

STAR DRIVE™
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OUTBOUND

AN EXPLORER'S GUIDEBOOK



Ed Stark

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Introduction	3	A Scout's Resource	62
System 2253	4	Scout Tech	62
Stellar Overview	4	General Equipment	62
The Two Sisters and the Orphan	4	Accessories and Clothing	62
The Planets	5	Medical Gear	63
The Boiling Ball—P1	5	Professional Equipment	64
Sunder—P2	5	Sensor Gear	64
The Sisters' Jewel—P3	5	Communications	65
The Cloud—P4	15	Survival Gear	66
Surveying the System	16	Weapons and Armor	66
Surveying the Wreckage: An <i>Outbound</i> Adventure	16	Cyberware	68
Fire If Fired Upon	16	Getting Paid	68
Dirtside	16	When the Concord Foots the Bill	68
Attack from Two Sides	17	Other Patrons	71
Other Adventures in 2253	17	Rigunmor Star Consortium	71
Infestation	18	StarMech Collective	71
Stellar Overview	18	Thuldan Empire	72
The Single Star	18	Hedman-Smith Trading Corp	73
The Planets	18	Independent Mining Concerns	73
The First Planet—K1	18	Biological and Medical Firms	74
The Asteroid Field—K2	21	Military Powers	74
The Big One—K3	26	Perks & Flaws	75
The Comet Belt—K4	27	Some Interesting Old Perks	75
Surveying the System	27	And Some Interesting New Perks	77
An Unsettling Discovery: An <i>Outbound</i> Adventure	27	Old Flaws Revisited	78
Arrival	28	New Flaws	79
Unwelcome Intruders	28	New Careers	80
Unexpected Incumbents	28	Combat Spec Careers	80
What to Do Next	28	Ranger	81
The Lost Civilization: An <i>Outbound</i> Adventure	30	Diplomat Careers	81
The Underdwellers of K3	30	Reunification Specialist	81
First Contact	31	Free Agent Careers	82
Dark Deeds in Deep Space	32	Interest Agent	82
Stellar Overview	32	Tech Op Careers	82
The Planets	32	Archaeologist	82
d'Sene	33	Mindwalker Careers	82
Robertson	33	Contactors	83
Tibalt	33	The Concord Survey Service	84
The Five Continents	33	The History of the CSS	84
Weather Changes and Geologic		The Stellar Survey Corporation	84
Rumblings	33	The Information Rebellion	85
Fauna and Flora	34	A Change for the Better	85
Tibapes	34	CSS and You	85
Kanites	36	Star Surveys 101	87
Tibolfins	38	The Survey Form	87
Other Fauna	40	Part 1: Basic System Information	87
Tibalt's Flora	41	Part 2a: Planetary Information	88
The Pyramid and Ruined		Part 2b: Individual Planetary Information	89
Structures	42	Part 3: Moon and Orbital Information	89
The Rescue of Calesque: An <i>Outbound</i> Adventure	57	Part 4: Basic Lifeform Analysis	90
Getting Involved	57		
What the Heroes Don't Know	59		
The Alien Overlords	59		
Calesque's Crew	59		
The Action	60		

INTRODUCTION

3 INTRODUCTION

Outbound: An Explorer's Guide is a Star*Drive adventure accessory that enlists the heroes in the ongoing exploration of the Verge and nearby frontier systems. *Outbound* includes three new systems for the heroes to explore. Their role in charting the unexplored regions of the Verge provides exciting material for adventures.

Outbound is divided into several parts: The system chapters include an overview of the system; details on the stars, worlds, and phenomena found there; and adventure hooks directed at introducing the systems in an interesting and exciting manner. A chapter on scouts follows, providing details on their ideal equipment, perks and flaws, and career options. The Concord Survey Service (CSS) chapter contains the history of the CSS and new guidelines for running exploratory adventures and campaigns. You'll also find a chapter called "Star Surveys 101," which will help your scout understand the intricate processes of surveying and filing reports.

Building on the information and examples detailed in this text is your role as the Gamemaster. If your campaign is exploratory in nature, feel free to turn *Outbound* into a mini-campaign. The systems described in this text can be located virtually anywhere in or around the Verge. This is easily

explained by the fact that, during the initial exploration of humanity's newest frontier, many stars and systems were "starleaped"—overlooked by explorers on the basis that other systems would fit their needs better. Still others may have been explored, and perhaps even colonized, but the colonies disappeared or were forgotten over time.

The heroes participating in an *Outbound* adventure have either the chance to be the first sapient beings on the scene in a number of star systems, or the opportunity to reestablish contact with people who have been forgotten for a century or more. The heroes can make their marks on the Verge and the universe by what they do in these adventures—from naming new planets and creatures to establishing first contact with lifeforms never before cataloged. They may suffer hardship and adventure along the way, but no one said an explorer's life would be easy!

The Concord Survey Service provides an excellent vehicle for any exploratory adventuring. Even if that is not the nature of your STAR*DRIVE campaign, *Outbound's* systems and adventures should provide enough action and intrigue for whatever campaign style you are playing!



SYSTEM 2253

One of many starleaped, unexplored systems in the Verge, System 2253 has not even been blessed with a proper name. For the sake of expediency, the CSS picked up the last four digits of an older designation when assigning 2253 to its proper place on a sector map. It is up to the heroes to find out if anything worth naming exists there.

Certainly someone else thought so. Much of the description of System 2253 details the failed efforts of a group of independent miners (some might call them "pirates") intent on pillaging the system. If these miners were the first to explore System 2253, their efforts were unknown and unreported to the Concord Survey Service.

Many of the details concerning System 2253 (particularly the planet Jewel) relate to the endeavors of these miners. The adventure at the end of this chapter explains why the mining attempt failed and why System 2253 has remained undocumented. Hopefully, the heroes can rectify that situation, for the system has much potential to offer an enterprising faction of the Concord.

STELLAR OVERVIEW

System 2253 has several unusual characteristics that should be obvious to even the least seasoned galactic explorer. It is a three-star system with two centrally located close stars forming a binary pair and one "orphan" star set on the edge of system space.

The planets in the system all orbit the binary pair at a far enough distance that at least one can be explored without much difficulty. However, the heat and radiation levels on the first two planets prohibit all but the most dedicated survey efforts.

The out-system asteroid field appears to have once been a planet torn apart millennia ago by the gravity pull between the orphan star and the binary pair. Now, the asteroids orbit the binary more or less regularly.

THE TWO SISTERS AND THE ORPHAN

The two "sisters" of the binary pair in System 2253 are Class F3 (Yellow-white) and Class K4 (Orange) stars. Relatively young stars, they give off enough heat and radiation to render the first planet in their orbital path almost impossible to visit, but they are gentler to their outer orbitals. For catalog purposes, these stars are referred to as 2253A and 2253B, respectively.

If the binary stars can be considered sisters, then the Class M (Red) star on the outer edge of their influence is an orphan—an angry red dwarf of an orphan with a somewhat tangential effect on System 2253.

Still, Orphan should be of great interest to stellar researchers and astrophysicists. After an extensive survey of

STELLAR INFORMATION: SYSTEM 2253

Number of Stars: 3

Organization: Binary pair, outer solitaire

Stellar Characteristics: Binary—Class F3 (Yellow-white) and Class K4 (Orange); Solitaire—Class M (Red)

Planets/Satellites: Four, orbiting the F3 (2253A)

TABLE I: SYSTEM 2253

	Boiling Ball (P1)	Sunder (P2)	Jewel (P3)
Primary	P	P	P
Planetary Class	Class 4	Class 3	Class 2
Gravity	G1 (0.63 g)	G1 (0.68 g)	G2 (0.83 g)
Radiation	R3 (56 rem/day)	R2 (18 rem/week)	R2 (14 rem/week)
Atmosphere	A0 (vacuum)	A3 (SO ₂)	A2 (N ₂ O ₂)
Pressure	P0 (0 atm)	P1 (0.31 atm)	P1 (0.46 atm)
Heat	H4 (397° C)	H4 (139.9° C)	H3 (66.7° C)
Orbital Distance	0.61 AU	0.89 AU	3.45 AU
Diameter	8,760 km	22,020 km	11,782 km
Year	129.7 days	752.7 days	4.78 years
Day	34.04 hours	16.12 hours	66.21 hours
Axial Tilt	7.6°	7.1°	37.1°
Density	0.93	0.39	0.78
No. of Satellites	0	2	1

the system, a team would probably come to the conclusion that 2253C actually entered this system after the planets had formed around the other stars. What could have caused such a wandering anomaly? The Concord Survey Service will undoubtedly be interested in such a question—even if the heroes cannot come to any conclusions themselves.

THE PLANETS

Counting the asteroid field on the outer edge of the system, four planetary bodies orbit 2253A. Each has its own unique characteristics, but none have any name designation as yet. They are either referred to as P1, P2, P3, and P4 or their unofficial nicknames—the Boiling Ball, Sunder, Jewel, and the Cloud, respectively.

THE BOILING BALL: P1

Orbiting at only 0.61 AU from 2253A, P1 is a small, molten rock. It is a sub-terran, Class 4 (G1/R3/A0/PO/H4) world with no moons. The "Boiling Ball" of System 2253 is composed primarily of oceans of molten ferrous compounds and extremely dense rock "islands." While some of the minerals on the Boiling Ball could be valuable, the precautions necessary even to survey the planet are enough to discourage any extensive mining venture.

The miners of Jewel (the third planet in this system) did not survey this planet since they didn't have the equipment necessary for such an undertaking. The other planets in the system suited their needs much more easily. If the heroes have the right tools and wish to investigate the Boiling Ball, they may find the uninhabited, airless world somewhat interesting, if only from a geological standpoint.

GAMEMASTER NOTE

The coordinates for at least one such mining base are recorded and in the possession of a dead miner whose body can be found on Jewel. See the description of "Home Base" in the section on Jewel.

SUNDER: P2

The second planet in the system orbits 0.89 AU from its primary but remains extremely hot. A large, super-terran world, this Class 3 (G1/R2/A3/P1/H4) is incredibly unstable; visitors can see how "Sunder" earned its nickname.

Visible from orbit, Sunder has a huge crack along its equatorial axis, and debris mingles with the two tiny moons that circle it. Close examination reveals that Sunder once had three moons, but something caused the smallest of them to lose its orbit and crash into the planet below, breaking open Sunder's crust. P2 is extremely unstable and highly volcanic. Forays into the toxic atmosphere (pri-

SITES OF INTEREST

Many of the places described under each of the planetary entries are keyed to the adventure presented later on in this chapter. If you plan to run the adventure for your players, you may wish to omit some of the text before presenting it to them.

marily composed of sulfurous compounds and carbonized gases) can be made with caution, however.

A survey of the planet's surface reveals a wealth of rare or precious minerals, including uranium, rhodium, and different types of gemstones. Though an attractive thought, a permanent mining base on Sunder would be impracticable to maintain, for even the moons are too dangerous for any extended habitation.

Any heroes who explore the planetary surface may find evidence of small mining operations. (A few of the miners based on Jewel have tried to pillage Sunder's broken crust for its mineral treasures.) Because of Sunder's size and instability, however, it will take more luck than surveying skill to locate any evidence of these mining endeavors.

THE SISTERS' JEWEL: P3

Blue-brown and positively inviting compared to the Boiling Ball and Sunder, the Sisters' Jewel (or simply Jewel) is the "friendliest" of System 2253's planets. A small, sub-terran world, Jewel fits comfortably into a Class 2 (G2/R2/A2/P3/H3) designation most of its year. Every so often, however, Jewel's somewhat erratic orbit (caused by the faint pull of the K4 star 2253B) brings it too close to the 2253A, and its radiation level rises to 3 or even 4 for long periods of time. During this interval, Jewel's 3.45 AU orbit lowers to almost 3 AU. Nevertheless, Jewel supports life even during this radical orbital shift.

Most of Jewel's surface is covered by mineral-heavy water. The water and soil are both faintly radioactive (more so than the air even), so consuming creatures or plants indigenous to Jewel is dangerous for most humanoids. Still, with purification equipment, these same humanoids could survive on Jewel indefinitely.

Jewel also supports a tiny moon in a close orbit. This moon is a barren rock devoid of atmosphere. Like Jewel, it too varies in its radiation levels, rising to R3 or even R4 during certain times of the year.

LIFE ON JEWEL

In addition to the occasional visitors, Jewel sports a sparse number of its own lifeforms. Several indigenous plants and insects live all over the hot, irradiated planet, and many types of primitive organisms and even some fish live in the oceans. The two most interesting species, however, dominate the land and sea, respectively: the sauronines and the triloceans.

SAURONINE GAME DATA

STR 16 (3d4+4) INT 6 (Animal 12 or 2d4+5)

DEX 9 (d6+6) WIL 8 (d4+5)

CON 18 (2d6+11) PER 3 (Animal 11 or 2d4+4)

Durability: 18/18/9/9 Action Check:

12+/11/5/2

Movement: sprint 50, run 30, walk 14 (jump 12)

No. of Actions: 2 Reaction score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Bite 20/10/5 d4+1w/d6+2w/d4m LI/G

Claw/kick 16/8/4 d4w/d4+2w/d4m LI/G

Tail slash 18/9/4 d6+1s/d4w/d6+2w LI/O

Defenses

Goes dormant during R4 radiation but is immune to its effects; immune to R3 or lower radiation

+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

no resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d6+2 (LI), d4 (HI), d4 (En)

Skills

Athletics [16], Movement [18], Stamina [18],

Awareness [8]—intuition [10], perception [12],

Investigate [8]—search [12], Resolve [8]—physical

resolve [11].

The Sauronines: The name is a blend of "saurian" and "canine," for obvious reason. Built much like the reptilian saurians described in the *Gamemaster Guide*, these creatures grow to sizes of about 1.5 to 3 meters in height, with long tails and huge rear legs. They resemble, in silhouette, the velociraptors of ancient Earth. However, these creatures are warm-blooded; they sport thick, short, bristling fur along their backs and sides. Instead of a wedge-shaped reptilian head, they have the squared-off features of a canine. Their eyes and ears are recessed like those of most saurians, and their teeth are organized into two rows. Their primary sense is that of smell.

Sauronines roam the plains and hilly regions of Jewel's small continents. Because they are warm-blooded, they live virtually everywhere, organized into small packs or prides like wolves or lions. They are tremendous predators and will eat almost anything. Fortunately, Jewel's plains also support a variety of herbivores and smaller carnivores that sate their appetites.

During Jewel's highly radioactive period, the sauronines' thick hides help protect them from the heat and the radiation (though they tolerate both fairly easily). They enter a sort of hibernation during this period, burrowing small holes

in the grass-covered plains and blending in to near invisibility in the landscape. They can survive for months this way, absorbing a little liquid and some nutrients from the soil. When they awaken, however, they are ravenous.

As to the sauronines' intelligence, they appear to be verging on sapience. A few more thousands of years of development could have them on the level of Neanderthal man. Some packs have begun using simple tools, such as rocks to break open the protective shells of their prey. Indeed, they are all extremely cunning, and strong and fast as well. They use their huge hind legs like a kangaroo's, leaping over the plains at terrifying speed. They are easily the fastest land animals on Jewel. Heroes caught out in the open by a sauronine pack will almost certainly be overwhelmed and eaten unless they can kill the creatures first.

The Triloceans: A mix of the trilobite and the crustacean, this gigantic, crablike creature lives in the oceans of Jewel and is seldom seen anywhere near the shores of the continents or even at the water's surface. Growing to nearly 10 meters in length and almost 5 in height, this creature resembles a giant horseshoe crab with huge claws growing out of its sides and reaching forward. These appendages apparently developed not for defense but to help the creature dig out its prey from the rocky coral colonies and the deep sea-beds of Jewel. Scientists justify this thinking by pointing to the fact that no single creature in the planet's oceans is large enough to threaten the trilocian.

TRILOCEAN GAME DATA

STR 19 (5d4+4) INT 6 (Animal 12 or 2d4+5)

DEX 6 (1d4+3) WIL 8 (d4+5)

CON 17 (2d6+13) PER 3 (Animal 11 or 2d4+4)

Durability: 17/17/9/9 Action Check: 10+/9/4/2

Move: run 24, walk 10, swim 8, (water jet 24)

No. of Actions: 2 Reaction score: Marginal/1

Attacks

Claw 22/11/5 d6+2w/d4m/d4+2m LI/G

Hot water jets 14/7/3 d6+3s/d4w/d4+1m

En/G

Defenses

Immune to R4 or lesser radiation

+5 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

-1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d8+1 (LI), d6 (HI), d6-1 (En)

Skills

Movement [17], Stamina [17], Awareness [8]—intuition [9], perception [11], Resolve [8]—physical resolve [10].

Unlike the land-bound sauronine, the trilocean's most active period occurs during Jewel's close passes to the center of System 2253. Actively hunting during that time, the trilocean digs out creatures that burrow deep into the ocean floor to avoid predation. It moves about the oceans in wide-ranging, solitary forays using its large spiked tail and the rows of water jets along its shell to travel. The purpose of its tail would seem to be for attack, but such is not the case; in fact, the trilocean uses its water jets in a fight. Although it seldom has to fight for its food, it does have other battles.

Right in the middle of the high-radiation interval, the trilocean climbs up onto the beaches of Jewel (usually near the poles, where the air is somewhat cooler) and lays its eggs deep in the reddish sand. Then it retreats into the ocean to continue feeding. After the interval ends (which varies somewhat, but generally lasts for half the year), the eggs hatch and the baby triloceans dig their way up to the surface of the beach, heading toward the ocean. During this time, the young triloceans have no shells and are extremely vulnerable. They make delicious snacks for the sauronines, just awakening from their radiation slumber.

Fortunately for the young triloceans, their ancestors' intelligence evolved at approximately the same rate as their land-bound rivals. Adult triloceans now return to the beaches where they laid their eggs, settling in to guard their offspring's journey to the sea. They will attack anything they find near their young during this time. This is the one period when the triloceans are utterly aggressive.

The Relay Station

At the northern pole of the tiny, barren moon orbiting Jewel is a man-made base. It is a small structure, built into the rock of one of the moon's many rugged hills, but the metal tower in the center of the structure makes its purpose unmistakable: It is a system-wide relay station.

The band of independent miners who came to System 2253 some 20-odd years ago built the station. It is unlikely the miners' true origins will ever be known to exploring heroes, but they will recognize that the equipment found at the relay station and at the base on Jewel hails from a variety of sources. Canny scouts will quickly identify the signs of a "pirate" mining outfit.

Solar batteries and panels still power the station, despite the obvious lack of maintenance. There is a small landing surface outside and, nearby, a crashed orbital shuttle half-buried in the silt of the lunar plain.

The Crashed Shuttle: A pair of miners tried to land their shuttle on the nearby pad. Unfortunately, something caused them to crash. They bounced off the landing zone and into the side of a nearby hill. The crash killed one of the miners, but the other one survived and made it to the relay station.

Aboard the shuttle there are several air tanks (made for spacesuits of various types and sizes), some mining equipment,



and the mummified remains of a female human miner inside the cockpit. If a hero using Medical Science-*forensics* (at a +3 penalty because of the age of the corpse) examines the woman closely, he can determine that she had wounds other than those caused by the crash. The heroes cannot determine the extent and exact nature of these wounds, however.

The flight log of the shuttle has been intentionally purged. To anyone familiar with flight procedures or shipboard computers, this should seem suspicious. The purge was not complete, however. A successful Computer Science-*hacking* skill check (at a +1 penalty) will determine that the shuttle's memory had been purged multiple times over its last several trips. Apparently, a program was in place to automatically purge the shuttle's log every time its systems were shut down. A Computer Science-*programming* skill check could rewrite the program and recover at least some of the purged information.

