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ESCORTS AND SMALL SHIPS



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By SCOTT McGAFFIN

THE HALIK is the epitome of the ultimate anti-fighter escort. The last thing fighter pilots attacking Brakiri ships want to see is the beetle-like shape of a Halik swinging their way. This essay will cover the capabilities and usage of the deadliest escort in Syndicracy service, the Halik and its sister ship, the Haltona.

What is an escort? An escort is a vessel that protects other ships. These 'other ships' are usually bigger, more powerful and/or more important than the escort, such as a heavy carrier, scout or transport. The goal of the escort is to prevent enemy units from attacking and/or closing with the ship being escorted. For the purpose of this essay we'll assume there are two kinds of escorts: the anti-fighter escort and the multirole escort.

The anti-fighter escort is primarily tailored for combating fighters and their ilk, by mounting predominantly anti-fighter weapons such as graviton pulsars, twin arrays and light pulse cannons. The multirole escort is tailored for fighting both fighters and warships. This is reflected in its mounting both anti-fighter weapons (as

above) and anti-ship weapons such as graviton beams, lasers and matter cannons. The Halik base model is obviously an anti-fighter escort, whereas the Haltona variant is a multirole escort. Both the Halik and especially the Haltona, can be used as fast attack units. This article only covers their uses as escorts. But a lot of the same guidelines as an escort can be applied to strike missions.

To be able to use the Halik/Haltona properly, a player has to understand its capabilities and its limits. First and foremost is its weaponry.

WEAPONS

The Halik mounts eight graviton pulsars. Though not as potentially damaging as other light weapons like the standard particle beam and the twin array, it does, or can provide a volume of firepower similar to a pulse cannon that neither of the aforementioned weapons can provide. Unfortunately the Halik doesn't have any extra power to increase the volume of pulses without shutting off some of its graviton pulsars. With a little planning though, this can be done. The Halik's pulsars do possess excellent fields of fire and its overall coverage is superb, as it can

bring no less than four pulsars to bear into each adjacent hex and at least three pulsars to bear on any other hex. The Halik has the potential ability to scythe through a flight of fighters quite handily.

This is of course dependant on what class of fighters the Halik is facing. Regardless of what type of fighters the Brakiri player is facing, he should do everything in his power to eliminate whole flights. Don't spread fire around numerous flights. Against heavy fighters the Brakiri player will have a problem unless extra power is applied to increase the number of pulses, as heavy fighters possess enough armor and structure to be able to usually shrug off a single pulse. Medium fighters such as the Sentri and Gorith will have a noticeable harder time. Light fighters, such as the Razik, Zorith and Delta-V, don't have a prayer. With extra power applied, it's even possible to slaughter an entire squadron of light fighters!

The Haltona on the other hand has exactly half of the anti-fighter firepower of the Halik. This is of course due to the fact that two graviton beams have been installed. While the anti-fighter capabilities have been severely reduced, its anti-war-

ship firepower is formidable, especially for a vessel its size. Even the much-vaunted Thentus only mounts two medium weapons. As a result any opposing unit attacking a Haltona-escorted ship may have to ignore the escorted unit and instead attack the Haltona. The last thing an opponent wants is to have a small, well-armed, agile ship sitting behind him and hitting him with heavy weapons. The only downside to this much-improved anti-warship capability is the -4 power deficit. To cover this power deficit, a player will either have to shut off two graviton pulsars or one of the graviton beams. This in turn forces a player to decide how this ship is going to be used. By shutting of a graviton beam, this provides an extra four power after the power deficit is accounted for, which can be put into the graviton pulsars (which increases it's anti-fighter potential). Shutting off two graviton pulsars cuts the anti-fighter firepower in half. A player has to know the answer to the following points, to know which systems to turn off. Are there enemy fighters nearby? If so, how many? Are there enemy warships nearby? If so, how many? If there's fighters nearby then you better keep the pulsars powered. Like wise if there's warships nearby, then keep the graviton beams powered. If there are both, then the Brakiri player will just have to judge which is the bigger threat to itself and the unit it's escorting.

ARMOR

The Halik/Haltona has average armor and structure for a medium ship. A few good, solid hits from a heavy weapon will seriously affect this ship. But this is a problem endemic to all medium ships. Hit them hard and they break. Avoid closing with large well-armed enemy warships, as the Halik will come out on the bottom every time.

MANEUVERABILITY

The key to survival for most medium ships is speed and maneuverability. In the case of the Halik it has a gravitic drive and agile ship status to help it along. Never sit still, always move around. As an escort, the general placement of a Halik is dependant on the ship it is escorting. In other words, it is generally supposed to stay reasonably close to its charge. There is of course a downside to this, especially in the case of the Halik (not the Haltona). Assuming it's escorting Aviokis (which should stay at long range), the Halik can easily be picked apart without being able to reply in turn. The only consolation to this is if your opponent is shooting at your Halik, he might not be shooting at the Avioki. Which is what the function of an escort is, divert attention from the ship it's escorting.

EW & PROFILE

The Halik has average EW and an average profile for a medium ship. Unfortunately like all Ak-Habil ships, it lacks gravitic shields to absorb damage and reduce its profile. There are three general situations a Halik functioning as an escort can find itself in:

1. facing only fighters
2. facing only warships
3. facing a combination of fighters and warships

Facing only fighters- against fighters defensive EW is useless (unless the fighters are using ballistic weapons). If the enemy fighters are not using ballistics then put all EW into CCEW. Lock onto the nearest enemy fighter group and hammer them. Remember to concentrate firepower. If the fighter player knows that the Halik is saving EW to be used as CCEW, he may just keep far away from the Halik entirely. In which case, park the Halik right near the unit it's escorting. If your opponent doesn't want to get near the Halik then your opponent won't get near the escorted unit. If facing ballistics the Brakiri player will probably be facing fighters that are reasonably far away, so the chances to hit even with total CCEW is probably poor. Use defensive EW. If the fighters are close the player will have to juggle his EW between defensive and CCEW, dependant on how many potential ballistics could be fired his way, and how many he could potentially intercept. If the Haltona is being used, then a player might as well shut off both graviton beams and use the power to increase EW, the number of graviton pulses fired and/or movement.

Facing only warships- against entirely warships, the player has to only worry about offensive and defensive EW. At anything but close range (10 hexes or less), the Halik should go full defensive. Its weapons are too ineffective at this range. At close range the key is to maximize the number of pulses. If facing only warships, it will be easier to predict where they'll be, so there is the potential to shut down graviton pulsars that are out of arc to increase the number of pulses fired. Against large, well armed ships the Halik might as well go full offensive because chances are there's not going to be much left of it (this is assuming it's been locked onto and fired at). The Haltona on the other hand can sit at long range and snipe away. Because it doesn't have a whole lot of EW, it should probably go either full offensive or full defensive. The Haltona is a sniping platform, so like its larger brethren, it should stay well out of close range. Facing fighters and warships- this is the trickiest situation. Every situation with these two will be different, so there are no hard and fast rules to cover everything. Remember the Halik is an escort. Hit anything that gets close to the ship it's protecting. Don't go running around the battlefield completely ignoring some unit or units making an attack run on the escorted unit. The Haltona in this situation has more potential targets, but its ability to deal with certain ones (fighters) is lacking.

GENERAL TIPS

-Because Avioki's tend to get pounded when facing fighters always include at least one Halik per pair of Aviokis. Tailor this to whether your opponent is using a fighter race and/or if you know how many fighters he's bringing to battle. Use the Haltona if enemy fighter concentrations are going to be light and a Halik is also taken.
 -Avoid attacking large concentrations of enemy fighters, unless there's multiple Haliks being used. It doesn't take much to get swamped. Two squadrons of heavy fighters are way too much, likewise three or four squadrons of light fighters are way too much.



Rising Stars

HOLLYWOOD "Jack of all Trades" and fan favorite comic book scribe J. Michael Straczynski revealed that his **RISING STARS** feature film adaptation is farther along than most have imagined.

"I turned in the fourth draft on the screenplay," said Straczynski. "MGM, oddly enough, in a press conference to vendors for upcoming licensing mentioned **RISING STARS** as being on the slate for 2002. So I was surprised; I didn't know that."

Published by Top Cow Comics, **RISING STARS** tells the story of The Specials - 113 individuals who are blessed with powers and abilities beyond those of mortal men.

How does this eclectic breed of individuals affect their world? Is a hero defined by a special power or is it something deeper? These are just a few of the questions explored in both the series and upcoming film.

"[The film adapts] the first eight books," reveals Straczynski. "It's 24 issues and each eight issue section is one act of a story covering 64 years. If this does well, we want to do a trilogy of films. If the first movie does well, they can reach into the second two acts of the books and shoot them concurrently."

- www.cinescape.com

Star Satisfaction

DOUGLAS Netter, executive producer of **B5**, **Crusade** and now **Babylon 5**: The Legend of the Rangers, told Dreamwatch magazine that the new telemovie has taken a new angle in its casting.

"The show is purposely designed by Joe for a younger crew than **Babylon 5**," he revealed to interviewer Frank Garcia.

"We think we have chosen well. We're deeply impressed with what we're seeing."

His admiration grew for the cast when it came to the filming of a particularly difficult scene, where with one steadicam shot the crew had to gather in a circle and perform a ritual.

"Each one of them performed well and there were no lines blown," he recalls.

"It just seemed to me at that point, boy, the choices are right."

Netter also talked about short-lived **Crusade**. Of its return, he said, "There is a possibility. We like **Crusade** a great deal. We had certain problems with the parties involved. The fans seem to like **Crusade** a great deal. We've been asked about the possibility of 'webisodes' of **Crusade** [on the internet]. We have encouraged that. Doing 'webisodes' should be fun."

The full interview can be found in issue 84 of Dreamwatch magazine

- www.5blr.com

Escorts: a vital component of the battlefleet

ESCORT tactics center around two things. These are the screening benefits of intervening ships of the same squadron, and the use of supporting anti-fighter (AF) fire. Both will help define the composition of squadrons, as well as ship formations and maneuvering.

Screening benefits help you protect your large ships, which are generally the ones with the heavy firepower that you need intact to destroy your opponents.

The screening benefit is that for every ship within a squadron closer to your opponent's firing ship than your opponent's target ship, the target ship gains a +1 to defense. This does not apply to ships not of the same squadron. Even a +1 to a ship's defense can make the difference between a hit and a miss, and multiple bonuses can make a ship untouchable except for at the closest of ranges.

By building squadrons with small, cheap ships up front, and your big cruisers and dreadnaughts in the rear, you can effectively protect your heavy assets long enough for them to cause significant damage to your opponents.

Although these ships may end up being sacrificial lambs to your opponents' long range fire, by properly choosing small ships with high defense values or high armor ratings you can ensure you make things as difficult as possible for your opponent to destroy your ships. Your enemy will be forced between taking shots at ships with high armor or high defense (and often with medium ship fire control dice as well), or taking shots at your bigger ships that suddenly have much higher defense ratings than normal.

The second benefit of escorting ships is anti-fighter defense. Any fighter flight passing within 1 hex of an enemy ship may be subject to long range anti-fighter (LRAF) fire. By surrounding your important assets at a range of no more than 1 hex away with ships capable with AF weaponry, you can help ensure your capital ships remain intact. By forcing enemy fighters to either brave significant AF fire to get your capital ships, or work on the outside escorts, essentially peeling the onion of your defenses, you again make things difficult for your opponent. This is the

The proper use of escorts in Fleet Action is critical to success in this game of squadron level combat.

ALEX ROBERTS details the basics of escorts in *Fleet Action*, and then covers specific escort use in the fleets of the Earth Alliance, Minbari, Centauri, Vorlons, and Shadows

way you want things.

The proper balance of escorts up front to provide screening benefits, as well as an arrangement close enough to your capital ships to provide an effective AF defense, can make a huge impact on your success in Fleet Action.

Earth Alliance

The Earth Alliance (EA) is blessed with several excellent escort ships. The foremost amongst these are the Artemis and its variants, and the Tethys and its variants. Each has their own advantages and disadvantages as an escort.

The Artemis' most defining characteristic is its high armor value. With an armor of 6, it is quite a bit better than other EA ships. Although its defense is only 15, the same as most other EA ships, and it is an HCV, denying you the advantages of being a medium ship, the armor itself can be a strong escorting characteristic.

Against enemy ships with armor piercing weapons, generally any die with a +1 or better, the Artemis is not the best choice. Here you want a high defense. However, against enemies whose weapons are small dice, like the Centauri, or enemies who do not have many long range weapons with pluses to the dice, such as the Minbari with their Neutron Lasers, the Artemis can shrug off fire like water off a duck's back. There are few things as satisfying as watching multiple Neutron Lasers bounce off an Artemis' armor. By placing these ships up front, you force opponents to choose to fire upon your high armor ships, or shoot at ships farther back in the squadron who now have pluses to their defense,

and risk missing with his fire.

The best choice of the Artemis ships currently published is the standard Artemis Heavy Frigate. This ship is common, allowing you to put your uncommon and rare points to more effective use. They are also quite cheap, coming in at 270 points per ship. Because each ship has a command cost of 2, you cannot generally include a large number of these ships and still have other ships to provide strike power. Generally 2 Artemis are enough. Place these out front of your squadron formation and watch enemy fire bounce off their armor.

When facing opponents with high firepower and armor piercing weapons, choose the Tethys instead. At a command cost of 1 each, and a cost of 140-160 each, you can typically purchase 2-4 of these per squadron. With a defense of 17 (including interceptors), and the benefit of only being targeted by the medium ship fire control die (their being medium ships), the Tethys is a fantastic escort. Their high defense will force your opponent to take risky shots no matter what they target. They will either target the Tethys with their almost unassailable defense at long and extreme range, or other ships in the squadron, typically each having a +2 to +3 to their defense, and being as hard to hit as the Tethys themselves. The only drawback to the Tethys is its small structure. When your opponent is lucky enough to score a hit, these little ships will fall apart very quickly.

Tethys' are also a good choice for AF escorting. Their light pulse weaponry will give you quite a few dice against enemy fighters trying to



close with your capital ships. An alternative is the Hyperion Aegis Cruiser. This ship is a fantastic AF escort (largely due to its aegis system and many SPB's), but its rarity forces players to often skip its purchase.

Generally the standard Tethys cutter is a good purchase for escorting, but if you have the uncommon points to spare consider the Tethys police leader. Its medium lasers for a cost of only 20 points provide your squadrons with some extra medium range firepower.

Minbari

The Minbari do not have it quite so easy as the EA. Most of their ships are quite expensive. Their escorts are no exception. The Minbari also have a small selection of common ships. Two of the most effective ones are the Tinashi, and the White Star.

Tinashis are one of the most reasonably priced common ships, and their higher defense than Sharlins and Neshatans makes them useful escorts for these powerhouses. Again, by placing them up front, you force your opponents to shoot at the Tinashis, or at the now high defense Sharlins or other capital ships. The relatively low cost of Tinashis also makes them excellent choices as "sacrificial" ships.

An alternative to the Tinashi as an escort is the White Star. With EM shields, high armor, medium ship status, and high defense values, the White Star could be the perfect escort were it not uncommon. This status means that you will likely only have a limited number of White Stars in your fleet. You will then need to make the decision to use White Stars as escorts for your other ships, and hamstringing their other strong ability, their fantastic maneuverability, or make wolf packs (separate squadrons of 4 ships each) of only White Stars, and let them run rampant around your enemy's fleets. Both are effective tactics for White Stars.

For AF defense, consider the purchase of one

or more Esharans. Although they are rare, their masses of shock cannons, EPG's, and fusion cannons make them deadly AF platforms. Place one in the center of your formation, ringed by your other ships, and your squadron will be very resilient to all but the largest fighter formations.

