the television spots were all excellent. It's easy to blame that sort of thing, but I don't think we can in this situation. I think that the competition of other films may have played some part in it, but I can't be certain of that, either. It's very, very hard to tell." Berman went on to say that he's not sure what the future will hold for the Trek film franchise. "There's a theory that there was too much time [between Insurrection and Nemesis]," he said. "There's another theory that there wasn't too much time. I, along with the people at Paramount, need a few months of perspective and thinking about it to then decide what's the best thing to do next. I don't think this is like falling off a horse, and you want to jump right back on it. But we'll see."

Berman said that he "can't imagine numerous other movies won't occur." He also hinted that future films may include a combination of characters from various Trek television series.

Troopers Sequel

A SEQUEL to 1997's *Starship Troopers* will begin filming in Los Angeles in May, Production Weekly reported. Phil Tippett, who supervised visual effects for the first *Starship Troopers*, will direct the sequel, the publication reported.

Paul Verhoeven helmed the original movie, which was based on Robert Heinlein's classic SF novel. Edward Neumeier will return to script the sequel, about a small group of soldiers who find themselves taking refuge in an abandoned outpost as they attempt to fight the bugs, not realizing that a much graver danger is infiltrating their unit, the publication reported.



The Anla'Shok's 'little ship' makes a big impression

THE Liandra is no hero ship. In fact, JMS appears to have gone out of his way to present a ship the exact opposite of that found in his previous venture - Crusade.

It is fragile. It is out-of date. It is damaged.

That being said, it is still a very capable ship - for its size.

It's just that it's size is... small.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Her lines and colors represent the Shinali sense of design. Until recently we strove for a certain aesthetic in our ships. A design both lethal yet pleasing to the eye. Then humans became involved in designing ships for the Alliance.

- First Officer Dulann

The Liandra sits forlornly on the Ranger Headquarter's landing pad, maintenance bots swarming about amid fountains of welding sparks. Parked alongside the Valen, it looks diminutive. Insignificant. Weak.

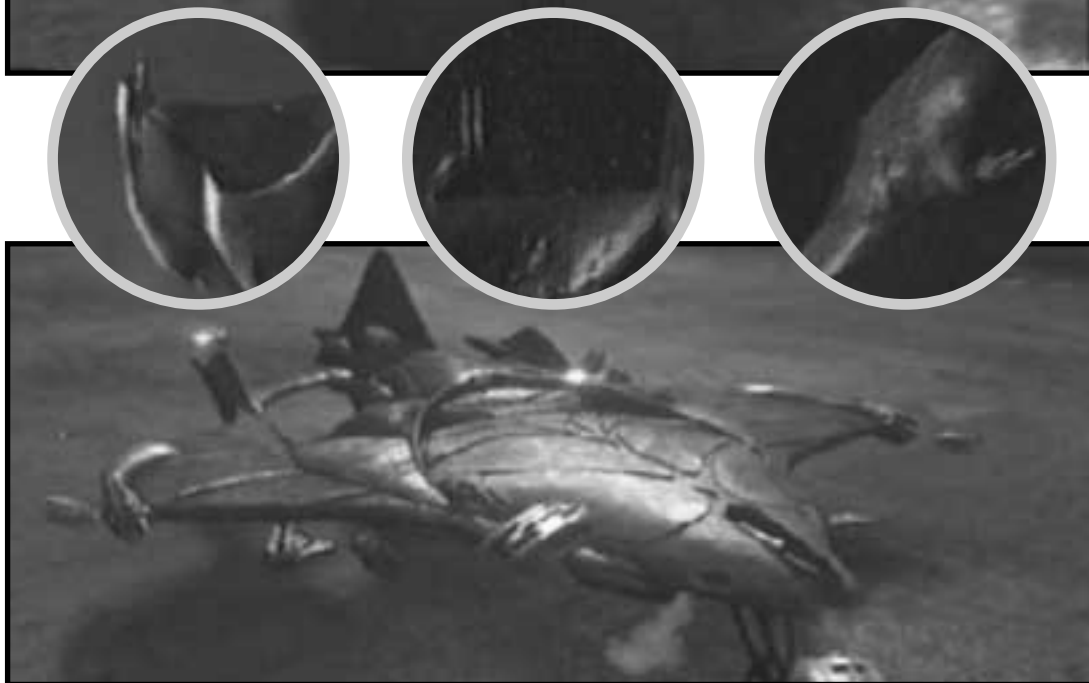
It is a ship with obvious Minbari derivations. It is sleek and curved. It has the fins common to Minbari vessels and a skin that looks somewhat other than metallic.

Where the Sharlin looks like a Sunfish, the Liandra looks like a stingray.

Where the Liandra differs from other observed Minbari ships is its turrets and the rusty, copperish tones to its hull.

WEAPONS

"The Liandra isn't like the Enterprise, it's more like a PT boat . . . It is also, by design, a small, fast (crew of maybe 20) patrol ship designed to go on the edge, it's not meant to go out there and



pulverize fleets. It would have been instantly outgunned and destroyed in the Earth-Minbari war's bigger battles." - JMS

For its size, the Liandra appears armed to the teeth.

But the power of those weapons appears limited.

With battle damage limiting weapons to "10 per cent capacity", the Liandra is able to fire one of its wing guns with a powerful enough pulse to disable the engines of a

Hand ship with a well-positioned shot. Once some repairs are conducted, Sarah reports: "Weapons are up to 25 per cent capacity - about enough to take out a really big rock."

Turrets: There are eight turrets,



placed symmetrically around the ship. Four turrets cover the four quarters on the top of the ship, four turrets cover the four quarters below the ship.

These turrets, if intended to be anti-fighter and weapons intercept capable, therefore offer comprehensive coverage against all attack approaches.

A close look at these turrets, as afforded by the close-up view of the underside and rear of the Liandra as it begins to discharge its countermeasures late in the engagement with the Hand, reveals them to be double-barreled.

These guns fire single orange-white pulses. We see these pulses being fired against Hand vessels, impacting upon their hulls. These pulses are also seen intercepting pulses fired from the Hand vessels and taking down proximity mines.

Pulses appear to be fired in widely spaced volleys, or rapid-fire "frenzy" bursts.

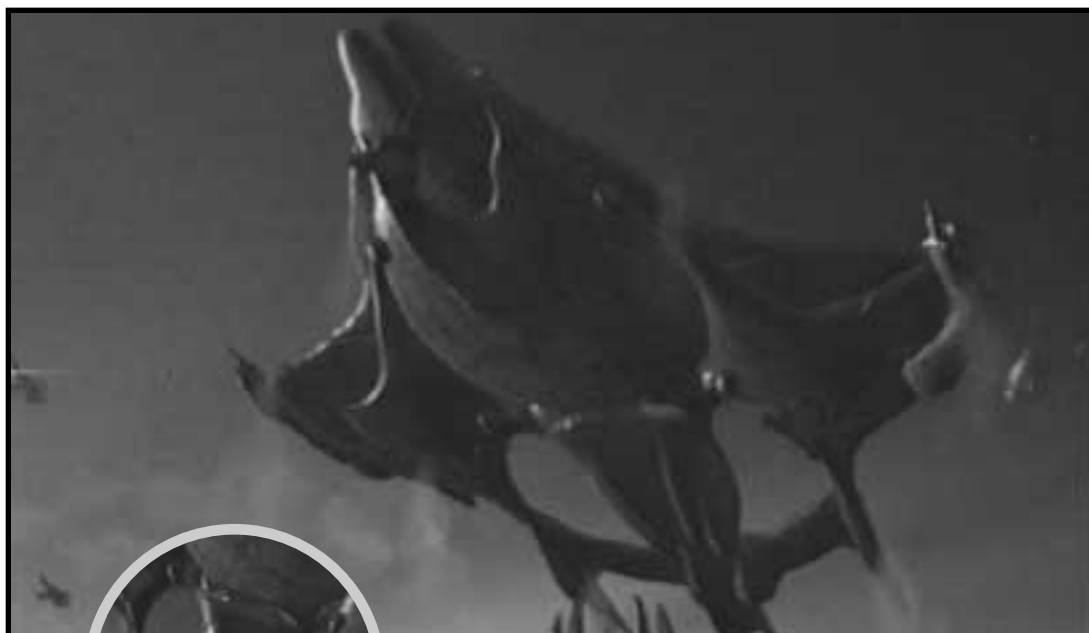
Wing Mounts: The only other weapon system on the Liandra seen to fire is the right wing mounted cannon. This is used for a last-ditch shot from the damaged Liandra to disable the engines of a Hand ship. It fires the same orange-white pulse as the turrets, though it may be larger. It achieves its desired effect - immobilising the Hand vessel with a hit at the base of its energy core.

Other Weapons: There is only one other obvious weapon aboard the Liandra. A large cannon formed deep into the bow of the ship. Almost a spinal mount, this gun is not shown firing at any stage during the Legends of the Rangers pilot. All of its capabilities, therefore, can only be conjectural.

Countermeasures: The Liandra also makes use, for the first time on B5, of physical countermeasures. We have heard the Minbari have jammers, though no mention is made of these in Legend of the Rangers.

But the Liandra has another device. A glittering cloud of silver and gold "chaff" is dumped into the ship's wake as it runs from a pursuing Hand ship.

This "chaff" absorbs the energy from a Hand purple pulse - or detonates the weapon. Either way, the impact upon Liandra itself is greatly reduced.



ARMOR

"The script specified an older Minbari vessel, one that had seen better days."

Co-designer Chris Wren

While the Valen sustains hit after hit, the Liandra is virtually disabled by two simultaneous hits from the Hand's green-white pulse weapon. The crew are violently thrown about. Internal systems short out and internal pipes burst.

Weapons are at 10 per cent, not enough to do any damage. Engines are functional, but barely. Tachyon com systems are offline. But short-range ship-to-ship communications were functional.

Engineer Na'Feel reports: "Jump engines are down. We can navigate in normal space, but only at half

speed" Much of this damage is either repaired, bypassed or minimised during the course of Liandra's attempt to flee the pursuing Hand ships.

Obviously, Liandra is not heavily armored. It is probably designed to rely on its manoeuvrability and speed to get it out of trouble quickly before fleeing to find some stronger friends...

MOBILITY

"Right, top condition for a cursed 20-year-old ship that's been through, what, two wars, four crews - some of which are still there in a sort of - dead kind of way."

- Weapon's Officer Sarah

In the middle of the show, Engineer

Na'Feel makes a startling statement: "Jump engines are offline". This goes against all we know about jump engine technology. Jump engines are not supposed to be capable of being installed upon small ships.

During the movie, we do not see Liandra obviously use its own jump engines. It exits Minbar via a jump-gate. It jumps into Beta Durani 6 with the Valen - so it was probably Valen that opened the gate.

At the end of the movie, the crew declares the Liandra has activated the jump-gate sequence - though we don't see the gate behind the vortex when the ship jumps in. Was this a blooper?

If so, JMS is too proud to admit it. However, this in in the vein of sev-



eral of JMS's famous comments - such as his reply to the question "how fast does the Excalibur go?" with the glib "Plot speed".

He is not afraid to make changes to suit the plot of his story.

Obviously, a series based on a ship without jump engines would provide a major restriction to exploration and covert operations story lines.

The Liandra, in normal space, is fast and nimble. It is seen flying circles around the Valen, darting in, around and between the Hand attack ships while taking pot shots.

It is supposed to be slower than the Valen. But it obviously does not need anywhere near as much time to work up to full speed. It can accelerate and decelerate very quickly.

It was slowly being caught by the Hand ship. But that was after sustaining battle damage.

Na'Feel initially reported being capable of "half speed" in normal space.

This was restored to 80 per cent "capacity" by the time of the pursuit.

BRIDGE

"The Liandra is a Ranger ship. The Rangers, if we recall our history from In the Beginning, were not directly involved in Earth related hostilities during the Minbari War. The EM war was under the aegis of the Warrior caste." - JMS

The bridge is surprisingly large for what is supposed to be a small ship. It is comparable to a White Star. The arrangement is very different, however.

Where the White Stars have consoles facing the windows in the front of the ship (and a virtual wall display), the Valen has a central command holographic projector around which all operations consoles face.

This main command console is surrounded by a slightly raised platform where crew members go about their tasks.

COMBAT SYSTEMS

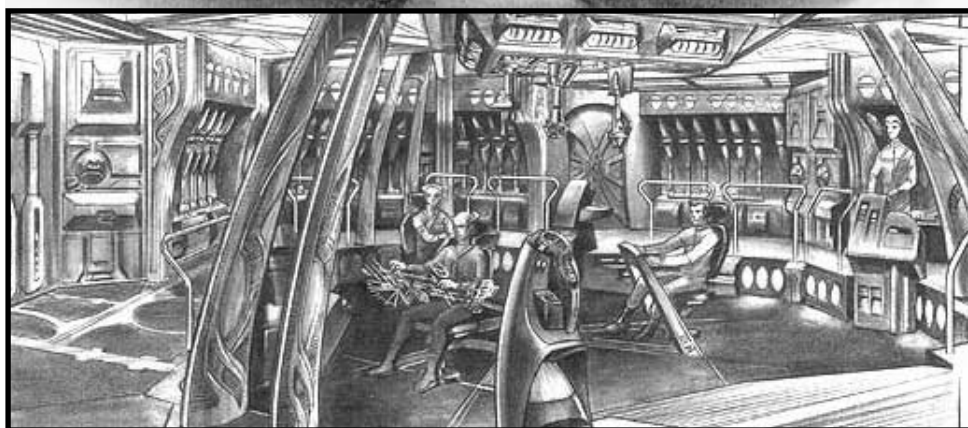
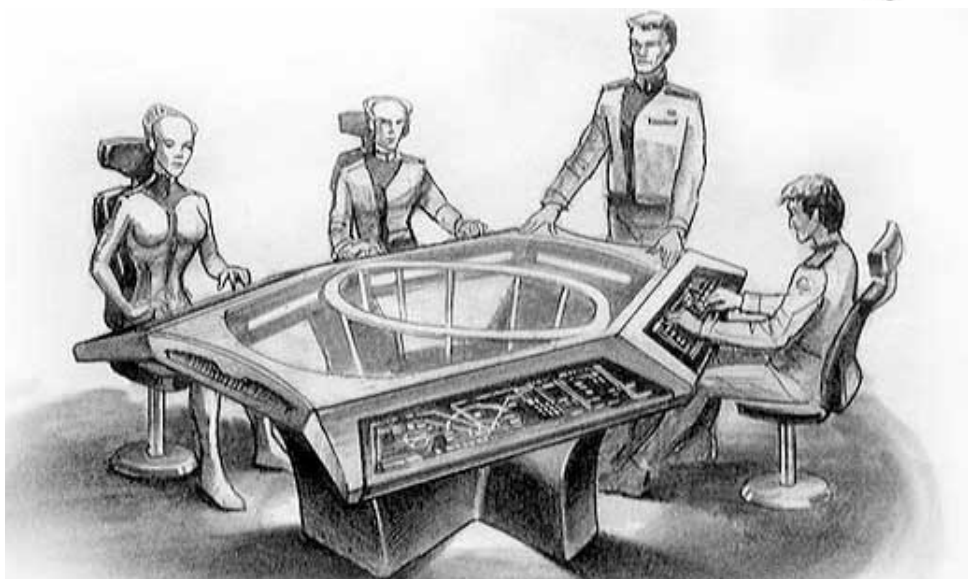
"This ship is being held together by little bits of wire and good intentions"
- G'Kar

The Liandra introduces something not previously seen in Babylon 5. Though it could be implied by the Sharlin's visual-surround command deck. Weapon's Officer Sarah Cantrell leaps into a dedicated fire-control pod. This is a controlled gravitational environment where she floats suspended in the centre of the pod.

When activated, the pod gives a full three-dimensional virtual reality picture of the combat environment. The weapon's officer "virtually" takes the place of the ship.

Laser sensors hone in on her eye, and begin to directly beam targeting information into her visual cortex and monitor her point of focus as a targeting direction finder.

Other graphic enhancements are projected on to the three-dimensional environment display -



including a holographic touch-pad interface.

The physical actions of the weapons officer are converted into firing commands. In some instances it even appears she has maneuvering control of the ship - though this is uncertain. It is a physically demanding interface.

But it is one that exploits a human's natural fighting instincts and reflex actions.

SENSORS

We are not given many examples of the Liandra's sensor ability during the show.

We are shown it has sensors capable of detecting the initiation of a jump-point before it opens.

We are also shown the Liandra detecting a pursuing Hand vessel at 10,000km "just outside maximum effective range of high-energy weapons".

This does not seem like a particularly effective detection range.

However, we have not been told how much damage was done to the Liandra's sensors during the initial engagement.

Therefore, its sensor ability remains conjectural.

ROLE

(One thing I'm curious about is the assumption that we've seen all of the Minbari ships. We've literally seen only a handful. Go to Jane's books on military weapons, planes in particular, and you get all

**kinds* of variation...from Ospreys to F16s to cargo*

jets to hovercraft...why should there be less variation in a more advanced society like the Minbari?)

- JMS

The Liandra is from the outset described as an attack ship.

But it does not seem terribly capable of attack.

It is pressed into service as an escort - albeit one that "does not draw much attention".

Its weapons prove to be capable of taking on the close escort role. Here, the Liandra would act as a "goal-keeper" or "point-defence" ship - protecting its charge from incoming weapons fire.

The large number of turrets also make it an excellent anti-fighter vessel - almost in the league of the Brakiri Halik (a ship it has a remarkable resemblance to).

The Liandra, however, does not appear capable of acting as an aggressive escort vessel.

Obviously, escort is not its primary role.

It is clearly a reconnaissance vessel.

It uses its speed, stealth and manoeuvrability to dash in to dangerous places - find out what is going on - and then slip out again unharmed.

It uses these same characteristics to deploy Ranger operatives planetside for covert and overt missions.

Otherwise, the Liandra would have to operate in "Wolf packs" to do any damage. This is not unprecedented. Though it would be unusual for the Minbari.



The Minbari Ranger Patrol Corvette By BEN RUBERY



ORIGINALLY built in 2244, these small craft were designed to work with a tiny crew (in comparison to standard Minbari craft) as the Ranger numbers were such that even though this craft could operate comfortably on a crew of half a dozen, the personnel required to field more than a handful of these craft was beyond them.

