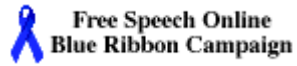




Issue 10: April 1997



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Editorial: The New Planeteer, Cookies and VGA-Planets

First of all an apology! I'm not going to go into great detail but my wife has been seriously ill and that, obviously, has forced *The Planeteer* into second place. Add to that the fact that I've had some significant hardware problems and an abortive attempt to switch to NT 4.0 and (I hope!) you'll be able to extend me a little leeway on this project. Again ... my apologies!



In case some *Planeteer* readers have not yet realised it ... I've left CompuServe!!!

I did this for a number of reasons:

- Real Names:** CompuServe has, for some time, been moving towards Internet technology (personally I don't think it'll ever truly make it but that's another story) offering proper Internet type browsers & real names. Now real names was one of the issues ... when the idea was first mooted I registered the name "Undead" only to find that when they first brought it out only a few were allowed to use it and I wasn't one of them.
- Web-Sites:** Then there was web-site access ... CompuServe offers it's members 5Mb of Web Space but 5Mb is not enough to put *The Planeteer* on ... the site is not complete yet it is already well over 10Mb. CompuServe web access is slow (both from within CompuServe and from outside ISP's), in a one test I found that UK Online (my current ISP) access was several times faster than CompuServe. Also it was rumoured that CompuServe have a tendency to "pull" members pages whenever their servers are suffering problems. One minor irritation was that when designing the site for CompuServe I enthusiastically designed it to the best of my ability including an organised use of names & directory structures and uploaded it all only to find that CompuServe only supported a flat web-site structure.
- Censorship:** It was never an issue anywhere else but Issue 3 of *The Planeteer* was censored by my CompuServe's Modem Games (my, then, home forum ... otherwise known as MGF) highest management. In that issue I was critical of another forums decision to pay hosts (See November 1995 Editorial) for a number of reasons but mainly because I felt it would attract the wrong type of person to host games. Believe me I do understand why MGF were unhappy and after some discussion I agreed to pull that editorial entirely from the MGF edition of *The Planeteer* ... with hindsight this is a decision I very much regret. What I should have done was stand my ground and tell them that it was my right alone, as editor, to edit *The Planeteer* and to decide what it should or shouldn't contain. I should have told them that their role was that of distributor and if they chose not to carry any or all of the editions then so be it. Ironically the forum whose actions had inspired the editorial, after a brief but constructive discussion of what had motivated me to write it, released the issue uncensored. It is also somewhat ironic that in before I was a member of MGF I was a member of that other forum and I left there over an issue of ... you guessed it ... censorship! I guess I was naïve enough to believe that a CompuServe forum existed that had no such thing as censorship ... yeah right!

Since then, I have had the distinct impression that MGF has been checking, very closely, the content of *The Planeteer* and the last straw was when I felt issue 9 was unacceptably delayed.

So, having struck out on my own, I am attempting to form *The Planeteer* into what I believe it should be. *The Planeteer* will still be available in downloadable forms (Windows Help & PDF) but from now on it will, primarily, be a Web-based publication.

The one thing I am sure of (and please feel free to check out The Planeteer's Mission statement) and that is that I will NEVER let The Planeteer be censored again. Distributors must understand that they have only one decision to make with regard to this publication ... distribute or not ... their choice!



More and more as I browse the web I get hit by cookies. Now, at first, I didn't know what they were and I'm betting there are still a number people out there who still don't know what they are. The name implies that they are something nice (like Fortune Cookies) but nothing could be further from the truth.

To quote the document included with *Cookie Crusher* the anti-cookie software I'm currently evaluating "A cookie is encoded data that a web site sends to your browser to store on your computer's hard drive for later retrieval. The cookie could be an identification number that tracks you from one visit to the next, the current time and date, or one of many other pieces of information the server has been set up to ask you for." It's true that cookie's could be used to help us but more often than not it seems they are being used merely to provide information about you to someone else. Again quoting *Cookie Crusher* "Cookies can generate profiles of your visiting habits -- monitoring what pages you visit, and what you like to access (for marketing purposes I imagine). Most people consider this practice a violation of their privacy."

UK Online was the last place I expected to find them but on one page, whilst looking for help on Guest Books, I got hit by two of the things. Now I dislike Cookie's because of what they represent (someone else's attempt to track me & my habits) but I realise that on a private web-site someone else puts up they can do pretty much what they like and my only choice is to choose whether or not to visit. But on my own ISP surely it is different?

I e-mailed UK Online with the following arguments:

- I pay a fixed monthly fee for a service that provides me with a fixed amount of time online. Unlike CompuSpend (sic), who simply charge me extra if I overrun, I get cut dead by the ISP until my online allocation is renewed the following month if I exceed it.
- By using cookies the company responsible (UK Online) are downloading something to MY machine to be later uploaded, presumably (as I thought then), for it's own purposes.

I stated that I find it unacceptable that the ISP I pay to provide me with such a service then introduce something (cookies) that delay the loading of web-pages and potentially put me in danger of losing access to my account for up to a month. I also stated quite categorically that in any case I have never given them or anyone else permission to download anything to or upload anything from my computer.

The reply I received told me that:

- The cookies were placed there by EMap (one of the worst abusers of personal privacy ... more often than not I have found EMap to be behind the use of cookies upon my internet travels) who UK Online pay to manage their web-pages.
- EMap use those web pages to sell advertising space to other companies.
- The cookie comes from the advert on the page.

- Cookies just store a single ID number on a visitors' computer (in this case mine!), so that certain sites can uniquely identify visitors.
- Cookies were so small it shouldn't really delay the download time of the pages visited

As suggested I took the matter further raising the matter to UK Online's Editor. I told him that I had no wish to be identified (uniquely or otherwise) by anyone except the UK Online system itself, nor did I want anyone generating a profile of me & my visiting habits. I expressed the opinion that such cookies might lead to more junk e-mail (see Editorial: Issue 09). I made it clear that the profiles were being generated without my consent and the fact that the cookies were small (so are viruses) was completely irrelevant. No doubt this means is that I am going to get more junk-mail & worse still electronic junk mail which I have to pay to download. These profiles consist of information collected about me without my prior permission

I made it clear that I objected to EMap's use of cookies at all times but accepted that, when deciding to follow a link to one of their adverts, I will get tracked. I said I understood why UK Online had handed management of their web-site to another company but that I was, as a result, spending more time on UK Online than I should.



Ever since leaving CompuSpend I have begun to frequent the greatest forum for the discussion of matters relating to VGA Planets i.e. alt.games.vga-planets newsgroup. I have to say it is a wonderful place to lurk though I tend to be slightly more vocal than a true lurker (but only just).

In this forum all matters relating to the best play-by-email game ever devised (and, yes, I AM biased!) are discussed here and more besides ... usually over 500 messages a day are posted to the newsgroup more at weekends.

Now 500 messages is a lot to monitor and if I didn't have a method for checking the forum I could be reading it all day. So I tend to look for replies to my own postings, anything from Tim Wisseman (**Error! Reference source not found.**) and a general scan down the forum for anything of interest. My impression is that there is a lot of useful material in the newsgroup, a lot of intelligent people and some complete whacko's. Perhaps whacko's is not the right word but I recall one thread where a number of non-PC people started (as they always do) to suggest that Tim Wisseman write a version of VGA Planets for the Sun (MAC, NextSTEP, UNIX or whatever). Tim refused, giving some very sound reasons for doing so. The next stage is that some individuals start suggesting that he give them the code and, apparently being really nice and helpful (perhaps some of them really are genuine in this respect I wouldn't know!), so that they could create a version for their specific platform. Each time they start saying how Tim would get all the major credit and that they would not really be doing anything except porting it to another platform and that would be reward in itself. Each time Tim refuses and eventually the debate, if debate it can be called, gets heated. My impression is of Tim as a besieged fortress, surrounded by loyal supporters but with a pack of wolves (the hostile programmers) circling warily around the peripheries and even into the supporting groups). During this time Tim's supporters rally round and finally the argument begins to die after having widened into a debate about the various merits and demerits of the DOS, Windows & PC's versus the various other systems and operating systems out there.

Now I will be first to admit that the PC platform isn't perfect, but every hardware platform has it's faults and no operating system is perfect. I presume the reason why Tim Wisseman chose the PC platform over the others is that he did so because it has the largest user-base and that he wanted to make money from it. Tim, I believe, is proud of what he has created and although concentrating on version 4 still supports earlier versions ... he has a lot of enthusiastic fans out here and he is reasonably loyal to them. But if he exported VGA Planets to another, less popular, platform (and let's be honest here ... EVERY other platform in the world is less popular than the PC) then he would double his support load. And for what? Tim is not an altruist (my opinion) he's in it because he wants to be in it but he is nevertheless in it for the money! Every platform he adds to the product creates a

whole new set of support problems, a whole new market to build and various other problems I can't even begin to imagine.

Tim wrote VGA Planets for the PC platform. The current standard version is WinPlan and the major future version is for 32 bit Windows i.e. Windows 95/NT. All current versions are written in Visual Basic. But, and this is the crucial issue that all of these people seem to forget, the idea is Tim's, the programs are Tim's, the plans for the future are Tim's and above all the code is Tim's. So, if for no other reason than he simply wants it that way (be that selfish or not), then that is the way it should (& undoubtedly will) be.

The message to you "the hostile programmers" out there is ... live with it!



This month I'm not gonna try and bullshit you with promises that The Planeteer continues on a bimonthly schedule though that remains my aim! This issue has been delayed by personal problems and (to a much lesser degree) an earlier lack of contributions.

There will be no submissions deadline for Issue #11 as I plan to publish the magazine whenever I get sufficient contributions.

Please note that I try to 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 or issue #9.... 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 #11



Important Announcement

I have it in mind to feature some 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. Hell, I don't mind if it's something I strongly disagree with as long as it is a well-designed and thought-provoking argument.

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 10, July 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 downloadable files (currently WinHelp & PDF formats) 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. In all cases the associated text file **MUST** be included.*
- *Articles submitted to The Planeteer may not be posted to alternative locations unless the explicit permission of the editor or author is sought (& gained). In the event that such articles are posted, without appropriate permissions, the Editor of The Planeteer will seek to have those articles removed at the earliest opportunity.*
- *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 & PDF formats only. The official HTML version will be available at: <http://web.ukonline.co.uk/members/undead>.*

Note: The Editor of The Planeteer does not sanction the formatting of The Planeteer into an altered WinHelp/PDF form of any sort 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.

Any webmaster who wish their sites to be included on the new Planeteer Links Page please contact me.

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!

Again this month we feature the work of Eduardo 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

Eduardo "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 neighbourhood 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 travelling 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 defence 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, defence 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 defence 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). Travelling 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 chunnelled. 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 chunnelled"! (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								
Turn	Race 1				Race 2			
	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), Tranquillity 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, Guilherme 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.
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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 defence 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 defence 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 defence). 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, defence 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.

M

aster at Arms

The Effects of Weapons against Naval Targets

by Sirius¹

This is the second part of a paper reporting the findings from my research about how weapons really work in VGA Planets.

Note: that the most up-to-date version available to me will only be available at The Planeteer Web-Site – Ed

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8. The timing of weapon systems

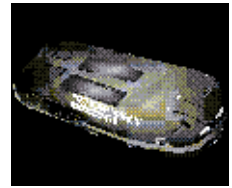
So far we were only concerned with how much effect the weapons have with a single hit. But in battle it is of at least equal importance how often and how fast the weapon systems will be able to fire.

There are random elements in the timing sequence of all weapon systems and in fact, the random outcome of battles between roughly equivalent opponents is a function of three important random effects: the timing of weapons, the hitting or missing of torpedoes and the number of target locks that fighters get on other fighters.

¹ Jan Klingele, 100441.3504@CompuServe.Com

a. Torpedo launchers

All torpedo tubes are loaded at the beginning of a battle, unless the shields of the ship are not at full strength, and will start firing at a distance of 30000 kellicams (this distance is reached 140 microns after the beginning of a battle between two ships).



Torpedo tubes reload and re-fire at a random time interval between 30 and 42 microns, where the probability of a faster reload and re-fire increases with the tech level of the torpedo.² Typical average times needed to fire again are:

Torpedo	Mk 1	Prot.	Mk 2	Gam.	Mk 3	Mk 4	Mk 5	Mk 6	Mk 7	Mk 8
microns	42	39	36	34	33	33	32	32	31	31

Note that all numbers are rounded, because the small differences between some of the launcher types are difficult to measure exactly. The increased reloading speed for high tech torpedo tubes can make an important difference in prolonged battles. In a battle between two Annihilation Class torpedo armed ships (1260 Kt battle mass with full Engine Defence Bonus), an Annihilation with Mark VII's will be able to fire about two more full volleys of torpedoes than an Annihilation equipped with Mark I launchers. Against a large fighter carrier however, even an Annihilation is probably not going to live long enough to justify the really expensive torpedo launchers, if cheaper (slower) launchers do the same damage per hit.

All torpedo types have the same probability of about a third to miss their target. Chris Holz has reported (and Tim Wisseman has confirmed later on) that the theoretical analysis of the VCR code indicates that 34% of all torpedoes fail to hit their target and not 35% as the original documentation says.

b. Beam weapons

Beam weapons are fully charged at the beginning of a battle as long as the shield power is at 100%, otherwise they are not charged at all. Beam weapons need about 200 microns to recharge fully. The charging time does not depend on the tech level of the beam weapon. If the enemy ship is within the firing range of 20000 kellicams, beams will re-fire with a 50% or higher energy load level after approximately 100 microns, although the cycle time varies randomly in a typical range from about 90 to 110 microns.



According to Chris Holz's interpretation of the VCR code beams have a 50% chance to recharge one percentage point every micron. The theoretical fastest time to re-fire would be 50 microns, but this is very unlikely. As soon as a beam is sufficiently charged, it has a 30% chance per micron to actually fire against a ship or planet. Most beams are fired in the next

² The firing cycle for Mark I torpedoes is actually not a random process, they will fire after precisely 42 microns.

few microns after the re-firing level has been reached, but occasionally the firing is delayed quite long. I could even observe battles, where a beam recharged nearly to full strength before re-firing.

Beam weapons need about 3 times longer to partially recharge than a good torpedo launcher to reload. This means that a beam weapon will deliver only between a half and an eighth of the amount of damage in the same time than a torpedo launcher of equivalent rating. The relation is about 1:2, if the target is so big, that all weapons do only one percent of damage and only the firing speed and the fact, that a third of the torpedoes miss their target, count. If the target is small, then the ratio goes up to approximately 1:8, because torpedoes do double the damage than beams, but miss a third of the time. The beams do only half of the damage since they recharge only approximately halfway and because beams fire at a third of the speed of torpedoes.

c. Fighters

The launch of a fighter is also a random event, but on an average every fighter bay will launch a fighter every 22 microns or about 0.045 fighters per micron.³ The more fighter bays a carrier has, the faster she can launch her fighters. You can see the speed of the launch in a VCR from the angle of the line that the fighters form, when they are launched at the beginning of a battle: the steeper the line, the faster the launch.



