

Galac-Tac

Interpreting Combat Reports

Davin Church

Combat reports in Galac-Tac would seem to be trivial information, but they're not. Of course, each report contains the usual details about the ships involved in the combat, but there's much more information that can be inferred from them when reviewed carefully by an experienced player. Strategic interpretation of these reports can be an art form in itself and can help you play a much better game.

Basics

The report layout is reasonably simple with labeled columns, but there are a few small things you don't want to overlook.

First and foremost, did you destroy all of your opponent's ships? If you left any of them at all alive then that means that they got a combat report too, which provides them as much information about you as you can gain from them. It also means that the combat went all 10 rounds without a decisive victor, and that in turn means that your two fleets were relatively evenly matched. Consider those consequences before your next encounter. And don't forget that if you were on the near-losing end of that battle, you'd better take your remaining ships and leave before your opponent can finish the job next turn. Also either one or both of you might reinforce your fleets to try to do a better job next time, instead of breaking off, and don't forget that your opponent may do a better reinforcing job than you.

Another useful piece of information on the combat report is the tiny little column marked "TL". This column is often overlooked, especially since near the beginning of the game it always says the same thing. But this is each ship's Tech Level. Not only does tech level

have a substantial affect on the outcome of the battle, it's telling you something important about your enemy's empire. Their empire's tech level must be at least as high as any of their ships. And you should expect that future combats may include many or all of their ships of that tech level. This is particularly useful to note about small ships such as scouts and freighters since those appear most often on a combat report (because they're easily defeated). That also means that those trivial ships were probably constructed from scratch since that tech level was reached (rather than refit later), and that may well be some time ago in game terms (because new trivial ships are not frequently constructed later in the game and are not worth refitting), so that empire may well have an even higher tech level than those reported by the time you see one. Be cautious.

A fun thing to note here is what your enemy is naming their ships. If they have nothing but bland names such as "X", then your opponent is not being very imaginative and getting into the spirit of the game. Most players' trivial ships are quite commonly named a single, meaningful name such as "Scout" or "Freighter" or "Fighter" – it's difficult to come up with interesting names for many hundreds of indistinguishable ships. But watch out for numbered ships (e.g. Scout 0042), as that can often tell you how many ships he's building of that type. But for the larger ships, a player that's having fun with the game and building their empire on a theme of some sort will be giving those ships theme-specific and often unique names. This will tell you something about how they enjoy playing Galac-Tac, and if you'll get "in character" too, are likely to make a good communications partner. Of course, be careful of your own ship names giving your

opponents the same kind of information about yourself.

Missing Fleets

Ok, the first thing that a combat report will tell you is if you *don't get one!* In that case, up in the main body of your report you will find a location where every ship there is listed as "Missing". Yes, this means they're all dead, but since nobody was left alive to report that explicit death they're officially considered to be Missing In Action (MIA).

In this situation, an enemy fleet has decisively beaten your fleet so that immediately tells you something obvious about your relative strengths. But **why** were you defeated? Was it because your ship or fleet design was inferior and could be improved? Or was it because his ship and fleet design was especially well-tuned to defeat you? Or was it simply the obvious reason that he had many more ships/SSD/weapons than you did? Or was it some combination of these reasons.

Don't just ignore such a defeat – use it to improve yourself before the next encounter. If he was just killing one of your scout ships, that's typically no big deal if you were just looking to see if someone was there. It's virtually impossible for a lone scout ship to survive **any** combat. But if you're anxious to get off a scout at that location, build special scout ships with maximum inertia drives and send in several at a time – you might just get back a partial scouting report.

Or if he has just killed one of your unarmed freighters you'd best be careful. He might be trying to take your colony away from you. Or he might be beginning an attack on your empire's economic system by disrupting the flow of PV. And you're likely to have another shuttle coming into the same place the next turn and it would likely meet the same fate. So either reroute your shuttles until something else

can be done or counter-attack to see if you can defeat his fleet (assuming he leaves it there).

While you're doing that, see if you can do something else to prevent a similar occurrence elsewhere. Arming shuttles can help, but that's usually only effective against the tiniest attacking fleets and is usually too expensive for that minimal protection. Better would be to set up permanent defenses in those systems or a separate roving sentry to check in on them from time to time.

But the more difficult situation is when a larger ship or fleet loses the battle. For that it's critical to know what kind of fleet defeated yours so you know what you can and cannot do about it. If the attack occurred in your own colony or PC then you should get a scouting-type report from them about the enemy that remains in the system. Otherwise you should send in some of your own scouts to try to determine something about the size and composition of the enemy before you can consider what to do about the loss of your fleet. In fact, if you're attacking an unknown fleet it's usually a good idea to try to send in a scout or two alongside your attack fleet (with separate orders, of course) so that if your fleet ends up being destroyed the scout (if it's not caught) might still get you a report of the size of the fleet that killed you.

Trivial Combats

In the case where you get a combat report against a trivial intruder, it's usually a scout ship out looking for general information. This usually does not provide very useful information, except in a few cases.

