

# Introduction to Galac-Tac

By Davin Church

Galac-Tac is a classic game of economic expansion and military conquest in space (a 4X game), in play since 1982. Originally a traditional PBM game, it is now available via the web at [www.talisman-games.com](http://www.talisman-games.com). It has a finite game scope and duration and is played against a small number of other players. Decisions are primarily strategic in nature, as you, the leader of your people, choose how and where to expand and when and where to use military might.

Before signing up to play in a new game (called a galaxy), you will need to decide how fast you'd like to be submitting turns. In the old postal days our turn speed was once every 2 or 3 weeks. Now that we don't have to wait for paper and stamps to change hands it can run much faster. Since you'll probably want to spend a fair bit of time planning each turn, you may want to allow yourself (and your opponents) about a week to peruse each turn. Remember that turns will process without you if you don't make the turn deadline, so give yourself enough time to deal with any distractions that come up in your real life. (Turns may be submitted early and then modified before the due date, if desired.) Missed turns, especially in the early turns of the game, will be quite detrimental to your position. If you want to play more often, you may also choose to sign up for multiple galaxies at once. A game will usually run about 60 to 80 turns... unless you're killed off earlier! [Ed. This has since been increased to a maximum of 80 to 100 turns.]

Once you've signed up to play, and about a dozen other players agree to play at the same turn speed, the game will begin and you're ready to have some fun. You'll receive an initial position report via the web site, along with your first turn's due date. You may just view it there (in the original PBM format), or you may print it out. Printing your turn report gives you a handy place to write up notes and plans prior to entering your next turn, but it is by no means necessary. Your next turn's orders are then entered directly on the web site, unless you use our downloadable assistant program to help you. Entering your turn begins the suspense of waiting to see what will happen, which on the web is every bit as tangible as waiting for paper to arrive in the mailbox.

When you begin, you'll find yourself in a single star system in the galaxy (a single spot on the map). You have a map of all of the few hundred systems (stars) in

the galaxy that are laid out randomly and relatively sparsely on a 100x100 rectangular grid. The grid wraps around off every edge to the opposite side, so there aren't any actual borders to the galaxy. You know that somewhere out there are other empires just like yours, each with a single Home World and looking to expand and conquer the whole galaxy. The remaining systems are available for expansion territory and exploitation of raw materials in pursuit of this goal.

Everyone starts off with a bit of cash (called PI for Production Inventory) and a handful of simple ships (primarily unarmed scouts and cargo ships) to get started. Right away, you'll want to send out all your scouts (and perhaps other ships) to nearby systems with Chart orders to inventory them for raw material potential. Once they're charted, you may start picking up raw material (called PV for Production Value) with cargo ships and bringing it home for conversion into PI that may be spent on additional ships. Or, especially for the juicier systems, send cargo ships loaded with PI to those systems and build colonies there. Colonies produce PV three times as fast as charted systems, and colonizing stakes your claim of ownership. To simplify the tedious mechanics of getting PV back home every turn, the Shuttle command is used to set up regular cargo runs back and forth to ferry PV automatically. Once you have a lot of colonies, you'll also need additional Production Centers to help collect all that PV and turn it into PI (and spend it on new construction).

As soon as you have even a little income flowing, it's already time to begin worrying about military matters. You start with a few defenses for your home world, but you can always use more protection. In addition, you should be considering what will happen when you start running into your neighbors, which can occur very early in the game. Will you be passive and back off from accidental encounters, or will you be aggressive and try to enforce your claim to those systems? If you're planning to fight for some of these systems, then you're going to need some warships. You start the game with a few basic ship designs to help you, but much of the fun of Galac-Tac comes from creating and building your own designs.

Ships may be constructed in various size categories (which you may think of as small, medium, large, or huge), each with different strengths and limitations.

They may move between star systems, only inside a system, or they may just be weapon platforms that do not move at all. Warships may be designed small and light for hit-and-run tactics, or as big-gun battleships for the slug-fests, or as fighter-carrier combinations, or for many other purposes or combinations. There are two different types of engines (with maximum speeds constrained by ship size), and three different types of weapons (one using high-powered but expendable ammunition), and ships may also contain cargo bays for transportation, hangar bays for fighters, and defensive shield generators. Your job as designer is to figure out what you'd like each type of ship to be used for and how you'd like to construct it to do that job. Once you've designed your ship, you may build as many of them as you have PI to spend on them. For instance, do you want your cargo ships to be cheap, fast, and easily replaced if they're attacked, or would you like them to carry their own weapons to fight off attempts at piracy? Or perhaps you'd rather leave them unarmed (to try to escape any battles) but send armed escort ships along with them to fend off aggressors? It's all up to you!

Once you have warships designed and built, you'll want to organize them into fleets. Fleets can have their own internal organization if you like, with different parts concentrating on different aspects of battle. For instance, your torpedo cruisers could be told to concentrate their fire on the largest enemy battleships in order to bring down their shields as rapidly as possible, or some of your fighters could be told to focus on defensive fire to prevent your opponent from doing the same to you. There are an amazing number of ways to construct, organize, and command warfleets, and every one will behave differently in battle. As military commander-in-chief, your level of combat control involves assembling your resources and giving them direction on how to attack or defend. Once a combat is underway, those ships then fight to the bitter end with autonomy, and hopefully most of them (or at least a few) survive to send back a report of the battle.

In the end, your military might and strategy will determine if you win or lose, and your military strength is determined by your ship and fleet designs and how much you spend on them. Of course, to get enough PI to build large battle fleets, you need plenty of star systems providing continuous income, and thus some measure of conflict with the other empires in the

galaxy is inevitable. Empire-building continues throughout the game, which will normally involve a generous amount of armed conflict, strategic expansion and withdrawal, informal alliances, information gathering, and vendettas. However, the primary goal is to protect your Home World, because if you lose that, it's all over. Don't forget to spend some PI on technological R&D occasionally as well to improve your combat capabilities as the game progresses.

Another critical aspect of the game is espionage. How will you find out where your opponent lives and where he keeps his fleets if he also sets up heavy protection to keep you from scouting out his locations and dispositions? Even the best strategies fail when you don't know enough about your opponents on the battlefield, and good information is often difficult to obtain. Trying too hard to gain detailed intelligence usually also clues your opponent in that you're hunting for information, and may elicit a military response from them if they feel threatened, but it's often knowledge that you really need to have. The challenge is to find a balance between need and risk.

Will you be a friendly neighbor and try to negotiate borders with those around you, or will you attack everyone on sight and risk provoking their wrath (perhaps from everyone at once)? Will you concentrate all your warships in your Home World when they're not needed elsewhere, or spread them out across your empire for rapid response wherever conflict erupts? Will you play a defensive waiting game building as much protection as you can, or will you send out roving strike fleets to try to take out your opponents before they grow large enough to attack you? Or are you perhaps willing to settle for repeatedly crippling your opponents' economics to keep them from growing in the first place?

You're in command. The fate of your empire is in your hands. It's Suspense & Decision time!