

Max Headroom, cont. from p. 48

ness partner, Dominique. Knowing no better, they put the computer image on the airwaves, to supply patter for their wretched collection of antique rock videos.

So much for Max's origin. In Britain, the Cinemax episode was followed by *The Max Headroom Show*, actual broadcasts in which the clicking, jerking, spastic Max serves as the world's first definitive "talking head." Typical of Max's style was his recent interview with Sting, in which Max gravely intoned: "Okay fella, let's get down to the nitty gritty and talk about your shoes." The Cinemax version of *The Max Headroom Show* will premier these interviews, including one with Simon Le Bon of Duran Duran. In his debut as an American video-jock, Max will specialize in European rock videos, never yet seen in the States.

As the Max cult has spread, he has assumed a kind of artificial personhood much like that of, say, a drug-crazed Kermit the Frog. He has been "interviewed" by the *New Musical Express*, and has "hosted" a live rock festival.

No one seems more wisely cynical about the Max phenomenon than Max's creators, Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton. Jankel and Morton are leading pioneers in computer graphics and animation. Their London firm, Cucumber Studios, created such ground-breaking rock videos as Elvis Costello's "Accidents Will Happen," Tom Tom Club's psychedelic cartoon "Genius of Love," and the sardonic, hilarious "New Frontier" by Donald Fagen.

Jankel and Morton have even found time to produce a book, *Creative Computer Graphics*, for Cambridge University Press. The images in this volume are amazing; they're clear signs of a coming media revolution in the late '80s and '90s.

The effect of computers on video, movies, and the graphic arts will change the way we perceive our world, forever. Never again will we be able to fully trust a photograph, a newsreel, or even a human face and voice, as Max's own image demonstrates. They are all just data now. Data that can be digitized, inverted, chromakeyed, frame-grabbed, scratch-mixed, sliced, diced and blended.

It's one of the cheerful ironies of the '80s that technology of such potential is being pioneered by people deep-dyed in creative weirdness. To date, the people controlling these technologies are not the coldblooded corporate reptiles of Channel 23. They're a strange elite of hip techies, loony academics, NASA space-freaks, cyberpunks, and art-school anarchists. These are the sort of people who'd mix drinks with ice chipped from Walt Disney's corpse. Creative '80s rebels in the tradition of the hacker underground.

One of the classic signs of an under-

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Star Trek
Gaming Material

OHMERA—class IV Patrol Ship

The Orion Frontier Mercantile Association

by Dale L. Kemper

Ship's Data

Hull Data:

Numbers—
Model Number—Mk II
Date Entering Service—2/1300
Number Constructed—25
Size—
Length—121.8 m
Width—35.3 m
Height—33.1 m
Weight—39,155 mt
Cargo Units—780

Other Data:

Crew—35
Shuttlecraft—1
Transporters—
1 standard 6-person
1 cargo

Engines and Power Data:

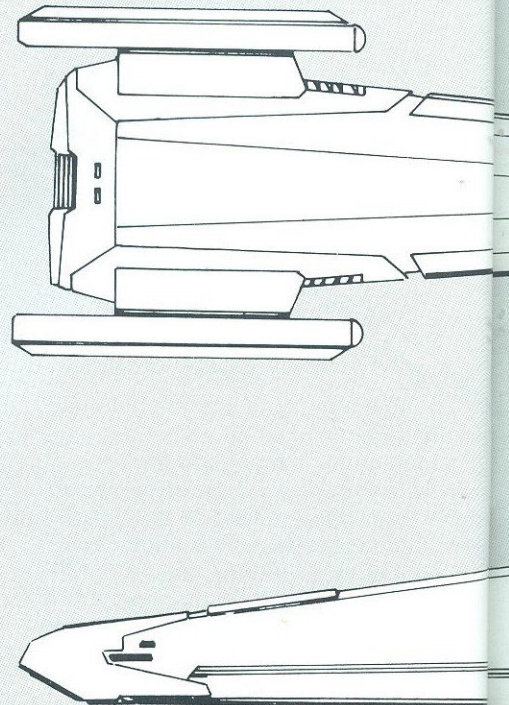
Total Power Units Available—33
Movement Point Ratio—3/1
Warp Engine Type—OWA-1
Number—2
Power Units Available—15 each
Stress Charts—G/F
Maximum Safe Cruising Speed—
Warp 7
Emergency Speed—Warp 9
Impulse Engine Type—DIB-3
Power Units Available—3

Weapons and Firing Data:

Beam Weapon Type—OD-3
Number—9
Firing Arcs—fwd, fwd/port, fwd/stbd,
2-port, 2-stbd, aft/port, aft/stbd
Firing Chart—R
Maximum Power—4
Damage Modifiers—+1 (1–16)

