



Copyright © 2000-2005 Jens Granseuer  
Copyright © 2007 Frank A. Grenz

## **Name**

Crimson Fields — a hex-based tactical combat game

## **Description**

Crimson Fields is a tactical war game in the tradition of the popular Battle Isle. Two players command a number of units on a map of hexagons, trying to accomplish mission objectives ranging from defending important locations to simply destroying all enemy forces. Damaged units may be repaired or replaced by new recruits, while victorious squadrons will improve their abilities so they will be even more difficult to beat next time.

The game can be played against a human adversary in hot-seat mode or via e-mail, or against a computer player.

## **Getting Started**

### **Introduction**

The once peaceful planet Nexus has been invaded by beings calling themselves the Empire of Kand who are determined to conquer Nexus or destroy it completely. The public unrest has become violent as the people attempt revolution against the invasion, but the Empire of Kand are quick to silence opposition. Nexus is on the verge of war and its people have formed factions to battle the Empire. As a member of one of the major rebel factions, the Free Nexus Army, your goals are obvious: to drive the intruders back to whichever part of the galaxy they came from and restore peace on planet Nexus...

(This is the background story for most of the included missions and the default campaign. There may be maps with entirely different settings.)

### **Main Menu**

The main screen presents a number of widgets to configure the game. The most important decision is whether you want to play a skirmish match, a campaign, or load a saved game. Skirmishes are stand-alone maps while campaigns consist of a number of maps which must be played (and won) in sequence. Each map that you advance to during a campaign will also be unlocked for skirmish matches. While campaigns can only be played against the computer, skirmishes can additionally be played as hot-seat matches (two players on one computer taking turns), or e-mail matches (see "Play-By-E-Mail"), and when playing against the computer you get to choose which side you want to play on. For both game types you can optionally define a handicap, to make the game a bit easier or harder. What this means exactly

depends on the map being played but in most cases a handicapped player will have fewer units or resources at his disposal than his opponent.

The large box on the left lists all available skirmishes, campaigns, or saved games, while the box on the right displays a small image of the selected map or, for campaigns, the story. For skirmishes, the number in brackets shows the recommended number of players. Missions designed for one player are often rather unbalanced if played against another human since the computer plays so different from a human, although a handicap can sometimes fix this.

After you have selected a map hit Start to enter the game.

## First Steps

After starting the match you will be presented with the mission briefing. Here you are given your orders and objectives to win the map. As both players usually have different and conflicting goals, each player gets his own briefing session at the beginning of his first turn.

After the briefing you will be presented with the map. This is your command center. From here you can issue most of the orders that will determine the outcome of the mission. The first player commands the yellow units while the second player or computer takes control of the blue units.

The map consists of small regions of land (or water) each known as a *hex* (sometimes also called *field* or *square*). Left-clicking on a hex selects that hex and moves the cursor to it. If there is a unit on the selected hex then a small bar will appear in the lower left of the screen showing the rank of the unit, its type, and the squad size (see "Experience" for more information about ranks). If there is instead a building or shop on the selected hex, the information bar displays the name of the shop and possibly some icons representing special attributes (see "Crystals" for details). Shops may occupy several fields, but they only have a single entrance, which is marked by the colour of the respective owner. Buildings with a white entrance are neutral and not controlled by any player.

A right-click on one of your units generally brings up a context menu for that unit (this does not apply to enemy units). Here you can view the unit stats, or inspect its contents (transporters only). Other units like mine-sweepers may have special skills which also show up here. If the unit is not a transporter and does not offer any special skills, the menu is skipped and you are directly taken to the stats display.

The stats window is basically divided in two parts. The top part shows the unit name and its values for speed, armour, and effectiveness against ground troops, aircraft, and ships in that order, from the top left to the bottom right. Most units have a weapon range of 1, meaning they can shoot at units one hex away (i.e. directly next to it). For units with different settings, the actual range is given in brackets after the weapon power. The second part of the window lists the most important terrain types. Shaded terrain indicates that the unit cannot cross that ground.

Right-clicking anywhere but on a unit or pressing **F1** pops up the Game menu

where you can review your mission objectives, take a look at an overview map, or save your game, for example.

You select one of your units by simply clicking on it. Large parts of the map will now be shaded to indicate that the unit cannot move there. Unshaded enemy units are potential targets. To move to an accessible field or attack a foe, simply double-click the respective hex. If you accidentally sent your unit to a hex you did not want it to go to, right-clicking on the unit gives you the option of reverting the last move, as long as it did not trigger any special events.

If you click twice on one of your shops or a neutral one, you enter that building. Of course, you can also move units into shops, although only some units (*Infantry* in the default set) can move into shops not owned by you, and some buildings may not allow all unit types. Quite often buildings are important mission objectives. Taking the enemy headquarters, e.g., is a very common goal. But even if you do not specifically need to control a certain shop for victory, it can still be very helpful as it may be possible to repair or build units (see "Crystals").

When you have issued all orders, select End Turn from the Game menu. Your commands are then executed, fights are resolved, and your opponent gets his chance to strike back...

## Movement

Each unit may only move once each turn, and only if it did not initiate combat on the same turn. *Artillery* and *Anti-Aircraft Guns* cannot attack if they have already been moved on the same turn. To move around on the map, a unit needs *movement points*. The number in the upper left corner of the unit information dialog (which can be brought up for one of your units by right-clicking it) indicates how many hexes the unit can move under optimal circumstances. The actual range is determined by several factors.

For ordinary ground units the terrain can greatly reduce the range of action. The maximum can only ever be reached on roads, everything else will slow the unit down, and mountains more so than forest. For airborne units or ships, terrain is of no importance.

