

Galaxy Express

A Solitary Confinement game for the piecepack by Matt Worden

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1 player, 15-30 minutes (includes setup)

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(Special thanks to Clark Rodeffer for testing, proofreading, and making excellent suggestions.)

Equipment

From a single piecepack:

- Ace Sun Tile & Ace Moon Tile, face-up
- 12 more tiles, facedown (suit & number do not matter)
- All 24 coins, separated into the four different suits
- All 4 dice
- 1 pawn (color does not matter)

Welcome ...

... to the exciting world of interPlanetary courier services, rookie! As a pilot for Galaxy Express, you will be responsible for handling your warp drive equipped Starship as efficiently as possible in delivering your customers' shipments.

From your studies at the academy, I'm sure you already know about the nuances involved with these modern warp drives – the separate thrusting and braking systems, the need to hit your Planetary orbit window “just right”, the high cost of fuel, etc., etc. And speaking of that fuel ... I don't want to give the impression that we run a cheapskate operation, but you'll want to keep an eye on your gauges, if you know what I mean. And, oh yeah, we don't really have an accurate Planetary chart available – so you'll have to figure out which Planet is which by scanning on the fly-by ...

So anyway ... there's your ship, rookie ... go get 'em!

“Galaxy Express” is a solitaire game for the piecepack about delivering shipments between Planets in the distant future. It is a game of strategic planning and clever movement. Carefully move your Starship to each of the Planets, in the proper order, while refueling as little as possible.

Game Setup

Star Chart (Tiles as a game board)

Arrange the 12 facedown tiles in a 4-wide-by-3-tall rectangle. The generic 2-by-2 grid on the back of each tile should combine to form an 8-by-6 grid of squares. All Planets and movement will be located on this *Star Chart*.

Delivery Queue & Planets (Crown & Arms Coins)

Each Arms coin will be a *Planet* on the Star Chart, and the Crown coins will make up the *Delivery Queue* – the order in which the Planets are visited. This step is intended to make sure each game starts with a unique, random distribution of the Planets on the Star Chart, as well as a random order to the Delivery Queue.

Place the Crown and Arms coins together, facedown (number-side down), on a flat surface. Mix and scramble the 12 coins, then organize them into a single facedown stack.

Going tile-by-tile on the game board, take a coin from the stack and place it, facedown, in any one of the quadrants (4 smaller squares formed by the grid) of the current tile. The quadrant should be chosen as quickly and as randomly as possible.

Once each tile has a coin placed on it (all Crown and Arms coins should be on the board at that point), the Crown coins should be picked up off the board and organized into a stack. Flip the entire stack so that all Crown coins are face-up – the top coin showing its number.

(Note: Do not be overly concerned with following these steps exactly to the letter – just be sure the Arms coins end up randomly scattered facedown on the board, and the Crown coins are in a random face-up stack.)

Starship (Pawn)

Pick any single Arms coin on the board and flip it to reveal its number. Set the Pawn (your *Starship*) on the face-up coin – this is the Planet from which your Starship will launch. If the number on the starting Planet matches the coin on the top of the Delivery Queue (stack of Crown coins), take the coin from the top of the Delivery Queue and move it to the bottom of the stack.

Place any 2 of the dice next to the board, with their null-side up. These dice (called *Refueling Dice*) will be used to keep track of refueling.

Thrust/Brake Systems (Sun & Moon Coins)

Place the Sun coins, facedown, on a flat surface. Mix and scramble the Sun coins, then organize them into a facedown stack. Take the top two coins from the stack and place them face-up in front of the stack. Place the Sun Ace Tile, face-up, near the stack of Sun Coins.

Then, do the same entire process with the Moon coins, placing the Moon Ace Tile near the stack of Moon coins.

Place the 2 remaining dice between the two stacks of coins, with their null-side up. These dice (called *Speed Dice*) will be used to track the speed of the Starship. The Sun coins (*Thrust Coins*) will be used to accelerate the Starship, and the Moon coins (*Brake Coins*) will be used to decelerate it. The face-up Ace tiles will hold the “spent” coins of their respective suits.

