3/8/2009

ENTERTAINMENT
TECHNOLOGY
CENTER

GAME DESIGN ASSIGNMENT

An Adventure- Role-playing Game | by Daniel Rodriguez Cuberos

1. Brainstorming an Adventure

Stories I would like to tell

1. A side story in the Nintendo DS game "It's a Wonderful World/The World ends with you"
2. My own campaign in the Macross Universe.
3. A group of explorers, lost in the rainforest
4. A "Lost-World" adventure, with Dinosaurs and cave men.
5. An Armageddon or end of the world scenario. Good vs. Evil where the players are stuck in the middle.
6. A Medieval setting.
7. An adventure settled in Nintendo's Legend of Zelda universe
8. An adventure in Final Fantasy VII's universe, with unknown characters that help the known FFVII characters in their adventure, without ever them knowing.
9. A story in DC Comics ongoing series "Batman: Battle for the Cowl".
10. Time travelers that discover that the timeline has been altered (i.e., we should had never won WWII) and the ethical implications of "fixing" the timeline.
11. A mysterious supernatural island (just like ABC's Lost)
12. A retelling of Lucasart's Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis.
13. An alternate timeline in the Terminator universe that reconcile the "Sarah Connor Chronicles" (TSSC) TV Show and the upcoming "Terminator Salvation" movie. (It is known that "T4" treats TSSC as an alternate timeline.)

2. The Chosen World : Macross Nova

Long ago, there was a war with a race of extra-terrestrial giants called the Zentraedi. After humanity experienced the threat of extinction in their first conflict with extra-terrestrial life, they decided to risk their future on advancing into the stars. Seeking new worlds, they scattered to every corner of the Galaxy.

On 2080 the 1st ultra-large scale galactic emigration convoy, Macross Nova, was continuing its grand voyage towards the Galactic Rim.

PROS	CONS
The world has a rich background. (The first Macross media appeared in 1981)	Have to design a world that feels "true" to the Macross Universe.
There's a plethora of information on the Internet about role-playing in the Macross Universe.	The Macross universe is too rich and complex to be explored in one session.
A typical Macross party always consist of three; An Ace, a leader and a support fighter.	Characters vs. Mechas: Compelling characters and transforming mechas have always been a staple of the series. Can't focus on both in a single session.
	One might feel compelled to follow a role-playing structure defined in the internet and not innovate.

3. The Chosen World: Plot and World

MAIN CONFLICT

Twenty years have passed since the Vajra War. The Unity Government and its armed forces, New UN Spacy (N.U.N.S.) have decided to change its approach and start a massive emigration towards another galaxies, in order to ensure humanity's and human culture survival, even in a galactic-wide phenomenon.

The first galactic emigration fleet, Macross Nova, departed from planet Frontier (*the world where the Macross Frontier fleet settled at the end of 2008's Macross Frontier series*) the 26th of November, 2077.

3 years later Macross Nova journeys in the galactic rim where a new enemy awaits.

MACROSS NOVA

Macross Nova is a new type of fleet, built from the ground for inter-galactic exploration and colonization. At its heart lays the Nova-Class colonization ship. This ship is the first redesign of the colonization ship class, since 2030, when the New Macross-type ships rolled out from Earth.

A nova-class ship is designed to support a self-sustained ecosystem, and not depend on the outside for supplies. The fleet is comprised of the following ship classes:

- Nova-class: Colonization Ship (x1)
- New Macross class: Colonization Ship (x2)
- Galaxy-Class: Colonization ship (x1)
- Uragawa Class: Escort Battle Carrier (numerous)
- Basara Class Stealth Carrier (numerous)
- Nome-Birge class Research-Experimental ship (x3)
- Hollywood Mk. 2 Amusement Ship (x1)
- Global Class N.U.N.S. Training vessel (x1)
- Detroit Class Mobile Construction-Yard/Factory Ship (x1)

QUEST

The Nova fleet has encountered a yet-to-be-named enemy at the Galactic Rim. The party, comprised of 3 students from the NUNS VF academy is thrown in the middle of the chaos to become unlikely heroes.

In the wake of the attack, about 60% of Nova's assets have been decimated. An emergency fold-jump (Macross' Universe faster-than-light mechanism) is prepared to Andromeda Galaxy. Four "state-of–the-art" Battle-class warships are deployed to hold off the enemy while the fleet is prepared. Our heroes are deployed as well, as a squadron onboard one of these battle-class warships.
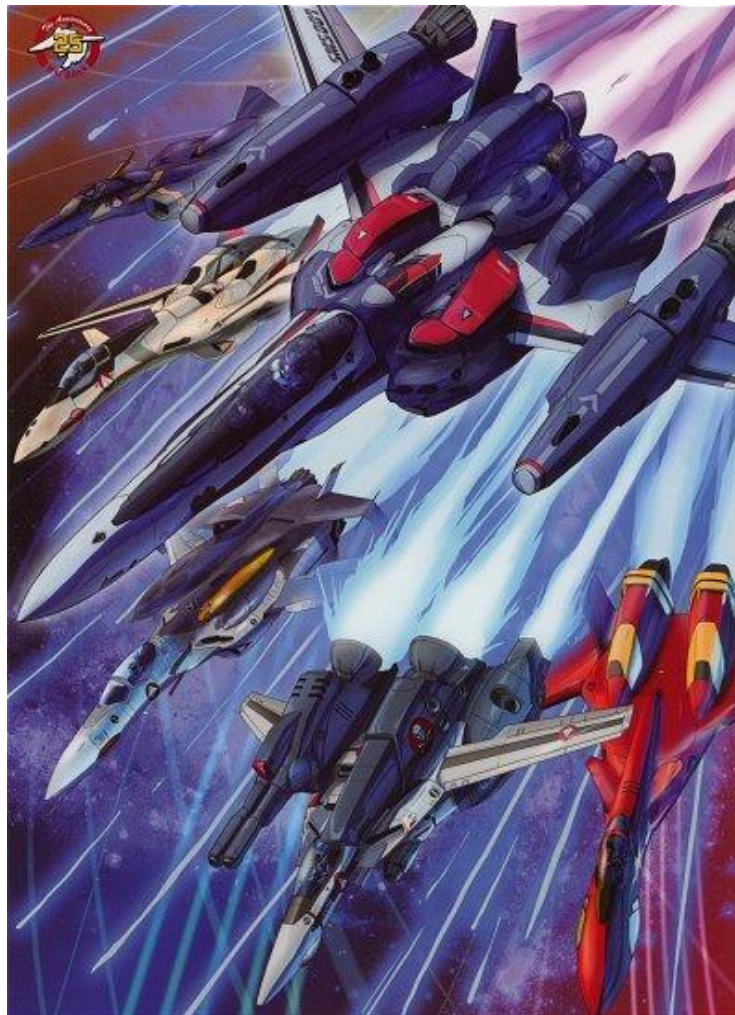