There is a limit of 19 fighters for every side as the maximum number of fighters that can be spaceborne at the same time. A carrier will stop launching fighters as soon as she has already 19 fighters flying until either a fighter is shot down or has returned to the carrier and is put back on board. A carrier will also never launch more than one fighter in the same micron.

The Solar Federation can (depending on the host settings) enjoy a special Fed Crew Bonus, which gives Fed carriers not only two additional fighter bays, as it has been stated previously, but three additional bays. Tim Wisseman has also confirmed this in a conference on CompuServe. In contrast to the documentation, the additional fighter bays are given to Fed carriers even if they have already ten bays, which brings these ships up to a launch capacity of thirteen fighter bays.

After fighters have been launched, they start immediately to travel towards the enemy ship. If they are not destroyed before getting close to the enemy, they fire several beam shots and turn around to travel back to their own carrier. Fighters fly at a speed of 400 kellicams per micron (k/m). Since ships move with a speed of 100 k/m, fighters approach them with a relative speed of 500 k/m. Stationary planets are approached with 400 k/m. The time required for a full round-trip depends therefore on the distance between the launching carrier and the target.

At the beginning of a ship-to-ship-battle, when fighters are launched at maximum distance, they need about 118 microns to fly the distance to the enemy ship and another 71 microns to return to their carrier. Once the fighters get - after 111 microns - close to the enemy ship they

³ The VCR code implies a theoretical launch speed of one fighter every 20 microns or 0.05 fighters per micron.

fire usually seven, occasionally six, shots against this ship. Launched at maximum distance fighters can fire an average of 6.8 shots in 189 microns or 0.036 shots per micron.

As the battle continues, the two ships approach each other and the fighters need decreasingly less time to fly from one ship to the other and back. At the minimal distance of 3000 kellicams, where the two ships stop approaching each other,⁴ fighters can also fire their beams more often - nine times instead of seven - against the enemy. At this shortest possible distance the fighters need to be spaceborne only for an average 23 microns to complete a full round trip. They open fire after 3 microns and fire a beam shot every micron until they turn back 9 microns later to spend another 11 microns on the way back to their carrier. If launched at the minimum distance, fighters can fire 9 shots in 23 microns or 0.391 shots per micron.

While the impact of a single hit by a fighter stays the same, the ability to hit a target more often is greatly increased for fighters with a shorter range to the target. Especially when fighter bays have to delay the launch of additional fighters because the maximum of 19 spaceborne fighters is already reached, the shrinking distance between two ships in battle improves the cycle times of fighters vastly.

9. Sequence of full battles

We shall now put everything together and see how ships with different weapon systems will perform in battle, how the weapon systems will interact with each other and what effects specific weapons will have during the different phases in battles between the most important ship types.

a. Non-carrier battles (torpedo ships only)



The sequence of a battle, where no fighters are involved, is pretty much forward and quite predictable. The two opponents will approach each other until they get into torpedo firing range. This occurs after 140 microns, when all torpedo tubes will be fired for the first time. Depending on the class of the torpedo launchers, this will happen nearly simultaneously or over a period of up to 10 microns. From then on the torpedo launchers will continue firing with average firing cycle times between 31 and 42 microns as a function of the torpedo class.

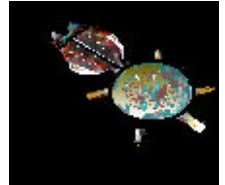
At 190 microns after the start of the battle, when typically two full volleys of torpedoes have already been fired, all beam weapons fire for the first time: fully charged and with full power. From this point of time onwards the beam weapons will re-fire at intervals of roughly 100 microns, although the individual timing may be randomly somewhat shorter or longer.

⁴ Please note that the display of the WinPlan VCR for the minimal distance between two ships is wrong. It displays 3200 kellicams, although the true distance is only 3000 kellicams. Tim Wisseman has also confirmed the minimal distance to be 3000 kellicams. The display in the DOS version of the VCR program is correct.

When the beams fire for the second time at about 290 microns, good torpedo tubes have already fired five times.

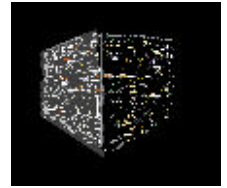
Please keep in mind that beam weapons recharge only about halfway before re-firing with about half strength and that about a third of all torpedoes will miss their target, while all beams will hit the opponent. Since the firing of beams and torpedoes is independent of each other, it is possible to calculate the amount of damage inflicted by each weapon system over time.

The following table shows how much damage one weapon of each type will inflict on a medium size ship of 451 Kt. battle mass per micron as an average over time. Higher numbers mean that the weapon system is able to deliver more impact onto the target in the same amount of time.



Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	0.047	0.031	0.016	Laser	0.010	0.010	0.010
Proton	0.068	0.034	0.034	X-Ray	0.010	0.010	0.010
Mk 2	0.092	0.037	0.018	Plasma	0.020	0.010	0.000
Gamma	0.039	0.019	0.097	Blaster	0.030	0.020	0.010
Mk 3	0.120	0.040	0.060	Positron	0.040	0.020	0.010
Mk 4	0.240	0.060	0.100	Disruptor	0.030	0.020	0.030
Mk 5	0.268	0.062	0.124	Heavy Blaster	0.050	0.020	0.020
Mk 6	0.309	0.083	0.165	Phaser	0.040	0.020	0.030
Mk 7	0.383	0.085	0.192	Heavy Disruptor	0.040	0.020	0.040
Mk 8	0.426	0.106	0.255	Heavy Phaser	0.050	0.020	0.030

The next table shows the average impact of weapons over time on the biggest torpedo ship: an Annihilation Cube with full Engine Defence Bonus and a battle mass of 1260 Kt.



Torpedoes	Shield	Hull	Crew	Beams	Shield	Hull	Crew
Mk 1	0.031	0.016	0.016	Laser	0.010	0.010	0.000
Proton	0.034	0.017	0.017	X-Ray	0.010	0.010	0.010
Mk 2	0.037	0.018	0.000	Plasma	0.010	0.010	0.000
Gamma	0.019	0.019	0.039	Blaster	0.020	0.010	0.000
Mk 3	0.060	0.020	0.020	Positron	0.020	0.010	0.000
Mk 4	0.100	0.020	0.040	Disruptor	0.020	0.010	0.010
Mk 5	0.103	0.021	0.041	Heavy Blaster	0.020	0.010	0.010
Mk 6	0.124	0.021	0.062	Phaser	0.020	0.010	0.010
Mk 7	0.149	0.021	0.064	Heavy Disruptor	0.020	0.010	0.020
Mk 8	0.170	0.043	0.085	Heavy Phaser	0.020	0.010	0.010

Now let us suppose we have a 100% Engine Defence Bonus and the following two ships fighting: a Diamond Flame with StarDrive1s, 6 Mark VIII Launchers and 10 Heavy Phasers against an Annihilation with Transwarps, 10 Mark VII Launchers and 10 X-Ray Lasers. The Diamond Flame's weapon systems will deliver a shield loss of $6 * 0.170 \% + 10 * 0.020 \% = 1.22 \%$ per micron and a hull damage of $6 * 0.043 \% + 10 * 0.01 \% = 0.358 \%$ per micron. Therefore the Diamond Flame will need an average 82 microns to take the Annihilation's shields down and another 279 microns to destroy her hull. The Annihilation on the other hand will pump out $10 * 0.383 \% + 10 * 0.010 \% = 3.93 \%$ per micron shield loss and $10 * 0.106 \% + 10 * 0.010 \% = 1.16 \%$ per micron hull damage. Therefore she needs 25 microns to lower the Flame's shields and 86 microns to destroy her hull. In other words: In the average battle the Annihilation will destroy the Flame about 111 microns after weapon fire has started (250 microns after the start of the battle).

And yes, I am aware of the fact, that beams start firing later than the torpedoes. But this delay is mostly compensated in many cases by the fact, that the beams will be stronger on their first shot. Therefore the above calculation is not 100% precise, but typically quite a good approximation for all the random events that occur during battle.

b. Battles with one carrier

With the introduction of fighters on one side, the situation becomes more complicated, because there is an interaction between the weapon systems. The beams of the non-fighter-side become anti-fighter guns and are typically no longer



available to target the enemy's carrier, at least as long as there are launched fighters available as targets.

Beam weapons can fire against incoming fighters already with a 40% charge level. The 60% energy level reported in the original documentation is not correct. To reload 40% of their capacity beams need on the average about 80 microns. When a beam weapon has the required energy level and at least one spaceborne fighter is present as a target, then the beam has a 20% chance to fire against one fighter.⁵ On the average the corresponding 80% chance not to fire against a fighter leads to a delay of 3 microns before a fighter is shot down.

Only if the firing against a fighter is delayed so long, that the beam weapon has reached a charge level of 50% in the meantime, there is the possibility that the beam will fire against the capital ship and not against a fighter. The probability for this to occur is quite small, it is only in the area of 0.5%. So all beams will primarily fire against enemy fighters and not against the enemy ship. Only if there are no enemy fighters spaceborne when the charge level allows the re-firing of a beam weapon, then it becomes likely that the beam will target the carrier

Since beams fire about every 83 microns, they are able to shoot down a little bit more than 0.012 fighters per micron. On the other hand fighter bays are able to launch 0.045 to 0.05 fighters per micron. Therefore it takes slightly more than 4 beams to shoot down all fighters which one bay can launch and about 8.5 beams to neutralise two fighter bays. Even a battleship with 10 beams cannot shoot down all fighters launched by a carrier with three or more bays.⁶

So the typical torpedo-ship-against-carrier-battle will involve fighters and torpedoes damaging their target as well as beam weapons fired against the non-carrier. The impact of the torpedoes and the carrier's beams is of course the same as in a battle with torpedo ships only.

The effect of the fighters is limited by the fact, that only a maximum of 19 fighters can be spaceborne at the same time. The impact of the fighters is therefore not directly proportional to the number of fighter bays.

With a medium or larger carrier with 7 fighter bays or more and a torpedo ship with 10 beams, the battle sequence looks approximately like this:

At Micron			
0	-	20	10 fighters launched and immediately destroyed
10	-	48	19 fighters launched, and moving as a first wave towards the target
80	-	110	10 fighters destroyed by the recharged beams and re-launched as second wave
135	-	150	the remaining 9 fighters of the first wave reach the target and score about 60 to 63 hits against the shields
141	-	152	first volley of torpedoes fired

⁵ This is a theoretical figure from the VCR code. I was not able to test it.

⁶ As long as the carrier has sufficient fighters on board. A Patriot, which can carry only 30 fighters, will always fight very poorly against a battleship with 10 beams, because she runs out of fighters soon.

160	-	205	recharged beams fire at fighters mainly from the second wave, some target returning fighters, a third more dispersed wave of fighters is launched
167	-	190	second wave reaches the target, decimated by beam fire they score 40 to 70 hits
190	-	195	the carrier's beams fire at the torpedo ship
172	-	194	second volley of torpedoes fired (depending on torpedo type)
203	-	230	third volley of torpedoes fired
212	-		the third, more dispersed wave of fighters reaches the target and scores the remaining hits
234	-		possibly a fourth volley torpedoes is commenced
234	-	250	the torpedo ship is destroyed

If the carrier has less fighter bays than about four bays plus the number of bays neutralised by the opponent's beams, the fighter waves tend to be more dispersed and the fight lasts longer. If the torpedo ship has fewer beams, then the fighter waves are more solid and contain more fighters, which makes the fight shorter. If the beams of the carrier are powerful, then the battle is shortened. If the carrier is relatively light, then the battle might end earlier due to the destruction of the carrier by torpedo hits. A higher Engine Defence Bonus typically helps the carrier more, since the impact of fighter hits is not reduced with an increased battle mass beyond the 320 Kt limit, but the impact of torpedo hits is further reduced. This is especially notable for fights between battleships and lighter carriers like the Crystalline Thunder or the Fed Kittyhawk.

Adding more fighter bays to the carrier shows little effect. The fighters become launched slightly faster, but the maximum number of spaceborne fighters prevents this small speed increase from translating into a significantly higher weapon impact on the target. The only real difference that may happen is that some torpedoes are not fired in the fourth volley, because the fight is finished a few microns earlier. At long distances (and in a fight between a carrier and a non-carrier, one ship is always destroyed before the ships get really close to each other) a high number of fighter bays do not increase the effectiveness of the fighters significantly. A Virgo with 8 bays has therefore about the same impact as a Biocide with 10 bays.

To summarise the (large) carrier versus (large) torpedo ship battle: Within about 240 microns all the following happens: a) the torpedo ship will fire its beams three times and destroy the corresponding number of incoming fighters (maximum 30), b) the torpedo ship fires three to four volleys of torpedoes (maximum 30 to 40), c) the carrier's beams fire once onto the torpedo ship and d) the fighters score enough hits to destroy the torpedo ship.

Against ships over 320 Kt, all fighters of the carrier together deliver an average impact (shield loss and hull damage) in the area of 0.8 % per micron. If we consider only the time period after the first fighter has actually reached its target (at 135 microns after the beginning of the battle, when no other weapons have yet fired at capital targets) the average impact of the entire fighter weapon system is in the range of 1.7 to 2.0 % per micron.

c. Battles between two carriers

In battles between two carriers, both sides are launching fighters into combat. This has the consequence, that all beam weapons are targeted against fighters and are generally not available to fire onto the enemy's hull. The effect of the beam defence against fighters at long range is the same like in the one-carrier-battle: about 8.5 beams are necessary to neutralise two fighter bays.



The main difference to the one-carrier-battle is however, that the fighters will interact with the opponent's fighters. Fighters can and will shoot down other fighters. Own fighters therefore form a defensive barrier against incoming enemy fighters.

A fighter has a chance of somewhat more than 5 % to shoot down another fighter that is passing it on the way towards the enemy. Fighters shoot only seldom against other fighters while they are returning to their own carrier. A single fighter may shoot down more than one other fighter and its ability to fire against the capital ship is not reduced by firing against enemy fighters. On first sight >5 % could seem to be a relatively small probability for a successful intercept of a fighter, but the odds for the destruction of a fighter are all cumulative with every pass that occurs between fighters.