Playing the Game

Objective

The objective of the game is to find and stop at each Planet, in the order presented by the Delivery Queue, while refueling as little as possible. This is done by finding, moving to, and stopping on the Planet whose number matches the number at the top of the Delivery Queue. Once that is completed, the coin at the top of the Delivery Queue is flipped over and set to the side, and the next Planet becomes the target.

Playing a Turn

A turn consists of the following steps:

- 1) ***Thrust or Brake*** ... Either a Thrust Coin (Sun) or a Brake Coin (Moon) must be applied to the ship’s current speed. Pick one of the 4 number-side-up coins, note its type and value (Null = 0 and Ace = 1), and place it on its matching Ace Tile to indicate that it is spent.
- 2) ***Adjust Ship’s Speed*** ... Taking the number currently showing on the Speed Dice (the two dice by the Thrust and Brake coins), add the number on the Thrust Coin (or subtract the number on the Brake Coin) chosen in step #1. Change the Speed Dice to show the resulting value of the newly-adjusted speed. Maximum speed is 10 and minimum speed is 0. Therefore, if a 4-point Thrust Coin is played when the speed is already 8, then the resulting speed is the maximum, 10. Likewise, if a 4-point Brake Coin is played when the speed is only 2, the resulting speed is 0.

- 3) **Move the Ship (“Warp Slide”)** ... If, after the adjustment made in step #2, the Starship has a speed that is greater than 0, it must be moved on the board. Its movement (called a *Warp Slide*) is carried out using the following rules:
- The Starship must move the exact number of squares indicated on the Speed Dice
 - The Starship must move in a single orthogonal¹ direction
 - The Starship cannot change direction during the Warp Slide.
 - Spaces that contain Planets are treated the same way as those without – the pawn representing the Starship simply steps on top of the coin representing the Planet.
 - Movement on the board wraps-around to the other side of the board. For example, if the Starship is moving to the right in the second row of the board and comes to the rightmost column with 3 spaces remaining in the Warp Slide, the Starship is moved to the leftmost column of the second row as its next move, and continues moving to the right to finish off its last 2 squares.
 - The direction of one Warp Slide has no impact on the direction or speed of the next Warp Slide.
- 4) **Respond to Scanning and Orbiting Planets** ... If a Warp Slide ends with the Starship on or orthogonally next to a Planet, it can scan the Planet – flip that Planet’s coin over to reveal its number. If the Starship is sitting on top of a Planet and its speed is at 0, it is orbiting the Planet, and can make a delivery (see “Making a Delivery”, below) and/or refuel (see “Refueling”, below).
- 5) **Reveal New Thrust/Brake Coin** ... Flip over a new Thrust or Brake Coin of the same type chosen in step #1. As long as enough of each coin type remain, there should always be 2 Thrust Coins and 2 Brake Coins to choose from at the start of each turn. This ends the current turn – the next turn should start again with step #1, unless game ending conditions have been reached (see “Game Ending Conditions”, below).

Making a Delivery

A delivery can be made when the Starship has stopped at a Planet. This means the pawn representing the Starship is sitting on top of a coin representing a Planet on the board, and the Starship’s current speed is 0. If the number of the Planet matches the number showing at the top of the Delivery Queue, then the delivery is made. The coin at the top of the Delivery Queue is flipped over and set to the side. The number on the new coin at the top of the Queue identifies the next Planet to receive a delivery. The game ends when all deliveries have been made.

¹ Orthogonal movement in this game is defined as movement in only the 4 major compass directions – vertically or horizontally on the board. Only orthogonal (no diagonal) movements and/or comparisons are used in the game.

Refueling

A ship can refuel whenever it has stopped at a Planet. Refueling is carried out as follows:

1. Increase the value on the Refueling Dice by 1
2. Return all “spent” Thrust and Brake coins to the game, mix them with the remaining coins, and stack them as was done in the game setup
3. Flip over the top 2 coins from each stack

Game Ending Conditions

The game can end under the following conditions:

All Deliveries Made (Win)

If the last coin from the Delivery Queue is flipped over, then all deliveries have been made – this is considered a “win”.

