GLOBULAR CLUSTER

A Good Portsmanship game for the piecepack by Michael Schoessow and Stephen Schoessow
Based on Tikal by M. Kiesling / W. Kramer
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2-4 players, 60-90 minutes
Equipment: 2 standard piecepacks incl. pawn saucers. ~100 pennies. Pencil and paper

STORY

Most of the galaxy has been colonized for uncounted ages. With the recent advent of new more powerful warp technology the peoples of the galaxy are finally ready to explore and colonize their closest galactic neighbors, the nearby globular clusters. The galaxy is governed by giant corporate conglomerates and a number of these are sending expeditions to the nearest cluster to compete for star systems with colonizable planets and needed resources.

GOAL

Each player takes the role of expedition leader for one of the conglomerates. Since the vast majority of the stars in globular clusters are very old and their stellar systems commonly lack the heavier elements, habitable worlds and useful resources are not easy to find so the competition will fierce. Expedition leaders are looking for three things: habitable worlds to colonize for profit, resource-rich star systems to exploit for profit, and star systems suitable for constructing the huge stationary warp stations that will facilitate quicker within the cluster.

PREPARATION

Each player chooses a color and takes the one pawn, both pawn saucers, and one die, and one 5 tile of that color. Players also take all the coins of their chosen colors.

The following bits won't be used in 2-4-player games. Remove them

from the game before continuing:

*All the red 2 thru 4 tiles and one of the 5 tiles.
*One blue ace tile and one blue 3 tile.
*One green ace tile and one green 3 tile.
*One black 5 tile.
*One pawn and one die of each color.

In a 3-player game, one of the green null tiles won't be required. Also remove the pawn, die, and pawn saucers of the color that wasn't chosen by any of players.

In a 2-player game, leave the green null tile in but remove the two pawns, two dice, and four pawn saucers of the colors that no players chose.

Set up the initial board layout as shown in figure 1. Don't forget to put one penny on each black ace tile. The face-down tile is a blue ace. This is the main intergalactic transfer station, or MITS, used to ferry expeditions from the home galaxy to the boarder of the cluster. It is the starting position for all players. Be sure to orient the tiles as shown. During game play the board will expand to the top, bottom, and left, until it almost fills a 6-tile by 7-tile area so leave space on the table as necessary.

Collect the remaining game tiles into the following three groups (RD=red, BK=black, BL=blue, GR=green).
Group 1: RD: ace, BK: 2, 2, BL: null, 4, 5, GR: 3, 4, 5.
Group 2: RD: ace, null, BK: null, 3, 3, BL: 2, 3, 4, GR: null, 4. In a 3-player game only, the green null tile is not used.
Group 3: RD: null, BK: 4, 4, BL: null, 2, GR: ace, null, 2, 2.

Turn the group 1 tiles face down and shuffle. Then stack them. Turn the group 2 tiles over and shuffle them. Then stack them on top of the group 1 stack. Finally, turn over, shuffle, and stack the group 3 tiles on top so all the shuffled tiles now form a stack of 28 tiles, or 27 in the case of a 3-player game. The tiles represent star systems.

Break the tile stack approximately in half so it won't tip over, being careful that the top portion of the original stack is used up first during

play.

Players keep their #5 tiles, their pawn saucers, and their dice in front of themselves. These tiles are not used in game play but help to identify players' colors to other players. Players take their pawns and expedition members (p.p coins, suit-side up) and move them near to the MITS. Each player groups his or her bits to the right of the MITS.

Each player also keeps paper and pencil handy for keeping score. Scoring involves two forms. Victory points can be directly earned, and then recorded as such. There is also the collection of resources (specifically mined dilithium crystals) that come in four types, based on dice rolls. The types are: N/1 (null and ace dice faces), 2/3 (#2 or #3 dice faces), 4 (#4 die face), and 5 (#5 die face). Players should keep track of these four types separately on their scoring sheets so all players may see how many of each type a player has accumulated. They can either be marked down with pencil or pennies can be used as counters.