When the Shadow War was in its infancy, the Vorlons approached the Religious caste and offered them the technology to build a new class of ships, and the White Star was born. A few more Ranger Patrol Corvettes had been constructed, but the arrival of the White Star diverted all resources available. After the Shadow War the ISA found it hard to maintain a large enough number of White Stars to patrol the space around the ISA member states. Production of more White Stars was proving problematic and the humble Patrol Corvette was revisited. The original production run was refitted and a new production run authorized in order to provide the Rangers with sufficient craft to meet their patrol needs. This was a short-term measure while the Minbari continued to research Vorlon technology and develop new ship classes.

The Patrol Corvette has limited capabilities. Its weapons are short ranged, and its jump drive is vulnerable to fire. Due to the crew limits this ship does not represent the pinnacle of Minbari technology, as it did not have the techs aboard to maintain the equipment. Instead it is designed to be rugged and easy to maintain by limited manpower, and needs only a crew of half a dozen to operate efficiently. Shortly before the Earth-Minbari conflict, Lenonn persuaded the Minbari to fund a limited run of these ships as part of his campaign to rejuvenate the Anla'Shok. The technology may be old but the ship features a cutting edge jump drive to allow it to act as a scout and operate independent of jump gates.

It is available to the Rangers, and the Patrol Corvette design is also produced in the Minbari Protectorate, who had a large amount of space to patrol and appreciated the small crew size. The Protectorate did not have access to the most advanced Minbari technology and were quite pleased with a hull of it's size carrying so much firepower. With the removal of the Jammer, the Protectorate hull had larger crew quarters and supply storage, and was able to extend the patrol range of the tiny hull. Protectorate fleets have also deployed the hull as an escort craft, able to use its Light Molecular Pulsars to shower incoming fighters in fire.

In the IA era these craft are often seen alone in League space, and the League find their presence far less threatening than the White Stars. These craft do the grunt work of patrolling borders, scouting for Raiders and gathering intelligence for the IA. They will call in White Stars as backup in the event of an emergency, but the Rangers have started to use these small craft for infiltration and black ops as the Anla'Shok resume their role as intelligence gatherers for the Minbari Federation and its IA allies in a cold war with the Centauri.

Limited Fire Control

The Ranger Patrol Corvette has limited fire control. For every target after the first that is fired at (flights of fighters count as one target), subtract 1 to-hit per additional target.

An Elite Weapons Officer using a limited fire control system gains the "Kung Fu Fighting" ability, which allows the targeting of up to three targets simultaneously without penalty, with the normal -1 per target penalty if four units or more are targeted.

Limited Jump Engine

Before the White Star, this was the smallest ship in Minbari service with a jump engine, and it is unable to do many of the things a standard jump engine may do. It may only keep a jump point open for two turns, the point cannot be formed more than two hexes from the ship and the point formed is only large enough for MCVs, LCVs and fighters to pass through.

PLAUSABLE?

OR PHOOEY?

By **CHARLES J. COHEN**
As posted to the babylon 5 news groups,
22 January, 2002

THIS article is a review of the Liandra's gesture and virtual reality based fire control system as seen on Babylon 5: Legends of the Rangers. I wanted to review it because gesture recognition based systems are my main area of study, and I am always excited to see representations of gesture based systems on television and films.

QUICK REVIEW

I believe that this Liandra's method of weapon control is a well designed system to allow a person to actively target ships, while ensuring appropriate system response (i.e. weapons firing) when desired without false positives (i.e. a weapon firing when it is not desired).

There are some clear areas for enhancing the system, such as adding higher level gesture commands, as well as voice.

LONG REVIEW

My Qualifications

So, who am I to be doing such a review? Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), and specifically gesture recognition, are my area of expertise. While I'm not *the* foremost expert in this area, I am well versed in the field. My Ph.D. in

gesture recognition (Electrical Engineering Systems, minors in Artificial Intelligence and Robotics) is from the University of Michigan in 1996 (thesis: Dynamical System Representation, Generation, and Recognition of Basic Oscillatory Motion Gestures, and Applications for the Control of Actuated Mechanisms).

Since then I've published a variety of papers in the fields of gesture recognition, HCI, and machine vision [1], have been interviewed by a small number of news publications [2], and have given talks on this subject [3].

My company (Cybernet Systems) has produced a very basic gesture/tracking software product called "Use Your Head" [4], that allows a person to use their head motions as an additional game device (which could be considered a precursor to the Liandra's targeting system!).

I've installed prototype gesture recognition systems for NASA and the Army [5], and still have government funding to continue this research.

Again, I'm not *the* authority in this area, but I like to consider myself an authority.

Since I also love Science Fiction in general, and Babylon 5 in specific, I decided it would be fun to review the Liandra's system.

Overview of the Liandra's Fire Control System.

This overview is taken from my viewings of Babylon 5: Legends of the Rangers. I will try to

point out three things: What I know, what I think I know, and what I don't know. That is, I'll try to keep assumptions to a minimum, and if I can't, I will at least point out what it is I'm assuming.

What I know:

1. The weapon's control officer (WCO) is suspended in a full zero gravity Virtual Reality (VR) environment.
2. The WCO has three degrees of rotational motion (roll, pitch, and yaw) centered around her center of gravity. That is, she can rotate herself to any orientation to view the combat environment as desired.
3. The VR environment is similar to that found on the Minbari command ships [6]. That is, a full 3D representation of the battle space, with gestures used to focus attention on various aspects of the battle environment, terrain, and assets.
4. Each of the WCO's extremities (hands and feet) are linked to specific weapons.
5. Ship tracking and targeting is performed using an eye-tracking system.
6. Multiple ships could be targeted off of the eye-tracking system.

7. A "fire" gesture consists of pumping a limb (arm or leg). There is a limited vocabulary in the set of gesture commands. The direction of fire is the direction of the gesture, matched to the eye-tracking software to determine the target. The ship's computer aims/targets the weapons.

8. A list of possible targets from eye-tracking is kept, so that if the WCO points at a ship behind her current viewing, that ship will be attacked.

What I think I know:

1. The gravity isn't quite zero g because the WCO remains centered in the VR environment. Therefore, some forces must be acting upon her to keep her centered and not bumping into walls.

2. Although only one eye was shown to track ships, I believe that both eyes were probably tracked to allow full three-dimensional target acquisition (that is, both eyes would be needed to determine which ship should be targeted when two ships are in the same line-of-site, the near one or the far one).

3. Extra battle information was either being presented (drawn with light) on to the WCO's eyes or on the VR screens directly, so she saw more than what we saw. This information was probably targeting information, status, etc.

4. It looks like the rate of fire of the Liandra's weapons were based off of the speed the WCO could pump her limbs.

5. The system never misinterpreted a command. That is, a shot was fired only when the WCO wanted it to fire, and it did not fire when the WCO did not want it to fire. In other words, it is a very robust system.

What I don't know:

1. I could not tell if voice recognition was used at all.

2. Can the WCO's firing commands be overridden from the bridge?

3. What happens if the ship is so damaged as to lose artificial gravity?

4. Aside from firing gestures, are there other hand/body gestures available to the WCO?

Discussion

As stated in the Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5, this fire control system is probably based on taking advantage of the Ranger's physical combat training [7]. However, I think there is more to it than that.

What would a WCO want from a human-computer interface for a battle system? I believe it is the following:

1. Quick identification of target(s) to fire at.

2. Full control of all weapons simultaneously.

3. Instant information, but only that which is desired (too much information is just as bad as too little).

4. Ability to view the entire battle-space, with proper orientation and perspective (that is, in a way we humans (and apparently Minbari) can understand it).

It is my opinion that the VR/gesture system as portrayed in B5:LotR achieves all the above desires, better than a keyboard, mouse, or button interface could. Specifically:

1. Quick target identification. Without using eye-tracking and gesture, to target a ship (among multiple targets), either a mouse must be moved over the iconic representation, or multiple keyboard/button commands must be given to cycle through to the target. If touch screen capability is allowed (pointing at a specific ship), then that is just an instantiation of the Liandra's gesture system. The WCO simply looks at a target, and that target is the one a weapon will fire at if the gesture command is given in the target's direction. Multiple targets could be tracked this way, even the huge number of space mines that were targeted and destroyed (but see more below).

2. Full simultaneous weapon control. Each weapon was linked to the WCO's limbs. For example - left cannon = left arm. With practice, using the Liandra's ship board weapons would be just like using any other hand held weapon in combat, which is what the Rangers excel at. A question that arises is what if there are more than four weapons on a ship - how are they controlled? (See Improvement's below.)

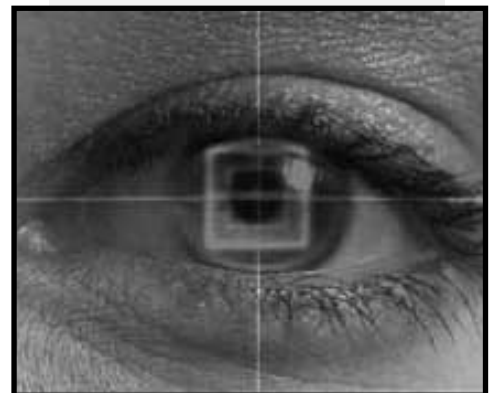
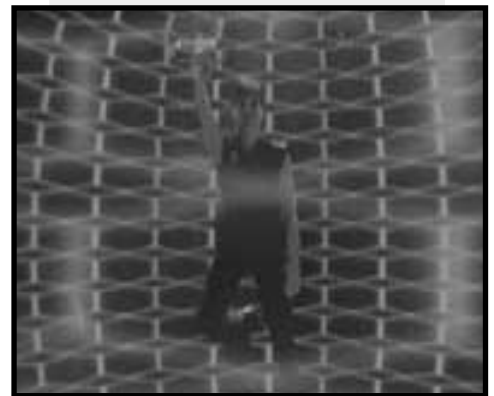
3. Instant information. The VR environment probably provides more information than just a camera view. Status of enemy power/weapons, full location, various weapon ranges (for enemy, friend, and the Liandra herself), etc., would all be available and either drawn on the eye or displayed on the VR screen.

4. Full battle-space view. I think this may even be my favorite part of the system. Current battle-field commanders have a difficult time viewing a battle-space environment. Here, the WCO just has to rotate her body/head and she can see everything, and still keep relative orientations of friends and foes in view. Yes, she has to be in excellent shape, but that is not unheard of in the military.

So, overall, I do find that this weapon interface is a viable one, and has definite advantages over traditional computer input devices. However, there is always room for improvements, which is my next section.

Improvements and Issues:

First, a note: the improvements and issues I





list have probably already been thought of by the Babylon 5 staff, and just not shown due to budget/time/plot considerations. Also, these are just my opinions, and I could easily see other people (or weapon officers) disagreeing with me. But then again, that is why we have discussion groups!

I am a firm believer that gestures will be an important input device in the future. However, I do not believe that gestures are the "be all and end all" in human-computer interaction devices. For example, I would not use gestures to replace a computer mouse (which is great for simple pointing, clicking, and pull-down menu operations) because, well, we already have a device that works as well as a computer mouse - the computer mouse itself!

So, while I think that gestures as shown works well as an input device for the WCO, I think more is needed, and in this case, that would be voice recognition. Now, I'm not talking about the Star Trek type of voice recognition which can parse sentences and never make a mistake. I'm referring to specific limited vocabulary of voice commands (just like the limited vocabulary of gesture commands used) to aid in controlling the "state" of the system. Here is where I think voice recognition would be useful:

1. Change weapons. If there were multiple weapons on a ship, then voice commands would allow the WCO to change weapon/limb configurations instantaneously.

2. Change firing modes. From the movie, it seemed that one shot was fired per pumping gesture. Therefore, to take out the dozens of mines, the WCO had to flail around to keep firing at the closest (or most dangerous) targets. Instead, a word could be used to set up continuous firing.

3. Switch gestures. Instead of using the 'pumping' gesture to attack the mines, instead each finger could be attached to the same or different weapons. Then only faster finger flicks would be needed to fire the weapon. This would probably lead to more false positives, but when you want to all out fire, that usually isn't a problem.

Voice commands, as well as meta-gesture commands to achieve the same result as some voice commands, would add great utility to the system. For #3 above, a different gesture could have been used to fire a weapon repeated at the mines. Training would be needed, but not much more than is probably required now.

Another issue is multiple WCOs to handle a larger number of weapons. I wonder if bigger ships would require multiple officers, and how they would interact. Maybe their relative orientation in the VR gravity environment would correspond to the relative location of the weapon banks.

I noticed gestures being used to control the VR environment. That is fine, but care must be taken to only use *purposive* gestures. It would be unfortunate if a random gesture (such as one

used to change the WCO's orientation) resulted in the system performing an unwanted action. This is why, for example, fingers weren't used to control weapons during normal combat operations.

Is such as system possible?

Yes! Well, okay, we don't have the anti-gravity yet. If you do, please email me - we'll do lunch.

But the eye-tracking, body tracking, and gesture recognition systems are not that far off from what was shown on B5:LotR.

Gesture recognition and body tracking is my area, so let me discuss that first. The system we've developed at Cybernet can do full body tracking in complex unstructured backgrounds. We can recognize hand and body motions (not American Sign Language) - specifically the types performed by the CWO of the Liandra! That is, repeatable hand/arm motions, similar to those used by Army scouts, construction crane operators, and the like. It is beyond the scope of this review to explain the various mathematical methods of gesture recognition (geometric, Hidden Markov Model, dynamic based, etc.). You can look up my dissertation if you really want a full overview!

As a point of information, tracking is a much harder problem than gesture recognition. Tracking needs to work in a variety of lighting conditions, backgrounds, and targets (skin color, clothing, hair, etc.). This problem is not yet completely solved, but it does get better every year, to the point that products can be made now.

For those interested in gesture recognition (and associated tracking software), head on over to the Gesture Recognition Home Page [8].

Some commercial body tracking devices are available. Many of these are used by computer game developers to track athlete's movements for their sports games. Note that all of these are 'tagged' trackers, that is, something must be worn on the body for tracking to occur. For Cybernet's gesture recognition system (and for other systems out there), untagged systems are used and preferred, although they are much less accurate.

There are a small number of companies that produce eye-trackers. While of course not on the level of fidelity as shown in Babylon 5 (specifically, in order to work the camera has to be extremely close to the person's eye, which was not the case in B5:LotR!), these eye-tracking systems are pretty robust. Companies include AmTech, Applied Science Laboratories, Cybernet, DBA Systems, LC Technologies, Microguide, NAC, SensoMotoric Instruments [9]. Methods used include CCD Line Scan cameras, Infra-red oculography, and video imaging. Precision for these systems is typically at around 0.5 degrees or less, with a 40 degrees (though some have 80 degrees). The sampling rate can be anywhere for 50 Hz to 1,000 Hz (with 50-60 Hz typical).

For the Liandra, I would imagine a large array of camera like devices with an extremely high resolution, sampling at 1,000 Hz or more.

CONCLUSION:

I do think that this gesture based interactive fire control system for the Liandra is not only a viable option for a battle environment, it might even be optimal. Fast accurate targeting, robust weapon control, full view of the environment, and instant information are all part of this system. With the addition or showing of meta-control using voice or other gestures, I think this system would be one that would be practical, even for the control of today's Uninhabited Combat Aerial Vehicles.

Thank you for reading my article. Comments are always welcome. If you wish to respond to me directly, please use my personal email of charles@umich.edu. The work address below should be used only for low volume work related messages.

- **Charles J. Cohen, Ph.D. Vice President,**
Research and Development Cybernet Systems
Corporation ccohen@cybernet.com
www.cybernet.com

Footnotes:

[1] Some of my papers and talks are:

Program Chair: Applied Imagery Pattern Recognition 2001 - Analysis and Understanding of Time Varying Imaging. Cosmos Club, Washington, DC, October 10-12, 2001.

Cohen, Charles J., Glenn Beach, and Gene Foulk. "A Basic Hand Gesture Control System for PC Applications." Applied Imagery Pattern Recognition 2001 - Analysis and Understanding of Time Varying Imaging. Cosmos Club, Washington, DC, October 10-12, 2001.

Cohen, Charles J. "Gesture Recognition Interface for Controlling Virtual Displays." Virtual Design Technology and Applications. Somerset Inn, Troy, MI, 15 November 2000.

Cohen, Charles J., Glenn Beach, Doug Haanpaa, and Chuck Jacobus. "A Real-Time Pose Determination and Reality Registration System." SPIE AIPR'99 Conference. Washington, DC, 13-15 October 1999.

Cohen, Charles J., Glenn Beach, Brook Cavell, Gene Foulk, Jay Obermark, and George Paul. "The Control of Self Service Machines Using Gesture Recognition." SCT'99 and ISAS'99 Conference. Orlando, FL, 31 July 1999 - 4 August 1999.

Beach, Glenn, Charles J. Cohen, Jeffrey Braun, and Gary Moody. "Eye Tracking System for Use With Head Mounted Displays." IEEE SMC'98 Conference. San Diego, CA, 11-14 October 1998.

Cohen, Charles J., Glenn Beach, George Paul, Jay Obermark, and Gene Foulk. "Issues Of Controlling Public Kiosks And Other Self

Service Machines Using Gesture Recognition." IEEE SMC'98 Conference. San Diego, CA, 11-14 October 1998.

Conway, Lynn and Charles J. Cohen. "Video Mirroring and Iconic Gestures: Enhancing Basic Videophones to Provide Visual Coaching and Visual Control." IEEE Transactions on Consumer Electronics, May 1998.

Obermark, Jay, Charles Jacobus, Charles Cohen, and Brian George. "Building Terrain Maps and Virtual Worlds from Video Imagery." AeroSense 1998. Orlando FL, 13-17 April 1998.

Conway, Lynn and Charles Cohen. "Apparatus and Method for Remote Control Through the Visual Information Stream." U.S. Patent 5,652,849, 29 July 1997.

[2] For example: New York Times, 31 August 2000, buried on page D7: "A Wave of the Hand May Soon Make a Computer Jump to Obey" by Anne Eisenberg.

[3] Cohen, Charles J. "The Bleeding Edge: New Technologies, New Ways of Learning." SchoolTech Expo. Chicago Hilton & Towers, Chicago, IL, 17-20 October 2001.

[4] <http://www.gesturecentral.com/>

[5] Our current Army project is with STRICOM to allow training of their scouts in their Dismounted Infantry Semi-Automated Forces (DISAF). See <http://source.asset.com/orl/disaf/> for details of their system.

[6] See the Babylon 5 episode "Shadow Dancing."

[7] <http://www.midwinter.com/lurk/guide/117.html>

[8] <http://www.cybernet.com/~ccohen/>

[9] This data is about a year old, so I can't guarantee if any of the companies are still around. Well, except for ours.



