

# Cosmic Encounter

by Paul Mason

**Cosmic Encounter** is a classic. People say that about many games, but in this case it's certainly warranted. A game which perfectly combines strategy, diplomacy and (above all) fun, using simple rules, can't be anything else really, can it?

Each player controls an entire alien race, and must strive for mastery of the galaxy. The galaxy in question is represented by the playing board which shows six solar systems, each of which have five planets. All these are rendered in luscious colour. Devotees of the old edition of the game should note this – no more tatty black and white hexagons – Cosmic Encounter has entered the Space Age!

The game's basis couldn't be simpler. Each player's alien race must establish bases on 5 planets outside its home system to win the game. Bases are established by invasion – spaceships (represented by plastic tokens) being transported across the emptiness of space by means of the **Hyperspace Cone**. This fascinating item regulates play, as players take turns to launch up to two attacks through it. The Hyperspace Cone is a whimsical entity, whose location is decided not by the player, but by **Destiny**. A pack of cards (the **Destiny Deck**) is used to determine which system will be the lucky recipient of the invading fleet.

The expansionist Cosmic General must now decide how many ships are to be committed to the attack. Players start the game with 20 – four on each of their five home worlds.

Up to four ships from any given race may be accommodated in the Cone, which is then directed at one of the planets in the victim's system. Both parties involved – the attacker and the unlucky defender, may then call for **allies**. These other players may then join in with up to 4 ships apiece, persuaded by the promise of a base (if they aid the attacker), or a reward (if they help the defender). The two **main players** each select a **Challenge Card** from their hands (dealt at the start of the game), and play these face down. Once the cards are revealed, the outcome of the invasion is determined. **Attack Cards** (the majority type of Challenge Cards) have numbers printed on them. This number is added to the total number of tokens on the player's side. The higher total wins. **Compromise Cards** (the other type of Challenge Cards), are a means of attempting to settle matters through diplomacy. Against a concerted attack (opponent plays an Attack card), they concede the battle (but earn a **consolation** of stealing a Challenge Card from the victor's hand for each spaceship lost). If both players compromise, they have a minute to come to an amicable

agreement, involving an exchange of cards and/or a base. If they don't agree, they both lose spaceships!

Whether through straight victory or an opponent compromising, all ships in the loser's side (including allies) are consigned to the scrapheap, or the **Warp**, as it's called in this game. This pocket of non-space is the destination of all losers – but it's not permanent. One ship may be reclaimed from the Warp before each attack a player makes, and defensive allies claim tokens from the Warp as part of their reward for allying with the winning side.

A simple game, no? But as with all the best, it's the refinements which make the difference. And in Cosmic Encounter nothing is sacred. Even the rules already described can be warped out of all recognition! So far all has been Order. Now for Chaos ....

*'The huge fleet swooped down upon the unassuming little planet. Each of the monolithic Macron vessels was the equal of four standard ships. It seemed nothing could stop them. Then, suddenly, they vanished in a flash of white non-light. Anti-Matter had reduced the proud would-be conquerors to less than nothing. But somewhere across the galaxy, the Healer was at work. Its mutant lore and science could reverse even the power of a white hole, and the Macrons were soon speeding home, their sub-light drive exhaust between their tail-fins. The Healers celebrated – for virtue was not their only reward.'*

So, Cosmic Encounter has a gimmick: each alien race is able to subvert the rules in some way. There are 32 alien powers given in the game, so the interplay between the aliens will be different each time you play it.

There's one final refinement that must be mentioned. Mixed in with the Attack and Compromise cards are **Edicts**. These may not be used in Challenges. Instead, they represent the intervention of some greater agency into the Cosmic interplay.

Each Edict has a powerful effect on the game, and for this reason are played and then discarded. Effects include the cancellation of an alien's power for the duration of a challenge (Cosmic Zap), the freeing of *all* spaceship tokens from the Warp (Mobius Tubes), the prevention of any or all alliances in a challenge (Force Field), and several others.

How do you win a game of Cosmic Encounter? What's the secret formula? Well, unfortunately, the secret formula is so secret that I haven't cracked it yet! However, what I *do* know is that the diplomatic aspect to the game is crucial. If you make enemies early on in the game, by being vindictive or gloating too much, then

there's a good chance you'll wonder where all your potential allies went. This is a tremendously fluid game. You can often find yourself fighting somebody who was your ally on the last challenge. So one piece of sound advice is to keep your head down – keep a low profile. It's surprising how many games can be won simply by not drawing attention to you conquests. With all the alien power-play going on, players often don't take the time to assess exactly what the situation is: who's got how many bases. This is something you *must* do, to prevent an opponent from sneaking a win.

