



PLATOON MANAGEMENT

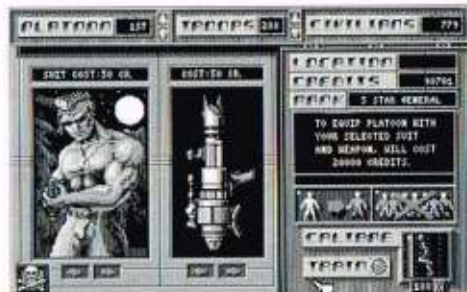
When you enter a new planet system for the first time, you come in peace, without an army. This is a state of affairs that can be changed on the Platoon Management Screen.

Training, equipment, aggression levels and experience all affect the strength of your soldiers when they enter into battle. Experience only comes with combat, but aggression can be adjusted on the Combat Control Screen. On the Platoon Management Screen, you draft soldiers from the civilian population, set them training, buy equipment – body armor and hand weapons – and commission Platoons.

All Platoon enlistment, training and equipping takes place on Starbase, drawing on human and other Resources on your base planet. Your forces are organized into Platoons – you can have up to 24 Platoons, which are identified by numeric names, and a Platoon can be composed of between 1 and 200 troops.

If a Platoon is wiped out in a battle on some far-flung planet, then its number becomes available to you again back on Starbase, and new recruits can be drafted and trained. If, however, a Platoon is diminishing in strength and you wish to assign extra men to it, you have no option but to bring it back to Starbase in a Battle Cruiser, decommission it, recruit new men, then train and equip them before commissioning the Platoon once more.

This screen can also be used to review the status of the Platoons you have scattered around the system.





Drafting Troops

To enlist civilians, you first need to select a vacant Platoon number – clicking on the up/down arrow next to the Platoon Identifier window cycles through the Platoons, and the number of soldiers currently in each Platoon appears in the Troops window to the right. To transfer civilians into a Platoon that is selected and available for recruitment, click on the up part of the up/down arrow next to this Drafting window. At any stage, right up until a Platoon has been commissioned, you can move men in or out of it.

When civilians are drafted, their training begins automatically. The green soldier in the window to the bottom right of the screen begins to run, and a percentage figure starts to increment. The longer you leave a Platoon in training, the higher that percentage becomes, until it finally hits 100% when the recruits have been trained to a level equivalent to that of a their leader, a Five-Star General. Training takes time, however, and while you can leave the rookies to it and get on with business on other screens, the pressures of war may mean you have to take strategic decisions about how much training to offer your new recruits.



Buying Weapons and Armor

Equipment – in the form of body armor and weaponry – affects the fighting strength of your soldiers. But the better equipment costs more money. You can flip through the options by clicking on the left/right arrows below the armor and weapon displays – the cost of equipping the current Platoon with your selection appears in a status window to the right.

Like craft, equipment can be delivered instantaneously to Starbase from your home system, Epsilon, but you must have enough credits on Starbase to fund your purchase.



Commissioning Platoons

Providing you have sufficient funds, clicking on the Commission Icon equips the currently-selected Platoon with the current selection of body armor and weaponry, and the Platoon becomes available for active service at the level of training it had reached when it was commissioned.



Decommissioning Platoons

If you want to change your mind – or have brought a depleted Platoon back to Starbase in order to boost its numbers or re-equip, you must first decommission it by clicking on the Decommission Icon. This has a penalty in that you can't sell weapons back into stores, and new recruits seriously dilute the training level of the hardened squad. Sometimes, it's simpler to let a Platoon get wiped out, rather than bring the boys home.





CARGO BAY

Each planet has three Docking Bays, which all incoming craft except the Atmosphere Processor use as landing and launching platforms. When you buy a new craft, it can only be shipped from your home system Epsilon into a vacant Docking Bay on Starbase.

