

BLACK ΩMEGA SQUADRON B5CCG UK NEWSLETTER

The Rangers

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"Like nothing you'll ever see again!"

UK Team Championships promise to SHATTER world record..

Up and down the country, teams have been registering for what could be the biggest and most intense B5 tournament ever! At time of printing there were 13 registered teams for the B5CCG UK Championship - making a field of 65 players - and shattering the former record of 52 for the US Nationals in 1999. Many of the teams are veterans from last year's nail-biting finale and there are some score to settle. However, the CCG world is rarely stable and neither of the top two teams from last year has the same line-up!

The tournament - running in Sheffield on the 8th April - will consist of three rounds. The first two are randomly drawn whilst the last is paired in 'swiss' style, pitting the best players against each other. The points that each player gathers count not only towards their own score, but their teams aggregate score too. There are two tournament winners - the individual and the team - with substantial prizes for a tournament of this size!

Triples is one of the UK's longest running wargaming conventions, as this year celebrates it's 20th anniversary.

National Leagues End in Triumph!

Over 70 players take part as UK paves the way for international models

The first national season of UK B5 leagues have ended with some tight finishes and worthy champions. The leagues - based on the ideas of Bruce Mason - have been applauded as a runaway success and a definite way of getting more players involved in the game on a regular basis. There has been considerable interest from around the globe regarding the format and other leagues could be popping up elsewhere. The Top 5 of each league are as follows - congratulations to all of them!

New leagues start on April 1st - see your local Ranger to sign up and to detail any rules changes that have been decided upon.

Northern Alliance

1. Peter Meredith
2. Andrew Watson
3. Craig Johnson
4. Gordon Skelley
5. Neil Gow

Wales and West

1. Ian Richards
2. Paul Sheward
3. Richard Willis
4. Stephen Gold
5. Stephen Crane

Black Country

1. Chris Slinn
2. Simon Overy
3. Darren Littlehales
4. Dean Gotheridge
5. Mark Ursell

New System for UK Rankers!

UK only rankings system launched

Following concerns over the volatility of the rankings presented in Black Omega every month, a new system is being tested that will concentrate on UK and Ireland players only. The system will be launched at Triples 2K.

Under the new system players will start with 1000 points and ante a certain percentage of those points depending on the size of the tournament. Bonuses will be given for larger events and named tournaments like the UK Championships.

When the rankings are established, they will be available on-line at the Black Omega website so that they can be checked whenever a player desires.

With both the World rankings and these new UK Black Omega rankings, we should have a better idea exactly who are the best players in the country.

The Wheel Turns...

FINALLY Wheel of Fire ships

Word from Precedence is that Wheel of Fire, the new B5CCG expansion including the Interstellar Alliance and the Drakh, will have a street release date of 'the week of April 17th' - normally adding a week onto that for the UK. The set has been the source of much pre-release expectation and is rumoured to shake the game up on the same scale as the Great War did 16 months ago.

Loughboro' Axed

GenCon moves to new venue

GenCon, the home of the B5CCG UK and Black Omega championships, has been moved from its usual venue at Loughborough University to the Manchester University Conference Centre. The move, allegedly due to contractual problems, may mean a drop in prices and takes the event into the northern heartland of the B5 game. GenCon, running from 31st August-3rd September is the biggest gaming convention in the country and Black Omega provides B5-related gaming every day. This year will also see the second anniversary of the founding of Black Omega.



Taking The Fifth

A preview of the Wheel of Fire by Bruce Mason

Please note that when this article was written over half of the cards hadn't been released on Vorlon Space so some of the playtest versions may have changed.

The Wheel of Fire expansion puts the game squarely into the fifth season and it is certainly the biggest shake up in the game since The Great War with the Drakh, the ISA, the resurgence of the Non-Aligned and the death of the old homeworlds. Several old characters get some seriously beefy replacements and a few new faces (Lochley any one?) make their first appearance.

