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Season 3 release brought forward

B5TV.COM has gotten its hands on the packaging shots for the third season DVD box set of Babylon 5.

Year one was orange, year two was blue. Year three takes a luminous green approach, and it looks utterly brilliant.

Here is an image of the cover artwork. It is a mock up of the box set, showing how the design will span around the sides.

And there's more good news. The WB is stepping up the release dates it seems, and the third box set is provisionally set for an August release date in the US.

In a brief post to the moderated news-group, JMS teased on the DVD front.

Although no release date is known yet, JMS did reveal: "We're almost finished with, the S3 DVDs."

Those fans that are interested in Crusade on DVD, also have hopes it is at least being thought about.

"We're also in discussions about releasing Crusade," JMS added. However, if Crusade DVDs were released, they would likely come after Babylon 5 has finished being released.

Meanwhile the season two box set is riding high, and looks set to be another success for Warner Home Video. It's was at #2 in Amazon.com's DVD sales on its second day of release.



JMS talks on thoughts, future

JMS recently gave an update on the status of his projects:

Q: Will we see more Babylon 5 and what are your new projects?

To part one of your question, one never knows.

To part two...season 2 of Jeremiah is just about finished in terms of production, and will go on the air sometime probably early or mid August.

Spidey continues to come out regularly.

My new comic, Supreme Power, also from Marvel, debuts July 16,

with art by Gary Frank.

Now that Jeremiah is done, I'll be turning my attention to finishing off Rising Stars.

I have a new television series currently in development, we finalized the contract with the company last week, and we'll see where it goes.

The director of Daredevil has said he wants to make Midnight Nation his next film, so we're taking meetings over the next few weeks to see if we can make that happen.

Just finished the commentaries

and interviews for the B5 Year 3 DVD set, and I think it's a bit better than the year 2 commentary I did, which I think kinda sucked. Year 2 comes out in April.

I'm doing a new audio drama series which I can talk about more later. We should go into production as soon as I've finished the last of the scripts.

I know there's some other stuff, but I've just forgotten it. (There may also be some strong interest in Polaris from another studio.)





B5W TACTICS

Part Four: By Todd Boyce

UP TO now the strategies explained have been fairly rudimentary and really only represent some basic concepts for forming a battle plan. Think of them as simply textbook examples that now lead this series into the next topic of discussion, that of the actual fleet composition.

Keep the battle plan in mind! Both it and fleet composition work together and are usually developed simultaneously. Making a fleet without a plan usually results in a poor fleet composition.

BALANCE, FLEXIBILITY AND BEING WELL ROUNDED

In the context of this article, balance will be defined as the ability of a fleet to attack and defend itself effectively in a variety of situations. An unbalanced fleet therefore has glaring weaknesses that can easily be exploited by the opponent's strategy or fleet composition.

Flexibility on the other hand will be defined as the ability of a fleet to alter offensive strategies based upon the opponent's fleet or actions. An inflexible fleet can only employ one or two of the basic strategies; a fighter-heavy fleet for example is generally inflexible.

When a fleet has both balance and flexibility, it is well rounded. Being both balanced and flexible is a worthy goal when designing a fleet but usually some of one or the other has to be sacrificed in order to fit within point value constraints. Anyone can make a balanced and flexible fleet when working with 10,000+ points, under 4,000 however, it becomes much more difficult for many races.

Unless a player knows the opponent's fleet composition before choosing his fleet, and can thus tailor his fleet accordingly, a balanced fleet

often performs better than one that is unbalanced. This is especially the case in a tournament or league situation where players choose one fleet and it faces a multitude of other fleets, but also at any time the opponent's fleet and/or race is unknown.

A balanced fleet often contains a variety of ships that support each other in different ways, offensively and defensively. It is built in such a way that weaknesses in the fleet are minimized. How this balance is achieved, mostly depends on the strengths and weaknesses of a given race's ships and is not always obvious. Though there is no hard and fast rule that works for all races, players should think about how each ship works within the fleet as a whole, and not solely on its own merits (or detriments).

A balanced fleet is one that is well thought out with contingencies and strategic options built in. Keeping the strategies discussed thus far in mind, one can look at a fleet and ask "How will this fleet deal with a fighter-heavy force?", "How will this fleet deal with wolfpacks?", and so on.

For being flexible, many experienced players build an Armada style fleet with a wet-navy support structure (line ships, escorts and fighters). Depending on the specific composition, these fleets can be built to perform just about any of the strategies previously discussed and are usually the most flexible. Many consider flexibility an extremely important strength in a fleet. I believe it is important only in certain situations, and that a balanced fleet is not only easier to construct but also more important in most circumstances. It is the goal of the player to make his opponent react to him, not the other way around. Control the opponent and you control the battlefield.

COMPOSING A FLEET

If the race an opponent will be playing is unknown, it is often best to build a well-rounded fleet with a very generalized plan, which is modified once the opposing fleet is seen.

If the race and fleet both are known, then it becomes easier to form a battle plan and select the ships best suited to perform it and is the only time when an exact plan can be made. However, maximizing a fleet to emphasize a known weakness of an opponent is generally poor sportsmanship in pick-up battles (in my opinion). In a campaign situation however, bringing appropriate forces together to crush an opponent with minimal losses is, well, realistic.

Most often a player only knows what race the opponent is going to play. This has the effect of giving an idea on what the general strengths of this opponent are and a player can work up a strategy based upon the expectation that the opponent will play to his race's strengths. This is far from guaranteed however and opponents who construct their fleets differently from what is expected could mess up any specific strategy. In this case, a fleet needs to be made that does not depend on the opponent's choices but can have some emphasis on areas where the opponent's race is weak.

SPEED, DURABILITY, FIREPOWER

These three aspects are the primary attributes of ship design, or "ship attributes". Important when choosing a particular ship, they are not the only consideration a player should make when building a fleet. Beginning players often see the big expensive ship with massive amounts of firepower and huge structure blocks, and think it alone will wipe out their opponents.

B5W TACTICS: PART FOUR

Experienced players know this is rarely how it works out.

What is more important is understanding the relationship ship attributes have in the fleet environment when considering *COST*, *THREAT* and *ROLE*. These aspects of a ship are its “fleet attributes”.

Just about every player has thought about how to min/max a fleet and therefore knows how the ship attributes relate to cost and overall “bang for the buck”. There’s no real need for this article to cover that area of fleet design. The Threat and Role fleet attributes however are often only lightly considered but they are the key to building a truly effective fleet.

THREAT

Threat is simply how the opponent will perceive the ship and directly translates to how badly he wants that ship to die. When a player sees a Dag’kar, a Nova, or an ELINT ship on the map, they often view them as being very threatening. Opponents rarely view a Maximus or a Sho’kos on its own in that same regard.

An important thing to understand is how a ship’s threat level will impact its overall performance in the fleet. If a player has only one high threat vessel in a fleet comprised of low-threat escorts, it will probably die to long-range fire since there’s nothing else worth shooting at with the big guns because the low-threat ships are likely out of range. By having a high threat level with nothing else around it to divert fire, the ship has become a damage magnet. A ship that has a low threat level is generally ignored by the opponent and is usually far more effective for its points so long as that level is maintained.

The threat level must not only be considered for each individual vessel on its own, it is also

compounded by the number of those ships in the fleet. One Haven in a fleet has a low threat level. Four Havens flying together have a much higher threat level. In this example the four havens become a single component with a high threat level.

An interesting aspect of this however is that the bigger the ship, the less the number of them affect the threat of their presence. I’d go so far as to say the largest ships are usually less threatening combined than they are individually when playing equal-pointed battles. One Sharlin is very threatening but the opposing fleet usually outnumbers it. Two Sharlins are actually less threatening because now one of them can be ganged up on by twice as many ships than previously. The same can be said of the Octurian, Bin’tak and Warlock. This is why these ships generally should fill the support role (more on that below).

While certainly not always true, it is often best to balance the fleet in such a way that no single

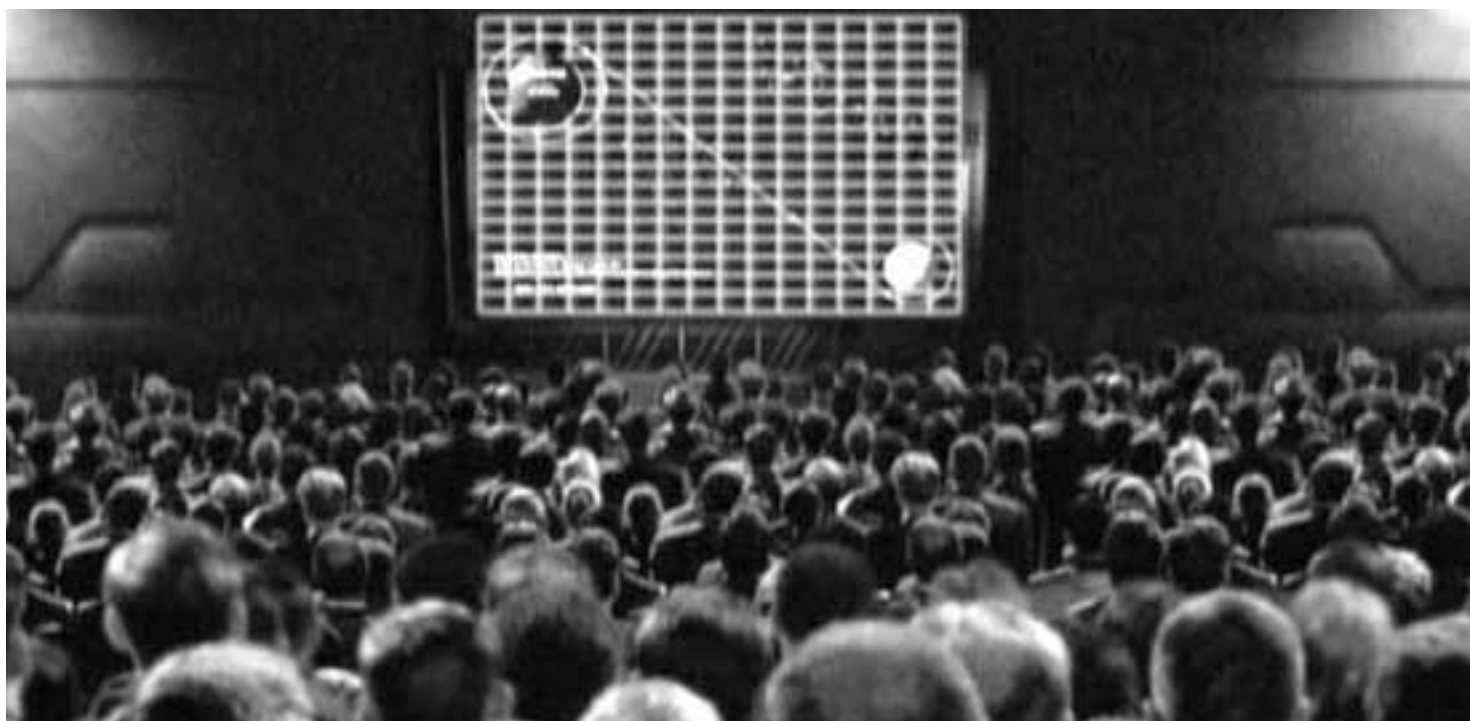
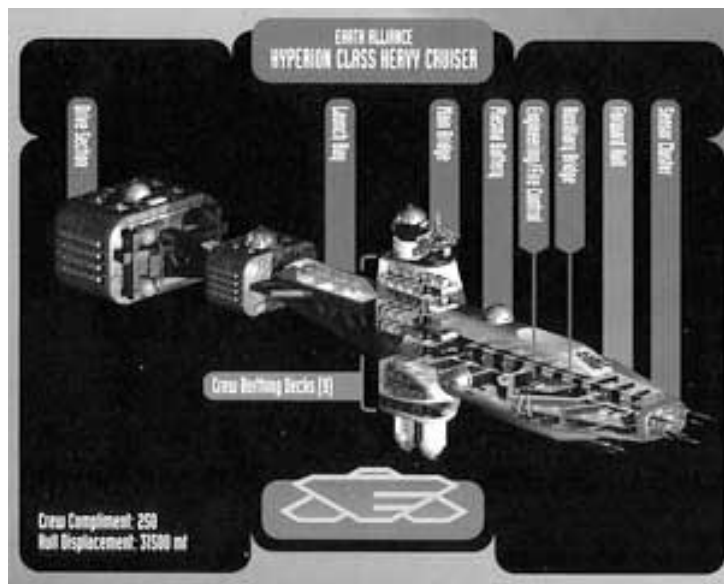
component is significantly more threatening than any other component. Fleet composition should therefore have a variety of levels of threat so that the opponent doesn’t have any obvious targets, unless of course that is the player’s intent. Sometimes it can be advantageous to have a damage magnet in the fleet to draw fire from the real threat or distract the opponent. This can be risky though and is only advisable if a player is comfortable enough with his fleet and fully understands how it will work in the overall plan.

ROLE

This article will define three primary roles that ships of any fleet generally have: *CORE*, *SUPPORT*, and *ESCORT*.

CORE - This is usually the primary attack component of the fleet. Comprised of one or more ships, the Core is what generally dictates the implementation of a plan and holds the fleet together as a cohesive fighting force. Without the Core, the fleet structure usually collapses and the battle is often lost. There is always a Core whether it is intentional or not, and identifying it can sometimes be tricky. If not identified immediately due to fleet construction, by turn two or three, the opponent’s plan should be evident and because of this, the Core is more easily identified.

The opponent’s Core is the biggest threat to a player’s plan, not necessarily the biggest threat to his ships. This is an important distinction because what is important is the integrity of the plan and threats to it are of the highest priority. Battles are often more about destroying an opponent’s plan than they are about destroying his ships. By keeping this in mind, it is easier to look



B5W TACTICS

at choices being made objectively since what is true for the opponent, is also true for the player as well. Players should look at their own fleets as if they were the opponent.

The Core may or may not be easier to destroy than the rest of the fleet. To compose an effective fleet, the Core either needs to be durable enough to withstand the brunt of the opponent's attacks or be non-threatening enough to influence the opponent to attack the rest of the fleet first. In order to fulfill its role effectively, the Core needs to be the consistent and steady force behind the plan.

SUPPORT - Support vessels are the secondary attack component of the fleet. They will either directly add additional firepower to the Core or create a diversion to draw fire away from the Core ships. For this reason the ship-to-ship threat level of the Support vessels is often greater than that of the core.

In some cases the Support vessels can add additional capability to the fleet in other ways such as dedicated artillery platforms like the Dag'kar/Saggitarius or movement unpredictability like those ships that employ weapons such as Gravitic Shifters, Gravity Nets or Gravitic Mines. Many times these ships perform the role of Support vessel as well as Escort.

When constructing a fleet, there is almost always at least one Support vessel. Without this element, the Core component is more vulnerable to concentrated attack.

ESCORT - These ships are a tertiary component whose purpose is to distract the enemy forces and to provide point-defense assistance to the Core and Support vessels. Escorts will go anywhere they need to in order to annoy and harass the opponent and they will also be somewhat expendable having much less importance attached to them in order to accomplish the goal. They are usually comprised of fairly low-threat units.

Many Support ships also serve as defensive Escorts, flying alongside other Support ships or Core ships and aiding in point defense. Sometimes it is unnecessary to have any true Escort because the Core and Support ships in the fleet can help defend each other, though doing so loses the ability to harass the opponent.

When I construct a fleet, the Core is usually the first component picked and I build up my fleet around it. Support and Escort vessels are then added in no particular order to fill in the rest of the points. Other players may do it differently so for the best way of choosing fleets, I don't know, this method simply works for me. What's important is knowing these different roles and designing the fleet accordingly while keeping in mind both balance/flexibility and the overall battle plan.

Here ends Part Four. Part Five will deal with reading an opponent and anticipating his actions.



Review: By J.J. O'SHAUGHNESSY

HERE'S a bit of a history lesson for all you whipper-snappers out there. Way back in the midst of time, just before all these 3D cards came on the market and the computer sitting on your desk didn't have the power of a small supercomputer, there was a game called I-War (short for Independence War).

One of the true classics of the genre, it had you, yes you, in command of your own personal starship. The game was one of the few that seriously took into account relativistic physics (i.e. inertia) in a space environment. Plus, you were in a small ship in a big navy. A powerful, small ship it is true, but you got no illusions about your small place in the scheme of things ("It's a Destroyer?? RUN!!!").

Anyway, as these things tend to do, it spawned a sequel. Independence War 2: Edge of Chaos was unfortunately not quite as good as the original, but is still a very good game in its own right. Basically you play a privateer running around, stealing stuff and upgrading your ship, and playing through a fairly good story-line (unfortunately the end is a bit of a disappointment. They planned on a fourth act but ran out of money to complete it). It is now out on budget under the "Best of Infogrames" label.

You might be wondering what relevance all this has to do with the Babylon 5 universe. Well, can I say now that I have spent the last couple of days playing through one of the most superb conversions of anything to B5 I have ever seen? This is the engine that B5 was born for. Take a look at those screenshots. No, I didn't alter them, apart from lighting some of them up to bring out the superb detailing on the models. That is what they look like in the game, folks.

They play extremely well too. The Nial I was flying around with is a joy to fly, if too tough for my tastes. The beams are extremely powerful, but difficult to aim properly as you are in a relativistic environment. You are in a vessel with a very light mass, and the slightest touch from a ship-mounted weapon can send you spinning out of control for a few seconds, and you have to learn the trick of slowing down to aim and turn. Otherwise you'll slide

right past your target.

