

One of the things I liked about the original *Serenity* Role Playing Game was the idea of the “ship as character” — a notion copped from Joss Whedon’s comment about *Serenity* being the “ninth character” of the ensemble in *Firefly*. It’s an idea that holds through most of the science fiction series — *Enterprise* is as much a character as Kirk or Spock in *Star Trek*, *Millennium Falcon* is the same in *Star Wars*, a character in her own way as an extension of Han Solo; *Argo* or more correctly *Yamato*, has her own character and qualities in *Star Blazers* or *Space Battleship Yamato*. *Galactica* is much like England in the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* — an extension of Adama much like the country was King Arthur.

In the Cortex Plus games, the ship would be more of an asset — a mechanic to aid the characters — rather than a character herself. (In the new *Firefly* RPG, the ships are reduced to the physical and mental stats of vehicles from *Serenity* RPG...) I prefer the older system, personally.

Here are some generalized Cortex spacecraft rules, losing the more specific fuel, range, and cargo attributes from *Serenity* RPG. The typical range for vessels would be between d2 and d12, but could go as large as d12+d12:

SHIP ATTRIBUTES:

AGILITY is the maneuverability of the craft, not her raw speed:

Agility	Description	Example
d2	Unresponsive or basic maneuverability systems	Space stations like Babylon 5, DS9
d4	Ungainly, slow to maneuver	Space liners, battlestar, heavy cargo ship
d6	Average maneuverability	Heavy raider, medium cargo ships & liners
d8	Good maneuverability	Light cargo ships, raptors, slow fighters
d10	Exceptional maneuverability	Vipers, Starfuries, etc.
d12	Ludicrous maneuverability	Cylon raiders, other “no way” fast ships

SPEED CLASS: While not an attribute, it covers the relative speeds of craft in a setting. You can set this to whatever you want. In *Serenity* and *Battlestar Galactica*, Speed Class up to 12 has been seen. If you were running a *Star Trek* campaign, you might set it at the Warp Factor the ship can maintain. You could have “jump capable” or other FTL systems that are used as a Trait, or — as in *Battlestar Galactica* — are separate from the Speed Class.

In a space-setting chase, the higher Speed Class will eventually escape or catch the opposition. Where maneuvering is needed — say, a chase through an asteroid field — you could give a die step(s) to the Agility of the faster vessel.

STRENGTH is a function of the size of the ship and her ability to take damage. You could base your ship’s strength on her mass, as in *Serenity* or based on an appropriate example:

Agility	Description	Examples
d2	10-100 tons	Escape pods, small shuttles
d4	100-1000 tons	Small transports, shuttles
d6	1000-10,000 tons	Light & medium transports, liners, etc.
d8	10,000-100,000	Large transports, light military destroyer, Space battleship <i>Yamato (Argo)</i>
d10	100,000 to 1 million tons	Original show <i>Enterprise</i> , Large transports, Alliance warship
d12	1-10 million tons	Light battlestars, basestars, USS <i>Excelsior</i> , Babylon 5
d12+d2	10-50 million tons	
d12+d4	50-100 million tons	<i>Galactica</i>
d12+d6	100-500 million tons	<i>Pegasus</i> , <i>Enterprise D</i>
d12+d8	500 million-1 billion tons	Federation Spacedock or other megastructures

VITALITY represents the maintenance and repair status of the vessel. This can be reduced if the vessel is not appropriately maintained:

Agility	Description
d2	Barely holding together, prone to regular breakdowns.
d4	In need of regular repair. Ex. <i>Millenium Falcon</i> .
d6	Performs well with regular maintenance.
d8	New model or built well enough to require low maintenance. Ex. TOS <i>Enterprise</i>
d10	Good design with multiple redundancies. Ex. TNG <i>Enterprise</i>
d12	Auto-repair systems. Ex. Minbari or Vorlon cruiser, <i>Moya</i> , Culture ships

ALERTNESS covers the range, power, and accuracy of a ship's communications and sensor suites:

