

Notes to the readers of grognard.com, 24.10.2001:

I wrote this beginners notes to help some friends along to get a grasp of the game. Some of what you read here will sound a bit odd as we are playing a house version of the game, a complete overhaul of the original I wrote. I have submitted the material to Brian Youse at MMP last week, lets see if it is of any interest to MMP. If I get notice that it isn't I will very likely post that material here.

However, most of what I wrote as beginners notes still holds true for the original game.

I reserve all rights to these Beginner's Notes. They may not be copied or reproduced by any means or their contents altered without my expressed, written permission. Uwe Alexander Reuter, 24.10.2001.

Apologies for any typos and such, but English is not my native language.

FREEDOM IN THE GALAXY

BEGINNER'S NOTES

Both Players in Freedom in the Galaxy have the chance to ease their game a lot by spending some time thinking and preparing before the game starts.

Though Freedom in the Galaxy has a lot of randomness, there is still a lot you can plan or at least think about and prepare in advance. Maybe it is because the game can seem so random game, that this kind of pre-game planning pays off so well. It will give yourself some guidelines about what you want to achieve and what your limits are so you will not get sidetracked later on once the game commences by the myriads of things that can happen throughout the game.

Lets start with the Empire. Not just because the Empire sets up first (the set up is to some extent fairly trivial), but because it is defensive and passive during the early game, building its defense against the Rebels and then waiting for where it will be challenged first. Once we have seen how to build these defenses, we can start to think how to dismantle them with the Rebels.

Throughout the Beginner's Notes I will use the terms 'Prime Systems' and 'Outer Rim Systems' A 'Prime System' is a System with a Capital, Throne or home of a Starfaring Race. These are the Systems you can fly to even if the Strategic Assignment does not name them. A 'Outer Rim System' is a System without these properties, i.e. the Imperial Player can only fly there, when the Strategic Assignment names the province of that System.

EMPIRE

The preparation for the Empire is much more difficult than to prepare for the Rebel Player. The Rebel Player has 20 characters, 20 possessions, complete freedom of movement and the initiative during the early game. The Empire has 51 Planets of various importance, over 100 military units, its 12 characters, restricted movement and no way of predicting where the Rebel Player will strike neither can it really prevent it. On one hand the Empire has fixed assets which it has to protect on the other hand it must prepare some forces to be used offensive without actually knowing where it finally get that chance to act offensive. These two main issues, guarding of your assets and be ready to strike out at the Rebel Player at any opportunity that might arise are difficult to balance. Use too much for guarding duties of your key worlds and the Rebel Player will have an even freer hand on all other Planets, use too little for guarding and he can target your key Planets directly. Often units have to serve both functions and it takes a bit of time when to switch between roles.

Deployment Plan

How to get started now?

The first step to do is to draw the Planet Secrets and then take the whole Imperial counter-mix into account to determine how you want (or better have to) use it. You have to take a look where are the Planets you want to protect and then decide which units of your force pool shall do it.

The first step to do is NOT to take the 35+ points per province allowed and place them on the map. That is not playing, it is just muddling through the game step by step and turn by turn. It lacks a plan, it lacks aim, it lacks any judgement what has to be done. Your forces at start are a mere temporary affair. Don't be fooled that the Strategic Assignment is that much of a hurdle that your initial setup will last more than three or four turns in the disarray it starts. Your taxation can ensure, that after turn four all that will be left in your force-pool are mainly Elite and Atrocity units. And a couple of turns later and you can have your force-pool empty.

Plan your game with your whole force-pool in mind. This means including your characters. Sure, no plan survives enemy contact, but till this contact occurs, till the Rebel Player has his own military forces, it will take some time. You will have to adjust your initial plans later on as necessary, but you need an initial plan to at least have something that you can adjust.

So lets think which Planets are important to you?

Obviously the Throne and Capital worlds, both for their VPs and their ability to tax your provinces (and in the Armageddon Scenario for their political value). As those are almost immune to domino effects, all the Rebel Player could do to take them away is to land on them and drag them by hand from Patriotic down. Anything else can be reached by domino effect from somewhere else at least in theory and is difficult to protect just by troops. Not so the Capitals and Throne. Also later on during the game, they will be the staging areas for those troops, that shall react to the first Rebellions. Guard them.

The homes of Star-faring races are next. Do not over-estimate the domino effect they can create, some races (Xanthons for instance) are so rare it makes little difference on which of their four Planets troubles start. However, they are all worth 3VPs and with some races, their domino effect actually CAN be nasty. Again, Home-Planets are immune to most domino effects (only Planets in their own System influence them) so again they can be protected a bit by troops.

Easy to miss for the beginner is, that there are some Planet Secrets which are so Important that I would rather choose to lose the Throne World than them. The IPOC is something most beginners seem to grasp at once. However, in my hierarchy even the IPOC ranks below the Gem, Slave and Industry Worlds. The Industry World gives you 15 resource points the other two each 25 points per se in five turns. Any other Planet will be taxed ONCE in the same time - at half value - if you do not have to forego its revenue completely to shift its loyalty. These three are the backbone of you financial basis. Keep them at all cost.

There are couple of other Secrets, which should be guarded at least during the early stages of the game. The Trap! ranks very high for that for me, next would be The Imperial Archives and maybe Casino Galactica, maybe Imperial Deltronics are worth a thought too. Some of them lose their value after the Rebel Player has succeeded with some kind of missions on them or got his Possessions together but till then you have to think if you want to make it easy for the Rebel to get down on them to perform those missions or not.

Each Secret in an Outer Rim System should have a mobile unit and a 0 PDB right from the start. The Trap! is the big deterrent for the Rebel Player at first to fly to every single Secret in the Outer Rim Systems. The Trap! of cause needs a level 0 PDB to be able to detected Rebel spaceships and be effective at all. And a mobile unit is handy to transport possible captured characters away. If you just put a PDB and a mobile unit on the Trap! however, even lousy opponents will get the idea where the Trap! is not. Don't give that info away for free.

Of lower importance, but still to mention are Coup ratings. Coups can backfire, but on a Patriotic Planet, that matters nil for the Rebel Player. Even one Militia will be a big deterrent for the Rebel Player to risk a coup as the whole group can be captured and some form of mobile unit to threaten to bring them away would be a bonus. Some people may wish to guard the orbit box over sovereigns, so they can intercept the units these could contribute to the Rebel cause.

