

Star Fleet Warlord News

Issue #14

The Official Newsletter of the Greater Magellanic Cloud

Early 1998

I WANT MY WARLORD NEWS!

We've been hearing that a lot lately, so here you go! In case you were wondering what the delay was, it's solely been a lack of material. So if you want to see more issues, send us some submissions!

SFW HALL OF FAME UPDATE

<u>Game</u>	<u>Winner</u>	<u>Corporation</u>	<u>Victory</u>
H22	Team victory	Alliance	Economic
H23	Team victory	Coalition	Default
H25	Team victory	Coalition	Military
DH1	Mike Bogdan	Savage Norsemen	20 sect, 212 sites
DH2	Mark Hall	Unlimited Ltd.	12 sect, 173 sites
DH3	None	None	Game Cancelled
49	Robert Vandenberg	Krasnya Flot	101 sites
50	Gene Malin	Gungho Iguana Corp	7 sectors
51	John Haugh	Bandit Bankers!	96 sites
52	Ty Johnson	Rapist Braineaters	83 sites
53	Barry Stephens	Storms	84 sites
54	Gene Malin	Privateer Star Corps	7 sectors

DH1 was one of the closest games on record, especially considering its length of 35 turns. This was the first to use the Die Hard game rules from SFW News #12 and proved the worth of that game setup. At the end, 6 diehards were still going at it, with Randy Hill's Desolation Angels Corporation scoring 20 sector bonuses and 228 sites against the winner's 20 sectors and 212 sites. However, Savage Norsemen scored 921 victory points (measured using sites, sectors, and ship kills) to Desolation Angels's 790 points, a clear victory for the Vikings.

DH2, the second Die Hard game, was a little more subdued. After 32 turns, Mark Hall's Unlimited Ltd. had a full 5-sector and 50-site lead on his closest competition, Joe Cool Camel (played by Dan DeLoye), with Todd Kagan's TMI a short way behind.

DH3 was an attempt to apply some bizarre options to the Die Hard rules set. Unfortunately, some of the options selected were among the most despised of all SFW variants (as we shortly discovered) which contributed to a high dropout rate. It soon became obvious that continuing the game would be a waste of time, as the remainder of the game would feature unlimited expansion without any real conflict between players. In case you're interested, the options which were most loathed were: -10 turn timeshift (i.e., starting the game in Y155 instead of Y165), anonymous players (so you couldn't tell who you were fighting), undead (meaning you didn't die if you lost your home office), and prospecting values were halved. The combination of these rules seemed to make the game unplayable, so we will limit games to no more than one of them (if at all) in the future. (Die Hard games themselves did not die, of course, as we are now up to game DH5 and working on starting DH6.)

SFW IN EUROPE!

We've recently completed an agreement with Pagoda Games, a British PBM company, to offer SFW in Europe! They are currently in the middle of their first game and have just started a second. Any SFW players in Europe should contact Pagoda at electronic mail address pagoda_games@compuserve.com or write to Pagoda Games, PO Box 5155, Tamworth, Staffordshire, B77 4QQ UNITED KINGDOM. Note that Pagoda is the exclusive licensee for SFW in Europe and players on that continent cannot choose to use the US provider instead (except to finish existing games).

AOG CORPORATE ISSUES

As many of you know, Agents of Gaming formed a corporation in 1997 for the purpose of producing board games and similar items, such as our surprisingly popular Babylon 5 Wars game and miniatures line. As part of this operation, the partners involved in most of the game design opened up an office in another part of town, resulting in a split location. AOG (the PBM side) is still in the same place, with the same phone number and mailing address, but now has a separate email address (agent1@agentsofgaming.com). This address should be used for ALL issues related to Star Fleet Warlord, including questions, orders, and emailed turns. The old address, which began with aog instead of agent1, reaches a totally different location and person (Robert Glass, actually) and should only be used if you actually have questions relating to Babylon 5 Wars or one of our other board games or projects. If you send your SFW email to the wrong place, it will be delayed or lost!