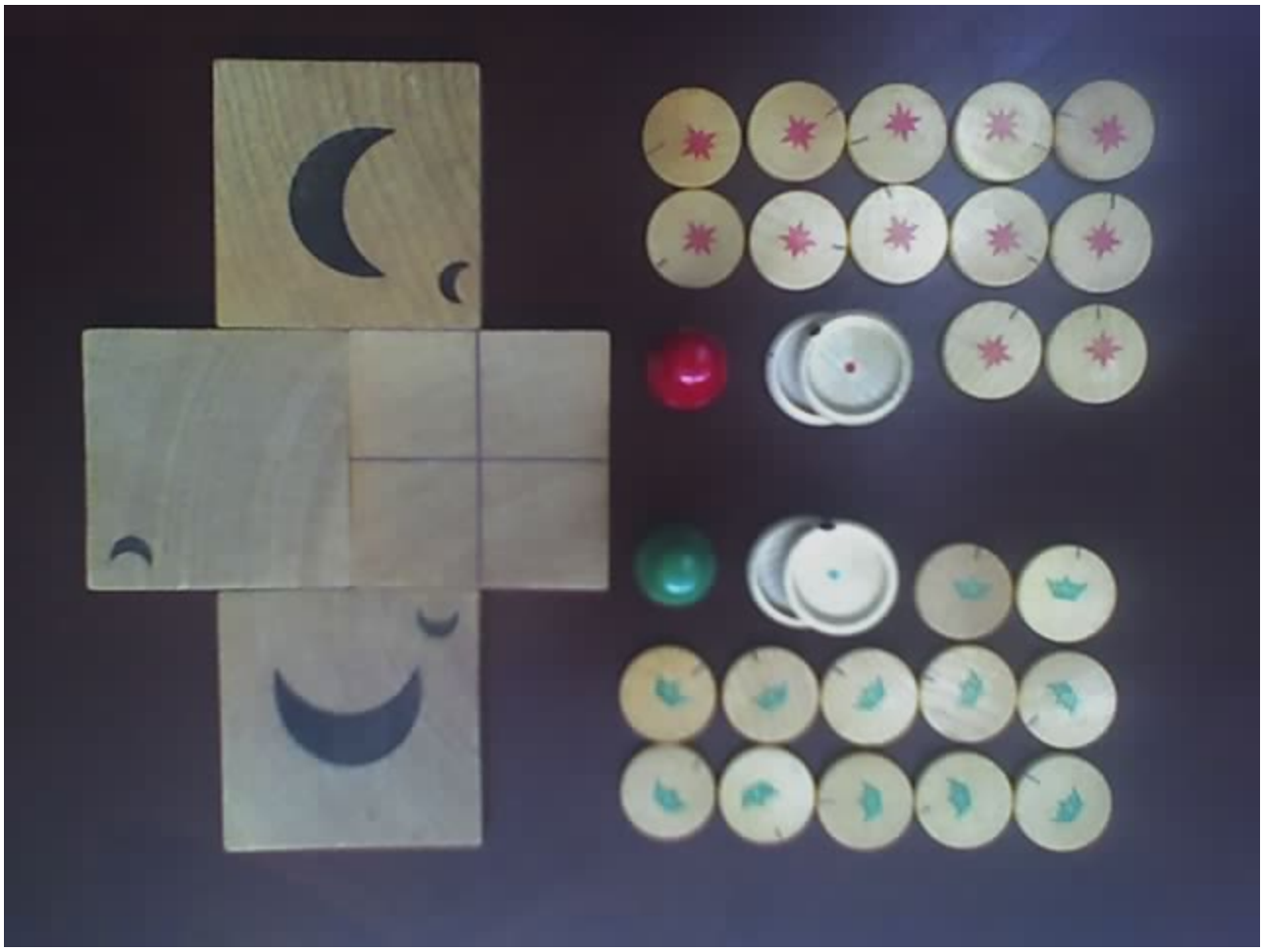

FIGURE 1. Showing board at start of a two player game.

NOTE TO PLAY-TESTERS: THE FIGURE SHOULD SHOW A PENNY ON EACH BLACK ACE TILE.

GAME OVERVIEW

The star tiles represent those rare stellar systems, encountered while exploring the cluster, which possess enough heavy to be useful. The type of stellar system a tile represents is determined as follows. All null tiles represent empty star systems with no habitable worlds or promising resources. Excluding nulls, habitable star systems are represented by blue and green tiles (the colors of life). Resource-rich star systems are represented by black tiles (the color of ore). Red ace tiles represent super nova explosions.

