

The Emperor's Star

A Chrononauts Role-Playing Occurrence

Designed and written by Andrew Plotkin

<erkyrath@eblong.com>

The Emperor's Star is a card game for six players, based on the *Chrononauts* rules. While not a traditional role-playing game, *TES* incorporates some role-playing elements. Each player takes the part of a character, and tries to favor his character's fortunes over the course of the game.

Where classic *Chrononauts* covers a century of Earth's history, *TES* takes place in just three days of crisis, in the ancient and eloquent Empire of Mars. The three days are played in order; each day has its own Timeline, its own Patches, and its own victory conditions. Therefore, a full game of *TES* comprises three complete *Chrononauts* games.

However, you will play the same character each day! Each day's play affects the following day's timeline, and you retain artifacts and victory points from one day to the next. The story of your rise — or fall — covers all three days; and at the end of the third day, you just might find yourself seated on the Imperial Throne.

Rules of Play

Each day's game in *TES* is played according to the standard *Chrononauts* rules, mostly. The differences:

General changes:

- Each card in the timeline is a time of day rather than a year. Each game's timeline runs from approximately 8:00 to 23:30. For simplicity, we use a 24-hour military-style clock. Noon is 12:00; sunset is around 18:00. (True Martian chronometry is a difficult subject for anyone who grew up under only one moon.)
- Each player starts the day's game with two favor tokens — one positive and one negative. These are worth victory points: see "Winning," below.
- During your turn, you may trade artifacts, cards, and favors with other players. See "The Trading Phase," below.

The Timeline:

- A few Ripplepoints have unusually complex conditions — for example, "Paradoxed if 13:00' and (14:00' or 15:00')". This card would be flipped if 13:00, and *either* of 14:00 and 15:00 (or both), were red-side-up at the same time.
- The Paradox reverse of this Ripplepoint would say "Restored if 13:00 or (14:00 and 15:00)". In other words, the Paradox would be undone if 13:00 was turned black-side-up, or if both 14:00 and 15:00 were (or all three). If you work through the logic, you'll see these conditions are exactly complementary, as they should be.
- On some days, there is more than one Nexus. Therefore, there are more unstable patches. Before playing an unstable patch, be careful to make sure it is viable.

- On the third day, there is a Nexus with overlapping Patches. That is, two or more different patches may be viable at the same time. Remember that you can only play a Patch on a naked Paradox; you cannot play a Patch on a Patch, even if it is viable. You must first nullify the existing Patch.

- There is no Uberparadox patch.

Winning the games:

- The game cannot be ended by a Timeline collapse. Any number of Paradoxes can be open simultaneously.

- The game cannot be ended by having ten cards in your hand. Increasing your hand size will improve your score (see below), but you cannot win by cards alone.

- Your hand is limited to ten cards in any case. If you end your turn with more than ten cards, you must discard enough cards (of your choice) to reduce your hand to ten.

- The game cannot necessarily be ended by collecting Artifacts or completing your Timeline goal. The winning condition is different in each of the three days.

- The winning condition for each day includes a certain number of victory points. These points come from the normal activities of a Chrononauts game. (For example, increasing your hand size always gives you more VPs. So even though you cannot end the game by having ten cards, it's still worthwhile to increase your hand size.) See the "Winning" section for the exact VP table for each day.

The three days each have a few special rules, which apply only to that day. Here are the three days, and an overview of the winning conditions for each day:

Day 1:

- To win, you must achieve your Timeline goal *and* have five victory points. Victory points come from cards in hand, and Artifacts on the table.

- Certain patches are worth an extra victory point for particular players. As long as that patch is in place on the Timeline, the player it names has +1 VP. If the patch is nullified, so is the point.

Day 2:

- To win, you must achieve your Artifact goal *and* have five victory points. Victory points come from cards in hand, and from parts of your Timeline goal.

- Certain patches give you a second bonus when you play them, after the standard bonus of drawing one card. The second bonus is always optional.

Day 3:

- To win, you must achieve your Timeline goal *and* have five victory points. Victory points come from cards in hand, and Artifacts on the table.

- Some combinations of Artifacts are only valuable if you have the entire set.

- On Day 3, you can die! Certain Timeline events involve the deaths of various people, including the six player characters. If your character is shown as dead on the Timeline, you cannot win the game.

- Of course, your death doesn't stop you from playing. Like all Timeline events, it can be changed; you may consider "survival" as an extra part of your Timeline goal. However, if the game ends while you are dead, you will suffer a severe penalty in the final standings.

Winning

Okay, so winning is complicated. Here are the details.

Each day has a primary goal:

- Day 1: Achieve your Timeline goal (one Ripplepoint (black) and two Patches (red))
- Day 2: Achieve your Artifact goal (collect three particular Artifacts)
- Day 3: Achieve your Timeline goal, and remain alive.

