

# Tips & Tactics Vol. 3, No. 1

## The Starfighter Shuffle

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Welcome back to Tips and Tactics, the column of *Star Wars* gaming advice. (This is actually the *third* edition of Tips and Tactics. The first edition covered the previous version of the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game**. The second edition focused more on the **Star Wars Miniatures Game**, and you can search our [full site archives](#) for some of these columns.)

This new incarnation of Tips and Tactics will cover both the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** Saga Edition and the **Star Wars Miniatures Game**. Approximately every two weeks, Tips and Tactics will give hints, ideas, advice, or alternative rule ideas. Anything from covering the basics for new players to sneaky strategies for experienced participants is fair game, and from time to time, we'll even discuss how to combine the two games.

In this installment, we'll look at using feats and talents to make a starfighter pilot character really stand out from the crowd.

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The new Saga Edition has been extensively streamlined to make it easier for new players to learn and to keep the pace as fast as the movies on which the game is based. Most players who have experience with previous editions of the game have little difficulty getting into Saga Edition, but a few nuances can create potential stumbling blocks for players used to how things worked before.

In particular, some have questions about the new skill system. Players want their characters to be truly exceptional at certain roles, but they don't know what to do after training their heroes in the relevant skills. For example, if Carl wants to make his character Gilac an ace starfighter pilot, obviously he takes Pilot as a trained skill. But how does he set Gilac apart from other characters who also have Pilot as a trained skill but who aren't dedicated starfighter pilots? Is there a way to excel at that role without reducing the character's ability to be useful in other situations?



For starfighter pilots in particular, there are two ways to set a character apart as an expert, rather than someone who is merely "trained." First, starship-specific feats and talents can set you apart from other heroes trained in Pilot. The Vehicular Combat feat makes you much more dangerous in vehicle combat, especially if you have a good Pilot check. Combined with Skill Focus (Pilot), you can build a character who can avoid attacks in combat even when flying a slow junker. Of course, these feats have few applications outside vehicular combat, and you might want to wait to take them until you're of a higher level (unless the campaign is based around starship combat, in which case these feats are hard to beat as early options). Similarly, anything from the scoundrel's Spacer talent tree gives you an edge in starship combat.

The other option is to take combat feats and talents that are useful both in vehicular combat and in character-scale combat. For example, the Point Blank Shot feat applies to both hand-held ranged weapons and vehicular weapons, which also have a point blank range. Taking this feat increases your effectiveness in starfighter combat, while still being useful in character-scale situations. Other feats that fit that description include Burst Fire, Far Shot, Rapid Shot, and Precise Shot (which is useful for firing into dogfights; see *Firing Into a Dogfight*, page 171 of the *Saga Edition Core Rulebook*). Numerous other feats can serve double duty if taken with heavy weapons (such as Weapon Focus), as can the soldier Weapon Specialist talent tree.

Once you reach 7th level, if you truly wish to be an ace fighter pilot, you should move to the ace pilot prestige class. Although you don't gain the bonus feats available to a core class, the vehicle dodge ability gives you defensive capability in a starfighter that members of others classes can't manage. There's no rule preventing you from taking multiple prestige classes, and some characters might also want to take a few levels of bounty hunter or officer, depending on their style of fighting.

Another popular starship-related option is to forgo the Saga Edition rules and play out combat using the **Star Wars Miniatures *Starship Battles* game**. Why? First, players who are already familiar with and enjoy the miniatures game might want to incorporate those rules just for the fun of it. Also, the *Starship Battles* rules currently have statistics for more starships (especially starfighters and capital ships), making it easier to run battles with numerous different classes of craft. Furthermore, while the miniatures rules are tactically more complex, as is fitting for a combat game, they handle large fleet engagements more easily than the roleplaying game rules. So, you gain more tactical options and the ability to play out large conflicts with ease. However, the drawback to incorporating *Starship Battles* rules is that character-scale action is largely ignored.



