Merchant of Venus Variant Rules

by Don Woods, Tom Lehmann and Steven Goodman

In addition to the rules listed below, we recommend two rules that appeared in the **AH General**:

- Cities in your home system (based on race) act as open ports, allowing any number of transactions even if you have already moved that turn.

- During set-up, toss all demands and non-factory goods in the cup and pull out 20 chits to start the game with (even though the system locations for these chits are unknown at the very start). Each time a new system is discovered (i.e. when its IOU chit is claimed), draw 4 more chits from the cup.

Rules and changes added by us:

- Map board change. Edit Colony system (just 'west' of Galactic Base) as follows:

    - Change the blue dot just left of Comfort Station into a blue $30 hazard.

    - Change the blue dot just left of Cobbleport into a navigation circle with 1,6 pointing to Cobbleport; 3,4,5 pointing to the new $30 hazard and 2 pointing to the yellow dot to the south-west.

- Start with all the 'unplaced' relics in play at Galactic Base using the following procedure:

    1. Put all 35 exploration markers in a cup (not including the Relic Laser).

    2. Draw 11 markers face up.

    3. Place any relics among these 11 at Base (these are the relics that would not have entered play if the other 24 markers had been placed on the board).

    4. Dump out the rest of the markers, find the remaining relics, count them and place them facedown to one side.

    5. Turn the other 26 markers face down and mix them.

    6. Remove a number of these 26 markers from the game, without looking at them, equal to the number of the face down relics you counted earlier plus 2.

    7. Mix the remaining markers with the face down relic markers and place these markers (which should now total 24) on the board normally.

- Victory: Be first to have cash and deeds totalling $3000; deeds, however, only count 1/2 their normal price towards winning.

- On a player's first turn, if he or she chooses to stay at Base, that player may only pick up **one** passenger there, even if more than one are present.

- The first shield (except the Relic Shield) on a ship occupies half a hold.

- The relic Gate Lock may be turned on and off during movement.

All other rules, except for the optional combat rules which we don't use, are played normally.

Comments:

We like the variety of having all the relics in play. It also leads to an interesting tension early on in large player games (when players start with enough money to be able to purchase the relics available at Base right away): Do you set off to explore or do you stay at Base to grab a relic? Which tends to reduce the advantage of going first in larger games.

In games with four or fewer players, we frequently noted that the Colony system was infrequently visited and often unexplored at the end of the game due to its poor connections with the rest of the map. Our minor map modification solves this.

One of our goals was to balance the various ship routes. At $2000 victory, we found freighters rarely useful. At $4000 victory, clippers were rarely used. At $3000 (and with deeds valued at 1/2), clippers, transports and freighters are all pretty balanced with respect to each other. If you find that clippers and scouts are outclassed, reduce the victory threshold to $2750.

Before, once a player had enough cash, buying out a system's ports and factories was a 'no brainer'. The money spent still counted towards victory and the ports and factories might bring in some extra cash along the way. Now, with deeds only counting 1/2 towards victory, the decision to buy a factory or port becomes much tougher.

The variable goods/demand set-up adds variety and tends to favour transports a bit over freighters as systems take longer to have all their goods available for purchase. This helps balance ship types.

Having shields always count a half hold makes combination drives a bit more powerful and makes the choice of which two of the three (red drive, yellow drive or shield) to take a bit trickier. It also makes the Relic Shield more useful.

The rule allowing a player to treat his or her home system as a port is mostly flavour but we like it as it helps distinguish races a bit more.

Allowing Gate Lock to be turned on and off during a turn is both more consistent with the other relics and improves it (Gate Lock seemed slightly weak to us). Note that it can be used quite effectively with Jump Start at the start of a turn (you declare which gate you're trying to jumpstart to, and if you fail to roll that number (if you do roll it, you must go there as per the normal movement rules), you can decide to turn on Gate Lock or go to another gate that you rolled).

All in all, these rules seem to make for a tighter game with harder choices along the way to victory. Enjoy!