However, in addition to the primary goal for the day, you must have a certain number of victory points in order to win that day's game. For example, on day 1, you need to *both*:

- Achieve your Timeline goal, *and*
- Reach five victory points for that day.

Both of these conditions must be true at the end of your turn. One is no good without the other. Neither is any good if it's not your turn.

The exact number of VPs needed to win, and the ways you achieve them, vary from day to day.

Day 1:

- You need at least 5 VP, plus your Timeline goal, to win.
- 1 VP for each Artifact in your possession. (That is, face-up in front of you. Artifacts in your hand don't count.)
- 1/2 VP for each card in your hand. (Round fractions down.)
- 1 VP for each positive favor token you hold, and -1 VP for each negative token.
- 1 VP for certain Patches in the Timeline. (See the relevant Patch cards. These are events that favor your character, even though they don't directly contribute to your goal.) You get the point as long as the Patch is actually in place on the Timeline. It doesn't matter who played the Patch, but the point goes away if the Patch is nullified.

Note that since you start the game with three cards in your hand, you have one VP automatically. (You also have one positive and one negative favor token, but these cancel each other out.)

At the end of each day, you get bonus points. These don't count towards ending a day's game, but they accumulate towards your final *TES* score.

Bonus points, end of day 1:

- 2 BP if you were the player that actually ended the day's game.
- 5 BP for achieving all three parts of your Timeline goal; 3 BP for achieving two parts; 1 BP for just one part.

(Note that the player who won the day will certainly get 7 BP. But it is possible for other players to get up to 5.)

Day 2:

- You need at least 5 VP, plus your Artifact goal, to win.
- 5 VP if all three parts of your Timeline goal are in place; 3 VP if two parts are in place; 1 VP for just one part.
- 1/2 VP for each card in your hand. (Round fractions down.)
- 1 VP for each positive favor token you hold, and -1 VP for each negative token.

(Note that during day 2, Artifacts on the table are *not* worth any VP. They count towards your Artifact goal instead. Artifacts are also worth bonus points at the *end* of day 2 — but remember that bonus points do not count towards ending the day's game; they are computed afterward.)

Bonus points, end of day 2:

- 2 BP if you were the player that actually ended the day's game.
- 2 BP for each Artifact in your possession which is part of your Artifact goal; 1 BP for each other Artifact in your possession.

Day 3:

- You need at least 5 VP, plus your Timeline goal, to win. You must also be alive. (Certain Timeline events involve the deaths of various characters, and you cannot win if your character is dead at the end of the day.)
- 1 VP each for certain Artifacts in your possession (see below).
- 3 VP for each complete trio of Artifacts in your possession (see below).
- 1/2 VP for each card in your hand. (Round fractions down.)
- 1 VP for each positive favor token you hold, and -1 VP for each negative token.

Artifacts worth 1 VP each:

- Prehistoric cookbooks, time travel documents

Artifact trios, worth 3 VP if you have all three of the trio:

- Knife, black cloak, canister
- Turkish Delight, isotope assay, dusty letters
- Codenames, holofilm, astrology chart
- Medical records, secret map, the Emperor's Star

Bonus points, end of day 3:

- 2 BP if you were the player that actually ended the day's game.
- -4 BP if you are dead, according to the Timeline.
- 5 BP for achieving all three parts of your Timeline goal; 3 BP for achieving two parts; 1 BP for just one part.

The Entire Tournament:

After the third day, add up the VPs and BPs you got for each of the three days. The total is your final score, and whoever comes out on top is the winner.

The Trading Phase

During your turn, you may trade with other players. Trading occurs after you draw your card, but before you play. (Once you play a card, you may no longer trade on that turn.)

All trades are voluntary, and must be agreed on by both players involved. You may trade any of the following, in any combination in either direction:

- Artifacts you have on the table
- Cards you have in your hand
- Positive and negative favor tokens
- Future considerations of your choice (but promises are not binding except as you choose to be bound)

If you receive a card from another player's hand, it goes into your hand; if you receive an Artifact that was in that player's possession (on the table), it goes into your possession.

It is legal to trade something for nothing. Or vice versa.

Remember that winning conditions are checked at the end of your turn, not after trading. You must play a card (or discard one) after trading, before you can win the game.

Favor Tokens

As already described, each player starts each day's game with two favor tokens. One is worth +1 VP to whoever owns it; the other is worth -1 VP. Since you start with one of each, these effects cancel. But if you gave your negative favor token to another player, your VP total would increase by one, and his would decrease.

These tokens represent favors. You might trade an Artifact to another player in return for a positive favor token; the token represents his general support, which is why it's worth a victory point. In a future trade, he might ask you to return the favor — or to do *him* a favor by accepting a negative favor token also.