A brand new Battle Cruiser, Horticultural Station, Mining Station or Cargo Cruiser needs to be crewed with civilians before it can be used – and Fuel has to be loaded from Starbase stores if it is to journey to another planet. Craft that are up and running may need to have cargo or passengers loaded or unloaded, and additional Fuel may have to be taken on board or transferred from a craft's cargo hold to its fuel tanks for particularly long journeys.

All these operations take can place in the Cargo Bay, which is controlled from this screen – providing, of course, that the current planet has sufficient Resources in its stores for you to draw upon.

Docking Bay Operations

The Main Data Panel reveals data about the ship you are working on in the Cargo Bay, and is updated as you move stores and people around.

The name of the current planet, together with the occupants of its Docking Bays appears in the information panel at the top left of the screen. To begin Cargo Bay operations on a craft, click on its name to make it the current craft unless it is the only ship in the planet's Docking Bays, in which case it is automatically selected as the current ship for Cargo Bay operations.





Loading and Unloading

The current ship appears, together with its class details, in the central Control Panel. If it has passenger-carrying capacity, clicking on the up/down arrows in the Passenger Embarkation Icon allows people to be taken on board from the current planet's population, or offloaded to join activities on the planet. Similarly, if the craft needs it to travel through space, Fuel can be pumped into the craft's tanks from the current planet's stores, or siphoned back out into stock.



Clicking on the Crew Icon – represented by a Captain's hat – allows the full complement of crew to be recruited from the experienced pool of spacefliers in the population, providing there are enough civilians in the population of the current planet.

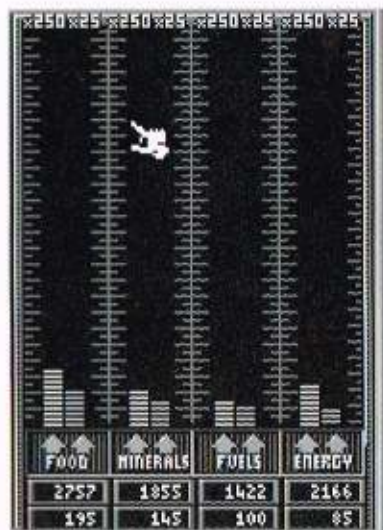


Clicking on the Auto-unload Icon allows all the cargo on board to be moved into the planet's stores – Fuel in the tanks is not considered to be cargo for the purposes of this icon.



And it's possible to decommission a ship, selling it off for scrap. You don't get a brilliant price – as the Value window in the Main Data Panel reveals – but you may need to make room in your fleet roster for a different craft, you may have captured an enemy craft which you want to turn into ready Credits, or you may need the Minerals.





The Stores Display

The contents of the current planet's stores and of the current craft's cargo hold are displayed in the Stores Display panel. The vertical green bars represent Resources held on the planet, while the red bars represent Resources that are in the cargo hold of the currently-selected craft. Each green block in the bar readout represents 250 units; each red block represents 25 units. A numeric readout, in corresponding green and red windows, gives a more accurate indication of what's where.

Cargo can be loaded and unloaded manually, by clicking and holding on the red buttons to move resources onto the ship or clicking and holding the green buttons to move them into stores.



PLANET SURFACE

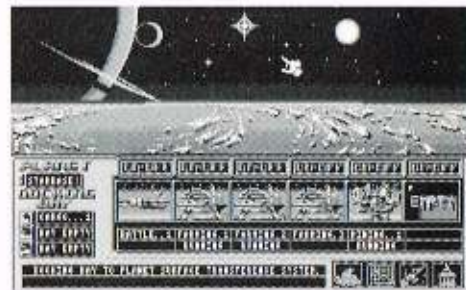
At any one time, a maximum of nine craft can be located on a given planet – there are three spaces in the Docking Bays, and six platforms on the surface of the planet itself.

In order to land a craft from orbit (or before you can buy a craft on Starbase) there has to be a vacant Docking Bay available to receive it. This may mean launching a craft and parking it in orbit – there's unlimited room in the space lanes – or it may mean transferring something from a Docking Bay out onto the surface of the planet to make room.

