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ENCOUNTERS

BY
DAVE COOK

"Encounters" is a new addition to the POLYHEDRON™ Newszine feature columns. It is a one page encounter description of each issue's cover art depicting a TSR role playing game. It may be used by referees to interject something unusual into their games or playtest problems on their players, or by players who want to explore different character classes.

Level 1 Computer
Level 1 Environmental
Equipment: Laser
 Pistol
Powerclip (18 SEU
 remaining)
Poly-vox
Level 1 computer
Level 3 Information
 Storage Program
Level 2 Language
 Program

NOTHRU FAR RIDER,
Ul-mor — RW:5, M:45,
PS:2, IM: 6, RS:55,
STA:40

LOPER — MV:FAST;
IM:5; RS:4; STA:300;
ATT:40; DM:4d10;
SD:Immune to needlers

Raoul is a minor member of a team of experts sent to investigate the strange alien city. For several weeks now, he has been doing minor busywork — running calculations, cataloging facts, proofing maps, etc. Raoul had originally joined the expedition for fame and excitement; the work as of late has caused him to be thoroughly bored and disgusted. Since work is light, he has taken the chance to slip away and explore the area beyond a ridge of hills to the west. None of the other members of the exploration team had ever crossed the ridge — satellite maps showed absolutely nothing of interest in this direction.

It is late in the afternoon and Raoul is hot, tired, hungry, thirsty and lost. He has been stumbling around for hours through the rock fields and dust pits, and has had to defend himself on two occasions from savage looking creatures.

Far too late, he realizes that he should have brought food, water, a communica-

tor and compass — he curses himself for the fool that he is.

Then, he sees it — before him, topping a rise is an octopus-like creature riding a big lizard. Nothru Far Rider is an outcast, exiled from his tribe. Captured by pirates on his home planet Volturnus, then taken off-planet to be sold as an oddity, he and his loper managed to escape when the pirates landed here. Its hot and barren conditions make Nothru feel at home. Nothru distrusts all non-Ul-mor, but knows that they are the key to his getting home.

Actions

Nothru will slowly advance the loper towards Raoul, trying not to scare the Human, but not letting his guard down. He recognizes that this may be a chance for him to get home. Once close enough to Raoul, he will attempt some simple sign language and speak (in his own simple tongue) to show that he is friendly. If Raoul uses his *Empathy* sub-skill successfully, he will be able to tell that the creature is uncertain and not immediately hostile. If Raoul uses his *Communication* sub-skill successfully, the referee may allow the player to speak to the Ul-mor in phrases of two words or less — nothing complicated. If Nothru can get close enough to Raoul, he will slowly withdraw his mind-link tentacle from the loper and extend it towards Raoul. The loper, out of contact with Nothru, has a 50% chance of panicking and attacking Raoul when this is done.

If Raoul checks his Information Storage program, he will learn that this creature is not native to Laco. It comes from a planet called Volturnus and is considered intelligent, but possibly dangerous. If he allows the mind-link to occur, he will understand that the Ul-mor is not hostile and wants to go to some place it calls the "Place of Oneness." If attacked it will fight to the best of its ability. 🐾

The setting:
This encounter occurs on the dry, windswept planet of Laco, an extremely inhospitable planet, swept by great duststorms during long, dry days. The minimal amount of animal life on Laco lives around the edges of the small shallow seas that dot the planet. Poor in resources, the only feature of interest is a huge, deserted alien city built long past by a race known only as the Tetrarchs.

The Characters:
RAOUL DEBONHAM — member of the Pan-Galactic Corporation Artifact Research and Development Team, Assistant Xenopologist
Strength/Stamina: 55/40
Dexterity/Reaction Speed: 50/60
Intuition/Logic: 70/60
Personality/Leadership:70/50
Skills: Level 3 Psycho-Social

RAID ON THESEUS

by Doug Niles
Polyhedron Magazine, #13, pg. 20

The peoples of the Frontier have been numbered by the savagery of the Sathar onslaught. The war is only ten days old and already the UPF Spacefleet has been driven from a half-dozen star systems. Courageously fighting against overwhelming odds, the Fleet has destroyed some Sathar ships, but seems unable to stem the tide of conquest.

A few small Spacefleet vessels, cut off from the main fleet, have fled to Theseus. Clarion (White Light system) is blockaded, so the star route from Theseus to the rest of the Frontier has been effectively cut.

Now these ships, repaired and rearmed, have joined with the militia vessels of Minotaur (Theseus system) to for the force that will have to defend the system against Sathar attacks . . . for there is no place left to run.

* * * * *

The Ships

The militia of Minotaur posses the following ships:

4 Assault Scouts:	*Gnat, Mosquito, Dragonfly, Wasp*		
HP: 15	ADF: 5	MR: 4	DCR: 50
Weapons:	AR (x4)	LF	
Defenses:	RH		

1 Frigate:	*Heroic*		
HP: 40	ADF: 4	MR: 3	DCR: 70
Weapons:	LC	RB (x4)	LB
	T (x2)		
Defenses:	RH	MS (x2)	ICM (x4)

1 Destroyer:	*Republic*		
HP: 50	ADF: 3	MR: 3	DCR: 75

Weapons:	LC	RB (x4)	LB
	T (x2)	EB	
Defenses:	RH	MS (x2)	ICM (x5)

The following Spacefleet vessels have joined the militia:

3 Assault Scouts:	*Dirk, Blade, Needle*		
HP: 15	ADF: 5	MR: 4	DCR: 50
Weapons:	AR (x4)	LB	
Defenses:	RH		

1 Frigate:	*Zz'Llikk'tt*		
HP: 40	ADF: 4	MR: 3	DCR: 70
Weapons:	LC	RB (x4)	LB
	T (x2)		
Defenses:	RH	MS (x2)	ICM (x4)

1 Light Cruiser:	*Intrepid* - combined flagship		
HP: 70	ADF: 3	MR: 2	DCR: 100
Weapons:	DC	LB	EB
	PB	RB (x6)	T (x4)
Defenses:	RH	ES	SS
	ICM (x8)		

This following station orbits the planet of Minotaur, providing a base for the combined fleet's ships:

Fortified Space Station:	Minotaur Station		
HP: 140	ADF: 0	MR: 0	DCR: 100
Weapons:	LB	LB	RB (x8)
Defenses:	RH	MS (x2)	ICM (x6)

Opposing the above vessels are the following Sathar ships:

3 Destroyers:	Villainous, Maggot, Assassin		
HP: 50	ADF: 3	MR: 3	DCR: 75
Weapons:	LC	RB (x4)	LB
	T (x2)	EB	
Defenses:	RH	MS (x2)	ICM (x5)

2 Light Cruisers:	Hellion, Foul		
HP: 70	ADF: 3	MR: 2	DCR: 120
Weapons:	DC	PB	EB
	LB	LB	T (x4)
	RB (x8)	S (x2)	
Defenses:	RH	ES	PS
	SS	ICM (x8)	

2 Heavy Cruisers:	Ghoul, Spectre		

HP: 80	ADF: 2	MR: 1	DCR: 120
Weapons:	DC	PB	EB
	LB	LB	T (x4)
	RB (x8)	S (x2)	
Defenses:	RH	ES	PS
	SS	ICM (x8)	

Setting Up

Ideally, the referee is the only player who should read the following description before the battle is fought. The referee should fill out a ship roster form for each of the ships listed above, and divide all players present into two teams. If the battle is being fought as part of a campaign, the Referee may wish to run all of the Sathar vessels, while the militia and Spacefleet ships are divided among the other players. Otherwise, roughly half of the players should be on each side.