Of course, your SFW GM, Bruce Graw, is a part of the corporate AOG Inc., and will occasionally be at their facility doing work (such as miniatures casting, technical writing or product layouts). However, this does not mean you should call that number for SFW questions or problems! If Mr. Graw is located at that site, he is only there because he is busy with another project not related to SFW. Besides which, he will not have access to any of his SFW computers or rules, so probably won't be able to answer questions, solve problems, or confirm the receipt of a turn. Therefore, if you call the AOG Inc. office looking for Mr. Graw for a SFW issue, you will be politely asked to call the SFW phone number, (937) 233-6886, and leave a message. For similar reasons, don't send a fax to the AOG Inc. office as it will only get delayed or lost. We thank you kindly for your understanding in this matter.

CHANGES TO THE AOG HOUSE RULES

The AOG House Rules haven't been updated in a while, but will be shortly. As soon as an update is ready, it will appear on our web site, www.agentsofgaming.com, as a free download. You'll receive a message in your turns announcing this when available. In the meantime, here's a short summary of changes and updates:

Turn Prices haven't changed, and won't be for some time, unless they raise postage costs significantly. (Now that paper prices have dropped back to a reasonable amount, we're back to 1996's overhead levels, enough to cover inflation.)

A new **Mailing Option** has been added. The introduction of Global Priority Mail by the USPS allows us to ship turns to Canada or overseas in a 2-3 day priority pack for \$7. This applies no matter how many turns are being sent to the same address, so it is ideal for historical games.

Credit Cards work as before, except that the 5% surcharge is no longer billed. There is also an option to use your credit card for one-time charges. If you would like to use a card once, simply write the card# and expiration date on your turn, along with the amount you want to spend and your signature. We'll make that single charge and add it to your account, but we won't continue using it every time your account balance drops to zero (as we would if you filled out the form). You can get the automatic billing form from the web site, by the way.

Changes to Turns will now incur an automatic \$1 fee (at a minimum, but it can be larger if you need to make many changes). Of course, we cannot make any changes once your turn has run! Note: Sometimes we pre-enter turns well before their run date. If you mail or fax in a new orders sheet, do us the favor of marking what orders were actually changed, so we don't have to retype it all. Otherwise your fee might be higher than necessary.

RECENT GAME CHANGES

Last issue, we announced the news that there would be no more double turns! And as this is written, the last game using the non-sequenced Day Cycle system has ended. The anti-double-turn rule seems to be working exactly as advertised. New players should see issue #13 (www.agentsofgaming.com/sfwn13.doc) for an explanation of the Sequence# system and why it was implemented.

Shortly after this (and after the last newsletter was published), we instituted a smaller galaxy policy in which standard games were only 8x8, not 10x10 as explained in the rulebook. There were several reasons for this, but the primary one was the number of players in the game. It's hard to fill a full 50 player game in a reasonable amount of time, especially with the special games (like those in the DH-format) starting up in between normal ones! Reducing the size of the game by 2 rows and 2 columns dropped the number of players from 50 to 32, allowing games to start on a more regular schedule. It also means that another major complaint we've had from some players (that they are too far away from the winner to have had any chance of stopping him from achieving victory) is somewhat taken care of. Under the 8x8 system, the farthest away anyone can be from you is 4 sectors, not 5, meaning you have a better chance of interacting with them in one direction or another. Typical winners have their fingers in plenty of sectors two away from their homes, and that's only two away from you!

Because games are only 8x8, you should note that the bottom right corner sector is 77, not 99, so any wrapping around you do will happen on the 7-row or 7-column instead of the 9-row or 9-column. In order to make the Warlord's Aide work properly, you should go to your Miscellaneous stats screen when you start the game and set your X and Y galaxy maximums (at the bottom of the screen) to 7 and 7 instead of 9 and 9. This will make the Aide wrap your ships properly. Of course, DH-games are still the full 100 sectors unless noted otherwise, and historical-format games have not been modified.

