

# FLEETS

## THE PLEIAD CONFLICT





## Skirmish at Eden

Story by Jacob Fryxelius

Admiral Gerald Hunter was inspecting the scene in front of him through the viewport.

"They can't be serious!" he exclaimed as he gestured towards the vessels below in orbit around Eden.

"It seems that the ThorGate Alliance got the intel as well, sir," his adjutant commented.

"No matter. They're no match for us. I can't believe they would send such a weak fleet here. Ergonia of all things! Even though the protector fleet has left the system, they should realize that they wouldn't have the spoils all to themselves. Perhaps this

is all they could muster on such short notice. Again, no matter. Battle stations, Foss. Prepare to launch fighters."

"Yes, sir!" Foss saluted and turned on his heel to relay the orders.

It would not be long before the Alliance detected Fleet Valiant, but Hunter had made good use of the time they were in planet shadow. He grinned to himself as one light after another blinked green on the console to his left. The Valiant lumbered on towards its prey when the com went live. Hunter switched it on and a Pleiad Council envoy appeared and immediately demanded that Fleet Valiant refrain from hostilities, in the name of the charter. Irritated, but unmoved, Hunter replied, "Not this time, envoy. Eden is unoccupied. I have clearance.

Negotiations are over." According to plan, his superiors and their council friends should have declared Eden unoccupied just a few days ago.

"But, what..." the envoy began before Hunter closed the com. He was so tired of these meddlers that always seemed to get in the way. But not this time.

"Well said, sir," said his adjutant, rejoining him on the bridge. "They will be in range in just a few minutes, sir. What are your orders?"

"Launch fighters and fire at will."

As his fleet prepared for battle and soared forward, Hunter watched the feeble Alliance fleet muster what defenses they had. More transports arrived from the planet surface, and the signatures of pesky ThorGate energy ships formed up with some other vessels in front of Ergonia. Those are new signatures, thought Hunter as his fleet opened fire. Missile streaks and laser beams began to fill the viewport, but immediately bright flashes emerged in their way. Shields! I should have known, thought Hunter. It must be a new design. No matter, though. No shield or energy is going to keep my firepower at bay for long.

"Send the fighters to destroy those shields. Hammer them to pieces," he ordered. "And log that shield ship signature."

Enemy fighters, hopelessly outnumbered, perished as they tried to protect the shield ships. His grin widened as, one after another, the shield ships were destroyed. Then his grin dropped as a green aura began to build around Ergonia and her closest ships.

"No! Blast her! She is escaping!" Hunter bellowed furiously.

But it was too late. Ergonia was gone with all the spoils she could carry. How could she engage the drive so quickly? He never could figure the ThorGate Alliance out. Always some new trickery. At least this time it had cost them a lot of ships, he thought sourly.

"Clean up and then tax that planet. And I don't care that they've already been taxed! Send full reports to my quarters. I'm out."

"Yes, sir," said Foss as he watch admiral Hunter stride away in a furious mood. Better not disturb him for a couple of days. As he watched the scene in front of the Valiant he thought, I'll have enough to do anyway.

# FLEETS

## THE PLEIAD CONFLICT

### Background

In 3400 AD, mankind has colonized the Pleiad star cluster where mighty corporations vie for control and influence. Each player equips fleets with escort ships and upgrades, and uses them to control star systems for victory points. Diplomatic leverage, cunning, and brute force will determine the victor.

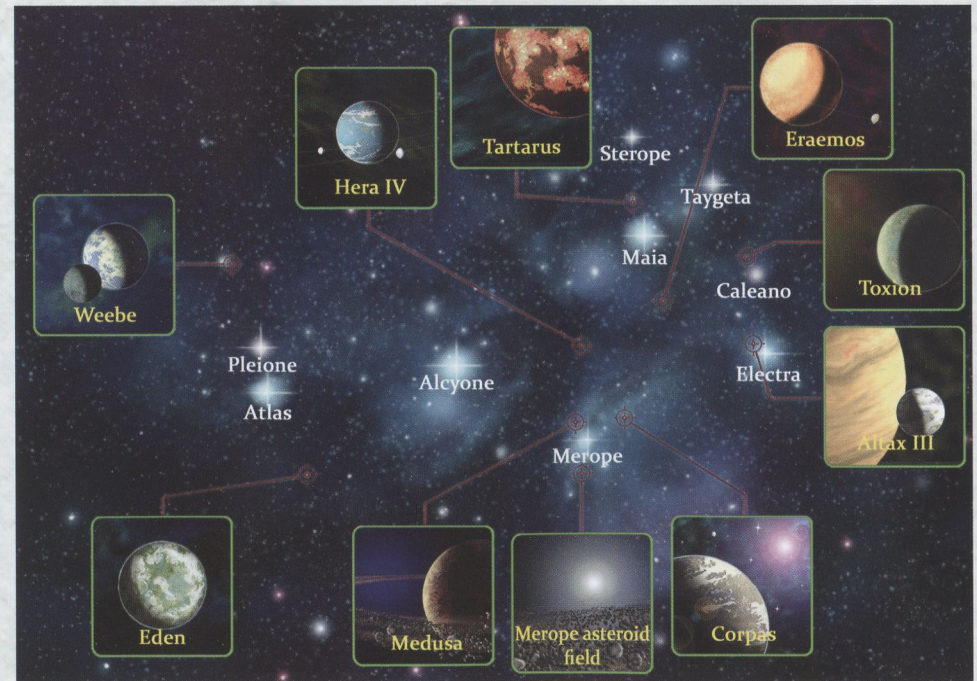
### Goal of the Game

In Fleets - The Pleiad Conflict each player controls a corporation. Each system that is controlled by only one corporation at the end of a round gives 1 Victory Point (VP) to that player. The game ends when any player has 7 (or more) VPs. Then the player with the most VPs wins the game (ties are won by diplomacy points, or total value of possessions if still equal).

**Game variants:** For beginners we recommend playing a shorter game to 5 VPs, where the players start without action cards. For 2 players we always recommend playing to 5 VPs, and switching player order each round instead of randomizing.