Centaury

The Centaury fleet balance is mostly made up of smaller ships. Aside from the formation of wolf packs from these small ships, many perform as excellent escorts for your larger warships, such as the Primus, Centurion, and Octurian. The most effective of these ships in this role are the Maximus, Mograth, and Haven.

Although the Maximus has very few weapons, being armed only with twin arrays, it has a high defense, guardian array level 2, and a very low command cost and points cost. These ships are excellent placed at to the front of your squadrons, applying their guardian arrays to themselves, providing them with a defense of 17 against most weaponry. They are also medium ships, making them even harder to hit.

The Mograth is more of a compromise than the dedicated escort ship Maximus. The Mograth has only a guardian array level 1, but it has more significant firepower in its plasma streams and matter cannons. It is also quite cheap, and has more structure than the Maximus. Because it is only 15 points more than the Maximus, and still can get a defense of 17, this ship is often a better choice than the Maximus. Its only drawback is its command cost of 2. This means that you can fit less Mograths in a squadron than you could Maximus', resulting in less effective defense of your capital ships through screening (again because the bonus is +1 per intervening ship).

The third effective Centaury escort is the Haven. This ship is covered in twin arrays, and has a defense of 16. For pure anti-ship screening the Mograth or Maximus are better choices.

However, when enemy fighters are expected, the Haven is a great AF choice. By placing Havens in adjacent hexes to your capital ships, you can ensure their coverage by LRAF. Several Havens accompanying capital ships can make your squadron a porcupine of AF fire. In conjunction with defending Senti fighters, Havens can help ensure a healthy AF defense for your squadrons.

Vorlons

The Vorlons have many of the same problems as do the Minbari. Their ships are expensive, and they have few choices for escorts. The only ships that can typically be considered for escort duty in a Vorlon fleet are the Transport and the Battle Destroyer, supported by small numbers (due to their uncommon status) of Destroyer Escorts.

The Vorlon transport has the advantages of being relatively cheap, at 200 points, having a small command cost, being a medium ship, and a decent defense of 16. These factors combine to make them effective screening ships. Although they are lightly armed, they are cheap enough to be sacrificed at the front of squadrons to help ensure the survival of larger Vorlon Dreadnaughts and Heavy Cruisers. By placing 2-3 at the head of a Vorlon squadron, you can effectively protect your ships from fire against most younger race opponents, and even force other Ancients like the Shadows to consider firing at alternate targets to avoid a missed shot.

Another effective Vorlon escort is the Battle Destroyer.

These ships make excellent escorts. Unfortunately they are also quite expensive. Their defense of 17 with their EM shields, combined with heavy firepower and a high structure makes them very effective. However, considering that one can get 2.5 transports for every Battle Destroyer it is sometimes tough to choose these ships. The high structure largely balances

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Scrap-iron flotilla

Earthforce small ships: out-dated, out-maneuvred

EARTHFORCE has struggled for decades to come to grips with the fact it is not sufficiently technologically advanced to build maneuverable, high acceleration vessels.

But economies of scale have forced Earthforce to compromise. Smaller ships are needed to patrol the shipping lanes around busy worlds, to escort convoys through troubled space and support their larger cousins in the battle line.

Earthforce has accepted it does not have sufficient powerplant and thruster technology to match the capabilities of the Vorchan, Thentus, Haven and Sho'Kov. These ships balance size, high acceleration and good maneuverability with adequate weaponry and armor.

Instead, Earthforce has placed its trust in a small field of medium sized ships carrying heavy armor and weaponry.

The effectiveness of the Olympus Corvettes and Artemis Frigates is heavily reliant on the convoy system. Instead of hunting the enemy, they wait for the enemy to come to them. This involves large numbers of small, but tough, warships placed in close proximity to high-value installations, jump-points and convoys. High-speed and high-acceleration vessels such as the Haven and Sho'Kov are force to run the gauntlet to carry out their commerce raids. Fast raiders have to slow down to maneuver into position to attack their targets. Even if they do not, they must pass through an area of space defined by the range of their own weapons.

Olympus Class Corvette

One of the older designs in Earthforce service, the Olympus Corvettes are desperately in need of replacement. While still serving the vital role of close escort, these ships suffer from increased maintenance and reliability problems. Crews are also very unhappy with their poor living conditions. But the key reason behind this ship's continued service is the powerful punch it can pack.

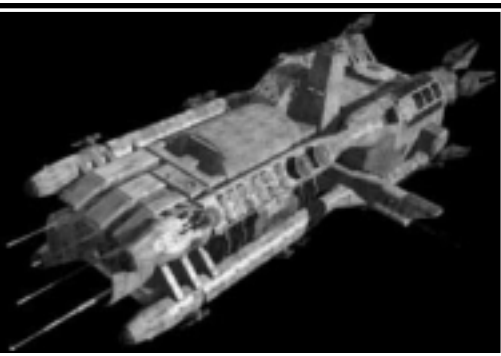
The medium pulse guns, Class-S missile rack and railguns of the Olympus-D variant provide a well-balanced armament. Few other ships in its class have this level of firepower.

Its armor is less than that of modern Earthforce capital ships, but compares favorably with that of the more contemporary Hyperion. Thrusters allow it to change course moderately well, but its acceleration is only marginally better than most capital ships. The Olympus-Ds should be placed only a short distance from their charge to reduce the need to maneuver.

The escort formation should be such as to provide maximum coverage for the pulse cannons and missile racks - denying faster raiding vessels the opportunity to dart past unmolested.

The wide range of weaponry carried by the Olympus-Ds allows them to operate in large

DIOGENES takes a general look at Earthforce's scrap-iron flotilla of frigates and corvettes burdened with the vital task of protecting shipping lanes and convoys from hordes of fast, agile and powerful alien vessels.



groups of same-class ships. However, they are most effective in small escort groups led by a Hyperion Heavy Cruiser. These escort groups would also often have a fighter carrier, such as an Avenger, to compensate for the Olympus' lack of hangar capacity.

The Olympus-B Gunship variant introduced the Particle Cannon in an attempt to strengthen anti-fighter protection for convoys while at the same time boosting the corvette's overall firepower. Two medium lasers make this variant a threat to even cruiser-class vessels. The Olympus B is usually scattered among the Olympus-based escort groups, sometimes acting as flotilla leaders. The Gunships are usually placed closest to the convoy, along with the Artemis Frigates, to maximize coverage by the Particle Cannons. A position just astern of the main convoy body exploits the firing arc of the medium lasers.

Artemis Class Frigate

Where most small ships are considered to be the greyhounds of space, the Artemis can only be described as an armadillo.

While other vessels of its class simply dance into firing range and then out again, this ship - like most Earthforce ships - is compelled to lumber into battle. Artemis-B frigates often form the outer screen of a fleet, using their firepower from behind the protection of their heavy armor to blow open a hole in the enemy's defenses.

But this class has its problems. The primary weapons have a low rate of fire. While the damage potential of the Rail Gun is high, the Artemis needs a "snapshot" capability to engage high-speed raider vessels when in the escort role.

The Artemis-Z was a long-overdue upgrade of the old frigate design intended to address this problem. The combination of Standard Particle Cannons and Medium Pulse weapons creates a devastating, but short ranged, envelope of fire.

Tethys Class Cutter

The Tethys Police cutter is only a moderately successful attempt to build a very small but highly maneuverable patrol vessel. While its

thruster strength provides the ability to maneuver at high speeds - obtaining those high speeds is a problem. In a flat-out drag race with almost any other vessel in its class, the Tethys is left behind as though it was standing still. This severely impairs its ability to conduct its police work. Like the Olympus and Artemis, it is forced to work in close proximity with convoys. This negates much of the advantage of its high maneuverability, as it needs a significant amount of time to work up speed.

In other areas the Tethys is more than adequate. Its weapons are a match to most vessels of its size. The light pulse gives it a high rate of fire while the medium pulse provides a heavier punch. The medium laser of the Leader adds range, but reduces anti-fighter effectiveness.

Future Requirements

Both the Olympus and Artemis class vessels are in desperate need of replacement. Both ships were in service well before the Dilgar War. Both have undergone extensive upgrade, modernization and life-extension programs. But they are becoming more and more expensive to maintain.

These smaller ships took a beating during the Earth-Minbari War. These losses have not been replaced. This has diverted more important ships, such as Hyperion Heavy Cruisers and Omega Destroyers, to convoy and picket duty.

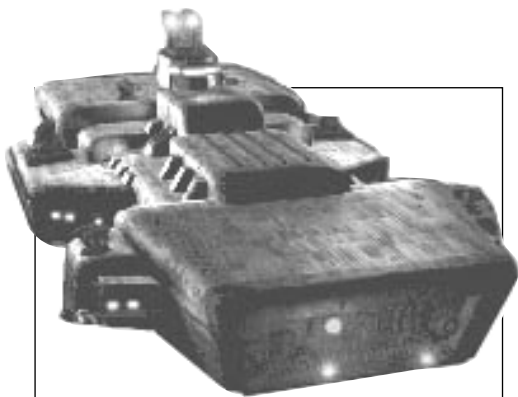
Earthforce requires a new class of frigate or corvette to undertake these "chores". It has to be able to take on combat frigates of similar size and firepower, while additionally providing enough point defence capacity to repel wolf-packs of fast but nimble raiders

Earthforce has benefited from its entry into the Interstellar Alliance with the gift of gravity technology. For the first time, it is within technological reach to build vessels capable of matching the likes of the Vorchan and Haven.

However, workable gravitic-drive ships are likely to be at least another generation away.

For the interim, another heavily armed small hull will be needed. Exactly what form this new "armadillo" will take is yet to be seen.

* * *



Definition conventions

The rapid growth in ship size, technology and mission requirements has dramatically outpaced conventional warship designations. What was considered a heavy cruiser when it was designed may find itself filling the role of escort destroyer towards the end of its service life. While some say definitions are out-dated in modern space-combat, the tradition remains.

Corvette:

THEN: Corvettes were unarmored civilian-standard hulls outfitted with a single, often out-dated, gun. A few depth-charges were carried on the decks and sensors were the Mark I eyeball. These ships served as a stop-gap measure to fill the holes left by insufficient numbers of frigates and destroyers. Of minimal speed and endurance, they patrolled the coastal regions and entrances to harbors. During the missile age these vessels took over the role of torpedo boat. They became cheap, but fast, vessels armed almost exclusively with a small number of powerful missiles.

NOW: Modern Earthforce Corvettes appear to have taken over the role of destroyers. Corvettes are large vessels, with good manoeuvrability and strong armor. Their balanced armament combines some anti-fighter ability with weapons of sufficient power to threaten larger vessels.

Frigate:

THEN: In the age of sail, frigates were tasked with the role of being small but fast patrol, scout and police vessels. During the 20th century, the role evolved into one of convoy escort specifically tasked with the destruction of submarines. Emphasis was placed on sensors, with adequate armament and speed. They were not armored. Frigate guns were primarily anti-fighter with some anti-ship capability. Their main weapons were of depth-charges. These were replaced by torpedoes delivered by helicopters.

NOW: There appears to be little distinction between the designation of Frigate and Corvette in modern Earthforce terminology. Frigates appear to be convoy escorts. Corvettes appear to be escorts for capital ships. However, this distinction is not firm. Frigates have adequate armor protection, a balanced armament and good manoeuvrability. Acceleration is inadequate to fulfill the hunter-killer role.

Struggling to fill the escort gap

B5W concept and design by:
PHILLIP WRIGHT
(Entillzha)



*Shipyard
Supervisor*

DURING the savage war with the Minbari, Earth found itself up against a near invincible enemy and after months of fighting, Earthforce had lost most of its fleet as the Minbari warcruisers encroached on Earth space striking deeper and deeper into the heart of the Alliance.

Earthforce was rapidly losing ships to the Minbari and their fleet of Novas, Hyperions and Olympuses were found to be rapidly diminishing. The Novas were too large and difficult to repair and maintain in the face of combat, the Hyperions were struck down swiftly and the Olympuses had no chance at all.

Earthforce required a ship that had better armor than the Hyperion, better maneuverability than the Nova and as much firepower as two Olympuses. The Arion took form after that. Though using standard EF construction lines, the Arion became a unique ship as instead of using fixed weapon emplacements they placed the weapons in configurable pods along each side of the vessel, allowing it to be easily configurable to any role.

Three different design concepts were established at the time, with the primary version consisting of a vast number of Railgun turrets in which the Artemis had shown to be quite adept which covered every arc of the vessel making it tactically sound.

Though the Arion was light in defensive capabilities with two interceptor batteries and a number of particle beams, it was still quite susceptible to fighter strikes and so, like its larger cousin the Nova, a launch bay able to carry a single squadron of fighters was introduced into the design.

Other concepts touched upon variants such as a combined Medium Laser/Pulse cruiser which presented the Arion with the ability to either attack at Short to Medium ranges while the Railguns were strictly short ranged, but this variant proved more difficult to adapt due to differences in the power distribution.

A Missile version was also considered to make

the Arion into a Long Range support vessel, but if forced into a melee engagement still had the firepower to fight.

Later when Earth completed a deal with the Narn Regime in purchasing technology such as the Heavy Laser, the Arion proved the perfect testbed to incorporate examples of this new weaponry and so shortly after another variant was produced. But this variant proved less popular in combat due to long recharge times with the vessel's weaponry though it is still an ample vessel suited for both Close-combat and Long-range roles.

One of the problems within the EF fleet was the lack of Scout ships that could jump into a hostile sector and jump out again in one piece. The Oracle cruiser was ageing and could do very little in fleet engagements on its own and when under fire had very little armor and weaponry to protect itself.

With the Arion easily configurable, Earthforce decided to adapt it to carry an enhanced sensor array and act as an ELINT ship. Although a more difficult variant to adapt than others and the rarity of combat engagements after the Minbari war, the ELINT version of the Arion became a rare variant. Although one was rumored to have been involved in the Earthforce attack on Mokdor under command of General Richard Franklin providing EW support for the ground troops.

The Arion concept, after the war, was superseded by heavier designs and upgrades of existing classes, but with few vessels remaining after the Battle of the Line, the ship became a testbed for the R & D section of Earthforce new technologies and upgrades.

It is rarely seen in actual combat duties with the Omega and upgraded Hyperions more suited for combat roles.

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Angry swarms are not the best use for small craft

By BEN RUBERY

SOME B5 races have Light Combat Vessels. These controversial units are often likened to PFs from Star Fleet Battles, but never think that the tactics of swarm and obliterate will work on an equal points basis with the LCV as it did with the PF.

LCV only fleets can't take an equal points number of ships simply because of their need to close, and most ships will be able to pick one or two LCVs off as they approach. This leads to several possible tactics for their employment. One of these is swarming in the manner fighters are employed.

The trick then is deployment of a sufficient number and concentration of force when they reach the target. Because LCVs are vulnerable to both anti-fighter weapons and ship to ship weapons and have a penalty on allocating defensive EW (as only 50% of their total EW can be allocated defensively) if your opponent decides to destroy them then he will. If your opponent treats them as he would SFB PFs and blows them to bits as soon as possible treat them as bomb magnets, as many people treat dreadnoughts and battleships, and be thankful the firepower spent destroying them is not used on other targets.

When attacking a ship of medium size deploy no less than 3 LCVs.

This may well mean you are deploying twice the points cost of your target, but you are fairly assured of destroying your target or doing serious damage in return for the probable loss of an LCV. The major trick of using LCVs is to see them as what they are, expendable attrition units. You may lose a few approaching the target, don't let that disturb you. When attacking an HCV you should probably deploy at least 4 LCVs, and at least 6 against a cap ship.

Remember the large initiative bonus provided by LCVs and never allow yourself to fall into the arcs of heavy weapons when you make your attack. When fighting Earth ships this is an easy task once



*Tactical
Display*

range has been closed, but becomes impossible against the Vree, and difficult against the Centauri and Minbari. Simply minimize your exposure to a retaliatory strike.

