

# Space Board Games

Mark Buckley



## Introduction

- Board games NOT computer games or Role Playing games
- NOT Boxing Day family games
- All 2,175 space board games listed on Board Game Geek would run the length of the Shambles in York, or be the same length as 15 buses OR 30 London buses high and the area would cover about 1 1/2 tennis courts

# Why

## Why did I choose these?

- I have a copy
- I have played it!
- They have a reasonably 'hard' science basis/  
plausible near-future setting/extrapolation
- NB Just because a game is set in space doesn't  
make it a 'space' game

## Four examples of 'space' games

- SETI (Earth)
- Spacecorp 2025 – 2300AD (Solar system+)
- Stellar Horizons II (Outside solar system)
- High Frontier 4 All (Solar system)



# SETI

**2024 Czech Games Edition**    **1-4 players**  
**Tomáš Holek**                      **~160 minutes**  
   **Complexity 3.82/5**

Search for signs of alien life by launching probes and analysing distant signals



<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/418059/seti-search-for-extraterrestrial-intelligence>

# SETI

- Launch exploratory probes from Earth
- Planetary positions shift
- Probes can be orbiters or landers
- Ground-based telescopes on star systems
- Collect and process data
- Upgrade equipment and increase resources
- Use publicity to gain resources/grants/investments
- 200+ illustrated cards with real technologies, projects and discoveries





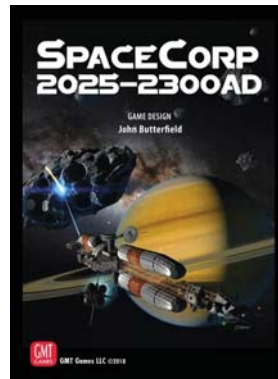
## Spacecorp 2025-2300AD

2018 GMT  
John Butterfield

1-4 players  
up to ~240 minutes  
Complexity 2.98/5

Develop your enterprise  
through the eras and take  
humanity to the stars

The game is based on Ejner Fulsang's SpaceCorp  
book, the first of the Galactican Series.



<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/214029/spacecorp-2025-2300ad>

## Spacecorp 2025-2300AD

- Assemble a spaceport at a Lagrange Point
- Launch an exploration mission to Mars
- Mine the asteroids
- Earn profit from exotic resources discovered on the Jovian moons
- Discover microbial life in the subsurface oceans of Charon
- Decode exo-DNA to develop radiation resistant human pioneers
- Undertake a mission to Alpha Centauri in a generation ship
- Break through technological barriers to achieve faster-than-light travel
- Establish a colony in the Tau Ceti star system

## Spacecorp 2025-2300AD

Each of the three eras is played on a different board.

The first era, **Mariners**, covers exploration and development out to Mars. The first player to reach the asteroid belt gains a benefit for the second era.



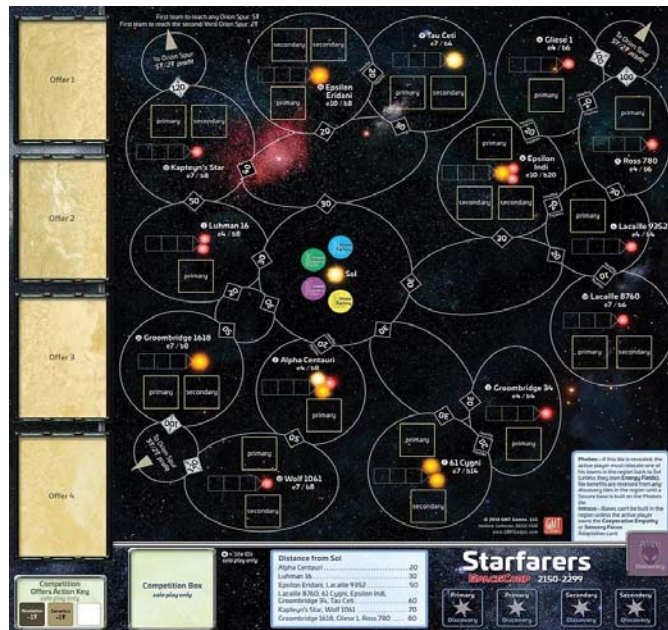
# Spacecorp 2025-2300AD

In **Planeteers**, players settle the outer solar system and have to contend with problems of hard radiation and cosmic rays. The first player to reach the Oort Cloud gains a benefit for the third era.

