

HOW TO CRACK A PLANETARY FORCE FIELD

Variants for STELLAR CONQUEST

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STELLAR CONQUEST is a time-tested classic of science fiction boardgames. But, like all science fiction games, it is almost irresistible to play around with the rules as published. I would like to present for your approval a few variants developed over many years of play. Twelve years to be exact; I purchased the original, manila-envelope version in 1973. All these variants add some complexity to the play, but make up for that by adding realism (if such a thing can be spoken of in terms of this game).

SYSTEM DEFENSE SHIPS

These are starships built with no stardrive (i.e., they cannot leave the star system at which they were built). Their main attraction is that, unlike starships, they can be built in a system under siege. This is because they are built on-planet and not in orbit like their star-faring cousins. ["On the besieged planet Bootis 2, frantic construction was underway in the camouflaged hangers to build a liberation fleet of patrol boats . . ."]. Now, besieged colonies have a chance to break the siege under their own power rather than waiting for the cavalry to come over the hill. Since they never leave their star of origin, they require no counters. They are recorded in a manner similar to missile bases. See Table 1.

Table 1: System Ships

Name of Ship	Combat Equivalent	I.P. Cost
Patrol Boat	Corvette	6
Crusier	Fighter	15
Monitor	Deathstar	30

MISSILE BASES

The cost of missile bases is decreased according to a new table of prices. See Table 5. Also, a new class of base (Mega-Missile Base) of combat ability equal to the Deathstar is added. Otherwise, they are unchanged. (I am at a loss for the absence of an equivalent of a "grounded" Deathstar in *STELLAR CONQUEST*.) Ground installations can always be built equal or larger than the shipboard equivalents. If anything, it is easier to build the ground version. For example, they will have unlimited ammunition. A Deathstar, light years from home base, cannot run down to the corner factory to place an order for ten thousand anti-matter warheads.

INCREASED DEFENSES

Improved Ship weapons is now balanced by increased defenses. Against a ship with ISW, it will allow only one barrage per combat turn instead of two. Against a ship without ISW it will have a 50% chance of preventing the barrage entirely. Roll a die, three or less and it prevents the attack. One can safely assume that a ship-sized force field would be developed before planetary-sized ones.

ADVANCED SHIP RANGE

Allow all ships to travel up to twelve hexes away from a combat post before they disappear. This is an intermediate step leading to Unlimited Ship Range. The original rule, with ships venturing more than one light year away from base plunging into the "Bermuda Triangle", always struck me as mildly ridiculous. But the richness of strategy the rule adds to play more than

makes up for its ridiculous rationale. This optional rule ameliorates that silly aspect, but retains the necessity for careful planning and gradual expansion of the sphere of empire.

Table 2:
Ship Movement Sequence

Level	Cost w/Pred.	Normal Cost
1 Scout +1	—	10
1 3 HS	—	20
1 4 HS	30 w/3HS	45
2 5 HS	40 w/4HS	55
2 6 HS	50 w/5HS	65
3 7 HS	60 w/6HS	75
3 8 HS	70 w/7HS	85

Speed of light reached, no further increase allowed.

SCOUT MOVEMENT INCREASE

Allows all scouts to move at a speed one better than the normal maximum speed. This benefit is retained even as the maximum speed increases.

EXTENDED BUILDING

It is possible to build an item which cost more than a colony's production year budget. So what if Ceti 3 only produces 20 IPs? Now, it too can buy its very own Deathstar—in installments. Just allot the colony's IPs to the item each production year until the cost is paid. It is *not* possible to save IPs. The IPs you spent on an item last production year cannot be re-assigned. In addition, since production is happening at that planet, all unfinished items (and the investment in them) will be lost if the planet is captured. Such projects may be voluntarily destroyed in the same manner as factories. (Though, of course, this will bring a slight mistiness to the eyes of the owning player).

Table 3: Technical Sequence

Level	Title	Cost with Pred.	Normal
1	Industrial Technology	—	20
1	Controlled Environment	—	30
2	Improved Industrial Tech	40 with Ind Tech	55
2	Advanced Ship Range	50 with 5-Hex Speed	65
2	Planet Climate Control	60 with Cont Environ	80
3	Unlimited Ship Communication	70 with 7-Hex Speed	90
3	Robotic Industry	80 with Imp Ind Tech	105
3	Unlimited Ship Range	90 with Adv Ship Range	125

Table 4: Weapon Sequence

Level	Title	Cost with Pred.	Normal
1	Missile Base	—	15
1	Patrol Boat	—	20
1	Corvette	—	25
2	Advanced Missile Base	30 with Missile Base	40
2	Cruiser	40 with Patrol Boat	50
2	Fighter Ship	50 with Corvette	60
3	Mega Missile Base	45 with Adv Missile	70
3	Monitor	60 with Cruiser	80
3	Deathstar	75 with Fighter	100
4	Improved Ship Weapons	—	100
4	Improved Defense	—	125
4	Planet Shield	—	150

PLANETARY CLIMATE CONTROL

This is also called terra-forming. By using vulcanism, the greenhouse effect, weather control, induced sunspots and other examples of macro-engineering, the planet is made more hospitable. ["Lob another nuke into Mount Burp; the air needs just a pinch more sulphur-dioxide".] When the cost is paid for the planet, the planet becomes the next-better planetary class: Barren becomes Minimal Terran, Minimal Terran becomes Sub-Terran, Sub-Terran becomes Terran, and Terrain remains unchanged. You may experiment with allowing PCC to be done more than once to a planet. PCC is an enhanced form of Controlled Environment Technology.

Table 5: IP Costs

Missile base	4
Advanced missile base	10
Mega Missile base	25
Patrol boat	6
Cruiser	15
Monitor	30
Scout	3
2 scouts	5
Colony Transport	1
Corvette	8
Fighter ship	20
Deathstar	40
Planet shield	30
Planet climate	25

CRACKING PLANET SHIELDS

This rule makes it possible to destroy a planetary shield, with some difficulty and risk attendant. Any warship may try to breach the shield. It makes a normal combat roll on the Combat Results Table, under the "Attacking a Deathstar" column. If it succeeds, the shield goes pop. If it fails, the ship goes pop *instead*. It is expensive in terms of ships, but it's worth seeing the look on the faces of all those arrogant colonists who were thumbing their noses at you.

