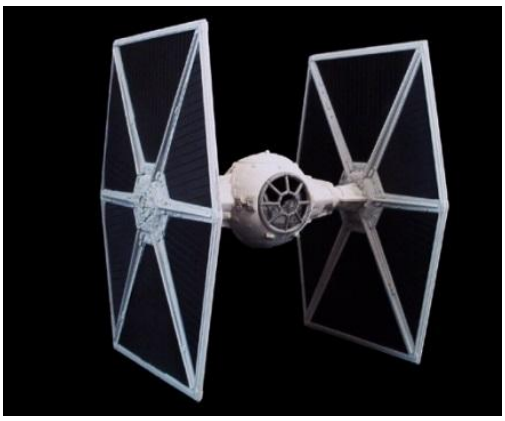
Solo Dogfights Past and Future?

By Marvin Scott

Christmas 2015 brought a surprise for me. I learned again the truth of the French saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same." My son got a new game. The box said Star Wars X-wing miniature game. He showed it to me and said, "It's P-40 vs Zeros." He was referring to a dogfight miniature game I developed in about 1975. My family has played it ever since. He may have overstated the resemblance, but P-40 vs Zeros and X-wing have some basic similarities and some significant differences. Since 1975, rules writers have developed some refinements, and a game developed as a tie in with a major motion picture has resources I don't have at my kitchen table. Upon reviewing them, we concluded that solo methods we used in P-40 vs Zeros could be grafted onto X-wing.





Let's compare some of the features. Both games use miniatures. The P-40 vs Zeros game used two types, solid lead scratch-built 1/300 scale planes or cardstock planes in 1/150 scale. X-wings and TIE miniatures are space age plastic, with elegant detail and coloring. The gaming area in P-40s vs Zeros is representing the air over China, Burma or the Pacific in about `1942. The X-wings etc. are maneuvering in space in a galaxy far, far away. The P-40s etc. move in three dimensions with lego blocks indicating altitude, one block = 5000 feet. The X-wings move in two dimensions. It's hard to determine what up and down means in space.

Both games have pilots decide their moves simultaneously. The P-40 pilot writes his move on a piece of paper. The X-wing pilot uses a disc to dial up his speed and move; then X-wings move in reverse order of pilot quality, that is, lower skilled pilot moves first. Both games use card stock template to guide movers. Space ships move faster of course. In both games shooting uses a card stock strip to determine range. The space ship shooting uses dice as did the fighter planes, but the space ship shots involve more die rolling and damage points.

Both games are relatively quick to play and have a feel like a dogfight. X-wing is an elegant game, but the version I saw did not offer solo ideas. In the forty years I have played with P-40s and Zeros I have developed several solo rules. Some of them look like they would work in space.

The first idea was pretty simple. Pilot the P-40 and let dice fly the Zero. The same idea with X-wing would be pilot the space ship of your choice and let dice fly the other. Take a D-6 and roll it after you have decided your move. 1-2 = turn left, 3-4 = straight, 5-6 = turn right. The result is a random unpredictable course. It's the sort of thing a wounded pilot or panicky rookie would follow. It does not produce much of a contest, but if you roll another D-6 and get a 6, you have an enemy on your tail (if space ships have tails). Two further rules make this system more challenging. The programmed enemy pilot cannot make a move that will obviously get him hit, and if he gets on your tail, he will move after you and follow you. Remember, solo play requires use of your imagination.

A somewhat more involved way of managing the opposition plane or space ship: Put your ship more or less in the middle of your playing space. Then imagine that it is sitting on an old fashioned clock face headed toward 12. (See illustration.1.) Roll two D-6s. Place your opponent on the number that comes up. To determine how far away the opponent is, roll a D-6. 1-2 = one move, 3-4 = two moves, 5-6 = three moves. He will be directed to move toward your ship and destroy it. If that is not challenging enough for you, repeat the process and add a second opponent.

Your enemy space ships are not the only danger. The game permits the placing of asteroids and even perhaps bombs or mines. In the 1942 game there is a rule for random placing of clouds. In space a similar rule can randomly position asteroids etc. Assuming your playing space is a rectangle, place numbers 1 to 6 along an end and one side. (See illustration 2.) Roll 2 D-6s and you get a set of coordinates. For example, 3-4 = a space shown on the illustration. Repeat the process until you have enough asteroids. Yes, you could roll dice to determine the number.

Of course some fights are more than just air-to-air or ship-to-ship combats. In 1942 they were bombing runs. In space the mission is to hit a vital spot on a death star or death planet, whatever. You will use some kind of guided explosive weapon. Similar rules could work. First mark the target, a coin, poker chip or simple pencil X will do. Now as your space ship approaches the target, decide where you will fire or launch your weapons. There are no dice involved, but your ship must be on a course directly toward the target. You select the point where you fire. It must be less than 20 centimeters from the target. How good are you at metric distances? Your weapon must hit within one centimeter of the target.

Since you are reading this in *Lone Warrior*, you are probably already thinking about how you will improve on these ideas. Feel free. Also feel free to write to *Lone Warrior* about how your games turn out. If you want to read more about my solo techniques the following articles are examples:

"Ambush in the Sky," p. 47-48 *Lone Warrior* - Oct-Dec 2013.
"Solo Methods," p 25-26, *Lone Warrior* - April-June 2015.

For pictures of my models see:

"Solo Scratch Building: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly," *Lone Warrior* – October - December, 2015.