

## **ASL Starter Kit Solitaire Rules (simple) review**

*First of all: I'm Italian, I'm not used to write in English, I will do a lot of mistakes, sure.*

*This simple review is my first ever. I played ASL in the 90s, solitaire of course, reading the Annuals, reading other magazines and enjoying SASL very much. I played little, I was a dancer and I had so little time to play, but it was enough and I was happy. In 1998 my little son (just 10 months old, at that time) was struck by a very rare bacterial infection, he was about to die for a long time, he survived in the end, but my life was completely dedicated to him for years and I haven't played ASL since. However, I continued to buy ASL products, reading the Journals and reading, just reading, the Starter Kits rules.*

*I'm sorry for this introduction, I think it was necessary for you to understand that I am an inexperienced ASL player, but I'm not even a beginner, I think.*

*So, to write the following notes about ASL Starter Kit Solitaire I played a scenario about 20 years after my last ASL game (it was SASL).*

*The scenario I chose to play using the Solitaire Rules by Mr. Peter Kossits is ASL S9 "Ambitious Assault" (Italians, of course...).*

*I will not write a series replay because I'm not able to, I will just discuss briefly the rules giving my very personal and modest thoughts.*

*I apologize since now if you will read something inappropriate.*

The ASL Starter Kit Solitaire Rules is, obviously, a set of guidelines to play Starter Kit scenarios solitaire, but not only Starter Kit scenarios, I think. It uses a deck of 40 cards to help the solo player. The AI opponent is called the BOT.

In the first pages of the rules there are some Terms and Concepts explained: if you haven't read these rules yet, I suggest to pay particular attention to the Normalized Firepower concept.

I had some difficulty understanding and applying the Normalized Firepower (NFP) concept. To obtain the Normalized Firepower in an attack you have to consider the FP of the squad/stack and compute it with the eventual modifiers. Read the examples on pages 3 and 4.

After the Terms and Concepts there is a description of how the Cards are used to determine BOT actions. The Cards will be used in different situations and different ways depending on the game phases, be careful reading this section.

There are also some guidelines about how to setup a scenario, both by considering the BOT as a Defender and as an Attacker.

Here, on page 7 of the rules, I found that it is suggested to assign SW, starting with the SW with the highest FP, to the highest quality squad and so on. I preferred to assign the HMG and MMG to half squads, which is more realistic, at least for me. In any case, these rules got a fairly realistic setup for the Italians.

After setup I have started the scenario playing the Italians with the BOT rules; then, after a couple of turns, I have played the Allies with the BOT rules for another couple of turns. The last turns I played both Italians and Allies with the BOT rules.

But, let's see how the BOT behaves, phase by phase.

### **Rally Phase**

BOT's management in this phase is simple. The rules suggest to transfer MGs from HS to full squad, but I didn't do that.

## **Prep Fire Phase**

The rules indicate how to decide which shots can take the BOT and how; this is done using the cards and considering the NF (Normalized Firepower). It is possible that the Italians don't take so many shots, because they are deployed single squad by single squad, the Americans are well protected by the stone buildings and the NF indicated in the cards is often too much for the poor Italian squads. This will be the same for the entire scenario duration. If we want to compare this with reality, it is perfectly possible that some squad was too poorly led or too stressed to be able to fire, so here the Normalized Firepower concept works well, I think.

## **Movement Phase**

The rules for the Movement Phase are long, at least for me, and they are full of cases to consider before deciding in which hex the BOT units will move.

Here we read about "objectives" towards which to move; they can be real objectives defined in the scenario victory conditions, more often simply enemy occupied hexes.

The rules cover both the case in which the BOT moves (pages from 12 to 19) and the case in which the BOT's opponent moves (pages 19-20). There are some guidelines for off board entry, but I didn't follow them.