For most roleplaying game scenarios, the Gamemaster will decide what ships are available without worrying too much about point cost. Of course, looking at point cost is a good way to see whether the two sides are balanced (though consider discussions of victory conditions and the heroic element to learn why the fleets still might not be balanced). Since the idea is to use the miniatures rules to tell part of a roleplaying game's story, the GM can set the victory conditions rather than simply requiring one side to destroy the other. For example, let's say that an escape sequence is being played out, such as the *Millennium Falcon* trying to get free of Hoth. One player might be massively outmatched, but perhaps in order to win, he needs only to get off the stellar grid.



Of course, the *Starship Battles* rules have no options for modifying starships when heroic characters are piloting them. The miniatures are static, designed to represent typical ships and a few famous specific vehicles, not to detail the exact abilities of a particular hero's starfighter. If none of the heroic characters are exceptional pilots, typical starships might be fine for their characters. Otherwise, a few changes need to be made.

The simplest way to represent heroic characters is to pick ships that are close representations of the character's ship and abilities. For example, if most nonheroic pilots are in X-wings, you can give the heroic pilot an X-wing Starfighter Ace, a Rogue Squadron X-wing, or even Luke Skywalker's X-wing.

However, if that doesn't quite balance the relative skill of heroic characters, it's easy to boost ships' attack values until they're more in scale to the heroes piloting them. To keep things simple, defense, damage and hull ratings are unchanged. It's best to stay with the miniatures game rules for movement, so that a class 1 ship moves 1 square per turn, a class 2 ship moves 2 squares per turn, and so on. While this doesn't map perfectly to the roleplaying game rules, there's no point in using miniature rules for their simplicity, and then making them more complex!

Many heroic characters also have feats, skills and talents that make them better than a typical pilot. Rather than try to rewrite these for the miniatures game, just use existing miniatures abilities to emulate their functions. The following list provides examples of how to emulate Saga Edition (SE) roleplaying game elements with abilities from the *Starship Battles* rules (SB).

- Any character with Force Pilot (SE) should be given the Force Sense (SB) ability.
- Any pilot with Vehicular Combat (SE) should gain the Evasions (SB) ability.
- Any heroic character who takes the Systems Operator position (SE) on a ship gives it the Sensor Array (SB) ability.
- Any heroic character with levels in the bounty hunter prestige class (SE) gains the Bounty Hunter (SB)

ability.

- Heroic characters with multiple levels of the noble class or officer prestige class (SE) should gain either the Advanced Communication Array (SB) or Sith Command +2 (SB) abilities.



Using the miniatures rules also lets you give characters who *aren't* pilots something to do. For example, if a heroic ace pilot is handed Luke Skywalker's X-wing to represent his character, other players can assume that their heroes are in the background and temporarily play typical pilots flying typical X-wings. Thus, while Leia, R2-D2, and C-3PO watch from the Rebel Base, their players can run typical pilots who help Luke take on the Death Star.

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## About the Author

[Owen Kirker Clifford Stephens](#) was born in 1970 in Norman, Oklahoma. He was introduced to gaming by his uncle in 1978 and was instantly hooked. He later enrolled in creative writing courses taught by **Forgotten Realms** novel author Mel Odom. In 1997, he attended a TSR Writer's Workshop, and later that year, his first professional work saw the light of day: an article on elven names in issue 251 of *Dragon* magazine.

In 2000, Owen moved to the Seattle area with his wife and three cats after accepting a job as a Game Designer at Wizards of the Coast. There, he worked on numerous **Star Wars Roleplaying Game** products and the *Wheel of Time Roleplaying Game*. Fourteen months later, he returned to Oklahoma and picked up his freelance career, writing for numerous companies, including Green Ronin, Paizo, White Wolf, and Steve Jackson Games. Owen co-authored the **Star Wars Roleplaying Game Saga Edition Core Rulebook** and has contributed to numerous licensed RPG products, including *The Wheel of Time*, *EverQuest*, *Black Company*, and *Thieves' World*.

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