Figure 1 Variable Fighters, From the Macross Universe

4.   The Chosen World: Character Design

1.   Character 1.

   A "lone-wolf" personality, this character joined the NUNS VF Academy to prove that he doesn't need anyone's help or support. A self-taught VF fighter who prefers dare and risky melee approach, that is often considered dangerous and reckless.

2.   Character 2

   This character is considered stunning and sexy by the opposite sex.   The heir to the Nome media empire on Frontier, he/she has decided to forget about the media world in which he/she was raised and pursue a military formation. A Long-distance expert who prefers sniper and stealth approaches in tactical simulations.

3.   Character 3

   Character 3 is a "total slacker" in his early twenties and an "utter genius" in mathematics, computers and other related fields. He/she is a social outcast with an "acerbic sense of humor". He/she joined the NUNS VF Academy when he surprised the military brass with a modded VF for electronic warfare.

5. The Chosen World: Mecha Design

1. **VF-30F "Godsent"**

   The VF-30F is one of newest generation VF (variable fighter) used by the humans and their Zentraedi allies in 2080.

   The VF-30F is derived from the YF-27 prototype, as the potential successor to the VF-25, the main fighter of the N.U.N.S. during the Vajra War.

   It has not been deployed to the N.U.N.S. yet. Instead it has been deployed to the N.U.N.S. academy so the students can familiarize with the new fighter. Its offensive weapons include a Gatling gun, missiles, and somehow, a plasma cutter. Fighters can be customized according to the pilot and characteristics of the mission.

Figure 2 VF-30F "Godsent" in all his modes

Game Design Assignment

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	VF MODE		
		FIGHTER Required Stats	GERWALK Required Stats	BATTROID Required Stats
Mode	Every VF has 3 modes: Fighter, GERWALK and Battroid mode. In each turn, a player can do two transformations, before and after taking an action.	-	-	-
Movement	During Battle a VF range of movement is affected by his current mode. Each mode has a different throttle output, which determines how fast it can move. The range of motion is determined by the number of hexes (HEX) that the mecha can move per turn • Fighter 5 HEX • GERWALK: 3 HEX • Battroid 1 HEX	-	-	-
Gatling Gun	Attacks with a Gatling Gun. Uses Strength. Range: 3 Hexes.	STR	STR	STR
Missiles	Attack with a barrage of missiles. Uses Strength and Perception. Range: Up to 5 hexes around your current position. VF Mode Modifiers • Fighter None • GERWALK: - 1 PER • Battroid Not Available	STR PER	STR PER	-
PLASMA CUTTER	A Melee attack using a Plasma Cutter. Due to the size and shape of the plasma cutter, it can only be used in Battroid mode. Uses Strength and Spirit Range: 1 Hex	-	-	STR SPI

Mar. 8

2. VF-31G "Shadow"

The VF-31G is a covert ops variation of the VF-30 line.   As the VF-30, the VF-31G is derived from the YF-27 prototype and share similar characteristics.

The VF-31G is considered a military secret and uses an undisclosed type of engine and energy source which renders the craft "invisible" to N.U.N.S. detection systems. The New U.N. Forces have deployed several squadrons all over the galaxy to do "hit and run" missions over renegade paramilitary factions, that oppose the Unity Government.

This specific version, present in the Nova fleet, sports the Nome family crest. It is seen as a symbol of status and wealth. Among the improvements that this model has are a sniper rifle as standard equipment and a head mono turret, adjusted for sniping.

Figure 3 VF-31F "Shadow" in all his modes

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	VF MODE		
		FIGHTER Required Stats	GERWALK Required Stats	BATTROID Required Stats
Mode	Every VF has 3 modes: Fighter, GERWALK and Battroid mode. In each turn, a player can do two transformations, before and after taking an action.	-	-	-
Movement	During Battle a VF range of movement is affected by his current mode. Each mode has a different throttle output, which determines how fast it can move. The range of motion is determined by the number of hexes (HEX) that the mecha can move per turn • Fighter 7 HEX • GERWALK: 5 HEX • Battroid 2 HEX	-	-	-
Sniper Rifle	Attacks with a Sniper Rifle. Uses Dexterity and Perception. VF Mode Modifiers • Fighter - 2 PER • GERWALK: - 1 PER • Battroid +1 PER	DEX PER	DEX PER	DEX PER
Missiles	Attack with a barrage of missiles. Uses Strength and Perception. Range: Up to 5 hexes around your current position. VF Mode Modifiers • Fighter None • GERWALK: - 1 PER • Battroid Not Available	STR PER	STR PER	-

3. RVF-33Y "Alchemy"

The RVF-33Y, codename "Alchemy" is a never-before seen VF model. It seems to be a production model based on the VF that character 3 had modded before being admitted to the NUNS academy.

