

# A CALL TO ARMS STAR FLEET

by Lt. Commander Tony L. Thomas, *USS Tennessee*

ADB, Inc.'s joint venture with Mongoose Publishing has resulted in the production of an entirely new game set in the *Star Fleet Universe*. This new game is a true fleet-action game utilizing the popular *A Call to Arms* game engine, which Mongoose Publishing originally created for *Babylon 5* and has used since then for other projects including *Noble Armada*. *A Call to Arms: Star Fleet* has started shipping and should be in (or available through) finer game stores in the US, Canada, and UK.

Unlike *Star Fleet Battles*, *Starmada*, or *Federation Commander*, *A Call to Arms: Star Fleet* is designed to be a hexless, miniatures combat simulation for entire fleets of starships. (Of course, *SFB*, *FC*, and *Starmada* have hexless miniatures rules, but these are rarely used. *ACTA* doesn't even have any version of hex-based rules.) As one can see from this quote on the Mongoose Publishing webpage "From skirmishes involving lone destroyers to the clashing of large fleets against their bitterest rivals, *A Call to Arms: Star Fleet* is your ticket to exciting battles that take place in the depth of space..." this is a system designed for massed fleet combat. By using the *ACTASF* system, even the largest battles can be completed in a single evening. Smaller skirmishes can be played in as little as one hour.

*ACTASF* accomplishes this by streamlining the game system. There is no energy allocation or energy tracking. Your starships move once per turn and shoot once per turn (rather than the 32 impulses in *SFB* or the eight impulses of *FC*).

## LET'S PLAY ACTASF

The two (or more) players select a conflict intensity level. This represents how far-ranging the battle is. There are five conflict intensity levels ranging from "Skirmish: 500 points or less" to "War: 2,000 points or more." Each level has a recommended playing surface size and an estimated time to play. Once you've become familiar with the rules, you should be able to play a skirmish in less than an hour while a war level battle may take a whole evening. [This author has played several skirmish level battles in under an hour and has played one 2,500-point battle that took under four hours with novice players.]

Next, each player selects his forces up to the point value of the conflict intensity level (as modified by any special scenario rules in play). Terrain features (if any) are then either placed as indicated in the scenario setup, generated as per the *ACTASF* rules, or placed in a mutually agreeable manner. Now, you're ready to play!

Each turn consists of an Initiative Phase, a Movement Phase, an Attack Phase, and an End of Turn Phase.

## INITIATIVE PHASE

Each player rolls 2d6 for his initiative at the start of each turn. Any modifiers for fleet composition, scenario special rules, or special traits are added at this time. The player with the highest modified total is considered the winner for that turn.

## MOVEMENT PHASE

This is where *ACTASF* first differs from previous editions of *A Call to Arms*. In earlier versions, the winner of the initiative roll got to choose who moved the first ship, either himself or his opponent. In *ACTASF*, the loser of the initiative roll nominates one of his starships to move. At this point (prior to the first point of movement), each starship may choose to undertake a Special Action.

Special Actions are exactly what the name implies. These represent the orders a captain might issue from turn to turn during combat and greatly affect the way a ship behaves or acts/reacts to the actions occurring around it. Each ship may select a single special action each turn (from a list of 14) and that action can change from turn to turn. There is no limit to the number of ships that may select the same special action each turn. Some of these actions are movement enhancers, such as High Energy Turn or All Power to Engines. Some are combat enhancements, like Boost Power to Shields or Intensify Defensive Fire. Others allow the use of advanced technology: Engage Cloak, Transport Marines, or even Launch Suicide Shuttle.

Some Special Actions require the ship to successfully complete a Crew Quality Check, while others cause an energy drain. Crew Quality Checks are just that: each ship has a crew quality rating (4 for typical military crews) and you must roll a d6, add your crew quality rating and exceed the required number (typically 8 or 9) for the action to be successful. Energy drain re-creates the decisions made by *SFB/FC* players during Energy Allocation. There's never enough power to move fast, shoot a lot, and reinforce shielding, so *ACTA* has energy drain rules. When you select a special action with the energy drain characteristic, you must choose between one of three disadvantages: You can only move your ship six inches, or can only fire phasers (no heavy weapons or drones), or can only fire one weapon system.