Finally, with the reduced number of players in the game (about 2/3 the former size), we're also altering the prize for victory. This is because it's no longer economical for us to offer a full free game with the lesser number of players available (especially considering how we have no plans to raise game prices any time in the near future). So, here's the deal: the winning player will receive \$50 worth of game credit for use however he likes (the current free game doesn't cover fax charges, etc.). The second-place player will receive \$20 in credit, and the third place position will earn \$10. Finishing positions will be determined using the victory conditions as best we can, with sector bonuses taking priority over site count, and in the event of a tie, we will look at the number of ship kills during play to break the tie. For example, if game #999 ended with Player A owning 7 sectors and 65 sites, player B owning 6 sectors and 69 sites, and player C owning 6 sectors and 70 sites, the order of finish would be A, C, and B in that order. Note: This change does not affect any games in progress. It will begin with Game #59 and #DH6, as well as any other custom games that start after this newsletter is published. We still cannot offer any prizes for historical games; custom games will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis depending on game factors and sizes. (*Note: Pagoda Games may use a different prize schedule in Europe.*)

NEW GAME FEATURE: SECTOR SPECIALS

Over the years we've heard some interesting ideas for new features for the game, but most have involved the creation of whole new levels of play (e.g., another kind of income or resource), or a new series of orders, or other complexities. Some, like Romulan nuclear space mines, are tabled for the next game revision. A few, however, are simple enough to add without too much difficulty and without affecting any games in progress. Sector Specials is one of the latter category.

Sector Specials are found on at most one major site in any wild sector (there is a 33% chance that any given wild sector will have one). In almost all cases, this will be the sector's pirate base. You cannot tell such a site by looking at the map, but an SH order will report one (if it isn't jammed), and a SCAN SITES order, when available, will also report it (regardless of jamming). Also, if someone uses Espionage on you, they can learn the number of Specials you own by using code #9 and their locations by using code #10.

The Sector Special will provide a benefit to whoever owns the site. Some of these benefits operate all the time, while others provide their benefit

only during specific phases of the turn. For example, if your Sector Special gives you a bonus during the Income Phase, it should be obvious you won't get its effect until the turn after you capture it, due to the Sequence of Play.

When you capture a Sector Special for the first time, you will be told all about it and how you should make use of it. Keep in mind that Sector Specials will likely be big targets once their presence is known to an opponent, so guard them well and don't be surprised if they get captured and you lose the use of their powers. Note: Monsters and pirates treat Specials as they would any other site.

Sector Specials are not cumulative with others of the exact same type; e.g., if you own two of the Fortification Hardeners, you would still get only a 10% bonus. You can consider the extra one to be insurance.

Some, but not all, of the Specials known to exist are:

Fortification Hardener: All FS orders (but not FA orders) you issue add a bonus 10%. Thus, FS 00 0101 200 would add 220 points of fortifications, not 200.

Fighter Merchant Connection: You gain a connection with a fighter provider, and all fighters you buy while you own this site will cost only 4 EPs, not 5. The random variation in cost disappears (while you won't see the occasional 3-EP fighter, you also don't take the risk of getting them at 6 or 7 EPs, either).

PF Merchant Connection: You connect with a PF merchant, who can supply you with PFs while you own the site. Even if it is not yet Y180, you can buy PFs (at a cost of 25 EPs each, though). The cost drops to 20 EPs in Y180 and 18 EPs in Y181 and thereafter. You never need worry about random variations in cost.

Dragon Hatchery: While you own this site, you can purchase one space dragon each turn (of any size you choose) exactly as if it were a regular ship. Should you get the buy any monster event, it supersedes this Special for that turn only, allowing you to buy as many as you want.

Academy Capital: This is similar to the Academy Center minor site that sometimes appears in wild sectors and provides a random legendary officer each turn to its owner. The Academy Capital, however, provides a Legendary Captain each turn, at a cost of 25 PE from the site's original value (the amount will already have been subtracted when you look at the site, so you don't actually have to do any math).

Advanced Scanner: This Sector Special improves the power of your SH orders. SH will no longer be blocked by Scan Jamming, and will produce the same information that SV does. As a bonus, if you scan a Stargate, you will learn its destination.