Agility	Description	Examples
d2	Rudimentary: radio, telescope, etc.	<i>Gemini</i> spacecraft, escape pods
d4	Basic: RADAR/LIDAR, etc.	Most basic civilian spacecraft

Agility	Description	Examples
d6	Average	Standard commercial ships
d8	Good	Average military vessels
d10	Excellent	Listening posts, exploration ships
d12	Amazing enough to be magic	TNG and later <i>Star Trek</i>

INTELLIGENCE represents the ship's computational abilities, guidance systems, etc. In transhuman or other setting with self-aware vessels, "sentience" starts at d6 or higher:

Agility	Description	Examples
d2	Basic: minor course corrections, online manuals	<i>Gemini, Apollo</i> space capsules
d4	Substandard: some automation	NASA Space shuttle, life pods
d6	Average: auto-pilot and auto-course calculation	Most commercial ships (basic sci-fi ship)
d8	Good: Low AI autopilot, good computer records	Light cargo ships, raptors, slow fighters
d10	Exceptional: AI-level control systems	HAL9000, <i>Enterprise D</i>
d12	Sentient or near sentient	Basestars, Vorlon cruisers, Shadow ships

WILLPOWER is a representation of the redundancies and other safety features built into the vessel, but could also represent the Willpower of ship "mind" in sentient craft:

Agility	Description	Examples
d2	Rudimentary	Auxiliary life support, little else
d4	Basic: some backup systems, compartmented	Cheap commercial and civilian ships
d6	Average: redundant systems and auto-sealing of compartments. Functions with light damage.	Most commercial and civil ships
d8	Good: multiple auxiliary systems. Function maintained with moderate damage.	Expensive civilian ships, older military vessels.
d10	Excellent: functions after significant damage.	Most military vessels.
d12	Amazing: modular design, multiple redundancies.	Borg vessels. Large space stations.

DERIVED ATTRIBUTES:

LIFE POINTS: A vessel's life points are based on Strength+Willpower.

RELIABILITY: This is the general maintenance health of a vessel and is Vitality and Willpower. When exposed to strange phenomenon, damage, or other factors, roll the Endurance of a vessel to see if there is a malfunction. If failed, give the vessel either Stun damage equal to the number failed by, or if it is some kind of physical threat, do Basic damage equal to the miss. Assume some kind of catastrophic failure requiring player character action on a botch.

SPEED CLASS: This is covered just after the Agility chart.

ARMOR: This could also represent "shields" or "screens" or some force field technology that protects a vessel. There are two kinds of armor — Wound and Stun. Any category of damage sustained is reduced by the appropriate armor rating. It is applied to any damage sustained (ex. the PC's ship take two hits from two different vessels. Both hits are reduced by the Armor rating before being applied to the vessel.)

VEHICLE OR SPACECRAFT TRAITS:

ALLURE (Asset d2, d4): The ship is particularly attractive and this can add to social tests involving the vessel.

BIOMECHANICAL (Asset, d2-d6): The vehicle is a combination of the biological and mechanical. It can repair itself over time, with Stun repairing as per characters at a point an hour or rest; Wounds, however, take much longer -- a wound point is repaired per week, once the craft has passed it's RESISTANCE test (VITALITY+VITALITY) and begun to heal. Most modern Cylon craft will have this.

BRANDED (Complication d2, d4): The vessel is notorious for some reason, and the complication factors into social situations the ship or her crew are known.

CONSTRUCTION FACILITIES (Starship asset, d2-d6): The vessel can construct the number of planetcraft equal to its die rating a week (assuming it has the materials to build the craft in question. At d6, the machine shops are so good that with the proper raw materials, parts and vehicles can be constructed.

DIFFICULT TO REPAIR (Complications, d2, d4): The vessel is either overly complicated, has parts that are uncommon, or in some other way is a royal pain in the butt to keep running. This adds to repair and maintenance tests difficulties.

