

# A Sky Full of Ships

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*A simple (but not too simple) set of starship combat rules, which allow huge fleets to engage each other in epic battle (and finish in a reasonable amount of time)*

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## Introduction

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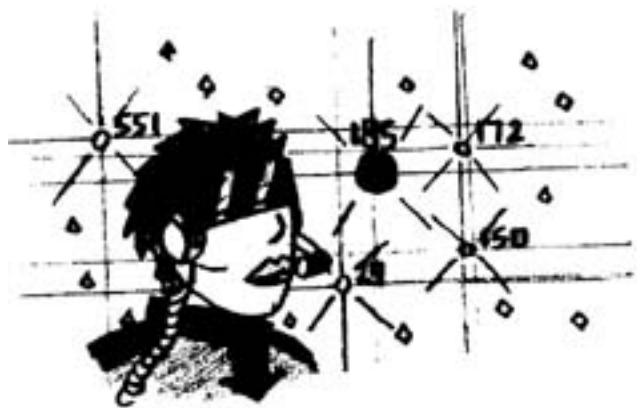
I have always been interested in science fiction. Whether it was in books, TV or movies, scifi has been one of my favourite literary genres since I was very young. Much later, when I discovered wargaming, it was only natural for me to combine these two favourite hobbies. Through the years I've played many scifi games and found several favourites that have stood the test of time. However, none really seemed designed to recreate those great fleet battles, those most dramatic of moments when entire empires stood or fell.

And so, to fill that void, these rules were born. Instead of being just the captain of a few ships, you take the place of an admiral, commanding entire fleets. Using simple, fast moving game mechanics, these rules attempt to portray the important aspects of huge fleet engagements without becoming too bogged down in time consuming detail. They're for those players willing to sacrifice some complexity to achieve a fast moving, playable, and most importantly, FUN game.

Don't be put off by the size of the rules, use only the basic rules until you are comfortable with play, and then add whatever optional rules you like.

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*Beka Eslar abruptly folded the page of hardcopy with a sigh and shifted her feet into a more comfortable position on the edge of the tabletop. She tucked the folded page back into the folio from which it had been withdrawn and tossed it with practiced precision into a nearby filing cabinet. Idly, Beka allowed her gaze to wander about the cramped and cluttered confines of her duty station. Observation Outpost 234, one of the many unsung guardians for the Colm Star System, was without doubt the most boring assignment she'd ever drawn and it would be a minor miracle if she finished her tour of duty here with her sanity intact. She sighed again and laid her head back against the padded rest.*



*"I'm gonna go nuts" Beka remarked aloud. Her voice echoed dully off the bulkheads. "See, I'm already half way there. I'm talking to myself," she remarked half in jest, half seriously.*

*Suddenly, a series of warning lights lit up her sensor boards. Beka's head jerked up from the rest and she blinked in surprise. Her feet snapped off the desk top and slammed to the floor abruptly as the sensor panels sparked to life and a warning alarm began to shriek throughout the compartment. Distantly, Beka heard the same alarm being echoed throughout every other compartment in the outpost. It was the Battle Stations signal. Beka felt chilled as she applied herself to her scanner controls and tried to refine the data that was pouring into her computers from the system's sensor net.*

*"Status report!" The voice of the outpost commander boomed over the intercom. He at least sounded calm; then again, he was an old combat veteran. Beka barely listened to the confused babble as reports flooded over the intercom from all over the outpost station. Her eyes were fixed on the various icons that were appearing on her consoles that indicated possible enemy warships. A quick glance showed her that there were at least a hundred separate warning icons, with more arriving by the minute. Beka found herself swallowing hard. It looked like the war had finally come to the Colm system after all.*

*"Commander, we have multiple contacts with an estimated 100 plus warships. They are a mix of capital ships, cruisers and light escorts. I think there are also several troop transports following the warships," Beka spoke as calmly as she could manage into her bridge pickup.*

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# PART I - Basic Rules

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## Game Setup

### Overview

A Sky Full of Ships (ASFoS) was designed to be an easy, fast-moving set of rules for large sci-fi fleet actions. Playable with as few ships per side as you like, or as many ships as you own, these generic rules will allow large games to be played to a finish, on an average-sized gaming table, within several hours. The game's movement and combat mechanisms were designed specifically for this purpose. Ships tend to move around the table at an acceptable speed and weapons fire at reasonable ranges. Actual time and distance scales are not fixed.

These are also generic rules; there is no specific background or ship designs forced upon the user. The generic nature of the rules will allow you to play in whatever setting you prefer, using any starship miniatures at all from any background. Invent as much or as little of your own universe, or borrow from the sci-fi background of your choice. These rules will work equally well for either.

### Setting Up

The first thing players need to decide is whether they intend to play a scenario or a pick up game in which evenly pointed fleets fight it out, with the side inflicting the most damage considered the winner. This choice will determine the fleets needed. A scenario will have a recommended number of ships. If it is to be a pick-up game, decide upon the size. A game with about 100 points of ships per side will make a good starting game that lasts a couple of hours. Once the game type has been determined, each player should select ships to equal his allowed points total.