This is the use of LCVs on their own. In my opinion there is a far more interesting use for them. Mixing a few LCVs with fighters can be done for two reasons.

a) To increase the fighter groups effectiveness against ships. This is done in two ways. LCVs attacking the same target can destroy facing structure, or anti-fighter weapons. Or LCVs attacking the target present a more inviting target than the accompanying fighters, and while one or two are damaged or destroyed, the fighters remain undamaged and attack the ship. If combined with a few levels of Jinking this can help protect your fighter groups from warships, and if he declines to fire at the LCVs, you've used the fighters to protect them instead.

b) To increase fighters effectiveness against fighters. By mixing a few LCVs into a fighter group that is engaging an enemy fighter group you cause several problems for your opponent. If your LCVs shoot down a fighter or two each you've immediately changed the odds, and the LCVs get to fire first. Your opponent then has the choice of having some of his fighters engage your LCVs instead of your fighters thus leaving them to fire after your fighters have fired, at more heavily armored targets that are harder to kill, or leaving them unscathed and engaging your fighters.

Due to the Haven and White Stars high initiative bonus these tactics apply to those ships as well as LCVS.

Rangers to revive Crusade storyline



Universe Today

BABYLON 5 creator J. Michael Straczynski revealed that the ill-fated spin-off series *Crusade* may finally be brought to an acceptable close.

Set five years after the events of Babylon 5, *Crusade* tells the story of the Ranger ship *Excalibur* and its crew, who are in a race against time. An extraterrestrial plague has swept over the Earth and if the Rangers do not find a cure in the depths of space within five years (sensing a theme yet?), the planet's population will be obliterated.

However, with his newest two hour telefilm, B5: *The Legends of the Rangers*, set to premiere on the Sci-Fi Channel - a network he feels understands how to handle sci-fi properly (a dig at *Crusade* host TNT) - in January 2002 and the potential for an ongoing series high, Straczynski has already envisioned a way to bring his previous failed series to a close.

"Well, *Crusade* was five years after the events of Babylon 5," says Straczynski. "Rangers is two and a half years after Babylon 5, so in theory if one season equals one year then in about two and a half years we're going to run into the events of *Crusade*.""

When asked flat out if, at that point, he would deal with the series within the setting of *Rangers*, the creator merely replies: "Yes. Absolutely. It's a sneaky way of handling it, but its nice."

Mark Savela, visual effects supervisor on *Rangers* is sounding pretty positive about his responsibilities. Savela gushed over the film, saying, "I just wanted to let you know that things on the visual effects side are going amazingly well. The fans are going to be so pleased. We have major sequence after major sequence that look incredible now. This show is going to be fantastic. JMS, Doug [Netter], Mike [Vejar] and Stein (the editor) have been great to work with and we've formed quite a team over the last while. I can't wait for the fans to see it."

-www.cinescape.com

Dag'Kar

Space-born artillery at its best

By ALEX KETTLE
(For B5W)

ANYONE who plays in a ground based miniatures game such as GROPOS knows the importance of artillery for restricting and controlling opponents, as well as acting as a force multiplier to your other units.

As important as artillery is on the ground, it can prove even more effective in space, where there is no terrain and countering enemy movement is even more critical, for this, the Narn have the Dag'Kar. A medium class vessel, the Dag'Kar mounts massive specialized firepower; 6 Ion Torpedoes and 6 Energy mines, both long ranged ballistic weapons with a good rate of fire, but very different effects.

The Ion torpedo is a straight up combat weapon. Best used in large numbers to overwhelm enemy defensive fire, this weapon has a range of 50 hexes (25 against a Jammer) and does enough damage to remove most non-rakeable weapons. Use these to soften up heavier targets in preparation for an attack from the rest of your fleet.

Energy mines are a more interesting weapon-targeted on a hex rather than a ship, it requires a bit more practice to be able to guess your opponents moves and place them correctly. However, they have another use- area denial. Mines can be placed where you don't want your opponent to move. Most players when faced with a heavy mine barrage will change their plans and begin moving erratically, thus possibly breaking up a formation, or providing a chance to attack them



Tactical Display

without retaliation as they will probably be moved out of their ideal position. Have an enemy bearing down to centerline you? Drop an mine pattern along his path, he will either be forced to move off or risk being damaged, and with it being ballistic damage it will take effect before he has a chance to even fire.

The Dag'Kar is an artillery piece, and should be used as such. Set it behind your main fleet, and ensure that it will have an escort in case enemy HCVs, MCVs, or fighters break past your line and attack. Fighters can be the biggest threat for a Dag'Kar since any ship attacking them will suffer a barrage of torpedo fire on the way in. Should you ever find your Dag'Kar about to be attacked by fighters try using the mines to form a defense. First - decide where your Dag'Kar will be moving to this turn, then launch your mines in a pattern around that location. Ideally you'll want to place your mines in the following pattern: 1 mine-1 hex in front and diagonally 1 hex to the left; the next 1 hex in front and one hex diagonally to the right. Repeat that pattern to the rear. Then place 1 mine directly to the side 2 hexes on each side. This should form a ring around your ship in which any fighter that isn't directly on top of the Dag'Kar is going to suffer 20-30 points of flash damage if it's within 2 hexes, enough to help break up any fighter

strike. Even if the mines deviate, because of the positioning, they cannot deviate back onto your ship, and at worst you will suffer a 10 point area hit- and even that is unlikely. Just be sure to save your mines when you see enemy fighters coming in- don't use them in a long range strike if you are going to want them for defense the next turn. This tactic can also be used to help defend any ship in your fleet against fighters, often coming as a nasty surprise as many players will sit their fighters a couple hexes away from any warship with anti-fighter weapons to maximize their survival. In this case it would obliterate the attackers.

While not as maneuverable as some small ships the Dag'Kar is still a nimble MCV, capable of moderately high-speed maneuvers. One tactic that can throw off an attacker is to have the Dag'Kar move at high speed back and forth across your side of the map, only turning towards the enemy on the turn before you fire your weapons. This can help maximize your ships survivability as it will be difficult for an attacker to catch the ship, while being easier for your Dag'Kar to make an escape if it's too seriously threatened, running back to the cover of your other ships.

Overall the Dag'Kar can serve many different roles in a game, from strike to fighter suppression and everything in-between. Just remember for all its abilities and firepower, it's still just a lowly MCV.

Escort service to the stars



Tactical Display

By REID HUPACH

WHAT does everyone need when you're afraid to go out alone into the dark of space? A good reliable escort of course. When you call up the Centauri Escort Service they have several models to choose from. Here we will discuss the virtues of these special ships.

To start there are two distinct types of escorts, anti ship and anti fighter. There are a few ships that can fit both roles. I'm going to start at the smallest and work my way up.

HAVEN: Well if you downloaded Babcom #1 you already have a lot of material about the Haven. As an escort it does take on a slightly different role. When escorting another ship the Haven gives superior anti fighter fire. If it uses CCEW and stays close to the ship it is guarding, fighter flights will have to weather a hail of TA fire to hurt their target. The Haven is primarily an anti fighter ship but the MC does allow it to hurt a ship or two when it needs to.

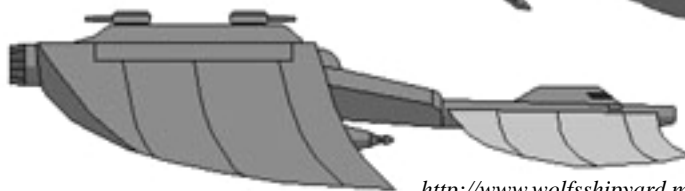
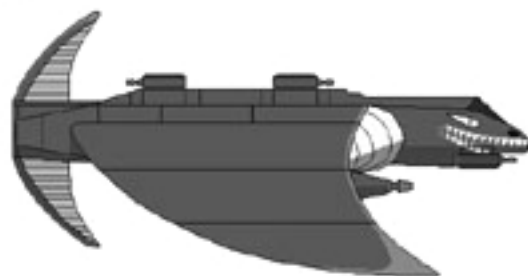
MAXIMUS: Now the real anti fighter specialist, the Maximus. A deadly array of Twin and Guardian Arrays make this little guy able to not only knock down fighters but the three Guardians have a 360 arc so they can even help intercept against missiles aimed at other targets. The Maximus optimizes speed, initiative, and firepower to keep enemy fighters in lots of trouble. Like the Haven, if it sticks close to the ship it is with, you will need several flights of fighters to do any real damage.

MOGRATH: The Mograth and its variant the Mogratti are two of the ships that can be used as both anti fighter and anti ship. When guarding against fighters use it much like a Haven or Maximus. Also if you feel that the main ships will be a few turns behind the fighters. Turn off the Plasma weapons and the Matter Cannons to get more EW against the fighters. Remember that CCEW is the way to go against fighters so you can lock onto the greatest threat. Now when going anti-ship, both of these ships should lead the way in. The Plasma weapons will weaken the armor of your target making follow up fire much more effective. These ships, while able to do both roles, are not quite as efficient as more specialized ships in each role.



HAVEN PATROL BOAT

MAXIMUS DEFENCE FRIGATE



MOGRATH FRIGATE

<http://www.wolfsshipyard.mystarship.com/drawings.html>

That finishes off the real little guys, now their bigger brothers will get some attention. The Sulust and its variant the Vasachi are escorts that can fill both an anti-fighter and anti-ship role. The Sulust with 4 TAs and 4 GAs will keep almost any ship safe from fighters and missiles. Operating with a pack of Darkners is what it seems to be made for, keeping the fighters at bay and adding its Battle Laser into the mix to kill at long range. The Vasachi has a different weapons load. Sporting 5 TAs and 2 GAs it also carries the Heavy Array. This is a good up close bruiser as far as escorts go. This ship makes a perfect escort for Demos packs like the Sulust does for the Darkners. Giving anti-fighter cover on the way in and a heavy hitting gun to help the Demos pack do what they do so well. On a side note if you downloaded the August Babcom you would have the Scylla another Sulust Variant, which is a deadly anti-fighter ship.

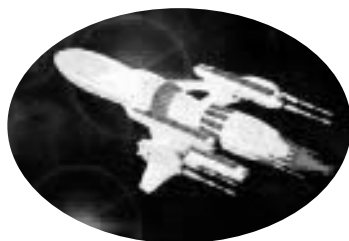
The Altarian family of ships is tailor made for escort duty. Not only are they well suited for both anti-ship and anti-fighter roles, they also bring a flight of fighters along to help. The Altarian sports 5 TAs and 3 Matter Cannons, enough firepower to make any Raider's day miserable. The Altarian or the Altarian Magnus are the perfect convoy escort vessels able to kill fighters or match blow for blow with most Raider ships. The Magnus with a Battle Laser is particularly deadly, a good piercing shot into a Raider Battle Wagon can sometimes effectively end the battle crippling its systems and driving it away. To a Raider losing a capitol ship usually

means going out of business so they will usually retreat when confronted by a lot of firepower. The Elutarian is a fighter killer platform. The addition of 2 Ballistic Torpedo launchers will make Raider fighters cringe in horror. When guarding a convoy a Magnus and an Elutarian with a couple of Havens will make most commerce raiding groups give this convoy a wide berth.

Now the Demos and Vorchan in a pinch can be used in an escort role but both these ships' talents are somewhat wasted doing this kind of work. The Vorchan on the other hand is very handy to send with valuable convoys. The addition of an Elint ship loaning DEW to the freighters can sometimes be the difference between escaping or not. Plus the 3 TAs can always help against fighters.

Of course fighters are always handy in an escort role so the Amar Fast Carrier can be used to escort ships or convoys vulnerable to fighter attack. 12 Sentris and 4 TAs will add a lot to the survivability of a convoy. While not very good in an anti-ship role (unless carrying Sitaras, a nasty surprise), the Amar will give the enemy's fighter flights concern.

Now since the theme of this issue is small ship escorts, this article is finished. However, if you ever wish to use a Capitol ship as an escort, think about a Dargan loaded out with Rutarians disguised as a freighter as a raider's nightmare... but that's for another issue.



(B5W)

Drazi Watchbird

It became clear during the Shadow War that the Drazi fleet required a dedicated fleet escort in addition to the Guardhawk. The military was unwilling to convert more Sunhawks to the Guardhawk design.

The answer to this dilemma was the Watchbird, a variant of the aging Warbird hull.

Equipped with the new anti-fighter missile rack purchased from the EA and 3 particle repeaters, this design has quickly gained popularity in border fleets with races that fielded heavy fighters.

It is often seen in warbird squadrons, and is often placed on convoy duty, where it strikes fear into Raiders.

- Ben Rubery

(B5W)

Drazi Robin

Drazi Robin Gunboat: Fast and aggressive, suited to fighting both fighters and ships, this ship is often the first stop on the command ladder for inexperienced Drazi officers. And the last stop on the career ladder for the incompetent or cowardly. Often assigned to convoy and defense duty, these ships often support Stareagles or the occasional fighter group.

- Ben Rubery

(B5W)

Vree Xappa

Vree Xappa Escort: These ships often find themselves mixed in with convoys and defending guild installations. They are small and inexpensive to run, and are found in use by many of the guilds for these reasons.

- Ben Rubery

(These SCS's can be found in the Attachments folder)

The forgotten heart of strategy



Picture: TODD BOYCE

Pak'ma'ra Strategy and Tactics:
Escorts - The Center of Strategy

By: TODD BOYCE

THE PSHUL'SHI and Thar'not'ak are the big bruisers of the Pak'ma'ra fleet, they strike fear in their enemies as they can destroy even the most powerful of enemy ships in seconds. While it may seem that they dominate the Pak fleet, they are not what wins battles.

The big Pak ships are slow, cumbersome and often lose initiative to everything else on the board. Escorts are where most strategy takes place and their use is what will win or lose a battle. In my opinion, the Pak have hands down the best escorts in the game be they used for anti-ship or anti-fighter duties.

In a previous article, I talked about the strengths of the Plasma Web and in particular, the three hex radius it creates around a Pak ship that fighters will almost never enter for fear of being hit. For simplicity I will refer to this area as the "plasma zone."

To use escorts to their greatest effectiveness against fighters is to increase that protective circle around the ships they are escorting by overlapping web coverage and creating a very large plasma zone. Ships in the center are well protected, as any fighter flight that enters the zone will certainly be hit by a plasma web. Proper placement of the escorts will ensure that the only target the fighters will have is the escorts and not the capital ships. This will help minimize the enemy fighters threats since these escorts will have the smallest defense ratings in the fleet.

The biggest strength to Pak'ma'ra escorts is the fact that they don't need to dedicate any resources to targeting fighters and this makes them extremely dangerous.

When ships lose a side they often become fighter-bait as enemy fighters are able to swoop in and hit the ship there where they're weakest. When a Pak ship loses a side, especially when it is the front or the aft where their Plasma Webs are mounted, escorts can be flown over to that side and present a plasma zone that will scare off any fighters hoping for an easy kill. It is also possible to move damaged ships into the safer parts of the plasma zone thereby always having the freshest ships on the outskirts to take the damage.

Keeping your ships alive this way will make it possible to spread damage around forcing the opponent to use more firepower than necessary to bring them down.

Sometimes it is more advantageous to protect a friendly ship than it is to attack an enemy's.

With ships like the Pshul'shi and Thar'not'ak on the field, and to a lesser degree the Resh'kas'u, many opponents are blinded by their massive guns and tend to ignore the smaller ships. Keeping escorts near the big ships during approach will often leave them untouched until they're close enough where their initiative bonuses and/or their heavy arsenal will spell doom for the enemy. Often the Pak capital ships are simply used as damage sponges after they fire their main weapons and the escorts are what wipes out the majority of the opposition.

