Nuts and Bolts

Refueling, advanced navigation, basic missions, and ship upgrades

Refueling

After my trip to Capella, my fuel supply was depleted somewhat, so I refueled at the Capella spaceport. It was only a hundred credits, and you can never have too much fuel, I always say.

A starship's fuel is used to power its jump engines, as well as a few extra special items you may pick up during your travels. It is not used to power your main engines (the ones you use to fly around in real space).

Your fuel status indicator, located just below the radar, shows you how much fuel you have left. Normally this bar is bright green — however, if you don't have enough fuel for some number of complete jumps, the "leftover" portion will be displayed as dim green. You can also check exactly how much fuel you have left by accessing the player-info dialog. (Hit P)

There are two ways to refuel your ship: by clicking on the Refuel Ship button at a spaceport, or by asking passing ships for assistance. Note that when you ask another ship for help, they'll probably charge you an exorbitant fee for their trouble!

Advanced Navigation

The Tau Ceti system is truly a beautiful place — the inhabited moon Merlin sweeps majestically around the rusty sphere of Tau Ceti IV once every twenty-three days, and the bright pinprick of light that is the colony of New Columbia hovers in the distance. However, in systems like that my ship's navicomputer always got a little confused, as there was more than one place it could try to land. I always got around this by telling it exactly where I wanted to go.

Eventually, you'll come across a system with more than one object in it — a space station or moon orbiting a planet, for instance, or even a system with two inhabited planets in it. In a case like this, the method of having your ship's computer select the closest stellar object when you hit L just doesn't work. Instead, you'll have to explicitly tell your ship's computer where you want to land. You can do this by hitting 1 through 4 (or F1 through F4) to select different objects in the system.

Basic Missions

A spaceport mission computer is a combination ATM machine and help-wanted ad. Whenever anyone has any odd jobs they need done — say, hauling a bit of cargo from one planet to another, or ferrying passengers where they want to go — they advertise through the mission computer. It's a handy way to get basic missions and gain experience and credits.

You can access a spaceport's mission computer by clicking on the Mission Computer button while you're landed on a planet or docked at a space station. The list of available missions, if any, will appear. Click on any of the missions to get a description of it, or click on Accept Mission to accept it. Note that the mission computer automatically scans your ship registry when

you key in your access code and tailors the list of missions to fit your ship. In other words, if you don't have the cargo space to take on a certain mission, it won't show up in the mission computer.

ission destinations are marked on your computer's star map with a red arrow.   If you want to get information on what missions you're currently assigned, hit the I key while in flight. A dialog box will appear, in which you can access quick briefings on your current missions, and abort any ones you decide you don't want to do after all.

ost of the missions you get from a mission computer are simple ones where all you have to do is take something, be it cargo or passengers, from one planet to another. The negotiation of payment is automatically handled when you accept a mission, and the party who advertised the

mission in the first place will automatically transfer credits from their bank account to yours when you complete a mission for them.

Accessing the star map (by hitting the M key) while looking at a prospective mission (in the bar or in the mission computer) will show a green arrow pointing to the system where you're supposed to go for that mission. This is mainly useful for determining whether or not you want to take a certain delivery mission.

Upgrades

It didn't take me long to tire of hauling other people's cargo around for them. Sure, being a merchant doesn't pay too bad, but the reason I bought the Journeyman was so I could have a little excitement now and then, not just to continue doing my old job. I had a desire to visit the Fringe regions — the band of sparsely-settled systems on the edge of explored space — and see what life was like a hundred light-years from the center of known space.

I knew from my two tours as a fighter pilot that the Fringes are a dangerous place to travel without some firepower on your side, though. In those days it was the aliens; now it's the Rebellion and the damned pirates. All the independent systems have trouble with pirates to some degree, and the farther out you venture, the more risk you run. For that reason alone, I wanted to equip my little ship with a bit of extra protection from attack.

Many planets and space stations have the facilities necessary to install upgrades to your ship. If a spaceport has a button marked Outfit Ship, you can click on it to visit the spaceport's ship-upgrade facility.

ou can select different items by clicking on them in the upgrade dialog. The right side of the dialog shows a picture and description of the selected item, along with some information on its price and the ability of your ship to carry that item. Different items have different masses — since your ship only has a limited amount of "free" mass available, it becomes important to manage your free mass carefully. Certain items also have a purchase limit on them, so if you see a message like "Can't have any more!" when you still have mass to spare, it's because you already have your quota of that item (e.g. you can only have one escape pod).

Click on the Buy button to buy one of the selected items, or Sell to sell it, if possible — some upgrades, such as an engine upgrade, are permanently installed on your ship and can't be sold back. If you want to buy or sell more than one of an item, you can hold down the Option or Command keys while clicking to buy or sell 5 or 10 of an item, or 50 of an item by holding both keys at the same time.

he number of a particular upgrade that you currently own is displayed next to the icon for that upgrade in this dialog box. The exception to this is a stellar map — since it is an item of information that goes into your ship's navigation computer, rather than a physical item you can touch and feel, you can't "own" a map upgrade. (But you still get the information when you click on Buy, however.)

Another thing to note is that not all places sell the same items — in fact, some specialized items are available only on a few worlds.