



STRATEGIES FOR TWILIGHT IMPERIUM

by Stefan Sasse

Twilight Imperium is the core game of Fantasy Flight Games, revised twice and being an all-time favorite of players with a large internet community and lively PBeM-scene. The box is full with nice plastic ships in different colors, stoutly-printed hexagonal system tiles and a thick rulebook. Everyone looking at it knows instinctively that he has a big baby in his hands that will consume much of their time. And in fact, Twilight Imperium features one of the longest playtimes of all FFG games: at least four hours in a four-player game in which everyone knows the rules and everything goes smooth and fast. But it is more reasonable to assume you need five hours for a four-player-game and to add one additional hour for every player above that.

So, an eight-player game takes at the very least eight hours; more realistic will be ten to twelve since with a game that long you will want to take a break to eat and stuff. You should be perfectly aware of that fact when you open the box because once the game starts, everyone is committed, since players very rarely get eliminated, unlike the equally long classic “Diplomacy.” When you bring new players to the table, make clear to them what awaits them once you open the box. Nothing is more unsatisfying than having to stop a game right in the middle because one player doesn’t want to play anymore.

That said, play at every opportunity you have. Twilight Imperium is a really great game, easily one of the best empire building games there is, maybe even the prime of its class. But be advised: the expansion “Shattered Empire” is highly recommended for play, because the vanilla game has some serious flaws (like the overpowered fighters or the very imbalanced strategy cards) that needn’t spoil your game experience. TI3 is also very forgiving about houserules, of which I’ll recommend several. This topic gets addressed at appropriate points and at the end of this guide.

A last word on theme: unlike normal board games, especially euro games, TI3 features a well-written background and very thematic rules that fit in quite nicely. It is rewarding to read the backstories and to delve a bit into the theme, because all the races and many rules are designed after the background, and if you know a certain background for a certain race, you will soon recognize that a certain play style goes with it. That might greatly influence your choosing of a race.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

The basic principles of Twilight Imperium are simple. You start with a great race on a not-so-great planet with a few units at your

hand and want to build up an empire. Unfortunately, you’re not the only one, so you find yourself at gunpoint with your fellow players soon enough. Luckily, there are several planets ripe for the taking before the bad matter of fighting others comes up. While you extend the borders of your empire, you will research new technologies, take your rightful place in the senate at Mecatol Rex and propose agendas (and vote on those), and conclude trade contracts with other players.



A game round is roughly divided into three parts: choosing the Strategy Card (SC henceforth), playing your empire and wrapping up. It is important to understand what these phases do so you can act accordingly. Let’s take a quick look at the SCs before we explore them in detail in the next phase. The choice of SC determines much of your strategy for the next round. You determine if you want to be aggressive (e.g. by choosing Warfare) or if you want to be more cooperative (e.g. choosing Trade). Of course, this does in no way force you down a certain path, but it surely helps if you know what you want. When choosing a SC, you should have a plan for the upcoming round.

In the second phase, which will take the bulk of play time in any given round, you take the infamous tactical actions, strategic actions and, sometimes, transfer actions. We explore these in detail in the later rounds. Suffice to say, this is the phase where your plans will falter and you have to adapt in order to survive. Try to avoid errors like blocking systems you will need later.

The third phase then is the great wrap-up. Tokens are removed, dealt out, you get cards and stuff, and, most importantly, Victory Points (VP) are scored.

THE GAME BOARD

TI3 features a flexible gameboard which is set up anew every game. So you won’t find the same two galaxies in two games, a

fact that doesn't allow for standard tactics since you have to adapt to the gameboard. Since it is not set up by chance but by the players themselves, the setup is an important strategic step you have to do, and there is a lot to consider when doing it. So first look at your hand of systems and quickly sort out what you have there. Are there any good systems, like Bereg/Lirta IV or Abyz/Fria? You will want to place them in easy reach of your HS, but not too close so you can use them as production sites. So, a distance of one other system is often recommended. If you don't have stuff like that, you have to see that other players place at least some of their planets in your proximity. Deal the empty

and special systems in their area of space and try to force them to place planets where you can reach them later. Remember that in a standard setup, the galaxy looks a bit like a pie with every player controlling one triangular pie piece. Usually, there is some sort of unspoken consensus that stepping over these "natural" borders means war.

