

VIDEO TUTORIALS

Perhaps the best way to learn the rules is by watching our instructional videos. Please visit our website, LooneyLabs.com, to find links to a complete video tutorial along with a series of narrated sample games, called Homeworlds Theater.

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HOME WORLDS



INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

What Chess is to medieval warfare, Homeworlds is to *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. (Even better comparisons are *Starship Troopers* and *Ender's Game*.) We've made contact with an alien race, but they are Evil and intent on destroying us, so we must obliterate them first. We are galactic overlords in this epic space opera, commanding fleets of starships, blowing up planets in our wake, and ultimately conquering the universe. And it's all done with little clusters of colorful pyramids arranged upon the table.

GOAL

Dominate the universe by destroying the enemy's Homeworld or by conquering or destroying all of their ships at their Homeworld. You lose the game if you have zero ships at your own Homeworld, regardless of how many other stars or starships you might control.

SETUP

Stack up the pyramids, sorted by size and color, and place them to the side of the playing area. This is the Bank.

HOW TO PLAY

Let's begin with the fundamentals of interstellar space travel:

- Star systems are marked on the playing field with upright pyramids. This "star map" displays only the star systems currently being visited by spaceships.
- Spaceships are represented by flat pyramids. The direction in which they point indicates who controls them. Your ships always point away from you.
- When a ship Discovers a new star system, the star is added to the star map, and when the last ship leaves the system, the star piece is immediately returned to the Bank.
- You can move a ship from one star system to another **ONLY** if the stars are of different sizes. Differently-sized star systems are connected, but same-sized stars are not. (Why? It's just the way the wormhole technology works...)
- A Binary Star (a system with two stars) is only connected to another star if that star is a size not included in the Binary Star.

WHO STARTS?

Flip a coin if the players' skills are evenly matched. Otherwise, the lesser-experienced player begins.

THE FIRST TURN

The game begins with a setup round, during which the players choose their initial pieces.

- **A Binary Star and Large Ship:** To begin, take a Large spaceship (of any color) and place it with your Homeworld, made of two upright pyramids, in your choice of sizes and colors. Stack them up to form a Binary Star. All Homeworlds have Binary Stars, and all other systems (called basic stars) have one star.
- **Choosing Your Homeworld:** The decisions you make during setup will greatly affect the entire game. You need to make smart choices when deciding on the colors and sizes of your Homeworld stars and the color of your Large ship. (See Strategy Tips on page 20.) If this is your first game, we suggest both players start with a Large Green ship, with one player starting with a Large Blue/Small Red Homeworld and the other player starting with a Medium Red/Small Blue Homeworld.

TURN OPTIONS

During each turn, you may perform one Basic action, OR you may Sacrifice one of your ships, putting it back into the Bank in order to gain one or more Sacrifice actions.

- **Basic Action:** You may perform your Basic action in any system where you control a ship, using any power you can access in that ship's system.
- **Sacrifice Action:** The number of Sacrifice actions you get is equal to the pip count of the ship you Sacrificed. You get that many actions, of that ship's color, in any systems where you still control a ship, regardless of which colors you have access to in said system.

Also, at any time during your turn, you may invoke the Catastrophe option for any Overpopulation situation on the star map. (See page 9.)

Lastly, you can choose to pass. (This is rarely useful, but doing nothing may be a player's best option during certain endgame situations.)

STAR CONNECTIONS

Starships can only travel between star systems if those systems are connected, and stars are only connected if they are of different sizes.

COLOR POWERS

A ship of any color can use any power that it has access to. Color access is provided by any of the following:

- 1) Star: Color of the system's star
- 2) Ship: Color of a ship YOU control there
- 3) Sacrifice: Color of a ship you dismantle

Each color provides a different power:

- Green = Build (The green Colonists construct the starships.)
- Yellow = Move (The yellow Navigators grok the wormholes.)
- Red = Capture (The red Warriors wield the weapons.)
- Blue = Trade (The blue Ice-Traders offer exchanges.)

GREEN

Build a new ship by taking a piece from the Bank and placing it next to one of your existing ships.

- Same Color: The color of your new ship must be the same as one of the ships you control in the system where the new ship is being Built.
- Smallest Size: The ship you Build must be the smallest size of that color currently available in the Bank.

YELLOW

Move a ship from the system it's in to any other connected system (known or newly Discovered).

- Travel: Move to any connected system whether it is currently populated with your ships, your opponent's ships, or both.
- Discovery: Take a piece of your choice from the Bank, add it to the field as a star, then move your ship to that star.
- Abandonment: Return a basic star to the Bank immediately if zero ships are located there.