If such an attempt is successful, heroes could learn some or all of the following:

- The shuttle's most recent trip was from near the northern pole of the nearest planet (Jewel). The exact coordinates are not available, but the heroes can guess within a few hundred square kilometers (close enough for their ship's sensors to scan for any sort of landing zone).
- The shuttle's home is the landing zone on Jewel. It has made several trips to other sites within the system, but no specifics remain.
- Different users operated the shuttle during its last flights. Each user had his or her own passcodes and verification numbers, as well as purge programs.
- There is (or was) at least one sister shuttle. The transponder and IFF codes of the shuttle are set to recognize one other similar set, and possibly more.
- The shuttle's in-board computer filed damage reports between its last memory purge and the crash. Its landing gear was disabled, and the landing thrusters had sustained heavy damage. Perhaps this is why the shuttle crashed.

For more information on the crashed shuttle, see the adventure at the end of this section.

The Relay Station: Apparently set up for wide-band communication between the surface of Jewel and anywhere else in System 2253, this relay station is a marvel of juryrigged engineering. There are only two features that stand out from the half-circle gray, metal box: the high relay tower itself and the swivel-mounted energy cannon on the roof of the station.

The fully automated, turreted mass cannon is set to shoot at any ship that passes within range. The mass cannon is of standard construction (see the *Gamemaster Guide*

for the weapon's statistics), and the computer fires with a System Operations-*weapons* skill of 16/8/4. The cannon begins firing when a target gets within medium range of the moon, but will cease fire if the ship passes out of long range or actually comes in to land on the moon. Since the tower is now immobile, it is not difficult to plot a course around the weapon's firing arc; a Navigation-*system astrogation* skill check with a -3 bonus can plot a route in to land near the base or to bypass the moon altogether.

Firing on the station is possible. Treat it as an immobile spaceship covered in cerametal armor with six compartments capable of taking damage. If the heroes wish to obliterate the relay station, they can do so quite easily.

The relay tower broadcasts a continuous beam of "white noise" caused by an open comm channel. Refer to the adventure at the end of this chapter for more information.

The door of the relay station is an iris-valve airlock. It is virtually impossible to force physically (though burning or cutting through it is possible, and Demolitions could work). The door lock is a number-pad combination lock that, while considered secure by pirate miner standards, takes a trained Security user only a single success to get past.

There are two tricks to the airlock, however. Unless the outer door is shut, the inner door will not open. If the outer door has been breached or disabled so that it cannot be shut, only force will get the heroes inside the building.

The second trick is more deadly. If someone enters the airlock and does not input the correct security code on the inner lock within two minutes (it happens to be the same code as for the outer lock), a security device is armed. Four fragmentation grenades are hidden in breakaway boxes in the corners around the inner airlock's door. The grenades arm and explode in three seconds after the two-minute timer elapses, making attacks on any heroes still inside the airlocks.

The grenades explode with a skill value of 18/9/4 because of their even placement. Any hero hit by the combined blast takes d4+2w/d8+2w/d4+1m damage (depending on the "skill check" of the trap). If the hero's armor does not absorb the primary damage entirely, then it is quite likely that the hero's spacesuit has been breached, as there is no atmosphere on the tiny moon!

If the heroes bypass this trap and get inside the station, they find a small room with a large one beyond. The small room has a long bench and lockers for storing spacesuits. A few spacesuits hang inside, but none have air tanks. There's also a torn spacesuit lying on the ground. Old, dried blood is visible to any hero who looks inside the spacesuit.

The larger room hums with electrical activity. A series of old-style transformers linked to the outer solar panels collects and routes energy to the uplink and the batteries. To one side of the room lies the body of a male human, partially mummified by the dry air of the room. He is clutching what appears to be a microphone. A series of wires and juryrigged attachments lead from the mike to a control panel built into the wall.

Apparently, before the man died, he modified a microphone to fit into the control panel of the uplink. The circuit is locked in the on position, ironically broadcasting "dead" air throughout the system. Because this is a juryrigged attachment, there is no recording of whatever the pirate miner was trying to say.

Closer examination of the body reveals multiple broken bones in the chest and abdomen area and what must have been terrible internal bleeding. Unlike the other body found in the crashed shuttle, this one shows no sign of pre-crash trauma (though even a forensics specialist would be hard-pressed to determine this). It seems he managed to complete his juryrigging before dying, but whatever message he sent off to the rest of the system was unable to save his life.

For more information on the body and the message, see the adventure at the end of this chapter.

Home Base

Near the northern pole of Jewel, along the coast of its large western continent, lies the pirate miners' home base. Heroes can probably pick it out from an orbital scan, but any scout who has investigated the Relay Station on the moon has at least some idea where it is.

1. The Landing Zone: Hardly a proper landing zone (LZ), this area can only be distinguished by the relative lack of rubble and the slight energy signal coming from beneath the red sand of the beach. The energy signal corresponds to a landing zone marker in most respects (hence the map designation), but it is faint and can only be detected by a sensor operator looking directly at the base. The background radiation of the planet hides this energy signature from random scans.

From the ground, the LZ's tell-tale cross is barely visible. It is covered with rough sand and ash, and only hours of cleaning and digging will uncover it. Bits and pieces of metal lie partially submerged in the red sand. Investigation shows these were pieces of a smaller ship—perhaps a shuttle or an atmospheric craft. Appropriate technical or engineering checks reveal the shards to be the remains of a craft's landing gear. Closer examination may reveal that the gear had been torn off the craft to which it had once been attached.

There are also shreds of silicate plates mixed in with the silt. Some bear the scars of laser fire, while other chunks appear undamaged. Close examination (and a few related skill checks) reveals heavy quantities of minerals similar to those present in the planet's soil.

2. The Scavenged Ship: From the air, this large, tube-shaped vessel looks like a complete wreck. Its airfoil wings have been torn off (one lies nearby, converted into what appears to be a large lean-to), and there are holes all over its hull. The round forward bridge is still joined to the passenger and cargo areas by its walkway struts, but even the head of the ship has been gutted.

Closer examination of the vessel reveals that most of the damage to the ship was deliberate. The holes in the outer hull were not made in any crash—nor even by energy weapons or missile fire—but by cutting torches and brute strength. It appears that someone began to dissect the vessel once it landed on Jewel's surface, possibly the owners.

The engines of the vessel (normally located at the rear) have been completely removed from the ship, apparently for conversion to some other use. Connectors and silicate systems dangle exposed from the stern.

The cargo door and gangplank are intact, as are many of the secured cargo shelving units in the main hold. The reddish silt of the area around the LZ covers the floor and many of the shelves. A few mining and construction tools hang in racks or lie untouched on the shelves. The airlock between the cargo hold and the passenger area has been breached, however, and the strong metal of the hull's interior door appears brutally torn and jagged.

The passenger area once contained thin, quad-bunk safety beds but only a few remain. No longer bolted to the floor, the light yet strong metal of four quad-bunk supports has been yanked off the floor, ceiling, and walls of the passenger area. The beds lie broken and twisted on the dusty floor.

A large gash in the starboard wall of the vessel reveals where something blasted, cut, or forced its way in, something stronger than the cerametal armor protecting the ship. Near this improvised "doorway" lay the scattered bones of at least two miners. The skeletons appear to have been stripped of any flesh and clothing long ago. A pair of discarded (and broken) 11mm charge rifles lie nearby. One of the rifles bears the stamp of a manufacturer who went out of business nearly 20 years ago.

The circular bridge has been almost completely destroyed. The computers, once packed in and patched together from the remains of many different systems, are in shattered remnants. More bones of unfortunate miners (one of them a t'sa) litter the floor. There is a gaping hole in one wall of the ship, and the cerametal appears to have been ripped away from the outside.

Putting together the computers or systems of the bridge is impossible. A search does reveal, however, that there are not nearly as many components smashed and scattered throughout the bridge area as there should be—some computer banks and system controls (particularly those linked to life support and cargo inventory) are missing. This information should be relatively difficult for anyone to determine without a very careful search, however. Investigate—search checks incur a +2 step penalty; Awareness—perception checks incur a +4 penalty.

3. The Lean-To: Built from the remains of one of the ship's airfoils, the lean-to once held mining and mechanical tools, and even a crude robot. The robot has been torn apart, however, and virtually all the tools have been broken and smashed. It looks as if a human miner had been

killed here, and then her bones were scattered to different parts of the lean-to. Any search of the area will reveal hands, arms, legs, and a skull in various sections.

There is one area in the lean-to that's relatively undisturbed, however. Underneath the broken robot (an inventory/cargo handling 'bot) is a trap door built into the ground. It, and the lower parts of the robot, have been covered with sand over the years, but if the 'bot is moved, the door is easily found.

The trap door is actually the door to a small safe, one cubic meter in volume. The safe is made out of an extremely tough material (cerametal would be a good guess) and has an old-style coded lock. Trying to break into the safe or disable the lock causes a loud, blaring siren to go off from within the safe—fortunately for the heroes' ears, the battery is almost dead and the alarm only rings for about 10 minutes. It can be heard for nearly a mile.

Cracking the safe is a complex feat using the *Security—security devices* skill. The lock is fairly difficult (a +3 penalty), and a successful job requires four successes. On one failure, the alarm sounds. On three failures, the lock fuses itself and the safe cannot be opened normally.

Blasting the safe works just as well. The *Demolitions* skill can be used to break it open, but a failure scatters and possibly destroys the safe's contents (particularly the records).

The safe contains the following:

- A logbook of the colony. The logbook is handwritten and not very detailed. A *Knowledge—deduce* skill check at a +2 step penalty reveals that this lack of detail appears to be purposeful. Little mention of the miners' origins is revealed, but clues indicate that most of the colony members came from the Tendril System.
- Maintenance reports and survey outlines are equally sketchy, but it seems that most of the equipment used by the miners was either stolen or "acquired" through somewhat dubious channels. There are references to the fact that several of the miners are criminals with outstanding warrants. Only a few appear to have been wanted for dangerous offenses (the logbook's writer refers to the "murderous nature" of a man and a woman he sent scouting the upper plains area); most had defaulted on high-risk loans or defrauded their employers. It appears much of the financing for the expedition came from the logbook writer's own embezzlement—a scheme he apparently was too proud of to keep secret.
- Approximately *10,000 in gemstones organized into small, labeled containers (a *Physical Science* skill check at a -2 step modifier reveals the relative worth of the stones). The value of these mineral samples, when weighed against their relative size, is impressive. Logbook entries mention the names of the miners who found the crystals but not where. Apparently,

the miners kept secrets from each other regarding their claims. From the labels, the heroes can glean that most of the miners worked in two-, three-, or four-person teams. A *Knowledge—deduce* skill check at a -1 bonus reveals that none of these very valuable crystals were actually mined on Jewel. The cometary belt known as The Cloud and the large planet referred to as Sunder are the two most likely candidates.

- Encryption software programmed to erase and reload information for navigational computers. Three of the packets show much use—apparently there were three shuttles. One packet contains star charts and drivespace coordinates for other systems. This packet is almost completely untouched; it seems the miners had some plan for leaving the system but did not get a chance to implement it. There are references in the logbook to a small, drivespace-capable ship on patrol in the system.

4. The Shelters: Prefabricated temporary shelters provided permanent homes for several of the miners. Each of these small domes was built to house four adults. They are all ruined, however. Large, ragged holes mark the dome's walls, and scattered bones and broken weapons lie mingled in the coarse sand. There is little of interest in three of the domes—only a few gemstones (not nearly as valuable as those found in the safe in the lean-to) and discarded personal effects can be found.

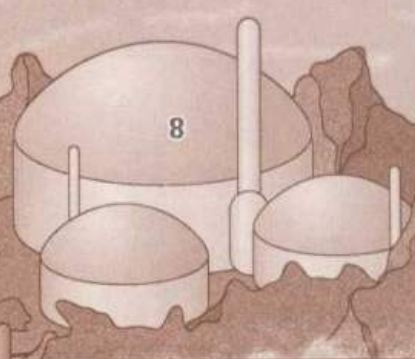
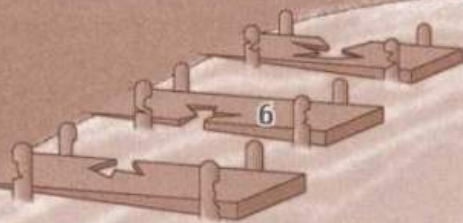
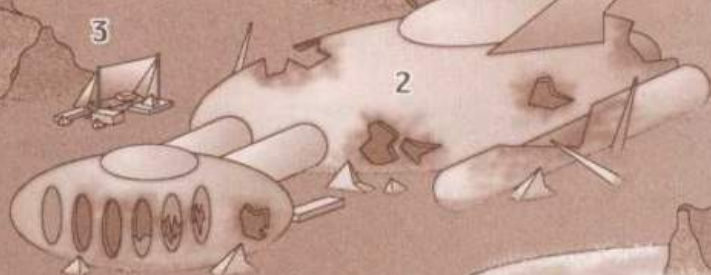
However, in the westernmost dome, the one nearest the water and set a little apart from the others, something unusual must have occurred. If the heroes investigate the bones in the wreckage of this dome, they find that there were more people here than the dome could have comfortably housed. All the cots and furniture are smashed, but a *Knowledge—deduce* skill check at a +2 penalty, or a *Tactics—infantry tactics* skill check at a -1 bonus, reveals that some of the miners made a last stand here. Many small arms weapons lie interspersed with the bones of a strange, alien creature. There is also a small metal box containing about *1000 in gemstones.

The alien skeleton, if laid out and examined (using *Life Science*, *Medical Science*, and other related skills at the Gamemaster's discretion), seems to be a saurian sort of being. It may or may not have been reptilian, but it bears the skeletal structure of a small dinosaurlike creature (about 2 to 2.5 meters in height, with a 1.5-meter-long tail).

The beast has two rows of extremely sharp teeth (though its lower jaw was broken, most likely in the battle) and large, powerful legs. It may be possible to deduce that the creature did not move like a typical dinosaur, instead hopping like a kangaroo rather than running like a two-legged reptile. The creature, of course, is a sauronine and is described earlier in this chapter. It plays a significant role in the adventure at the end of this chapter.

Landing Zone

11
SYSTEM 2253



5

5. The Caves: The bulk of the miners lived in the large caves located a kilometer or so away from the beach. If the heroes explore the caves (most are very wide-mouthed but not very deep), they can conjecture that nearly 100 humans and/or humanoids lived here at one time. Unfortunately, all that remains of the people here are scattered bones and the wreckage of the settlement. Tool racks are torn apart, the tools scattered in the red sand with the bones and personal possessions of their owners.

The central cave is a little smaller than the other two, however, and it contains a man-made structure toward its back wall—a large, steel wall. The only door, in the center of the wall, is sealed. It appears that someone—or something—scarred the door with heavy tools or claws, and there is definitely evidence of small arms fire (both laser burn and bullet scars) in the area. Bones of humanoids and aliens (as described in the Shelters) lie near this wall.

If the door can be forced open (it was electronically sealed but the battery has long since run out) using a heavy tool or cutting torch, a small room is revealed. Inside the room are several crates, a few tools, and three bodies.

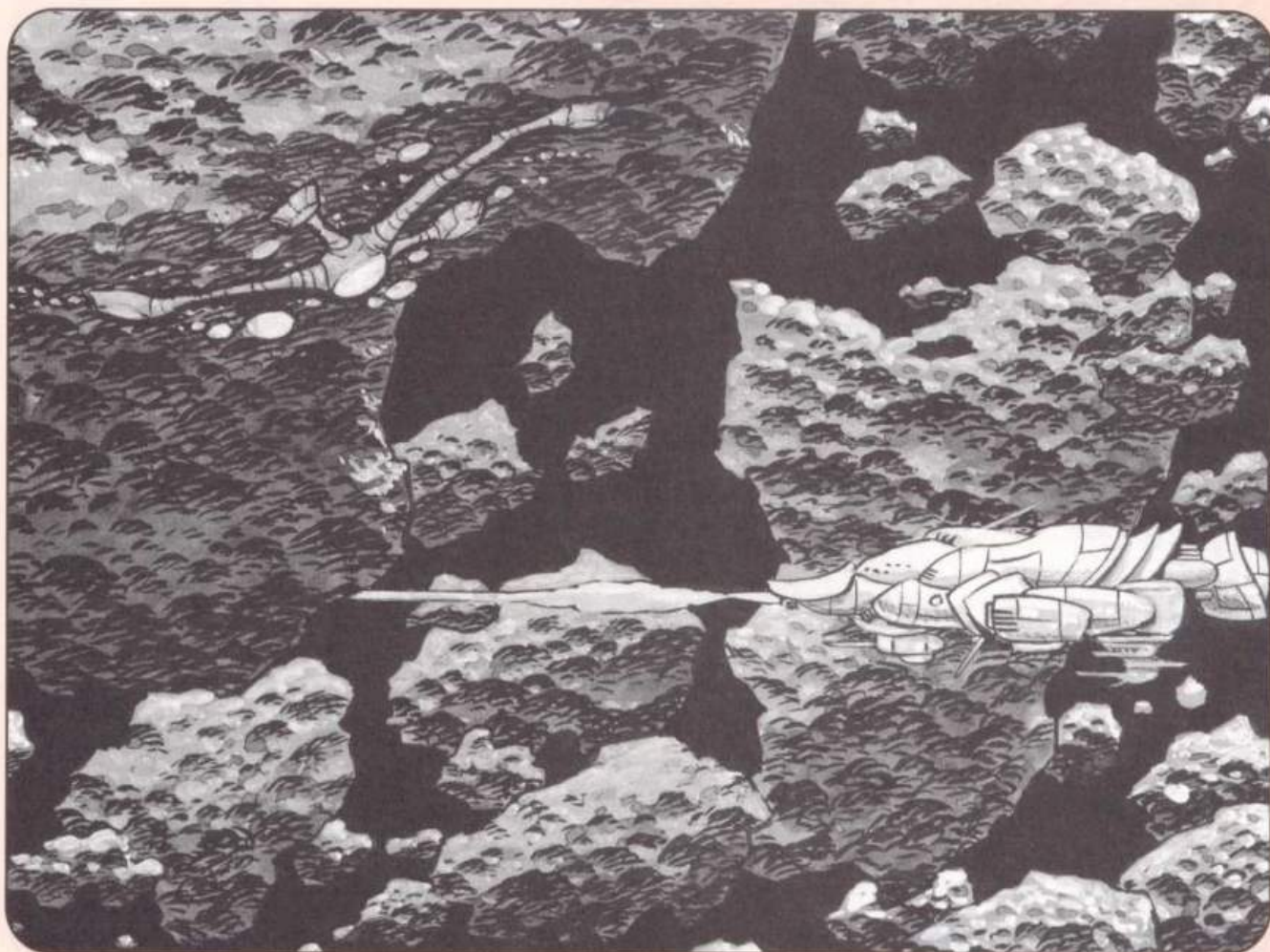
The greatly decayed corpses were once two humans and a t'sa. They all wear ragged coveralls; the t'sa has an unusual necklace. The necklace itself isn't valuable but if

closely examined, the central gem pops out to reveal a folded piece of paper. On the paper are abbreviated notes showing the coordinates of five mining sites located in the Cloud (described below). One of the sites has been circled in red ink.

Each of the dead beings is armed with a different weapon. The t'sa has a laser pistol of military quality that's empty but undamaged; the item is of human military make. The larger of the two humans (a male) has a chainsword with a broken razor filament—a spare can be found by searching the crates. The female has a 9mm submachine gun. There are two full clips of ammo in her belt pockets.

The male human appears to have been killed by terrible wounds to his chest, caused by multiple raking claws, while the female human was shot once in the forehead by a laser weapon. The t'sa seems to have died without sustaining a wound—perhaps from hunger or thirst. There are scattered emergency rations containers in the room, and all the crates have been pried or broken open. Piles of gemstones and other valuable minerals lie about the area. The approximate value of these rough and uncut stones is around *10,000.

The rest of the tools, spare clothing, and other supplies in this room are virtually worthless.



6. The Docks: Three prefabricated docks, made of material similar to that of the miners' domes, rest just south of the landing zone. All have sustained terrible damage from a variety of sources. If heroes up to a combined weight of 112 to 135kg stand on any of these docks at a time, the docks will collapse into the water, even though they look strong enough, even damaged, to support eight to ten people. The support pillars below have been eaten away by the mineral-rich water, and the structure itself seems to have been broken apart by some great calamity.

