

RUNNING A STARSHIP COMBAT

There are three types of starship combat which may arise during the game – these are usually called *quick encounters*, *tactical encounters*, and *complex encounters*.

When a group of players combine together to run a single ship, there is a danger of the encounter feeling flat and boring. This is because, in essence, they're running one “character” between them, instead of a character each. For this reason, it's vital that starship combats of this type either (a) be very quick, or (b) contain lots of other things for each player character to do. A long starship combat with the players all merely helping to run a single ship *will* be a tedious affair otherwise.

Quick encounters. Quick combat encounters can be easily incorporated into the narrative of the adventure and do not require a starscape or miniatures. Such a combat should last no more than a few rounds, with each player character doing something each round (using sensors, firing a weapon, manoeuvring the ship, repairing damage, and so on). The GM narrates the encounter as he would any other encounter.

Tactical encounters. Tactical encounters use a starscape (hex grid), and miniatures or counters to represent the position and heading of any ships or other objects in the area. In a tactical encounter, every player controls a ship. Use the basic starship combat rules from this rulebook to adjudicate these encounters.

Complex encounters. In a complex encounter, every player plays his character as normal engaging in activities other than the control of the starship, with the starship movement performing a background role to the narrative. You will need two battlemaps in this type of encounter – one for the player characters, and one for the starships. In this sense, you almost use the starship as an extra NPC controlled by all the players, while their characters act normally. In a complex encounter the PCs are involved in some kind of shipboard scene. Perhaps they are trying to find the saboteur aboard their ship, defending the engine room from a boarding party, boarding an enemy ship themselves, or trying to solve some other problem. Perhaps they, themselves, are boarding another vessel, or searching an abandoned base on an asteroid in the hopes of finding the new hyperspatial time reactor before the opposing Spartan crew does. While all this is going on, the starship – the additional NPC – engages in combat simultaneously.

MAKING STARSHIP COMBAT INTERESTING

It's important to put thought into a starship combat encounter. Unlike the ground, space is generally very empty – there's no terrain, different elevations, cover, or objects to interact with. An empty starscape should be avoided for the same reason that a ground-based encounter should not take place on a wide stretch of bare terrain – it won't be fun.

Goals. The goal of a starship combat should never be simply “destroy all opponents”. You should view this as the Golden Rule of Starship Combat. There should be a tactical objective which makes sitting there and firing all guns at the enemy until they explode a non-viable option. Tactical objectives can be as simple as escape, or they can be more complex tasks such as protecting a convoy while it traverses the starscape, getting to a location, sending an away team to retrieve something, and then getting away, discovering a cloaked ship, or scanning derelict starship wreckage to locate a vital power source.

Terrain. Space does have terrain. At least, the bits of space where starships get into fights do. Planets, moons, asteroid fields, nebulae, and space stations can all provide obstacles, cover, concealment, and more. Some nebulae can even grant bonuses to starships, and gravity wells can be used for slingshot effects. Plasma storms and gravitational or temporal anomalies can wreak havoc

Environment. Environment is different to terrain in that rather than referring to objects on the

starscape, it describes the entire starscape. Environmental factors could include extra-strong gravity wells from black holes and other stellar objects which pull all vessels towards one edge of the starscape, or large nebulae which reduce sensor ranges or line-of-sight, creating a more “submarine” type encounter. Radiation can also provide an interesting environmental effect to those ships which do not maintain their shields, and nearby magnetars or other unusual stellar bodies can have periodic effects on nearby ships.

The Golden Rule of Starship Combat

Always have a tactical objective other than destroying all opponents.

RANDOM LIST OF THINGS TO INCLUDE IN A STARSHIP COMBAT

Roll 2d6 to randomly select terrain and environmental effects in a starship combat encounter. You should try to use at least two different items from the table below. Reroll any duplicates.