Fighting the Ancient fighters is interesting. The Shadows aren't too bad, but the Vorlons will quickly repair any damage you do to them and their beams will gut you in less than a second if you let them. However, they are great to fly against. Flying capital ships is a bit of a disappointment. You have control of the forward facing guns, but the computer controls the turrets. In general the fighters are more fun than the cap ships (with the exemption of the White Star).

Of course there is a downside. First the models are in a demo stage, as it were. There is a 70 Meg "ship pack" that you can download, and a few missions in a Christmas pack. I haven't downloaded them yet (I'd probably have to use someone else's connection to do that). I'm not sure about the ship pack, but the stand-alone models are mostly replacements for the flyable ships in the game. That means that if you were to want to fight against some of the ships in this pack, you would have to learn how to alter the files to place them where you want in the game. It would almost be worth the effort. The difficulty with the standard game ships is that they are simply no match for the B5 ships. Also the mod is a work in progress, and some of the ships are in no way complete. The Shadow fighter for example is simply a marauder corvette with a new (albeit really cool) skin.

However, if you are willing to put up with that, the mod is simply a gift from God. Go check it out.

Independence war 2: Edge of Chaos is available on the "Best of Infogrames" label or directly from Atari at www.atari.com.

You will need the 14.6 patch to run the mod (this doesn't come with the 'Best of Infogrames' version). This is available (along with a ton of other stuff) at <http://www.independencewar.com/downloadsandsupport/patches.htm>

Oh the mod itself? That's at <http://mods.firststones.com/buda5/iwar2/index.html>.

www.firststones.com, is a site that is dedicated to Babylon 5 mods and has a ton of really good quality ones. I recommend you check it out.



S2262-A Super-heavy fighter

From a top-down perspective, the fighter craft appears to have a very slender structure. It looks almost like a set of tweezers - or a musical tuning fork - with stubby forward-swept fibrous - wings.

From a front-on perspective, the craft shows a slender downward protrusion from its "chin". It is surmised this "chin" is part of the fighters sensor suite. The hull appears to be metallic in colour, though covered in strands of a fibrous - almost resinous - textured material. Color variations give it an almost "tiger-striped" look. This material does not appear to have any outstanding armour properties - though the attacking craft did appear to need several direct hits from both Starfuries and Thunderbolts. At other times, they appeared to only take one hit - though this was during the "fast-paced" combat footage.

The fighter craft appears to be approximately five to six times the length of a Thunderbolt. At about 80m, it is rather large for a fighter.

This was reflected in its poorer dogfight relative to Earthforce fighters. But it displayed no lack of acceleration or speed - and was clearly able to out-run the EA fighters.

The craft appeared to be armed with a single weapon: a cannon firing large yellow-colored balls of energy at a rate of one shot per second. But this weapon appeared to also have a "mine" or "flare" mode. Each pulse is capable of destroying a Thunderbolt. However, a strike from this energy ball upon a Whitestar was observed to do apparently moderate to minor damage.



S2262-A Super-heavy fighter

Crimson tide rising

The mystery of Species 2262-A

Prelude

"We don't have confirmation yet, but this may be the scout fleet the Gaim warned us about. Apparently they are the advanced wing of a hostile alien force that is scouting out this sector for likely worlds to invade. For likely read soft and vulnerable. Our task is to make sure they either don't leave here or they leave convinced that we are neither soft or vulnerable, and way too much trouble to invade. We win this battle, they go away, we save ourselves a great deal of trouble in the future. We lose, this will get a hell of a lot worse. Let's get ready."
- Captain Lochley.

The Gaim ambassador approached ISA Security Chief Michael Garibaldi and warned of the approach of a hostile alien race in their sector. The ambassador reported that a scout force was detected moving in the direction of Babylon 5. Intelligence supplied by the Gaim states that the race - hereafter designated S2262-A - was surveying the area for worlds suitable for invasion and colonization.

This data implies one or more clashes with the Gaim - outcome unknown. However, it can be inferred the Gaim were suitably intimidated as the scout fleet was able to penetrate as far as Babylon 5 with apparent impunity.

This approach was confirmed when a scouting force of five Species S2262-A's "Horseshoe" fighters destroyed an Earthforce hyperspace probe before they entered the range of its primary sensors.

This implies superior sensor ability - or very effective jamming equipment.

Probing Attack

PHASE ONE, ASSAULT ONE

"We read three scout vessels ahead of the main group."
- Lieutenant Corwin

A trio of scout vessels use the jump gate to enter Babylon 5 space. They are met by waiting Starfuries.

These "Horseshoe" ships are small vessels, discharging large yellow balls of energy. Their rate of fire is not high - about one shot per every three pulses from a Starfury.

"I can't get a lock! They're blowing past"
- Starfury pilot

The initial encounter is waged at what appears to be a medium range. The Starfury weapons fire appears inaccurate, scoring no hits in the first volley. One Starfury is hit a glancing blow by a ball of yellow energy - the bolt continues on after destroying his right-upper engine nacelle. A second Starfury is seen to explode upon a direct hit.

One pilot reports he cannot get a lock. This suggests the alien vessels have some form of stealth technology - be it active jamming or sensor-absorbent materials.

PHASE TWO, ASSAULT ONE

"Defence grid, aye. Primaries locking on."
- Lieutenant Corwin
"Splash Bogey One"
- Starfury Pilot One
"Target lock on Bogey Two"
- Starfury Pilot Two

The three alien small craft push through the formation of Starfuries, intent on closing the range with Babylon 5.

By the time they reach close range, Babylon 5 is capable of gaining weapon locks with its primary defence grid.

The Starfuries, in close pursuit, are also able to gain targeting information at close range.

The first kill is recorded by Babylon 5's defence grid. A direct hit by (BIG GUN) blasts the Bogey One into large fragments.

In the same flypast, a second alien - designated Bogey Two - is hit by pulses from the (SMALL BLUE PULSES). These strike at the base of one of its nacelles, causing a small explosion and a trail of green sparks. A small glowing green fire is seen to continue for a short time. The craft loses speed - causing it to fall back into range of the pursuing Starfuries.

"Direct hit on Bogey Two"

- Starfury Pilot One

The Starfuries open fire, and are seen to score at least one more hit on Bogey Two - blasting more green sparks off its surface.

PHASE THREE, ASSAULT ONE

"They're scanning us, trying to access our defence information."

- Lieutenant Corwin.

The purpose of the hostile scouting mission is made clear when Lieutenant Corwin detects that Babylon 5 is being scanned and its computer systems hacked.

Being able to breach Babylon 5's high security computers - to the extent of beginning to download the security codes and defence grid tactical systems - requires some serious sensor technology.

It also implies all or some of Species 2262A's "horseshoe" fighter craft contain advanced electronic warfare equipment.

Captain Lochley orders the defence codes scrambled - shutting down the Primary Defence Grid.

At this point Bogey Two is finally destroyed by the pursuing Starfuries. At point-blank range a Starfury unleashes several volleys that strike and turn the alien craft into a ball of green vapour and medium sized chunks of debris. As a consequence of his close range, the Starfury is engulfed and destroyed by the explosion.

PHASE FOUR, ASSAULT ONE

"She's making a run for it"

- Lieutenant Corwin

"All fighters, I want that ship."

- Captain Lochley.

"She's out running them. Out of range of the Primary weapons systems. Secondaries back on line."

- Lieutenant Corwin

Bogey Three makes a break for the jump gates once it has lost its two wingmen. It is able to out-accelerate the pursuing Starfuries now that its close run along Babylon 5's hull is complete - and its damaged wingman has been destroyed.

It's initial break is successful, as Babylon 5 struggles to get its defence grids operational. By the time Bogey Three passes into medium to long range, these are reactivated.

Babylon 5 must have been receiving enough targeting information to fire. However, it had to spray several long bursts in Bogey Three's general direction. Eventually, one of the shots hits. The ship is hit by a (GREEN PULSES) from Babylon 5. This severs its left forward-swept wing. The craft begins to tumble forward.

A second pulse strikes the craft in the rear. It erupts into a green fireball and medium-sized fragments are scattered.

"That was only a taste of what was coming. Just enough to soften us up and scout out the area."

"The rest of them won't be far behind. We're in serious guano here Lieutenant."

- Captain Lochley.

Debriefing

"How the hell was I supposed to know they could download our tactical systems... The Gaim didn't say anything about that part, when his people got hit they.."

- Garibaldi

The implication of the recon mission are of significant concern to Captain Lochley.

- The "Horseshoe" fighters are large and capable of sustaining several hits from light weapons fire.

- The Horseshoe fighters can out-run a Starfury. Starfuries cannot get weapon's lock on the Horseshoe fighters at long to medium range.

- Babylon 5 itself has only weak targeting information once the Horseshoe fighters pass beyond close range.

- The Horseshoe fighters carry sufficiently powerful electronic "eavesdropping" equipment that they can "hack" in to Babylon 5's secure defence grid computer systems during a fast, close-range flypast.

The nasty surprise S2262-A's craft dealt to Babylon 5 angered Lochley. She lost at least two, possibly three, Starfuries in the assault. At least one was severely damaged.



S2262-A Capital ship

The attacking capital ships are wagon-wheel-shaped, with what looks to be six large spines on each forward arc. These spines may be weapon ports. Or they may be sensor arrays.

There is an under-slung outrigger of some kind. It is clearly a detachable pod, held in place by pylons. Its purpose is unknown. It could be a long-range fuel tank. It could be a sensor pod. It could also be a detachable landing bay for operating the Horseshoe fighters seen accompanying the warships.

There are also inward-angled "fins" at the end of the middle of three spars extending outward and rearward from the main central hull to hold the "wheel" in place - almost like spokes.

The main fuselage of the warship looks something like an aircraft - with a pointed nose opening up to a taller, wide body. This tapers towards the rear of the ship and terminates at roughly the mid-point (centre) of the "wheel".

The hulls of the Wagon Wheel warships appear to be the same metallic color - with a very slight green tinge - as their fighters.

It also has the same resinous texture - almost as though the ship was built of excretions. They certainly are not built of welded heat-formed plates like Earthforce technology. Nor of organic skins.

The nose appears to be variable geometry - like a concorde. The nose is "up" in hyperspace, and down when coming through the gate.



S2262-A Capital ship



S2262-A Combat Troops

The enemy are bipedal, to the point of being humanoid.

They wear firm, fibrous dark-red vests over bright red coveralls, belted at the waist. Most wear tall conical red warhelms. Others have a flat, flared backward helmet. This may be an indication of rank due to its relative rareness. Both have the same five-slit openings in the front of their masks.

In hand-to-hand combat they appear to be of relatively similar strength to humans.

All carry light rifles. These fire green pulses very similar in size, shape and ballistic characteristics to the red PPG bursts from the station personnel. They do not damage structure.

The breaching pods the troops were carried in have an almost parasite-like appearance. They have a resinous textured hull - metallic blue in color.

There are a pair of "spines" on its back, and a broad, arced "blade" along what appears to be the craft's front.

The boarding craft have a circular hatch which fires a grappling hook at its target. Once the craft is firmly attached, a blue cutting laser is used to breach the hull - enabling the boarding hatch to extend and seal the hole.

These craft appear to be capable of avoiding enemy sensor locks - or their approach would have had to have been masked by Electronic Warfare "Horseshoe" fighters.



And the alien craft had not even been trying.

In her anger, Captain Lochley chews out Garibaldi for not gaining more intelligence from the Gaim ambassador - and insists he conducts another interrogation to find out more. She is severely concerned by the threat.

In hyperspace we see four large Wagon-Wheel shaped ships and swarms of the Horseshoe fighters.

First Wing

PHASE ONE, ASSAULT TWO

*"The first wing of the attack is coming through.
I repeat, the first wing is coming through."*

- Captain Lochley

The jump-gate opens, and two of the Wagon-Wheel warships come through. Accompanied by Horseshoe fighters.

We then jump to a close-range battle above the hull of Babylon 5 - implying once again that the Earthforce sensors are unable to gain locks beyond close range.

However, it also implies the Horseshoe's weapons are short ranged - otherwise why waste a tactical advantage?

It is immediately evident the Horseshoe fighters are considerably bigger than the Starfuries and Thunderbolts.

We have a momentary glimpse of two Thunderbolts pouring a volley into one Horseshoe fighter, which erupts in a ball of green flame. A fraction of a second later its wingman hits a Thunderbolt with a yellow energy ball - turning it to red vapour. Simultaneously, another Horseshoe is hit by (BLUE PULSE) from Babylon 5, destroying it. The pace of the combat is frenetic.

But the Horseshoes are not manoeuvring. They

fly straight and fast, in tight formations (often of five ships).

Starfuries and Thunderbolts are seen stopped in space above Babylon 5, swinging their noses to track the enemy as they flash by.

Others attempt pursuit.

PHASE TWO, ASSAULT TWO

A lone White Star opens a jump-point close to the station, immediately entering the fight.

At the same time, breaching pods are seen moving towards the station. Defence grid fire does not seem able to gain an effective lock on the small craft.

They attach themselves to the hull and disgorge their troops.

The tactics of S2262-A's small craft is not apparent. They are once again doing fast sweeps of Babylon 5's hull.

During this action these craft show other abilities. This includes "dropping" one of their large yellow energy balls in space for pursuing craft to run into.

There are other energy balls - this time green - seemingly sitting motionless in space - that are sometimes shown to detonate. These are not the same as exploding Horseshoe craft, as the ball is much smaller, longer-lasting and more intense. Is it flak from the warships? Are they counter-measure flares? Are they energy mines? We're not shown..

The general pace of the battle footage is not as slow or as revealing as the initial action.

The White Star appears able to avoid being swarmed by the Horseshoe fighters, and has little difficulty in targeting the enemy - though combat is once again close range.

During a "flash" into a Starfury pilot's mind, we are shown the targeting screen of his fighter. It shows the accompanying Starfuries. It does not show the flight of Horseshoes until they are



S2262-A Breaching Pod

EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE VIEW FROM THE GALLERY

“right on top” of the fighters - as they “blow through” his formation from the front. This further indicates that the Starfuries were only capable of targeting at close range.

PHASE THREE, ASSAULT TWO

A second wing of Horseshoe fighters - this time not accompanying the Wagon wheel warships - breaks through the jump gate.

Three flights of five craft are shown passing through the gate - but the perspective and scene is short. There may have been more.

This five-ship formation is common - though not exclusive.

Again, they are shown to be fast movers.

Again, we are not shown any long-range combat. But we are shown largely ineffectual medium-range defensive fire from Babylon 5. They rapidly close to close range, when B5's defensive fire fragments one Horseshoe craft. It's high velocity turns the debris into missiles that causes considerable damage to Babylon 5's hull.

This time the Horseshoe craft were clearly firing at Babylon 5 itself. It is likely that this has always been the case - that the Horseshoe fighters were conducting strafing attacks on the station and attempting to “blow through” the fighter defences with superior speed and suppression fire from wingmen.

PHASE FOUR, ASSAULT TWO

The arrival of the White Star fleet quickly dispatches the remaining Horseshoe fighters.

Up to that point, it is obvious the the station and its fighters were barely holding their own.

But the Improved Neutron Lasers of the White Stars sweep through the Horseshoes easily.

They can move faster. And they appear to manoeuvre better.

But the White Stars are not without loss. Several are seen falling victim to yellow energy balls.

Speculation

“Wish I knew what kind of life form we're in for. Kinda hard to prepare.

- Dr Franklin.

Wagon-Wheel warships

We see four of these ships approaching Babylon 5 in hyperspace.

We see two of them enter through the jump gate.

We never see, nor hear, of them again.

Presumably these warships “stood-off”, outside of Babylon 5's defensive range.

Presumably, these warships did not engage the station with weapons fire.

This makes sense: they had deployed landing craft full of troops as boarding parties. They also had their fighters in close contact with the station. Firing at the Babylon 5 would have placed these ships - and troops - at risk.

It can only be assumed that the warships escaped into hyperspace once the White Star fleet arrived. Or, perhaps, they were quickly destroyed.

But given the relative size and strength of the Horseshoe fighters against the Earthforce fighters, these warships would have probably been tough nuts to crack.



The blood-dimmed tide is loosed

THE species known only as S2262-A came to the notice of the newly formed Interstellar Alliance early in the Earth year 2262, when the Gaim detected them as they scouted in the vicinity of Babylon 5.

There followed a brief but bloody battle between an assault force of this species and the aforementioned station, with the result that the attackers were driven off by the timely arrival of the White Star Fleet. They presumably decided to turn their attentions away from this part of the galaxy, as no further attacks have been reported.

As far as is known, no members of this race were captured alive, if any were, no results of any interrogations have been released at this date.

There is some evidence to suggest that species S2262-A may be the Wen'dan Horde, an aggressive nomadic race that last attacked this part of the galaxy during the Earth years 1780-1793, before being defeated and driven off by the Anla'shok. If this is the case, it is highly probable that only a small portion of their whole fleet was involved in the attack on Babylon 5, and that the attack was a probe to test the strength of the local races. Had the attack succeeded, a much larger assault against the Interstellar Alliance would have probably followed.

