THE PLANETEER

Issue 9: December 1996/January 1997

Free Speech Online
Blue Ribbon Campaign

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Editorial: Internet Junk Mail & Changes in The Planeteer

Happy New Year to all VGA Planeteers and welcome to issue #9 of The Planeteer … with luck this will be the year VGA Planets version 4 gets released?

Well … that was Christmas and I sincerely hope you all had a good one. If you're not of the Christian persuasion then I hope you enjoyed the festivities that go with the commercial side of the season. If you're a Jehovah's Witness I guess you got your own problems ☺.

This issue I am particularly proud to feature two articles. Dr. Jan Klingele's (a.k.a. Sirius) "Master at Arms", serialised in two parts, examines in significant detail the way weaponry actually works in VGA Planets whilst Mark Wilmot's "So you wanna be a Privateer?", serialised in at least three parts, goes into great detail about how to play The Privateers or whether you should even consider doing so! Also, despite being January I have included a couple of humorous, Christmas oriented, pieces.

Please check the end of this editorial for an important announcement.

THE PLANETEER

Recently I have had cause to cross swords with both those involved in junk E-Mailing and those that defend these individuals rights … yes … you read that right … those who would ACTUALLY stand up and say they believe that these people out there have the absolute right to abuse you and the mail facility for which you, not they, pay.

Junk e-mail comes in two main types: Chain e-mail (quite often of the humorous variety) and large scale bulk e-mailing and, although you may not yet realise it, both equally abhorrent.

We all know (and almost certainly have been the victim of) the bulk e-mailer. The bulk e-mailer, much like junk Snail Mail, gets your e-mail address either by collecting them themselves, by buying a list of e-mail ID's off someone else or by submitting their advertisement to a specialist bulk e-mailer who with little apparent effort or research sends that advert to thousands, tens of thousands or possibly even millions of unsuspecting and, more to the point unrequesting, E-mail recipients.

Now I understand these people … but I believe that they do not have the right to use my e-mail ID. Further I believe that it is not enough to simply be taken off their lists (at my request!) I should be secure enough in my own e-mail address to know that I will not receive such e-mails without my specific request …. why? Because I pay for my E-mail account and not them!

As I said … I understand these people and why they carry out these abhorrent practices but don't let my understanding mask my true feelings … these people are scum … nothing more, nothing less! When I received one of these kind advertisements ("Oh! Lucky me!") I was annoyed … when I received it for a second time the same day I was furious! Apparently, this e-mail informed me, they had done

some research the results of which indicated that I would be interested in some photographic type product (somewhat sickeningly justifying it with some vomit-inducing testimonials) and inviting me to reply using the word remove in the header if I wished to be removed from their mailing list. They were wrong … not only was their research seriously flawed (I have no interest in photography whatsoever) but they were requesting me to e-mail *them* to request the removal of my e-mail ID from a list upon which it should never have been in the first place! My instant response was to complain … I complained (10 times ☺) to the sender of the e-mail with the following note (which included a copy of the original, rather large, e-mail):

> *Whoever,*
>
> *Please have your message back (which I received twice and have send back to you more than that!) & note the following points!!!!*
>
> ** I did not request it therefore I do not want it!!!*
> ** It is unsolicited e-mail that I had to PAY to download!!!*
> ** I demand that you take me off ANY associated mailing list and NEVER E-Mail me again with this CRAP.*
> ** Your so-called research sucks!!!*
>
> *Please note that I have also forwarded your letter to CompuServe as a formal complaint and as an attempt to have mail from you banned within CompuServe and to your own ISP's postmaster in an attempt to prevent this kind of arrogant behaviour at source!!!*

I also cc'd the note to the postmaster of the offending domain (hostmaster@netmcr.com) and received a reply from one Nicky Smith of the INTERNET/MCR CORPORATION in which I was informed that the company, effectively, would take no action against this individual and outlining their companies policy on the subject of spamming. One section (3) of this policy stated that it was "It is contrary to INTERNET/MCR policy for any user of any of these services to effect or participate in any of the following activities through an INTERNET/MCR-provided service: …. To send unsolicited mass emailing's to more than twenty-five (25) email users, if such unsolicited emailing's provoke complaints from the recipients"

Now some would say that this is an irresponsible response (does that make sense?) but there you go … at the time I was very, very annoyed!

So I approached my colleagues in my home forum with a simple inquiry … had any of them received this e-mail? It was my intention, once I had figured out if enough of them had received it to then approach each with a simple request to use their names in my complaint and thus attain the required 25 people and force the complaint to be officially recognised … in this I have to admit I failed. What surprised me, however, was that one individual (for arguments sake let's call this person Ray) stood up for the "rights" of the bulk e-mailer stating that *they* had the "right" to send me e-mail as they wished. I followed the forum "thread" (in particular the individuals comments) quite closely, contributing as appropriate … in essence his major arguments were as follows:

1. It is easier to type "DELETE" or "REMOVE" than to complain to other sources, e-mail (perhaps many times in anger) the source or postmaster of the sender's domain or just cause a general fuss!
2. That preventing such e-mailings constitutes an unacceptable level of censorship.

3. That preventing such e-mailings constitutes a violation of their rights of free speech.
4. That the fact that I object to having to take action to either remove myself from a mailing list or to refuse to download mail on the basis of it's title is pathetic.
5. That my response to Junk E-Mailers is inappropriate
6. That these people are in business and therefore have the right to use my e-mail account to inform me of their products!

I proceeded to point out the flaws (as I saw them) in his arguments … essentially as follows:

I agreed that it was easier to type "REMOVE" or "DELETE" but that to do such a thing was not necessarily the correct or most appropriate course of action because, by doing so, the recipient of the e-mail was putting their (junk e-mail) future in the junk e-mailers hands …. a little ironic if you ask me. I pointed out that it would be impossible to be sure that the e-mailer had removed you from the mailing list in question, had not sold your name onto any other company and would certainly not track down & remove your name from any mailing list they had previously sold.

I told Ray that I didn't like censorship either (although I have to concede that we are all subject to it to a degree … after all I censor my children don't I? And generally that is considered to be in their best interests … yes?) and that I was only complaining about this method of E-Mailing. I was trying to protect my rights (and the rights of others in similar situations) … specifically my right to maintain sole use of (or at least control over) something that I pay for. I was objecting to the practice of spamming ... particularly when I am the recipient of it ... if that is a view that is pro-censorship then yes … I am guilty!

I agreed with him that everyone has the right to free speech (although it seems that many try to deny us that right … a current example of this is the protests voiced by supporters of the Blue Ribbon campaign … a group The Planeteer is proud to be associated with) but stated that despite this I have the right not to listen if I so desire. In pursuing my right to control my e-mail I am not denying them the right to free speech … no … I am simply walking away from the speaker that is all. Despite my wish not to be bothered by such trash (particularly when I must foot the bill for reading it) I would defend to the death their right to speak as freely as they wish.

The next point made is one I find particularly interesting as it involves solicitation for junk mail. As editor of The Planeteer I encourage my readers to air their views about the magazine, to suggest ways in which in can be improved and, above all, to contribute articles … effectively I solicit mail from people with a common interest in VGA Planets. As such I have to open my CompuServe e-mail account to the wider world of the Internet (it has to be said that, in my experience, CompuServe has few internal problems with junk mail) so the suggestion of Ray's that I don't read mail from external (to CompuServe) sources was, quite apart from the fact that it shouldn't be necessary, unworkable. Add to that the fact that I use an off-line reader meaning that I tend to make a single pass through my mailbox and download everything that is there. To operate a checking procedure would necessitate a greater amount of time (two passes) and therefore greater telephone costs and the possibility of exceeding my allotted 5 hours monthly that CompuServe allows me without charging extra.

To put it simply: Why the hell should I make two passes? It's my life, my account and spamming is a pain in the bum! I solicit e-mail from contributors and would be contributors to The Planeteer ... this does NOT mean I am soliciting e-mail from anywhere else. Given the sources of material for my magazine I cannot, easily, tell what is a spam and what isn't so I DO have to read a message (thus downloading it) to find out!

His strongest argument is that my response to these people was inappropriate … but I would argue that it they who abused my rights by sending me unsolicited mail and anything that I do in return is justifiable at least in principle. So what if I sent the e the junk e-mailer 10 copies of his own letter in return for the two sent to me … in my opinion that is quite justifiable. In the course of this forum discussion I researched how to respond on the web ... at specialised sites people have built to deal with those who indulge in the excesses of bulk e-mailing.

But to balance this slightly more sensible argument Ray then proceeded to put forward the most pathetic argument I ever saw … that *"That these people are in business and therefore have the right to use my e-mail account to inform me of their products!"* … come again? When I read it I was, to coin a phrase, gob-smacked! These people are in business are they? So what? Does that give them some God-given right to abuse the rights of others? No it doesn't! The web is an excellent advertising medium ... many high quality web sites advertise products (just like any public forum) and like most advertising it is largely ignored unless it addresses a subject that is actually of interest to the viewer. I fail to see why these people can't just select popular web-sites and (pay to?) place an advert there ... just like the real world ... I don't object to that .. how can I? It ain't my site and it is entirely my choice whether to visit it or not (thus subjecting myself to the advertising!).

In the end it comes back down to the simple fact that these people DO NOT pay for my e-mail account and therefore have absolutely zero right to use it unless I specifically solicit mail from them (believe me … I don't!). Advertising by e-mail is NOT justifiable because (and only because) the recipient must pay to receive the mail in question. I fully agree that these people have the right to use e-mail ... where that right ends is where that e-mail is sent, unsolicited and unrequested, to the mailbox of someone who doesn't want it!

In a similar vein a friend of mine received some junk mail … this time of the good-luck, chain mail variety.

To cut a long story short he was sent an e-mail that, apart from being complete rubbish, was, by implication, a threat … a threat that if you don't send the letter on, is that you will, at best, NOT be lucky. But, if you think about it, there is a deeper implication that you will actually be unlucky .. so the sender of the e-mail is actually, without realising it, wishing bad luck upon those who do not forward the mail and quite evidently not everyone in the world can forward the mail … the Internet would die under the strain. I hazard a guess that a higher number of people do not forward such letter's than do and a proportion of them will always wonder if their luck would have been improved if they had sent the stupid thing to the required number of people

as requested. So instead of increasing happiness I'd say that these kind of crap actually adds to the general unhappiness in the world!

My friend responded with what I felt was a terse, but entirely reasonable, request: "I don't appreciate getting chain letters of any description, and I probably speak for the rest in this regard, don't do it again".

At this point the matter would have rested except that the original sender (let's call him Clint because he likes horses!!!!) decided to further abuse my friend:

> *It's always nice to hear from someone who has his finger on the pulse of everyone in the world. Your all knowing power should not be wasted on just slapping my hand.<ouch> You should contribute to healing the sick or feeding the homeless.*
>
> *Or you could do what most people do when they get junk mail:*
>
> > *1)Read it and throw it away.*
> > *2)Ignore it all together.*
> > *3)Get rid of your mailbox and isolate yourself from the outside world.*
>
> *Your response is so noted. And the tone is not appreciated. A simple thank you, but I would rather not recieve such mail, would have accomplished the same results. I'm sure you can see how the "all knowing" statement, backed up by a threat, only encourages a return reply.*
>
> *Now that we both have had the oppertunity to comment on this episode, I request no further responses. I also assure you that you will no longer recieve mail from me.*

Anyway being the sort of person I am my friend solicited my opinion and agreed that I should tackle the sender of the chain-mail about it ☺

I won't go into great detail about it but to put it simply I expressed the following views:

- that his original letter was unsolicited mail, mail that my friend had to pay for the *privilege* of downloading … now where have I heard that before?
- His response was right to the point, contained no threat (as suggested by Clint and unlike the original unsolicited chain mail) and was absolutely correct!
- That the sender's reply to that letter was unwarranted! He should have APOLOGISED … nothing more nothing less!

I received a fairly vehement reply to this mail (much in the vein of the reply my friend received) and responded in a manner that is typically me.

I think, as in many arguments of this nature, no one can truly be said to have won as each of us stood up for his own opinion. However in both cases I think it is fair to say that I won the argument … not because my arguments were better (of course they were ☺) but because both my "opponents" decided to drop to level of pure abuse as a method of argument … and, provided the other(s) refrain from it, in such situations there can only be one winner … the one who stays on the higher moral ground.

The Planeteer is on a bimonthly schedule (although due to family crises I'm afraid that the intervals are, presently, somewhat longer) and all the usual distributors will be able to make it available on the first day of every second month.

The submissions deadline for Issue #10 will be the Friday 21st March 1997 and the issue should be available at a distributor near you from 1st April 1997.

Please note that I try to (but cannot always) respond to casual E-Mail concerning The Planeteer and that recent changes in The Planeteer mean that I am effectively the ONLY contact point for the magazine. Submitting authors will ALWAYS receive replies as will all regular & new contacts (distributors etc.) and the best of the E-Mail will, as always, be featured in Letters to the Editor.

Finally I have to apologise to some of the authors who MAY have submitted work to me which has not been published in the issue #7/8 double issue …. life ("Life? Don't talk to me about life!") has been, um , complex recently (I referred to it last issue as "messy" … a description that seems very apt!)! I invite you to re-submit those articles so that I can consider them for publishing in issue #10.

Important Announcement

As of next issue (Issue #10) I have decided to feature occasional Guest Editorials. I do not mind what the subject of these are as long as they fall within the range of VGA Planets, Computing or Science Fiction. If you are interested please contact me with a rough outline of your idea and we'll take it from there!

The Undead HedgeHog

Editor, The Planeteer

The Planeteer: Issue 9, January 1997

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Mission Statement.

- *The Planeteer is a Forum/Service independent publication who's major aim is to support, entertain, inform and express the views of the VGA Planeteer ... wherever they are found.*

- *The Planeteer or any article from it may be uploaded in an unaltered form to any forum, bulletin board or service that supports VGA Planets provided that The Planeteer is acknowledged and the intellectual property of the Author is observed.*

- *The Planeteer, in line with the latest version of VGA Planets, is committed to Windows as an operating system and therefore it's current distribution format is as a Windows HelpFile. It is released in Help and HTML formats only ....*

   Note: The Editor of The Planeteer does not sanction the formatting of The Planeteer into an altered WinHelp form at all and alternative or altered HTML formats are allowed only with The Editors prior permission.

Guidelines.

- *The Planeteer is an independent publication and is solely guided by the interests of the VGAP community ("Planeteers") and the wishes of it's Editor, James C. Rocks (a.k.a. The Undead HedgeHog).*

- *The Planeteer exists to support the VGAP enthusiast and as such must be allowed to publish game reports, strategic advice, utility reviews and other material relevant to Planeteers regardless of locations of files/games, persons mentioned in or authoring articles or forums, nodes, networks within such articles.*

- *The Planeteer reserves the right to edit any article submitted for content and grammar/spelling (based on UK English) but undertakes to retain the spirit/sentiment, general structure and purpose of the article. In the event of this goal being, in the Editors' opinion, unachievable the Editor will decide whether or not to seek a modified re-submission from the Author.*

- *Authors submitting articles to The Planeteer MUST acknowledge the intellectual property of others (for example quotes from Tim Wisseman's VGAP documentation).*

- *Articles submitted to The Planeteer will, at all times, remain the intellectual property of the author provided that the author adheres to the above.*

- *The Editor of The Planeteer reserves the right to refuse any article for any reason whatsoever and The Planeteer magazine remains at ALL times the property of James C. Rocks (a.k.a. The Undead HedgeHog).*

- *In the event of a rejection please note that, whilst no further correspondence (regarding the submission in it's current form) will be entertained, the Planeteer will be pleased to consider a modified submission OR an alternative article.*

Known Availability.