During the course of the game the board gets built by the players as

they add tiles to it, representing exploration of the globular cluster, expanding outward from the MITS. Players also move their expedition members, represented by p.p. coins, out into the cluster.

Although empty systems (null tiles) are not useful for habitation or resource collection (mining), they are suitable for constructing giant warp transfer stations powered by the stars. Such stations cannot be built in colonized systems because of the intense gravimetric disturbances the stations cause. Such a stations provides instantaneous transport over any distance and may only be accessed by its builder.

Habitable star systems (blue and green tiles except nulls) are potentially profitable and the expedition leaders (players) can increase their value during the game by building infrastructure to prepare them for colonization.

Resource-rich systems may be mined for the most important ore in the galaxy: dilithium crystals. They are critical components in every warp engine and transfer station, and sources of good quality crystals are rare. Fortunately the conditions in the globular cluster are favorable for their formation. Crystals possess one of four refraction gradients and are more valuable in matched sets of two or three so players try to collect pairs or triplets, or force trades with other players when they can.

Super novas (red ace tiles) can never be entered or traversed because of the intense radiation. The appearance of a super nova has the game function of triggering a scoring round.

GAME PLAY

Pick one player to go first. That player adds a star tile to the board and then spends action points to explore the globular cluster. All expedition members start the game from the MITS. Each player starts the game with twelve normal expedition member (the coins), one leader (the pawn), and two warp transfer stations (the saucers). Leaders are the equivalent of three normal expedition members (i.e., having a leader on a tile is equivalent to having three normal members.

Players get 10 action points per turn to use in exploring the cluster.

Play then passes clockwise to the next player, who places a tile and explores the cluster, etc.

PLACING A TILE

The player picks up the top-most tile from the stack and adds it to the board.

Figure 2 shows a portion of the growing board early in a game. The following placement rules must be met:
a) Each horizontal row of tiles must be offset by 1/2 tile with the rows above and below it, yielding a pseudo-hex pattern.
b) There may not be any interior holes in the pattern.
c) All the tiles must form a single contiguous group.
d) The expanding board, including the MITS tile, must always fit within an imaginary 6-tile by 7-tile rectangle. The retangle may be vertical or horizontal, and the MITS need not be centered vertically in the group.
e) No part of any tile may extend past the right hand edge of the MITS tile.

The tile may be added wherever the player wishes, consistent with the above rules, and in any orientation.

When a resource tile is placed, the player must place a quantity of pennies on it, equal to the tile number. Each penny represents a dilithium crystal cashe.

USE ACTION POINTS TO EXPLORE THE CLUSTER

Players may use their 10 action points to do any actions they can afford and in whatever order they wish. The cost of various actions is as follows:

Move one expedition member between adjacent tiles

The cost depends on the suit ticks in the corners of the tile. The MITS is treated as a tile with no suit tick.

All tiles have a small suit tick in one corner. The relative orientation of

these ticks on two adjacent tiles determines the cost, in action points, of passing from one tile to the other. There are four different cases:

a) The two tiles each have a tick on the side facing the other tile, and the ticks are directly adjacent to each other. The cost of crossing is then 4 A.P.

b) The two tiles each have a tick on the side facing the other tile, but the ticks are offset from each other. The cost is then 2 A.P.

c) One of the two tiles has a tick on the side facing the other tile while the other tile has no ticks on its facing side. Then the cost is 1 A.P.

d) Neither tile has a tick on the side facing the other tile. In this case expeditions may not move between these tiles directly.

Some examples of costs to move between tiles on this board are as follows. To move from the MITS onto either black ace costs 1 A.P. Movement from the MITS direct onto the black null is not allowed. It costs 1 A.P. to move from blue 2 to the green 2, or from the red null to the green ace. It costs 2 A.P. to move from the blue null to the green null, or from the green ace to the green 2. It costs 4 A.P. to move between the red null and the green 2.

A tile may not be placed with tick mark orientation such that it can never be reached during the game.

The cost to move a leader is the same as the cost to move a normal expedition member.