A whole book could be written on the best strategies for individual powers, and even that wouldn't be able to take account of the most important part of the game – your personalities. In some ways, Cosmic Encounter is a crude role-playing game. The player with the deadly Virus power (which *multiplies* his tokens by the number on his challenge card rather than the usual addition), will frequently become an arrogant, assertive type, certain of his ability to walk all over any opponent. A subtler power, such as the Gambler (who may bluff his opponent on the value of his Challenge card – he doesn't have to reveal it unless the opponent takes the risk of calling the Gambler's bluff) produces a wily individual, resembling a poker player. All this makes the atmosphere of a Cosmic Encounter game virtually unique.

The original game was backed up with a long succession of Expansion Kits, some of which were (to put it mildly) a bit dodgy in places. The **Moons** for example, included such things as a situation where all players had to speak in rhyme, or one had to sing a little song about his power. When they developed the game, Games Workshop selected the good bits, and cut out the more unproductive aspects.

However, having selected 32 powers to go into the 2nd Edition Game, they found there were still some interesting powers left, deserving of publication. So on the opposite page you'll see four new powers to add to your game. Cut them out, and mount them, back and front, on thin card. If they stand out too much, and players can pick them by feel when selecting powers during set up, you may have to introduce a new system for picking powers (for example, using cards from a normal pack of playing cards, keyed into particular powers). You will also have to keep Alien Power cards well hidden, if using the 'Hidden Powers' option given in the rulebook, to avoid giving the game away.

There's not a lot to be said about the powers – they're fully explained. I must mention the **Reincarnator**, however. This one causes all kinds of Chaos in the game as the lucky owner frequently changes power. It's not as powerful as it may first appear, since you can't really come up with a long-term strategy when you don't know what your power is going to be! Oh, and keep an eye out for the **Warrior**. His experience points make him a particularly dangerous foe, and since he begins the game without any particular advantage it's often easy to discount him.

So, that's the game of Cosmic Encounter. A game for schemers, dictators, generals, weirdoes, aliens, and, of course, gamers! Now in a gorgeously produced edition. It just has to be a must!





PENALIZES FOR REFUSING TO ALLY

## GRUDGE

### GRUDGE

You have the **power of revenge**. Whenever you are one of the two players in a challenge, if you invite another player as an ally and he chooses not to come to your aid, if you win the challenge (or make a deal) he loses 4 tokens to the warp. These lost tokens cannot include tokens he used to ally with the other side.

#### History:

Suffering from a species history of almost uninterrupted betrayal and disappointment, the original kind Grudges gradually grew cynical. Expecting no good will from others, they began to brood and resolved to wreak vengeance on all who would turn aside from their outstretched suction disc of friendship. Now adept at revenge, the Grudges gaze spitefully at a world that has denied them fellowship. They will get even! They will repay!

Do not use in a two-player game.



ADDS EXPERIENCE POINTS

## WARRIOR

### WARRIOR

You have the **power of mastery**. Each time you are one of the two players in a challenge, you accumulate one point if you win (or make a deal), or two points if you lose (or fail to deal). You keep a running total of your points throughout the game, starting at zero. Whenever you play an Attack card in a challenge, you add your present experience points to your total in the challenge.

#### History:

Once considered ferocious but dull-witted by more "enlightened" races, the Warrior clans were bred as fighting stock for the petty squabbles of their lords. Throughout the ages, however, they have learned the value of both defeat and victory. This wisdom gives them mastery over those who would sneer at their potential.

Do not use in a two-player game.



CHANGES POWER WITH OPPONENT

## CHANGELING

### CHANGELING

You have the **power to change form**. When you are one of the two players in a challenge you take your opponent's Alien Power Card and give him yours. You do this as soon as the defensive player is determined. The challenge is now carried out. The Changeling power may be used *only once* per challenge. When you change into an Alien, you get all facets of his power; e.g. the Miser's Hoard, the Warrior's Points, the Schizoid's Terms.

#### History:

The childlike Changelings love play and gleefully anticipated new experiences. Recently they have developed the unsettling ability to shed their psyches in exchange for those of others. Their standard greeting of "I just don't seem to be myself today" provokes panic in many a passing acquaintance as the Changelings leapfrog about the Cosmos.

Do not use in a two-player game.



USES POWERS NOT IN GAME

## REINCARNATOR

### REINCARNATOR

You have the **power of reincarnation**. Whenever you are involved in a challenge as a player or ally and you lose (or fail to deal), you reincarnate. That is, just before the next challenge begins, you draw an Alien power card at random from the pile of those not in use and become that Alien. If it cannot be used in the game, draw another. When you lose as that Alien, discard it and draw another, etc. The Reincarnator power stays with you while you use the others. In a game with the Plant or Insect, they may copy your current incarnation, but if they lose they must reincarnate, and the Plant or Insect power is out of the game.

#### History:

Having conquered the fear of death, the Reincarnators rejoice with the passing of each of their kind. Feeling kinship with all life forms, they know that those who die will soon be born again in an endless cycle.

Do not use in a two-player game.