

New Paths To Universal Domination

Variations For Stellar Conquest

by Klaus Æ. Mogensen

Avalon Hill's Stellar Conquest is perhaps the most widely played boardgame about exploration, colonization and conquest among the stars, and almost certainly the major inspiration for the computer games Master of Orion I & II by Microprose. The rules work well for the most part, but I still think there's room for improvements in several aspects of the game. For this purpose, I have developed a number of optional or alternative rules, which are listed below. For each rule, I explain why I think this rule will improve the game, and under what circumstances.

(A): Emigration Bonus. The rules about getting a population bonus when emigrating colonists from a planet (Emigration 4-6) lead to many problems. One is that new players almost invariably get it wrong, which ruins the first game they play in. Another is that it leads to a lot of shifting colonists around between already settled planets in order to get a faster population growth, which greatly slows the game down. The following rule eliminates these problems:

[A]: No population bonus is given upon emigrating colonists from a settled planet. Population increase on Terran planets is one-fifth of the population, rounded off (not down), and on Subterranean planets is one-tenth of the population, rounded off (this encourages establishing many small colonies over a few big). Option: To prevent min-maxing in roundings, colony transports must be built and moved in units of 5, except when a colony is totally abandoned.

(B): Fighter Combat Ability. Calculations show that in combat between groups of corvettes and fighters with the same total i.p. cost (e.g. 5 corvettes vs. 2 fighters), the corvettes have a small advantage, which is increased when Improved Ship Weaponry is developed. Advanced missile bases are likewise less effective than ordinary missile bases in combat vs. all but death stars. The combat abilities of fighters and advanced missile bases thus needs to be improved, leading to:

[B]: Fighters and advanced missile bases destroy corvettes and missile bases on 1-3 rather than 1-2.

(C): Robotic Industry. When scenarios are played that extend play beyond the standard 44 turns, having an unlimited number of factories on a single planet can become rather too much. Besides, it makes it unnecessary to ever have more than one mineral rich planet, and thus reduces the possible areas of conflict. The following rule is only really necessary in extended scenarios, but it's reasonable for shorter games as well:

[C]: Robotic Industry allows up to four factories per million population on a planet, not an infinite number.

(D): Planet Shields. Planet shields allow total protection of a planet for less than it costs to build a death star. This is a real, though not major, problem in standard games, but makes it next to impossible to play meaningful extended scenarios. A solution is to let planet shields provide less than absolute protection:

[D]: A planet shield moves the attacks of attacking ships up one row on the Attack Table (corvette to scout, fighter to corvette, death star to fighter). Defensive fire from missile bases and advanced missile bases is not reduced. If all defending bases are eliminated, the planet shield is destroyed.

(E): Unlimited Ship Range. When this technology has been developed, the need for command posts is eliminated, as is the main advantage of scout ships. The elimination of command posts eliminates the possibility for tactics like destroying that enemy command post which is the life line of enemy ships in your territory, and thus removes one of the interesting aspects of the game. To retain this aspect, the following alternative rule can be used:

[E]: The technology Unlimited Ship Range is renamed Ship Range 12 Hexes, with the obvious change in effect.

(F): Research: In Stellar Conquest, there's no distinction between industrial points used to build things and those used for research, with the result that mineral rich planets effectively provide a bonus for research as well as for industry. Similarly, factories can do double duty as research labs. Though this can be perceived as a minor problem, it can be handled with a similarly minor rule change:

[F]: The maximum amount of i.p. that a planet can allocate towards research is one per million population.

(G): Racial Advantages: In Stellar Conquest, all the game races are exactly alike. While this ensures a level playing field, unique racial advantages for each Entry can add new dimensions to the game. One possibility is the following:

[G]: Players starting at different Entry hexes have different advantages:

Entry 1: Has researched Industrial Technology before game start, and can build factories at a cost of 3 i.p. each regardless of industrial technology level.

Entry 2: Population maxima are changed according to the star colors: Red & Orange, +10. Yellow, +5. Green & Blue, +0.

Entry 3: Population increase on Terran planets is one-fourth the population, but all other planet types count as being one type worse (except for victory conditions). Thus, Barren planets can never be colonized.

Entry 4: In combat, has barrage rounds before the opponent rather than simultaneously with the opponent (i.e., eliminated ships don't get to shoot back).

(H): Other Victory Conditions. Rather than arbitrarily ending the game after turn 44, players can decide on other conditions for victory, for longer or shorter (or just different) games:

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[H]: Possible alternative victory conditions:

- 1: The winner is the first to gain control of 10 Terran planets.
- 2: Draconis is guarded by 5 neutral death stars. The winner is the first to conquer the system. If attempts to conquer the system fails, lost neutral death stars are replenished.

3: The winner is the first to get a total population of 500 million or more (not counting conquered colonies).

4: One ship token of each color is put into a cup, and each player draws one secretly when game starts. Once a player is eliminated, the winner is the one who drew the color of that player. Rule [D] must be used with this victory condition.

As few or as many of these rules can be used to enhance Stellar Conquest. The first four (A to D) are recommended for most (if not all) games, the others just add spice to the game.

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