Please check out the contacts page towards the rear of the magazine ... if anyone should know of other locations for The Planeteer please let me know ... preferably with a contact name.

Note/s

The Planeteer will be featuring (and seeking!), from month to month, contributions from various authors (new and old!) on any aspect of VGAP and humour & opinion on anything related to Science Fiction & Computing.

VGA Planets .... Begin Here!

This month I am featuring the work of Eduado Fonseca as the writer of The Planeteers beginners section. Hopefully I will be able to feature the work of others new (or old) to the game who'd like to pass on their first impressions. Eduardo Fonseca ("Edy") is 30 years old, a musician and a graduate in communications. He lives in Belo Horizonte MG, Brazil. - Ed.

My impressions about VGA Planets

by

Eduado "Edy" Fonseca

1.0 Overview

I realise the time spent writing these words could be used for studying music or other things, however I know I can contribute a little of my experience and "know-how" to other VGA Planets players, from novices to experts. I have been playing Planets since March 1994 when I saw it for the first time. During this period, I've been learning as much as I can about this wonderful game. Now, as I have collected a little VGAP knowledge, I have decided to detail what I have learned.

I do not intend to teach you how to play VGA Planets. My goal is give you a little help in key areas .. without it, you could spend a lot of time only to arrive at the same point. Let's take a good sense to use only your own resources. It is very easy to play 5 Meteors, 2 Falcons, 4 Fireclouds, 1 Darkwing, 10 Virgo's etc., right .. FORGET THEM. Here we will use only our own race ships and HCONFIG defaults.

2.0 My philosophy

1. **DON'T BE FOOLED INTO THINKING YOU KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT VGA PLANETS**. We play with human brains and they are all brilliant, providing lots of new ideas and tricks. Everyday new ideas are discovered .. new players showing their style. This game is continuously changing .. it never stops. If you don't read or only play in same place with same players, you will never learn new things. You stop in time and may be destroyed when a new different opponent with new strategies appears against you.

2. **DON'T PLAY FOR SCORE.** If you play for points, you cannot build your needed battlecarriers. You are wasting money and minerals while you should be building warships, fighters and torpedoes. At the end of turn 40, I typically have about 20 to 30 Virgo's with 100 fighters each. At least 1 of my opponents was destroyed and I started a new attack against other. "The Higher you fly, the deeper you go" -- John Lennon.

3. **TRY TO AVOID PLAYING MORE THAN 2 GAMES AT SAME TIME**. Planets is a "way of life" .. focus yourself to do the best you can. If you play lot of groups you divide your energy. You play the first game well, the second so so

while neglecting the details of the others. Two games are enough. A great Commander manages only 1 or 2 armies .. why should you have more?

3.0 The first turns

The first turn is one of the most important turns of the game. In general there aren't a lot of things to do. Yes .. you are right .. in this turn you decide which planets to colonise and where you should or should not go. In the first turn, you build your strategy of colonisation.

At my HomeWorld, I build factories and mines, continuing to build until the world has reached 300 factories and 400 mines. I need duranium quickly .. the typical concentration of 15% makes mining too slow hence I look for this ore in nearby planets.

With the StarBase. I increase the **Hull** to tech level 6, the **Engines** to 10 and both the **Beams** and **Torpedoes** to 4. (What!! You're not a Registered player? Why not? What are waiting for?)

The 2 small ships: Don't reveal yourself and don't go recycling your 2 small ships .. they are very useful. Explore those planets close by and transfer 5 to 10 (necessary) clans, 5 - 10 supplies and sufficient $$$ (3 times the supplies) .. you need to control these planets quickly. If you need to travel through deep space in order to explore new planets, accelerate your ships to warp 7, 8 or 9. You have to know your neighborhood to decide which planet you'll colonise first. Always, take care with your fuel (although as Colonies this is less important.) Then, return with your ships. The 10 first turns are crucial. If you do well in the first 10 turns, nobody will stop you. See table 1 for thoughts on the best way to tax your clans.

4.0 Colonisation

The first 2 ships will show what you have nearby. You should only carry the necessary clans to colonise these planets then return to the HomeWorld. For example: if you have 10 nearby planets, you should carry only 10 clans dropping 1 clan in each planet before returning home. Don't be crazy traveling through deep space getting all planets you can .. return home bringing back Duranium. It is much better to colonise planets with 100 - 1200 clans each time than to own a lot of planets but never return to them.

After checking out these planets, the second step is colonise them properly. You should build 2 medium sized war ships in turns two and three, your first Large Deep Space Freighter (LDSF) the fourth turn. Set your ship's primary enemy to Rebel (to avoid any disgusting Rebel Ground Attacks) and drop those initial clans, supplies and $$$ at the nearest planet as you build a second war ship and return home with all minerals, mainly Duranium, to scout your LDSF.

Don't be a "penny pincher". Drop lots of supplies and $$$ to quickly mine clean the planets, building all factories, mines and 16 defense posts at least to hide your colony. This investment in planets has a quick return. If you have rich planets, build as many mines as possible. If your natives become upset, find the best number of factories and mines. A well colonised planet provides everything you need: Supplies, minerals, $$$,

clans, StarBases, defense posts, the works.. I see lot of players building only 100 mines over the planets... fools!!!!!

Try to build colonies in close planets. The HomeWorld provides the initial clans, but soon, the fuel becomes scattered and it becomes very difficult to return home. I often see ships stopping without fuel as they return to their HW. The best procedure is to drop your clans in order to build other Home Worlds (Cyborgs being the exception). Try to leave your HW quickly unless you have very good planets near it. In most of my games, I finished with more clans in other planets than in my HW. As these colonies grow quickly, you can later use these clans as a source for colonising other planets.

Remember: **DON'T LEAVE YOUR FREIGHTERS ALONE**. The freighters are not explorer ships. They do one of the most dignified missions .. carrying your clans to other planets. Use warships to explore the starchart.

5.0 Hints and Strategies

I love my WINPlan. *(Have you ever looked at VPA? It is a freeware product without some of the glamour of WinPlan but I find it much easier and quicker to do things, especially work between ships and planets or building on StarBases!)* It gives me everything I need. I love it's BMPs, Wavs, Mids etc. Strategy, that you have to develop yourself. Nobody can teach you how to think.

You must read a lot, learn from other players, monitor your opponent's movements and study, study and study. A great commander has lots of experience, fighting lots of battles in lots of situations. Winning and loosing battles. Don't play only in front of your computer. Most of the good ideas appear when you are far away from your PC.

A good player never shows the ship's bearing. If you must stop in deep space, stop halfway between planets. Your enemy will never know from where you came or where you're going. Stopping halfway, you could be saving fuel too.

Try to imagine what your opponent is thinking. If you know what is in their head you have nothing to worry about. So, don't be obvious! Try to confound your enemy when you are in their territory. Stop in a place in the middle of 2 or 3 planets when you prepare your attack. Your enemy will not know which planet will be attacked. Stop 4 - 6 LY from a planet and attack other one. IMPORTANT: A single ship won't win the war .. you must arrive at least, with 6 - 8 war ships (2 or 3 Battlecarriers, 2 Mediums War Ships, 2 Support - with fuel/supplies/torpedoes/fighters) to defeat your enemy.

When you enter an opponent's territory you must take clans and supplies. There are 2 ways to do this.

1. Keep them as cargo in the offensive fleet. This is dangerous due to the excessive use of valuable cargo room. You attack the enemy planets, beam down the clans then build defense posts using the supplies and $$$. But this is dangerous as you will likely lose ships in battles and, unfortunately, you lose those valuable clans as well.

2. The better strategy is to carry the supplies and clans in a background fleet. This background fleet has 1 or 2 battlecarriers and some medium ships. After battles, some ships will be damaged .. it would be prudent to quickly build a StarBase to fix any damaged ships. You can do it arriving with your support fleet carrying the necessary minerals. *(I like to have what I call 'A Base in a Can' .. a LDSF with the minimum minerals and cash required to build a base so I don't have to rely on finding the minerals on the surface! Drop everything on the planet and build the base that turn...pickup what you can when you move on.)* You can fix them using supplies, but they are not as readily available as you would like.

Use the Warp Wells. *(VPA is useful here. One of its functions is to automatically use Gravity Wells...you set your waypoint to a planet and VPA corrects it to the minimum distance to acquire that well. Neat!)* Fuel is one of most important components of the game. Without it you cannot be attacked *(except by planets with NUK of course),* but you cannot do most missions. Your ships will be vulnerable to tow capture, could surrender at any StarBase, and, without fuel you STOP. All ships with warp set to more than 1 is affected by Warp Wells. When a ship is going to a planet, set it's waypoint 3LY short. You could be saving 1 or more units of Neutronium per ship. It seems like nothing, but when you have a total of 100 ships in your fleet you will be saving 100 Kt fuel. Which planet build it every turn? Imagine the situation: A Super Transport Transwarp with 2.600 cargo towing a full Merlin (2.700 cargo). Traveling 80LY from a planet to another using warp wells, you are saving about 20Kt Fuel. There are 24 points you can choose:

```
        x                    I  prefer use exactly 3.0 LY, but you can set to
      x x x                  2.1; 1.2. If you set 2.2 you will be outside the planet.
    x x x x x
  x x x P x x x
    x x x x x
      x x x
        x
```

Use of the Borg Chunnel: It's very easy to see when a Firecloud will engage the Chunnel in the deep space. In general Borg keep the ship at warp 0, or there are always other ships at the same point. If you want to run the risk to catch ships arriving at shields 0% or to travel into a chunnel go ahead. There are 2 ways to an enemy ship travel trough a chunnel: The Cloaked and Warp 0 ships. The cloak one okay, but how can I arrive there with warp 0? Easy: Tow your "voyager" with another ship. In one of my games I had a Virgo towed by a Cobol. I was fighting against the Borgs and I saw a Merlin at the same point of a FCC. They were trying to escape to save his Merlin but my Cobol towed the Virgo to the same point he engaged the chunnel. In the next turn, I destroyed 2 FCC, the Merlin and took over the Planet.

"I play the Borg a lot. I frequently have multiple Fireclouds at planets. The turn before I chunnel, I move at least 1 Cloud with sufficient fuel outside the planet's gravity well. The turn I chunnel I move whatever other ships are to go over the Cloud while setting it's FC to the target ship and it's warp to 0. This way I can select which ships will be chunneled. Having multiple Clouds around a planet

allow me to select multiple locations or simply to confuse the enemy. I leave a Cloud around the planet to allow return-trips. One of my first strategies is to move out with a Cloud, find a decent planet then chunnel ships with what I need (often a 'Base in a Can') before moving on with the Cloud. I like to keep a group of Biocides with a Cloud for rapid deployment to those hot areas.

To be safe, I typically set inactive Firecloud FC's to numbers greater than 500 to avoid an accidental Chunnel. The first time this happened to me I was really confused but the feeling didn't last, nor did that fleet which chunneled"! (Michael "Whump" Patrick)

6.0   Taxes and Rates

This is a general rule for all races, except for Lizards (Hissss mission) and Federation (2 times MC rates). I build in the first turn all mines and factories and keep them for all turns. *(Okay...I'm lazy! I use a product call Randmax to build as well as to set taxes for both natives and clans. Randmax has many options although I find the standard ones work quite well. It will automatically adjust rates to maximise returns without messing up the happiness levels. Look into it!)*

Race 1 - keep the safe rate to 8%.

Race 2 - rate 25% when Happiness. arrives at 100%

	TABLE							
	Race 1					**Race 2**		
Turn	**Rate**	**Happ.**	**Clans**	**$$$**	**Rate**	**Happ**	**Clans**	**$$$**
02	8%	82	3.127,2	13.950	0%	88	3.221,6	13.705
03	8%	82	3.187,3	14.200	0%	94	3.387,7	"
04	8%	82	3.248,6	14.455	0%	100	3.551,8	"
05	8%	82	3.311,1	14.715	25%	86	3.581,4	14.593
06	8%	82	3.374,8	14.980	0%	91	3.760,5	"
07	8%	82	3.439,7	15.250	0%	96	3.948,5	"
08	8%	82	3.505,8	15.525	0%	100	4.145,9	"
09	8%	82	3.573,2	15.805	25%	86	4.180,4	15.692
10	8%	82	3.641,9	16.091	0%	91	4.389,4	"
13	8%	82	3.856,1	16.982	25%	86	4.879,6	16.839
17	8%	82	4.161,4	18.251	25%	86	5.695,9	18.251
21	8%	82	4.490,8	19.621	25%	86	6.648,6	19.899
25	8%	82	4.846,3	21.099	25%	86	7.189,6	21.689

It's no use tax your colonies with the safe tax. At the end of turn 17 you'll have the same money but 21% less clans. At turn 25, we have 48% more clans *(The Borg will never get more than 20% tax rates. If you set taxes to more than 20% (say 50%) you get the returns of a 20% rate but the negative happiness adjustments for the higher value! Very bad!!)*

7.0 The fleet

This is one of my favourite parts. As I have played many times with the Lost Colonies of Man (LCOM), I'll describe little things about them. LCOM is a fighter race, however you need to build some torpedo ships .. Cobol (of course), Tranquility and Cygnus. You have to lay mine fields and frequently the torpedo ships are very useful against other warships, planets and StarBases. Remember: The Colonials sweep with fighters, so you DON'T need high tech beams .. X-Ray Lasers and Heavy Phasers are the same against fighters.

1. Taurus: Good Fuel room, but not so useful. With Disrupters, it's good to avoid HYP ships. You can build a few and leave them as a "watch dog" over a planet.

2. Cygnus: Very good torpedo ship. This ship I use for the 2nd combat after Virgo. With mark 7 - 8 you easily destroy a planet and other medium warships.

3. Cobol: They are my "Crown Jewels". NEVER trade them, except with allies. Your enemy stops when they run out of fuel, you...NEVER stop. In my opinion, this is the most important ship of The Lost Colonies of Men. Tech 4, very cheap, good cargo room (250 Kt), build fuel while towing other ships - mainly VIRGOS. The LCOM must have lot of these ships. As a Bioscanner ship - do you want more?

4. Patriot: Ship for 1 combat. Cheap ship with terrible fire power. LCOM must have lot of them to patrol, to protect freighters and attack enemy ships.

5. Tranquillity: Nice ship. Good fuel and cargo room. It is very good to lay mines and transport and build torpedoes. Never go into enemy territory without them.

6. Aries: Redundant ship. It's very good to trade with other races.

7. Gemini: The best fighter building ship. With 400 cargo room it's good to transport minerals

8. Sagittarius: Do you like to waste your money? 'Nuff said!

9. Lady Royale: Gambling ship. You can use them in conjunction with your "watch dog" ships while it earns $$$ for you. You don't need to move them. Beam up 160 clans, set FCode to "bdm" and let them work!