To the untrained eye, it appears like a heavily modified version of the VF-30 line. Among the capabilities that this Variable Fighter offers is enhanced radar detection (via fold waves), radar jamming (via fold crystal cancelation), and remote control (via fold wave communication) of up to (4) AIF-7S "Ghost" Fighter.
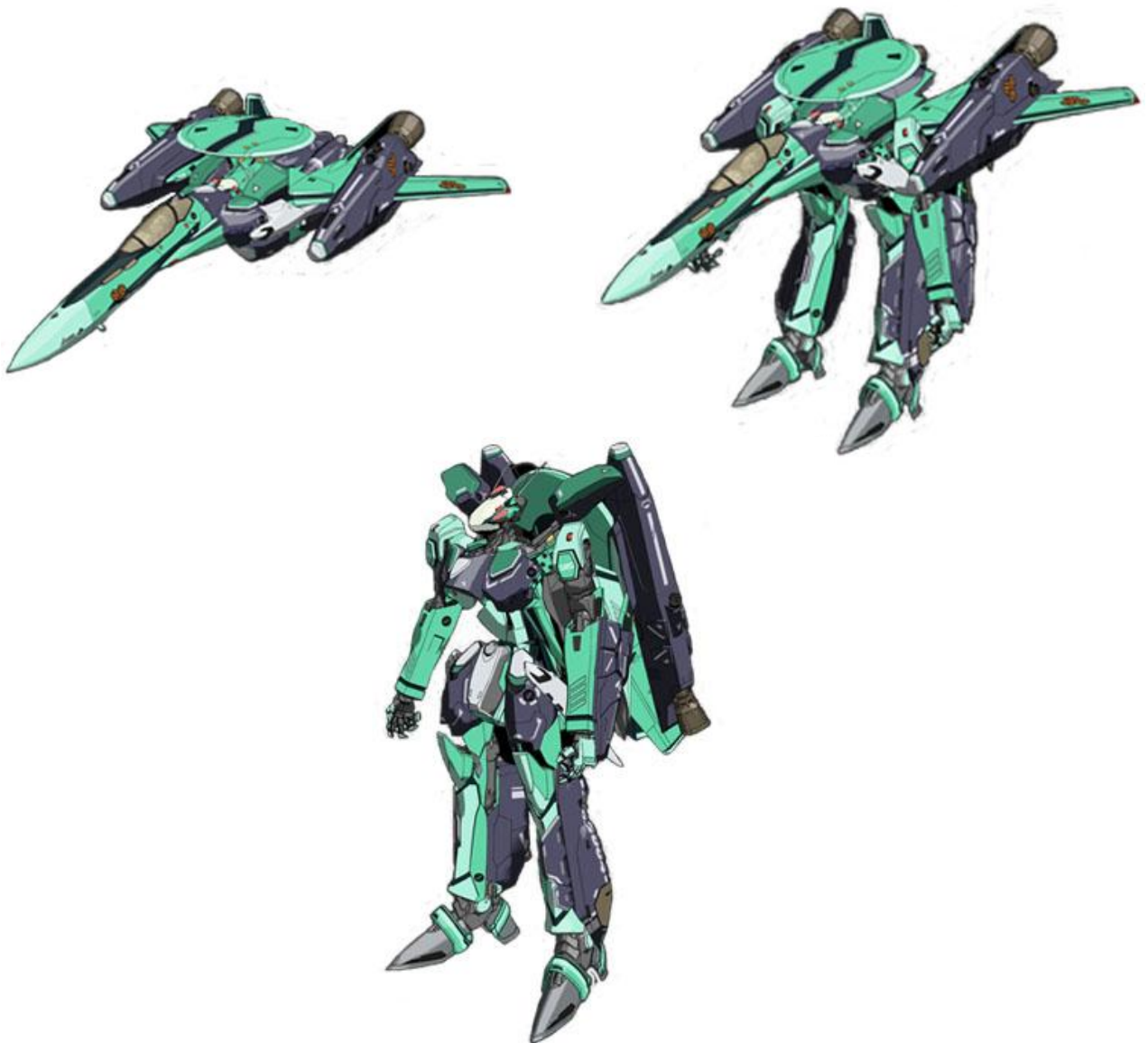

Figure 4 RVF-33Y "Alchemy" in all his modes

ACTION	DESCRIPTION	VF MODE		
		FIGHTER Required Stats	GERWALK Required Stats	BATTROID Required Stats
Mode	Every VF has 3 modes: Fighter, GERWALK and Battroid mode. In each turn, a player can do two transformations, before and after taking an action.	-	-	-
Movement	During Battle a VF range of movement is affected by his current mode. Each mode has a different throttle output, which determines how fast it can move. The range of motion is determined by the number of hexes (HEX) that the mecha can move per turn • Fighter 6 HEX • GERWALK: 4 HEX • Battroid 2 HEX	-	-	-
Gatling Gun	Attacks with a Gatling Gun. Uses Strength. Range: 3 Hexes. VF Mode Modifiers • Fighter - 2 PER • GERWALK: - 1 PER • Battroid +1 PER	STR	STR	DEX PER
Enemy Detection	Locate the position of enemy fighters that are in an area out of sight Uses Perception. Range: If successful, up to 5 hexes around the scanned area	PER	PER	PER
Radar Jamming	Jams the enemy's radar, making the party un-detectable for N turns. Uses Agility. N is a number rolled from a 4-sided die.	AGI	AGI	AGI
Summon	Summons N AIF-X20 "Phantom". Uses Spirit and Endurance.	SPI END	SPI END	SPI END

| | Must throw Endurance every turn to control the Phantoms. If the throw is unsuccessful the Phantoms can't adapt to the Battle conditions, in which situation they will retire.

N is a number rolled from a 4 sided die. | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|

AIF-X20 "Phantom"

The AIF-X20 Phantom is the latest unmanned aerospace plane utilized by the N.U.N.S. The craft has high maneuverability beyond what is possible for most human piloted mecha and is able to fight very effectively with other Phantom craft in formation.   The Phantom shares an obvious design lineage with the AIF-7S and the Ghost X-9, created in 2060 and 2040, respectively.

However, the AIF-X20 Phantom needs a human-piloted Mecha for a wireless remote control. Development of a completely autonomous AI for the AIF-X20 and similar unmanned aircrafts has been curtailed, as there is always a danger of being taken over by hacking, in addition to the "Sharon Apple Incident", illustrating the dangers of the incredibly risky "Sentient AI".