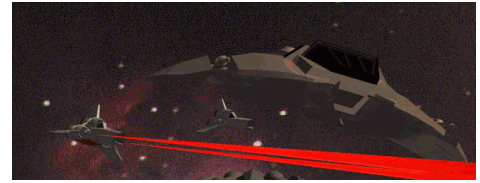
The VCR code shows that the odds of >5% for a successful fighter intercept are the outcome of two combined random events. The first condition is that two opposing fighters have to meet at the exact same location (the same 100 kellicams interval) in space. Since fighters travel with a relative speed of 800 k/m towards each other, the chances of meeting at the same place are 1/8 or 12.5%. The second condition is to get an actual weapon lock onto a fighter at the same location. The probability for this is very close to 50%. Therefore the theoretical chances for a fighter intercept are 6.25% per fighter pass for each side.

The probability that an individual fighter will successfully pass all 19 enemy fighters is therefore only in the area of 35 %. If two waves of 19 fighters are launched against each other, on average 10.5 fighters are shot down and only 8.5 fighters survive to continue their flight towards the enemy. But the remaining 8.5 fighters will face another wave of enemy fighters and therefore suffer further losses, since the same number of fighters, which the enemy lost during the encounter, will be launched from the enemy carrier and will have to be passed before the enemy carrier can be reached. Combined with some anti-fighter defensive beam fire from the target carrier, it is unlikely that any fighter will make it through the defensive barrier formed by the enemy fighters as long as the enemy is able to maintain a sufficient number of fighters in the barrier.

The defensive or shielding effect of a fighter barrier is much larger than the effect of anti-fighter beam fire. Therefore only a few lucky fighters will occasionally succeed to break through the barrier and to reach the target capital ship. Usually a carrier suffers no or very little shield loss during the first phases of a battle against another carrier, where a torpedo ship would already receive substantial damage.

During the long range phase the number of fighter bays is not very important, as long as sufficient fighter bays are available to get eventually all 19 fighters (after losses due to beam fire) into space and to keep them there. As we shall see later, 7 fighter bays are usually sufficient to launch the 19 possible fighters even against 10 beams.

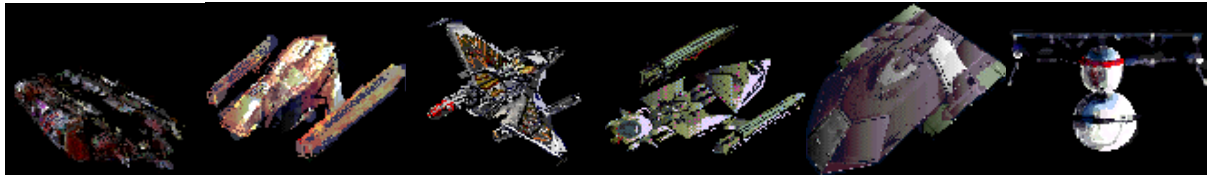
If one side is able to launch fighters clearly faster than the other side, then the battle zone between the fighters (where the two defensive barriers meet) will be pushed towards the slower launching carrier. In this case the additional time required for launching fighter by the slower side is compensated with additional travel time for the fighters of the faster side. Only if one side is so slow in launching fighters, that the enemy can destroy fighters faster than fighters can be re-launched (which occurs when there are only four bays or less), then the fighter barrier will collapse and the ship takes damage early on.



Basically what you are doing with the fighter barrier is to trade fighter for fighter. Since the odds in shooting a fighter down are symmetrical for both sides,⁷ the enemy gets a chance to shoot at one of your fighters every time you get a chance to shoot at him. Therefore you need to re-launch statistically one new fighter for every fighter you intercept. The fighter barrier is only effective, if you are able to keep close to 19 fighters in it, because the probability of fighters passing through the barrier increases with a smaller number of fighters considerably.

So the necessary condition to keep the fighter barrier up is to be able to keep all 19 fighters in space travelling towards the enemy, which becomes increasingly more difficult, as the distance to the enemy shrinks. Shorter travel times mean shorter times until the fighters become destroyed in the barrier, which requires shorter times to re-launch new fighters. The minimum distance down to which a carrier can successfully keep all her fighters constantly in space is therefore dependent on the number of fighter bays. The following two tables show for carriers of all different „sizes“ the average minimum times that are required to launch 19 fighters. The distance that the fighters can travel towards the enemy during this time period is the minimum distance required for a full fighter barrier.

⁷ Chris Holz has found in the VCR source that the odds are actually 49.5% for the left and 50.5% for the right side to have a successful fighter intercept. This small difference does not seem to be relevant.



Carrier class	Gemini	Red Wing	Valiant Wind	Bloodfang	Madonnzilla	Patriot
Fighter bays	1	2	3	4	5	6
Beam weapons	4	2	7	7	4	2
Time to launch one fighter	20.833	10.417	6.944	5.208	4.167	3.472
Fighters launched per micron	0.048	0.096	0.144	0.192	0.240	0.288
F. destroyed by beams per micron	0.048	0.024	0.084	0.084	0.048	0.024
Time to launch a full barrier	396	198	132	99	79	66
Necessary distance (at 500 k/m)	197'900	99'000	66'000	49'500	39'600	33'000
Minimal distance reached at micron	-700	-205	-40	43	92	125
At 3200 kellicams: Carriers still moving						
Fighters in defensive barrier	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.2	1.5	1.8
% Fighters intercepted in Barrier	2%	4%	6%	7%	9%	11%
Impact launched (6.8 shots per fighter)	0.326	0.653	0.979	1.306	1.632	1.958
Impact lost in barrier (5.8 shots/fighter)	0.005	0.021	0.046	0.082	0.126	0.180
Impact lost to beams (2.5 shots/f.)	0.119	0.059	0.208	0.208	0.119	0.059
Net impact done (% per micron)	0.202	0.573	0.725	1.016	1.387	1.719
At 3000 kellicams: Carriers stationary						
Fighters moving forward to target	0.3	1.0	1.2	1.8	2.6	3.3
% Fighters intercepted in Barrier	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Impact launched (9 shots per fighter)	0.432	0.864	1.296	1.728	2.160	2.592
Impact lost to beams (3.1 shots/f.)	0.151	0.075	0.264	0.264	0.151	0.075
Net impact done (% per micron)	0.281	0.789	1.032	1.464	2.009	2.517

Most of the light carriers have generally not enough fighter bays to form an effective fighter barrier. Carriers with 3 or fewer fighter bays launch fighters so slowly, that they will never have the 19 possible fighters simultaneously in space. Carriers with 4 and 5 bays could theoretically have a full fighter barrier out, but by the time they could have launched all necessary fighters, the ships are already closer together than the necessary minimal distance, so that some fighters have already turned back before the last fighters are launched. In the first table only carriers with 6 fighter bays are effectively able to form a full fighter barrier, but not for very long and only if there are not too many beams on the enemy ship.



Carrier class	Instru- mentality	Virgo	Fed Kittyhawk	Gorbie	Fed Biocide
Fighter bays	7	8	9	10	13
Beam weapons	4	10	4	10	10
Time to launch one fighter	2.976	2.604	2.315	2.083	1.603
Fighters launched per micron	0.336	0.384	0.432	0.480	0.624
F. destroyed by beams per micron	0.048	0.120	0.048	0.120	0.120
Time to launch a full barrier	57	49	44	40	30
Necessary distance (at 500 k/m)	28'300	24'700	22'000	19'800	15'200
Minimal distance reached at micron	149	167	180	191	214
At 3200 kellicams: Carriers still moving					
Fighters in defensive barrier	2.2	2.5	2.8	3.1	4.0
% Fighters intercepted in Barrier	12%	14%	16%	17%	22%
Impact launched (6.8 shots per fighter)	2.285	2.611	2.938	3.264	4.243
Impact lost in barrier (5.8 shots/fighter)	0.243	0.314	0.394	0.482	0.792
Impact lost to beams (2.5 shots/f.)	0.119	0.297	0.119	0.297	0.297
Net impact done (% per micron)	1.923	2.000	2.425	2.485	3.154
At 3000 kellicams: Carriers stationary					
Fighters moving forward to target	3.7	3.9	4.9	5.0	6.8
% Fighters intercepted in Barrier	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Impact launched (9 shots per fighter)	3.024	3.456	3.888	4.320	5.616
Impact lost to beams (3.1 shots/f.)	0.151	0.377	0.151	0.377	0.377
Net impact done (% per micron)	2.873	3.079	3.737	3.943	5.239

As you can see, the large carriers with many fighter bays have a considerable advantage in this field. All carriers with more than 6 bays can form a full fighter barrier and most of them can maintain the barrier for quite some time during the battle. With a little bit of luck the battle between two Fed Biocides will be so well balanced, that even after 225 to 230 microns the shields of both carriers will not have a single scratch, although each carrier will have lost already about 75 fighters in the intense zone of weapon energy between them. This shows clearly that commanders of ships like a Kittyhawk under Fed control or even an Instrumentality must never forget that their ships are severely hampered by their limited cargo space, since they may be out of fighters before they can even reach the enemy. So the first long range phase of a heavy-carrier-to-carrier-fight is distinguished by two facts: it is very

expensive in fighters and there is hardly any weapon impact, even up to the moment in time when one of these carriers would have already almost completely destroyed a big torpedo ship.

Ultimately however, the distance between the two battling carriers will become so small, that even the most powerful carriers will not be able keep enough fighters in the barrier. Consequently more and more fighters will reach their targets and open fire onto the carriers, which are going to receive more and more damage as the distance shrinks further. After the minimum distance for the defensive barrier has been passed, the carriers will gradually have less fighters out and the effectiveness of the barrier is reduced down to the point that is shown in the tables under the heading „At 3200 kellicams:“. This is the latest point of time when the two opposing carriers are still moving and shows the fighter barrier at it's weakest stage.

At this distance fighters will be travelling only for about 10 microns towards the enemy and will be firing after 3 microns 6.8 times on the average. However they can be intercepted by enemy fighters only during the first 6 microns of their journey, since they will have passed the opposing carrier and therefore all defending fighters after 6 microns and fire their remaining shots from a position behind the enemy ship.

The effectiveness of the anti-fighter beam defence is reduced even further, because beams may target also fighters on the way back, when they have already fired all their shots. The average fighter shot down by the ship's beams has fired 4.3 times against the ship, so that a hit by the defending beams prevents on the average 2.5 fighter hits.



The carrier tables show the number of fighters in the barrier at the 3200 kellicams distance, as well as the protection offered by the barrier, which is the number of shots per micron that are not fired against the ship because of the fighters shot down in the barrier. The figures for the equivalent protection by beam defence fire are also shown. If you deduct the two protection figures from the damage potential of the fighters launched by the opponent (number of fighters multiplied by 6.8 shots per fighter), you get the actual net impact (shield loss or hull damage) done by the enemy fighters. The net fighter impact for one side is a function of this side's number of fighter bays, the other side's number of fighter bays and the other side's number of beams. The last line in the table shows the net fighter impact under the assumption, that two ships of the same class fight each other. This calculation requires of course, that both sides have sufficient fighters available and that both ships have a battle mass of at least 320 Kt.⁸

At 3000 kellicams the situation changes drastically, since the two carriers will stop approaching each other. The opposing fighters are now all launched 3000 kellicams apart from each other, which is not a multiple of 400 kellicams. Because fighters move 400 kellicams every micron, they can never meet with hostile fighters at the same point of space and there are consequently no more dogfights between fighters. In other words: the defensive barrier collapses entirely.

Furthermore fighters have more time to shoot at the enemy carrier, since their target does not move anymore. Now they can fire nine times against it. The beam defence on the other hand becomes slightly more effective since the relative speed of approaching fighters is only 400 k/m instead of 500 k/m. The defending beams have therefore a bit more time to destroy incoming fighters before they have delivered all their shots. For every fighter destroyed by

⁸ The tables use a launch speed of 0.048 fighters per bay and micron and a fighter intercept probability of 6.0%. These values are a compromise between my empirical findings and the theoretical values.

beam fire, an average of 3.1 fighter hits against the ship are prevented. As you can see from the carrier tables, the defensive effect of the beams is very small compared to the offensive power of the fighters at the 3000 kellicams battle distance. The tables show also for this case the damage potential of the launched fighters, the protection from damage by beam defensive fire and the net impact as the difference between the two figures.

Two points deserve special attention. The first and more important point is that the number of fighter bays makes a lot of difference in a close up fight. Carriers with a higher number of fighter bays have a very significant advantage. Especially heavy carriers with ten fighter bays (Biocide and Gorbie, but also Golem and Rush) become absolute deadly killers when they get thirteen bays under Fed control. Their ability to inflict per micron more than 5.2 percentage points of hull damage even on the largest ships is unmatched by any weapon system in the Echo Cluster. Not even the best defended ship with a Lizard crew can stand that kind of weapon power for long.⁹

The second interesting point is that you need about 11.5 beams to neutralise a single fighter bay at close distance, since the beam defence has become so ineffective against incoming fighters. It is likely that a ship with many beams facing an opponent with relatively few fighter bays will start targeting the enemy carrier with her beams frequently, since there are not always fighters in space available as targets. This will decrease the effectiveness of the anti-fighter fire by the beam weapon banks even further.

Since the number of beam weapons is more important at long distance (one fighter bay equals about four beams), while the number of fighter bays is more important at close distance (one fighter bay equals 11.5 beams), the overall effect is a mixture of the two components. It seems that in the entire fight as a rough average about 6 beam weapons more are needed to offset the advantage of one additional fighter bay. This explains, why a Rush (10 bays, 5 beams) or a Golem (10 bays, 6 beams) will generally win against a Virgo (8 bays, 10 beams).

The following table shows the battle performance of the „Big Five Carriers“ in the hands of their original owners (no Fed or Lizard combat bonuses). The numbers in the table are the average results of my experiments, where the two opponents had to fight for all possible random seeds¹⁰ and then to switch places (between the left and the right side of the VCR) to fight again for all possible random seeds. The quality of the engines and of the beam weapons does not influence the battle outcome, because nearly all impact comes from fighter hits and all five ships are well above 320 Kt battle mass. Since both the Biocide and the Gorbie have 10 bays and 10 beams, they are absolutely identical when fighting against carriers.

Odds for ship below to win (all sides)	against one of these opponents			
	Virgo	Rush	Golem	Bio/Gorbie
Virgo	50,00%	31,48%	26,15%	11,42%
Rush	68,52%	50,00%	44,24%	34,27%
Golem	73,85%	55,76%	50,00%	36,70%
Bio/Gorbie	88,58%	65,73%	63,30%	50,00%

⁹ with the possible exception of the Serpent's Venom, the Lizard king's modified Merlin with 18 beams and 12 enhanced Hell Hammer torpedo tubes. See The Undead Hedgehog's article „Final Conflict“ in the forth issue of the Planeteer for the story about this fictional ship.

¹⁰ The Host program uses only a certain range of random seeds that are passed to the VCR program.

