

CAPTAIN'S LOG #42: SUPPLEMENTAL FILE

A BATTLE WE HAD TO WIN

Admiral Kumerian is famous for saying “Never fight a battle that you do not have to win.” Well, *CL#42* was a battle we had to fight and had to win, but it was tougher than it should have been.

We always know how an issue is going to go by the fiction. If we have a good story on file, ready to go, then we seem to have an easy time of the whole issue. If the fiction is a problem, then everything, including things not even remotely related to the fiction, seems to become a problem.

The lack of fiction for *CL#42* meant delaying the issue two weeks while we *created* a story; the delay meant an intense schedule for people who were already tired, a schedule not particularly tolerant of things that do not go smoothly.

To be sure, every issue has some things that get done easily and some things that fight to the death to avoid being done. It just seems that the story makes the difference in how we respond to each. If the issue is going well, the problem pages just don't bother us. They bother us a lot more if the fiction for the issue is not finished and in the file.

Being “creative on command” is not a good thing, as it usually produces substandard work. Unwilling to tolerate that, we took the time needed to create a story that was good, that was worth reading, and that made a point, that added something to the knowledge base of the universe — something our customers would enjoy, even if it took twice as long as creating something boring. You deserve no less.

PUBLISHER'S NOTES

Captain's Log #42 was done as part of a normally paced plan (until the fiction problem), not a “rushed” project. We had done a lot of pages ahead of time, and had people working on more pages. So, let's walk through the issue and let me share some background and other thoughts.—*Stephen V. Cole*

HISTORY

The history (fiction) section of an issue always sets the mood of the company, as we noted above (and many times before). We had a story planned, but the writer did not do it. The backup story had already been delayed (as it is linked to the release of *Star Fleet Marines* which was also delayed). A very long story that arrived unexpectedly looked good on page seven, but by page ten we just wanted it to end (which it did on page 20) and we set it aside for major revisions at a later time (delaying the unwanted start on writing a story from scratch). We have some “reserve ideas for stories” on file, and when things aren't rushed we enjoy getting one of them out and writing it. When things go wrong, we have to get one out of the file and write it, and while we could write a story in a day or two, writing a *good* story takes a week or more as the plot has to develop in our minds.

A Quality of Speed: I wrote the story from a reserve idea Steven P. Petrick had, a team concept that has worked many times before. We had to find a central character who was interesting and then give him a reason to do what he did. Plot must always come from character, not the situation. Killik was a cadet

who took time to think things through, which combat never allows. His “thinking” was seen as “hesitation” and even “cowardice” by his commanders. When he got over his habit of overthinking a problem, he ran into a unique situation in which a slower approach was the right one. Steven P. Petrick suggested that we use Krelt, the aggressive officer sent packing from a gunboat flotilla back in *Captain's Log #30*. The story gave us a chance to bring in much more background about how the Klingon Navy (and any military organization) works.

The Second Story: We often have a second, shorter story, and this one was planned because of a unique situation. Xander Fulton, a gifted artist of some note, had done a marvelous piece of art, and Leanna told us to use it as the cover of *Captain's Log #42* because it was “too good not to use”. (Leanna can be pretty insistent about making something happen even if it means that the creative people around here have to get *really* creative to find a way for it to happen.) Since we had no fiction to match the cover, we invited several writers to submit a story that could plausibly use that art. Out of a dozen invitations, we got three stories or outlines, and printed the best of them, by veteran writer John Sickels. Sadly, it was a short, two-page story and became one of those rare “cover stories that were not the main story”.

Snapshots: These one-page articles are a combination of fiction, datafiles, and background. We had quite a selection in this issue, and each has its own “story behind the story”.

Star Fleet Pawn Stars 2 came from the talented pen of Michael Bennett, who wrote the original *Star Fleet Pawn Stars*. We felt that the original story was unfinished, and now you know how things turned out (and who the real brains of the outfit is). If you want to hear more (or no more) from Rick, Chumlee, Big Hoss, and the Old Man, you might want to let us know as Mike just keeps churning out this kind of material.

Star Fleet Organization is this issue's extract from a recent *Prime Directive* project, but seemed to make more sense in the History chapter than in Venues. We thought that the information, buried in an RPG book that boardgamers will rarely see, should be made available to the non-roleplayers.