Lost in Space (Loss)

If the remaining combination of Thrust and Brake Coins will not allow the Starship to stop at a Planet to make a delivery or to refuel, then the Starship will continue to drift through space, until a rescue vehicle is sent. This is considered a “loss”.

Scoring

Whether the game is won or lost, points are scored as follows:

- Score 20 points for every delivery that was made
- Subtract 10 points times the value of the Refueling Dice
- Add 1 point for each unspent Thrust and Brake Coin

Total scores fall into the following categories:

- 100 or more – “Employee of the Year!!”
- 90 to 99 – “Nice going, kid!”
- 80 to 89 – “Not bad ... for a rookie!”
- Less than 80 – “Maybe you need to spend more time at the Academy!”

Hints & Tips

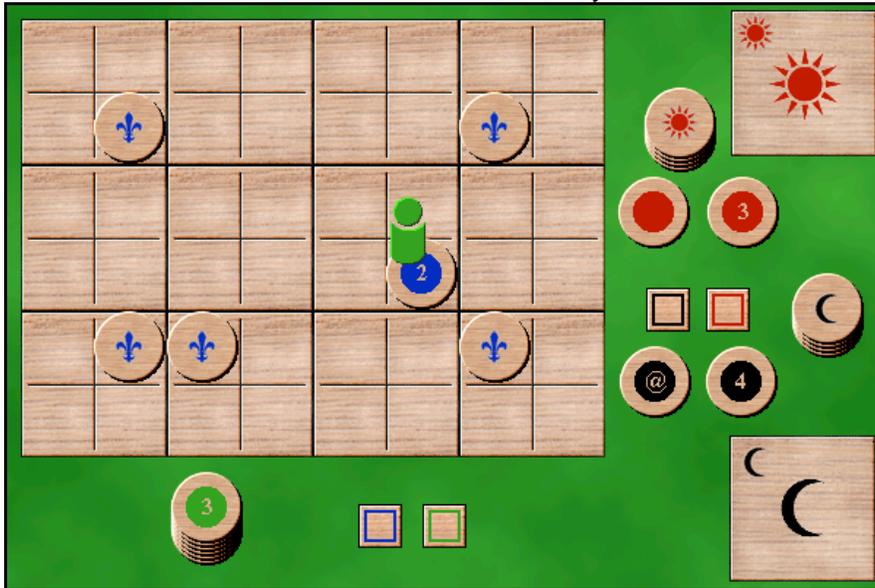
- ***Scout Early*** – Early turns should be used to scan as many Planets as possible. This will make it easier to plan movements later in the game.
- ***Think in Circles*** – Keep in mind that the board wraps around for movement. Mentally walk through all of the options before moving.
- ***Limit Dimensions*** – When initially approaching a Planet, try to get the Starship into the same row or column of the Planet. This will limit needed movement to a single dimension, making it easier to calculate.
- ***Every Planet Has a Refueling Station*** – If you’re not sure you can make the next Planet in the Delivery Queue with your remaining Thrust and

Brake Coins, it is probably best to stop at the most convenient Planet and refuel. Better to take that 10 point hit than to get lost in space.