Back to Movement: The losing player has nominated his first ship, chosen any Special Actions for that ship, and now he moves it. Each ship has a turn score. This is as low as three for smaller, more nimble ships and as high as nine for larger ships. This is the distance a ship must move straight ahead before it can turn. Once it has moved this distance (or more) it may make a turn. Turns can be made in any increment up to 45°. (The Agile trait allows ships to turn up to 90° in each step.) Movement for this ship continues in this manner: move up to the turn score, turn, move up to the ship's turn score, turn, and move until it has moved its maximum amount. A ship's maximum movement is typically 12 inches although two traits (Fast and Slow) can change this, as can the All Power to Engines Special Action. Ships are not required to move their full movement allowance, although they must move at least their turn score before they are allowed to turn. Ships do not have to move and stationary ships may turn up to 45°.

Once the first ship has completed its movement, the player winning the initiative nominates a ship to move and follows the same steps. Movement alternates from player to player until each ship has been nominated. If one player has more ships than the other, play alternates until one player has moved all of his units, then the player with the larger number of ships continues moving his one after another until all have moved.

## ATTACK PHASE

During the Attack Phase, the player who was the winner of the Initiative Phase selects one of his starships. This unit nominates a target for each of its weapons, fires those weapons, and resolves their damage.

Seeking weapons function quite differently in *ACTA* than in *SFB* or *FC*. In *ACTA*, the target of a seeking weapon is declared as in other games of the *SFU*, but a seeking weapon marker is not placed on the table. Instead, the target is allowed to perform and resolve defensive fire immediately. Any weapon in arc that has not fired may be used during defensive fire (as may the weapons of any ships in range that have utilized the Intensify Defensive Fire Special Action) that has not previously been used for offensive fire. As with *SFB* and *FC*, each weapon may only be fired once per turn although whether that be offensively or defensively is up to the player. Each successful hit on an incoming seeking weapon will destroy one drone or remove one attack die from the strength of a plasma torpedo.

Since the fire from each unit is resolved before the next unit is nominated to fire, it is quite likely that some units will be destroyed before they have a chance to fire. This is part of the strategy involved in the game: do you fire at a ship with the potential to damage you or do you concentrate your fire on a larger ship that has already fired? Do you launch all your drones at a single target to overwhelm its drone defenses, or do you spread the love around? You will face such decisions every turn.

Once damage resolution has been completed, the player who lost the initiative nominates a ship and fires its weapons and resolves damage. As with movement, this continues until all ships have been nominated and have had a chance to fire.

### END OF TURN

The End of Turn phase has three steps: Damage Control, Compulsory Movement, and Check for Escalation.

**Damage Control** only allows a player to attempt to repair Critical Hits. You cannot repair damage points or replace lost troops within the limits of the game nor can you repair shields outside the use of the Boost Energy to Shields Special Action.

During the course of the game, ships will take multiple points of damage. The first damage points will be scored against the ship's shields, although any attack dice (AD) that roll a natural 6 will bypass the shields and strike the ship itself. Once the shields are gone, any further hits will also strike the ship. Damage which does strike the ship will be scored in one of three ways, depending on the roll of a d6 compared against the Attack Table. A modified roll of a 1 or less will hit the ship's bulkheads and score no real damage. A modified result of 2 through 4 will be a solid hit which scores one point of damage. A roll of 5 or 6 will score a point of damage *and* a critical hit. Critical hits can be scored against five locations: Impulse Drive, Dilithium Chamber, Weapons, Shields, or Crew. Each critical hit location has six hit points with each successive hit being more serious than the previous hit. In addition, at a certain point for each location, the Escalate characteristic comes into play (more about this shortly). These critical hits have additional effects ranging from extra damage scored to system failures to immediate explosion of the ship.

During the Damage Control Phase each damaged ship can select one critical hit location to attempt a repair. A d6 is rolled and the crew quality is added. For every point above 8 scored, one critical hit in that location is repaired. This means that a roll of 6 will repair two critical hits [d6 roll of 6 + typical crew quality of 4 = 10; 10 is two points greater than 8.] A modified roll of 8 or less does not allow any repair, but you may attempt to repair again during the end phase of the next turn, assuming your ship survives that long.

