

BRANTHODON PRIMER

Stop dragon my ship around...

by Scott Moellmer

The Branthodons in the Omega Octant are truly a unique empire. Cybernetic symbiotes of living creatures using electronic upgrades, and tiny-hulled ships, the Branthodons warred to the point of racial extinction versus the Alunda in the Omega Octant. If you enjoy flying dragons, hop on one's back, and away we go.

FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

The first and foremost thing you need to remember when flying Branthodons is their vulnerability to attacks. They have no shields, and minimal armor, so every point of damage *hurts*. You can not dance around at medium or long range and win attrition fights flying dragons. No dragon can exceed Speed 30; some are slower, and you must close, and fast, to have any chance of victory. Your enemies know this, too.

The second thing to remember is that the Branthodon fleet consists mostly of hordes of smaller ships. The larger dragons take years to grow and train, and are fairly rare. The effective weapons range of Hatchling and Young dragons (the most numerous types) is around two-to-three hexes. They can do very little damage (other than perhaps a dragonbreath bolt) beyond that.

The third major point to remember is that the Branthodons are part Space Dragon, and part tiny starship attached to the beast's back. The dragon part has eyebeams, plasma-flavored dragonbreath, wings, claws, and a tail. These systems are not affected by electronic warfare, and sometimes not even by shields! The "ship" part (the backpack) has particle phasers, which are generally *very* short ranged, as well as more "normal" ship systems (tractors, transporters, etc.). This part of the Branthodon *is* affected by electronic warfare normally. The particle phasers have at least the potential to be very powerful at short range, but the widely varying damage they do is not something to bet your attack pass on.

The fourth unique point about Branthodons is that larger "units", unlike those of every other empire in *Star Fleet Battles*, gain new abilities instead of "more of the same." Attacks such as rake, bite, etc., are only found in the rare larger dragons. The different-sized Branthodon units have different tactics, so use the younger and smaller dragonships as a more expendable screen for the older and larger ones. The downside of this tactic is that larger dragons are a little slower (maximum Speed 24 or so as opposed to the Speed 30 of smaller beasts). In pickup BPV games, flying an Ancient Dragon is likely to instill some terror in the mind of your opponent.

One large advantage Branthodons have is that most of the dragon special functions (attacks or defenses) are "on demand," (assuming you are large enough and have the needed vital energy and body parts) in that you can do them mid-turn without preparation. (Wing buffets are an important exception to this.) Offensive tail slap, eyeburn, and other such things do not have to be allocated, giving the dragons an important edge in flexibility. Regarding eyeburn, it is usually better to go for two shots, unless that one blast is all you are going to get, and you need extra damage.

ON THE ATTACK

A big factor for the Branthodon is that dragon weaponry is usually 360°, making maneuver a little less important. Also keep in mind that should you for some reason need to use a High Energy Turn, dragons pay that cost per hex side that you change facing, so a 180° turn costs three times the wing factors. Fortunately, with your 360° arcs, you usually will not need to do a High

Energy Turn.

Erratic Maneuvers are also expensive and do not last long, otherwise the “charge the enemy while under Erratic Maneuvers” tactic would be devastating. Erratic Maneuvers also take up wing factors that are probably better utilized gaining more speed. Erratic maneuvers may still work, in short bursts. If you are having trouble matching the maneuver skill of your foes, sic some dragons on them!

Regarding dragon breath, there are several options, especially for the larger creatures. The “plasma” weapon can be split for smaller torpedoes every turn, or made enveloping, or even faster than Speed 32, although in the latter case the torpedoes will be smaller. The lack of pseudo torpedoes will help your foes, but you have great flexibility in your heavy weapons, which cost no power.

Other weapons include biting (within Range 3, for larger dragons only), an attack that ignores shields! Claw attacks also ignore shields, and all dragons can use them, but they require reaching Range 0. Always expect the enemy to have a suicide shuttle ready. (Pity that you cannot have them, but you have no warp power!)

Branthodon fighters are fairly unremarkable phaser platforms, and care needs to be taken on shuttle/fighter launching from an undulating dragon platform.

Special cybernetic upgrades vary widely in effect.

“Hyperadrenaline” will get you twice the vital energy on a given turn, at the cost of having only half your normal energy level on the next turn.

“Agile tail” gives you the ability to use the normally defensive tail slap on offense, and can be very nasty, but like most of these upgrades, is rare and expensive.

“Slashing claws” gives you double claw attacks, but the sixteen-impulse delay between attacks limits that greatly, unless you can stay in a foe’s hex, or attack a group of slower foes.