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# Game Components

## 74 Escort Ships

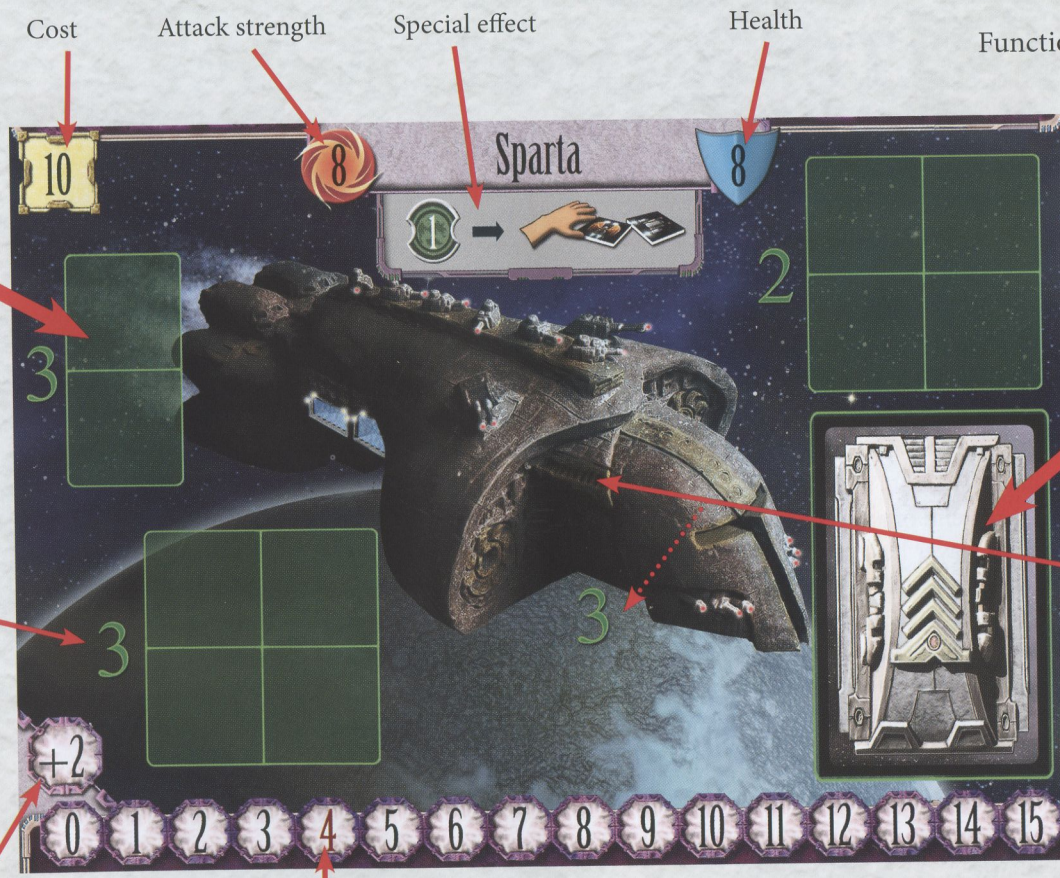
of 8 different types to customize your fleets. Each type has its own cost, size and strength.



Spaces for Escort Ships

## 20 Fleet Boards

each with a Flagship with its own Attack strength and Health. The Fleet Boards also have spaces for Upgrade Cards and Escort Ships, as well as an Energy Track for use in battle actions.



Cost

Attack strength

Special effect

Health

Function

Cost

Initiative Number shows attack order from 1 to 4

Space for Upgrade Card

Flagship (and its initiative number). Put damage markers here if the ship is damaged.



20 Dice for use in battles

Reactor to supply energy



Energy Track starting point



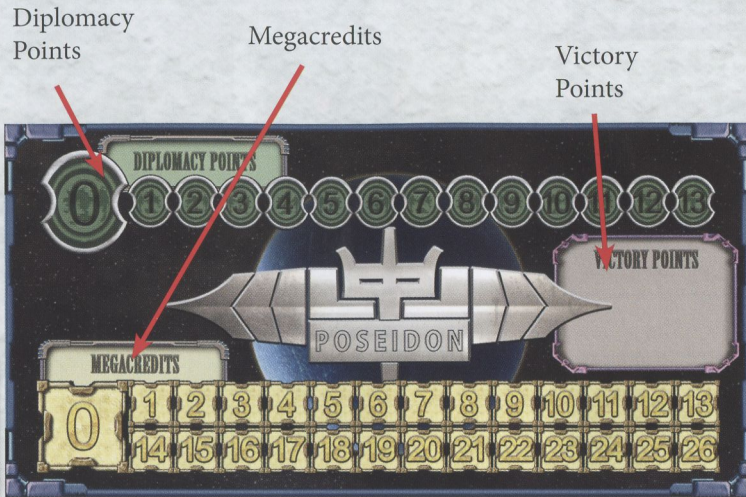
## 60 Markers

to indicate diplomacy points, megacredits, VPs, energy and damage.



### 4 Player Boards

to keep track of players' money (MCs), Diplomacy Points (DPs) and Victory Points (VPs).

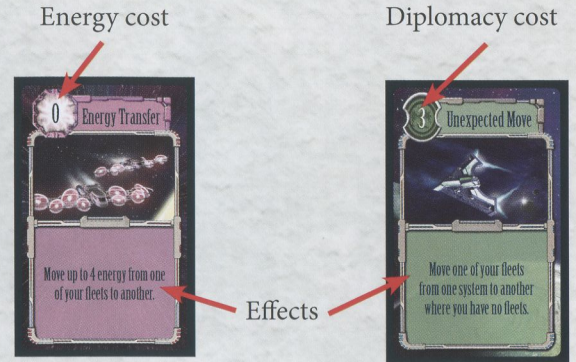


### 1 Rule Book

in which you find a summary of Game Components telling you that a Rule Book is included in the game...

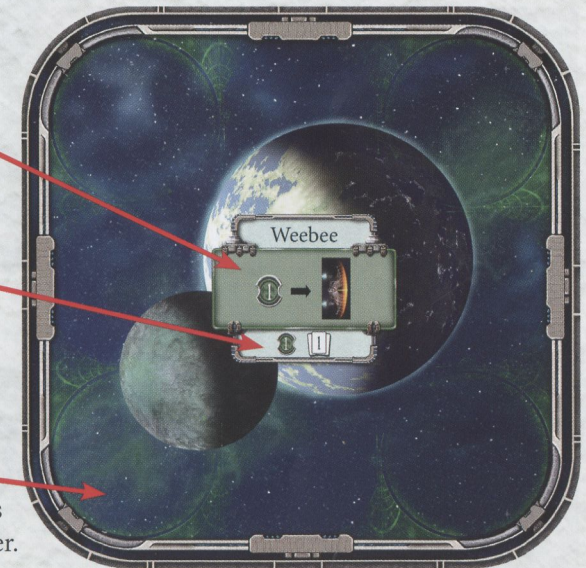
### 58 Action Cards

for use in diplomacy and in battle



### 10 System Tiles

for randomly selecting planets or asteroids



### 4 Player Order Cards

to randomize a new player order each round.