The Spacefleet has been ordered to await the enemy in the vicinity of Minotaur, so place a counter in the middle of the map. Place a fortified station counter in orbit around the planet to represent Theseus Station.

The two fleets will enter the map from the opposite short map edges. The ships of each fleet may be spread among as many hexes as the owning team wishes or stacked together.

All of the Sathar ships enter with a previous speed of "12". The UPF and militia ships may be traveling at any speed from "1" to "20" as they come on the map. The UPF and militia ships do not all have to travel at the same speed.

If the UPF has at least one ship traveling faster than "12", it is the attacking side in the battle, otherwise the Sathar are the attackers.

Referee's Notes

At first, this scenario might seem a bit unbalanced since the Sathar ships are generally larger and posses more firepower than the UPF and militia vessels. In fact, in the hands of inexperienced players, the Frontier force may well be ignominiously wiped out.

The key to a UPF victory lies in utilizing the superior speed and maneuverability of its ships, particularly the assault scouts. The assault rocket may be the deadliest weapon in the game; if the scouts can get behind the cumbersome Sathar cruisers, these rockets can inflict great damage. Whenever possible, assault rockets should be launched at maximum range (4 hexes), so the scouts can avoid the rocket batteries of their opponents.

The UPF can fully capitalize on its advantage by entering the map with all ships traveling at the maximum allowable speed (20). This will allow all of the militia and Spacefleet ships to make close approaches to the enemy, while maintaining enough speed to flee out of range if a ship is badly damaged.

AMBUSH ON LOSSEND

by Steve Winter

Lossend, in the Timeon star system, is famous for its copper and diamond mines. LRM Enterprises is the largest mining interest on the planet, but several other large companies and many small operators and independent prospectors also have claims on the planet's surface. The sun shines for 40 hours during the day, pushing temperatures up to 55 degrees Celsius. During the 30 hour nights, the temperature drops to freezing.

   While waiting for a connecting flight at Lossend's orbiting starport, Diamond Station, the player characters are approached by an LRM agent with a job offer. LRM needs beings from outside the company to drive supply trucks from LRM's main surface installation to one of its mining camps, a round-trip distance of about 2,600 km. The trip takes 50 to 55 hours. LRM Enterprises will pay the characters 1,000 credits apiece plus free passage out of the system on the next available company transport going their way.

   If the characters accept the job, they are put aboard the next shuttle flight to the surface. The shuttle arrives during Lossend's long, cold night. The characters are driven by aircar to LRM's corporate headquarters for a briefing on the mission.

   The briefing is conducted by LRM's chief of security, Col. Liif Ban-Nep, a Human veteran of the Star Law Rangers. The briefing can be read aloud to or paraphrased for the players.

   "The transport cartel here on Lossend is striking the mining companies, demanding more compensatory time off for drivers who make long hauls. It's not that we don't want to honor their demands, but our markets are depressed right now and we can't afford to hire the extra drivers that would be needed. That means our camps have been living on emergency supplies for the past eight days. Camps are set up so they can last 60 days without resupply, but a fire at Northslope Camp 7 has destroyed most of the emergency stores. In two days those miners will be alternately roasting and freezing, and starving in between, unless we get several truckloads of food concentrates and parabatteries through to them. We'd fly these supplies up, but none of our air vehicles has the range or capacity to do much good, and the camp hasn't the facilities to land or launch a shuttle.

"The trucks are loaded and ready to go. You're scheduled to leave as soon as possible. The camp is about 1,300 klicks up the Northslope road. You can average about 50 klicks per hour, so you should reach the camp in less than 30 hours. Each of the transports has two extra parabatteries wired into the cargo compartment so you can make the round trip without refueling; the camp has no parabatteries to spare.

"I won't try to fool you people, this could be dangerous. We suspect that the fire was started by cartel sympathizers, and the same people may try to stop this shipment. You can draw weapons from the munitions master before you leave. Any questions?"

Ban-Nep will answer questions about the road conditions, directions, and preparations, but will downplay the dangers, and will not mention hijackers at all. He will stress that the best protection for the convoy is in leaving quickly, before any saboteurs find out about the trip.

The characters can draw one sidearm, one shoulder-fired weapon, and up to 20 clips of ammo for each from the munitions master. No heavy weapons or poison grenades are available, and none of the trucks carry any weapons.

The supplies, in sealed standard reinforced cargo containers, are loaded into LRM hover transports. The number of transports equals the number of characters divided by two, so that each truck has at least two passengers. One character can rest or act as an observer while the other drives.

When the characters are ready to leave, roll 2d10; the result is the number of hours until sunrise.

The Northslope Road passes through several hundred kilometers of scrub brush and rolling, rocky hills before reaching the base of the Northslope, a rising plain covered with low woody plants and thousands of boulders. The smallest of these boulders are only a few meters across, while the largest tower hundreds of meters over the road. The road is surfaced with crushed rock, and is not in particularly good condition. The first few hundred kilometers are fairly straight and level, but the road becomes a twisting, serpentine track once it reaches the Northslope boulder fields and canyons.

Ban-Nep's briefing, of course, is almost entirely untrue. The transport driver's cartel is not on strike, and there is no emergency at Northslope Camp 7. LRM transports are disappearing along this road, and Ban-Nep is using the player characters as bait to find out what is happening. The cargo containers in the transports are filled with gravel and packing material. Suspecting hijackers, Ban-Nep has spread rumors through underworld contacts that the trucks are carrying upgraded computer programs, records on company procedures and installations, new prospecting equipment, and the monthly payroll for the camp.