One thing you should not forget is, that you will need some military unit(s) to transport characters. You can create five mission groups with your characters easily, but you have just four spaceships.. One Veteran or better yet an Elite Navy if you can spare the points can make up for that last ship.

Last to mention is, that from a certain point of the game on, you will need troops not only to guard planets, but also to attack the Rebel Player. You will see, that your forces will already be spread very thin if you want to guard all the places I mentioned above. But still, one turn in the future you must have the troops in place to attack Rebel units and crush Rebellions. Not at the start of the game, but you should already think, which units you will spare for that matter. As a beginner, it is a good idea to reserve your Elite units for that. They will usually arrive later in the game (you can build two at most per turn and cost maintenance) while almost everybody else can be ready within turn four to garrison and protect your important planets.

So these are the things for your units to do during your game. And you barely have enough units to get all jobs done. There is no perfect way to do it and it depends a lot how the game develops, but if you at least have a plan how to guard them, you at least will not blunder around with your units in some remote insignificant corner of the galaxy while the Rebel Player wins the game somewhere where it counts.

Initial Setup

Now, after you have this idea how you want to arrange your troops ideally, now you can bother to spend your initial 210 points. But this will only serve one purpose: to provide you a list of which units still lack and where to buy and put them. And an idea how the first couple of Strategic Assignments should be arranged.

With PDBs, I usually do not have the points to spare at start for anything better than a 0 PDB on all Secrets and planets worth more than one VP. Later on, these are raised each time the province is taxable while any other Inner Planet may get a level 0 PDB at most and Outer Rim Planets very often nothing at all. You could of course raise the Outer Rim planets to level 1 and make life difficult for ships like the Freighter or Solar Merchant, but it will cost you. As well could you raise all Planets in Prime Systems to level 0 to help you hunt Rebels there, but the net effect will be not very much. In general, do not over-estimate what your PDBs can do for you without troops to back them up. With regards to the units you buy at the start of the game, I am not even writing how to do that. They are just the first step of your forces and soon it will not matter at all any more what you bought where.

Pay instead attention to your Strategic Assignment. As you have no way to predict how the game develops, you can not do much wrong (or right) here with. It pays off to have the Cards connect to each other. You can worm your way through the Galaxy or you can fan out from Galaxy one to the other provinces or use a combination. One thing however which you should plan proper are the first couple of cards to bring all your forces to their proper destinations fast.

Gameplay

Now, how are your units usually used during the game:

Use your characters for missions during the early game. The guy who wrote in the original Imperial hints they are good for nothing has little inkling about the game.

You have three proper diplomats (Dermond, the Emperor and Gelba) to perform D missions while your many good leaders can try their luck with C missions. Also think about doing I missions from the start of the game. It will maybe not reveal the secret base for you, but will after some time reduce the choices the Rebel Player can offer you for one I drawn. Once he has revealed a couple of Supply Conduits and gave you the free choice of atrocity (which you will just keep to block that choice) all that is left for him is grant you freedom of movement for one I. That can be very handy on occasions. Just make sure that you in fact have a good unit to threaten to move with whenever you go on an I mission.

Take a look how you could combine your characters in the example below. Usually, I let most of my characters follow the Strategic Assignment. If you take province four as an example, there are only two Prime Systems (three planets) you can fly to without the Strategic Assignment. Once all of these

are Patriotic, you need an I mission to get away, wasting maybe precious time. On the other hand, some provinces have so much work at hand for Imperial characters, that you can leave a group behind and keep it occupied till the province is in the Strategic Assignment again. Province Three and Five are good example for this, later on also Province One. If the IPOC or Slave World (both in Outer Rim Systems) are low on Loyalty, you can leave a group there till it is Patriotic, then fly to a Prime System to find work there or the Capital to get away with an I mission.

One future turn there will be the need to remove some of your characters from mission groups to lead units in battle. Prepare for this ahead.

Now to your military units.

Those in Prime Systems can be used a bit flexible. You still have to guard some Planets there, but you can occasionally thin your defenses out to put pressure on Rebels showing up in Prime Systems in the hope to get lucky and bag them in. Chances are low, the Rebel Player will only use his best ships on these Planets, usually all three at the same time in one province, but you should try your best. If you get lucky, it will help you a lot. And it will keep the Rebel Player jumpy even if you don't get lucky.

Those on Outer Rim Planets (IPOC, Slave World, some Coup Ratings and unrevealed secrets ...) have to stay put to interfere with any Rebels. You can not send them to Prime Systems temporarily, as that direction is one way only (until the Strategic Assignment names that province again). However, some of these troops will become free to be used elsewhere after some time. Once the Trap! is revealed, all those mobile units to bluff at other secrets are not needed any more in that role. Once the Rebel Player got an I on the Archives or the Trap! the Planets become mainly useless etc. etc.. These troops can be used to bolster your defenses of other important places or can be put on a Capital to have them ready as part of your reaction force against future Rebellions.

Regularly, you will strip some of your defenses to root out Rebel Camps once the SA allows so. Mass your troops, stomp the Camp and fly back to your usual post again, don't let the Camp go on.

After some time, the first Rebellions will occur. They will unlikely occur within the Strategic Assignment so be prepared. Units at the respective Capitals should be ready. Rebellions in Outer Rim Systems can be reached only from the respective Capitals and the Rebel Player knows that. You can send anybody from the Capital to the Rebellion and reinforce the Capital from within the Province, but there has to be a suitable force on the Capital to react to Rebellions. As said, think in time of diverting leaders.

Which units to have as this kind of fire brigade? I earmark almost all of my Elites for that purpose, three of them per province on average. They are reliable and they will not suffer losses easily. Also the units which I received from obsolete Secrets (see above) are good for the reaction force. Depending on the province, these can be another three to four units in that province. Together with thinning out your defenses, you can have up to eight units maybe in each province free to react to Rebellions. At first enough to prevent any Rebel units from escaping (before the learn how to conduct Escape Moves that is). Keep in mind, that you will have to leave a garrison behind to prevent the Planet from switching to Rebel Control. Two M would be perfect, anything more fancy you will lack in later battles.