### 20 Fleet Markers

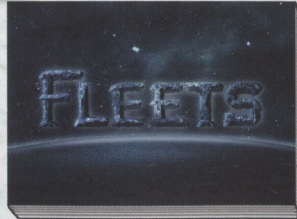
to indicate presence in a system

### 2 Rule Sheets

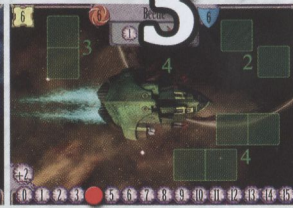
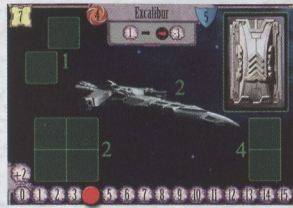
with game summary and ship overview

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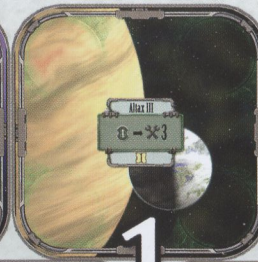
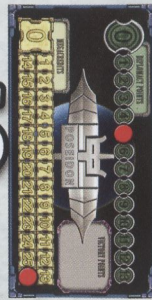


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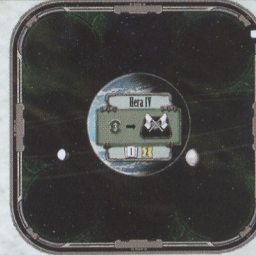
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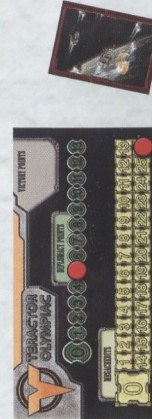
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## Setup

- Game board:** Randomly select as many system tiles as the number of players plus one, for example 5 tiles for 4 players. Place them in the middle of the table. Put the unused system tiles back into the box.
- Action cards:** Shuffle the action cards and put them in a pile face down. Action cards are either diplomacy action cards (green), to be played in the diplomacy phase, or battle action cards (purple), to be played in the battle phase.
- Markets:** Shuffle the fleet boards and upgrade cards (yellow) and place them face down in 2 separate piles. Turn up the top 3 fleets and the top 3 upgrades and place them in 2 rows. These are now the Market and the items can be bought by the players in the build phase. The Market always consists of 3 fleets and 3 upgrades. When someone buys a fleet or an upgrade, it is immediately replaced with the top card from the corresponding pile. A fleet or an upgrade that is destroyed in combat is placed at the bottom of the corresponding pile, and may thus be available again in the market later on (see Phase 5 - Battle).
- Nice piles of stuff:** Sort out markers, escort ships, fleet markers, player order cards, and dice into separate piles and make them easily accessible for all players.
- Player Boards:** Each player gets a player board, representing a corporation, and 2 markers. Each player starts with 26 megacredits, 5 diplomacy points and 1 action card.

## The Corporations

*In the Pleiades, there are 4 major corporations that players can choose to control. These have been the main actors in the colonization of the Pleiades and are now both wealthy and strong, controlling their own battle fleets. The rivalry between these giants has now escalated into open warfare... Will your corporation be the victor?*

### PhoboLog

*The first corporation to reach the Pleiades, PhoboLog got a head start and is now in a position to challenge even the strongest competitors. PhoboLog specializes in ship building and space technology.*

### The ThorGate Alliance

*Energy giant ThorGate arrived in the Pleiades, forging a strong alliance with lesser factions, making them one of the top contenders for power in the Pleiades. Many planets and corporations are dependent on ThorGate energy technology.*

### Teractor-Olympiac

*A conglomerate of several martian and earth-based corporations after the terraforming of Mars, Teractor-Olympiac are great colonizers and terraformers, as well as being one of the strongest corporations in history.*

### Poseidon

*Weapon technology and money is a powerful combination. Poseidon is poised to strike and claim whatever they can in the Pleiades. Several planets have already surrendered to their rule.*



## Round Overview

We are ready to start. Each round consists of six phases where the players will be able to build fleets, deploy their fleets, use diplomacy, then battle, and finally collect VPs and other rewards. Finally all players withdraw their fleets and start a new round.

The round consists of these phases:

1. Player order
2. Building
3. Deployment
4. Diplomacy
5. Battle
6. Rewards



## Phase 1: Player Order



Each round will have a new, randomized player order. Shuffle the player order cards and hand them out. This determines the player order during the different phases, always starting with player number 1, then number 2, and so on.

There are different advantages to being early or late in the player order. For example, during battle it's good to be early, because your ships may act first in each initiative stage. On the other hand, during deployment it's an advantage to see where your opponents place their fleets before you have to place your own.

## Phase 2: Building



During the building phase the corporations construct, buy, and organize their fleets. The players first take turns buying fleets and upgrades, and then equips their fleets simultaneously:

### 1) Buy fleets and upgrades:

The players take turns (following the player order) buying 1 item at a time from the market. For fleets, pay the cost (in the yellow box) for the fleet, then take it from the market along with the corresponding fleet marker. Place a marker on the starting point (at 4 energy) of the energy track. For upgrade cards, pay the cost (in the yellow box) for the upgrade and place it beside your player board. Fleets and upgrades are immediately replaced with new ones in the market. (Note: A player may not own more fleets than there are systems in the game.)

The players continue to either buy from the market, or pass, until all players have passed consecutively.

### 2) Equip fleets:

All players may then equip their fleets simultaneously (secretly if they wish). Each fleet has a flagship but also spaces where you can place escort ships and upgrades. Different escort ships have different sizes and must also be placed facing to the right, (same as the flagship). This means, for example, that a cruiser (that takes up 2 spaces horizontally) cannot fit

in a single space, or in a double space that is vertical, but it may fit into a horizontal double space, or take up 2 spaces in a 4-space box (the 2 remaining spaces may be filled with other ships; see example). Buy as many ships as you like by paying their cost (see the yellow boxes on the rule sheets) and put them on empty spaces on your fleet boards.

Upgrades and escort ships may be placed and rearranged within a fleet during the building phase, but they may never be moved to other fleets. Once they are built they belong to that fleet. You may also discard ships and upgrades from a fleet, if you like, but you get no money back.

When all players are finished building, move on to the deployment phase.

Tip: It's often a good idea to have defensive escort ships, such as interceptors and shield ships, or your enemies may fire directly on your flagship to destroy it!



Example: A fully equipped fleet.