TECHNOLOGY

The technology of species S2262-A appears to be fairly advanced, on the same level, in most cases, as that of the oldest of the so called 'younger races', such as the Minbari, Hyach, and Yolu. Their weapons include both antimatter and fusion-based proximity weapons. Like many of

By CHARLES 'Nerik' TAYLOR

I have based these Babylon 5 Wars implementations of the alien vessels seen in the Babylon 5 Season 5 episode 'A View from the Gallery' on the accompanying 'Empirical Evidence' article, as well as my own recollections of the episode.

the more advanced races, species S2262-A uses gravitic drives.

Computer Systems

This system resembles the computerised fire control system used by the Hyach, however, the bonus fire control points (BFCPs) generated by a S2262-A computer system can be utilised for two additional functions, in addition to those used by the Hyach.

They can also be used to co-ordinate the attacks of S2262-A 'Horseshoe' gunboats. In game terms, each BFCP so used will give a flight of 5 gunboats a +1 bonus to their initiative. No single gunboat can benefit from this bonus more than once.

They can be used to initiate an Information Warfare (q.v.) attack.

With the exception of the two additional abilities, S2262-A computer systems follow all of the rules for Hyach computerised fire control systems.

The computer systems are provided largely to interface with the mechanics for Information Warfare (q.v.).

Information Warfare (IW)

With sufficiently advanced computer technology, it can become possible to access computer systems by remote, disrupting their functioning, reading important information, or even taking control of their functioning in some way. At its lowest level, information warfare merely represents the more advanced forms of EW and ELINT, and requires no additional rules. Species S2262-A have somewhat more advanced IW capabilities than most younger races, and have proven capable of remotely accessing sensitive data files on the Babylon 5 computer network.

To represent this capability, all Species S2262-A ships of MCV size or greater possess ELINT abilities. In addition to the usual capabilities of EW and ELINT, a species S2262-A ship may attempt to remote access the computer systems of the target. Their capabilities in this regard are somewhat limited, in that they can only target the systems that are most active at the time, however, in battle, this will tend to be the computers controlling sensors, weapons, and defensive systems.

To attempt to 'read' a computer system on the target vessel, the attacker allocates 1 or more EW points and one BFCP to the attempt (offensive ELINT can be applied as well). During the fire resolution segment, make a single attack roll, modified by the EW allocated to the attack, and a range penalty of -1 per 2 hexes, against a target of 20 minus any DEW and/or defensive



ELINT currently allocated by the target (this is not a true 'attack' and thus cannot usually be intercepted). If the attack succeeds, record by how much, this is now many 'information points' that have been gained. Then roll a hit location; this determines which system the info points relate to. Any hit to structure gains IW points relating to 'general', as does any hit to a system that is currently deactivated (not that all instances of a particular system in a section must be deactivated for this to apply). A called shot can be used, with a penalty of only -4, or -8 if a primary system is targeted, in which case the attacker chooses which system is accessed.

Info points relate to all examples of that particular system in use by the race of the target ship, general info points relate to all ships of the same class as the target. Info points can be used for a number of purposes:

The most important is in campaign play, any info points gained on a particular system will give a bonus to either reverse-engineering that system, or designing a countermeasure.

Specific scenarios may have victory conditions that are met by acquiring a certain number of info points on a particular subject.

Using the information gained, the attacker can attempt to shut down systems on an enemy unit. Make an IW attack, as above, but against a defensive profile equal to the number of general info points gained, modified by DEW. On a successful hit, treat the target system as if hit by a burst beam. A called shot can be made, with the modifiers given above, against a defensive profile equal to the number of info points relating to

the desired target.

There are a number of possible defences against IW attacks, with varying effectiveness:

Defensive EW and ELINT (including blanket protection), as noted.

Disruptive ELINT nullifies IW in the same way that it nullifies EW.

Deactivated systems cannot be 'read', but they cannot be used either.

If an enemy has accumulated a large number of info points against a particular system, a defence is to re-configure that system. All instances of the system must be de-activated for a turn, and the intent to re-configure announced during the ship power segment. The attacker then loses half of the info points they had accumulated with regards to that system but only with regards to those ships that re-configured. Each reconfigured system must then make a critical hit roll during the appropriate segment of the turn that they were reconfigured.

A Jammer prevents an IW lock on, doubling the effective range. Likewise for limited stealth abilities.

A BFCP can be allocated to 'IW defence', giving a -1 penalty to all IW attacks that turn. Unlike other uses of BFCPs, there is no limit (other than the total produced by the computer) to how many can be allocated to this each turn.

If an IW attack is used against an IW capable target, the target can allocate IW to defence (DIW), requiring 1 BFCP. This otherwise functions like DEW, however, if the total of DIW exceeds the attacker's IW (modified only for range), the defender gains a number of info

points equal to the difference relating to the attacker's computer systems. Any further IW attacks by that attacker against that target will be penalised by the number of info points so gained.

IW by younger races has no effects against any organic ships or ships with advanced sensors. The more advanced younger races (Minbari, Hyach, Yolu, etc.) gain a +4 bonus to their defence against IW attacks, in addition to any defensive systems they may have. As an option, very primitive races (probably more so than Gromes or Hurr) may not use much in the way of computer control, and thus will be immune to the disabling capability of IW.

As an option, the Hyach could be given IW capabilities. Among the Ancients, the Torvalus and the Walkers should be given IW capability, while the other Ancient's technologies are incompatible with the development of IW.

This is all based on the fact that the initial incursion by S2262-A ships was able to access the computer systems of Babylon 5. In the later battle this capability was not used, probably because the ships were allocating their EW to more conventional uses during the battle.

Anyway, I feel that these rules could add an interesting extra dimension to a battle, and I am working on a more advanced form for another project, so I thought I'd 'test the waters' here, as it were.

Stealth Ships

All species S2262-A ships that have been observed in action appear to have limited stealth

abilities to a level that could well exceed that of the Hyach (for example, they do not need to use special thruster arrangements on their ships in order to use stealth, like the Hyach are forced to do with their Alichu Kav stealth ship, while the S2262-A gunboat has similar stealth characteristics to the Hyach Doskva stealth fighter!) The S2262-A stealth technology is similar to its Hyach counterpart in being somewhat reliant on the functioning of the ship's computer and sensor systems, if either is destroyed, both the defensive profiles of the ship are increased by 3.

It is possible, if not probable, that species S2262-A does have ships that lack stealth capability, however these are likely to be limited to logistics vessels that are not intended to see front line service, and civilian vessels assuming such exist.

I have given all of the S2262-A units described in this article Limited Stealth Abilities, as this most closely matches the fact that the Babylon 5 Starfury and Thunderbolt fighters, or the Babylon 5 defensive weapons could only obtain a weapon lock at very close ranges. There is no direct evidence that the White Stars were similarly affected, but they were observed engaging the S2262-A gunboats at close range, while using a long range weapon (the Improved Neutron Laser).

Jump Drives

It is interesting to note that no species S2262-A ship has ever been observed opening its own jump point, in all cases, they utilised an existing jump gate to enter or exit hyperspace. It is possible that they have a 'technology blind spot' where hyperspace is concerned; alternatively, they simply do not have many jump drive equipped starships.

The most likely explanation is that they tend to raid space-faring races, using their information warfare capabilities (q.v.) to override the controls of a jump gate allowing it to be used to mount an invasion upon its owner. Using this strategy, they can use non-jump drive equipped ships, using the power and space saved by not using a jump drive to carry more weapons or troops. A lack of quantum-40 in their home region may have spurred this strategy.

Species S2262-A actually do have some whole jump gates, carried by their large world-ships, for use in emergency situations. They also have reasonably advanced hyperspace navigation capabilities (but not at the level of Ancients).

This is all pure surmise, but we never do see a

S2262-A ship opening its own jump gate, and I liked the idea of a race of galactic nomadic raiders using the jump gates of their victims against them. Their hyperspace navigation ability seems a reasonable capability for a race of galactic nomads.

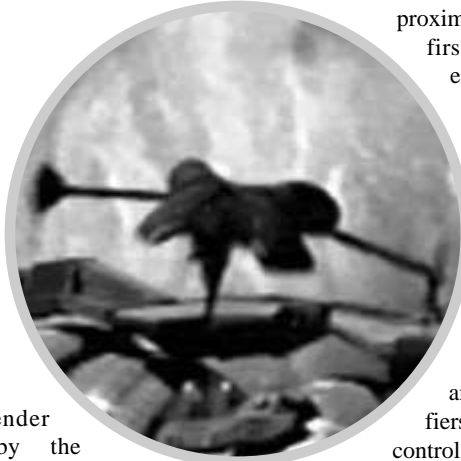
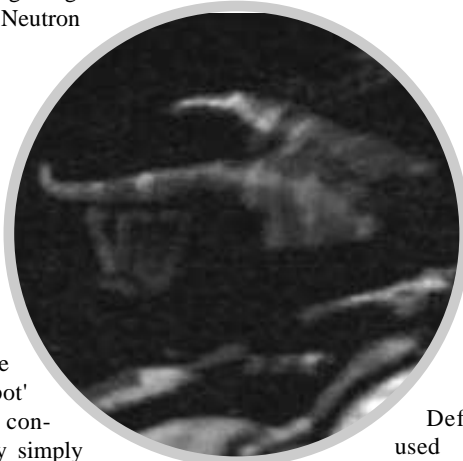
Docking Bay

As well as conventional hangers to house shuttles or breaching pods, the larger S2262-A ships include docking bays capable of handling their gunboats. Each gunboat occupies 4 boxes of the docking bay. The docking bay suffers normal hanger critical hits.

Antiproton Bolter

Class: Antimatter Mode: Standard

This weapon appears related to the Antiproton Gun and Antiproton



Defender
used by the

Vree, it fires a 'bolt' of antiprotons at the target. It inflicts similar damage to the Antiproton Gun, but is somewhat more reliable on the accuracy of its hit. Its range is comparable to that of the Antiproton Defender, while its interception capability is noticeably inferior. Its primary use is as the main weapon in the small S2262-A gunboats.

The forward weapon is of the antimatter class, as the dependence of this class of weapons upon by how much the attack roll succeeded (the 'X' factor) would represent the difference in effect between a glancing hit (which can drop out but not kill a Starfury or Thunderbolt) and a direct hit (which kills a Starfury or Thunderbolt). The weapon range would have to be short, otherwise the gunboats could have used their stealth advantage to hold back outside effective range of the EA ships. The rate of fire is slower than

that of either a Starfury or Thunderbolt, but it should be remembered that the two Uni-Pulse Cannons allocated to a Starfury in Babylon 5 Wars represents 4 weapons in the show, and the Gatling Pulse Cannon on the Thunderbolt is a pulse weapon in the show. A rate of fire of 1 per turn was chosen for simplicity, but a rate of fire of 2 per 3 turns could be just as easily justified, but more complex in play. I decided to give the weapon a minimal interception rating of -1, although there is no evidence either way as to the existence of interception capability.

Antiproton Mine Launcher

Class: Proximity(Antimatter)

Mode: Standard

This appears to be a development of the Antiproton Bolter, however, instead of 'firing' a bolt of antiprotons, it 'drops' them to attack or deter pursuing craft. To use in play, follow the procedure below:

Determination and declaration of use should occur during the relevant parts of the Electronic Warfare and Ballistic Launch Segment. As an option, the ability to drop the mine during any part of the gunboat's movement may be allowed.

As with other proximity weapons, the target hex should be noted. The weapon is treated as a proximity mine, and will attack the first unit (of any side) that enters the target hex.

Unlike normal proximity mines, however, the attacked unit will have some warning, so the attack will not automatically hit, and is subject to interception, roll an attack against the attacked unit, but only modifiers from interception and shields apply; no modifiers to range, EW, or fire control apply.

If the attack hits, the amount by which it hit (the 'X' factor) determines the damage inflicted, as is normal for antimatter-class weapons. An Antiproton Mine can only attack a single target.

The Antiproton Mine has only a shot duration, any Antiproton Mines that are still in play are removed during the end of turn actions step.

This weapon is largely to deter enemy fighters (which are probably more manoeuvrable than the gunboats) from getting on the gunboat's 'six', and for attacking units that are too sluggish to avoid it.

The small S2262-A craft were shown 'dropping' glowing yellow balls, as well as firing them, I decided that this was a separate weapon system, but using a related technology to the forward firing guns.

Antiproton Pulse Cannon

Class: Antimatter

Mode: Pulse

This is a development of the Antiproton Bolter, in a similar way to the relationship between Dilgar bolter and pulsar weapons. It fires a string of antiproton bolts at the target. Its primary function is as a close-in anti-fighter weapon system for the larger S2262-A craft. It follows the rules of both pulse-mode weapons and antimatter weapons, so the 'X' factor is used both to partially determine the number of pulses that hit, and to determine how much damage each pulse inflicts. For ease of play, all pulses in an attack use the same 'X' factor.

This weapon was not seen during 'A View from the Gallery' but is included as a reasonable extrapolation of the antimatter bolter to a defensive weapon for the larger ships.

Proximity Burster

Class: Proximity

Mode: Flash (No collateral)

This weapon resembles a lighter version of the Narn Energy Mine, however, unlike the Energy Mine, instead of exploding as soon as it reaches its target hex, it can remain active for some time, and will only explode when another unit enters its hex.

Initially, play this weapon as an Energy Mine with only a single hex of effect. However, if there are no craft in its hex after movement, its hex is still declared, and the record of its location is kept. If on any turn, a craft moves onto the same hex as the Proximity Burster, it

explodes, inflicting the listed damage to all craft within the same hex. During the end of turn actions step, roll 1d10 for each Proximity Burster still active, on a roll of '10', it explodes and is removed from play.

This is one possible explanation of the 'exploding green balls' seen during the battle. It is a long range 'flak' type weapon designed to harass fighters attacking the gunboats. In conjunction with the gunboats own Antiproton Mines, it could be used as a 'herding' weapon to control the movement of enemy fighters.

MILITARY

From what has been observed, species S2262-A appears to be highly aggressive. Its tactics appear to concentrate on attempting the capture of key enemy installations, using gunboat swarms to suppress enemy fire while stealthed breaching pods deposit squads of marines. They

are highly proficient at boarding actions gaining a -1 modifier to all boarding party die rolls. Species S2262-A can purchase breaching experts at the same rate as Balosians, Yolu, Narn or Gaim. They may also purchase expert software engineers, but at double the cost that the Hyach pay.

This is largely guesswork, but they did send in breaching pods in an attempt to seize Babylon 5, and it is probably their typical modus operandi, so I allowed them to purchase the relevant expert at the reduced cost. Likewise, their use of computers permits them to purchase expert software technicians, but at a more expensive price, partially because they get more out of their computers.

Starships & Fighters

Species S2262-A ships, as mentioned, almost

matter-class weapons, a forward firing Antiproton Bolter for offence, and a rear-firing Antiproton Mine launcher. Their main defence is their limited stealth ability, which is as effective as that of the Hyach Doskva stealth fighter, despite their larger size.

Their main tactic is to make high speed passes, dropping a few antiproton mines to deter pursuing fighters.

Their control system is sufficiently advanced to allow for limited IW attacks, they are incapable of performing any ELINT function, but can attempt to 'read' the computer systems. To do so they can allocate up to all of their EW as IW (in contravention of the normal rules on EW allocation for LCVs - a rule that applies for all other EW uses), they do not need to allocate a BFCP, as they have a specially dedicated computer system built into their control system for this purpose. They're

stealth abilities are tied into this control system, should it be destroyed, their defensive profiles will both increase by 3.

These ships appear to have a reasonable operation range, as they have been observed operating some distance in advance of their fleet.

As stated, I felt that these ships were rather to large to class as fighters, even super-heavy ones, combined with their relative lack of manoeuvrability settled this. Their very high thrust rating is taken from the observation in 'Empirical Evidence' that they can out-accelerate Thunderbolts. The reasoning behind the

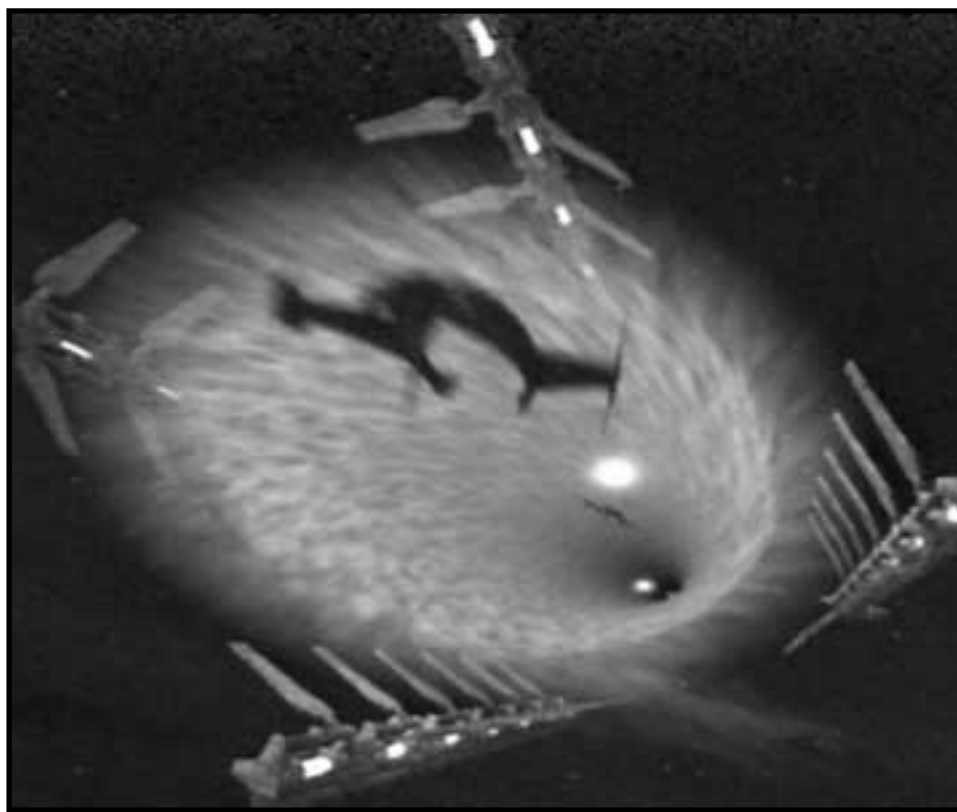
weapon systems and IW capability were given earlier.