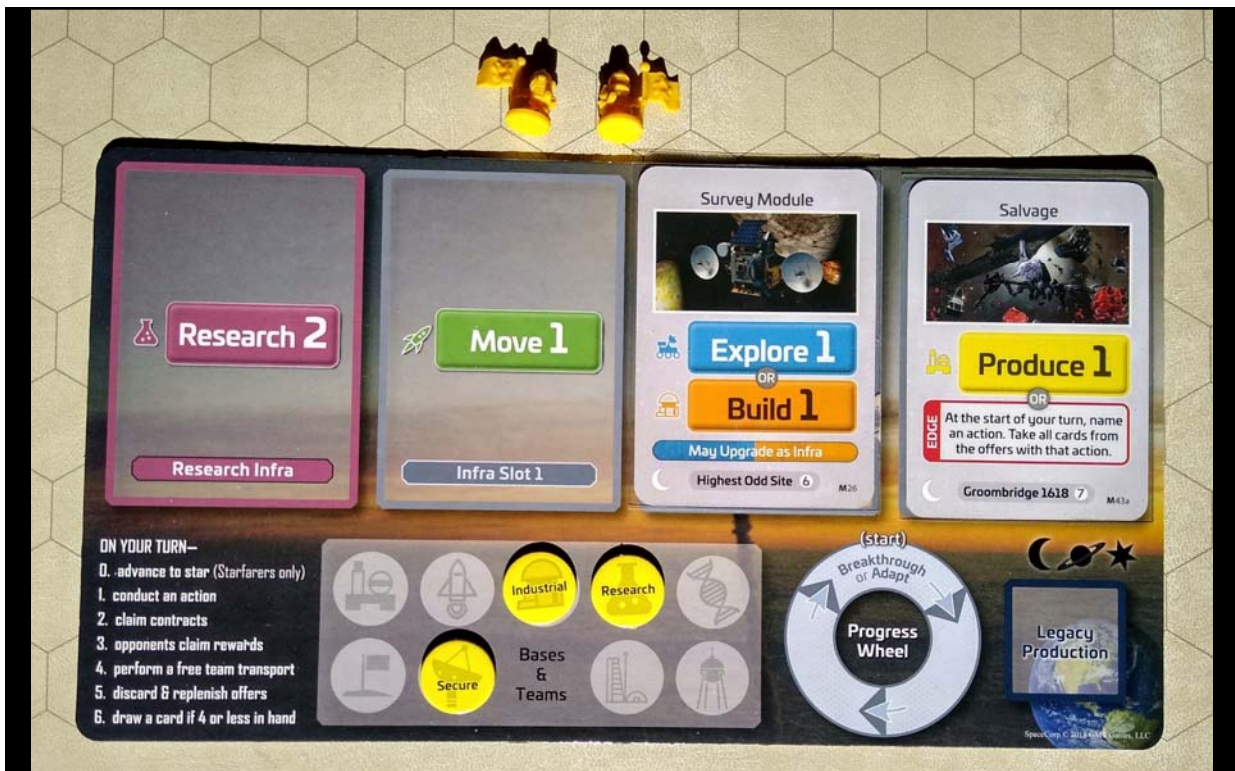


# Spacecorp 2025-2300AD

In **Starfarers**, players send missions to nearby star systems and establish interstellar colonies.



# Spacecorp 2025-2300AD



# Spacecorp 2025-2300AD



# Spacecorp 2025-2300AD



## Stellar Horizons II

**2025**

**Compass**

**Andrew Rader  
(MIT, SpaceX)**

Trace humanity's  
journey into the  
galaxy over the  
coming centuries

**1-7 players (!)**

**up to 360 minutes or more**

**Complexity 3.0/5**



## Stellar Horizons II

- 1 - 7 asymmetric factions exploring outwards from Earth to nearby star systems
- Settle, trade, conquer, terraform
- Develop technologies eg science vessels, mining ships, genetic manipulation
- Competitive and cooperative scenarios and campaigns
- Each turn is one decade, up to 90 turns!

# Stellar Horizons II



A map of the solo campaign I played in April 2025 ending in 2640AD. Each hexagon represents 1.5 parsec (~5 ly)

# Stellar Horizons II



# Stellar Horizons II

### FACTION: PRAETORIANS

**ABILITIES**

1. Draw an extra fleet improvement card; each additional fleet improvement card per level costs +3 instead of +5.
2. +1 to combat rolls.
3. Your bases can't be raided.