Heroes examining the docks need to make two separate skill checks. The first check should be made using Knowledge-*deduce* with a -3 step modifier. On a success, it appears that the large chunks broken away from the docks were apparently pushed or pulled downward, into the sea. The breakage shows a distinct downward turn, as if something suddenly hit the docks from above or pulled down from below—with phenomenal weight and strength.

The second skill check requires Life Science-*biology* or -*zoology*, with no modifier to the difficulty. This check reveals bits of shell driven into the break-points of the ceramic structure—shell that could have come from some crablike crustaceans ... or possibly one huge creature.

The remnants of several small boats lie about on the shore and in the water. On an Awareness-*perception* check with a -3 bonus, a careful search reveals that two of the motorboats are nearly seaworthy. Though their engines are a complete loss, a few routine repairs could yield a pair of rowboats in no time.

7. The Sunken Shuttle: Submerged some 100 meters off shore, this crashed shuttle apparently tried to take off and failed—or, rather, was stopped in midflight. Looking down into the murky water from the shore will not reveal its location, but heroes traversing the water between the docks and the small island (Areas 6 and 8) will easily spot it (no skill check necessary).

If the heroes go underwater to investigate the shuttle, they find that much of the craft is stuck deep into a rocky, silt-covered shelf about 20 meters below the surface. The canopy of the shuttle is cracked, and there are no occupants. The computer on the bridge, however, is still intact. If the "black box" can be removed (a Technical Science or System Operations-*engineering* feat with a +1 penalty for working underwater), the data can be easily read using any computer the heroes have.

Apparently, the shuttle had just returned from a trip to Sunder, where the occupants had been tending their mining stake. They picked up a *5,000 load of diamonds, emeralds, and other valuable gemstones as well as about *17,000 worth of rhodium—all still safely stowed in the cargo area. Since the log gives coordinates to the stake, it would seem the miners hadn't had a chance to purge the records—possibly because they had just returned from the stake and landed when trouble occurred.

"Shut-down commencing. Cold in three ... two ... one ... and we are shut down."

"Shut-down confirmed. Good day up there, Kip?"

"None o' yer business, control. Let's just say Taylor'n I'll be ready for pullout next month."

"That's what you all say. Member-me'n Sleepy get a cut for sitting dirtside."

"Jus' 'cause you-hell! What's that?"

"What's what—omigod! They're coming up out of the sand!"

"Taylor—get back up here! I don't care what you're doing! Close the hatch and get up here! Siddown, dammit!"

"Wha ... They're diggin' up outta the sand! They look like turtles, but with crab claws."

"Who's that? Jesper? What's he doing?"

"I sent him out to investigate. He's prodding ... aw, the thing's pretty slow. They're making for the water. Don't look like a threat to me."

"Hey, what's that rumbling sound?"

"Hmm? What?"

"It's coming from the external mike. I switched it on. Can't you hear it?"

"There, I'm on your line—jeez! Cut your volume, that's feedback!"

"It's not feedback. It's coming from—"

"What the hell is that?!"

"Oh, crap! Lookit the size of that thing! Right up out of the water! Taylor, prep us!"

"Don't cold start! You've got sand in your intakes!"

"It's coming right at us— My god! It just crushed dock three!"

"Jesper, get the hell back here! Taylor, Kip, get out of the shuttle and get over here! I'm punching the panic button!"

"Kip, let's—"

"Shut up, Taylor! We're getting out of here! I can cold start—I've got it! Punch lift!"

"Kip! Don't—"

"I've got it, I've got—what was that?!"

"Omigod! It's got you, Kip, cut power!"

"I ... ohmigod!—"

"Shut down, Kip! Shut down!"

"Power—it's overloading! We're going in! We're—"

There are no log entries concerning the trouble, only the chatter from the pilot and whoever was manning the communications area. A complete transcription of the conversation is presented below.

The chatter on the box is punctuated by the sounds of shuttle thrusters being forced online, the jostling of the

loose contents of the cabin, and an ear-shattering twisting, wrenching sound. There is a deep, rumbling sound throughout that grows until the shuttle takes off (from the point at which one of the speakers notices the noise, it's hard to tell "Kip" from "Taylor" and "Control" throughout the quick by-play). The narrative is cut short by a loud splash and a high-pitched, metallic squeal.

Examining the outside of the shuttle shows the heroes that not only was the canopy completely destroyed in the crash, but the right thruster mechanism (a tube-shaped gravitic array just below the cargo area) has been almost completely ripped away. Searching for it (and succeeding at an Investigate-search check at a -3 bonus or an Awareness-perception check with no bonus) reveals it lying about halfway between the shuttle's remains and the shore. Lying along with it is the fragment of a giant claw-shaped shell. The claw was large enough to entirely grasp the array (which is nearly 2 meters in diameter), and the creature was either strong enough or heavy enough to cause the shuttle to crash. Unfortunately for the "giant crab," its claw and much of its limb was torn off by the sudden jolt.

8. The Island Base: This small, rocky island is almost completely covered by a large, mostly intact dome and two smaller shelter-style domes. The only seaward approach to the high, rocky edge of the island is from the southwest—where the miners built another of their prefab docks. The dock is, unfortunately, in the same state of repair as the three on the mainland, but it does not appear to have been ripped apart. Rather, it has fallen apart because of the sea. The other docks did not incur the tumultuous waves normal for the small island; the high, rocky land mass sheltered the miners' main cove from many of the smashing waves.

The two smaller shelters are entirely intact. Both are apparently living quarters, neither of which has been inhabited for a long, long time. Each could have held four miners—or engineers (there are scattered tools and parts everywhere), but two of the beds have been stripped. There is no sign of any sort of battle here, but everything useful has been taken away along with the two sets of missing bedding.

The larger dome is another matter. Inside the heroes find a working desalination plant and a small, abandoned hydroponics farm. Most of the plants in the farm are dead or gone to seed now, and there are places where the walls of the farm are smashed. If a hero using Life Science-botany examines the farm (with a -4 bonus), he can easily tell that the hydroponics once provided a decent variety of radiation-free vegetables and fruits for the crew.

The hydroponics plant still provides desalinated water at near-acceptable levels of radiation, though repairs should be made to the plant if the heroes want to start consuming anything. If the dome were repaired and the shielding patched, both facilities could be repaired by heroes with the proper skills in a matter of days. Of course, the heroes probably have no reason to set up home here.

Searching the area also reveals two other interesting things. First, someone had set up a crude laboratory and was apparently experimenting with the removal of harmful toxins and radiation from the animal and plant life found on Jewel. A decent lab in any civilized part of the Verge could effect the same fairly easily—but the heroes should be impressed that someone without proper tools was on the verge of accomplishing the same thing. Several samples of the person's experiments remain bagged and labeled in a small storage area.

The second interesting detail is a small hatch in the center of the dome that leads down into a service area. The hatch has been sealed or locked from the inside, however, so the heroes must force their way through. The cerametal of the floor and hatchway is very tough, so this could take quite a bit of effort.

If the heroes find their way down into the service tunnels of the desalination plant, however, they may be even more impressed. Instead of finding a damp, gray tunnel filled with dripping water pipes, they find themselves in a tiny jungle of strange plants and hanging vines. A hero who has the Life Science-botany skill can automatically determine that most of these plants come from wildly different environments all around the Verge (and even some Old Space areas), and that all of them produce some sort of edible food. Close examination reveals that they are edible and contaminate-free.

Farther down the overgrown tunnel, the heroes will find a disturbing sight. In a small access room, someone has set up living quarters large enough for two. The bedrolls from the domes above are here, along with other personal effects. One, however, has been bundled into a ball and stowed in a corner near a large service pipe. Etched into the pipe are the words "Here rest the mortal remains of Dr. Ayu Bethsui. He should not have been here." A decomposing human body is found in the pipe if anyone pries it open.

Among the personal effects in this corner is a picture of an old man with a young child. The man is dressed in a lab coat and the child in a hospital gown. Both are smiling. There is also a logbook with the name "Ayu Bethsui" on the inside front cover. It details a six-month period where Dr. Bethsui chose to accompany a group of miners to an unknown system to learn the truth about certain reports concerning undocumented lifeforms.

The journal describes Dr. Bethsui's attempts—and successes—in keeping the desalination plant running after the colony was destroyed. There is only one mention of the miners at all, and that is to say "Per our agreement, I will not document anything regarding my hosts, even though I fear most of them are dead. According to my last companion, the colony was attacked by creatures from the sea and from the land. One shuttle tried to take off but crashed in the water between the land and the island. Perhaps I will write more about the colony if I can obtain my last remaining companion's permission." This was the last entry.

The companion referred to by Dr. Bethsui can be found farther down the hallway. A decaying corpse dressed only in her undergarments, she lies underneath an empty water tank with a juryrigged showerhead. Her neck has been broken.

9. The Hills and the Cliff: A kilometer or so west of the ocean, the rocky hills and reddish sand give way to a high, jagged cliff face. The many holes and tunnels in the cliffs are littered with rocks and bones, a few of which are humanoid, but most are from small animals. Many of the tunnels lead upward and come out onto the large, rolling plain at the top of the cliff, but a few of the tunnels simply dead-end into the rock.

During the normal radiation period of Jewel's year, many of the sauronines live in these caves. They do not go down toward the beach at this time—nothing lives on the rocky shores between them and the ocean—and they raise their young in safety here while the packs of hunters venture out onto the plains. While the sauronines have little to fear from any other land creature, they are extremely territorial, and the tunnels give them some space so that they don't engage in continuous warfare with their neighbors.

However, just after the high-rad interval of Jewel, the sauronines in this area pour out of the caves and race toward the beach—to greet the young triloceans just being born. The rumbling of their attack can be heard a minute or two before they arrive at the beach; they hope to overwhelm the young creatures before the elder triloceans come to the rescue.

THE CLOUD: P4

Slowly orbiting the Sisters at more than 20 AU, this tightly grouped collection of asteroids has been slowly spreading outward the last few millennia. Now it looks like a large, black cloud with wispy trailers preceding and following its orbital line.

Evidence suggests that the Cloud was once a planetoid of moderate size, and that the arrival of the red star Orphan into the system resulted in its destruction. The gravitational pull of the binary Sisters keeps the Cloud in a stretched-out, elliptical orbit, and the Orphan exerts its attraction when the Cloud enters the most extreme edge of its course around the system. Every year, the Cloud grows a little flatter and a little less dense. In a few more thousands of years, it could become a much less remarkable asteroid belt.

High Stakes Claims

Only heroes who actually fly through the Cloud can determine that there are small survival bases built into some of the larger asteroids. Even some of the smaller rocks show signs of mine-work.

None of the half-dozen or so bases are currently inhabited. All are basically the same in structure: small holes in the rock shielded by survival dome materials and showing

signs of short-term habitation. A few have small storage lockers containing gold, mercury, and other precious and semiprecious metals.

The asteroids of the Cloud are simply rife with semi-precious metals, and a stellar mining company would have no difficulty quickly and efficiently gathering the wealth. It seems the pirate miners went about the process the hard way. Working in ones or twos, they personally mined the Cloud, cutting minerals out "old style"—with picks and lasers. Then, they transported their goods back to their survival camps or back to the base on Jewel. A mining corporation could go in with an asteroid-cutter and break up the small rocks, sift through the materials, and keep only what it needed; a quick, in-and-out job. Strip-mining asteroid fields is not only effective, it eliminates the exposure to natural hazards.

Still, each of the pirate miners had the opportunity to amass quite a fortune on his or her own. For more information on this, see the adventure at the end of this chapter and the description of the Jewel mining base, above.

Navigating the Cloud: Actually flying into the cloud is very dangerous, but the heroes may attempt it if they suspect their efforts will be rewarded.

Flying through the asteroid field requires a continuous complex skill check. The pilot must make a Vehicle Operation—*space vehicle* skill check at a +3 penalty every round to avoid hitting or being hit by an asteroid. Another hero manning the sensors can make System Operation—*sensors* checks to pick a clear path. If the heroes' ship has point defense or energy weapons, other heroes can assist the pilot by making System Operations—*defenses* or —*weapons* checks.

Failure to avoid an asteroid (a failure on the pilot's skill check) means a large piece of metallic rock has struck the ship at a very high rate of speed. See Table P15: Impact Damage on page 58 of the *Gamemaster Guide* to determine the damage suffered by the ship; use the Critical Failure or Failure result (as appropriate) under the "M" column.

Determine which compartments are damaged randomly. Only one compartment will be hit on anything short of a Critical Failure; in the latter case, two compartments suffer damage.

Of course, if the heroes are going to fly into the Cloud, they should probably have someone making a System Operation—*sensors* check to collect data on the asteroid field. That hero cannot assist the pilot in picking a path through the field as he must attempt to scan the asteroids.

Two successes at this feat check means that the sensor operator has "locked onto" a short-range beacon. The beacon's output is scrambled, but a hero who has System Operation—*communications* (–1 bonus) can pinpoint it. The beacon leads the heroes to one of the larger asteroids and a survival shelter. There, they find the remains of a miner's stake as well as evidence that the pirate miners found the

SYSTEM SURVEY LADDER: SYSTEM 2253

Use the following complex skill check ladder for a stellar survey of System 2253 using skills described in the "Star Surveys 101" chapter. As always, three failures ends the skill check. The hero learns only the information that she accumulated up to that point.

Successes	Information Acquired
1	The system contains multiple stars.
2	The system contains three stars: a binary pair (F3 and K4) and a solitaire (M4).
3	There are four planetary bodies orbiting the F3 star.
4	The other two stars have no discernible planetary bodies in orbit around them.
5	Planets P1 and P2 are within an AU of the primary, P3 is almost 3.5 AU from the primary, and the asteroid belt (P4) is more than 20 AU from the primary.
6	Provide one of the planets' base information. There is a radio signal coming from the vicinity of the third planet, it is little more than a carrier wave.
7	Provide a second planet's information.
8	Provide a third planet's information. The radio signal near the third planet seems to be coming from a moon.

Cloud valuable enough to hide their claims—even from each other. The latter seems a little odd, because a pirate miner, operating alone or even with one other partner, would never be able to navigate the asteroid field, pinpoint another miner's claim beacon, and fly all at the same time. Greed will make paranoids of anyone, though.

Any heroes who have investigated Jewel may have clues that reveal where some of the stakes in the Cloud can be found, at the Gamemaster's option or gleaned through the text. If so, assign bonuses to the heroes' skill checks before they make their rolls.

SURVEYING THE SYSTEM

Starrise into System 2253 usually occurs perpendicular to the plane between the Sisters and Orphan and far on the edge of the system. This gives heroes a panoramic view of the place and allows them to activate their scanners well

before they've made much progress at all toward the planets or the suns.

SURVEYING THE WRECKAGE: AN OUTBOUND ADVENTURE

The adventure for System 2253 is a straightforward one: The heroes arrive in the system and discover something is not quite right—someone else is, or has been, here before them. To properly survey the system, the heroes must investigate and find out what is going on. This adventure revolves around Jewel and the mining colony. The Gamemaster may wish to run a different sort of adventure; some options to customize the adventure are made below.

FIRE IF FIRED UPON

The heroes arrive in the system and almost immediately pick up the "dead air" broadcast originating from somewhere in the direction of the third planet (see the System Survey Ladder: System 2253 sidebar, above). Further investigation reveals the broadcast is coming from the moon.

Investigation, however, prompts an attack by the automated defense system. The heroes may choose to fight back, to run away, or to try evading the attack. If they flee and don't want to come back, the Gamemaster will have to cobble together a different adventure.

If the heroes fight back and destroy the base, they may be able to find some evidence of what the construct was in the wreckage. It is possible they will take out the mass cannon without destroying the rest of the relay station—but this is unlikely. Certainly, they will notice that the communications signal has ended.

Should the heroes evade the attack, they can bypass the relay station entirely or choose to investigate. If they check out the station, use the description of the relay station (see page 8) to resolve the scene.

Bypassing the relay station makes the heroes' job more difficult. Because of the small size of the miners' outpost, it should be quite difficult for the heroes to locate the camp on the planet without some clue as to where to look. A series of System Operations—*sensors* checks could succeed in pinpointing the base, but the penalty would be at least +4, and without any clue as to where to start.

DIRTSIDE

Once the heroes locate the mining base, they can land and investigate. Time the heroes' arrival to coincide with Jewel having just passed out of its high-radiation interval. If the heroes survey the system, they will doubtless feel thankful, for the necessity for radiation gear will be at a minimum.

Use the description of Home Base in the text above (see page 9) to run the adventure from this point. The heroes should have time to poke around the area and uncover a

few interesting things. How much they learn about the miners' colony before the "Attack from Two Sides" (below) occurs depends on how long they take to investigate each part of the base.

If possible, the heroes should learn that the miners did not abandon the base but were actually destroyed. They should learn that the miners had another drive-capable ship but it is gone (that's what the signal on the relay station was calling). There is no evidence as to where or when it disappeared.

The Gamemaster should allow the heroes to spread out and investigate the base as much as possible before moving to the next scene. The farther the heroes are away from their ship—and from each other—the better!

ATTACK FROM TWO SIDES

When the Gamemaster feels the time is right, the heroes near the beach should notice the sand starting to move. Some ... things are pushing themselves up through the red sand. These creatures are all over the place, though only along the beach and not on the landing zone. Then the rumbling begins.

Heroes nearest the cliffs hear the rumbling first, while those on the island hear it last, but everyone hears it eventually. The sauronines, responding to the birth of the triloceans, are attacking. Dozens of the reptilian creatures are leaping across the rocky landscape between the cliffs and the beach. Because of their dusky coloration, they are almost impossible to see until they reach the caves.

The sauronines will attack anything moving—and breathing counts as moving. They came to kill and eat triloceans, but humans, fraal, weren, t'sa, sesheyan, and mechalus smell just fine to them. The trilocean young try to crawl to the water, and the battle begins. The heroes must try to either get away or fight.

Unfortunately for the heroes, the trilocean adults now appear. (Note, the Gamemaster should time the triloceans' arrival just as the heroes feel like they're getting the upper hand with the sauronines. The object is to put them off their guard again.) Erupting up out of the sea, the triloceans attack everything on the beach that isn't another trilocean—sauronians and heroes alike. Unlike the sauronians, however, the triloceans lose interest in the heroes if the heroes move away from the nesting ground—that is, toward the rocky hills. Again unfortunately for the heroes, many of the newly sated sauronians turn to go this direction as well.

The heroes should not have an easy time of it here, though they will probably fare better than the lightly armed miners. The island is not attacked, and their ship is probably not a shuttle. Of course, if their ship suffered damage from the attack at the relay station, they could be in trouble....

The battle lessens after the first few frantic minutes, but does not end quickly; in fact, the battle rages for days. Sauronians use the shelters and the caves to hide from the

large triloceans, waiting for more of the young to rise to the surface and then racing out to snack on them. The adult triloceans rest just offshore, waiting for the exact same trigger. Movement by the heroes (especially near the landing zone, which is right alongside the beach) prompts attacks from both quarters.

If the heroes find a way to survive or escape, however, things settle down within a few days. They can return and investigate the area more fully if they wish, though some sauronians will continue to investigate the area every day or every other day. The creatures are smart, after all.

OTHER ADVENTURES IN 2253

Investigating Sunder, the Cloud, and even the Boiling Ball can be extremely profitable for heroes who have the skills and desire to mine. All three orbital bodies present their own dangers—from volcanic eruptions, to asteroid "attacks," to explosive vapors—but all can be extremely profitable.

There is also the miners' other driveship to factor in. Perhaps it and its crew abandoned the base during the attack, or perhaps the crew had left beforehand to purchase supplies and returned only to find the base destroyed. Twenty years is a long time, but if the survivors recruited a new band of pirate miners (this time more heavily armed), they could be getting ready to set up shop in System 2253 when the heroes arrive.