Omni-Directional Kung-Fu Cannon

Humor

By ANTHONY PAKIZER

Class: Molecular

Mode: Standard

Damage: 20

Range Penalty: -1 per hex

Fire Control: +8/+8/+8

Intercept: -4

Rate of Fire: 3D6 per turn plus 2 if player screams at the top of his lungs while punching into the air.

A WEAPON designed fifty years ago by the great Minbari weapons master Munchnier. He was a very "special" Minbari from the worker caste. He was a fan of Human transmissions known as "Kung-Fu" movies that were picked up by pickets on the EA's frontier. He couldn't understand anything that was being said, but thought it was quite interesting how the humans apparently waged combat on one another, according to the movies. He designed the weapon, and its control system based on these old movies.

The weapon was planned for wide spread fleet deployment. The first ship that was to receive it, the Brus'Li, a modified Tinashi, was pulled into the dock for the conversion. Then someone looked at the weapon, and popped Munchnier upside the back of the head, and told him to go study the words of Valen. Munchnier slipped back to reality and the weapon went unused till now, when the patrol corvette Liandra was brought back to Yedor for repairs.

Note: This weapon was originally proposed by "Phish" on the Babylon 5 Wars online forums a long time ago. I laughed pretty hard when I first saw this thing. It sat on my hard drive for months, and now that the Ships of the Rangers issue of Babcom is coming out, I decided to actually make a version of the Liandra with this weapon. The above text is based on the same post to the boards by "Phish."



It can run, but it cannot fight back

Nobody likes it, it was a compromise between Humans and Minbari (which Dulann also mentions), more politically motivated than structurally sound. We won't be seeing its kind again.

- jms

THE Valen does not fit neatly into any established category of warship. And we're never told what it is... fast cruiser, fast armed transport... that is up to you.

We know the first mission it was assigned was the transportation of diplomats. But the ship does not have to be built specifically for that role.

However, building such a ship could make sense in a vast and diverse interstellar alliance.

Otherwise, all we know is that this ship is the first to be built under the spirit of interstellar cooperation between Earth and the Minbari. We know they didn't quite get it right...

FIRST ENCOUNTER

If human military designers had their way, every color of the spectrum would be removed - except for grey, green and black. And, we'd all live in windowless boxes...

- Second Officer Dulann

We first see the Valen landing at the Ranger Minbar headquarters, sitting on the tarmac and then taking off.

These are some of the clearest and cleanest views of the ship.

Armament: We clearly see two boxy turrets above and below the neck between the battering-ram bow and the main hull. These are also clearly four-barreled mounts. A closer look reveals another of these quad turrets positioned on the very front of the ship - about where you would expect an Omega's docking bay.

There are four large pylons extending from the front of the ship. They look somewhat similar.

The two closely clustered pylons



under the chin appear fixed and bigger than those on each side.

The side mounted pylons can be interpreted as having swivel mounts.

As the ship takes off - in the final two or three frames - there are clearly two more of these side-mounted pylons attached to the lower sides of the rear engine block. The pylons extend behind the ship to about the same degree the bow side mounts extend beyond

the front.

These lower rear engine-mount pylons are confirmed in a close fly-beneath of the Valen in hyperspace.

ENGAGEMENT

>The Valen has weapons, so why were they never fired? Maybe they were fired but we never saw them fired.

= The Valen never had time to fire; they were hit within a second of the Hand ships coming out of

*hyperspace (actually *as* they were coming out)...the hits disabled most of the systems on the new ship (you can see eruptions all over the bridge). The weapons systems were intact elsewhere, but the control mechanisms were down. That's why they kept hammering the Valen, to make sure it wouldn't be able to fire.*

- jms

As the Valen emerges from the



jump-point it created - accompanied by the Liandra - it is attacked from behind by three of the mysterious Hand ships.

Armor: Two bright green energy balls are launched at the ship - one striking the upper-right rear plating structure, the second striking the right-most engine nozzle.

The damage is severe, with systems on the bridge shorting out.

Armament: these first shots of the attack reveal two “bulges” on top of the stern of the Valen, between the engine block and the side wing plates.

Armor: We see - from the vantage point of Sarah Cantrel’s virtual reality turrets - another three green pulses hit the rear section in quick succession.

The stern of the Valen is burning fiercely by this point.

Two more shots are fired as the Liandra begins to shoot back. Then another hit...

Armament: About this point we have a close-up shot of the top of the Valen looking rearward. We clearly see two boxy turrets on the wings between the engine block and side plates. They look similar to the neck and nose turrets - but we cannot see if they are quad or twin mounts.

Previous and later shots of the underside of the Valen do not appear to show any similar turrets beneath the rear of the ship.

Armor: Another shot shows a Hand ship firing pulse after pulse - three in succession - without opposition. Each shot hits.

The Captain of the Valen is shown reeling under the impact of each hit. The Valen has not had a chance to return fire.

Nor has it managed to break away from the attack.

It's too late... Engines are hit, we can barely manoeuvre, the rear decks are on fire, it's only a matter of time...

Two Hand ships retreat for a time, leaving the crippled Valen behind. Secondary explosions are seen erupting from the hull about the rear engine section.

The third Hand ship remains behind, sending pulse after pulse of green energy into the Valen.

The Valen is being battered. But while it is inactive, it does not seem in danger of destruction.

“Weapon systems are gone... nothing left... they’re powering up for



the next shot... there's only one way to stop them now. Full power to engines.

The fires on the rear deck appear to have been extinguished. The Valen’s remaining engine power is used in a ramming attempt. As the Valen approaches the damaged Hand ship, it is struck no less than 15 times by green pulses. These burst on the outer hull, but no not appear to do severe damage.

When the Valen rams the hand ship, its bow crumbles into the alien vessel - explosions ripping through its forward sections.

However, even now, the basic structure of the Valen appears intact.

OBSERVATIONS

Yeah. Sure. I suppose. You know things in space don't have to be aerodynamic - which is pretty much what they've done here - and It'd be fast...

- Captain David Martel

Size: The size of the Valen is difficult to establish. It is not placed in close context with any “known” object - such as a White Star or Sharlin.

We know it is big. But not how big.

It dwarfs the Liandra.

The B5tech.com website claims the Valen is 1300m long. B5tech says this size is based on the assumption the Liandra is 160m long - and the Liandra is the only ship ever seen in

close proximity to the Valen other than the Hand ships.

Netter Digital claims the Omega is 1700m long...

Shape: The Valen is not a pretty ship. It's bow is vaguely reminiscent of an Omega or an Oracle - cross-bred with a Romulan Warbird. It has a narrow central fuselage form extending to the bulky rear engines. From this central hull extends a short, but deep, horizontal “wing” ending at a bracketing fin.

Weapons: We can observe only five obvious weapon emplacements. These appear to be standardised turrets above and below the “neck” - just after the bow. Another sits on



the “nose” - in the middle of the front plate of the “battering-ram” bow. From the brief glimpses we get of these we can see the front three turrets are quad-barreled. The rear turrets are likely to be quad - though the one good glimpse we get is from above and behind and only clearly shows two barrels.

But we know nothing else about these mounts. They are never seen firing.

Nor is any bolt of energy seen emerging anywhere from the ship.

There are four pylons extending from the bow. But, without any clear evidence of these actually firing, they are just as likely to be Earthforce-tech communication and sensors pylons. They look a little like weapons - it is possible they are. They look a little like an Omega’s or Warlock’s sensors - it is possible they are.

The bow pylons are split into two sizes - though they all have a similar shape. Two are clustered tightly under the “chin”. These are the biggest. There is one on either side of the bow’s “cheek”. These are smaller, and appear to have swivel mounts.

There are also one or two clear frames - in the last moments of the Valen taking off from Minbar - where we see copies of these “cheek” mounts placed on the lower sides of the rear engine block. We see fuzzy glimpses of these again later, in hyperspace and in battle.

That makes these more likely to be weapons.

Armor: The Valen is obviously well armored. It is seen taking more than 30 hits from the Hand ships - which obviously did not want to destroy the Valen’s cargo. The fact the ship retained structural integrity for so long - even after ramming the enemy - also indicates extensive armor and structural reinforcement.

Speed: Other than Sarah’s quote - which could be based on idle scuttlebut sourced from over-enthusiastic public relations officers - we have no means of determining the speed of the Valen.

The ship is jumped after emerging from a jump point. It is quickly hit in the engines, and is unable to escape. From this we can determine the thrusters are vulnerable. Nothing more.

The Valen does not seem reliant on gravitic drives for propulsion. We are shown huge “glowing” engine thrusters. They are clearly reaction



engines of some sort (hence the glow and commands like “full burn” which would not apply to a gravity drive.)

From the bridge scenes - and the fact it is carrying so many “fragile” diplomats - it can be inferred the Valen has artificial gravity. But, perhaps the Earth engineers haven’t succeeded in reverse-engineering the propulsion system yet...

However, it is also possible the Valen has two drive systems. The

gravitic drive could be the vertical “plates” on the side of the ship.

SPECULATION

So what do you think of the Valen?

They say it’s faster than anything else in the fleet.

- Weapons Officer Sarah Cantrel

The Valen is built for speed and survivability. For firepower, it is reliant on escorts.

This is how the Valen can be

pounded into submission - yet retain enough structural integrity to keep its crew and passengers alive. To be able to do this, it must have the heaviest armor available.

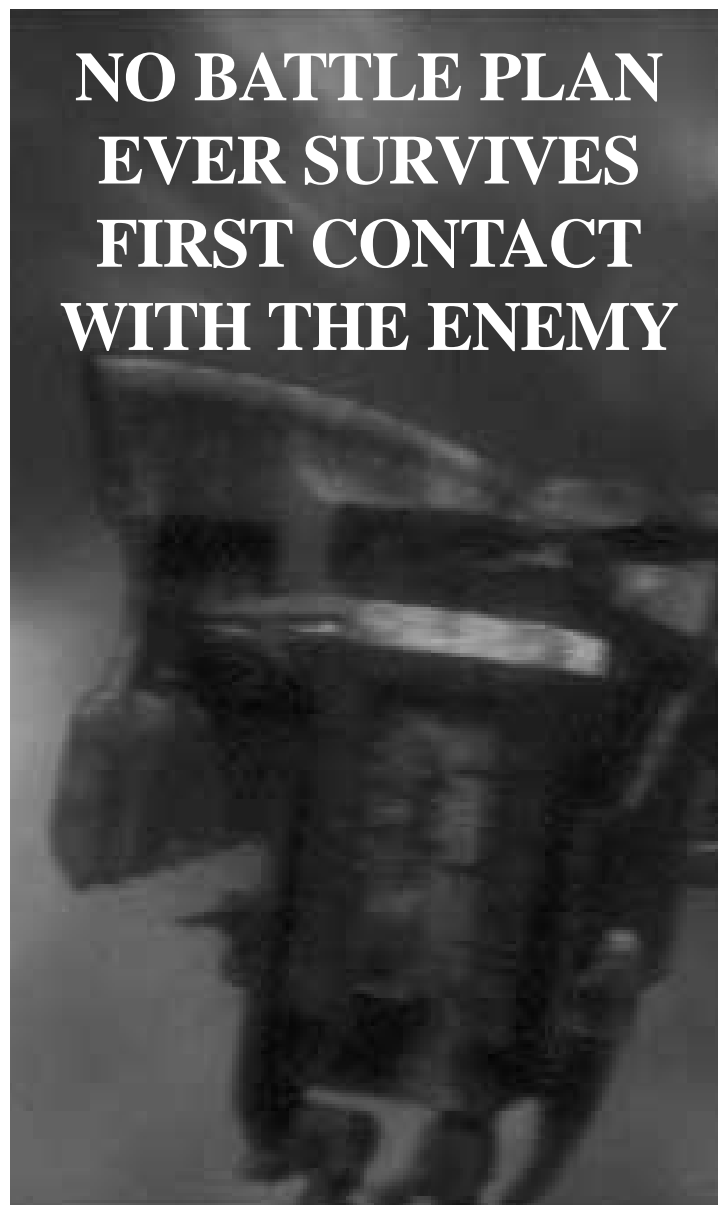
I believe the Valen has both gravitic and reaction engines. It is supposed to be the fastest ship in the alliance. It has gravity. It has reaction engines... It can also explain how the ship’s engines can be “destroyed”, yet it was able to ram...

The Valen is the first vessel designed by a joint effort of Human and Minbari engineers and shows the two schools of design followed by those races well. The advanced Minbari technology coupled with the deeply ugly Human school of design has produced an interesting looking ship that has led at least one commentator to say, "It must have a wonderful personality". However, the ship was not designed with aesthetics in mind, but to be a tough and fast hull designed for quick response and facing down enemies a White Star would have difficulty dealing with.

The ship has a number of distinctive features, having both a gravitic drive and a conventional reaction mass engine. Designers felt both were necessary to create a ship capable of outrunning a White Star in a straight line race, while being several times larger and while the Valen lacks the manoeuvrability of the White Star, it lacks the power problems and mounts four, not one, Improved Neutron Laser. The Human design influence leads to two of them being mounted facing aft for overrun attacks (something quite easy to do once the Valen has accelerated to attack speed).

The ship also features a new Minbari weapon: the Quad Fusion Defender. The Minbari, having recently encountered Centauri array weapons in the IA/Centauri war, felt the necessity for a weapon capable of intercepting massed fire while also being capable of shooting down virtually any fighter in service in the known galaxy. The Quad Fusion Defender is quite capable of both. The Valen mounts five of these weapons, which are slightly larger than Molecular Pulsars and it is felt these will be quite adequate in obliterating Raider fighters.

However the Valen class proved to be ill fated. The prototype, the Valen, was destroyed on its first mission, and no further orders for the class were made. An even larger warship design was felt to be the answer to the Alliance's need for warships and while the Alliance members made no comment when the Valen was produced (as it was only a heavy cruiser design, and not as large or powerful as the Minbari Sharlin War cruiser) the Victory class destroyer caused some discomfort when it was unveiled. The production of the Valen was also



NO BATTLE PLAN EVER SURVIVES FIRST CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY

open, and a number of ambassadors visited the construction docks while on Minbar, whereas the Victory class was constructed in an atmosphere of worrying secrecy from those the design was intended to serve, the member races of the Interstellar Alliance.

The Valen class was designed to be the core component of a White Star patrol group, remaining in one system while White Stars monitor the systems adjacent, ready to call in the Valen if trouble strikes. Able to act as a command ship and a fast cruiser, the Valen class was supposed to supplement the White Star class, supporting them in their new police role. This was not what happened and with the loss of the prototype, the name Valen was scheduled to be taken by a new advanced cruiser hull.

Note: on the SCS the 12 free thrust engine is the gravitic drive, and the 10 free thrust engine is the reaction drive. If the gravitic drive is destroyed, the ship loses the benefits of having a gravitic drive.

Quad Fusion Defender

The Minbari created an array weapon after their encounters with the Centauri, and with the advice of the Abbai. While it proved difficult to mount full-scale Fusion Cannons, a smaller version of the Fusion Cannon, the Fusion Defender, was used. With four of these in one mount, missiles and weapons fire could be intercepted far more easily than with normal Fusion Cannon fire.

The Fusion Defender had originally been developed preceding the Fusion Cannon, but never saw widespread deployment, as the Fusion Cannon was perfected only a short time later and was significantly better.

Why I did my version of the Valen like this

Obviously this is an article justifying my version of the Valen from LotR. The ship is not seen for very long and was destroyed fighting the Hand within the first half of the show.

So what happens? The turrets

spotted are all four barrelled and no existing Minbari weapon is. The EA could supply Quad Particle Arrays, but these are a bit too good. Hence I created the Quad Fusion Defender, which isn't as good, but is still pretty nice and gives the Valen decent anti-fighter defences and intercept without being at the Sharlin level.

It is described as faster than the White Star and I have designed it so that it is. It is nowhere near as nippy though, so if you try to push the envelope on speed you will find yourself using extended turns when you hit speed 22. So it combines the speed of a White Star (able to accelerate by seven per turn) with the brick like manoeuvrability of an EA ship.

However this poor manoeuvrability is to fit as much armour as possible on the hull (and armour seven on the structure is pretty good and means a lot of fighter fire will bounce). This armour and high structure means it is survivable (it certainly takes a lot of damage in the battle in LotR before starting to look a little mashed), but at the same time it has few systems to absorb damage and lacks the profusion of non-rakeable systems that most Minbari ships have. So raking weapons will gouge chunks out of the structure, while pulse weapons will have problems.

So who is the Valen designed to fight? It can muster as much intercept as a Centauri ship of the same size, along with some long ranged lasers for sniping at enemy ships. Long ranged engagement and lots of intercept? Fighting missile races? Fighting races with lots of short-range interceptable weapons? Sounds perfect for some of the League or EA, but given the Centauri are the obvious enemy to be thinking about fighting, the hull has some strange weapon choices unless it is planning on fighting only Demos class ships, rather like the Demos only fleets deployed in season 5.

Basically this is my take on the Valen seen in LotR. It isn't canon and I don't have access to what JMS had wanted it to be armed with, but I think it is a fair go at a ship we see little of in the show.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)

The Valen

By J.J. O'SHAUGHNESSY

The Valen is a bit if a hard one to simulate. We never see it firing in the show. We don't see it do much of anything really, apart from come out of a jump point and withstand a chunky amount of damage.

When looking at the ship the EA influence is obvious. The Minbari influence is less so. As it was fairly large and tough, I decided to take a HCV as the baseline of the hull. Looking at the available tech among the two powers, I decided that the Chronos was the one to base it off for several reasons, mainly that its manoeuvring capabilities are far superior to the Tinashi (it really amuses me that EA is described as an un-maneuvrable race). The Chronos has three engines, same as the Valen and that the Chronos and Tinashi's other capabilities are pretty much identical. The sensor eight slotted in quite nicely. One thing I deleted was the Energy Web. I feel quite strongly that the IA should not have that technology, if for no other reason that it helps differentiate between the two powers. In other words, IA should not simply be EA+. The jump drive is less capable than a Minbari one, but not by a great deal.

The weapons load was more problematic. When my attention was drawn to the quad mounts on the Valen, I felt that only one weapon could fit the bill. The Quad Particle Beams seen on Babylon 5 would make the Valen truly horrific (20 Standard Particle Beams? I don't think so) and any other available weapon would be far too nasty in those numbers. So I went with the Abbai Quad Array. The ship is still very nasty up close, but it is primarily defensive in nature. One new system is the Entertainment/residential deck. A nice place for diplomats to relax and put their feet up after a hard day screwing the masses. To sip wine, and discuss deep, intellectual matters. And to add to their red underwear collection (uh sorry, don't know how that slipped in there..)