However, one turn it will happen, that the big trouble arrives. There is one new Rebellion in a province started, of cause by Rayner Derban. At the same time, Rebel units built via Supply Conduits destroy units you left as garrisons on two Planets in Rebellion in the same province. Both these Planets have a formidable stack in Orbit to interdict you, one with Ly Mantok. You are just happy that the other two R missions the Rebel Player did in that Province this turn failed. Three Planets in Rebellion with only eight units and Saytar to fight them. Maybe you have to thin out your defenses even more?

But this is only the first sign of doom. Maybe you will manage to keep two Planets out of Rebellion, the third will slip into Rebel Control. And you can bet the domino Effect will put his neighbor into Rebellion too, the fourth now within one turn and all the troops you can spare in that province are already involved in battles, your defenses thinned out to the minimum. But at least now, you can ask other provinces to assist you and send troops to your Capital.

At this point of the game, it is difficult to give advice how to act. It will depend a lot on how the situation has developed till then overall. On the other hand, when you have played that far, you should not need advice any more.

So let us take a look at an example how I would prepare for a hypothetical game.

EXAMPLE

Here a communiqué sent by Redjac, Headmaster of the Imperial Knights to Barca, Grand Marshal of the Imperial Army:

From: Redjac, Head of the Order of the Imperial Knights Q.222.S.U
To: Admiral Barca, Grand Marshal of the Imperial Army, O.162.T.U

By the Emperor,

With this Standard Cycle, his Goddess the Emperor Coreguya of Orlog has passed the 'Resolution of Internal Strength' to put in the Empire's hands those means necessary to defend itself against all threats alien as well as internal, future and present.

Built up is to be commenced as with this resolution. Please find attached the detailed plans for mobilization, training and deployment of our forces as laid out therein. You are to organize these forces as stated in these plans within the next 4 Standard Cycles, five at most. All resources necessary for this built-up will be made available ASAP. Please find the Order of Taxation and Conscription and the Strategic Assignment attached in subfile B-00.02.

The present forces are to reorganize in compliance with these plans. The 'Systems Defense Act' has been revoked, you are free to reassign current Planetary Defense Forces as deemed fit and integrate them into the new deployment of forces as feasible.

Your objections against the transformation and expansion of the Order of Imperial Knights from a Royal Security Force to a regular Army formation have been brought before his Goddess the Emperor. It is his Majesty's will however, to make the Imperial Knights the new vanguard of his might. Your personal cooperation has been ordered by the Emperor on this issue.

Signed in the absence of the Emperor in his name,

Redjac, Head of the Imperial Knights

IMPERIAL SCHEDULE

PROVINCE ONE	Start (PDB/units)	Final
111 KAYNS	- M	LPM
112	- PM	
113 ? Drug World c	- MM	MM
121	- P	
122 SEGUNDENS	0 M	LPM
131 ? Imp. Deltronics	0 VM	VM
141 e.r	- P	
142	- L	
143 ? Living Planet	0 P	P
151	- P	
152 CAPITAL	0 VM Dermond	VPM
161	- L	
162 THRONE	0 VV Emp, Thysa, Barca	LPM
163	- L	
	4V 3L 5P 7M	2V 3L 5P 7M
PROVINCE TWO		
211 YESTERS	0 M	LPM
212 ? Welcome Rebels e.i	- M	
221 ? Trap!	0 V	VLPM
222 ? IPOC c	0 LM Redjac	VLPM
223 e.i	- P	
231 e.i	- P	
232	- L	
241 CAPITAL c	0 M Saytar	VPMM
	1V 2L 2P 4M	3V 3L 4P 5M
PROVINCE THREE		
311 CAPITAL	0 P Jon Kidu	LLM
312 ? Clone World e.r	- P Jin Voles	
321 SAURIANS	0 M	LPM
322 e.n	- L	
323	- P	
331 ? Casino Galactica c	0 PM	VLPM
341 ? Slave World c	0 LM	VLPMM
342	- P	
351 SUVANS e.n	- M	LPM
352 ? Gem World	0 M	VPM
	-V 2L 5P 5M	3V 6L 5P 7M
PROVINCE FOUR		
411 CAPITAL	0 V Telmen	VVM
412 e.i	- M	
421 c	- LM	LM
431	- P	
432 c	- LM	LM
433	- L	
441 e.r	- L	
442 ? Dead World	0 P Els Taroff	P
451 PIORADS	0 M	LPM
	1V 2L 2P 4M	2V 3L 2P 4M
PROVINCE FIVE		
511 e.r	- P	
512 ? Industry World c	0 M	VPMM
513 XANTHONS	0 L	LPM
521 ? Mutant World e.n	0 P	P
522 ? Imp. Archives	0 LM Vans Ka-Tie-A	VLPM
523 c	- M	PM
531 ? Hyper World	0 P	P
541 ? Empire Forever e.n	- P	
542 CAPITAL	0 P Gelba	VPM
551 c	- M	PM
	-V 2L 5P 4M	3V 2L 8P 7M

Subfile B-00.02.

Strategic Assignment

turn	tax	assignment
1	none	1-5
2	two	1-2
3	three	1-3
4	four	1-4
5	five	4-5
6	one	5-2
7	two	2-3
8	three	3-1
9	four	1-4
10	five	1-5
11	one	1-2
12	two	2-3
13	three	3-4
14	four	4-5
15	five	
16	one	
17	two	
18	three	
19	four	
20	five	

Characters:

Redjac, Emperor, R.'s Ship
Dermond, Taroff, Telmen, Ship
Gelba, Thysa, Ka-Tie-A, Ship

Jon Kidu, Jin Voles, Ship, N
Barca, Saytar, N

Notes:

M = Militia
P = Patrol
L = Line
V = Veteran

Military units (final)

The first step for me was, to put a Veteran, Patrol and Militia on all Capitals and a Line, Patrol and Militia on all Home-Planets, all to be put in the Orbit Boxes. From there, the Veteran/Line can go down in a reaction move together with the loaded Militia should any Rebels dare to land and become detected.

A Line and a Patrol might look not very much, but the Rebel Player will have to guess where the dangerous Veterans are and where not, as all stacks look the same. I can switch these stacks regularly during the game to keep him further guessing, but once the first Rebellions loom on the horizon, I will have to think more carefully which units to put on the Capital. Though they are mainly to guard the Planet, if I am short of troops they might be the last I can throw against a Rebellion in due time.