Unknown to the players, a single aircar carrying extra parabatteries and computer-enhanced optical ground scanning equipment is tailing the convoy at high altitude, filming the convoy and trying to locate the suspected hijacker's hidden base.
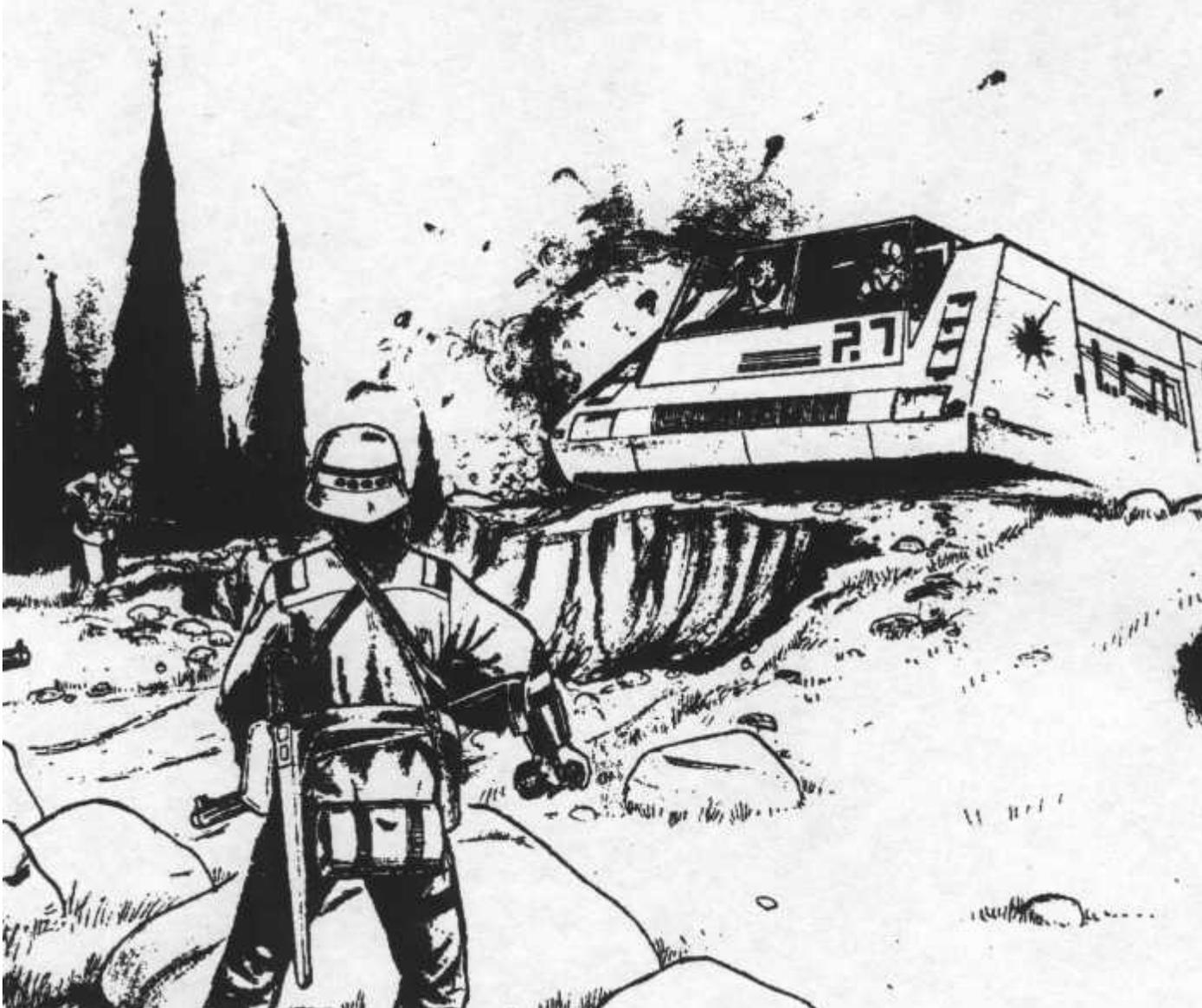
Hijackers will attack the convoy as it passes through a narrow gorge on the Northslope. The attackers are armed with enough heavy weapons (heavy lasers, machine guns, recoilless rifles, and rocket launchers) that one heavy weapon can be fired at each of the first and last trucks, hoping to stop those trucks on the narrow road and trap any others between the two wrecks. The weapons are positioned 50 meters from the road on both sides, behind hard cover. The gunners have +20 skill bonuses to hit with the weapons, and the transports are large targets. The hijackers will use doze grenades fired from grenade rifles to capture any characters who abandon the trucks. If the characters refuse to surrender, the hijackers will try to fire doze grenades through the windows of the vehicles (shooting out the windows with small arms fire, if necessary). The hijackers outnumber the player characters in the convoy about 2 to 1.

Ten minutes after the convoy is captured, a heavy jetcopter with a cargo sling arrives and the hijackers begin transferring the cargo crates back to their base.

Once the first crates are opened at the hijacker's base, the outlaws (and the characters) discover the trick. When the jetcopter returns to the road, the hijackers open all the crates immediately and find nothing but gravel and packing foam. The angry hijackers set off incendiary grenades in the cargo containers and empty vehicles and head back to their camp, taking the captured characters along.

The hijackers live in prefabricated buildings stolen from LRM camps and trucks, and covered with camouflage netting. The characters will be kept under guard in one of these buildings.

After five hours, the camp is attacked by 20 LRM security police armed with needler rifles (firing anesthetic needles) and laser pistols, and 6 LRM police armed with grenade rifles (firing doze grenades) and automatic pistols. All LRM police wear skeinsuits and albedo screens. Unless the characters find some way to identify or protect themselves, they will be mistaken for outlaws, attacked, and captured.

If captured as outlaws, the characters will be in constant danger until released. The real hijackers think the characters were working with LRM, and will attack them at every opportunity while in jail. Ban-Nep will look for the characters if they are still in jail 15 hours after being captured.

Once released, the characters will be de-briefed and paid according to the agreement, plus 1,000 credits each as a bonus for hazardous duty.

LAYOVER AT LOSSEND

The Setting

You are a member of a Pan Galactic Corporation (PGC) Scout and Exploration Team returning to Port Loren from a mining expedition on Gollywog in the White Light system. During the return trip, you are forced to take a five-day layover at Lossend in the Timeon system and wait for another ship. Several members of the Scout and Exploration Team decide to look for temporary employment from local residents.