If they have just scouted one of your production centers, or worse, your home world, now they know that they've found an intentionally-protected system. If they get a report back from an undetected scout that you have large platforms (too big to be mobile) then they also know that they have at least found a production

center. Either way you should protect yourself against more scouts and possibly an invasion. Moving your home world might also be something to consider if you think it might have been located.

If they have sent in multiple scouts to the same location then they are trying to deduce your level of defense at that location and you should immediately provide for additional system protection and improve your anti-scout defenses.

If you've got a trivial scout here and there then it's nothing to worry about. But if you start catching many scouts at the same time scattered across your empire then your opponent is probably trying to quickly gather detailed information on your empire's maps, developments and defenses, often in preparation for a large attack of some sort. Be careful of further incursions or large attacks in the near future.

Ship Compositions

The first level of combat strategy involves the design of individual ships, both yours and his. Look at the combat report to see what kind of ship designs he has in his fleets, and keep in mind what else you've found out about him in other combat reports. This information is critical to being able to plan for future military encounters with that empire. Then compare your own ship designs with his to see how they fared in this combat. If he had fewer ships but they still put up a respectable battle, perhaps you could learn something from his designs. If he did poorly under the circumstances, see what portions of your designs might have given you a relative benefit that you might use again for a future advantage.

The first thing to consider in combat ship design is the balance of shield generators to weapons in each ship. The more (and more effective) weapons, relatively speaking, the faster you can

kill off the enemy ships. But the more defensive shield points you have then the longer your ship can survive, doing more damage to the enemy during that time. So a balance is called for in any particular size (SSD) of ship. See how his shield-to-weapon ratio performed compared to yours.

Another important consideration in the ship designs is how many inertia engines each ship has. For best combat benefits use the maximum inertia engines that you can on a combat ship, even though it's expensive. The inertia engines determine how often your weapons damage the enemy and how often the enemy weapons can damage you. Obviously this has a big effect on combat results. Did any of your or their ship designs have fewer engines than the maximum? That's something to consider changing for your own ships, or exploiting the enemy's lack thereof.

Tech level differences are terribly important in combat as well. Keep your tech level as high as you can reasonably afford and keep your warships refit to that level. If the enemy has a tech level advantage, avoid conflict unless you greatly outnumber him (say a 4:1 or better advantage). If your tech level is higher, you can assume generally better destructive capabilities without as great a numerical superiority, and thus may be able to attack him more effectively in more places with somewhat fewer resources. Even with similarly-sized fleets a tech advantage can allow you to win combats with minimal to zero damage to your own ships.

Fleet Compositions

The more difficult level of combat strategy occurs when dealing with the way fleets are constructed out of various different kinds of ships. Look at the fleet compositions in the combat report and compare them. The larger the combat fleets are the more important is the overall composition of that fleet.

For instance, in small fleets hangered fighters are the most versatile and cost-effective combat ships to use. But as the size of the fleet increases little by little, larger and larger ships become more important to include. Large fleets work best when there are a wide variety of ship types and sizes included in the fleet.

Having many ships of different sizes greatly affects the targeting over the entire combat, as each size of ship tends to fire first on enemy ships of its own size, as mentioned in the rule book. Thus, a fleet (of empire A) of entirely fighter-sized ships tends to fare poorly against a fleet (empire B) that contains a mix of 5-SSD, 10-SSD, and 20-SSD ships, even when the total fleet sizes are about the same. Empire A will fire solely at enemy fighters until they are all disabled, during which time the entirety of empire B's fleet will be shooting at the fighters with more powerful weapons against empire A's more limited shielding. And that's just the beginning of a much more comprehensive combat-details issue that isn't covered here.

So compare your fleet's ship size composition with his to see what advantages one side or the other might have had in this battle and decide what you might be able to do in future battles to improve or take advantage of your situation.

Also consider that large fleets should have a mix of weapon types. P-Types are the best all-around weapons, but other weapon types are also quite important in large battles. For instance, T-Types are very helpful when fighting battleships and large platforms because they do a lot of damage to large ships early in the battle, knocking down many enemy shields and making them more susceptible to later ship attacks. Drones are especially valuable if the enemy has his own drones or T-Types and they can reduce the effectiveness of these enemy attack methods. See more details in the rules about how the different weapon systems work and figure out how they might be best employed together.

So what can you learn from your opponent's fleet construction on any combat reports you get? As you can see, prior information about enemy fleets is terribly important to planning your own fleet composition for best effect. Learning as much as you can from your previous combat reports (and scouting reports) is really important to configuring your own fleets against them for future battles.

Damage Results

There's also a lot you can learn from the amount of damage that individual ships have taken during the combat. For instance, if most of a group of a certain size of enemy ship (fighters, for instance) were reduced to or near a “//” rating, that tells you that they were far overmatched (by size category) in the combat – they took much more damage in a single round than it took to destroy them, so there were a lot more ships firing at them at the same time than were needed. A better use of that firepower would have been to spread it around to different sizes of ships by including a larger variety of ship sizes in your own fleet.