Auto-Cloaker: If you have this Special, all your ships with the cloaking device will cloak out at the end of their turn, without having to use the CLOAK order. However, you will be charged 1 point of Dilithium for each ship which does this (of course, you won't be billed if your ship is already cloaked or has a hidden cloak, when that technology becomes available), assuming it is not in cloak-disrupting terrain.

Industrial Center: These sites create miscellaneous items for you automatically each turn, during the Income Phase. You will receive 1-4 fighters, 2-5 commandoes, 2-5 T-bombs, and 2-12 heavy drones, plus a decoy every other year (on odd-numbered years). In Y180 and after, you will receive 1-2 PFs as well.

Others: There are, of course, more than Sector Specials than those listed above. You, the reader, are even invited to send in your own suggestions! Just be sure they aren't too powerful. A Special that added 25% to all your prospecting would be rejected, for example. Also, they must use existing rules and ships, and shouldn't add any new orders or resources. At best, they should enhance existing technology, and nothing more.

WHAT'S UP WITH THE AIDE?

Okay, there are a few bugs in the Warlord's Aide. We know about them, but we can't fix them because the source code was destroyed in a freak hard disk accident in April 1996. This was the same crash that very nearly destroyed AOG—but we were able to recover most everything from backups so most of our players never even knew anything had happened. Needless to say, we now make daily backups to an alternate hard disk and a weekly backup to a zip disk kept offsite. And our backups include all our source code ... at least, they do *now*. Back in early 1996, they only backed up the code found in the Warlord directory. The Aide was stored in the Aide directory, which wasn't part of the process. In computerese this is called "failing to accomplish proper backup procedures." In layman's terms, "Whoops!"

Anyway, that code took months to write and debug, so rewriting it was going to be quite a task, and the time wasn't available. We also wanted to do it in Windows 95, and learning to program for that operating system was out of the question. A couple of industrious Win95 programmers who also play SFW have offered to produce new Aide versions, but none of these programs have yet arrived here at AOG. We remain cautiously hopeful.

In any case, the point is, the DOS version of the Aide you have will be the final one and can't be upgraded. Thus, you are stuck with any bugs or anachronisms it has in it. Below is a list of the ones we are aware of. I'm sure a few more exist that haven't been reported, and if you know of them, pass them along for inclusion herein.

Sequence Numbers: The Aide code died before the Sequence# system was implemented, so it is still set up for the 2-digit Day Cycle number, which no longer has any meaning. If you email in your Aide-produced turn, there is no problem because the reader at our end automatically updates it. But if you print out your turn and mail it in (which we'd rather you not do—use Email if at all possible), you need to handwrite the Sequence# in the Day Cycle position. Otherwise your turn will get put at the bottom of the stack and run last no matter what your correct sequence is.

Mission 000: Apparently we forgot to program mission 000 into the Aide, so any time you try to use it you get an error message. That mission isn't used often so this will rarely come up, but if you do need to use it, just enter MSNN and ignore the message. It will work (assuming your ship meets the criteria, of course).

Die Hard Game orders: There are a couple of Die Hard game orders created for that game type after the Aide's code was lost. These include the FF and FP orders as well as the purchase of CUSS ships. Naturally, these things will not work in any non-DH game, so if you try them there, they won't work. But in a DH-game you should ignore the error message the Aide gives you (in the case of FF and FP) or, in the case of the CUSS, add their ship base hulls to the Templates database. To do this, just go into that database and hit Insert, then enter the data for the FF, DD, CL, CA, and DN. Don't try to enter a class for every possible variation!

Decoys and Logistics Bases: They are in the basic template database for reference, but don't try to buy them with a PS order! If you do, the Aide won't give you an error message but the order still won't work. If you need to add one to your ship list database, though, they are there for easy copying. Note that you don't have to do this if you don't want to, unless you are sending in a printed turn by mail (which, again, we don't recommend). If you send it in by mail, we *insist* your decoys and logbases are in the correct positions on your orders sheet. Otherwise we may enter ship moves in the wrong places or in the wrong order.