Due to this VF-Phantom link, the Phantom is vulnerable to ECM. Also, if the integrated sensors are blocked, the link to the controlling VF is severed in which the aircraft loses its ability to adapt to new situations. In this situation the on-board AI will instruct the Ghost to abandon the battlefield.

Figure 5 AIF-X20 "Phantom"

| ACTION	DESCRIPTION	VF MODE		
		FIGHTER Required Stats	GERWALK Required Stats	BATTROID Required Stats
Mode	The AIF-X20 is an unmanned aircraft designed with speed in mind. For this reason, transformation modes have been removed from the overall design.	-	-	-
Movement	The AIF-X20 sacrifices the GERWALK and BATTROID mode, but has high maneurability, beyond what is possible by most piloted human mecha. This allows the AIF-X20 to perform quick hit and run missions. The range of motion is determined by the number of hexes (HEX) that the mecha can move per turn. This mecha can do two moves per turn, regardless if it attacks or not. Range: 6 HEX	-	-	-
Pulse Laser Cannons	The main weapons of the AIF-7S Phantom are two powerful pulse laser cannons. Two are mounted on either side of the drone on the belly. The lasers can be fired separately or in combination, against single or multiple targets.	STR	-	-
Missiles	Attack with a barrage of missiles. Uses Strength and Perception. Range: Up to 5 hexes around your current position.	STR PER	-	

6. The Chosen World: Maps
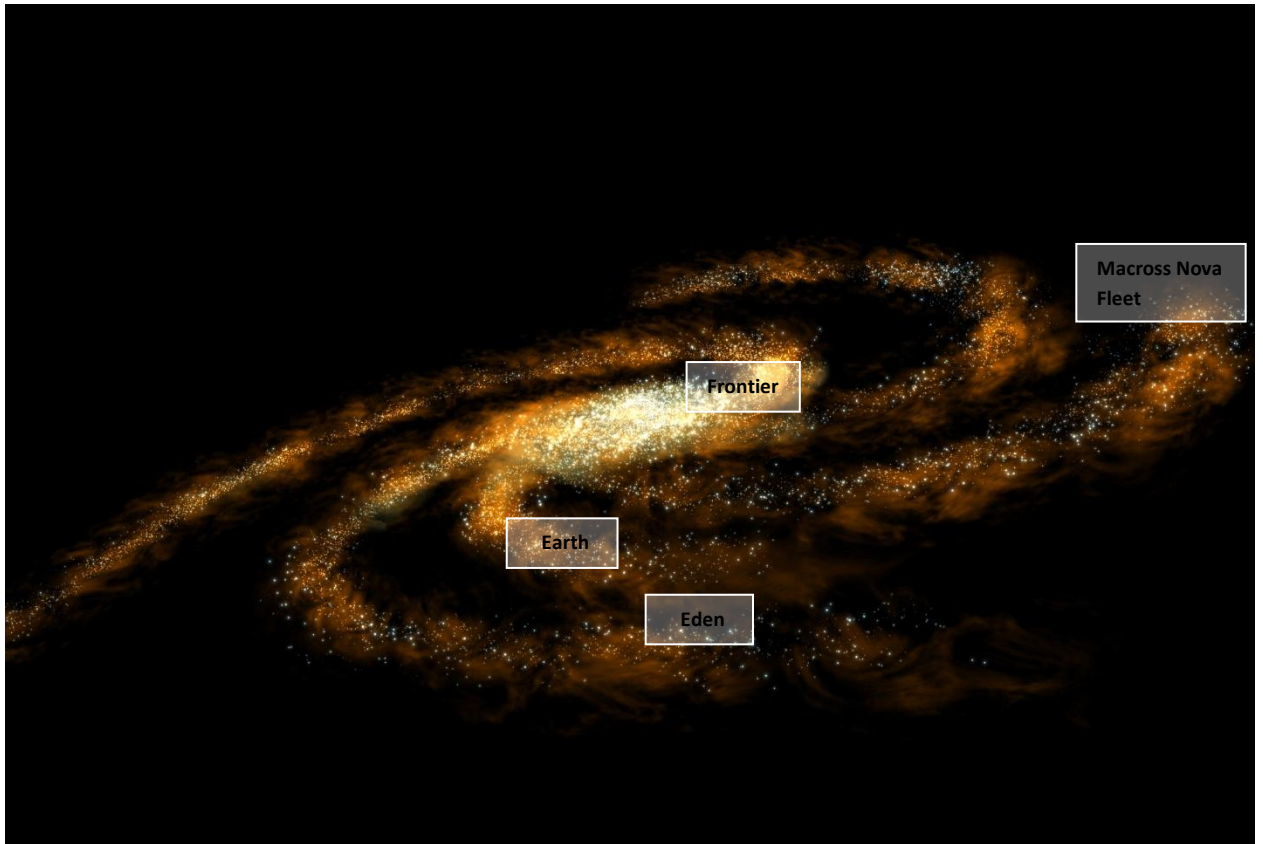
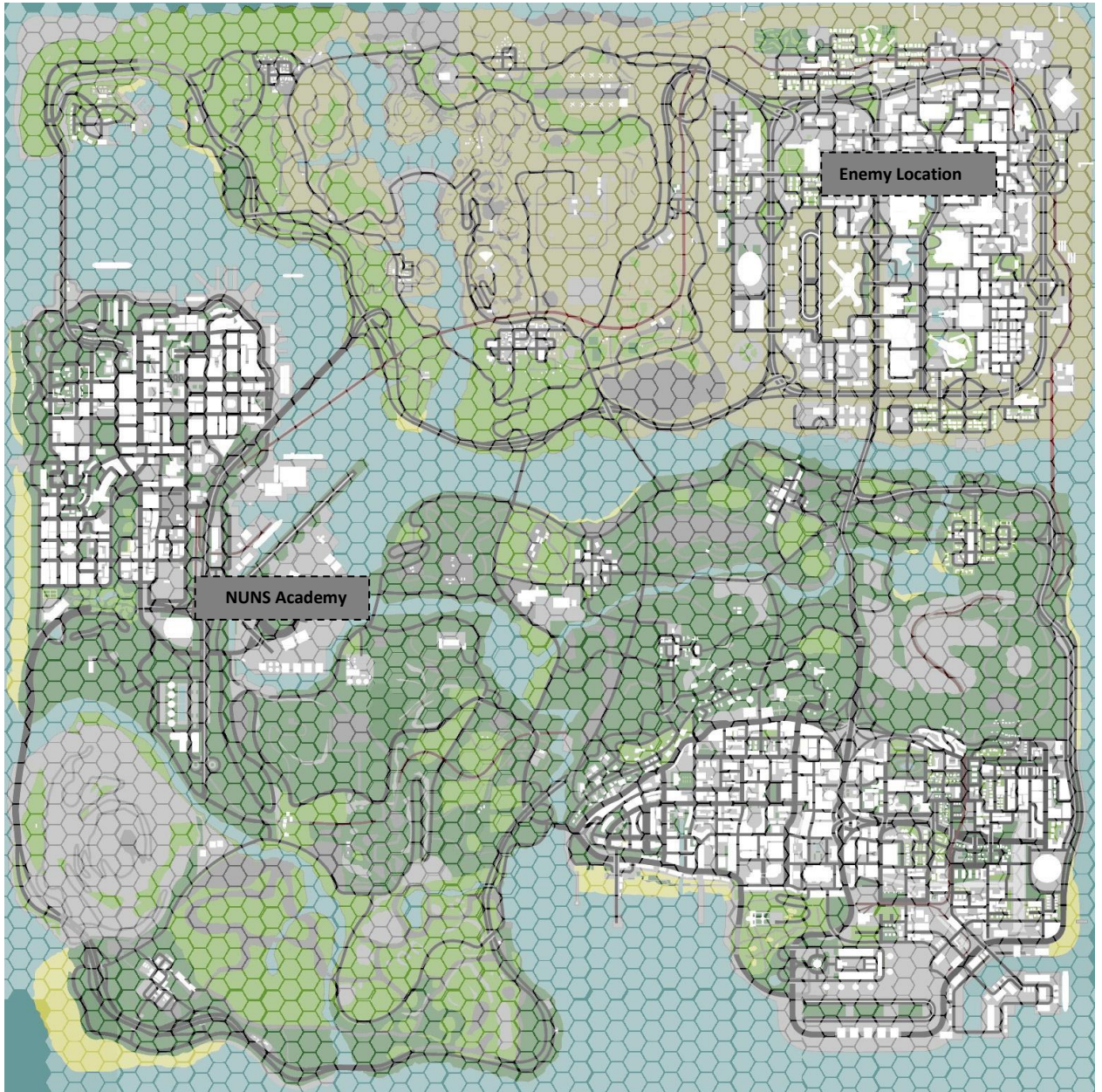**Figure 6 Milky Way Galaxy, circa 2080**