Next I put a strong stack on the IPOC and the Slave world - a Veteran, a Line a Patrol and a Militia each. The Veteran and Patrol in Orbit to give two shifts on the detection table, the Line and Militia to search on the ground. These stacks have to be strong and self-sufficient as both Planets are in Outer Rim Systems and are difficult to reinforce.

I do the same with the Trap! also an Outer Rim World. This will of course give away, that this is an important Secret. The other option would have been, to put just one unit in Orbit (a Veteran) to pass the Planet off as 'just another Secret'. However, I deem it more important to make it difficult for the Rebel Player to do an I mission on the Planet than the slim chance I can bag in a careless mission group approaching the Planet without Professor Mareg or the Advisor Android. I usually assume my opponent avoids such blunders. I would love to put similar stacks on the Imperial Archives and Casino Galactica, but this will have to wait if I can spare the units.

Next I put a Veteran, Patrol, Militia stack in the Orbits of the Industry and Gem Worlds. These stacks can be slightly weaker than on the IPOC and Slave world, as they are in Prime Systems and can be reinforced. Should Rebels land, I can fly in a Line from somewhere else to make life difficult for the Rebel.

With the most important Systems now protected, I continue with the less important ones.

Each Secret in an Outer Rim System has to have its mobile unit to pass it off as the Trap! I put a Patrol in each Orbit except Imperial Deltronics. The Imperial Deltronics are a nice chance to shoot down some Rebel ships. By putting a Veteran in Orbit I will get a nice fleet detachment to attack with. However I do consider this just a nice trick, not really important to my game and should I need that unit elsewhere, I will recall it without second thought. This in mind, I decide to thin out the Throne World a bit, replacing the Veteran there with a Line as the Veteran on the Deltronics is just one jump point away if need arises.

I see that I still have enough units to strengthen the Casino Galactica and the Imperial Archives, so I add a Veteran to the Orbits and a Line and Militia on the ground to each Planet.

Next, I like to protect the coup rates with two units minimum. If a planet already has units in Orbit, I just add a Militia which will stay in the environ with the coup, on the Slave World I add it even though there are already units to give the Line there freedom of movement on the Planet. All the other coups, I have to think a bit. Ideally I would place a Patrol and a Militia on each, the Militia protects against 'Locals Raid Enemy Forces' the Patrol threatens to transport characters away foolish enough to go on a C mission. However, I am running out of Patrols, but I still have a couple of Lines left over instead. How to use these last units?

In a situation like this, I like to check a bit which Province already has how many units. Each Province needs a certain amount of good units (Veteran and Lines) even if there are few important planets just to be able to react to Rebellions, browse Prime Systems for Rebel characters showing up there and to destroy Rebel Camps. It turns out (as so often) that province four is fairly empty with one Veteran and one Line. That is okay when it comes to guarding the assets there as there are few of importance in Province Four, but on the other hand, the Piorads are notorious troublemakers. Especially in this game, with Tartio being the Dead World, I expect them to come at me rather early in the game, along

with Yarro Latac and Nam Nhuk joining the fray. I should add another Veteran and Line at least to be prepared.

I add a Line with a Militia with each of the two coups Lonica in Province Four. Furthermore, I decide to take away one Veteran from the Capital of Province Three and replace it with a Line, as province three is bristling with units (there is an exceptional concentration of important Secrets in Province Three this game). I replace the Patrol on Troliso with it, freeing another Patrol for a Coup and strengthening Province four a bit.

The two unguarded coups in Province Five receive one Patrol and Militia each. The Coup on Fliad, I guard with two Militias only. It is in a Prime System, were I can send in units to pick up captured Rebels.

Except my special units (Elite, Special Ops and Atrocity) I have five of Militias left. I will reserve to be used in conjunction with Elite units. I plan to put at least one Elite unit on every Capital with a Militia early on. Should I go on an I mission on any Planet in the hope of revealing Supply Conduits, the Rebel Player will have to think if he wants to grant me freedom of movement instead. I could then cast an Elite Navy unit with a Militia into the Orbit above the Freighter or Merchant, posing a serious threat to them during take-off. The Militias are necessary to protect against 'Locals Raid Enemy Forces'. Maybe I will later recall one Militia from Fliad for that use and put another Elite on Orlog.

One Elite unit will be used as a transport for Barca and Saytar.

Last I take a look at the Provinces. Province One and Four are fairly empty for their size, they will receive Elite units first to bolster their defenses. The Clone World is totally unprotected. However, it is not nearly as important as during the original game so I can live with that. Once the Rebel Player has most of his Possessions, I can think about switching the forces there to the Clone World should it become important for the Rebel Player.

With that I consider my preparation done. Enough units to guard each important Planet and occasionally a couple of units in addition, leaving all Elite and other Special units free to deploy as necessity arises. I don't want to say this is the only way, you could as well include some or all Elite units in your plan or leave other units out, but I like to do it this way. Elite units tickle in slowly as you just can build two per turn and as the game develops, you will get some ideas where they may be used best.

However you can already think a bit what you could do with your remaining special units.

Another use for new Elite units is to replace a Veteran unit guarding an important Planet. The IPOC and Slave World come to mind as they are very important, but in Outer Rim Systems, deserving the best protection one can afford. The replaced Veteran can then be sent to the Capital, waiting for Rebellions to crop up. In general however you see is, that these last 16 strong units in one way or the other will finally be my vanguard against the Rebellion.

Don't wait too long to build your Elite units. It is true that they require maintenance. However it is also true, that you can only build two per turn. If you spend turns 1-4 only building all other units, it will be turn 12 that your last Elite arrives.

[Data regarding Special Ops and Atrocity units require security clearance indigo or higher]

A lot what is written above looks a bit off-the-cuff and arbitrary. This in fact is true in some cases. The Empire has no way of telling how exactly the game will develop. My concerns for Province Four might prove totally useless, the Rebel Player my postpone Rebellions there (maybe because of my setup) and concentrate on another Province. As said, you will have to adjust your plans to the development of the game. However, it is better to at least have a plan to change than just muddle through from turn to turn to turn. If you prefer it that way, at least make sure your opponent still enjoys the game.