If you won your battle but still took lots of minor damage on many of your ships, then that often means that you don't have enough shielding on those ships (or he had quite a few more ships of that size firing at you).

If any of your ships were destroyed while most of their rating code was reasonably intact, then most likely you have some portion of your beginning rating code (such as inertia engines or a weapon type) with only a 1 or 2 in that spot in the code and the combat ended with a 0 (blank) in that space. That represents a location in your ship that an enemy weapon has destroyed and another weapon was able to punch through the hole that it left in your ship and destroyed it from the inside (excess damage, from the game rules). If so, try not to build ships with very few items of a particular type that may be sensitive to leaving a gap in your ship structure. For

example, a 1D+1P+1T1/1;1;1/1-1 is the worst possible rating you could build when just considering this reason alone.

If either set of ships included T-Type weapons, this can tell you something about how long the combat lasted (i.e. how fast you killed him). Look at the number of missiles expended by a ship during the combat and compare it to the number of T-Type launchers it had. For example, if a ship started with 1T10 and had 1T10(4) left at the end of the combat, then they expended 6 missiles over the course of a 6-round combat. That tells you how quickly and easily you defeated him, which tells you something about your effectiveness in combat (at least in this particular case).

If you cannot see any obvious reason why one side had the advantage over another, particularly in smaller encounters, review the rules on how the commands given to ships affects how combat begins. It may be that one side got in one (or even two) free shots on the other before his opponent could begin shooting back. This can turn the tide in smaller battles and gives one side an edge in larger ones. So if the combat report seems otherwise fairly even and the results do not, look into that possibility.

Another issue that does not directly appear on the combat reports that you might be able to infer, is the use of the Combat or Standing orders. For instance, let's say you have a mix of different sizes of platforms (small to large) defending your home world along with a number of other ships, and yet your platforms took an excessive beating, relative to the rest of your fleet, even from a slightly weaker attack fleet. From that you might infer that he gave his fleet Combat orders to concentrate on platforms. Other such inferences are possible, too.

In general, if one side or the other took more damage than the above considerations alone would imply, you could then do some additional detailed calculations to tell you more about how

the combat might well have played out. For each side, and for each ship classification, tally up the number of weapons of each type that were being fired. Then figure the damage each of those weapons is capable of. Then, assuming what group of enemy ships each ship and weapon type might be firing at, use the rule book to determine the percentage chance of that weapon getting a hit. Multiply all those items together and sum the results to see how much actual damage your ships are probably sending downrange in each round (as long as it lasts). Then also compare how many shield points each opposing ship has protecting it. Compare the damage being done by each side to the shielding of the other side's ships. Just looking at these totals on both sides will tell you something about how fast you can expect one side to defeat the other – the most important part of which is about how many combat rounds the defensive shielding will last before the ships start taking actual damage. And if you know (or can estimate) something about an enemy fleet before you attack, you can also do this same thing in advance of combat to predict how you might fare.

Scouting Reports

As you might have noticed, knowing what your opponent's ships are in a combat is necessary to knowing how that combat played out. A combat report (or several of them) can help you learn how an enemy constructs his ships and fleets in general and where weaknesses might be found. But that's not the only way to gain information of this sort.

While it's not nearly as detailed as a combat report, a scouting report can still give you vital information about what you are confronting. Scouting is cheap and easy, especially in comparison to constructing a winning war fleet to get a combat report. If a scout dies, then you know they have protective (Patrol or Sentry) measures in place at that location and thus they consider it important enough to be thus

protected. But any scouts that can return information can be invaluable in planning future offensive and defensive operations.

It would seem that a scouting report does not give you very much information, but that would be a mistake to assume. It enables you to make some reasonable guesses as to the composition of a fleet. First of all, it tells you the number of ships present, which is very important. If your opponent has 100 ships and you've got 5, don't attack! Even if your ships are large and his are small you can still be overwhelmed by numbers.

The last number given is the total SSD of his fleet. If his SSD is twice yours, don't attack! If you have twice his SSD then you stand a reasonable chance of winning, although not necessarily undamaged. But if you take his total SSD and divide it by the number of his ships that will give you an average ship size. An average size tells you a lot more about what you would encounter, even without a full combat report. An average size of something near 5 SSD means he has a fighter-based fleet. If it averages 10 or even 20 SSD then he's got a lot of larger ships.

The middle number shown, if any, is the size of the largest ship. If this is only 10, for example, then he doesn't have any big ships and an average near that maximum means the fleet will have to be composed of a large number of this size (e.g. 10 SSD) of ships. If the largest ship is in the 20-30 range then he's got battleship-sized ships and you should be prepared for a serious fight. But if his average is also high like that, then he has few small ships in his fleet and that may signal a weakness that you can exploit. If the largest ship is 40+ SSD then you've found a production system, perhaps it's even a home world! But it also means that it will be a tough nut to crack, so carefully observe the average ship size and try to estimate what his fleet would look like before engaging him.

So use scouting reports as if they were limited-information versions of combat reports and get as many of them as you can, throughout the game. Intelligence information is always useful!