Figure 7 A section of Nova Island, with common landmarks.
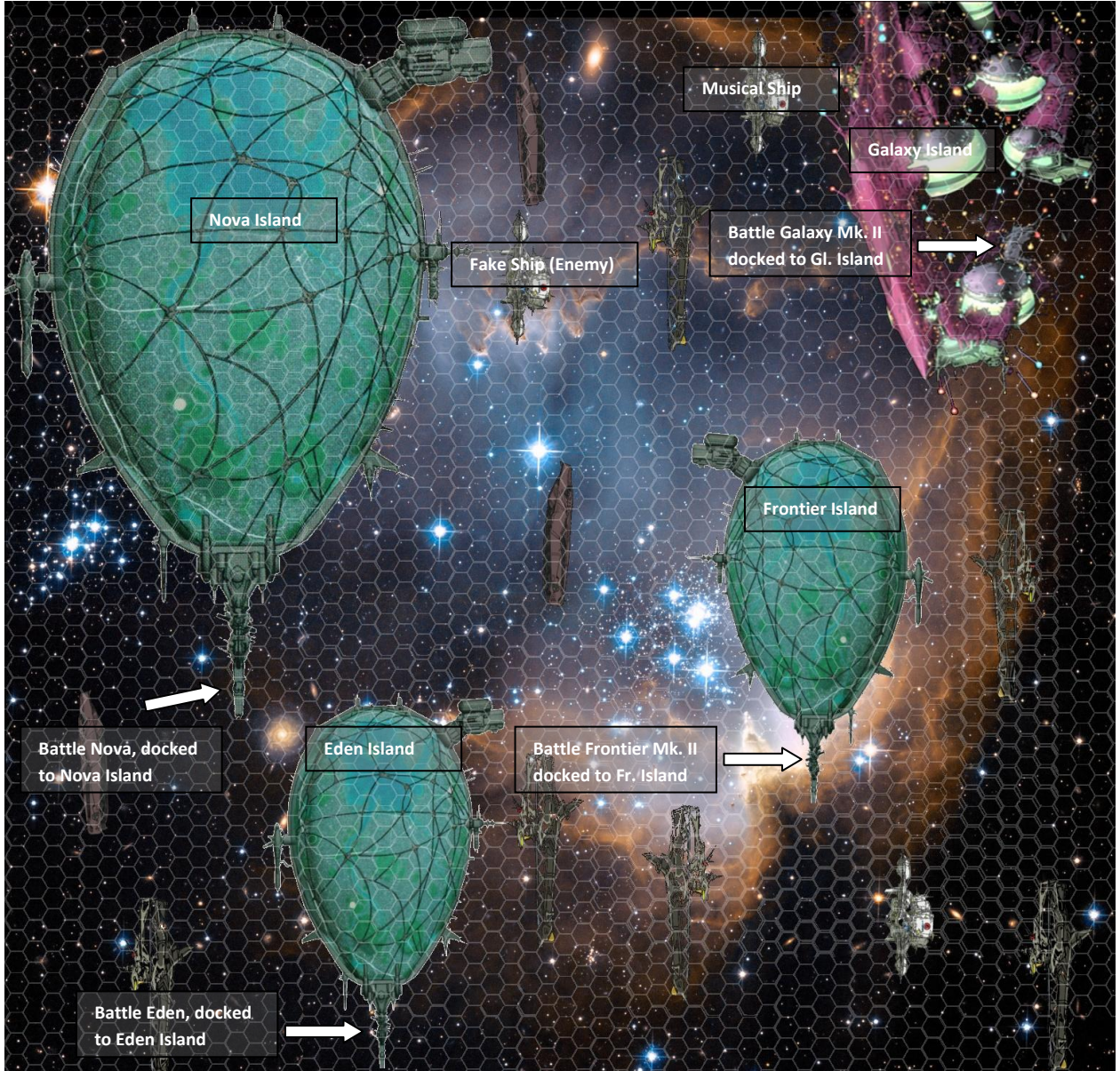
Figure 8 Macross Nova fleet, section