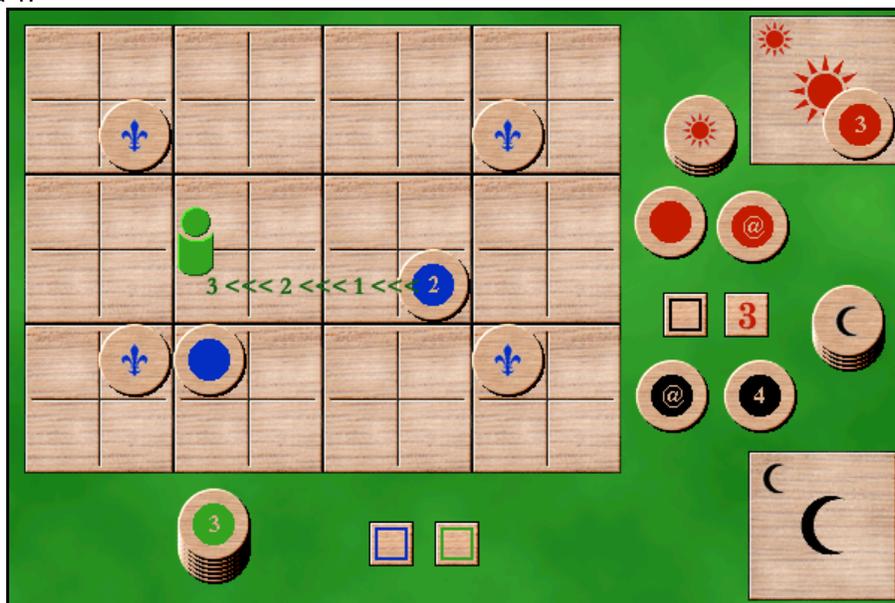
Sample Game

The following are a handful of turns from a sample game ...

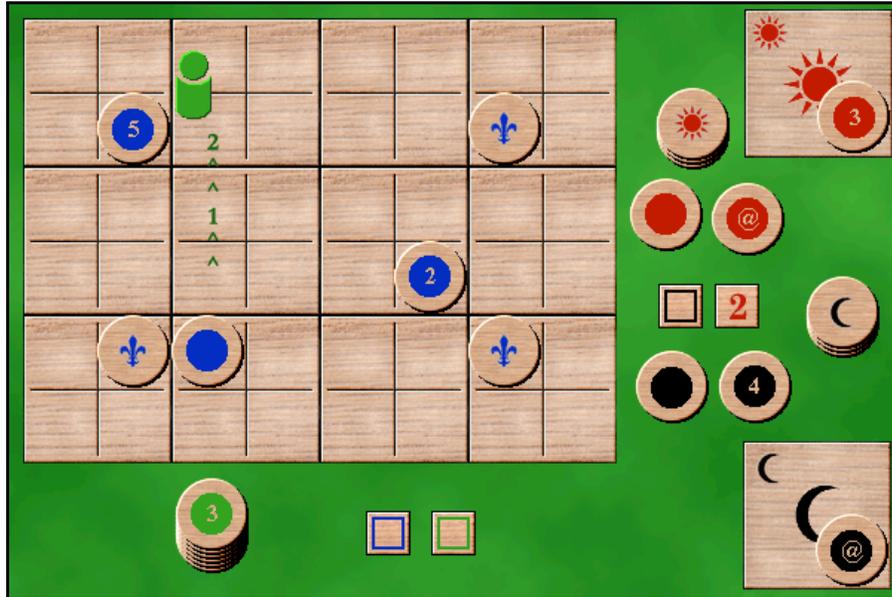
After Setup: After setup, I choose to start on a Planet in the 3rd column from the right and the 3rd row from the bottom. Flipping over the Planet revealed it to be the #2 Planet. Since the coin at the top of the Delivery Queue was also a 2, I moved that coin to the bottom of the Queue. This revealed that the #3 Planet would be the first Planet for delivery.