## Phase 3: Deployment



During the deployment phase, all players take turns placing their fleet markers on the systems they want to control this round. Each fleet that you own must be placed on a system tile, and you may only place 1 fleet in each system, so you have to spread out your fleets.

The first player chooses a system tile and places one of his fleet markers on it. Then player 2 places one of his fleet markers in a system, and so on. All players take turns deploying 1 fleet at a time until all fleets are deployed. Remember to place your fleets in your “own” corners on the system tiles, so that it’s easy to see which fleet belongs to which player.

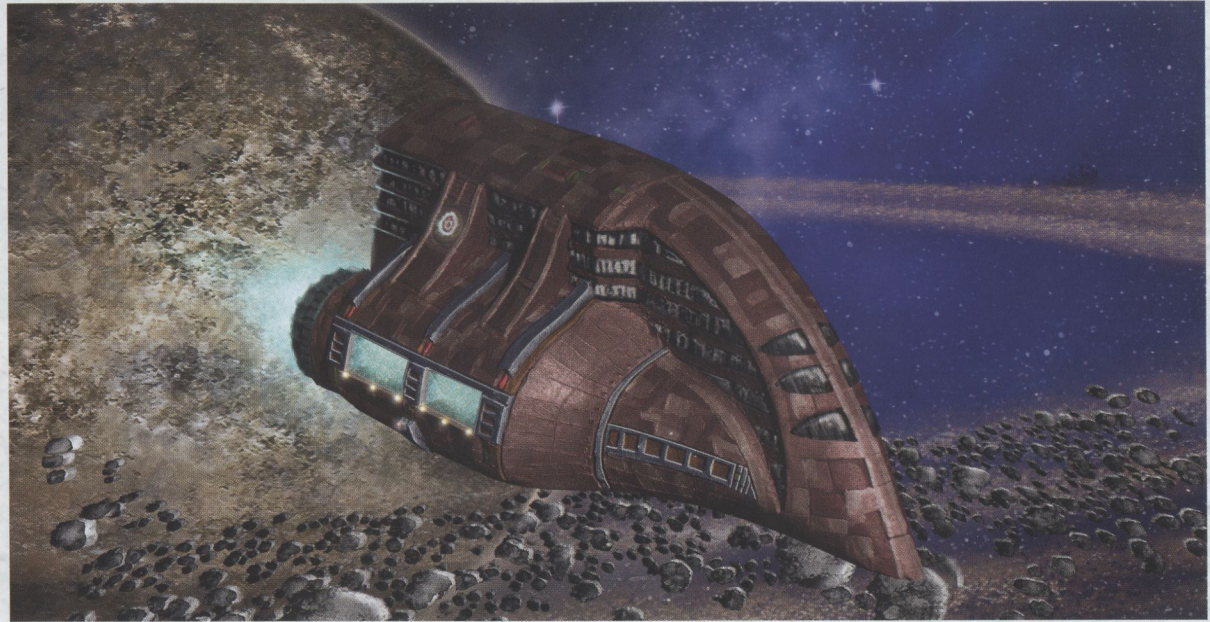
If 2 or more fleets are deployed on the same system tile, there will be a battle between them. But before that happens, the diplomacy phase may change the situation...

## Phase 4: Diplomacy



The players take turns doing 1 diplomatic action at a time. You may choose from the following actions:

- \* If you have a fleet on a system, you may use that system’s **special diplomacy effect** (only once per player and round).
- \* If any of your fleets have a **diplomacy effect**, you may use it. (Only once per fleet. Only a few fleets have diplomacy effects. Look for the green diplomacy icon.)
- \* Play a **diplomacy action card** (and pay the DPs indicated by the green icon).



\* Pay 2 DPs to **withdraw** one of your own fleets (back to your hand).

\* Pay 6 DPs to **force an opponent’s fleet to withdraw** from a system (back to his hand). You must have a fleet of your own in that system to force your opponent to leave.

\* Pay 2 DPs to **tax a system** where you have a fleet. Gain the rewards for that system. Each system may only be taxed once per diplomacy phase (use markers). A taxed system still gives rewards during the rewards phase.

\* You may **pass** and let the next player continue. On your next turn you may jump in again with an action if you like.

When all players have passed consecutively, the diplomacy phase ends.

### *Paving the way*

Story by Jacob Fryxelius

*Delegate Wosan was retreating to his chambers to change his clothes. They were damp with sweat, and no wonder – not only was the Pleiad Council Hall on Olympus suffocatingly hot, but the vote had been a tough one too! Still, they had made it, he thought with satisfaction.*

*Aridor, a sure supporter of opening Eden up for corporate action, had suddenly turned around and voted against it, arguing that the protector fleet was only temporarily away for maintenance. Wosan had depended on Aridor and on the vote to go though! The Valiant was even now on its way to Eden to claim it. But then a last-minute bribe to ThorGate had worked. ThorGate had voted in favor of the proposition, its allies following suit.*

*The bribe had been almost too easy, but Wosan didn’t worry too much about that since it had saved his own skin. Whew! Yes, he definitely needed a shower. And a massage. He was looking forward to the evening reception.*

## Phase 5: Battle

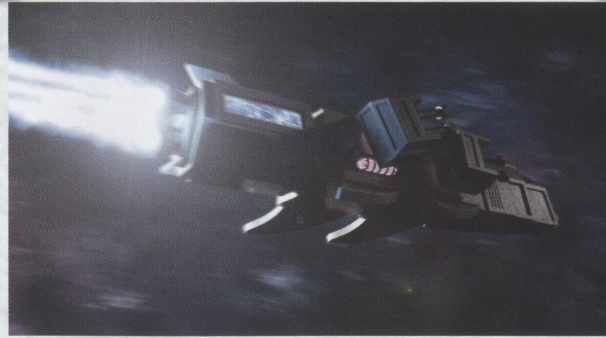


If there is more than one fleet in a system, the fleets will engage in battle. In a battle, each player decides which enemy ships he wants to attack. **Each ship must fire, but may only attack once per battle.** If there are more than two fleets in that system, you must decide if you want to focus on one opponent, or divide your forces between different opposing fleets. You may also choose between attacking the escort ships, going for the flagship, or both. If the flagship of a fleet is destroyed, the fleet is lost and immediately taken out of the game. (See 'Attack')

You may not attack your own ships, or choose not to attack with your ships; every ship must attack an enemy.

If there are battles in more than one system in the same round, the first player in the player order decides in which order to resolve the battles.

**Fleets not in battle:** Fleets that have been withdrawn, or that have no opposition in their systems, are not involved in battles, but you may use any ship effects or flagship effects that do not affect enemy fleets (such as collecting energy or money, or healing damage). Do this before resolving the battles (See Ship Effects). You may not play battle action cards.