The highlight of the set are clearly the Drakh: pound for pound these are the most powerful cards in the game. What is for sure is that playing the Drakh isn't easy - they may be powerful but that power comes at the price: you have to win with a Drakh agenda and you don't start with your ambassador in play, putting you at severe risk of not getting it. To a large extent your choice of Drakh strategy is based around your ambassador: Shiv'kala for unrest or intrigue, Rimush for military, and Sharkali for psi. Of course the problem is: what if someone else gets your ambassador? In that case you have to go get La'Shan who is OK at pretty much everything. Finally there is the Master of Darkness - at first I ignored this card until every time I played Drakh I realised I wanted him, the shadow mark gaining is not to be underestimated and if you're playing with the Drakh Entire and/or Espers then an extra ambassador is always useful.

Setting up your opening with the Drakh is tricky. The Drakh ambassador has to be sponsored at printed cost and I have yet to find a way to bring an ambassador into play on the first turn. This means that you will always have to risk not being able to play the ambassador of your choice

Drakh military is also an awesome machine. Unfortunately you can not use Full Mobilization as it isn't a Drakh agenda but consider using Empire Builder or War Footing to build up then switching to Power Supreme. There's also the Drakh "damned if you do, damned if you don't" military strategy which alternates between Search for a Home and Let the Galaxy Burn. As for chaos tokens, generally I found I tried to ignore them, just too much like hard work apart from Foment Discord decks which really do require The Work of the Wicked. Finally there is a really nasty, obvious Drakh psi deck out there. Using Psi Corp Intelligence, Espers and Power Supreme.

The ISA caused some arguments in playtesting and resulted in the weirdest looking card in the game - "Interstellar Alliance." In theory the ISA is a counter to the Drakh, among other things the +2 power requirement to win per ISA member makes Power Supreme a lot harder. In particular the ISA gets "We Say It's Over," also known as "We laugh in the face of Growth in Chaos" and the particularly nasty "But We're your Allies." Oddly the nastiest counter to the ISA is "Secret and Arrogant" which is a diplomacy conflict - generally the ISA's strength. Mind you, if playing the ISA then you have to expect "Declaration of Principles" against you. If you go to a tourney always have one in your sideboard. It's unclear what effect the ISA will have in practice. It was a common strategy in playtesting for the Non-Aligned to try to start the ISA very early, but of course persuading someone else to join can be tricky. In theory the ISA can be formed to counter a nasty mark, Drakh or military deck in which case you can usually find an ally. Or of course there's always a well-timed and carefully phrased Monitored Deal too. One thing to remember the ISA formation vote is *not* a B5 vote so you can't Call in a Marker.

The Non-aligned get a serious speed increase in this expansion, having finally been reined in from the Great War. Rule By The Masses is likely to become the opening agenda of choice - just watch out for Taunts and Games. Consider an opening hand of: Miziri Tal, Kalika, Burn from Both Ends, Rule by the Masses, Miloshi.?

As for the top 5 pick of utility cards: I would go for Corporate Connections, Feast of Lights, It Stops Here, Outfoxed, Hindsight. Other highlights include Legacy of Power - the aftermath that thinks its an agenda and just loves the Minbari and The Corp is Father (The Corp is Mother, The Corp is Father, Conscriptio - 8 influence and a supporting Psi Cop on turn 2 if you've set your deck up right, who said The Corp were slow?).



What happened to Fun?

Q. Whatever happened to the fun games? Why do I have to face the same speed decks and mark decks? What can I play that's worth a laugh but still has a chance of winning occasionally?

Zathras answers (with the aid of Newcastle funster Mark Lancaster) ... Players have their own individual reason for playing B5. For many it is win is the most important thing, for others the challenge, and yet others the power, the women and the prize support. However, there are a small breed of players still out there who love the game for the fun of it

This deck is designed around the Zathras card mechanics and as such is a little on the fat side (79 cards in this version), but as it uses the "Fulcrum of Power" and "Independent Support" influence engine, drawing cards is rarely a problem. The deck is built around a simple concept, interfere and steal.

Starting Hand : Vlur/Nhar, She'lah, Fulcrum of Power, Independent Support, Rapid Growth.