The Letter 000: Please note that the letter 000 is different from the number 000 (zero). On your computer screen, they look different, the zero often having a slash or dot in the middle to distinguish it. If you put an O in a zero position, such as in a number like 10 or 200, it will be treated as nothing, and the number the game reads will be different than what you expect! If you write a 200 with oh's instead of zeroes, you will get a 2 (the oh's will be ignored) and the Aide, seeing a legitimate number in that position, will not give you any kind of error message!

THE FRUGAL GRAVEKEEPER

by John Haugh

[Editor's Note for new players: The Graveyard of Ships is a single, terrain-filled sector located outside the bounds of the normal Galaxy. You can send one ship into it per game, beginning in Y171. Rules for how this is to be accomplished are explained in Y170.]

Players might consider an alternative, frugal approach to the Graveyard of Ships. This suggestion should only be considered after reading Brian Robbins's excellent analysis presented in SFW News #7 (www.agentsofgaming.com/sfwn7.doc). I agree with most of Mr. Robbins's analysis but question his emphasis on large, expensive ships like the CVA, DN or BB in order to "...survive one-on-one combat." I would suggest players send a small, cheap ship rigged for prospecting as a low-risk, potentially high return strategy. This strategy is designed to generate income early with a minimum investment, as EPs are worth far more early in the game than later.

One key point here is that players should do everything they can to send their chosen Gravekeeper into the GS in Y171. I have found it difficult to prepare a DN, CVA or BB to send into the GS in Y171 while still expanding my empire at an acceptably fast rate. A cheap Gravekeeper has seemed a good compromise at times. Remember that your Gravekeeper should be staffed with the appropriate legendary officers, equipped with optional items, and the crew trained in time to issue the one-pulse GRAV order while located in a gravity well, black hole or white hole during Y171. *[Editor's note: If you were wondering, the reason we make you wait until Turn #6 is so that everyone has an equal chance to find the appropriate terrain.]* This will generate a free map of the GS (you don't need a scout) and the Gravekeeper will be able to start contributing to your empire immediately. The Graveyard of Ships is full of sites and prospectable terrain.

For example, one game I used my initial build's F-POL in the GS. I added my Y170 Prime Team and a Legendary Navigator, trained the crew up to level 7 and used the Upgrade order to reach crew level 8 (this only works because it was a Fed ship, of course). At this point, I had spent 40 EP for the hull, 40 FP for the PT and LN, about 27 PE for training and 10 OR for the upgrade. This is roughly the equivalent of a 59 EP investment. My F-POL landed on a SN upon entering the Graveyard in Y171, which it immediately prospected for 100 EPs which I spent in Y172—almost a 100% return on my investment. It then proceeded to prospect for over 700 EPs and add three major sites and a minor site over the course of the next 10 turns. Granted, it was lucky to live 11 turns in a one-sector cage match, but considering the return on my investment, the risk was worth it.

A number of other cheap ships might be used in the Graveyard. The O-SLV might be a good choice because of its uncommon flexibility. For example, the O-SLV can safely handle a variable pulsar when in mission 000 and equipped with a Legendary Navigator. The WYN or Orion generic ships are an option as well. Any generic ship equipped with a Prime Team offers considerable flexibility, a great strength in the Graveyard. At least one player has sent in an A-OGS, though I personally consider a speed-2 ship to be overly limiting. Adding an LE or even an LC is affordable if sending in a cheap Gravekeeper, and can make most terrain navigable.

Granted, a cheap ship will die horribly to even a medium-sized CA. There is not much you can do about this except cross your fingers and avoid obvious target hexes, though some terrain might offer a little protection. However, sending in a huge ship-killer is expensive and may generate a minimal economic return other than denying other players income and sites in the Graveyard. Ship-killers running over opponents' ships are fun, and that is important. However, the profits from a Frugal Gravekeeper might help finance a nice Death Fleet back in the Cloud. A loaded BB would cost around 400 EPs, a loaded CVA 300+ EPs and even a loaded, crew-5 O-DCR or R-SUPA would cost around 250 EPs. Further, a BB would not normally be able to enter the GS until Y177 which is a bit late getting to the party. Consider sending a cheap little prospector into the Graveyard. It is a gamble, but the payoff can be outstanding if your Frugal Gravekeeper can survive long enough.