Of course, as stated above, you are not bound by any promise you make, unless you decide to be. In the end, politics is politics, and a token is nothing more than a victory point. One way or the other.

Favor tokens can only change hands as part of a trade. (They are not Artifacts; they cannot be stolen, trashed, or so on.) Your tokens must be kept visible on the table.

New and Changed Cards

A few cards are added to the standard Chrononauts deck for this game. Some are used in all three day-games; others are used only for one day.

Mutate History: The opposite of *Restore History*; it lets you invert any black-side-up Linchpin to red.

Current of Time: This inverter lets you flip any Linchpin in a given range of time. (For example, between 12:00 and 16:00.)

Discontinuity: Instead of each player passing his entire hand to the next player, you each pass only four cards. You have to choose which cards to pass before you receive any; everybody passes at the same time. If you have fewer than four, pass them all.

Time Vortex: Instead of distributing the cards evenly, each player gets as many cards as he started with.

Pre-Emption: Take a card from any other player's hand, at random. Put in into your own hand.

Temporal Trace: Name a Patch. If any player has that card in his hand, he must give it to you. If nobody does, too bad for you. You can only use this to find Patches, not any other kind of card. If the Patch is for a Nexus, you must specify whether you want "a", "b", or "c".

Ahead of the Game: For you, this turn only, the number of victory points needed to win is reduced by two. If the winning condition is your Timeline goal plus five VP, then you could win with only three VP. (But you still need your Timeline or Artifact goal!) This only applies on the turn on which you play it.

Cooperation and Competition

At the end of *TES*, one player will be the winner. But this does not mean that you do not have goals in common. Particularly on the first two days, some players will find themselves working towards similar Timeline states, and may find it valuable to concoct alliances.

The trading phase, of course, offers much opportunity for mutual gain.

Remember that you can get victory and bonus points for partial Timeline goals, Artifacts, and other conditions, even if you don't win a given day's game. It is even possible for the day's winner to come up second in the VP tally — and at the end of the third day, only victory points count.

You may not show another player your hand or your character goal sheet, but you may certainly discuss them. All table talk is legal. Honesty is your own business.

Mars in the Late Paleocanal Era

On Mars, all canals flow towards Xi City. Be welcome.

The Imperial family

The city, the canals, and the Empire are ruled by:

- The Emperor Illuminated, Dirigent of All Canals, Boreal Ice Master, Conqueror of the Moons, who stands ever in the sunlight, **Taxar the Seventeenth**. His favorite candy is Turkish Delight.

Martians everywhere remember and mourn:

- The Martian Empress, **Sorshelle**, who died this past year of a sudden degenerative illness. A

wise and gentle daughter of the mercantile class, who kept her canny head when she joined the Illuminated in marriage. Liked peppermint sweets.

And all make cute googling noises upon meeting the Heir:

- **Renxi** (one and a half exactly). His favorite candy, of course, is all of it.

The Players

- **Voxim**: The Emperor's cousin, and thus third in the line of succession. Tall, red-haired, handsome. (Red-haired is always handsome on Mars.) Young still; but already well-known in the influential private chambers of Old Town, not just the back-street dance temples. Likes fudge.
- **Morixa**: Voxim's bratty younger sister. Fourth in succession. Takes many interests, although perhaps not as seriously as she might. Recently she has enjoined as Apprentice in the Pyramid of Astrologues, and this may settle her down — or not. Likes liquorice.
- **Seranst**, the Magister of Canals: A powerful woman in a powerful office. As Magister she is sworn to “neutrality of the blade” — this means she's never caught taking bribes. Theoretically her neutrality applies to feuds of succession, as well. Likes peanut brittle.
- **Farlen Mait**, called “the Emperor of Barges” (although he never says so himself, as the epithet is technically treason against the Illuminated). The most famous man in the mercantile; his boats run every kind of goods on every canal. Fifth richest man on Mars. Likes jelly beans.
- **Zendibar**, the Great Gamer — the title means Chief Strategist of the Imperial Army of the Skies. Old, cranky; he was called brilliant in his day, and his day may not be over. Likes gumdrops.
- **Koyen**, the Hero of Phobos. His conduct in that crisis earned him a captaincy, and a place in the public eye which may be worth more than any Army rank. Likes cayenne chocolate truffles.

Other Personages

- The Astrologe **Noulin**, Magister of Moons. Old and dreamy; his position has little influence these days, as the Astrologues are not much attended to. Likes lollipops.
- Lord **Orxino**: Elder of the oldest family in Old Town. The secret genealogies of his lineage, it is rumored, go back to before men lived on Mars. Formally has no role in government, but many members of the Confluent look to Old Town for their constituency.

And, of course,

- A mysterious knife-wielding **figure in black**.