In short, when the BOT moves, the rules indicate to choose between 1 to 4 "candidate" hexes and then, for each hex the BOT decides to move to, you have to draw a card: if the NF requirements on this card aren't satisfied, the BOT can move to the hex chosen, but then the enemy can Defensive First Fire...

This procedure for the BOT's Movement is very much thought without doubt, but I didn't even realize if I have understood it well and I found it very time consuming.

When the BOT's opponent moves, it is much more simply a matter of deciding when to Defensive First Fire, draw a card and see if the NF requirements are met. It's more or less the same as the PFPh. There are some very short suggestions about Subsequent First Fire and Final Protective Fire, but I didn't consider them.

Also there are some guidelines about how the BOT leaders behave, those too are not so obvious.

I had a hard time managing these rules, they disoriented me, but, as I said, I didn't play since a lot of time...

Talking about movement in the scenario I played, the Italians are already in bad conditions from the beginning, they cannot move so freely and have been torn to pieces by the Allies when they decided to do some risky move, which I tried to do on purpose.

### **Defensive Fire Phase**

Here too you find a series of guidelines about choosing which enemy unit or stack to Defensive Fire against: find a Valid Shot, then chose the Most Economic Shot, then draw a card and see if the BOT does fire or not. It is a procedure similar to the Prep Fire Phase, but with a difference: while in PFPh the BOT units in a stack have to fire together against an enemy unit/stack, here in DFPh the BOT units in a stack can fire to different targets.

The Italians took some good shot in the scenario I played, routing in a couple of situations some American and British unit, this happened when I played both sides with the BOT rules, but it could have been happened in any case.

### **Advancing Fire Phase**

The rules themselves say the BOT behavior is the same as for the DFPh.

In my game the American AFPh was devastating for the Italians, thanks to the Assault Fire Capability of the Paratroopers.

## **Rout Phase**

The guidelines here are very simple. The BOT never risk Interdiction, will rout to hexes with the highest TEM and will choose Rout Continuation, if possible.

In the scenario the Italians had almost ever a very bad time during the rout, their squads have been eliminated for failure to rout in some situations, when they had not already badly treated by enemy fire.

## **Advancing Phase**

Regarding this phase you will find at page 23 a little table which will help the BOT in deciding about advancing in CC or not, as well as regarding whether to advance or not, in general.

In the game this Phase was really applied only by the Allies, the Italians had very few occasions to advance in good hexes.

## **Close Combat Phase**

Here the rules help the BOT to decide in which situations and with which odds it will have a CC.

Not even to say it, in the scenario I played, the Italians where completely annihilated in the CCs in which they found themselves.

## Conclusions

The scenario I played is a bad thing for the Italians since the beginning, and the Allies have won without problems.

Playing with the BOT rules wasn't so easy, I didn't play for many years, as I said, and I had to remember the Starter Kit rules learning at the same time these Solitaire Rules. I've tried various tactics, even very aggressive, for both sides, sometimes the results have been surprisingly realistic, even when I have played with the BOT rules for both the opponents, with some very interesting situations, which I have remembered to have read in some of my WW2 books. This is war, a simulated war but war after all, in war nothing is taken for granted and playing with the BOT rules you don't have the control which the omniscient player has normally in ASL Starter Kit, as well as normal ASL.

This is, to my very personal and modest opinion, the limit of ASL in general: too much freedom is given to the player, but I don't want to criticize, I don't have the experience to do it and I still love this game, even if I didn't play it for many years.

I just love to play solo, not only ASL, but any game I have the chance to play in the short time I still have today. Playing solitaire is the biggest satisfaction for me, because I don't like competition, simply, and for me playing this game with the BOT rule has been the biggest part of the fun: just letting the scenario flowing, playing it using the BOT rules in the best way for both sides. It was not unrealistic, far from it, it was very close to reality because, after all, the BOT rules are very well thought and the solitaire player can be very satisfied, especially if he/she is an experienced player who can understand and manage the rules much better than I have done.

Every criticism will be appreciated.

Thank you very much.