

Starships Present and Past by Doug Dropeskey

In 1984 I began playing a game called [Star Fleet Battles](#) (a.k.a., SFB) published by Amarillo Design Bureau. The game, set in the Star Trek universe of the original series and animated series, allows players to fight tactical level duels and fleet actions with individual starships. At first, the game only utilized those ships found on screen or in the Star Fleet Technical Manual. Over time, the game grew to reveal a very detailed alternate timeline, diverging from the better known Star Trek universe. This well defined, internally consistent universe features many new races and hundreds of starship designs never seen on screen. In recent years, Amarillo Design Bureau published a streamlined version of Star Fleet Battles called Federation Commander. Both games use the same miniatures.

From very early on, players could recreate their space battles using 1/3788 scale ships. At this scale, the 947 foot long Constutution Class Heavy Cruiser measures exactly three inches in length--small enough for a board game but big enough for extensive details. Over time the range of ships expanded to cover most of the major races and ship types featured in the game.

Over the years, I acquired small numbers of these miniature starships but rarely built and painted them. In late 2008, about two years after returning to model building, I rediscovered this stash and decided to give them a go. Paint, model building, and especially decal technology advanced dramatically in the last 10 years, making it possible to super detail these tiny ships in a way previously impossible. The pictures below attest to these advances as well as my own hard won experience.

United Federation of Planets



Five of the original miniatures for Star Fleet Battles were actually injection molded models with excellent detail and fine raised panel lines. All five ships appeared in the Star Fleet Technical Manual. The saucer sections match stated dimensions in diameter but measure approximately half scale thickness at the rim. The secondary hull sections and warp engines are slightly under scale in diameter. The neck of the Heavy Cruiser requires some trimming to match plans. You can find these little models in the [Star Fleet Games](#) store as part 0201.

Top row: Dreadnought 1901 Athena, Heavy Cruiser 1705 Excalibur and Fleet Tug 1644 Titan.

Bottom row: Destroyer 1899 Electra and Scout 1762 Circe.

All ships except Circe represent stock game miniatures. Circe was modified from a stock Scout by adding a tadpole tale with impulse engines, large sensor arrays, and hangers. Two robust struts hold a single warp engine and a sensor array rotates at the top of a flying boom like the radome on an AWACS plane.

The excellent markings on all vessels were purchased from [Starfighter Decals](#). You can order custom markings like those on my ships for an hourly charge. Those with artistic skill, time, an inkjet printer, and a vector art program can remaster the markings. The font

used on Federation ships matches that used on USAF aircraft in the 1960s.

All ships were painted Model Master Light Ghost Gray lightened with Camouflage Gray. A wash with Windsor and Newton Black oil paint created the hull weathering and shadows. The asteroid bases were made using Super Sculpy and brass rod. I call them **hexeroids**!

For those who follow Star Fleet Battles, my Federation ships do not follow the official ship name registry or painting guide.

Klingon Empire



Amarillo Design Bureau sells an extensive line of Klingon ships, mostly derived from the basic D7 Battlecruiser design.

Tom row: C7 Heavy Battlecruiser and T7 Tug
Bottom row: D7 Battlecruiser and D7 Battlecruiser

The C7 Battlecruiser and T7 tug were painted Model Master British Olive Drab with a mottling of Faded Olive Drab. The two D7s were painted and mottled with custom blue mixtures. I once again purchased markings for these ships from Starfighter decals. The company no longer lists their excellent C7 squadron markings but will print them upon request. I greatly prefer the C7 markings to the D7 markings and used them on both D7s.

Everyone Else



More miniatures from Amarillo Design Bureau and one scratch built creation.

Left to Right: Orion Heavy Raider Star Girl, Gorn Heavy Battle Destroyer, Tholian Patrol Cruiser

After painting up the Federation and Klingon ships it was time to get more adventurous.

Many of the miniatures for Star Fleet Battles and Federation Commander look rather "flat" and "plain". On the one hand, broad flat shapes make sense considering the (fantasy) nature of shield technology. However, they just look boring and demand intricate paint jobs, custom scribing, or grebles to improve matters. I utilized all three techniques on these ships.