7. The Puzzle

The puzzle for my game was a coordinated attack by the last Battle-class warship and the players. Since communication is interrupted, it is up to the players to understand what does "Battle Nova" is up to and act accordingly.

Character Number 3, is the only character who can receive clues, due to his advanced mecha detection systems.

The Puzzle

The enemy that has to be attacked in a timed fashion is a mothership:

Figure 9: The Enemy mother ship, in robot form

Battle Nova tries to pinpoint 3 dots on the enemy. The players must attack these dots in a timely fashion.
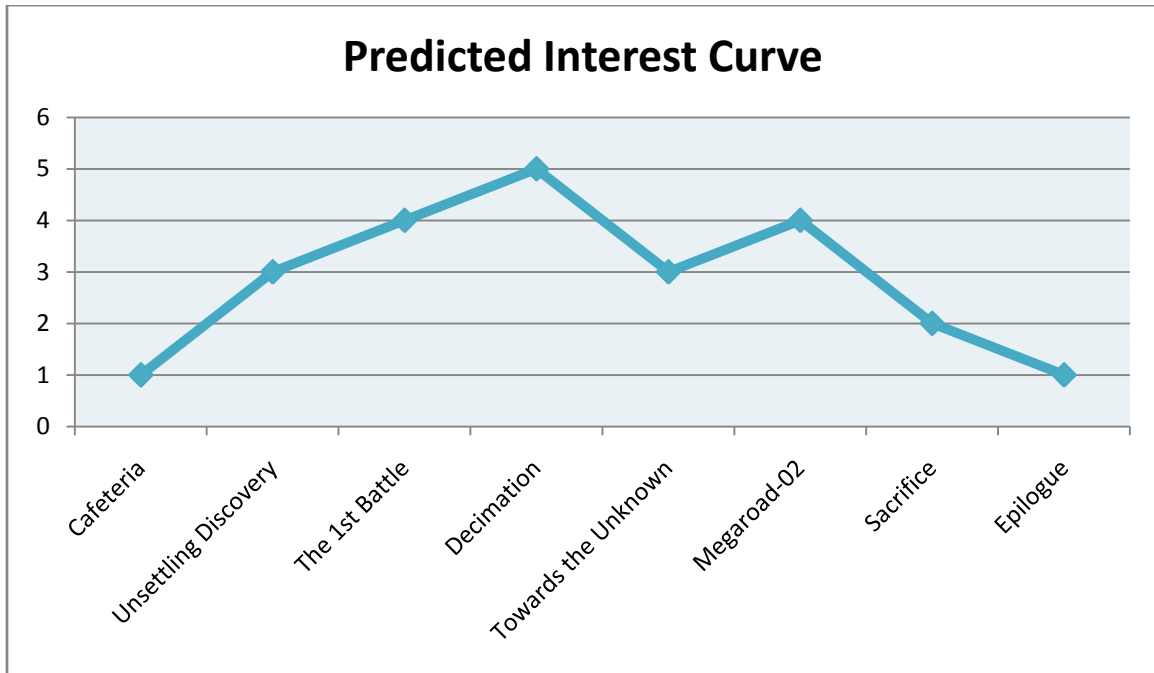
In order to catch this, I will keep reminding to the 3rd character that he's feeling weird and "compelled to do something" about those three dots. (Remember that the 3rd character's VF is equipped with a Brain-Wave device which feedback important data to him as "feelings" and images in his mind).

The New Puzzle

In the middle of the improvised side-quest I decided to throw in a puzzle. The players were exploring an unknown (at the moment) ship. Since the original Macross is a space opera, I decided to honor that, and do a musical puzzle:

1. I had my computer with me. I quickly checked YouTube and searched for Macross songs.
2. Whenever they tried to explore the ship, I rewarded them by playing one of the songs.
3. Eventually Dan realized that music seemed to have an effect. At that moment, I played again the music and "played" the following code in Morse code: "S.O.S."
    (I used http://morsecode.scphillips.com/jtranslator.html to create my coded message)
4.   I repeated the same pattern over and over.

8. Play testing

Predicted Interest Curve

A line chart titled "Predicted Interest Curve" with the y-axis ranging from 0 to 6 and the x-axis showing: Cafeteria (1), Unsettling Discovery (3), The 1st Battle (4), Decimation (5), Towards the Unknown (3), Megaroad-02 (4), Sacrifice (2), Epilogue (1).

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE

Cafeteria: A normal day in Macross Nova's N.U.N.S academy.

Unsettling Discovery: An enemy attacks the fleet. The characters are thrown into chaos and they end up boarding their respective VFs.

The 1st Battle: A Battle in Island Alpha. The players, now part of Alpha Squadron, get a glimpse of the enemies' prowess.

Decimation: A Pyrrhic victory for the Macross Nova fleet. 60% of the Fleet is lost in the attack. It is discovered that it was just an advance party. The enemy will attack full force.

Towards the Unknown To avoid the slaughter of countless innocents, the fleet decides to perform a never-attempted-before galactic fold jump.   The 4 flagships of the fleet; Battle Nova, Battle Eden, Battle Frontier Mk. II and Battle Galaxy Mk. II are deployed in a desperate maneuver to give the fleet time to

prepare to fold jump.