P.S. I'm told that there should be a quad mount in the rear of the Valen. I apologise, as I was unable to correct this because of computer problems.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)

IF AT FIRST YOU DO NOT SUCCEED ...

Interstellar Alliance Valen Class Cruiser
By ANTHONY PAKIZER

THE Valen Class Fast Cruiser was the first attempt at cooperation between the members of the Interstellar Alliance at building a ship type with systems and design aesthetics of different species. The Earth Alliance and the Minbari Federation were the primary designers of the class.

The Valen Class was built using some of the lessons learned from recent ship building projects of both nations. The Minbari brought their experience with the White Stars. These ships were fast, well armed, and durable. The EA, on the other hand, excelled in survivability, defensive systems, and a certain flare for aesthetic design. The resulting ship that was designed by the two governments was fast, well armed, well defended and was ugly as sin. Everyone agreed that the blending of EA and Minbari design cues did not work, but no one actually said anything about it.

The ship was built more to be a diplomatic cruiser. The Valen carried two Minbari combat fliers, as well as six EA shuttles. Its engine was so powerful, some called it the fastest ship in space, even faster than a White Star.

The ship itself was a small capital ship that was atmospheric capable. It was equipped with a Gravitic drive, Jammer and a small jump drive supplied by the Minbari. The Earth Alliance provided Heavy Interceptor Batteries (minus the e-web capability), as well as smaller Interceptor Mk II's (also lacking the e-web capability). A total of two heavy and three Mk II Interceptors were installed. The Minbari weapons are of the same type found on the White Star. Four Improved Neutron

Lasers were installed on the ship, two firing forward and two firing aft. This really doesn't provide the ship with anything more than a few long range weapons to discourage attackers from getting too close.

An interesting feature of the Valen was the addition of two Gravity Nets on the sides of the ship. Since the Valen herself was to be a diplomatic cruiser built to showcase the cooperation between member nations of the IA, the ship wasn't supposed to be too heavily armed. The weapons put onto the ship would be able to get it out of trouble against smaller enemies, but up against most capital ships, the Valen could only run. The Gravity Nets were installed to give the Valen a little bit of extra help when trying to exit a combat area. The thought was that if the Valen's escape route was blocked, the Gravity Nets would move the obstacles out of the way to allow the Valen by.

As it turned out, the prototype of the class, the IAS Valen, was destroyed while on its maiden voyage. It turned out that the power systems were more easily disrupted during combat than had been anticipated. In the opening moments of a battle with a new force in space known simply as "The Hand," the Valen's weapon systems were disabled. She was destroyed when her captain ordered her to ram one of the attackers.

The Valen class has since been shelved, and a new joint project is rumored to be well underway to replace it. Estimates are that this new project, sometimes called "Victory," will not be ready before 2268.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)



Born from collaboration, built upon compromise

Valen Diplomatic Courier

THE Valen Diplomatic Courier represents the first major collaboration between Minbari and Human military contractors.

The Valen was designed to serve as a dedicated diplomatic transport for the new Interstellar Alliance. To this point, the Alliance had relied on its already overextended fleet of White Stars to serve in this role and Alliance leaders knew that a replacement was needed to free up these valuable assets.

The history of the construction of the Valen is one of continuous compromise. Constructed under Minbari supervision on Minbar, the Valen integrates many Minbari



Shipyard Supervisor

By TYREL LOHR

and Human design features. One major design compromise was the exclusion of a Minbari jamming device on the hull.

Neither the Human nor Minbari crews could find a way to properly mask the background noise of the Heavy Interceptors' Energy Web. The Energy Web practically lit up the operating ship, negating the advantages the Jammer bestowed.

Despite design setbacks and budgetary constraints, the first Valen Diplomatic Courier was launched in 2265 only to be

destroyed by the mysterious forces of The Hand on its first major mission. The construction of new Valens was put on hold pending a review of the ship's operations in that confrontation.

The fact that the weapons were knocked out on this ship before we could ever see it fire is a little disheartening.

I have interpreted two of the forward prongs to be Neutron cannons, because in some screen shots they look closer to a compact version of the Sharlin's forward Neutron cannon assembly than they do an Omega's sensor boom. Several people noted the turrets above and below the neck, and I felt that it would be most reasonable to have these be the

much talked about but not often seen Heavy Interceptors. For this ship, too, it makes great sense. The ship isn't designed for attack missions but to defend its passengers, so building the ship to be fast and well defended seemed like the best route to take.

I elected to not include a Jammer just so as to not have to tackle the "stacking effect" of Jammers and E-Web together. I think a fluff explanation of the E-Web lighting the ship up and negating the effects of the Jammer is a pretty good technobabble explanation, and would help keep things sane.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)

Centauri Centaurum Attack Carrier (Centaurum Variant)

By JASON WELLS

AS NEWER ships replaced the old workhorses of the Centauri Navy, many of these out of date vessels were scraped, sold to others or bought by other Houses for their own uses. Some were kept as experimental engineering platforms or weapon test beds; a few others were converted to other roles and kept in service.

The Centaurum Attack Carrier was an attempt to make a fleet carrier but with decent fire power, something lacking in most Centauri carriers. Replacing the Matter Cannons and Battle Lasers up front are two Assault Lasers and two 6-fighter hangars. The rear Matter Cannons

were also replaced with two 6-fighter hangars. This gave the Centauri a 36-fighter carrier with a decent punch.

Originally Ballistic Torpedo's were selected for the nose but were not installed because of the cost. Instead cheaper Assault Lasers were installed.

The Royal House responsible for the design, kept one for themselves, converted a few for other Houses and the Royal Navy.

Unfortunately due to the age of the ship and the lack of maintenance, it still has all the unreliable ship problems as the more common battleship model.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)





A look at the “Lion” of the Ranger fleet

Captain: *Status?*

Deck officer: *Engines damaged,
20pc capacity. Automatic weapons
tracking system disabled.*

THE Enfali is a difficult ship to analyse. It's screen time is only a few minutes in the prelude sequence to Legends of the Rangers. In that time, there is very little revealing dialogue. There is also very little action and footage involving the ship's capabilities. This makes the following analysis all the more subjective.

ENGAGEMENT

The opening shot of the movie is of two widely spaced green beams slicing through an orange nebula. We then see five Delta fighters flash past, followed further back by another two.

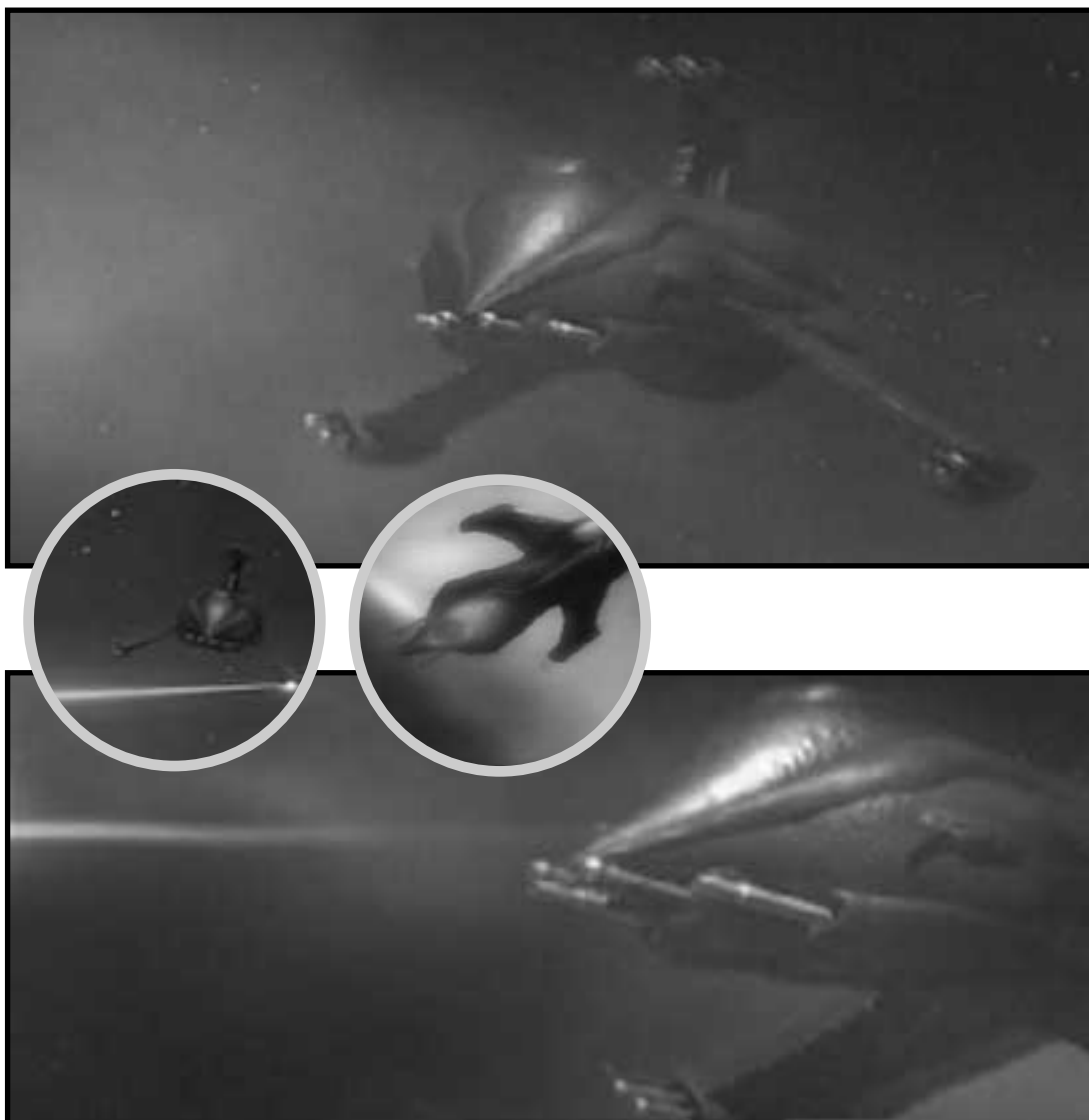
Another green beam - this time obviously from the Enfali's lower left nacelle - slices through the sky, cutting one of the rear Delta fighters into small fragments.

Simultaneously, the surviving rear Delta fighter fires an orange-white pulse from its rear towards the Enfali. This strikes high on the bow - but appears to do little damage as the fireball is rapidly left in the Enfali's wake and the Ranger ship does not display any secondary flames or explosions.

A second orange-white pulse from the fighter closes in on the nose of the ship. The pulse appears quite large - roughly one sixth the size of the bow section.

This pulse strikes the vessel in the nose - amid the Enfali's bow-mounted protrusions. This time the hit strikes home - we cut to explosions on the bridge.

It is at this point that the captain is informed that the ship's automated weapons targeting system is offline and the engines are down to 20 per cent capacity.



The lead fighters come about for an attacking pass.

The Enfali is hit again - with more impact damage revealed on the bridge.

The Delta fighters retreat again, leading the Enfali into a trap.

About 15 Delta fighters emerge head-on from an orange nebula cloud.

The viewscreen shows two shots fired. At least one hit strikes the upper-bow of the Enfali. The other may have hit the right fin.

The damage to the bow is severe. The Enfali tumbles out of control,

with venting atmosphere burning into space from the bow structure.

These hits did not further damage the engine systems (probably because the hits were to the bow). But the weapons were taken completely offline.

OBSERVATIONS

Size: The Enfali is clearly not supposed to be a vessel in the same league as a Sharlin. Instead, its size relative to the attacking fighters appears to place it more in the league of a White Star.

One shot reveals the Delta fighters flying past and beyond the crippled Enfali. Their shape is still clearly discernable even when well in the background.

Clearly the Enfali is not large enough a ship to conduct its own fighter operations. It would be big enough, perhaps, to contain one - perhaps two - shuttles.

However, these observations could possibly be proven false:

Shape: The Enfali is an unusual design. While it conforms to the previously established “triform” fin



structure of the Sharlin and Tinashi, it does not appear to have the distinctive “leaf” shaped drive systems of the Sharlin and White Star. The fulelage is reminiscent of a peanut - two bulges linked by a slightly narrower midsection.

The bow is a bulbous structure that tapers towards a pointed nose. The top of the bow appears to have a canopy of sorts - shown to be of a more reflective, organic-looking, material than the rest of the hull. However, this does not conform to the bridge viewscreen as seen from interior shots. Perhaps this is a large sensor-receptive area? It is this structure that is hit, and burns, when the Enfali is put out of action. The Enfali’s fuselage tapers near the midsection before expanding again to a bulbous rear - from which the forward-swept trifins emerge.

The lower two “wings” are quite large. The upper “fin” is much shorter - roughly one-third the length of the other two.

The fins, and the nacelles at the end of them, are very reminiscent of the design of the Victory and Excalibur - only shorter and stubbier.

Armament: The prelude sequence clearly shows the Enfali firing the familiar Minbari green beams from the lower two of its three trifins. Closer shots of the Enfali reveal the pods at the end of the fins have twin barrels extending from their front. In the final scene of the Enfalli, as it burns in space, we also see single barrels extending out of the rear of these wing pods...

Protrusions are also visible in the bow. As the Minbari have not previously demonstrated the need for sensor pylons, these can be assumed to be weapons.

Four large barrels are clustered under and to either side of the nose - two on each side. A smaller gun barrel is shown mounted slightly higher, on the side of the bow.

This places four large barrels on the nose, one either side of the bow, and six divided between the fin nacelles.

For its size, the Enfali appears to be heavily armed.

Bridge: The Bridge of the Enfali does not look Minbari. In fact, it looks very Earthforce. However, this ship cannot have been built with Earth assistance: it is stated



during this movie that the Valen diplomatic transport was the first such joint venture. There are no wire-frame consoles holding crystal data-entry points. There are no holographic projectors. Just a Star Trek-like view screen and six or seven deck officers.

SPECULATION

>The Enfali is in a firefight with some Raider fighters. Since when have Raiders ever been able to do serious damage to a Minbari vessel, and why are no Nials around? = Even a lion can be brought down by a pack of smaller predators. The Enfalli was alone and the pursuit was a long one, and they just kept taking hit after hit.

- JMS

I believe the Enfali belongs in the same class of Patrol Corvette as the Liandra. However, it is somewhat bigger - perhaps between a Liandra and a White Star. It needs to be bigger in order to power the distinctive Minbari green beams (We are told by JMS that the Liandra had too small a powerplant to hold those weapons).

The implication is clear that this ship does not carry fighters. The nature of the bow guns is pure speculation. From the opening moments we only see the fin-mounted beams fired. One of the first hit registers among the bow sensor/weapon pylons. So we cannot infer that they are short-ranged weapons simply because they do not fire.

Enfali is hit, and damaged, by weapons fired from the rear of the

Raiders. These cannot be terribly powerful. While the Enfali was obviously previously damaged, the implication is that the ship is not heavily armored.

Perhaps the Enfali is a new ship - a design that emerged from the Entilzha’s appeal to the Grey Council at the start of the movie In the Beginning.

As the movie implies, perhaps these ships were built to tight budgets. Perhaps these Ranger vessels did not receive high-tech bridges in their early variants. Perhaps they were built for speed, and given only superficial armor.

This, however, will forever remain speculation only - as there will be no Legend of the Rangers TV series.

AS THE cold war between the Orieni and the Centauri heated up, the Minbari became more and more concerned with the possibility of getting dragged into a conflict between the two empires, or at least suffer attacks against their commerce lanes and frontier systems by "raiders" or "renegade" ships from either side.

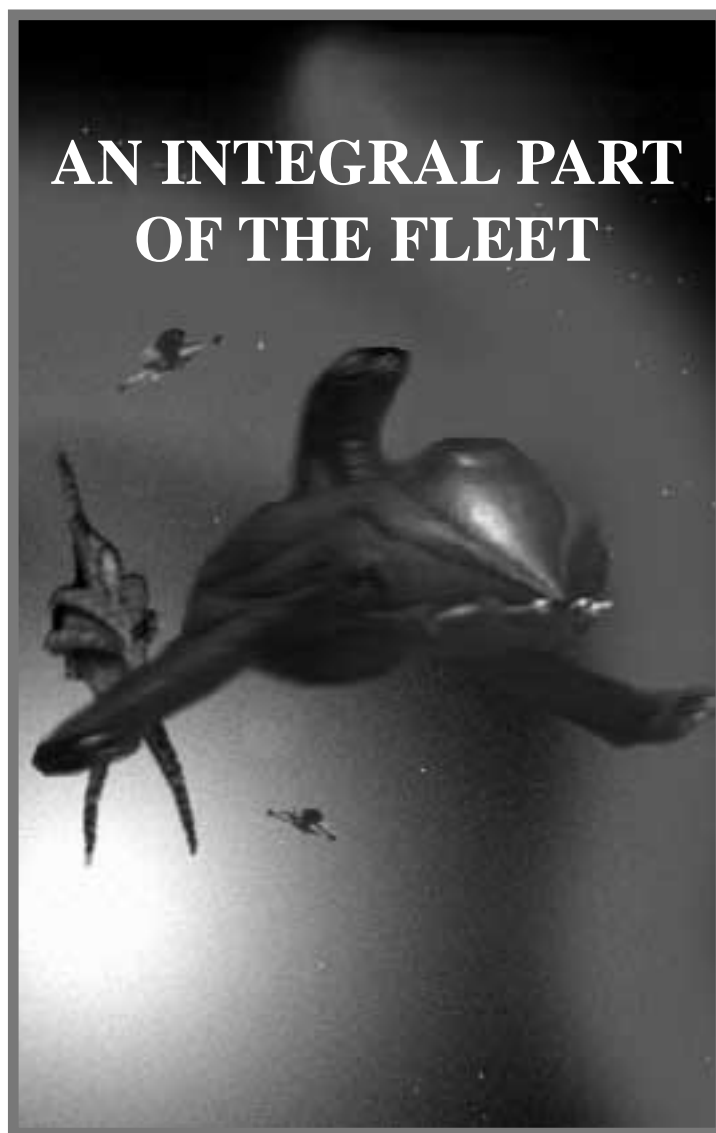
This led to a general improvement in the number and capabilities of the Minbari ships. One of the results of this program was the Eranni Escort Frigate.

This class was designed as a low cost warship with patrol and escort missions in mind, being heavily influenced by the then new Tinashi Frigate. Even if this design lacked a jump engine and heavy weapons, it was well armed with a high number of Fusion Cannons (mainly for anti-fighter purposes), and several Neutron Beams, the weapon from which the heavier Neutron Laser was developed, that until then had been only employed experimentally.