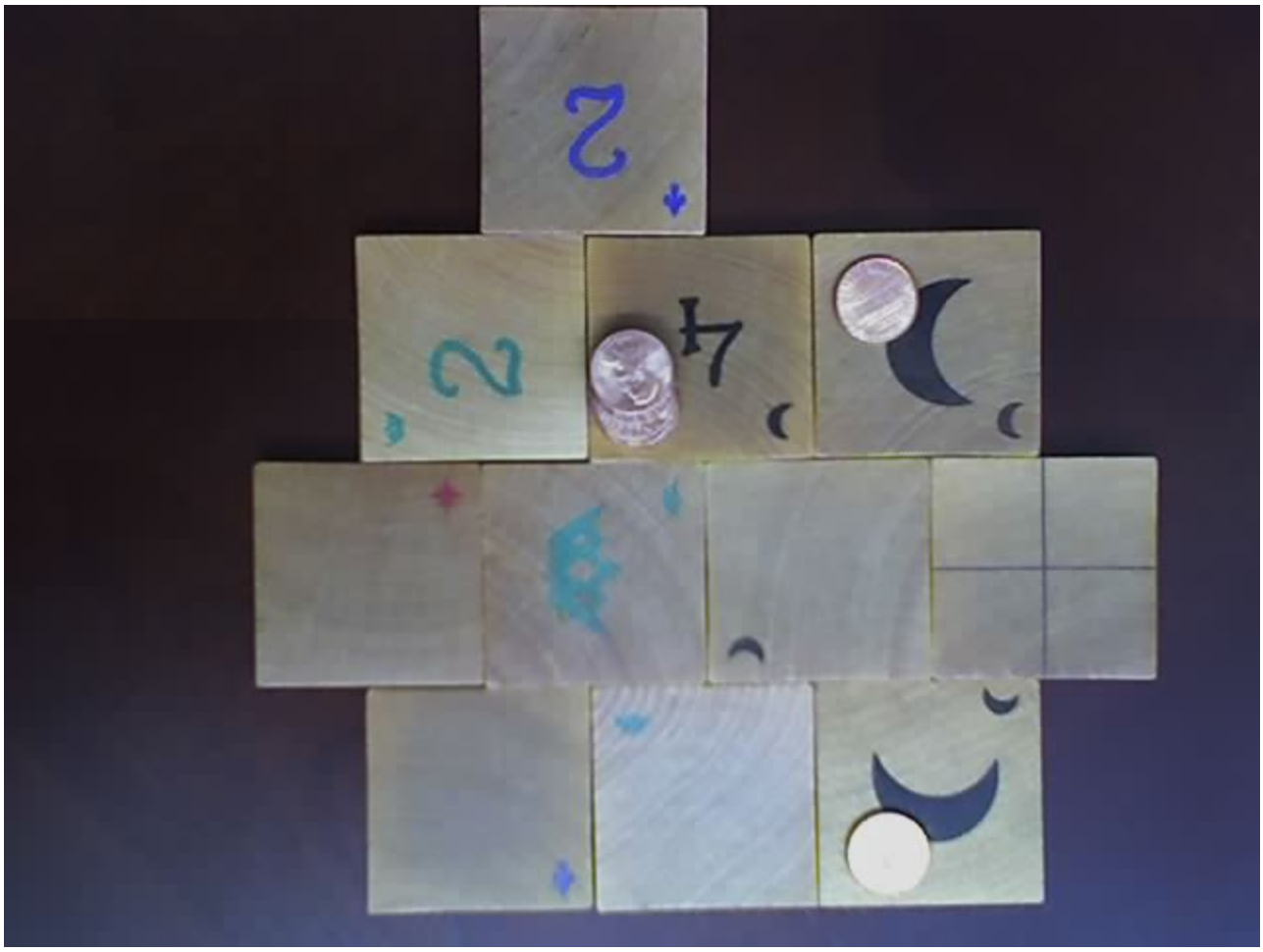

FIGURE 2. Showing a section of the board illustrating tile placement (expedition members are not shown).

Mine one cashe of dilithium crystals

This can only be done on resource tiles (black except nulls). To mine crystals a player must have at least one expedition member in the star system. The cost is 3 A.P. per cashe of crystals mined.

On a player's turn he may mine up to two caches of crystals in a star system. A player may not mine from more than one star system per turn. The player must have one expedition member in the star system per cashe of crystals mined. To mine, the player removes a penny from the tile, then rolls his or her die to determine the refractive gradient of the crystals. The crystal types and quantity mined are then recorded on the player's score sheet, either by noting with pencil or by placing the penny next to a column heading on the scoring sheet.