Century	Cash	Tech Markers	Max Ships	Max Bases	Trade Goods
2100:	\$28B	2 3 2	4	1	2
2200:	\$30B	2 3 3	5	2	3
2300:	\$32B	3 3 3	6	3	4
2400:	\$35B	3 4 4	6	4	5
2500+:	\$35B	4 4 4	7	4	5

Settlement cost: \$6B

### BASE PRODUCTION

Settlements	Trade Goods	Cash Bonus	Tech Bonus	Population
1-4	1*	-	-	10,000
5-9	1*	+\$1B	+1	100,000
10-14	2*	+\$2B	+1	1 million
15-19	2*	+\$3B	+2	10 million
20-29	2*	+\$4B	+2	100 million
30-39	3*	+\$5B	+2	1 billion
40-49	3*	+\$6B	+2	10 billion
50+	4*	+\$7B	+3	100 billion

\* Base storage capacity is 2x this.

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### FACTION: CONSORTIUM

**ABILITIES**

1. You can sell trade goods in systems with other player bases for free.
2. When you draw demand markers, draw 3 instead of 2 to choose from.

Century	Cash	Tech Markers	Max Ships	Max Bases	Trade Goods
2100:	\$25B	1 2 2	5	1	3
2200:	\$27B	2 2 3	5	2	4
2300:	\$30B	2 3 3	6	3	5
2400:	\$33B	3 3 4	7	4	6
2500+:	\$35B	3 4 4	7	5	7

Settlement cost: \$5B

### BASE PRODUCTION

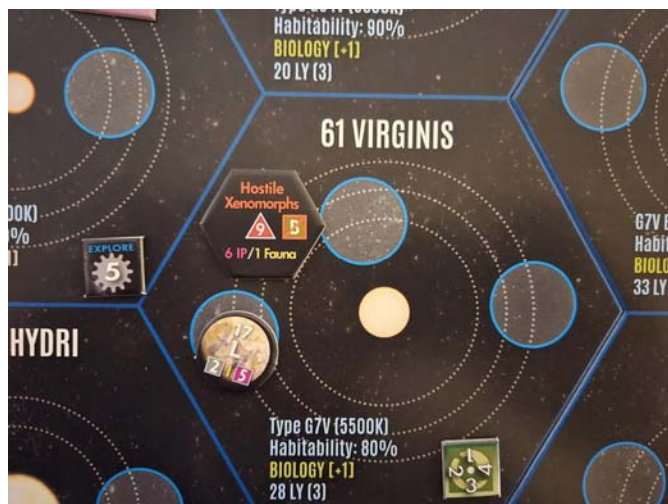
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# Stellar Horizons II



## Stellar Horizons II



**Game over man!**

## High Frontier 4 All

2020 Ion

Phil Eklund (ex ESA)