Enemy units can be trapped in order to prevent them from using superior speed or to deny them access to certain areas of the map. A unit which attempts to cross a hex between two hostile units or one hostile unit and inaccessible terrain will be stopped immediately after passing through.

A unit cannot leave a transport or building and enter another one on the same turn. Enemy buildings can only be conquered by infantry units.

## Combat

### Results

Basically the probability to hit an enemy unit in combat is the same for all unit

types, although the attacker always gets a slight advantage. This hit probability is then modified by effects such as experience, distance to the target, terrain, or wedging (see below). Similarly, each unit gets assigned a probability for evading an attack which is then modified by experience, terrain effects and blocking. If a unit scores a hit it will increase its attack pool by an amount equal to its strength. A unit which successfully evades an attack will have its defence pool grow by an amount equal to its defence or armour value. Finally, each attack pool is compared to the enemy's defence pool, and the resulting ratio determines the casualties on both sides.

## **Terrain**

Terrain is an important factor in combat as it can heavily influence a unit's effectiveness. For example, fighting on a road or open plains will greatly increase attacking strength but offers relatively poor defensive capabilities, whereas a unit in the mountains will profit from the higher position in both attack and defence. Terrain modifiers do not apply for aircraft.

## **Wedging**

Friendly units can help increase the combat strength of an attacking unit without attacking themselves. For each friendly unit which is adjacent to and capable of shooting at the defender, the attacker will get a 10 per cent bonus. If the unit is adjacent to the defender, but cannot attack it the bonus is reduced to 5 per cent. A friendly unit in the back of the defender will earn another 5 per cent bonus, or 10 if it could also attack. It does not matter whether a wedging unit actually attacks the defender. Wedging does not work for long-range attacks.

## **Blocking**

In a manner similar to wedging, defending units may improve their position in combat. For each friendly unit adjacent to the attacker and the defender, the defending unit will have its combat strength increased by 10 per cent. Just like wedging, blocking does not help against long-range attacks.

## **Experience**

Veteran units are usually much stronger than newly assembled ones. If you manage to wipe out an enemy unit your unit will receive three experience points. If the enemy is only damaged you will still get one point. Every three experience points a unit advances to a new rank which improves its combat skills. Still, a seasoned infantry unit will have a very hard time against a group of recently recruited heavy tanks. Destroying mines does not earn any experience points.

# Crystals

Crystals represent the resources required to maintain and enlarge your army. You need them to repair damaged units or build new ones.

## Repairs

Units which have been damaged in combat can be repaired in any building equipped for this purpose (a *workshop*). To check whether a building is a workshop, click on it. For workshops a wrench icon will be displayed in the small info bar that appears in the lower left of the screen, and a repair button is available in the icon bar inside. Repairing will restore a unit to its full strength and requires an amount of 5 crystals, no matter what kind of unit it is or how badly it was damaged. Apart from the crystal cost the unit loses one experience point for each rookie that fills up an empty slot.

The ability to repair damaged units is not necessarily limited to shops. Some unit types may offer the same service (from the standard unit set, for example, the *Aircraft Carriers* can bring aircraft back into shape). Repairs in units works exactly the same way as in workshops, and you also need to supply the crystals to do so.

## Production

To build new units you need some crystals and a *factory* (hammer icon). The amount of crystals required depends on the type of unit you want to build: A squad of light reconnaissance vehicles is cheaper than a group of heavy attack choppers. Most factories can not produce all unit types, even if you could afford it. If you click on the production button inside a factory, you are shown the list of units which can be built in this particular factory. Next to each unit type is the amount of crystals that will be consumed. Newly built units can only move on your next turn.

## Mines

To replenish your supply of crystals you need *mines*. Mines are buildings which 'produce' a certain amount of crystals each turn. They can not be identified from the outside. Many maps do not have any mines at all, so it is always a good idea to consider carefully what you spend your resources on. Crystals can be transferred from one building to another (e.g. from a mine to a factory) using any transporter unit.

## Play-By-E-Mail

If Crimson Fields is played in play-by-e-mail mode, the game will automatically be saved whenever a player ends her turn. The resulting save file can then be sent to your opponent using your favourite mail client program.

On your first turn you will be asked for a password. You will be prompted for this password at the beginning of each of your turns to prevent your opponent from spying. Note, however, that the password only offers very mild protection if you are playing against deliberate cheaters. Choose your enemies carefully!

## **AI Weaknesses**

The crimson fields AI, like most AI's, has it's weaknesses, and these can be used against it during the battle.

### **The AI does not use Factories correctly**

Factories are a good thing to own during the battle, especially if they also produce crystals - they enable reinforcing the front line, and serve perfectly as your last stand in case of defeat.

Since different units has different costs, it often makes sense to wait until your factory has enough crystals to produce the units you *need*.

However, the AI chooses to produce as soon as there are enough crystals for any kind of unit. Since infantry is often the cheapest one, the AI just builds a large repository of infantry units, when it actually needs tanks or artillery units.

### **The AI is non-aggressive when no forces are on the field**

When facing an AI enemy with superior number of forces, one can easily "cheat" by just moving his forces back to the base. when there are no longer forces in the field, the AI will often just fallback it's entire task force back to it's own bases.

The only units which keep advancing are infantry, and once the rest of the armada is several turns away, they are not a real threat if one acts on time. that's pretty useful trick for holding the 1000 crystal base for long periods at Lost Factories.

### **The AI easily diverts forces from the front line**

One way to break through the AI lines often simply requires dropping a small number of fast ground units behind the lines(Delivered by an air/sea carrier or hovercraft).

Even if no infantry units on the task force(which could take over bases), the AI will devote a large portion of it's main task force to chase 2-3 units, creating a weakness in the front line.