These miners could already be inhabiting the Jewel base, or they might arrive while the heroes are surveying the system. Paranoid and greedy, these new pirates will be ready and willing to attack anyone who discovers their treasure trove—especially nosy scouts who want to put 2253 on the star map.

Another idea for adventure could tie into the pirate miners' past. Perhaps someone who "lost" the equipment the miners used wants to find out what happened to it, and finally has a lead. That person could offer a reward to the heroes if they thoroughly investigate the system and find out exactly what the miners were doing and what happened to them. This should prompt the heroes not to cut and run when the creatures of Jewel or the returning pirate miners attack. Being so paid might even force them to survey the Cloud or Sunder (something they might not do otherwise).

INFESTATION

Located on the outer edge of the frontier, this nameless system has never before been visited by humankind. It is an unremarkable system in appearance but, because of its location, it could soon be of great importance.

STELLAR OVERVIEW

This small, one-star system has no features that immediately call out to the stellar explorer. There are no anomalous stellar bodies or bizarre orbital features to be documented—only a single orange star and four main orbital bodies.

The star itself appears cool for its class, but not overly so. As a result, explorers may investigate the first planet of the system with relative ease. Even so close to the star, the planet's surface is not inordinately hot.

The asteroid belt appears quite large and dense, but perhaps that is because of its closeness to the star. It does appear that asteroids from this field occasionally break off and bombard the two nearest planets.

The large, super-terran world beyond the asteroid belt has no moons and features an extremely cold environment.

Lastly, the comet belt at the edge of this system is also

denser than usual. Again, part of the explanation could be its closeness to the single star of the system, but most students of stellar science would want to record and observe the anomaly.

THE SINGLE STAR

Nameless except for its numeric stellar designation, Star K1 is a comparatively cool, orange star. It is fairly large, however, but could not be mistaken for a red giant by any stretch of the imagination.

Star K1 holds on tightly to its orbitals; none of its satellites orbit the orange star at more than 5 AU. Otherwise, Star K1 is largely unremarkable as stars go—the usual amount of solar flares and other phenomena can be observed, but nothing seems out of the ordinary.

THE PLANETS

Four satellites orbit Star K1 at distances of 1, 2, 3, and 5 AU, respectively. Only two are actual planets—K1 and K3. The asteroid belt at 2 AU and the comet belt at 5 AU are the remaining orbital bodies.

THE FIRST PLANET—K1

This terran, temperate world orbits closer to Star K1 than any of the other satellites in the system, but it still retains a remarkably welcoming surface. A Class 2 (G2/R1/A3/P3/H2) world with two moons, visitors to this planet require little in the way of protection to survive other than a tolerance for near 40° Celsius heat and almost continuous high humidity. Only the toxic atmosphere keeps it from

STELLAR INFORMATION: UNNAMED SYSTEM

Number of Stars: 1

Organization: Solitaire

Stellar Characteristics: Single Class K1 (Orange)

Planets/Satellites: Four, in close orbit

TABLE 2: UNNAMED STAR SYSTEM (K1 STAR)

	K1	K3
Primary	K	K
Planetary Class	Class 2	Class 3
Gravity	G2 (0.85 g)	G3 (1.33 g)
Radiation	R1 (2 rem/year)	R3 (4 rem/week)
Atmosphere	A3 (N ₂ , O ₂)	A1 (N ₂ , Ne)
Pressure	P3 (0.97 atm)	P4 (8.21 atm)
Heat	H2 (40.3° C)	H1 (-172.2° C)
Orbital Distance	0.53 AU	4.30 AU
Diameter	14,140 km	19,140 km
Year	45.3 days	9.97 years
Day	41.45 hours	22.94 hours
Axial Tilt	0.5°	18.2°
Density	0.76	0.88
No. of Satellites	2	0

GAMEMASTER NOTE: ADVENTURE THREADS

Throughout the description of the Star K1 system, there may occur references to adventure possibilities that may or may not happen. This is particularly true regarding any mention of the clicks inhabiting the asteroid field that orbits Star K1 at 2.0 AU. If the Gamemaster does not wish to run the adventure featuring the clicks, he or she should ignore or modify this information before using it in the game.

being a planet capable of supporting human or similar humanoid life.

Of course, it is this very atmosphere that keeps the planet tolerable in other ways. The heavy carbon dioxide and chlorine clouds of K1 actually protect the planet's surface from the heat and radiation of its too-close sun. The few oceans are made up mostly of dangerous elements as well; for example, hydrogen cyanide permeates the water, making it deadly to humankind.

Even the rain showers on the planet can do moderate damage to unprotected humanoid life. A hero wearing no protection at all (bare skin, normal clothing or armor, etc.) must make a Stamina-endurance check every 10 minutes or take damage. Only on an Amazing success does the hero avoid all damage; on a Good he takes $d6+2s$, an Ordinary means $d4w$, a Marginal inflicts $d4+2w$, and a Critical Failure inflicts $d6+2w$. Rain showers occur daily for varying periods of time, but a character with the Survival-survival training skill may avoid damage with a successful check, possibly by burying himself underground or somehow building cover. Of course, wearing good quality rain gear does the same thing.

Indigenous Life on K1

Despite the somewhat harsh conditions, some living things do exist on K1. Primordial life, mostly, but higher lifeforms are cropping up on the surface of the planet. So far, the only animal life consists of single-celled organisms that can survive in the toxic oceans and soil of the planet. A very few multicelled creatures are on the cusp of evolution.

Plant life, however, grows on K1 in abundance. These plants thrive on chlorine and hydrocarbons, but they do not produce nearly as much pure oxygen as an Earth plant would. Still, they survive quite well in the cloudy atmosphere of K1. Mosses, giant ferns, compact shrubs, various forms of lichen, and even strange, chlorinated fungi cover much of the land. The caves and sheltered craters of the planet's surface are covered with all manner of white and brown fungi as well. An exploring botanist could spend years documenting the indigenous plant life and still come across a new species every month.

Of exceptional note are the large ferns. Extremely tough, with sharp leaves and sturdy stalks, these plants are toxic to eat, as



**TABLE 3: KICK ACTIVITIES
IN SYSTEM STAR K1**

Detection Modifiers			
Roll	Klick	Klick	Hero
2d6	Activity		
2-3	None	0	+3
4-5	Maintenance	+2	+1
6-7	Prep for fire	+4	-2
8	Fire	+6	-3
9-10	Observe	+2/-4	0
11-12	Direct contact	+4/-4	-2

None: The clicks are resting, engaging in unrelated activities, or performing minor maintenance. Since this leaves the scouts with few responsibilities, they have nothing to do but scan the area. Detecting click activity among the asteroid fields is much more difficult at this time since the least amount of power is being used to keep the labs and the weapon platforms stable. If the heroes do detect any activity in the asteroid field, it might be some small power signatures (Ordinary success), anomalous movement in the asteroid field (Good), or a ship moving into, through, or out of the field (Amazing). This nonactivity can take from a few hours up to a few days.

Maintenance: Checking out the weapon and repairing any minor damage caused during previous firings or random asteroid strikes is an important part of the clicks' mission. The clicks don't use much power during this activity, but they do move around a lot. The levels of success correspond to the results found under the "None" activity, above. Maintenance can also last from hours to days.

Prep for Fire: Bringing all parts of the weapon into position consumes energy and click power. Sometimes one or two of the attack or scout ships are used to destroy or shift smaller asteroids out of the way. The clicks are not likely to detect new arrivals in the system at this time, since all their attention is turned on the weapon. If the heroes detect anything, they find large power signatures somewhere in the center of the field (Ordinary), definite movement and a firing of ships' guns (Good), or a large structure with a high energy output in the center of the field (Amazing). This activity takes from minutes to a few hours.

Fire: Once the weapon platforms are in place, firing takes very little effort. When it occurs, though, nearly all of the click scouts have been ordered to watch the target of the attack, the Weapons' Platforms, or the nearby area for any anomalies. Unless visitors to the system are near the weapon when it is fired, it may go unnoticed. Unfortunately, firing the weapon takes only a few minutes.

Observe: After firing the weapon, the clicks monitor the platforms for any damage caused by the energy output; they also study the target for the accuracy of the weapon and its effectiveness. The two modifiers listed relate to any visitors' position in the system. The first modifier should be used if intruders are anywhere other than near the target of the attack—which will almost certainly be K1 or K3. (Roll d8: on a 7+, the target is K3, otherwise, it is K1.) The modifier after the slash should only be used if the visitors are near the clicks' target when the weapon is fired. If the clicks are detected during the Observe activity, watchers pick up residual energy and movement among the asteroids (Ordinary), actual movement of some of the asteroids (Good), or the fact that three larger asteroids near the center are giving off large amounts of energy and are not, in fact, asteroids at all (Amazing). This stage can take anywhere from a few hours to almost a day.

Direct Contact: This step is sometimes skipped. If it is rolled (or moved to as part of the clicks' activity progression), roll 1d6. On an odd result, the clicks move on to "None." On an even result, the clicks send out a few scout ships to investigate their target. They will actually head toward either K1 or K3 (whichever was fired upon), land, and survey the damage. If they find any visitors near the target, the scouts use the modifier after the slash to try to detect them; otherwise, the standard modifier before the slash is used for click sensor checks. Should visitors to the system detect click activity during this period, they find two or three small ships moving into or out of the asteroid field toward either K1 or K3 (Ordinary), two or three alien ships (Good), or they discover the ship and notice that they are actually coming from or going to some of the medium-size asteroids (Amazing). This activity is extremely time-consuming and seldom takes less than a day but never takes more than three or four days.

are all the plants of K1 to a greater or lesser extent. The ferns happen to be remarkably supple and resistant to water penetration. To a colony just starting out or even a manufacturer interested in organic rather than synthetic material, these ferns could serve as the basis for many different products. For instance, they could be woven into shelters for strong, rain-resistant huts or even processed into water-resistant clothing. A well-made "fern

cloth" would be resistant to weather, staining, and damage (providing leather-quality armor at about two-thirds the weight).

The other plants are of interest to the curious explorer as well. Their resistance to the toxicity of K1's atmosphere may mean some of them could be adapted into potent antidotes for diseases or poisons, or perhaps deadly toxins themselves.

Unfortunately for the developing animal lifeforms of K1, the nearby asteroid belt regularly bombards it with ice and rocks. The surface of the planet is covered in craters and pockmarks where these crushing stones have hit in years past. Most of the plant life seems able to adapt to the changes in climate and atmosphere caused by the strikes, but any explorer who delves into the zoological history of the planet will find many slow starts and abrupt stops along the animal life's evolutionary ladder. Still, K1's animal lifeforms haven't given up yet. In a few million years—if K1 survives—it may produce some fascinating higher lifeforms.

Asteroid Strikes

Heroes surveying K1 must be aware of the frequent asteroid strikes. Most of the icy meteors burn up upon entering K1's atmosphere, but some become meteorites and strike home. When this happens, depending on the size of the meteorite, nearby heroes may feel the effects of small earthquakes, tidal waves (if they are near any of K1's tiny oceans), or even rare, once-in-a-million-years' occurrences—small "nuclear bombs." K1 could be hit by a giant meteor at any time.

Another threat that makes both K1 and K3 dangerous places to explore originates with a large klik contingent living in the asteroid field of this system. This nasty arachnid race is experimenting with a prototype "asteroid gun" that makes both planets hostile places for heroes to visit—especially if the clicks observe them entering the system. For more information on the clicks and how they could interfere with investigating heroes, refer to the description of the asteroid belt (below) and the adventure material at the end of this section.

The Two Moons

The two moons orbiting K1 are tide-locked. They are both small, without much atmosphere, and not particularly inviting. Covered mostly by dust and chunks of crashed meteorites (from the nearby asteroid field), there may be some mineral wealth on each, but it would take more work to mine the moons than to simply mine the asteroid field itself.

One feature of the larger of the two satellites is worth noting. What little atmosphere that is on the moon has been almost completely permeated with dust and silt. A recent asteroid strike is the cause, and the reverberations are still creating quakes and seismic disruptions throughout the planetoid. The asteroid itself, a little more than two kilometers in diameter, struck with incredible force and saturated the larger moon's atmosphere with ash.

This asteroid strike was not an accident. It was caused by the clicks and their experimental asteroid gun (see "The Asteroid Field—K2," below). Whether they were targeting the moon itself or the planet is up to the Gamemaster, should he or she use the adventure material presented at the end of this chapter. If any explorers investigate the moon, they may discover (on a successful System Operations—sensors or —communications check) that someone has placed several seismic monitors on the moon's surface. Placed only a few days before

the heroes first arrive in the system, these alien monitors are measuring the disturbances caused by the impacts. They are broadcasting unprotected data.

THE ASTEROID FIELD—K2

Not unusual to see in any system, Star K1's asteroid field appears unremarkable. Large, mountainous boulders spin and crash through an orbital pattern along with tiny motes of dust and all manner of other rubble. As any stellar explorer would expect, Star K1's particularly dense atmosphere contains a variety of mineral wealth for the taking—nickel, iron, and other hard metals can be found among the rocks, and a competent asteroid miner would have no trouble "digging" for it.

Except for the clicks, that is.

It is impossible to tell when the clicks arrived in this system, but they have been here quite a long time. Their motivation appears fairly clear. They have established several bases actually in the asteroid field (to be completely accurate, the bases have been built into hollowed-out and specially reinforced asteroids). They are using these bases to experiment with a new weapon: an asteroid gun.

The concept of an asteroid gun is neither new nor even particularly innovative: It consists of a mass driver or accelerator capable of hurling an asteroid at a nearby target, usually a planet. But the clicks have more in mind than just that. Their scientists are working to create a mechanism that they can move into a system—perhaps under cover of attack or some other distraction—and wield against humanity and its allies before the clicks can be detected.

The Klick Bases

Currently, the clicks have three types of bases scattered throughout the asteroid field. What the clicks call them can never be determined, but they appear to be observatories, labs, and weapon platforms.

The Observatories: Located on the outer edge of the asteroid field, the observatory bases are made from medium-size, hollowed-out, and reinforced asteroids that have enough space to conceal a klik scout ship, its crew, and a complex sensor array. The sensor array is usually mounted above the ship and attached by sensor cables and relays for direct access. The scouts live in the ship and can blast out with only a little notice—which they would do if the asteroid were about to be destroyed in a collision, or if they were ordered to investigate something out of the ordinary.

Most of the observatories face toward K1, and the accompanying sensors are trained on the interior planet's surface. Constantly monitoring the planet for changes in temperature, atmosphere, or any other anomalies, these structures have been built to observe the effectiveness of both natural asteroid strikes and the klik-powered meteorites.

A few of these observatories have been set up to scan away from K1. Their sensor arrays occasionally focus on K3, such as when a natural meteor shower "attacks" in that direction (the

klicks have not used their asteroid gun on K3 yet). Mostly, however, these observatories monitor activity in the rest of the system. The klicks are operating on the edge of the Verge; they know that, at any time, they may have visitors.

If a klick observatory were attacked, it would have the same statistics as a klick scout ship (presented in the sidebar, "Klick Vessels in System K") except that it would be immobile and feature one extra compartment that could take damage (the sensor array). Even a completely surprised observatory crew could blast out of the asteroid given a complete round of combat.

One klick scout ship mans each observatory. The Gamemaster can determine how many observatory posts are in the Star K1 system. There should be no fewer than six posts facing toward K1, and at least one-third the total number facing outward and scanning K3 or the rest of the system.

If a vessel makes starfall in this system, the klick observation posts have a reasonable chance of detecting it, based on whatever they are doing. Consult the klick Activities in System Star K1 Table to randomly determine their activities, as well as to check on modifiers as to their chance of detecting new arrivals and whether any new arrivals might detect them.

The klick scouts have a System Operations—sensors skill of 12/6/3. Make a skill check for them whenever a ship enters the system. If it remains undetected, make a check again when-

ever it does something that might catch the scouts' attention—like moving toward one of the planets or the asteroid field, for example. The Gamemaster should also make a new skill check whenever the klicks change activities. The klicks act in a predictable pattern, starting at one end of the table and going around to the beginning. Each activity, however, takes a different amount of time.

Note that heroes make skill checks only when they call for them. The modifiers listed below in the table should be used only when the heroes actually investigate the asteroid field or where the klick activities can be detected. Read the description of the various klick activities to determine where these locations might be.

The Labs: Also built from large, hollowed-out and reinforced asteroids, the labs are—compared to the observatories—huge. Equipped with the best armor and shielding technology the klicks have, the labs also have emergency thrusters to avoid any rogue asteroids that try to hit them. These thrusters are always on, and klick pilots and engineers monitor the labs' spin through the field carefully. The klicks have too much invested in this operation to lose it to a random strike.

Each lab contains several large compartments. The Klick Asteroid Laboratory map represents a typical facility. Each lab



CLICK VESSELS IN SYSTEM STAR K1

The clicks have two types of craft at their disposal: the click attack craft and the scout ships. A complete description of the click attack craft can be found on page 219 in the *STAR DRIVE* Campaign Setting. Each scout vessel is connected to an external sensor net built into the surface of its asteroid shell. When the scout ship moves out of the shell, it can either spend 4 rounds detaching or it can blast out, destroying the shell and the sensor net immediately. The scout ship's statistics are as follows:

Klick Scout Ship

Compartments:	6	Dur:	30
Maneuver Rating:	0	Acc:	2 Mpp
Cruise Speed:	2 AU/hr	Berthing:	12*

Armament:	Particle beam (Range 6/12/18 Mm), damage d6+3s/d4+1m/d4+3m (En (e)/A)
Defenses:	Jammer, damage control (Good)
Armor:	Moderate (unknown) (3 dur), d6+1 (LI), d6+1 (HI), d6+2 (En)
Computer:	Marginal computer core
Engines:	Induction engine
Power:	Grav-fusion cell rated at 10 power factors
Drive:	5

*Even though this version of the click scout ship can hold 12 clicks (most can hold 24, but room had to be made for the drive), the observatories where the vessels are stationed have two- or four-click crews (Gamemaster's option). When the clicks eventually leave the system, they intend to use the scout ships as transportation for their technicians, engineers, and warriors. The click attack craft are fully crewed.

There is one scout ship per observatory (minimum nine). There is also one attack craft per lab (minimum three, maximum nine). The scout ships are only pulled out of their observatory berths to survey the planetary bombardments, for maintenance, or in an emergency (such as the clicks deciding to leave or if a large force of enemy craft enters the system). The attack craft are used to ferry personnel or equipment to or from the labs as well as for occasional patrols.

has facilities to support two click warriors, four engineers, and six technicians (who also function as pilots). There is enough room to temporarily house two additional clicks as well.

All of the labs function with only minimal atmosphere (0.5 atm), and even the living quarters would be inhospitable to

humans. They are heated, however, at about 10° Celsius in most places, and up to almost 30° Celsius in some of the click living quarters.

The lab passages are irregular and must be crawled through. clicks travel as well on six legs as two, however, and do not find their hallways unusual. There is a variety of claw-holds everywhere, so the lack of gravity doesn't present much of a problem either.

The tunnels and walls of the facility, unless otherwise noted, are rock reinforced with steel or cerametal beams and plates. The labs have not been "dressed up" to appear more comfortable (that's a human failing); instead, they are utilitarian and hive-like in nature.

Within the system there are no fewer than three labs and no more than nine, at the Gamemaster's option. Any fewer than three labs could not service the observatories and the weapon platforms, and more than nine would be overkill—and attention-grabbing.

1. Docking Bay: Built into the widest surface of the asteroid shell, the docking bay contains enough room for one click attack ship and one scout vessel. The attack ship is kept here at all times (except in case of an emergency) but the scout is almost always in one of the observation asteroids. If the clicks have to perform maintenance on one of their vessels or the weapon platforms, they may use this bay to either bring in a vessel or take parts and crew out.

It is not unusual for one or two click warriors to be present in the docking bay. If a scout ship is present, its crew of two will almost certainly be here as well.

2. Engineering: Arranged along the outside surface of one of the asteroid's walls, the engineering area is heavily shielded against impact. Random asteroid strikes should not cause any problems here. The walls are covered with cerametal, and the instruments are weighted and armored so that an occasional impact will not disable them.