**Compulsory Movement** is self-explanatory. Ships which have no control over their own movement are moved at this point. This would be ships that are running adrift, ships inside the gravity well of a black hole, and ships inside a nebula.

**Check for Escalation:** Once a ship has suffered critical hits, the effects can rapidly cascade out of control. During this phase, any ship with one or more critical hit locations at or above the Escalate level must roll to see if the critical hits escalate. Roll a d6 for each location at or above the Escalate threshold. On a roll of 4 or more, the location escalates. Score another critical hit at that location and apply the damage results immediately.

Once this phase has been completed, the turn is over and it's time to do it all over again. Continue repeating turns in this manner until the scenario victory conditions are met or the time limit is reached.

Victory is determined by individual scenario victory conditions or by scoring points for ships damaged, crippled, killed, and captured as in *SFB*, *Starmada*, or *Federation Commander*.

That's the game in a nutshell. For more information check out [www.StarFleetGames.com](http://www.StarFleetGames.com), [www.federationcommander.com](http://www.federationcommander.com), or [Forums.MongoosePublishing.com](http://Forums.MongoosePublishing.com).

## CALL OUT NOTES

### Warp Speed, Mongoose!

#### or How to Speed up an Already Fast-Paced Game

*Lieutenant Tony L. Thomas, USS Tennessee*

*ACTASFi*s designed to be a fast-paced game where large fleet actions can be completed in as little as one hour or as much as a single evening, but there are tricks and tips that can reduce the time required to play a battle significantly.

1. Squadrons: In games of 2,000 points or more, form your ships into three-ship squadrons. Squadrons move and fire as one unit. If you have 15 ships on each side, formed into five squadrons of three each, you've cut the required actions by 66%.

2. Special Actions: Have a series of Special Action markers printed up and have enough for each ship in the game. Simply throwing down a Special Action marker beside a ship as it declares its actions will save tons of time later in the turn as you try to remember which ships had performed which actions.

3. Dice: Have plenty of dice available in multiple colors. When it's time for your Federation heavy cruiser to unload an alpha strike, simply pick up the dice and declare, "The red dice are photons, the yellow dice are phaser-1s, the white dice are phaser-3s, and the green die is the drone!" Roll all the dice at once and remove any 1's, 2's, or 3's as those are misses. Whatever is left are hits and you can simply pick up any 6's and re-roll them for damage on the Attack Table... Next ship, please.

4. Movement: When it's your turn to nominate and move a ship, leave the mini in place and utilize a spare die as the movement token. Using the appropriate rulers and turn gauges, you move the die through the desired moves the ship will make. Once satisfied, pick up the ship miniature and place it where the die ended up. This way, if you decide to retract all or part of the move and go a different route, there's no question about where the ship was at the start of the Movement Phase.

5. Targeting: Many times you will want to place a ship so that its desired target is on the boundary line between two firing arcs. [*A Call to Arms* rules allow weapons in both firing arcs to fire at a target on the boundary line.] In a friendly game, it's often advantageous to place the ship in its final position and state: "the captain has maneuvered this ship so that your battlecruiser is located on the boundary between these two arcs" (or simply "I center lined you"). That will often save several minutes of arguing and measuring exact angles with compass and protractors to confirm that you did indeed angle the firing ship just right.

### Cloaked Suicide

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Unlike previous *Star Fleet Universe* games (*SFB* or *FC*), in *A Call to Arms: Star Fleet* suicide shuttles are not classified as seeking weapons. Instead, they are remotely piloted vehicles that do not need to have a specific target programmed into the flight data banks. You launch a suicide shuttle as a Special Action during the Movement Phase and it moves independently of the launching ship. It moves up to four inches each turn and will explode when in contact with an enemy ship.

The suicide shuttle has the Accurate +2 and Multihit d6 trait, but not the Seeking trait. This lack of the Seeking trait also makes them particularly effective against cloaked ships. As long as your opponent is cloaked, he's limited to six inches of movement which means that he can outrun your suicide shuttles, but if you continue launching them, there will eventually be a wall of self-guiding, anti-matter bombs between you and your cloaked opposition. Eventually, you will catch up to him... either on his cloaked final run, where the Multihit d6 will almost assuredly mean some damage is scored; or as he uncloaks to launch his own weapons where the Accurate +2 will virtually guarantee hits.