Although the probabilities of the important events are symmetrical for both sides, I have found a significant advantage for the carrier on the left side in many carrier-to-carrier-battles (much more than in battles with only one or without a carrier). Overall the left side enjoys often a better fighter intercept ratio and a slightly faster fighter launch speed. Tim Wisseman and Chris Holz have confirmed, that this discrepancy does not come from differences in the code of the VCR program between the two sides, but is the result of an unfortunate bias in the generation of the pseudo random number in the VCR program. For the „Big Five“ the separate results for fighting on the left and on the right side are the following:

Odds for ship below if one of these opponents is on the right side

to win on left side	Virgo	Rush	Golem	Bio/Gorbie
Virgo	63.30%	49.54%	33.94%	17.43%
Rush	86.92%	63.30%	60.55%	60.38%
Golem	81.65%	72.22%	54.55%	42.20%
Bio/Gorbie	94.55%	91.59%	68.81%	70.64%

Odds for ship below if one of these opponents is on the left side

to win on right side	Virgo	Rush	Golem	Bio/Gorbie
Virgo	36.70%	13.08%	18.35%	5.45%
Rush	50.46%	36.70%	27.78%	8.41%
Golem	66.06%	39.45%	45.45%	31.19%
Bio/Gorbie	82.57%	39.62%	57.80%	29.36%

Tim Wisseman chose to overcome the left side advantage by giving the ship on the right hand side a 60% chance to receive a 360 Kt additional bonus mass. Although this seems to be a significant increase in battle mass, the effect is very small, since there is hardly any beam fire against the capital ships in a major carrier-to-carrier-battle. Also, all fighter hits have always the same impact no matter how much the target's mass exceeds the 320 Kt limit.¹¹

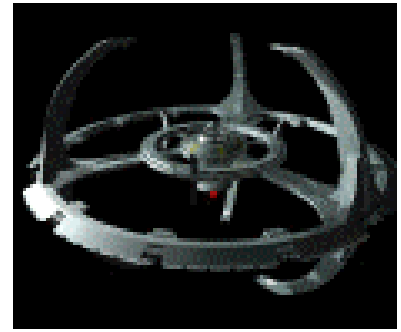
The 360 Kt bonus mass has a tremendous effect for carriers with a battle mass under 320 Kt (like the Fed Kittyhawk without an Engine Defence Bonus), but it does not change anything for the Big Five Carriers at all and is therefore totally ineffective to reduce the imbalance. I am currently conducting some more research to find a more suitable way to overcome the asymmetry between ships on the left and the right side of the VCR display.

¹¹ The 360 kt bonus mass is also given to torpedo ships on the right side that face a carrier. This is unfortunate, because in such a case there is only a small (if at all) imbalance between the left and the right side, but the effect of the increased mass is much more important, since all beams of the carrier shoot against the torpedo ship and not against fighters.

d. *Battles with a planet or starbase*

Planets and starbase's fight basically like carriers. A maxed out starbase on a fully populated world with 366 planetary defence posts has 19 planetary plus 60 starbase fighters, 19 planetary plus 5 starbase fighter launch bays, 10 Heavy Phasers and a battle mass of 666 Kt.

With more than 20 fighter bays, this maximum starbase is guaranteed to launch a fighter every micron, as long as the base has not 19 fighters out in space. This is even much faster than the launch speed of a Fed crewed Gorbie or Biocide. Such a starbase is a very powerful carrier, which is only hampered by its low storage capacity for fighters.



There are two important differences between a ship-to-ship- and a ship-to-planet-fight. The first difference is that there is no Engine Defence Bonus for ships attacking a planet. This makes ships with a hull mass of less than 320 Kt vulnerable against the defending fighters. The second difference is that only the ship moves. Therefore the relative speed between the two targets is only 100 kellicams per micron (as opposed to 200 kellicams per micron in ship-to-ship-battles). The slower relative speed is compensated only partially by the somewhat smaller starting distance of 54,000 kellicams (at micron 0) between a ship and a planet as compared with the 58,000 kellicams starting distance between two ships.

In a battle between a torpedo ship and a starbase the ship needs much longer (280 microns) to get into torpedo firing range compared with the case when the torpedo ship is facing a carrier. Since the planet is able to launch fighters from the beginning of the battle on, the starbase fights better than a carrier of equivalent specifications against the torpedo ship. Where a heavy battleship with 10 torpedo tubes can fire 30 to 40 Mark VIII's against a heavy carrier, the same battleship can fire only 20 to 30 Mark VIII's against a full starbase before the ship is destroyed. Because the fighters have to travel longer towards their target, the battle lasts longer and the beam defence against the fighters has more time to shoot them down. The battleship can shoot down up to 40 fighters from a starbase, while she can shoot down a maximum of 30 fighters from a heavy carrier. Since the starbase fighters (which are not replaced after each battle) are shot down before the planetary fighters (which are automatically replaced), a starbase tends to run out of fighters quickly and can be destroyed already by a pair of battleships.

In a battle between a carrier and a starbase the immobility of the planet is even more important. Since the starbase does not move, all fighters from the base are launched at the same location in space and can all travel only to the exactly same 100 kellicams intervals all the way to the enemy, which are in distances of full multiples of 400 kellicams from the starbase.

The carrier on the other hand moves and launches her fighters randomly over all 100 kellicams intervals. Therefore only a quarter of the carrier's fighter will be able to intercept the starbase's fighters and are therefore likely to be overwhelmed. Since a fighter barrier trades on the average fighter for fighter it is likely that three quarters of the starbase fighters (after losses due to defensive fire by beam weapons) reach their target and fire against the carrier. The fighters from the carrier are in a similar situation: three quarters of them are not facing any kind of fighter barrier and can therefore (after losses to defending beams) open fire on the starbase.

Although both sides can keep up their fighter barriers longer, because the critical minimal distance would be reached at a much later point of time, and although the longer cycle times of the fighters result in less impact per micron by the entire fighter systems of both sides, the fighter barrier is so ineffective that both sides take damage early on. During a fight between a carrier and a starbase the slower relative speed between the two opponents leads to a faster, shorter lasting battle.

Therefore a maxed out starbase has a relatively good chance to win a battle against a heavy carrier, although the base has less than 80 fighters in total. This is very different from a battle between two heavy carriers, where a carrier with only 80 fighters on board has absolutely no chance against a fully loaded heavy carrier.

10. Conclusions

The effectiveness of weapons in VGA Planets can be judged only against specific targets. You have to decide first which opponent you want to fight and then you can choose the ships best suited and arms for the task. As we have seen, the quality of the ship's overall offensive strength can be expressed by a single figure: the average amount of time necessary to destroy the opponent. This figure can be calculated by taking into consideration:

- a) The impact of weapon hits.
- b) The timing and probability of weapon hits.
- c) The protective effects of the enemy's weapons against fighter hits.

The shorter the time, which your ship (or ships) needs to destroy the enemy, is in comparison to the time the opponent needs, the better your chances are to win the fight. And that is the aim why you are sending armed starships into battle: to destroy the enemy as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Since your resources are, especially at the beginning of a game, quite limited, you have to consider also the cost when you build new starships or order existing ships into battle. The best way to do this, is to compare the battle performance of your various ship designs with their requirements for your bottleneck resources. According to your specific situation, you may have a shortage of starbase capacity, mega-credits, one or several minerals, ship slots or priority build points. Optimise your usage of ships, so that you get the most effect in relation to what you have to spend of your most limited resource.

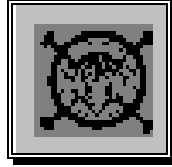
I hope that my pieces of information will help you to know better how to spend your resources, how to design your ships and how to fight. Plan well! ... and then ...

All weapons: Open fire!

Starting Out As the Privateers, Part II

by

Mark Wilmot



So, you're playing the Privateers and the first RST is open before you. Now what do you do? Your opening moves are probably the most important moves you'll make during the game. Mess-up things initially, and you'll have a very long game ahead of you. A great deal of electronic ink has been spilled on general starting strategies - though very little specifically for the Privateers. I will present a couple of these, and then what I myself generally use and why.

1. "Noah's Ark" - The LDSF gambit.

Build a big boat (LDSF), and load all the animals - er, convicts - no colonists (Just what kind of people do you think live on a Privateer HW anyway?), save some room for supplies - maybe 100 or 200, and -if feeling really generous - add some MC's and boldly set out for the nearest sizeable cluster. En-route, drop off a few colonist and supplies and any world you stop in at. If you find a really nice world, then unload a enough colonist to insure healthy development and press on to the next one. The idea is to jump-start your empire via an early massive economic expansion. There are those hosts who swear they can predict the winner of the game by simply seeing which player does this the quickest.

What you need: Hulls upgraded to TL6 and Drives to at least TL9 - and TL10 is better yet, as "speed is life". You'll also need plenty of colonists so this isn't an option really if you're playing in a "normal" population game. As the TL's required are fairly high, you'll also need a Rich or Very Rich start to upgrade your starbase and still have funds left to develop some kind of fleet for other activities.

Pro's: Nearby clusters with good natives/minerals can be brought online very quickly. Early presence may deter other players from advancing that direction. Hyperjumping colonisers - particularly the Borg can be foiled too if defence posts are built up and planet FC set to NUK/ATT. The LDSF can collect existing and mined minerals to greatly speed up the building of new bases in the more distant cluster.

Con's: If there are no decent worlds, you've wasted a lot of time and fuel - plus potential population growth at your HomeWorld. Your cloaking neighbour - or one who planet hops/hyperjumps, may have the great joy of confiscating and converting your LDSF to their cause. This can be very fatal in a game with restricted resources. I once had the great pleasure of nailing two such LDSF's another player was trying to expand into what he imagined was safe empty space. Guess who built the first new starbase in that region. Also, if playing in a game with the Explore add-on, you won't be able see much of the map so you may not know where the best clusters for expansion are initially.

Suggestions: Pass on this as an opening strategy. For the Privateers, it's little better than a crap shoot. A couple of variations on this will be discussed later which are much safer and more economical. About the only time I'd consider this would be if playing in a medium range start - something I normally don't do, and there was a cluster I could reach via planet hopping so as not to reveal my HW or my destination. In any case - this should be used to expand AWAY from known enemy territory, NOT towards it or you'll risk the disaster mentioned above.

2. "The Grey Wolves" - The MBR strike.

Build several MBR's and strike out in the direction of one, or more, neighbour(s). The goal is to cripple your opponent's fleet before he's had a real opportunity to expand or develop his economy or his fleet. Unleashing mayhem and terror early capitalises on your major abilities from the start. The psychological impact of such a campaign is particularly effective vs. beginning players.

What you need: Hulls TL5, Drives TL9-10, Optionally Torp's and Beams TL5. The optional weapons will allow you to easily destroy or capture small escorts and lay minefields to further disrupt his economy and expansion. If you go with the heavy weapons option, this will be more expensive in R&D than the others.

Pro's: If you can capture his freighters and rob and tow-capture one or more initial warships, he may well never recover and you'll have a free hand in expanding his direction. If you get really lucky, he may even go inactive and drop out. In such cases, the race might be killed off or turned over to one of the computer players - none good at handling Privateers - if the host is unable to get a replacement.

Con's: As you'll need to have 2-3 ships minimum working together, your own expansion in other directions will be slower. The cost of this task force will be a major drain unless in a very rich start. Conversely, the opening is less damaging in very rich starts as the opponent will have ample resources to develop his HW initially and can survive the loss a few ships as well if he's maintained a reserve of MC and minerals. The more experienced the opponent, the less likely you'll be able to do much more than slow him down some. As your own expansion is curtailed you'll have to balance cost vs. the benefits of this opening.

Suggestion: In a game with minimal resources, this can be a very nasty opening. If you're playing in game with a lot of beginners, it could also prove devastating. In a very rich game or with experienced players, this is much dicier course to follow initially. Better to send in the fleet later when your own economic stability is secured. Also - while you may send ships out in different directions searching for victims at the start of the game, NEVER actually initiate two such campaigns simultaneously or you'll likely find yourself the victim of an multi-national Privateer eradication campaign!

3. "Lewis & Clark" - BR4 Survey

Build several BR4's load them up with colonists and a couple of Kt.'s of supplies and send them out in all directions to scout the lay of the land at all surrounding worlds in an ever-widening circle from your HW. Drop a colonist at each non-amorphous world and 2 colonists and a supply at any world with natives. Once you've emptied the ship, you can either head back for more or press on in search other players

freighters. Based on the results of your survey, you'll know exactly which worlds and clusters are worth developing and which can be ignored, initially at least.

What you need: As the BR4's a TL1 hull, you only need to upgrade drives to TL9-10 and you're in business. You can optionally upgrade beams to TL3 if you want to be able to kill other races scouts instead of trying to rob/capture them - that's time consuming and risky sometimes. I got a shock once when one of my BR4's armed with x-rays got nailed by a puny Falcon armed with a heavy disrupter!

Pro's: You don't waste time and fuel sending a freighter full of stuff where it won't prove profitable. The BR4 is the best surveyor in the game due to it's low price, high-speed and low fuel consumption. You can maintain a cash/mineral reserve with which you can react to the discovery of good worlds or new neighbours. Should you lose a BR4 to an enemy, it's not going to come back to haunt you nearly as badly as if you lost a BR5 or MBR - both having torp's - the MBR having much greater towing capacity.

Con's: Due to the low cargo capacity, you'll have to return or rendezvous with another ship to restock. With a considerably smaller fuel capacity than an MBR, you won't be able to Rob enemy ships you may encounter as effectively. In the long run, MBR's are more versatile for use in the Privateer fleet. Economic development is a little slower initially while the surveying ships are being built and sent out. You must be careful to save sufficient resources to exploit the survey results.

Suggestions: This is generally the opening strategy I use. If it's a very rich start, I upgrade some of the BR4's scouts to MBR's instead. I also build many of the BR4's with TL9 drives as they're significantly cheaper (also in games with RacePlus, you won't get toasted by Rebel booby-traps as they only affect TL10 drive equipped ships). I normally put 16 clans and 4 supplies aboard so I can hit 12-16 worlds before I need to re-supply.

The Privateer's Need for a Loki

By

Matthias Brod

Judging from the title you just might think that a Privateer needs a Loki almost as much as he needs a hostile crystal 150ly web covering his territory. In this article I plan to prove to you that a Loki in Privateer hands can be a deadly weapon against hostile cloaking races. Or didn't you always want to rob that DarkWing that your "friendly neighbour" was using to get all of your defenceless planets? I will try to show you how you can do just that and this of course works equally good for any cloaking ship however, as you may have already guessed, it will not work quite as well with cloaking ships owned either by Feds or Lizards. Fed and Lizard ships are immune to the effects of Loki's, but hey in planets any coin has two sides, doesn't it?

OK enough introductory babble let's get to business.