I derived their structure boxes from the observations of how many weapons hits tended to kill them, 'Empirical Evidence' lists four main examples of these ships coming under fire:

In the initial raid, a single hit by one of Babylon 5's large pulse weapons (assumed to be a Heavy Pulse Cannon) destroys a gunboat. This was likely a 'lucky' hit to the reactor.

In the same battle, a gunboat comes under multiple fire from Babylon 5's small weapons (either an Interceptor or a Quad Particle Array) and Starfury guns (Uni-Pulse Cannon), taking several hits to destroy.

The last of the initial attackers takes two hits from a large Babylon 5 weapon (again assumed to be a Heavy Pulse Cannon) before it is destroyed, the first hit probably hit and destroyed either its drive or control system.



always have limited stealth abilities, limiting the range at which an enemy can effectively engage them. This advantage is reduced, however, by their tendency to use short-range weapons. Their ships tend to be capable of high accelerations, but are not overly manoeuvrable. The actual designations that species S2262-A gives their ships are not known, so they will be referred to by descriptive names.

'Horseshoe' Fast Attack Gunboats

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

These are the small craft that first attack Babylon 5. They are of the light combat vessel class, and are at the smaller end of the size range of that class, but are sufficiently large and capable not to be classified as fighters. For LCVs, especially of their size, they are somewhat unmanoeuvrable, but are capable of high rates of acceleration. They're are armed with two anti-



The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and every-
where

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words
out

When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in the sands of
the desert

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle
And what rough beast, its hour come round at
last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

- William Butler Yeats

In the large battle, a gunboat is hit by multiple (probably two or three) Thunderbolts (Gatling Pulse Cannon), and destroyed.

They did not appear to be particularly heavily armoured, so typical armour values for an LCV were chosen. Their control rating is higher than usual, to represent their high-tech sensor and computer capabilities. Finally, to give them a bit of interest, a power shortage was added, forcing a choice as to which weapon to use each turn, and requiring some forward planning.

'Wagon Wheel' Assault Cruiser

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

These large ships are primarily used to provide support to attacking packs of gunboats, and to transport large numbers of troops and their associated breaching pods and assault shuttles. To fulfil this role they have large docking bays to service the gunboats and house the breaching pods and assault shuttles. They have powerful ELINT sensor arrays to support the gunboats and perform IW attacks as required. Armament is relatively light, consisting mostly of short-ranged defensive weapons and a few long-range Proximity Bursters to provide anti-fighter fire support. They tend to rely on the gunboats to defend against enemy ships.

The SCS provided is for those used in the episode, with a load-out of breaching pods intended to be used to capture Babylon 5. For an assault on a planetary base, substitute the breaching pods for assault shuttles.

We have very little evidence of these ships capabilities, so a lot of this is based on the fact that they did not seem to take an active role in the battle, other details are extrapolated from the observed abilities of the gunboats.

'Trilobite' class Breaching Pod

Base Hull (Unlimited Deployment)

These are function identically to other races' breaching pods, except for their limited stealth ability, which substantially improves their survival chances while approaching their target.

Other Hypothetical Ships

We can hypothesize about the existence of other ships used by species S2262-A, assuming that species S2262-A is the Wen'dan Horde then the following additional ships are a possibility:

World-ships: these enormous vessels (of the same order of magnitude as a Drakh mothership) act as the major population centres of the Horde, as well as including food production centres, and enormous docking and repair bays capable of servicing or building any smaller ship type used by the Horde. Such ships would be heavily defended, and would never be willingly involved in a battle. These ships could well be the only ones in the Horde with jump drives, in the form of whole jump gates taken from races that have been ravaged by the Horde.

War Cruisers: this variant of the assault cruiser usually sees service escorting the enormous world-ships. Unlike the assault cruisers, that rely on escorting gunboats to engage enemy shipping, the war-cruisers are essentially gunships, armed with heavy weapons (probably Antimatter Converters and Antimatter Torpedoes or similar) to engage any enemy ship that threatens the World-ships.

Obliterators: these are terror weapons, effectively heavy bombardment cruisers loaded with high-yield antimatter bombs, they are usually used as a threat or a decoy unit.

The weapons carried by such units could include existing antimatter class weapons, such as Antimatter Converters (which could be the source of the Minbari version of this weapon, depending upon its introduction date by that race). They may also use some electromagnetic and gravitic class weapons, or for that matter weapons of any class.

This is all purely guesswork, and I haven't detailed any of these, as yet, leaving that as an 'exercise for the reader', if anyone is interested. The world-ship would probably require a multi-sheet SCS.

* * *

(The SCS sheets found in Attachments folder)

“A View from the Peanut Gallery”

IN PREPARING this submission I watched both the episode in meticulous detail and examined Babcom's speculative evidence, in order to draw my own conclusions.

My conclusions in the end differed somewhat from the Babcom analysis. The major difference is in the interpretation of the smaller craft. Where one labels it a Super Heavy Fighter I'm of the belief that there are actually two sizes of the same class.

Throughout the rather uninspiring CGI of "A View from the Gallery" there are clear discrepancies between the performance of the "horseshoe" in the first wave, and the performance in the second. In the first wave three craft avoided a wing of Star Furies and were largely brought down by B5's defence Grid. In the second wave, seemingly smaller craft are swatted like flies by both Thunderbolts and Star furies.

Therefore I have come up with two designs, a relatively weak LCV and a medium Fighter design. For the capital ship, there's little data on the vessel other than the seeming support role. I therefore equipped and armed it accordingly. I have largely denounced the idea of some stealth capabilities in the attack fleet.

The short-ranged combat between fighters is typical of the poor season CGI sequences, and the fact that the breaching pod survived to carry out its mission is not unlike the sequence in Severed Dreams which featured a plain old Earth pod. I have given the LCV some level of "stealth technology" to help account for the dialogue, and to compliment its scouting mission.

THE WEN'DAN HORDE

No one is quite sure where this nomadic race originated, but what is known is that the encounter in 2262 was not the first. On at least one previous occasion the Horde has moved through this known area of space. It is believed that the two separate intrusions are accounted for by different groups of an original race. When their homeworld reached planetary collapse, the species performed their exodus in varied groups. These groups then went their separate

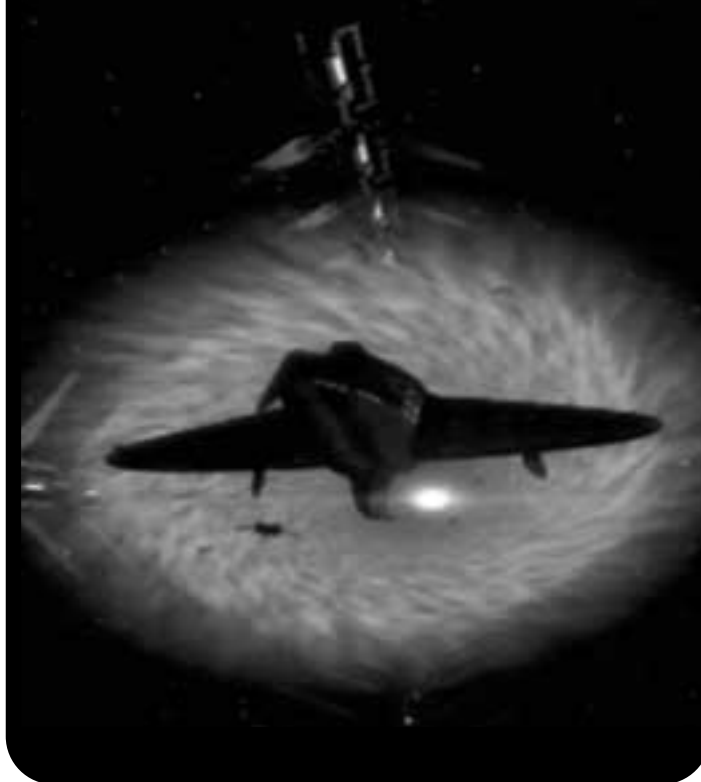
directions, each to make a life for themselves. One of these factions encountered the Minbari several centuries ago and was defeated. The second intrusion is believed to not be the original wave but rather a second faction, which conquered different worlds, and eventually followed in their brother's footsteps.

Unlike most species, the Wen'Dan are at a point of technological stagnation. The nature of their society promotes the conquest and consumption of suitable worlds. With a constantly moving

infrastructure there is little effort placed upon the research of new technologies. Though some of their designs may be more recent or based upon conquered races, for the most part their ships are at the same level of technology that the Minbari fought centuries ago and that was achieved on their homeworld. Wen'Dan tactics are also largely based upon overwhelming enemies with sheer numbers and consequently older, lower maintenance and more reliable technology is preferred. As a race as old as the Minbari, they are

SURELY SOME REVELATION IS AT HAND

PAUL BROWN'S take on the
Wen'Dan Horde



using weapons and sensors comparable to Drazi technology.

"Ravager" Assault Carrier

These relatively recent designs are used in advance fleets to scout and test potential targets. Though a large ship it is poorly armed and armoured, instead of engaging directly in combat it utilises fighters and supplies smaller ships, which accompany its fleet. It's most important weaponry are its breaching pods which enable it to capture enemy vessels to better evaluate the technology and physiological abilities of a species.

"Nomad" Patrol Craft

These smaller escorts accompany the larger assault carriers. They patrol an area around the main fleet to destroy enemy scouts and early warning systems, therefore hiding their fleets' true strength. They also act as the first-in-system scouts and are able to both effectively scan enemy targets and achieve a level of stealth with their distortion fields. In assaults, they spearhead the attack along with their smaller fighter brethren to enable breaching pods to land upon enemy targets.

Distortion Field: Effective only on smaller ships, this midlevel jamming device acts like a Particle Impeder except that it has no arc restrictions and no intercept capability. Each turn a ship may devote any amount of EW to this device and it consequently lowers the defensive profile from all directions against both ships AND fighters. Effectively it provides advanced DEW, and also enables the Nomad to ignore normal LCV EW restrictions.

"Locust" Medium Fighter

Carried onboard the assault Carriers, these fighters benefit from both a powerful engine and a low profile enhanced with a sensor absorbent hull. For firepower they mount a cannon which fires concentrated bursts of neutron particles contained within degrading stasis fields. The collapse of these fields' releases the particles in a cloud, which when used defensively can provide powerful intercept capabilities.

(The SCS sheets can be found in the Attachments folder)



The New Storm

By: STEVE1

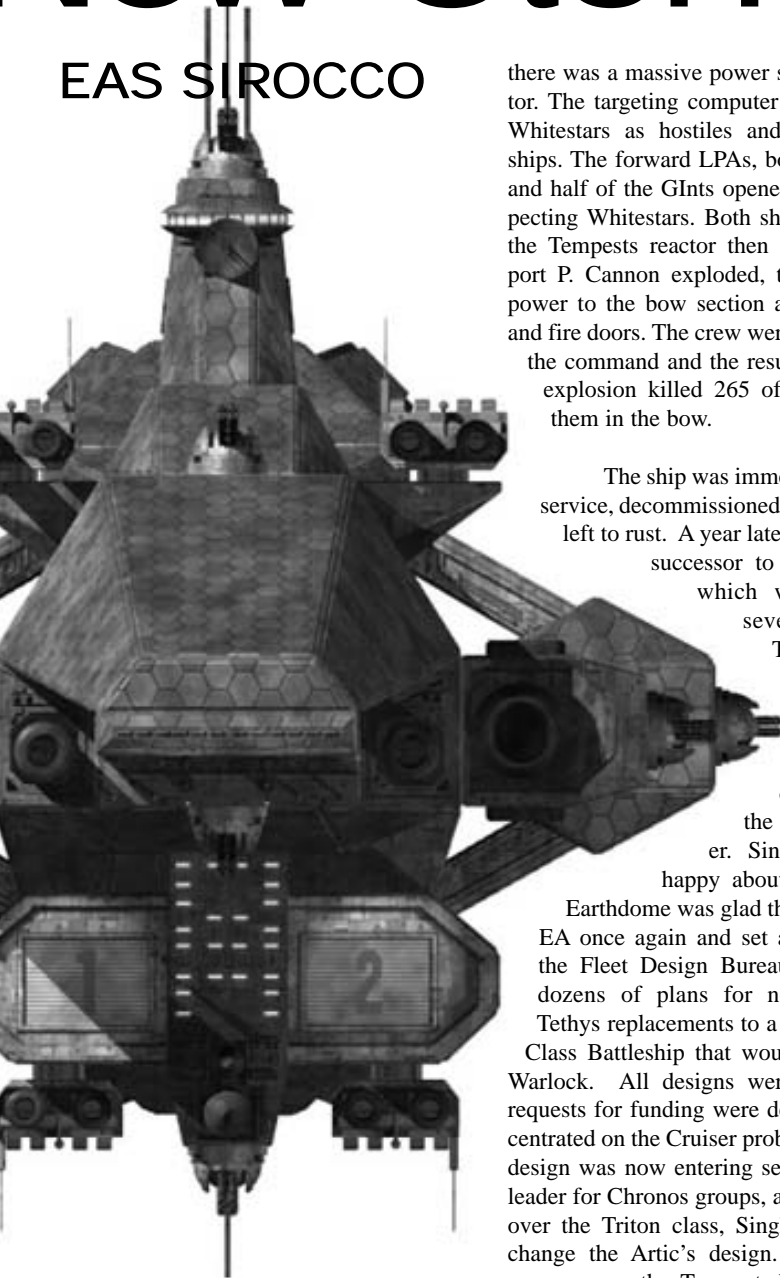
EAS SIROCCO

In 2255, the EA Cruiser 'D' design project was intended to build a replacement for the aging Hyperion line as the general purpose EA Cruiser that would supplement the Omega Class Destroyers. This would further free up the new Chronos Class Frigates from the roles that did not suit their design, such as patrolling and convoy escorting. Unfortunately the 'D' design was flawed as political interference and continuous changes to the design delayed the project and caused massive cost overruns. The design was eventually finalized in 2263 into what would become the Tempest Class Advanced Cruiser. The ship would incorporate the latest technology available to the EA, such as artificial gravity, improved sensors and new weapons.

The Intermediate Particle Cannons were very powerful and had good fire control but were plagued by high maintenance needs and had high power consumption levels. This did not make them bad weapons, and were viewed as a possible successor to the Hvy Laser so prevalent in Earth Force. But the decision to mate them with the Tempest hull was a bad one. The Tempest boasted the most advanced and comprehensive Interceptor suite ever fitted to an EA warship. The brand new Gatling Interceptors were the leading edge of EA defensive technology. These weapons replaced the common Interceptor/Particle Beam mix on most EA warships, but were fitted in such numbers that they drained a massive amount of power. The reactor on the ship was as big as it could be, and provided enough power to arm the Gatling Interceptors, the four LPAs and the dual Heavy lasers that the ship originally mounted.

The Particle Cannons replaced the Hvy Lasers, but this meant that the Tempest needed more power than its already stressed reactor could produce. This fault was noted but it was decided to go ahead with the construction of a prototype to test the ships performance in a multitude of roles.

Once the usual teething troubles with the new ship were overcome the Tempest joined the EA's order of battle. The new ship was generations ahead of anything in service with the EA apart from the Warlocks, which the Tempest bore a superficial resemblance too. But almost from day one, the ship seemed plagued with faults and failures.



In exercises 'hostile' ships and fighters were able to take advantage of the blind spots provided by the Tempests massive power deficiency. Her computer system, although brand-new, was very temperamental, and often did things without any commands being entered. The small arc of the particle cannons made them less capable than had been hoped, and the excessive maintenance requirements of the new Gatling Interceptors kept the ship in dock for more time than she was out in space.

Even after many months spent in dock the electrical faults could not be solved. The problems with the computer system came to a head when the Tempest was involved in a large ISA exercise. The Tempest performed adequately on the exercise, but during the third day of the campaign disaster struck. A pair of ISA Whitestars was assigned to act as escorts for the Tempest and were approaching the ship head on when

there was a massive power surge from the reactor. The targeting computer designated the two Whitestars as hostiles and locked onto both ships. The forward LPAs, both particle cannons and half of the GInts opened fire on the unsuspecting Whitestars. Both ships were destroyed; the Tempests reactor then overloaded and the port P. Cannon exploded, the computer killed power to the bow section and sealed the blast and fire doors. The crew were unable to override the command and the resulting fires from the explosion killed 265 of the crew, most of them in the bow.

The ship was immediately taken out of service, decommissioned and mothballed and left to rust. A year later the EA still had no successor to the Hyperion line, which was now showing severe age problems.