Megaroad-02:   The battle between the 4 flagship and the unknown enemy forces is a stalemate. Suddenly an unknown ship folds right in the middle of the battle.   The unknown ship rams Battle Frontier Mk. II and Battle Eden. Both ships are destroyed in the impact.   The party notices that all communication with the remaining battleships is lost.


Figure 10: MegaRoad-02 Leaving Earth, circa 2012

The unknown ship is identified (by the systems onboard the VFs) as the MegaRoad-02, a colonial fleet-ship that disappeared 80 years ago.

Sacrifice: Battle Galaxy and Battle Nova attempt a final suicidal run against the enemy.   The fleet finally fold-jumps to safety. However, both Battle-class ships are lost.

Epilogue "Lost in Space":   The fleet folds to its destination. However, instead of a star system, the fleet finds itself surrounded by a massive darkness.   Three galaxies, none of them known to man, appear in the far distance.   Without knowing where they are, there's no way to go back to the Milky Way Galaxy. We are lost in space.

Result Interest Curve (avg.)
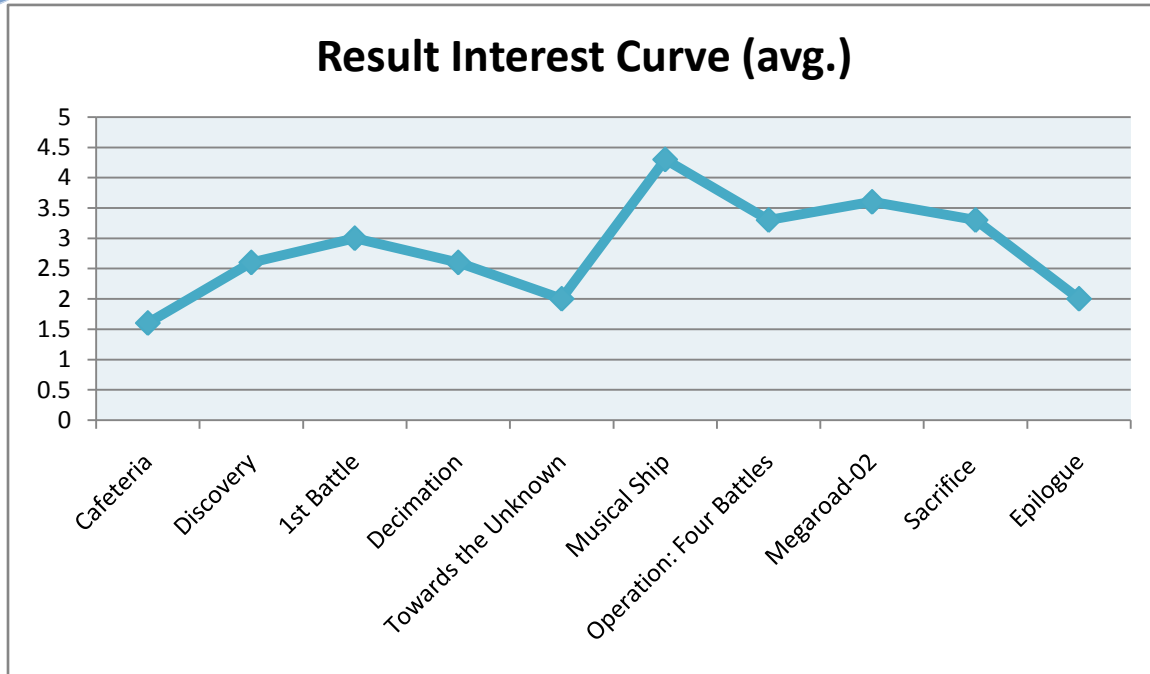
DESCRIPTION OF THE RESULT INTEREST CURVE

Cafeteria: A normal day in Macross Nova's N.U.N.S academy.

Unsettling Discovery: An enemy attacks the fleet. The characters are thrown into chaos and they end up boarding their respective VFs.

The 1st Battle: A Battle in Island Alpha. The players, now part of Alpha Squadron, get a glimpse of the enemies' prowess.

Decimation: A Pyrrhic victory for the Macross Nova fleet. 60% of the Fleet is lost in the attack. It is discovered that it was just an advance party. The enemy will attack full force.

Towards the Unknown To avoid the slaughter of countless innocents, the fleet decides to perform a never-attempted-before galactic fold jump.   The 4 flagships of the fleet; Battle Nova, Battle Eden, Battle Frontier Mk. II and Battle Galaxy Mk. II are deployed in a desperate maneuver to give the fleet time to prepare to fold jump.

(Side quest) Musical Ship The players explore the fleet, encountering an unknown white ship that seems to have a life of its own. They discover that music seems to be the only way this "sentient" ship has as a communication mechanism.

Operation: Four Battles The players finally jump to the final battle scenario.   They only encounter one of the four Battle-class warships, under heavy fire. After a while the other 3 Battle-class vessels jump to the battle. A new "endgame" enemy ship jumps ramming Battle Frontier Mk. II and Battle Eden. Both ships are destroyed by the impact. Battle Nova loses all communication mechanism due to the impact.
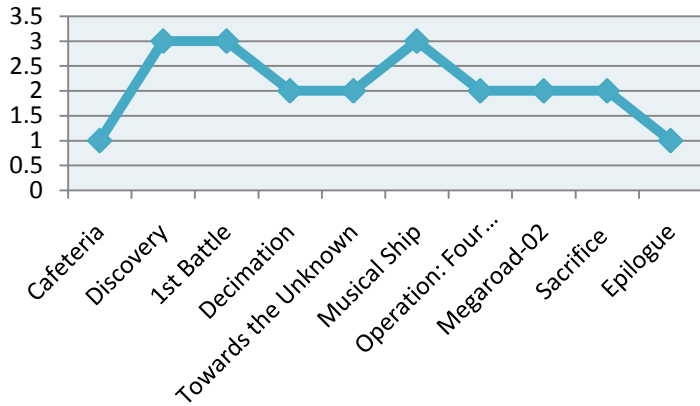
MegaRoad-02: The battle between the 4 flagship and the unknown enemy forces is a stalemate. Suddenly an unknown ship folds right in the middle of the battle.   The unknown ship rams Battle Galaxy Mk II, which is destroyed in the impact.   The party notices that all communication with the remaining battleship (Battle Nova) is lost.