Exchange one cashe of Mined Crystals

A player may do a forced trade (one type of crystals for another) with another player. Trades are always 1 for 1. Players may never trade for matched pairs or triplets and may not break up other players' pairs or triplets. The cost to do a trade is 3 A.P.

Build Infrastructure

Star systems with habitable worlds (blue and green tiles except nulls) have starting values from 1 (ace) to 5 as indicated by the tile number. When a scoring round occurs the player with the majority presence on a habitable world tile (the player who has more expedition members there than any other single player) receives victory points equal to the tile number. If infrastructure improvements have been made, the number of victory points is higher by one point for each improvement made. An improvement is recorded by placing a penny on the tile. So, for example, a #3 tile with two pennies would score 5 V.P. for the player with the majority presence.

To make an infrastructure improvement a player must have at least one expedition member on the tile. The cost to make an improvement is 2 A.P. per improvement made. The player must have one member there per improvement made and no more than two improvements per tile per turn are allowed.

During the course of the game, there is a limit on how much total infrastructure improvement can occur across the globular cluster (resource limitations of the funding conglomerates) as follows.

There may be no more than five habitable star system tiles of total value 6 (tile number plus number of pennies equals 6).
There may be no more than four tiles of total value 7.
There may be no more than three tiles of total value 8.
There may be no more than two tiles of total value 9.
Infrastructure totals greater than 9 are not allowed.

Open a Star System For Colonization

Star systems with habitable worlds that have had at least one

infrastructure improvement may be opened for colonization by the player who holds the majority presence there. Do do this the player moves one of his or her expedition members present on the tile onto the top penny in the stack of pennies there. Once this is done, the player always scores this tile for the remainder of the game no matter how many members other players have stationed there. However, this action freezes further infrastructure improvements of this tile for the remainder of the game. After moving one expedition member onto the pennies, the player removes all of his or her other members from the tile and places them out of the game. During future turns, all players' expedition members may still visit or pass through the tile.

The cost to colonize a tile is 5 A.P. and no player may colonize more than one tile.

Build a Warp Transfer Station

Warp transfer stations allow instantaneous transport from the MITS to the station of from station to station. Station use is restricted to members of the expedition that built it.

A player may build a warp transfer station in any empty star system (null tile) or any mined-out resource tile (black tile with no pennies remaining). It is not necessary to ave any expedition members on the tile (it is assumed that the construction crews have finished and left by the time the station is activated). The only restriction is that there may not be two stations on the same tile.

The cost to build a station is 5 A.P. The player then places a pawn saucer on the tile (colored dot face up) to represent the station.

The player may now move expedition members from the MITS directly to the station for a cost of 1 A.P. per member moved. Similarly, members may be moved from one station to another. Players may only use their own stations, although there is no restriction on stationing expedition members on tiles that hold other players' transfer stations.

SCORING ROUND

When a Supernova tile is drawn, the game immediately enters a scoring

round.

The player who drew the tile temporarily puts it aside and uses 10 A.P. to explore the globular cluster.

After using the 10 A.P. the player scores his or her position.

There are two parts to scoring: scoring habitable star systems and scoring dilithium crystal cashes.

For each habitable star system tile (blue and green except nulls), a player scores V.P. equal to the sum of the tile number and the number of pennies on the tile IF he or she has the majority presence. If no player has a majority for a tile, no player scores that tile.

For each single dilithium crystal cashe a player owns, he or she scores 1 V.P. For each matched pair of crystal cashes, a player scores 3 V.P. For each matched triplet of crystal cashes, a player scores 6 V.P.

A player's score for the round is equal to the sum of the two scores.

After the player who drew the super nova scores, all other players, in turn order, use 10 A.P. to explore the cluster and score. No tiles are drawn during this time.

When all players have scored, the player who drew the super nova tile places it instead of drawing a new tile for his or her next turn (using 10 A.P. to explore the globular cluster). No other tiles are drawn during this turn. Then the game continues as normal until the next super nova tile is drawn.

GAME END

After the last tile is placed and that player completes his or her turn, all players complete one more turn without tile placement.

Then all players complete one additional turn, with all players scoring as they complete these last turns.

The player with the highest score wins.

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