RED

Capture an enemy ship by turning the piece around so that it points away from you. (Traditionally, this power was referred to as attacking, and many players may continue to use that term, but it's more accurate to say Capture since the goal of the attack is to seize the ship, not destroy it. Starships are valuable.)

- **Size Matters:** You can only Capture a ship if it's the same size as, or smaller than, the biggest ship YOU control in that system. But note that a Small Red CAN be used to Capture a larger ship — you just need to have your own larger ship (of any color) in that system, which can attack the enemy's ship using the power of your Small Red.
- **Example:** Suppose you have a Small Red and a Medium Yellow, and the other player has a Medium Red in the same system. Your Small Red is not big enough to Capture the Medium Red, and your Medium Yellow cannot attack on its own (except when the star is Red). But together they can prevail, because the Medium Yellow can "borrow" the power of the Small Red.

BLUE

Trade one of your ships with a differently colored piece of the same size from the Bank. You can only Trade exact size for exact size; if the size you want is not available, you cannot Trade.

OVERPOPULATION

Too much of one color in one system can trigger a disaster called a Catastrophe. Overpopulation exists any time a single system contains four or more pieces of the same color — including ships on both sides AND the star system itself.

CATASTROPHES

At any point during your turn, if you notice an Overpopulated star system, you have the OPTION to declare a Catastrophe in that system (even if you don't have a ship there). If called, all pieces of the Overpopulated color are returned to the Bank. If this includes the star itself, then ALL ships at that location are destroyed (unless the star was half of a Binary Star, in which case it becomes a single-star system, but still a Homeworld). If a Catastrophe leaves a basic star unoccupied, the piece is immediately returned to the Bank.

HOMEWORLD ABANDONMENT

It's OK to momentarily abandon your Homeworld as long as you have a ship there again by the end of your turn. However, you are eliminated from the game if both stars in your Homeworld are destroyed, or if you don't control any ships at your Homeworld when your turn is over.

Note that Homeworlds are different from basic stars and thus are not returned to the Bank if the star is temporarily abandoned. (Even if you send your whole fleet away for a brief time, Earth is still the Earth and you don't remove it from the active star map the way you do with basic stars.)

HOW TO WIN

There are three paths to victory (not including resignation by the other player):

- 1) Direct Assault: Use Red to take control of all enemy ships at the enemy's Homeworld.
- 2) Fleet Catastrophe: Destroy all enemy ships at their Homeworld by causing a Catastrophe.
- 3) Star Demolition: Cause two Catastrophes, each destroying half of the Homeworld.

OTHER NOTES

DEADLOCKS & DRAWS

There are two ways in which the game can end in a tie. First, if one player eliminates the other, but in the process, leaves their own Homeworld abandoned, it's a draw (both players simultaneously win and lose). Second, if both players conclude that they've reached an impasse (if, for example, they both feel that their only acceptable action is to re-capture the same ship the other player just Captured), the game is deadlocked and ends in a draw.

THE TURN INDICATOR

It's very helpful to move a token back and forth to indicate whose turn it is. This helps avoid confusion (in cases of distraction or interruption), but also signifies that you're done with your move. Since one turn may consist of a sequence of actions, there are times when you won't realize that you want to rethink your move until after you've seen how it looks on the table. So think of moving the Turn Token as being like clicking "send" on the orders to your fleet.

ARRANGING THE STAR MAP

Because the layout of this game's playing area is free-form and ever-changing, players should feel free to move the star systems as needed to positions that are the most desirable for seeing the connections. This process is sometimes called **Star-Towing**. Here's our system for arranging the field:

- Stars connected to a player's Homeworld are placed nearest to said Homeworld.
- Stars not connected to either Homeworld go in the middle.

Arranged in this way, each star is connected to the stars in the rows ahead and behind, but not to stars in the same row.

As for the location of your ships, think of them as being like cars on a freeway. Your ships (and the systems you control) are moved to your side of the road. Assuming you drive on the right-hand side, place your ships on the right side of the star, and move star systems that you control to the right side of the star map. Place disputed systems in the center.

MARKING THE HOMEWORLD

It will be clear which star systems are some player's Homeworld for as long as both stars of such systems remain intact, since all binary star systems are by definition someone's Homeworld. However, once a player's Homeworld is reduced to a single star, you may find it desirable to mark said system with a card or token of some kind, to remind the players of its significance.

THE SECOND TURN

It will almost always be the case that both players' second turns will be the same: Building a Small ship of the same color as your initial Large. Other choices don't make sense: there won't be anything to Capture yet; even if you decide to begin with Yellow, you can't go anywhere on your second turn without abandoning your Homeworld; and if you wanted a different color than Blue, you'd have chosen it rather than wasting your second turn Trading your Blue ship for another color. The only time when the second turn isn't automatic is the rare case in which the second player creates a setup that conflicts with the first player's desires in such a way as to make an immediate use of Blue necessary.