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ASK THE GALACTIC COUNCIL!

Q. I had a ship lose its shields in an unexpected battle and then enter an undefended site in a Heat Zone, whereupon the ship perished in flames. My question is, why didn't I take the site? The rulebook says I only have to fly my ship into the hex of an undefended site and I will own it.

A. Well, what the rules say (p.6) is this: you must defeat [the site's] guards and fortifications (if any) to capture the site. Since you must first survive any terrain effects before you could even attempt to defeat any guards and fortifications (and, indeed, before you even learn if such things exist), as explained on page 16, it follows that you would have to survive entry into the hex before you could ever become a site's owner.

Now, this little bit of sequencing isn't actually spelled out in the rules (but left for you to deduce), so perhaps it would be wise to print the official sequence here, to avoid further confusion. Here is the exact sequence of play for ship movement during a turn:

1. Start with the first ship you own, oldest first.
2. Move the ship, assuming it is moving, or resolve its other orders, if any, for Pulse #1.
3. Check for Stargate or Weak Space involuntary movement.
4. Check the effects of area terrain, and apply any damage or other effects immediately.
5. Check the effects of point terrain in the same way.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 for each ship you own.
7. Any ships which issued the LINK order successfully are moved to the hex of their mothership (note that this neatly avoids terrain effects). If the mothership is dead due to terrain, the satellite ships are destroyed (I cannot recall ever seeing this happen during play, but it is programmed to work this way).
8. Check for and resolve all combat.
9. Pickup items at bases (and other base-related operations, like Engineer auto-repairs).
10. Go to the next pulse. Repeat steps 1-9 until completely done with movement.

UPCOMING GAME ANNOUNCEMENTS

GAME #59, scheduled for a late February start, will be a standard game and will introduce the new Sector Specials as well as the new prize schedule.

GAME #60, starting in late March, will be a Nomad Game. In this popular variant, which appeared in both games 49 and 54, there are no Home Offices at all! Every sector is a wild sector, and contains one of the really nasty monsters, as well as a pirate base. You'll start with a Warp Gate as usual, somewhere near the middle of your sector (in an empty hex) with 1000 EPs, not 300; however, loans aren't available, and since you don't

have an HO, you won't have that 100 EPs coming in every turn like you're used to. Since you don't have an HO, you can only buy ships at Warp Gates, and if you lose them all, you can't build ships any more! Thus, we recommend you buy at least one extra WG during your build (perhaps two). Losing all your WGs and other ships is the only way to get knocked out of this game completely, as you have no Home Office to lose.

GAME #DH6 will be a variation of the popular Die Hard format. The following changes to the rules seen in Issue #12 are in force: (1) You will get a good event every turn, with no EV order needed. (2) Monsters are available for purchase at any time during the game, but their prices are subject to supply and demand; REP and GER types are unavailable. (3) 50 of the 100 sectors are wild, with 2 monsters of the largest size in their class. No monsters in player or NPC sectors. (4) Hive ships are available for unlimited purchase. (5) No free item orders (FD, FP, etc.). (6) No Graveyard of Ships. (7) No naming of ships unless you use the Aide to email in turns, due to the large size of the game and the GM's borderline carpal tunnel syndrome. All other rules are the same as a standard Die Hard format.

CATCH US ON THE WEB!

Agents of Gaming's World Wide Web page location has changed to www.agentsofgaming.com, a site which presents AOG's full line of products in addition to SFW. Our old GNN address was lost when GNN was absorbed by AOL, and we chose to purchase our own site and URL rather than submit to AOL's rules and space limitations.

Follow the links to SFW to find out about upcoming games (we try to keep the page updated at least monthly), to send Email directly to AOG, and even to fill out an Initial Build Form online! You can also find various helpful files available for download, including the latest House Rules, the credit card authorization form, and every back issue of the Star Fleet Warlord News!

PUBLISHER'S INFORMATION

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