

ALONE AGAINST THE BUGS

A Solitaire System for STARSHIP TROOPERS

By Rick Mathews

What with all the discussion on solitaire play recently, it was inevitable that a few articles concerning such come across my desk. As sceptical as I am, I gritted my teeth and played every one. Surprisingly, in terms of the game system, Mr. Mathews' solitaire version of SST can be quite enjoyable. And he's right—it is tough to beat the bugs.

Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. It is simply not always possible to find an opponent to play a good competitive game whenever I desire. For this reason, I set about designing solitaire systems for some of the games I own. With the expectation that other wargamers find themselves in a situation similar to mine, this article will attempt to share the results of my efforts to design a solitaire system for Avalon Hill's *STARSHIP TROOPERS*. Using this system, the player as the futuristically armed Terrans may battle the subterranean Arachnids without making any decisions for the opposition. The system is competitive—it has beaten me more often than not.

Before this system is explained, perhaps a few words about *STARSHIP TROOPERS* and why it was chosen for solitaire treatment would be in order. Gamers generally interested in historically based wargames often turn up their noses at *STARSHIP TROOPERS*, regarding it as little more than a fantasy "trip" undeserving of a second look. They are making a mistake. First, *SST* is in many ways a very conventional wargame. Second, and more important, *SST* captures like few other games on the market the intensity and elusive "feel" of individual soldiers locked in desperate, raging combat. This is partly because the game is most often a wild melee with no static fronts. Also, each counter represents but one man and not an "abstract" group. While playing, one can easily imagine oneself as the lone trooper standing on a desolate future battlefield with awesome blasts exploding in too-close proximity, deadly energy beams flashing overhead, and hideous giant spiders boiling out of their holes and madly charging without regard for the handflamer cutting down their companions.

At first glance, *STARSHIP TROOPERS* may seem to be one of the least likely to lend itself to solitaire play. The Arachnid hidden movement system looks to require a live opponent. It is this very hidden movement, however, which makes a solitaire system possible for it. In a two-player game, a good Arachnid will try to appear as random as possible to his Terran opponent. A predictable Bug is a dead Bug. Consequently, it is possible to design a system whereby the Arachnids really do move and fight semi-randomly, while the solitaire player controls the Terrans.

In the following system, it is assumed that since the Arachnids would have little knowledge of the Terran mission, they will react in basically the same manner to any Terran invasion. Thus, they will try to maintain access to the surface, protect their hive, and kill Terran troopers. Even though the Terran player may choose from three possible missions, only one set of rules is needed to control the Arachnids. They are, after all, alien and their thoughts beyond our ken. This results in a very playable system.

All regular rules for *STARSHIP TROOPERS* are in effect unless amended by the following:

Battling the Bugs

1. The sequence of play is somewhat altered. Refer to the game tables for the revised *Sequence of Play*. The rules in this section generally follow that sequence. *Steps one through four are ignored on the first game turn*. In addition, note that there are no inverted alien counters in Solitaire *SST*.

2. The mapboard is divided into six sectors defined by the mapfold and the board partitions. Each of these sectors (except one in each game) will contain an Arachnid "hive" consisting of one, and only one, combat brain cell. There are no queens nor master brains here. These cells and their corresponding tunnel complexes are *not* drawn on the Alien Control Pad prior to play. They are simply assumed to be there, and their actual location must be discovered by the Terran using the following rules.

3. To begin each game, the Terrans must drop to the planet surface using the initial drop procedure, except that only one squad may initially be placed in each sector. After the initial drop, Terran troops are free to move out of their sector. When the drop has been made, five sectors are randomly chosen by assigning each an arbitrary number (1-6) and making die rolls. Each of these sectors contains an Arachnid one-cell "hive". Place a counter for each hive, labelled A through E, in these individual sectors as a reminder. Each hive begins with the usual compliment of units attached (i.e., five warriors, 5 Workers, one Beam Weapon).

4. At the beginning of each turn (except the first), the Terran must determine where new breaches will be created. A new breach will appear in each sector where a die roll yields a number equal to or less than the number of Arachnid workers surviving in that sector. To find the location of the new breach, the player must randomly choose a vertical row in that sector, and then randomly choose an actual number hex within that row where the breach will be emplaced. This can conveniently be done with numbered chits (1-17) or with a twenty-sided die (available at any game shop). When a breach is placed, a worker is also placed in the same hex. It is assumed to be underground. Workers *never* come to the surface nor are used in any way other than this in Solitaire *SST*. At the end of the next Terran player segment, all surviving workers are removed from the board and are available for subsequent breaching on the next game turn. There are no "engineers". Instead, the workers perform a semi-engineer function as described.

5. The Terran now rolls two dice for each sector containing a hive. If the roll is equal to or greater than the current *turn* number, an Arachnid demolition may explode in that sector. Roll two dice for each hex in that sector occupied by a functional Terran. On a roll of three or less, the hex will receive a demo attack. Roll one die on the *Arachnid Demo Table* to determine the exact demo type. The player must roll for possible demos as long as the combat brain in that sector is alive and on-planet (even if captured).