COMMON MISTAKES

Homeworlds is a complex game, and even seasoned players can make mistakes. Here are some of the concepts new players find most difficult to grok:

- **Can't Move There:** Beware of thinking two systems are connected when they aren't.
- **Can't Do That:** Your ships can't use the power of another player's ship even if it's in the same system. You can only use your own ships, the star itself, or power gained by a Sacrifice.
- **Can't Build That:** You can't construct a ship if you don't already control a ship of that color in the same star system.
- **Can't Capture Yet:** The one-two punch nature of attacks in this game is confusing at first. You must have the drop on the other player — you cannot move in and attack all at once. When you move a ship into my system, I get a turn to respond before you get to attack me. Then, during my turn, I can (potentially) Capture your ship, as if it were a gift being delivered right to my doorstep.

NOVICE VS. EXPERT

Homeworlds is a complex game with a steep learning curve. Because of this, novice players (known as "Junior Officers") will be no match for experienced players (called "Senior Officers"). To make the game equally challenging for both, a Senior Officer may wish to offer one or more of these headstart options to the new player:

- **Second Turn Timewarp:** After both players build their Homeworlds, the Junior Officer may be allowed to perform one or more bonus turns, so as to get ahead faster.
- **Red Alert:** Similar to saying "Check" in Chess, the Senior Officer will say "Red Alert" whenever the Junior Officer is in immediate danger of elimination.
- **Brain Transference:** The Junior Officer is given one chance, at some point during the game, to completely change places with the Senior Officer for the remainder of the game.
- **Tactical Computer:** The Junior Officer is given one or more tokens which they can spend to ask the Senior Officer what they would do if their positions were reversed.

A GAME IN PROGRESS

Two-piece stars are Homeworlds.
This Homeworld is the enemy's.
Conquer or destroy it to win!

Enemy starships point at you.

Flat pyramids are starships.

Small-Medium stars are only connected to Large stars.

This is the Bank of unplayed pieces.

Your ships point away from you.

Different-sized star systems are connected.

Each color provides a different ability:

The Turn Token on this side of the table means it's your turn.

Same-sized stars are NOT connected.

Move

Capture

Trade

Build

Small-Large stars are only connected to Medium stars.

This is your Homeworld.

This is your fleet.



PHOTO DOCUMENTING

Homeworlds can be a long game. If you need to pause it, remember that everyone has a camera on their smartphones now so it's easy to save a record of the state of a game and reconstitute it later. Just make sure the picture includes the pieces in the Bank, and a Turn Token indicating whose turn it is. When reconstructing the game, a check of your Bank against the state of the Bank in the photo will confirm if you have everything restored correctly.

ADDITIONAL PLAYERS

It is possible to play Homeworlds with three or more players, however, you will need more pyramids and additional rules. You must add one Trio of each color for each additional player, and you will also need to choose a victory condition. There are several options: 1) fight to the last captain standing; 2) each player must destroy the player on their left; or, 3) each player is assigned a secret role (Good vs. Evil), with the Good players seeking to destroy all Evil players and the Evil players seeking to destroy anyone. Look online to find more details about playing Homeworlds with three or more people.

STRATEGY TIPS

IT'S ALL ABOUT THE ECONOMY

While Homeworlds may seem like a war game, like most wars, it's all about the financing. So keep a close eye on the Bank! Here are some tips on banking wisely:

- **Don't Take the Last Serving:** When possible, avoid being the player who has to take the last available Small or Medium piece of any given color. (You'd rather be the one who gets to Build the first ship of the next size.)
- **Smart Shopping:** Wait for bargains, and snap them up when they're available. It's a good time to go shopping when there are three of a size available in the Bank, but the best time is when there are two, since the other player will be opening up availability of the next size if they copy your action. Other good opportunities to look for are times when you might be able to Sacrifice a Medium Green to Build a couple of Larges, and times when you can leave the next size open because you know your opponent can't safely Build the next size themselves.

- **Don't Get Frozen Out of Any Color:** Maintain control of at least one ship of each color (and seek to freeze out your enemy by monopolizing a color they lack). It's easy to get frozen out of a color early in the game, when most of the pieces in play are Smalls. If the only piece you have available to Trade for a new color is a Small, and the other player grabs the last Small of that color, you won't be able to get into that economy until you have a Medium available to Trade... and that could take a while. And by then, all the Mediums might be gone and they'll be Building Large ships while you're still struggling to catch up.

