

## ***Admiral Quixote's two-cents on how to learn VGA Planets version 4 (VGAP4 or just Planets) as transcribed by Commander Panza.***

Ahoy my lad! So you want to be a leader of men, or at least sentients? You wish to test your mettle at the ancient art of warfare in futuristic times? Then look no further my friend, help is here.

If you haven't done so already, go to <http://www.vgaplanets.com/v4beta.htm> and download the game. You can do this for free. Look for latest beta package – Tim, the game's author, will have a heading somewhere down the page that says "New players start with this package."

Install the game. Then download any updates that appear on Tim's site with a date more recent than the beta package. The client (planets.exe) host (host.exe) and master (master.exe) files all go in the planets folder (probably under c:\program files\planets4). Race packs updates include both ship information and race information. After you expand them, the ship files (.spk) go in the ships subfolder and the race files (.rce) go into the races subfolder.

Once you have the game installed, I strongly suggest you host your own game against yourself to get a clue as to what is going on. Load the master program and create a new game. Here are some quick step-by-step instructions.

1. You have 12 game slots. Click on one of the numbers (say 1 since this should be your first game, but use any one you want).
2. Click on next
3. This screen is for picking maps or using scripts (custom scenarios). For now, just leave it on the Echo map (default) and click on next.
4. Name the game "my first test" or some such. You can play with the other names or ignore them, then click next.
5. This screen is where you say who is playing. You first should tell it how many players. I strongly suggest three. Type the number of players and hit enter.
6. Now you need to pick three races. What three you pick is up to you. Since your objective is to figure out what is going on, it really doesn't matter. However, most players will tell you that Feds are a beginners race and easier than most. I think they are wrong and this is a holdover from those who have played version 3, but they are a good average race and you should probably pick them as one of your three. I recommend the Feds (The Solar Federation of Planets), the Borg (The Cyborg Collective), and any one of the following (Birds/The Birdman Republic; Klingons/The Stormer Kingdom; the UA). These are some of the easier races to play and learn. Oh, most people say playing the Borg is difficult, but they are wrong :-). In my opinion, the mechanics of playing the Borg are very easy compared to the others. However, they are hated and feared, so it is hard to win as the Borg since most people will try to kill them early.
7. After you have selected your three races, hit next.
8. This screen lets you choose where to place the races. For your learning game, choose pick.

9. Then click on the map to place your three races. I suggest visualizing a quarter (a mid-sized coin) on the map and clicking on the edge of your virtual circle. In real games, you should start farther away from each other, but this closeness will help you for learning.
10. Click on Next.
11. This screen lets you change the defaults of your universe. Just hit next.
12. Repeat previous step.
13. The master program will now create the universe. When it says finished, you can exit the program by clicking done.

Congratulations, you have now created a universe.

Now load the host program. The game starts at turn zero and before you can play it, the host must run the first turn. If you don't see your game, click on Yig Scan. You should then see it. Using host, you can also tweak the parameters of the game. For your first game, I wouldn't experiment with most of them. However, under preferences I usually click on the last option "no countdown, run host at once" so I don't have to wait 24 seconds after I tell the host to run. Anyway, here are step-by-step instructions for running host.

1. From the main host screen, click on the slot number of your game. You should see three red lights. Each light represents a player in the game. The red light means that they have finished their turn. For the first host run, the master program made everything ready.
2. Click on run host
3. Wait until it says done

That's it. Now load the game client itself (planets.exe). Click on the appropriate slot number and you should see your game. If you don't, you may have to click on the RST path and tell it where to look. The host program created a RST file for each player. (When you play on a site like Drewheads or Saarland Outpost, you'll get an RST file from their hosts via email.) Once you see your game and have selected it (by clicking on the slot number), you should see three players. Click on the desired player number and unpack it. (Warning: You only want to unpack the turn once after each host run. If you make changes in your turn, unpacking the same turn again will erase your changes. Sometimes the client will warn you, sometimes it won't.) Do your turn (more on this momentarily) and then click on File to return to the main Planets screen. Now that you have finished your turn, click on "make trn file". The trn files are your instructions to the host and when you play on sites like Drewheads this is what you email to them. But since you are hosting your own game, you don't need to send them anywhere. Do your turns for all your players. When you are ready, go back to the host program and run the host. Repeat as desired.

Great! Now you know how create and run your own games. All you need to do now is learn what is going on so you can play. I suggest you do the following.

1. Read one or more of the primers on the game:

<http://www.vgaplanets.com/v4verse/planiver.htm> (quick overview by game's author)

<http://www.furfur.demon.co.uk/geop/v4startup.htm> (This one is very detailed and I highly recommend it)

2. Go play at least 5 turns with each race.
3. Go read the players guides for the three races you've chosen.

<http://www.vgaplanets.com/v4beta.htm> (scroll down a little and Tim has guides for all his races).

<http://www.furfur.demon.co.uk/geop/v4races.htm> - a nice collection of guides, especially for races that Tim didn't create.

4. Go play another 15 turns or so with your races. Make sure you create some new colonies, build new ships, and fight another race. For races with pod launchers, make sure you use every type of pod at least once. Experiment with devices.
5. Start playing real games (games with other people at public hosting sites). Take my advice – until you've played a while, never sign up for more than 2 games. The first 15 turns take very little time (once you figure out how to do what you want to do), but the game takes a lot of time thereafter. I strongly suggest only signing up for games with 500 or less planets until you know what you are doing – then you can make your own decisions. (Games with more planets take longer and require more micromanagement. IMO, games with less planets leave more time for the fun stuff). Unless you have a lot of gaming experience, start with a Green Recruits game. Go ahead and sign up for another game too if you want, but avoid “advanced” games until you feel comfortable with what you are doing.

Hope this long message helps you get started understanding the game. It's a fun game, but does have a steep learning curve. On the bright side, in two weeks, you'll be amazed at how much you know.

If you enjoy the game, register it. Not only will you be supporting a great game, registered players have built-in advantages (for example, unregistered players cannot fully advance their technology levels).

Tim's game is great, but his documentation is poor. So you may find some things work differently than you expect. That's part of the fun of the game. Also, you may be interested in this [site](#) – it does a great job documenting host changes.

One last bit of advice, take all inputs – including mine ;-) – with a grain of salt. Try things and pick a style that is comfortable for you. Some people fall in love with a particular race and become experts with it. Others just like trying new races so they can continually try new things. Do whatever you enjoy.

Admiral Quixote