Characters

How to group your characters. Well, it is a good idea to group them in a way then can survive missions. For the Rebel Player, this means a total Strength of eight or higher for me (more on that in the Rebel section) and though the Imperial Player has not to fear Sentry Robots in the early game at least, he should heed the same advice.

I like to group Barca and Saytar. They are the best leaders and I get two of these when I dissolve that group. They usually get some military units and either go on coup missions or gather information (especially when their units could do some damage somewhere).

I like Senator Dermond with Els Taroff and Telmen. This mission group has a combat strength of ten, ensuring that Dermond can go almost every turn on Diplomacy, even if somebody is gets wounded. Els Taroff provides navigation as good as it gets.

The Emperor fits good with Redjac. Strength eight, decent diplomacy rating and also not bad at summoning sovereigns.

The third diplomatic group would be Vans Ka-Tie-A, Gelba and Thysa Kymbo. Thysa looks a bit misplaced, but I like her one point of combat strength here. Also her Intelligence is a boon to that group.

Jon Kidu and Jin Voles are a nice team for Coups, Gather Information and maybe - Assassination.

As said, Barca and Saytar can start at leaders almost any time. Once more leaders are needed however, there has to occur some shuffling. However, the Empire can come up with new combinations fairly easy and there are a lot of options. For example I would guess Telmen and Jon Kidu being the next two mobilized together, with Jin Voles either replacing Telmen with Senator Dermond (raising that group to a whooping eleven strength points) or a much more thorough reorganization to spread combat strength more even and optimize navigation (e.g.: Dermond+Vans+Taroff / Emperor+Thysa+Redjac / Gelba+Voles). Or just mobilizing one of the two and continuing with four mission groups, thinned out a bit strength-wise (e.g. Barca, Saytar and Telmen as leaders and the groups like: Emperor+Redjac / Dermond+Voles+Thysa / Gelba+Vans / Kidu+Taroff).

Just try a bit to mobilize those as leaders first, that have little other use (i.e. no diplomacy rating to mention, low combat strength, bad navigation). It pays off to calculate a bit before you sort someone out.

Initial Setup and Strategic Assignment

As said, this is almost trivial. Just make sure every Secret, Capital, the Throne and Home-Planet gets a 0 PDB and you fulfill the one unit per Planet requirement. Put mobile units on Planets you do not want to guard anyway and move them to Prime Systems ASAP. I have lost sometimes lost a Line to 'Locals Raid Enemy Forces' because I waited (in fact without a real chance of finding the Rebel characters anyway). Many Planets will start with a Militia only, put them on Planets that will have to receive on anyway or at least in Prime Systems, it saves you a lot of logistic hassle later. Make sure that your characters have the mobile units needed to combine them as fast as possible. If you can manage, try to prepare against events like 'Imperial Deltronics recall standard spaceships' by putting even your Knights with a mobile unit.

Once you have done your initial setup, there is one purpose it can serve: to tell you how to start your Strategic Assignment Deck. A few sentences on that. You have no chance to predict the next fourteen turns, so don't bother too much about them. Get a nice connecting path (worming, fanning, both, whatever) and try a bit that no province is out of assignment for too long. However, the first couple of turns, you should plan a bit to get your forces into position as fast as possible. Take a look at which province lacks most units for its final setup or holds the planets most dear to you and put it early under the Strategic Assignment. Fanning out from Province One during the first couple of turns is not a bad idea. Remember that Province One may always raise new units during the Resource Phase, so if you empty Province One in one turn to support another one, you can replace these units the next turn (barring a preventing Galactic Event).

REBELS

The Rebels are a lot easier to prepare than the Empire. You do not have to predict which Planet could come under what kind of threat, you are the threat. You do not have to guess where in the next five turns the attack will come from, you mount that attack. And when you don't want to continue it, you disengage. Of course an idealized version of how the game will be for you - but not too much.

In one respect however, the Rebels are more demanding in their preparation and this is in the fine-tuning of the meager forces they begin the game with. And it is astonishing how often I have seen Rebel Players putting no thought at all in how to use the little forces they have to the best use. If the Imperial Player misplaces a unit or two (or three or four) it will not ruin his day. Most of his plan is at best just guessing anyway. But to the Rebel Player, one mission group lost to creatures because of insufficient strength is a loss of more than 10% of your power. The two heaps of junk (the Freighter and the Merchant) not utilized are 25% of your mobility just thrown away. Two of your three dedicated diplomats in the same mission group? A waste of 33% of your core diplomatic corps. And I have seen that all, it is amazing how often I have seen groups thrown together at random and then expecting to make progress.

To make it clear: The Rebel Player has only 20 characters and 20 possessions for a very, very long part of the game. And to make it worse it is the beginning stage. You do not optimize your strength during that time, you maybe never will leave that begin.

These 40 cards are all you have. 40 cards, not 20. Whoever just thought he can leave out his possessions during his preparation just qualified for the 'Yes I just need 50% of my stuff to lose this game'-medal. These 40 cards will be all you have for a very long time. The basic question that you should ask yourself isn't when you will get them (or if). They may come later, they better come earlier, but after a couple of turns they will be all yours. You do P and G and they trickle in, this is out of question. The question you should ask yourself isn't either, how are you going to use them. That is written in the rules. The real question is: How much can I get out of them pushed to the limit and then a bit.

My answer would be: Nine mission groups. Four on your three best ships to stir troubles in Prime Systems and maybe heavily guarded Planets. The other five in the remaining ships responsible for everything else in the Outer Rim Systems.

It is only the way I arrange my characters and possessions and there are a lot of variations possible, but if you manage less you should ask yourself why. It can't be because I have more cards than you, I own the same game. It can't be because you can not get them together, your characters ain't nailed to the board on their home-planets. And it also can't be because the task is so overwhelming, because I start with the same forces as you. And though it is not trivial, it is also not too complicated to come up with good mission groups, it is just 40 cards you have to arrange till you get no more out of them. And though not being trivial, this arrangement of your characters and possessions has a couple of parameters determining very fast, if a combination is useful or not.