The general idea is that you need to see your enemy before you can tow him to a Wolf Pack. My concept bases on the idea that you wait on one of your planets, likely to be attacked by a cloaking ship. You will probably loose this planet but if you get e.g. a DarkWing in return this loss will probably be well covered. Let us then continue the next round when you have already lost your planet. What you have there now is one of your cloaking MBR's and a non-cloaked DarkWing (from now on I will continue with the DarkWing example, but it might well be any other cloaking ship), and a planet which both ships are orbiting. If you would now try to rob the DarkWing it would just cloak before you could rob it, since cloak comes before rob in the mission order. What you will do is lock a tow beam on the DarkWing and tow it out. The nice thing is that you are allowed to tow cloaked ships (whether this is good or bad is another question not to be answered here). So you are towing the DarkWing out; but where to, you will ask yourself. And of course the Wolf Pack comes to mind. But then again we have the problem that you just cant rob those ships which are cloaked. And this is just the moment where we get back to the title; of course we need the Loki now. The problem is that if the Loki was waiting there none of your ships would be able to cloak and although you would get the DarkWing uncloaked it would just attack all your ships waiting there and most likely kill them too. This assumes that the Birdmen player is not a complete idiot who forgets to set his primary enemy to Privateer. So what to do?

Think fuel! Think no (!) fuel! Have you got it yet? If so congratulations if not then don't worry I will tell you. Ok here we go. The Loki is waiting with 0 (zero) fuel on board. It can't be attacked by the DarkWing for exactly that reason. It will also not de-cloak anything, for the same reason. So what we have got is a ship that towed the DarkWing out (which has most likely been shot into pieces by the towed DarkWing), the cloaked (!) DarkWing which we do not see, the fuelless Loki and of course the wolf pack containing at least one cloaked MBR. It will stay that way until the next round.

Now we transfer fuel to the Loki and set our cloaked MBR to Rob and to be on the save side (DarkWing has a fuel load of 290 the MBR can rob only 284) will we also set the Loki to rob. Next round the Loki will de-cloak the DarkWing, the MBR and the Loki will rob the de-cloaked DarkWing and we end up with an uncloaked fuelless DarkWing and a MBR & a Loki. With no fuel the DarkWing can not cloak (I know it can cloak without using fuel but it cant cloak without any fuel!) and is ready to be tow-captured next round. Voila you have got yourself a DarkWing and a very angry Birdmen to go along with that, what else do you want?

There are of course a few things you should be aware of. Try to tow out the DarkWing to an area where no other hostile ship will be able to cloak rendezvous with it, because this follow up could spoil the whole party. Also make sure that the tower and the MBR which is going to rob the DarkWing end up at the same position or you will make a big fool of yourself. If you stick to these things you should be able to successfully rob any cloaking ship.

Good luck fellow Pirate!!!

The Crystals

by

Cecil



This is the "Light Ship" from Battlestar Galactica (Galactica 1980). I still think it is a cool picture because it is a mysterious picture that no one can seem to figure out ... much like many of the players who don't play the Crystals. They just don't know how to use them or take the time to do so. They want fighting warships, or ones that can sneak off cloaked, or the big huge carriers. When you look at the Crystalline fleet next time, you will notice that they have only a few decent warships that will generally be wiped out anyway by another fleet because that other races generally have larger warships. The Crystals don't ... not at first anyway, until you start *taking* those nice large warships from your opponents. And hence the players soon figure out that the Crystalline race isn't as bad as they thought it was.

I have been using the Crystals for two consecutive games now and have learned even more about how to effectively use them (and I'm still not done learning yet). I had on my first game started off by creating a couple of Emerald Class ships. And still to this day I will swear that these ships are one of the best warships that you could possibly build. With a 510Kt. cargo capacity, these ships make one of the best armed transports in the game. The Ruby's are very nice as well, but they don't have as much capacity. But I would first suggest that you build freighters first. This should be common knowledge now, but I could have used this when I first started using the Crystals. Go out and colonise. All over. Just load up and take over all planets in sight. After you have a few freighters made, make about 5 or so Onyx class warships. Now to some this is a bad strategy, but I found this one to work out quite nicely especially when executed early on in the game. You don't need to put the highest tech engines on them, or even high torp's or beams. I would suggest maybe a tech 5 or 6 engine at the highest (in the beginning anyway). If they need to go any further distance than that, tow them. They will basically sit derelict on a planet slowly nuking it away anyway, so warp factor is not as essential. The good of this will be that for every one of these that you have built and hovering over a planet, it will begin cooking that planet that many degrees. And it is permanent. This will

- (1) help you begin to better your conditions in colonising your planets for maximum potential, and
- (2) make these planets basically useless for other races to use, so they will leave you alone (for now...)

This is especially useful for placing them on the best planets you have. If they are crappy planets, leave them the way they are. But if you have a Bovinoid planet that has about 2 Million or so colonists on it (maybe even more, like 5 Million, maybe even 10!) and it has minerals so rich that you are forced to weep upon sight of it, nuke it. Nuke it for 100 degrees. Let the colonists know that you love them and that you won't let those other nasty races clutch them from out of your hands. The natives will still grow regardless of the temperature. And of course that is just ONE example. We won't mention the potential of an Insect planet

with 15 Million natives on it with rich minerals... Then as your colonists begin to multiply rampantly now to the new temperature conditions, begin to build your Emeralds (or Ruby's for now if you lack the necessities). These ships can then be used to transport anything as well as defend any invaders if any are around. (Usually though you won't run into these problems unless your host has put everyone close together which then results in a lot of fighting. In which case, build fighting vessels in replacement of the Onyx's. The game will probably run too short for you to actually use these to their full potential.) And finally, if at all possible, find major planets with gobs of Neutronium on it (explained below...)

After a while, you will then begin to start having to do some combat. During my first campaign I was actually able to use the Onyx's to capture a Falcon Class (which shows that they can be of some use other than nuking planets in emergencies). They are also very nice to use to capture freighters with if you are using them on a border of another race's territory. But the main thing that you want to use is MINES. LOTS AND LOTS OF WEB MINES. These are pretty neat for a few reasons.

1. They have a much better success rate at hitting other race's ships. Usually the default is 5%, which is far better than a regular mine's chance of 1%. If your host changes this default for the worse, they better have it balance out some other way. This is very significant.
2. The chances of you uncloaking enemy vessels are greater. Since the % does not go down regardless if a vessel is cloaking (cloakers have a 0.5% chance instead of a 1% chance of hitting a regular mine), this will indeed help aid you in discovering your cloaked invading enemy.
3. They stop the ship's movement to a dead halt. Now they are stuck. And since other invading warships along with it will hit them also, it will scatter them in different places, forcing them to be easily singled out. Now, yes, the warships could continue going further or sweep it, but they will soon notice something else about the mine field...
4. They suck gas. By the simple notion of even being within a (*singular*) minefield, it will drain every ship within it 25 Kt. of fuel A TURN. If they strike a mine within it, it will suck out 1/6 of their gas tank or 50 Kt. of fuel (whichever is more) ON TOP OF the 25 Kt. of fuel for being in there in the first place. So you are going to drain at a minimum of 75Kt. of fuel upon a strike of a mine.
5. Web mines can be layered for an even better effect. Yes, ONE web mine field will drain every ship 25 Kt. of fuel a turn. But how about 4 of them, or maybe even 8 if you are crazy enough? Well, since each web field does cumulative draining (yes, that is 25 Kt. of fuel PER mine field PER turn), you could conceivably lay so many mine fields that as soon as a fleet enters your territory they will automatically be drained of all of their fuel. But you are going to have to lure them in there first, and not to mention it will be very expensive to do so. But it may just be well worth it.
6. The Boarding party. Once you have drained them of all of their fuel, you can then use the Crystal's second special trait and board their ships. Just go up and tow the ship, and next turn you will have a brand new ship. Yep, they're yours now. No fighting needed, they're just yours. So fly them off wherever you'd like them to go (and now you know why you are going to need a lot of Neutronium rich planets). This comes in very handy when the ship queue is full (500 ship limit slot).

Now that you have your ships (and everyone else's ships) use them against the other races that invaded you! (or if you invaded them...). If you can at all get yourself a cloaker, get

some. Steal it, trade for it, buy it, do whatever it takes to get some. They can be used for really sneaky manoeuvres by cloaking into enemy territory fully loaded with torp's (or a group of them, oh the agony!!) and web their area! If you can colonise a nearby planet to sneak back to to obtain more minerals for creating torp's, do so. Bring some cash with you though so that you can make them.

As far as defending your own area is concerned, build a few Crystal Thunders and a couple of Diamond flames. Some say that building Diamonds aren't worth it because of the cost. Well, if you want to still keep your webbing up, then I suggest building them so that your other little ships don't get eaten for lunch. I'm not saying that your whole fleet should consist of them, but if you have a few they can be very nice. In my current campaign, I built a few of them and gave them some disruptors and tech 10 torp's. Two of them went head to head with a couple of DarkWings that weren't so tech'd out (Mark 4 torp's) and they ended up blowing up the DarkWings. They were injured yes, but they could be cured. Teaming these ships up with the Crystal Thunder, you can take out any huge ship in the game and only lose one of yours (Vs. Golem, Biocide, Gorbie, etc.) A small price to pay to get rid of a big problem. I suggest attacking with the Diamond first and then go after them with the Carrier. You'll use the Carrier a lot more, although the upkeep on it is a lot too. Just make sure that you have a nearby planet to run to or another ship with you that has supplies on board to repair it. And if you have an entire fleet after you, build that ridiculously huge web field with tons of layers on top of it (mine drop 20 torp's at a time with each ship for those who have tech 10 torp's, or more if you don't have tech 10's). If you can see it coming you can prepare ahead of time. Be sure that each planet has a mine field orbiting it not including the massive one mentioned above to further ensure that you won't have your HomeWorld invaded (at least easily). After their fuel is all gone take their ships and refuel them, and afterwards scoop up the remaining mines that weren't swept away. Another key point is that only one mine field can be swept away at a time so, if you lay more mine fields (in case they break through the first few, layered or not) you may be able to hold off long enough to take their ships or, at the very least, slow them down so that you buy yourself time to get your reinforcements in.

In another campaign that I am in, we are allowed to be two races to control (there are only 4 people playing). In this one, I am the Crystalline and the Rebels. After a few turns I made a couple of hyper-jumping ships, and one of them is now heading for my Crystalline base. At that time I will transport the remaining colonists on a planet that is designated for them that is most suitable to them (50 degrees) so that they can multiply more and get money from the planet. (Why nuke it to 100 and waste your resources and time when you can have the other race use it more effectively using less time and resources?) Once the ship is emptied, I plan to give the ship to the Crystal race and send it back to my Rebel base full of Crystal colonists to do the same. Once this is done, I will then build a StarBase on those planets for the two to co-operatively build and exchange ships. Not to mention, I'll have web mines up on my Rebel area for protection. And I'll have a Rush waiting for anyone who plans on invading my Crystalline area. This same strategy can be used for alliances, although you better make sure that you trust the other one well enough that they won't turn their back on you, not to mention, have them stationed near your HomeWorld (I suggest a different StarBase location instead for this reason). And if they do decide to back-stab you, they probably won't have enough colonists on it to defend themselves with (important when making defence posts, lots of defence = lots of colonists). They will shortly run out of supplies/minerals more than likely since they will be getting them from your planets, and your force will probably end up being more concentrated in that area for you to destroy whatever ships they may have made to rebel against you. Another reminder: the ships being made will be given to you/them with the "gs#" friendly code, any that are not should be noted as suspicious.

Late Update

- For the layering effect to work with the web mines described above, groups of mine layers must be in different locations at the time of the laying. If you have a group travelling together and they all lay mine fields at the same point in space, it will combine into one mine field instead of several. This will increase the chances of ships hitting mines, but will also negate the layering effect as mentioned above. Now, had they been on separate nearby planets, or if one or more ships went ahead first, this will create mine fields in different areas, and thus creating the stacking effect.
- Always wait until your enemy is lured into a desired area, and don't jump the gun. Doing so will always result in them smashing into one of your mines and taking even more drain. Then to conserve, scoop them the next turn. Then your opponent will usually continue to move forward after there are no mines to scoop, or sit derelict in a defensive position. Regardless, you will already have them beaten by already laying another web field without them realising it. They go to move and get smashed anyway, or it will keep them in that derelict position in fear. Eventually they will suffer complete fuel loss, and you will have another ship on your way.

Unless however they start to run away... Cowards! I suggest that if you have any of your enemies run away on you that you change their primary colour of their race to yellow. ^ _ ^ There is nothing more severe than to lose one's reputation and pride in this game. You can lose your whole fleet and still go down as a real hero. But to have the whole echo cluster know that you ran away from a battle and now have the primary colour of yellow from a foe will make every race want to attack that person. After all, this is a war game, not a game for coward sissies.

- Get yourself a cloaked ship!!!!

You can't imagine how useful it is to be able to lay web mines without having anyone realise where you are. Then to follow them around and scoop them all back up again. Oh the irritation of it! Your enemies will be absolutely frustrated beyond death. And for that reason, I suggest that you get more cloaking ships. Then your opponent will *dread every turn they take* to see *what else* has happened to their fleet, that is, if they still have one left with any fuel. Just make sure that you get rid of any Loki ships if they have any so they don't spot you.



Ryosaku's Homepage - the Den of the Draconians

by

Ryo Nakamura (Editor of the Den)

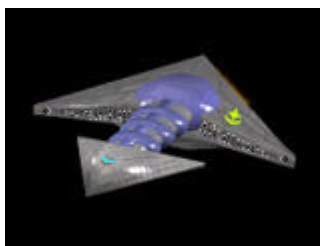
The Den of the Draconian mainly features Draconians (one of the races in VGAP4), Official VGA Planets Polls and RCC VGAP Add-ons.

Draconians

In this section, a background text and many graphics concerning the Draconians are available. Many graphics are 3d rendered works of artists working on Draconian graphics for VGAP4. Here is an example of a picture of Draconian ground attack robot, one of many graphics that can be previewed at the Den before VGAP4 comes out :



There are also texts on Draconian warships. Viewers are shown 30-degrees perspective, side and top views of ships and then given their descriptions and their background information. There are currently 6 ships at the Den, but more will be added as time goes on. It is designed so that more about the Draconians are learnt as the viewers read the text on ships.



Official VGA Planets Polls

The Den of the Draconian also hosts polls on various things connected with VGA Planets. Currently, there are results for favourite ships, races and add-ons polls. At the time of writing, the Den is hosting a favourite utility poll. This will go on until at least half way through the month of March. The votes for polls are gathered by a CGI-script voting form at

the Den. This is very simple to use and all voters need to do is fill in their names, e-mail addresses and what they are voting for. After clicking the "Vote!!" button, they will be greeted with a confirmation message.