Q-Ships is one of Steven P. Petrick's technology reports, and explains in military detail just what Q-ships hope to accomplish and how they set about making it happen.

The story of *Ketrick's Kat* is one that Steven P. Petrick created more than a decade ago, and he has told it to visitors and people at Origins many times. Jean Sexton came up with the clever ending to the story, and the rest is part of the history chapter. The published story is a very short version of a much longer tale, and we have added some additional material, and an extra scene, in this *Supplemental File*. Maybe, someday, the entire story will become a major part of a future *Captain's Log*.

The Librarian Returns (in this *Supplemental File*) is, obviously, a joke that doesn't make sense in reality (would the Hydran not starve to death between maintenance cycles?), but it was so funny we decided to print it anyway.

We did not have a Class History or Developmental History this issue. Those take serious work, and none of those in progress had reached a “ready for prime time” status for this issue. We do have a class history in the works for the next issue.

COMMUNICATIONS

News: Last issue, I said (in the *Supplemental File*, written weeks after the issue was finished) that “Much of this page is standard and is repeated almost unchanged every issue.” That was when Marketing Director Jean Sexton blew a fuze, went ballistic, launched into a rant, and otherwise indicated that we (you can read that as “I” if you want) had really screwed up. “If it’s repeated unchanged,” she scolded, “then everybody stopped reading it long ago and it’s just wasted space! You think you’re communicating with your customers — and you’re not!”

Chastened, I set out to reorganize and update this information, and mention recent (and previous) things which Jean (and Mike Sparks and Joel Shutts) have been doing. Actually having someone *doing* the marketing job has meant that the company (i.e., Jean) is *doing a whole lot of things* to get information into the hands of current, past, and future customers. As you can see, her “kingdom” has expanded to include many venues and programs (and all of us now work for her at least part of the time). We’re doing so many different “communications” things that we cannot even remember them all, and left TalkShoe off of the list!

Star Fleet Awards: We had a lot of awards to recognize in this issue, and are more than a little proud of the Wall of Honor project on the website. Many other game publishers have stopped by to marvel at that web page, and have asked in stunned admiration “You got *how* many people to do *this much stuff* over how many *years*?” We’re proud to be the company with more player-submitted material published, and more volunteers working to check and test things, than any other game company.

After-Action: As is now the standard practice, we used the space in the issue for stuff *about* the products, and put the “every stupid comma we missed” stuff into this *Supplemental File*.

Command the Future: This is Stephen V. Cole’s article to write as it is the strategic vision for the company. Some of these projects are not getting done as fast as we wanted them to get done, but progress is being made.

Ten Questions: We gather interesting questions with important answers all the time, and print them if we have ten. Last issue, we had to change an answer at the last minute as our policy on PDF sales suddenly shifted, and this issue we had to admit that it should have shifted sooner than it did.

Input Guide: Jean Sexton became unhappy with some of the writers, who simply would not learn what she was teaching and continued to make her job (and mine) more difficult than it has to be. After a humorous first attempt, she produced a worthwhile article pointing out some specific instances of “you can do better”. She has (I am told) more of them for her pages of this *Supplemental File*.

Starline 2400: I am not happy with what I did on this page of *CL#42*, if only because I do not have a good grip on where the marketplace (and the closing of a third of America’s surviving game stores) will take the miniatures industry.

Why?: This is one of my favorite pages, partly because I get to explain things, and partly because it’s just about the easiest page to do in the entire issue.

A Galaxy of Song: We didn’t do one this issue, but we did have one song (on Jean’s Input Guide page) which delighted even players who hate my filksongs. We also have a different humor page (the job application, which is designed so that only one person in the whole world can qualify for the opening). That happened when somebody posted a similar job application a couple of weeks ago for a Star Fleet Red Shirt. Converting that into the document we published was done just for fun, but 30 seconds after posting it on the BBS, I took it down and put it in the *Captain’s Log #42* file.

Scatter-Pack: This is actually at the very back of the book (before the SSDs and Ship Cards). It is a collection of small items which needed to be printed but found no other home.

FEDERATION COMMANDER

Communique: This page is fairly obvious and easy. We just remind you what we have done, and tell you what we plan to do. It was also a great place to promote the e23 product series.