Unfortunately for the clicks, this also means that hasty repairs to the facility are virtually impossible. Built to take damage and continue running, if any part of engineering is disabled, repairs have to be done either from the ground up (essentially rebuilding most of it from scratch) or the place must be abandoned. Deliberate sabotage (the kind heroes might like to perform!) can be done with a -2 bonus to the appropriate skill checks, while repairing such sabotage can be done only at a +5 penalty.

There are always at least two click technicians on duty here unless an emergency calls them away.

2a. Reactor: Housed in central engineering, the reactor powers both the thrusters for the base and the laboratory facility itself. It is quite powerful—actually overly so—and appears to have been taken from a large ship or base of some kind.

2b. Thrusters: Like the reactor, these maneuvering thrusters seem to have been scavenged from a large vessel of some kind. Analyzing the reactor and the thrusters could allow

a clever hero to learn an interesting fact about the clicks. It seems the clicks have manufactured a ship in such a way that it can be disassembled and built into the components now arranged around the asteroid field. This "component vessel" is the clicks' new secret weapon. They can build it anywhere, fly it to their destination, and then easily disassemble it, using it to build labs, weapons, space stations, or whatever they need. The vessel solves the problem of sneaking an asteroid gun and its companion components into a system—the elements all arrive in one ready-to-reassemble package.

The thrusters have one other interesting feature. Hooked directly into the reactor, they have to be carefully monitored to avoid overburn or flare-out. Either result could be catastrophic for the base. A System Operation—*engineering* skill check with a -2 bonus reveals this is intentional. Apparently, the clicks built the thruster and reactor package so that they could easily set the entire base to explode if they had to abandon the facility.

3. Construction: This large, open area is used to repair or manufacture parts of the weapon platforms. At least two click technicians remain in this area at all times. If major repairs are underway, more technicians and engineers may be present. One or two click warriors may also be on hand.

Close examination of the tools and support materials found in this facility by a trained engineer, technician, or xenobiologist may reveal something interesting about the technology the clicks are using. If a hero succeeds at a Technical Science—*technical knowledge* skill check (made at a +3 penalty unless a successful Life Science—*xenology* check is also made) in this area, he discovers the clicks' secret.

While most of the tools are obviously made for click manipulation (making best use of their six limbs and body construction), someone has modified the most advanced technology for their use. There is no evidence pointing at any particular species known to the heroes, but higher degrees of success (beyond Ordinary) could reveal that the creatures may have had two manipulator limbs and hands similar to humans. Beyond that, the modifications are so extensive that nothing else can be gleaned.

Hacking into the computers (complex Computer Science—*hacking* skill check with a +4 step penalty—8 successes required) could provide the heroes with some details about the lab facility's construction and even the techniques the clicks used to build the asteroid bases—but not one concrete bit of knowledge exists regarding the design of the asteroid gun. This is another positive byproduct of the clicks' methods: The gun was actually built somewhere else entirely; even if the entire lab computer could be decrypted and analyzed, it doesn't house nearly enough information on the weapon to do the clicks any real harm.

3a. External Hatchway: The entire construction area can be opened to space, or smaller hatches can be opened one at a time. The hatchway and construction areas are large enough to function as small dry-docks for a click ship or—as was intended—the three sections of the weapon. During a mainte-

nance activity phase (see the Klick Activities in System Star K1 sidebar) there is a 1 in 10 chance that one of the sections is actually inside a lab construction area.

4. Living Quarters: These simple burrows off the lab's main corridors seem to confirm the "insectoid" nature of the clicks—but appearances can be deceiving. While the rock walls and floors are rough-hewn and apparently primitive, each has been equipped with a safety hatch and private heater. When off duty, most of the clicks spend their time in these small quarters. Occasionally, two clicks simultaneously occupy quarters.

Personal effects are kept to a minimum. Warriors may have spare blacklaser weapons or ammo clips, or even a few trophies (preserved humanoid body parts appear to be a favorite), but nothing more. The technicians and engineers may have a few small, strange tools and bits of machinery lying around, but nothing more unusual than the human equivalent.

5. Storage: This medium-size room contains all the clicks need to operate in this system, including spare parts for the ships, the lab facilities' internal systems, and foodstuffs. The clicks store what armament they do not carry here as well—a dozen blacklaser pistols and six blacklaser rifles, as well as extra clips for each. It would not be unusual to find a click warrior, an engineer, or even a technician here at any given time.

6. Control Center: The hub of the click operation in this system, the control center is truly the center of the clicks' lab bases. The communications between the labs and the observatories are all routed through the control centers of each lab. The controls for the asteroid gun can be found here as well. Each lab's control center is identical and deliberately redundant. That is, if all but one of the control centers in the system were destroyed or cut off from the network, the sole remaining center could run the entire operation. Of course, one single lab facility could not supply or service the weapon platforms and the observatories alone, but that is a separate problem.

In the control center's computers—and nowhere else—the clicks store detailed information on their "component ship" project. Hacking into the computer and bypassing its encryption is extremely difficult without the right passcodes, however. A complex skill check using Computer Science—*hacking* (with a +4 penalty) that yields six successes is the only way to do it. Moreover, on three Failures or one Critical Failure, the entire system purges and the thrusters and reactor set to explode. (See "Engineering," above.) Only an override input directly into the construction computer or sent from one of the other labs can stop this ten-minute countdown.

Because of the sensitive nature of the control center, the clicks try to keep at least one technician, one engineer, and one warrior here at all times. Unfortunately for them, this is not always a priority. Under certain circumstances, the clicks do not always adhere to this policy as strictly as their superiors might like. They have been in this system for quite a while, however, so some laxity is understandable. However, at least

CLICK CHARACTERISTICS

25

INFESTATION

Characteristic	Warrior	Technician	Administrator
STR	11 (d4+8)	9 (d4+6)	9 (d4+6)
DEX	11 (d4+8)	11 (d4+8)	9 (d4+6)
CON	10 (d4+7)	9 (d4+6)	9 (d4+6)
INT	9 (d4+6)	11 (d4+8)	10 (d4+7)
WIL	8 (d4+5)	10 (d4+7)	11 (d4+8)
PER	6 (d4+3)	6 (d4+3)	9 (d4+6)
Durability	20/10/5/5	18/9/5/5	18/9/5/5
Sprint/Run/Walk	26/16/6	24/16/6	22/14/4
Action Check	13+/12/6/3	13+/12/6/3	12+/11/5/2
# Actions	2	2	2
Reaction Score	Ordinary/2	Ordinary/2	Ordinary/2
Last Resorts	0	0	1
Attacks			
Pincers (22)	14/7/3	11/5/2	11/5/2
Damage	d6w/d6+2w/d8+2w	d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w	d4w/d4+2w/d6+2w
Blacklaser Weapon	12/6/3	12/6/3	10/5/2
Defenses			
Resistance Modifiers	+1 vs. melee attacks	+1 vs. ranged attacks	+1 (WIL) vs. encounter
	+1 vs. ranged attacks	+1 (INT) vs. encounter	
Armor (LI/HL/En)	d6+1/d6+1/d6+2	d4+1/d4+1/d4+2	d4+1/d4+1/d4+2
Skills			
	Athletics [11]	Athletics [9]	Athletics [9]
	climb [16]	climb [12]	climb [12]
	jump [12]	jump [10]	jump [10]
	Unarmed Attack [11]	Unarmed Attack [9]	Unarmed Attack [9]
	brawl [14]	brawl [11]	brawl [11]
	Modern Rngd Wpns [11]	Modern Rngd Wpns [11]	Modern Rngd Wpns [9]
	SMG or rifle [12]	pistol or SMG [12]	pistol or SMG [10]
	Stamina [10]	Stamina [9]	Stamina [9]
	endurance [14]	endurance [11]	endurance [10]
	Awareness [8]	Awareness [10]	Awareness [11]
	perception [11]	perception [12]	perception [13]
	Movement [10]	Knowledge [11]	Knowledge [10]
		computer op [14]	computer op [12]
	Stealth [11]	Vehicle Operation [11]	Administration [11]
	hide [14]	space [14]	bureaucracy [12]
	sneak [13]		management [14]

one armed klick is on duty in the control center, regardless of any other activity or emergency. This last klick is always a technician/pilot.

The Weapon Platforms: There may be any number of observatories or labs scattered throughout the asteroid field, but there are only three weapon platforms, and they are all located near the center of the field. Equipped with powerful reactor engines of their own, the weapon platforms are the only one of the three types of klick bases not actually made out of asteroids. The klicks disguised the platforms as asteroids, but they knew the constant motion of the weapon platforms—necessary to protect them from random collisions with asteroids and to keep them relatively close so that they can be utilized—could be singled out by their energy signatures.

Anyone who knew even remotely where to look could spot the three weapon platforms in a few moments of scanning—which is why a few of the observatories look outward. Outsiders approaching the weapon platforms could be intercepted by the scouts—or at least delayed long enough for the klicks to destroy their super-weapon by remote control if necessary. As much as they have invested in it, they would not want this technology falling into the soft hands of their humanoid enemies.

The reasons behind this thinking should be obvious, even if no heroes get close enough to spot the weapon platforms themselves. The small crews manning the platforms use their thrusters to keep them in a triangle formation at all times. Indeed, the platforms are shaped something like the corners of a jagged equilateral triangle.

But performing this synchronized maneuver requires all the crews' attention and some luck—asteroids constantly threaten to destroy or damage the platforms, and even the strong hulls and powerful shields cannot protect a platform from a series of direct strikes. As a result, the asteroid gun—which needs to be in a precise triangle shape to fire—cannot be utilized easily or at a moment's notice. The crew must make a complex skill action using their impressive Vehicle Operation—*space vehicles* skill of 20/10/5 to succeed at 9 separate checks to align the structure. Each crew may make one check a round, and Good or Amazing results speed the process. Three Failures or one Critical Failure, however, means that the whole operation must begin again. Perhaps a large asteroid threatened to crush one of the "corners" of the triangle and the pilot had to back up or reposition.

Once the weapon is in position, it can fire at either K1 or K3, or any large, immobile or predictably mobile target in the system. Using impressive (and apparently PL8) tractor beam technology and a massive particle accelerator (definitely PL8 or above), the weapon grabs an asteroid and fires it at incredible speeds. Damage depends on the size of the asteroid, but even the smallest rock does more damage to a ship than the most impressive PL7 or even PL8 conventional weaponry. (The Gamemaster may want to assign his or her own damage ratings, but the weapon should do no less than d8+3w/d6+1m/d8+4m on any hit.)

Range is not a serious factor. Unless a ship is right on top of

the weapon when it is fired, such as within a starship range of 2, a vessel with even passive sensors and minimal thrust can get out of the way of a hurtling asteroid without difficulty. Anything but a critical failure on a Vehicle Operation—*space vehicles* skill check should do it.

A vessel the size of a typical spaceship should not have any trouble avoiding the attack at longer ranges. The asteroid gun was made to attack planets or space stations, not ships. Even huge capital ships provide a comparatively small target for the asteroid gun, but the klicks are working on that.

During the "Maintenance" phase of the klick activity cycle (see the klick Activities in System Star K1 Table), it is possible that some of the weapon platforms aren't anywhere near the central formation point. In this case, the missing platform(s) has been hauled/maneuvered to one of the nearby labs for an extensive overhaul. It's also possible that during this phase, one or more klick scout ships may be near the formation point and klick engineers or technicians are performing EVA to work on the platforms.

THE BIG ONE—K3

The largest satellite orbiting the star in this system is known only as K3. It is a large, super-terran Class 2 world (G3/R3/A1/P4/H1) with no moons and no oceans. At only 4.3 AU from the star, K3 might seem as if it should be more hospitable than it actually is. Still, even with its 1.3 g gravity and dense 8.2 atm pressure, the inert atmosphere is survivable with a vacuum or breather mask, and the radiation level is well within humanoid tolerances.

The planet's surface is rough and barren. Mountains of rock and ice break up vast plains of frigid ground. Only a little snow lies on this world; the atmosphere has clouds, but there is almost no precipitation at all. The only thing that falls from the sky is rock—asteroids from the nearby belt and the occasional blazing comet.

Over the last several thousand years, these strikes have added some features to K3's barren landscape, but not much. A few craters large enough to park a capital ship inside have formed, and the slight axial tilt of the planet insures that, occasionally, these areas have been known to approach 0° Celsius every dozen years or so.

The klicks in the system have virtually ignored K3 since their earliest asteroid tests. As a result, they have missed out on a few interesting observations.

The Great Caverns

Anyone performing a competent survey of K3, finds that, while the planet appears extremely stable (considering all the asteroid bombardment), it is geologically active. A very hot core exists in the planet's center, and occasional tectonic shifts and internal eruptions have formed large caverns and networks of tunnels. In millennia past, K3 was actually a temperate world but has only entered an extreme ice age during the last million years or so.

The largest crater on the planet's surface—surrounded by a huge series of mountains—opens up into a gigantic tunnel

SYSTEM SURVEY LADDER: STAR K1

The following complex skill ladder can be used for a stellar survey of the system surrounding Star K1 by heroes using skills described in the chapter called "Star Surveys 101." As always, three failures results in complete failure, and the heroes must start over using some other means. As mentioned in the description of "The Asteroid Belt-K2," heroes only learn information about the clicks by investigating the belt itself (or some other place where click activity may be occurring).

No. of Successes	Information
1	There is a single star
2	The star is Class K (Orange)
3	There are two planets, an asteroid belt, and a comet belt
4	One of the planet's types (determine randomly) is revealed
5	The other planet's type is revealed
6	The asteroid belt is extremely dense

If the planet is K1, the number of moons is also revealed.

complex. Other craters lead down into the planet's crust as well, but even an orbital survey of this 10-kilometer-wide orifice reveals this fact (on a successful System Operation—sensors skill check).

Some of these tunnels are large enough to lose a ship in—at least a small ship. There, heroes would find that the atmosphere slowly creeps toward A2. The temperature becomes warmer beneath the surface as well; after a descent of only about a kilometer, the temperate evens out to just above freezing—practically balmy, by space standards. The pressure and the gravity are uncomfortable for most humanoids, but not dangerous.

There are two features of the Great Caverns of K3 worth mentioning beyond this discovery. First, the tunnels leading down toward the planet's core are occasionally lined with gold, silver, platinum, gemstone, and uranium deposits. A miner can find rhodium, copper, and iron as well. A small-scale mining operation could spend several months excavating the passages themselves without needing to construct shafts of its own.

The second discovery, however, dwarfs the other. Deep within the Great Caverns, down where the temperature begins to rise above freezing, there are signs of life. These signs are ancient at first. Fossilized bacteria and simple lifeforms are easily found and identified as hydrocarbon-based. Hydrogen breathers must have had a harder time in the cooling environment of this planet—which might partially explain the lack of recent life signs. More mysterious breakthroughs lie farther down in the tunnels, however.

If the scouts persevere in exploring K3, perhaps lured by ever greater discoveries of larger and more complex fossils, they eventually find signs of higher lifeforms. Insectoid and invertebrate fossils are next, ranging in size from tiny bugs and worms to huge, human-size and larger creatures.

The Gamemaster can continue this exploration as long as he or she wants. The dominant lifeforms of K3 appear to have been insects disturbingly similar in body structure to the clicks, except they had eight legs instead of six and shared more internal features with Earth insects than arachnids. Evidence of primitive tools abound, and the Gamemaster may want to introduce clues regarding their past civilization.

The invertebrates, however, appear to have been of animal intelligence. Like giant slugs and huge earthworms, they may have been the prey of the insect species, or perhaps they served as some sort of domesticated animal.

It does appear that both the insectoid and the invertebrate creatures evolved specifically to live underground. No evidence of their existence can be found on K3's surface, and it doesn't look like they evolved far enough to evacuate during the gradual cooling of their planet. But it is possible that they may have survived by burrowing ever deeper into the core of the planet.

For more information on the insect species of the Great Caverns, read the adventure material at the end of this section.

THE COMET BELT—K4

Orbiting the star at no more than 5.0 AU, there is nothing particularly unusual about the comet belt in this system. It is, perhaps, a little more dense than most belts of its kind, and perhaps this inspires more "rogue" comets—comets that streak toward the interior of the system and burn up or become asteroids and meteorites as they near a planet's atmosphere.

SURVEYING THE SYSTEM

This compact, single-star system might not inspire explorers to great feats of exploration, but it holds a lot of interesting surprises. Starring into the system probably occurs well outside the comet belt. Heroes may actually be amazed at how far away from the system's interior they come out of in drivespace. Of course, if they detect the clicks in the asteroid belt, they may be extremely happy that this is the case.

AN UNSETTLING DISCOVERY: AN OUTBOUND ADVENTURE

This adventure hook deals primarily with the clicks and their experimental weapon. Its events are triggered when the heroes begin to survey K1, K3, or the asteroid belt and find evidence of something unusual happening in the system. Either that, or the heroes begin their survey and the clicks find them!

ARRIVAL

When the heroes arrive in the system, the Gamemaster must determine what activity the clicks are currently engaged in. The click Activities in System Star K1 Table can be used at this point, or the Gamemaster can simply decide what phase the clicks' operation is currently in.

With a little luck, the heroes aren't noticed immediately, and they get an opportunity to poke around the system. Once they begin surveying the asteroid field or the nearby planets, they should be allowed a chance to discover the clicks (or, at least, evidence that someone is doing something). Of course, this allows the clicks another chance to find them.

UNWELCOME INTRUDERS

If the clicks do spot the heroes, they attempt to lie low at first. Whatever phase of activity they are in becomes "None" as the clicks shut down their experiments and repairs and try to go unobserved. This lasts for at least a few hours—perhaps even days—depending on where the clicks were in their experiment. If they had just fired their asteroid gun or were actually in the "None" phase, then they can be patient. If they were just preparing to fire, however, they won't wait very long.

If the heroes begin poking around the asteroid field, or if they show signs of spending significant time in the system (by entering a planet's atmosphere or conducting a thorough survey of the system in general), the clicks will quickly lose patience. They would rather strike from a position of surprise and risk alerting the humans to their presence than just sit there and wait for a fleet to show up.

The clicks' strategies are straightforward:

- If the heroes look as though they are staying inside the system for a while, the clicks launch two attack craft and try to sneak them out of the asteroid field. Then, they simulate starrise on the edge of the system (if they haven't been detected yet) and attack. If at all possible, the clicks want to draw their enemies' attention away from the asteroid field and make them think that both the clicks and the heroes stumbled upon Star K1 at approximately the same time.
- If the heroes are too close to the asteroid field for this trick to work, however, the attack craft simply appear out of nowhere (from the heroes' perspective) and attack. This gives the heroes a really good chance of noticing more than just the attack ships in the asteroid field, however, and the clicks will prepare to evacuate their facilities and destroy their weapon system if necessary.
- If the heroes' ship enters the atmosphere of either K1 or K3, the clicks wait until their observatories detect the ship landing. Then, they dispatch an attack craft full of warriors to engage the humans on the ground. In this case, the humans have the lesser chance to discover where the clicks are coming from, and the clicks can use their superior hand-to-hand abilities to destroy the weak intruders. Of course, this is all from the clicks' perspective!

UNEXPECTED INCUMBENTS

If the heroes spot activity in the asteroid field or around the two planets of the system without being spotted themselves, then they have the upper hand. The description of "The Asteroid Belt-K2" outlines the information the heroes might pick up by conducting sensor sweeps. How they react to the information is up to them. If they call attention to themselves, the clicks react predictably: They send out their attack craft first and ready themselves to abandon their experiment second.

The heroes can make it more difficult for the clicks to spot them while the heroes observe the activity around K1, K2, and K3. They can do this by using any sort of jamming or cloaking technology they have—as well as their own cleverness. The heroes might even be able to get inside the asteroid field without being detected, and could conceivably penetrate one of the labs. In this case, use the detailed description of the click labs provided earlier for this part of the adventure.