This game can be played on any table surface large enough for the players to maneuver their ships. Each starship in ASFoS should be represented by a miniature or counter. A sheet of ship counters, fighter flights and missiles are included at the end of this rulebook. Once each side has chosen its fleet, the miniatures (or counters) can be placed along their side's edge of the gaming table.

If both sides agree, terrain can be placed on the table (i.e. asteroids, planets, etc.). This can either be done randomly, or one player can place the terrain with the other player choosing which edge of the table to set up on. After the sides have finished setting up, the game can begin.

### Playing the Game

Things you will need to play the game

- At least one pair of differently coloured six-sided dice (d6).
- Measuring tapes and/or rulers for determining distance(s).
- Playing pieces for the ships (i.e. miniatures or counters).
- At least one copy of each different type of ship design being used.

Since this is science fiction and all ships are equipped with computers and sensors to keep track of the ship's current speed, bearing, and distance to every other object in the game, players are allowed to pre-measure (i.e. check the range). Also, ships sometime travel a bit too fast and find they can't turn quick enough to stay on the gaming table. You can resolve this in one of two ways. Ships that leave the table are gone, or use a 'floating' playing area. Since one area of space is the same as another, whenever the action drifts towards one table edge, and ships end up off table, simply move everything the same number of inches back towards the center of the table, keeping the same relative locations and facing.

# Ship Concepts

## Mass

The starships used in ASFoS range from the smallest Frigate to the largest Titan. This variety requires an artificial measure of a ship's Mass that is achieved by use of an artificial game mechanism, the Hull Box. The size of a ship is represented by the number of these Hull Boxes. The more massive (bigger) the ship, the more Hull Boxes it has.

As with modern wet Navies, ships tend to be further classified into categories of Mass. ASFoS follows this example with Mass categories of its own. The table below shows the Mass (number of Hull Boxes) of the different classes of ships.

Frigate: 1	Heavy Cruiser: 5 or 6	Dreadnought: 13 to 18
Destroyer: 2	Battle Cruiser: 7, 8 or 9	Super-Dreadnought: 19 to 24
Light Cruiser: 3 or 4	Battleship: 10, 11, or 12	Titan: 25 or more

Frigates and Destroyers are both classified as Escorts. Titans can vary greatly in size; anything greater than 24 Mass is called a Titan. The use of Escorts and Titans require the use of the optional rules section; ignore them for now. The basic rules apply to all the classes in between.

## Power

The power of a ship is directly related to its Mass. The bigger the ship is, the more room it has for weapons and their associated power supplies. So when ships are built, their offensive abilities are directly related to their size. Everything is again based on the number of Hull Boxes. They determine not just the size but also the capabilities of the ship. The bigger the ship, the more combat power it has.

## Hull

In addition to using the Hull Box to represent size, every ship has a basic structural strength that is determined during construction. This basic strength is often good enough for Escorts and Light Cruisers, but some larger ships reinforce their hulls for greater survivability. The hulls of some ships are intentionally weakened to produce cheaper ships. These practices give a large range of possible defensive strengths for ships' hulls. In ASFoS, this range is represented by a hull strength number: 2 (weak), 3 (average), 4 (strong), 5 (armoured). These could conceivably go even higher.

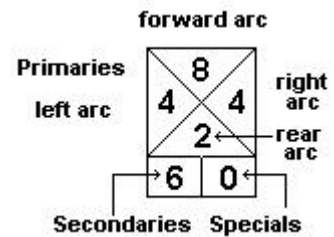
## Electronic Defences

Usually a ship's defences are not limited to armour. Many ships enhance their defensive strength through electronic means by adding electromagnetic screens or force shields. Their strengths can range from 0 (none) to 4 (maximum). These electronic defences do not exist independently; they are added to the ship's hull strength. The sum of a ship's basic hull strength and its electronic defences is called its Defence Factor (DF).

## Weapons

A ship's standard beam weapons represent either multiple laser tubes firing coherent light or larger, more powerful particle beams. These weapons are most commonly arranged together into batteries which fire together, guided by a single fire control system. This tends to compensate for the relatively low damage potential of any individual gun.

In the basic rules, all weapons on a ship are grouped into one of two main types: Primary Batteries or Secondary Batteries. The Primary Batteries constitute all of a ship's large powerful anti-ship batteries and are split into four 90 degree arcs of fire. The Secondary Batteries are short-ranged all around defensive weapons. The Weapons Box on the Ship Display is used to show the current strength of both types. The example to the right illustrates ONE Weapons Box.