CHOOSING YOUR HOMEWORLD

But what setup is best? Most Starship Captains agree that you need to start with Blue and Green along with either Red or Yellow. Beyond that, opinions vary. Some players like to start with Yellow, so they can move immediately, but others prefer starting off with a Red ship. Many like building a "Planetary Defense System" which means including Red as one of the two colors that form the Homeworld itself. As for the size pairings, here are the three possibilities:

- **Banker (Small-Medium star):** This setup gives you an edge when using the Investment strategy, since it moves first to Large systems.



- **Fortress (Medium-Large star):** This setup makes your Homeworld harder to invade as the game progresses, since the supply of Smalls needed for bordering star systems dwindles quickly.



- **Goldilocks (Small-Large star):** The stars you can go to from here are "just right" because they're not too big and not too small.



BEWARE THE SMALL UNIVERSE

If the second player chooses the same two sizes of pieces for their Homeworld as the first player did, the star map will be far more compact than with non-matching Homeworlds. This shrunken universe makes the game very claustrophobic. Choosing a “Gemini Star” (Large-Large, Medium-Medium, or Small-Small) also shrinks the universe. These setups aren’t illegal, but they create tricky situations, so be careful.

AVOID GETTING BLUEBIRDED

Imagine you have exactly two ships at your Homeworld, and they’re both the same color. Let’s say they’re Blue. If your opponent has a Large Yellow, and two Blue ships at near and far positions, they can knock you out in one turn. Don’t let this happen to you! (The name refers to a coffeeshop in Amsterdam called the Bluebird, where a particularly memorable game ended this way, back in the earliest days of the game’s history.) There are two ways a Bluebird can happen, and one is easier to see coming than the other. Either way, you are vulnerable if you have exactly two ships at your Homeworld and they’re both the same color.

- **The Easy Bluebird:** Your enemy Sacrifices a Medium Yellow to simultaneously move two ships of your color, from systems one jump away, into your Homeworld.
- **The Tricky Bluebird:** Your enemy Sacrifices a Large Yellow to move in two ships of your color, one from a nearby star and one from two jumps away.
- **The Sitting Duck:** This is like a Bluebird but even more vulnerable. If you have three ships of the same color (or two ships plus a star of the same color) and no other ships at your Homeworld, all your enemy needs do is to drive one ship of that color into your system and KA-BOOM it’s game over.

DON’T RUSH

Tempo is tricky in this game. Sometimes fortune favors the patient, not the bold. For various reasons (such as how all Bank quantities are in odd numbers), the player who acts first can sometimes get the short end of the stick. If it’s a bad time to go shopping, consider stalling instead, moving ships around rather than constructing new ones.

MAKE INVESTMENTS

When the only ship at a basic star goes away, the star-piece is immediately returned to the Bank. If the ship that just departed was Green, and was Sacrificed, it may be possible to instantly change the star it was taken from into a ship. Parking Green ships at stars you'd like to change into ships later is called Investing. The best use of this strategy is to park Greens at Large stars while Mediums and Smalls of that color are available, then wait until the Bank is empty to "cash in." You just need to hope that your enemy doesn't move any other ships into your Investment system before you can Sacrifice the solitary Green ship you have at that system to turn its star into a ship.

PLAY KEEP-AWAY

If you can't Build a desirable piece as a ship, try turning it into a star. Even if the ship you Discover it with isn't Green, you might be able to turn the system into an Investment opportunity later on. More importantly, you are preventing your enemy from getting to Build a ship with that piece.

SQUONKING

There are times when you might wish to Sacrifice a piece wastefully, specifically to interfere with your opponent's access to the Bank. We call this Squonking (a combination of squandering and blocking). For example, you might want to Sacrifice a Small Yellow when moving a ship away from a Yellow system, not because you need the movement ability — you don't — but because the return of the Small Yellow to the Bank will block your opponent from Building a larger Yellow piece.

THE HYPERSPACE BYPASS

When the first half of someone's Homeworld is destroyed, the whole star map changes. New connections become possible, and travel times to and from that Homeworld become shorter. It's like when a planet needs to be destroyed to make way for a hyperspace bypass... travel becomes easier after the obstruction is removed. So whenever a new bypass is created, take a good look at how the stellar topography has changed, and consider all the new possibilities.

THE FACTORY

A Large Green ship, along with another Green ship in the same system, sets up a powerful maneuver called the Factory. When you get to the point when only Large Greens (or none) remain in the Bank, you can Sacrifice your Large Green for three Build actions. Then, as one of those actions, you can re-build the Large Green in the same system you took it from. You now have two more Build actions without having lost your original Large Green. You can do this over and over again!