WHAT TO DO NEXT

Eventually, both the clicks and the heroes will become aware of each other. Depending on how this happens (and who survives initial contact), the following could happen:

- The heroes may choose to flee the system—simply alerting nearby Verge systems that clicks are in the area is worthwhile—but by the time anyone gets back, the clicks and all evidence of their presence will have been virtually destroyed. Finding out what they were doing in the asteroid field will be almost impossible.
- Fighting the clicks is a possibility, especially if the heroes noticed the clicks first. Depending on how much information they have and what they saw, the heroes could do anything from infiltrating the click lab, destroying the weapon platforms, or luring scout or attack ships toward a planet and destroying the clicks that way. The more knowledge the heroes can gather on what the clicks have been doing in the Star K1 system the better for them. Various Stellar nations and the Concord itself would pay dearly for confirmation of what the clicks are up to next. Moreover, discovering how the clicks have managed to build an asteroid gun that can be moved into a system and set up fairly easily is certainly be information that would be well rewarded.
- Other options may present themselves. Hiding from the clicks after both sides have detected each other would be difficult and pointless—unless the heroes somehow convince the clicks that they have left the system or that they pose no threat to the clicks' mission. As long as the heroes appear to be alive and in the system, the clicks will try to hunt them down and destroy them. If the heroes are forced to land on one of the planets, the clicks will send forces after them.

This adventure resolves when either the heroes are destroyed or leave the system, or the clicks are destroyed or



(more likely) feel their position has been compromised to such an extent that they must move on.

THE LOST CIVILIZATION: AN OUTBOUND ADVENTURE

Even with all the other action going on in this system, if the Gamemaster wishes to run a "first contact" sort of scenario in the Star K1 system, he or she has the perfect opportunity on K3. Indeed, the Gamemaster may wish to combine this adventure hook with "An Unsettling Discovery." Perhaps the heroes actually arrived in the system before the clicks, and they spend their time exploring the Great Caverns of K3 while the clicks set up their superweapon. The first indication of the clicks' presence the heroes might have could be an asteroid's impact on K3.

Exploring the Great Caverns can be done fairly easily, especially if the heroes like to map large caves and tunnels winding downward through the crust of a frozen planet. They notice all the things outlined in the "Great Caverns" description, and they find clues of more recent habitation where otherwise they would find nothing but fossils.

The Gamemaster should create the insect species living under K3's surface using the guidelines presented in the *Gamemaster Guide*, making them suit his or her campaign as desired. The aliens could be primitive, barbaric, and superstitious, or they could be philosophical, peaceful, and friendly—or a combination of these traits with a few new ones thrown in. The following example is only one possibility.

THE UNDERDWELLERS OF K3

Large, beetlelike creatures that have flexible torsos and mantislike heads and forelimbs, the underdwellers of K3 inhabit a subterranean world that grows progressively colder and darker as the years pass. Though now extinct on the frozen planet's surface, large colonies of this species still survive deep below the surface.

Description: These giant eight-legged insects range from 1 to 3 meters in length. They use their two hind limb pairs solely for movement, but their first two rows of appendages can be used for finer manipulation. The second pair is mounted on something of a ball joint and can be used to assist the third and fourth pairs in moving the insect along the ground. Or, when the underdweller pushes itself upright (using those limbs and a surprisingly flexible torso), it can apply the great strength but limited dexterity of this second pair in other efforts.

The underdweller uses its first pair of limbs, located near the front of its torso, almost exclusively for manipulation. Ranging from .75 to 1.5 meters in length at full extension, these triple-jointed forelimbs resemble the front limbs of a preying mantis. The creature's head is likewise attached to the underdweller's torso by a mantislike neck. Its large, bulbous eyes and projecting mandibles also remind humans of the Earth-bound mantis. The eyes give it 360° vision, but their vision is limited to very close range. They are extremely short-sighted and extremely

sensitive to bright light. The underdweller depends almost entirely on the two long antennae growing out of its large head for sensory input. The creature can hear, smell, taste, and touch through these antennae, and its low, chittering voice and almost imperceptible scent (to humans anyway) can be recognized by others of its kind for up to a kilometer.

Their coloration ranges from light gray to mottled brown, providing excellent camouflage in their underground homes. Whole communities of underdwellers are often the same color, and that shade often corresponds to the hues most common near their home. An underdweller's coloration can change over the course of a few months to a few years if it moves into a radically different environment. Ironically, the creatures themselves are colorblind and do not appreciate the difference. They only know that they feel varying degrees of comfort in different caverns and tunnels.

Encounter: Tough and intelligent, the underdweller of K3 may be encountered away from their community in ones or twos. Occasionally they'll be accompanied by one or more giant tunnelworms, creatures they use for pack animals and food.

Larger groups of underdwellers sometimes search for food in unoccupied tunnels and caverns. Omnivorous, they are hunters, gatherers, and scavengers. They do not prey upon each other (not directly, anyway), but wars between packs are not uncommon. A group of underdwellers that encounters a party of heroes may try to find out if they are edible before determining if they are intelligent. Life underneath K3 is hard, and starvation is the number one cause of underdweller death.

In a fight, underdwellers employ their strong second limbs to grab or crush opponents; their sharp, clawed first limbs to spear or slash at enemies; and their powerful mandibles to administer the coup de grâce. They have no knowledge of missile weapons beyond the occasional thrown rock.

Habitat/Society: Underdwellers live in roaming packs or small, stable tribes. The roaming packs usually consist of no more than two to three dozen males and females that live mostly by hunting and eating or taming tunnelworms. They do occasionally raid the larger tribes and have been known to use their tunnelworms to burrow in and steal food stores belonging to others. For the most part, however, these nomadic underdwellers are simply creatures who have chosen not to live in a single cavern. Occasionally, a pack that loses its leader or tires of its roaming existence joins a tribe that has room to expand its population. These nomads tend to be the best hunters and tunnelworm trainers of all the underdwellers, so they are often welcomed into the stable tribes.

The tribes usually range in size from 50 individuals to as many as 200, though 100 is the usual limit. Over the course of the last few thousand years, the underdwellers' birth rate has plummeted sharply. Maintaining a stable population is not much of a problem for these underground insects. If anything, they appear to be dying off slowly as more and more eggs fail to hatch, and fewer males are born fertile.

UNDERDWELLER ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series II

Environment: Class 2

GRAPH: G3/R2/A1/P4/H0

Biome: Subterranean

Encounter Chance: Possible (if heroes are underground)

Group Size: 1-2 individuals, 11-30 (1d20+10) pack, 100-200 tribe

Organization: Individual, pack, or tribe

Niche: Omnivore

Intelligence: Sentient

Each tribe and pack has a different way of choosing its leader. Most of the packs select the best hunter to lead them. The tribes may also "rule by the strongest," but many elect their chiefs or councils, while a few even have religious hierarchies.

The underdweller religion, however, is an understandably fatalistic one: It preaches that the end of the world will be quick and cold, like the snuffing out of a candle. (The underdwellers view light as a thing of mysterious magic. Using tallow from the tunnelworms, they have discovered how to make candles,

which they use to impart a note of mysticism in their services.) The major instruction to its followers is not to get too attached to life, for it could end at any moment. underdweller religious figures do not make inspiring leaders for tribes.

Recently, however, a new religious fervor has sprung up among some of the tribes. The packs that range nearer the surface report that they have heard great crashes and seen the roofs of some caverns shake and even collapse. Other nomads who live below tell of great fires springing up out of the earth and heating caverns long grown cold. This religion has a desperately optimistic feel about it, and its adherents believe the gods have finally remembered the underdwellers and are trying to reawaken the fire deity who sleeps deep in the core of their planet. If he can be reawakened, the world will grow warm again, and the underdwellers will survive.

FIRST CONTACT

As suggested above, first contact with the underdwellers can occur in a variety of ways. Here are some suggestions:

- The heroes are simply exploring the Great Caverns when they stumble upon a few individuals (members of a nomadic pack). Contact proceeds according to the heroes' wish, with the underdwellers being curious and fearful.
- The heroes come into contact with a hungry pack out looking for food and, at least initially, must fight to keep from being added to the menu. After that, they may make more peaceful contact with a tribe.
- The heroes' exploration brings them to the middle of a war. A pack, caught in the midst of raiding a large tribe, is being pursued by angry tribe members and thus is fleeing farther up the tunnels than usual. The underdwellers who encounter the heroes are extremely agitated and ready for battle.
- Scouts have been sent to investigate the rumblings and cave-ins near the surface. They encounter the heroes and either think they are emissaries of the gods (every hero's dream—but not likely); enemies of the gods (more likely, as they are coming from above, where it's cold and not below, where the heat is); or strangers who are unrelated to what's going on in the underdwellers' world (probably the most likely—after all, whoever heard of gods who have only four limbs?).

Adventures featuring the underdwellers can also include the clicks (as hinted at above). If the heroes are forced to flee into the Great Caverns to avoid the clicks (not an unlikely turn of events), they may be pursued. Clicks will probably not see the similarities between their species and the underdwellers (any more than the t'sa feel a connection with humans) and may simply attack everyone to get at the heroes.

On the other hand, the clicks may already know about the underdwellers and could have some sort of bizarre alliance with them. It is even possible that the clicks have convinced the underdwellers that they are there to bring back the heat of K3's core to the whole planet—but only if the underdwellers serve them. The heroes could be caught between a frozen rock and a very hard place!

UNDERDWELLER GAME DATA

STR 9 (d6+6) **INT** 8 (d6+5)

DEX 10 (d6+7) **WIL** 8 (d6+5)

CON 9 (d6+6) **PER** 6 (d6+4)

Durability: 9/9/5/5 **Action Check:** 11+/10/5/2

Move: sprint 22, run 14, walk 4 **No. of Actions:** 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Claw (x2) 12/6/3 d4w/d4+1w/d4m LI/O

Grab 10/5/2 d6+2s/d8+3s/d6w LI/O

Bite 6/3/1 d6+1w/d4m/d4+1m LI/O

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

0 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

0 resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Camouflage provides +1 vs. ranged attacks if underdweller is not moving

Armor: d6+1 (LI), d4 (HI), d4-1 (En)

Skills

Athletics [9]—climb [12]; **Unarmed** [9]—brawl [12]; **Movement** [9]—trailblazing [11]; **Survival** [9]—survival training [10]; **Awareness** [8]—intuition [10], perception [12]

DARK DEEDS IN DEEP SPACE

Remarkably few habitable planets boast advanced life-forms in the galaxy. Despite the odds of finding such planets, scouts tend to find them more and more frequently as humanity and its allies reach out farther beyond known space. It seems that "life is drawn to life." Such attraction is both a blessing and a curse.

STELLAR OVERVIEW

Named in honor of the captain of the scouts who performed the initial survey of this system, the star Calesque is a bright Class G (yellow) star just reaching maturity. It is not prone to solar flares or irregular radiation output—which should be a relief to most explorers—and its satellites follow regular orbital paths.

The star of this system is orbited closely by three planets. Only one of these—the third—appears comfortable for human life, but the other two have merits of their own.

GAMEMASTER NOTE: PRIOR SURVEY

Unlike various star systems that exploring heroes may visit during their careers, this system has actually been surveyed before—but incompletely. All three planets, as well as its sun, have been named and given a very general classification. For survey purposes, Part 1 and Part 2a of the Survey Report Form have been filled out already. Sections of Part 2b have also been filled out (the Gamemaster should decide to what extent this information is provided). However, surveys of the moons (Part 3) around planet three have not been done. No in-depth details have been reported about any of the planets, and Part 4: Lifeform Analysis has not been performed.

The reason for the partially complete survey is detailed in the adventure at the end of this chapter, "The Rescue of

Calesque." If the Gamemaster wishes to run a full survey (not providing the heroes with any of the information on the forms), he or she can do so, but the adventure must then be modified.

THE PLANETS

For such a small system, Calesque does have a certain amount of potential. Uncluttered and tightly organized, this system seems almost quaint and undisturbed by the universe around it.

All three of these planets are fairly warm (which is not surprising, considering their proximity to the bright star) and high in pressure. Radiation levels are all comparatively low, probably because of their protective, dense atmospheres, and gravity remains within tolerable levels, comparatively speaking.

The planets were named after the remaining members of the first survey group to enter the Calesque system and return with news: d'Sene, Robertson, and Tibalt.

D'SENE

On an extremely tight track around Calesque's innermost orbital path, d'Sene is a huge, super-terran, inferno world

GAMEMASTER NOTE: STELLAR INFORMATION—CALESQUE SYSTEM

Number of Stars: 1

Organization: Solitaire

Stellar Characteristics: Class G (Yellow)

Planets/Satellites: Three planets

TABLE 4: SYSTEM CALESQUE

	d'Sene	Robertson	Tibalt
Primary	Calesque	Calesque	Calesque
Planetary Class	Class 3	Class 3	Class 1
Gravity	G3 (1.9 g)	G1 (0.7 g)	G2(.91 g)
Radiation	R2 (18 rem/wk)	R2 (14 rem/wk)	R1(4 rem/yr)
Atmosphere	A4 (H ₂ CO ₃)	A3(O ₂ , HCN)	A2(N ₂ , O ₂)
Pressure	P4 (9.12 atm)	P2 (0.70 atm)	P3 (1.10 atm)
Heat	H5 (518.0° C)	H4 (130.4° C)	H2 (29.8° C)
Orbital Distance	0.15 AU	0.35 AU	0.70 AU
Diameter	18,100 km	11,340 km	11,200 km
Year	22.40 days	79.70 days	225.20 days
Day	77.86 hours	13.02 hours	44.29 hours
Axial Tilt	3.4°	-64.8°	3.5°
Density	0.94	0.75	1.03
No. of Satellites	0	1	1

with little chance of attracting visitors. This Class 3 (G3/R2/A4/P4/H5) blazing planet with no moons is unlikely to be settled or used as a forward mining base by even the most aggressive industrialist.

D'Sene's surface is covered in molten, steaming rock with lakes of liquid iron and nickel running freely. Add to this a corrosive carbonic atmosphere and an exceedingly high pressure, and d'Sene has little to recommend it to visiting scouts. Its cloudy nature further makes it unlikely a full planetary survey will be completed any time soon.

ROBERTSON

Only marginally more welcoming than its innermost neighbor, Robertson is a Class 3 (G1/R2/A3/P2/H4) torrid, terran planet. Not quite a fireball, its other characteristics are likewise not unconquerable. Its oxygen-hydrogen-cyanide atmosphere is toxic, as are its reddish-blue oceans, but the rest of its features do not preclude exploration.

Robertson's land masses are plentiful (more than two dozen continental-class islands), but cyanide and a few other less valuable minerals are the only resources to be found. No discernible life inhabits Robertson, and it seems unlikely any will develop. Still, Robertson might be a candidate for a limited colonization/partial reclamation project in the future. The polar regions on this planet approach temperate levels at times during the year, and settlements have certainly begun with less promising material to work with.

The one tiny moon orbiting Robertson is without any appreciable atmosphere or pressure, but its heat is much less. Composed primarily of nickel, iron, and rock, it could be a good property for a mining concern.

TIBALT

The jewel of the Calesque system, subterranean Tibalt is a Class 1 (G2/R1/A2/P3/H2) world with one moon and a head start on colonization—it has several lifeforms already on the planet. The original Calesque survey team spent much of its time here, observing and cataloging the interesting ecosystems and features of Tibalt ... but little of this information has made its way back to the Concord Survey Service. (For information on why, see "The Rescue of Calesque" at the end of this chapter.)

Several oceans, five continents, and many scattered islands cover the surface of Tibalt. The average temperature of the oxygen-rich atmosphere seldom reaches freezing anywhere on the small planet (even near the poles), and Tibalt's slight axial tilt causes minimal seasonal changes. Both the seas and the lands of Tibalt teem with a rich variety of lower and higher lifeforms.

Tibalt's tiny moon rotates around its host planet quickly. Mostly rock and dust and no appreciable atmosphere, Tibalt's single satellite evokes a regular tide schedule.

THE FIVE CONTINENTS

If Tibalt's land masses were given names by the system's original scout group, that information was not passed on to the CSS. The largest of these continents sprawls out just below the world's equator and features the most diverse topography. From mountains to deserts to jungles, the "Big Sprawl" also contains the widest range of lifeforms.

Two of the smallest continents are almost completely covered in deserts. Located near the poles, these land masses are extremely similar in features. High mountains mark the center of both continents, seeming almost to stretch the small planet as if trying for some sort of growth spurt. Depending on the season, the mountain peaks of "North Polar" and "South Polar" do occasionally reach freezing temperatures—meaning snow and ice occasionally cap the mountains. Rocky deserts spread out from the bases of both mountain ranges, making the polar continents habitable for only a minority of Tibalt's lifeforms.

The two medium-sized continents of Tibalt's northern hemisphere lie quite close to each other, suggesting they may have been one land mass at some point in the past. The "Western Reaches" and the "Eastern Shelf" share many similar features, but as they move farther apart they are developing individual characteristics. With Tibalt prone to climatic and geological disturbances, continental shifts seem a likely feature of the planet's past—and a predictable occurrence in its future.

WEATHER CHANGES AND GEOLOGIC RUMBLINGS

With its quick revolution around the sun and its minimal axial tilt, Tibalt experiences few distinct seasons. Its summer is only a few tens of degrees warmer than its winter, and the transitional seasons of spring and fall are virtually meaningless.

Most of Tibalt's atmosphere remains humid throughout its entire year. The larger deserts are dry (especially in North and South Polar), but the jungles and plains of Big Sprawl, Western Reaches, and Eastern Shelf experience high humidity, dense fog, rainstorms, and even monsoons. In fact, fog or thick clouds cover more than 60% of the planet's surface nearly 80% of the time. Fortunately, shifts in weather occur quickly. Rains and more devastating storms seldom settle over any area of Tibalt's continents for more than several hours or a few days at a time.

Of the five continents, the Big Sprawl has perhaps the most climatically varied weather patterns. The central mountain range and the two pocket deserts play havoc with the prevailing winds. Heavy rain sweeps over the jungles and rain forests in the north and east only to hit the high central and western mountains and burn off at the edge of the deserts.

In the northern hemisphere, the Western Reaches continent appears to offer some protection to the Eastern Shelf. Although wracked with occasional earthquakes, the jungles and plains of the Shelf have the least drastic weather on Tibalt.



FAUNA AND FLORA

As mentioned previously, Tibalt supports several complex ecosystems and a few higher lifeforms. The oceans of Tibalt and all five continents support life, and the planet looks well suited to continue fostering the evolutionary process. Among the most interesting of the higher lifeforms are three that bear watching—though none has been reported to the Concord Survey Service as yet. Of these higher lifeforms, two live on the three central continents and one populates the vast, green-blue seas of Tibalt.

Tibapes

Humanoid in appearance and sharing some developmental characteristics with humankind and its allies, the “tibapes” (a nickname for reference only as they have not been officially classified) will grab the attention of any scout expedition. One of the planet’s higher lifeforms, they appear to be just developing tool use—a sure sign of intelligence. The tibapes live on the Western Reaches, Eastern Shelf, and Big Sprawl continents in small tribal populations.

Description: This interesting lifeform is short (no more than 1.5 meters in height) and squat with two hind limbs used primarily for movement and two front limbs featuring three digits as manipulators. tibapes have brownish skin and short, bristly greenish fur that covers most of the body. With two small, forward-set eyes and short snouts set above their wide, flat-toothed mouths, tibapes resemble Earth primates quite closely. The resemblance ends at the ears, however, for tibape ears are large, sharply pointed, and independently mobile (like an Earth horse’s). They walk upright but often run with a hunched posture that suggests their ancestors may have used their forelimbs like an Earth monkey or gorilla.

Following the evolutionary logic inherent in Earth chimpanzees and gorillas, the tibapes’ short, brushy tails ought to be verging on the vestigial. However, their tails are in constant use, always in motion, twitching back and forth even when the tibapes stand still. Only traumatic unconsciousness or death stops their tails from twitching.