## BASIC TACTICS IN ACTASF

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*A Call to Arms: Star Fleet* is the newest game in the *Star Fleet Universe*. Game play in *ACTASF* is similar to the other game engines, but we will review the specific differences and how they impact tactics.

### RULES THAT KILL

**Firing Arcs:** *ACTASF* is a hexless miniatures game. This means that there is no need to conform to the 60° arcs found in *SFB/FC*. *ACTASF* instead uses a total of nine firing arcs. Four of them are 90° (Port, Forward, Starboard, Aft) abbreviated as P, F, S, A and four of them are 180° (Port Half, Forward Half, Starboard Half, and Aft Half) abbreviated as PH, FH, SH, and AH. The ninth arc is 360° Turret mounts. While these arcs lend themselves very well to the hexless nature of the game, they do cause some issues with some *SFU* ships. Mongoose has made every effort to accurately portray the arcs, but there are some unexpected results from the conversion. Look at your ship before the game and make sure you understand the actual arcs. Nothing is as embarrassing as lining up a perfect kill shot only to realize that with the revised firing arcs you can't fire a full alpha strike.

**You Go/I Go:** In both *SFB* and *FC*, weapons fire is considered to be simultaneous. Even if you close to point-blank range, you can still fire when your opponent does. In *ACTASF*, everything is done in a you go/I go manner. Players alternate firing their ships, and each fire declaration is resolved before the next ship gets to declare fire. This means you should always be aware of what ships have and have not fired as you can lose a critical ship to massed weapon fire before it gets a chance to fire if you wait too long to select it as the active ship.

**Terrain:** *ACTASF* scenarios utilize terrain differently from previous *SFU* games. In *ACTA*, terrain is randomly generated for each map prior to the start of most scenarios. Terrain effects can have a huge impact on the battle. You should be certain you understand the rules of any terrain type in play before selecting your fleets. Some terrain types are advantageous to some units and disastrous to others.

### FLEET SELECTION

This is where the tactical choices begin. After a conflict intensity is selected, you must purchase your forces. Everyone has a different play style and no one style is right or wrong. Do you select a lot of small ships, a few big ones, or a balanced force containing both small and large ships? Again, it's up to you, and there are no "command" and "formation" rules from *SFB*. Some things to keep in mind for force selection:

**Quantity:** Since *ACTA* uses the you go/I go method for movement and fire, having more ships than your opponent gives you an advantage during both movement and attack.

**Quality:** Dreadnoughts and other big ships are nice but make enticing targets. They can dish out an astounding amount of fire in a single turn, but your opponent can field three smaller ships for the same price. You have to weigh the potential of your dreadnought against what those three smaller ships can do.

**Ability:** Each ship has multiple traits and those traits should be considered. Is your opponent's force a drone-using empire? Then consider getting units with the Anti-Drone trait. Does your opponent have Stealth? Consider ships with Accurate weapons.

### THE GAME TURN

The *ACTASF* turn is divided into four phases: Initiative, Movement, Attack, and End of Turn. Let's look at them in order:

**Initiative Phase:** Winning the initiative for a turn gives one an advantage. The winner gets to move second and can react to

his opponent's movement. The winner gets to fire first, and can target the ship of his choice before it gets a chance to fire at him. You can aid this process by selecting a ship with the Command trait as this gives a bonus to your initiative roll. This often makes that ship a prime target. If your opponent only has one ship with this trait and you can destroy it, he has lost the modifier. If you only have a single Command ship you must protect it well.

**Movement Phase:** If the first player has more ships, he might elect to move one that is out of position or pick a small, non-important ship and choose not to move it. This puts the onus of first movement on the other player. If both players have an (approximately) equal number of units, the decisions are a bit different. After the first player has moved a ship, you know where it will be for the rest of the turn. This often leads a player to move his larger ships or his Command trait ships later in the turn as fewer ships can then react to their movement. In *SFB*, many ships have weapons that can fire down the hex row directly ahead of the ship. In *ACTASF* these ships have weapons that are split into PH and SH arcs. The *ACTA* rules state that if a target is on the boundary line between two arcs, both arcs can fire at that target. If moving to target a unit that has already moved, it can be beneficial to declare that you are "center lining" the targeted vessel.

