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## Game Preview: Race for the Galaxy: The Gathering Storm

By Tom Lehmann  
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Publisher: [Rio Grande Games](#) / [Abacusspiele](#)

Designer: Tom Lehmann

Players: 1-5

Ages: 12+

Playing Time: 30-60 minutes

Release Date: September 2008 (Europe) / October 2008 (U.S.)

Price: \$25

I've been very happy with *Race for the Galaxy's* reception. While I suspected, based on pre-publication testing, that many players would enjoy the game, one never knows for sure until it enters the market.

### The Initial Gathering



The first expansion was partially designed before *Race* was accepted by a publisher as several playtesting groups were still constantly playing *Race* after a year and asking for more. Since I didn't know whether a publisher would even want an expansion, my first cut was straightforward: add a fifth player; add four new start worlds and new game cards for increased variety; and strengthen the balance among game strategies, given experienced players. While I didn't want to change game play dramatically – this could occur in later expansions – I did want to shake things up a bit.

What I had observed (and confirmed after publication) is that new players often start out doing military settlement strategies (as these are easily grasped), then gradually discover produce-consume strategies before moving to a more flexible play style centered around produce-consume, but also encompassing military and development paths when indicated. Thus, the base set is tilted slightly towards produce-consume to encourage players to look beyond the military strategies.

*The Gathering Storm* redresses this with the Imperium Lords, a development that grants its owner a card for each military world in the owner's tableau when Produce is called; the Terraforming Guild, a development which gives two VPs for every windfall world in its owner's tableau; and the development Improved Logistics, which allows a player to settle a second world in a Settle phase.

Improved Logistics, which both helps the military players (who just need to have the worlds in hand, not pay for them) and can dramatically alter game tempo, forces play adjustments. Consume strategies can still work, but players often need to earn more VPs per Consume to win as there may be fewer turns in which to turn the Produce/Consume “crank”. Fast tableau strategies are also easier. Of course, drawing Improved Logistics doesn't guarantee a win. Many playtesters slapped it down and ended the game quickly, only to discover they didn't win. Learning when and how to use Improved Logistics is part of its challenge.

Some paths in the base game, such as the Genes and Alien lines, relied on drawing just the right cards in the right order. The first expansion helps these paths by adding a higher proportion of Genes and Alien cards, some “helper” cards, and a second 6-cost development for Genes worlds.

*The Gathering Storm* also provides a “preset” start hand for the fifth player. While we recognize that most expansion players will be experienced, some may still be fairly new to *Race*.

### How Does the Gathering Grow?



At this point, the expansion was fairly small (about 30 cards, including the fifth player action cards) for three reasons: I didn't know what format the publisher would want; I was leery of card draws becoming too "streaky" if I added lots of cards; and I wanted room for some blank cards. By providing templated versions of different *Race* card types – developments, 6-cost developments, worlds of each windfall and production kind – depicting a starry background with blank power "swooshes" and text areas for players to write in custom powers, players could effectively create their own mini-expansion, while these cards could still blend in with the official ones. Further, if we did two expansions, we could provide an official entry card in the first one, run a contest for best card idea, and include it in the next one.



When Rio Grande Games decided to publish *Race*, I suggested this to Jay Tummelson and he liked the idea. However, Jay stated that he didn't want the expansions to include just cards and he challenged me to come up with interesting ways to add additional material to the game.



One idea was to provide a solitaire version. My notion was to abstract an opponent's actions, tracking the results on a mat with counters. While we couldn't provide a real AI, a player could roll custom dice to select the "robot's" actions. By having various robot faces on the dice which map to different actions, and by providing custom overlapping mat pieces, we could provide not just one robot opponent, but nine, one for each start world. If some die faces had a "matching" symbol, when this was rolled the robot would "adapt" by matching one of the player's chosen actions. Thus, if the player swung into produce-consume mode, the robot would tend to follow. I also came up with several difficulty levels to play against.

After sketching out these ideas, Wei-Hwa Huang and I developed them. Wei-Hwa wrote a simulator so we could test how the different robots performed against various recorded two-player games and, together, we developed graphics to represent the robot actions and tweaked the numbers until we got the desired chance of success for each robot at the various difficulties.

While I don't expect the solitaire game to appeal to everyone, after seeing over 20 solitaire variants posted on BoardGameGeek following *Race's* publication, I feel confident that many players will enjoy this bonus feature.

My other idea (for this expansion) was to add two types of goals to *Race*. One is "most" goals, such as Greatest Military or Most Production Worlds or Most Developments, which can move around similar to Greatest Army or Longest Road in *Settlers of Catan* and provide another way for players to interact. The other is "first" goals, which are awarded only once, for being the first player to meet conditions such as placing three Alien cards, or placing the first 6-cost development, or having a power in every phase (plus Trade). These goals increase player tension and can provide some immediate direction during the early game.

In *The Gathering Storm*, we provide four "most" and six "first" goals, with two "most" and four "first" goals used in a given game (chosen randomly during setup). Each future expansion will use just two and four of these goals, but will come with another five goals to provide more variety.



#### One Gathering Leads to Another



At the 2008 Gathering of Friends, Jay asked me to design a third *Race* expansion. As production work on *The Gathering Storm* was in progress, this led to a bit of a scramble as I designed and we tested various ideas, trying to figure out what changes would be needed to accommodate and properly foreshadow the new cards, powers, and concepts in the third expansion. Luckily, this work mostly affected the second expansion; just one card in *The Gathering Storm* was replaced and another one reworded.

In the end, *The Gathering Storm* adds a fifth player and preset hand, two types of goals, four start worlds, and new game cards, along with blank cards and a solitaire version with two custom dice to *Race for the Galaxy*. Enjoy!



Posted by W. Eric Martin on Sep 26, 2008 at 03:00 PM in [Previews](#) / 493

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Great preview, Tom! I can't wait for this to make it to the market. I'm especially intrigued by the solitaire version as I'm always on the lookout for a good game when it's just me at home.

Dale

Posted by Dale Yu on Sep 26, 2008 at 02:10 PM | <#>

Fascinating, Tom, thanks much!

My current favorite solitaire version of the base game is by waddball, and is the sixth message here:

<http://www.boardgamegeek.com/thread/246761/page/1>

Very simple and direct, but not much interactivity, as there is not really much of a simulated other player.

So, looking forward to the dice used to partially decide AI player(s) actions—a new mechanic, it would seem!

Posted by Jeffrey D Myers on Sep 26, 2008 at 03:22 PM | <#>

Why does Ancient Race say “3 (not 4)” cards?

“Then thou must discard down to three. Three shall be the number to discard to, and the number of the remaining cards shall be three. Two shalt thou not keep, neither shalt thou keep four, excepting that thou then discardest to three. One is right out. Once the number three, being the number of the remaining cards, be reached, thou shalt stop discarding.”

Posted by gschmidl on Sep 26, 2008 at 04:34 PM | <#>

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