

STAR CHASE

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HINTS & TIPS

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READ THIS NEXT

INTRODUCTION

The objective of the game is to score lots of points by owning lots of industry, but the things you need to make this happen are lots of income and lots of technology. Income is fairly easy to get as your empire and population expand, although it'll disappear soon enough if you build yourself a fleet, but technology is tricky. If you try to compete with someone who's got better technology then it's going to be an uphill struggle.

TECHNOLOGY

There are nineteen different technologies and you want lots of as many as you can get. You can generally buy only one tech per level per turn. You get another each turn from research, but this one is random. You may want to be careful in the early turns to concentrate on technology you want lots of, as the ones that reach respectable levels early in the game are usually the ones that your researchers will get excited about – and then they go on produce more and more of the same technology. You can find you get a lot of something you don't really want.

You can buy a second tech level each turn provided you can find anything player who's already got it and is willing to trade it. This is a really good idea, as technology from trades costs half as much as buying it new, and the empire that traded it to you gets half what you pay. They'll probably be looking to buy some traded technology from you at the same time (which means you get some of your hard-earned treasury back again). Trading is a really good idea. You get to buy twice as much technology each turn, plus it's cheaper and you get some of your costs back again. And you get some choice of which technology you get.

The other way to get technology is from exploration, but in this case what you get is completely random. And you don't know how much of it there will be. Then again, it might be lots.

ALLIANCES & TRADING

It's possible to be trading effectively right from the first turn. For this reason you might want to make sure that the GM has your email address or phone number before the first turn and has the word from you that it's okay to put it in the game. This means that other players can contact you easily right at the start report (your address will be given to the other players in the startup information, but many players never write letters at all, although they will send emails, and some prefer to use the phone).

The start positions in the game aren't balanced, and they can get more unbalanced quite quickly. This is when you need to work with other players to catch up. If someone is looking very strong then work against them and not with them. If they can't find anyone to trade with, then you'll soon close the gap.

EMPIRE NAMES

The other thing you can give some thought to before the game starts is choosing your empire name. People will often assume you chose your empire name to indicate how you intend to play. If they think you're role-playing a race of psychopathic insects then they may be a bit wary of working with you. The majority of names seem to come from TV, film and books (and even from other games).

EXPLORATION

Exploration in Star Chase isn't just about grabbing star systems to expand your empire. As you sift through the Old Empire ruins in the newly explored territories you can find all sorts of useful stuff. You can get lucky. There's all sorts of obvious useful stuff like population, industry, and bank vaults stuffed with money. There's also technology to be discovered and a few prize finds can really change your empire.

In one test game I met a non-player empire that got lucky with finds of Expo Tech. He must have hit it several times in the early turns, and then his research got stuck producing more, so that his Expo Tech went well into the twenties. After that, when he explored a new system he could add up to fifty BPs to his treasury, or find twenty shiny new cruisers just waiting to join his fleet. Or five more tech levels.

In another I encountered an Empire that had a Weapons Tech of sixteen when mine was still only four. I couldn't fight him: I'd lose too many ships in each encounter. Instead I had to post colony ships all along the frontier and leave that sector untouched.

THE STARTUP TURN

At the start of the game you want to explore and expand as quickly as possible. Send the cruisers out to nearby stars as quick as you can. Remember that they'll be moving to unowned systems, so they'll be stuck as soon as they arrive (but you'll get some sort of bonus from what they find). Send one cruiser to your asteroid belt. If there are more planets or asteroids in your home system then it's probably best to leave these to be picked up later (they're not going anywhere, and no-one else is going to be able to get at them, so leave it to this one cruiser to go back and forth to pick them up one at a time).

At the start you've only got one colony ship, but on turn one you've got lots of BPs to spend. So build a second, as it will probably be a while before you can afford one again. You probably want to move one of your colony ships out from your home star in whichever direction looks most likely to provide lots of living room (where your cruisers already went). Drop a colony there in your next action. Use your other colony ship to "throw" a colony into your asteroid belt (assuming you captured it).

You can probably afford to grow the population in your home star and increase the industry there as well. That's about all you can do with the first turn, part from the Tech and Probe actions. Your probe isn't going to anything interesting on turn one, but you could give it a head start for future turns by sending it in whichever direction seems mostly likely to need exploring. Your first tech action is almost certainly going to be to buy more Expo Tech, maybe even as high as level three.

Try to find someone whose research in the startup turn was different to yours (it's visible in your game report, in the top tech levels part of the "roundup") so as to be able to buy another tech level.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

What you do after the first turn is going to depend quite a lot on what you find at the start. You'll be able to see a lot more of the map after the first turn. If there are stars with planets (especially) and asteroid belts then you want get after them as quick as you can. But be aware that other people's home star look like that as well (if it's a dwarf star with both planets and asteroids, then it might be home to someone else and they won't be pleased to find you charging in with warships, so that's the sort of place you might prefer to investigate quietly with a probe).

In turn two you'll probably be short of income, and will have to decide whether to slow down and make tax actions to raise more BPs, or whether to raid your treasury.