If you are the first player to move and you have fewer units, there are a couple of strategies you may consider:

Save your most critical ship until the end of the turn. The more units your opponent moves before you move the key one, the fewer that will be able to target you directly.

Pretend one of your units is a sacrificial penal ship. Throw it into direct confrontation with your opponent's juiciest ship. He may panic and immediately move that ship out of the danger zone. This will allow you to follow on with other ships that can target it now that it has completed its move.

**Attack Phase:** As the winner of the initiative phase, you get the first opportunity to fire. There are many variables to consider. Do you attempt to cripple or destroy a prime target before it can shoot you? Do you finish off a cripple that's been hanging around the periphery of the battle zone hoping to score a lucky shot?

If you can take out (or cripple) one of your opponent's ships before it gets to unload on you, that's a no-lose proposition. Crippled ships suffer several penalties, so crippling a mid-sized unit may outweigh destroying a small vessel. Taking out the only ship with a specific trait can work. If the scenario being played requires the use of labs to win, then kill or cripple the unit with the most labs. If you've got a lot of drones, take out the ship with Anti-Drone capabilities or with the most tractor beams.

Once you've decided that, then you have to decide which ship to fire first. Do you fire the ship with the most weapons that bear on the desired target? Do you fire your best ship first, even if it's not the ideal shot?

Often times, an opponent will not fire at a ship that has already expended its weapons if they can target one that has yet to fire. This can allow a crucial ship to survive to repair a bit of damage or regenerate its shields enough to stay in the fracas.

Once you've picked a target, you have to decide how much weaponry to fire at it. Is it more important to kill/cripple several ships? In that case you may want to spread the fire from your forces among those several ships. Or do you need to make the target ship go bye-bye in a big way? If you can score enough damage on it to reduce it to zero points and still have damage remaining, there's the possibility of causing it to explode. Since ships explode with a four-inch radius, always look at what's near the target. A crippled or damaged ship within the blast radius just might be taken out by an explosion and a damaged ship might be crippled. This "two-fer" is worth taking a second look at.

One last point: Just because your first shot didn't take out the target is no reason to despair. Owing to the you go/I go nature of *ACTASF*, if the tactical situation warrants it, you can follow on with the next ship at the same target, and so on.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE JOINT VENTURE

### Why did you do this?

ADB, Inc., has long wanted a strategic partner which had access to more markets. Most stores only carry games from the biggest companies (of which Mongoose is one). They automatically buy every new Mongoose product, but cannot even see ADB, Inc., products in the crowd of 40 or so "smaller hard copy publishers" vying for their attention.

Mongoose has long wanted to get into the greatest science fiction genre of all time, and a partnership with ADB, Inc., allowed that to happen in an exciting way.

It also meant that ADB would finally get a new and much improved line of miniatures that could be used for all of the games.

### What will be the next product?

Precise details are yet to be determined, although in general the plan is to do a new hardback book each year. Each book would combine the ships from several *Federation Commander* products, so that the Squadron Boxes match. (The first book combined *Klingon Border*, *Klingon Attack*, *Romulan Border*, and *Romulan Attack*.) The general plan is to get "fill out the two small empires, then do the rest of the empires" in a reasonable manner, which would indicate that the 2012 book would *Tholian Attack* (the Seltorians and more Tholians), but beyond that, we're still figuring it out. We definitely want to get the battleships into the second book and some extra ships for everybody. Whether we might squeeze in *Orion Attack* or *Distant Kingdoms* is unclear; those may have to wait for a future book. The empires from *War & Peace* might be spread over several books so that each new book has one new empire.

### How will *A Call to Arms Star Fleet* be supported?

Both companies do a free electronic newsletter every month. Mongoose does *Signs & Portents* and ADB, Inc. does *Hailing Frequencies* and its companion PDF *Communique*. Both newsletters will include something new and fun in every issue, such as a new ship, scenario, tactic, or special rule.

Of course, both companies already have extensive marketing efforts, and massive customer support efforts such as Q&A, discussion boards, download sites, and more.