First of all, you have to realize that though you have much freedom of movement, you do not have the time to meet for every single mission anew to get your act together. You have to form groups, that can act on their own without needing help from another group every turn. That will happen anyway once and then when you suffer wounds and a character has to heal, but if it becomes your stable diet that regularly two groups of two characters have to meet every time to go on one mission they will do at most half the work two groups of two could do if they were designed proper.

What does it now take for a group to be able to stand on its own? There are three parameters.

First, they need sufficient combat strength to survive hostile locals, creatures and sentry robots. Squads are not really a consideration. Squads can be avoided by just staying away from enemy military units too strong. Locals and creatures can't be avoided. And though the game now isn't lethal any more, your characters are as useless while captured, incarcerated or incapacitated as they would be when dead.

Second, they need transport. A seat in a ship and someone to fly it as best as you can manage.

Third, they need the skills for the job to be done. And the main job for a big part will be D and B. All other missions have their time and their use, but D and B is what is the mainstay. D needs diplomacy rating, B needs leadership.

These are the three parameters that make a mostly self-sufficient mission group. There is a fourth parameter however that will have an impact on the design of your mission groups. Shall it be geared to target Prime Systems, where the Imperial Player may interfere with his units, or will it target the Outer Rim, where it is largely undisturbed?

Let us take a look at the different needs and roles of these two groups. The Prime System Groups need the best ships you can get, backed up with everything you have that works against enemy searches, detection routine and PDBs. Furthermore, I also back them up with everything that will help them on their missions. These groups in my opinion need success fast for staying too long in one place of Prime Systems just invites troubles. B missions are not really suitable for these groups, as Camps in Prime Systems cease fast. D is what they will go for. Once a Planet is out of Patriotic and subjectable to Domino Effects, a lot is achieved already.

Outer Rim groups on the other hand have none of this pressure. The worst that usually happens to them is, that the Strategic Assignment names the province they are in, which only means they have to pack up and go to one of the other three provinces. B missions are as viable for these groups as D missions. Occasionally a unit will be sent after them through an I mission.

That is already all that there is to it. There are a lot of ways how you can combine your characters and possessions along these four guidelines. However, without any thought to what you want to achieve, without an idea what your mission groups should look like, all you will do is throw people together randomly from turn to turn. That is not playing, it is just muddling through the game. It lacks a plan, it lacks aim, it lacks any judgement what has to be done. Your at-start characters are a mere temporary affair. What counts is the whole set of them assembled as you think they will be most efficient.

If this sounds familiar, you read almost the same sentence for the Imperial Player.

As with the Imperial Player, lets look at an example, how the 40 Rebel Cards could be combined.

EXAMPLE

Here an internal rebel communiqué:

Status Report - Galactic Cycle 5
Imperial Strategic Assignment: Province One and Two

Ship:	Operatives:	Location / Mission:
S-XIII	Yarro Lafac (Narrocks, Personal Body Shield) Oneste Woada (Charsof)	Tamset/Wild - D
Stellar Courier	Ran Jayma Vudot Vodot (Scanner, Medi Kit of Ptolus, Advisor Android) Drakir Grebb	Suti/Subt. - D
Explorer	Scott Rubel Doctor Sontag (Cache of Rare Gems, Scrambler) Bridne Murcada (Assassin's Blade) Frun Sentel Sidir Ganang	Tsjpa/Urban - D Tsjpa/Urban - B
Planetary Privateer	Boccanegra Professor Mareg (Helian Drug)	Midest/Orbit - none (revealed Slave World, guarded heavily)
Star Cruiser	Ly Mantok Odene Hobar	Lonica/Urban - B
Interstellar Sloop	Rayner Derban (Cervac Mk V) Adam Starlight	Scythia/Fire - B & D (Hyper World)
Solar Merchant	Tourag Agan Rafa (wounded, healing)	Scythia/Fire - B & D (assist group Derban, raise strength)
Galactic Freighter	Kogus (High Energy Sniper's Rifle) Zina Adora	Niconi/Wild - B

How and why were the characters and possessions grouped like shown in the example.

Strength:

As you can see, every group except one has a combat strength of eight. When you take a look at the irate locals chart you see, very few are rated higher than seven. With regard to creatures the most common one - Sentry Robots - also yields a strength of seven. Also when you go through the Galactic Guide, you will see that few creatures are higher than strength seven those that do all have some limitations or disadvantages in combat. Finally, the squad strength of two Militias guarding a coup is also only six.

With very few exceptions, a strength of eight puts you on the -1 table during the first round of attack. Even if you fail to break off, you are more likely to hurt the attacking creature/local than the other way round. Defeat is very unlikely for you under these circumstances. This is why I consider a strength of eight to be sufficient.

The only group with a Strength below eight is Yarro Latac and Oneste Woad, with a mere four even with the Norroks added. However, because of its special abilities combined, this group will not be attacked by locals or creatures. The group is however very vulnerable to enemy squads and should avoid enemy units at all cost.

Navigation:

Half of the ships have pilots with a Navigation of five (the S-XIII raising Yarro Latac's stat) the other half a Navigation of Four (Kogu's rating raised while with Zina Adora). All in all there are only nine characters with these ratings, so you must try a bit till everything fits.

Skills:

Two ratings are of prime importance to consider. Diplomacy for D missions and leadership for B missions. A diplomacy rating of two is already fairly good, more being excellent. It protects from those Action Results already, which backfire on Diplomacy missions. For the Rebel Player, also a leadership rating of two is fairly high, only two characters having a higher stat here.

In most groups there is either an excellent Diplomat in the group with a diplomacy rating higher than two or diplomacy and leadership are both two or better, making the group non-specialized but capable at B and D. Two groups are an exception. The group formed by Frun Sentel and Sidir Ganang, which however combines two bonus draws for B missions with a leadership of one, and the group formed by Boccanegra and Professor Mareg which only has good leadership but can reveal Planet secrets.

Role of the Groups; Prime Systems and Outer Rim Systems

The three fastest ships - the S-XIII, Stellar Courier and Explorer - will be used to target Prime Systems and anything slightly dangerous. The ships with the lower shieldings got some possessions to help them through the detection routine, the Courier the Scanner and the Explorer the Scrambler. If the Explorer with a shielding of only two is fit for that task, and if the Scanner is the right help for it is open to debate. However I think, that five spaceships for the Outer Rim Systems are enough, especially if you take the work Rebel Camps can do there into account. On the other hand I consider just two ships for the Prime Systems too little. More than half of the game's Planets lie in Prime Systems. Should the Explorer really get lost, it could be repurchased with the Cache of Rare Gems. Yet, as two mission groups are put into the Explorer, there is the question if this is not overdoing it as one of them could try a P mission to retrieve the Explorer. As said, there are several ways how to combine your characters.