**2 Initiative:** The battles are divided into initiative stages. Initiative value for each ship is marked with large green numbers from 1-4 on the fleet board. These numbers indicate when the ships will act during the battle. The players perform their initiative stages one at a time, according to the player order.

There are 4 initiative stages:

**Stage 1:** The first player attacks with all his ships marked with initiative 1. The first player may also play battle action cards and use ship effects before or after firing his ships. Destroyed ships are removed immediately. When the first player is finished, the next player starts his initiative 1. When all players have performed their initiative 1, the battle moves on to stage 2. (Note: It's unusual for ships to have initiative 1. Instead, this stage is mostly an opportunity for the players to use battle action cards before the real fighting begins.)

**Stage 2:** The first player attacks with his ships with initiative 2. He may also play more battle action cards, and use ship effects, if he likes. When he is done, the next player starts his initiative 2, and so on...

**Stage 3:** And so on...

**Stage 4:** And so on...

After stage 4, the battle is over.

To summarize, when two players have ships with the same initiative, the player order decides who fires first. Destroyed ships are removed immediately and may not return fire or use effects.

Some battle action cards or upgrade cards may alter the initiative values temporarily, but initiative may never be lower than 1 or higher than 4.



**Battle Action Cards:** When a player performs his initiative he may also play battle action cards (the engaged fleet pays the energy cost in the purple icon). Even if a player has no ships in that initiative stage, he may still play cards. A player may use his cards and ships in any order he likes, but when the next player has begun his initiative (playing cards, attacking, or using ship effects) it's too late for the first player to play more cards. Only cards marked "reaction" may be played during an opponent's initiative.



## Ship effects

These effects are summarized in the rule sheets. Special effects **may only be used 1 time** per ship and battle (including special effects on flagships).



**Fighter:** Attack 1 - Health 1 (Cost 1)

Special effect: After rolling the die, you may choose to pay one energy from the fleet to add 1 damage to the attack.

*Example: A fighter attacks another fighter but misses. The attacker pays 1 energy to give his opponent's fighter 1 damage, to take it out anyway. Or: A fighter attacks an interceptor and the player rolls a hit. The interceptor has health 2, but by paying 1 energy the attacker will give it the extra damage that will destroy it.*

**Interceptor:** Attack 0 - Health 2 (Cost 1)

Special effect: Reaction - You may pay 2 energy and sacrifice your interceptor to stop an attack. If the attack involves dice, you must decide **before the dice are rolled**.

*Example: The opponent's battleship is attacking your flagship with 6 dice. You decide to stop the attack by paying 2 energy and discarding your interceptor instead. If the dice are already rolled, it's too late to use the interceptor.*

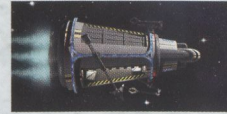


**Cruiser:** Attack 4 - Health 4 (Cost 3)

No special effect.

**Mechanics:** Attack 2 - Health 3 (Cost 3)

Special effect: At the start of a battle, remove 2 damages from any ships in this fleet. Note: The mechanics may remove damages each round, even if the fleet is not involved in battle.



**Shield Escort:** Attack 2 - Health 3 (Cost 3)

Special effect: Reaction - You may pay 1 energy to stop 2 damages to 1 ship in your fleet. This effect is used after the dice are rolled (if dice were used), when you know how many hits your opponent got. Shield Escorts may also shield themselves with this effect.

*Example: An opponent attacks your flagship and gets 7 hits on their dice. You pay 1 energy to take away 2 damages, so your flagship "only" gets 5 damages instead, and survives. Or: A fighter attacks your shield escort and gets 2 hits (using his special effect). Instead of taking the damages, you decide to pay 1 energy to prevent it.*

**Generator:** Attack 2 - Health 3 (Cost 3)

Special effect: When the generator attacks, your fleet gets 2 extra energy.

Note: Generators generate energy each round, even if the fleet is not involved in battle.



**Battleship:** Attack 6 - Health 5 (Cost 5)

Special effect: Besides its attack, you may pay 3 energy to shoot 2 missiles at 2 different targets. The missiles count as 2 separate attacks. Each target gets 2 damages. Missiles may be launched before or after the normal attack but in the same initiative stage.

*Example: You want to attack a flagship with your battleship. You start by firing 2 missiles to take out the 2 interceptors. One of the interceptors is blown apart but the other interceptor is saved by an enemy shield escort. Rats! you think. Then you try to attack the flagship with 6 dice, but your opponent throws away his interceptor to stop the attack before you roll the dice. I'll get him next time, you think.*



**Refinery:** Attack 3 - Health 5 (Cost 5)

Special effect: When it attacks, you may pay 4 energy to get 4 MCs. Note: You can use the refinery effect each round, even if the fleet is not involved in battle.

**About energy:** It's important to have energy in a fleet to be able to use the ship effects and play battle action cards. Without energy enough to use your interceptors, for example, your flagship is an open target. Moving energy between fleets (except by using certain battle action cards) is not allowed, and you may only use the energy of the fleet that is involved in the battle.

**Attack:** When a player attacks with a ship he first chooses a target and then rolls as many dice as the ship's attack strength. It is important to clearly state which ship attacks and which ship it targets, and to give the opponent a chance to react with cards or interceptors before dice are rolled. **Each die showing 4 or more represents 1 hit**, and damage is marked on the ship with red markers. (Note that some effects in the game may alter the die values temporarily.)

*Example: A player points at his cruiser and says: "This cruiser attacks that battleship", and points at an opponent's battleship. His cruiser has attack strength 4, so he rolls 4 dice. The dice show numbers 1, 2, 5, and 5, which counts as 2 misses and 2 hits. The opponent puts 2 damage markers on his battleship.*

If a ship gets damages equal to or more than its health, it is destroyed and immediately removed from the game. If a fleet's flagship is destroyed, then the whole fleet is immediately defeated and removed from the battle. In that case the fleet board and upgrade cards are turned face down and placed at the bottom of the market piles. Escort ships that are not damaged return to the player and may later be placed in other fleets during a building phase. Damaged ships are discarded.



## Debacle

Story by Jacob Fryxelius

"Bank left, Ziggy! There – I got him. Close call."

"Thanks, Myon. We'd better... Hey! They're targeting Ezreel! Where are our interceptors? No!"

Their flagship was big, but so was the enemy fleet, and now they could see Ezreel's shields flickering and failing under the heavy bombardment. Helplessly they watched the flagship die, huge chunks being blown off into space. No! We're lost! Ziggy felt despair begin to squeeze his heart. His home these last six years, blown to pieces, along with many of his friends.