10. Little Joe: Well I never built this ship, because I never saw it's use, so...no opinion.

11. Scorpious: The same as Little Joe. Massive ship, use 231 tritanium...

12.   Virgo: The Battlecarrier. It is a very expensive ship with 8 engines. If you use Transwarp in the early stages of the game you are wasting money. Build them with Nova drive 5, Heavy nova drive 6 or Quantum 7 and tow with Cobol. *(I would even go as low as tech-1 to tech-3, towing them around as re-enforced rocks!)* You can build them with low tech beams. You'll se there is only a little difference of X-laser from Heavy Phaser. *(With those large fighter carriers, I seldom put more than minimum tech weapons on. Most of the battles these ships have should be handled by the fighters they carry .. if the fighter bays are empty the ship isn't likely to last too much longer! As you point out, a laser is the same as a phaser against a fighter...zap...poof!) (next sentence confuses me)* Don't measure forces to build Virgo's. In my games, near turn 70, I have at least 50 Virgo's of all kinds (Transwarps, stardrive, X-laser, Heavy Disrupt, etc.). There is no enemy able to destroy your fleet. In combat you never use more than 120 fighters.

8.0 Appendices

This is my first attempt to document my impressions of VGA Planets. There are lots of things I missed, but slowly, I'll add them to this document.

9.0 Thanks to:

Antonio Castro - my teacher, Bernardo and Bruno Veo, Helbert Cesar, Luiz F. Fonseca, Auro Lessa - great commander, Eduardo Amaral, Carlos Luis Santos, Guilhermo Vidal,

Michael "Whump" Patrick - for his comments and revision, and all VGA Planets players and Mr. HOSTs.

Special thanks to: Tim Wisseman, Dan and Dave.

Glossary.

Cash	Players can generate cash (megacredits) by taxing natives and colonists or by converting supplies into cash.
Defence:	Defence posts can be built on planets (the number allowed is dependent on the number of colonists on the planet) to defend them from marauding warships and StarBase defense can be upgraded to a maximum of 200 in addition to planetary defence.
Factories:	Factories can be built on planets. 1 factory produces 1 supply unit each month.
Fighters:	Fighters are small 1 man craft which can be built (given available cash & minerals etc.). They are launched during battles from planets (free dependent on no. of defense posts), StarBases or ships. Some races build these for nothing (although minerals and supplies may be required).

Freighters:	Freighters are ships (see Ships) with no beams, torpedo tubes or fighter bays. They have large capacity fuel tanks & cargo bays so are ideal for shipping minerals and colonists around ... however they will ALWAYS lose in combat.
Friendly Codes:	Planets and ships can be given unique friendly codes, which give the ability to allow players of allied races to NOT attack each other. Friendly codes can also be used as attack codes to determine the order in which warships enter a battle. Somewhat confusingly, friendly codes are also used to carry out additional tasks or to modify the way certain tasks or missions are carried out e.g. the LAY MINES mission can be modified by the md1, md2, md3 etc. which will determine how many torp's are converted into mines.
Game:	A game is where a host has set up a game universe and has anything from 1 (fairly pointless) to 11 (very complicated but damn good fun) races playing.
Host:	The host is the central computer to any given VGAP game. To this person/computer all TRN files must be sent and from it all RST files are issued. It is on this computer that game action actually occurs (although players view it on their own PC).
Mine Fields:	A torpedo carrying warship can convert it's torpedo's into a mine field so that any enemy ship passing through it runs the risk of being destroyed or damaged.
Minerals:	Minerals are essential for fuel & construction of ships, StarBases, torpedo's and fighters (as well as StarBase defense). There are 4 minerals used: molybdenum, duranium & tritanium & lastly neutronium which is used for fuel. Certain ships can create minerals from supplies and fuel from supplies & minerals. Every planet will have these 4 minerals in varying quantities.
Mines:	Mines remove minerals from the planet and allow them to be used (see Minerals) ... too many mines on a planet will lower the tolerance of the natives to taxation etc.
Missions:	Ships & StarBases can carry out missions which vary from simple EXPLORATION through LAY & SWEEP MINES to missions which can only be carried out by specific races e.g. the Fed's SUPER REFIT and the Robots & Colonies BUILD FIGHTERS.
Month:	Every turn in a game represents 1 galactic month.
MS DOS:	To play VGAP you must have a 386 based PC running MS-DOS 3.3 or higher. You cannot run it on a Mac or Amiga or Atari (PC software emulation may allow you to, I don't know!)
Multi-Player:	A multi-player game is one which involves more than one player (VGAP can support up to 11 players and unused players can be automated)
Play by Mail:	means essential game information (i.e. RST & TRN files) are sent by mail, E-Mail or sneakernet.

Player:	A person or 1 of the races that has been automated by the host.
Race:	Each player plays a specific race (i.e. Solar Fed's, Lizards, Birdmen, Fascists, Privateers, Cyborgs, Crystals, Evil Empire, Robots, Rebels or Colonies of Man). Each race has it's own unique advantages and ships that differ to other races.
Registration:	The process of paying the author a sum of money ($15 to register the DOS version of VGA Planets) in order to register a program. Registering VGAP gives access to technology levels higher than 6 (up to 10) and use of specific Friendly Codes.
RST:	The result file which shows the results of your last submitted TRN file (e.g. Player 1, The Solar Federation would receive the file PLAYER1.RST)
Shareware:	A piece of software that the author has decided may be used on a trial basis (for evaluation) but that you should register it with the author if you intend to continue using it. Registration usually gives additional benefits (see registration). The DOS version of VGA Planets is shareware and should be registered ($15), the Windows version is NOT shareware and must be purchased from the author or an authorised distributor ($20).
Ships:	Ships are the means by which you expand your empire (see Freighters and War Ships). Each race has a unique set of ships that they may build (although there are common designs) and some of those ships may have special features (e.g. cloaking, gravitronic & hyperdrives etc.). A race cannot build the ships of another race (but under Host V3.2x can often clone one if they acquire it!). Ships come in varying sizes with varying potential for armament (refer to VGAP documentation or help).
Sneakernet:	A humorous term for the process of distributing datafiles via disk and foot (hence sneaker)
Stale Turns:	A TRN file that has been submitted to the host but one that is based on a non-current RST file.
Supplies:	Supply units are produced by factories and are essential for building mines,
	factories, defense posts and fighters. They can also be converted into cash.
Tech Levels:	Technology levels. These can be upgraded to a maximum of 10 (6 in shareware version) only within StarBases. The type of hull, engine, beam weapons & torpedo's that you may build depend on tech levels. Generally speaking the higher the tech level the more powerful the item (i.e. tech 10 hulls are bigger and less prone to damage, tech 10 engines are the most efficient, tech 10 beams & torpedo's are the most lethal (tech 10 torp's produce the most mines per torp) and, of course, tech 10 items cost the most!)

Tim Continuum: The Tim Continuum watches over the game to check for cheating (such as hacking to create more money, minerals etc.) and use of same registered copy by more than one player in the same game. In the event of the Tim Continuum activating the player/players in question will suffer unaccountable mishaps and other players will be informed that that player has been attacked by the Tim Continuum.

Torpedo's: Torp's are more powerful than beam weapons but they stand 33% chance of missing their target. Torpedo's can be converted into mines using the "LAY MINES" mission (Higher tech mines produce more mines per torp).

TRN: The turn file is, effectively, a list of your commands which, when submitted to the host, is acted upon. It should be based upon the current RST file otherwise a stale TRN will result (e.g. Player 1, The Solar Federation would send the file PLAYER1.TRN)

Universe/Galaxy: The game universe is a galaxy of 500 planets based in an area 4000 light years square (although only a central square, 2000 lights years across are used). Ships move between the planets colonising, supplying, raiding and fighting other ships.

War Ships: Unlike freighters War Ships are armed, typically have smaller cargo bays and fuel tanks and are more massively built (so requiring more fuel to move them around). They vary in size from the diminutive PL21 probes (with one engine, one beam, a 20KT cargo bay and an advanced hyperdrive capability) to the massive Rush class cruiser with 5 beams, 10 fighter bays, 6 engines and a 390KT cargo bay.

"The Horses Mouth"

compiled by

The Undead HedgeHog

This article is supposed to be like a gossip-column but featuring only things "said" by Tim Wisseman. I do not guarantee that anything in it is correct but I will try to ensure that it is. My sources are listings of conferences at which Tim was present and I guess the idea is that this way of presenting it is just a bit more interesting that reading a bulky list of rubbish (several hundred "Hi's" and "Goodbye" etc.) … just the stuff we really want to know!

VGA Planets now!

A few tips about how VGA Planets works that might help you play the game better - Ed!

- There is no FC that let you scoop enemy mines. You can destroy them, but not scoop them. He can scoop them and lay them in your race id and then you can scoop but the "ffx" (where "x" represents a valid race number from 1 to 9 & "a" or "b") affects minefield and combat and nothing else

- You can set ff# once and it will stick for the rest of the game no matter if you change the code to something else the next turn e.g. use "ff7" once on one ship and race 7 will be a friend until you use "ee7".

- An FC of "ffx" does not prevent robbing allies.

- In ION Storms you gain points by being in a storm, the more experiance a ship has the better chance of living through a storm it has.

- In combat the Feds (effectively) get 3 extra fighter bays, not torp tudes.

- The blast/kill power for a fighter is 1/1 and a fighter "should" get off 4 shots each, large ships will take at least 4% damage per fighter (assuming the fighter survives), smaller ships will take more damage.

- In a ship to ship battle a Lizard with over 100% damage will survive but over planets they get destroyed.

- Supplies on board ship will repair a ship right after ship to ship combat and before ship to planet combat. Supplies on board, do not affect ship mass at all for combat only the hull mass counts in combat.

- The number of fighters and torps on a ship are important only if you run out.

- In battles The FC numbers can make the difference. The lower FC gets one side. The defender will be left so if you are not set to attack (No KILL mission or Primary Enemy, you are just minding your own business) you should end up on the left. You should be left every time if you do not use a kill mission or PE … the attacker gets the right. Ship ID's account for Left / Right if both ships are on the attack.

VGA Planets in the Market Place

- Tim has sold over 45,000 copies of VGA Planets so far.

- Tim keeps himself informed about the development of 3rd party programs that he is involved in like "Lurkers", "Stormfront", "Planetfall", "RAW", "HostCon", "Market Forces" etc. but does not watch programs that are being put out by semi-hostile programmers, like team PHOST. He has no control over how team PHOST changes the rules, they are on their way to changing the game so completely that it will not even be the same game soon. Tim says that they (team PHOST) are working on upping the ship limit in phost to at least 2000 ships and are working their own interface for PHOST that has nothing to do Tim. VPA (VGA Planets Assistant) is now working very closely with them on the new changes. Tim has resisted adding PHOST like features to host because team PHOST will then just add new things to PHOST that people will then demand that he add's to host, like taking the ship limit to 2000 plus ships etc. In the end this just takes time away from his work on version 4.0.

- Tim changed to the 3.22.007 format version numbering because that is the standard Windows 95 / Microsoft version numbering system

- MS is already planning to stomp VGA Planets with "Reach for the Stars" for windows 95.

- Tim loses a lot of revenue from cracked versions, VGA Planets is pretty easy to crack and cracking tools get posted to certain news groups all the time. The crack of Planets does not get me down there are enough honest people out there to support VGA Planets.

- To date Tim has only had 2 lawsuit threats, one from Microprose and one from Starcrossed Software. Microprose wanted all rights to VGA Planets, there was a lot of hot air over a slander case against me for something that he apparently said about Master of Orion (MOO). Tim says there was nothing to what he said about MOO, they were just trying to scare me into turning VGA Planets over to them and in the end they offered me $7,000 for all rights. MOO came out after version 3.0 of VGAP and Tim got a case of MOO's from them … he feels they were "Bad Cop" / "Good Cop"ing him. He feels there is nothing to sue them for …. it is more likely MS will sue him over "Reach for the Stars", it came out like 15 years ago, it is supposed to be just like Planets although he has never seen it.

- If he plays by Paramounts rules they do not have any problems. I can not uses any of their registered trademarked names or characters.

VGA Planets v4.0

Version 4.0 is going well. Tim has almost done with the Pod command screens. After that he will work on the planet screens, the VCR, the message systems and then finish up the host and master. Most the game design is done. VGA Planets v4.0 have a object limit of 20,000 objects, with an adjustable ship limit of 500 to 5,000 ships.

Beta testing might begin late next summer, release maybe the end of 1997. After version 4.0 is released and tested, host in add-on data formats will be released. V4 Beta testers will be those people who have in the pass reported bugs to him and he has a log of v3.5 beta testers that were "great testers". They will be on the first beta test team. New version 4 races are:

> *The Controllers*
> *The Earthers*
> *Confederation of Non-aligned Aliens.*

Version 4 will be 32 bit (Win95 / WinNT only) on the player side & DOS on the host side. VGAP 4.0 might be something that could be sold in shops but for an "in the shops game" it has to be a very good one player sort of game, something VGAP was really never designed to be. Version 4.0 will be done in Visual Basic 5.0. Version 4 will have fleet controls … you will be able to move the fleet leader and all will follow. A pod is a cargo device in version 4.0 that moves ship parts, minerals and natives and many other things. They can dock with ships. AVI's will not be used for battles, they will be part of a help system, the VCR will be a little like the current VCR but with fleets. IN version 4.0 players can build space stations in deep space. . . they will be able to work together with allies to build the station. Also in version 4.0 there are such things as cloaked minefields.

Miscellaneous

Tim has not played in any games for over a year now other then in a few RAW games. The next game that he plans to play in will be the first version 4.0 game.

There will be a 32 bit version of WinPlan 3.5 as soon as Visual Basic 5.0 is released. It (Bit bit) will use direct sound which will not slow the battle down at all. The 32 bit version of WinPlan 3.5 will be able to play all the sound FX at once. The 32 bit version should run much faster than the 16 bit version and should be available as soon Visual Basic 5 is released (DEC or JAN) … the code is all written, it just needs a compiler. Apart from the fact that it will only run on Windows 95 or NT, it is just like the current WinPlan. The only changes that you would notice is it is faster and the VCR sounds better. Tim will put it up on the web site as soon as it is compiled as a public beta version.

Tim has a programmer working on a OS/2 32 bit native version of planets.exe.

M aster at Arms

The Effects of Weapons against Naval Targets
by Sirius[1]

This is the first part of a paper reporting the findings from my research about how weapons really work in VGA Planets. It will be continued in the next issue of the Planeteer.

Introduction

Well, you have fought a couple of battles in VGA Planets and have noticed the effects of your weapons on enemy targets and what their weapons do to your ships. You have probably noticed that the better (more expensive) weapons do more damage than the cheaper ones, that torpedoes seem to more efficient than beam weapons and that you need a lot of torpedo armed ships to destroy those heavy fighter carriers. But do you really know how weapons work? Are you using the right weapons?

Every time you design and build a new capital ship, you face the question: How much more damage will the high tech weapons do than their cheaper varieties? Are they really worth their

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price tag? The Dreadlord Battle Manual by Ramutis Giliauskas[2] (which by the way is an excellent source of information for the serious VGA Planets player) states the following about weapons: "There are two primary theories to weapons. One is to use the most powerful weapon you can (ex. Mark 8), and the other is to use the most efficient weapon (ex. Mark 4). The best solution is a combination of both. The reasoning behind the biggest BANG theory is that if your ship survives because you spent more on weapons, then the extra money was worth it. The reasoning behind the most efficient weapon theory is that by using cheaper weapons, you can produce so many more ships that it's worth losing a few more battles. The best solution has to be tailored to your particular circumstances (enemy, abundance of minerals, abundance of megacredits, race) as well as to your playing style."