So, since every player must place a planetary system with at least every second tile, you can try to block their precious spots with your empty or special systems. This way, they have to put their planets farer away from their HS. But this only allows for meager chances. If you have a bad hand of systems, make this known to your fellow players as soon as possible. They will then hopefully not take you out entirely and place their crappy systems along themselves.

Concerning the special systems, always remember to use them to your advantage. You can block certain routes to your main turf with systems like the Supernova, the Nebula or the Ion Storm. Never ever make the mistake of thinking the Asteroid Field would give you a likewise advantage! Sooner or later in the game everyone will usually have the Antimass Deflectors technology, and then the Asteroid Fields are no obstacle, but a shortcut directly in your base because you are not allowed to put a ship in there to block movement off! Putting an Asteroid Field adjacent to an enemy HS in the planetary setup is really nasty and provides a way into their base for everyone who wants to take the chance. Nebulas and Ion Storms are great for blocking purposes, however, because ships can't fly through (at least not without the seldom researched Light Wave Deflectors tech in the case of Ion Storms) and, more importantly, because you can put a single ship in these systems to block enemy movement off. In most cases, an invader will opt to go through some planetary system if possible to take a planet on the way too.

Another thing you have to consider is the ratio of planets per player. The game is really balanced for six players. If you play with three, four or five players, there will be considerably more planets per head compared to a usual six-player game. The same goes for the seven- and eight-player game. Compare it; the number of systems doesn't change in the same relation as the number of players increases. This means in games with fewer players there are more resources and votes per head. While the latter doesn't make a real difference, the enhanced resources will allow you much bigger fleets and a much more sped up rebuilding of lost fleets.

You also need to have an eye for good systems. There are one-planet systems with three resources on them, but generally one-planet systems suck. What you need are two-planet systems with as high resource values as possible for production if you don't already have them in your HS like the Letnev do. Two-planet systems allow you to throw down two SD, each one counting for the important build limit. Remember: Resource value plus two (three with Enviro Compensator) equals the building limit, so a system like Bereg/Lirta IV allows you a building limit of eleven! Even though a planet like [0.0.0] (the L1z1x Mindnet HS) also has five resources of its own – just like Bereg/Lirta IV have, combined – it only allows you to build up to eight, which is a serious disadvantage in comparison. Even the crappy starting planets of Hacan can reach a combined build limit of twelve! It is imperative not only to compare the absolute value but also to determine which planets are good production spots.



Another very interesting thing are wormholes. They allow you to open backdoors. You should be very careful where you put these. Normally, you don't want them anywhere near your precious systems, so you should place them where they endanger the enemy. It is always rewarding to use wormholes to break up a galaxy setup that tends to be static, because everyone secures himself a nice turf, blocks it with empty and special systems and has just one or two ways into his HS. Putting a wormhole in the proximity

of such regions is always messing things up, and the two planet/wormhole systems contain nice planets. A Greek present if there ever was one! You can exploit this by promising to give the other player a

decent planet in exchange for some action of his and then put this nasty thing down. Likely he will even thank you for it!

These things in mind, you need to lay out some strategic ideas before you put down the first system. Do you want to go for MR or not? If yes, you should place a good production system in the proximity, if you are daring, even adjacent to MR. If not, keep your stuff away from the big MR, because someone almost always will fight over it and perhaps decide to take some juice with him while he can. Likewise keep the crappy stuff on the border to the neighbour you don't intend to fight so he has less incentive to attack you. Your overall plan already takes shape in the very first phase of the game, so it is important not to throw down the systems randomly.