I began work on the Orion by cleaning up the miniature and scribing panel lines into every surface. The tail end lacks any sign of impulse engines so I scratch built some using plastic card. Most Orions wear black, but black makes it difficult for a wash to highlight the panel lines. The ship received an overcoat of Black, gradually faded to Gunship Gray and finished with some white invasion stripes for good measure. Every good night fighter needs nose art, so I added a suitable pinup and named the vessel **Star Girl** with some dry transfers.

The Gorn looks more visually interesting than the Orion. I started by scribing panel lines using a ruler and circle template. Again, the ship shows no signs of impulse engine exhausts so I added some at the rear of the hull. According to the game, these engines belong in the wings. Photo etched rivets by Lion Roar serve as the running and position lights.

The ship was painted Dark Tan and faded to Armor Sand with a wash of Raw Sienna to bring out the panel lines. To make the paint scheme more interesting, I added invasion stripes for operation in Romulan space. Most of the decals came from a Hasegawa F-16. These responded extremely poorly to Micro Sol.

I own a Tholian Dreadnought but no cruisers or frigates so I decided to scratch build some. The lawn dart hull was made from three layers of plastic card, scribed with panel lines and attached to a hex rod core. Hex rod also serves as the front weapon and rear impulse engines. Other details were added using round and square rod stock. The iceball base, airbrushed in shades of blue and white, turned out surprisingly well.

You can find Star Fleet Battles / Federation Commander miniatures by Amarillo Design Bureau at many game shops or online at [Star Fleet Games](#).

Echos from the Distant Past

Back in 1993 I made an abortive attempt to make my own miniatures for Star Fleet Battles. Over the course of three months I built about three dozen ships using acid free, fadeless Bristol board, paper, and wood dowels. Various circle and hexagon templates provided the basic shapes, often laminated to form a thick hull. I offer all of the following ships as an amusing curiosity from the distant past. Not a single one of these paper starships was ever used in an actual game!

A Race Like No Other

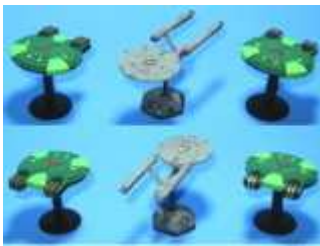


The first series of these creations represent my 1993 take on Hydrans. Even then, I thought many of the SFB game miniatures looked "flat" and "plain". Like many die hard fans I wanted to "improve" the game. Everyone's a critic.



My new alien race included cruisers, destroyers, and frigates. Years later, I decided this was some "other" space fairing race with nothing to do with the Hydrans of Star Fleet Battles. That led to a new series of ships which I will present in a future article.

Andromedan Invaders



I actually like the Andromedan miniatures for Star Fleet Battles but could not afford them at the time and so made my own.

Klingon Empire



I also like the larger Klingon ships for Star Fleet Battles but wanted more variety in the designs. Still do, actually.

Romulan Star Empire



I never liked the hawk series miniatures for Star Fleet Battles and so invented this design based on the Romulan Warbird from Star Trek: The Next Generation.

The Star Trek license held by Amarillo Design Bureau only covers the original series and animated series. The game cannot include ships, races, and history from post 1977 productions, including hybrid designs like these.



Top row: Nova Hawk and Killerhawk.
Bottom row: Nova Hawk and Royal Hawk.

Gorn Confederacy



I tried to make the Gorns more interesting by chopping out a wedge for the sensor array and sweeping the warp engine struts. Skip ahead 15 years and I have something more elaborate in the works. These were intended to represent a Medium Cruiser and a Heavy Battlecruiser.

United Federation of Planets



Of all the paper miniatures I built, the Federation ships look the worst. Modern printing technology now allows much more realistic paper designs. Back in 1993, I favored the "refit" style warp engines from the movies. Now I would use original series style warp engines.



Top row: Heavy Battlecruiser and New Light Cruiser
Bottom row: DDG Destroyer, DDL Destroyer, and New Light Cruiser.

I hope you have enjoyed this trip into the world of starship miniatures. Though small, they offer the model builder an excellent opportunity to build a large variety of very detailed vessels. With a little invention, plastic card, and epoxy putty, a modeler can create practically anything he or she can imagine.

-Doug

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