Unlike the Tinashi, the Eranni class was designed to be constructed in large numbers in a short time, employing already existing and proven technologies and materials on a modular frame, with provision made for an ample range of improvements and refits, which would have a great importance much later.

Unfortunately to reduce costs, the hull was armoured with older alloys, even lacking the latest command suites, that in this time only the new Tinashi class, or command ships like the Sharaal had. Once in service, it proved unpopular with the Warrior Caste, who not only objected to the low levels of protection provided by the armour, but also the lack of a jump engine and advanced command suites. They even complained about the low damage produced by the Neutron Beams when compared with the heavier version employed by the Tinashi. The only positive point was the large number of Fusion Cannons, which made this little ship a natural fighter killer, as well as a formidable short range attack ship; but this was not necessarily a positive point for the warriors, for during this era the Minbari tactical doctrine was changing from short range fights to long range duels.

Even with the opposition of the Warrior Caste, the Workers continued with the production of these



ships at a slow rate, with a certain number of hulls entering in service with the Worker Caste fleet. But after some time, the combination of increased isolationism and the end of the wars near Minbari frontiers led to a definitive halt in the Eranni's construction. Shortly after that the manpower intensive Sharlin class was introduced and the need for crewmembers for the ships in the Worker Caste share of the regular fleet, led to the retirement of all the ships in this class.

In the service of the Rangers

The ships of this class remained in mothballs during almost two centuries (many of them almost in pristine condition), until the foundation of the ISA.

During the Shadow and Civil wars, the Minbari lost many ships, so when the ISA applied for new ships for the Anla'Shok, the Grey Council was unable to provide any significant numbers. This was mainly due to the fact that they also had to reconstruct the cities and infrastructures that were damaged during the Civil War, as well as to replace the ships lost during both

wars (and according to rumours, because the Warrior Caste was reluctant to heavily arm the new ISA forces). But they were also determined to give strong support to the new alliance, so as a compromise they began to look at old mothballed ships that were in good condition and that could be employed at least until the ISA could replace them with new construction ships. As a result a certain number of the old Eranni class ships (those in best condition) were pulled out of mothballs, refurbished and pressed into Ranger service as general-purpose escort-patrol ships.

When the frigates were reactivated, it was decided that the general hull characteristics and weapons system were acceptable, but the sensors needed some improvements thus the ships received a limited modernization of their sensor suites, raising the EW capability from 9 to 10.

After a few years several shortcomings were detected, (even if the ships were popular among their crews for their small maintenance requirements), mainly concerning

the low level of the armour in several areas of the hull, as well as in several internal systems, but as these ships were considered a temporary solution, while newer classes were designed and constructed, no refit was planned.

Then came the Drakh attack on Earth, and the loss of a considerable part of the Earthforce fleet. On top of that, Drakh ships began raids across all of ISA space, dramatically raising the workload of the already overworked Anla'Shok. To make matters even worse, the new Victory Class Destroyer was delayed several years because of a Drakh attack on the shipyards. As a result the Rangers needed more and improved ships urgently.

When the report on the Eranni Frigates was made, the engineers did take note of the modular nature of the hull, which made it easy to add improvements to it, as well as to replace several weapons (mainly the Neutron Beams), with other weapons of similar size, like Molecular Pulsars.

This, coupled with the generally good operational record against raiders and a simple design that made for easy and low cost maintenance, led several members of the Ranger council to briefly consider an ambitious modernization program for this class, but the arguments exposed above made them abandon the idea, until the needs of the Drakh war reawakened the project.

All the new ships that were being pulled out of mothballs received a partial reconstruction, receiving not only the sensor upgrade, but also replacing the old armour plates with new ones made of harder alloys, mainly on the primary and forward hull areas. Several critical internal systems, some weapons and new command suites were introduced, increasing the efficiency and reducing the reaction time of the crews. Also the ships already in service received the new improvements as they went to the yards for repairs or maintenance.

After this modernization, the escort frigates seem to have a long operational life before them, increasing their popularity among the Anla'Shok fleet to the point where the Ranger council seems to be considering a new construction version of this ship, given the simplicity, reliability and low cost nature of the design.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)



ISA PATROL FORCES

Enfali Patrol Cruiser By TYREL LOHR

H EIGHTENED Raider activity in Minbari territories at the end of the 21st Century prompted the Minbari to begin fielding a light patrol cruiser to patrol their borders, hunting down any Raider ships operating on the fringes of their space. Lightly armored and only moderately armed, the Enfali Patrol Cruisers were suitable for the task of policing these areas of space. The cruisers were cheap to construct and maintain and were popular for many years.

Once Raider sightings dropped off, the Enfali Patrol Cruisers became less numerous and many were retired from active service. Due to the low construction cost of the ships, the Anla'shok were able to procure several aging Enfali hulls from the Minbari castes for use in their eternal watch for the Shadows. Because of their advanced age, these vessels were ill suited for scouting missions and were instead used as couriers and escorts within the Anla'shok fleet structure, ensuring the safety of personnel and supplies being transferred through Minbari space.

I found the Enfali a rather odd design aesthetically, not because of its departure from the traditional Minbari vessels such as the Sharlin or Tinashi, but because it resembles many of the Minbari ships from the Atlas of Earth Alliance Wars product!

We see the Enfali being nibbled to death by Raider Delta-V fighters, so I assumed that the Enfali must have been more lightly armored than other comparable Minbari ships. This makes sense too, given that the Anla'shok have tended to be thrifty with their ships, and using hand me down, cheap warships seemed like a reasonable assumption. The ship is an effective fighter and precursor to the Shaveen,

but not so good as to elicit the reaction of "why aren't they still using these predominantly for routine police duties?"

Allegiance Light Cruiser By TYREL LOHR

S TEMMING from President Sheridan's request for proposals concerning a "destroyer" version of the White Star that would be able to confront enemy capital ships on an equal footing, the Allegiance Light Cruiser is only 40% larger than a standard White Star. This Heavy Combat Vessel fills the mission requirements that call for a ship more powerful than a White Star, yet does not have the true firepower that would later be seen on the Victory-class.

The Allegiance has slightly more firepower than the White Star, but is much more versatile. Increased firepower over the standard model White Star, allows the Allegiance an advantage when combating enemy cruisers. The Achilles' heel of the White Star, namely its power shortage, was also corrected in the design of the Allegiance, allowing it to power all of its weapons as well as its Jammer in a combat situation. The Allegiance can also operate six fighters, providing fighter support for other Alliance ships.

The Allegiance Light Cruisers proved hard to produce and even harder to maintain. The reliance on Vorlon/Minbari hybrid technology ultimately doomed the hull. The Allegiance is Limited Availability (33%) when operated as part of an Interstellar Alliance Fleet. If operated as part of a Minbari fleet, the Allegiance's availability is considered Restricted Deployment (10%).

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)

The Enfali

By J.J. O'SHAUGHNESSY

THE Enfali is a bit of a mystery on many levels. It is not compared with anything (apart from Raider fighters), but it seems to be small. It also seems to be relatively well armed. I think that an MCV was probably the most appropriate ship class.

Basically I looked at the upper end of what an MCV could have, namely the Yolu Matau Frigate. This had three heavy and six light weapons.

I figured, looking at the outline that there were two lights on each of the nacelles and as it was an old ship that Molecular Disruptors were appropriate on the heavy weapon hard points. I added an EP Gun to round out the weapons. This does leave a blind spot at the rear, but I could not justify more weapons on the hull (there are pylons on the rear of the nacelles but they are less than half the size of the forward mounts. I don't think they qualify as weapon mounts, at least if the ship remains an MCV). The rest of the design was fairly straightforward.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)



Black hand of death or dirty snowflake?

*The ships that are after us, are they
the Hand?*

- Captain David Martel

*Those? Ha. Those are only toys that
are given to races who serve the Hand
- as I serve the Hand.*

*Together, we will prepare the way
for their return.*

- Minister Khafta

UNUSUAL and ugly, the ships we later come to know as vessels of the Hand's minions are first seen in a combat report from a destroyed scout vessel "on the edge of known space". A swarm of these vessels appear to be going somewhere, until one notices the probe.

They have a side profile that looks something like a Man-o-War jellyfish that had inter-bred with a Starfish - and then had been run over by a truck...

Large glowing beams are emitted from the centre of the vessels, above and below..

Their form is vaguely reminiscent of Shadow cruisers. Mainly in that they have arms, have unusually textured skins, and a very disturbing shape...

APPEARANCE

The Hand ships are based about a central, symmetrical five-pointed star shaped hull with a hole in the centre.

This central hole contains a ball of energy, from which beams like a warship's searchlight pan upward and downward.

A complex interlaced weave of tendrils extend from the main hull. Unlike Shadow tendrils, these do not look organic. Instead, the whole effect is something of a crystalline nature. "Dirty snowflake" is not an inaccurate description.

The primary color is a dark blue, almost black in places.

Five primary tendrils extend from the points of the fuselage. These five primary tendrils are linked at their base with slivers of a similar material.



From these interlinking slithers emerge splinters.

Some splinters extend on the same plane as the primary tendrils. Others dangle beneath the ship like the tendrils of a jellyfish.

The whole hull appears rigid. However, it also appears to have a soft "skin" encasing this harder material. Under this translucent skin appears to be a fluid in constant motion.

The appearance is very much

like that of the liquid metal mercury, wobbling about on a moving sample tray...

SURPRISE ATTACK

Jump engines: The three Hand ships jump into normal space immediately behind the Valen and Liandra. They come through the same vortex, without jumpgate assistance.

The lead ship immediately opens fire.

Light pulse: It sends a rapid-fire volley of green energy balls with a white core at the Valen. The pulses appear to come from the interlaced splinters and small tendrils under the ship.

These first two pulses hit the Valen in the rear, sending shockwaves through the vessel and clearly bursting upon the rear structure.

These are not one shot, one kill pulses. They are clearly targetted at the Valen's engines and hull to dis-



able the ship. Not destroy it.

However, the Hand ships appear to have to fire a lot of these pulses to achieve their goal.

This "light pulse" weapon appears to have several modes of fire. We see green pulses emitted at a rate of about one every half second. We also see bursts of two simultaneous pulses with a half second gap before another single or double pulse.

In the scene where Sarah first jumps in to her virtual reality targeting pod, we get a hint as to the nature of these green pulse weapons.

A double burst hits the Valen. We see a red secondary explosion. We then see red "lightning" dancing over the Valen's hull...

Perhaps this is why the Valen was so ineffectual in defending itself. Perhaps these pulses were dual impact/electro static weapons which could fry electrical systems as well as inflict pinpoint damage to the ship's external systems.

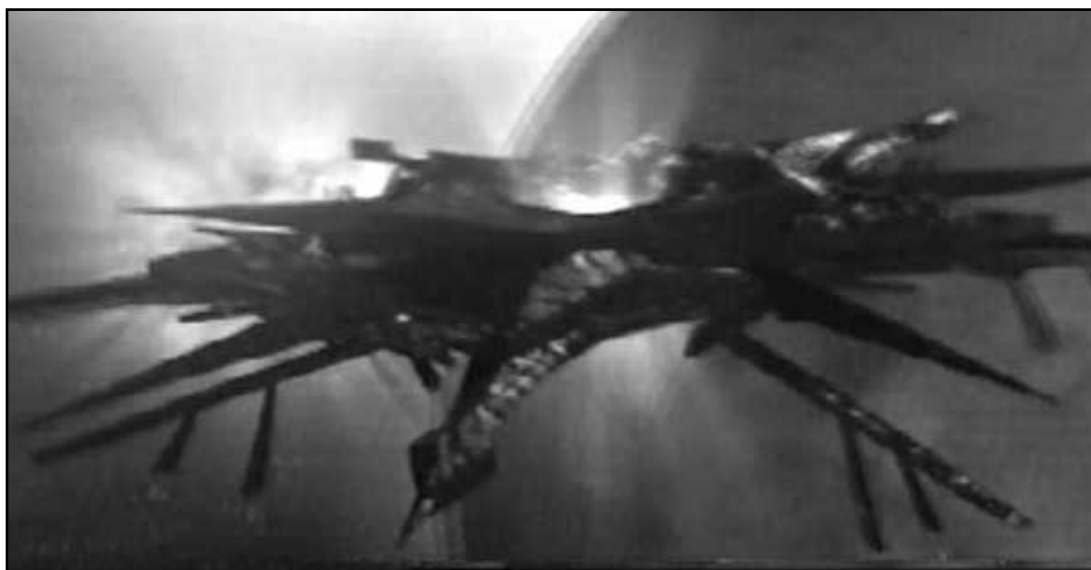
Armor: The Liandra fights back. One of its upper pulse turrets fires an orange-red pulse at the lead Hand ship. This impacts between the forward tendrils, and envelops most of the hand vessel in the burst.

The Hand ship jinks a little, and rotates the next of its five facings towards the Liandra... Perhaps this is to present a fresh, undamaged face. Perhaps it is to rotate an energy absorbing tendrill out of the line of fire for it to dissipate the energy.

Light Pulse: As the Liandra starts to fight back, the Hand ships continue to focus on the Valen. One of the green pulses is intercepted by the Liandra's orange pulses as it attempts to take the heat off the Valen.

Bombardment Pulse: One of the Hand ships opens fire on the planet. A pulse forms, slower than usual, under one of the five primary tendrils. It starts out green like all the others. But it grows in intensity. When released, it is a large ball of glowing blue-white energy. That one pulse is capable of penetrating the atmosphere and taking down the domed colony.

Manouverability: The Hand ships do not appear to be as sluggish as an Omega or Sharlin. They appear to be a little more manouverable than the Valen - though that ship sustained damage early on in



the battle. While certainly not White Stars, they would appear to have good speed combined with an average turn ability for a ship of small-to-medium size. The Liandra, however, can run rings around them...

Armor: Sarah lands a second blow on a Hand ship. This impacts from below, amid the splinter tendrils. The ship is again enveloped in a red explosion. This time, we see several of the splinter tendrils being fractured or knocked out of alignment. The whole Hand ship is seriously buffeted by the impact.

Light Pulse: The Liandra - itself an LCV or MCV - is hit by a green pulse. It is almost a glancing blow, striking at a fine angle on the ship's leading edge. The burst is nowhere near as large as the explosions from the Liandra's own pulse weapons. However, the single hit has a serious effect on the little Ranger ship.

"Weapons at 10 per cent, engines functional - but barely. "

Hull: The damaged Hand ships retreat from the battlefield. The Valen is disabled. The Liandra is disabled. Their skins ebb and flow almost as though they were liquid crystal. They open a jump-point, and two retreat. The third stays behind - pounding the Valen.

Critical Hit: Sarah fires the last of the Liandra's weapon's energy at the remaining Hand ship in a bid to cripple it. She takes aim at what she believes is the engines. The orange red pulse comes from the right wing nacelle - not the little hull turrets as previously seen. This pulse strikes the Hand ship, scattering slithers of the hull and tendrils into space.

Scale: When the Valen rams the Hand ship, we get an opportunity to establish scale. We have seen the

Liandra in close proximity to the Valen. Now we get to see the Hand ships in close proximity.

The main star fuselage of the Hand ship is barely one quarter the length of the Valen. It is as long as the bow section alone. However, with the length of the tendrils taken into account, it would measure roughly half the Valen's length.

Light Pulse: As the Valen makes its ramming run towards the Hand ship, the crystalline vessel fires a continuous stream of pulses - approximately four per second. Once again, these are not high-powered pulses. But the sheer weight of fire rapidly builds up against the previously un-damaged front arc of the Valen.

Searchlight: With the Valen and the first Hand ship destroyed, the two Hand ships jump into the debris field from their own vortex. Whether or not these are the same



ships that left earlier is not clear.

These ships fly rapidly through the debris field, using an aqua-green "searchlight" to seek whatever it is they are looking for.

In terms of volume, the Hand vessel would probably be only one eighth that of the Valen. The Hand vessel is much "flatter".

PURSUIT

"Confirmed. One enemy ship at 10,000km and closing - just outside maximum effective range for high energy weapons."

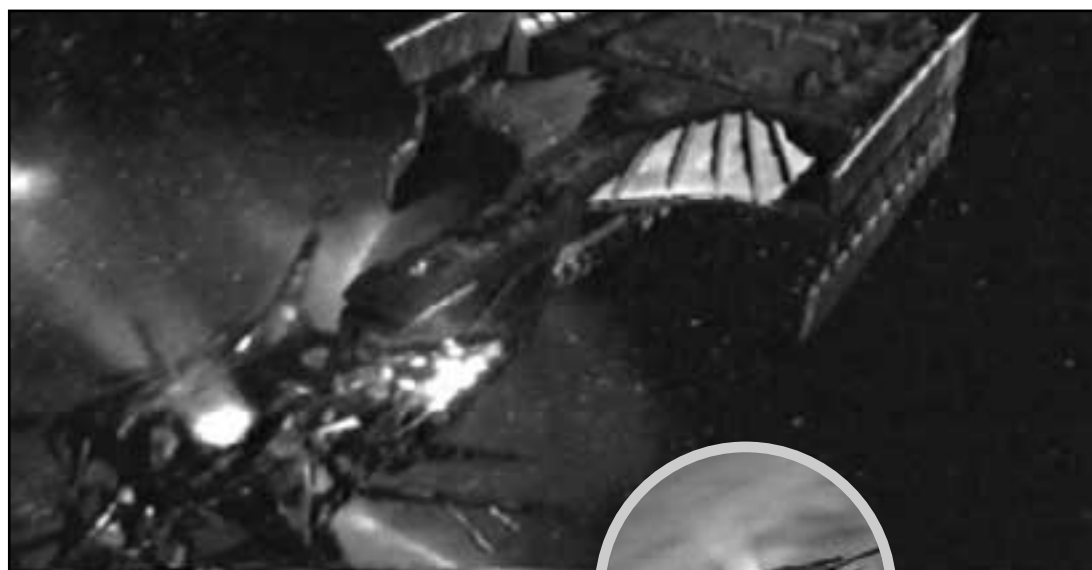
A single Hand ship is led to the Liandra by a traitor's homing beacon. It is able to catch the Liandra slowly - which by this time as restored "80 per cent" of its engine power.

Purple Flare: At extreme range, the Hand ship opens fire with a new weapon. This time it appears to be emitted from the central glowing core. It is purple-white in color and leaves a trail of dissipating particles behind it. It looks somewhat like a comet.

"The distance reduced the impact to 10 per cent of effective strength. The closer it gets, the stronger those hits will become - until they achieve hull-breaching capacity."