Characters

Dirk Manhak:	Human member of the PGC Scout and Exploration Team.
Strength/Stamina:	45/55
Dexerity/Reaction Speed:	60/60
Intuition/Logic:	65/75
Personality/Leadership:	55/45
Skills:	Level 2 Environmental
	Level 1 Technician

	Level 1 Robotics
Equipment:	Standard Survival Kit*

Sarvo "Lightfoot" Grun:	Yazirian member of the PGC Scout and Exploration Team.
Strength/Stamina:	60/50
Dexerity/Reaction Speed:	70/70
Intuition/Logic:	60/50
Personality/Leadership:	45/45
Skills:	Level 2 Robotics Level 1 Computer Level 1 Beam Weapons
Special Abilities:	Battle Rage (5%) Gliding Night Vision
Equipment:	Standard Survival Kit*

Average Wypong:	RW:55 M:45 PS:3 IM:7 RS:65
Stamina:	65
Equipment:	Bow and eight arrows

Description: Wypongs are a race of semi-intelligent apemen. They inhabit remote forested regions far away from civilization. Their society is based upon small clans which rarely grow larger than twenty members. They are physically strong, and their hands and feet are well adapted to climbing trees. They are omnivorous in nature, and they use primitive weapons such as clubs and stones along with the bow and arrow. They speak their own rudimentary language.

   When humans and other colonizers first started to fly over their remote territories, the Wypongs became frightened and superstitious. Over time they have come to look upon aircraft as gods.

   Dirk and Sarvo, who are good friends, are among those seeking employment on Lossend. A large company has hired them to find the source of some mysterious radio emissions coming from some hills to the northwest. They are loaned a jetcopter and some additional equipment for the job.

   Heading in the direction of their destination, they fly over a section of unexplored coniferous forest; the jetcopter's engine suddenly quits. Both members are able to ditch safely, using parawings, and eventually land some distance from where the jetcopter went down. Realizing that much of their equipment still remains on board the jetcopter, they start their hike back through the forest to where the wreck should be.

   As they come within sight of the wreck, they see what appears to be three bipedal

apelike creatures which are armed with bows and arrows and which are chanting around the downed jetcopter.

Referee's section

As soon as the Wypongs notice Dirk or Sarvo, they will stop their activities and wait for them to approach. One of the Wypongs will then come forward and kneel before the travelers in an act of submission and devotion. Because of their religious beliefs, they will see Dirk and Sarvo akin to gods. If Dirk or Sarvo establish communications through the use of the polyvox or by some other means, they will find that the Wypongs will help them in any way they can so long as they do not have to leave their territory. If either Dirk or Sarvo attack, the Wypongs will defend themselves with bow and arrow. Within five minutes of Dirk and Sarvo's arrival at the crash site, 1d10 additional Wypongs will arrive at the scene, armed in the same fashion as the others.

As a source of expanding this scenario, players may either play one of the provided characters, use them as NPCs, or eliminate them entirely, substituting already-existing player characters. If you use more than two player characters, increase the number of Wypongs encountered propotionately.

The DM may also wish to have the characters or party complete the adventure to the source of the unknown radio emissions, or may decide to develop adventures around the Wypongs.

The Laser Pod

A new Knight Hawks weapons system

*written by Jon Pickens.*
Article from *Polyhedron* Newszine #19

One item lacking from the Knight Hawks Ship-to-Ship Combat Rules is a beam weapon small enough for use on a fighter. Such a weapon would allow much more flexibility in the use of the smaller craft. Since fighters are cheaper and much more easy to come by in play than larger ships, the introduction of a cheap laser weapon for small ships allows the players to fight mini-fleet actions with smaller ships without having to worry about where all the large ships are coming from. (After all, the whole First Sathar War involved fleets of less than half a dozen ships per side!)

The general statistics of the laser pod are:

Description:
Cluster of 2-4 lasers of limited range and power. Usually employed as a fixed forward-firing weapon mounted on a fighter to replace the assault rocket battery.

MHS:	1
Availability:	1 (I, II)
Cost:	8000 credits
Program Level:	1
Function Points:	3
Type:	FF, RD
Reflective Hull:	50%
Masking Screen:	10% *
Range:	5
Damage:	d10
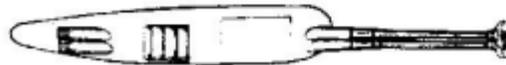
Tactically, laser-armed fighters give up the punch of assault rockets for the long-lasting firepower needed for extended actions. Defensively, laser-armed fighters are best used to screen against enemy fighters carrying assault rockets; hopefully the enemy will expend his Sunday punch against the less valuable defensive fighters, and every assault rocket fighter destroyed could well save a major ship. In attack, laser-armed fighters should be committed against major enemy ships that have been crippled in previous actions, or used to harass and harry enemy fighters. They are less useful against more powerful enemy ships -- attacks can be pressed home successfully, but expect heavy losses when doing so.

Small, cheap fighters that do not need to rearm after every third shot are ideal for close-in system or station defense, almost enough to make the high losses they sustain in combat worthwhile. They make excellent short distance raiders and blockade patrols if properly supported by a mother ship. They would probably be encountered most often as patrol ships in systems too poor to support a permanent local squadron.

If you are a referee in an action involving fighters, try to discourage player characters from flying fighters. Fighter combat is extremely lethal, and combat with laser-armed fighters is doubly so. Remember that in many fighters the entire pilot compartment doubles as an escape pod. Player characters should be given a generous chance to escape if their luck goes bad. (I favor 90%, -1% per hull point under 0 hull points for player character survival. If players are to be penalized it should be because of sloppy play rather than bad luck.)

Finally, some thought should be given to the introduction of the laser pod into the campaign. Such marvels do not appear overnight, nor should something of this nature simply pop into play without some effort on the part of the referee. The game becomes much more interesting if the players are actually involved in the introduction of the laser pod into the STAR FRONTIERS(tm) game universe. Some possible scenarios:

1. INDUSTRIAL ESPIONAGE. Pan Galactic has just perfected the first working module of the laser pod and has installed it in an experimental ship (large enough to accommodate the party). The ship is stolen by a rival firm (like Streel Corporation), and the characters are hired to get it back.

2. TEST RUN. The player characters are chosen to test the new pod. The belt pirates find out and arrange a hijacking. This could end in a traditional marooning if the characters blow it.

3. ALIEN ARTIFACT. The characters explore an alien hulk and find the technology to construct the laser pod (this works well if you have a high tech expert in the group). The characters develop the first working model themselves.

4. ALIEN CONTACT. The characters will contact an alien race that has the ability to construct the first pod. This is best staged under time pressure of an imminent enemy attack. An upcoming Knight Hawks module will feature a suitable race.

5. WAR SPOILS. The Sathar have perfected the pod first. After several encounters with the new Sathar fighters, the player characters are given the mission to capture one of these new machines -- if successful, the UPF can also develop the pod laser.

Remember that how you add new material to your campaign can be as much fun as what you put into it.