This is very true, but it leads immediately to two questions:

1. How is BANG (power of a weapon) translated into damage to the target?

2. What are the most efficient weapons?

The official documentation

Tim Wisseman's documentation for Host 3.22 (which is the same ~~as~~ WinPlan 3.52) tells us:

- The strength of the shields and the ship's armor is determined by the mass of the ship's hull.

- The mass of cargo, fuel, weapons and engines does not count toward stronger shields.

- The more massive a ship the stronger the shields are.

- Engine Shield Bonus: The power from higher tech engines increases the shield power of the ship. How much? At 100%, a ship with transwarp engines fights like a ship that is 300 Kt more massive. The cost of one engine is added to the combat mass of the to ship take in to account of the effect of the higher tech engines powering the shields. This shield bonus is based on the tech of the engines and not the number of engines on the ship. The engine tech do not effect the charge rate of the weapons. The shield bonus does not apply to ships attacking planets. The engine tech shield bonus rate is set by the host.

- Amount of damage done to a ship decreases as the mass of the ships hull increases.

- Fighters tend to do more damage to larger ships than torpedoes.

- Beam weapon banks with more than 60% energy will fire at enemy fighters.

- The tech of weapons does not effect the rate of weapon recharge.

- Torpedoes and beam weapons tend to do more damage to smaller ships than fighters.

- All torpedoes have a 35% chance of missing their target.

- The percentage of energy lost from a shield that is hit by enemy fire follows the formula:

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$$\text{LOSS\%} = \text{Tetawatts} * (80 / (\text{hull\_mass} + 1))$$

- The percentage of damage done to a ship's hull follows the formula:

$$\text{DAMAGE DONE \%} = \text{Tetawatts(E)} * (80 / (\text{hull\_mass} + 1))$$
$$\text{CREW KILLED} = \text{Tetawatts(K)} * (80 / (\text{hull\_mass} + 1))$$

The "Tetawatts" represent the rating of the weapons, either explosive (E) or killing (K) power. For our purposes only the numerical value of this rating is important. The unit "Tetawatts" is difficult to understand for me: probably it is to be supposed to read "Terawatt" (which is 10^{12} Watt), but the WinPlan version uses "gw" as an abbreviation, which probably should be "GW", which stands for "Gigawatt" (10^9 Watt). (But then the energy of weapons or their destructive work should be measured in Tera- or Giga-Joule and not in Watt, which is the measurement of performance (Energy divided by time)).

In any case, the numerical values are set in the files Beamspec.dat and Torpspec.dat and are displayed in WinPlan, when you build these ship components. The standard values are:

Beam	**K**	**E**	**Torpedo**	**K**	**E**
Laser	10	3	Mark 1 Photon	4	5
X-Ray Laser	15	1	Proton	6	8
Plasma Bolt	3	10	Mark 2 Photon	3	10
Blaster	10	25	Gamma Bomb	15	2
Positron Beam	9	29	Mark 3 Photon	9	15
Disruptor	30	20	Mark 4 Photon	13	30
Heavy Blaster	20	40	Mark 5 Photon	17	35
Phaser	30	35	Mark 6 Photon	23	40
Heavy Disruptor	50	35	Mark 7 Photon	25	48
Heavy Phaser	35	45	Mark 8 Photon	35	55
			Fighter	1	1

First doubts: Comparison with standard battle doctrine
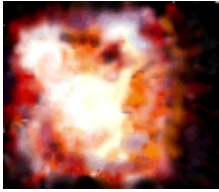
So now we can calculate the exact damage all these weapons will inflict onto a hostile target, can we not? Well, if you try it, you will find, that it just does not work! But before you start doing all sorts of test battles, just sit back and think a little bit. If these above formulas were true, why would fighters become so efficient against heavy ships?

And there is another effect, which already the Dreadlord Battle Manual observed: "As a general rule torpedoes are more effective at destroying the shields of a ship than causing hull damage." Several experienced players suggest, based on the same observation, that you should use torpedoes to drop the shields of larger opponents followed by a fighter carrier to destroy the opponent's hull. Thomas Voigt[3] for example recommends Crystal players: "Use a Diamond Flame to drop the shields of a big carrier and kill it with a Crystal Thunder."[4] Or Richard Nadolny[5] advises the Cyborg player: "While more expensive than the Biocide because of the torp tubes, the Annihilation is important for taking out the shields on those big enemy battleships so the Biocides can finish them off."[6]

In fact the obvious differences between the effects of fighters and torpedoes are one of the most important cornerstones for a successful battle tactic in VGA Planets. But there is nothing in Tim Wisseman's documentation and his formulas, which would allow these effects. So Tim's documentation about the effects of weapons is at least partially wrong![7]

General findings

I have tried in many test fights to find out what is really going on. I have used the WinPlan battle simulator (3.5x) a lot for this (most of the battle behaviour is determined by the VCR program and has therefore not changed between the different host versions), but I have also looked at the DOS version (3.0) and have checked my findings with the new host versions (up to 3.22.009). All my observations and conclusions are valid only for the original host program by Tim Wisseman. I have never played a game of VGA Planets with PHOST and can therefore make no comments about weapons in a PHOST environment.

From my test results I was able to formulate the following observations for the effects of weapons. Although I included all available weapon systems and many different ship hulls in my tests, it is still possible that I missed some special cases, which behave differently than my projections. Please let me know, if you find any case, where my hypotheses are not applicable.

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[3] spock@dobag.in-berlin.de

[4] in Gary Grothman's (grothmag@vax.cs.hscsyr.edu) FAQ

[5] richardn@outside.com

[6] in Ted York's Warroom (http://www.teleport.com/~goldman/)

[7] This is probably not very surprising, since, as Timo Kreike (Kreike@chem.vu.nl) pointed out to me, "it is generally known that Tim's docs are wrong at many subjects".

a) The Engine Shield Bonus should be called Engine Defense Bonus, because it affects both the strength of the shield and (once the shield is gone) the resistance of the hull against damage and crew loss. When I speak about mass in the rest of this article I shall always refer to the effective battle mass, which is the sum of the hull mass plus the Engine Defense Bonus.

Battle Mass or Defense Rating (Kt) =
Hull Mass (Kt) + Cost of one Engine (MC) * Engine Shield Bonus Setting (Kt/MC)

b) I have found no difference between ships fighting on the right side of the VCR display and ships fighting on the left side of the VCR display.

c) There is no influence of the range over which a weapon is fired on the impact (shield loss, hull damage or crew loss) caused by one hit of the weapon. The graphical display of the strength of the weapon system in the DOS version 3.0, which shows a relation between weapon power and distance, is wrong or at least highly misleading, although it looks nice.

d) The formulas for beam weapons and torpedoes are different. In general torpedoes inflict double the damage they are supposed to. The torpedo formulas are also valid for fighters (although fighters fire beams themselves). We shall look into these formulas now in detail.[8]

The impact of torpedoes and fighters

We start with torpedoes and fighters, since these weapon systems are typically more important to determine the outcome of a battle than beams.

Against shields

$$\text{Shield Loss \%} = \frac{\text{Explosive Rating} \times 160}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1$$

Note, that there are two differences to Tim's documented formula. Firstly the multiplier is 160 instead of 80, which doubles the effectiveness of all torpedoes, and secondly, the result is increased by one, which means, that all torpedoes will reduce the shields - even of the biggest ships - at least by one percentage point, a very significant fact.

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[8] In all of the following formulas, the end result has to be rounded (up or down) to the nearest integer, because shield strength, damage level and number of crew member are displayed and stored only as integers in VGA Planets. I have omitted this final rounding to make the formulas easier to read.

$$\text{Hull Damage \%} = \text{Rounded}\left(\frac{\text{Explosive Rating} \times 160}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1\right) \times \frac{80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1$$

(Rounded means that this expression has to be rounded to the nearest integer.)

This is a very significant change to the formula documented by Tim. Basically the same calculation (with the doubled effect) as for the shield loss is used, but the rounded result is then (after multiplication by 80) divided a second time by the battle mass. Therefore the protection of the battle mass against damage to the hull is squared. The relationship between mass and damage is no longer linear, but quadratic. This is the reason, why heavy ships take so little damage from torpedoes. The addition of one to the end result however guarantees, that every torpedo and also all fighters will inflict at least one percentage point of damage per hit.

Crew killed

$$\text{Crew Killed} = \frac{\text{Kill Rating} \times 160}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1}$$

The effect against crew members is doubled. Otherwise the formula follows the documentation: there is no minimum of one killed crew member per hit and no quadratic protection from higher mass.

The impact of beam weapons
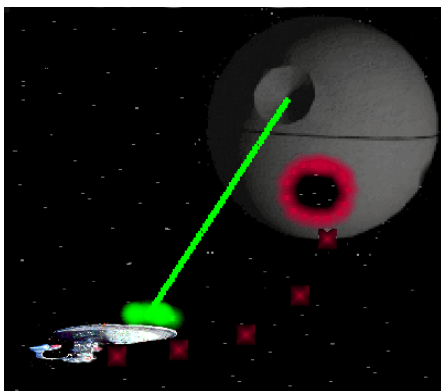
The special feature of beam weapons is that they need a relatively long time to recharge and will fire even when only partially loaded. Typically beam weapons fire randomly with a charge level between 50% and 54% if in range to the target. The documentation mentions a required energy level of 60%, but that is not correct. Beam weapons that are not fully loaded will do less than full damage.

Against shields

$$\text{Shield Loss \%} = \frac{\text{Rounded}\left(\text{Explosive Rating} \times \text{Charge Level}\right) \times 80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1$$

(Rounded means that this expression has to be rounded to the nearest integer.)

Since the result is increased by one, all beam weapons will always reduce the shields - even of the biggest ships - by at least one percentage point.

Damage to hull

$$\text{Hull Damage \%} = \text{Rounded}\left(\frac{\text{Rounded}\left(\begin{array}{c}\text{Explosive Rating} \\ \times \text{Charge Level}\end{array}\right) \times 80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1\right) \times \frac{80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1} + 1$$

(Rounded means that these expressions have to be rounded to the nearest integers.)

As for torpedoes, the protection of the battle mass against damage to the hull is squared. The relationship between mass and damage is no longer linear, but quadratic. While the effect of beam weapons is not doubled, the addition of one to the end result guarantees here also, that every firing beam weapon will inflict at least one percentage point of damage.

Crew killed

$$\text{Crew Killed} = \frac{\text{Rounded}\left(\text{Kill Rating} \times \text{Charge Level}\right) \times 80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1}$$

(Rounded means that this expression has to be rounded to the nearest integer.)

Hard to believe, but true. In this case, Tim's documented formula works! No increased weapon effect, no minimum of one killed crew member per hit and no quadratic protection from higher mass.

Tim's formula works also for Privateers perfectly in this case. The number of crew members killed onboard the target of Privateer beam weapons is three times the standard value (before the final rounding). Privateers receive no "kill bonus" for the beams of their fighters (and also no "kill bonus" for their torpedo hits).

$$\text{Crew Killed by Privateers} = 3 \times \frac{\text{Rounded}\left(\text{Kill Rating} \times \text{Charge Level}\right) \times 80}{\text{Battle Mass} + 1}$$

(Rounded means that this expression has to be rounded to the nearest integer.)

The defensive effect of battle mass

The impact of beams and torpedoes

Well, I think we had enough formulas so far. So let's fire some weapons against a target ship! We start by picking a typical medium size ship, the Crystalline Emerald with a hull of 180 Kt and no Engine Defense Bonus.[9] The following table shows the shield loss (in percentage points), the damage to the hull (in percentage points) and the loss of crew members (in men) causes by one hit of the indicated weapon.[10]
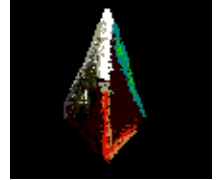
Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	5	3	4	Laser	2	2	4
Proton	8	5	5	X-Ray	1	1	7
Mk 2	10	5	3	Plasma	5	3	1
Gamma	3	2	13	Blaster	12	6	4
Mk 3	14	7	8	Positron	14	7	4
Mk 4	28	13	11	Disruptor	10	5	13
Mk 5	32	15	15	Heavy Blaster	19	9	9
Mk 6	36	17	20	Phaser	16	8	13
Mk 7	43	20	22	Heavy Disruptor	16	8	22
Mk 8	50	23	31	Heavy Phaser	21	10	15
Fighter	2	2	1				

It is easy to see, that the high tech weapons are doing a lot more damage than the low tech weapons and are worth their price tag in this situation. Sure enough, those weapons, which have a very high rating in relation to their cost and to their tech level (like the Heavy Blaster has for explosive power), show up quite strong also on this table.

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[9] Since a Birdie Resolute has the same mass, it shows exactly the same results like an Emerald.

[10] All the numbers in the table have been found by experiments, but using my formulas yields the same results.

Before we continue with heavier ships, let's have a second look weapons when they refire as soon as the charge level allows following table shows the effect beam weapons have against a Crystalline Emerald and a 120 Kt Crystalline Ruby[11] in a close up
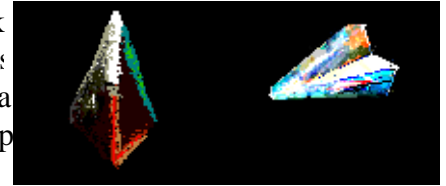
| Against Emerald	Shield	Hull	Crew	Against Ruby	Shield	Hull	Crew
Laser	2	2	2	Laser	2	2	3
X-Ray	1	1	4	X-Ray	2	2	5
Plasma	3	2	1	Plasma	4	4	1
Blaster	7	4	2	Blaster	10	8	3
Positron	8	5	2	Positron	11/12	8/9	3
Disruptor	5/6	3/4	7	Disruptor	8	6	10/11
Heavy Blaster	10/11	5/6	4/5	Heavy Blaster	14/15/16	10/11/12	7
Phaser	9	5	7	Phaser	13/14	10	10/11
Heavy Disruptor	9	5	11/12	Heavy Disruptor	13/14	10	17/18
Heavy Phaser	11/12	6	8	Heavy Phaser	16/17	12	12/13

In the case that there is more than one value, the first value is the minimal effect the weapon has when refiring (typically at a charge level close to 50%) and the last value is the maximum effect I have observed (at charge levels of about 54%). I have included the case of the Ruby to show that these random variations can be even larger than a difference of 1 for lighter ships.

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[11] Other ships with 120 Kt mass like the Fed Banshee, the Lizard Saurian, the Cyborg Firecloud or the Robotic Cat's Paw have of course the same resistance against weapons.

Now we equip our Emerald with Transwarp Engines (which cost 300 MC ea[...]
enable the Engine Defense Bonus with a setting of 90%, so that the effective bat[...]
is increased to 450 Kt.
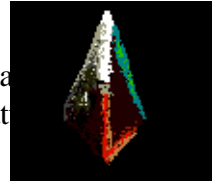
Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	3	2	1	Laser	2	1	2
Proton	4	2	2	X-Ray	1	1	3
Mk 2	5	2	1	Plasma	3	2	0
Gamma	2	1	5	Blaster	5	2	2
Mk 3	6	2	3	Positron	6	2	2
Mk 4	12	3	5	Disruptor	5	2	5
Mk 5	13	3	6	Heavy Blaster	8	2	4
Mk 6	15	4	8	Phaser	7	2	5
Mk 7	18	4	9	Heavy Disruptor	7	2	9
Mk 8	21	5	12	Heavy Phaser	9	3	6
Fighter	1	1	0				

We can see, that the ship has become much more resistant against enemy fire. It takes considerably more hits of any kind of weapon to destroy the ship, but the high tech weapons still do the job much faster.