ACTIONS & PLANNING YOUR ROUND

There are essentially five kinds of actions. One of them you take at the end of the round; it's the passing action. You always pass when you don't want to perform any of the other actions anymore. An exception to this is stalling, but we will come to that later in this section. Another simple-to-grasp action is to play an AC that has the phrase "Play as an action." This is a two-edged sword, either allowing you to stall or hindering your movement. A card like Enhanced Armor which gives your Cruisers an additional hitpoint like the Dreadnoughts and War Suns for the entire round is rendered useless when you are attacked, because you can't play it then, so timing is crucial. Check your hand of action cards every once in a while to realize your options. I'll advise to sort them a bit; put AC that are only used in combat in a different section than the rest, so you have to keep only this rest in mind and forget about the rest. You should have a concept when to play AC that requires an action. The last simple action is the Strategic

Action which is simultaneously the only action mandatory to you. You mustn't pass before you have taken all possible Strategic Actions. We already talked about them in the Strategy Cards section, so I won't go into more detail here.

This leaves us with two more actions: the Transfer Action and the Tactical Action. You won't see many Transfer Actions in your games, but sometimes they come in handy. You activate two systems, both of which must contain units of yours, with one CC, the other one taken from the reinforcement pool. (Remember that you cannot perform this action when there are no CC left in reserves!) You may freely exchange ships between the two systems, but you may only build in one of the systems (even if you have an SD in both). This is especially useful when you want to exchange two fleets, for example because you previously fought a battle in an adjacent system. You then bring back the empty carriers in the SD- system to build new fighters for them and simultaneously sending the reinforcements from the last round (probably locked in the previous round because you activated the system to build them) into the system the battle took place. That is the main use of the Transfer Action, but most of the time fleets take a one-way trip anyway so you have no need to lock other systems with CC. Another use of the Transfer Action actually exploits this: should you have researched Integrated Economy that allows you to build in adjacent, activated systems, you can activate many adjacent systems more efficiently and so spread your forces.

The action you will take most frequently however is the Tactical Action. With this action, you may perform a series of steps of which you only need to do the first one: placing a CC down in a given system. The other stuff is pretty straightforward: move in, fight, build. Remember that you are not allowed to build SD on newly-conquered planets and you may not build units at newly-constructed SD. The most important aspect is to always consider that an activated system may not be activated again in this game round and any ships in it may not move. So always make sure, for example, to move out any ships you want to move from a production system before activating it to build new ships. You can exploit this by forcing an enemy to build early to protect himself and thereby locking his fleet for the remainder of the round.

OBJECTIVES AND VP

When I explain TI3 to new players, I always tell them a strategy certain to lead to victory: "Score Victory Points." This may sound a bit redundant in a game where the only way to win is by reaching a fixed number of VP, but it isn't. Especially new players fall

for what I call the “epic illness”: they will be so overwhelmed by all the cool options and stuff that comes along with the game that they totally forget about its objective. They are delighted to research all that fancy tech, to build a great fleet, to mass up planets and votes, have CC for every eventuality – and then are stuck with two VP while the guy that was reduced nearly to his HS wins the game. How does this happen?

Essentially, you have to have the big picture in mind. You have to score VP, at least enough to keep up with the Joneses. There is no need to lead in the VP race; as I will show in the Diplomacy section, it is essentially a disadvantage to lead it. Some Public Objectives (PO henceforth) are static objectives; they refer to achievements that, once achieved, can’t be taken away from you (like researching a certain number of techs). Other POs are dynamic, like holding MR at a certain point of the game. If you can fulfill several POs at a time, you should always fulfill the dynamic ones first. If the “I have held MR this round” PO is up and you currently own the planet – fulfill it. You can then always use it as a bargaining chip in your diplomatic efforts to avoid war.