Homing Mines: About 18 seconds after firing the first purple flare, the Hand ship fires another new weapon - a mine cluster. Dozens of tiny mines are launched at the Valen, held together in a polygonal sphere. Once the sphere passes in front of the Liandra - in the little Ranger ship's flight path - it fractures into hundreds of little starfish-shaped mines. Once again, these mines are not high energy weapons. They hit - and breach - the Liandra's hull. But the damage is pinpoint. Not broad. They are easily taken down by Sarah firing the little turrets from her virtual reality pod. Several times we see several mines taken out by the one pulse as it simply continues on after destroying the first. At one point, a chain reaction is caused - either by the Hand ship or Sarah's firepower - that causes the entire field of mines to explode.

Purple Flare: After the failure of the mines, the Hand ship continues to fire its purple flares. The second flare is intercepted by a sparkling cloud of countermeasures left in the Liandra's wake.



"Even with the countermeasures that hit with 5pc more energy than the last one." Seven seconds later "Correction, 10 per cent and building fast. "

Five seconds later

"25 per cent, estimate we're only a few more shots away from a kill."

Hull: An escape pod with a homing beacon and explosives is picked up by the pursuing Hand ship. The hull ripples and pulses. The fluidic skin seems almost cancerous with mottled imperfections - perhaps scars from previous battles? Or perhaps it is simply vacuum-forced clusters of the liquid-mercurily like substance.

Tractor Beam: The tendrils and splinters clearly move as the Hand ship uses some sort of orange tractor-beam to pull the escape pod inside. The beam comes from the central energy core.

The internal detonation of the life-

pod destroys the ship.

BETA DURANI 7

Who are these people? If we are going to survive, we have to know what we're up against.

- Captain David Martel

Beta Durani 7 is a domed colony, roughly 600 people. It's an archaeological dig.

It contains a secret the Hand do not want the governments of the Interstellar Alliance to find out about.

Those who do know are afraid, and determined to keep it a secret.

G'Kar only reveals the relevance of this location to the Captain of the Liandra as they attempt to flee the pursuing Hand minion vessels

G'Kar's explanation to Captain Martel sums up most of what we know of this threat.

G'Kar's Dialogue: *"Until recently all we knew is that ships identical to those that attacked us have been trying to destabilise the*

Alliance by attacking its weaker members. Then we learned that some information relevant to this new race had been found at an archaeological dig at Beta Durani 7. Every space faring race has two things in common... And, they all share a myth about a time when ancient dark forces prowled the universe only to be cast down and cast away by an even greater force - a force of life. Until recently, I assumed that is all it was - myths. Then, we received this recording from the archeological team at Beta Durani 7. They found a city eight miles beneath the surface of the planet. A city billions of years old. Older than anything found before.

(background music very similar to that used in Thirdspace)

According to the Heiroglyphs, this city was built by an ancient race that drove off the forces of darkness a billion years ago. They indicate that the enemy was driven from normal space to a place of



eternal darkness.

A parallel dimension.

It's possible. The translators were still working on the rest of it. At first they were unsure how much to believe. Then, they found this.

A door. To another place. Another space.

We sent a probe through that door. It came back - changed. Distorted beyond recognition.

The heiroglyphs warned of a time when the enemy might return. We have a reason to believe there is a connection between this and the ships that attacked us."

The terminology used by G'Kar, and even the background music during this scene, is very similar to that used to define the Thirdspace aliens from the movie of the same name. Is this coincidence?

As the series has not been given the green light, this will remain conjecture until - and if - JMS decides to spill the beans.

More is revealed about the Hand during Captain Martel's interrogation of Minister Khafta. Martel is suspicious. He knows Khafta's people only recently joined the Alliance. That they are located on the fringe of Alliance territory and that none of your ships have been bothered by raiding attacks from the Hand. Martel thinks Khafta's race has made a deal which involves spying on the Alliance.

Khafta's Dialogue: *"Beat them? You really don't have the slightest idea of what you're up against do you?"*

They do not have a name as you understand the concept. They are called The Hand. The Hand of God. The Hand of Death. The Hand that reaches forth and blots out whole suns. They have left a thousand worlds in their wake - blackened cinders that were once thriving planets. For millions of years they have been outcast, hungrily staring out across the darkness between the stars - searching for a way back. And now they have found it.

If you had seen what I had seen you would have done the same. Compared to the Hand, the Shadows who straddles the galaxy on legs of fire during the Shadow war were nothing more than insects.

The Hand rewards loyalty. It is their only virtue. And they do not know what I know, so they cannot allow my return to Minbar where I can be questioned further.



They are coming Captain. You cannot stop them. You cannot fight them. You can not defeat them. You can only join them - or be ground into dust before them."

PILOTS

Finally, we get to see one of the pilot's of the Hand ships. But we're told they are not of the Hand race itself...

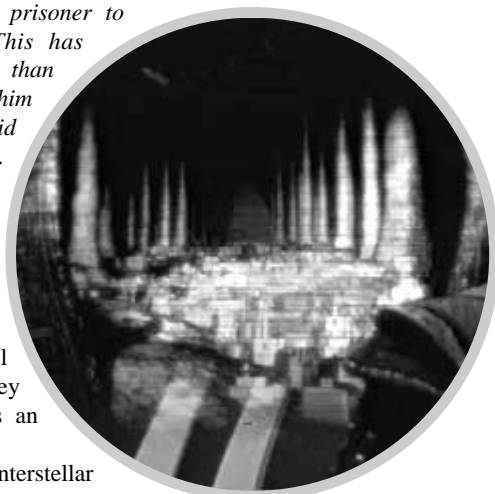
These "Hand Servants" are black cowed creatures somewhat reminiscent of a Vorlon. Perhaps deliberately so. It appears to be a Vorlon-shaped encounter suit encased in a heavy black fabric. The hood is dark - much like that of a Ringwraith from Lord of the Rings. But it is also elongated - deep enough to hold a Vorlon encounter suit helmet. It speaks with a deep, artificial voice - rich with reverb.

However, there are no mystical chimes...

"Instructions were to exert every effort to reclaim the prisoner to avoid questioning. This has already cost us more than anticipated. Release him to us and you will avoid destruction. Absolution is conferred by those who serve."

These words convey a sence of absolute obedience, and economical thought. When they speak, they use it as an opportunity to preach.

Were we in for an interstellar Jihad or Crusade?



The Hand Advanced Warship By TYREL LOHR

INTERSTELLAR Alliance member races have encountered this mysterious type of vessel only in a few rare encounters. In these encounters, however, the Hand Advanced Warship has proven to be a very potent fighting vessel for a ship of its size. These "snowflake" shaped warships are quite technologically advanced and there is a strong indication from Alliance intelligence sources, that those races operating them have received them from another, unknown power.

It is believed that the Advanced Warship represents the best hardware that this unknown power are willing to give their followers as nothing larger than this ship has yet to be encountered by Alliance patrols.

The Advanced Warship is equipped with several different types of advanced weapons. The ship's primary weapon is its Molecular Pulse Blasters, a weapon similar in function to the Minbari Molecular Pulsar. The Molecular Pulse Blaster is capable of extremely fast firing rates and does more damage than the comparable Minbari pulse weapon.

Additionally, the weapon can be overcharged on the turn of firing in order to ensure maximum pulse outputs. Unlike other weapons that can have extra power applied at time of firing, Molecular Pulse Blasters do not require a turn of cooldown after firing.

The Advanced Warship also utilizes an advanced plasma beam weapon, the Plasma Converter.

The Plasma Converter fires a powerful albeit unreliable plasma beam at its enemy. Longer ranged than most plasma weapons, the Plasma Converter does suffer from an above average attenuation of its plasma beam. This fact makes the Plasma Converter a poor weapon for long-range combat.

However, at close ranges, the Plasma Converter can be devastating to enemy warships.

Perhaps the most interesting and chaotic weapon the Hand Advanced Warship fields is the Polyhedral Captor Mine.

Launched by a centrally mounted ballistic mine launcher, the Polyhedral Captor Mine is capable



WOULD YOU LIKE A HAND WITH THAT?

of filling entire areas of the battlefield with small, deadly captor mines that are swift and accurate when acquiring their target.

In no time at all, a fleet of Hand Advanced Warships can lay down an extensive minefield.

Each Polyhedral Captor Mine is counted as a single mine launch for purposes of the ballistic mine launcher. However, when the mine impacts in the target hex, it will in fact separate into seven individual mines, one being placed in the impact hex and one each in each surrounding hex.

Each mine is equipped the Identify Friend or Foe (IFF) mine

enhancement for no additional cost. Statistics for the captor mines placed by the Polyhedral Captor Mine are located on the Advanced Warship's ship control sheet.

Although the individual mines deployed by the Polyhedral Captor Mine are weaker than mines operated by other races, they make up for it in their sheer numbers. The ability to place 'instant terrain' on the battlefield can allow the Hand to control the movement of their enemy while establishing kill zones, forcing their enemies to either engage their formidable ships in battle or face a gauntlet of mines within the minefield.

Despite their speed and firepower, the Advanced Warships of the Hand are still relatively fragile and too small to effectively challenge the mainline cruisers of any Alliance race.

Operating in wolf packs, however, such ships are to be feared. The few sightings and confrontations with ships of this type have occurred on the frontiers of the Alliance in areas that remain largely unexplored. Until more resources can be devoted towards exploring these new regions the Interstellar Alliance may never know who-or what-is the creator of these ships and the technology behind them.

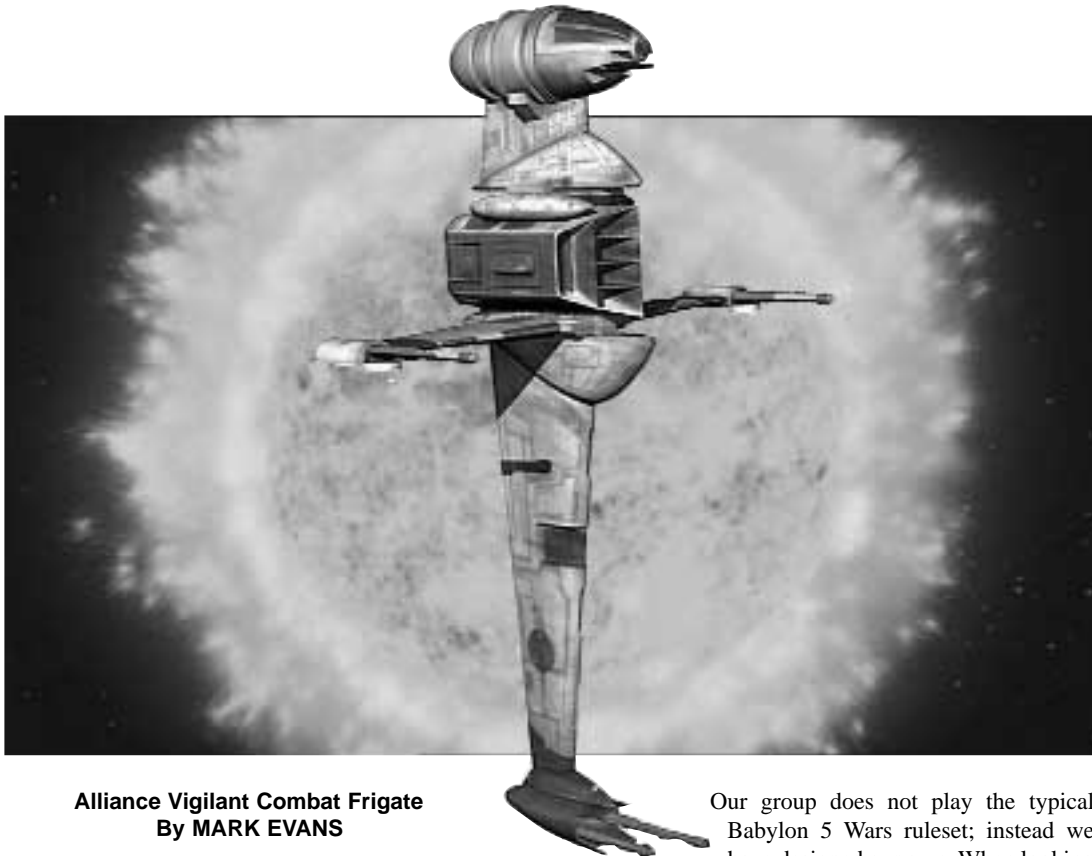
The Plasma Converter was designed to meet the "beam that falls off at range" requirement that was demonstrated in Legend of the Rangers. The weapon is extremely powerful and deadly at close range and on a good damage roll, but it demonstrates why long-range fire from such a beam would not be able to significantly damage the Liandra.

The Molecular Pulse Blaster is an attempt to model the rapid firing green pulses that they used to destroy the Valen. Originally I considered using a stored up shot system similar to the ballistic torpedo, but opted instead for a molecular pulse weapon that fired fewer, higher damage pulses when compared to the Molecular Pulsar.

The ballistic mine launcher just screamed to be used as an "off the shelf" solution to the mine launcher. All that was left was to design the actual mine that The Hand used. The Polyhedral Mine is an attempt to simulate what I remember through fogged memory. Each mine deployed by the launching of a single Polyhedral Mine launcher is not as strong as most race's mines, but the fact that one mine launch deploys seven mines on the board makes them incredibly deadly instant terrain objects. The low damage of each mine is necessitated so that the Liandra could reasonably make it through the minefield without being destroyed.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)

A rebellious alliance brings micro machines to B5W



Alliance Vigilant Combat Frigate
By MARK EVANS

SINCE AoG went out of business, there seems to be a shortage of space miniatures one can collect, so what's a person to do? I was pondering this thought and then I looked around my den and saw some older Star Wars micro machines that I had collected over the years. And then it hit me; why not use the micro machines as Orieni or any other race out there for Babylon 5 Wars?

So off I went scouring the Internet to see if anyone had ever done some Star Wars ships up, and that's when I found some of the weapon ideas. Next came the creation of my first ship. I looked at the micro machines and really liked the Rebel Medical Frigate as say, a destroyer and the Star Destroyer as a large cruiser. Then I saw the B-Wing fighters I had. Since I have always been a fan of the Centauri, Vorchans in particular, I put a game plan together to convert the B-Wing into what you now see as the Alliance Vigilant Combat Frigate.

The concept for the ship is to be a fast attack frigate. Nothing too powerful, no jump drive was to be included since I didn't want another type of Vorchan using surprise attacks, but enough light weapons to fend off any fighters who get too near. I picture the Orieni or Interstellar Alliance or whoever you use, to have many of these in wolfpacks around the fleet to attack both fighters and cruisers using the one turn quick recharge medium turbolasers and close range medium torpedoes. Basically I took a look at the weapons the original Star Wars B-Wing fighter has and fell in love. That's the ship for me, no priming and painting, bang it's done and on the board. You will notice that all the weapons are capable of firing forward and that the ship is fast and agile. It's also weapon heavy in weapon cost to structure and has a low attack profile.

Our group does not play the typical Babylon 5 Wars ruleset; instead we have designed our own. When looking at the SCS you will notice that we use what we call a "Quick Fire, Quick Move". This set of rules was created over months of playing in which we decided to give up some realism for playability, in particular speeding our games up that seem to go on past the point of mental exhaustion. I mean do I really care after six hours of playing, what fighter does what anymore or whose ship fires on whom?

Anyway, we have changed many concepts, we play on a non-hex board using a clock dial for turning, we use written orders for movement to avoid spending 15 minutes for one person to put their destroyer in the best place possible, we have simplified movement costs and don't get bogged down in small weapons fire, instead you will note that all anti-fighter weapons have a range of five. We also allow for what we call a half turn move when ships are too close and they would not pass each other without firing. There are ranges for the weapons with the following modifiers, 0/?2/?4/?8 and for movement you pay the acc/dec cost for a 15° turn, acc, dec, pivot, or slide with other guidelines, also once over speed 11?14, add +1 to move and 15?20, +2. The frigate above is labeled an Agile ship, which gives it the ability to have a free 15° turn, each turn due to it's advanced thrusters. That's about all I can say for now, this should be enough info to get you started if you want to use this ship in your gaming.

Many thanks go out to the people that make up Babcom and have designed prior SCS's in which I have collected and used many times over. So here you have it, my first ground up designed SCS, cheers and happy gaming.

(The SCS for this ship can be found in the attachments folder)



WHEN the Anla'Shok were designated as the Interstellar Alliance's armed force, they were charged mainly with patrol, reconnaissance, anti-piracy, and intelligence-gathering duties across all of Alliance space, while at the same time were a numerically reduced force.

With an initial fleet composed mainly of White Stars and other small ships, meant that the typical Ranger fleet would be composed of medium ships, which was adequate to accomplish most of their missions.

But no one missed the fact that sometimes, the Anla'Shok would have to fight against military opponents in real battles, and if many of their small ships were extremely advanced, they would need support against heavy ships.

The initial idea was to provide this support with the projected Victory class destroyers, but as time passed and the costs increased, it was clear that a limited number of these ships would be constructed, thus making it necessary that other more conventional and less costly ships were needed to makeup the backbone of the support cruiser force of the Ranger fleet.

One of the initial ideas was to use an enlarged version of an Abbai escort ship being studied by the Alliance, but this ship was too small to provide all the capabilities required on the new cruisers, even if many of its advancements (like the integration of Minbari and Abbai technologies or the new and experimental Quad fusion weapons) were nonetheless adopted. At the same time it was decided to integrate the two projects, it was also decided that some of the new technologies of the destroyer program would be employed on this class, mainly the propulsion system and the crystalline armour.

Initially, it was decided that the new cruisers should accomplish the following requirements:

- They should have ELINT sensors, both to provide EW support to other ships and for intelligence gathering duties.

- They should be well armed, with at least four heavy weapons (mainly Neutron Lasers), and six to eight secondary weapons, preferably Molecular Pulsars.

- Good anti-fighter and point defence capabilities were also required, for one of their main mis-



sions would be to escort high value ships, like the new destroyers.

- They should be well defended, employing a combination of Minbari Jammer technology and Abbai Particle Impeders.

- Their hangars should be able to deploy at least 12 Nial class fighters, to correct one of the most typical shortcomings amongst the Ranger forces: the scarcity of fighters.

- Powerful and extensive command suites and facilities were required to coordinate other Alliance ships.

- They should have good acceleration and manoeuvre characteristics.

As the studies progressed it was quickly made clear by the design committee that some of the requirements were too ambitious, requiring at least a heavy cruiser sized hull, which was too big for the needs and manpower capabilities of the Rangers, so the requirements were reduced. The command/support cruiser (named C/SC) design was the final result.