Part of an escort's duty is to supply supporting firepower. When the capital ships shoot, fire their escorts as well to guarantee the destruction of the target.

It is also sometimes good to stagger attacks such that one capital ship fires with its escorts, then in the next turn another capital/escorts fire but keep them working in unison. Remember, while the small ships are protecting the large ships, the large ships are drawing fire away from the small ships. If either is left alone or caught without support, they are vulnerable.

Depending on the situation, flying some escorts out ahead of the main body of ships may not be a good idea as they can more easily be concentrated upon and draw attention to themselves as being a threat. Flanking with the escorts is also sometimes a good tactic but again, that could put them in a position where they are not supported by the heavy firepower of the capital ships. Depending on the strategies used, the opponent can be diverted by a perceived threat or ignore a threat they don't see as being dangerous. For example, a pair of Urik'hal flying alone will draw attention and is an obvious threat but a pair of Tra'shu'li could be ignored until they blow off the aft of the enemy's cruiser.

Placement and the "body language" of escorts' movements can make the enemy think they know what the biggest threat is and knowing what the opponent is thinking is always a substantial advantage. Escorts are the pulse of the Pak'ma'ra fleet and they control how the battle is waged. Using them well will make capital ships all but immune from fighters and at the same time will also make short work of the enemy ships. This is the mark of a true escort and subtlety is the key to their success in the Pak'ma'ra fleet.



Review: ALEX ROBERTS

WARS of the Ancients is Agents of Gaming's most recent release for their Babylon 5 Wars line of space gaming products. Covering the races called the Ancients, this supplement provides complete fleets for 4 of these races (Walkers, Torvalus, Mindriders, and Triad [who actually get 3 fleets]), as well as additional ships, weaponry, and enhancements for 3 other races (Kirishiac, Vorlons, and Shadows).

Presentation

The format of the book is similar to AoG's other Showdowns supplements. It is however, larger, weighing in at 96 pages total, and is bound rather than stapled. The cover is a very nice looking CG image showing a Vorlon, Shadow, and Triad ship engaged in combat. Internally the book is black and white, again similar to a Showdowns book. The only lacking item is the absence of artwork for the new ships provided at the back of the book.

Rules and Background

The first 59 pages of the book cover additional background for the races and ships included, as well as weaponry and enhancements. Additional generic rules are given for using higher powered Ancients (optional of course), as well as rules to cover the Ancient's advanced mastery of Hyperspace.

Each of the Ancients races except for the Vorlons and Shadows gets a thorough section covering additional background. Although some of this, most notably with the Kirishiac, is repeated from earlier supplements, the vast majority (>90%) of the background material is original, and very entertaining. Several small fiction sections are provided enhancing the attitudes and motivations of the Ancients. Lengthy sections for the Walkers, Torvalus, Mindriders, and Triad flesh these races far better and more thoroughly than that material provided in Coming of the Shadows or the Rules Compendium. Comical anecdotes include the activities of the Walkers during their war with the Kirishiac, as well as the early history of the Torvalus.

A number of new weapons systems are also provided for these races. Although some of these appear to be a bit complicated in their usage during a game, all of them are well written and examples are given of use for the more difficult ones. Since most games will likely only have a few ships, the lengthy rules should not be a huge factor in slowing down play.

In addition to new background and weaponry for the Walkers, Torvalus, Mindriders and Triad, the Kirishiac, Vorlons, and Shadows are not excluded from new material. The Kirishiac receive some new weaponry, while the Vorlons can now take genetically enhanced ships through skin alteration or petal alterations. The Shadows can also enhance their ships through centuries of growth, allowing their fleets to contain Shadow vessels that were actually piloted by the Shadows themselves.

Ships

Numerous new ships are provided in this supplement for each of the races covered. Despite the number of ships (36 SCS' total), all are well thought out in terms of their inclusion within the fleet doctrine of their race, as well as in playtesting to ensure balance while maintaining originality.

The Walkers, Torvalus, Mindriders and Triad can now all field complete balanced fleets of capital ships, escorts, ELINT, and fighters, allowing them for the first time to be used outside of scenarios or campaign games. In fact, the Triad receive 4 fleets, covering their aspects of chaos, order, neutrality, and unity, bringing the fleets provided by this book to 7 complete fleets of 3-5 hulls plus fighters for each race. The Kirishiac and Shadows each also gain 2 new hulls, with the Vorlons receiving 2 more hulls plus another fighter type.

Conclusions

This supplement is one of the larger books AOG has released for Babylon 5 Wars, and it appears that the extra space has been put to good use. There is quite a bit of fluff material for each race covered. In fact, the background and ship descriptions alone make this an excellent purchase, and will provide readers with many afternoons of enjoyable reading.

Although the ships and races provided in this supplement will likely not make their way into all or even most games of B5W, they do provide a nice alternative to the more traditional younger race battles. For players who like the aloof and enigmatic status of the Ancients, or who just want to see things blowing up on a massive scale, Wars of the Ancients will provide them with many hours of fun.

NEWS

Majel complains sci-fi is losing its American flavor

MAJEL Roddenberry has "pulled back" from her executive producer duties on *Earth: Final Conflict* and *Andromeda*, both of which are based loosely on ideas of her late husband, *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry.

In particular, she said in the interview that the concept behind *Earth* has changed so much that it doesn't have much in common with her husband's vision.

"We no longer have Americans on the show," Roddenberry said.

"That makes it, to me, a different show. The whole concept has changed so tremendously that even though [earlier seasons] weren't very much of Gene's concept, at least we had the pretext of doing it [per Gene's writings]. Now, I guess, they've just forgotten the whole thing. It's an entirely different concept. There are so many people willing to just go ahead and pay to use the

[Roddenberry] name. That's why I insisted on seeing everything." Roddenberry added that she likely won't play Dr. Belman again in the show, in part because she's not eager to travel to the show's production site in Canada.

"Toronto is a long way for me to fly," she said. "Every time they want me for something, it seems it's the winter months, and I'm cold. So I've really withdrawn from that."

With regard to *Andromeda*, Roddenberry said, "You've got someone up there, Kevin Sorbo... knows the story and knows where he wants this to go. And he has a right to take this in a certain direction. I told him, 'Just keep an eye on it,' because *Andromeda* is great as it is."

But she said that she's eagerly awaiting UPN's Sept. 26 launch of *Enterprise*, the fourth series spun off from *Star Trek*. "It sounds interesting, but I know they've got a safeguard in there. It is different, but if it shouldn't catch on and shouldn't go the way they want it to, they've already got a ship, already got a crew, so all they'd need to do is [tell] the same kinds of stories we're used to seeing."

- www.scifi.com

Omegas in the beginning?



IN THE spirit of the debate that brought us the Secundus version of the Centauri Primus, here is potential “evidence” that Omega-class destroyers were present during the fateful defence of the Earth Alliance.

It's just a few seconds of footage, just a few frames of CGI. But it contains images that may change the course of Babylon 5 history.

No doubt it will be filed under the same category of “rogue scene” as that which shows Vorchans in the atmosphere of Centauri Prime, overflying the royal palace.

But it is a fun debate, nevertheless.

Revisionist historians can now claim there were possibly *two* prototype Omegas forced into action during the Earth-Minbari War.

The scene from *In the Beginning* takes place early in the war - before Sheridan's victory over the Black Star.

In a dark, stained-red, starfield, a determined line of Earthforce capital ships is torn to threads by a wall of Sharlins.

This is the scene from which the above screen capture was taken. In it can be identified, in the foreground, three Novas and a Hyperion under attack from Nials. Directly behind this group is another Hyperion and Nova.



But it is two ships lost in the background and at the edges that deserve more attention.

Are they Omegas? You decide.

The original screen capture has been highly contrast enhanced to draw their shapes out from the background. Enlargements are placed within yellow boxes at the bottom of the frame.

If you have a tape of *In the Beginning*, or obtain a copy of the soon-to-be released DVD, take a

look. It's just a few frames. The Earthforce ships are cut down within seconds.

The possible Omega on the left takes a direct hit. The second possible Omega disappears off the edge of the screen as the camera pans left... Just a few frames.

But should we be re-writing the history of the Earth-Minbari war?

- Diogenes

THE BATTLE FOR BETA 412



Test of Wills part 3

By **THOMAS WELLER**

Continued from previous edition:

"Sir, the enemy ship is beginning to out leg us. The Goddard can keep up, but we'll fall behind," Cmdr. Baticci stated as he turned to face Captain Jagerson.

"Order the Goddard to fall back with us. Then I want the Goddard to shadow the enemy ship by using their superior sensors to keep it in sight. The enemy probably doesn't know the capabilities of our new scouts yet." The 144th started to lose ground slowly to the fleeing raider, but then the Goddard started to break away from the squadron and kept pace with the enemy ship. The gambit seemed to work as the raider altered course and appeared to make a run for home.

"Sir the Goddard is reporting they've found the enemy base. It is located in the small system Beta 412," Ensign Hickory told the captain.

"What does the raider group have in that system?" The Captain asked.

"The Goddard reports that it believes the raiders have some sort of base, two Capital ships both Dragonship cruisers, and five other smaller ships. Not sure what the configurations are as yet, but they are probably medium or light combat vessels."

"Very well. Order the Goddard to rendezvous with the squadron, and we will proceed to Beta 412 and engage the enemy."

"Two minutes to the attack on the raider base." Cmdr. Baticci was relaying the final orders to the squadron. "Sir, the squadron reports that all ships are ready and in position. The squadron of fighters from the Marathon has returned from their escort of the Darlene. All fighter squadrons are in point defense positions."

Captain Jagerson commanded, "Relay to Goddard, as soon as we jump in, I want blanket protection of the squadron from enemy fire. Order the Perseus and Marathon to engage the enemy base. We will attend to the two Dragonships ourselves."

Aboard the Dragonship cruiser Hell Bent "Boss, we have two jump vortexes forming in sector three," Ricky told his captain. Captain Jacob Miller, the leader of the Malcontents, was an average looking 50'ish man who had served in Earthforce back during the Earth/Minbari war. However, he had left the service to explore more lucrative jobs.

Currently the raider captain just stared dumbstruck at the young sensor operator. "Are you sure? How is it possible that they found us? We led them on a chase that would have taken them away from the base. You assured me that their scout could not be tracking us anymore."

Ricky, the young sensor operator, was 26 and had served with Earthforce as well. He had been on the Heracles during the recent Earth Civil War, and he saw what blind loyalty could do to a man. He had also left the service. He met Cpt. Miller soon after and signed up with him. "But boss, I was sure we were out of range of those ships! I served on an Omega in the electronic warfare section. I know what the earth sensor technology is capable of, and they could not have followed us! Besides, we out ran them and there is no way they could have kept up. The Omega is a good ship when it comes to firepower, but they don't have many legs."

"Sound the alert, launch all fighters, and prepare to get us out of here." Cpt. Miller could not believe that Ricky had led the law back to his hideout.

Meanwhile, aboard the Merlin - "We are

jumping into system now, Captain," Cmdr. Baticci told his commanding officer.

"Weapons, I want a hard lock on the closest enemy cruiser. Sensors, identify all the enemy ships and their positions," Cpt. Jagerson ordered his crew.

"Sir, we have a hard lock on the enemy cruiser," the weapons officer told Cpt. Jagerson.

The captain replied, "Fire forward heavy batteries!"

The ship hummed for a short moment as the two massive particle cannons unleashed a fury not seen before by this enemy. The twin beams lanced into the enemy cruiser, and the resulting explosion annihilated the enemy ship. Not much remained after the reactor went critical on the enemy ship.

"Good shooting Weps. Now I want a lock on the second cruiser. Fire all remaining batteries as they bear!"

"Sir, this is EW. We have positively identified the enemy forces. There is one remaining Dragonship cruiser, five Jomic class frigates, and three squadrons of enemy fighters."

"Order Dragon, Gryphon, Falcon, and Eagle squadrons to engage the Jomics. I don't want them to get into plasma range. Order Manticore and Pegasus squadrons to engage the enemy fighters", the Commander ordered back.

The bridge of the Hell Bent was in chaos. "What the hell is that ship?" Demanded Cpt. Miller.

"I don't know boss," Ricky yelled, "but it just destroyed the Stiletto in a single shot!"

"Tell our boys to break and run. We can't fight this battle. Try and get away. Order our fighters to try and buy us some time. What in all nine Hells did I do to deserve this?" Everything Jacob Miller had built was coming down around his ears. He could not believe he had

just lost his newest ship. Did the Earthforce pukes know how much one of those things cost?

Lt. Cmdr. Michael Hideshi told his squadron "Dragon squadron, this is Lead, form up on my wing and begin attack run on Jomic-Alpha. We can't let it get close to the Merlin. Those plasma weapons will chew right through the armor."

"We're being lit up with electronic warfare skipper," Lt. Mitchell told his pilot. "It appears these raiders have upgraded the sensor package of those old tubs. Oh shit! Look out incoming fire!"

The Jomic had opened up not with the usual plasma type weapons as expected by the Dragon squadron, but instead it had opened up with pulse cannons- the bane of any fighter pilot.

"Break off and report in." Hideshi anxiously awaited the call in from his squadron. Dragon 10 did not call in. He was gone.

"Alright Dragons, we got caught with our pants down on that one. Lets go back, but this time I want everybody jinking. Let's not give them an easy target. Lets go!"

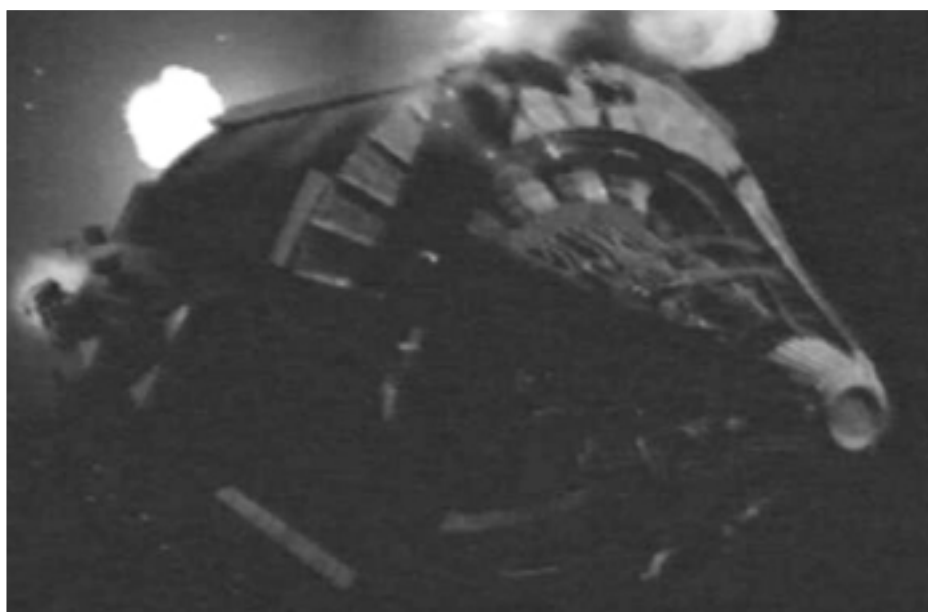
The Dragon squadron dove in on the small raider ship and began to exact a terrible vengeance for the loss of one of their team, but before it was over Dragons 3, 5, and 12 would be lost as well.

The battle was coming along as planned. Cpt. Jagerson did not welcome the surprise of the Jomics, for he had lost a number of good fighters due to that nasty little surprise. The Jomic was an antiquated ship, but these raiders had seemed to find a very good use for its design in dealing with fighters. The raiders called the new design the Drake. His fighters had been able to overcome their initial shock and were making good on their ability to deal with the new situation. The other enemy Dragonship cruiser was attempting to run, but the smaller batteries of the Merlin soon had stripped the main engines off the ship and it was floating out of control. Having no alternative, the enemy ship struck its colors and surrendered. The battle lasted exactly one minute and fourteen seconds.