POLYHEDRON #19

RPGA Network Item Design contest results

by Frank Mentzer

[....]The First Runner-Up, receiving a 10-year membership extension, is
Pierre Savoie of Kingston, Ontario. His item is "The Taser Rifle" for
the
STAR FRONTIERS game.

[....]

First Runner-Up: The Taser Rifle (for the STAR FRONTIERS game)
Rating: Usefulness #2; Originality #2; Rules Adherence #2.

SKILL BONUS USED: Projectile
DAMAGE: Stun (needle damage is negligible)
AVOIDANCE ROLL: Current STA or less (no effect)
AMMO: 20 SEU clip (or powerpack connection)
SEU USE: 2 per hit
RATE: 1 shot per turn
DEFENSE: Anti-Shock implant (suits and screens are ineffective)
RANGES: PB (0-2); Short (3-5); Medium (6-10); Long (11-20); no Extreme
(20
m natural limit)
MASS: 5 kg
COST: 900 Cr (new disk-and-wire assemblies 50 Cr each)

   This rifle has four disks mounted near the front, each connected to
a 20 m coil of insulated wire. Each disk is 10 cm in diameter, with a
short barbed needle in the center, a steel plate around it (3 cm
diameter) and velcro (fasteners) on the remainder of the surface.
   The user may fire one disk per turn. On a successful hit, the disk
attaches to the target and a surge of electricity is delivered through
the wire. The victim is stunned for the first turn (during the power
surge) and remains helpless for d100 turns. A successful Stamina check
means that the victim has resisted the stun.
   After the initial turn of the power surge, the disk can be removed
and reeled back to the rifle in one turn. As there are four disks,
immediate recovery may not be needed. In addition, each reel may be
set to recover automatically while the user continues to use others.
Note that the wire may snag on obstructions in some terrain or may not
easily be removed from certain creatures. The wire has high tensile
strength but is easily cut [using a set of built-in gun mechanisms],
enabling the user to flee if necessary without losing the gun itself.

Take Command
of a Titan!

"Big Ship" campaigns in the STAR FRONTIERS® game
**by Roger E. Moore**
Polyhedron Magazine, #21, pg. 10

Even though this is a STAR FRONTIERS® game article, it will start with some thoughts about the TRAVELLER® game, by Game Designers' Workshop. One of the oldest science-fiction RPGs on the market, the TRAVELLER system developed some fascinating game concepts that can be applied to virtually any other science-fiction campaign. One or its most interesting adventure settings was that of the Big Ship campaign.

Those who have been involved in a TRAVELLER campaign may recall the *Leviathan* and *Azhanti High Lightning* starship supplements, in which a large merchant craft and a titanic-sized warship, respectively, were drawn out and detailed to the *n*th degree. Entire campaigns could be organized around these mighty ships, with players taking the roles of the numerous crewmen manning the bridge, gun turrets, computer stations, small craft, exploration teams, repair crews, and so on. If characters die in combat or disaster, new characters may be drawn from the ship's crew or by recruiting at any nearby planet. The starship itself is the core of the campaign; men come and go, but the ship lives on. . . .

The thrill of having a Big Ship is hard to match. No longer wilt pirates get away with ripping off your puny merchant ship; instead, they'll get a taste of laser fire-power that can peel the rock off an asteroid. You have the advantage of a large crew and many supplies, and you can often get a few other smaller ships to serve as backup scouts and escorts. A Big Ship campaign is a unique experience.

Choosing a Big Ship

Having decided to try a Big Ship campaign, the first (and most important) question is, which sort of Big Ship will be used in the adventures? This decision will require input from all of the players, as they will be the ones to suffer through the scenarios. Some of the possible campaign options that may be taken include:
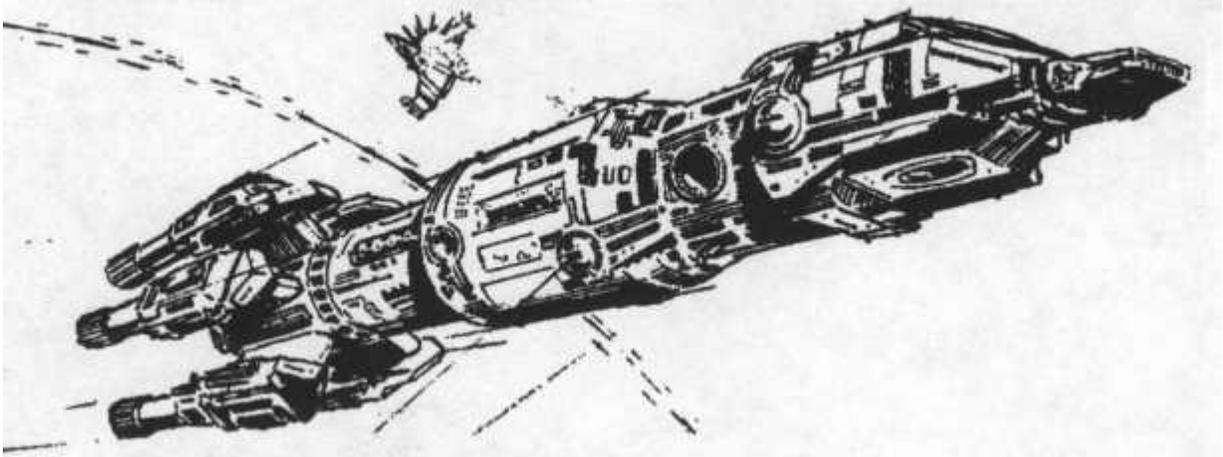
Merchant ships. Large-sized merchant craft that pick up and offload hundreds or thousands of tons of merchandise with each planetfall are fascinating to run, particularly for players who like to calculate profits on their pocket calculator. Anyone with a bend toward accounting (or greed) will like this set up; it's nice to be rich.

Interestingly, many science-fiction games are organized so that it is difficult to make a loss on a run, no matter what cargo the ship is carrying. The referee may wish to adjust this to give players a little trouble now and then, but making money is the major reason that most players will take this campaign route.

Merchant starships in STAR FRONTIERS gaming are generally of two types, either spaceliners (passenger haulers) or freighters; some notes on them appear on p.6 of the Campaign Book that comes with the Knight Hawks set. Spaceliners are great if the players and referee want lots of action as well as lots of money. All sorts of weird and dangerous characters can be picked up (including hijackers and assassins).

Note that freighters might prove somewhat boring, since they involve low crew sizes and (sadly) freighters are not well armed and aren't very maneuverable. However, a heavily-armed freighter that makes specialized runs (possibly during a Sathar war) could prove enjoyable to base a campaign around.