Tibapes have two forward fangs on the sides of their

TIBAPE ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Jungle

Encounter Chance: Possible

Group Size: 1–6 rogues (1d6), 10–40 family (10d4), 60–300 tribe (1d6x40)

Organization: Rogue (rare), family (common), tribe (rare)

Niche: Omnivore (primarily herbivore)

Intelligence: Sentient (low)

TIBAPE GAME DATA

STR 11 (d6+8) INT 6 (d4+4)

DEX 11 (d6+8) WIL 8 (d4+6)

CON 12 (d4+10) PER 6 (d4+4)

Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action Check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 40, run 24, walk 8 No. of Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Pummel 10/5/2 d4s/d4+2s/d4w LI/0

Bite 8/4/2 d4+1s/d4w/d4+2w LI/0

Defenses

+1 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks

Armor: d4 (LI), d4-2 (HI), d4-3 (En)

Regeneration: tibapes have the ability to regenerate lost limbs. The process occurs slowly, but a tibape can regrow a severed arm or leg in about six months.

Skills

Athletics [11]-climb [16], jump [12], throw [12], Unarmed [11]-brawl [12], Movement [12]-trailblazing [13], Survival [12]-survival training/jungle [13], Awareness [8]-intuition [9], -perception [11]

mouths that give their wide faces a ferocious appearance. They seldom use these tusks for aggressive or carnivorous purposes, however. Indeed, the tibape's primary foodstuffs are fruits and grublike insects. In the past, when the tibapes did not walk upright, they may have used these fangs to root for grubs. Now, the primates use their fierce-looking tusks to break open the hard shells of Tibalt's rockfruit (see "Tibalt's Flora" below).

Having two sexes and bearing live young further classifies tibapes as mammalian. They may or may not mate for life, depending on circumstance (see "Habitat/Society" below). The entire family unit takes care of offspring until they reach maturity—at which point these offspring become full-fledged members of the family unit themselves.

The tibapes' tool use remains limited. Being primarily vegetarians with their own means of opening their favorite foods, tibapes have had little need for tool development skills. Their competition for dominance in the planet's food chain has become an issue, however, and some tibapes have begun using rocks as weapons. A few tribes have even developed their own variant of the sling. Stone knives and axes may be a logical next step, but the tibapes have not reached that level yet. With only two fingers and an opposable thumb, they may be somewhat limited.

Tibapes have no real language skills, though they do seem able to express basic concepts and emotions to each other easily enough. Simple gestures and grunts from a

tibape may have some meaning—warning, curiosity, or fear in most cases. The shrieks of an injured or a frightened tibape are unmistakable in their meaning.

It is possible that, despite their lack of complex language skills, tibapes do have some sort of mythology. As a species they are learning to share experiences with each other, passing on stories of mysterious events that they try to attribute to supernatural causes that they can placate by superstition.

Encounter: Skittish and not terribly aggressive, tibapes tend to flee encounters with the unknown rather than show curiosity or belligerence. Still in their infancy as far as social development goes, they are unlikely to be found in more than large family groups. With food plentiful on all the continents they inhabit, tibapes would rather find new foraging grounds than fight over territory with other family units or with newcomers. Still, even tibapes will defend themselves if pressed, especially against non-tibapes. Their encounters with the dangerous kanites (see below) have taught them that flight may not always be an option.

Those that have begun to use tools are much less likely to flee encounters, instead expressing an atypical curiosity in most cases. These tibapes are experimenters and excellent imitators. If they see a simple tool in use, they can probably figure out how to use it themselves. As mimics, they can experiment or "play" with humanoid tools they have seen others use and, if trained, they can actually operate many simple apparatus. Teaching a tibape to use a shovel, axe, or other muscle-powered tool would not be extraordinarily difficult. This mental flexibility makes first contact with tibapes a rewarding event for scouts—though a potentially dangerous one for the tibapes.

Habitat/Society: Tibapes live in primarily small family units. They do not breed quickly but are very hardy, with some limited regenerative abilities. They live an average of 25-30 years. A tibape family unit mingles with other families at regular intervals, mating, sharing experiences, and on rare occasions banding together for strength. A tibape family unit of 30 or 40 individuals is not unusual, though tribes of more than 200 tibapes would be.

The small family units tend to exhaust the food supply of a region within a Tibalt year and then move on. tibapes do not appear to be inordinately territorial but, unless interfamilial matings are occurring, they avoid living less than 2 or 3 kilometers from other family groups. When two or more family groups do live in close proximity, they become a tibape tribe.

This banding together is usually caused by migratory circumstances. Tibapes are arboreal creatures, living mostly in large trees (though some have started to live on the ground). They do not like the open plains very much—and they have a strong fear of the ocean. If a tibape family group finds itself up against a barrier of some kind with another family group migrated on its heels, the two groups may merge temporarily or permanently. Seldom do tibape family groups engage in



territorial feuds. Indeed, individual tibapes hardly ever fight one another, even over mates.

Tibape mating is another reason for tribes forming. When near enough to each other to mate outside their family units, tibapes usually temporarily band together. When these matings produce offspring, this may either cause the units to band together to create a tribe or cause a new family unit to form (splintering off from the initial pair of family units).

Other splinter groups of tibapes form as well, the rogue members of which roam Tibalt's surface. Usually, these groups were caused when two or more family units united into one tribe and some of the individuals didn't fit in with the larger society. Going off in pairs or small groups, these are older tibapes who have little or no chance to form permanent, separate family units. Still, they may survive for many years, occasionally interacting with other family units.

Free to wander without caring for either ancient members of a family or offspring, these rogues sometimes cover four or five times the terrain a tibape family unit could cover in the same amount of time, and nearly 10 or 15 times as much territory as a larger tribe. Still social in nature, these rogues may live on the fringe of other tibape social groups, gaining some protection from predators and occasionally scavenging from the family unit or tribe.

If violence between tibapes does occur, it is between these

splinter groups and the more stable family units. This dissension may be the reason why fear and attendant superstitions are developing in families and tribes. Indeed, the more settled tibapes have begun to ascribe spiritual powers to the rogues, equating unexplained attacks or disturbances with ever-growing tales of the supernatural. These rogues may be responsible, at least in part, for the developing "experience sharing" of the tibape primates—the larger family units and tribes have begun to pass on tales of mystery among each other.

Kanites

The second most notable higher lifeform on Tibalt may be overlooked as a simple predator, but the kanites show much more potential than that. Doglike creatures that have proved extremely adaptable, kanites live on all of Tibalt's continents as well as some of its larger islands. Extremely territorial carnivores, the kanites could become the dominant species on Tibalt before too long.

Description: These six-legged canines are the closest creature Tibalt has to a large reptile. Though warm-blooded and definitely mammalian in nature, they have almost no body hair, and their tough, dark, leathery skin seems scaly to the distant observer—and from a distance is probably the

KANITE ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series I**Environment:** Class 1**GRAPH:** G2/R1/A2/P3/H2**Biome:** Desert, plains**Encounter Chance:** Possible**Group Size:** 4–9 hunting party (1d6+3), 4–12 raiding party (1d8+4), 10–60 pack (10d6), occasional individuals**Organization:** Pack**Niche:** Carnivore**Intelligence:** Sentient (low)

healthiest way to examine a kanite. Unlike the peaceful and skittish tibape primates, kanites are aggressive creatures with the strength to claim and hold territory.

No more than 1 meter in height, kanites range in length from 1 to 2.5 meters. Males grow long and thin and turn almost black-green as they age, while female kanites become thick and tough, with overlapping folds of scaly skin along the back and head. Kanite skin is so tough that even casual contact with it can cause abrasions or cuts, and contact with an older female's neck folds can rip leather. In the deserts of the polar continents, this skin protects the kanites from the burning heat of Calesque's rays, while in the plains of the middle continents, it sheds the endless rain and protects the canines from unpredictable weather changes.

Kanites, like their primate neighbors, have two forward-facing eyes and pointed, mobile ears. Like most canines, kanites also have large snouts and powerful jaws. The jaws differ in that they sport two rows of teeth. The front incisors are sharp and fanglike, made for biting and grasping. Slanted, flatter back teeth are used to hold and chew.

If a kanite is examined closely by a xenobiologist, he may discover that the creature's six paws differ in structure. The kanite's rear limbs are obviously made for running and jumping—much like a typical canine's. However, the front paws are clawed with long "fingers," and it is possible the species may be developing some sort of manipulator skill. Examination of their middle limbs supports this. Slightly longer than necessary, these limbs are developing heavy pads on the undersides, and it might be possible for a kanite to push its torso into an upright position for short periods of time. Currently, this development makes it possible for the kanite to bite or claw larger opponents without losing balance; in the future, it might mean that the kanite could develop a "waist" of sorts and a more upright posture.

Encounter: Incredibly aggressive and fiercely territorial, kanites roam the plains and desert areas of Tibalt. Until about a century ago, they were found only on the two polar continents and Big Sprawl, but then a small number of them were transplanted to the Western Reaches. ("The Rescue of

KANITE GAME DATA

STR 12 (d4+10) INT 5 (d4+3)

DEX 9 (d4+7) WIL 10 (d4+8)

CON 13 (d4+11) PER 4 (d4+2)

Durability: 13/13/7/7 Action Check: 12+/11/5/2

Move: sprint 50, run 26, walk 6 No. of Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Claw (x2) 14/7/3 d4+2s/d6+2s/d4+1w LI/0

Bite 14/7/3 d8s/d4+1w/d6+2w LI/0

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

Armor: d4+2 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4 (EN)

SkillsUnarmed [12]—*brawl* [14], Movement [13]—*race* [17], Stamina [13]—*endurance* [16], *resist pain* [16], Survival [13], Awareness [10]—*intuition* [12], *perception* [14]

+2 step modifier in jungle

Calesque" provides details on this interesting development.) Small packs of kanites now live on both the middle continents as well. As a result, they can be found anywhere on Tibalt.

Kanites prey on the various smaller animals they find on the plains and deserts, and even the fringes of the jungles. They dislike thick vegetation and mountainous regions, for their eyesight is poor and they depend on smell and hearing for hunting. In the jungle, these senses are easily confused. In the mountains, they lose their speed advantage.

Never found alone, kanites are typically encountered in small hunting packs. They are not migratory, preferring instead to defend their territory from all intruders: other kanites, tibapes, or roving scouts. They do not try to warn off invaders with territorial howls or other displays—they simply attack. Six to ten males in a hunting party is not unusual. They will all attack prey at once, using their swift, low running attack style to overwhelm larger prey or capture a multitude of smaller creatures all at once.

Habitat/Society: Kanite packs are made up of anywhere from 10 to 60 individuals (80 percent male and 20 percent female). During breeding season, this number may increase by up to 20 percent as the young are whelped, but pack size levels off quickly. Kanites protect and nurture able young only. Older pack members and sickly offspring are killed and eaten before the beginning of the next breeding cycle. As a result, packs of kanites seldom contain more than one or two older members, and the young mature very quickly or not at all.

Fiercely competitive, kanite packs battle other packs for supremacy at virtually every opportunity. Kanites have

strong territorial instincts and, since packs seldom live less than a dozen kilometers from each other, these creatures seek out each other to engage in pack warfare. It is through this pack warfare that the kanite's intelligence and aggressive nature can be fully revealed.

When a kanite pack grows beyond its optimal size and has a surplus of adult males and ruling females (as opposed to older creatures or immature young that can be put to death with minimal resistance), one or more of the younger females will almost invariably lead either a "raid" or "war" against the pack's nearest neighbor.

A raid consists of one younger female and a dozen or so mature males sneaking into a competing pack's territory and ambushing a hunting pack. Outnumbered, taken by surprise, and without a dominant female of their own (females do not hunt), the ambushed pack is almost always destroyed, routed, or captured.

The victorious kanites lead their victims back to their pack's den and keep the beaten creatures as slaves. The ears of slave kanites are shredded in an almost ritualistic fashion. They lose most of their aggressiveness (at least against other kanites) and serve their masters for the remainder of their usually short lives. On the rare occasion that a slave kanite escapes and returns to its pack, the slave is almost always put to death by its fellows. If not, it is turned into a slave by its former litter-mates.

If the younger female that led the raid survives and returns home victorious, she is admitted to the ruling hierarchy of the pack. If she does not succeed, the young female can expect only death at the teeth of her enemies or her packmates, should she return to the den.

A kanite war is infinitely more bloody than a raid, revealing much about the fierce nature of these beasts. When one kanite pack suffers a disaster of some sort (for example, the majority of its ruling females dying, the loss of a major food source, and so on), it may become desperate. The remaining leader females gather the entire pack together—even any infants or ancient pack members that have not been killed for food—and lead the pack in a massed attack on the nearest rival kanites.

As in the raid, the invaders usually have the advantage in the kanite war. They drive right toward the heart of their enemy's territory, killing anything in their way. Then, they throw themselves at the females of the enemy tribe, hoping to slay them all and, ostensibly, take their place. Desperate to protect their rulers, the defending pack fights back. Battles like this can last a long time, with kanites hunting each other over the plains and deserts of Tibalt—and even into the jungles. Eventually, however, the war ends. More than likely, both packs have been so decimated that mutual annihilation is the only outcome. The sole hope for survival is that one side's females come through unscathed, while the other side's are killed. Wounded individuals are then slain, and remaining members of the two packs merge as one.

Interaction Note: Kanite packs have, on occasion, taken non-kanite slaves. A higher-order creature (such as a tibape) that can be captured by a pack of kanites may be spared death to be brought back as a servant for the pack. It is almost always marked in some way similar to the ear-mutilation kanites do to each other. Seldom living long, it learns to do what its kanite masters desire very quickly. A tibape in the company of kanites is always a slave of those creatures.

Tibolfins

Even in Tibalt's oceans, mammals prove to be the highest level of lifeforms, though many alien piscine, echinoderm, and mollusk species also live beneath Tibalt's waves. Tibalt's version of the dolphin, the "tibolfin" shares only a few characteristics with the Earth creature it is compared to, but there are enough similarities to make a human marine xenobiologist take notice.

Description: Like most of Tibalt's mammals (higher lifeforms or not), the tibolfin's smooth skin has a somewhat greenish color. But, where the kanite and the tibape both darken in color with age to near brown or black, the tibolfin's sheen becomes lighter, a blue-green to match the sea it lives in. From the underside, the tibolfin's epidermis appears almost white.

Males and females look virtually identical and have no external sexual characteristics, except for the period of a few months just after the female gives birth to one or two young. At that point, the mother's secondary sexual characteristics become evident: Four nipples appear, and the female can provide milk for her growing young for almost half a year. tibolfins may mate and bear young a number of times during their life cycles, but those in larger communities seldom do so more than two or three times; deep-water tibolfins breed more regularly because their population suffers more frequent depredations.

Tube-shaped in front, the tibolfin's body tapers along its 2.5- to 4-meter length until its abdomen splits into two long-finned tails. Incredibly strong and flexible, these "twin-prop"

TIBOLFIN ECOLOGICAL DATA

Biochemistry: Series I

Environment: Class 1

GRAPH: G2/R1/A2/P3/H2

Biome: Ocean (coastal or shallow water)

Encounter Chance: Unlikely

Group Size: 11–16 hunting party (1d6+10), 60–100 deep-water community (10d6+50), 300+ coastal community

Organization: Pod, tribe, or community

Niche: Omnivore

Intelligence: Sentient (low)

TIBOLFIN GAME DATA

STR 11 (d6+8) INT 7 (d8+3)
 DEX 13 (d8+9) WIL 9 (d6+6)
 CON 12 (d8+8) PER 6 (d6+3)
 Durability: 12/12/6/6 Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
 Move: swim 50 No. of Actions: 2
 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Bite 20/10/5 d8+2s/d4+2w/d4m LI/O
 Tentacle 20/10/5 d4+1s/d4+3s/d6+3s LI/O
 Spear* 18/9/4 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4+1m
 LI/O

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
 +2 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
 Armor: d4 (LI), d4-1 (HI), d4-3 (En)

Skills

Unarmed [11]-brawl [16], Movement [12]-swim
 [20], Stamina [12]-endurance [14], Awareness
 [9]-intuition [12], perception [12]

*Only one tibolfin in 20 has or knows how to use one of these oversized spears.

fins can lazily guide the tibolfin through the water with graceful agility—or paddle in a staggered fashion to move it even more quickly. A tibolfin near the surface can create a wake that might be easily mistaken for a creature three or four times its size.

The tibolfin has two sets of appendages other than its impressive twin tails. Its steering limbs, located forward and on its sides, are strong, flat fins capable of flexible motion but are only used for manipulating the creature through the water. In a situation where a tibolfin has to brake or reverse suddenly, these steering fins can be rotated almost perpendicular to the creature's body and flapped for additional leverage.

The remaining set of limbs are the tibolfin's tentacles. Set just below the creature's narrow bottle-shaped mouth (which has one row of sharp teeth on the top and flat teeth on the bottom), a tibolfin may have two, four, or six tentacles. The number of tentacles marks a tibolfin's age—they are born with two, they grow a second set upon reaching maturity, and older tibolfins grow a third set about the time they reach middle age. (A tibolfin with an odd number of tentacles probably lost it in battle with one of Tibalt's sea predators.) These tentacles are strong and supple, made entirely from muscle and cartilage. They can grow to lengths of more than 2 meters, but only their "youth" tentacles have a chance of getting that long. Older tentacles seldom grow beyond 1 meter.

Tibolfins use their tentacles for a variety of purposes. Living mostly in shallow waters (though tibolfins can function perfectly well at depths up to 2 kilometers), they sometimes



use these tentacles to hunt for shellfish and mollusks among the many ocean reefs. Sensitive to vibrations as well as touch, these tentacles can probe deep into crevices, hunting for prey like blind snakes.

Most interesting to outside observers, however, may be the fact that tibolfins are tool-users even more advanced than the tibapes dwelling on Tibalt's continents. Using their dexterous forelimbs, tibolfins have begun to fashion spears, knives, digging tools, and even nets that they can use to hunt, to defend with against predators, and to fashion dwellings on the ocean's floor.

Encounter: Tibolfins are mostly found in small groups in the coastal waters of Tibalt's oceans. A large colony of them resides in a great reef between the Western Reaches and the Eastern Shelf continents. Mammals, they must spend at least some of their time actually on the surface of the water breathing, though unlike the dolphins of Earth, they can stay underwater for more than sixteen hours at a time. When spotted near the coasts, tibolfins are almost always hunting shellfish. They lie motionless in the surf, probing the ocean floor with their tentacles and grasping at anything that moves.

Encounters with tibolfins may occur between heroes exploring underwater or even on the ocean's surface. Tibolfins have fairly small mouths (in comparison to the rest of their bodies) and prefer eating food they can swallow whole. However, as tool users (if not particularly voracious carnivores), they have been known to attack larger prey and cut it up for eating later. It is possible a small pod of tibolfins may assault a swimmer as potential prey.

This possibility increases the farther away from shore the tibolfins are encountered. Those that choose to live in the depths of the oceans, out of sight of land, are more barbaric and warlike than their shallow-dwelling cousins. They tend to be darker in coloration and spend more of their time below the surface of the waves, and they are also more likely to employ spears or knives. This predilection arose because their chosen prey are not small shellfish, mollusks, or various piscine species that inhabit Tibalt's oceans, but larger predators. Creatures similar to Earth's sharks, squids, and octopi inhabit Tibalt's oceans, and the deep-dwelling tibolfins feed off of them. A scout that ventures into the depths of Tibalt's oceans is just as likely to be seen as potential prey by these tibolfins as would a passing squid.

Habitat/Society: Tibolfins usually live in large societies numbering 300 individuals or more. They prefer the shallow, coastal areas of the ocean to the depths. Their societies are usually broken up into smaller groups or "pods" that serve the overall community's goals. Certain pods act as the tibolfin's "military" (predators exist even in the ocean's shallows that find tibolfin a pleasant dish), while other pods care for the community's young. Still other pods perform hunting or foraging tasks, and there are even some even "farming" pods located in a few of the largest inland societies. Tibolfins

also seem to have developed some sort of leadership class among them (creatures who do nothing but make decisions for the rest of the community), but that is not immediately apparent to scouts new to the planet.