DULL SENSE (Complication d2-d6): The vessel has some kind of limitation to its sensor suite — maybe a limited scanning angle or spectrum, or blind spot.

ENHANCED PERCEPTION (Spacecraft Asset, d2, d4): The vessel has its DRADIS and other sensors acting together as an interferometer to increase the acuity of the sensors. Add to vessel perception tests.

EVERYONE HAS ONE/MASS-PRODUCED (Complication d2): The vessel is a common make and this can be used against them during a fight, as everyone knows the weak spots.

FAST THROTTLE (Asset, d2, d4): The vessel is particularly quick off the line, accelerating or decelerating faster than most vessels. In a chase, this is added to the operator's test to flee or catch a vessel.

FUEL EFFICIENT (Asset d4): Uses less fuel than normal; add a quarter of the standard operational time.

GAS GUZZLER (Complication d4): Uses more fuel than normal. Reduce the operational time by a quarter.

HANGAR QUEEN (Complication, d4): This vehicle is either a bad design, a Monday-morning build, or is beautifully designed and constructed, but finicky as hell (think a Ferrari...start it up and you need a valve job.) Anytime the vehicle is used it requires a Mechanical Engineering/Maintenance or Repair test, or it incurs d4S.

LOVED (Asset d4): Any member of the crew can spend plot points to improve a ship's dice pool, the outcome of a roll, reduce damage, etc.

MEMORABLE (Complication d4): The vessel is a design or has some feature, like a specific electronic signature, that makes it more easily identifiable. Adds to difficulty of cover tests involving the vessel.

MODIFIED AI (Asset, d2-d6): Cylons often find it easier to retrofit existing Colonial vehicles with a biomechanical brain and control systems. This means previously "dead" machines can operate independent of a crew (but still require maintenance from one.) If an enemy could destroy this "brain", they could once again use the vehicle.

NBC HARDENED (Planetcraft Asset, d4): The vehicle is pressurized higher than that of the surrounding air to keep out nuclear/biological/chemical hazards. It is also constructed to minimize radioactive exposure.

PAST ITS PRIME or **SEEN BETTER DAYS** (Complication d2, d4): Adds to maintenance difficulty or a ship's Endurance test. In a campaign where cost of repairs is a factor, the cost is 25% and 50% respectively.

SHORT RANGED (Spacecraft Complication, d4): The vessel is not designed for deep space operations and has neither the fuel, air, nor victuals to operate beyond up to an SU from its base of operations.

SLOW RESPONSE (Spacecraft Complication, d2-d6): The vessel either does not have magcat capabilities or they are limited (as in the Erynis-class.) At d2, only half of the fighter complement can be launched at a time, d4, a quarter, and at d6 a tenth of the fighter complement per turn. (I'm thinking of getting rid of the d6 and making this a d2, d4.)

SLOW THROTTLE (Flaw d2, d4): The vehicle is too heavy, underpowered, or suffers from some other design flaw that makes it slower to handle than other craft. This adds to the difficulty to flee or catch another vessel in a chase.

STEALTHY (Personal or Planetcraft Asset, d2, d4): The design of the craft, the color, or the DRADIS absorbent paint makes it hard to see or scan for. Add the rating to the difficulty of to spot the vehicle.

WORKHORSE (Asset, d4): The thing is built to last. Mechanical Engineering/Repair tests have a step up to the skill die, it's so easy to maintain.

SHIP SKILLS:

Ships with good enough systems might have "skills" that the vessel could use when on auto-pilot, or other automated systems. The skills cannot exceed the Intelligence of the ship.

Table 1.7: Ship Skills	
Athletics (I prefer to just use Pilot for this)	Collision avoidance systems

Covert	Stealth systems or defensive Electronic Warfare
Heavy Weapons	Auto targeting systems
Knowledge	Library or databases
Mechanical Engineering	Interactive maintenance manuals or self-repair systems.
Perception	Sensor or internal security monitoring systems
Pilot	Auto-pilot and navigation

SHIP WEAPONRY:

It's pretty standard for ships to be armed in most sci-fi universes. Even the allegedly "peaceful" *Star Trek* universe saw shuttles and transports with rudimentary defensive firepower.