An “eye focuser” also increases your eyebeam damage, but is vulnerable to destruction.

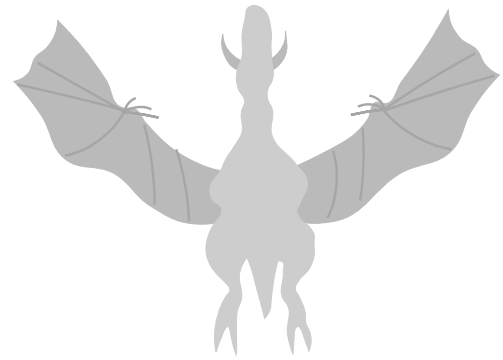
“Power diving” can be a lifesaver if your dragon has taken lots of wing hits and is slowing too much to catch the enemy. Keep in mind that the dive only lasts for four impulses, but if you can pull off a “rake attack” during the dive, you get an extra damage point inflicted, and then doubled! Again, only larger dragons can accomplish this.

DEFENSIVELY

Branthodons boast immunity to asteroid/dust/subspace coagulator damage, enabling them to utilize those terrains to their advantage. They are also immune to hit-and-run raids, as long as some part of the wings remain. Dragons are able to mentally identify seeking weapons as labs can, with larger numbers and ranges of course in the larger dragons.

The chief way the dragonships survive to reach short range (despite all of the damage that their enemies can throw at them) is the large amount of damage they can take. The dragon part of the dragonship is not “killed” until all body parts are reduced to zero, and if you really need to save a damaged claw or wing from further damage, the Branthodons can utilize the “body block” to force all incoming (non-enveloping) damage to hit the body, which is the largest area to absorb damage. Regeneration can heal the dragon’s body, but slowly, and to a limited effect, as each usage burns one box. Using fast regeneration prohibits any dragon attacks that turn. The exoskeleton can fire its weapons, although at most reasonably effective ranges you would want dragon attacks as well. Fast regeneration is probably the best route to take, if you are going to lose the box at the end of the turn anyway.

The tail slap defense does great damage to incoming seeking weapons, sufficiently so that most Alunda foes, for example, will not bother with whipcrack torpedoes in less than huge masses.



THE PRIME ENEMY

Since the Branthodons’ major foe is the Alunda, we will focus on that matchup. The Branthodons fought other empires, such as the Hivers, Souldra, and Sigvirions, but the vast majority of historical battles were against the Alunda space whales.

The Alunda use biobolts for their main firepower, and the plasma whip will definitely sting (doing double damage versus a dragon’s unshielded hide) at short range. The attraction-repulsion fields they carry will usually be trying to push you away from point-blank range, assuming they do not tractor you to try and prevent that as well. The fact that they have shields, and you do not, means they will usually be trying to shoot you with biobolts while running away and playing a medium-range attrition game.

But, you have a few counter-tricks of your own. Your speed will be high, and it costs you no power to move, for as long as your wings remain relatively undamaged. If the space whales want to go fast, they will not have huge amounts of power for guns. As always against a fast-running foe, striving to destroy the #4 shield is a great option. They have to run away at an angle to keep shields toward you, and that effectively slows them down.

Alunda ships often have relatively small amounts of forward hull, which leads to the early loss of their vital adrenal batteries more quickly.

Should you get caught in an attraction-repulsion field, or a tractor, remember that wing buffets can break either of those, so be sure to allocate at least one in Energy Allocation. Since the buffeting dragon can choose how far it pushes its target away (up to Range 5), zero hexes is a perfectly-legal way to free itself without making the Alunda ship harder to catch. In a group attack, push an Alunda ship toward another dragonship, making his job easier. Do not forget that even if an Alunda ship does tractor you, it will be slowed by the combined move costs, thus making it more vulnerable to your flamebreath and attacks by other dragonships. You might even try some negative tractor from your exoskeleton, but given the very limited power the exoskeletons have, this may not be practical, except perhaps against long-range tractors. Keep in mind that the plasma whip, and especially the attraction-repulsion field, have long cycle times, and keep the pressure on.

As a personal note, when I first encountered the Branthodons, I noticed that one could breathe out a fireball, then use the Wing buffet to immediately move it five hexes in a row. I called this tactic “Hard Serve,” and SVC made it illegal, just as immediately, but it was great fun to imagine.

The Branthodons were crushed as an empire and made virtually extinct in the Omega Octant by the Alunda in Y189. That said, they are simple and easy to fly, and do not have to worry about many things that other empires do. Nothing in the Omega Octant (or most any other place) is scarier than an angry Ancient Dragon bearing down on you. Enjoy!