Characters : 2 x Luhf/Suhf, 2 x Lhim/Dram, 2 x Nhuk/Vrek, Kailika Qwal'mizra, Hyach Patriarch, Suarez Cil'tlakh, Milashi Voktal, Lethke Zum Bartado, Vizak, Hyach Matriarch, Harkar, Fashar, Trakis, Wade, William Edgars, Abbutt, 9 x assorted Zathras Characters.

Conflicts : 3 x Border Raid, 3 x Prey on the Weak, 3 x Aggressive Action, 3 x Taking Credit.

Contingencies : 3 x Hidden Treasury.

Enhancements : 3 x We are not Impressed, Commerce Raiding.

Events : 3 x Not Meant to Be, 3 x Burnt from Both Ends, 3 x My Hands are Tied, 3 x Not the One, Carpe Diem.

Fleets : 3 x Combined Fleet, 3 x Drazi Strike Fleet, 2 x Vree Scouts, Drazi War Fleet.

Locations : 2 x Zhabar

As I mentioned the idea of the deck is to interfere with the existing conflicts and steal what influence you can. It isn't a deck full of its own conflicts, but the re-usable "Aggressive Actions" are ideal for keeping a winner in check. Just make sure you don't say you will make someone lose influence, and then change your mind, you can end up being branded a Liar for a long time.

Each Ambassador has its own unique ability, some are useful some are not, but they are there primarily for increasing that influence available to spend. The rest are there to gain from your small amount of conflicts, with 2 exceptions. Hyach Matriarch, a wonderful way to knock someone out of winning a conflict by rotating them for no effect. Finally there is Trakis, a superb card for those ever so annoying "Hidden Treasury" cards, even more fun against the hapless Centauri. Then we come to Zathras, which can be any of the nine available, but the best ones are Zathras' for influence steal, and Zat'hras -1 support and opposition, incredibly annoying to "Rally the People" My Hands are Tied lets you cut out the next player capable of winning your conflict and makes automatic losers in Prey on the Weak, always fun. Not the One is the decks main card, rotate out of conflicts the biggest and strongest, 2 influence to take out Santiago or Minister Durano has to be good. Plus if NMTB arrives you get the whole influence back due to the no-cost rule, Bargain!!). There are enough fleets to avoid being a target, especially with those Combined Fleets, but also enough to pose a threat to most big gaining military conflicts. The Taking Credit is there to stop Rally and Show the Colours.

All in all a fun deck to play, and has a realistic chance of getting a reasonable place in a tournament situation. As a variation switch out some characters and introduce some unrest cards for maximum effect. So go out there and look for the fun, you may find a deck that can stand up to the big boys, and be enjoyable at the same time.

(Ed. Adds - remember there are other funky 'fun' cards like The Price of Power that could be added to the deck, and that you don't need three NMTB or HT or Aggressive Action for the deck to work! Part of the fun of fun decks is making 'serious' players squirm with underutilised cards!)



Tournaments and Demos



DATE	CITY	VENUE	RANGER	TYPE
16 th April	Newcastle	Neil Gow	The Percy Arms	Const.
16 th April	Hatfield, Herts	Jeff O'Brien	The Harrier Pub.	Sealed Deck
23 rd April	Cardiff	Richard Willis	Cardiff Games	Const.
30 th April	Leeds	Kris Aspinall	Felon and Firkin	Const.
6 th May	Manchester	Shaun Hovers	Area 51	Const.
6 th May	Newport	Richie Willis	Lears Books	Sealed Deck
21 st May	Newcastle	Neil Gow	The Percy Arms	Const.
21 st May	Portsmouth	Mic Davy	Silvermoon	Const.
28 th May	Leeds	Kris Aspinall	Felon and Firkin	Const.
3 rd June	Manchester	Shaun Hovers	Area 51	Const.

The Gambler Returns...

By Van Plexico - international BOSq reader!!