Email & On-Line: I am blessed to have Frank Brooks running our Play-by-Email system and Paul Franz running our on-line gaming system. They do a super job, year round. This issue, Tony L. Thomas asked Frank if he could write the PBEM article, and we were glad to let Tony spread his wings.

Tactics: I can always count on Patrick J. Doyle to write a brilliant tactics article for *Captain’s Log* and this time we were privileged to publish his *Command at Origins 2010* report.

Scenarios: We have a bunch of *Federation Commander* scenarios on file, but it always seems that it takes hours to find two or three we can publish. Please write more, and *please* use the format we provide on the website:

<http://www.starfleetgames.com/fc/designguide.shtml>

Command Notes: We really need people to write more of these, but at least we had a good selection for this issue.

Project Z: Mike West was inspired, this time around, to write an article about how to use *Federation Commander* Ship Cards in *Star Fleet Battles*. We moved that to the Database chapter, so that *SFB* players might actually see it.

Borders of Madness: Mike West contributed another of his articles here, this one about the infamous Tholian pinwheel. His article inspired me to do a Ship Card to match it.

Ship Cards: Besides the Tholian pinwheel already mentioned, this issue includes two Ship Cards (done by Richard Smith) for the Omega Playtest Pack on e23, and a “player’s choice” ship, the infamous Hydran cruiser *Anarchist*.

SFB SCENARIOS

Steven P. Petrick is in charge of these, and he tries to keep a file of them ready to publish at any given time. His file is a little thicker than it was six months ago, but 80% of the scenarios on file come from one author, and we try to get as many different authors into *Captain’s Log* as possible. It’s not by accident that we proudly hold the record for publishing more player-created material than any other game publisher *ever*. We have to actually *work at it* to create as many published writers as we have, by teaching, coaching, coaxing, and (gently) editing articles.

This issue doesn’t have a scenario to match the fiction story. The *Moray Eel of Space* scenario was published decades ago, and the shorter stories did not lend themselves to a scenario. Nevertheless, John Sickel’s *Maximum Effort* was a fine choice for the lead scenario. We always try to have one scenario from outside the Alpha Sector, and can always count on Gary Carney for that. The other scenarios each presented a unique challenge and a new puzzle to solve.

SFB DATABASE

Monsters: Steven Petrick does another monster in each issue. This issue, it was the turn of the Ice Monster.

Update for Campaigns: Every time we do a new product, it creates questions for all published campaigns. Can this or that ship be used? Does the Order of Battle change? Every few issues, Steven P. Petrick does an update for all published campaigns, and this time, he did one covering *Module R12*.

Background Questions: This came out of a series of questions on the BBS, and seemed important enough to be published.

Proposals Board: We are now handling these on a more orderly basis and had a page for this issue (and already have a page for next issue).

Major Background Article: These “just happen” when some interesting conversation comes up, and nothing came up in the last six months to inspire an article.

Ask Admiral Growler: We normally do four pages, but when the scenario section came to only nine pages (it had been scheduled for ten) we added a reserve page of Growler rather than create something entirely new (which would have delayed the issue while it was edited and proofread).

Brothers of the Anarchist: This issue, we published Chapter 22 and have several more to go.

Ask Kommodore Ketrick: I did not have enough of this to make a page, so we'll save that for next time.

New Rules: Mike West (who is the primary staffer for both Early Years and *Federation Commander*) came up with this article and we decided that (given the interest in Y3 and Y2 and Y3G) we would print it.

Example: Steven P. Petrick wrote the article based on a "challenge" from a player that a flotilla of direct-fire PFs could not defeat a Moray Eel. Boy, was he wrong.

SFB TACTICS

Victory at Origins: We had an outstanding article from Gregg Dieckhaus for this issue. We're considering what to do for *Captain's Log #43*. We might use an old *Victory* article we still have on file unpublished, or we might commission an article from another tournament, or we might have another kind of tactics article for that issue.

Term Papers: We had enough good papers for a decent section this issue, but we need players to submit more of them so we can rebuild this section to its former four-page status.

Battlegroup: This has become one of the most popular articles, now that it has evolved away from accounting and into a primarily tactics article.

Primer: There is no law that says only Scott Moellmer gets to write these, and this issue we had one from Gary Carney on a little-known non-Alpha Octant subject.

STAR FLEET VENUES

Star Fleet Command: We continue to support the computer game that refuses to die.