You want to be as efficient as possible about exploring as much space as you can with your cruisers while your colony ships follow behind and plant new colonies. You want to drive your tech levels up as quickly as you can. As your income grows you can afford to grow more population and build more industry. Growing is cheap at the start, but gets more expensive quite quickly. The balance of what's best to do will depend on what technology you find.

NON-PLAYER EMPIRES & DROPOUTS

When there's a missing player, either because someone drops out of because the game started short-handed (it's often better to start a game when it's nearly full than wait for the last few positions to fill and Sodd's Law dictates that if a GM starts a game with no gaps in it then two more players will usually apply to join in the following week) then there's a set of routines that writes orders for the player that's missing. A similar routine is used when a "live" player misses a turn. Some people like to call this an AI (that's artificial intelligence - it's actually nothing like an AI, but just a reasonably flexible script).

The dropout empires in Star Chase can be tough and aggressive. I've tested them by playing against them, and they often win (I spend too long fighting against one dropout and another one I never even met conquers half the galaxy). If there's a dropout empire around then you need to watch it carefully. You can try to outsmart it, but the most reliable method is to gang up on it. Other players are usually quite keen to work together to eliminate such awkward neighbours. If there's more than one dropout empire on your borders then be extra careful. They can work together, and they bear grudges.

EXAMPLE FIRST TURN

This is a first turn written with "smart" actions (see the optional rules for details of these). It should suit most startup positions (they're not all the same, and it will suit some positions better than others). You don't really need to understand these actions to use them effectively, so if you can't decide what to do in the first turn then use these orders and see what happens. From the game report that comes back you'll probably be able to get an idea of what to do in future turns.

The last one of each SETTLE, POP and INCREASE groups will probably fail, but they might do interesting things according to what you find when exploring. A good alternative would be to replace actions 9, 13 and 15 with TAX actions.

1 [EXPLORE]	9 [SETTLE]
2 [EXPLORE]	10 [SETTLE]
3 [EXPLORE]	11 [TAX]
4 [EXPLORE]	12 [TAX]
5 [EXPLORE]	13 [POP]
6 [NEWCOL]	14 [POP]
7 [SETTLE]	15 [INCREASE]
8 [SETTLE]	16 [INCREASE]

TECH & TRADE ACTIONS

Enter ET for your Tech Action, unless you're really sure you want something different. If you can find someone else to trade with then buy whatever tech level they're able to offer (any of the tech levels they could have at this stage are useful, and will also be cheap).

HINTS & TIPS

The most common mistakes when writing orders are trying to move direct between planets (and/or asteroid belts) and trying to capture new systems with colony ships. Cruisers go first, always.

If an opponent has higher WT than you, be careful not to tangle with individual ships. It's better to fight ten ships at once than fight them all separately, because the difference in their weapons tech will do the same amount of extra damage in each battle.

Don't try to capture planets intact unless your fleet is very large and your Marines are very strong. Sit in orbit and throw rocks at it. Or smash it to bits with a planet-buster. Or blockade it and offer to sell it back to the owner.

To blockade a planet use colony ships and fighters. They're cheaper than cruisers.

Know the geography (err...) of your empire. If someone attacks you they'll probably dash past your defences and try to run all over the place doing as much damage as possible. So they'll try to follow a path that's all dwarf stars (because giant stars are sticky). So park a colony ship in a key location, because they're sticky as well. You'll lose it, but your opponent won't be going any further that turn, and by next turn your own fleet will be able to strike back.

Colony ships and fighters can't retreat so your defending fleets (if they're made up of colony ships and fighters) might as well take a guess at which way the opposition is going to come and try to ambush them (which means you get to fire first, and the other side has to remove their losses before they get to fire back).

Two small empires are stronger than a single big one if you use the right tactics. The big empire can probably concentrate the biggest fleet, but it can't be everywhere at once and the small empires have twice as many actions. Use hit and run tactics, attacking stars as far apart as you can manage.

MORE EMPIRE NAMES

As an aside, it's been interesting with this series of game to see how the empire names have changed over the years. At the start we had lots of names from Star Trek (mostly Klingons and Romulans, but one time there was even an empire of Tribbels) and Dr Who (usually Daleks and Cybermen) with a few from books (Kzinti were an early favourite, although they've not been seen for years, but the Vogons make regular appearances).

It's interesting we rarely get any from the later Star Trek series (unless you count the guy who named his home world as "Voyager Sucks"). Probably because they're all talk and no torpedoes.

Then came a rush of empires with themes from Babylon 5. We've had Narns, Centari, Minbari, Vorlons, Shadows and any number of Earth Alliances. Once we had an unfortunate Vorlon with an empire called Shadows on one side and Z'Ha'Dum on the other.

Most recently we've started to see the first few with names like Manticore, Basilisk, Grayson and Haven from the Honor Harrington series (if you like this sort of game, and haven't found these books - by David Weber - then go straight to Amazon and get started).

And every now and then we get one from the books of C.J.Cherryh, but if you want to name your empire after the Kif or the Knnn then make sure you enter your turns via the website (so you can enter the names of your stars and planets for yourself - your GM is not going to be keen). That's another author you might want to visit Amazon for - start with the Pride of Chanur and see where it takes you).