A second thing to consider are the Secret Objectives (SO henceforth). You never know what these are with the other players, and you want to hinder them in their efforts to fulfill them because 2VP actually is a lot. Some of them seem easier to fulfill than others. Many players dismiss objectives like destroying the last SD on the board or conquering a HS due to the difficulty they bring along to fulfill them. You shouldn’t. These difficult objectives have the advantage that no one sees them coming. SOs like those concerning MR are easy to foresee and therefore to forestall. Someone is stacking Dreadnoughts at MR? He will have the corresponding SO in most cases. You then just need to destroy one to hinder him, and to hold MR another round is always difficult, especially if everyone knows that a SO is tied to it. So if you are attacking an enemy player anyway, say to hinder him from victory, you can by the way fulfill this war-SOs everyone sees as impossible.

Last thing to consider is the Bureaucracy SC. This SC allows you not only to fulfill a second objective in the round you use it, but also to determine which objective will be the next popping up. Many games are won by someone using the Bureaucracy SC. You can fulfill up to three objectives with this card (two PO and one SO) and, playing with the green Special Objectives (from the expansion), even more! That allows you to gain five, six or even seven VP in just one round and a so-called “bubble victory.” These are very dangerous. Players that hang behind one or two

VP after the VP leaders are often overlooked and are more likely to end up with Bureaucracy. If you can pull a bubble victory then, the game is instantly won! For this it is important to do some long-term planning. You need one PO in reserve you can fulfill any time, like those you have to spend CC for or that require certain techs. You should also fulfill your SO in this round without instantly claiming it, and then hope that the use of Bureaucracy will turn up yet another one you can fulfill (perhaps you have bribed the last owner of the card to tell you which PO he laid back on the pile). This way, you fulfill the PO coming up and after everyone passed you fulfill yet another PO and your SO.

There is just one chance to prevent such bubble victories (and other obvious victories like the guy having nine VP already): you have to seize control of his HS. It is important never to forget that you can’t score VP if you don’t have control over the planets of your HS. In many cases, that is attainable. So if you plan to go for victory in a round, see that your HS is secured! Many advanced players save some nasty AC for such a situation, like “In the Silence of Space” to do some emergency invasions.

Systems

In this section I will talk about systems and give details in the corresponding sections about what you have to consider when playing with them. (Home Systems are discussed along with their respective races.)



Empty Systems: All empty systems are the same, obviously. They don’t hinder fleet movement and there is nothing in them to conquer. Put one ship in it to prevent enemy movement and else try to move through them as quickly as possible.

Special Systems: First, let’s consider the Supernova. This system is pretty straightforward: you shall not pass (with one exception). This system very effectively blocks out movement through it. You should put it in the path of incoming enemy fleets when possible, flanking the precious systems to guard them from attacks from multiple directions. You may also put it directly in the path of an enemy HS to MR, which is always a nasty thing to do.

Second, there is the Asteroid Field. As already mentioned, this

thing should never ever be considered as an obstacle for an enemy. Instead, it's the number one autobahn to wherever you want to go. You'll piss off anyone in whose path you put these thing. Make sure to make them adjacent to strategically-important locations you don't own.

Third, there's the Nebula. It's a splendid block too, because every incoming ship has to stop and may only leave with a speed of 1. Oftentimes it's more efficient to move around the Nebula. Should you have managed to put one next the enemy's HS, however, you can fly in with your fleet. He won't really want to attack you in there, since as defender you get +1. Normally, this bonus is highly overrated, though – you seldom see fights in Nebulas.



Fourth, there are the wormhole systems. There are two that are otherwise empty and two containing planets. The empty ones don't give you the benefit of a planet but open you up for attacks. Of course, this works in

both ways. I generally dislike to have a wormhole in my proximity because it makes the situation so much more unstable and gives way to nasty surprises. Of course if you like the risk and play aggressively anyway, put them where you can go through them. If you have the choice, take the planetary wormhole systems because you can protect them with two PDS against incoming raids.