6. Surviving, underground Arachnid beam weapons will now move to the surface; and all beam

weapons will attack if any targets are available. If more than one target is available, use the *Beam Fire Priority Table*. Beams will *not* fire at WIA Terrans, unless the same hex contains another non-WIA Terran. After firing, beam weapons will move onto any WIA Terran (if one is available) and remain there until destroyed, firing normally in the meantime. Failing this, they will remain in their initial breach hex until no targets are available, at which time they will descend underground. The Terran must roll for beam weapon attacks as long as the combat brain in that sector is alive and on-planet (even if captured).

7. The player must now check for Arachnid warrior attacks in each sector. If a Terran unit or units on the surface can be reached and attacked by warriors during the current game turn, the warriors will attack on a die roll equal to or less than the surviving number of warriors in that sector. The same die roll is used to determine the actual number of warriors attacking. These warriors will issue from the nearest breach to the Terran target. Any warriors still underground will always attack underground targets (no die roll is necessary), unless the potential target hex contains heavy nerve gas.

For either surface or subterranean warrior attacks, if the warriors are presented with multiple targets, roll one die for each sector to determine which targets are actually attacked and at what odds:

1-3 Warriors will attack at the highest possible odds (up to six against one!), even if this means that some potential targets must remain unattacked.

4-6 Warriors will attack as many targets as possible, with the highest odds being but a secondary concern.

If, after using this method, there is still a question as to which targets will be attacked, choose between the targets randomly by assigning each a die roll number.

Like beam weapons, warriors will not attack a WIA Terran. Once on the surface and unengaged, warriors will move toward and attack any new targets which present themselves, using the same system described above for actual target determination. When warriors no longer have potential targets, they will move onto any WIA terran available; failing that, they will move as quickly as possible underground. Warriors will *never* move through radiation areas.

8. The Terran player now conducts his player segment according to the rules. At the conclusion of this segment, the Terran must remove surviving Arachnid workers from the mapboard and record accumulated Arachnid defense points.

Terrans and Tunnels

1. In Solitaire *STARSHIP TROOPERS*, no one taught the Bugs how to dig straight tunnels. When Terrans descend below ground, roll one die for each tunnel hex entered (beginning with the first breach hex entered) and consult the scatter diagram printed on the board. The tunnel will exit the currently occupied hex through the corresponding hexside. Use the Alien Control Pad to keep track of tunnels explored.

2. If the number rolled while mapping indicates the hexside last passed through, the hex currently occupied is the brain cell for this sector. After the brain cell is found in a sector, subsequent rolls of this result simply indicate a dead end.

3. If the Terran is searching for prisoners, he may roll one die for each tunnel hex entered. On a roll of six, a prisoner cell may be drawn in the appropriate adjacent hex.

4. If mapping die rolls would cause a tunnel to run off the mapboard, or to intersect a previously mapped non-breach tunnel hex, simply roll again.

5. When a Special Talent is activated use the same procedure described above for mapping any tunnels within range. Simply choose any breach and begin. A Special Talent may also map from more than one breach simultaneously.

6. Listening devices may be used to locate tunnel hexes (most likely for subsequent CE breaching or demolitions). When a LD is activated, roll on the scatter diagram. A tunnel will exist in the indicated direction at a range from the LD determined by a second die roll. If this second roll is five or six, however, no tunnel exists.

7. A combat Engineer demo charge detonated in a non-breach tunnel hex will seal off the breach nearest the detonation hex, as well as any subsequent breaches which may be placed nearer (do not even place these later breaches on the mapboard since no units can issue from them). Arachnids do not receive defense points for sealed-off breaches. Breaches may also be sealed off by using Heavy Nerve Gas or a CE demo in the actual breach hex, or by placing a radiation area there. DAP and DAR charges do not seal off breaches, but they can affect units underneath them (i.e.: workers).

Defense and Casualty Points

1. Defense points are tallied for the Arachnid for the following:

- a. 1 point per turn for each functional breach
- b. 3 points per turn for each functional warrior on the surface
- c. 6 points per turn for each functional beam on the surface

Victory points are no longer awarded for breaches when all warriors and beam weapons have been destroyed in a sector (although points accumulated by the Arachnid up to that point are valid). Bugs must be undisrupted to be considered functional. Defense points are awarded at the end of each Terran player segment and must be recorded.

2. Casualty points are tallied for the Terran for the following items used in accomplishment of his mission(s). Points for support weapons and equipment are only calculated if that item is either expended in combat or lost. Unretrieved non-KIA Terrans are worth three times their KIA point value listed below. Casualty points are not totalled until the end of the game.