Each of the fastest ships has one dedicated diplomat (i.e. not Rayner Derban, who is more important as a leader) with a diplomacy rating of three or more, each further boosted by a possession that grants additional bonus draws on D missions. As said, I consider it important that these three groups show successes fast and then leave again.

Each of the ships got a way to heal wounds (by Doctor Sontag or the Medi-kit) or to avoid wounds (the Body Shield). The assignment of the Body Shield however is a bit questionable. Yarro Latac and

Oneste Woda will have little chance to get wounded. On the other hand, the Shield will help them a lot should they ever have to face an enemy squad. Still, I am not really satisfied with this assignment.

The Explorer got an additional mission Group. If this addition of the ninth group in this way is really the best idea can be argued. First of all, should the ninth group really put at risk by going to the Prime Systems? I think yes as the Outer Rim Systems are fewer and can be influenced with Rebel Camps. The next question is, should it really join the Explorer? It is still the ship with the lowest shielding. The other ships however are already full if possessions are not reassigned as well (remember that each companion takes up one passenger space). Last is, what kind of mission could the group do if I put it in another ship? In the current configuration, Frun Sentel and Sidir Ganang can go on B Start Rebel Camp with three bonus draws. The Camp will be rather short lived, but it would draw units away from Orbit and thus help to leave the planet. If the Explorer along with the Cache is destroyed, they could go on P to recover one of them. Furthermore, Sidir Ganang and Bridne Murcada can switch groups and then Murcada and Frun Sentel can form a group for Assassination with as much as twelve bonus draws. If I would put the ninth group into another ship, whom should it include, Murcada or Ganang? Yet, the safety concerns of the Explorer remain a problem for me.

As can be seen an ideal arrangement of groups is maybe impossible to reach. In the end, it becomes a matter of various trade-offs, but as long as you know what you trade of for what, chances are that you at least know what group is at which risk and what they can dare.

Now to the remaining groups, which will stay in the Outer Rim Systems.

For the early part of the game, Boccanegra and Mareg will form one group, though they lack a decent diplomacy rating. The reason is, that these two will go to reveal secrets, which is also the reason, why they got the best ship after the Explorer, the Privateer. The only other characters strong enough to form a strength eight group with Mareg (whose special ability is not a protection against everything) and still be able to pilot a spaceship adequately would be Rayner Derban or Ly Mantok. These two however are your best leaders and too useful to just stay in the Orbit of heavily guarded Secrets and way too valuable to risk in an attempt to perform an I mission on the Archives or the Trap! The Helian Drug is exactly for this kind of mission, to boost Professor Marge's Intelligence if necessary. Later on however, the Helian Drug should be given to Ly Mantok (once it was scavenged anew) to boost his Space Leadership in a decisive battle (e.g. to crack the defenses of the IPOC).

Once however, the Secrets of the Outer Rim Systems are mainly revealed (in the Prime Systems, the Advisor Android can do this job) it is possible that some characters in the Outer Rim groups could be rearranged. Professor Mareg could from then on be of valuable assistance against the many undefeatable creatures (Frost Mist, Elilad, Thunks to name only a few) which love to dwell especially in the Outer Rim.

The other four groups of the Outer Rim Systems are more or less all suitable for B and D missions. B missions would be my primary choice as long as it is allowed. Instead of avoiding the Strategic Assignment, it often pays off to follow it, i.e. to start Camps in the province, that just dropped out of the Assignment. That way, Rebel Camps can increase their life-expectancy a bit.

So much to the way, how mission groups can be grouped. There are some constants which will never change. Zina Adora will always be grouped with Kogus and Yarro Latac will always pilot the S-XIII. Oneste Woda and the Norrocks are an ideal combination etc., but there are also a couple of decisions to make which are not so clear cut. Most important however is, that you come up with an idea how you think your characters and possessions will serve you best.

Now after having decided how your mission groups could look like, how are you going to play them.

Gameplay, early game

The first step would be to assemble them to begin with.

I have seen Rebel Players going on D, B and even I missions during the first turns. I see little use in this and do not believe very firm in the 'Early knock-out-victory' some claim to be able to pull off this way.

G and P are what shall be done during the first turns. Every character gained this turn will translate in more mission groups (i.e. missions) next turn and for the rest of the game. D and I missions do not and B only temporary. A character gained one turn later is one mission group less that turn is 10% of your potential less that turn, definitely. A loyalty marker shifted one turn later is very likely just a loyalty marker shifted one turn later, especially during the early game. I consider this calculation so simple, that I have very little understanding for the many excuses I have heard for why this or that D or B or H or I mission was just _the_ thing to do right now.

The few exceptions when another mission than P or G is an option while there are still characters or possessions to be found are when you discover a Secret like the Trap! or Archives very early, before they are guarded properly. In that case, exploit this chance and do your I mission, it will be much harder later on. If you see a chance to get the loyalty of the IPOC, Slave, Gem or Industry World down (or even into Rebellion) this way early, give it a try. Even if you only manage to pull its loyalty down, this will already pay off later. But anything else can wait.

Though G and P missions are your main concern during the first turns, there are other issues to pay attention to. One is that you do not only have to collect your characters and possessions, but also that you have to get them together in the groups you planned.

The best way for that is to find a group of Outer Rim Planets near to each other (without unrevealed Secrets of course), preferably with several environs even if not very big ones and then stay close to each other while doing G and P, constantly exchanging a character or possession here or there. You will need a good number of environs to do missions in, three at least, as in each environ you are only allowed to perform one G and P mission per turn. If you put all your characters just in the same environ, you will only gain one new character and Possession per turn at most.