PBEM and On-Line: What Frank Brooks and Paul Franz do for *Federation Commander*, they have long done for *Star Fleet Battles*, and they continue to do it with style and grace.

Star Fleet Marines: I didn't want to give away any more about this delayed product, so I just added a note that it will come out in the spring.

Star Fleet Warlord: One of the oldest of *SFU* campaign games, Paul Franz runs this system.

Galactic Conquest: Probably the oldest and longest-running *SFU* campaign game, *Galactic Conquest* is the creation of John Berg. While John takes a break to deal with some real life situations, the staff he trained have kept the game running and their *Captain's Log* page full.

Prime Directive: We promote the *Prime Directive* product line by publishing interesting background articles, such as the article about Federation numbered fleets. We did move the article to the history section. After I finished *CL#42* and did the last work on *Alien Armada* (which had a planet rule, so I filled up an empty spot with one of Ted Geibel's planet pictures) I was kicking myself that I didn't do a planet survey (with a planet picture) in the issue.

Starmada: This issue brings word that the *Alien Armada* module has been released, along with four new ship data sheets. We put two more ship data sheets in this *Supplemental File*. We also included the ship background information.

Star Fleet Battle Force: We continue to publish playtest material from future expansions. This issue, we did some proposed "action cards" players suggested on the BBS.

FEDERATION & EMPIRE

The Front Page: This promises *ISC WAR* will be published "for Origins". Really. We're not kidding this time. Supporting this project is the updated version of the echelon rule.

F&E Why: The *F&E* game system continues to make good use of its Why page.

Q&A: Mike Curtis answers questions on the BBS and sends me packages of answered questions and questions requiring rulings. I then process a few questions every month (well, all of them in one batch a week before we go to press) and the result is three pages of *Captain's Log*. The system is working well, and I'm blessed by the efficiency and efficacy of the FEAR in this endeavour.

New Ships: This issue brings two more fast battleship raiders and two Vudar dreadnoughts.

Tactical Notes: Prolific *F&E* players never stop writing them and we continue to publish them, but we need more of them.

F&E Proposals Board: With the fiction crisis, I just did not have time this issue to compile this.

Scenario: This issue includes the last three sectors of the new multi-sector version of Scenario (603) Hurricane.

SHIPYARD

Fast Battleships: Players liked last ones so much that we did two more of them this time.

New SFB Ships: To accompany Mike West's project on Early Years simulator empires, we published four ships for them.

New Federation Commander Ships: Richard Smith did two Omega Sector Ship Cards from the Federal Republic of Aurora to support the e23 PDF pack of Omega playtest material. Then I did a pinwheel Ship Card for Mike West's *Borders of Madness* article. Then I asked Mike to poll the players and pick one more ship, and the players said that they wanted to actually see the Hydran D7H *Anarchist* that sparked the *Brothers of the Anarchist* series. Here's a funny story. The guys at TFG #2 refused to allow us to print the first *Brothers of the Anarchist* article without explaining why. The guys from TFG #3 said "go ahead and print it" without any objection. We found out, much later, that TFG #2 had refused to allow us to publish it because they thought the title was *Brothers of the Antichrist*.

New Starmada Ships: We provided four new ships this issue, and you will find two more in this *Supplemental File*.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON CL#42

The continuing concept of doing *Captain's Log* based on a plan instead of crisis management worked well in this issue. Despite the fiction problem, the plan worked.

For one thing, about half of the issue was done (as per the plan) before "crisis" arrived.

We do plan to solve the fiction problem by a tried and true methodology. Many years ago, the product schedule demanded a lot of *SFB* scenarios, so Steven P. Petrick and I invented a "scenario machine". There was, of course, no actual metal and plastic mechanical device, but it was a procedure by which we worked on scenarios for one day every two weeks. Each time Scenario Day arrived, we made enough progress (doing early steps on some scenarios, later steps on others) that, on average, the Scenario Machine spit out the number of scenarios we needed. We're now building a Fiction Machine to make sure that we always have a reserve story (not just a reserve idea for a story) in the file. (A much longer version of *Ketrick's Kat* would be a good story.)

And a final thought. Any given product is not over when it ships, but when the FLAP list is finished (which takes about a week) so avoid premature emails that say "Now that you finished that product, can you take a look at my idea for..."