One decision that would have interesting consequences was that

the basic design was to be a modular one, making it easy to develop a reduced version of the original project into an escort scout HCV.

The number of Neutron Lasers was reduced to two, while six Fusion Cannons, thereby reducing the energy requirements and thus the reactor's size, replaced the initially projected eight secondary Molecular Pulsars.

The sensor suite was also reduced, but the defensive systems and the fighter capabilities were steadfastly maintained, for the Alliance naval experts believed that a twelve fighter wing was the minimum number required by the modern era "fighter-rich" battlefields.

After the Drakh attack on Earth, and the destruction of the Victory class experimental shipyards (and the resultant delays in this project), the Alliance decided to accelerate the C/SC development, and the building of the prototypes. During the initial tests of the first prototype (the ISA Kerzadenn), the ship performed well but some members among the design committee and the Anla'Shok council were unsatisfied for they believed that these cruisers, while not bad, were the

resultant of too many compromises to fulfil all their intended duties. As a result they began to lobby for new versions of the basic design intended for more specific missions.

Even when the slow construction of the new class had just begun, the original design committee was charged with developing at least two new variants of this ship, one a dedicated escort and support ship, with both ELINT and anti fighter capabilities and one light/medium cruiser, more heavily armed. The entire project was redesignated as the Triad program.

Kerzadenn Command / Support Cruiser

This is the original design, being a cross between a light cruiser and a scout in a medium cruiser frame. The extensive command facilities and the decent sized fighter wing compensated for any perceived shortcomings, making it a popular ship among Ranger commanders. It has performed generally well, unless its inherent limitations (comparatively low ELINT capabilities and reduced firepower) are exceeded.

Betriel Escort Scout

The second Triad design to be produced, this ship is an enlarged version of the original escort scout designed by Abbai engineers for the ISA. It retains the ELINT capabilities of the Kerzadenn, but eliminates the extensive command facilities, main hangar and the weapons system of the original ship to make space for four of the new Quad Fusion Arrays. It is primarily employed as an escort ship for high value targets, like fleet command ships or diplomatic transports. Sometimes, one ship of this class would operate in conjunction with a Kerzadenn cruiser, in the same manner that the Hyach Senchlat Kes does.

Unzadenn Strike Cruiser

This is the purely combat-oriented variant of this class, lacking any ELINT capabilities, and reducing the fighter wing by half, while increasing the reactor size to meet the energy requirements of its more powerful weapons system.

Others variants of this class have been studied, mainly a dedicated scout and a carrier with 36 fighters, but as of 2275 no decision has been made on this matter.

(The SCSs for these ships can be found in the attachments folder



The ISA Blue Star
By Roman Alexander PERNER
(aka ShadowScout)



AFTER the Vorlons left for the rim, they took with them their technical assistance, which made constructing new WhiteStars a bit difficult for the Minbari. Nonetheless they had shipyards set up to build them, and a stockpile of vorlon enhancements ready for fitting. Then the Minbari civil war happened, and in the confusion nobody had the time to sit down and look into the possibilities of more WS construction. And later, after the forming of the ISA the minbari were still occupied healing the wounds their society recieved in that civil war. However a decade later their scientist began working... first to understand the vorlon systems, which was only partially successful - they did manage to get the vorlon hull armor to grow, take a desired shape and attach itself to a normal ship hull, but didn't really understand how to create it on their own. However that wasn't necessary for resuming production, as their stockpiles were enough to "harvest" new armor for a number of newly constructed ships - the production speed was slowed by this at first, but not made impossible; and after some time their stockpiles had grown enough to provide all the hull armor they needed for more WhiteStars and the next generation of Vorlon Hybrids. At the same time researchers worked on a few related designs - incorporating new discoveries, technical advances and experiences into the next generation of ISA ship design. One of the projects they finished was the BlueStar - a miniature version of a WhiteStar intended to take over priority transport and courier services from it's bigger brother, freeing the ISA's limited number of WS's for duties that required more fire-power. The BS was only lightly armed, but equipped with the newest model of a miniaturized Jump Engine (making it the only jump-capabel LCV among the younger races - not counting the Technomages of course), as well as vorlonized armor and the usual minbari jammer. It was also highly automated, allowing a single person to fly and even fight the ship; however not at it's full effectiveness - that needed a crew of at least three. The BS became the ship of choice for low-intensity ranger missions, transporting a small team to it's destination for inspection, special operations, etc.

Thoughts behind the SCS:

I made this one with as much high-tech as the WS, sacrificing attack strength to squeeze it all in - that's why it only has two light weapons, which I made lighter versions of the Molecular Pulsar. The usual LCV medium gun was replaced by the nifty systems - mostly the Jump Drive which we know from the show the ship has (as it jumps into Coriana on it's own). The ship also gets "vorlonized skin" with a light EM shield and adaptive armor (it would follow the hybrid AA rules, but since it has only 1 point of AA anyway that point's moot).

Special rules - crew. If the ship has less then at least three crew members, it's initiative bonus is reduced to +10 and it suffers a -1 to hit penalty for firing at more than one target ("one target" = one lock-on; so a fighter flight would count as one target even though it has six fighters...)

* * *



FOR GROPOS
By Alex Roberts

UNITED STATES COLONIAL MARINES GROUND FORCES

THE United States Colonial Marine Corps (USCM) is America's interstellar strike force. Tasked with defending and furthering the interests of the United Americas (UA), the USCM are a well equipped, integrated ground and space military arm. As such, they are the only combat arm of the UA capable of taking a hostile area from space.

The USCM was formed at the end of the 21st century, as America began establishing colonies amongst the stars. By the year 2179, the USCM was composed of 4 divisions and 4 aerospace wings comprising 179,000 Marines, with another 50,000 Marines reservists organized as a fifth division and additional aerospace wing.

The standard USCM unit is the Marine Assault Unit (MAU), a reinforced battalion sized force with 2 to 4 line companies. However, operations may be carried out by units as small as a section, as with the disastrous Marine reconnaissance on Zeta 2 Reticuli's Acheron planetoid, or as large as multiple divisions as fought in the Tientsin campaign on 8 Eta Boois A III in 2165. Generally though, the MAU is considered the optimum combined force unit for regular action. Force levels during the Earth-Alien war are impossible to ascertain exactly, but can be estimated at around 180,000-200,000 Marines. Losses were sustained during the year of infection, as well as the periodic civilian rescue attempts after the evacuation, but as the bulk of

Marine forces were stationed around the colonies, regular army units stationed on Earth carried out the brunt of the fighting. By the time most reinforcement forces arrived by Faster-Than-Light travel, the Earth had been almost completely compromised, and full scale evacuations were well underway.

The units and force lists below cover the USCM and Militia units from 2179 through the first Alien infections on Earth, the Earth-Alien war, and on to a period of 18 years after the conclusion of the Earth-Alien war, to approximately the year 2215.

UNIT TYPES:

Standard Colonial Marines: Standard Colonial Marine infantry squad, composed of 4 Marines divided into two fireteams. The first fireteam is equipped with M41A Pulse Rifles and a motion tracker. The second fireteam is equipped with one Marine with a Pulse Rifle, and one Marine with an M56 Smart Gun

Marine Flamethrower Squad: Colonial Marine squad armed with 3 M41A Pulse Rifles and 1 M240 Flamethrower.

Light Marine Squad: Colonial Marine squad armed with 4 M41A Pulse Rifles. This squad is generally used when the M56 would be too large or heavy to use effectively in combat.

Marine Recon Squad: This is a Marine squad with 2 fireteams armed with M41A Pulse Rifles, and both equipped with motion trackers. These Marines are extensively trained for reconnais-

sance missions.

Marine Scout-Sniper Squad: This Marine unit is composed of one Marine Sniper armed with a M42A Scope Rifle, and one Marine Scout armed with a M41A Pulse Rifle.

Light Anti-Tank Squad: Marine squad armed with 3 M41A Pulse Rifles and 1 M5 RPG for light anti-armor and bunker assaults.

Plasma Anti-Tank Squad: Marine squad armed with 3 M41A Pulse Rifles and 1 M78 Phased Plasma Infantry Gun. This weapon, though not quite as effective as the M5 RPG against vehicles, provides a better balance versus both armored and non-armored targets.

Medium Anti-Tank Squad: Marine squad armed with 3 M41A pulse rifles and 1 M83A2 Sadar anti-armor weapon. This squad is deployed when a mobile infantry portable medium anti-armor defense is needed. The M83A2 attacks the top armor of the target vehicle, and is very effective against light and medium armored vehicles.

Marine Anti-Air Squad: This is a Marine squad equipped with a man-portable SIM-118 Hornet missile for anti-air defense.

M112 Hi-Mat: The M112 Hi-Mat is a remotely deployable anti-armor rocket weapon. It consists of a hand-held control system, attached via wire to the Himat tube and warhead, which is mounted on a baseplate and

bipod. This allows the system to be set up some distance from the controlling Marine, providing protection when the enemy returns fire. The M112-Himat carries a large warhead, making it effective against even heavy armor.

M402 Mortar: The M402 is an 80mm man-portable mortar system.

UA 571-C Remote Sentry Weapons System: The UA 571-C is the standard autonomous sentry device used by the USCM and Regular Army.

Equipped with a pulse action machine gun, firing 10mm X 28 HEAP rounds.

The sensor array on the UA 571-C is capable of reading IFF devices and interpreting enemy targets in its assigned zone of fire.

(Note: These are assigned to any platoon the player chooses. They may be carried in transports for free. They may be fired by an infantry stand as per the book, or they may be set to autofire on a fixed forward arc, with a crew die as per a regular stand.)

M572 Mortar Carrier: The M201 is an armored, tracked vehicle, carrying an auto-loading M402 mortar.

M292A2: This is the USCM's standard SP artillery gun, armed with a 41 caliber 158mm tube, capable of firing 6 rounds in 10 seconds. An air-defense laser is also mounted on the top of the hull.

M201 MLRS: The M201 is a tracked transporter carrying 8 250mm rockets with submunitions. It is, however, very slow to reload.

M577 Armored Personal Carrier:

The M577 is the Marine Corps standard APC. A wheeled vehicle, the M577 is armed with a hull mounted RE700 20mm Gatling cannon, and a dual turret mounted 20mW Boyars PARS 150 phased plasma cannon. Variants are equipped with 40mW free electron lasers, or 20MeV turboalternator powered charged particle beam cannons.

Special: This vehicle can carry 2 infantry stands.

M577 Armored Command Car: This is a standard model M577 with much of the carrying capacity taken up by an advanced command and control suite.

M577 Recon Car: This is a standard M577 that trades some of the carrying capacity for better sensors and reconnaissance equipment.

Special: This vehicle may carry 1 stand of infantry.

M579 AA Vehicle: This is an M577 that has had its turret replaced with a quad 20mm Gatling cannon, and the front mounted gun cupola replaced with a quad vertical launchbin loaded with Sim-118 Hornet Missiles.

M34A2 Longstreet Light Tank: This tank, along with the M22A3, forms the mainstay of the 6 USCM armored battalions. Armed with a

90mm tank gun, as well as a 20kW point defense gun, the M34A2 is becoming obsolete.

M22A3 Jackson Medium Tank: This medium tank is armed with a 100mm tank gun and 20kW point defense gun. USCM command is considering replacing these vehicles with the M40 Ridgeway, though interstellar lift requirements may scuttle these plans.

M40 Ridgeway Heavy Tank: This tank is being considered as the replacement for the M22A3. Armed with a 115mm cannon, integral 60mm mortars, and a 20kW phased plasma point defense gun, this is a powerful armored unit. However, its weight may make it unsuitable for interstellar deployment.

UD-4 Cheyenne Dropship: The UD-4 is the Colonial Marine's standard dropship and tactical transport. Equipped with a strong weapons suite, the Cheyenne can perform well as a gunship, as well having the capabilities of transporting 1 M577 APC.

Special Rules: As a VTOL the UD-4 never enjoys the highly stable platform bonus. The VTOL may also not fire when landed.

Marine Plasma Rifle Infantry: These Marines are equipped with Plasma Rifles. More powerful than standard M41A Pulse Rifles, Plasma Rifles are however quite expensive, and as such the M41A Pulse Rifle remained in continued use throughout the Earth-Alien war.

Regular Army Rifle Infantry: Typical of the lower quality Army conscripts forced into service during the Earth-Alien war, these units were low priority recipients for equipment and weapons. These units were usually armed with M41A Pulse Rifles, or a similar local derivative for non-UA units. M56 Smart Guns were issued to Army units, but usually in smaller numbers than the better funded USCM.

Militia: Militia squads are typical of hastily thrown together local defense forces assembled by towns and cities in an attempt to halt the Alien tides on Earth. These units were armed with whatever was available, from shotguns and hunting rifles, to even more advanced Pulse Rifles later in the war, as local governments struggled to fight off the spread of the Alien infection by issuing weapons to anyone who would fight. To represent the mish mash of weaponry, Militia squads use the generic Assault Rifle weapon stats.

Militia Hunters: Composed of backwoods men and traditional animal hunters, Militia Hunter Squads provide much needed reconnaissance for hard pressed Militia units.

Android Marines: These Marines look and talk like regular Marines. However, in violation of the Geneva Convention, USCM command has programmed these androids to be the ultimate fighting machines. Equipped with Plasma



ALIENS:

Rifles, these androids can outfight and outshoot any Marine in the Corps. However, their Asimov controls remain in place, preventing them from harming, or allowing harm to come to any human. Though expensive, they remain the perfect expendable unit for fighting the Alien menace. Sadly few were produced before the infection of Earth was complete. (It is rumored that some Corporations have removed their inhibitions from hurting Humans. However, these assertions remain unproved.)

Special: These units may not be used before 2180, and are limited deployment after that. They may not fire on any human or human crewed unit.

Mobile Offensive ExoWarrior (MOX) suit:

These powered suits were designed specifically to fight Aliens. Armed with 3 45mm Grenade Launchers, 2 25mm Pulse Rifles, a flamethrower, and protected from Alien acid, the MOX is designed to penetrate an Alien hive, and terminate the Queen. As this is an extremely dangerous job, even for this fearsome suit, Marines piloting these suits are generally psychotics, given adrenaline and psychoactive drugs just before they enter the hive. When not on mission, these Marines spend their days under heavy sedation.

Special:

-- If there are any friendly units within 4" at the beginning of activation for this unit, roll a d6. On a 5-6, this unit must fire on the closest friendly unit. It will fire its Pulse Rifles against infantry, or its Grenade Launchers if the closest unit is a vehicle.

-- These units may not be used before 2210.

-- Combat Drugs: This unit may activate twice per turn. Both activations must be taken at the same time. Essentially, this unit gets to move and shoot twice.

EQUIPMENT:

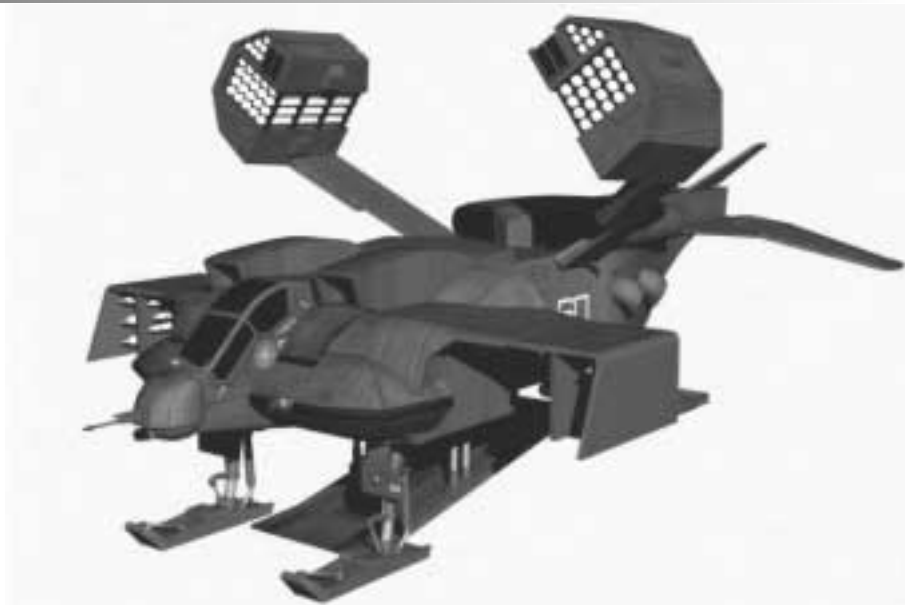
See Weapons Spreadsheet for Infantry.

Vehicle armament and stats as per data cards. Some vehicles list elements that do not match the TO&E. This is to allow one data card to cover multiple sizes of unit. If all vehicles on a card are of the same platoon, just note this in the element box.

Z-110 Acid Neutralizing Combat Wardrobe:

Although no successful combat armor was designed during the war to avoid the lethal effects of the Aliens' blood, in 2215 scientists finally managed to construct a suit of body armor that was maneuverable enough to allow troops to fight effectively enough in combat, while sophisticated enough to make the wearer immune to the acid.

These suits function not by neutralizing the acid, but by re-growing with astonishing speed. They will not survive a bath in a vat of Alien blood, but they grow back quick enough to negate any splashes of Alien blood in combat.



Special: The bearer is immune to the effects of Alien blood in combat. These suits may not be used before 2215. Deployment: May be added to any infantry stand after 2115. Cost: + 1/2/3/4 per stand.

TO&E USCM / Militia / Misc:

United States Colonial Marines Battalion Level Assets:

Background: The units below may be added to line companies. No more than 1 may be added to any line company, and all of the units are limited.

Note: No Company may have more than 2 artillery vehicles or stands. Artillery is classified as the M201 MLRS, M292A2, M402 Mortar, and M572 Mortar Carrier. This restriction includes Battalion level and Company Support choices.

Battalion Level Asset A:
2 Scout-Sniper

Battalion Level Asset B:
1 Mox Suit

Battalion Level Asset C:
2 M579 AA Vehicles

Battalion Level Asset D:
2 M201 MLRS

Battalion Level Asset E:
4 Marine AA Squads
2 M577 APC

Battalion Level Asset F:
2 Plasma Anti-Tank Marines
1 M577 APC

Battalion Level Asset G:
2 Medium Anti-Tank Marines
1 M577 APC

Battalion Level Asset H:
2 M292A2 SP Artillery

Battalion Level Asset I:
2 M572 Mortar Carriers

Battalion Level Asset J:
Note: Deployment limited to special scenarios due to rarity.
4 Android Marines
2 M577 APC

Battalion Level Asset K:
Note: Up to two of these units may be purchased, and they may be in addition to 1 of the above units as Battalion level assets.
2 UD-4 Cheyenne

Cost:

Asset A: --/40/60/80

Asset B: --/--/45/60

Asset C: 42/84/120/160

Asset D: 70/140/210/290

Asset E: 86/172/245/320

Asset F: 43/86/130/170

Asset G: 41/82/123/170

Asset H: 76/152/228/342

Asset I: 56/112/168/215

Asset J: --/156/225/310

Asset K: 100/200/300/425

Marine Assault Unit:

Background: This is the standard Marine TO&E for the late 22nd century.