Starting Hand - Londo Mollari (Gambler)
Aftermaths - Renowned Victoryx3
Agenda - Rise of the Republic
Locations - Ragesh III, Centauri Prime (optional)
Characters - Lord Kiro, Kha'Mak, Centauri Captainx2, Ambitious Captain
Conflicts - Show the Colorsx3, Limited Strike x3, Gunboat Diplomacyx3, Annex Neutral Worldx3, Attack Babylon 5x3, Carve up the Galaxyx2, Border Raid
Enhancements - We are Not Impressed, The Eye, Commerce Raiding
Events - Special Ops, Short Term Goalsx3, Seductive Argumentsx2, Not Meant to Bex2, Meditationx3, Liberating Resources, Level the Playing Field, Exploration, Fleets on the Border, Attack Formation x2
Fleets - Utility Fleetx3, Third Battle Fleetx2, Second Battle Fleetx2, First Battle Fleetx2, Deep Space Fleetx3, Expeditionary Fleetx2

This is the deck that took "Gambler Londo" from derided loser into one of the most popular starting ambassadors in the area. There's only one goal here: Get fleets and conflicts out quickly. You will get to 10 influence before anyone else, obviously-- possibly WELL before-- and you want to do your damage while the opportunity is there. By the time you get to 10, or shortly thereafter, you should have at least one decent fleet out, and a couple of conflicts to play, while everyone else--even if they're playing military--will still be struggling along with no fleets and less than 10 influence. Ideally, the first fleet you draw is "Second Battle Fleet," and the first conflict is "Show the Colors." Watch their faces when that combo comes out, and they have nothing to contest it with! "Renowned Victory" is the card that was MADE for this deck-- it's military, has "Won" in the text (free influence!), and gives a Destiny Mark. The second time I played this deck, it was actually the first card I drew! Talk about gamblin'...! I've tossed in a few random influence boosters-- choose your favorites-- because the one big drawback to this deck is that it tends to stall out once the other players get up to speed. Especially if one of them is a militant Minbari. Once the stall hits, it's time to go to "alternate methods." I love the "Seductive Arguments"/"Kha'Mak" combo because I get an influence and the Narn player goes nuts! Kiro's great, too-- he can lead a fleet, then later, give you "The Eye" (and you give the Narns "The Finger").

"You never count your money when you're sittin' at the table. There'll be time enough for countin' when the dealin's done." --The Gambler

A Call to Arms! Help to save your game from Apathy

Negotiated Surrender, No Escape, Observers - or - Hidden Pressures, Hyach Matriarch, Intervention Force

I assume these sequences of cards are familiar to each of you? Yes, they are the cards in the folders of traders up and down the country that surround the empty slots where the 'Not Meant To Be' and 'Hidden Treasury' cards once lived. I'm not sure what is the most heartbreaking: watching the players scouring folder after folder for new stock at the card marts, or seeing the dealers trying to sell the same old bilge to them.

You see, B5 is a dying game in the UK. No one buys it, fewer and fewer people are interested in it. Honest. OK, so in Newcastle, Manchester, Wales and Birmingham tournament attendances are well up to the 'signed card' level. OK, so we are on the verge of the largest B5 tourney in the world. OK, so a figure quoted from Precedence suggested that nearly 30% of the world's organised play occurs in the UK. Yep, all signs of a dying game! Here's an insight for the traders out there, who might want to know how to get more B5 sold.

1. The game is very easy to collect - bad news for traders all round. The reason for the collectability is the relatively small size of the expansions and the low price of the boxes. It appeals to a slightly older group of players who can afford two or three booster boxes. Traders can capitalise on this by offering cheaper box deals.
2. There are some crux cards that players want many multiples of - the classics being Not Meant to Be and Hidden Treasury at the moment. Are they ever in stock? Are they buggery! Now lets look at the Magic example (Masticore) or the Pokemon example (Charizard) - lots of offers to BUY these cards, so why not do that for NMTB? It will sell at £5 so why not buy it at £3? And while we're on - not all characters are equal - Wade is great (but generally cheap), Sheridan Reborn is pants (but generally expensive..) so Wade disappears and SR gathers dust. And don't mention collectors - they don't come back for multiple copies!
3. Chill out on the promos! It was hard luck on the trader who came to Newcastle touting Past Victories as a 'ultra-rare promo' the week after just about every player had managed to get one - but even if it wasn't, who would pay £50 for it? It's a dreadful card! The promo distribution has just got MUCH better, so all the regular promos are much easier to get - so DROP YOUR PRICES! Yes, you may make a loss, but it's better than holding out for one mug.
4. Commons and fixed cards sell - Meditations would fly out of your folders at 50p each. Non-aligned starters are little rocking horse droppings, so cards like Zhabar, Vree Scout and Non-Aligned Aide are sought after. To make another Magic analogy - remember, Strip Mine was an uncommon?!