Fifth, coming to us with the SE expansion, is the Ion Storm. It shares the movement blocking traits with the Nebula, but it lacks the defensive bonus. Fighters may not be used, which makes the Ion Storm a good parking spot for a fleet that doesn't want to take it on with a fighter-heavy fleet on their terms, and PDS mustn't shoot in as well. But be warned: there is a certain agenda as well as the tech "Maneuvering Jets" that allow to ignore the movement restrictions. So, don't feel too safe about the Ion Storm.

Sixth, also courtesy of SE, is the Wormhole Nexus. Not only is he connected to every wormhole and thereby offering a nice shortcut to where you want to go, but Mallice is also worth three influence which is a free annex with the use of Diplomacy II's Secondary or a free Command Counter for Leadership's Secondary. It is difficult to defend, but if you control the system you can basically

go everywhere.

Seventh, there are the planetary systems containing a trade station. These are hard to protect, but you should get them when you can and use their ability as often as possible. Two TG in the pot is always preferable to the normal income since you can also use them as bargaining chips and build with them when you like.

Eighth, there are Gravity Rifts. Like Asteroid Fleets, they pretty much deter any movement while you don't have the right tech (Gravity Drive, in this case), but once you have it, they are empty systems and more or less highways, since placing units in there comes as waste. They are not as useless as Asteroid Fields, however, since with Gravity Drive, you can use them to accelerate your ships in all adjacent systems. And if you got the Gravity Drive with the planet in it, you even profit double from it.

Crappy Planet Systems: Some planet systems are not really good. This is because they lack high values in resources and/or influence, because they consist of only one planet or because they suck for other reasons. These systems are: Tar'Mann, Thibah, Wellon, Mirage, Tempesta.

You may be surprised to find Mirage around them, because getting two free Fighters seems kind of cool. It isn't. The planet isn't worth a SD, and you seldom can allow yourself the trouble of parking an empty carrier in orbit to wait for those fighters who you can't support otherwise. Even with the "Advanced Fighters" tech the planet doesn't really shine because it just takes so long to get there.

Medium Planet Systems: These planet systems are medium. They're not good, they're not bad. You place them alongside the juice to take them when the opportunity presents itself, but it's not a real loss when you have to concede them to other players. These systems are: Arnor/Lor, Centauri/Gral, Corneeq/Resculon, Dal Bootha/Xxehan, Lazar/Sakulag, Mehar Xull, Saudor, Tequ'ran/Torkan, Vefut II, Ashtroth/Loki/Abaddon, Capha, El'nath, Garbozia, Lesab, Perimeter, Rigel I/Rigel II/Rigel III, Hope's End, and Vega Major/Vega Minor, Herculor/Tiamat, Industrex, Faunus.

Some quick words about the Rigel-system and Ashtroth/Loki/Abaddon: should you have no reasonable other spot to throw down your SD, then these planets can be treated as "Good Planet Systems" since they then have a high build limit; in most cases however you'll want something like Abyz/Fria or Lisis/

Velnor and put up the third SD someplace else like MR or your HS. Hope's End, on the other hand, is nice, but in most cases you don't want to forego three resources for a Shock Troop (ST henceforth). Should you be in a ground-combat-heavy game though, it becomes an option.

Good Planet Systems: These are the real juice, having high values and good tech discounts. You always want to have them in your grasp. These systems are: Abyz/Fria, Arinam/Meer, Berag/LirtaIV, Mecatol Rex, Mellon/Zohbat, New Albion/Starpoint, Qucen'n/Rarron, Lisis/Velnor, Primor, Sem-Lore.

Of this list, only MR and Primor require some further explanation. First MR. The resource value of this planet is crap, so building a SD here is no step you do for build limit. Since MR is always the center of the map, however, you will want to reinforce it if you plan on keeping it. Be sure to produce two PDS quickly and constantly put out additional GF. Don't bother with the fleet – this you should bring in from behind; the build limit is too bad to cope with a serious invading force anyway. Possessing MR will in most cases make you top in the total number of votes, so be prepared to receive some envy. You can also exhaust it to gain three CC with Leadership Secondary. Primor, on the other hand, is often underestimated. Put it in the path to the enemy or a strategic relevant objective like your production center or MR. Always use its ability and spawn GF like there is no tomorrow. Soon, you will have two carrier full of GF waiting to get picked up. That is invaluable, since it saves you the build limit for ships!