As you can see, this issue of *Captain's Log* includes extensive support for the first releases. And yes, you may begin submitting Call Out notes for consideration for *Captain's Log #45* and those will count for promotion points just as those for any of the other games do.

### The relationship between the two companies seems even more bizarre than the one between ADB and TFG. How, exactly, does it work?

It's a "joint venture" which means that some products are done jointly by the two companies (each company continuing to do other products on their own). ADB, Inc., did not close down and hand over the *Star Fleet Universe* to Mongoose, and Mongoose did not hand over their checkbook and distribution list to ADB, Inc. Anything done "together" requires both companies to agree and cooperate. As each company has their own successful product lines outside of the joint venture, neither is tied to the other for survival.

### How have the two companies worked together? Do Steve Cole and Matthew Sprange get along?

Very well. There have been some "clashes of corporate culture" in that each company has years of doing things the way they do them and was surprised and the other's approach. Mongoose, for example, does not have the level of player involvement that ADB, Inc. has, and Mongoose had to get used to the idea that new miniature designs were going to be reviewed by dozens of gamers before a report on required changes was sent.

The biggest problem has been the time zones, as there is only an hour or two of overlap between when ADB, Inc. gets to work and when Mongoose goes home for the day. There have been times that someone at ADB, Inc., had to get up early, and (far more) times that someone from Mongoose had to stick around the office until midnight as emails bounced back and forth across the pond. Given the success of the first products, it's worth it!

### Clear resin Romulans were issued for cloaked ships. Will clear/cloaked Orions be done?

Yes, sometime next year or the year after.

### I plan to use my 2500 Minis with SFB/FC. Will a hex-friendly base be issued?

Not as such, but with minor effort you can just use mount your ships on the standard 2400-series black stands available from ADB, Inc. as spare parts. Also, Mongoose has smaller bases used for some of their ships and you can swap them out.

### The first releases used standard Klingons for the Romulan Kestrels. Will you eventually release Romulan versions of those designs with belly bird etchings?

Perhaps. We'll see if the marketplace demands them.

### Will you do new minis for the classic Franz Joseph ships, the CA, DD, DN, SC, and Tug?

We may well do the ships in an electronic publication sometime next year. Miniatures for them would probably have to wait for a special package in a year or two.

### Is it true that Steve Cole hates games *without* hexes and Matthew Sprange hates games *with* hexes?

Despite a few jokes about this, both of them are experienced gamers who have played many different games, with and without hexes. The point is that customers have one more game to pick from in deciding how they will explore the universe.

### Can I work up my own cards for other ships?

You probably can figure out how to do it, although the point values have to be adjusted by playtesting. The problem is what can you legally do with it after you create it. Let's start by saying that anything you do for your own amusement or for the amusement of people at the same table with you is your business and no one is going to burst into the room and stop you.

Posting it on the web or publishing your own products, however, is definitely not allowed, and would violate the copyrights of Mongoose, Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc., and (very likely) someone else (such as Paramount).

Converting a ship from *Star Fleet Battles* or *Federation Commander* (which use, basically, the same ships) is fairly easy to do but since the original ships are owned by Amarillo Design Bureau, Inc. you cannot post them. (We have a web policy that allows anyone who invents a new ship and first asks us if we want to publish it to post it on the web if we don't want it. However, this does *not* apply to ships for *ACTASF* since that game system is owned by Mongoose. (In theory, if both companies agree to such a posting, it could be done.)

Creating an entirely new ship runs into the problem that Mongoose owns the game system and has said they allow people to post their own designs on the Mongoose or ADB, Inc. forums as long as they don't claim copyrights or try to publish them.

Creating your version of a ship created and owned by someone else (say, *Enterprise-D* or *Battlestar Galactica*) runs into the copyrights of the original ship designer and Mongoose, and as such, cannot be allowed.

All of that said, never fear. New official ships will appear at regular intervals, and (as noted) what you do for your own amusement (without posting it anywhere) is your business. There is no need for you to post your version of, say, the Klingon E7 cruiser (which was created by ADB, Inc.) because anyone else who wants one can do it for himself in about five minutes (with just as much accuracy as you can). Thus, everyone *already has* access to the E7 and doesn't need you violating the rules and the laws and the copyrights doing it for them.