

To provide a better picture of where I think we're headed with combat, let's start with a small battle with one squadron on each side.

Alpha Force



Beta Force



Detection

First step in the Space Combat Phase is to roll detection. This determines what the players learn about the enemy force and what their readiness state is for this encounter. Note that this differs from 1E/2E where you were rolling before each battle, now you roll once at the encounter level. Readiness modifiers do not adjust each round anymore, either, and are static (before they shifted towards zero every round, but that's fiddly).

Alpha Force rolls **Good (+1)** and Beta Force rolls **Normal (+0)**.

Generating Scenarios

In an attempt to eliminate the flow chart nightmare that is VBAM combat, I instead have players generate and resolve space combat scenarios in readiness order from lowest to highest. The player generates all that he wants before moving on to the next player.

In this case, Beta would get first choice. They decide to generate a Deep Space scenario against Alpha force. Because Alpha player is at or above Normal readiness, he may choose to either accept the scenario or refuse and fight a Pursuit scenario instead. He chooses to accept the Deep Space scenario.

Task Force Setup

This works the same as normal, except the max number of squadrons per side is now equal to flagship CR and not flagship CR+1.

Note: I tried to get away from the multi-squadron combat and go to a single task force, but the results of what we ended up with is basically single task force combat but with a few wrinkles added.

Combat Round

The combat round is broken into four stages: Ships vs. Ships, Ships vs. Flights, Flights vs. Flights, and Flights vs. Ships. Fire is simultaneous in each phase, but damage in one phase will carry over to the next. This creates the impression of an elastic engagement range with ships engaging each other at long range, and then the flights coming in and eventually making their runs on enemy ships.

Screening

A concept that has been revived is one of using ships to screen. Ships ordered to screen may use their AS/AF to place other units in the same squadron into a formation bonus, which effectively doubles their DV. The screening cost to place a unit in a formation bonus is equal to its DV.

Both fleets are using their Corvettes to screen, giving them 8 screening points, and are placing a Light Cruiser (5) and Destroyer (3) in a formation bonus.

Ships used to screen do not get to fire during the firing phases, and screening units cannot themselves be placed in a formation bonus (since they are fighting on the front lines and all).

Note: One thing that I'm currently testing is to only use AF for screening to reinforce the idea that the stat is more of a point defense capability. Importantly, this would make AF important even in situations or settings where flights and fighter combat are not particularly prevalent. It would also effectively force players to decide if they are going to use their high-AF ships to screen to get formation bonuses or use them to fire on enemy flights.

Ship vs. Ship

Each task force has 12 AS from ships. The combat results table is like this:

CRT (d10)

1-3: 25%

4-6: 50%

7-8: 75%

9-10: 100%

You take your total attack value and multiply by the effectiveness and round fractional amounts up to determine the number of hits you score. The attacker now scores ALL damage. This eliminates the concept of directed damage and having two different ways of scoring hits.

Alpha force rolls "5" for 50% and scores 6 hits. Beta force rolls "9" and scores 12 hits.

Alpha player cripples 1 Frigate (4) and 1 Corvette (2) in Beta's task force.

Beta player destroys 1 Frigate (8) and 1 Corvette (4) in Alpha's task force.

Ships vs. Flights

Alpha force has 6 AF and rolls "9" for 6 hits. He destroys 1 Fighter (4) and cripples another (2).

Beta force has 7 AF and rolls "2" for 2 hits. He cripples 1 Fighter (2).

Note: fighters now cripple like ships and are effectively half-cost corvettes that rely on ships to carry them around. At the end of the battle you recover half your crippled flights (rounding down, player's choice). This allows flights to survive longer, but they are MUCH more expensive to build (1 EP per flight).

Flights vs. Flights

Alpha force has 5 AF and rolls "9" for 5 hits. He destroys an undamaged Fighter (4).

Beta force has 3 AF and rolls "2" for 1 hit. No effect.

Flights vs. Ships

Alpha force has 4 AS and rolls "3" for 1 hit. No effect.

Beta force has 1 AS and rolls "10" for 1 hit. A natural "10" on a combat die is a **critical hit**. This means that any leftover damage will reduce the weakest target in the enemy fleet. This balances situations just like this where you would otherwise not be able to do any damage. The remaining Corvette in Alpha force is crippled!

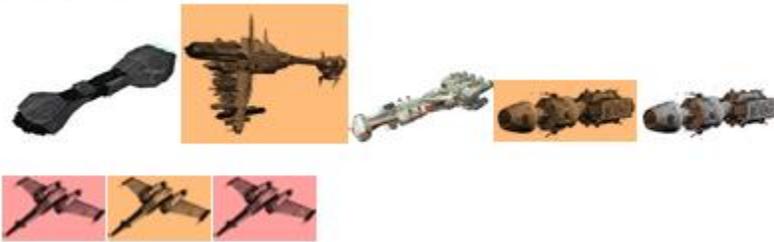
End of Round

The combat round is over, and this is what our fleets look like:

Alpha Force



Beta Force



Alpha fleet is worse for wear thank to the lucky hits by Beta force. The battle could still go either way.

Subsequent Rounds

A battle is going to continue until one side is destroyed or retreats. The decision to retreat is made at the start of the combat round and then tested for success at the end of the round with the retreating task force rolling a d6 and succeeding on a 5+. This makes staying in a fight an active decision on the part of the player and not the result of a semi-random scenario length roll.

Conclusion

What the *Empire of the Sun* style combat results table does is enforce a parity between AS/AF and DV values so that they have a 1:1 and not 1:2 relationship. Changing formation bonuses into active vs. passive defensive bonuses that require a player to sacrifice firepower allows the attacker to score all damage (providing him with more control over how damage is allocated) while at the same time giving the defender a way to protect units against that damage.

Screening also has the advantage of redirecting firepower away from the enemy, which reduces the absolute amount of hits that are scored as damage -- unless you are willing to gamble on removing your screens and going all-in on offense. Which is a valid strategy, but one that could lead to heavy losses.

You'll notice that now that flights can be crippled, they stick around longer in the fight. Small numbers of them are still rather inconsequential, but they can still have an impact on the game. And those flights are 1 EP a piece, so they aren't exactly a huge investment in resources.

The end result is that we end up condensing battles into half as many rounds, as the damage multiplier is effectively twice that of before. But this also means that instead of fighting 6-7 rounds you fight 3-4 and then the battle is over. It really speeds up smaller battles (like raider fights) and gets them over quickly.