1d6	1	2	3	4	5	6
1	Planets & Moons	Space creatures	Asteroids	Spatial anomalies	Planets & Moons	Nebula
2	Asteroids	Plasma storms	Magnetar	Energy fluctuations	Radiation	Plasma storms
3	Nebula	Invitational anomalies	Wormhole	Solar winds	Volatile gas pockets	Funnel clouds
4	Volatile gas pockets	Asteroids	Radiation	Nebula	Temporal anomalies	Asteroids
5	Quantum singularities	Energy barrier	Alien artifacts	Psychic phenomena	Energy fluctuations	Planets & Moons
6	Asteroids	Funnel clouds	Black hole	Planets & Moons	Asteroids	Nebula

ASTEROIDS, PLANETS, AND MOONS

Asteroids take up between one and three hexes. They should be sprinkled liberally across the starscape. Asteroids block line of sight. Planets are usually 3-8 hexes in diameter; it is rare that multiple planets will be found on a single starscape. Moons are smaller, usually 2-3 hexes in diameter.

BLACK HOLE

A black hole is not placed on the starscape itself; rather it exists off of one edge of the starscape. Each round, all ships are dragged 1d6 hexes towards that hex edge in a straight line. Any vessel which crosses the edge of the starscape has passed through the event horizon and is effectively destroyed.

ENERGY BARRIER

An energy barrier forms an impassable “sheet” which causes 3d6 heat damage to any ship which

comes into contact with it.

ENERGY FLUCTUATIONS

Energy fluctuations are an environmental feature. Each round, roll 1d6; on a roll of 5 or 6, and energy fluctuation takes place. Roll 1d6 on the following table to determine its effect:

- 1 All shields are overloaded and go down for this round.
- 2 All energy weapons deal double damage for this round.
- 3 All ships take 1d6 heat damage.
- 4 All sensors are knocked offline, making firing impossible this round.
- 5 Characters aboard a ship all take 1d6 heat damage.
- 6 Energy reactions are amplified; ships all double their velocity this round.

FUNNEL CLOUDS

Funnel clouds are gaseous entities of 3 hexes diameter. They look like towering pillars of turbulent gas. A ship can hide within a funnel cloud, rendering it effectively cloaked. However, the ship will take 1d6 heat damage each round while inside the cloud.

GRAVITATIONAL ANOMALY

Gravitational anomalies have unpredictable effects on starship. An anomaly is 1d6 hexes in diameter. The GM should determine its location, but it is a Difficult [16] INT check to use sensors to locate and chart an anomaly. Any ship which comes into contact with a gravitation anomaly is thrown 3d6 hexes in a randomly determined direction.

MAGNETAR

A magnetar is a type of neutron star with a powerful magnetic field, about the size of a large asteroid. They inflict a -3 die penalty to all sensor checks and attack rolls. Magnetars also cause energy fluctuations (see above) with strong x-ray and gamma ray bursts.

NEBULA

Nebulae encompass an entire starscape and reduce sensor (and attack) range to 2d6 hexes.

PLASMA STORMS

Plasma storms are dangerous, explosive phenomenon which can cause damage to vessels which stray too close. Storms appear randomly, and disappear again just as quickly. At the start of the encounter, place 1d6 plasma storms of 3-hexes in diameter on the starscape. Each storm as a countdown die of one dice; roll 1d6 for each storm each round, and remove it if a 6 is rolled. Additionally, roll 1d6 each round and on a roll of 5-6 add a new plasma storm to the starscape in a randomly determined location. Plasma storms cause 6d6 damage to any starship which comes into contact with it.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

Psychic phenomena affect crew rather than ships, adjusting their emotions. Each round, each character is subjected to a 4d6 vs. MENTAL DEFENSE attack. If the attack is successful, they suffer one of the following effects:

1-3 2d6 psychic damage.

4 *Stunned* for this round.

5 *Enraged* for this round.

6 *Panicked* for this round.