The designer of the EAS Artic, Admiral (Ret'd) Ashvin Singh was called out of retirement to help the EA get a new cruiser. Singh although not too happy about being recalled by

Earthdome was glad that he could help the EA once again and set about working with the Fleet Design Bureau. Earth Force had dozens of plans for new warships from Tethys replacements to a resurrected Medusa Class Battleship that would even outgun the Warlock. All designs were put on hold; all requests for funding were denied as Singh concentrated on the Cruiser problem. His own Artic design was now entering service as a squadron leader for Chronos groups, and after the debacle over the Triton class, Singh was unwilling to change the Artic's design. Singh eventually came across the Tempest design and he liked what he saw. The ship was sleek, modern and reached all the criteria set by the FDB for a new cruiser. Singh realized where the design had gone wrong and set about fixing the failed cruiser. The hull of the Tempest was taken to Proxima where the Artic yards were. Once a berth was free the Tempest took its place and work was started immediately.

The ship was gutted, until only her hull remained. Once free of all the troublesome computer systems, Singh had a modified Artic system installed in the ship. It didn't use any new equipment and had many features of the Omega design. The weapons Singh felt, were an easy choice, the Particle Cannons were replaced with a pair of Hvy Lasers, and the two forward facing LPAs replaced with Hvy Pulse Cannons.

The rear facing LPAs were swapped out for Medium Pulse Cannons but had their arc



improved so they could face forward. The Gatling Interceptors were replaced with a mix of Mk2 Interceptors and Particle Beams. The engine was tweaked and improved to provide more thrust and a reactor from a Warlock was fitted to eliminate the rampant power problems the Tempest faced. The ship now mounted 2 Hvy Lasers, 2 HPCs, 2 MPCs, 6 Interceptor Mk2's, and 8 P-Beams, which gave the ship an impressive punch without stressing the reactor. But to fit the larger reactor and engines along with the improved thrusters something had to be sacrificed. Some of the original Tempests 24 fighters would have to go, but still Singh found a way around losing 12 of the fighters as had

been originally feared. Instead 3 fighters went from each hanger, and the primary hanger was sacrificed with the shuttles going to the side mounted hangers. Although 18 fighters was an odd amount for Earth Force they were happy with the design.

In her shakedown the re-named EAS Sirocco performed admirably, the ship was faster than the Hyperion, and could keep up with the Chronos class.

Her armament was also satisfactory and Officers who served on her gave sterling reports about the ships performance and capabilities. The design went before the FDB along with the extensive reports on the ships performance and

capabilities and they liked what they saw. The ship was also cheaper than had been expected which would please Senators in Earthdome.

The design was approved and a new shipyard was built onto the existing yard for the Artics. The first two Siroccos' out of the production line (EAS Thunderchild & EAS Stormbringer) performed as well as their primogenitor. And production was stepped up to meet the demand of replacing the Hyperions. Although the number of Siroccos in service is small at the moment this number will only grow with time.

* * *

(The SCS for the Sirocco can be found in the attachments and was created by Hyperion)



SEASON TWO

DVD BOXED SET REVIEW

By J.J. O'Shaughnessy

Ahh yes. Babylon 5 Season 2. "The Coming of Shadows". Once again I fork out the guts of a weeks salary to watch the collected episodes of a show with "No Story" "Crap acting" "Silly special effects" and is nothing compared to the glories of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Sorry about that. Must have a cold.

Ok, what did I get for my hard-earned cash? Well, it's blue! (Get on with it! -Ed.) It comes packaged very similar to the first season boxed set. The episodes are once again spread across six CDs with four episodes per CD (apart from the last, which has two episodes, two documentaries and some special features.) The insert has one major flaw, in that a Sharlin is placed upside down on the picture, a bit annoying for a Minbari fan. I also hear that some people got a German Insert instead of the English version. However, enough of those gaffs, the meat is within the CDs.

Similar to the first boxed set, you open to a menu with an annoying Warner Brothers scene and an opening menu scene that you can't skip through. You are then presented with a fairly standard menu with the scene of various cast members morphing into each other. (If you want to know true horror, you have to watch Talia turning into Kosh and Delenn turning into Vir. Someone somewhere is really proud of that effect.) When you enter the episode selection screen, you can simply select the episode or you can look at the AD! Yes, now for all time you can thrill at the wonderful and accurate trailers put together by the marketing department! OOH at the dialogue! AHHH at the drama! YEEARRRGH as you put your fist through the TV. They are terrible. And they are mine for all time! God bless Warner brothers!

Ok. I can sense you are sick of my pontificating and are wondering about the episodes. Well, the quality of episodes is a subjective thing, as ever, but from my own perspective... well; let's look at it this way. I put the first one on at 9:30 at night, thinking I'd sit down watch one, maybe two episodes and then go to bed. Have you ever listened to the dawn chorus? It's so soothing. And people really don't need sleep every 24 hours. Yes folks, I was up all night looking at it. AND last night looking at the rest. I was an hour and a half late for work today. These episodes are good. Damn good.

That's not to say that there aren't a few episodes that are weaker than the rest. Also the structure in some leaves a bit to be desired. Occasionally JMS has to put in parts of the wider arc into an episode and that episode can suffer. The worst to suffer from this is "All

Alone in the Night," a very good episode until you are asked to believe that a guy kidnapped and tortured by the Streib would be yapping on about his conspiracy less than four hours after rescue (and they spent close to a quarter of an hour on it.) And there are a few glitches, like Omega's being referred to as Cruisers until episode 15, where they suddenly became Destroyers. But in general, very, very good.

The screen presentation does leave a little something to be desired however. There are two ways to do wide-screen presentation of a standard TV screen presentation. One is to stretch the screen to the proportions of the new width. The second is to chop off a portion to make it look wide-screen. They have chosen the latter

(wisely) but they chopped off the bottom of the screen. This would be a minor problem, but there are a couple of times where subtitles are lost because of this. This is very unfortunate and does distract from the general quality of the product.

I don't want to focus on the bad stuff. This is a really good product and at worst the stuff above is only mildly distracting. The episodes are filled with moments. For example, the most haunting thing for me (I had never seen a lot of Season 2 and completely missed this) was "The Long, Twilight Struggle". The Narn-Shadow battle is done with such agonising slowness, the drama wrung out with such pathos. And at the end when the Centauri are bombing the Narn, I was



DVD

genuinely moved. JMS crafted this episode with ultimate care, and it shows. It would have been all too easy to just go the “YEEHAA lets have tons of action” route, and he really doesn’t. And the episode is the better for it. And when you see the Shadow being damaged it echoes a line heard much later: “They are not gods, and they CAN be beaten”. Hope in despair. First class.

On to the special features. The “data files” are your standard watch once and forget material, with a new “moving along the docking bays” interface that will make damn sure you only look at them once (that effects designer really earned his pay cut with this product.) There are two documentaries with it, one talking about the two episodes that won the Hugo award (“The Coming of Shadows” and “Severed Dreams”), the other talking about the process they went through when making the episodes. These documentaries, obviously made just for this product, are very good viewing and well worth perusing. From a personal perspective, I wish they had gone into a little more detail about the process, but that would probably have required someone being there with a camera at the time, which is obviously now impossible. As before there are commentaries by JMS on two episodes “In the Shadow of Za’ha’dum” and “The Fall of Night.” As before these are funny, intelligent and informative. (I fully agree with his comments on Lt Keffer, btw *heh heh*.) My comments on this in my report on the previous boxed set still stand.

New in this product however, is a commentary by cast members, namely Bruce Boxleitner, Claudia Christian and Jerry Doyle, on the episode “the Geometry of Shadows” (you know, the one with the Drazi purple, green thing.) This is, well, to be honest, a bit of a mess, but is worth it for the amusement value if nothing else. In between all the laughter and CC screaming about how small everyone’s “butts” are, you can pick out some interesting thoughts by the cast on the series and what they went through to make the series. (This actually lessens my thoughts on the slight lack of detail in the documentary, come to think about it.) It’s well worth listening to, and at least proves these guys had a ball making the show, which I guess is perfect as we all had a ball watching it. And, on a personal level, its nice to know they all agreed with my reaction on the whole “Tracy Scoggins used to be married to Sheridan” thing. “WHAT?!”

Anyway, I’ve rambled on long enough. This product is sitting at pride of place in my collection (beside “The Princess Bride”, high praise indeed!) I can highly recommend it.

Trivia; The guy that played Lt Keffer (you know, the annoying hotshot pilot from season 2) also was in the game Wing Commander 4 (where he played an evil annoying hotshot pilot.) There, something you didn’t know.

What’s new is old again in Battlestar



THE “reimagined” Battlestar Galactica will mix design elements from the original 1970s TV series with new designs.

But the choice of these elements seems suspect. Instead of the original series’ distinctive use of ancient civilisation themes, the “reimagined” version is doing the usual - adopting a direct graft of current US culture and iconography. No Egyptian-esque helmets or clothing. No weave of ancient mythology. Just the standard US Airforce “rescue” stickers on the side of the Vipers and Hollywood sweatshirts. Ho hum.

The new Galactica’s Vipers are essentially identical to the original’s. But the show will also introduce a new ship, the Raptor. Built for reconnaissance, not combat, we are told the Raptor looks like a bulkier version of the Viper, bristling with antennas and sensors.

The iconic Galactica will also change. Although the new design contains elements that reminiscent of the original, there are significant differences. The new Galactica has retractable landing bays and contains far more gridwork and steel grating than the original design. Where the 1978 Galactica provided the look of an armored fighting ship, the new design appears to be a piecemeal construction.

As are the Cylon base ships and raiders. The Base Star has a “chrome executive” look, and the Raider is a sleek ship with one pilot.

The Cylon’s themselves also change. Whatever new form those killer robots will take is being kept under wraps. But we are told an actual Cylon costume from the original series will make an appearance-in a museum case. Hooray....

Battlestar Galactica will debut in December.



The best mixed with the worst

By MELISSA J. PERENSON

THE year is 2259, and the universe is on edge, a powder keg on the verge of exploding-with a rippling effect echoed far and wide. The space station Babylon 5-the universe's self-proclaimed last, best hope for peace-is trying to maintain order amid the impending chaos as hostilities break out between the Narn and the Centauri.

The lyricism of Babylon 5 becomes clear when revisiting the show's second season. This season, which was predominantly scripted by series creator J. Michael Straczynski, has remarkable resonance, even now, 10 years after the episodes aired. If anything, the arc of the season-which is aptly titled "The Coming of Shadows"-serves as a timely commentary on the eternal struggle between war and peace.

Straczynski's fluid vision for his story is completely realized as the year progresses, and even standalone episodes that are not overtly part of the greater Shadow War arc often contain foreshadowing of the events to come.

The season starts out with the unexpected introduction of a new captain, John Sheridan, a new look for the Minbari ambassador Delenn, and a new, darker dynamic on the station. Sheridan needs little time to grow into his role as station commander; in fact, he hits the ground running in a big way in the season opener, "Points of Departure," dodging rogue Minbari intent on making Sheridan pay for his past success in the Earth-Minbari War.

The first half of the season slowly builds to a crescendo, interspersing the humorous with the chilling (as in "Soul Mates"); tracing the mounting tensions between the Narn and the Centauri ("Revelations"); delving deeper into the Psi Corps's duplicity ("A Race Through Dark Places"); and of Centauri ambassador Lord Mollari's (Jurasik) increasing complicity with the Shadows (any number of episodes). By the ninth episode, the stunning, Hugo Award-winning episode "The Coming of Shadows" chronicles one emperor's last bid for salvation, even amid the power plays for his throne and threats on his life.

After "Coming of Shadows," the series continues toward its inexorable conclusion, one that sets the stage for the Shadow War. Sheridan, Garibaldi and Ivanova wrestle with increasing



doubts about the integrity of the president, of Psi Corps and of EarthForce itself. The arc episodes can be powerful ("In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum," "The Long, Twilight Struggle," "The Fall of Night"), but so too are the episodes in the periphery ("There All the Honor Lies," the clever "And Now for a Word," "Divided Loyalties" and "Comes the Inquisitor").

DVD: Stellar stories poorly presented

The six-DVD season-two set includes three audio commentaries, an introduction to the season, two documentaries and assorted supplemental multimedia bits with information about the universe of Babylon 5. Generally speaking, sea-

son two of Babylon 5 is well conceived, well constructed and well implemented. The same cannot be said, however, of this DVD set.

Sadly, Warner apparently did not take time to clean up the master video-presented in anamorphic widescreen format-before putting this season on DVD: Multiple episodes are plagued by scratches and other obvious, visual glitches. Warner also seems to have done a middling job at compressing the video, as seen on the final box set we received for review: occasionally, on a DVD player, we could tell this is compressed video; and, more often on a laptop PC using a software MPEG II decoder, the pixellation becomes quite evident.

The flip-book design of the case remains a positive, at least, as does the fact that the navigational menus are refreshingly streamlined.

Also refreshing are both of Straczynski's audio commentaries, for "In the Shadow of Z'ha'dum" and "Fall of Night." Straczynski does a great job at providing a mix of detailed insights and anecdotes, woven together in a coherent and entertaining way.

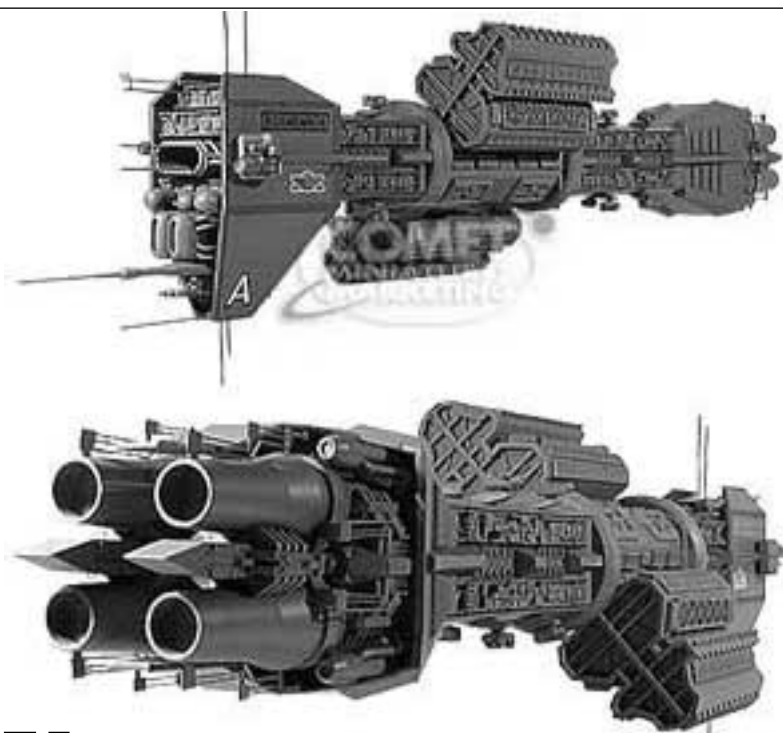
Less interesting to hear is the audio track for "The Geometry of Shadows." As narrated by Christian, Boxleitner and Doyle, it's clear that most of the rambling commentary is improv. And there's so much crosstalk and meandering among the trio's narrative that it's impossible to walk away with a coherent viewpoint, let alone enjoy listening to the track for any length at time. That said, it's also clear that the trio of reunited actors are obviously enjoying playing off each other and hamming it up.

The first disc includes a 10-minute introduction to the season with Straczynski and a handful of cast and crew. The short documentaries on disc 6, titled "Building Babylon: Anatomy of an



Episode" and "Shadows and Dreams: Honors of Babylon," are packed with interviews of various cast and crew and offer an interesting perspective on B5's evolution and honors (i.e., the show's Hugo Award nominations). Less useful are the handful of super-short personnel, data and tech files and the historical timeline (which goes only as far as season two).

While Babylon 5's first season was filled with world-building, its second did a tremendous job of engaging viewers with a science-fiction tale of epic proportions. It also ratchets the story and the action up several notches-without devolving into the darkness that is to come, at least not just yet. Reliving the season again, it's easy to see why this was one of my favorite seasons of B5 ever. Even the lighter moments-such as when Ambassador Mollari holds up his miniature, anatomically incorrect action figure (a poke at genre licensing and merchandising) are classic elements that make this season particularly worthwhile.



You pay your money, you take your chances

WITH the release of the official Star Fury resin model in the late 1990s, many of us anxiously awaited the release of our favorite Babylon 5 starships. Apart from Babylon 5 itself, those ships never came.

It was a major disappointment.

With the Babylon 5 franchise continuing to contract, some are grabbing whatever they can - even though it may be "unofficial". Here is an initial review of two such products currently on the market, the USS Agamemnon and a Thunderbolt.

USS Agamemnon

Manufacturer: Warp

Cost: 99pounds

THIS 18inch model arrived in the post neatly packaged, with all components accounted for and a basic - but vital - set of diagrammatic instructions.

It looks beautiful.

The resin components suffer the usual slight bubbling and uneven coloration. Nothing a layer of paint won't fix.

Some of the resin flash (mould injection points) were a little thick and were difficult to carve away neatly.

All parts appear straight and true to form.

This is particularly important given the vast quantity of components that have to be assembled to build this distinctive warship.

The mould has been cast to allow wiring for lights in the bow and engine sections, and a set of decals allow the ship to be classified as one of seven Omega-class ships seen in the series. While the model is expensive, it appears to be a very accurate and good quality rendition. I am eager to see it assembled.



Thunderbolt

Manufacturer: Studio 2

Cost: 90pounds

THIS is the model they were referring to when they warned you about the risks you take when buying non-official products.