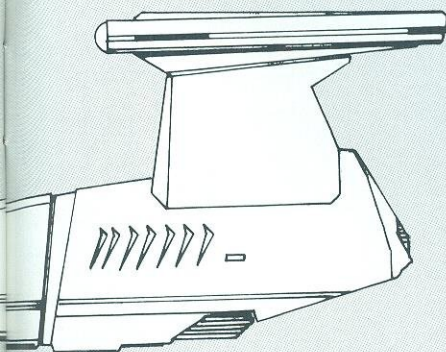
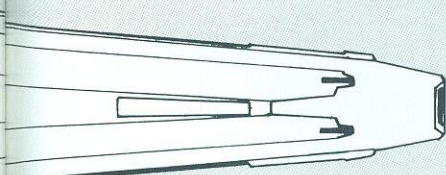
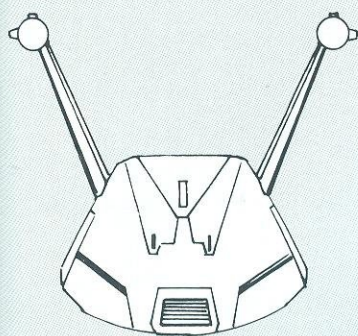
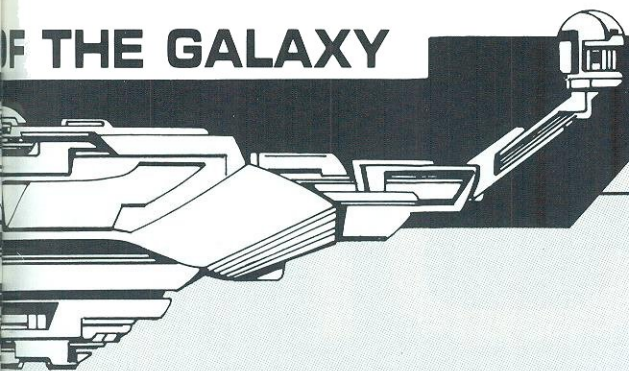
Shields and Damage Control Data:

Superstructure Points—15
Damage Chart—C
Deflector Shield Type—OSJ
Shield Point Ratio— $\frac{1}{4}$
Maximum Shield Power—8



Combat Efficiency:

D—80.8, WDF—27



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The Ohmera Class of Patrol ship is one of the few standardized classes of ships in the Orion Frontier Mercantile Association (located in the Triangle) or any other Orion government. Constructed in and around the Rigel System near the Orion home world, these 25 ships were then transferred to the OFMA for patrol and system defense. It is reported that some 150-odd more ships of this class are elsewhere in Orion controlled space, some of which have been given various design modifications in keeping with usual Orion practice.

Loosely based on some older Orion blockade runner designs, the Ohmera Class is able to catch anything it can defeat in battle and run away from anything that it cannot. Her nine OD-3 disrupters are placed in three groups of three each located on the bow and one on each side of the hull. These weapons are fired independently by gun crews near their weapons. One shuttlecraft of Klingon design is usually carried on these vessels.

The Ohmera Class Patrol ships are usually seen in and around the systems of the OFMA. They are used mainly as police and customs ships by the various corporate interests in the area, although they are considered a part of the permanent Navy of the Orion Frontier Mercantile Association. These ships have also been seen as convoy escorts on the more dangerous trade routes within the Triangle but this is rare. Interestingly, rumors are becoming widespread that these ships have, on occasion, been involved in some "privateering" of their own in the usual Orion fashion. This has never been proven, however, and these vessels are still considered part of a bonafide Navy rather than as pirates.

It is reported that some ships of this class were patrolling the Workday System during the recent "Devon Incident." The explosion of this Federation warship seems to have caused considerable damage to the facilities there, including the loss or crippling of at least one vessel of the Ohmera Class.

Max Headroom...

ground is its love of in-jokes. *Max Headroom* is crammed with them. Take the video pirates, Blank Reg and Dominique, who broadcast Max from a rusty bus stuffed with dead machinery, cigarette butts, and wadded paper towels. They are modelled on Morton and Jankel.

And Channel 23's hideous advertisements are no accident, either. Like any new, high technology, computer graphics faces one severe bottleneck: money. Real-world computer graphics has gone where the money is, and that is in advertising. Who else can spend ten thousand dollars a second for the ultimate in eye-catching effects? Cucumber Studios' award-winning ads are already famous in Britain. (They also did the intro for ABC's *Friday Night Videos*.)

It's not often recognized that rock videos are ads. They are given away free by the music industry, to promote record sales. The major secret of MTV's success is that is the only channel with ads between its ads. And the three-minute rock promo is a perfect vehicle for directors trained in half-minute ad spots.

Even the *Max Headroom* film was in some sense an ad, a promotion by Chrysalis Records for the series that followed. Jankel and Morton had to sign away the rights to Max to their corporate sponsor, one of the many artistic annoyances of the advertising game. It's a cruel situation, since Maxploitation is now a minor industry, with T-shirts, badges, and the works, from which Cucumber nets zilch. But Jankel and Morton bubble over with new ideas. Why not completely synthetic anchormen, game show hosts, weathermen?

Carry the idea to extremes, and you have the skewed and edgy world of *Max Headroom*. In the days of the Hollywood Presidency, it's not hard to see how media image translates into power. "All your politicians in little boxes," as the villain Bruegal remarks, his Scotch brogue dripping with an evil your parents never dreamed of. "Very handy."

Max Headroom is the first successful collision of rock culture, SF, and '80s video technology. That alone would make it a pop milestone, but it does more than that: it makes us think, really think, about what lies ahead, "fifteen minutes from Now." Under the pop glitter, the dazzling rush of state-of-the-art sight and sound, is a subversive message that slides in and sticks like a chrome fishhook.

When the film ends, *Max Headroom* is free: an uncontrollable cybernetic lunatic, bursting up through the cracks in the system. Max tells us what any hacker already knows: the system is full of cracks. The same power that made the system, makes the cracks as well. When the microchips are down, it's up to you: to use that power, or be used by it. The future belongs to those who aren't afraid to look at it.

Go for it, Max.