Numbed, he was dragged back to reality as the intercom was transmitting from cruiser Zebulon.

"... group at Weebe. Repeat: The battle is lost. All survivors disengage and regroup at Weebe. Good luck and God save us!"

Looking out at the approaching swarm of ships, Ziggy thought: Yeah, we're going to need both before this is over. Debacle! He turned his fighter to close with Zebulon and make a warp-link to it. Before being able to escape, though, there would be some wild evading to attend to.

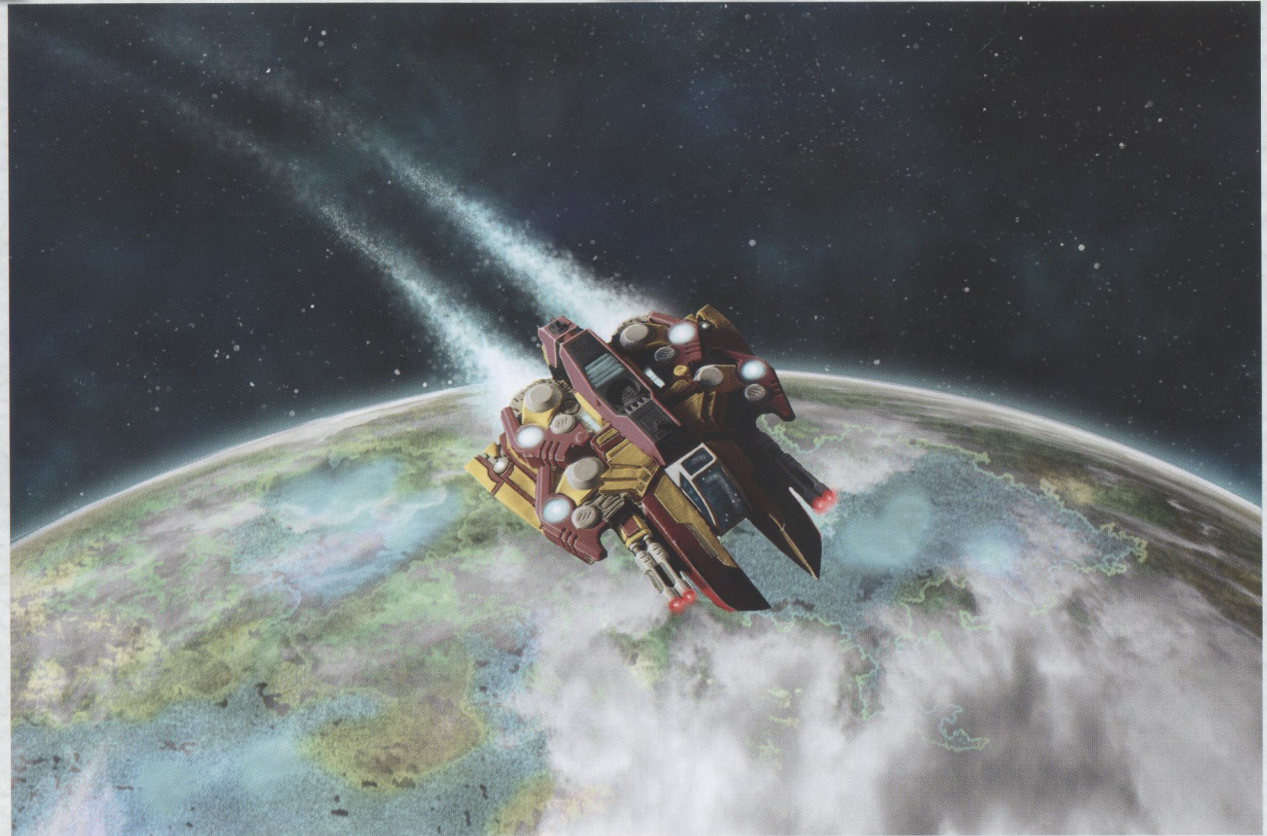
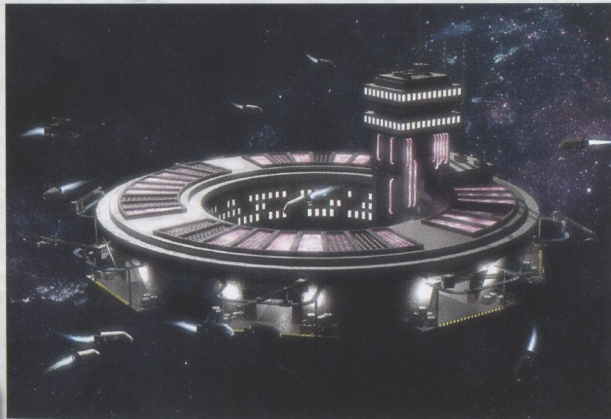


## Phase 6: Rewards



The last phase of the round consists of collecting VPs, rewards, and new resources for the players before the next round begins:

- 1) Go through the systems one at a time. If a player is alone in a system he gets 1 VP (puts a marker on his player board). Then all fleets in the system receive the rewards for that system. It might be energy, action cards, megacredits or diplomacy points (See the icons on the system tile). Energy rewards are only given to the fleet you have there. Rewards are collected even if there are 2 or more fleets on the system tile. After the fleets have received their rewards, they are withdrawn to the players' hands. Then move on to the next system for VPs and rewards.
- 2) Besides the planets' rewards, all players get 6 MCs, 2 DPs and 1 action card. Each player may also discard 1 card to draw 1 additional card, if they like. Each fleet gets energy equivalent to their reactor value.
- 3) **If any player now has at least 7 VPs, the game ends. If not, a new round begins. Ties are won by having the most DPs. If still equal, the highest total value of fleets, escort ships and upgrades determines the winner.**



### Taxed

Story by Jacob Fryxelius

Farmer Golinda watched the sky intently. Yes, it was a lander, coming down towards the starport at the capital just beyond the horizon. But it didn't have the usual blue exhaust of the PhoboLog landers. And it was less than a week since the last lander. Who this newcomer was she couldn't say, but new masters usually meant harder taxation and lower prices for her vegetables.

Medusa wasn't a very fertile planet, never would be, it seemed. Medusa was a mining world. Few crops could thrive and those who did weren't very tasty. With loads of excellent

food coming in from Eden, the competition became harder every year and she hardly made a profit anymore.

Golinda saw another glint in the clouds.

What? Two landers? There, another one coming through the clouds. Something must really be going on up there. Someone must really be in a rush to get resources off the planet, and it isn't PhoboLog.

