

## The Workers Strike

By Joe Osentoski

“Bugs, Mr. Rico! Zillions of ‘em! I’m a-burnin’ ‘em down!”

“Hughes, take a close look at those Bugs. Any of them fighting back? Aren’t they all workers?”

“Uh—“ I hit the ground and bounced again. He went on, “Hey! You’re right sir! How did you know?”

“Rejoin your squad, Hughes.” I clicked over. “Captain, several thousand Bugs have exited near here from an undetermined number of holes. I have not been attacked. If there are any warriors among them they must be holding their fire and using workers as camouflage.”

*Starship Troopers*, p.196

The first Avalon Hill version of *Starship Troopers* remains my favorite science fiction game. The combination of personal investment in the well-being of each Mobile Infantry trooper, balanced by the asymmetric warfare needs of the Arachnid or the seemingly pathetic Skinnies makes for a great game. Designer Randall Reed and assistant Richard Hamblen made the most of the limited information found in the novel on the organizations and actions of “The First Interstellar War.” In one area, however, the game seems lacking, and for this I offer a variant.

Several times in the book the organization of the Arachnids is given, and one salient point is present: most if not nearly all Arachnids are workers, not warriors. Yet in the game each hive cell is given an equal number of five workers and warriors. For several reasons I find this less than satisfying.

Due to their minimal surface movement factors of “1,” any venturing onto the surface is dicey for the Arachnids. To address this problem my personal strategy has been to form a breach, make my attacks, and then leave the breach with multiple units to provide a decoy to the inevitable M.I. ranged fire, DAPs and DARs. Moving one or two warriors to the surface with several workers allows for at least some chance for survival if the M.I. picks the wrong unit to flame. This tactic was used several times in the book, especially during Operation Royalty where both Trooper Hughes and Johnny Rico are caught up in feints.

Then a surge of living monsters carried me back up into the light—and training paid off; I landed on my feet, talking and fighting: “Breakthrough at Easter Ten—no, Easter Eleven, where I am now. Big hole and they’re pouring up. Hundreds. More than that.” I had a hand flamer in each hand and was burning them down as I reported.

“Get out of there, Johnnie!”

“Wilco!”—and I started to jump.

And stopped. Checked the jump in time, stopped flaming, and really looked—for I suddenly realized that I ought to be dead. “Correction,” I said, looking and hardly believing.

“Breakthrough at Easter Eleven is a feint. No warriors.”

*Starship Troopers*, p.195

The same tactic applies when a beam weapon is brought up into a breach and fires. Having several workers to screen the location of the beam after movement allows for a more realistic

modeling of Arachnid tactics. But alas, when I implement this in game terms I am often running short of workers long before my pool of warriors is exhausted.

Presently I got so I could kill a Bug without wasting ammo or juice, although I did not learn to distinguish between those that were harmless and those that were not. Only about one in fifty is a warrior—but he makes up for the other forty-nine. Their personal weapons aren't as heavy as ours but they are lethal just the same—they've got a beam that will penetrate armor and slice flesh like cutting a hard boiled egg, and they cooperate even better than we do...because the brain that is doing the heavy thinking for a "squad" isn't where you can reach it; it's down one of those holes.

*Starship Troopers*, p.109

So the answer is simple: double the number of workers assigned to each cell. The counter backs must be the same as the original units to allow for some form of fog of war, but it gives the Arachnid the same ability to launch feints, exhaust M.I. ammo, test the Terran deployment, and keep the spirit of the book and Arachnid organization. My personal preference would be to triple the amount of workers in each hive, but for playability purposes doubling is the best compromise.

This should not have a huge effect on play balance: I find that the game is tilted in the direction of the Arachnid player already but don't see this as making Terran objectives insurmountable. In many games I have succeeded in destroying the entire M.I. platoon with concentrated beam fire, having kept the heavy weapons in reserve and preserved by use of worker feints, then popping multiple breaches on the last turn as the Terran scurries to his retrieval boat, then launching an Arachnid "Hail Tarantula" at the boat with concentrated Heavy Weapons fire. With the increased number of workers it has allowed me to rarely use the Heavy Weapons, instead keeping the Terran guessing just where and when I would bring it to the surface. More workers added a considerable "fog of war" capability to the Arachnid arsenal. Great hives think alike.

No rule changes are necessary to implement this variant: simply add the additional Arachnid workers to each scenario with Arachnids--five extra worker units per cell. This will apply to Scenarios Two, Four, Five-A, Six, and Seven. For how you actually implement the extra workers, the following suggestions are given:

- In scenarios with one hive, simply use the worker units from the second hive to double the amount available.
- Find a cheap extra copy of *SST* (great for those four platoon mega-games) on-line or at a convention auction and use the extra counters from the second copy.
- Simply re-use up to five (or ten, or twenty, or more) of each hive's workers as they are eliminated. Keep a simple tally on the Alien Control Pad or a piece of scrap paper. This limits the Arachnid to only five workers per cell at a time, but still allows for much greater use since the easily eliminated workers are replaced just as easily.
- Purchase a nice replacement set of counters from AHGeneral.org and you will have plenty of extras. A nice bonus are the "Saga of the Bug War" units and variant counters found in The General Volume 13, Number 6. You can also purchase the *Starship Troopers* CD and get a scan of the counters to make your own.

Then see what it's like to deal with those "zillions" of bugs. "*C'mon you apes! You wanna live forever?*"