1-5 players

up to 240 minutes or more

Complexity 4.81/5

Use rocket science in a race to explore and industrialise the solar system

<https://boardgamegeek.com/boardgame/281655/high-frontier-4-all>



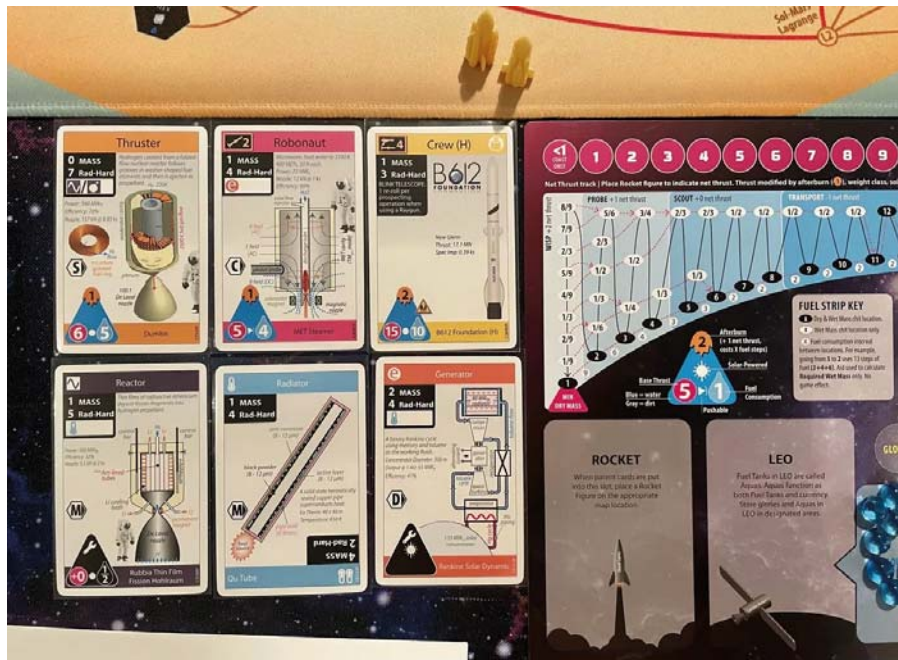
## High Frontier 4 All

- Developed from Rocket Flight (1999) and is now in the fourth edition
- Each player starts as a space-faring company trying to make a profit in trade and technology development bidding for patents
- Components built and boosted to LEO, to be assembled into rockets and cargo
- The map is a delta-v map, showing the energy requirement to get from one locale to another
- Aqua is used as currency and propellant

## High Frontier 4 All



# High Frontier 4 All



# High Frontier 4 All

## Cards

- Thrusters: rocket thrusters, solar sails, dirt thrusters, fission (Project Orion), fusion
- Robonauts: remote mining machines
- Refineries: ore purifiers
- Generators: pulse or steady current
- Reactors: three kinds
- Radiators: cooling, energy is difficult to disperse in space as there is low conductivity
- Crew module (thrust, mass, ISRU, rad-hardness etc)

## High Frontier 4 All



## High Frontier 4 All

### The Map and Boards

- Sites: size, spectral type, atmospheric, hydration, astro-biology, submarine
- Intersections: Hohmann, Lagrange points, burn spaces, hazards, flyby, radiation belt, aero braking, buggy roads, heliocentric zones, synodic comets
- Sunspot cycle tracking

### Rule Book

40 pages of rules and 11 pages of glossary (ignore at your peril!)

## High Frontier 4 All

Player Actions (1 per turn per player)

- Gain income (1 aqua at LEO)
- Research auction for patents
- Free market (sell a card)
- Boost (move components from Earth to LEO)
- Site refuel
- Prospect
- Industrialise (build exo-factories)
- ET production (building at an exo-factory)
- Delivery (move components from exo-factory to Earth)
- Free actions

## High Frontier 4 All

For masochists, there are six expansions making it possible to spend your entire life playing the game – with another one due out this year:

- 1 Politics (included in base game)
- 2 Terawatt and Futures
- 3 Colonization
- 4 Conflict
- 5 Exodus
- 6 Economy
- 7 Odyssey (due 2026)

Also integrates with earlier and later sequence games: Bios Genesis, Bios Megafauna, Bios Origins, Interstellar, and Arrival!

## Honourable Mentions

**Leaving Earth:** starting in 1956, a game about planning and managing risk in rocket development

**Terraforming Mars:** compete with rival CEOs to make Mars habitable and build a corporate empire

**On Mars:** be a part of the first Martian colony striving to be the best contributor

**Shackleton Base:** lead your space agency to expand your presence on the Moon

**Liftoff 2.0:** be the first nation to land a human on the moon and successfully return them home again (Kickstarter coming soon)



## Other space games: Role-playing games (RPGs)

- Traveller (1977 and still going)
- Apollo 47 with 1,199 additional pages of info
- Eclipse Phase (solar system, trans-humanist)
- Hard Wired Island (O'Neill colony, cyber-punk)
- Mothership (space-based horror)
- Alien (see above)

## Other Remarks

- Historical UK / Germany – different attitudes to games
- Spiele / Essen October every year 4 days with 250,000 attendees including school trips
- Rise in popularity of board games/RPGs since 1990s, especially since COVID
- Euro / Ameritrash differences (derogatory term but in current usage)

## Meriel's Favourites

For a lighter and shorter game, try these

**Space Base:** dice-based

**Moon Colony Bloodbath:**

card-based and  
whatever can go wrong  
will go wrong – death  
ensues



## And in conclusion

### Useful info:

- boardgamegeek.com
- Gaming Rules @GamingRulesVideos (Youtube)
- Heavy Cardboard @Heavycardboard (Youtube)

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