

TWELVE QUESTIONS ABOUT ...FEDERATION COMMANDER

1. What made you decide to go “back to basics” with a new fast-play version of *SFB*? I am delighted that you did, but I am surprised.

When we started the corporation, we knew that the single most important thing we were going to have to do was a new tactical game to bring in new customers. *SFB* is, of course, the best-selling and longest-running starship combat game in the history of wargaming, but it is so huge that new players are more terrified than awed by just how much of it there is.

2. We have been hearing of a new “fleet scale” game for nearly ten years, under various titles such as *Star Fleet Squadrons* or *Star Fleet Action*. Is *Federation Commander* that game?

Yes! As you can tell, the game has undergone many tests and several distinctly different versions have been tested. All of these were based, more or less, on the “cadet ships” (now seen as the Fleet Scale Ships in *Federation Commander*) with various limited sub-sets of the *SFB* rules. We tried for a long time to make “eight impulses” work, but that didn’t give enough time for ships to maneuver, so we went to the final system of eight “action” impulses (with up to four “movement sub-pulses” in each of those impulses).

3. Are we likely to see any of the other prototypes, say, *Star Fleet Action*, appear as separate games?

There is no need for them. While *Federation Commander* is many things, one of them is the “official fleet scale combat system of the Star Fleet Universe”. That niche has now been filled. While we don’t need two products competing with each other for the same niche, we already published the best and most workable ideas from all of these previous projects in *Federation Commander*. There simply aren’t enough good rules left unused to create another game.

4. Is *Federation Commander* just a sneaky plot to recruit more players for *Star Fleet Battles*?

Not really, but established *SFB* groups can use it for that. If you recruit some new players for the faster *Federation Commander* game and some of them want “more” you can move them up to *Star Fleet Battles*.

However, don’t feel that the *only* thing for *Federation Commander* to do is recruit *SFB* players and if new players don’t want to “move up” you shouldn’t try to force them to do so.

5. Are you going to load up *Federation Commander* with dozens of “expansions” so that it turns into another *Star Fleet Battles*?

Why? We already have *Star Fleet Battles* and we want to keep *Federation Commander* in its current “fast play” niche as “the official fleet scale rules”. Anybody who wants *Star Fleet Battles* doesn’t have to wait ten years for us to turn *Federation Commander* into such a game.

Now, it has to be admitted that for any game company to survive it needs to sell sequels and expansions of its most successful games. But while *SFB* thrived on expansions that had more *rules*, we plan to expand *Federation Commander* with ships and scenarios. While we must bring out endless expansions to survive in the marketplace, most of those will be “convenience” items (packs of extra ship cards so you don’t have to use a photocopier) and packages of miniatures. The previous publisher just never bothered to capitalize on the doomsday success of *Star Fleet Battles* to do calendars and coffee mugs, and we plan to fully exploit all aspects of the universe.

6. What was the focus, the priority, the core of the design for *Federation Commander*?

Fast playing speed. Everything was done to make the game play faster. The color-coded ship cards were not just pretty, but you always know to look for a red box when you want a weapon or a blue box if you are searching for power. Moving the charts from the ship cards to a separate card made production more efficient. We eliminated housekeeping power just to save a step in the Sequence of Play. We eliminated no end of rules nobody ever uses (Klingon mutiny, Energy Balance Due to Damage) so that references to them did not slow down the game.

7. Does the publication of *Federation Commander* mean that you will be abandoning the *Star Fleet Battles* line?

Not in the least! We have new products scheduled for 2006 including the *Magellanic Cloud* and the *Master Starship Book*. Other new *SFB* modules will be selected for “the next batch” (since we have to print the counters for several products at the same time) after the release of those two products. Modules Y2, X1R, E3, C7, R11, R12, and R13 are all under consideration.

8. Doesn’t the launch of this new product line mean less SVC time will be available for new *SFB* products?

It might seem that way, but it is not.

First, *Federation Commander* has been designed to take less time to create and manage than *SFB* or *F&E*.

Second, as the company grows (two new employees have already taken over much of SVC’s and SPP’s non-design work) both of the Steves will have more “design time” than in the company’s first six years.

Third, Steve Petrick has been around long enough (15 years!) that he has already taken over much of the *SFB* design and maintenance work from SVC.

9. What do *SFB* fans get out of all the effort that you spent on *Federation Commander*?

Lots! A stronger company, more stores carrying the *Star Fleet Universe*, more players, even some cool new rules to try out. *Federation Commander* fixed the problems of superstacks, bricks, starcastles, and retrogrades, and those fixes can easily be applied to *Star Fleet Battles*.

10. How much did your new marketing director, Ken Burnside, have to do with the design?

While Steve Cole designed the game, Ken Burnside designed the product line. It was Ken’s idea to sell “boosters” of extra ship cards, and it was Ken’s idea to tie our existing line of miniatures to *Federation Commander* by simply repackaging them in sets that matched the *FC* ship cards. This makes the line stronger and produces extra sales (while giving good value to customers) without causing a lot of extra work in the design office.

Ken’s greatest contribution to the “design” was to review the failed “eight movement impulse” concept and propose a solution. While his solution didn’t work, explaining to him why it wouldn’t work led Steve Cole to create the “four sub-pulse” concept that in fact *did* work. Ken also showed us the ideas of laminated cards and paperclip power tracking.

11. Will *Federation Commander* have its own tournament system? And what about FCOL?

We plan to have a scenario-based tournament at Origins and to use scenarios as the core of the Organized Play league. Paul and Aaron are already working on *FCOL*.

12. Why wasn’t the rulebook in color?

Color printing costs *a lot more* than black and white printing, and would have increased the cost of the game by \$10. Within the budget, we put the money (color printing) where it did the most good: on the map, the counters, and the ship cards.