We move up the weigh scale and open fire on a typical heavy carrier, in the Rebel Rush with 645 Kt and no Engine Defense Bonus.
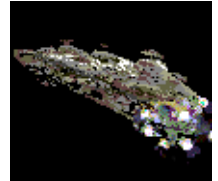
Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	2	1	0	Laser	1	1	1
Proton	3	1	1	X-Ray	1	1	2
Mk 2	3	1	0	Plasma	2	1	0
Gamma	1	1	4	Blaster	4	1	1
Mk 3	5	2	2	Positron	5	2	1
Mk 4	8	2	3	Disruptor	3	1	4
Mk 5	10	2	4	Heavy Blaster	6	2	2
Mk 6	11	2	6	Phaser	5	2	4
Mk 7	13	3	6	Heavy Disruptor	5	2	6
Mk 8	15	3	9	Heavy Phaser	7	2	4
Fighter	1	1	0				

Of course, the nearly 200 Kt increase in battle mass helps the ship to absorb the weapon impact even better. We still see a clear differentiation in the effect of weapons against shields, but less against the hull. There is for example no difference between the damage Mark III, Mark IV, Mark V or Mark VI torpedoes inflict on the hull of the Rush.

Let's get real heavy now and put an Imperial Gorbie in the firing line. The Gorbie weighs 980 Kt and there is again no Engine Defense Bonus.
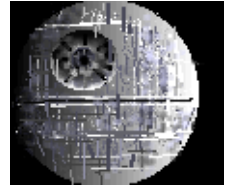
Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	2	1	0	Laser	1	1	0
Proton	2	1	0	X-Ray	1	1	1
Mk 2	3	1	0	Plasma	2	1	0
Gamma	1	1	2	Blaster	3	1	0
Mk 3	3	1	1	Positron	3	1	0
Mk 4	6	1	2	Disruptor	3	1	2
Mk 5	7	2	3	Heavy Blaster	4	1	2
Mk 6	8	2	4	Phaser	4	1	2
Mk 7	9	2	4	Heavy Disruptor	4	1	4
Mk 8	10	2	6	Heavy Phaser	5	1	3
Fighter	1	1	0				

The trend continues: the ship gets tougher, high tech weapons still excel against shields, while no beam weapon does more than a single percentage point of damage to the hull, and even Mark VIIIs do only double the damage of a Mark I.

And here comes the ultimate warrior: the Gorbie now has Transwarp engines and receives a 100% Engine Defense Bonus, so that her effective battle mass goes up to 1280 Kt.

Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	2	1	0	Laser	1	1	0
Proton	2	1	0	X-Ray	1	1	0
Mk 2	2	1	0	Plasma	2	1	0
Gamma	1	1	2	Blaster	3	1	0
Mk 3	3	1	1	Positron	3	1	0
Mk 4	5	1	2	Disruptor	2	1	2
Mk 5	5	1	2	Heavy Blaster	3	1	1
Mk 6	6	1	3	Phaser	3	1	2
Mk 7	7	1	3	Heavy Disruptor	3	1	3
Mk 8	8	1	4	Heavy Phaser	4	1	2
Fighter	1	1	0				

I think you got the message. The Gorbie is very difficult to destroy unless you can launch lots of fighters or several ships against her. High tech torpedoes still help to bring down the shields faster and you are going to need the speed you get from the extra punch of expensive torpedoes, because no torpedo armed ship is going to live long against a fully stocked Gorbie. High tech beams could help to bring down the shields in theory, but in practice they will fire mainly against incoming fighters (and when firing after a partial recharge even Heavy Phasers are good for only 2% shield loss). After the shields are down, every weapon has exactly the same effect on the Gorbie's hull, there is no additional hull damage done by Mark VIIIs compared to by Mark Is or by Heavy Phasers compared to by Lasers.

The impact of fighters

You have probably noted, that Fighters inflicted 2% of shield loss and hull damage on the Emerald without Engine Defense Bonus, but only 1% of impact to the heavier ships. Since Fighters are used by all planets and many ships, they warrant a closer look. The following table shows the effect of a single fighter beam against ships with different battle masses.

Mass from	Mass up to	Shield Loss	Hull Damage	Crew Loss
Kt	Kt	%	%	men
320	1280	1	1	0
106	319	2	2	1
96	105	3	3	2
68	95	3	4	2
64	67	3	5	2
58	63	4	6	3
49	57	4	7	3
45	48	4	8	3
42	44	5	10	4
38	41	5	11	4
35	37	5	12	4
33	34	6	15	5
30	32	6	16	5
.	.			
10	10	16	117	15

I have omitted the masses between 10 Kt and 30 Kt, because only the Neutronic Fuel Carrier can have these battle masses (with different classes of engines and different settings of the Engine Defense Bonus) and that is really not interesting, since Neutronic Fuel Carriers cannot shoot back and a single fighter will always win against them.

The important point here is that a fighter beam will always do the same amount damage for ships above 320 Kt battle mass, no matter how massive the ship is. While the effectiveness of beams and torpedoes decreases significantly with higher masses, the effectiveness of fighters stays the same above 320 Kt, which makes them the prime weapon against large targets.

Ships below 320 Kt mass are extremely poor combatants against fighters, since the impact of the fighters' hits is at least doubled. Try to avoid battles with these light ships against fighters unless the ship's beam weapons (and fighters) can pretty much hold all fighters off!

This also very important for planets: If you expect an attack by a carrier against one of your planets, then put enough defense posts on the surface and on the StarBase to reach a battle mass

of 320 Kt! Going from 319 to 320 Kt battle mass is a tremendous increase in toughness for the defending planet.[12]

This concludes the first part of the article "Master at Arms". In the next issue of the Planeteer you will read about the timing of weapons and about the interaction between different weapon systems. All aspects will then be put together to show the sequence of full battles for the most important ship types.

I like to thank here especially my "Beta-readers" Timo Kreike, Ocie Hudson and James Rock[13], who helped me to improve my paper.

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[12] The battle mass of a planet is 100 Kt plus the number of planetary defense posts plus the number of StarBase defense posts. The building of a StarBase (without defense posts on the StarBase) does not increase the battle mass of a planet. The DOS Informer program is wrong in this respect.

[13] Kreike@chem.vu.nl, 72430.3376@CompuServe.Com and 101516.3334@CompuServe.Com.

So You Wanna Be A Privateer - Part 1

by

Mark R. Wilmot
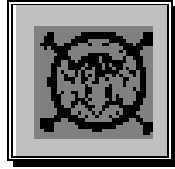
Introduction

So you wanna be a Privateer, eh? Wanna streak across the galaxy - yet like a shadow dancing from star to star? Wanna strike fear into the hearts of your enemies - siphoning their ships and stealing them away without a trace? You wanna curse Loki's and quiver at the smell of webs? Do ya got what it takes?

If so... Read on!

It's unlikely that any other race in the galaxy can evoke as an emotional debate as the Privateers. A great deal of discussion has been devoted to their tactics and counter-tactics on The Internet, various BBS's, and online services such as American Online and CompuServe. Over the past several years, I've collected a large amount of Privateer related material in my wandering through Cyberspace, and contributed a few comments myself in these various forums or in private email in response to questions from various players. What follows is a synthesis of this with the experience I've gained firsthand over the course of several games as a Privateer. Hopefully this discourse will prove enlightening to beginner and experienced player alike.

Note: I've never played using PHOST. There can be some significant differences due to the wider range of options under PHOST. Overall though, I believe the general principles I discuss are equally applicable.

I. Whether or not to play the Privateers.

When contemplating playing the Privateers in a newly forming game there are a number of factors which should be carefully considered. Too many players drop out because they failed to fully perceive their starting situation and get frustrated when things don't work out as they thought they should. If the host will not provide this information before you make your race selection, look for another game - there are always others forming. While some may think of this as quibbling, think about it for a minute... If you're going to play a game lasting between 60 -120 turns and invest six months to a year of time to game, you might as well make sure you don't have the deck stacked against you from the start. Or at least, be fully aware of the disadvantages you face should you decide to go with the Privateers.

1. What are the master settings?

   Economic - MC/Minerals

   Generally, the Privateers fare better, the weaker the economic starting situation. Privateer ships and bases are considerably cheaper to bring online both in terms

of money and minerals. The threat the Privateer poses to others is likewise greater the poorer the starting conditions as the Privateer can cripple enemy economies much faster. Enemy defences are also correspondingly weaker as Loki's are a TL7 ship, mines cost valuable MC and minerals, and planetary defences soak up a bigger part of capital if developed. Naturally, if there's less neutronium - ROB missions are going to be a lot more painful for the victim and success is more likely. If money is max'd out to start, you will not be able to prevent enemies from max'ing out their R&D at their HomeWorld since they'll have sufficient funds to develop key TL initially.

Distance.

Normally, the greater the distance between HomeWorld's, the better the Privateers will do. Their gravitronics and lower fuel costs make rapid expansion easy and you'll reach your neighbours twice as fast as they will reach you in nearly all cases. Starting at medium range or less, your HomeWorld is very vulnerable to your neighbours. However, you can reach your neighbours HomeWorld within two turns yourself and could potentially knock their economy for a real loop if you take out one or two crucial early ships. Personally, I'd never play them at medium or less.

Population.

Less than a 3 million start and you're vulnerable to getting your HomeWorld knocked off by Lizard - or even Fascist - ground assault. More importantly, the Borg's assimilation can quickly overwhelm the rest of the galaxy in production capability.

2. What are the HCONFIG settings?

HCONFIG setting can radically change the whole nature of the game. Failing to find these out before hand can be quite fatal. If these are other than default you'll definitely want to know the differences beforehand. Settings of particular interest include the ROB%, Cloak fail%, Cloak fuel cost, tow-capture, cloaked hit mine%, mine/web hit% and - last but not least - Ion Storms.

- Rob% by default is 1%. Many hosts increase this a bit - I use 5% in the games I host. If this is increased dramatically however, you're going to be have serious problems as ROB is your bread 'n butter. I'd think very carefully about playing in any game where this was more than 10% unless the Privateers were compensated in some way by other settings.
- Cloak Failure default is 0%. Many hosts use 1% - anything more should be avoided as you'll lose a lot more ships over the course of the game at higher settings. Even 1% will result in a trickle of losses if you have a large fleet operating in enemy space. Be prepared.
- Cloak Fuel cost default is 5 Kt. per turn. This can really limit the range of operation of your BR4's and BR5's with their smaller fuel tanks. I would avoid any games with higher than default settings. Some hosts play with lower costs - this will really help you.
- Tow-Capture is ON by default. If this is OFF, you should forget about playing the Privateers as you'll have a difficult time benefiting from your ROB mission since you'll have to tow the enemy ship back to one of your bases to force surrender.

- Cloaked ships hit mines defaults to .5%. If this is raised substantially, it will seriously hamper your ability to threaten other players and you'll lose a lot more ships to minefields.
- Webs default to 5% and being cloaked DOESN'T reduce the odds of hitting web mines. If this is increased more than 2%, you'll not want to be anywhere near Crystals at all - regardless of your race.
- Ion Storms default to ON with 5 Storms. Ion Storms are a nightmare for cloakers. Aside from the Resolute and Darkwing in the latest version of Host, no ships can cloak in Ion Storms. Ion Storms are unpredictable and uncontrollable. I generally avoid games with Ion Storms like the plague. If other setting are favourable I can tolerate a 1 or 2 Ion Storm setting, but otherwise - FORGET IT!!!

3. What Add-on's are in going to be used?

There are many add-on's for VGAP floating around. All of them bring new twists and challenges to the game. Some of these really can benefit the Privateers others can really make life miserable. The whole analysis of add-on's could easily fill a full FAQ, so I'll limit myself to making just a few comments regarding a few of the more common ones.

Sphere/PWRAP: This is a two edged sword. You can now easily expand quickly in any direction - but people can now come at you from all directions. I like these overall, but pay attention to the default seam between edges or you may end up where you weren't expecting.

Explore: You can quickly gain a better view of the galaxy since you can move twice as fast as your neighbours - always good.

Tachyon: I hate this one. EVERYONE can de-cloak your ships:(Look VERY carefully at the number of ships, cost and frequency of use before jumping into a game using Tachyon. Normally I pass.

JumpGate: You move twice as fast, why would you want others to be able to move around quicker? Not favourable.

RacePlus: The Dwarfstar crew repair is nice, but watch out for those Fascist D3's. If you though you could steal ships, wait till you get hit by one of these! You'll also want to build some scouts with TL9 drives or Rebel Booby Traps may be a very nasty surprise.

Nemesis: While the Cloak Tow looks inviting, the Robot Viral Field is just too nasty - avoid if being run at defaults.

FHOST: You can be attacked at a distance by fighters and missiles. This dramatically reduces your ability to snag enemy ships since they don't need to move into orbit to takeout your worlds. If ships on ROB mission are not immune to attack from fighters, then pass on playing the Privateers.

Aliens!: You have some protection the others don't. Live long and prosper, but watch out for the critters all the same - they are VERY nasty.

4. Is an alternate ship list going to be used?

There are many alternate ships lists in circulation and hosts sometimes create their own. Some of these are really nice, but others really hose the Privateers. The only game I ever dropped out of was because of the ship list. The host refused to divulge the ship spec.'s before the game started so I didn't find out about them until then. I discovered the MBR had been more than tripled in cost in terms of minerals/MC and it's fuel capacity had been halved. I was not amused. If the ship list is non-standard and the host won't provide it before you select your race - go elsewhere.

5. What are the victory conditions?

You'd be surprised at how often people seem to forget about the point of the game. Victory conditions are very important and have a major impact on selecting your race. There are a great many different ways to determining victory though the standard score and REF add-on are probably two of the more common ones.

The Privateers can do very well under the standard scoring system. They can expand quickly and seize many planets. Their ships are cheap so they can build a lot of them. Their bases require less R&D so you can get these up and running faster too.

The REF scenarios are generally much more challenging for the Privateers. The Invasion and Ashes scenarios are especially difficult as you initially lack the ships necessary to take out a well-developed HW. Given time, you can amass the required fleet through captures and trades, but usually not as quickly as the other races. The Hull Scenario isn't much better since your effective ships are small, you won't get as many points as other races per ship. The Election Scenario - votes received from natives/colonists is best avoided as the Borg should be able to win that one via assimilation very easily - you might be able to take second though as you expand faster so should find more natives earlier than the others. You can do very well in the Holy Moly Scenario as your ships aren't very expensive in terms of minerals. In the Tantalus scenario, your superior speed should prove useful in finding the secret weapon.

Some games are scored based on ships destroyed, as the Privateers generally capture rather than destroy, you won't do well in these.

Quite a few games use an alternative score which rewards players for maximising their resources through building ships and bases. As the Privateers are one of the best races at moving/redistributing resources, you can do well here too, but will have to get more points through building bases as your ships simply aren't very expensive and you'll have a lot of resources unused.

6. Is there a time limit?

The Privateers usually do better in a shorter scenario due to their faster speed and lower ship/base development cost. The longer the game is set to last, The more likely enemy fleets will be able to rollback your early landgrab and hunt down and eradicate your bases. On the other hand, once the 500 ship limit kicks in, your fleet is usually the only one which will continue to grow at a constant rate<g>!