QUANTUM SINGULARITY

A quantum singularity is a tiny space-time distortion which follows the Uncertainty Principle and appears in a random location each round. It has an event horizon of 3 hexes diameter, and any ship which touches the event horizon is destroyed instantly. Quantum singularities are extremely dangerous and hard to detect – it is a Severe [29] INT check to locate and chart a quantum singularity.

RADIATION

Radiation pervades a starscape. Any ship with no active shields is vulnerable to radiation, which harms the crew, causing 1d6 casualties each round.

SOLAR WIND

A solar wind is a stream of plasma emanating from a star; solar winds are what solar sails use for propulsion. Technically every star emits a solar wind, which is usually harmless to starships, but occasionally a stellar body will emit such a ferocious solar wind that even starships are in danger. Solar wind moves across the starscape from one edge to another. Starships are pushed one hex in that direction each turn (those with solar sails are pushed 1d6 hexes). In addition, they take 1d6 heat damage from the direction of the solar wind.

SPACE CREATURES

Space creatures are placed randomly on the starscape. A space creature is unpredictable. Roll 4d6 for a space creature's INITIATIVE and roll 1d6 on the following table for its action each turn.

1 No action.

2 Move 2d6 hexes in a random direction.

3 Move in a straight line towards the nearest vessel.

4 Attack the nearest vessel with a ranged attack (4d6 to hit, 4d6 damage).

5 Emit an energy surge (see Energy Fluctuations above).

6 Flee towards the nearest map edge.

A space creature has 4d6 HEALTH and 3d6 DEFENSE, should any vessel wish to attack it.

SPATIAL ANOMALY

A spatial anomaly randomly teleports any vessel which enters it to a random location on the starscape. Spatial anomalies are 3 hexes in diameter and are placed randomly on the starscape. The GM should determine its location, but it is a Demanding [21] INT check to use sensors to locate and chart a spatial anomaly.

TEMPORAL ANOMALY

A temporal anomaly can speed up, slow down, or stop time for any that come into contact with it. If a vessel touches a temporal anomaly, roll 1d6. On a 1-3 the vessel misses its next turn; on a 5-6 the vessel gains an immediate bonus turn. The GM should determine its location, but it is a Strenuous [125] INT check to use sensors to locate and chart a temporal anomaly.

VOLATILE GAS POCKETS

Volatile gas pockets are hard to detect, but they can be charted with a Difficult [16] INT check. A gas pocket is usually 3 hexes in diameter, and 2d6 of them should be placed randomly on the starscape. Any ship within a volatile gas pocket when it fires a weapon, or when it is hit by a weapon, takes 2d6 heat damage from exploding gas. The gas pocket disappears after exploding.

WORMHOLE

A wormhole is a one-way portal to another location. Any ship entering the wormhole leaves the encounter immediately. Wormholes are usually only 1 hex in diameter.

ROLES ABOARD A STARSHIP

A starship can have any combination or assignment of roles and tasks. What follows is a common example of how a starship may be set up. Often roles are combined on smaller ships or subdivided on much larger ones. There are five major roles in addition to the captain – pilot, gunner, comms, engineer, and doctor – although some of these may be combined on a smaller ship or subdivided on a larger one.

These roles do not define a character; they merely represent the job that a character is doing right now. Anybody can attempt to fill any of these roles, although some will be more suited to specific roles than others. These roles also change situationally, with other roles being adopted during non-starship activity.