RCC Add-ons

Most recent versions of RCC add-ons are also available from the Den. They are Pname (automatic planet namer for WinPlan), GivePlan (Give planets to allies using FCs for DOS and WinPlan), Huge Rock (allows SkyFire class cruiser to launch mass drivers at planets for DOS and WinPlan), Pstable (stabilises neutral planets in rebellion or disorder for DOS and WinPlan) and Mass Driver (transfer solid minerals to another friendly planet for WinPlan).

There are also plans to work on Events, an add-on which creates random events in the game. However, this is still in design stage and there are no solid decisions on actually making this program.

Chat Room

The Den of the Draconian also has an open chat room. Visitors are free to use it for talking about VGA Planets as they wish. However, there is also a pre-scheduled conference every Saturday from 9pm GMT to 10pm. There will be a general subject to each conference and the subject will be up on the chat room notices and the Usenet newsgroup.

Add-on writers are also welcome to hold their own support conferences there. Please e-mail me for details as I do not want 'double bookings' <grin>.

Jukebox

You can also choose twelve MIDI files to play in the background from the Den Jukebox, which can be accessed by scrolling down in the menu bar frame. The MIDI files include themes from all four Star Trek series, Wrath of Khan, Star Wars and Battlestar Galactica. The Den even offers In the Hall of Mountain Kings, Beethoven's Für Elise and 5th Symphony for users with more classic taste!! You can stop, pause and play using separate window which appears when the music is selected. I believe this system is better than simple background music as users can choose their own choice of music (including silence <grin>) from anywhere within the Den. I intend to increase the library of music available in future. Please note that the size of MIDI files vary from 3.25kb (DS9), 32.5kb (Star Wars), 46.5kb (Battlestar Galactica) to 90.2kb (Beethoven's 5th Symphony).

Beginners' Guide

The Den will also start a comprehensive section dedicated to newcomers to VGA Planets. There will be a general manual for WinPlan, tutorial and other guides. I have not yet started this at time of writing this, but I am about to. I would very much appreciate any suggestions or help people can provide me with.

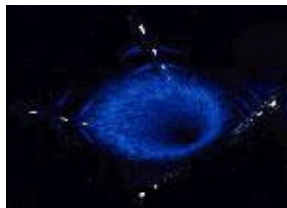
File Downloads

The Den has a file download section to which many things are constantly added. Here people can download Planeteer issues, Psyborg's alt-ship list and playing guides. The Den will also start featuring comprehensive list of ALT-maps. I hope this will allow hosts to start new games more easily as they can start downloading maps from the Den rather than having to make their own every time they start a game. Creating competent maps is a

daunting process and map creators usually end up fiddling around with them endlessly. The Den would appreciate any ALT-maps sent to them. Thanks in advance.

Others

- Alphabetical index page - for ease of accessing files around the Den.
- Guest book - Visitors can sign and write comments on the Den (sensible ones only please [grin]).
- News section - easily reference for what is on and coming events at the Den.
- Visitors' Centre - What is VGA Planets and etcetera.



Finally...

Well, I've said as much as can be said for the Den of the Draconian at the moment. I will undoubtedly be working on new additions to the Den. I have already been getting many suggestions, one of which was a hosting page where advertisements for new games can be put up. This is an excellent idea, but I need more people to visit the Den for this to become viable. Your suggestions, help and support will be very much appreciated. Feedback is a must for improving the Den. Please do not hesitate to e-mail me, even if you are just saying hello. Thanks for listening!!

THEY'RE MADE OUT OF MEAT (OMNI, April 1991).

By

Terry Bisson

From the Author - This story, which was a 1991 Nebula nominee, has been appearing around the internet lately without my name attached. Several people were kind enough to alert me, but the truth is I'm more flattered than offended.



"They're made out of meat."

"Meat?"

"Meat. They're made out of meat."

"Meat?"

"There's no doubt about it. We picked up several from different parts of the planet, took them aboard our recon vessels, and probed them all the way through. They're completely meat."

"That's impossible. What about the radio signals? The messages to the stars?"

"They use the radio waves to talk, but the signals don't come from them. The signals come from machines."

"So who made the machines? That's who we want to contact."

"They made the machines. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Meat made the machines."

"That's ridiculous. How can meat make a machine? You're asking me to believe in sentient meat."

"I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. These creatures are the only sentient race in that sector and they're made out of meat."

"Maybe they're like the orfolei. You know, a carbon-based intelligence that goes through a meat stage."

"Nope. They're born meat and they die meat. We studied them for several of their life spans, which didn't take long. Do you have any idea what's the life span of meat?"

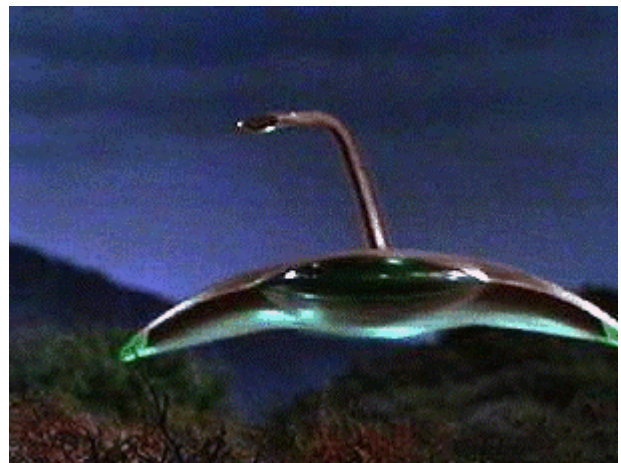
"Spare me. Okay, maybe they're only part meat. You know, like the weddilei. A meat head with an electron plasma brain inside."

"Nope. We thought of that, since they do have meat heads, like the weddilei. But I told you, we probed them. They're meat all the way through."

"No brain?"

"Oh, there's a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat! That's what I've been trying to tell you."

"So ... what does the thinking?"



"You're not understanding, are you? You're refusing to deal with what I'm telling you. The brain does the thinking. The meat."

"Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat!"

"Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Loving meat. Dreaming meat. The meat is the whole deal! Are you beginning to get the picture or do I have to start all over?"

"Omigod. You're serious then. They're made out of meat."

"Thank you. Finally. Yes. They are indeed made out of meat. And they've been trying to get in touch with us for almost a hundred of their years."

"Omigod. So what does this meat have in mind?"

"First it wants to talk to us. Then I imagine it wants to explore the Universe, contact other sentients, swap ideas and information. The usual."

"We're supposed to talk to meat."

"That's the idea. That's the message they're sending out by radio. 'Hello. Anyone out there. Anybody home.' That sort of thing."

"They actually do talk, then. They use words, ideas, concepts?"

"Oh, yes. Except they do it with meat."

"I thought you just told me they used radio."

"They do, but what do you think is on the radio? Meat sounds. You know how when you slap or flap meat, it makes a noise? They talk by flapping their meat at each other. They can even sing by squirting air through their meat."

"Omigod. Singing meat. This is altogether too much. So what do you advise?"

"Officially or unofficially?"

"Both."

"Officially, we are required to contact, welcome and log in any and all sentient races or multibeings in this quadrant of the Universe, without prejudice, fear or favour. Unofficially, I advise that we erase the records and forget the whole thing."

"I was hoping you would say that."

"It seems harsh, but there is a limit. Do we really want to make contact with meat?"

"I agree one hundred percent. What's there to say? 'Hello, meat. How's it going?' But will this work? How many planets are we dealing with here?"

"Just one. They can travel to other planets in special meat containers, but they can't live on them. And being meat, they can only travel through C space. Which limits them to the speed of light and makes the possibility of their ever making contact pretty slim. Infinitesimal, in fact."

"So we just pretend there's no one home in the Universe."

"That's it."

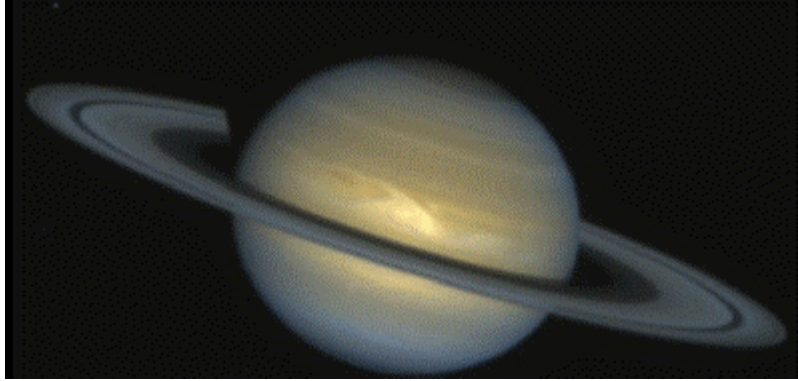
"Cruel. But you said it yourself, who wants to meet meat? And the ones who have been aboard our vessels, the ones you probed? You're sure they won't remember?"

"They'll be considered crackpots if they do. We went into their heads and smoothed out their meat so that we're just a dream to them."

"A dream to meat! How strangely appropriate, that we should be meat's dream."

"And we marked the entire sector unoccupied."

"Good. Agreed, officially and unofficially. Case closed. Any others? Anyone interesting on that side of the galaxy?"



"Yes, a rather shy but sweet hydrogen core cluster intelligence in a class nine star in G445 zone. Was in contact two galactic rotations ago, wants to be friendly again."

"They always come around."

"And why not? Imagine how unbearably, how unutterably

cold the Universe would be if one were all alone ..."

S.O.S: NYPHIDONIA CALLING

by

J.P. v. Bolhuis



Slowly the night settled down on the governmental centre of the Lost Colonies of men on Nyphidonia. The people of Perdue prepared themselves for the night, at ease, not overly concerned by the news that evening. Once again Klingon ships had raided Chrome, a mere 60 light-years away. Although the Spokesman for Defence acknowledged it as reason for concern, he had no doubt about the safety of the HomeWorld. "Let them come" he said grimly, "The last time a Klingon vessel tried to raid Nyphidonia it was easily repulsed and the home defence fleet is even stronger now." Memories of the victory celebrations and the subsequent Colonial incursions deep into the Klingon heartland flooded the watching citizens minds and the feeling that the Klingons were even half as dangerous as nearby Rebel base, 80 light-years distant, began to recede.

Darkness engulfed the ships moving away from the Chrome solar system. At last the time had come to return the honour of the Klingon Kriegsmarine. Admiral B'ahtir surveyed the battle plans and the small but powerful fleet under his command ... the demise of the *Cool sneaker-432* and the *IWCB-283* would be avenged. An *Ill Wind*, A *Victorious*, 2 *Sabre's*, a *D19b Nefarious* and a *Large Freighter* loaded with troops were on their way to the target planet. More ships could have been his but Kriegsmarine honour demanded the mission be executed by a small fleet. B'ahtir would strike a stunning blow to the Colonials, making them live up, once again, to their name, *Lost*, and their HomeWorld would fall before his combined attack. With the *Ill Wind* minesweeping, the rest of the fleet would arrive safe and sure at Nyphidonia and he would follow the fleet in. The *Glory's* would explode upon arrival, obliterating the weaker Colonial guard vessels and damaging the remaining *Scorpious* and *Virgo*. The *Victorious* and *Ill wind* would be loaded up with repairing supplies and would pillage the Colonial HomeWorld, following which some 1100 Assault troopers would try to penetrate the Colonial ground defences and take control of the planet.

But what surprises awaited at Nyphidonia? A Cloaker was required. He contacted HQ to request a cloaking scout for this mission and had the Coldpain class *Cool Sneaker-212* scout ahead.

The fleet was on its way and the *Ill Wind* in sweeping position, the cloaker was launched towards Nyphidonia. A *Virgo*, 2 *Patriot's*, a *Tranquility*, an *Iron Lady* and a freighter were observed ... a sizeable fleet if battled at once. The captain of *Cool Sneaker-212* volunteered to tow away the *Virgo* and the honour was granted. The mighty beams of the *Ill Wind* wreaked havoc on the Colonial minefield and the battle wagons went in. One after another the *Glory* ships detonated, irradiating the planet, bringing its population down from 5 to 1 million, destroying 4 ships and causing 96% damage on a newly built *Scorpious*. One *Patriot* escaped, fleeing his HomePlanet even before the attack.

Surveying the battlefield Admiral B'ahtir decided to plunder for one month more before releasing his 1100 Assault troops, insuring that the message to HQ would sound:

NYPHIDONIA HAS FALLEN, BASE CAPTURED

(As recorded by JP-MIE State Historian.)

If the Beatles were Programmers?

Submitted by

Max K'os

Eleanor Rigby

Eleanor Rigby

Sits at the keyboard

And waits for a line on the screen

Lives in a dream

Waits for a signal

Finding some code

That will make the machine do some more.

What is it for?

All the lonely users, where do they all come from?

All the lonely users, why does it take so long?

Guru MacKenzie

Typing the lines of a program that no one will run;

Isn't it fun?

Look at him working,

Munching some chips as he waits for the code to compile;

It takes a while...

All the lonely users, where do they all come from?

All the lonely users, why does it take so long?

Eleanor Rigby

Crashes the system and loses 6 hours of work;

Feels like a jerk.

Guru MacKenzie

Wiping the crumbs off the keys as he types in the code;

Nothing will load.

All the lonely users, where do they all come from?

All the lonely users, why does it take so long?

Unix Man

He's a real UNIX Man
Sitting in his UNIX LAN
Making all his UNIX .plans
For nobody.

Knows the blocksize from du(1)
Cares not where /dev/null goes to
Isn't he a bit like you
And me?

UNIX Man, please listen(2)
My lpd(8) is missin'
UNIX Man
The wo-o-o-rld is at(1) your command.

He's as wise as he can be
Uses lex and yacc and C
UNIX Man, can you help me
At all?

UNIX Man, don't worry
Test with time(1), don't hurry
UNIX Man
The new kernel boots, just like you had planned.

He's a real UNIX Man
Sitting in his UNIX LAN
Making all his UNIX .plans
For nobody ...
Making all his UNIX .plans
For nobody.

Write in C

(I'm sure Tim W. will appreciate this one ... NOT!!! Ed)

When I find my code in tons of trouble,
Friends and colleagues come to me,

Speaking words of wisdom:

"Write in C."

As the deadline fast approaches,

And bugs are all that I can see,

Somewhere, someone whispers:

"Write in C."

Write in C, Write in C,

Write in C, oh, Write in C.

LOGO's dead and buried,

Write in C.

I used to write a lot of FORTRAN,

For science it worked flawlessly.

Try using it for graphics!

Write in C.

If you've just spent nearly 30 hours,

Debugging some assembly,

Soon you will be glad to

Write in C.

Write in C, Write in C,

Write in C, yeah, Write in C.

BASIC's not the answer.

Write in C.

Write in C, Write in C

Write in C, oh, Write in C.

Pascal won't quite cut it.

Write in C.