HQ Section Choice Alpha (Max 1 HQ):
1 M577 Armored Command Car

Support Unit Alpha (Max 2 support units total):
2 UA-571 Sentry Guns
(Note: These are assigned to any platoon the player chooses. They may be carried in transports for free.)

Support Unit Bravo:
2 M402 Mortars
2 Std Marines

Support Unit Choice Charlie:
2 M112 Himat ATGM
2 Std. Marines

ALIENS:



Support Unit Choice Delta:
1 M577 Recon Car / 1 Marine Recon Sqd.

Support Unit Choice Epsilon:
2 Light Anti-Tank Marines
1 M577 APC

Alpha Platoon:
4 Std. Marines
2 M577 APC

Bravo Platoon:
4 Light Marine Squads
2 M577 APC

Charlie Platoon:
2 Light Marine Squads
2 Marine Flamethrower Squads
2 M577 APC

Delta Platoon:
2 Standard Marine Squads
2 Marine Flamethrower Squads
2 M577 APC

Costs:
HQ Choice A: --/38/57/75
Support Choice A: --/45/--/--
Support Choice B: 42/84/125/170
Support Choice C: 38/76/114/155
Support Choice D: --/60/90/115
Support Choice E: 35/70/105/145
Alpha Platoon: 72/145/220/310
Bravo Platoon: 57/114/172/240
Charlie Platoon: 60/120/180/245
Delta Platoon: 70/140/210/290

Marine Armored Company:

Background: This is TO&E covers the various armored units in USCM service.

Note: All Marine Armor companies are composed of homogenous tanks. Thus, all platoon choices must be of the same type.

HQ Section Choice Alpha (Max 1 HQ):
2 M34A2 Longstreet

HQ Section Choice Bravo (Max 1 HQ):
2 M22A3 Jackson

HQ Section Choice Charlie (Max 1 HQ):
2 M40 Ridgeway

Support Unit Alpha (Max 2 support units total):

2 M292A2 SP Artillery

Support Unit Bravo (Max 2 support units total):
1 M577 Recon Car / 1 Marine Recon Squad

Alpha Platoon:
4 M22A3 Jackson

Bravo Platoon:
4 M34A2 Longstreet

Charlie Platoon:
4 M40 Ridgeway

Costs:

HQ Choice A: --/108/162/230
HQ Choice B: --/100/150/200
HQ Choice C: --
/120/180/250
Support Choice A: --
/152/228/342
Support Choice B: --
/60/90/115
Alpha Platoon:
100/200/300/420
Bravo Platoon:
108/216/332/450
Charlie Platoon:
120/240/360/500

Militia Company:

Background: This below TO&E represents local city defenses thrown together in the last days of resistance against the Aliens. This structure could also represent wandering bands of breeders, humans who escaped becoming hosts by capturing other humans, and bringing them to local Alien Queens for feeding to facehugger eggs.

Note: Militia Units may NOT take Marine Battalion Level Choices.

HQ Section Choice Alpha (Max 1 HQ):
2 Militia Stands

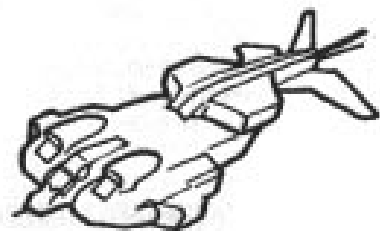
Support Unit Alpha (Max 2 support units total):
2 Militia Hunters

Alpha Platoon:
6 Militia Stands

Costs:

HQ Choice A: 8/16/24/35 Support Choice A:
10/20/30/45
Alpha Platoon: 24/48/72/100

(Data cards and other details can be found in the attachments folder)



AIRMOBILE WARFARE

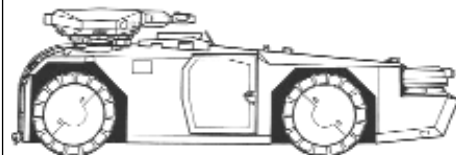
THE concept of airmobile forces was conceived out of the necessity to disperse on the modern battlefield under the threat of nuclear weapons and still retain the ability to mass quickly for decisive actions, then disperse again. Vietnam obscured these origins and have led many people to the assumption that airmobility was designed for and limited to counter-guerrilla contingencies. This was not true. It was the flexibility of airmobility that overcame the tremendous problems of working in the jungles and the mountains of an undeveloped country.

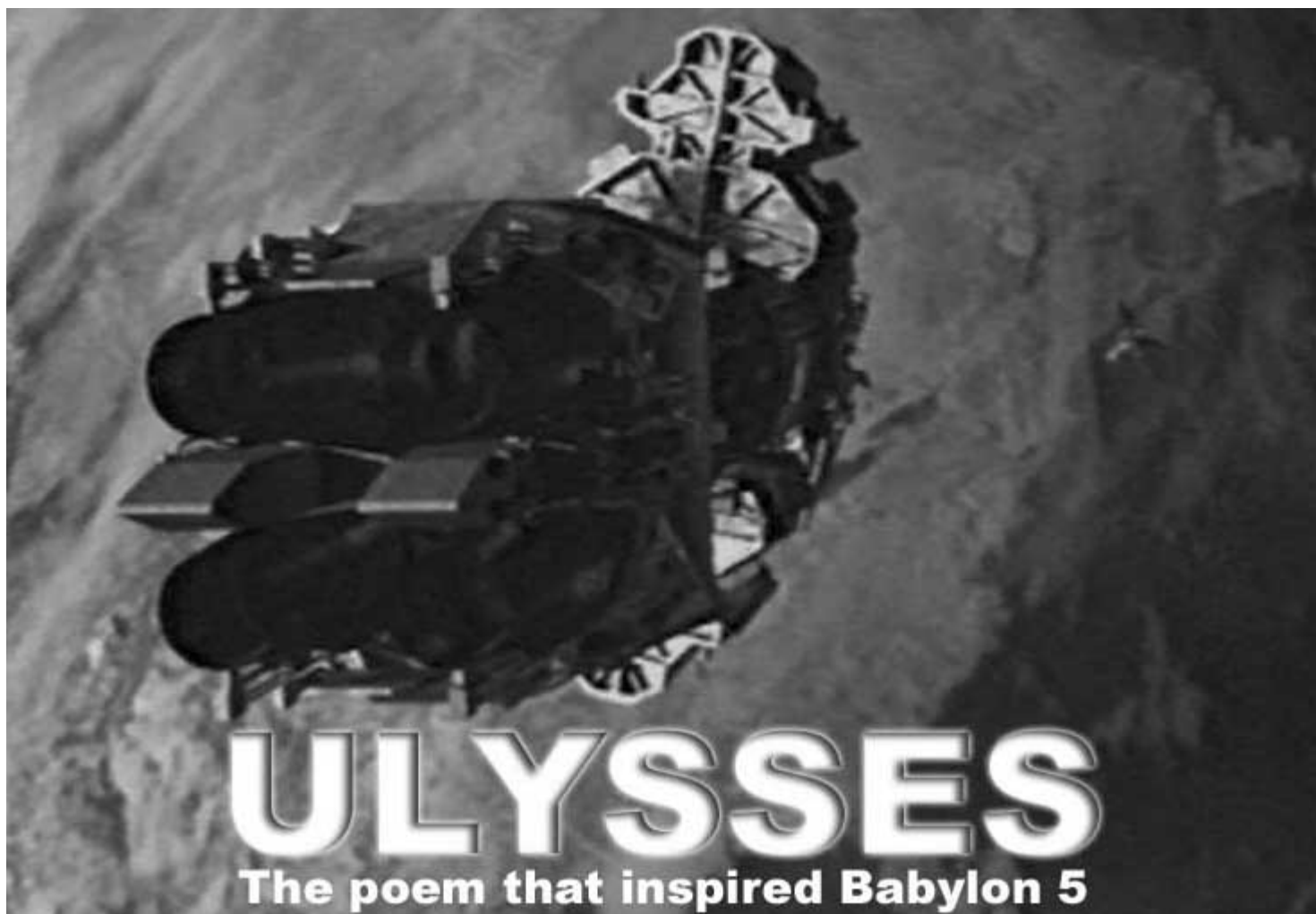
However, there is much more to airmobility than just dodging terrain. The attack craft, the light observation craft and the assault craft are the essential vehicles of airmobile combat and combat support.

The tactical advantages of the airmobile division can be summed up as follows: increased efficiency due to the repeated association of units; thorough integration of its assets because of close association and command relationships; and the ability to take a different conceptual approach because of its assured assets.

The epitome of "superior" airmobile tactics, as contrasted with "good," is the capability to exploit not only an opportunity but the trends and changing patterns in enemy activity. More than any other unit, the air cavalry development has proven the need for quick reaction to meet the demands of the situation as seen by the commander on the scene.

The airmobile division commander is able to plan a complete campaign based on airmobility as opposed to a campaign which, as an incidental element, employs airmobile assets in some of its battle plans. The commander is willing to consistently commit all his forces on a day-to-day basis; that is, not keep the traditional reserve. The airmobile division commander knows that he can extract a reserve out of his deployed units as needed because he has the assets and the training to do so. This is a major economy of force.





The following post from JMS was inspired by a complaint that the ending of Babylon 5 - Sleeping in the Light - was an unhappy one. Here, JMS tells us why...

THE sad truth is that we die. That is not a happy ending, not a sad ending, simply a fact. Whether we die alone, or die among friends and family; whether we die in the pursuit of happiness or at the end of a life of frustration, we die.

The question is what we accomplish during the days and months and years preceding; do we leave the world a better place or a worse place? If we have left the world around us a better place, as these characters did, then it's a happy ending.

Because what constitutes a happy ending? If a character dies happily, among loving friends, but pulled an Enron on the rest of the planet, is that truly a happy ending? Or is a happy ending the man who frees a nation at the cost of his own life? Is the end of Braveheart a happy ending? Or is it the story of a man who lived deeply, fought bravely, kept faith with his dreams and achieved something of note thus that happy doesn't enter into it?

The poem "Ulysses" by Tennyson crops up a lot in B5, and some have made it a point to note the last few stanzas. But that poem is, to me, the summation of the power of human will. Its ideals echo through the B5 storyline. It's one of the bravest pieces of writing I've ever read, and its effect on me was profound. Still is. Read it here,

below, and think of B5, and you will see the resonances in terms of theme and the end of our story.

Ultimately, for me, the end of B5 is neither a sad ending nor a happy ending; it's not an ending at all, since the universe carries on. But if I were to describe what kind of ending it was, I'd say it was a graceful ending, a dignified ending, an ending that said individuals can effect profound change, if they are willing to put their own lives and happiness on the line; not happy, not sad, but a testament to the idea that you have used your time here well.

Everything else is ephemera and coffin-cloth.

- jms

Ulysses

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.

I cannot rest from travel; I will drink
Life to the lees. All times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when

Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea. I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known,--cities of men
And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honor'd of them all,--
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.

How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
 To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
 As tho' to breathe were life! Life piled on life
 Were all too little, and of one to me
 Little remains, but every hour is saved
 From that eternal silence, something more,
 A bringer of new things; and vile it were
 For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
 And this gray spirit yearning in desire
 To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
 Beyond the utmost bounds of human thought.

This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
 To whom I leave the sceptre and the isle,--
 Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
 This labor, by slow prudence to make mild
 A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
 Subdue them to the useful and the good.
 Most blameless is he, centered in the sphere
 Of common duties, decent not to fail
 In offices of tenderness, and pay
 Meet adoration to my household gods
 When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.

There lies the port; the vessel puffs her sail;
 There gloom the dark, broad seas. My mariners,
 Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me--
 That ever with a frolic welcome took
 The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
 Free hearts, free foreheads,--you and I are old;
 Old age hath yet his honor and his toil.
 Death closes all; but something ere the end,
 Some work of noble note, may yet be done
 Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks;
 The long day wanes; the slow moon climbs; the deep
 Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
 Push off, and sitting well in order smite
 The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
 To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
 Of all the western stars, until I die.
 It may be that the gulfs will wash us down;
 It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
 And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
 Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
 We are not now that strength which in old days
 Moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are--
 One equal temper of heroic hearts,
 Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
 To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

- Alfred Lord Tennyson



JMS speaks of the future

On projects new and old...there's been a variety of happenings.

On Jeremiah, we're about to start on episode 7, "Voices in the Dark," and I just finished writing 8 and 9, "Crossing Jordan" and "Running on Empty." By the time we hit mid-week, we'll be halfway through shooting on the season, which should wrap around the first week of April, though post will take us through mid-May.

On Polaris...we got down to one of three projects of which one or two would be greenlighted for production. It went down to the wire, but finally SFC decided that the premise of Polaris was a little too science fictiony, when they were looking to go for ideas that had more immediate mainstream appeal. So even though they felt that Polaris was the best written of the projects they had in development, they went for a project about intergalactic (not interstellar, intergalactic) vampires called "Bloodsuckers." It is, to be fair, one of those concepts that, when you hear it, you get it, there isn't a lot of background needed.

It happens. Networks develop tons of shows but only green-light a handful every year. Showtime had something like 35 projects in development this past season, and picked 3. So at least we made it to the final cut, which is something.

We still feel strongly about Polaris, and once the turn-around period has expired, plan to bring it elsewhere.

But as one door closes, another opens. The thing about television is that you can only have x-number of projects in the works at one time as a show runner (as opposed to someone who EPs and just sells shows). For instance, on Jeremiah, I'm in first position, meaning MGM and Jeremiah have first call on my services. When Polaris was in development, it occupied second position, meaning that had it gone ahead, that show would've had call on me above any other projects, but second behind Jeremiah in case of any conflicts of priorities or schedules.

It's very difficult to sell or develop projects in third or fourth position, because it has the potential to compromise those productions if you get jammed up on shows with higher priority.

Which is a long way to say that, once Polaris went away, it cleared the decks to take on another television project in development, which is very new and I can't discuss it yet until we're further down the road.

On the comics front, I've turned in the first 2 issues of Supreme Power, and should have the third issue in sometime next week. I'm working with Gary Frank and Joe Quesada on the art and look of the book, which is very cool. Also working on issue 51 of Amazing Spider-Man, which I hope to turn in this week. (Issue 49 should be out in a couple weeks, I think.)

I've been told the writer/directors doing the dust-up on Rising Stars: The Movie are progressing well, and I keep hearing about this thing shooting sometime later this year, but that's strictly unofficial until somebody tells me on the record.

The text for the B5 Quote Book is nearly done, and I think that one will be out around April.

I'm also doing an 80-minute audio drama called "The Adventures of Apocalypse AI," for a company that will put the show out later this year.

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GROPOS

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The Babcom Poll

Yes, it's that time again, the one, the only Babcom Poll! Cue cheering crowd. "But wait Gergle", I hear you say, "what about the last Poll??"

Babcom Poll results:

Question: "How many people (including yourself), read at least some part of your copy of Babcom, each issue?"

The responses to this were almost invariably either "Just me" or "My group, of X people", with X being a sometimes surprisingly large number. We're split between Loners and Joiners, it seems. After much number crunching down at Dr. Weirdly's House of Statistics and Taxidermy, the answer turns out to be ... 4.75 readers per copy.

That's astonishing! Our estimates were maybe a thousand readers total? On a good month, we'll have over 900 downloads, some are repeats, so we'll call it an even 900. That's over 4000 readers. Of course, statistics being what they are, error margins are large on small samples, yadda yadda yadda. Make of it what you will; regardless it seems a lot of people read Babcom.

THIS ISSUE'S QUESTION:

"What race would you most like to see as a GROPOS force book?"

Replies can be emailed to gergle@proaxis.com

Subject: Babcom Poll

Gergle will compile the responses and publish them, along with a new question, in the next issue of Babcom.

Pitch Black sequels

JUDI Dench is in final talks to star opposite Vin Diesel in Universal Pictures' Chronicles of Riddick, the sequel to David Twohy's SF hit film Pitch Black, according to The Hollywood Reporter. Colm Feore, meanwhile, has come aboard to play the lead villain in the film. Twohy will write and direct for Radar Pictures and One Race Productions. Production begins in Vancouver in April, the trade paper reported.

In the sequel, Riddick (Diesel) is now a hunted man and finds himself in the middle of two opposing forces in a major crusade, the trade paper reported. Feore will play Lord Marshal, a warrior priest who is the leader of a sect that is waging the 10th and perhaps final crusade 500 years in the future. Dench will play Aereon, an ambassador from the Elemental race. She is an ethereal being who helps Riddick unearth his origins, the trade paper reported.

Mech Warrior movie

DEAN Devlin (Independence Day) will produce a movie based on the best-selling Mech Warrior video games, according to The Hollywood Reporter. Paramount Pictures is in talks to option the property from Wiz Kids, a Seattle-based game company, for Devlin's Electric Entertainment, which will develop a screenplay that Devlin will produce, the trade paper reported. The movie will focus on the Republic and the forces outside it that are hoping to restart the Mech Wars of old, the paper reported. Jordan Weisman, who created Mech Warrior 20 years ago, will play a creative role in making the film, the trade paper reported.

Hopes for a new V

WRITER Kenneth Johnson told Dark Horizons that a sequel to his SF TV miniseries V is still possible. "At this point I am talking to NBC

and Warners about a three- or four-hour sequel. Nodel is in place, but I'm hopeful."

SCI FI names Galactica leads

THE SCI FI Channel has cast the key roles of Starbuck and Apollo for its upcoming original miniseries Battlestar Galactica, based on the 1978-'80 TV series. Oregon native Katee Sackhoff (Halloween: Resurrection), 22, will play a female Starbuck in executive producer Ronald D. Moore's reimagination of the series, SCI FI announced. Meanwhile, British actor Jamie Bamber (HBO's Band of Brothers), 29, will play Apollo. In the original series Starbuck was a male character played by Dirk Benedict, while Apollo was played by Richard Hatch. The four-hour Galactica miniseries, from Roswell and Star Trek: The Next Generation veteran Moore, is slated to debut later this year.