Each trooper HVY: 2	DAP: 2
Each trooper WIA: 4	DAR: 3
Each trooper KIA: 6	HNG: 4
CE Lost: 8	HE Demo: 5
ST Lost: 50	NUC Demo: 10
HE Launcher: 2	Aircar Lost: 15
NUC Rocket (each): 6	LD Lost: 1
	Boat Lost: 75

Help From the Humanoids

1. The Terran may use Humanoid allies, who revolt against the Bugs in conjunction with the Terran invasion, if he so desires. For each sector where they will be used, the Terran must choose the specific force before play starts and predesignate

the turn of arrival. On that turn, the Humanoids may enter via any exterior board edge of their designated arrival sector. The Terran may cancel the entry of any group at any point prior to their arrival.

2. The Terran must add casualty points for any Humanoids concluding the game on the mapboard but outside of a strong point, unless their specific sector has been cleared of Arachnid warriors and beam weapons. Humanoids may not go underground, and may not be retrieved via landing boat. Casualty points are charged to the Terran for Humanoid losses:

- Worker Lost: 1
- Warrior Lost: 2
- Beam Weapon Lost: 6
- Missile Weapon Lost: 12

3. Strongpoints may be built as follows: two workers must commence their player turn in the construction hex; here they are inverted. On the next game turn, they are turned right-side up, and a strongpoint is placed over them. Terran units may not use Humanoid strongpoints.

The Missions

Solitaire STARSHIP TROOPERS is not meant to be used with the scenarios provided in the game. Instead, prior to play the player must choose from the three missions below for each sector; alternately, use a die roll to randomly determine which of the missions is to be attempted in each sector. These need not be identical; a different mission can be chosen for each sector landed in. Each game is twelve turns in length. At the end of the game,

GAME TABLES

Sequence of Play

1. Check for and emplace new breaches and Arachnid workers.
2. Check for and resolve Arachnid demo attacks.
3. Check for and resolve Arachnid beam attacks.
4. Check for and resolve Arachnid warrior attacks.
5. Conduct Terran player segment.
6. Remove surviving, non-disrupted Arachnid workers.
7. Record Arachnid defense points accumulated during the turn.

Arachnid Demolitions

1-2	HE
3	Scale 1
4-5	Scale 3
6	Scale 6

Beam Fire Priority

1. Humanoid Installation
2. Special Talent
3. Combat Engineer
4. Landing Boat
5. Scout
6. Commander
7. Marauder
8. Empty Aircar
9. Humanoid Missile Launcher
10. Humanoid Beam Weapon
11. Humanoid Warrior
12. Humanoid Worker

Warrior Attack Priority

- 1-3 Highest Possible Odds
- 4-6 Largest Number of Targets

Arachnid defense points and Terran casualty points are added together and divided by the number of sector initially occupied by Arachnid hives to find the average point value. The Terran wins if he is able to accomplish his mission objectives in a majority of sectors without having the average point value exceed 100 points.

The Terran must use initial drop procedure for all but his Combat Engineers and Special Talents—which must enter via soft landing. The player may use as many landing boats as desired so long as no more than two are on planet at any one time. He need not predesignate turns of arrival nor hexes for rocket beacons.

Note that the Terran may play as large or as small a game as he desires. If he chooses to drop less than a full platoon, he will only battle as many hives as he has squads. When he does drop a full platoon, the squad landing in the unoccupied sector may assist any other squad in the accomplishment of their mission.

The Missions:

(Quotations from Robert Heinlein's fine novel, *Starship Troopers*)

The missions are arranged in order of increasing difficulty. It is generally easier to destroy the contents of a hive (usually by destroying the combat brain itself) than to retrieve a prisoner.

Mission One: "Burn 'em Down"

*Bugs, Mr. Rico! Zillions of 'em!
I'm a-burning 'em down!*

Your Objective: Destroy every beam and warrior in this sector.

Mission Two: "Get 'em Alive!"

He had captured a brain Bug and was using its bloated body as a shield. He could not get out, but they could not attack him without (quite literally) committing suicide by hitting their own brain.

Your Objective: Capture the brain in this sector, and transfer him off-planet via landing boat. (Yes, Bugs will fire at a Terran carrying a brain, once that brain is on the surface. If hit, the brain is not hurt.)

Mission Three: "Bring 'em Back!"

Those who are still alive are waiting, knowing that we will show up. And here we are. Now we go get 'em.

Your Objective: Retrieve at least one prisoner from this sector, and transfer him off-planet via landing boat.

Concluding Remarks

Basically, the Terran must do what every good commander must: accomplish his mission with a minimum of loss—but against a strategy totally alien, and hence seemingly random. This fact will influence his choices from the outset. Heavily-armed Terran troopers will certainly kill Bugs, but they are also prone to higher casualty ratios. On the planet surface, the Terran is confronted with many tasks and several difficult decisions in a short space of time. He must blast surface threats, chase down worker units, and invariably go underground in order to accomplish his mission. He will find it difficult to do all of this and retrieve his boys inside the twelve-turn limit. If he does go underground before blasting most of the beams, warriors and even lowly workers in a sector, he may find himself not only fighting at a disadvantage in the tunnels, but will also watch helplessly as Arachnid breach points mount. If he goes underground too late, he may never get off the planet. All in all it is a tense contest. The solitary trooper will not find it easy standing alone against the Bugs.

