

GALAC-TAC Startup: Building Your Nest, or Nurturing Your Roc Eggs

Genny White

No, Galac-Tac (a PBM-style game of galactic conquest) does NOT have Rocs, unless you choose to name your favorite battleship classification for those giant mythical birds of prey! But the success of your gaming strategy relies critically on having a solid cash flow for development and warship production, which makes the somewhat tedious business of establishing your economic system in the first few turns an absolute must.

Those who do not delight in balancing their checkbook or devising (and sticking to) a budget, but want to dive right into creating attack fleets to conquer the galaxy, take heart! In just a few turns, the flurry of exploration and infrastructure creation will be history, and you'll have your chance to challenge the rest of the lesser beings for territory to which they *thought* they had a prior claim. However, if you don't make early economic development a priority at first, you simply won't have the resources to build the fleets to back up your claims and defend what you have.

The concept is fairly simple: take your limited starting resources and make the most of the first handful of turns to establish your holdings and get cash coming back to the Home World as efficiently as possible. There's not much else you CAN do in the first few turns. Think of it as the slow progress climbing uphill on a roller coaster. Not very exciting, but the higher you go, the more exciting the ride will be once you hit that peak!



So... it's the dawn of a new Empire in a newborn Galac-Tac Galaxy. You get your first turn report, which is identical to everyone else's. Only "You Are Here" differs – your Home World, the stronghold and birthplace of your empire. You and everyone else have a modest stash of cash (Production Inventory, or "PI") and a handful of ships and a map of the Great Unknown. Your job is to take your little starter fleet and go forth and plant your flag on all the stars within reach... before somebody else gets 'em. Then you can start hauling the resources that star system provides back home to manufacture into more ships and more colonization supplies.

To lay claim to a local star, you must first evaluate its potential – Charting it to determine its value, expressed in "PV" or "Production Value", a number from 2 to 10. This is the amount of raw material available for collection on each turn. Your Home World will be a 10, but you'll find a wide range of values in the nearby reaches of space. Most will be in the "average" range of 5-7, but luck will pay a part in the richness of your galactic neighborhood.

An undeveloped star does not belong to you, but you can pick up its PV if somebody else hasn't collected it that turn before you arrived. The next step is to make it yours:

you Colonize the star by taking 10 PI worth of colonizing gear down there and taking two turns to build a new colony. Then, not only is the star officially yours, it will now generate three times as much PV every turn, which can only be collected by your own ships.

Any ship with interstellar capability can visit and Chart a star, but only a ship with cargo bays can transport PI for colonization or return PV to your Home World. You have a few of both types in your initial fleet. The freighters have cargo bays and start out already loaded with 10 PI, ready to colonize any charted stars. You can send them out to Chart whatever stars you find in range, then be ready to Colonize on the next turn with the ship already in system. The scout ships have no cargo bays, so all they can do is Chart or Scout (take a peek at the ownership status of a star and any other visitors present that turn). You can send out your next wave of colonizing ships based on the Chart results they report to you.

Now you come to your first few decisions: where do you send those initial cargo vessels and scouts, and what orders do you give them? There's no reason not to send both the freighters and the scouts out charting. You're unlikely to run into any other empires this early, as they are probably sticking close to home, too, so using a scout to just... well, Scout... is a waste of an opportunity. Soon enough you'll want to send a flurry of little scouts all around, checking out the neighborhood and observing what the other guys are up to.

Meanwhile, back at the Home World, you'll want to build some more ships with your small starting stockpile of PI. Here's where the born CPA will shine: make your best guess as to what ships you may need in the next turn or so, making best use of your

resources. Will you build larger carriers to ferry rich troves of PV to your Home World from your new colonies, or small ones that are cheaper but only carry the minimum 10 PI to start new colonies? What about more little scouts to chart additional worlds so that you have a wider choice of where to send your colonizers? Perhaps you feel the need to build more armed vessels to enforce your claims or for Home World security, although it will be a while (hopefully) before anybody else comes calling.

You can construct new vessels from existing shipyard designs, or build them to your own specifications, using new designs that you Classify before you Build. You won't have enough PI to start building those Battleships and Death Stars yet, but you can start dreaming up your designs while you are building the freighters necessary to fund them. Whatever you decide to build, remember to save some PI for colonization expenses.

Now the second turn report comes out, and you get the exciting news of the value of the first few stars in your local area. You may have another decision to make: if you've found a measly 3 PV world with one of your freighters that is ready to colonize, but a scout has charted a juicy 8 nearby, do you grab the 3 while you're there, or take an extra turn to send the freighter over to the 8 PV world, establishing the richer colony first and coming back for the little guy later? The key thing in these initial turns is to "get rich quick"... and that may mean making difficult choices.

When you have colonies online and have set up regular delivery runs using freighters with appropriate capacity (easy to do with the Shuttle command, once you have built the ships), you will have a steady income

stream. Until then, you will only have 100 PI added to your coffers each turn (the Home World's own production), and your expansion efforts are severely limited. So, go for the most income you can. By the way, "Knowledge is Power". Every star you chart, whether you colonize it immediately or not, adds to your empire's standing in the game, because it is data you *can* use to expand down the road, even if you have to take it from somebody else to make it your own. Be sure not to miss a turn in these early days, or you'll lose a lot of ground in the great land rush across the galaxy!

For the next few turns, you stake your claims, using Chart, Colonize, and Shuttle as your tools. Then suddenly you find that you've pretty much claimed everything you can reach, and you've encountered several other empires out doing the same, and you have a tense peace at the moment (unless one of you has brought in guns to assert a border claim.) Now, the focus of the game changes. It's time to consider where to push, where to wait, how to defend what's yours, and how to take what's theirs. What you can do now is limited only by the economic base you have established, the efficiency of your operations, the resources you have coming in turn by turn, and your own imagination and cunning.

And THAT, gentle reader, is a story for another day.