The Birdmen: Not Just Sneaking Around
by
Noysh
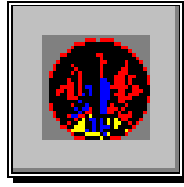
Intro:

It was a dark day for the Crystalline Confederation. The truce was broken and war was upon them at the worst possible moment in their race's known history. Three spectral vessels had appeared in orbit around their HomeWorld. Although the unchristened diamond flame that had just been constructed launched to meet the uncloaking warbirds, without a load of torpedoes it was not match for the Dark Wing battlegroup.

It was a bloody space battle, but in the end millions of Crystalline voices cried out and were silenced as the third of the spectral battlegroup liquidated the planetary defenses and slaughtered the inhabitants of the Confederation's HomeWorld.

The knowledge that I am about to impart to you here, could have been used to stop this travesty. But alas, it was too late for the Crystals. Pray that you have received this in time to stop it from happening to your people.

This is how you gut an Echo Cluster as the Birdmen.

Starships:

The topic of starships is one that seems to be the one that everyone and their dog has to say something about on the strategy forums, and all of them contradict one another. So which ones are wrong and which ones are correct? All and none.

Let me explain.

As Dave Killingsworth says in Complete VGA Planets User's Guide, "Without them you are NOT dangerous." By and large, I have found that when people spout off an essential ship-list for any race, many of their strategies are specific to the game that they are presently in.

There IS no essential ship-list. However, each given scenario has an essential ship-list that if you deviate from it you are lost. And guess what? Only hindsight is 20/20.

When playing the Birdmen, there is a lot more room for potential error than when you play, say, the Colonies. There are two universal ship-building strategies that I work with when playing the Birdmen.

The first rule that I work by is: Build a fistful of swift heart class scouts with transwarp drives. Then, as the name implies, use them as scouts. It is often more comforting to know who your neighbours are and how close they are.

The second rule is: If it doesn't cloak, don't build it. There are two exceptional cases to this rule:

- Freighters are desperately necessary. But make sure you planet-hop. No sticking your neck out.

- If it will help your overall situation, and it doesn't cloak, discard rule 2.

- Your ships are smaller. This is an overlying theme of your entire fleet. Never get too attached to anything, not even a Dark Wing.

Building

Proportionate to your fleet's lack of overall mass, they have guile. This means several things. Primarily, it means you have to be aggressive. The Avian Empire that waits for the other race to come to them is the Avian Empire that falls.

However, I am not telling you to be stupid either. You don't have the fleet mass to charge through someone else's empire like a mad bull.

All of your ships have qualities that make them worth using. Here are some of the things that I've found them useful for.

The Swift Heart	One of the wonderful things about this vessel is it can go cloaked forever before refueling. It can be used with limited success to raid freighters. Due to its ability to last so long without refueling, it is ideal for sending it around an opponents colonies to size up the situation.
Neutronic Fuel Carriers	With a load of 5 Kt of Neutronium, this vessel can go from one end of the star map to the other. This starship is ideal for intra-Imperial cash transfers. Its not to wise as a scout though, too easy to see.
The White Falcon	Both this vessel and the Fearless wing are very similar in design. Both are ideal scout/re-supply vessels. There is a key thing to remember when sending this ship into battle, however. It has 150 crew members. When the e-s bonus is on, that means that attacking another ship of similar size with it is practically giving it away to your enemy. This ship is more scout oriented. It is also ideal for laying big minefields in your enemies' space <g>.
The Bright Heart	The Bright Heart does its shining as a disposable torpedo battery. It really doesn't have the fuel capacity to get around much, nor the mass to stand up to a larger warship. The e-s bonus usually manages in getting it captured like the White Falcon. However, the Bright Heart is both cheap and has four torpedo tubes. The trend seems to be (and I agree with this) to make a bunch of them with high-level torpedo tubes and low level stardrives and about eight to twelve torpedoes. Then tow them to fringe planets and leave them cloaked to give any invasion force a bloody nose first off.

The Fearless Wing	This ship is the White Falcon's double crew, six beam counterpart. The significant cargo/fuel capacity of this vessel make it another quality resupply vessel. Especially if you don't have a secure economic base within the enemy's territory to make more torpedoes and refuel (all of this is true about the White Falcon as well). The major difference between this ship and the White Falcon is that you can consider the Fearless Win a small warship.
The Skyfire	This ship's biggest problem is that it doesn't cloak. It could be reasonably useful as a Birdman warship if it had a cloaking device. This ship is marked, like that of most ship designs that the Privateers also have by a 250 Kt cargo capacity. However, this ship has more than one torpedo tube.
The Valiant Wind	The Valiant Wind is another vessel that doesn't cloak, but it is a carrier. In fact, it is a good middle-sized carrier. The real crippling factor is that it is a carrier. If you're really sold on using carriers, then perhaps you should ally yourself with a fighter building race. Otherwise, this ship represents a significant drain on your resources.
The Deth Specula	In shared ship designs, there is always something missing for one of the design's holders. The case with the Deth Specula is it has the Fascist's token lack of cargo space. This cripples an otherwise quality ship design. Therefore, there is a trick to using the Deth Specula's. When you put together a battlegroup, make sure you pair them off with things that can carry a backup supply of torpedoes (i.e.- 2 Deth Specula's and a White Falcon/Fearless Wing). Otherwise, your campaign will be short.
The Resolute	With the advent of host 3.22.005, the resolute has been an invaluable and all-purpose large-medium warship. It has both a 420 fuel capacity and now cloaks without burning fuel. Even in ion storms. Its weakness is in its lack of torpedo tubes. With a cargo capacity of 280, it carries more torpedoes that it will ever fire before going down to another ship of comparable size. The cargo/fuel capacity of this vessel makes it a great compliment to a Dark Wing Battlegroup.
The Red Wind	A carrier that cloaks. Sounds good doesn't it? What sounds good on the drawing board is often not as successful in the empirical sense. The Red Wind carries the trademark traits of many of the Birdmen ships: "not big enough." As a carrier with 2 beams, and 2 fighter bays, its a grand design. However its cargo space of eighty coupled with the cost of fighters make this a Bright Heart that wasn't. The problem is that Birdmen just aren't fighter oriented enough to justify spending 8000 MC on outfitting this tiny vessel. If you ally with a fighter-building race, however, these things could potentially work like, and even compliment, the Bright Heart as cheap garrisons. But as

	an offensive ship they are stopped at the front lines by their fuel capacity.
The Dark Wing	What is there to say. This is the biggest cloaking warship in the game. This is one of the ships that is feared and reviled by non-Birdmen players almost as mush as the Gorbie and the Meteor Class Blockade Runner. This vessel has a serious Achilles heal: Its fuel hold. This vessel now requires no fuel to cloak under the same advanced cloaking convention listed above for host 3.22.005 and later. The Dark Wing has the mass of T-Rex and the fuel capacity of a medium freighter. If these things don't move in battle-groups that include Resolutes, their movement often stops quickly. There is also the interesting issue of what a Dark Wing, built without beam weapons does to a carrier. In combat against a carrier, this vessel survives longer if the fighters have to fly back to the carrier in waves instead of the steadily pummeling that a Dark Wing with enough beams to shoot down significant numbers of fighters and allow the carrier to launch early second-waves. This makes a strong argument for a B-class variant of Dark wing that is build with one beam and as many high-tech torpedo tubes as one can spare for use against enemy carriers (run the SIM's; it works).

Trading

As the Birdmen, there are tools available to you that the other races can often see gain in procuring for themselves. However, how many of those vessels that you would like to see sent back to haunt you is up to you.

There are a few significant considerations when deciding on what to trade and who to trade it too, and what to trade it for.

When Trading vessels and making alliances (as the two often go hand in hand) it is important to consider not only short term goals, but long term ones as well. In fact this is probably the place to discuss allies. For it is dubious logic to trade warships with the enemy.

Fed's	The Federation has little to offer in an alliance with the Birdmen aside from the obviously large war vessels and the super refit capability. These abilities are hardly a worthwhile compliment to the Birdmen (unless they are your neighbours. Even then, eventually you will be building your own tech 10 stuff without the wait.) A valid position to make at this point is that any neighbour makes a good ally, no matter what the race (if you're into that ally stuff <g>).
Lizards	Lizards have cloaking vessels so as long as you don't give them a big one, there's really no harm done. However, if you're looking for an ally that compliments your racial

	advantages, the lizards (apart from having oodles of minerals) only share your weakness of small vessels (smaller even).
Fascist	I admit that glory devices are both handy and a lot of fun to get hold of, but for the purposes of warfare, it only tells your enemy where you're coming from because glory device vessels don't cloak. Fascists' got little ships too.
Privateers	I know everyone across the Internet touts the "great" meteor class blockade runner. But for the purposes of remaining unseen, nothing beats having a fleet of gravitronic accelerated vessels to tow your non-cloaking freighters. The Privateers are practically adept at keeping unseen as well.
The Cyborg	The Cyborg are difficult to work with as an alliance. Usually, they demand protection for the first 20 or so turns from an ally, then they will get to big to keep in check and they eat their allies (unless that ally can provide free fighters for their Biocides, which you cannot). However, being on their good side can save a lot of woe over lost Dark Wings.
The Crystals	The Crystal Confederation are both slow and are restricted to primarily to defensive warfare Your strengths are really in your offensive capabilities (the old strike and fade tactic). Their vessels are solid, but not strong. Really they have nothing that you need.
The Empire, Robots, Rebels, Colonies	inevitably these races are all similar for the purposes that they serve for you. Brute force. These races could fill your carriers with little commitment on their part and generally pack the biggest ship to ship/planet punch. None of them have the subtlety that cloaking warships provide. They all are good as allies and have lots of middle to large vessels that are of quite convenient. What they have that you want, however is mass, firepower and fighters. (I apologise to this race's players for the vast generalisation).

Planets:

Planetary organization for the Birdmen is synonymous with that of most of the other races. Except that you reeeelly don't want to be seen before you have to. Because of this, I propose the sidestep colonization strategy.

The sidestep strategy is dangerous, but it may save you having to deal being sighted by multiple races at once. This strategy assumes that the HomeWorld distance is set to very long in the host configuration and that you are at least within 200 LY of the star map edge.

This technique is, instead of the traditional starburst flow of colonization, choose one of the two directions and push that way. This accomplishes two things:

1) This puts your HomeWorld on the fringe of your empire where freshly built warships can charge forth to engage enemy scouts/others stuff that get dangerously close.

2) If you expand in one general direction, the chances that you will encounter one race and remain invisible to the other are raised. Then you run up the white flag and sue for peace (or wreak havoc on an unsuspecting opponent, depending on the size of your fleet and his).

The dangers of this strategy rest in the fact that when the other race that you expanded away from comes around. Your HomeWorld is right there where he doesn't have to fight very far to get to it. If you utilise the information in this article, it shouldn't be a problem. The trick is to keep close tabs on his activities and launch a crippling attack of his HomeWorld that you have found the location of with your scouts.

StarBases:

Unless it directly effects your end score, or it ups your building capability, don't spare the minerals and cash for an extra StarBase, build a ship with those resources. The reason for this that in combat you will go through so many ships when combating the races with bigger vessels, that you can wait for the 500 ship-limit to be reached before you begin to produce extra StarBases. However you should have several StarBases by the time the ship-limit is reached that have already cranked out a sizable fleet. Remember that all your ships are smaller than most races' ships and you have to work harder to make them count and be willing to sacrifice them to achieve an objective.

Warfare:

As I have said already, as the Birdmen, you must be aggressive. Never give your neighbour enough due time to mount an invasion. Force him to defend himself. A good standard to play by is, never attack until you know what's there. But make sure that you know what's there.

The beauty of having a cloaking warship is the capability to pick and choose your battles. If you are being invaded, you will eventually have to make a stand, thus reducing your options.

One of the most important thing that I have learned is move everything in battlegroups with both warships and support vessels (**2-3 Deth Specula's, 1-2 Fearless Wing\White Falcon; or 3 Dark Wings and 2 Resolutes**) this insures that there's always something left to pick up the pieces after a key battle. Also when throwing a battlegroup up against a Virgo, Rush, Gorbie, Biocide and the like if the Dark Wings have 1 or less beams weapons built into them and loaded with high-tech torpedoes, you will save yourself a Dark Wing or two sometimes.
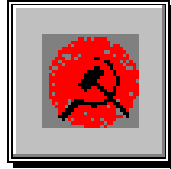
Summary:

The key to making the Birdmen work is to play smart and never give up the chance to keep a conflict on the opponent's territory. Never Disregard a potential ally or a non-

cloaking ship design entirely on the basis that it doesn't cloak. Just remember, the next HomeWorld that my Dark Wings drop cloak over could be yours.

The Empire Probe Gambit

by

Donald L. Worrell

Early in a game the Empires most deadly weapon is the PL-21 probe. The first mission for the probes is to seek out and find all enemy StarBases using the Dark Sense. After this is accomplished the PL-21 can then be turned into one of the most feared weapons in the game. With your probes in enemy space you can see and know all. You can get a turn by turn report of what new planets the enemy colonises. This is important because you want your probes to be able to move about freely with out fear of the enemy.

Lets say you have the Robots for a neighbour. Early in the game say on the second turn you had sent a PL-21 probe out and it reported the presence of the Robots to your east. The Dark Sense will tell you were his HomeWorld is and what other planets he holds. Since it is turn two the dark sense should have informed you of all of the Robots planets. With this PL-21 probe in the area with mission set to dark sense each turn from now on you will get a dark sense report of the Robots colonisation efforts. You will now send a second PL-21 probe into the Robots area . These probes will take over a planet were they can stay hidden from the enemy. You will now lie in wait for the enemy to send out a freighter.

With the PL-21s on station when the enemy sends a freighter into open space you will be able to plan to meet it at its destination. Just watch the enemies expansion and go after the enemies freighters when ever they appear unescorted. You should be able to tell which planet the enemy is moving the freighter to because they will not be worried about losing the freighters in there own back yard. But once you pick the planet that the freighter is moving to, then draw a hyper warp circle around it. Then draw hyper circles around your probes. If you are lucky you might have a probe in position to meet the freighter at the planet it is moving to. If you can do this with enemy FC set you have just captured a freighter. If you have to take two turns to get there that will work as well. The freighter will move to the planet, then the next turn it will have to drop clans to take possession of the planet. You probe will arrive on the second turn capture the freighter and attack the planet. But since you have the dark sense you will know that the planet was unoccupied so there will be no defense post to worry about.

That's the basic tactics. Just watch the enemies expansion and go after the enemies freighters when every they appear unescorted. Remember that you should know every planet the enemy has and how long they have been held. How long they have been held will let you guess whether they have built defense posts or not. So in closing the Empire probes should rule the galaxy at the beginning of the game. If you can force the enemy to escort all their freighters you will slow down there growth. That in it self will make the Empire probe gambit a success. If you can capture a couple of LDSF that would be icing on the cake.

Host sequence

by

Dave Howard

Dave Howard has compiled a very thorough Host sequence that has been verified by Tim Wisseman - Ed.