USING GREEN TO TELEPORT

This trick is very useful if you get frozen out of Yellow. You can “teleport” a Small Green ship into any other system where you have another Green ship. Just Sacrifice the ship to get a Build action, then re-build that ship in a different star system that is occupied by one of your Green ships. If the Bank is low on Green, you can also teleport Medium or even Large ships, and get extra Build actions in the process!

CREATE HAPPY SYSTEMS

When you have a system containing exactly four pieces, one of each color (including the star), we call it a Happy System. This is ideal because it's the most difficult to blow up and it gives you all the options. So, while it's great to have a Factory, doing so requires having two Greens in the same system, and that's more dangerous.

TERRAFORMING

When you Sacrifice a Yellow for movement, the piece immediately goes into the Bank, which means you can instantly take it out again and place it back onto the field as a star, while moving one of your ships into orbit alongside it. We call this Terraforming, and it's a very useful technique for a couple of different reasons. First, it allows you to maintain control of the Yellow piece you're Sacrificing, so that your opponent can't immediately Build it as a ship themselves, which is particularly important if the Yellow ship you are Sacrificing is a Large and the Bank is empty. Second, Terraforming allows you to transform one of your Yellow ships into a star, which can be crucial when all pieces of that size are gone from the Bank and you need to get to a star of that size.

BEWARE THE INCOMPLETE BATTLE PLAN

One of the easiest ways to lose this game is to mount an attack that fails to annihilate your opponent, but leaves your own empire vulnerable. This most often happens when you knock out half of a player's Homeworld, leaving you with fewer ships and your opponent with a better-connected Homeworld than before. Plan for total victory!

THE DOOMSDAY MACHINE

With a particular fleet of nine ships, scattered across the galaxy in specific positions, you can vaporize your enemy's Homeworld in exactly two turns. We call this setup a Doomsday Machine:

- 2 Large Yellow ships, for two triple-jump moves
- 3 ships of one of the colors of the target system, all located at systems one jump away
- 3 ships of the target system's other color, located at stars that will be within one jump after the first half of the target Homeworld is destroyed
- 1 extra ship, to protect your own Homeworld

THE DEMOLITION FLEET

This is a tricky maneuver, requiring just the right conditions, but it's devastating if done correctly. It's only possible if your opponent has just one Large ship at their Homeworld, along with at least one other ship of that color. (Note: if the only ships they control at home are those two, it's a Bluebird situation.) You will need two ships of the same color as your opponent's Large, accompanied by a Large ship of a different color. We will call these three ships your "Demolition Fleet." You will also need a Large Yellow you can Sacrifice, and some kind of access to Red. Position the ships in your Demolition Fleet at stars one jump away from your enemy's Homeworld. Spread your fleet out between multiple stars if you can, to make it more difficult to notice what you're setting up. Assuming they don't see the threat in time, you can move all three of your Demolition Fleet ships into your enemy's Homeworld at once, and call Catastrophe. They will be left with no ships big enough to challenge your Large, and as long as you don't run out of attack power, you should be able to Capture all enemy ships at their Homeworld on subsequent turns — including any other Large ships they might try to return home after the damage is done.

OBEY THE PRIMARY DIRECTIVE

The Starship Captain's Primary Directive is to defend the Homeworld. Here are four practical tips for accomplishing this:

1) MAINTAIN A STRONG HOME DEFENSE:

Keep a Large ship at the Homeworld at ALL times. Tempting though it can be to use that big powerful ship elsewhere, you should always protect your Homeworld with a Large ship, unless you are about to win or are absolutely certain you will get a Large back at home before being invaded.

2) DON'T BE THE ONE WITHOUT A GUN:

As soon as your enemy gets a weapon (i.e., a Red ship), you should get one, too. You may not need a weapon until your enemy has one, but as soon as they do, you need to arm yourself immediately. (This is particularly true if you don't have a Planetary Defense System, i.e., a Homeworld setup that includes a Red star.)

3) CREATE A HAPPY HOMEWORLD:

Diversify and minimize your local defense fleet, i.e., the ships at your Homeworld. To reduce the threat of Catastrophe, avoid having more than one piece of each color at your Homeworld, either as a ship or part of the star system. In particular, never let ALL your home ships be of a single color if there's ANY chance of being invaded.

4) LOCK DOWN YOUR ACHILLES COLOR:

If your star is half-destroyed, monopolize the remaining color of your Homeworld. After half of your Homeworld has been blown up, your enemy needs just three ships of your remaining color to finish you off. Take those pieces out of circulation any way you can!