From the opening of the box, the Studio 2 Thunderbolt has been a disappointment.

The bulk of the resin components were warped and require significant hot-water reshaping to get them anywhere near a usable shape.

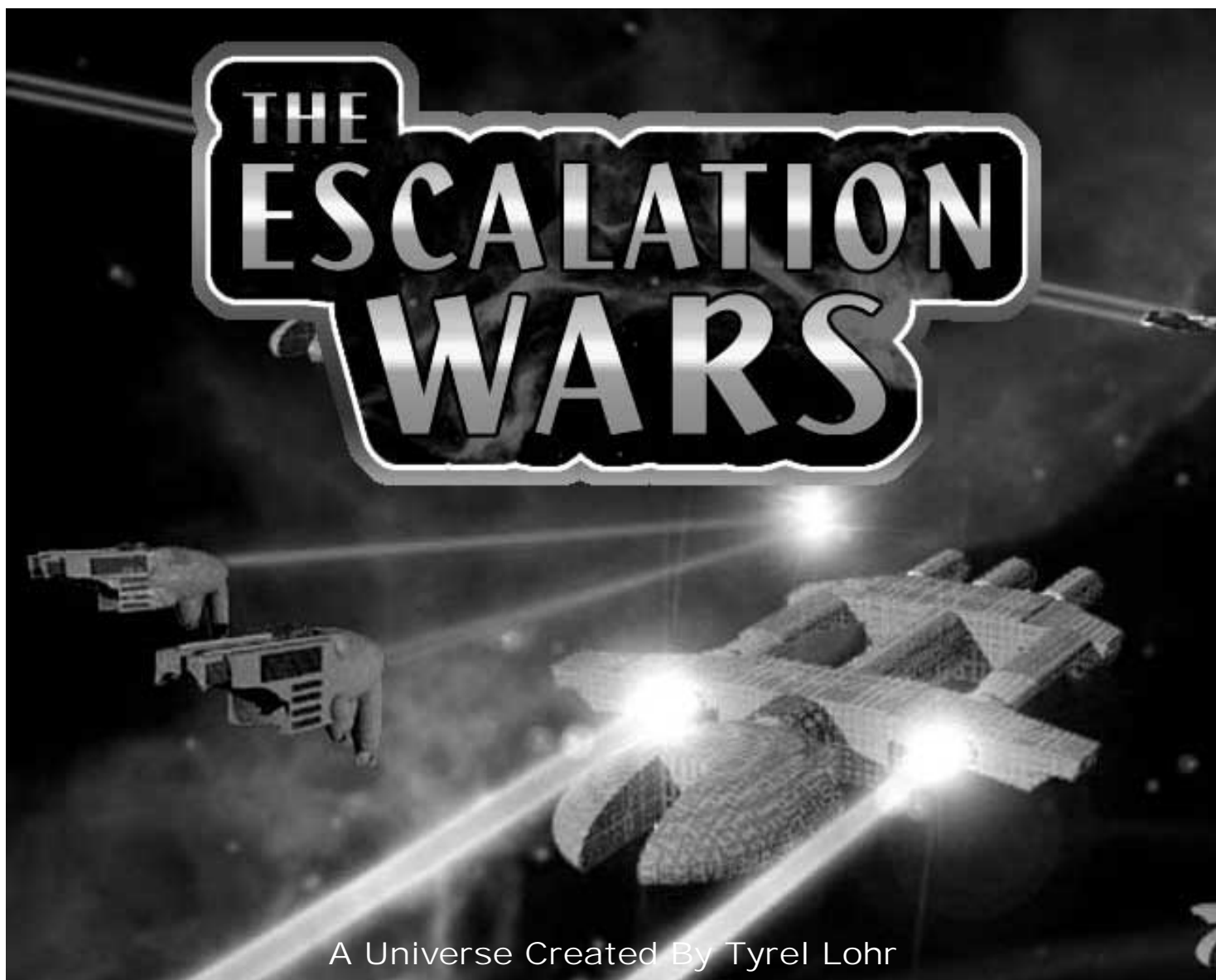
Worse, a vital - and large - wing panel was missing. We got two of the other wing...

But, worst of all, many components are one or two millimeters thicker than they should be.

You can see from the seams that the moulds either lifted or overflowed. This is almost a model-breaking flaw. We will try sanding, but only time will tell...

There are limited instructions. At least the model is significantly less complicated than the USS Agamemnon.

There are no decals.



INTRODUCTION

The Escalation Wars universe is an entirely new, original setting replete with a colorful cast of characters and a rich history. The core concept of the Escalation Wars was born several years ago and the release of *Empire Rising: A History of the Chouka War*, an unofficial supplement for the *Babylon 5 Wars* game system, is the culmination of more than two years of hard work.

What are the Escalation Wars?

Central to the story of the Escalation Wars universe, the Escalation Wars were a series of wars that engulfed all of known space from 2004 to 2025. At the heart of the Escalation Wars is the epic conflict between the two superpowers of the time: the Circasian Empire and the Courata Imperium. One nation built its empire through bloody expansionism, the other through the political and economic domination of its neighbors.

In the end, the Escalation Wars marked the beginning of a new age in known space. Dozens of races lay devastated by the conflict, their fleets and colonies battered or destroyed. The great empires of the Circasians and Courata waned after the conflict, but the legacy of their war remained.

The Chouka War

Empire Rising is a full-length supplement detailing the Circasian/Chouka War, more commonly referred to by historians as the Chouka War. It was this conflict that acted as the catalyst for launching the Circasian Empire into a position of power in the region of space, laying the framework for the future expansion of their empire—and the wars that went with it.

A Brief History of Known Space

In order to better understand the Escalation Wars universe one must look to its past. Long before the Escalation Wars, in fact long before either the Circasian or Courata had taken to the stars, the region that would come to be called known space was alive with activity. Little is remembered from these early days of civilization, though the telltale signs of intelligent life can be found in the scattered ruins and relics littering the area. The first recorded inhabitation of the region was the migration of the Hastan into the region in approximately 8100 B.C.E. Little is known of this spacefaring race, only that their empire enjoyed nearly total control of what would become known space.

About the time that the Hastan Empire was

fading and evidently receding from the region, a new power was rising upspin and coreward of known space. The great Lossoleguul Star Empire would reach its height in 1445 C.E., its far-flung colonies and outposts eventually connecting their empire to the periphery of known space. Fighting many great wars in its time (many of which are only half remembered in fables handed down by those races that yet remember the days of the empire), the Lossoleguuls dominated the region until the fall of the empire to outside invaders. Weakened by a protracted war with the Gammaks, the Lossoleguul were unsuccessful in beating back the waves of nomadic and displaced aliens fleeing from some unknown threat coreward of the empire. By 1600 C.E. the homeworlds of the Lossoleguul had been destroyed.

While the Lossoleguul's star was setting in the upspin territories, the first interstellar civilizations in known space were beginning to expand. The Ukal, Kholran, and Vendrizzi, among others, quickly rose to power and began exploring in earnest, establishing colonies and outposts in surrounding systems. Shielded from invasion due to their distance from the Lossoleguul remnants, these races were allowed to flourish. Technology and culture alike blossomed during these early days of discovery.

Among the first of these new races to appear in

THE ESCALATION WARS

known space, the Ukal were the most outgoing and adventuresome. The Ukal can be credited with expanding the frontier more than any other race and many of the races that would later rise to power in known space have the Ukal to thank for the introduction of jump technology.

The development of nations within known space has been mostly uneventful with wars as common as peace in some areas. Only one conflagration of note occurred that should be remarked on in such a brief summary as this, that being the Great War against the E'chekri.

A savage and brutal race of absolute xenophobes, the E'chekri appeared seemingly out of nowhere circa 1800 C.E. from outward and downspin of former Ukal space. This region, abandoned by the Ukal during the Takaaran crisis, had quickly become a cradle of civilization and home to half a dozen alien races. The E'chekri were indiscriminant in their genocidal fury, attacking any power at the slightest opportunity. It did not take long for most of the races in the region to take notice that the E'chekri were not simply a rogue nation desiring territory and resources but rather a race bent on the extermination of all other intelligent life.

The Great War against the E'chekri saw the forging of a great alliance of worlds to combat the E'chekri threat. Principally comprised of the ak-Tai, Lleskath, Kholran, Ghotekhen, and Solassi, this alliance was ultimately successful in defeating the E'chekri and scouring space of their menace, but not before many races and worlds paid the ultimate price for victory. The Komad, Menassi, and X'chukta were all destroyed during the war, and several of the other allies were likewise devastated by the conflict.

As the survivors began the slow process of rebuilding, the Kholran began their withdrawal from galactic affairs. The Kholran had been betrayed by their long time allies, the Ukal, when they reneged on their mutual defense treaty.

aspiring powers were able to learn from the mistakes of those that came before them and become stronger for it. Others believe that the success of these races can be more appropriately linked to changing attitudes after the Great War. In any event, it is these powers that would be instrumental in the shaping of the future of known space.

Creating the Past, Present, and Future of the Escalation Wars Universe

The Escalation Wars is something of an amalgam of many different fictional backgrounds that I have been developing over the years.

The Escalation Wars and the concept behind them were born two or three years ago as part of an aborted campaign. The idea and the major players in the conflict intrigued me, so I continued development of their universe in earnest.

The Circasians have existed in multiple forms for many years, created even before the development of the initial Escalation Wars concept. Traditionally a hybrid of the Dilgar and Narn, looking like Dilgar and (originally) flying very Narnish ships, the Circasians had always been one of my favorite creations. Their inclusion in this new, different universe spurred me to action more than any other factor. The current incarnation of the Circasians is far different than their initial incarnations in which they were a far more spiritual people, and even slightly more aggressive than they are now.

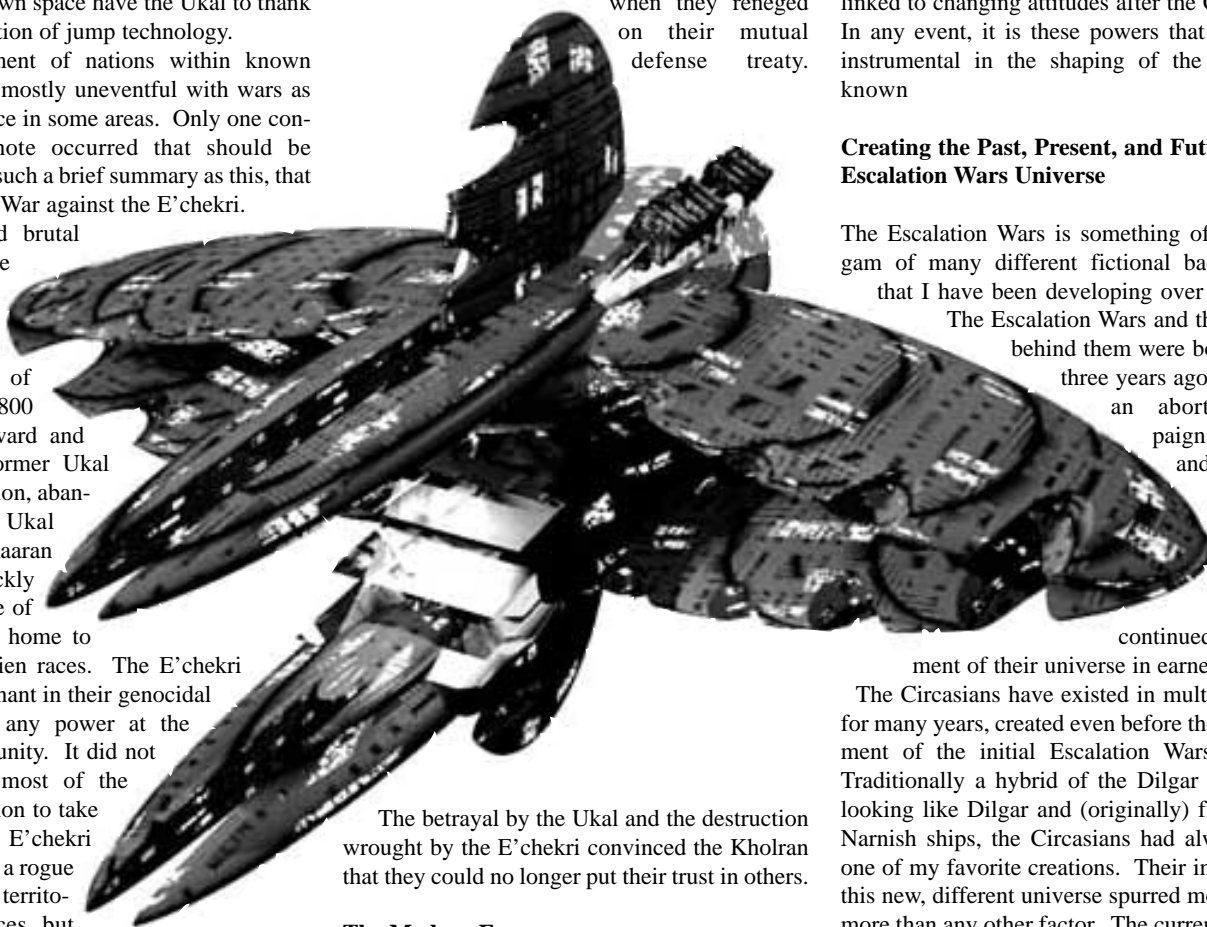
The Courata were a new race when the Escalation Wars material was first being drawn up. I had only used them once before, and then only as a minor power. As the background came together a picture of the large, cat-like aliens so devoted to their family and their emperor soon took form. Despite their similarity to the Kilrathi from the Wing Commander universe, I felt that the Courata as developed would work as an excellent counterpoint to the Circasians.

Now, as many will undoubtedly note, this does pose a slight oddity in that both the Circasians and Courata have felinoid overtones, but it is something that happened out of coincidence and there was no preplanning or conscious thought involved in that decision.

Many of the other races that you'll find in the Escalation Wars universe come from some of my other universes or campaign settings. The Vendrizzi, Anticians, and Vok'Nar are just some of the races that have made appearances elsewhere before being woven into the history of the Escalation Wars.

A Place to Start

The first challenge in deciding on where to go with the concept of the Escalation Wars was to pick a race and a time period to begin working on. I thought about starting off with detailing

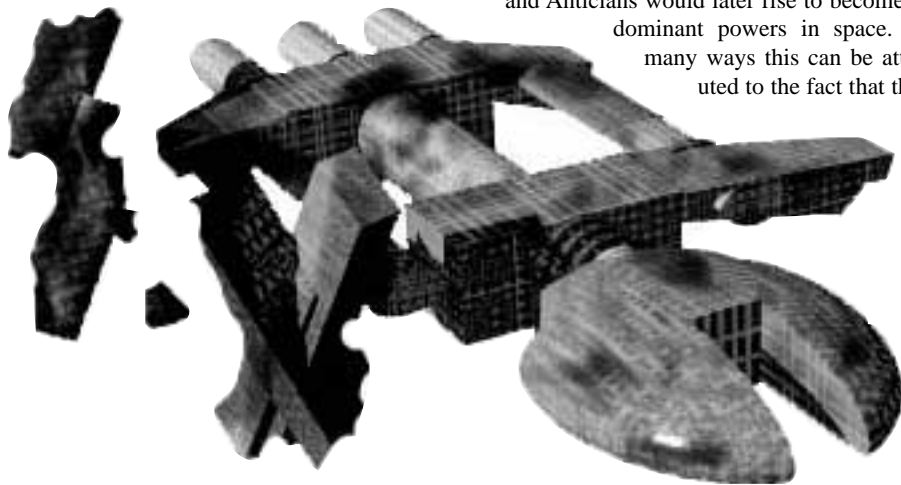


The betrayal by the Ukal and the destruction wrought by the E'chekri convinced the Kholran that they could no longer put their trust in others.

The Modern Era

The end of the Great War marks the beginning of the modern era as defined by historians. The time before the Great War was one of naiveté and innocence for the races of known space. It was in the time after the war that many new races began emerging, either independently or through contact with other interstellar powers, and taking their place among the stars.

Many of these races would later represent a second generation of interstellar powers. Sometimes viewed as 'upstarts' by older powers, races such as the Circasians, Sshel'ath, Th'sook, and Anticians would later rise to become the dominant powers in space. In many ways this can be attributed to the fact that these



THE ESCALATION WARS

the Escalation Wars themselves but quickly realized that, without a foundation from which to build on, the history would most likely be too disjointed. So I decided to go back and explore the history of one of the races and see where it took me.

Now, when I first started on this project I was assuming that I would sit down and in a week have the back-story and relevant information for the race I had chosen to start with (in this case, the Circasians) totally completed. I was wrong. Just as in my campaign universes, the Circasians proved to have an interesting tale to tell that couldn't be limited to only a few pages.

Over the course of that first week the picture of who the

the Unsheathed Claw whose home was long ago destroyed, or spread carnage with the marines of the Blood Swords—the possibilities are endless.

ENCOUNTERS-1 VARIANTS CONTEST

It's been a long time since we had a variants contest, no?

Accompanying the release of Empire Rising, I am holding a variants contest for anyone that is interested in participating. After reading the book and/or looking at the ship control sheets, are there any variants that you think make perfect sense to you or that you believe fill a role that the particular power is missing? Or just a variant that you think would be fun and make for an interesting addition? In any case, e-mail your submissions to variants@escalationwars.com.