Role	Sub-roles*	Alternate Names	Attribute	Important Skills
Pilot	Navigator	Helmsman, conn officer	AGI	<i>Piloting, navigation, starship tactics</i>
Gunner		Gunnery officer, tactical officer, weapons officer	INT	<i>Gunnery</i>
Comms	Science officer		INT	<i>Computer operation, linguistics, cryptology, [scientific skills]</i>
Engineer	Engineer		INT	<i>Engineering</i>
Doctor	Counselor	Medical officer	INT	<i>Medicine</i>
Ancillary/Alternate Roles				
Captain		Commanding officer, C.O.	-	<i>Leadership, negotiating, starship tactics</i>
Soldier		Security officer	STR, AGI	<i>[Combat skills], [subterfuge skills]</i>

*On larger ships these roles are often separate



CAPTAIN

The captain (commanding officer, or CO) of a starship gives the orders and makes all the important decisions. However, most captains do not micromanage – officers in various positions are trained to do those specific jobs. While he might order an engineer to find more speed or a pilot to orbit the fifth planet, he won't generally tell them how to do those things.

In the game, the captain might also have another job, or be an NPC. A *collaborative captain* is an NPC broadly controlled by the players – the players get to decide what they wish to do, and the

collaborative captain is assumed to have given appropriate orders. Generally speaking, having one player tell the others what to do decreases the enjoyment of the latter.

A captain benefits from skills like *leadership* and *starship tactics*, as well as good INTELLECT, CHARISMA, and REPUTATION attributes.

PILOT

The pilot (often called the helmsman, helm officer, or flight officer) is responsible for actually flying and navigating the starship. Her job is to move the ship from place to place, often in accordance with the captain's instructions. The pilot moves the ship in combat, and navigates it through interstellar space during travel, calculating



FTL coordinates and vectors.

The pilot benefits from skills like *piloting* and *navigation* and a good AGILITY attribute.

GUNNER

Depending on the size of the ship, gunners, or gunnery officers, also called tactical or weapons officers, may be combined with the pilot into a single role or split into multiple gunners. Gunners are responsible for firing weapons and maintaining shields. The gunnery officer is an expert in offensive and defensive artillery patterns, energy and missile weaponry, Newtonian and relativistic motion, and more. On larger ships, gunnery is a very math-intensive job. The gunner will also raise shields when necessary, and more specifically reinforce specific shields when required.

The gunner benefits from the *gunnery* skill and a good INTELLECT attribute.



COMMS

A communications officer, often combined with a science officer, has a broad remit which deals not only with communications, but also sensor use and electronic warfare, both offensive and defensive. A science officer will scan a star system upon arrival, will be the officer to uncover and alert the rest of the crew of new threats, and provide a constant stream of information.

Electronic warfare is a highly technical and varied task which uses computer skills, ion weapons, and more. The science officer is an expert at countermeasures, Heisenbergian uncertainty, cloaking technologies, misinformation, communication and sensor jamming.

The communications officer also monitors a wide array of electronic and non-electronic communications channels, deciphers languages, ciphers, and codes, and more.

The comms officer benefits from *computer operation*, *linguistics*, and a good INTELLECT attribute.

ENGINEER

The engineer is a vital member of the ship's crew. Not only does she handle repairs and system maintenance, and is responsible for a vast array of systems from life support to the engines to the ship's infrastructure and superstructure, but she is also needed to provide additional power and support during combat.

The engineer benefits from the *engineering* skill as well as a good INTELLECT attribute.



DOCTOR

The ship's doctor (or medic, or medical officer) is responsible for the health and well-being of the crew. Often the doctor also fulfils the role of counselor, responsible for the emotional well-being of a ship's crew as well as being useful in diplomatic situations and trained in first contact, ambassadorial, and cultural issues.

The doctor benefits from the *medicine*, *intuition*, and *psychology* skills as well as good INTELLECT and CHARISMA attributes.



OTHER ROLES

Soldier: A soldier is an ancillary role; soldiers do not usually play a part in actual starship operations, although they can have security roles aboard the ship. Soldiers are often called security officers.

Operations Officer: An operations officer is a broad position which can combine the duties of the engineer, science, and communications roles.

Signal Officer: A signal officer runs a flight deck or landing bay, and is responsible for a vessel's fighter and shuttle complement. In combat, this officer controls fighters and other ancillary vessels.