Something

Something in the way it fails,

Defies the algorithm's logic!

Something in the way it coredumps...

I don't want to leave it now

I'll fix this problem somehow

Somewhere in the memory I know,
A pointer's got to be corrupted.
Stepping in the debugger will show me...

I don't want to leave it now
I'm too close to leave it now

You're asking me can this code go?
I don't know, I don't know...
What sequence causes it to blow?
I don't know, I don't know...

Something in the initialising code?
And all I have to do is think of it!
Something in the listing will show me...

I don't want to leave it now
I'll fix this tonight I vow!

The Use of Computers in Movies

Submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

Taken *apparently* from the list of Movie Clichés.

- Word processors never display a cursor.
- You never have to use the space-bar when typing long sentences.
- All monitors display inch-high letters.
- High-tech computers, such as those used by NASA, the CIA, or some such governmental institution, will have easy to understand graphical interfaces. Those that don't, have incredibly powerful text-based command shells that can correctly understand and execute commands typed in plain English.

Corollary: you can gain access to any information you want by simply typing "ACCESS ALL OF THE SECRET FILES" on any keyboard.

- Likewise, you can infect a computer with a destructive virus by simply typing "UPLOAD VIRUS" (see *Fortress, ID4*).
- All computers are connected. You can access the information on the villain's desktop computer, even if it's turned off.
- Powerful computers beep whenever you press a key or whenever the screen changes. Some computers also slow down the output on the screen so that it doesn't go faster than you can read.
- The really advanced ones also emulate the sound of a dot-matrix printer. (See *The Hunt For Red October* or *Alien*)
- All computer panels have thousands of volts and flash pots just underneath the surface. Malfunctions are indicated by a bright flash, a puff of smoke, a shower of sparks, and an explosion that forces you backwards.

Corollary: sending data to a modem/tape drive/printer faster than expected causes it to explode.

- People typing away on a computer will turn it off without saving the data. (See the opening credits for *The Hunt For Red October*)
- A hacker can get into the most sensitive computer in the world before intermission and guess the secret password in two tries.
- Any PERMISSION DENIED has an OVERRIDE function (see *Demolition Man* and countless others).
- Complex calculations and loading of huge amounts of data will be accomplished in under 3 seconds. Movie modems usually appear to transmit data at the speed of 2 Gigabytes per second.
- When the power plant/missile-site/whatever overheats, all the control panels will explode, as will the entire building.
- If a disk has got encrypted files, you are automatically asked for a password when you try to access it.
- No matter what kind of computer disk it is, it'll be readable by any system you put it into. All application software is usable by all computer platforms.
- The more high-tech the equipment, the more buttons it has (*Aliens*). However, everyone must have been highly trained, because none of the buttons are labelled.
- Most computers, no matter how small, have reality-defying three-dimensional, active animation, photo-realistic graphics capability.
- Laptops, for some strange reason, always seem to have amazing real-time video phone capabilities and the performance of a CRAY Supercomputer.

- Whenever a character looks at a VDU, the image is so bright that it projects itself onto his/her face (see *Alien*, *2001*, *Jurassic Park*).
- Either a Jacob's Ladder or a Van Der Graaf Generator is absolutely necessary for the operation of new, experimental computers (especially when built by brilliant scientists), although in real life, these devices do absolutely nothing.
- One can issue any complex set of commands in a few keystrokes (*Star Trek*).
- The Internet connects to everything in the movies. You can edit credit records, search hotel registries, lookup police criminal files, search (and edit) drivers license databases, edit social security files and more just using the internet! (see *The Net*)

THE 10 DOS COMMANDMENTS

Submitted by thy humble servant

The Undead HedgeHog

- I I am thy DOS and thou shall have no other OS before me (unless Archangel Bill gets a cut of the profits therefrom).
- II Thy DOS is a character based, single user, single tasking, standalone operating system. Thou shall not attempt to make DOS network, multitask, or display a graphical user interface, for that would be a gross hack.
- III Thy hard disk shall never have more than 1024 sectors as thee have no need of that much space.
- IV Thy application program and data shall fit into 640k of RAM that being tenfold that of a CP/M machine. Keep holy this 640k of RAM and clutter it not with device drivers, memory managers, or other devices to make thy computer useful.
- V Thou shall use the one true slash character to separate thy directory path. Thou shall learn and love this character, though it be on no typewriter keyboard and unfamiliar. Standardisation on where that character shall be located on thy keyboard is forbidden.
- VI Thou shall edit and shuffle the sacred lines of CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT until DOS functions adequately ... giving up in disgust is not allowed.
- VII Know in thy heart that DOS shall always maintain backward compatibility to the holy 2.0 version and not become compatible with things created in the latter half of this century. Know that thee will always be able to run the holy WordStar 1.0.
- VIII Improve thy memory, for thou shall be required to remember that jd031792.ltr is the letter that thee wrote to Jane Doe three years ago regarding the tax deductible contribution that thee made to her organisation and that the IRS auditor shall be impressed by thy memory as he stands over thee demanding proof.
- IX Pick carefully the names of thy directories, for renaming them shall be mighty difficult. Altho do not try to relocate branches of the directory tree, either.
- X Learn well the Vulcan nerve pinch (CTRL-ALT-DEL) for it shall be thy saviour on many an occasion. Believe in thy heart that everyone reboots their OS to solve problems that shouldn't occur in the first place.

Life Will Not Be Like Star Trek by Scott Adams

Submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

The following is an excerpt from "The Dilbert Future" written by Scott Adams and published by Harper Business. Copyright United Media, 1997. Not that I'm big into Dilbert but if you like this you might want to buy "The Dilbert Future" ... I'm planning to. I subscribe to the Dilbert ListServer ... if you want to send an e-mail as follows:

Address: Dilbert_Products@listserv.unitedmedia.com

Subject Line: Products

Message: Products

Dilbert also has a WebSite: <http://www.unitedmedia.com/comics/dilbert>.

There are so many Star Trek[™] spin-offs that it is easy to fool yourself into thinking that the Star Trek vision is an accurate vision of the future. Sadly, Star Trek does not take into account the stupidity, selfishness, and horniness of the average human being. Allow me to describe some of the more obvious errors in the Star Trek vision.

Medical Technology

On Star Trek, the doctors have handheld devices that instantly close any openings in the skin. Imagine that sort of device in the hands of your unscrupulous friends. They would sneak up behind you and seal your ass shut as a practical joke. The devices would be sold in novelty stores instead of medical outlets. All things considered, I'm happy that it's not easy to close other people's orifices.

Transporter

It would be great to be able to beam your molecules across space and then reassemble them. The only problem is that you have to trust your co-worker to operate the transporter. These are the same people who won't add paper to the photocopier or make a new pot of coffee after taking the last drop. I don't think they'll be double-checking the transporter co-ordinates. They'll be accidentally beaming people into walls, pets, and furniture. People will spend all their time apologising for having inanimate objects protruding from parts of their bodies.

'Pay no attention to the knickknacks; I got beamed into a hutch yesterday.'

If I could beam things from one place to another, I'd never leave the house. I'd sit in a big comfy chair and just start beaming groceries, stereo equipment, cheerleaders, and anything else I wanted right into my house. I'm fairly certain I would abuse this power. If anybody came to arrest me, I'd beam them into space. If I wanted some paintings for my walls, I'd beam the contents of the Louvre over to my place, pick out the good stuff, and beam the rest into my neighbour's garage.

If I were watching the news on television and didn't like what I heard, I would beam the anchorman into my living room during the commercial break, give him a vicious wedgie, and beam him back before anybody noticed. I'd never worry about 'keeping up with the Joneses,' because as soon as they got something nice, it would disappear right out of their hands. My neighbours would have to use milk crates for furniture. And that's only after I had all the milk crates I would ever need for the rest of

my life. There's only one thing that could keep me from spending all my time wreaking havoc with the transporter: the holodeck.

Holodeck

For those of you who only watched the 'old' Star Trek, the holodeck can create simulated worlds that look and feel just like the real thing. The characters on Star Trek use the holodeck for recreation during breaks from work. This is somewhat unrealistic. If I had a holodeck, I'd close the door and never come out until I died of exhaustion. It would be hard to convince me I should be anywhere but in the holodeck, getting my oil massage from Cindy Crawford and her simulated twin sister.

Holodecks would be very addicting. If there weren't enough holodecks to go around, I'd get the names of all the people who had reservations ahead of me and beam them into concrete walls. I'd feel tense about it, but that's exactly why I'd need a massage.

I'm afraid the holodeck will be society's last invention.

Sex with Aliens

According to Star Trek, there are many alien races populated with creatures who would like to have sex with humans. This would open up a lot of anatomical possibilities, but imagine the confusion. It's hard enough to have sex with human beings, much less humanoids. One wrong move and you're suddenly transported naked to the Gamma Quadrant to stand trial for who-knows-what. This could only add to performance anxiety. You would never be quite sure what moves would be sensual and what moves would be a galactic-sized mistake.

Me Trying to Have Sex with an Alien

Me: May I touch that?

Alien: That is not an erogenous zone. It is a separate corporeal being that has been attached to my body for six hundred years.

Me: It's cute. I wonder if it would let me have sex with it.

Alien: That's exactly what I said six hundred years ago.

The best part about having sex with aliens, according to the Star Trek model, is that the alien always dies a tragic death soon afterward. I don't have to tell you how many problems that would solve. Realistically, the future won't be that convenient.

Phasers

I would love to have a device that would stun people into unconsciousness without killing them. I would use it ten times a day. If I got bad service at the convenience store, I'd zap the clerk. If somebody with big hair sat in front of me at the theatre, zap!

On Star Trek, there are no penalties for stunning people with phasers. It happens all the time. All you have to do is claim you were possessed by an alien entity. Apparently, that is viewed as a credible defence in the Star Trek future. Imagine real criminals in a world where the 'alien possession' defence is credible.

Criminal: Yes, officer, I did steal that vehicle, and I did kill the occupants, but I was possessed by an evil alien entity.

Officer: Well, okay. Move along.

I wish I had a phaser right now. My neighbour's dog likes to stand under my bedroom window on the other side of the fence and bark for hours at a time. My neighbour has employed the bold defence that he believes it might be another neighbour's dog, despite the fact that I am standing there looking at him barking only twenty feet away. In a situation like this, a phaser is really the best approach. I could squeeze off a clean shot through the willow tree. A phaser doesn't make much noise, so it wouldn't disturb anyone. Then the unhappy little dog and I could both get some sleep. If the

neighbour complains, I'll explain that the phaser was fired by the other neighbour's dog, a known troublemaker who is said to be invisible.

And if that doesn't work, a photon torpedo is clearly indicated.

Cyborgs

Given the choice, I would rather be a cyborg instead of 100 percent human. I like the thought of technology becoming part of my body. As a human, I am constantly running to the toolbox in my garage to get a tool to deal with some new household malfunction. If I were a cyborg, I might have an electric drill on my arm, plus a metric socket set. That would save a lot of trips. From what I've seen, the cyborg concept is a modular design, so you can add whatever tools you think you'd use most.

I'd love to see crosshairs appear in my viewfinder every time I looked at someone. It would make me feel menacing, and I'd like that. I'd program myself so that anytime I saw a car salesman, a little message would appear in my viewfinder that said 'Target Locked On.'

It would also be great to have my computer built into my skull. That way I could surf the Net during useless periods of life, such as when people talk to me. All I'd have to do is initiate a head-nodding subroutine during boring conversations and I could amuse myself in my head all day long.

I think that if anyone could become a cyborg, there would be a huge rush of people getting in line for the conversion. Kids would like it for the look. Adults would like it for its utility. Cyborg technology has something for everyone. So, unlike Star Trek, I can imagine everyone wanting to be a cyborg.

The only downside I can see is that when the human part dies and you're at the funeral, the cyborg part will try to claw its way out of the casket and slay all the mourners. But that risk can be minimised by saying you have an important business meeting, so you can't make it to the service.

Shields

I wish I had an invisible force field. I'd use it all the time, especially around people who spit when they talk or get too close to my personal space. In fact, I'd probably need a shield quite a bit if I also had a phaser to play with.

I wouldn't need a big shield system like the one they use to protect the Enterprise, maybe just a belt-clip device for personal use. I could insult dangerous people without fear of retribution. Whatever crumbs of personality I now have would be completely unnecessary in the future. On the plus side, it would make shopping much more fun.

Shopping with Shields Up

Me: Ring this up for me, you unpleasant cretin.

Saleswoman: I oughta slug you!

Me: Try it. My shields are up.

Saleswoman: Damn!

Me: There's nothing you can do to harm me.

Saleswoman: I guess you're right. Would you like to open a charge account? Our interest rates are very reasonable.

Me: Nice try.

Long-Range Sensors

If people had long-range sensors, they would rarely use them to scan for new signs of life. I think they would use them to avoid work. You could run a continuous scan for your boss and then quickly transport yourself out of the area when he came near. If your manager died in his office, you would know minutes before the authorities discovered him, and that means extra break time.

Vulcan Death Grip

Before all you Trekkies write to correct me, I know there is no such thing as a Vulcan Death Grip even in Star Trek. But I wish there were. That would have come in handy many times. It would be easy to make the Vulcan Death Grip look like an accident.

'I was just straightening his collar and he collapsed.'

I think the only thing that keeps most people from randomly killing other citizens is the bloody mess it makes and the high likelihood of getting caught. With the Vulcan Death Grip, it would be clean and virtually undetectable. Everybody would be killing people left and right. You wouldn't be able to have a decent conversation at the office over the sound of dead co-workers hitting the carpet. The most common sounds in corporate America would be, 'I'm sorry I couldn't give you a bigger raise, but . . . erk!'

And that's why the future won't be like Star Trek.

STAR WARS IN LEATHER CAPS AND BIG MOUSTACHES

Submitted by

Neil Gratton

To the tune of YMCA (The Village People) as sung by Yoda, on meeting Luke Skywalker.

YOUNG MAN, I saw your ship come down. I said
YOUNG MAN, now it's muddy and brown. I said
YOUNG MAN, put your weapon away, 'cause I

MEAN *YOU* *NO* *HARM* *I* *SAY*

YOUNG MAN, There's no need to feel fear. I am
WONDERIN', tell me why are you here? How you
GROWIN', from this food on the plate, I say

WARS *DO* *NOT* *MAKE* *ONE* *GREAT*

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A
You must be here to see Y.O.D.A.
He's 900 years old!
He's so strong in the Force!
Do your Jedi Diploma course!

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A
You must be here to see Y.O.D.A
Come and get yourself clean!
Come and have a good meal!
Pretty soon now, the Force you'll feel!