Smaller merchant ships could venture into unexplored star systems to open up trade with new cultures or colonies, thus doubling as scouts (see below). This sort of adventure was the major purpose of the *Leviathan* adventure mentioned above, and interested players and referees should examine a copy of that booklet for more information.

Exploration and scout ships. Exciting, long running adventures can be organized around scouting crews who are sent out to new star systems to search for habitable (or inhabited) worlds. The players will have thousands of adventures open up for them as they explore strange new worlds, seek out new life and new civilizations - you know the rest.

The demand on the game referee, however, could be immense. Whole work's

would have to be invented with each adventure, and the creative demand to put together unique and enjoyable scenarios would be enormous. It would help for the referee to have access to set entire journals and texts on other planets and solar systems, and a good supply of science-fiction novels describing unusual new worlds that could be adapted into the campaign would also be of value.

One interesting variant on this theme might be to have a giant starship become lost in the galaxy by some means. Perhaps a Big Ship passed too close to a black hole or other space-warping phenomenon in the Void; when it exited the Void, it wasn't where it was supposed to be (by several thousand light years!) In this situation, the lost ship's crew will know they will not be able to return home again in their lifetimes. But - they can explore and settle the area they are in, and begin a new human civilization in a remote part of the galaxy. What alien worlds and dangers will they encounter? The possibilities are endless.

A final thought: Referees are referred to module SFKH 2, *Mutiny on the Eleanor Moraes,* for some thoughts on major complications that could develop on long-range scouting missions.

Warships and privateer. The Second Sathar War has started, and you and your friends are in command of the battleship UPFS *Admiral Morgaine*, the heart and soul of Task Force Prenglar. All that lies between you and victory is the entire Sathar fleet, and the Sathar feel the same way about you as you feel about them. . . .

Using details from the STAR FRONTIERS Campaign Book (pgs. 55-60), the referee can create a major campaign in which the players role-play their way through the planning, preparations, fighting, and adventure of the Sathar wars. If the Sathar are too "tame," then there aft Mechanons and other hostile aliens to battle, pirate bases to locate and destroy, and convoys to escort and protect. Perhaps some smaller Big Ships of assault scout, frigate, or light cruiser size will receive special missions to scout enemy forces, run blockades, and conduct surprise attacks on enemy positions.

Other campaign backgrounds are suggested by the information in SFKH 1, *Dramune Run,* in which the tension between Inner Reach and Outer Reach explodes in the Dramune War, and by *The Warriors* of *White Light,* the mission brief included with the Knight Hawks game. The latter is further described below and includes a series of adventures for small Big Ships.

The possibility of inter-corporate rivalries exploding into warfare must also be considered; after all, there was "Laco's War." Some interesting information on corporate conflicts in space may be found in module SF 4, *Mission to Alcazzar,* and in DRAGON® Magazine #88 ("Yachts and Privateers Return," p. 82), both sources by Doug Niles. A two-part series on corporations and their wars in the Frontier Sector will appear in DRAGON Magazine issues #89-90, written by Kim Eastland, and will provide valuable background information on the "company wars."

Private ships and others. The least "confining" of all Big Ship adventure campaigns would be, of course, ones centered around privately owned ships that can go anywhere the crew wants. One or more of the player characters should be rich enough (from previous adventuring or by the referee's ruling) to have a

giant starship constructed for a select crew to go wandering in. The ship's crew may then dabble in military, mercantile, or exploratory affairs, as they choose.

The "Yachts and Privateers Return" article from DRAGON® Magazine #89, mentioned above, has information on the larger private yachts that sail the Frontier Sector's stars. Developing a suitable adventuring background for the campaign would prove easier in this instance than in the above ones, as the player characters themselves have control over their future plans. It could prove difficult at times to get everyone to agree with the same plans, however, but generally there should be little problem in coordinating the group's interstellar activities.

References and aids

A list of game aids that may prove helpful for running or gaming in a Big Ship campaign follows. Some of these products were designed for game systems other than the STAR FRONTIERS game, but the organizational material and gaming hints they have can be invaluable.

STAR FRONTIERS® game aids

Knight Hawks - The starship expansion rules (for the STAR FRONTIERS game.) Obviously essential for any Big Ship campaigns in this system. The mini-module that comes with this set, *The Warriors of White Light,* is required reading for the scenario ideas and organization it gives to starship campaigns.

SFKH1: *Dramune Run* - The first Knight Hawks module, this adventure lays much groundwork for running starships as the core of the campaign. The merchant ship provided in the adventure is only hull size 6, but a good referee can extrapolate from the information provided, particularly the excellent Ship Log layout on p.13, when designing larger ships and the adventures to go with them.

TRAVELLER® game aids

Book 5, *High Guard* - Though only those who are familiar with this game system will understand most of the material here, this booklet does provide some interesting detail on crewing and operating major starships. The shipbuilding system used here is of little use in STAR FRONTIERS gaming, but the list of things that ships can be outfitted with might make interesting reading.

Supplement 9, *FightingShips* - A fascinating look at what the TRAVELLER game calls *big.* This booklet can give players some wonderful ideas on how to construct their own Big Ship, if allowed to do so by the referee. Beware of the half-million ton monsters, though. . . .

Adventure 1, *The Kinunir* - On the "'small" side or the Big Ship scale, the military starship described here has numerous adventures centering around it that could be adopted into other game systems with ease. The idea of gaining a Big Ship by salvage (with the associated dangers) is explored, and a crew roster is given that details where the crewmen might he found at any particular time

(useful for NPCs).

Adventure 4, *Leviathan* - Absolutely required reading, even if you don't play TRAVELLER games. Superb detailing of a major starship (though still on the "medium small" end of the scale), its crew, and a selection of adventures that will last through many games.

Game 3, *Azhanti High Lightning* - To my knowledge, this is the most expansive set of starship deckplans ever done. A BIG ship, the *Azhanti High Lightning* class cruiser masses 60,000 tons and is satisfyingly huge enough to please anyone. This game is also required reading for anyone who thinks that running a Big Ship campaign might be easy. It isn't, but the payoff can be enormous. The enclosed booklet (Supplement 5, *Lightning Class Cruisers*) is worth the cost of the game itself and presents much useable information on crewing major starships and keeping them going. The adventuring possibilities described are outstanding and far-reaching.

STAR TREK®
The Role-Playing Game

The best known of all Big Ships in science fiction may be the U.S.S. *Enterprise.* Though the game has little to do with the STAR FRONTIERS system, the "Starship Combat" section of the rulebook presents what is probably the best starship command system for gaming purposes there is. *All* of the players can take roles as important ship's officers and have an effect on combat. All too often it seems that only the one or two players controlling the guns have anything to do while firing away at the enemy; STAR FRONTIERS game players can adopt the STAR TREK combat system or some variant of it into their campaigns to give players more of a chance to work together.