Remember: Horticultural and Mining Stations only produce Resources when they have been moved out on the surface of a planet and activated.

The Planet Surface Screen allows you to move craft between the six platforms on the planet and the three Docking Bays. To move a craft out, click on its name in the Docking Bay panel. To move it back into a vacant Docking Bay, click on the visual representation of the craft that appears when it occupies a surface platform.

And to turn on a Mining or Horticultural Station, simply click once on the the 'ON/OFF' toggle switch... you may need to check all your Mining and Horticultural Stations after a cosmic storm or energy failure – they have a nasty habit of switching themselves off and going unnoticed until stores have dropped dangerously low.





COMBAT CONTROL

This is the screen you need to access on Starbase once you have trained and equipped some Platoons and bought and commissioned a Battle Cruiser. It's the only way to get combat units off your base and on their way to garrison a colony or attack an enemy planet. As a game progresses, this screen is used to deploy forces.

And this is the only Control Screen that allows you to access a planet that is currently under the enemy's control. Providing you have landed a Battle Cruiser on an enemy planet, it is possible to go to the Main Screen, select that planet as the current planet and use the Combat Control Icon to call up this screen for the planet you are about to attack.

Platoons are displayed as pairs of numbers: the first number is the identifying Platoon number; the second number reveals how many soldiers are currently in that Platoon.



Using the Docking Bays

You can land up to three Battle Cruisers on an enemy planet at any one time. (And in case you were wondering, they blast their way in, vaporizing any craft the enemy may have parked in his Docking Bays.) Once you have landed a Battle Cruiser, click on its name to select it as the current ship for Combat Control operations, and the contents of its Platoon accommodation appear in the status window to the right of the three Docking Bay windows.



The Planet Surface

It would be possible (but not necessarily advisable) to move 24 Platoons onto a single planet – there's certainly room on the planet surface. Click on the identifying number-pair of a Platoon in the Battle Cruiser contents window to move it onto the planet, and the number-pair appears in the large grid. To embark a troop, make sure there's room in the current Battle Cruiser, then click on its number-pair in the large grid to move it aboard the ship.



The Color Of War

Green identifies your forces and red is the enemy's color. When you first access the Combat Control Screen, the Video Window at the top right of the screen shows a short animated sequence of a soldier planting a flag in the ground. If this takes place against a green backdrop, then the current planet is under your control; if the background to the mini-movie is red, then the enemy has control of the planet.

The moment after you land forces, a green vertical bar readout appears in the center of the screen; the red and green bars reveal the comparative military strength of the opposing forces. Clicking on the Auto Scale button located between these two bars allows you take a more detailed view of the difference in fighting strength – the strength of the larger force is displayed as a full bar and the bar representing the smaller force is scaled to proportion. A numeric value for the scaling factor appears in a window to the right.





Battle then commences, and numeric readouts of your military strength and the enemy's military strength show the might of the two forces. Another readout gives a headcount, revealing how many soldiers remain on each side of the battle lines. As combat begins, the Video Window shows scenes from the conflict – click on it at any time to see the next sequence.

Finally, at the end of the battle the Video Window will repeat the clip of the soldier triumphantly planting his flag. A green background indicates that you have won, and have control the planet, while a red background reminds you that the enemy now controls this planet.



Altering Aggression

Apart from strategic decisions – beating a hasty retreat or shipping in more Platoons – you can affect the way the battle progresses by adjusting the aggression factor of your soldiers. Clicking on the up/down arrow in this icon allows the aggression factor with which your soldiers fight to be altered.

Increasing aggression raises your military strength, but you lose troops more rapidly if the boys are fighting aggressively. The bigger the difference between your overall military strength and the enemy's, the more quickly the battle is over. Raising aggression increases your overall strength, but use the control wisely – when you already outnumber the enemy's forces and want a speedy conclusion to the battle so you can move the Platoons involved to another combat zone. Increasing aggression when the contest is quite close or when the enemy outnumbers you could have disastrous results. For advice on military strategy, see the Mission Background section on Page 82.