DISTANT SUNS

There is a lot of heat going on about Distant Suns, the optional rule which assigns a random counter to every planet containing a good, bad or neutral event. I strongly advise to play with Distant Suns, but there are those who object it even more strongly. So, what's the problem?

Distant Suns, one might criticize, add an additional layer of chance to a game that is already rich on chance. What AC and PC you get is up to chance, which systems you may place in your proximity at the beginning of the game is up to chance and the space and ground battles are. So why add Distant Suns, and what implications does this decision bring?

First, you're not adding too many new rules, which is a point in favor of Distant Suns and allows them to be used even with beginners. Second, the expansion phase in the beginning where all



players grab new planets as fast as they can is slowed down. The second implication is important. In the vanilla game, everyone needs just to put down a GF on a planet to take it. With Distant Suns, many things can happen. The whole feeling of the game changes, and you need to adapt new strategies for it. In the following I will always assume that you play with Distant Suns in your games.

So, what does this bring for the early game expansion in general? You have to be prepared. It doesn't do anymore to send in a lonely Carrier with one GF on it to take a planet; you are easy prey then for defending Fighters or GF. So, I usually recommend to bring one additional ship like a Cruiser or Destroyer or two Fighters and to place two GF on every planet rather than one. Two GF have a chance to cope with most hazards, especially the Biohazard Domain Counter. More are a waste most of the time and die totally with the Radiation counter.

Don't be too upset, however, when you don't get good counters and another player not only grabs all the TG, but also the free SD and tech. This does change the situation, and you can exploit it diplomatically.

RACES

The Races are one of the most beautifully-designed concepts of the whole game. The rule changes that occur to every race – the special abilities – seem to have such a little impact since they touch only slight aspects of the game. None of these special abilities seems to be in any kind particularly groundbreaking, an impression that is only enforced since every race uses the same units. But one would be mistaken if he thought that these special



abilities don't have much of an effect. In fact, they alter the way of playing, create a different feeling for every race and determine your play style to a certain degree if you don't want to forego serious benefits or even suffer disadvantages.

In the following, we will take a detailed look at each of the fourteen existing races, examine their special abilities, starting techs, starting units and how all that stuff fits together. Some opening moves will be explained, and we will see where to go from there.

ARTIFACTS

Artifacts are a game option provided with the Shattered Empire expansion. There are four (in different meaningless colors) and each grants one instant Victory Point when you possess them; you also instantly lose this VP when you lose the Artifact. So, it's good to have them, right? Yes and no. Artifacts are deceiving:

it seems like you have more VP than you actually have since you can lose these VP, which isn't true for VP granted from fulfilling objectives. VP from Artifacts aren't real VP, they are just borrowed; they are potential VP. Nonetheless, they help you achieve victory. So, how to treat Artifacts?

I consider it best to see them as potential VP. Since they are placed outside the reach of the main power centers normally due to placement rules (not adjacent to MR or HS) they can be quickly taken in most cases. That makes Artifacts the number one thing to go for if you plan a bubble victory. Oftentimes it is possible to snatch one, or possibly more, Artifacts in the decisive round since people tend to take them for granted.

So if you have an Artifact within easy grasp, resist the urge to take it if there is no immediate danger of anyone else to win with such a move. All you gain is another easily-lost point. However,

gaining it makes you look a little more dangerous, like someone who has to be stopped. This is not an impression you want to give. Try to have Artifacts as potential in your range, and then take them in the one round where you will close the game. Many people also forget the loss of Artifacts can cost them victory; if someone will reach 10VP this round, it might still be possible to cut him back to nine by taking an Artifact in the same round.

