

BattleFleet Mars

Revolt of the Martian Colony, 2096 AD

- Three-Dimensional Space Combat
- Political, Economic and Logistical Considerations
- Independent Strategic and Tactical Games

BattleFleet Mars is a science-fiction game of inter-planetary conflict. Set late in the 21st Century, the game concerns an attempt by a colony of humans on Mars to break free of Earth-based control. In addition to military considerations, political, logistical and economic facets of the struggle are highlighted, as the "Martians" must attempt to establish the legitimacy of their independence before the generally sympathetic, indifferent population on Earth begins to feel the economic effects of the Martian embargo on raw materials and actually turns hostile. As for the military sphere, the game features an innovative "double-planar" system which constitutes a realistic, Newtonian consistent simulation of outer-space combat.

BattleFleet: Mars is actually two games in one. The 22" x 34" Strategic Map provides a miniature model of the Solar System from the Sun out to Jupiter. Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, and Jupiter as well as Ceres, Pallas, Vesta, and Juno—the four most significant asteroids—are each represented by a counter. The time scale is approximately one (Earth) lunar month per Game-Turn, and the orbits on the Strategic Map are each divided into segments to correspond to that period. At any given time, therefore, the relative position of the planets is represented exactly. Movement within the Solar System (at a constant acceleration of .01 G) is accomplished by means of a simple point-to-point range finding system which expresses the amount of time needed to travel from one place to another in Game-Turns.

The game begins in mid-2096 with the seizure of power on Mars by a radicalized cabal of colonists intent on gaining independence. The Martian colony facility, as well as the four mining bases in the Asteroid Belt, the H-Scope settlement on Ganymede, and nearly every space-faring vessel are all owned by the Earth-based Aries Corporation, a conglomerate of space-industry oriented, privately financed

concerns that has pioneered the exploration and established an officially sanctioned monopoly over the utilization of extra-terrestrial resources. The Martian colony constitutes a huge "company town," therefore, with everyone living there of necessity an employee of Aries Corp. Endemic dissatisfaction and a series of ever-more harsh "labor disputes" over the course of the latter part of the 21st Century have set the stage for the revolt.

The heart of the Strategic Game are the Morale Indices, of which there are two—one each for Earth and Mars. These register an abstract of the willingness of the respective populations to prosecute the conflict. For the Martian Player (representing the Cabal), the Index level starts high, and the pressure is on to maintain that level by winning significantly more battles than are lost and by (hopefully) ending the war quickly, before people on Earth begin to lose patience and demand an arbitrary settlement along lines of the old status quo. Any sustained decline in the Martian Index threatens the Cabal's hold on power. For the Earth Player (representing Aries Corp.) the problem is trickier still, as it is desirable that public opinion on Earth be strong enough against Martian independence that the weak-kneed Federal Assembly of Nations (FAN) support Aries Corp. in its efforts to regain control, but not so strongly that FAN be impelled to take genuinely strong steps on its own initiative (which may have the effect of disestablishing Aries Corp.). Tied to each Index is an Events Table, with events keyed to correspond to the Morale Level. These events may affect the *other* Player's Index level positively or negatively; hence morale on one planet indirectly affects the other. The Morale Indices are also affected directly by the fortunes of war; in particular, casualty levels and the gain/loss of control of particular bases. In addition, the Events Tables also control the actions—if any—of the FAN, which under some circumstances may be impelled to call for a truce, increase

or decrease the amount of aid rendered unto Aries, enforce binding arbitration, and so forth, with various effects on the course of the game. In addition, there are rules governing Production and Repair of space ships, propaganda, and sabotage.

BattleFleet Mars also features a unique, highly realistic tactical combat system. Battles between ships take place on the Tactical Display. The Tactical Display consists of two square-grid sheets; one ("x-y") representing the horizontal plane, and the other ("z") the vertical. The position of each vessel taking part in a battle is marked on *both* planes, thereby fixing its location (and relationship *vis a vis* the other ships) in three dimensions. Movement is accomplished elegantly by the measurement of standardized bursts of acceleration; which are recorded on the map with vector markers—two on the "x-y" grid and one on the "z". These may be adjusted during the course of each four-minute Tactical Game-Turn. Ships—depending on type and status are equipped with high energy pulse lasers which are utilized for long-range combat and guided missiles and launched fighters for toe-to-toe slugfests. A table cross-indexing the distance between targets in the horizontal plane with that in the vertical is used to determine the range. Ships are rated by type for weapon characteristics, fuel capacity, ease of target acquisition, and damage control capability. All in all, the *Battle Fleet Mars* tactical combat system is a thoughtful and highly playable solution to the problem of simulating space combat in three dimensions.

The Strategic game includes a "tactical abstract" for resolving individual battles without recourse to the Tactical Display; also included in the game will be several scenarios concerning particular battles drawn from campaigns played out here at SPI. It will be possible, therefore, to play either the Strategic or Tactical games independently.

***BattleFleet: Mars* will sell for \$12. Available 28 February '77.**