As with the AOG variants contests, please include your name and variant submission(s) in your e-mail. Variants of existing hulls will be pre-

Circasians were started to fall together. And, as the image of the Circasian people and their empire grew sharper in my mind, there emerged several other races that I had not heard of or considered in the past. The Chouka and Sshel'ath appeared for the first time and took shape, as did the Th'sook. As I mapped out the future of the Circasian down my rough timeline of events, even more things began to appear. The war against the ak-Tai. The border wars against the Ukal. The race called Ypsi, whose sole description was (and is) that they resemble "a flamingo mated to a pair of fuzzy dice".

Needless to say it became obvious that there was more information about the history of the Circasians than would fit into a single book or supplement. What I had originally intended as maybe twenty pages of background fluff is quite obviously above that estimate. The final draft of Empire Rising is sitting at over 100 pages (without images or graphics!).

Experience the Chouka War

Empire Rising is now available for download! Visit www.escalationwars.com or planetside.firenebula.com to download the book, ship control sheets, and counters for this full-length Babylon 5 Wars supplement. The book offers a compelling history of the Chouka War and details the ships, bases, and fighters of the Circasian Empire, Chouka Theocracy, and Sshel'ath Alliance in addition to numerous raider bands and civilian units. Learn about the early years of the Circasian military, weep for

ferred, but don't hesitate to submit ideas for new hulls/weapons if you feel that they are more appropriate to your ship submission.

Variant contest winners will have their ships appear in the Empire Rising companion book Encounters-1. This book will be very similar to the AOG Showdowns books and are slated to include variants and associated rules as well as additional scenarios and special officers (for sure) and will likely also include information and ships for some of the minor surrounding powers (Th'sook and Thaline are good bets).

In addition to variants submissions, if anyone is particularly inspired by the contents of Empire Rising, player written scenarios would be gladly welcomed.



A Circasian



A Ghotekhen



A Chouka



A Sshelath



STARSHIP DREAMING

By **LYSANDER LYSANDROU**

Drazi Star Cobra Heavy Fighter

THE Drazi, after seeing how effective Dilgar fighters were, realized they wanted a Heavy Fighter of their own to fill the gap between the Star Snake and the Sky Serpent. If they really needed it or not was irrelevant, they wanted one anyways. Copying the Brakiri, they sought to design what was essentially a strike fighter, even though it was never called that. The Star Cobra was designed almost 10 years after their Heavy Cruiser went into service and as such it could not be carried by it. It was however quite abundant on bases and as a planetary defense unit. It is a very capable design following Drazi design philosophy, hit hard and keep hitting hard.

They are now looking at securing a contract to design and build a carrier for this outstanding craft and several designs are being considered but none have yet been decided upon (as far as we know). There have been rumors of a new capital ship being tested deep inside Drazi space but nothing has confirmed this. If true and a carrier is in the testing stage we may begin to see the Star Cobra operating on the borders of Drazi space in the near future, however this is highly doubtful as the Drazi do not seem to be intensely interested in large ships.

Drazi Pulsehawk Battlecruiser

THE Drazi, fascinated with the rapid-fire ability of the Pulse Cannon tried to create their own version based on their Particle Blaster. The idea was to make the Blaster fully Pulse capable. The result was only partly successful. The Pulse Blaster was never reliable and the Drazi could never get it to work quite right. When it worked it could dish out a lot of damage to the enemy, the problem was it just kept breaking down. As a result, it never made it into production and only three ships were modified to carry it, none of

which stayed in service.

Pulse Blaster
Class: Particle
Mode: Pulse
Damage: 1d10+12
Maximum Pulses: 5
Grouping Range: +1 per 4
Range Penalty: -1 per 2 hexes
Fire Control: +4/+4/+1
Intercept rating: N/A
Rate of Fire: varies

The rate of fire was never consistent on this weapon, nor was the reliability and it has a 20% chance of breaking down every time it fires. As a result when the weapon is fired you roll to hit as normal. If a hit is achieved, immediately roll a d20. On a roll of 1 to 4 the weapon has broken down and misfires, no damage is dealt. Also, it is considered out of service for the rest of the scenario and it's power can be used elsewhere. If it has not broken down, roll for the amount of pulses that hit the target. Rate of fire is based on pulses, see the chart below.

1 or 2 pulses: 1 per 2 turns
3 or 4 pulses: 1 per 3 turns
5 pulses: 1 per 4 turns

EA Hyperion Battlecruiser

PRESIDENT Clark, ever obsessed with control was getting desperate. The rapid advance of Sheridan and the continued losses he was inflicting upon Clarks' forces led to this upgrade of the Hyperion. Wanting more firepower, they removed the two forward Plasma Cannons and moved the Heavy Lasers from the side of the hull into the nose. This greatly increased the arcs of these weapons and increased the forward Laser firepower by 100%.

They also greatly improved the other systems on the ship. By essentially gutting the ship, they rebuilt it from the inside out. The reactor was increased in output, the engine was replaced

with an Omega engine, and more powerful rear thrusters were added as well as were the sensors. A pair of SPB's filled the space left from the Lasers on the side, and the Interceptors were upgraded to Mk. II's. It is the ultimate conversion of the Hyperion hull; they just couldn't upgrade this hull any further so it is called the Omega variant. It cannot carry Thunderbolts.

Clark ordered some Hyperion hulls upgraded to this model and as such a crash program was instituted. Many of Clark's remaining forces were updated to this standard before the war ended, how many is not known since many were destroyed in battle. It is assumed that any new Hyperions, if built, would be of this design.

Yolu Howler Attack Boat

THE Yolu, being defensive minded, wanted a low cost, easy to construct vessel to defend their colonies and convoys against Raider attack and also for fighter defense. The LCV they designed for this purpose became known as the Howler, named for the sound the crews would scream on the comm channels when they roared to the defense. It was meant at first to discourage the attackers, thinking the crews were some gung-ho hired outworlders who were more than happy to attack, which is very unlike the Yolu. Later it became a tradition. The crews who fly these small vessels are strictly volunteers as Yolu abhor the loss of life and service is usually very short.

This small ship is rather heavily armed for such a small craft, with a single Heavy Fusion Cannon in the nose and a Fusion Cannon on each side and a large sensor for an LCV, it is more than capable of discouraging many foes when flown in flights of four to six.

(The SCS sheets can be found in the Attachments folder)

Raid on Gamma 12

TENSIONS have been rising with your neighbors for months now. Trade disputes and military posturing have pushed it close to the breaking point. Neither side really wants a war, but some sort of confrontation may be inevitable.

Yesterday, you received the report of a team sent to survey Gamma 12, a border system long claimed by your nation but so far unexploited. They discovered much more than resources in the system: a supply post and patrol squadron, obviously preparing to cover for miners and other exploitations of the system. A system whose resources should be yours!

The diplomats are working on the situation, trying to talk them down without kicking off the war you've been dreading. But you know that mere words aren't going to be enough. It's time to give them a bloody nose, remind them who's stronger. But if you hit too hard, they'll feel obliged to hit back, and the war will be on. You've ordered your fleet to hurt them - cripple a ship, disable the station - that's all. Don't let things get out of hand...

SCENARIO SETUP

Attacker:

Choose 4,000 BPV of ships and fighters (mobile units only, no civilians) for your strike fleet.

Defender:

1 small base (choose from Raider Sanctuary Base, Civilian Small Base, Centauri Marcanos, or any other small, lightly-armed space station. Both players should agree on which station will be used.)

2 Cruisers of the type fielded most commonly by your race

4 escort craft of MCV or HCV size

Appropriate fighters for the ships selected

Map setup:

Use two standard Babylon 5 Warsô maps, to form a 42x60 playing field. Each player

(defender first) places 20 asteroid counters as described in the standard rules, with no more than six counters contiguous after both players have placed theirs. Place the starbase selected within twelve hexes of the center of the map and the defending fleet within ten hexes of it. The attacker may enter from any single map edge.

Special Rules:

Called Shots are in effect. Special Officers may be selected.

Victory Conditions:

The attacker's objective is not to destroy the defenders, but to damage them significantly without actually destroying them. "Disabling" a ship is defined as either a) stripping it of both side thrusters and all weapons with range penalties better than -1/hex, or b) destroying one non-primary hull section. The attacker wins if he is able to destroy one hull section of the station and disable one capital ship or two lighter vessels, without any of his own ships being disabled. Any other result is a win for the defender.

THE BATTLEFORCES

Batter Up!

(Dilgar, from dlande@wm.edu)

Combat Master Del'Rath was annoyed. He understood why the Dilgar high command didn't think they were ready for war with the pathetic aliens at Gamma 12 yet, but he didn't like it. He liked his orders even less. What was the fun of damaging something without being able to watch it burn when you finally destroyed it? Still, orders were orders, and Del'Rath intended to carry them out to the letter. Perhaps this attack would inspire the aliens to declare war... He did hope an ISN cameraman would catch the look on the aliens' faces when a giant rock smashed into their base.

A Pentacan consisting of

1 Trartharti

1 Trartharti-G

1 Protra

1 Ochlavita-B

1 Jashakar

6 Thorun Mk-II

6 Thorun Mk-III with navigators and missiles.

3939 points

Massive damage + automatically hitting structure + no overkill = perfect for making a mess out of a base without destroying it. This will be the job of the Trartharti, with the Protra helping ensure the mass driver hits. The rest of the fleet will be busy knocking the ends off of ships until the Protra's jump engine recharges, a task made easier by the fixed damage of the bolters.

Stormtroopers

(Abbai, by Kizarvexis)

(late spring 2260)

"...Ab-bai, Ab-bai, whatcha gonna do? Whatcha gonna do when they come for you?"

This is Lee Inez Estes from "COPS: Abbai on Patrol". ISN is on patrol with an Abbai Military Fleet in our shuttles 'Amarillo' and 'Journalist'. In tonight's episode you will see the supposedly peaceful Abbai show their true alien face and instigate hostilities against one of their neighbors in the so-called League of Non-Aligned Worlds. In a previously recorded interview with Captain Annatar of the Military Police Frigate 'Judisch', she details her government's public position on the invasion of Gamma 12.

- "This is Captain Annatar of the ..."

- "Excuse me, but it is Annatar, please. My name is Rao Tiway."

- "Yes, of course. This is Captain Annatar Tiway of the Military Police Frigate 'Judisch'. She is here to brief us on the assault that will be hurled at Gamma 12 shortly."

- (strained smile) "As you know, Gamma 12 is a system nominally under the protection of the Natar. A group of 'privateers' have secretly set up a base in the Gamma 12 system. They have been preying on Abbai shipping in the area. The mission of the 'Judisch' is to capture evidence that



these are supported by or even fleet elements of a neighboring government and present that evidence before the League on Babylon 5. Your neutrality as journalists of the Earth Alliance will lend legitimacy to any evidence we find."

As you can see, our 'neutrality' as journalists is very important to the Abbai strike fleet. We were later introduced to the other captains of the Abbai fleet, who coincidentally were also named Annatar. Nepotism in the fleet of the supposedly democratically elected Abbai government perhaps? We will be back after this break with an interviews from the Office of Public Information and the Ministry for Public Morale on the real workings of the Abbai Matriarchate. (screen pans to show the ISN shuttle 'Amarillo' following the shuttle 'Journalist' traveling towards a group of Abbai ships)

{The Psi Corps is your friend. Trust the Corps.}
1 Fetula Warrant Cutter, the 'Judisch' commanded by Annatar, Rao Tiway (470)

2 Kaltika Breaching Pod (80)

18 Kotha Medium Fighters (630)

1 Expert Dogfighter (18)

3 Tiraca Attack Frigates (1350)

1 Nakarsa Command Cruiser (750)

1 Skiatha Escort Scout (690)

2 ISN Shuttles (0)

3,988 points

The Abbai plan is to jump into Gamma 12 and disable as many of the 'privateers' as they can. The Kaltika breaching pods will pick likely ships and board them for evidence once they are sufficiently disabled. The Abbai do not want to start a war, so they are looking to disable ships with Combat Lasers and not to destroy them. The Skiatha is along for ELINT support and to escort the Abbai 'admiral' on the Nakarsa Command Cruiser. The Marti wanted an experienced Annatar to lead the fleet to make sure the objective of disabling and not destroying the 'privateers' was properly carried out. The Kotha fighters will be targeting thrusters and weapons for disabling once fighter superiority is achieved.

Your Space Station Is Purple

(Green Drazi, by Ivan Edgerly)

Jumphawk 500

4x Sunhawk 2100

4x Stareagle 1400

Total 4000

My idea is to take out any fighters and cripple supporting ships, then dismember the outpost as best I can. Target priorities for the base is: Weapons, Cargo holds, then Hanger bays. Target priorities for ships are: Thrusters, Weapons, and then any thing of interest (cargo bays...etc).

As a side note the Jumphawk should stay out of the battle as much as possible. It has the only jump engine in the fleet and it will be hard to leave quickly without it.

The Babcom Poll

By Gergle

Yes it's time (past time, actually) for another Babcom Poll!

Our last Question ... "What race would you most like to see as a GROPOS force book?"

The Centauri were the overwhelming favorite here. Other candidates, in rough order, were..

Dilgar

Drazi

Gaim

Brakiri

The Dilgar's minor opponents as a group

Orieni

Balosians

Pak'ma'ra

Kor-Lyan

Hyach

Vree

Ipsha

If I missed anyone, my apologies!

Next Question:

"Several races have incomplete mini fleets. What is the single most important ship, (or ships if it's only a couple), necessary to make some race "complete"?"

Name the race and the ship. Try to avoid races that have no minis whatsoever, and races that are only missing bases, boarding pods, etc.

Replies can be emailed to

gergle@proaxis.com

Subject : Babcom Poll

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



The Plague Cruiser



Alternate History Fiction By Paul Brown

2258

OVER the ruins of San Francisco, the targeted city of a nuclear strike by terrorist groups on Earth, an atmospheric shuttle speeds at low altitude amongst the crumbling skyscrapers and debris filled streets. An encoded beacon guides it to its destination, a shattered street as desolate as the rest. But as the shuttle hovers over the area, its vertical thrusters kicking up dust and radioactive particles, the street beneath it slowly pulls away revealing a secret hangar. The shuttle descends and lands upon the pad as the hangar reveals itself and begins decontamination procedures.

An unremarkable man exits the shuttle in an environmental suit; at his side are two accomplices, though to anyone else he appears to be alone. A man in a dark suit greets him at the hangar exit, extending a gloved hand to welcome him as the polished broach on his suit catches the rays from the hangar's landing lights. He leads the visitor into the secret complex and deposits him at the control centre. The door slides away and he seats himself before the consoles, computer screens, and the shorthaired woman within.

She forces a smile, pleasantries are exchanged, and several matters are briefly discussed including that of weapons transfers between the two parties. The conversation is short, taking no more than a few minutes. At its end the man

nods his head and stands, readying to leave for his shuttle when the woman, as though suddenly remembering something, speaks again.

"There is one more matter Mr. Morden."

"Yes?"

"An . . . item . . . is being delivered to Earth from Babylon 5 tomorrow. My superiors would very much like if you would be able to offer some level of protection during its transport."

The man smiles, "Is it very valuable?"

"Yes, we believe it is. Our concern is that certain parties within the League will attempt to capture or destroy this cargo. But we would prefer that it made it safely to the rendezvous ship and to Earth."

"You do remember, that if my associates do this favour for you, we would like a favour in return in the future."

"Of course", the woman says smiling. "Is it agreed then?"

The man pauses, and turns his head partly to the side as though listening though to the woman the man stands alone. After a moment he says "I believe my associates and I can assist you on this matter."

They both smile once more and exchange a handshake before the man departs down the lit corridors towards his shuttle, alone save for the company of his shadow.

The next day . . .

In the red and swirling depths of hyperspace two large black ships stalk the depths just a little off the Babylon 5 beacon. The two pilots interwoven to each vessel have been instructed to

mercilessly destroy any unscheduled warship which approaches the area. Their superiors expect a small League of Non-Aligned World vessel, a few Drazi ships, perhaps a couple of Abbai cruisers, but the ship which approached was something their superiors did not expect.

The two pilots sensed the ship suddenly; much closer than when they should have first felt its presence. It was a huge vessel, even larger than their own with shimmering green skin and four outstretched arms. The ship was unknown to the two pilots, its owner's name never mentioned by their superiors, as they believed it to be poison. They were only referred to allusively and then only briefly as far pleasanter subjects abounded. The pilots were unaware of the fear their superiors had of this ship, they were unaware of the consequences, and so they attacked.

The two ships closed on the green vessel, one screaming a call to battle across the depths of hyperspace. Intense beams of energy surged from their forms and cut into the hull of the great adversary. Onboard, its commander moved quickly from feelings of surprise, to pain and then to bitter resolve. It turned towards the aggressors; power beginning to flow into its beckoning arms.

The three ships danced the dance of death in the eerie red glow of hyperspace. Beams of crimson and surges of electric fire flashed across its wide expanse. And the combatants screamed in hatred and agony at one another. One by one they began to falter and at last the battle drew to a close. One of the black ships was now grey and shrivelled, its flesh burned and beaten while the other black vessel injured and in pain withdrew

FICTION: THE PLAGUE CRUISER

towards its den. The lumbering green vessel, cut and ravaged by a senseless enemy sunk slowly into the depths of hyperspace. Its green hull no longer shimmered like a mass of swirling cloud but now lay still, dull and cold. Within the dead hulk a fading light remembered the eons of its experiences, cried to its fellows and breathed its last.