AUXHOST1:

      Update Planet Structure built During Turn
      Update Cargo/MC Transfers From Owned Planets/Ships
      Build Bases
      Meteor Shower
      Loki First Decloak
      Sensor Sweep Mission (Including Bioscan)
      Cloak Mission (HCONFIG Cloak Fail Rate Set)
      Birdman Espionage (FCode change attempt)
      Minefield FCodes Established
      Privateer ROB Ship
      Most Mission 9 (Hiss, Build fighters, Repair, Dark Sense)
      Cargo Drop/Pickup (Ship to All Planets)
      Cargo Transfer (Ship to Ship)
      Lady Royal Generates 1mc Per Clan
      Beam Transfer FCodes (bdm, bum, lfm, btf, btt etc.)
      Gather Missions (Fuel, Minerals, Supplies)
      Alchemy
      Lay Mines
      Lay Web Mines
      Ion Storms
      Mine Sweep/Scoop
      Mine Decay (Mines Destroy Mines)
      New Minefields FCodes Established
      Web Drain
      Cheat Detect
      Work On Ships (Fix/Recrew/Recycle With StarBase)
      First Build New Ships
      Clone Ships
      Super Refit
      Force a Surrender At StarBase
      Recalculate Ship Masses (Repair With Supplies)
      Make Torps In Space (mkt FCode)
      Towing Ships Move
      Most Ships Move (Including HYP)
      Intercepting Ships Move
      Warp Well Calculation
      Glory Device
      Chunnel

Loki Second Decloak
All Other StarBase Missions
Ships with RamScoop Make Fuel
Recalculate Ship Mass (Repair With Supplies)
New Natives
Colonise Ship
Ship VS. Ship Combat
Recalculate Ship Mass (Boom If >100% Or Repair W/ Supplies If <100%)
Ship VS. Planet/Base Combat
Terraforming Missions
Planets produce Minerals and Supplies
Birdman Super Spy
Fascist & Rebel Mission 9 (Pillage & RGA)
Borg Assimilate
Taxes Calculated
Happiness Change Computed
Taxes Produce MC (If Not Rioting)
Population Growth [Based On Climate & Happiness (happiness >70)]
Second Ship Build [Post-Combat Priority Point Build (P.B.P. >20)]
Recalculate Ship Mass (Repair With Supplies)
Ship XYR (Save Ship Data In Star Map Data Fields)
Exploration Mission
Make Score Log
Kill Points Messages
Dump Old Messages
Count UFO's
Save Host Data
Update Time Stamp

AuxHost2:

Add-ons Run Here

The Difference Between Battlefield Honour and Honourable Play

by

Ryan Kenny

Ryan addresses a subject that, being by definition a pro-alliance player (and an extremely honourable one at that!), is close to my heart - Ed!

No matter how many hours the game designer spends making his game cheat-proof, there is always an honour system among players. You must trust the host/player not to give himself an advantage, you must trust players not to 'hack' the game, and all alliances you make depend at least a little bit on trust. If you plan on exchanging ships with another player, trust is a large factor.

Tim Wisseman advertises now that over 40,000 people have registered VGA Planets. If this is the case, our 'honour system' includes 40,000 members. This is akin to trying to administrate Akron, Ohio on an 'honour system'. But at least in Akron most people speak the same language. VGAP players span several countries.

I believe this subject is important because I have been recently accused of breaching this honour system. What I did probably was outside the realm of many definitions of 'honourable play'. Now I would like to share with you everything I learned from this experience.

First and foremost, I must separate the terms 'battlefield honour' and 'honourable play'. Historically, battlefield honour referred to facing your opponent, and only attacking combatant targets. An honourable knight would not attack an opponent with his back turned, nor attack unarmed men, women, and children.

The industrial age changed honour completely. While non-combatants are still protected, deceit became a potent weapon. False transmissions were sent in World War II quite frequently. The U.S. intercepted a Japanese transmission with the travel plans of their fleet admiral; a flight of fighters intercepted his personal commuter plane and killed him. More recently, the United States infected all of Iraq's computer networks with viruses 3 days before massive bombing runs, crippling their radar. Is this an honourable tactic?

Given the morphism of battlefield honour, I think back to an opponent who taunted me to 'fight him by honourable means' (he was the Lizards, not Fascists). This was the same person who used cloaking ships to attack defenseless freighters and then run away. I do not fault him for the tactic, but I wonder what he thought honourable combat included. More importantly, what constituted 'dishonourable' means?

In the context of VGA Planets, there is nothing you can do to violate rules of 'battlefield honour'. In addition to the fact that this concept is culturally relative (and we are each warring cultures), there is no friendly code for 'torture all captured crew members,' or 'poison the planet's water supply'. As with most computer wargames, anything that is possible is acceptable.

There are many possible breaches of honour and trust in this game, but they all fall under the category of 'honourable play'. This code of honour has nothing to do with

battle, but with competition. And the definitions of honourable play are as morphic as battlefield honour. Most of us would agree that tampering with TRN files is cheating. I knew one player who would inform his opponent four turns in advance when he would attack - how many of you are that honourable?

Most of us lie somewhere in between. Some claim there is an unspoken agreement not to swap homeworlds in an invasion game. This makes perfect sense. But how is a newbie to know this? If it is so obviously wrong, then why do the game mechanics even allow it?

The answer is that no game is perfect, and there will always be loopholes in the scoring system or game mechanics. No matter how often these loopholes are plugged with more sophisticated programming, someone will find another loophole. Gamers are a very clever bunch. Is the guy who finds the loophole 'dishonourable' or just too smart for his own good (or both)?

Alliances are another category entirely. You will never find two gamers with exactly the same definition of 'alliance'. Some people will terminate an alliance with an e-mail, while others think taking your ally's HomeWorld is a much clearer message. While we all get angry at another player from time to time, most people accept the 'caveat emptor' approach. Alliances are investments - high risk, high payoff.

What I did was give away my Cyborg HomeWorld to an ally. I took the precaution of polling alt.vga-planets first. I got some definite mixed opinions on whether or not I should do it. But my opponent was of a very definite opinion - he thought I had sunk lower than Brutus, Iago, and Benedict Arnold. He thought I had endangered my soul by violating the 'unwritten rule' about HomeWorld swapping. This was my first registered game of VGA Planets. I thought VGA Planets was 'just a game' until this guy harassed me with e-mail after e-mail about my crime of ignorance.

Rather than ruminate on the honour of that action (if only for the sake of my volcanic opponent, I admitted I was wrong - I probably was), I brainstormed how to avoid such situations in the future. I came up with a few simple questions for my host in future games. Although you think you are pretty easy-going and think players can do whatever they want, there is probably someone in your game that is pretty uptight. Do this for their sake.

Ask the host if he is planning on being the authority in any rules disputes. If everyone agrees to this up front, there will probably not be any problems. This may be difficult if the host is playing. I would recommend that the host moderate rules interpretations even if he is playing, but many are uneasy about this.

Also important is knowing the victory conditions in advance. Make sure everyone agrees with the victory conditions as stated. There is probably nothing worse for a game than an argument about victory conditions after turn 50.

No problems should arise if all of the players actually play for recreation and are having fun. Tournament play and player ranking can be fun, but can also push people to get greedy. If only for this reason, do not underestimate the importance of 'honourable play' agreements among the players in your game. If problems arise, they often occur too late to fix.

EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL EXPOSURE LAW PASSED BY CONGRESS

submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

Whilst surfing the net I came across this little gem … perhaps they have already landed? Ed!

On October 5, 1982, Dr. Brain T. Clifford of the Pentagon announced at a press conference ("The Star", New York, Oct. 5, 1982) that contact between U.S. citizens and extra-terrestrials or their vehicles is strictly illegal.

ACCORDING TO A LAW ALREADY ON THE BOOKS: (Title 14, Section 1211 of the Code of Federal Regulations, adopted on July 16, 1969, before the Apollo moon shots), anyone guilty of such contact automatically becomes a wanted criminal to be jailed for one year and fined $5,000.

The NASA administrator is empowered to determine with or without a hearing that a person or object has been "extraterrestrially exposed" and impose an indeterminate quarantine under armed guard, which could not be broken even by court order. There is no limit placed on the number of individuals who could thus be arbitrarily quarantined. The definition of "extraterrestrial exposure" is left entirely up to NASA administrator, who is thus endowed with total dictatorial power to be exercised at his slightest caprice, which is completely contrary to the Constitution.

According to Dr. Clifford, whose commanding officers have been assuring the public for the last 39 years that UFO's are nothing more than hoaxes and delusions to be dismissed with a condescending smile: "This is really no joke, it's a very serious matter." This legislation was buried in the 1,211th subsection of the 14th section of a batch of regulations very few members of government probably bothered to read in its entirety, the proverbial needle in the haystack, and was slipped onto the books without public debate. Thus from one day to the next we learn that, without having informed the public, in its infinite wisdom, the government of the United States has created a whole new criminal class: UFO contactees.

The lame excuse offered by NASA as a sugar coating for this bitter pill is that extra-terrestrials might have a virus that could wipe out the human race. This is certainly one of the many possibilities inherent is such contact, but just as certainly not the only one , and in itself not a valid reason to make all contact illegal or to declare contactees criminals to be jailed and fined immediately. It appears the primary effect of such a law would not be to prevent contact, it would be to silence witnesses. If enforced, the law would prevent publication of contactee reports except under cover of anonymity, and unleash a modern inquisition in the Land of the Free. However, it is unenforceable, so obviously absurd and unfair that the public will refuse to accept it. The citizens of the United States will greet it with a resounding Bronx cheer and laugh it out of court, forcing it to be repealed. It should be replaced by clearly worded legislation, not open to interpretation in a multitude of different ways, humanely relevant to the contingency of E.T. contact, debated and passed by Congress openly instead of slipped through "under the table" without the public being informed.

According to NASA spokesman Fletcher Reel, the law as it stands is not immediately applicable, but in case of need could quickly be made applicable. What this means is that it is ambiguously worded, so that it can be interpreted either one way or the other, as the government desires. It is certainly not a coincidence that Dr. Clifford held his press conference during the period when the popularity of the film E.T. was at its peak. As E.T. portrayed a type of extraterrestrial that was benevolent and lovable, the inference is that the press conference was intended to discourage attempts to communicate or fraternise with UFO occupants. However, instead of having the intended effect, it backfired, causing public furore.

There may be some relationship between this fiasco and the next semi-officially endorsed attempt to deal with the subject of extra-terrestrials, the TV film V, which was featured with repeat performances and maximum publicity by major networks world-wide. The aliens portrayed in V are the most horrifying and repulsive nightmares imaginable, who are defeated thanks largely to a CIA hit man specialising in covert operations, the tough guy with the heart of gold who with the aid of the handsome hero saves the human race. This is obvious and transparent propaganda, designed to do what the government's widespread use of dis-information, and Dr. Clifford's press conference about the absurd lemon of a law already on the books failed to do: squelch attempts to communicate or fraternise with UFO occupants.

One way to avoid widespread panic at the announcement of the news that we are under surveillance by non-human intelligent beings with a technology far more sophisticated than our own is to point out that this situation is nothing new, but has literally been going on for millennia. If the "flying dragons" mentioned in the I Ching intended to attack and destroy us, they could easily have carried out this objective long ago.

Along with this article, the text of the E.T. Law will be presented. However, there are several points that I wish to make:

1211.101 Applicability.

The provisions of this part apply to all NASA manned and unmanned space missions... I could dismiss this whole controversy as a tempest in a teacup if the above passage contained the word "only", so as to read: "The provisions of this part apply only to all NASA manned and unmanned space missions..." However, it does not contain that one little word which would have made such a big difference. If the government was suddenly faced with the accomplished fact of an undeniable overt E.T. visitation, this regulation could therefore, be construed as being applicable to all space missions, NASA or non NASA, whether of terrestrial or extra-terrestrial origin. As it stands, this law is applicable to UFO contact. The meaning would have to be stretched, but the built-in loophole does exist.

1211.102 Definitions (b) (2):

Touched directly or been in close proximity to (or been exposed indirectly to)...Even without involved in a UFO close encounter would become eligible for indefinite quarantine under armed guard according to the above. By including indirect exposure, the NASA administrator is empowered to make the definition mean just about anything he wants it to. An example of indirect exposure is given, but an example is not a definition. Unless indirect exposure is defined precisely, it can mean almost anything. The possibility is not specifically ruled out that other types of indirect exposure than

the example given might be considered valid grounds to "quarantine" a citizen or group of citizens. In my opinion, it is vital that we challenge the validity of his law, for if it is allowed to stand unchallenged, UFO contactees and researchers may all meet behind barbed wire and armed guards somewhere in Alaska. I strongly urge everyone who reads the E.T. Law, Title 14, Section 1211 of the Code of Federal Regulations (at the end of this article), to clip it out, and send it on to your congressman, with a demand penciled in, to repeal this absurd and potentially lethal law. We must use reason, and transcend fear in order to make this planet a place where all may live in peace and harmony, as One.

Text of the E.T. Law   1211.100

Title 14 - Aeronautics and Space

Part 1211 - Extra-terrestrial Exposure 1211.100

Scope This part establishes:

(a) NASA policy, responsibility and authority to guard the Earth against any harmful contamination or adverse changes in its environment resulting from personnel, spacecraft and other property returning to the Earth after landing on or coming within the atmospheric envelope of a celestial body; and

(b) security requirements, restrictions and safeguards that are necessary in the interest of national security.

1211.101 - APPLICABILITY

The provisions of this part to all NASA manned and unmanned space missions which land or come within the atmospheric envelope of a celestial body and return to the Earth.

1211.102 - DEFINITIONS

(a) "NASA" and the "Administrator" mean, respectively the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration or his authorised representative.

(b) "Extra-terrestrially exposed" means the state of condition of any person, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever, who or which has:

(1) Touched directly or come within the atmospheric envelope or any other celestial body; or

(2) Touched directly or been in close proximity to (or been exposed indirectly to) any person, property, animal or other form of life or matter who or which has been extra-terrestrially exposed by virtue of paragraph (b)(1) of this section. For example, if person or thing "A" touches the surface of the Moon, and on "A's" return to Earth, "B" touches "A" and, subsequently, "C" touches "B", all of these - "A" through "C" inclusive - would be extra-terrestrially exposed ("A" and "B" directly; "C" indirectly).

(c) "Quarantine" means the detention, examination and decontamination of any persons, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever that is extra-terrestrially exposed, and includes the apprehension or seizure of such person, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever.

(d) "Quarantine period" means a period of consecutive calendar days as may be established in accordance with 1211.104

(a). Administrative actions.

The Administrator or his designee .. shall in his discretion:

(1) Determine the beginning and duration of a quarantine period with respect to any space mission; the quarantine period as it applies to various life forms will be announced.