The losses for the enemy included their home base, four Drake frigates, fifteen Zephyr fighters, 7 Double - V fighters, and the Dragonship Stiletto. One Drake, nine Zephyr fighters, five Double - V fighters, and the Dragonship Hell Bent were captured.

"Not bad for a couple of minute's work," Captain Jagerson thought. The Earthforce losses included 21 Thunderbolts and some minor damage to the Perseus. But 17 Thunderbolt crews were later recovered. The Earthforce casualties were less than a dozen men. "The only question is, how did this group of raiders destroy the Corinth, an Omega class destroyer, yesterday and not have any damage to show for it today." This was Captain Jagerson's last thought as he was making his report to Earthdome.

To be continued . . .



Recreating the battle

By THOMAS WELLER

History: Beta 412 is a small system. It has no habitable planets. An independent surveyor initially discovered it in 2213. The initial scans of the system showed several common hard metals, but due to the remoteness and the lack of a hospitable planet, it was never mined. The area has several asteroid fields, and Miller discovered it during his time with Earthforce. Miller decided it would be a good place to make a raider base and shipyard to refit and produce Drake class frigates. This was to be the showcase between Miller's Malcontents and the 144th Heavy Battle Squadron of the Earth Alliance.

This battle is between the forces of the Earth Alliance and the Malcontents, a raider group.

Map

Floating map rules will be used.

All ships cannot start at a speed above 5.

The ships can be any facing as desired by the players.

Set-Up

Raiders:

- Sanctuary Base located in hex 3119 rotation set by raider player (from speed 1-3).
- 2 Dragonship cruisers (Hell Bent and Stiletto) within 5 hexes of the base.
- 5 Drake class Frigates within 10 hexes of the base.
- 24 Delta - V fighters (standard weapon).
- 12 Double - V fighters (with missiles).

Earth Alliance:

- Warlock Destroyer (Merlin).
- 2 Omega Destroyers (Marathon and Perseus).
- Delphi Scout (Goddard).
- 72 Thunderbolt fighters (with navigators and missiles).

Special Rules

All fighters start deployed.

Earthforce: The EA player must use the jump-in rules, but their initial jump-in point



Frontline scenarios

cannot be any closer than 20 hexes from the base. They have to pick their jump-in hex (in secret) before the raider places his forces.

EA fighters may not use Jinking rules until the Drakes fire a weapon, get within 5 hexes of a capital ship, or get within 2 hexes of a fighter. EA capital ships may not fire at the Drakes until one of the above conditions is met. They are too busy dealing with the base and the enemy cruisers.

Raiders: The raider Dragonships have both just returned from scouting runs on merchant shipping. The Stiletto has 4 turns before its jump engine is recharged and the Hell Bent has 6 turns.

The Raiders must survive long enough to run away. They can't hope to win this battle.

Victory Conditions

Raider Astounding Victory: Destroy all the EA ships and still have one Dragonship left. (You are the MAN!)

Raider Major Victory: Both Dragonships and 4 Drakes escape.

Raider Minor Victory: One Dragonship and 2 Drakes escape.

Draw: One Dragonship escapes.

EA Minor Victory: All raiders are destroyed, but you lose one ship.

EA Major Victory: Destroy all the raiders and don't lose a ship in the battle.

Historical Outcome

Read Test of Wills part 3 to see what happened.

* * *

(The B5W SCS for the Drake class Frigate can be found in the attachments folder)

Combined fighter flights

By SHAWN QUICK
(for B5W)

THOUGH most military units will never have to worry about this problem, those of us who fly for Raiders or other independent groups often have to work with a variety of different vessels in the same squadron. Not only does this play havoc on our technicians and us, but also our commanders have problems controlling us.

Normally, each separate fighter class is split up into its own flight for simplicity. With these rules, you will be able to fly flights of mismatched fighters. Most of the following is common sense, but here are the rules for using a combined fighter flight.

- You may use any type of fighter from ultralight to heavy for these flights. Just remember your limitations as described below. I used the reasoning that the fighters in the flight will usually have to follow

the worst rated fighter while also giving some benefit to them. Also note that you must specify which fighter is which in the flight before starting the game. E.G. Number One: Star Snake, Number Two: Delta-V, etc. It must also be in Offensive Bonus order, highest to lowest. You'll see why later on.

- Jinking limit: Use the lowest limit in the flight.

- Turn Cost/ Delay: These are pretty standard for fighters, but if a Por'fa'tis is included, use the worst maneuverability.

- Accel/ Decel/ Pivot/ Roll: Most all of these are standard for all fighters, but if it is different, use the highest cost in the flight.

- Fwd/Aft Defense and Side Defense: Here comes the tricky part. I could have used the worst one in this case, but in a realistic sense, smaller fighters would hide behind the larger fighters and the larger fighters would have the smaller fighters run interference for

them. So, I decided to average this out. Any special pilot abilities that alter this will alter that fighter's defenses before being averaged.

- Thrust: Use the lowest amount. The rest have to stay with the slowest fighter.

- Offensive Bonus: I was at a conundrum here as well. Using the lowest would result in the fighters that had better systems being penalized. On the other hand, fighters with poor systems would get the benefit of this better technology they didn't have. So, once again, the average as used along with the same rules as above for special pilot abilities.

- Initiative Bonus: Again, average this. The smaller fighters are able to better react to threats, but the bigger ones slow them down.

- Weapons fire: This is as normal, but you go in order of the fighter list you created before starting. This way, the fighters with the higher offensive bonus hit more often.

With missiles, use that specific fighter's bonus along with the navigator rules if a navigator was purchased for it.

- Special Items: Jammers, shields, etc. do not work for the entire flight unless the entire flight has them. Shields will reduce the defensive rating of a fighter before it is averaged in though. If there is only one fighter left, this of course changes to normal rules for that fighter.

- Damage: As per the rules, the owner of the flight chooses which fighter gets damaged. If that fighter has shields, then it will count against the damage done.

This pretty much covers using combined fighter flights. As usual, it probably doesn't cover all the contingencies, but I hope that it helps make it easier to make up rules when these come up.

* * *

Spoo Wars

By TODD BOYCE

FOR EONS the Spoo have suffered under nearly every race in the universe. Being slaughtered by the millions, little did the spoo ranchers know they were killing highly intelligent beings.

What is most suprising is that the Spoo race is powerfully telepathic though they are only able to communicate with members of their own race. Originally created by the Vorlons as the perfect food, even they did not realize the error in their genetic tampering.

Over a thousand years the Spoo have watched and learned the technologies employed by every race and have been telepathically communicating this information to the only world where they still live free. Though it has taken them a long time, they have constructed a massive fleet and are now ready to strike back!

Spoo Onri Class Cruiser

The first encounter with the spacefaring Spoo occurred at a backwater planet near Thrakallan space. An Onri class cruiser jumped in without warning and destroyed an orbital Spoo processing center and disabled an orbital Spoo ranch. By the time a police force arrived the ranch had disappeared along with the mysterious ship. The only clue to the identity of the attacker was at a farm on the planet below where a rancher

was killed by his herd of Spoo. How is still a mystery to the authorities but similar attacks at other ranches occurring simultaneously with appearances by these strange ships points to a connection between the two.

Spoo Keu'lar Class Heavy Carrier

At each attack, the Spoo somehow anticipate the composition of the defense forces and each time have shown up with an force tailored against them. The appearance of the Keu'lar class heavy carrier was a suprise to the raider forces that were hired to protect a shipment of live Spoo. Overwhelmed by attacking fighters of unknown design, the raiders lost their nerve and disengaged seeing they were outmatched by what was obviously a superior force. After the attack, the raiders found no trace of the ships they had been hired to protect.

Spoo Sow'da Class Light Fighter

Learning from both the races they have watched and their own experiences with predators' techniques, the Spoo learned small units work best using pack tactics to overwhelm their opponents. Nearly every Spoo ship that carries fighters carries at least one pack of 6 Sow'das.

Spoo Kow'la Class Medium Fighter

With the success of the Sow'da, the Spoo expanded the design of their basic fighter and created a more durable design. The first ship to

carry these fighters, a heavy carrier named the Ko'ca, found the pack assigned to them to be invaluable and eventually formed the first elite fighter force, the Ko'ca Kow'las.

Spoo Teu'lytar Class Heavy Fighter

Expanding the fighter design yet again, the Spoo's heaviest fighter commonly deployed is the Teu'lytar though only the most recently built carriers are designed to accomodate them. In some sections of space it is rumored that yet a heavier fighter exists called a Thri'lytar but they are not commonly found elsewhere.

Future designs may include the Spoo Banh'kwitt Battleship - which will most certainly have P-shooters, Pure Rays, Green Beams, Psi-Cannons, Ginzu Beams, Appl Corer, and probably even the insidious S'lad Shooter (the main gun of the Spoo S'lad heavy cruiser). Basically every weapon they have except the Ki Chan Sinker. Naturally it will also carry enough Teu'lytars, Sow'das and Kow'las to go around.

* * *

*SCSs can be found at, Battle Spoo:
<http://ravensbranch.tripod.com/battlespoo.html>*

The Bermuda Triangle & Flight Level Combat

B5W RULES ANALYSIS

By GARETH SMITH (Damnation)

E-mail : gamersmith@eircom.net

THERE you are, ready to have a game of B5Wars. Both you and your opponent have picked out 3500 point fleets and are lined up and ready to go. You've picked one of the fighter reliant races such as Earth Alliance whilst your opponent has gone with a not so reliant race such as the Drazi. You may not realise it, but you could already have handicapped yourself. If you are using the flight combat system to resolve fighter attacks on average 15% of your hits are disappearing into a mysterious Bermuda Triangle.

There is a problem lying hidden in the heart of the B5Wars system. It is called the flight level combat rules. The premise of the flight level rules is that over several die rolls for a large number of fighter flights you will get roughly the same result as making the equivalent number of individual fighter rolls. A certain margin of error is to be expected but a small error is accepted in order to speed up play. The problem is that the margin of error is a lot higher than most people think - on average fighters using the flight rules will score 15% less hits than those using individual attack rolls!


If you work out the number of average hits scored under the flight rules (for 1 flight) and the average number of hits scored if you use the individual fighter to hit rolls, you get the following results (See Table inset)

Effects on large battles

What does this mean? Well if your to hit number was say 10 and you fired 100 flights, under the flight rules 255 fighters hit (on average) but 300 would have hit under the individual rules. 45 fighters, at whatever point cost they come to, have effectively been rendered useless by the game mechanics! Given the way fighters degrade, this one round of fire could decide the outcome of battle, but you've brought 45 fighters who sole purpose is to tie up points which could have been better used elsewhere. In a 10-flight battle, 25 fighters would hit versus 30 - in percentage terms this is even worse, 1/6th of the hits you should be getting are cancelled by the flight rules.

Effects on small battles

Ok, there are problems with large scale battles but with small numbers of flights surely it won't be as much of a problem? Actually, small numbers of flights run into a different problem that is masked by the large number of die rolls in bigger battles. With low numbers, the high standard deviation of the flight to hit table can result in



To Hit	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
Chance										
Flight	5.25	5.05	4.85	4.60	4.35	4.05	3.75	3.45	3.15	2.85
Individual	6.00	5.70	5.40	5.10	4.80	4.50	4.20	3.90	3.60	3.30
Percentage	12.50	11.40	10.19	9.80	9.38	10.00	10.71	11.54	12.50	13.64
Difference										
To Hit	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Chance										
Flight	2.55	2.25	1.95	1.65	1.40	1.15	0.95	0.75	0.60	0.45
Individual	3.00	2.70	2.40	2.10	1.80	1.50	1.20	0.90	0.60	0.30
Percentage	15.00	16.67	18.75	21.43	22.22	23.33	20.83	16.67	0.00	-50.00
Difference										

the fighter flights generating far too many extreme results. In simple English, you are too vulnerable to lucky die rolls (Good or Bad).

Take a to hit chance of 10. A single flight, using individual to hit rolls, has a 50% chance of scoring 3 hits. A flight using the flight rules would only have a 15% chance of scoring 3 hits. The chance of scoring no hits for individual to hit rolls is less than 1%. For one roll on the flight table the chance is 30%. To score 6 hits under individual rolls the chance is the same, less than 1%. Under the flight rules the chance is 15%. As you can see the chance of an extreme result (Good or Bad) is significantly higher under the flight rules than when using the individual to hit rules. In massed battles of course the intent was that with enough rolls the extreme results would cancel out. However, that only holds true if the extreme results have the same probability of occurring, which is not the case. Hence in games with less than 10 flights you won't be making enough rolls to "average" out the luck.

The Bermuda Triangle.

So what are the consequences? In any round of combat approximately 15% of the fighter hits you should be getting are disappearing into a Bermuda Triangle created by the flight rules. All your fighters appear to be present, they cost you

the appropriate portion of your points and they can take damage. But when you fire, the results will be less than they should be.

What to do?

Don't use the flight rules if you use fighters as a significant part of your fleets. Use the optional Individual Fire Rules, which should actually be the default rules. As AoG says in the Rules Compendium, you will get "more statistically accurate results" using the individual fire rules. I didn't realise how much more accurate until our group did the math and got a shock. The whole reason for the flight rules is to speed up play, which the flight rules often actually don't. The time spent calculating the difference and resulting number of hits is not much (if at all) faster than rolling 6D20 and counting hits. The vast majority of the time spent resolving fighter attacks is in the damage resolution rather than determining how many fighters hit. Buy yourself 6D20 and switch to the individual fire rules. You will gain much more predictable fighters. This will be of benefit to yourself and to your opponents - it's difficult to plan a battle if the actions of some units cannot be predicted accurately. And 15% of your fighters won't be vacationing in the Bermuda Triangle.



*Babylon 5 fans are eagerly anticipating the next B5 incarnation, Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers, which will debut this coming January on the Sci Fi Channel. **PREVUE.COM** had the opportunity to sit down with B5's newest captain, DYLAN NEAL, who plays Captain David Martel. A veteran of shows such as Hyperion Bay and Pacific Palisades, Neal passed up a role in Cameron Diaz's latest film, the Sweetest Thing, to play Martel. B5 fans will be glad to know that the new show and ship are in the hands of a wonderfully good humored and absolutely unpretentious actor, who is clearly just as excited about exploring the B5 universe, as B5 fans are excited about seeing his work.*

PREVUE: What can you tell us about "Captain David Martel?"

NEAL: David Martel is a guy who has had a bit of a troubled past. He was orphaned at a young age and shipped from one foster family to another. He always had a dream of becoming a Ranger, but because of his past, he has a bit of a temper or attitude problem. It juxtaposes with being a Ranger because the Ranger's are this Zen-like warrior caste. They are very focussed, very controlled, and generally in the past made up almost solely of an alien race called the Minbari. Humans have only recently been allowed to join the Rangers, so human emotions and quick-temperdness, particularly with David Martel, are in conflict with the ideal Ranger.

PREVUE: Is he a brash guy?

NEAL: Not too much, but he does put his foot in his mouth sometimes and his actions would not necessarily be what would be wanted by the Rangers. When the movie begins, he's second in command of a ship called the Enfalli. When the captain is injured he's suddenly in charge and he makes the decision to stand down and not unnecessarily endanger the lives of his crew. That's a big no-no for the Rangers, as they always fight to the death. So, he's in big trouble when he gets back to home base and is in jeopardy of being

tossed out of the Rangers. He's given a last chance to stay in the Rangers and that's when he's given command of the Liandra, which is this piece of junk nobody wants, and is supposedly cursed. He's told to assemble a crew of anyone who will join him, so he's got this rag-tag group of whoever will join him on this cursed ship. And off they go.

