

Take Command of a Titan!

"Big Ship" campaigns in the STAR FRONTIERS® game

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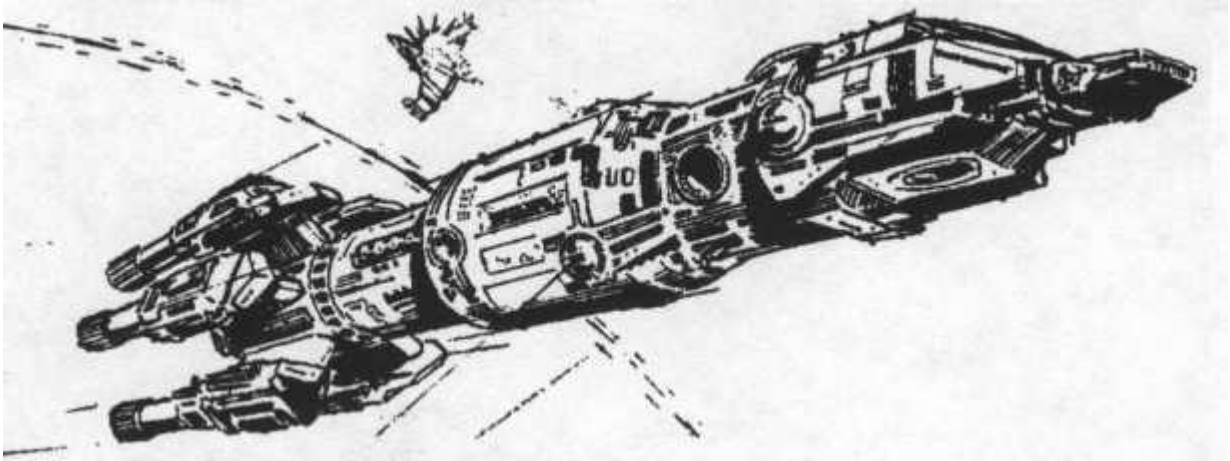
Even though this is a STAR FRONTIERS® game article, it will start with some thoughts about the TRAVELLER® game, by Game Designers' Workshop. One of the oldest science-fiction RPGs on the market, the TRAVELLER system developed some fascinating game concepts that can be applied to virtually any other science-fiction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

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

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

Choosing a Big Ship

Having decided to try a Big Ship campaign, the first (and most important) question is, which sort of Big Ship will be used in the adventures? This decision will require input from all of the players, as they will be the ones to suffer through the scenarios. Some of the possible campaign options that may be taken include:



Merchant ships. Large-sized merchant craft that pick up and offload hundreds or thousands of tons of merchandise with each planetfall are fascinating to run, particularly for players who like to calculate profits on their pocket calculator. Anyone with a bend toward accounting (or greed) will like this set up; it's nice to be rich.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

References and aids

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

STAR FRONTIERS[®] game aids

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

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

TRAVELLER[®] game aids

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

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

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

(useful for NPCs).

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

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

STAR TREK[®] **The Role-Playing Game**

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

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