PROMISSORY NOTES

Promissory notes were included in the "Shards of the Throne" expansion. You may trade them in the negotiation step of the Assembly II SC, and they offer a variety of options for both sides. Basically, you allow another player to force you to do something at a point where you might not want to do it. There are five different Promissory Notes:

Support of the Throne: The player holding this Promissory Note requires one less VP to win. Obviously, this is the strongest Note you can give away, and it's really game changing. I strongly recommend that you remove this card from the game, even if you use Promissory Notes, since it tends to destroy much game experience and does not add anything.

Territorial Concession: With this card, you can force the other player to retreat from a Space Battle at its start. This card can be used to create a strong non-aggression pact. It's the single best Promissory Note. I strongly recommend giving it to a neighbor in exchange for his. This will prevent war with him better than anything. Try to collect these, too. If you are winning, you can fend off player's attacks on you quite easily.

Promise of Protection: You can lightheartedly give this one away. It seldom has any lasting effect on the game.

Voting Concession: Another very strong thing. Try to avoid giving it away, especially if "Voice of the Council" is used. It can have a devastating and totally unforeseeable effect on you later.

Monetary Concession: Rarely given away, but in most cases not as useful as one might think.

MERCENARIES

An option newly introduced with "Shards of the Throne" are the Mercenaries. They are strong single units, represented by a paper token, and can be gained by use of the Trade-III- SC. Normally, there is no reason not to get mercenaries if you are not in dire need of every single TG. Mercenaries are very strong, some possess ridiculously strong special abilities, and they all share the new "Evade" key word which allows them to survive much longer.



The most interesting mercenaries are Daffren (for his ability to deny crucial SC to another player; but beware of the almost certain retribution), Sara Crane (for the cheap CC she provides), R'una (for in longer battles she really pays off), 52N6 (because the one Technology denied can be crucial, especially if it's something like ADT or Duranium Armor) and Krevvil (because assigning hits is a mighty thing, especially to Carriers).

A WORD ON HOUSE RULES

TI3 is a game that is very forgiving and open to many kinds of houseruling. You can experiment with almost every aspect of the game and tweak it – from the initial galaxy setup to the matter of resolving combat to the effect of the Strategy Cards. There are hundreds of altered techs, SC or AC and Agendas to find on the internet, and many of them can juice up the game really good. You can also find additional systems should you be bored by those supplied with the game and complete rule modifications on scoring victory points.

The sheer range of modifications makes it nearly impossible to look into all of them. I will just show some minor modifications I like to play with since they make the game considerably better in

my eyes and shortly explain why I think that these modifications should be used.

Change in Diplomat and Agent - The Diplomat can be very annoying. He requires no gaming skills or foresight once sitting on an important planet and blocks it seemingly forever. An easy change to solve this problem and to make the use of this leader worth thinking about is to rule that he can only be used on unexhausted planets. Like this, it becomes more difficult to protect, say, Mecatol Rex or your HS since both are likely to be exhausted. One has to use more planning and to weigh in the likelihood of attack in order to use the Diplomat.

The same is true for the Agent who oftentimes simply serves as a Sabotage AC sitting in the HS. The proposed rule alteration is that he can only sabotage AC directed at the system he sits in (and political AC when he is on MR), but is not discarded by use in this case. He just can use this ability only every second round, like the Diplomat. More planning and foresight is needed to use him now, making the game more interesting.

STAR BY STAR

The standard galaxy setup has a major problem: it creates “pie slices” of the universe from the HS to MR, something like natural borders, and makes the game more static than it needed to be. It can be very interesting to make the HS freely placeable in galaxy setup, which is what Star by Star does. This way, borders become more fluid, and players can decide whether to be right in the center of the universe, near the action but open to attacks, or more at the edge and safer for it. One important rule about placement is that HS can't be adjacent to each other unless there's no other option. Also, since many times there will be HS within two spaces of each other, activating another player's HS is disallowed in the first round.