The next issue of POLYHEDRON™ Newszine will present more information on Big Ship campaigns, as well as a Big Ship that can be used as the foundation for STAR FRONTIERS game adventures - the frigate PiniPedikord*, the terror of the spacelanes.*

Of Great Ships and Captains

"Big ships" in the STAR FRONTIERS® game, Part 2

by Roger E. Moore

Polyhedron Magazine, #22, pg. 26

In the last issue of POLYHEDRON™ Newszine, some of the basics of starting a Big Ship campaign in a Star Frontiers® game were described.

The *referee* and players must decide what sort of Big Ship the group will be using; campaigns based upon military, merchant, and scouting missions will each require a different type of ship, each having different type of ship, each having different abilities, crew sizes, and so forth.

As the cover of this issue points out, having a Big Ship is no guarantee that star-faring characters will be invincible. The bigger the ship, the harder it crashes. A careful and dedicated crew (and referee) will keep their ship flying for many sessions of play.

Details, details

The first hurdle to overcome in running a Big Ship campaign (after you've chosen which ship to use) is to map out the ship's interior. Eventually someone will want to know where the staterooms are, what the bridge looks like, how far away the lifeboats are from the cafeteria, and where the bathrooms are. A large amount of graph paper and patience is required to get this job done.

Numerous ship maps are scattered throughout the STAR FRONTIERS game rules, and it only takes a few minutes of study to get a feel for how the mapping system works. Based on 2-meter squares, the maps detail the interiors of various smaller ships used by the UPF Spacefleet (such as the assault scout and frigate). The notes on designing deck plans given in the Campaign Book (p. 23) are required reading for this sort of work.

If you like extra detail, 1-meter squares can be used, This is extra-nice in figuring out exactly where everyone is standing in melee, and those who like filling in details of crew seating, equipment appearance, and so forth may prefer the enlarged scale.

Some of the most commonly seen areas on starship maps are given below. Players and referees may use this as a checklist to determine what parts of the Big Ship they're using need to be included in the maps. Most of the areas named are self-explanatory.

- **Bridge** (main bridge and emergency bridge) including pilot's, co-pilot's, astrogator's, and communications stations;

- **Computer Room**, possibly with computerized library;
- **Engineering section**, including spare parts storage, main and emergency power systems, maintenance shafts to engines, spacesuit storage lockers, backup engineering systems, emergency life support systems, workpods, machine and electronics shops, and tools and equipment storage;
- **Gunnery decks**, including firing controls for main ship's guns and defense systems, major man-portable weapons storage, weapons maintenance rooms and repair shops, ammunitions storage, and armored (military) spacesuit storage;
- **Crew quarters**, with rec center, galley, food storage, life-support system, offices, small weapons storage, and other areas required by the ship's crew (like bathrooms);
- **Passenger decks**, with accommodations similar to those on the crew deck (only more expansive and probably more expensive as well);
- **Cargo decks**, including freight handling machinery, major airlocks, cargo space, security station, and cargo handling "arms" (for deep-space work); and,
- **Other areas**: observation domes, airlocks, passenger and crew lifeboats, robot storage areas, hydroponics areas, freight and crew elevators running throughout ship, and internal defense points (heavy weapon mounts for repelling boarders).

A partial layout of a frigate is given in the Campaign Book which displays some of the above areas rather nicely. Other ship maps in the STAR FRONTIERS books are also helpful.

Aside from the internal maps of the ship, the referee should generate ship's papers similar to those found in SFKH1, *Dramune Run* (p. 13, Ship Log for the *Gullwind*). Various expenses involved in running the Big Ship should be carefully detailed. How much does refueling cost? How often should maintenance be performed? How much are crew salaries?

One last thought about designing your ship. If you choose a ship type that's been previously described in the rules (such as the frigate, which is detailed below), don't worry about whether your ship design is going to be "official". Given the wide variations between the different types of frigates in the rules, one supposes that different races and different shipbuilding contractors have different ideas of how to build the same starships. After all, a Volkswagen Beetle, a Corvette Stingray, and a Lincoln Continental were all designed with four wheels and the ability to get you from one place to another at 55 mph; no one said all cars had to look alike.

Player characters & crewmen

Most crew positions on a starship are self-explanatory. Everyone knows what a pilot or gunnery officer does. The problem comes in figuring out exactly which crew positions aboardship should be filled. If you have a Big Ship with a crew of 400, you may have trouble deciding how many cooks and internal security

personnel will be needed.

If there was an easy answer to this, it would be included here in this article. The TRAVELLER®game system has some helpful comments and rules of thumb for crewing major warships in Book 5, *High Guard*, that are certainly worth reading. For the most part, you will be on your own in building crew positions for the player characters to fill. Note that there is no reason why players cannot each control a number of separate characters on the ship, though a good supply of referee-controlled NPCs is recommended for ease of play.

If you have access to a local library, you might try to discover what sorts of crews major ships like aircraft carriers, submarines, and destroyers have on them. This could be very helpful in laying out starship crew positions.

Some of the most commonly used crew positions on a starship are given below, with a few brief notes on each.

- **Captain**, who is often the ship's main pilot;
- **Executive officer**, a lieutenant who handles matters when the captain is absent and performs some of the captain's paperwork;
- **Pilot or helmsman** (often several pilots, copilots, and backup pilots are kept aboardship, all of officer grade and usually lieutenants);
- **Gunnery officers**, usually junior lieutenants (each officer is specialized in one form of weapons or defense system, such as rockets or energy weapons);
- **Chief medical officer/surgeon** and any medical assistants required;
- **Astrogator/navigator**, a lieutenant who operates the guidance and stellar location systems and (to a lesser extent) the detection/radar equipment;
- **Communications/detection officer** and crewmen;
- **Chief engineer** (usually a lieutenant) and engineering crewmen, responsible for the ship's power and propulsion systems, life support, damage control, and other engineering systems;
- **Computer officers** (on larger ships with big computer systems);
- **Maintenance and repair crewmen**;
- **Boarding party personnel, shipboard marines, internal security forces**, and other armed military personnel, usually commanded by a junior lieutenant (other personnel, such as squad leaders, a first sergeant, and platoon sergeants are optional); and,
- **Other personnel** as needed (robot techs, food service and agricultural specialists, scientists, passenger stewards, etc.)

In the *Warriors of White Light* adventure, some additional notes on the crewing of the smaller starships (frigates and assault scouts) are given. Enlisted ranks are referred to under the general title of Midshipmen, though other ranks and titles may be adopted if the referee desires. Other space navies aside from the Clarion Royal Marines would probably have new designations for officers and crew.