So, more taxes then. Maybe even a new governor. Just what we need, she thought sourly. You'd think that the extensive mining industry would be the ones to pay for 'protection', since that was always the demand from off-world, but no, everyone was taxed. Taxed unto starvation. And now taxed again.

## 400 years earlier...

## Discovery

Story by Jacob Fryxelius

Chief Analyzer Gordon Brack of the Teractor-Olympiac corporation sat at his desk. To his right, the glass wall offered a view of Candor Chasma in all its splendor. The Valles Marineris had always been spectacular, but the terraforming of Mars had made it a breathtaking marvel of cool lakes, lush islands and sky-reaching canyon walls. Gordon, however, had all his attention on the reports on his desk. ThorGate had these last few years increased their ratio of omni-encrypted messages. Of course, there was no deciphering them, but it told him that something was going on. The messages were mainly being sent between headquarters and the analysis department (which was to be expected for any top secret project), but also to their space docks at Triton. This had gone on without anything notable happening, but now the quarterlies contained reports of increased omni-encrypted messages in Planetary Gardening as well, and following a similar pattern. Maybe... yes it could be that the 'gardeners' had actually found out what ThorGate was doing. Hmm. We'd better find out, too, if it's important enough for Gardening to tag along.

Gordon took a closer look at the page with message details. It seemed that Planetary Gardening's colonial board may be in on this one too, and maybe even their terraforming department. No surprise there, he smiled wryly. That was their main department after all, with all the legacy and experience of the great Ecoline and Inventrix!

A light flashed on his desk.

"Yes?"

"Dr. Meldoc wants to see you. He says it's important."

"In 4 minutes," Gordon said, switching off. He rose, filled his glass and walked over to the glass wall, taking in the view. He was used to it, of course, but it usually helped him clear his mind and allow new strands of thought. He should be grateful to Ecoline and Inventrix, he realized, for having contributed so much to his planet. Pity they refused the offer to join Olympiac

when they had the chance, before Teractor entered the picture and made it diplomatically impossible. Well. Teractor may be a difficult enemy to cooperate with, but they do pay top credits for what they want. With more than a credit a year, my family's not going to starve any time soon.

The door opened behind him and closed, Dr. Meldoc waiting for Gordon's initiative. Good old Meldoc! Head of Observations subdepartment, Meldoc was always polite, but he could sometimes get carried away by his eagerness over his findings. Even if his intrusions were often not very helpful, a few times they had saved the corporation millions of credits. And when he wasn't helpful, he was still amusing. Gordon turned around and gestured towards the visitor's seat while he returned to his own.

"I have exciting news for you, my dear Mr. Brack!" He could hardly contain himself. "It hasn't happened in a decade or more! Fantastic! Absolutely fantastic!"

"WHAT is fantastic, doctor?" He couldn't help smiling.

"On my watch on Tuesday evening I discovered - no, wait, it was Monday evening. Or was it Tuesday? Today is... never mind - a strong warp signature, sir! And not just any warp signature; its apparent speed is 0.882c!" Meldoc said triumphantly, waiting for Gordon to react.

Hmm, that was really slow. Only a colony ship would be that slow. Allowing for the light return time of the signature, real speed would be (he worked on his wristpad) 7.35c. Just in line with the last of the colony ships, and no lighter ships would willingly be that slow.

"A colony ship," he said.

"Yes! After decades of refining the art of colonization, we set out again! They must finally have figured out how to make colonies stable, growing and prosperous, despite the inevitable isolation from Sol. A-sol-ation, get it? Get it?"

"I get it. Quite funny. So where is it heading? And who is it?"

"Well, the measured distance to the warp signature - which was really strong, I tell you - was 0.28 light years, so with a speed of 7.35c, and allowing for light-return, that means the ship left Sol 116 days ago, that's almost 4 months. So we checked our records from that date and found the corresponding take-off signature. It had escaped our first scrutiny by being cleverly concealed by other warp traffic, and by a large moon, Triton," Meldoc said with a smile.

So this was what ThorGate had been planning. But another colony? Really? None of the 30-odd exo-planets colonized so far had been able to hold up. The long distances, even to the closest stars, were such that travel took many years, even with the latest warp-drives. Even a really small probe could, at best, reach a speed of 25c, enabling it to travel the distance in a year or so. The colonies had been effectively isolated from any meaningful exchange and help. Societies stagnated, trade was in decline, and many colonies experienced civil wars that mother Sol could only watch from afar. No, the colonies were a big disappointment. What could have changed?

"So where are they going?"

"That's the thing that baffles me, sir. We figure they are heading for Aldebaran, which lies 68 light years away - more than twice the previous colony distance. Don't ask me why - Aldebaran is an orange giant and couldn't possibly have any suitable planets." With a smile Meldoc continued, "But it also seems that they're not very good at aiming, because their course is off by a few degrees! They are actually heading for the Pleiades star cluster 380 light years away! They will all be dead before they reach any star at all! Isn't that priceless! Hahaha! Can you believe it? Hahaha..."

While Meldoc sat there chuckling to himself, Gordon pondered the news. No, he did not believe ThorGate would make such a blunder. Somehow they apparently meant to send a colonizer to the Pleiades. Generation ships had been designed before, even though they had not been needed for any of the colonies so far, and settling further away seemed utterly pointless in view of the 'successes' of the current colonies. They must know something we don't. And Planetary Gardening has caught on to it as well, he reminded himself, realizing the seriousness of the situation.

"Meldoc, I need you to do some more scanning. See if there are any other signatures in the direction of the Pleiades. And scan every warp signature leaving Sol, in any direction! I must know of every interstellar ship."

Meldoc looked perplexed, but nodded and left the room. Gordon transferred Meldoc's dig-report to his console and switched on the com.

"Please get me all available data on the Pleiades, categorized and structured. And tell Intel and Traffic to double their

watch on ThorGate and Gardening.”

“Yes, sir!”

He looked out the glass wall again. Colonies in the Pleiades? Whatever for? Well, that's what I'm going to find out. And I doubt I'll be home for dinner, he thought as he watched the Pleiad info fill his console screen.

A week later Gordon had compiled a list of unusual traits of the Pleiades Cluster. It was one of the closest star clusters. It had several nebulae. It had mostly hot, blue stars. Meldoc had reported several small planets in the cluster, bringing the known total up to 31. The stars and planets seemed to contain the ordinary elements, although Merope was a bit unusual in that regard. It had an asteroid belt with some abundance of iridium, beryllium and encased argon and helium gas. He-3, according to a poster by a PhoboLog scientist at the Olympus Interplanetary Conference some 70 years ago, dug up by Intel. The Pleiades counted around 1000 stars, had a diameter of 40 light years and were, most notably, far, far, FAR away.