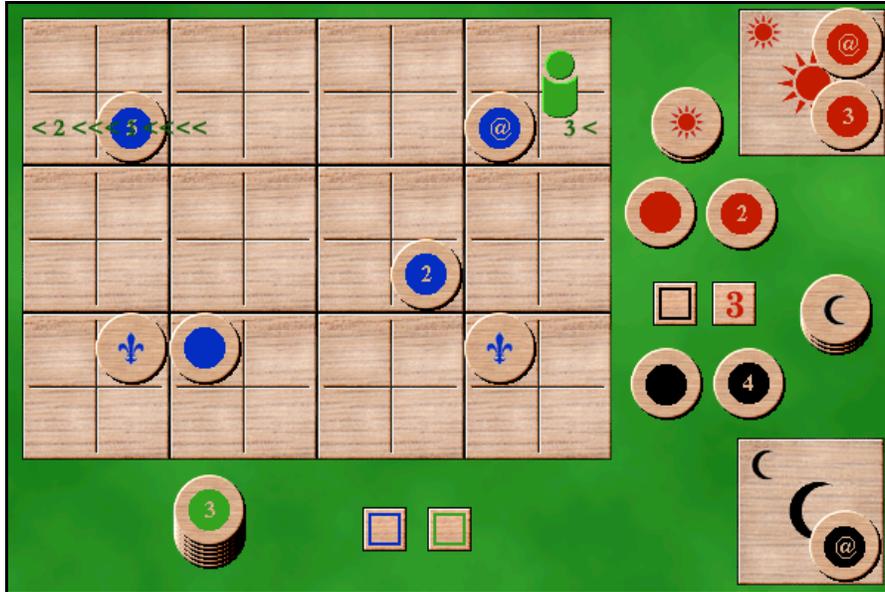
Turn #1: On my first turn, I had a 0 & 3 for Thrust Coins and a 1 & 4 for Brake Coins. Since I needed to get the Starship moving, I really had no choice but to play the Thrust of 3. This put my speed up to 3 and I was ready to Warp Slide. I wanted to end up next to or on a Planet in order to scan the thing and learn its number. I decided to move to the left, since that was the only way I could get next to a Planet, which turned out to be Planet #0. Flipping over a new Thrust Coin revealed a 1.



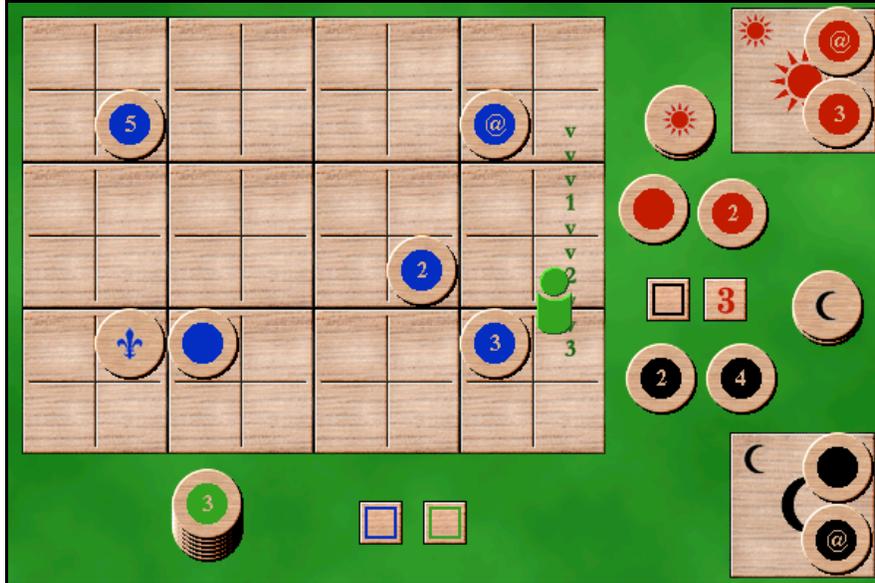
Turn #2: Using the Brake Coin of 1, I reduced my speed to a 2 and moved upward in order to end up next to another unknown Planet. It turned out to be Planet #5, and the new Brake Coin was a 0.