PREVUE: The Liandra is not a giant starship.

NEAL: Yeah, think Das Boot in space. You've got different species all trying to get along with each other and given the small size of the ship it gets interesting.

PREVUE: What interested you about playing "David Martel?"

NEAL: That's always the funny question. What interested me was that I got the job. There are only a handful of actors that actually choose their projects. I'm just a regular Joe working actor and you take what you can get. So, I just auditioned like everyone else and got hired. Most stars pretend and don't give you the real answer, but that's the real answer.

PREVUE: Captain David Martel is a very action oriented guy. It would seem to be a fun part to play.

NEAL: (laughing) I am the new Captain Kirk! Actually, action is always fun. I've had some experience with that in the past. I've never done any sci-fi, so that's new for me. But, it's always fun to enter into a new genre and learn about and see what you can do with it. I think anybody likes doing action because you are like little kids playing cowboys and Indians. You are trying to root out the bad guys and save the day. You don't have to take things too seriously. Drama is great and very rewarding for an actor, but it is very draining.

PREVUE: From what I've seen this seems to be a shift in the B5 universe to a very action oriented series.

NEAL: With this series I think Joe wanted to be very action oriented with a side helping of drama, where the original B5 was more melodramatic with just a little sprinkle of action.

PREVUE: How physical was the role?

NEAL: Not as bad as some things I've done, but there is some marital arts, with a bo staff, one of those long poles like you see in Robin Hood with Little John. I never had any experience with that, so I worked very close with a stunt choreographer and double on those scenes, and that was kind of fun. We had a great double for me in

Steve McMichael. He's a five-time World Wu Shu world champion, who has worked on films such as X-Men, so I was in good hands.

PREVUE: Was there a lot of green screen work?

NEAL: I fortunately didn't have to do any of that, well I had to do a little bit, but it was Miriam Sirois who had the green screen to deal with for her character in some action sequences. What the rest of the cast had to deal with was holographic images that naturally aren't really there. There's no screen work involved, but there are visual effects guys on set who talk you through what exactly you are looking at and getting the angle of your head so that you look like you are actually eye to eye. That gets a little tricky. It was fun to watch them doing their business and learning from them what exactly is involved.

PREVUE: Were you ready for B5's huge fan following?

NEAL: I had no idea. I had heard of Babylon 5, but I had never watched it. It surprised me how many fans there are and how involved they are. Once I got the role, I suddenly realized how big the fan base is and how involved the world of Babylon 5 is. I had a lot of catching up to do when I first signed on.

PREVUE: Guess what? You're famous!

NEAL: (laughing) Andreas Katsulas chided me that if I did nothing the rest of my career that I'd still always be in demand for conventions. We had a screening of Galaxy Quest while we were shooting Legend of the Rangers.

PREVUE: How was working with Andreas Katsulas?

NEAL: I was really honored to work with Andreas, who was the one regular from Babylon 5 that came over to Legend of the Rangers. He's just the greatest actor I've had an opportunity to work with. In television, you don't always get to work with such acting heavyweights. I certainly haven't anyway. He was just such an incredible performer to work opposite and I really enjoyed myself.

PREVUE: While we are talking about the cast, can you tell me about Myriam Sirois, who plays Sarah Cantrell, the weapons specialist on board the Liandra?

NEAL: Myriam's got a tough job. She's the Sigourney Weaver, touch-as-nails woman in our cast. It's not an easy thing. You've either got it or you don't. You can't really fake that kind of strength and power. She's got what it takes to take on the guys or any problems that she comes across. She had a very physically demanding job. Her job encompasses some new CGI that the guys involved with Babylon 5 hadn't done before. Basically, her green screen work was very demanding, with lots of wirework and a lot of acrobatics. There are not a lot of actors, girls or guys, that would have done as well as she did.

PREVUE: And Alex Zahara?

NEAL: He plays my second in command. He's the wise, measured, logical one. He's the guy that it is always great to go to for some council.

PREVUE: It's an all-Canadian cast.

NEAL: It's ironic that we're all Canadians. It wasn't planned that way. The producers didn't even know I was Canadian until I mentioned it to them. It just happened to work out that everyone was from Vancouver except for myself. I'm from Toronto. So, we had a lot in common being Canadians.

PREVUE: How was the on set chemistry?

NEAL: It was a fun group of people. We spent a lot of time together both on and off set. That's what makes these kinds of projects fun, when everyone has a good time. That's not always the case. I know everyone always says that, but it certainly isn't always the case, but in this situation we really did have a lot of fun.

PREVUE: How long was the shoot?

NEAL: Just over three weeks. Your basic TV movie, ram it through production schedule.

PREVUE: Sounds grueling.

NEAL: You can get pretty tired. There was still a good bit of special effects obviously, but this was not as bad as some TV movies that I've done. It was all held together by our director Michael Vejar, who is a veteran of the Babylon 5 series. I think if we were working with anybody else, it might have turned into a nightmare. You really do need a strong director that is well versed in the special effects. It was very enjoyable working with him and if we do go to series I hope we work a lot with him.

PREVUE: How much interaction did you have with J. Michael Straczynski?

NEAL: A lot. He's really a great executive producer to work for because he really does have an open door policy. If you have questions about what you are doing, or things in general about your character, you can go and talk to him at any time. He really takes the time with actors. First and foremost, he really enjoys actors. That may sound a little strange, but in my experience, not every executive producer has a lot of time for actors. He's a great leader of people, which is what you need in an executive producer.

PREVUE: It would seem that the relationship between the cast and the producers is critical for the long-term success of the show.

NEAL: Joe's someone of great integrity, which is a great change for me. Just this past year I had a nasty run-in with some producers that were just ethically shocking. Ironically, Joe had had a run-in with these same people once upon a time, and it's just great to be involved with someone who you know what he says is what he means, and there are no behind your back antics.

PREVUE: This is debuting as a two-hour TV movie, but the refrain is "new series, new series." Are you all set to star in a Legend of the Rangers series?

NEAL: We'll see. One of the concerns that I have is that due to a legal snafu between Warner Bros. and Sci Fi Channel we couldn't be locked into a contract with this project. The longer that Sci Fi takes to make up their minds, the more chance they run of losing one or more of us to other projects.

PREVUE: So nothing is on paper?

NEAL: None of us are signed on contractually. If it's a go, they are going to have to come back and renegotiate with us to stay with the project. Assuming that we get invited back and that their test audiences haven't decided that we should all be recast.

PREVUE: So where does that leave you?

NEAL: I've already been offered another series that I've turned down. I'm anxious for Sci Fi to decide what they are going to do, and if they are going to go ahead, to at least come back and talk to us and see if we're all on board.

PREVUE: So, how does it strike you now that you know the whole B5 culture?

NEAL: Now that I've gotten involved with the world of B5, I've gotten very attached to it. I would very much like to be a part of this long-term if everything works out.

PREVUE: Is it any extra burden as an actor, knowing that a project is so highly anticipated?

NEAL: I feel a responsibility to Joe and the fans as they've entrusted me with this. I feel very honored that Joe picked me and I don't want to let anyone down. We've all got some really big shoes to step in to.

PREVUE: Have you had any interaction with B5 fans yet?

NEAL: Absolutely, when I first started looking to find out what Babylon 5 was all about, I was on the net, and there are a number of websites already devoted to The Legend of the Rangers. I've already been posting some stuff on a site called www.b5lr.com, which Joe turned me on to in the very beginning. It's a very professional, well organized site, so I think a lot of us have learned about the show from this site. I started talking back and forth with some of the fans and trying to answer what questions I can and hoping that we all can live up to everybody's expectations.

PREVUE: Was there anything different working on a project where you know J. Michael Straczynski has already worked out a five-year story arc?

NEAL: When you do a regular movie it's set in present day and telling a regular story. Here we're dealing with a five-year legacy in a completely different universe, with different species, and there's a lot going on. Joe's always thinking way into the future, so even though we're doing a TV pilot, there is the potential that we'll go to series. He always tells not to deviate from the script, because everything he put in there is put in for a reason. That reason may not pop up until year three of the series, but it has been planted there for a very specific reason. Joe is different from most people in that he does like to have these long story arcs, and he does have it meticulously mapped out.

* * *

- www.prevuemagazine.com

Breathing life into Starlight

Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers is set to debut this November on the SCI FI Channel. The two-hour telefilm To Live and Die in Starlight already has fans buzzing and looking forward to more of the ever expanding B5 universe. DAVID MAZOR of PrevueMagazine.com spoke to

J. Michael Straczynski on the Vancouver set of The Legend of the Rangers, where he shared his vision for the future of one of sci-fi television's most popular franchises.

PREVUE: We're thrilled to hear that Babylon 5: The Legend of the Rangers will hopefully lead into a new B5 series. Where do things stand right now?

STRACZYNSKI: Well, certainly everyone's intention is to do the two-hour movie as a test vehicle and to then produce a series based on it.

PREVUE: Then do you already have a new five-year story arc?

STRACZYNSKI: There is always a multi-year story arc involved. You have to understand that when I created the Babylon 5 series, what I had to do was in broad strokes sketch out a million years of history in both directions and in fine detail work out a thousand years of history in both directions.

PREVUE: Where does The Legend of the Rangers fit in?

STRACZYNSKI: This story takes place about two and a half years after the events of the last proper B5 episode: "Objects at Rest," in the year 2265. I know all that happens in that time because I have to be able to refer to it in other material. So, the story is already there.

PREVUE: This B5 is on a spaceship not a space station, so what is the ship like?

STRACZYNSKI: The ship itself is much smaller than we are used to seeing. It's a 20-person crew. It's not the huge 200-person starship, it's 20 guys stuck in a tin can. The sets are very claustrophobic, very confined. You get a sense of being stuck inside this ship, fending for your life and having to deal every day with people you can't escape from.

PREVUE: So will the stories mostly be set on the ship?

STRACZYNSKI: They are on a ship, but if we go to series I don't want it to be a ship-bound kind of story. I want the flexibility to be able to go behind the lines and infiltrate. It's almost more about the infiltration and covert ops, and being knights in a sense, than it is about being aboard a ship. The metaphorical structure for it is the birth of a new empire--a new republic if

you will. These are the guys who, like King Arthur's knights, go out to find the competing fiefdoms and say "join us, or oppose us, or make a deal with us." They also help out those kingdoms that they are aligned with, which are having problems. Their job is to be on the frontier, to pull in new members, and to protect current members and resolve disputes--which often means going in behind the scenes.

PREVUE: What other new directions are you exploring?

STRACZYNSKI: I want to look at some things that haven't been done before. In most science fiction television series, a military of the future is often still an Earth-based military structure. Whether it is the Alien movies, Star Trek, or even Babylon 5 to some extent, it's Earth's military. This is an alien military, Minbari. It has been around for a thousand years--there is a great tradition behind them--and it has just opened up for membership by humans. We're the new kids on the block in that respect.

PREVUE: What is the guiding philosophy behind the Rangers?

STRACZYNSKI: The Rangers really are in a large sense a group of warrior priests. There is a spiritual side to them as well as a military side to them. There is a whole different regimen, a whole different philosophical approach to what it means to be in this kind of organization than in your ordinary military.

PREVUE: Is it easier to start a new B5 series with all the history you have already established?

STRACZYNSKI: Well, certainly in terms of the public's perception of it. The Rangers of the Anlashok we introduced in year three of B5, so it's there to begin with. In terms of the popular culture and consciousness, prior to Babylon 5 no one knew what Minbari were, no one had ever heard the words Centauri Prime before. Now, it has spread out far enough in the popular culture that there are people at conventions that dress in Narn costumes. There are references in popular culture, cartoon strips and in television shows

such as The Drew Carey Show that make reference to the show. It's starting to get more entrenched in the cultural consciousness. I think we're in a better position now than we were six years ago to take the fundamental elements that are Babylon 5 and tilt the mirror slightly to look at a different part of it a different way.

PREVUE: Is it also easier to produce, because you have been through it before?

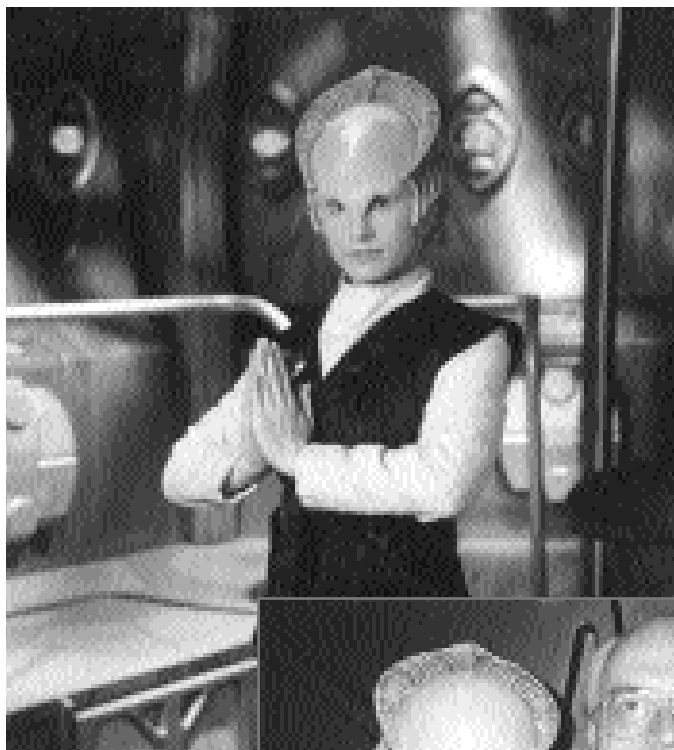
STRACZYNSKI: The foundation is already there both creatively and culturally. In terms of the production elements, we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We know what Minbari are, we know what Narns are. We are trying to think of some things to make it more interesting, and some things that no one has ever tried before--to take it to the next level.

PREVUE: What is take it to the next level?

STRACZYNSKI: Part of answering that question would mean giving away what we are going to do in the two-hour movie. How can I put this without giving away too many trade secrets? Traditionally in CGI based space shows you have the stuff inside, which is all live-action, and the stuff outside, which tends to be all CGI. Often, it's hard to connect the two. It's hard to personalize the action. When a fight starts, someone says "fire," and someone pushes a button. The challenge is can we completely rethink that mechanism? How can we completely reconceptualize what it is to be in battle by doing something that's never been done before? We came up with a way of doing that. We spent a lot of time working out the technology of it, doing the tests with the camera work, the wire works and other stuff. It's going to be a whole different kind of a look. I won't give it away, because there are other shows out there. When you see it, you will say, "of course that's an obvious thing to do." But, nobody's ever done it before. I don't want it to get into enemy hands too early!

PREVUE: What was your approach to casting the show?

STRACZYNSKI: The cast is a much younger



Enid-Ray Adams has launched her first official website, just in time for the swarms of B5LR fans to descend upon it. The site contains many things to see, including a biography, image gallery, demo reel video and of course an acting resume. There are some particularly interesting pictures in the gallery, including the first cast shot. You can also see Enie behind the scenes with Andreas Katsulas and JMS.

You can find the Enid-RayAdams site at : <http://www.enid-rayeadams.com>



cast than we had on Babylon 5. I wanted to set the story in the beginning of people's careers. These are people who are trying to find a purpose in life. Everyone on B5 kind of knew who they were and where they belonged. These guys are like the French Foreign Legion. They are running from something or to something, and they haven't quite decided who and what they are yet. Each of them embodies those characteristics in a very large way.

PREVUE: Tell us about Dylan Neal who plays Captain David Martel?

STRACZYNSKI: As Captain David Martel, he has the command motive, but he also has his vulnerabilities. Dylan's very likeable, he's introspective, and he really brings a tremendous level of professionalism to the role. On the set, he's taken on the role of captain even amongst our cast. He looks after them. One of our actors, for instance, had a very, very long day doing the stuff we are doing for the gunnery pod--which is again something I can't say very much about. Since almost everyone had left, he stayed around to drive her car home while we drove her home.