Pronox, Lysenda and Charkhan in Province Two are a very good place for a start (just be careful with the Drants if your Endurance is two or less) when Province One is not named in the Assignment even Ownex and Adare can be included in this cluster. Another good place would be Horon, Solvia, Cercis and Lonica in Province Four (but avoid the Frost Mist and be careful with the Thunks on Rhexia as well), though that cluster is in a far corner of the Galaxy. Last worth mentioning would be Niconi and Adrax in Province Five. Of course, the Strategic Assignment will sometimes force you to evacuate, but do not spread out over the whole Galaxy. Try to stick together, while avoiding to mass more than two mission groups - one for P and one for G - in any single environ.

Try to combine at least some of your groups each turn like you have planned them to be before the game started. As time goes by more and more of your groups will appear in the shape you wanted them to be. Very likely first the simple ones (i.e. those of consisting not much more than two characters and a spaceship) later the more sophisticated one (those with a lot of possessions). Send these finished groups to other environs nearby and continue with P and G. Remember that you can leave behind characters on a Planet with one group and send another group to him from somewhere else. Remember also that characters can walk from environ to environ without a ship.

The only group I would possibly release from your cluster, would be the Boccanegra / Professor Mareg group, which you can assemble very fast by sending Boccanegra to Cercis and do a G mission there. Once Professor Mareg shows up, send the two on their exploration tour to reveal Planet Secrets. First those lightly guarded near your cluster, to scout more environs for your other groups, but then further and further away from the other Rebels, who will still stay together to organize as you planned before the game started.

Occasionally Boccanegra and Mareg will discover a Secret, that will prevent them from performing missions (for instance the Dead World or the Mutant World, the latter being too dangerous for the two alone). However, this delay is acceptable. You have to reveal the secrets in the Outer Rim Systems and the earlier the better. Not only to reveal what they hide, but also to make them save for the other characters. There are a lot of Secrets in the Outer Rim Systems getting in the way for your other groups again and again. While revealing Secrets, Mareg and Boccanegra can still try to Scavenge Possessions if their destination is not too dangerous. They can later give that possession to the group that needs it. Do not Gain Characters with them, the character can not contribute anything valuable to them and will be missed only in the group he was intended for.

Possessions can be added a bit later to mission groups, the more pressing issue at first is, to get every group to its proper combat strength to survive missions. As all possessions that help during combat are given during the setup, this aim can be achieved once all the six remaining characters are gained. From then on, it is just adding gadgets to do missions better, fly faster or fly saver.

It can look very confusing sometimes with so many characters and possessions so near to each other but eventually everything will fall into place. Concentrate a bit, combine and arrange till you get your results. If necessary, practice this a bit solitaire before the game.

Gameplay, mid-game

This is when you have your groups mainly assembled but are not yet challenging the Empire with military units.

Now, once you have your groups together like you planned, how to use them?

Very careful would be my first advice. Opportunistic would be my second. These two go hand in hand.

One thing that should be obvious is, to check locals and creatures BEFORE you go on missions. There are some creatures so dangerous, you can not enter their environ without the Norrocks or Professor Mareg, others are dangerous if your Endurance is low or you lack a certain Intelligence. Take a close look at the following creatures: Elilad, Frost Mist, Chantenes, Gadhars, Thunks, Virus, Drants, Magrons, Dindin, Telebot, Vorozion, Drusers and Crunge. Some look weak at first, but the proper combination of wrong circumstances can incapacitate a character easily. Some are obviously outright lethal.

Another thing is, that you should avoid unnecessary risks. It is astounding how often I have seen Rebel Players homing in on one Planet (usually the one in front of their nose) oblivious to obvious dangers there even when I pointed them out because 'that Planet is still Patriotic'. That there were a handful of other Planets also Patriotic within reach and without any risk eluded them. There is no real need to fly to that guarded IPOC, when there is still another Patriotic Planet within easy reach. For your 26 VPs, you don't need any of the Capitals, Home Planets or important Secrets. Sure, each of these will help you, but if there is not a good opportunity at hand, there is no need to make your character's lives more dangerous than they already are. There are a lot of Planets on the map, concentrate on those that come easily to you now. The only risk you should not be afraid to brave is to fly to a planet in a Prime System that is only lightly guarded. Sure, the Empire can send units after you, but if you let yourself be bullied away from these many many Prime Planets, your choices will become very limited very soon.

If you heed that advice, your game should develop as follows. Once you have your groups assembled you begin your D and B missions. Your three best ships target Prime Systems, which are not guarded and not within the current Strategic Assignment. If you can manage it, send them all three into the same province, that way the Imperial Player can not go after all at once.

Your other groups should focus on the Outer Rim Systems, pulling them down with B and then D missions. Avoid heavily guarded Planets while you still have other Planets that you can work on. Scout Planet Secrets with Professor Mareg in the Outer Rim (and with the Advisor in the Prime Systems if you deem him expendable for that) to find out which Planets of them is the Trap and which ones are save to go to, increasing the number of Outer Rim planets for you. When you find the Archives, think carefully if you want to speed up that process by landing on the Planet and trying for an I.

Once you get the chance, start Rebellions. Do it early, different from the original game, you will get something in return. The first ones will be crushed, but slowly your Escape Moves and later Supply Conduits will begin to produce your first units. Sidestep with them the Strategic Assignment as you would do with your Outer Rim mission groups and gather them. When strong enough. launch raids on isolated Imperial units at overwhelming odds. As the game progresses you will grow strong enough to attack even planets like the IPOC, Slave World or Trap! even when heavily guarded. Ly Mantok with the Helian Drug can give you a four column shift on such an attack. Destroy the PDB first if you can,

then continue with the Enemy's units. Work fast especially if you do not know the next Strategic Assignment. A Gather Information mission would have been hand in this situation. Once you have breached the Planet and it is save for your characters to land, send in your best groups. Do the missions you need (I on the Trap! D and R on the IPOC) and then leave before Imperial reinforcements arrive.

Be careful of Imperial I missions. Always think carefully which choice you give him for a single I. Too many Supply Conduits revealed early will mean, that later on you can not reveal some more when a violation of the Strategic Assignment would be very inconvenient. Better to allow the Imperial Player some free moves during the early game and later just reveal two Conduits to him, when he really is in need of a free move.

Gameplay, late game

How to finally stage a coordinated Rebellion of Galactic Scale, is described in my designer's notes of my rules and I like to refer to them at this point and close my beginner's hints.