YOUNG MAN, you fell out of the sky, into
SOMETHIN' brown that smells like a sty, and this
TIN CAN started swimming and then, he got

SPAT *OUT* *LIKE* *SOME* *THROAT* *PHLEGM*

YOUNG MAN, Welcome to Dagobah. He is
COMIN', master Yoda not far. I'll be
HAVIN' this bright thing that ain't hot. It is

MINE *OR* *I'LL* *HELP* *YOU* *NOT*

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A.

He's 900 years old!

He's so strong in the Force!

Do your Jedi Diploma course!

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A

You must be here to see Y.O.D.A

Don't just stand in the rain!

You're all covered with mud!

come and sample my homemade crud!

OLD BEN, Are you listenin' to me? I can't
TRAIN HIM, he's so reckless you see! Like his
OLD MAN, he's so angry but brave! Betcha

>

HE *SCREWS* *UP* *AT* *THE* *CAVE*

YOUNG MAN, If you start will you end, or be
GOING, off to save all your friends? To be
TRAINING, needs commitment and work, if you

WIMP *OUT* *THEN* *YOU'RE* *A* *JERK*

You gotta stay here with Y.O.D.A

You gotta stay here with Y.O.D.A

You should stay here and train!

You don't have to save Han!

If you do so, you'll lose your hand!

You gotta stay here with Y.O.D.A.

(repeat and fade).

Career Choices

submitted by

Neil Gratton

Drug dealers

Refer to their clients as "users".

"The first one's free!"

Have important South-East Asian connections (to help move the stuff).

Strange jargon: "Stick," "Rock," "Dime bag," "E".

Realise that there's tons of cash in the 14- to 25-year-old market.

Job is assisted by the industry's producing newer, more potent mixes.

Often seen in the company of pimps and hustlers.

Their product causes unhealthy addictions.

Do your job well, and you can sleep with sexy movie stars who depend on you.

Software developers

Refer to their clients as "users".

"Download a free trial version..."

Have important South-East Asian connections (to help debug the code).

Strange jargon: "SCSI," "RTFM," "Java," "ISDN".

Realise that there's tons of cash in the 14- to 25-year-old market.

Job is assisted by industry's producing newer, faster machines.

Often seen in the company of marketing people and venture capitalists.

DOOM. Quake. SimCity. Duke Nukem 3D. 'Nuff said.

Damn! Damn! DAMN!!!

So you think you're" computer illiterate? by Jim Carlton!

Submitted by

Gary Marks

1. Compaq is considering changing the command "Press Any Key" to "Press Return Key" because of the flood of calls asking where the "Any" key is.
2. AST technical support had a caller complaining that her mouse was hard to control with the dust cover on. The cover turned out to be the plastic bag the mouse was packaged in.
3. Another Compaq technician received a call from a man complaining that the system wouldn't read word processing files from his old diskettes. After troubleshooting for magnets and heat failed to diagnose the problem, it was found that the customer labelled the diskettes then rolled them into the typewriter to type the labels.
4. Another AST customer was asked to send a copy of her defective diskettes. A few days later a letter arrived from the customer along with Xeroxed copies of the floppies.
5. A Dell technician advised his customer to put his troubled floppy back in the drive and close the door. The customer asked the tech to hold on, and was heard putting the phone down, getting up and crossing the room to close the door to his room.
6. Another Dell customer called to say he couldn't get his computer to fax anything. After 40 minutes of troubleshooting, the technician discovered the man was trying to fax a piece of paper by holding it in front of the monitor screen and hitting the "send" key.
7. Another Dell customer needed help setting up a new program, so a Dell tech suggested he go to the local "Egghead". "Yeah, I got me a couple of friends," the customer replied. When told Egghead was a software store, the said, "Oh, I thought you meant for me to find a couple of geeks."
8. Yet another Dell customer called to complain that his keyboard no longer worked. He had cleaned it by filling up his tub with soap and water and soaking the keyboard for a day, then removing all the keys and washing them individually.
9. A Dell technician received a call from a customer who was enraged because his computer had told him he was "bad and an invalid". The tech explained that the computer's "bad command" and "invalid" responses shouldn't be taken personally.
10. An exasperated caller to Dell Computer Tech Support couldn't get her new Dell Computer to turn on. After ensuring the computer was plugged in, the technician asked her what happened when she pushed the power button. Her response, "I pushed and pushed on this foot pedal and nothing happens." The "foot pedal" turned out to be the computer's mouse.
11. Here is a true story from a Novell NetWire SysOp:

Caller: Hello, is this Tech Support?"

Tech. Rep: "Yes, it is. How may I help you?"

Caller: "The cup holder on my PC is broken and I am within my warranty period. How do I go about getting that fixed?"

Tech Rep: "I'm sorry, but did you say a cup holder?"

Caller: "Yes, it's attached to the front of my computer."

Tech Rep: "Please excuse me if I seem a bit stumped, it's because I am. Did you receive this as part of a promotion, at a trade show? How did you get this cup holder? Does it have any trademark on it?"

Caller: "It came with my computer, I don't know anything about a promotional. It just has '4X' on it." At this point the Tech Rep had to mute the caller, because he couldn't stand it. The caller had been using the load drawer of the CD-ROM drive as a cup holder, and snapped it off the drive!

The Hedgehog Song v2.0

Words - Heather Wood, copyright 1993.

From the Discworld novels by Terry Pratchett.

*You can bugger the bear, if you do it with care,
in the winter, when he is asleep in his lair,
Though I would not advise it in spring or in fall--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*If you're feeling quite coarse, you can bugger the horse,
or the palfrey, the jennet, the stallion (with force),
You can bugger the donkey, the mare, or the mule,
Though to bugger the pony is needlessly cruel.*

*You can bugger the ox (if you stand on a box)
And vulpologists say you can bugger the fox,
You can bugger the shrew, though it's awfully small--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*Herpetologists gasp you can bugger the asp,
Entomologists claim you can bugger the wasp.
If an insects your thing, man, then just have a ball--
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*And the elephant too, that you meet in the zoo,
Can be buggered if you are sure just what to do,
You will need a large mattress upon which to fall--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*You can bugger the bees if your down on your knees,
You can bugger the termites with terminal ease
you can bugger the beetle, the ladybug (bird!) too,
there's no end to the buggering that you can do.*

*You can bugger the cat if it isn't to fat
You can bugger the rabbit you draw from your hat
You can bugger the shark that you've chased in your yawl--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*You can bugger the ermine, and all other vermin,
like rats, mice, and roaches, if your not discernin'.
You can bugger the dog, it will come when you call--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*Although Mr. Tiggy is not very big, he
Avoids with great ease those who fancy his arse.
He just curls in a ball, shows his prickles and all--
And the would-be seducer leaves him in the grass*

*If you're that kind of fool, and you have a long tool,
Do it with a giraffe, if you stand on a stool,
Catch a yeti, who lives in the snows of Nepal--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*For the hedgehog escapes the posterior rapes
Performed upon others of different shapes
Those who run, swim, or slither, they get it withal--
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*It is said, if you try, you can bugger the fly,
Or the swallow as it skims so skilfully by,
Use a noose or a net, or lime (if you've the gall)--
but the hedgehog can never be buggered at all*

*You can bugger the cow (I will not tell you how),
Or the boar, or the piglet, the shoat or the sow,
You can bugger the ass as it stands in the stall--
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*You can order or shoo 'im, or run a knife through 'im
The one thing you cannot do is stick it to 'im.
If you try to seduce 'im, you'll end in a fix,
His prickles defend him against rampant pricks.*

*You can bugger the ram, you can bugger the lamb,
You can bugger the ewe, though the weather's a sham,
You can bugger the tiger (it may caterwaul)
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*You can bugger the seal, you can bugger the eel,
You can bugger the crab, though they say it can't feel,
You can bugger the bat as the night casts its pall,
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*You can bugger the snake (hold it down with a rake),
Though to bugger the quetzal may be a mistake.
You can bugger the billy, the nanny the kid,
But to bugger the hedgehog just cannot be did.*

*You can bugger the slug, though it messes the rug,
You can bugger the different species of bug,
Or do it with a snail, if you slow to a crawl,
But the hedgehog can never be buggered at all.*

*At the end of the day, when you've had your rough way
With all of those creatures, you'll just have to say
"That damned Erinaceous has been my downfall--"
For the hedgehog can never be buggered at all!*

Wave of the Future

submitted by

Max K'os

TCI, the nation's largest cable television Company, is in talks to launch a unique pilot project in conjunction with Pacific Gas & Electric Co. and Microsoft Corporation to design a "smart home". The home automation industry is expected to triple in size, from \$1.7 billion this year to more than \$5.1 billion by the year 2000.

A Home Owners Journal.

November 28, 1995

Moved in at last. Finally, we live in the smartest house in the neighbourhood. Everything's networked. The cable TV is connected to our phone, which is connected to my PC, which is connected to the power lines, all the appliances and the security system. Everything runs off a universal remote with the friendliest interface I've ever used. Programming is a snap. I'm, like, totally wired.

November 30

Hot stuff! Programmed my VCR from the office, turned up the thermostat and switched on the lights with the car phone, remotely tweaked the oven a few degrees for my pizza. Everything nice and cosy when I arrived. Maybe I should the universal remote surgically attached.

December 3

Yesterday, the kitchen crashed. Freak event. As I opened the refrigerator door, the light bulb blew. Immediately, everything else electrical shut down - lights, microwave, coffee maker - everything! Carefully, I unplugged and replugged all the appliances. Nothing. Called the cable company (but not from the kitchen phone). They refer me to the utility. The utility insists the problem was in the software. So the software company runs some remote telediagnosics via my house processor. Their expert system claims it has to be the utility's fault. I don't care, I just want my kitchen back. More phone calls. More remote diagnostics.

Turns out the problem was "unanticipated failure mode" - the network had never seen a refrigerator bulb failure while the door was open. So the fuzzy logic interpreted the burnout as a power surge and shut down the entire kitchen. But because sensor memory confirmed that there hadn't actually been a power surge, the kitchen's logic sequence was confused so it couldn't do a standard restart.

The utility guy swears this was the first time this has ever happened. Rebooting the kitchen took over an hour.

December 7

The police are not happy. Our house keeps calling them for help. We discover that whenever we play the TV or stereo above 25 decibels, it creates patterns of micro-vibrations that get amplified when they hit the window. When these vibrations mix with a gust of wind, the security sensors are actuated and the police computer concludes that someone is trying to break in. Go figure....

Another glitch: whenever the basement is in self-diagnostic mode, the universal remote won't let me change the channels on my TV. That means I actually have to get up off the couch and change the channels by hand. The software and the utility people say this flaw will be fixed in the next upgrade - SmartHouse 2.1, but it's not ready yet.

December 12

This is a nightmare. There's a virus in the house. My personal computer caught it while browsing on the public access network. I come home and the living room is a sauna, the bedroom windows are covered with ice, the refrigerator has defrosted, the washing machine has flooded the basement, the garage door is cycling up and down and the TV is stuck on the Home Shopping channel. Throughout the house, lights flicker like stroboscopes until they explode from the strain. Broken glass is everywhere. Of course, the security sensors detect nothing.

I look at a message slowly throbbing on my PC screen: "Welcome to HomeWrecker!!! Now the FUN begins....(be it ever so humble, there's no virus like HomeWrecker....)". I get out of the house. Fast.

December 18

They think I've digitally disinfected the house but the place is a shambles. Pipes have burst and we're not completely sure we've got the part of the virus that attacks toilets. Nevertheless, The Exorcists (as the anti-virus SWAT members like to call themselves) are confident the worst is over. "HomeWrecker is pretty bad," one tells me, "but consider yourself lucky you didn't get Poltergeist. That one is really evil".

December 19

Apparently, our house isn't insured for viruses. "Fires and mud-slides yes," says the claims adjuster, "viruses, no."

My agreement with the SmartHouse people explicitly states that all claims and warranties are null and void if any appliance or computer in my house networks in any way, shape or form with a non-certified on-line service. Everybody's very, very sorry but they can't be expected to anticipate every virus that may be created.

We call our lawyer. He laughs. He's excited.

December 21

I get a call from a SmartHouse sales rep. As a special holiday offer, we get the free opportunity to become a beta site for the company's new SmartHouse 2.1 upgrade. He says I'll be able to meet the programmers personally. "Sure, I tell him"...

Air Force Denies Rumours of UFO Crash!!

Submitted by

The Undead HedgeHog

Valles Marineris (MPI) - A spokeshing for Mars Air Force denounced as false rumours that an alien space craft crashed in the desert, outside of Ares Vallis on Friday. Appearing at a press conference today, General Rgrmrmy The Lesser, stated that "the object was, in fact, a harmless high-altitude weather balloon, not an alien spacecraft".

The story broke late Friday night when a major stationed at nearby Ares Vallis Air Force Base contacted the Valles Marineris Daily Record with a story about a strange, balloon-shaped object which allegedly came down in the nearby desert, "bouncing" several times before coming to a stop, "deflating in a sudden explosion of alien gases". Minutes later, General Rgrmrmy The Lesser contacted the Daily Record telepathically to contradict the earlier report.

General Rgrmrmy The Lesser stated that hysterical stories of a detachable vehicle roaming across the Martian desert were blatant fiction, provoked by incidences involving swamp gas. But the general public has been slow to accept the Air Force's explanation of recent events, preferring to speculate on the "other-worldly" nature of the crash debris. Conspiracy theorists have condemned Rgrmrmy's statements as evidence of "an obvious government cover-up", pointing out that Mars has no swamps.

What OS is best for Star Trek?

Submitted by

The Undead Hedgehog

The Federation

Windows 95. It's happy and bubbly, just like them. They have gotten so used to it crashing during an hour long episode that it is considered mandatory plot development.

The Klingons

Mac OS. They don't have the tech skills to run anything else.

The Romulans

Windows NT. Technically more advanced than the other races in the Beta Quadrant, they tend to be overshadowed by the Federation and Klingons. Have a heavy interest in internal security.

The Cardassians

OS/2. They use older software than the other races, but their equipment is extremely rugged in the field. Ugly and clunky as hell though.

The Jem'Hadar

UNIX. Rather than subscribe to the philosophy of building giant, do-it-all OS's, they believe in small, fast apps that work in concert to achieve goals.

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Q. So which is best?

A. Whatever the Borg are using!

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Note: Scott Shepherd is currently changing his ISP and E-Mail so you may experience problems in reaching him or The Neutral Zone (believed to be <http://www.sacredcow.com/vgap>)

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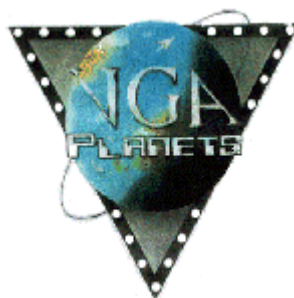
The Undead HedgeHog

[Editor]

The Planeteer

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 !!!

Issue Three: March 1996

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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