This method can be altered in two additional ways to make things interesting: players only determine position of HS, not which goes there. Then in order of play, they choose the spot they want to sit in, thus leading to a more balanced universe. Or, you can place all systems randomly, so no one gets to place his systems himself and the whole board is a product of chance.

CHANGES IN TECH

As already said, there are certain possibilities to alter techs. The most important one in my eyes comes for the racial techs and their acquisition. Unfortunately, many racial techs seldom see

use in a game since they are so expensive. There are two ways to alter this so that race techs see more use. One way is to get a discount for the number of Victory Points you already have (yes, that makes Artifacts more valuable). Another option is to receive the race tech automatically for free once you have a VP total that equals the resource cost on the race tech's card.

Other possibilities include the altering of expensive, seldom-used techs like Fleet Logistics. In this case, one possible use would be to alter it this way: Once per round spend one CC from SA to turn a CC in any one system to the "fleet" side, thus allowing an already activated fleet to leave the system but not allowing you to activate the system and build again. Another possibility would be to change Gen Synthesis, which is somewhat broken when fighting at a HS. Instead, allow it to grant you Shock Troops on a roll of 9 or 10, rather than just on 10.

CHANGES IN DREADNOUGHT AND WAR SUN

The Dreadnought is a ship much too expensive for what it actually does. Even the L1z1x have problems using them efficiently, and if the fleets don't become real big, the two hits are simply not worth the cost. This rule change gives Dreadnoughts two combat dice instead of one, making them real scary capital ships – slow, but deadly. In exchange, Dreadnoughts take up two production slots during a build. (In other words, when you build a Dreadnought, count it twice toward your SD's production limit.)

If changing DNs this way, then enable War Suns – which already roll three dice – to sustain three hits instead of two and to take up three production slots, the better representing how big and scary they are.

In both cases, remove one combat die for each point of damage the ship receives. This will keep both types of ship from being too overpowered.

PROBING ALTERNATIVE

When you play with Distant Suns, you might want to use an alternative to the rather useless probing as it is proposed in the rules. Simply assign every Fighter in the activated system to a planet with a DS token on it and throw dice for all of them: on a 10, you may look at the assigned DS token.

SPEAKER TOKEN BIDDING AT STARTUP

To remove a bit of the element of chance in the beginning of the game, every player is handed out three trade goods. He then secretly bids some, all or none of them for Speaker. The player who bid most gets to be Speaker; the rest keeps the TG they didn't bet. In case of a tie, there is still a die rolled for the tied players.

Alternatively you can simply award a TG to the players 5 and 6, since they get the worst SC in the first round(s).

Ninth Strategy Card Options can be found on the Internet for adding a ninth SC. This SC is only used in 4- and 8-player-games so there's still a leftover to generate bonus counters and not being stuck with useless cards. Who needs Diplomacy in round 1, after all?

CONCLUSION

Twilight Imperium is, that cannot be denied, a very complex game. It is my sincere hope that this guide has helped the reader somewhat in diving more into the depths of the game. It is nigh impossible to even begin covering all the situations that can arise in your typical game session or the strategies and tactics resulting from them. To figure out the best move in any given situation is still a task to be performed by the individual player. If this guide has helped you somewhat in finding these solutions it has achieved its goal. If not, I hope it was at least fun to read.

My sincere thanks in creating this guide go to Remy Gibson, who took it on him to correct all the grammatical errors and misspellings and relentlessly told me where I just laid out some shallow, obvious things and where an in-depth-look was required. Thanks to the users of the ti3wiki-boards Kirstobal and Nikas-Zekeval to point out some errors. I also thank Mike Evans for creating some of the best racial guides to be found on the Internet, the creators of the ti3wiki-boards and, of course, Christian T. Petersen to create Twilight Imperium in the first place. Let's hope that, someday, we will see Twilight Imperium Fourth Edition and may be allowed to discover all the depth and fun again.