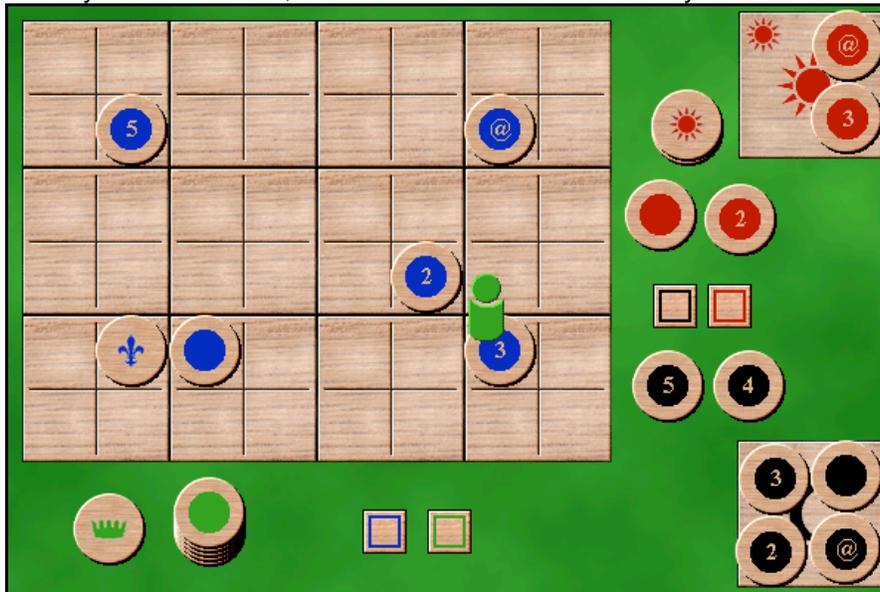
Turn #3: Using my Thrust Coin of 1, I increased the speed up to 3 and headed to the left, wrapping back around to the right side of the board and ending up once again next to a Planet that need scanning. It turned out to be Planet #1 – still not the one I was looking for. The new Thrust Coin was a 2.



Turn #4: There were only 2 more Planets to scan, and one of them had to be the #3 Planet I needed to make a delivery to. One of the un-scanned Planets was 3 squares below my current position, and since I already had a speed of 3, it made sense to use one of the 0 coins to continue coasting at that speed. I used the 0 Brake Coin in order to give myself more braking options for future turns. This found me the Planet I was looking for! And, the new Brake Coin turned out to be a 2, which was a good thing, as I'll explain on the next turn.



Turns #5 & #6: I needed to find a way to get one square to the left, and then do a full-stop on that Planet for the delivery. Since my current speed was 3, and there was a Brake Coin worth 2, I used that to reduce my speed down to 1. Then, I moved to the left and landed on the Planet. The new Brake Coin was a 3, which I applied on the next turn to get my speed down to 0. This means the delivery had been made, and the next Planet in the Delivery Queue was revealed.



Turns #7, #8 & #9: This worked out nicely ... I used the two Thrust Coins to move the four squares to the left over the next two turns, then applied one of the Brake Coins to make that delivery. I was down to a single Brake Coin at that point, so I refueled before continuing on through the Queue.

Game Summary: I ended up getting quite lucky a couple of times. One of those came when I had just 1 Brake Coin (5) and 2 Thrust Coins (2 & 5) left – the next Planet came up in the queue and it was exactly 5 spaces away ... a nice, quick delivery before refueling!

In the end, I finished all of the deliveries, having only refueled twice, and with 9 Thrust and Brake Coins remaining. This would yield a very nice score of 109 (120 for the six deliveries, subtract 2x10 for refueling, and add 9 for remaining Thrust/Brake Coins).

Player's Shorthand Reference

Setup

1. **Star Chart (Tiles as a game board)** -- 4 tiles wide x 3 tiles tall = 8 squares wide x 6 squares tall
2. **Delivery Queue & Planets (Crown & Arms Coins)** – Randomly distributed facedown Arms coins on the game board. Randomly stacked face-up Crowns coins. Refueling Dice at 0.
3. **Starship (Pawn)** – Flip 1 Planet coin over, place Starship on it.
4. **Thrust/Brake Systems (Sun & Moon Coins)** – Mix and stack facedown Sun and Moon coins separately. Flip over top 2 coins from each stack. Speed Dice at 0.

Game Turns

1. **Thrust or Brake** – Must use exactly 1 Sun or 1 Moon coin.
2. **Adjust Ship's Speed** – Update Speed Dice. Minimum speed of 0. Maximum speed of 10.
3. **Warp Slide** – Must move the exact number on the Speed Dice. Board wraps around.
4. **Scan Planets, Make Deliveries, Refuel** – Any adjacent Planets can be scanned at any speed. Deliveries and Refueling require Starship to be on a Planet and a speed of 0.
5. **Reveal New Thrust/Brake Coin** – Be sure to always have 2 of each showing.