What was the problem with the colonies? Communication, no doubt. But the Pleiades are even further away, a lot further. So what could... wait. The Pleiades are distant to Sol, but they are VERY close to each other. He checked his data – often less than a light-year apart! That would mean travel times of weeks, not years. The previous colonies were never close to each other, but here they could be. Very close. Worlds in reach of each other could trade and support each other culturally and scientifically. Still, he thought doubtfully, interstellar space travel is expensive, even with the mass converter. And the Pleiades are so distant. There is something more. Something...

He checked his data again. And again. Something... Then his stomach turned to ice. Before he could even put his conclusions into words, he felt his heart sink and his knees go weak. Not only would there be synergy between the worlds of the Pleiad Cluster. Not only would they offer new scientific opportunities. They also had helium-3. It took him a while to remember something he had learned in school all those years ago, that helium-3 was an ideal fuel for the fusion reaction required to initiate the mass converter. The problem was usually a shortage of helium-3, but there it was, waiting to be harvested from the Merope asteroids. The Pleiades could thrive, grow, and, given time, develop into

the first interstellar empire, even surpassing Sol! Indeed, outclassing it, he realized. The Pleiades could grow to become the center of human civilization!

And ThorGate was already on its way to claim it. And Planetary Gardening too.

Well, Teractor-Olympiac is not that far behind, he thought. If I can convince the board of directors to act quickly and forcefully, we may still be the ones to win this prize in the end. With his jaw set, Gordon began working on a report to present to the board of directors. They would not be pleased with the development so far, but Gordon worked away with the grim satisfaction of a man with a mission.

The light on his desk flashed.

“Yes, what is it?” he asked irritably.

“Guess who?”

He was not really in the mood for a chat with Meldoc, but let him in by habit.

“Again I have a surprise for you, my friend,” said Dr. Meldoc with his usual intrigue.

“I'd be surprised if you didn't,” Gordon answered sourly.

“Ah. Hahaha. Good one. Want to hear it? We found another colony ship warp signal going for the Pleiades! Isn't that something! Speed 0.871c and distance 49 light years. It was quite tricky to find it and we...”

“Wait, wait, wait! 49 light years? Did you lose a couple of decimals or something?”

“No, no, sir! 49 light years. Isn't that marvellous! Although this one is also a bit off track. We...”

“Hey, stop it! 49 light years at a speed of... 6.8c, that would mean those colony ships left Sol... 56 years ago!! He quickly checked his console. There had been no colony ships from Sol for over 150 years. But the speed checked out with an older colony ship model.

“But they didn't leave Sol, sir. That's the thing – they seem to originate from Ashkelon. Very strange, I must say, but it explains why no one seems to have any record of its departure. Now that it has traveled a larger portion of the distance, we are able to see its warp signature when we look towards the Pleiades. A bit off to the side, and quite weak, but still visible.”

But Gordon wasn't listening anymore. His heart sank as the secrets were revealed to him.

PhoboLog! Ever so clever. First to realize the potential of the Pleiades. Their Ashkelon shipyards being both remote and disregarded as part of the colonial decline. Using that cover to secretly launch a generation ship for the Pleiades and then keeping their little mouths shut, shut, shut. For over half a century! Unbelievable, but there it was. Their colony ship must be arriving just now, settling, mining, and claiming planet after planet for decades to come. No competition – oh, they knew they were going to lose if they had any serious competition! But now they won't for another 50 years. Considering ship building time, ThorGate would also get a head start of about 10 years. To be sure, neither PhoboLog nor ThorGate, nor Planetary Gardening for that matter, could stand toe-to-toe with mighty Teractor-Olympiac, but that head start could pretty much even things out.

“Did I tell you that the signature is actually comprised of three? Meldoc continued. It is weak, but still stronger than what could be expected from a single colony ship, and if you analyze the wave patterns it becomes three distinct warp waves quite nicely. Oh, and when we backtracked their trajectory from Ashkelon, we found several weaker, but faster, signatures going towards the Pleiades as well. Consistent with old freight ships, I believe. Now, wasn't that a surprise?”



## Credits

Game design: Daniel Fryxelius  
Assistant design: FryxGames & Thomas Fryxelius  
Graphic design & artwork: Daniel Fryxelius  
3D modelling: Michael Nilsson

FryxGames thanks: Thomas Fryxelius and the play-testing group in Gråbo, all our family and our fans. And, of course, our Creator.

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### *Nimrod's Agony*

Story by Jonathan Fryxelius

*The news left Grand Admiral Nimrod with a pounding heart and tightly clenched fists. The council's decision was outrageous. It couldn't be possible, could it? PhoboLog, of all pathetic corporations, couldn't possibly have beaten him? After all, he had single-handedly obliterated their largest fleet, the 'Not-So-Great-Anymore Gorgon' just a week earlier. But it was too late, their diplomatic influence was already too vast to counter, and his strikes against them only seemed to cause public outrage. How could it have come to this?*

*When the com closed, Nimrod slammed his fist on the panel, sending echoes around the bridge. All of it was the council's fault! All their political correctness and 'protection of the weak' mumbo-jumbo, negotiating their way around battles he would definitely win. It was not fair! If power was all that counted, then Poseidon - not PhoboLog - would appoint the first Supreme Chancellor of the Pleiades! Admittedly, investing everything in Goliath had made him limited to controlling one system at a time, while PhoboLog scattered their forces all over the Pleiades.*

*Then a thought crossed Nimrod's mind and hardened his heart. Maybe one system is all I need to control. If the Pleiad council can make these changes, they can also undo them.*

*"Set course to Olympus" Nimrod commanded "Let's restart this game..."*

## Turn Order:

- 1. Player Order Phase.** Randomize new player order (for a 2-player game, just switch the player order cards.)
- 2. Building Phase.** Take turns buying fleets and upgrades. Then equip your fleets simultaneously.
- 3. Deployment Phase.** Take turns deploying 1 fleet at a time.
- 4. Diplomacy Phase.** Players take turns performing diplomatic actions and play diplomacy action cards.
- 5. Battle Phase.** If two or more fleets are located in the same system, there is a battle.
- 6. Rewards Phase.** Follow these steps:
  - Go through each system. If a player is alone in a system, award him/her 1 VP. All present fleets gain the rewards of the system.
  - Each fleet gains energy according to its reactor value.
    - Each player gains 6 MCs, 2 DPs, and 1 card.
    - Each player may discard 1 card to draw 1 card.

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