**Primary Batteries** - The strength of a ship's main long-range weapons is split into four 90 degree arcs of fire: forward, left, right and rear. Each arc can have a different strength, depending on which weapons are represented in that arc of fire. The forward arc is commonly the most powerful, although normally no single arc has all of the Primary Battery Power. This Primary Battery Power represents the maximum fire that can be brought to bear in a given arc. The Primary Batteries may be fired once per turn at a single target within ONE of the four fire arcs. You may pick which arc you wish to use but the Primary Batteries may be fired only ONCE per turn (many weapons actually have more than one arc of fire, so firing your Primary Batteries again would represent some weapons firing in two directions at the same time). Primary Batteries have a maximum range of 36 inches.

In the example above, the Primary Batteries have a strength of 8 in the forward arc, 4 in the left and right arcs and 2 in the rear arc. During a game, you may have no eligible targets in the forward arc, one enemy ship in the left arc, and one in the rear arc. Since you can't use the strongest arc (no targets), you might therefore fire the Primary Batteries into the left arc with a strength of 4.

**Secondary Batteries** - These smaller but possibly more numerous, rapid-firing, short-range batteries have a 360 degree arc of fire but a maximum range of only 6 inches. They may also fire ONCE per turn at any one target in range.

The sample Weapons Box example has no special weapons noted (for Special Weapons see page 20).

## Engines

To move, all ships need motive power or drive of some sort. The power of this drive, its acceleration and turning capability, is represented by the Engine Rating. This rating ranges from 0 to 8 and determines how much a ship can turn, speed up, or slow down during each turn.

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*Admiral Rom looked pointedly at his main tactical imager, the glowing lights from its holographic deeps reflected eerily off his face. The Marz system was the target of his attention, a binary star system with two yellow stars and a dozen planets, one of which was suitable for habitation with a minimum of terra-forming work.*

*His lips twisted into a deepening frown. Once Marz had belonged to his people, they had made a promising start at colonizing it and developing it into a viable member of their interstellar community. That was before the enemy had discovered the Marz system, ejected the original colonists and replaced them with their own. Marz had been for a hundred years a jewel in that enemy's crown. A smile flickered onto Admiral Rom's face, a jewel that he was about to pry loose.*



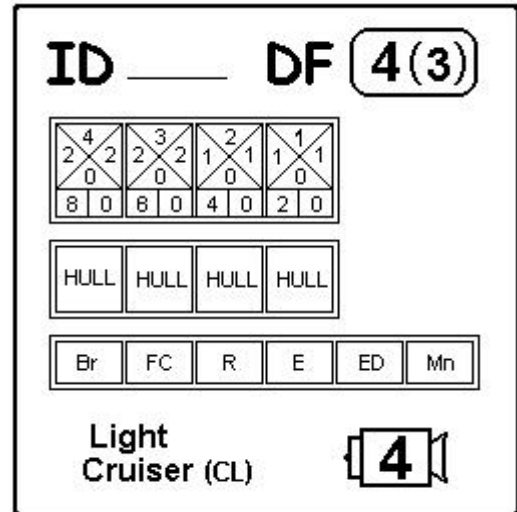
## Ship Displays

To the right is an example of a Ship Display for a light cruiser.

'ID' is used for simple ship identification.

### Defence Factor (DF)

DF represents the ship's total hull strength. The number inside the brackets represents the ship's basic hull strength before being strengthened by electronic defences. This example shows a average (3) hull strengthened by one point of electronic defence screens for a total DF of 4. The basic strength is shown in case the electronic defences are lost.



### Weapons Boxes

The first row of boxes represents Weapons Boxes. Although a Ship Display always begins with the same number of Weapons Boxes as Hull Boxes, only one Weapons Box is important, the leftmost. It contains the six numbers that represent the current strengths of the different weapon types and arcs. Only this box is considered active; the other boxes are merely pre-calculated damaged strengths. You'll notice that the numbers in each box in the row of Weapons Boxes get proportionally weaker as you move along the row to the right.

The leftmost Weapons Box in the row represents all weapons and all arcs at full strength. As the ship takes damage to its weapon systems, and Weapons Boxes are marked off, starting with the leftmost box and moving right; the active box becomes the next one in line. As the active Weapons Box moves right, the strengths get weaker; when only half the Weapons Boxes remain, the strengths in the leftmost undamaged Weapons Box are exactly half of what they were at full strength. When only one quarter of the Weapons Boxes remain, the strengths are one quarter of full strength, etc. Primary Battery, Secondary Battery and special strengths all decrease at the same rate, exactly in proportion to the percentage of Weapons Boxes lost.

### Hull Boxes

The next row on the sample Ship Display represents the Hull Boxes; this indicates the size of the ship. Damage to the hull of a ship is taken in a similar fashion to weapons, marking off the leftmost box and moving right. When all the Hull Boxes have been marked off, the ship is destroyed.

### Critical Hits

The third row on the sample Ship Display represents the Critical Hits, used only with the optional rules.

### Engine Rating

The last number on the sample Ship Display, inside the icon in the lower right of the display, represents the engine's power.