(2) *Designate in writing quarantine officers to exercise quarantine authority.*

(3) *Determine that a particular person, property, animal, or other form of life or matter whatever is extra- terrestrially exposed and quarantine such person, property, animal, or other form of life or matter whatever. The quarantine may be based only on a determination, with or without the benefit of a hearing, that there is probable cause to believe that such person, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever is extra-terrestrially exposed.*

(4) *Determine within the United States or within vessels or vehicles of the United States the place, boundaries, and rules of operation of necessary quarantine stations.*

(5) *Provide for guard services by contract or otherwise, as many be necessary, to maintain security and inviolability of quarantine stations and quarantined persons, property, animals or other form of life or matter whatever.*

(6) *Provide for the subsistence, health and welfare of persons quarantined under the provisions of this part.*

(7) *Hold such hearings at such times, in such manner and for such purposes as may be desirable or necessary under this part, including hearings for the purpose of creating a record for use in making any determination under this part for the purpose of reviewing any such determination.*

(b)

(3) *During any period of announced quarantine, no person shall enter or depart from the limits of the quarantine station without permission of the cognizant NASA officer. During such period, the posted perimeter of a quarantine station shall be secured by armed guard.*

(4) *Any person who enters the limits of any quarantine station during the quarantine period shall be deemed to have consented to the quarantine of his person if it is determined that he is or has become extra-terrestrially exposed.*

(5) *At the earliest practicable time, each person who is quarantined by NASA shall be given a reasonable opportunity to communicate by telephone with legal counsel or other persons of his choice.*

1211.107 *COURT OR OTHER PROCESS*

(a) *NASA officers and employees are prohibited from discharging from the limits of a quarantine station any quarantined person, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever during order or other request, order or demand an announced quarantine period in compliance with a subpoena, show cause or any court or other authority without the prior approval of the General Counsel and the Administrator.*

(b) *Where approval to discharge a quarantined person, property, animal or other form of life or matter whatever in compliance with such a request, order or demand of any court or other authority is not given, the person to whom it is directed shall, if possible, appear in court or before the other authority and respectfully state his inability to comply, relying for his action on this 1211.107.*

1211.108 *VIOLATIONS*

Whoever willfully violates, attempts to violate, or conspires to violate any provision of this part or any regulation or order issued under this part or who enters or departs from the limits of a quarantine station in disregard of the quarantine rules or regulations or without permission of the NASA quarantine officer shall be fined not more that $5,000 or imprisoned not more than 1 year, or both.

Write or call your congressman and tell him you want this law taken off the books. This article was printed in The Open Line Newspaper (Environmental Stewards) August, 1992 in Spokane, WA 99223.

Star Trek Night Before Christmas

submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

Apologies for the "out-of-season" nature of these two seasonal Star-Trek goodies but … well there is not buts … I just liked them - Ed!

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the ship
Not a circuit was buzzing, not one microchip;
The phasers were hung in the armory securely,
In hope that no alien would get up that early.
The crewmen were nestled all sung in their bunks
(Except for the few who were partying drunks)
And Picard in his nightshirt, and Bev in her lace,
Had just settled down for a neat face to face...

When out in the hall there arose such a racket,
That we leapt from our beds, pulling on pant and jacket.
Away to the lifts we all shot like a gun,
Leapt into the turbo's and shouted "Deck One!"
The bridge red-alert lights, which flashed through the din,
Gave a lustre of Hades to objects within.
When, what on the view screen, our eyes should behold,
But a weird kind of sleigh, and some guy who looked old.

But the glint in his eyes was so strange and askew,
That we knew in a moment it had to be Q.

His sleigh grew much larger as closer he came.
Then he zapped on the bridge and addressed us by name:
"It's Riker, It's Data, It's Worf and Jean-Luc!
It's Geordi, and Wesley, the genetic fluke!
To the top of the bridge, to the top of the hall!
Now float away! Float away!
Float away all!"

As leaves in the autumn are whisked off the street,
So the floor of the bridge came away from our feet,
And up to the ceiling, our bodies they flew,
As the captain called out, "what the Hell is this, Q?!"
The prankster just laughed and expanded his grin,
And, snapping his fingers, he vanished again.
As we took in our plight, and were looking around,
The spell was removed, and we crashed to the ground.
Then Q, dressed in fur from his head to his toe,

Appeared once again, to continue the show.
"That's enough!" cried the captain, "You'll stop this at once!"
And Riker said, "Worf, take aim at this dunce!"
"I'm deeply offended, Jean-Luc" replied Q,
"I just wanted to celebrate Christmas with you."

As we scoffed at his words, he produced a large sack.
He dumped out the contents and took a step back.

"I've brought gifts," he said, "just to show I'm sincere.
There's something delightful for everyone here."
He sat on the floor, and dug into the pile,
And handed out gifts with his most charming smile:

"For Counselor Troi, there's no need to explain.
Here's Tylenol-Beta for all of your pain.
For Worf I've some mints, as his breath's not too great
And for Geordi LaForge, an inflatable date."
For Wesley, some hormones, and Clearasil-plus;
For Data, a joke book, for Riker a truss.
For Beverly Crusher, there's sleek lingerie,
And for Jean-Luc, the thrill of just seeing her that way."
And he sprang to his feet with that grin on his face
And, clapping his hands, disappeared into space.

But we heard him exclaim as he dwindled from
sight, "Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good flight!"

Christmas in Space: The Previous Generation

submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the decks
Not a crewman was stirring, 'cept those having sex;
Their boots were all placed by the vent shafts with care,
In hopes that by morning they'd get some fresh air.
The Redshirts were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of stay'ng alive danced in their heads;
And Kirk in his gold shirt, McCoy in his blue,
Had just settled down for a nice Christmas brew--
When from the comm panel there came such a wail,
They sprang from their chairs, knocking over their ale.
Away to the panel Kirk flew, drenched in beer,
Snapped on the comm switch and barked loudly, "Kirk here!"
The squeals that emerged from the thing after that
Sounded just like the Devil was strangling a cat;
When, what to their bombarded ears should appear,
But the music of "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer,"
With a voice in the background, a murmur of talk,
That made Kirk exclaim, "Bones . . . That sounds just like Spock."
More rapid than bullets his syllables came
As he tested each circuit and called it by name--
"Cross Alpha to Beta, join Delta to Theta,
Route Kappa through Lamba, and Gamma to Zeta.
To the end of the circuit, the end of the line,
Now clip a resistor--there. That should do fine."
As Kirk and McCoy listened closely to this,
The comm unit speaker let out a long hiss.
So, off to the turbolift both of them flew,
With a mind to discover what Spock was up to.
And then, in a twinkling, they reached the bridge deck,
Stepped out of the lift and began a quick check.
As they went down the steps and were looking around,
From a nook Spock emerged, barely making a sound.
He was all dressed in gray from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with solder and soot.
A bag of components he had in one fist,
And held in the other, a rather long list.
His eyes didn't twinkle, his dimples were none,
Yet somehow it looked like he'd been having fun.
His mouth, at one corner, quirked up just a touch,
And one eyebrow lifted, though not by too much.
A soldering iron he held in his teeth,
And the smoke from it circled his head like a wreath.

He looked like a man with a task to complete
And nothing would stop him, not rain, snow, nor sleet.
His two colleagues stood there, dumbfounded by this.
McCoy chuckled softly; Kirk let out hiss.
The look in Spock's eye and the set of his head
Soon gave them to know he would not go to bed.
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And tuned all the sensors then turned back to Kirk,
And pressing a button and counting to three,
He lit up the bridge like a huge Christmas Tree.
His work done, he nodded, and walked toward the lift
As his friends stared in awe at his luminous gift.
But they heard him exclaim, his voice with good-will rife,
"Merry Christmas! And to you all, Peace and Long Life!"

Men Who Use Computers Are The New Sex Symbols Of The `90s
by

Scott Adams (submitted by The Undead HedgeHog)

I get about 100 e-mail messages a day from readers of my comic strip "Dilbert." Most are from disgruntled office workers, psychopaths, stalkers, comic-strip fans -- that sort of person. But a growing number are from women who write to say they think Dilbert is sexy. Some say they've already married a Dilbert and couldn't be happier.

If you're not familiar with Dilbert, he's an electrical engineer who spends most of his time with his computer. He's a nice guy but not exactly Kevin Costner.

Okay, Dilbert is polite, honest, employed and educated. And he stays home. These are good traits, but they don't exactly explain the incredible sex appeal. So what's the attraction?

I think it's a Darwinian thing. We're attracted to the people who have the best ability to survive and thrive. In the old days it was important to be able to run down an antelope and kill it with a single blow to the forehead.

But that skill is becoming less important every year.

Now all that matters is if you can install your own Ethernet card without having to call tech support and confess your inadequacies to a stranger whose best career option is to work in tech support.

It's obvious that the world has three distinct classes of people, each with its own evolutionary destiny:

- Knowledgeable computer users who will evolve into godlike non-corporeal beings who rule the universe (except for those who work in tech support).
- Computer owners who try to pass as knowledgeable but secretly use hand calculators to add totals to their Excel spreadsheets. This group will gravitate toward jobs as high school principals and operators of pet crematoriums. Eventually they will become extinct.
- Non-computer users who will grow tails, sit in zoos and fling dung at tourists.

Obviously, if you're a woman and you're trying to decide which evolutionary track you want your offspring to take, you don't want to put them on the luge ride to the dung-flinging Olympics. You want a real man. You want a knowledgeable computer user with evolution potential.

And women prefer men who listen. Computer users are excellent listeners because they can look at you for long periods of time without saying anything. Granted, early in a relationship it's better if the guy actually talks. But men use up all the stories they'll ever have after six months. If a woman marries a guy who's in, let's say, retail sales, she'll get repeat stories starting in the seventh month and lasting forever. Marry an engineer and she gets a great listener for the next 70 years.

Plus, with the ozone layer evaporating, it's a good strategy to mate with somebody who has an indoor hobby. Outdoorsy men are applying suntan lotion with SPF 10,000

and yet by the age of 30 they still look like dried chili peppers in pants. Compare that with the healthy glow of a man who spends 12 hours a day in front of a video screen.

It's also well established that computer users are better lovers. I know because I heard an actual anecdote from someone who knew a woman who married a computer user and they reportedly had sex many times. I realise this isn't statistically valid, but you have to admit it's the most persuasive thing I've written so far.

If you still doubt the sexiness of male PC users, consider their hair. They tend to have either: (1) male pattern baldness -- a sign of elevated testosterone -- or (2) unkempt jungle hair -- the kind you see only on people who just finished a frenzied bout of lovemaking. If this were a trial I think we could reach a verdict on the strong circumstantial evidence alone.

I realise there are a lot of skeptics out there. They'll delight in pointing out the number of computer users who wear wrist braces and suggest it isn't the repetitive use of the keyboard that causes the problem. That's okay. Someday those skeptics will be flinging dung at tourists. Then who'll be laughing? (Answer to rhetorical question: everybody but the tourists.)

Henry Kissinger said power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. And Bill Clinton said that knowledge is power. Therefore, logically, according to the U.S. government, knowledge of computers is the ultimate aphrodisiac. You could argue with me -- I'm just a cartoonist -- but it's hard to argue with the government. Remember, they run the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, so they must know a thing or two about satisfying women.

You might think this was enough to convince anyone that men who use computers are sexy. But look at it from my point of view: I'm getting paid by the word for this article. I'm not done yet.

In less enlightened times, the best way to impress women was to own a hot car. But women wised up and realised it was better to buy their own hot cars so they wouldn't have to ride around with jerks.

Technology has replaced hot cars as the new symbol of robust manhood. Men know that unless they get a digital line to the Internet no woman is going to look at them twice.

It's getting worse. Soon anyone who's not on the World Wide Web will qualify for a government subsidy for the home-pageless. And nobody likes a man who takes money from the government, except maybe Marilyn Monroe, which is why the CIA killed her. And if you think that's stupid, I've got 100 words to go.

Finally, there's the issue of mood lighting. Nothing looks sexier than a man in boxer shorts illuminated only by a 15-inch SVGA monitor. If we agree that this is every woman's dream scenario, then I think we can also agree that it's best if the guy knows how to use the computer. Otherwise, he'll just look like a loser sitting in front of a PC in his underwear.

In summary, it's not that I think non-PC users are less attractive. It's just that I'm sure they won't read this article.

GirlFriend

submitted by

Max K'os

Last year, my friend upgraded his GirlFriend 3.1 to GirlFriendPlus 1.0 (marketing name: Fiancee 1.0). Recently he upgraded Fiancee 1.0 to Wife 1.0 and it's a memory hogger, it has taken all his space; and Wife 1.0 must be running before he can do anything. Although he did not ask for it, Wife 1.0 came with Plug-Ins such as MotherInLaw and BrotherInLaw.

Some features I'd like to see in the Upcoming GirlFriend 4.0....

- A "Don't remind me again" button.
- Minimize button
- Shutdown button
- An install shield feature so that Girlfriend 4.0 can be completely uninstall if so desired (so you don't lose cache and other objects)
- "Abort" button (O.K. that one's pretty bad - but had to say it)

I tried running GirlFriend 2.0 with GirlFriend 1.0 still installed, they tried using the same I/O port and conflicted. Then I tried to uninstall GirlFriend 1.0 but it didn't have an uninstall program. I tried to uninstall it by hand, but it put files in my system directory.

Another thing that sucks in all versions of GirlFriend that I've used is that it is totally "object oriented" and only supports hardware with gold plated contacts.

***** BUG WARNING ******

Wife 1.0 has an undocumented bug. If you try to install Mistress 1.1 before uninstalling Wife 1.0, Wife 1.0 will delete MSMoney files before doing the uninstall itself. Then Mistress 1.1 will refuse to install, claiming insufficient resources.

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VGA Planets

Echoes of the Cluster

VGA Planets - EotC is a quarterly magazine published by Tim Wisseman. This magazine is a collection of articles, artwork and stories created by the "**VGA Planets** Community." This means that all of the artwork, articles and work that goes into the magazine is designed, written and created by the players of **VGA Planets**, like yourself.

The magazine is filled with information and news that you will not find anywhere else. The articles range from help for Newbies to information that is even useful to the most experienced player. There is also a great fictional story series, an in-depth look at a race each issue and a programmer's column. All of this and a whole lot more, with new ideas coming in all of the time.

The following are examples of the various things you can find in each of the *VGA Planets - Echoes of the Cluster*, that have been published to date:

Issue One: August 1995

Hints and Strategies: The Cyborg. - This article tells a player how to get the most out of the Cyborg.

The Privateers : The Tricks of the Trade: Some the tricks and tactics you should use as the Privateers.

An Interview with Tim Wisseman: An interview about VGAP with its creator Tim Wisseman.

Programmer's Corner: A regular column about the "nuts and bolts" of programming for/with VGAP.

VGA Planets Fiction: A regular fictional (ongoing) story based in the VGAP genre.

The Care and Feeding of Planets: An article about how to best exploit your planetary resources.

And much more !

Issue Two: Dec. 1995

The Strata of Politics in VGA Planets: How to play politics while playing planets. Maximise your advantage.

Creating Good Scenarios: How to best utilise the Campaign Editor to make your games more interesting.

What's the Whole Point, Anyway? : An article about how to play while keeping victory conditions in mind.

Net.Planets : A column that covers a wide variety of things. Ranging from VGAP on the net, to looking at trends in the VGAP community in general.

Tech Levels: An in depth look at some very complicated and technical information (formulas included).

VGA Planets Classifieds: A place for BBS's and people to advertise their games and boards.

The regular features and a lot more !!!

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Married…with VGA Planets: An article dealing with handling VGAP and married life.

The Battle for Bimbo: A play for VGA Planets (you just have to see it).

VGA Planets Terran Memory Banks: A list of VGAP WWW and FTP sites and a HOT BBS list.

Plus the regular features (*Fiction, Programmer's Corner, Net.Planets, Tech Levels*) and more.

You are invited to get a copy of the ***VGA Planets*** Magazine. Currently available are issues #1, #2 & #3. These issues are only $3.75 (USA), $4.25 (Canada), $5.00 (Europe, Asia, Africa) and $5.25 (Australia, New Zealand) EACH. You can also subscribe (starting with any Issue- just note to Tim which issue you want to start with) for four issues at a time. The subscription price is the single issue price multiplied by 4. (So a subscription in the USA would be $15.00) Don't miss out on the fun and information.

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