Opponents & adventures

Designing adventures for a Big Ship campaign should not be overly difficult. The ship can often play a background role in getting players from one planet to another so they can take part in "regular" sorts of adventures in which PCs seem to immerse themselves so regularly. The Big Ship shouldn't always have to serve as the group's taxicab, however.

In military campaigns, life aboard a large warship could be played out in detail. Obviously there is a lot of boring time even in a major war, but there are certain moments when danger might creep up on the characters as well.

Adventures occurring aboardship would include saboteur and spy activity (especially in anti-pirate and Sathar campaigns), boarding actions, and crew mutinies. It must be strongly stated that crew mutinies should be VERY rare. The United States Navy has never had a large mutiny, though several times small numbers of crewmen, dissatisfied with their lot and often mistreated by their officers, have rebelled. Criminal activities among crewmen involved in drug dealing, loan sharking, gambling, and other pursuits might prove to be long-standing problems that characters will have trouble laying to rest.

Special passengers bring their own troubles, as crewmen try to protect alien ambassadors, locate terrorist-implanted bombs, deal with hijackers and stowaways, or take on disaster victims from shipwrecks or wartime activities. Animals in cargo bays can escape by accident or on purpose. Pets brought aboardship might prove to have thief-like talents.

Players should be able to develop other shipboard adventures that keep things rolling in the game. Of course, there are adventures that keep things rolling outside the ship as well. Major space battles can be played out with the PCs' ship involved, using the Knight Hawks rules, though everyone should be forewarned that the fastest way to totally wreck a starship is to get into a shooting war with another ship. Diplomacy, trickery, and careful tactical planning should be explored beforehand to eliminate the chances of having the Big Ship become a **BFLH** (Big Floating Lifeless Hulk).

The referee should keep the first rule of managing a Big Ship campaign in mind: *avoid destroying the ship*. This doesn't mean that if the player characters decide to dive the ship into a local star that they should get away with it. But the referee should avoid putting the ship itself in critical danger of being destroyed, especially early in the campaign. The *threat* of having the ship be destroyed is one thing, but doing it is another.

A good case in point was a campaign I participated in a few years ago, in which he players controlled a *Leviathan*-class merchant ship in a TRAVELLER game. Within a month of gaming, the ship had sustained extreme internal damage from fighting and was in danger of being gunned apart by hostile starships. This was not conductive to a secure feeling on the players' part. It may happen that more than one ship bites the Asteroid of Doom before the players and referee figure out how to keep the ship alive longer.

BUT - if it happens that the player characters wind up stranded on an alien planet with their Big Ship crashed and seriously damaged, all is not lost. There are repair crews and construction firms willing to put the ship into working order again, for a hefty price. The shuttle-type starship on the cover, though it

obviously isn't going anywhere for a while, could be salvaged, carried back to a spaceport or well-equipped industrial center, and sent back into space only a little worse for the wear.

Frigates in general

One example of a Big Ship that could be adopted into campaign play is the frigate, A frigate is comfortably small and manageable for a beginning Big Ship group, though it's still of respectable size. The crew size is more than adequate, and lots of NPCs can fill out the crew roster and serve as replacement player characters if the originals die or retire.

Despite last issue's promise of a view of the *Pini Pedikord* ("the terror of the spacelanes"), deck plans for a sample frigate will have to wait until a later date. However, some basic information can be culled from the various STAR FRONTIERS game books, deduced from the above, and invented on the spot. Any group interested in creating a campaign based around a different Big Ship should follow the same procedure: look up every scrap of information you can find on that ship type, add implied material, and then fill in the gaps with your imagination.

Frigates are the smallest major warships in common use. Built around a size 5 hull, frigates are well-armed and fast. They are most often used by planetary navies, marines, and militias, interstellar navies (such as Spacefleet), and captured or "junked" frigates might be employed by pirates or private concerns. In the STAR FRONTIERS game, frigates form the mainstay of the UPF fleet.

Because of their speed and firepower, frigates are often sent on high-speed patrols and pirate suppression, anti-smuggling, or blockade assignments, They work well with smaller craft such as fighters and assault scouts, lending firepower support when necessary and serving as "headquarters" ships for small military operations.

Frigates are equipped with high-quality detection gear. Interplanetary radar, high-powered cameras, energy sensors, and hull skin sensors allow the ship's crew to monitor activity in, on, or around the ship at any time. Normal radio and subspace radio systems are installed, along with a videocom system for "face-to-face" communications and a white-noise broadcaster of normal size for use in combat. A standard intercom system is installed for communication between crewmen in different parts of the ship.

Frigates are heavily armed when compared to smaller ships like assault scouts and fighters, and they have a variety of weapons systems that may be used during combat. Some weapons systems may be replaced by others, as noted below.

One large laser cannon (range: 100,000 km) is set on the bow in a fixed mount that only allows the cannon to fire forward. A laser beam battery is mounted to one side of the ship, consisting of a cluster of small laser cannons set in a rotating turret with an unlimited field of fire. (The frigate may be rotated to allow the laser battery to reach targets initially on the other side of the ship from the battery.) The laser battery has a 90,000 km range. Both types of laser weapons

have their "punching power" reduced by great distances.

Frigates also commonly carry two nuclear missiles called "torpedos", which are used as ship-to-ship weapons with homing devices. Each torpedo has a fission-drive engine to send it to its target. Torpedos can sometimes be used for space-to-ground attacks against planetary fortresses, military bases, missile silos, spaceports, etc.

Four rocker batteries are mounted on the hull as well. Each battery may fire a cluster of small and extremely fast missiles propelled by fusion drives. No homing systems are placed on these missiles because of their extremely fast movement; targets cannot dodge them.

Some weapons may be exchanged for others. The two torpedos may be eliminated and replaced by another four rocket batteries or by another laser beam battery; other combinations of these systems are possible (such as exchanging the four rockets for a laser beam battery, etc.)

Frigates have a good array of defenses, too. A reflective surface may be applied to the hull to defend against laser attacks. A masking screen device good for two uses is installed (complete with water tanks), and four interceptor missiles useful against incoming missiles and torpedos are carried as well. The entire masking screen system may be replaced by installing another interceptor missile, or a smaller masking screen system good for only one use could be installed with on decoy system. A large masking screen system good for two uses could, of course, be broken down into two smaller one-shot systems.

For a "small" starship, a frigate packs a nice wallop. A long-playing military campaign could be developed with little trouble around a UPF frigate or a similar ship in a planetary navy, of the solar system it hails from has a large number of planets to visit.

Deck plans, a crew roster, and more information on running a frigate in a Big Ship campaign will wing their way to you in a future issue of POLYHEDRON™ Newszine.