The unknown ship is identified (by the systems onboard the VFs) as the MegaRoad-02, a colonial fleet-ship that disappeared 80 years ago.

Sacrifice: Battle Nova attempt a final suicidal run against the enemy.   The fleet finally fold-jump to safety. However Battle Nova is lost.

Epilogue "Lost in Space":   The fleet folds to its destination. However, instead of a star system, the fleet finds itself surrounded by a massive darkness.   Three galaxies, none of them known to man, appear in the far distance.   Without knowing where they are, there's no way to go back to the Milky Way Galaxy. We are lost in space.

Dan Rickets

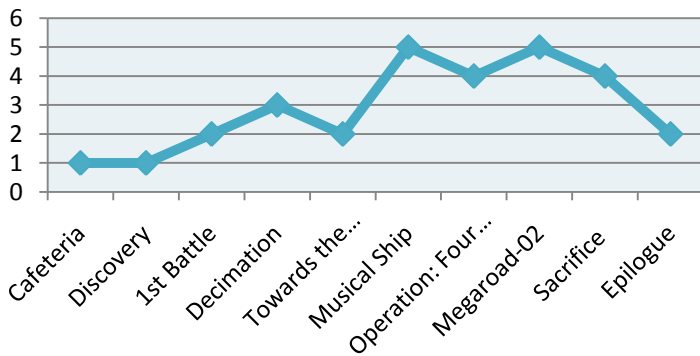(Line chart with y-axis from 0 to 3.5 in 0.5 increments; x-axis categories: Cafeteria, Discovery, 1st Battle, Decimation, Towards the Unknown, Musical Ship, Operation: Four..., Megaroad-02, Sacrifice, Epilogue. Values approximately: 1, 3, 3, 2, 2, 3, 2, 2, 2, 1)

Chongho Lee

(Line chart with y-axis from 0 to 6; x-axis categories: Cafeteria, Discovery, 1st Battle, Decimation, Towards the..., Musical Ship, Operation: Four..., Megaroad-02, Sacrifice, Epilogue. Values approximately: 3, 4, 4, 3, 2, 5, 4, 4, 4, 3)

Dyala Kattan-Wright

(Line chart with y-axis from 0 to 6; x-axis categories: Cafeteria, Discovery, 1st Battle, Decimation, Towards the..., Musical Ship, Operation: Four..., Megaroad-02, Sacrifice, Epilogue. Values approximately: 1, 1, 2, 3, 2, 5, 4, 5, 4, 2)

9. Post-Mortem

WHAT WORKED WELL

- Using the Macross universe worked well. There was a sense of cohesion.

- Using videos from the original series, to explain the background. I introduced them as part of the story. They were "instructional videos" for the flight cadets of N.U.N.S.
  The videos are
    - http://www.veoh.com/search/videos/q/macross+frontier+01#watch%3Dv16231886TZ2Jx5tG (only showed them from 0:00 s to 0:40 s as a video introduction to the universe)
    - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8k4MKFNAj4 (Showed this video as a in-game air show, to explain what is a Macross VF)

- Improvisation!! One of the neatest parts of the game (the "musical ship") was a result of improvisation on my part. After the "Towards the Unknown" part of the adventure, I explained that the 4 battle-class warships fold-jumped towards the enemy. Instead of following the 4 battle-class warships, the players decided to explore the fleet, to make sure that there were not any enemies left behind.
  Instead of punishing them, I decided to allow them and improvised on the fly, an entire sub-plot and related quest that I later connected to the main quest. The best part is that they never knew that it was an improvisation!!!

- Having a well-thought background for the entire scenario allowed me to improvise my sub-plot and quest.

- Maps! The maps helped me locate the enemies and their location, especially in the sub quest.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK WELL

- The VF different modes felt more than a gimmick in-game. Usually the players would forget about the modifiers when attacking and moving. I had to disregard these things in order to keep things going.

- Tried to explain the dragon lance card system but the players didn't understand. I decided to make them play so they can grasp the concept in-game. Shouldn't have done that!

- The battle system had flaws. They were related to my inexperience to the dragon lance card system. However I made the rules on the fly and obeyed them in order to not suspend disbelief in middle of the role-playing session.

- My musical puzzle threw them off. I had to force them to get out and continue on the adventure.   They never solved the puzzle.

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS

- If this is your first time role-playing, prepare yourself. Even though it was my first time doing this, I came prepared and with an open mind.

- Never assume that your players have the same level of knowledge of the world as you do. Remember that as the DM, you are god. Use that to your advantage and help reach a common ground before going role-playing. I did this by establishing an entire background of my adventure within the Macross Universe and used videos to my advantage.

- Make sure that you know very well the rules of the device you are using. If you are using cards, make sure you play-test them.   I didn't do this and I had to make up rules on the fly

- Be consistent. If you decide to do something, stick with it. I did this for my card rules and was able to enjoy my adventure, regardless of using the cards correctly or not.

- Don't be afraid to improvise.   Feel how the players are faring in your adventure and follow accordingly. The interest curves for all three players show that they really enjoyed the story arc that was improvised, even if they were unaware of it.

  I also had to adjust my final scenes and battles to give it a sense of progression. That's why the events in my planned and actual adventure are different. The important thing is that is to respect the world you have built: It is the same outcome but how we get there is different.

- I benefited greatly from the fact that I had some major guidelines planned, but nothing was scripted. That, plus a well thought world allowed me to do my improvised story arc, and later connect it, to the main story.

- Borrow from other sources. I based my 3 main characters and mechas from medieval melee, ranged and magical archetypes and elaborated them from there.