Onboard Babylon 5 . . .

Kosh drifted into the crowded assembly to the surprise of some such as Mr. Michael Garibaldi. The mass of people remarked briefly upon his presence and returned their attention to the view screen as a small Minbari flyer made its way to the system's jump gate. Everyone held their breath as the gate came alive with pulses of energy and formed the portal into hyperspace. A moment later, the flyer slipped through and disappeared.

"Well Jeff, there goes the damn universe."



12th of June, 2262

Captain John Sheridan sat on his bridge aboard the Commonwealth Destroyer Agamemnon. Some of the consoles onboard the bridge were still inoperative; blackened from damaged sustained during months of combat. With resources becoming increasingly limited, repairs were being prioritised and damaged ships had to make due with jury-rigging and re-routing of systems. Sheridan had been giving out orders for the last half an hour, making sure his small task force was ready for the coming attack.

"Ten minutes to target Captain," said one of the bridge hands.

"Well let's just hope our intel is right on this convoy, I don't want to jump into the middle of some damned ambush," responded Sheridan.

"You and me both sir."

Sheridan smirked. His fleet was in hyperspace nearing the former Mitoc homeworld, now far behind enemy lines. He wasn't too crazy about the mission but he felt it was a mission worth taking, and his friend Jeffery Sinclair had agreed though not exactly for the same reasons . . .

A few days earlier, onboard Babylon 5 . . .

John Sheridan had found Sinclair and Garibaldi having a strong drink in the Zocalo.

"Why the long faces?" Sheridan asked.

"Well the fact that the universe has gone to hell, Earth is scorched black and we have our

backs to the wall from seven different directions for one thing."

"That's hardly breaking news Michael."

Sinclair signalled the bartender for another drink and for his friend to join them. "No thanks Jeff, I'm still officially on duty even if I'm not on the Agamemnon."

"Bestine has fallen John". Sheridan sat down and told the bartender to make it a double, "Refugees are pouring into T'Lad'Tha and the Descari are begging for help from the Commonwealth."

"Even though they've been doing the same damn thing as the invaders," added Michael.

Sinclair continued, "The Markab aren't too eager about helping them but we're moving our ships to secure T'Lad'Tha. We'll save as many people as we can."

"And what about all the people who couldn't get out?"

"Convoys have already begun moving people out of Bestine, we have some intelligence reports several of the Pak'ma'ra convoys have already moved through Gaim and Cascor space."

"Damn carrions" cursed Sheridan, "the Pak'ma'ra used to be traders and merchants, now they're slaughtering people for the serum and selling to the highest bidder."

Sinclair took another sip of his drink, "they're just doing what they have to, to survive. Merchants and aliens were the first targets after the serum reached the League, if they hadn't started dealing in the serum they would probably all be wiped out by now."

"That doesn't mean I have to like it Jeff."

Garibaldi polished off his water and looked at both men, "Well the bottom line is a lot of people are going to die and there's not a damn thing we can do about it."

After a moment of silence, Sheridan's eyes lightened up "maybe we can save some of those people."

"You're not thinking of--"

"You damn well bet I am. I could scrounge up a few ships and be out and back before you know it."

"Rescue mission huh?" Michael shrugged, "I'm in."

"Now wait a minute!" said Sinclair sitting up.

"Look Jeff, Sheridan doesn't have enough troops for this kind of job. I could go out and borrow some of the security staff here--"

"I need you here."

"Like hell you do. Look Jeff, John's out fighting battles, you're here forming military alliances and all I do is sit around keeping peace and order on the station while people are dying out there. Damn it, I got to do something Jeff."

After a moment Sinclair smiled, "You always were stubborn, Michael."

Michael nodded briskly with a smile, accepting the compliment.

Turning to Sheridan, "just try to avoid being alone with Michael for too long when you go, he likes to ask funny questions."

The three of them laughed.

Aboard the Agamemnon, Sheridan smiled. He

keyed his com link, "Michael, you ready?"

"We're packing into the breaching pod now John, feels like we're a bunch of sardines in here."

"Well just don't act like a fish out of water when you cut through the hull. We'll be transiting to normal space in a minute, we'll launch you as soon as we've targets for you to board."

"Roger that."

Sheridan turned to one of the bridge officer, "are all of our birds in the air?"

"Aye aye Captain, all Furies have been launched."

"Good, put me through to the fleet."

"Channel open sir."

"This is Captain John Sheridan to all ships, we'll be jumping into combat in the next few moments. I will remind you that our first concern is disabling and capturing the Pak'ma'ra



transports, destroy all of the escorts and fighters. After we've secured the prisoners, we'll be getting out of here quick. We don't want to be caught with our pants down this far into enemy space." The helmsman looked back to the Captain and signalled that they were in position, "All ships activate jump engines."

A vortex tore open the fabric of space before the Agamemnon, and the swirl of red quickly passed into the familiar starry night of normal space.

"Convoy is in front of us captain, ten seconds to contact. Read about six transports and about an equal number of escorts plus a dozen fighters."

Sheridan checked the tactical display, most of the escorts were fairly small save for one. "Target that Dreadnought and open fire with forward batteries. Let's just hope the Pak'ma'ra haven't started refitting them with laboratories as well."

"Aye, weapons firing." Red beams and heavy pulses flew from the head of the Omega towards the Dreadnought; fire quickly joined by the other ships in the task force. The Pak'ma'ra were completely surprised by the ambush, and the escorts began to ready their weapons to return fire even as the flights of Star Furies collided head on with their own fighters in a swirling, duel of death.

Over the Earthforce communication channel, orders were barked and information relayed.

FICTION: THE PLAGUE CRUISER

"Beta flight, advance and engage, cover our flanks from those damn fighters. We're moving in on the first transport."

"Plasma webs! Theta wing break off! Evasive action! . . . Damn it Theta 4 and 6 get out of there, pull up!"

"Omicron wing, this is the Augustus, pull back to fleet, one of the frigates has broken through."

Sheridan picked apart what information he needed from the flurry of chatter coming quietly from the communications officer, "Damage report on that Dreadnought."

"We've hit her good sir, but she's still moving to engage. Forward weapons are powering up."

"Keep firing – Alpha wing, assist in the attack against the Dreadnought."

The Dreadnought was trailing flame even as the fighters moved to engage as hits from the Commonwealth fleet slammed into her. As the Agamemnon fired the fatal blow of heavy pulse cannons she opened up with her forward batteries.

"Incoming fire sir, its targeting the Augustus – her interceptors are firing."

The huge barrage from the Plasma Fuser exploded halfway between the two ships but the concentration on the heavier weapon allowed the secondaries through. One shot missed but a second round from a mega plasma impact against the lower front of the Hyperion and tore through the upper hull, narrowly missing the tower on its exit.

"Augustus has taken heavy damage sir, she's falling back to a rearguard position."

"That's fine, continue the advance."

"Agamemnon this is Beta Wing, transports 2 and 3 are disabled we're moving to help Gamma with the others."

"Confirmed Beta Wing," Sheridan acknowledged, "Garibaldi, you're up. There are still a few escorts so it might be a hot ride."

"That's what I live for Captain."

"Launch the breaching craft!"

Garibaldi gripped his plasma rifle as the breaching pod tore out of the Agamemnon's hangar. He could faintly hear the radio chatter from pod's control room, "This is Alpha wing, moving to escort position." Aside from g-forces, the ride was relatively smooth. Without an atmosphere there was no medium for the sounds and feelings of war to broadcast across the battlefield. Huge explosions were merely a glow in the dark. Still scattered debris would impact upon the hull, the tings of metal on metal echoing throughout the cramped compartment.

Suddenly the pod turned and dived, evidently taking evasive maneuvers. "Pod 2 is down, Alpha 3 through 6 take out those damn--"

"Coming in on target, all troops to ready", said the pod's pilot coolly.

"10 seconds to contact . . . 5 . . . 4 . . . 3 . . . 2 . . . pod attached, activate cutting laser."

The pod attached with a hollow thud and hum of the laser began move around the base of pod.

Garibaldi un-strapped himself from his seat and floated into the middle of the pod. "Everyone here knows the plan: entry 5 seconds after AP detonation, point men provide covering fire while everyone gets in by 7 man groups.



Everyone knows the way to the brig, once we've got the prisoners we'll rendezvous with the shuttles in the main hangar. The pod will break off 15 seconds after full insertion. Everyone ready?"

Everyone roared in agreement. The hatch slid open into the hallway of the transport and Garibaldi lowered his mask as the AP charges were fired in. The hatch closed and a second later the sound of a thousand ricochets reverberated throughout the pod. The pod opened and the men started to float into the null gravity environment. As Garibaldi entered he was greeted with the sound of weapons fire.

"It's the damn Gaim", someone shouted over the comlink.

Garibaldi grimaced, "well this'll be some party then."

"Captain Sheridan, the last of the escorts has been destroyed. All breaching pods are attached,

we lost three going in. We're readying to launch the cargo shuttles."

"Launch when ready. And recall the empty pods to pick up the next batch of marines."

"Aye Captain . . . sir, we're getting reports that the transports are carrying Gaim troops."

"Damn, get those pods back on the double. Those troops are going to need reinforcements."

"Get off of me!" Michael shouted as he pushed the Gaim soldier against the bulkhead before firing a dozen rounds into its exoskeleton. "I hate these guys."

Despite the tougher than expected resistance, his troops had been making good progress towards the holding cell. Though a few of the troops had to be left behind. Over the com link a second breaching party reported in, "Garibaldi?" "Zack?"

FICTION: THE PLAGUE CRUISER

“Yeah Michael, we’ve came up against some Gaim troops. They hit us pretty hard but we’re getting the prisoners out now.”

“Good, I’ll meet you in the main hangar.”

Garibaldi’s squad was nearing the holding cell when another burst of enemy fire echoed down the hallway. Two of his troops floated past him, now lifeless they had been thrown back by the impacts. Garibaldi moved up to the point man. “What do you make of it?”

“There’s at least a dozen of them in the next room, scragged Donovan and Parker before we knew they were there. Its gonna be hard getting past them sir.”

“Well this the only way to the cells, we can’t circle around them now. Fire a few AP charges in there and close off that bulkhead.”

“Aye sir.”

A few other soldiers moved into position as the one Garibaldi had been talking to readied himself by the bulkhead controls. Five to six AP charges were fired in before the soldier quickly closed the door only moments before the tell-tale ringing of metal told them the charges had gone off.

“Alright now get that door open.”

After a moment or two, the soldier looked back exasperated. “It won’t respond, must have been damaged by the charges.”

“So then cut it open.” Down the hallway scattered firing began to erupt. The Gaim were advancing on their rearguard.

Sheridan tapped his chair, “Any news from Garibaldi’s team?”

“They’re still engaged onboard the transport sir.”

“Shuttle status?”

“The first of the shuttles are docking in what hangar’s we’ve secured, the refugees are being loaded on now.”

“Alright, keep me informed.”

Garibaldi pulled himself through the hole and into the ravaged room where a dozen or more Gaim lay dead. His company was quickly advancing towards the holding cells as Gaim soldiers continued to close after them. The rear-guard troops were delaying them with AP charges and disabling doors along the way.

“There it is people, get that door open.”

Michael floated to the window and looked inside where scores of Descari were laying around, practically piled on top of each other. He waved to them, “We’ll get you out of there” he yelled, though none could hear him. Suddenly a klaxon began to go off and the warning lights within the holding area came to life. The Descari began screaming and crowding at the door. “No, no you bastards” Michael yelled down the hallway, “get this door open NOW.”

But it was too late, the reinforced wall of the cell broke away and opened upon the vacuum of space. The frightened Descari were swept out to the last man.

“They’ve spaced them sir.”

“What?” Sheridan demanded

“The captives, sir, they’ve spaced them.”

“Sons of b-



“Incoming Fire!”

A brilliantly bright laser tore out of the darkness and into a nearby Olympus Gunship, gutting her port side and destroying the bridge. Nearby, a jump point opened up and ships began to move into the area.

“We’ve got company sir.”

“Damnit, get our people off those ships now”, he keyed his com link, “all ships, turn to engage. I repeat, all ships open fire.”

Author’s Premise

Originally envisioned for the alternate history edition of Babcom. This project was long in the making due mainly to my sloth in both writing the history and creating the SCSeS. The essence of the story is the extrapolation of what would have happened, should Jha’dur have arrived at Earth and developed her serum. My history is a sorted affair of war and chaos with an open ending to promote you, the audience, to draw your own conclusions to even build upon the story in your own campaigns. I don’t expect more than a passing interest and a few words of praise, but I figure that most of you will at least enjoy it. The two stories and one ship here are only a taste of the entire package. Shortly after the publication of this Babcom the full zip file will be uploaded to the repository for the enjoyment of all.

Pak’m’a’ra Sim’sil’ash Plague Cruiser

In service 2260 – Common Variant

In the Pak’m’a’ra’s bid for survival they chose to serve the other races rather than been conquered by them. Many of their transports lost cargo space to be replaced by laboratories and holding cells. The “Plague Cruisers” as the Commonwealth dubs them are laboratories for hire, and also roam the remnants of battlefields in search of survivors to “donate” ingredients for serum development. Because of the role of these ships, they have become a prime target by those fighting against the spread and use of the serum.

* * *

The Campaign Begins!

By RadonCarl

AS of the publication date of Babcom, June 15, 2003, there are now 34 players registered for the PBEM campaign game. This will be based loosely upon the rules created by Bandit, with some modifications to fit what is actually planned by the GM. A yahoo news-group has been created specifically for this campaign so that the players can banter back and forth without using up bandwidth in the regular B5 forum. Also, a website has been set up for posting of files, including rules, maps, and anything else that is deemed noteworthy such as battle results.

The URL is:

<http://b5campaign.home.insightbb.com>

Most of the younger races are represented in this campaign, such as EA, Minbari, Centauri, Narn, and the League races. Also included are the Dilgar plus most of the ancients – not just the Vorlons and Shadows, but also the Kirishiac, the Torvalus, and the Walkers. Addendum: The ancients and the league have also set up their own yahoo groups.

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Science Fiction industry news

Resist, or perish: NBC revisits V

NBC has confirmed rumors that a new film based on the 1980s miniseries about alien invasion is in the works, Variety reported. The three-hour made-for-television movie, called *V: The Second Generation*, will be directed, written and produced by Kenneth Johnson, creator of the original series.

Johnson is talking to original stars Marc Singer, Robert Englund, Jane Badler and Faye Grant about reprising their roles, though no official casting decisions have been made, the trade reported.

The *Second Generation* will be set 20 years after the original, with the alien Visitors now in control of much of the Earth, according to Johnson.

The resistance continues with its sporadic (terrorist?) attacks on aliens, alien sympathisers and facilities.

"The alien force is deeply entrenched, has turned many Earth people into followers and is sweeping them toward a dangerous new conquest," Johnson told the trade. "The Resistance seems to be fighting a losing battle when suddenly Earth gains a powerful and mysterious new ally."

While the movie is envisioned as a stand-alone project, future sequels are possible if ratings are high enough. If green-lighted, the project wouldn't be ready until fall 2004 at the earliest, the trade paper reported.

Johnson added, "I have only just delivered the first story treatment to Warner [Brothers] and NBC. They must approve it, I must write the screenplay, go through as many drafts as they want, determine what the budget will be, have NBC order it to production, and Warners elect to pay the necessary cost in concert with NBC. Many, many, many, many, many, many, many bridges yet to cross."

Enterprise Sets New Course

RICK Berman, executive producer of UPN's *Enterprise*, told SCI FI Wire that the second-season finale sent the show off in a "startling" new direction. "What we've decided to take on here in our third season, which is more than hinted on in this final episode, is that for the first time a *Star Trek* television series is taking on a specific mission other than just exploring space. And because this mission is preceded by a very heinous act of destruction on Earth, the series is going to be far more action-packed."

The finale, "The Expanse," which was written by Berman and Brannon Braga, begins with a terrible attack on the Earth that leads to the *Enterprise*'s being recalled home. Berman admits to seeing parallels in the episode with the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. But he added that they weren't apparent when he and Braga began to work on the story.

"We were literally way into the scripting stages before we started to see the parallel," Berman said. "I think one of the things that motivated us is in ana-



lyzing the 10 existing *Star Trek* movies, we were looking for something that would help torque up our series and add a little dimension to get a little added excitement towards the end of the season. We did a little analysis of our own, and we saw that two of the most popular movies ... were *Star Trek IV* [The Voyage Home], which was the one about whales, and *Star Trek VIII*, which was *First Contact*. These were both films that had to do with the future of Earth being at stake. And we decided that that would be a great place to start. ... It wasn't literally for a long time that we suddenly realized [the parallel]. But the idea of aliens coming to destroy Earth has been around a lot longer than 9/11."

Berman said that "The Expanse" will set in motion a series of events that will play out in an arc next season, involving the *Enterprise*'s journey into a dangerous Bermuda-Triangle-type area of space to search for those responsible for the terrorist act.

More Aliens On The Way

THE Zap2it Web site reported preliminary details of the fifth and sixth films in the popular *Aliens* franchise, which will feature Sigourney Weaver's character, Ripley, defending the Earth from colonization by the evil aliens. According to the site, Weaver has said that she would be interested in reprising her role for the sequels.

The site revealed that the fifth film will find the Earth "under attack from alien warrior drop ships," while the sixth will force Ripley to "turn to the dark side in order to save civilization." No directors or cast have been attached to the as-yet-untitled sequels.

* * *