And now a call to arms to all the players out there - the survival of the game depends on you too. You need to talk to the traders and tell them what cards you want. Talk to the shops and get them to stock the cards. Talk to players of other CCGs and see if you can't get them involved in a demo. Nine out of ten old Magic players prefer B5 because of the multi-player aspect! Turn up to tournaments and pub games and social meets. Believe me, everytime someone new plays at a tournament, a bell rings in Precedence headquarters - honest!

The Rangers who produce Black Omega are 100% behind the Babylon 5 CCG. Between the players, the traders and the Rangers we have made the UK arguably the biggest B5 hotspot in the world. We want to keep it that way!

The B5CCG is not dead, it has a long life yet - maybe as long as 20 years and then.....

The Second Welsh B5 Open Championships

Richard Willis' Guide to doing it Welsh Style!

Edited by Neil Gow (because that boy can write long!)

The "Welsh B5 Open Championships" were attended by 17 players, travelling from as far a field as Haverfordwest, Reading and Cardiff. All of who would again like to thank for them for attending the tournament and making the day most enjoyable.

Round 1 got off to a flying start with wins from Mark Boulter (Centauri) playing with Londo Gambler, Ian Richards (Centauri) and James Blagden (Non-Aligned). Richard Willis (Minbari) gained a major victory.

Round 2 got underway with wins from Mark Boulter (Centauri), Ian Richards (Centauri), Stephen Gold (Narn) and Paul Sheward (Narn).

Round 3 was a critical round with several people fighting tooth and nail to reach the final. This round saw wins for Ian Richards (Centauri) Stephen Gold (Narn) and Paul Sheward (Narn). Richard Willis (Minbari) gained another major victory.

So the finalist were Ian Richards (Centauri - 48pts), Andy Laken (Human - 19pts), Richard Willis (Minbari - 37pts), Stephen Gold (Narn - 42pts) and James Blagden (Non-Aligned - 33pts).

So let the final begin.

The game started with no real surprises, with each player building up their influence. Then we saw the first conflicts played, not one of these early conflicts gained influence as people stopped conflicts rather than build. Every players first conflict has the same result, either failing completely of winning but not by enough to gain them influence or benefit. As the game progressed it saw 2 players breaking free of the pack, Richards and Gold, with Willis floundering in last place. Richards was playing a strong Intrigue deck and Gold playing a military deck, and over the next few they got themselves into winning positions, with Willis coming up strongly on the outside to 3rd place. = Blagden played WANI to stop Gold or Richards gaining extra power from agenda's. By this stage Gold switched to Defence in Depth to overcome the WANI and started to play extra locations (his Homeworld was already in play). Willis had by now brought himself within striking distance of both players with his Military deck.

So we had Richards on 16 Influence, Gold on 17 and Willis on 14, on the declaration of conflicts all 3 players had conflicts. Richards had a conflict against the WANI, Gold with a Annex Neutral World and Willis playing a Gunboat Diplomacy again targeting the Centauri. During the round Willis played a You Are Not Ready against the WANI conflict. Richards responded by playing Ulkesh Kosh into Willis' faction. Gold agreed to help the Gunboat Diplomacy against Richards and would let his conflict fail. Richards pulled out all the stops. He leveled Mr. Morden into the Gunboat Diplomacy conflict only to be attacked by the Humans, Narns and Non-Aligned. Gold played 2 more locations. Laken played a Gravity Well on the Gunboat Diplomacy conflict, but the fleets kept going in. Richards played a contingency on his agenda and then the round progressed to completion. Willis won and gained 2 Influence, Richards revealed his Hidden Treasury and Laken gained an influence from his Impasse. So Richards stayed on 16 along with Willis. Gold went on to 19.