PREVUE: What did you see in his acting that said this is the captain?

STRACZYNSKI: There is a Latin term "gravitas." It means centeredness, it means weight--the voice of moral authority. It isn't about being gung ho. It isn't about being the biggest guy with the biggest fists. It's about having the moral

courage and the moral position to lead. He has those elements and he brings them to his role both on and off camera.

PREVUE: Tell us about Miriam Sirois who plays Sarah Cantrell?

STRACZYNSKI: Miriam Sirois is our gunnery officer. This type of ship needs a weapons and tactical combat specialist. We tried to figure what you need in this kind of operation. You need someone to front the group--nominally the captain--and you need a weapons officer of some kind.

PREVUE: What did you like about Miriam in particular?

STRACZYNSKI: She was, oddly enough, and this sounds strange, the right height and build, because of what we have to do with the gunnery pod. She's very acrobatic and just has a great openness and a kick ass attitude about her, with an underlying vulnerability. This character is also someone who has been on the run, who keeps people away from her to a certain extent. But, behind that tough exterior is almost always vulnerability. She really nailed those elements.

PREVUE: Tell us about Dean Marshall who plays Malcolm Bridges?

STRACZYNSKI: Dean Marshall is our covert operations guy. Again, if you are going to be behind enemy lines, doing infiltration and working to find out what is going on on the fringe, you

want someone who is qualified in covert operations. On all the actors, what I was trying to do was open the door up and wait until the character walked in the door. And, in each case, the character walked in the door. Dean had intelligence behind him and he was very slick when he wanted to be. Those are all elements we have to have for someone in covert ops. Very thoughtful, but ready to turn on a dime emotionally.

PREVUE: What other characters were essential?
STRACZYNSKI: You also need a tactical first contact person, because you are going to be making contact with new civilizations and you want a person trained in first contact protocol, so that no one starts a war inadvertently by saying the wrong thing.

PREVUE: How are the Rangers organized?

STRACZYNSKI: The Minbari have been organizing this for about a thousand years, and their crews tend to be half Minbari. There are other members who have joined up recently as the membership has gotten wider, but there is a certain lack of ethnic understanding on the part of the Minbari. Some of these groups they haven't really let them have their own ships yet, or let them work in crews yet. They've sort of been saying "when your time comes." But our guys say, "look, screw that, there are some guys here that we want to bring on." So, we have a number of Minbari on the ship. Firell, who is a healer, played by Enid-Ray Adams. Tafeek, who is our political officer and first contact officer, played by David Storch.

PREVUE: Are there other races of beings in the crew?

STRACZYNSKI: We've got a Drazi--which you've seen on Babylon 5--and it's the first time they've been allowed on a ship because the Drazi aren't the most even-tempered individuals. That character's name is Tirk (Gus Lynch). Tirk's a really large guy, who when asked what he does answers, "I lift really large and heavy things." Na'Feel (Jennie Hogan), is the environment and engines person. She's a Narn, who are members of the Interstellar Alliance and also not known for being even tempered. Each individual on the ship has two or three different jobs, because it's a small crew in a small ship.

PREVUE: How does all that raw emotion sit with the Minbari?

STRACZYNSKI: The Minbari have a problem with people who can't seem to control their emotions. They are a very sedate, very staid people, and Narns wear their emotions, their hearts on their sleeves. They also wear somebody else's heart and they see whether they can grab it...and yank it out of your body!

PREVUE: Is there anyone from the original B5 on the show?

STRACZYNSKI: Andreas Katsulas, who played G'Kar on Babylon 5, makes an appearance and is our primary guest star. He is a former warrior, turned ambassador, turned religious icon.

- <http://www.prevuemagazine.com>



FROM THE OFFICIAL ENTERPRISE BIBLE

THE STARSHIP Enterprise: The first of a new generation of warp 5 vessels that will take humanity to the stars. Enterprise is a vessel of exploration, designed for long-term space travel and scientific discovery.

Although it predates Kirk's Enterprise by more than 90 years, it will have a sleek, futuristic design by today's standards, with shadings of starships to come. Make no mistake: this Enterprise is state-of-the-art, with all the technology and trimmings we've come to expect from Starfleet engineering.

Length: 190 meters.

Mass: 80,000 metric tons.

Crew compliment: 87.

Maximum cruising speed: warp 5.1.

Weapons: laser cannons with spatial torpedoes. The Bridge has a classic design, with Captain's center chair and a forward Viewscreen. The crew surrounds their commander at various stations. A turbolift flanks one side. Located directly behind the Bridge is the Situation Room. A table graphic in the center of the room displays tactical data, star charts, and other information Archer and his officers will use during briefings and strategy sessions.

Two Shuttlepods are kept in the ship's Launch Bay. Each can accommodate a pilot and six passengers. Capable of sub-warp speeds only, they are designed to take Away Teams short distances from Enterprise: to the surface of a planet the ship is orbiting, or to another nearby ship or space station. In the Launch Bay, passengers enter their shuttlepod through a top or side hatch. A magnetic arm then lowers the Pod through a set of "bomb bay" doors and releases it once it's safely positioned below Enterprise's hull.

Although the galley is stocked with genuine foodstuffs, there is another option: a proto-replicator called a Protein Re-Sequencer. It can pro-



vide a limited menu; it makes decent pasta, soup, and simple beverages, but that's about it. For the most part, meals are prepared by the ship's galley crew, headed by a chef who was handpicked by Captain Archer. Aside from the primary Mess Hall, there is also the Captain's Mess, a small, private area where Archer takes his meals along with specially crewmembers. T'Pol are Charlie are favourite guests of the Captain.

There's also a Transporter System, but it was designed primarily to beam cargo and technology - not bio-matter. (During the first season of Enterprise, we will see how the crew refines the Transporters to start beaming people. There will be those among the crew - Captain Archer included - who are quite wary of this new development.)

Because "bio-filters" haven't been invented yet, the ship includes a Decon Chamber. Away Teams exposed to any kind of spatial radiation or alien microbes will first receive a bioscan. If the scan detects anything out of the ordinary, the team must strip down to minimal clothing, and apply a phosphorescent gel to their skin to neutralize any pathogens. Under the low, ultraviolet light of this cramped room, the crew will review the mission, wind down, and get closer to one another - literally.

Away Team personnel will typically carry Phase Pistols (an early version of hand Phaser)

and Communicators. Phase Pistols have only two settings: stun and kill. Communicators include a built-in Universal Translator that allows our crew to converse with aliens who don't speak English. The Universal Translator, however, is only programmed with a handful of alien languages, and its interpretations are by no means perfect. A more sophisticated translator module can be attached to a Communicator to provide a wider range of linguistic processing, but the technology is still in an early stage of development. As noted above, Hoshi will often be called upon to employ her extraordinary innate skills as a linguist and interpreter.

Unlike 24th century starship crews, Enterprise crewmen don't wear combadges. Aboard the ship, Companels allow crewmen in different sections to speak to each other. Essentially, a 22nd century intercom system, a crewman must step up to and tap the control of a Companel to address someone located in another part of the ship.

The ship has no "shields" or "forcefields", but instead relies on Polarized Hull Plating to protect itself against enemy weapons. When the hull plating is down, the ship is vulnerable to attack. There are no phaser banks (although Reed might invent this technology in a future episode). The ship is equipped with Spatial Torpedoes, which are launched from torpedo bays; it's also armed with retractable turrets that rise up from the hull and fire plasma-charged artillery rounds.

Long range, subspace communications are only possible while the ship is at warp. As a result, our ability to contact Starfleet Command will be extremely limited.

There are only two alien crewmembers - T'Pol and Phlox. Everyone else is human, hand-picked by Starfleet for this mission, the best and the brightest.

-<http://www.trekgalaxy.com>

The insiders at the movie and television rumor page Aint-it-cool-news have somehow managed to get a look at the pilot for the upcoming Enterprise series. Here is what they had to say.

What's it called?

The title of the two-hour launch is "Broken Bow." It's set to air 8 p.m. Sept. 26 on UPN.

Why "Broken Bow"?

Broken Bow, Okla., is where mankind meets its first Klingon.

When does the new series take place?

Ninety years after the events depicted in "First Contact." Starfleet exists, but the Federation doesn't yet.

The big news?

As long rumored (and often disputed), the new series features a villain from another time, making this series perhaps a sequel to the movies and other series as well as a prequel. The pilot establishes that the villainous Suliban are taking orders from someone in the "far future."

How far in the future?

Whether this mystery man makes his home in the 23rd century, the 24th, the 29th or some other era, we do not learn in the pilot. Similarly, we don't know if FutureGuy is Suliban, Romulan, Klingon, Cardassian, Borg, a member of Section 31, or anything else. Per the script, "we can barely make out the image of a humanoid figure."

What's the pilot about?

A 7-foot-tall Klingon, carrying vital information to his homeworld regarding the shape-shifting Sulibans, is shot down over Oklahoma and pursued through cornfields by evil Suliban agents. The Klingon manages to kill his pursuers but gets shot by a farmer who (like all other humans of this era) speaks no Klingonese.

While transporting the delirious Klingon home, Starfleet captain Jonathan Archer encounters more Suliban, who invade his ship (a pre-Federation warp vessel dubbed "Enterprise") and kidnap the Klingon.

As Archer and Co. search for their lost Klingon, Archer learns from a Suliban dissident that the Sulibans are trying to instigate a Klingon civil war at the bequest of FutureGuy. In return, FutureGuy is teaching the Suliban how to enhance their DNA and give themselves super-powers.

Meanwhile, T'Pol, the comely young Vulcan science attaché assigned to the mission (think a less-trusting version of Saavik), thinks Archer should have returned to Earth the minute the Klingon was captured.

Does Archer command the April/Pike/Kirk Enterprise?

No. At least if one is to judge by the number on the ship's hull.

Is this Oklahoma Klingon the first non-Vulcan extraterrestrial earthmen have encountered?

Decidedly not. The ship's helmsman says he's encountered several interstellar races, and the alien Dr. Phlox is already familiar to many within Starfleet. Also, communications officer Hoshi Sato seems to have a working knowledge of many alien languages. But as Archer tells Phlox, "Our doctors haven't even heard of a Klingon."



Is this humanity's first interstellar mission?

No. Just the first to be undertaken at warp 4.5. The ship's helmsman establishes that, as a pre-teen on a cargo ship, it took him three years to reach Trillius Prime (the Trill homeworld?).

How fast can the Enterprise go?

Warp 4.5. "Neptune and back in six minutes," as Archer puts it. Archer also comments that it will take the Enterprise four days to reach the Klingon homeworld from Earth. It's also implied that the Klingons have many ships that are just as fast.

Does the Enterprise have transporters?

Yes, but though they've "been approved for bio-transport," none of the crew have traveled through them and don't really trust them. Archer, we're told, "won't even put his dog through it." Midway through the story, when someone suggests using the transporters to retrieve the kidnapped Klingon, Archer offers this nod to Seth Brundle: "No. We've risked too much to bring him back inside-out."

Is it true James Cromwell has a cameo?

There's launch-ceremony footage of a very old Zefram Cochrane giving a speech 32 years earlier: "On this site, a powerful engine will be built... an engine that will someday let us travel a hundred times faster than we can today. Imagine it. Thousands of inhabited planets at our fingertips. And we'll be able to explore those strange new worlds... and seek out new life and new civilizations. This engine will let us go boldly... where no man has gone before."

Do the Klingons declare war on Earth for its meddling?

Not at all. In fact, at pilot's end, the high council even seems to gruffly approve of Starfleet's actions.

Who's in the crew?

JONATHAN ARCHER (Scott Bakula), a San Francisco native, is the son of one of Zefram Cochrane's chief warp-drive collaborators. He is a reasonable but headstrong Kirk-like figure who resents the Vulcans because he believes they impeded his father's work. (Archer's dad, it's implied, harbored far less resentment.)

T'POL (Jolene Blalock) is a young, all-business science attaché with the Vulcan consulate. She is assigned to the mission as science officer, but when Archer is badly injured midway through the mission, she asserts that her rank in the Vulcan military is higher than the Starfleet ranks of anyone else on board, so - Spock-like - she also serves as the ship's de facto first officer. Like Dr. Phlox, she's at first only supposed to be assigned to the ship during its eight-day mission to the Klingon homeworld and back.

CHARLIE TUCKER (Connor Trinneer), chief engineer, fills the McCoy role as captain's friend and confidant. Like Bones, he's a southerner who provides a lot of pointed wisecracks. Like fellow engineer Montgomery Scott, Charlie also seems to be third-in-command after Archer and T'Pol.

MALCOLM REED (Dominic Keating), a Brit, is the ship's armory officer. We don't find out too much about him in the pilot, but toward the end

he provides Archer and Tucker with weapons they've never seen before, but we'll all find familiar.

Why are aliens like T'Pol and Phlox in the crew?

T'Pol has star-charts that will guide them to the Klingon homeworld. Phlox has the most info about the injured Klingon's physiology.

Will the "Enterprise" pilot be more fun than, say, the "Voyager" finale?

Almost certainly. The pilot actually reads more like a "Star Trek" feature than a series pilot. It boasts an epic quality, spanning as it does Oklahoma cornfields, arctic Rigelian trading centers, and high-tech Suliban spacelabs.

What's good?

Fans love continuity, so they should love connecting the events depicted in "Enterprise" to the future history referenced in the movies and other series. (Presumably the series will utilize a few "continuity compliance officers" to ensure there's as little as possible to piss off longtime "Trek" fans.)

Aside from all the "continuity porn," there's some funny stuff with Reed getting distracted from his mission by half-naked Rigelian butterfly-eaters. There's some sexy stuff with Tucker and T'Pol in their underwear, rubbing blue decontamination gel all over each other's bodies as they argue about who will take command of Enterprise in Archer's absence. There's some dark humor as Archer and Tucker infiltrate a Suliban complex by trying to pilot one of the Suliban's unfamiliar alien "cell-ships." The Klingon was good too.

What's not so good?

There's a scene toward the end in which Archer stumbles upon the Sulibans' "temporal chamber." By this point we've seen the chief Suliban villain, Silik, use the chamber twice to converse with the shadowy FutureGuy -- so one assumes Archer is about to find out who and/or what this Humanoid From The Future is. But this turns out to be a big tease. Before Archer can activate the temporal mechanism, Silik interrupts, there's a fight and Archer never gets to meet FutureGuy. Turns out we'll just have to learn more about this mystery man as the series soldiers on. (We also never get to learn the nature of the Klingon's intelligence on the Suliban - though Hoshi and T'Pol, who both know at least a little Klingonese, get a glimpse of it at pilot's end.)

Will the series suck?

You can never tell from a pilot script, but the central relationships between Archer, T'Pol and Tucker are compelling and evolve gracefully, and the show's set of supporting characters might turn out to be the best to inhabit any "Trek" series. One can only hope that the producers, tired of the endless stand-alone stories necessitated by "Voyager's" very linear journey home, will come to re-embrace the long, multi-episode story arcs that distinguished "Deep Space Nine." You can be sure I'll be watching to find out.

* * *

- www.aintitcoolnews.com

Battleforce: choosing the best escort group

THE BATTLE FORCE SOLICITATION:

You are assigned to escort a convoy of ten assorted cargo vessels through an area where Raider activity is expected. Choose a race, choose 2500 points worth of ships, fighters, and optional fu, including no capital or enormous units, and explain why you chose it and how you'd use it to defend against a Raider attack.

Intelligence reports that the Raiders are known to have at least one Strike Carrier and one of either Battlewagon or Dragonship.

