

Xeno

Souvenir Programme for the 2386 Earth Congress Xeno Championship Games.

The flat frozen face of Io stretched into the distance. The only buildings were a scattering of E.A. (Earth Atmosphere) huts, and the only lifeforms a small crowd of miners and pioneers. Across an improvised field two suited men pursued an ice puck, pushing, kicking and propelling in any other way they could think of, two large blocks of solidified methane gas. They were not too gentle about it, either. If a block hit a man instead of the puck, it was just too bad.

Then one man kicked his gas block into the puck hard and accurately enough to ricochet it between two metal poles stuck into the iron-hard ground. He danced clumsily in the air, encumbered by his suit and the uncertain gravity. His pleasure was not very long lived. His opponent rushed at him and knocked him over. Before long a full-scale brawl had broken out, involving players and spectators. Even the referee joined in.

The game we now know as Xeno, named after the Earth colony on Io, began as a rough and almost ruleless pastime among that colony's platinum miners. Labouring long hours in harsh conditions, making big money but having nothing to spend it on, they found that Xeno provided the dual attraction of exciting activity and something uncertain on which to gamble their wages. In the game as played in this pioneer community, almost anything went, although actually killing your opponent was considered unsporting.

That was almost a century ago. Our modern game is a more sophisticated and humane affair, though still a tough test of reflexes and athletic ability, not to mention courage. Using the technology of our age, the players now set atop ground saucers, harnessed and protected, their vital signs electronically monitored to pick up early evidence of physical damage. Danger and accidents are unavoidable, but the methane blocks and the unbridled brutality are gone, thank goodness!

Today, versions of Xeno are played by children on frozen lakes and at ice rinks. There are computer and table-top versions, enjoyed by all age groups. The great players – such as Kreon, the current Earth Champion – are folk heroes. This series of Championship Games will be watched by tens of billions throughout the inhabited galaxy, and revenues from advertising, vidicast and stadium receipts alone run into trillions of credits every season.

In the mining camps and the trading stations, though, Xeno is still played with the same "vigour" and disregard for the niceties as in its early days on Io.

THE OBJECT.

Xeno has one- or two-player, keyboard or joystick options. Each player controls a manoeuvreable disc in an attempt to push a smaller puck through his opponent's goal. The winner is the player who scores most goals in the game.

SETTING THE GAME VARIABLES.

You can vary certain aspects of the game to suit your level of playing ability. This facility gives Xeno infinite variability.

DEFINING KEYS.

If you take the keyboard option, Xeno will ask you to define each key function in turn. If you also choose two-player mode, be sure to define your keys carefully, so that both players can easily operate them without getting in each other's way during the course of the game.

SETTING THE SHOT TIME-OUT.

Control of the cursor showing the direction your saucer/disk will travel switches automatically from player to player after a pre-set time interval. This interval is the time-out period. It is entered as a single number of seconds, from 1-9. By entering 0 you can disable the time-out facility.

SETTING THE LENGTH OF QUARTERS.

Xeno is played in four quarters of equal duration, which may be varied from 1-9 minutes.

SETTING THE COMPUTER HANDICAP.

You can handicap the computer by slowing down its response to your shot. The handicap values range from 0-9.

The Xeno program has default settings. Follow the screen instructions if you wish to change these.

You are now ready to play Xeno.

GAMEPLAY HINTS.

The rules of Xeno are very simple. Play proceeds in turns from one side to the other, each player moving his disc in such a way that the puck is deflected in the desired direction.

You may knock your opponent's disc out of position, or retreat to cover a possible shot at goal. In either case it is not necessary to make contact with the puck.

When setting the variables, give some thought to the consequences. With a very short time-out, you may have insufficient time to react. Also, if a quarter is too long, you will have to maintain your concentration for a considerable time.