Next Round was a quiet round with the Impasse. Richards, Laken and Gold all played conflicts, Laken's and Golds fizzled but Richards Shadow Assaulted Narn to have both him and Willis on 16 while Gold dropped down to 18. Next round Richards again played a conflict against the WANI, Willis played a Show the Colors and Gold again played and Annex. This round was very tense with several plays taking plenty of time to decide what to do. Willis supported his conflict with the damaged Warleaders Fleet, Gold supported his conflict with a Heavy Fleet and Richards supporting the WANI conflict. Gold sponsored another fleet, when Richards pounced and played a Chaos in Confusion ending the round, Gold was the only person who had enough influence to stop him, but once the fleet had been sponsored that was game over. Richards won his conflict ending on 23 Power, Gold on 20 Power, Willis on 19 Power, Blagden on 12 Power and Laken on 12 Power, on the tie-break Laken was on 12 Influence whilst Blagden was on 11 Influence. A very intense final where Ian Richards conquered all to become the "Welsh B5 Open Champion 2000".



Players Name	Prev	Local Play Area
1. Paul Whitehouse	(new)	Portsmouth
2. Douglas Howgill	14	Kent
3. Andrew Watson	2	Newcastle
4. Mark Warren	(new)	Wales
5. Stephen Gold	(new)	Bristol
6. Mark Boulter	(new)	Bristol
7. Mike Penberthy	8	Reading
8. Gordon Skelley	11	Newcastle
9. James Blagden	5	Wales
10. John McCann	13	Leeds
11. Tom Hopkins	(new)	Wales
12. Cliff Jenner	(new)	Portsmouth
13. Corinne Penfold	(new)	Kent
14. John Wilson	19	Newcastle
15. Stephen Humphreys	(new)	Wales
16. Peter Meredith	21	Newcastle
17. Jon Noakes	10	Newcastle
18. Giles Lewis	12	Newcastle
19. Rob Wilton	26	Kent
20. Mark Lancaster	16	Newcastle
21. Ralph Holland	18	Newcastle
22. Jim Wotherspoon	27	Newcastle
23. Mark Lawrence	25	Newcastle
24. Freddie Hughes	28	Wales
25. Richard Davies	(new)	Wales
26. Richard Earle	(new)	Wales
27. Andy Laken	23	Wales
28. Craig Johnson	24	Newcastle
29. Trevor Copley	3	Kent
30. Shaun Hovers	17	Manchester

Results applicable to all players based in the UK and Ireland who have played 7 games in the period Sept 1st to Feb 28th 2000

Tournament Results

A new feature - your chance to shine!

Newport, 15th Jan (21) Mike Penberthy (Narn) Paul Whitehouse (Minbari)
Bristol, 13th Feb (19) Paul Whitehouse (Minbari)
Newcastle, 20th Feb (17) Peter Meredith (playing Centauri)
Milton Keynes, 28th Feb (13) Richard Willis (various races due to format)
Manchester, 5th Mar (18) John McCann (Minbari)
Carmarthen, 18th Feb (12) Gavin Evans (Centauri)
Taffs Well, 18th Mar (12) James Blagden (Narn)
Newcastle, 19th Mar (17) Andrew Watson (Centauri)
Manchester, 1st Apr (20) Kris Aspinall (Centauri)

Next Issue..

What you can find in Black Omega #12?

Well, for a start it won't be called Black Omega Squadron anymore! Finally the merger with the official Precedence Legends newsletter is going ahead and we are becoming Black Omega: Legends! You'll still get the same range of decks, news, strategy etc but if you are a Legends member, you'll also get that newsletter re-tooled in the Black Omega style **alongside** Black Omega, posted to your door! As for content? More in-depth analysis of the Drakh and ISA from Wheel of Fire, much chest beating about Triples and a look forward to what's to come for the rest of the year - it's all new, all B5 excitement! Thanks - Neil

And as an additional note, a big thanks to the contributing writers for this issue - Mark Lancaster, Van Plexico, Richard Willis and Bruce Mason - take a bow!