THE SUBMITTED FLEETS:

Drazi anti-piratical type fleet (Russ)

-Wareagle Frigate leader (gunsight for particle cutter) 400 + 8

-2x Stareagle Frigates 700

-War Talon w/ 6 Star Snacks 500 + 240 with an expert pilot (40) and expert dogfighter (20)

-Darkhawk Missile Cruiser (gunsight for particle cutter) 450 + 8

6x Heavy (24) 6x Harm Missiles (60) 2x Multi-warhead Missiles (48)

Total-2498

Ok it's short on fighters, but it's got good anti-fighter firepower. Plan is for the star snacks to engage enemy fighters--with the dogfighter and expert pilot they should more than be able to hurt the raider fighters. The talon will also use CCEW to support the fighters with its weapons to make sure they don't get too overwhelmed. Plus the Talon is quite handy vs ships up close in a pinch.

The darkhawk moves to lock-up the raiders fighting ship and attacking with the particle cutter, using alternate HARM and Heavy missiles to score the most damage. If threatened by fighters it can use multi-warhead missiles to defend itself. It should be guaranteed the EW edge over the raider ship as it only has to worry about hard targeting for its cutter and particle beams, the HARM missiles will help too!

The wolfpack of eagles is the ace in the hole, they are versatile enough to be used as a swing-force to stop incoming fighters, or to engage and destroy the raiders warships. The strike carrier if present is only a mild threat, and can be dealt with later, or the Talon/eagle wolfpack can move to engage this if there are no other options.

Abbai, Abbai, What'cha Gonna Do When They Come For You? (Kizarvexis)

This is Janice Hadley from "COPS: Abbai on Patrol". ISN once again is on patrol with an Abbai Military Police Fleet in our shuttles 'Amarillo' and 'Journalist'. Abbai Fleet Captain Annatar has told us that she has information

about a band of pirates that are raiding the convoy route they are patrolling this week. The pirates are expected to have at least 2 battle cruisers and up to 4 squadrons of fighters. Please turn in to tomorrow nights "36 Hours" at 21:00 EST, to see how these Raider groups are able to acquire so many combat ships.

The fleet we are with this week consists of the Tiraca Attack Frigates 'Saibi', 'Houda' and 'Mierau', the Bisaria Escort Frigate 'Sprehe', and the Fetula Warrant Cutter 'Judisch', which carries 3 Kaltika Breaching pods.

We were able to watch them run a practice simulation right before the convoy departed. When the simulated Raider ships and fighters attacked, the Warrant Cutter and Biscaria Escort Frigate stayed near the freighters to provide cover against fighters and the 3 Tiraca Attack Frigates moved in between the raider capital ships and the convoy. When the raider ships capital ships moved into range, the Tiraca's made a quick attack run on them and returned to the convoy. The Warrent Cutter and Biscaria Escort Frigate then moved toward the cap ships left in range to disable them with comm disruptors. After the battle Captain Annatar used the breaching pods to capture as many raiders as they could for trial on Ssumssha.

After this commercial break, we will show you footage of what happened when we ran into the raiders that Captain Annatar was warned about.

Fleet composition as provided by Annatar Rao Tiway

1350 - 3 Tiraca Attack Frigates (combat laser for antiship)

500 - 1 Biscaria Escort Frigate (quad arrays for AF fire)

470 - 1 Fetula Warrant Cutter (quad arrays for AF fire)

120 - 3 Kaltika Breaching Pods (for capturing prisoners for trial)

48 - 2 ISN civilian armed shuttles (to get in the way while they film)

Drimdal Free Mercenary Fleet (drimdal)

Who better to protect against raider attacks than RAIDERS

You take

1 Raider galleon - 450

1 Wolf raider - 450

1 Raider Brigantine - 450

1 Raider Sloop - 380

24 Delta-V - 768

At first this seems like a very large convoy guarded only by 1 Sloop. Once the raiders approach the Galleon and Brigantine reveal themselves and launch fighters. Suddenly things aren't that bright any more for the raiders.

The ships will try to lure the fighters away and bring the battle to their carriers. This does leave the freighters unprotected. If the raiders take the bait the wolf raider comes on-line and the galleon and brigantine will return catching the raider fighters between the hammer and the anvil.

If they do not and pursue the brigantine and galleon the wolf raider comes on-line behind their backs and charges in.

Belt Alliance Fleet Requisition #3A147-Q (hlprmnky)

<<<BEGIN MESSAGE

Belt Alliance Interdepartmental Memo

TO: Charles S. Spivey, VP Sector Operations

FROM: Fleet Captain Jameson Hathaway

RE: Force requisition #3A147-Q

Charlie,

You and I go back a long way, and I'm afraid I have to call in a favor or two on this one. Word on the spacelanes is there's a nasty mess of Raiders prowling the space around Tachunq, and the Drazi-Pak'ma'ra aid convoy to Narn from points coreward has hired us on to help guard one of the shipments through that area. What I've been able to determine is that the Raiders are fielding at least one capital vessel, possibly jump capable, and probably a full fighter wing. Read that again if you have to, Charlie; these fellows aren't messing around.

So, what's the favor, right? Well, I need you to read the fleet re-org and supplies requisitions I've turned in, and approve them. Hell, I don't even need you to read them, just sign 'em! Here's a quick idea of what I have in mind, in case you're curious:

The Graf Spee will take up standard position about the middle of the convoy, with the Lady Jayne and two of Patel's rigs running point, and the missile barge and two more Punishers bringing up the rear. My Delta-V's are getting two pilot crews, which will warm-bunk. Each pilot will be on CAP as much as humanly possible (well, Drazi-ly possible in Drofana's case). If and when this Raider group attacks, the missile barge will let go with the long-range missiles, hoping to scare 'em off. Assuming that doesn't work, we'll keep hitting the enemy fighters with flash missiles and cluster rounds until we're out or they run. The heavy missile and penetrator round for the main cannon on the Spee are a little reserve in case anything bigger than a Delta-V comes in for a close look at us.

I know this is a hell of a favor to ask, but the Drazi are paying through the nose for this job, so I should be able to make it up to you.

Talk to you when we get back, Jimmy

>>>>END MESSAGE

Force list:

1 BA Heavy Gunboat "Graf Spee" with:
- 1 x hvy. blast cannon penetrator round,
- 2 x med. blast cannon cluster rounds,
- 8 x lt. blast cannon cluster rounds (551)
6 x Delta-V Light Fighters (192)
1 BA Medium Gunboat "Lady Jayne" (350)
4 x BA Light Gunboat "Patel's Punishers"(800)
1 x EA Civilian Missile Barge "EAS-770"

with:

- 20 x flash missile
- 2 x long range missile
- 1 x heavy missile (606)
TOTAL - 2499

Analysis: The BA is a fairly even match for the Raiders technologically. The primary difficulty with the given scenario is that the BA are not great at flexibility; any one group of BA ships will be good at driving off capital ships, or swatting fighters, but rarely both. The solution here is to take a force that will do well against a small Raider capital force, say a Dragonship and a couple of HCVs, and supplementing it's anti-fighter "punch" with Flash missiles. The special loadouts on the Heavy Gunboat's blast cannons are another attempt to make the force work well against fighters; the cluster rounds improve the volley count by one and shorten the volley grouping to +1 per 4, hopefully causing more dropouts among Raider Delta-Vs.

The only contingency which could cause real trouble for this group is a Wolf Raider or two tucked into the standard convoy. Of course, if such a beastie reared its head near the Graf Spee or Lady Jayne, it could be put down fairly quickly. But a Wolf Raider crippling or destroying the Missile Barge early on in the game would make the fighter battle much more one-sided, and a Belt Alliance win more difficult indeed.

Dilgar Escort Pentacan (ShadowScout)

Ochlavita Destroyer Leader 632 Combat Points

(Ship - 550 pt; 5 Flash, 3 Standard missiles for the bomb rack - 30pt; Gunsights for 2 Quad Pulsars, 2 Point Pulsars and 2 Med.Bolters - 52pt)

2 x Ochlavita Destroyers 1176 Combat Points
(Ship - 525pt; 5 Flash, 3 Standard missiles for the bomb rack - 30pt; Gunsights for 2 Point Pulsars and 4 Med.Bolters - 33pt)

2 x Senschuka Patrol Ships 692 Combat Points
(Ship - 325pt; Gunsights for 2 Med. and 4 Light Bolters - 21pt)

Total: 2500 Combat Points ;-)

I choose a Ochlavita-DL because someone has to lead the Pentacan, and to seriously hurt the Raider big ships from beyond their own range with it's Quad Pulsars (add gunsights to make sure these shots will hit - and increase the volley count a bit).

Ochalvitas generally to kill Raider fighters with Flash missiles from their Bomb Racks (these light Deltas are sooo gone when a flight is flashed - one fighter vaporized instantly and many of the remaining will have to drop out due to the collateral damage - light armor and low structure), and to worry big shps with their Bolters, Point Pulsars (with gunsights to take extra advantage of the quick firing rate) and Med.Lasers. Senschukas to protect the flanks,

deal with any fighters that survive the Flash missiles, and later dance around the big ships to fire into damaged areas...

Tactics:

First Flash Missiles will take a serious toll on the light Raider fighters, if any remain they are wiped out once they get into range of the Senschukas Light Bolters. Meanwhile the Pulsars and Bolters will take apart the raider big ships, with added help from standard missiles once no raider fighters remain.

These Raiders are sooo dead...

Pak'ma'ra (Todd Boyce)

4 Urik'hal - 445 each

1 Ar'tees -- 400

6 Por'fa'tis -- 300

2480 points

The Ar'tees and the freighters all stay in one hex and keep moving toward their destination while trying to avoid the big raider ships. The Urik'hal and fighters go attack the Raider's ships avoiding their fighters if possible (attacking them only if they win initiative). The Urik'hals and fighters should be able to eat the main Raider ships for lunch but their only intent would be to cripple them by removing their afts.

If the Raider fighters enter the 3 hex death zone of the P-Webs, they'll be hurting badly (probably 4-5 fighters in a flight will drop out after getting hit by a single plasma web). At 4 hexes and with the crappy offense of the Delta-V, they're not going to be able to cripple the freighters fast enough.

Once the larger raider ships are destroyed or crippled, the remaining Urik'hal circle the freighters widening the p-web zone probably making it almost impossible for the raider fighters to attack anything but the escorts.

If the raiders are particularly fighter heavy (over 36 fighters) I might hold back one or two Urik'hals to help the Ar'tees while sending the other two with the Por'fa'tis on the strike mission. After the strike Uriks fire their heavy plasmas, they return to the freighters while the other two fresh Urik's go on the next strike.

THE SCENARIO

Given that we deliberately did not specify a time for the scenario, there can be minimal fluff for it - we wanted to encourage the most diversity of fleet selections for the initial installment. Later Battle Force articles will provide more specific dating and scenarios.

Thus, we have the convoy - a small mixed-race flotilla of freighters and the like - and the raiders.

UNITS:

CONVOY:

2x Civilian Standard Freighter
2x Civilian Fast Freighter
2x Civilian Ore Barge
1x Civilian Bulk Freighter
1x Brakiri Batrado Armored Transport
1x Hermes Priority Transport
(6x Nova Starfuries)
1x Civilian Passenger Liner

ESCORT:

Select a 2500 point flotilla of your choice, using no capital ships, or choose one of the forces detailed above.

RAIDERS:

1x Strike Carrier (24x Delta-V)
2x Barque (6x Delta-V each)
1x Sloop
1x Special (See below)

SETUP:

Place two standard maps vertically to form a 42x60 playing area. The top map will be referred to as "A", the bottom as "B". Set up one Convoy unit in hex 2115 of map B, with all other convoy units placed behind it and within 8 hexes of all other convoy units. Place each Escort unit within 4 hexes of a Convoy unit. All Escort and Convoy units will begin moving at speed 2. Up to ½ of the Escort's fighters may be in space, the remainder will begin in the hangars.

Placing the Raiders: The Raider player should first select one Convoy civilian unit and secretly designate it to be replaced by a Raider unit. It will move under the Convoy/Escort player's command until the Raider player activates it, at which point it is revealed and may lock on EW, fire weapons, launch fighters, et cetera. A Standard Freighter would be replaced by a Wolf Raider; a Fast Freighter by a Felucca or Xebec; a Bulk Freighter by a Galleon. The remaining Raider ships may enter from any map edge or edges, or may jump in (the infiltrating vessel is carrying a jump beacon, allowing them to locate a jump point as if they had an ELINT unit on the map).

VICTORY CONDITIONS:

The Escort's job is to get the convoy to the jump gate, which is located just off the north edge of the map. Thus:

- Each freighter to the north edge: 5 points
-Each escort reaching the north edge: 2 points
-Each escort fighter : 1/6 point
- Each Raider fighter destroyed: 1/6 point
-Raider Strike Carrier destroyed: 3 points
-Each Barque or Sloop destroyed: 2 points

-Escort Decisive Victory: 60 points
-Escort Major Victory: 48 points
-Escort Victory: 40 points
-Escort Marginal Victory: 32 points
-Raider Marginal Victory: 25 points
-Raider Victory: 18 points
-Raider Major Victory: 12 points
Raider Decisive Victory: 5 points

A note on selection of the posted fleets: I've limited the number actually posted to conserve page count in BabCom. The full list of fleets is available on the Battle Force 2500 thread in the Forums. Future Battle Force solicitations will be made to the email list as well, and will be archived on the web for download by those interested. URL for this archive will be posted with future Battle Force articles.

There were many excellent ideas, and I thank you all for participating.

- Nasipak

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Escorts: a vital component of the battlefleet

- Continued from Page 5

this out though, and 1-2 Battle Destroyers at the head of your formations can make a huge difference in the survival of the rest of the squadron.

One thing the Vorlons tend to be weak in is a large quantity of carriers. Although they do have very effective fighters, they are unable to bring them to battle in numbers comparable to the EA, Centauri, or even Minbari. To help combat this weakness, players can choose a strong AF platform in the Destroyer Escort. Armed with multiple discharge guns, these ships are very effective against fighters, either at the center of a squadron formation, or in larger numbers surrounding your capital ships to provide AF defense either at close range in the same hex, or as LRAF to adjacent hexes. Their high cost and uncommon status limits their usage however.

Shadows

Of all the published FA races, the Shadows may be most lacking in choice amongst escorts. Their only real choice is the Destroyer. Although the Scout could be considered an escort choice, the high Elint capabilities of this ship encourage its protection rather than its placement at the head of a squadron.

Like the Battle Destroyer for the Vorlons, the Shadow Destroyer is quite expensive, weighing in at 500 points each. However, to balance this, it does have significant firepower in its Heavy Phasing

Cannons and Cutters. Although it has a small defense of 15, its diffusers and medium ship status ensure that it is harder to hit and kill than other Shadow ships, and encourages its use as an escort, placed in front of other Shadow ships to effectively raise those ship's defense through screening benefits. Though they have a command cost of 2 each, the high command rating (12) of Shadow capital ships will allow you to build squadrons composing of 2 Shadow Cruisers or Carriers, and still include 2 Destroyers as escorts.

The Cutters on the Destroyer are also effective in an AF role, but not nearly so as other race's escort ship's weapons. Shadow fleets must rely more on their excellent fighters, arguably the best interceptors in the game, and the ability of Molecular Slicers to swing through space, cutting down multiple fighters with one sweep.

Conclusion

The above treatise is not meant to be comprehensive in regards to tactics, nor does it clearly cover every race in existence. However, hopefully this article will provide players new to Fleet Action with a better understanding of squadron construction, as well as giving them a quick overview on several race's escort ships and their most effective uses.

* * *



Unfortunately, the original artist of this image did not attribute his work and I have lost the link from which I downloaded it. Nevertheless, it is an excellent picture and full of action. It appeared on the front cover of the first edition of Babcom.