SCALE: There are three scales in most Cortex games — personal, vehicular or planetcraft, and spacecraft (with could also be used for large watercraft like battleships and aircraft carriers.) The scaling between these is 1 to 10 (planetcraft weapons would have to do 10 points to do 1 point of spacecraft scale; 1 point of damage spacecraft scale is 100 points personal or 10 points planet craft scale.)

Due to the disparity of power, it's recommended that there be some kind of penalty for targeting larger scale weapons on smaller vehicles. Traditionally, it's much harder for a capital ship to hit starfighters in space opera than vice-versa, and to hit a single person on the ground, even more so (other than the assumed area effect a photon torpedo or turbolaser would have on impact.)

To remedy this, capital vessel might have planet scale weapons, like the point defense batteries on *Galactica*, or the Aegis system on a modern aircraft carrier, to defend themselves form missiles and fighter craft.

There is a vehicle weapons chart on page 78 of the *Cortex System Role Playing Game* book, but for our purposes, we are basing our damage system on the *Battlestar Galactica* RPG (original versions of these charts are on pages 133-135.)

GUNS: This is a catch-all for weapons that shoot something at a target. They could be bullet, plasma beams, lasers, or phasers — they fire something in a straight-line at the "bad guys." In a more realistic campaign, a directed energy weapon would most likely have some kind of bonus to hit because of the speed at which the weapon moves, but in terms of game mechanics there's no real difference between kinetic kill and directed energy weapons, save range — in an atmosphere, lasers would have a Distant (Short DRADIS) range, in space a Long DRADIS range.

Scale	Weapon Type	Example	Range	Damage
Planetcraft	Light	.50 cal machinegun	Personal	d4W

Scale	Weapon	Example	Range	Damage
Planetcraft	Medium	20-40mm Autocannon	Skirmish	d8W
	Heavy	60mm-100mm anti-aircraft or tank cannons	Skirmish	d12W
Spacecraft	Light	4"-8" naval cannons; light railgun	Skirmish	d4W
		Light railguns battery	Capital	d6W
	Medium	10-12" naval cannons; medium railgun	Capital	d8W
		Medium railgun battery	Distant (Short DRADIS)	d10W
Heavy	14"+ naval cannon; heavy railgun	Distant	d12W	
	Heavy railgun battery	Distant	d12+d2W	

As you might note, a battery of cannons or railguns does a step up in damage. If a vessel were able to bring multiple batteries to bear (with either a successful Tactics or Pilot/Planetary Vehicle test), the GM could give another step up (or down, if in the course of play the batteries are damaged or not able to come to bear, or multiple targets are engaged by the batteries.

Scale	Weapon	Example	Range	Damage
Planetcraft	Light	Light anti-aircraft missile	Skirmish	d8W
	Medium	Medium anti-aircraft missile	Skirmish	d12W
	Heavy	Heavy anti-aircraft missile	Capital	d12+d4W
Spacecraft	Light	Anti-ship missile (can be carried on planetcraft)	Skirmish	d8W
	Medium	Anti-ship missile	Distant (Short DRADIS)	d12W
	Heavy	Tactical-level conventional missiles, kiloton yield	Distant	d12+d4W
	Extreme	Atomic/nuclear payload, 100-500 kilotons; light photon torpedo-like weapons	Distant (Short DRADIS)	d12+d6W
	Extreme	Nuclear payload, megaton yields; quantum torpedo-like weapons	Extreme (Long DRADIS)	d12+d8W

Missile weapons may be dumb (continuing in a straight-line until they run out of fuel), or guided in some manner. If a target manages to evade impact from a missile through electronic warfare. Using evasion, a target must continue to evade for another two turns at an AVERAGE difficulty (unless the GM wants to keep things simple and brief...)