Most tibolfins are territorial and stay in the same section of the ocean for many, many years—only natural disasters or shifts in the relative ecosystem may cause them to move. The great reef between the two middle continents of Tibalt has been home to tibolfins for more than three centuries. As a result, they have developed some primitive forms of undersea agriculture. Kelp and seaweed farms line the ocean floors around a tibolfin community, and the reef itself provides a home to schools of fish and mollusks the tibolfins raise for food.

Coastal tibolfins carve out caves in these same reefs to use as homes, though they must all return to the surface for air at least once a day. A few tibolfin communities have actually located underwater passages to air-filled caves below Tibalt's islands and continents, and these lairs are particularly prized. Tibolfins value undersea dwellings as defenses against the larger predators of the ocean—and as a place to keep their small assortments of tools and ornaments.

Deep-water tibolfins, however, are migratory creatures and depend on speed and ferocity to defend themselves from predators. Seldom numbering more than 100 individuals, these "barbarian" tibolfins have no agriculture and no permanent homes, though they may occupy abandoned tibolfin dwellings from time to time. As aggressive as they may be toward other species, even deep-water tibolfins seldom attack others of their own species.

Organized into much smaller communities, deep-water tibolfins seldom feel the need to break into smaller pods to perform communal functions. They attack in large numbers, usually going after creatures many times their own size. They are more likely to have dominant individuals in their communities, usually one or two tibolfins of either sex.

Other Fauna

Tibalt's land and oceans team with lower lifeforms, including mammals, fish, insects, and a variety of other creatures. One interesting note is that there are no arachnids native to Tibalt (though "The Rescue of Calesque" describes some "artificial" arachnids). Another intriguing anomaly is that a higher proportion of herbivores live on Tibalt than is normal for a biome this size.

A group of scouts can probably spend years uncovering all the interesting species of Tibalt. There are some dangerous predators, but nothing that seriously rivals the kanites in intelligence and ferocity. Likewise, the tibapes are unquestionably the most highly developed primates.

The creatures of Tibalt's oceans are perhaps even more diverse—with giant sharklike creatures almost on par with Earth's megalodon (though these leviathans seem to be reaching the end of their evolutionary cycle), huge squids, and even

fish the size of whales. But none of these threaten the tibolfin communities or their chance for development as a species.

Tibalt's Flora

The plants of Tibalt's lands and oceans are as diverse as its animals. Dark green grasses and alien vegetation cover the plains and steppes of the three main continents, and rough brush pockets the deserts of the polar continents. The jungles of Tibalt contain a wide variety of plants, from the giant tree-like ferns of the Big Sprawl to the softwoods of the Western Reaches and the huge spiny bushes of the Eastern Shelf.

One interesting plant found on each of Tibalt's three middle continents is the rockfruit tree. This tree has wide green leaves attached in umbrella fashion along a single central trunk (some older trees have two or even three trunks, but only very few). These "umbrella leaves" are almost translucent, allowing sunlight to reach the jungle floor, but they are also tough and pliable. Tibalt's many storms may tear away one or two of the upper leaves from a tree, but they grow back quickly in the humid environment.

The rockfruit tree gets its name from the hard, blocky fruit that matures close to the trunk under its umbrella-shaped leaves. The rockfruit is extremely hard but can be broken into four to ten sections, revealing a soft, sweet, melonlike meat inside. The rockfruit is a primary staple in many Tibalt herbivore and omnivore diets, including that of the tibape primates. Most humanoids (including humans) can gain sustenance from it. Without the tibapes' tusks, however, breaking open a rockfruit can be difficult unless one knows where to strike (right along the creases between the sections)—even an axe or combat knife might not prove sufficient.

Another plant native to the jungles is a spiny bush clearly related to the larger spiny trees of the Eastern Shelf. Only a meter or so in height and about the same in girth, the spiny bush makes up in punch what it lacks in size. Its trunk is surrounded by needle-sharp spines that appear to extend 20 to 40 centimeters away from its "body" but can actually poke out three times that length to impale its prey.

Unlike its larger cousin, the spiny bush is a carnivorous plant. It grows among other, less dangerous, plants in the jungle underbrush, keeping its spines close to its trunk. When it senses motion nearby, it automatically extends its spines outward, increasing its reach threefold in the appropriate direction. This "attack" is involuntary, but an unwary creature caught in the radius may be stuck by the spines. (The spiny bush's attack skill is 14/7/3, but it gains a -4 step modifier if its potential victim is unaware of the attack.) The spines themselves do only limited L1/O damage (d4s/d4+2s/d4w), but if they actually deliver any damage, even stun, they have scratched their target to deliver a potent poison to their target.

This poison is a paralytic, and it works instantaneously. Immediately upon taking damage from the spiny bush, the creature feels the area struck by a spine go numb. This numbness spreads, rendering the area around the attack

GAMEMASTER NOTE: FLORA AND FAUNA DISCOVERIES ON TIBALT

Compared to more than 90 percent of the planets exploratory heroes are likely to visit on their travels outside the frontier, Tibalt has to be one of the friendliest (at least ecology-wise). Its plants and animals are a cornucopia of potential discoveries and breakthroughs for any botanist, xenologist, or life sciences scout. Examining these creatures and plants can take years—an extremely exciting opportunity for any true scout.

However, roleplaying these sorts of discoveries may not be as exciting as combat or other roleplaying experiences. Still, the Gamemaster should make an effort to come up with some interesting alien animals and plants for the scouting heroes to catalog. Most will simply be alien versions of flora and fauna the heroes have seen before—but one or two in every set could have some interesting potential.

The section on Tibalt's flora and fauna serves as a model for Gamemasters interested in creating species appropriate to Tibalt. The three higher life-forms of Tibalt—the tibape, kanite, and tibolfin species—should all prove interesting to scouts and their patrons, and these are the most detailed. For the lower lifeforms and plants, the Gamemaster can use his or her imagination and the less-detailed examples provided in this section to populate Tibalt's surface as much as is desired.

immobile. The bush's toxin is enough to render an entire humanoid leg immobile in the space of one phase. Smaller creatures find their entire body numb almost instantly.

This numbness lasts for a length of time based on the victim's Stamina-endurance check (which he can make immediately upon feeling the numbness set in). On an Amazing success, the numbness passes after only one combat round. On a Good, the numbness lasts d4+1 rounds, while an Ordinary outcome indicates 2d4 rounds is normal. On a Failure, the numbness lasts 15 minutes or more, while on a Critical Failure, the target's numbness can only be taken away by a successful Medical Science-treatment check at a +4 step modifier. The same skill check can be made to remove numbness from a victim faster than the allotted time.

If the paralytic remains within reach of the spiny bush (or any other spiny bushes nearby, a frequent and dangerous predicament since they tend to group together and automatically sense a paralyzed victim), further attacks occur. In addition, the spiny bush starts consuming its victim almost immediately, automatically causing 1d4 stun per round as it drains an "attached" victim's blood and fluids. It takes a long time for a spiny bush to consume a human-sized creature (as

stuns become wounds and wounds become mortals), but if the creature cannot move because of its paralysis (or for some other reason), the end is inevitable.

The spiny bush itself is not particularly tough. It has a durability of 3/3/2/2 and no protective armor. It is not intelligent and attacks on it (melee or ranged) are made at a -3 step modifier if the attacker knows what he is striking at.

Other plants range from the beneficial to the malevolent on Tibalt's surface and in its oceans. The rockfruit tree and the spiny bush are only two such examples.

**GAMEMASTER NOTE:
THE BURNT TRAIL AND THE ALIEN PYRAMID**

These descriptions are heavily keyed toward "The Rescue of Calesque" adventure presented at the end of this chapter. The Gamemaster may use these descriptions even if not running the adventure, but he or she may wish to change a few of the points.

THE PYRAMID AND RUINED STRUCTURES

One anomaly exists on Tibalt that will certainly attract the attention of any explorers who examine the planet in detail. A primitive world by all accounts with three species on the brink of sapience, Tibalt should not have any artificial power emissions—fusion emissions—coming from its surface. Yet a careful sensor sweep over the Western Reaches reveals such an energy signature, just south of the northernmost mountain range in the depths of the jungle. Upon closer inspection of this area, several other anomalies can be found.

Refer to the map entitled "The Burnt Trail" when reading the descriptions below of these anomalies.

1. Scorched Landing Zone (LZ): This wide, brownish area appears from above to have been carved out of the jungle. It is nearly a kilometer in diameter and so strikingly out of place that even a casual fly-by should reveal it to any heroes scouting from above. Further examination of the LZ can reveal the following information (using a variety of skills):

Investigate—search (-1 step modifier): The area was raked with energy fire from above to clear out the trees. On a Good result (or a second success), it appears a small ship landed here and took off several times.

Life Science—botany (+2 step modifier): There are very few plants growing in this area. The soil has been subjected to an extremely effective defoliant. On a Good result (or a second success), the defoliant was applied just over a year ago. On an Amazing result (or a third success), the defoliant was one commonly used in military operations by both StarMech and Rigunmor forces (and perhaps others).

Awareness—intuition (+4 step modifier): There are signs that large creatures have been at the outer perimeter

of the LZ fairly recently, but no signs of anything crossing the boundary inside. On a Good result (or a second success), the creatures appear to have been humanoid. On an Amazing result (or a third success), the creatures appear to come here regularly.

If visiting heroes use the LZ as it was intended and land their ship here, one or two hunting parties of tibapes visit within 2d4 hours. The tibapes are extremely wary (more so than anywhere else on the planet) and are likely to attack or flee at the slightest provocation. The tibapes encountered near the LZ are armed with spears and slings (unusual for the limited primates). If any are captured, they will be panic-stricken and may even go into shock.

2. Ruined Camp: Hardly distinguishable from the rest of the jungle, this camp is very difficult to find. Scouts progressing along the northern, burnt trail (Area 4) may miss it entirely. Still, any hero examining the edge of the lake (Area 3) or the northern edge of the scorched landing zone may discover it (by making an Awareness—perception check at a +3 step modifier).

The following skill checks reveal more information about the ruined camp:

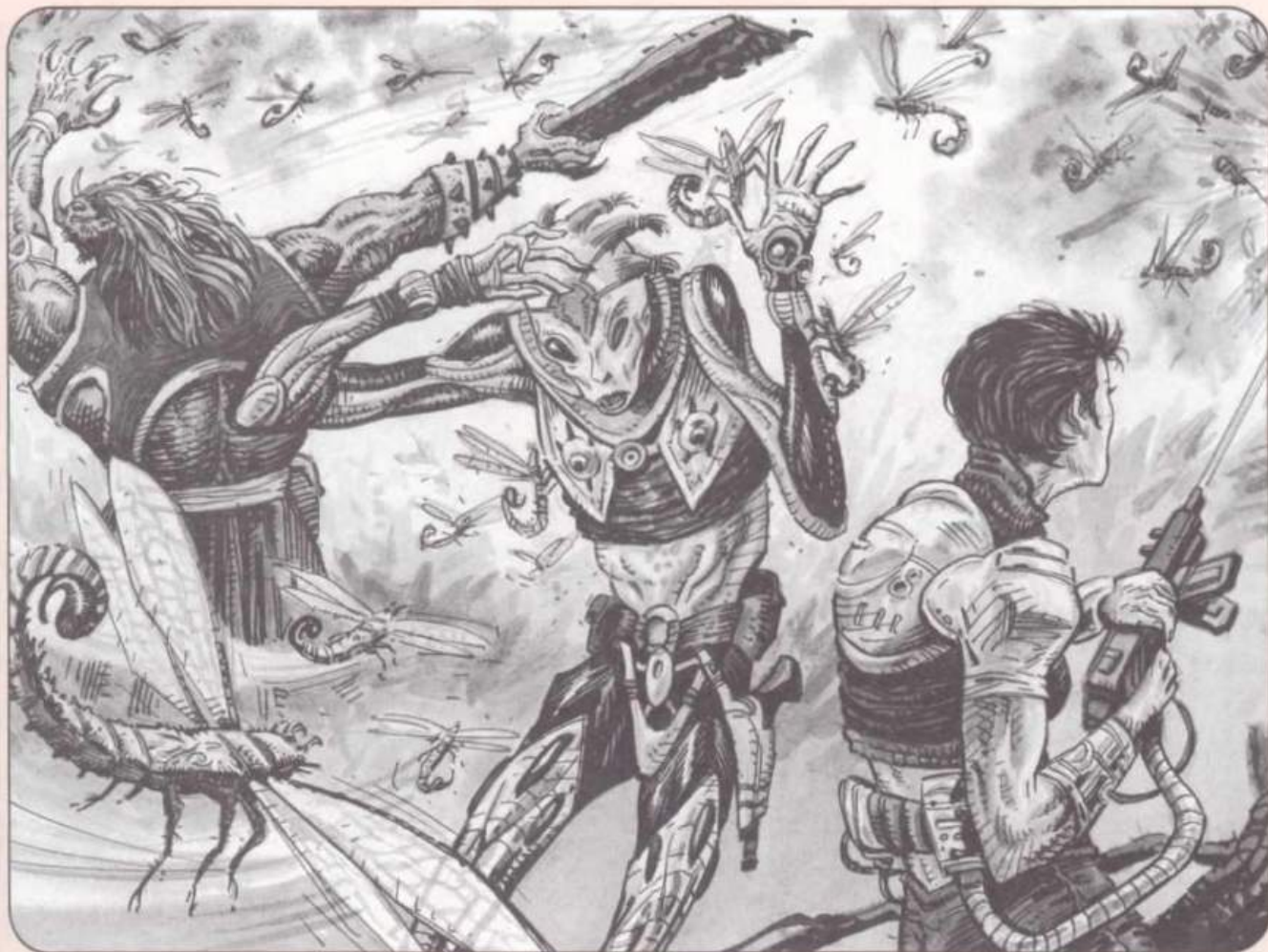
Investigate—search (+2 step modifier): There are bits and pieces of equipment here, apparently abandoned. Most are unrecognizable junk, but there are the remains of at least three survival huts and four canisters, one of which is full of the defoliant used to clear the LZ and the burnt trail (Area 4). Bits and pieces of a harness and trigger mechanism, rotted away now, may have been used by a character to spray the defoliant while walking along. The defoliant is highly poisonous and will kill almost instantly any plant with which it comes in contact, but it is relatively harmless to animals. On a Good result (or second success), it appears the camp was either abandoned in a hurry or the people who kept it intended to come back soon.

Medical Science—forensics (+4 step modifier): Amid the detritus of the campsite there are bones and the remains of small animals. Among these bones are humanoid and canine remains, carefully separated from the rest. On a Good result (or second success), the bones appear to have been here for nearly three years (almost two years after the LZ was defoliated). On an Amazing result (or a third success), the bones are definitely those of a tibape male (killed by a broken neck) and a kanite (shot in the head and back).

3. Polluted Lake: Most of the water on Tibalt is mineral- and bacteria-rich, but drinkable by humanoids (with a little filtering and/or boiling). This lake, however, smells "wrong" to any creature that pauses to consider it. Creatures that drink from it without purifying it first will almost certainly become sick.

Examining the area surrounding the lake may reveal some interesting details:

Investigate—search or -track (no modifier): There are signs that a large number of creatures have been here



recently. Bits of broken, primitive weapons and footprints of humanoid creatures litter the damp soil. On a Good result (or a second success), the visitors appear to come here often (signs of earlier visits are also apparent). On an Amazing result (or a third success), it appears the creatures bring heavy burdens with them but leave (going south) unburdened.

Knowledge—deduce (+2 step modifier): Something is added regularly to the lake and in great quantities. On a Good result (or a second success), whatever is added by rights should be washed away or purified quickly, considering the frequent rains and the number of smaller streams that flow into the lake. However, whatever is polluting the lake is added very frequently, and the planet's natural defenses can't keep pace.

Life Science—biology or —xenology (–2 step modifier): There is something unnatural in the lake, and it is what causes the water to be deadly. On an Amazing result (or three successes), the added element appears to be waste materials from animals.

The lake is fairly shallow and is slowly turning into a rancid, septic marsh. Its odor is repellent, and animals avoid it—with the exception of a tribe of tibapes. They add waste material to the lake every few weeks (as explained in the adventure, "The Rescue of Calesque"). There is a 1 in 12 chance

that a party of 12–36 tibapes may visit while the heroes are searching the lake. If so, they will drop their smelly burdens and either flee (if given enough warning and distance) or attack (if the heroes are close to them when discovered). They will be armed with slings and spears.

4. The Burnt Trail: While the landing zone is obvious from above, the trees and undergrowth of the jungle make the northern trail harder to pick out. Still, anyone looking carefully at the area just north of the LZ and the polluted lake will spot the narrow, winding trail as it snakes northward into the overgrowth.

A fly-by quickly reveals why the location of the LZ was chosen. Immediately beyond the lake, the land becomes extremely uneven and somewhat unstable. A few kilometers to the north, where the mountains begin, there are two small but active volcanoes. Tremors are common, and the large crevice just south of the mountains appears to have formed within the last 20 or 30 years. The rocky hills and dense forest provide no good landing area south of the mountains and north of the scorched LZ.

The trail itself is easy to follow on foot—and that's about the only way heroes might be able to follow it. Less than a meter wide at some points but more than four or five at others, the terrain is relatively clear to view but extremely

Burnt Trail



1. The Scorched Landing Zone
2. Ruined Camp
3. Polluted Lake
4. The Burnt Trail
5. Kanite Attack
6. Primate "Village"
7. The Ruined Settlement
8. The Alien Pyramid

irregular to walk. Unlike the scorched landing zone area, the defoliant that was obviously sprayed here was not concentrated; grass and small bushes (including the dangerous spiny bush) are already starting to grow over it. The irregularity of the land (climbing over ridges and broken hills is necessary at times) makes it very difficult to get any sort of vehicle through.

Along the way, heroes may find signs of earlier travelers, especially if they look. Discarded defoliant canisters, ration containers, and occasional personal items may be found by those who search carefully, but nothing of particular interest. There are no signs of recent passage along the trail.

5. Kanite Attack: The kanites of Tibalt seldom venture deep into the jungles of the continent's interior, but a small pack of them has done just that. Their lair actually lies somewhat west and south of the area marked on the trail, but unless detected (not an easy thing to do), they shadow any travelers along the path for a kilometer or so before attacking.

A pack of eight kanite males led by one older female attack the heroes when they reach this point in the path. If the heroes have any knowledge of kanite behavior, they find more than a few things about this encounter unusual, including the following:

- The kanites are out of their element (they live in the plains and deserts of Tibalt; they avoid the jungles).
- Though these creatures roam all five continents, the population on the Western Reaches is quite small and would more likely dwell anywhere but the jungle.
- There is a female with the pack, and females never hunt with kanite packs except in raids and wars.
- The kanites are unusually skittish; though they won't break off the attack easily, they lack some of their usual bloodthirsty determination.

If the heroes defeat the kanites and examine their corpses, they find something else of interest, but only by carefully searching the bodies. Of the eight males, the four oldest have small implants just below the base of their skulls. The female has an implant as well—a more elaborate one—surgically imbedded between the folds of her thick neck layers. A hero who has Medical Science—*forensics* or —*surgery* can examine the extent of these implants (with a +2 step modifier unless he is familiar with cybernetics) and determine that they are built right into the creatures' spines and brains. Whatever purpose the implants served, however, is over—the implants were partially broken even before the battle, and the power sources of all five implants are completely dead. Forensics further reveals that the cybernetics were placed in the kanites' bodies about 12 months prior to this attack. They must have been exceptionally shoddy workmanship to have failed so quickly.

6. Primate "Village": If the heroes are at all familiar with the higher lifeforms of Tibalt, they will find this encounter highly unusual. The tibapes, the primates of Tibalt, live mostly in the trees and thicker areas of the jungle (partly to hide from the kanites, but mostly because that is where their food source is). Here, however, just south of the wide crevice separating the jungle from the mountains, is a native "village."

The "buildings" of this village are really nothing more than broken or collapsed trees arranged in crude lean-to fashion around the area. There is enough room for more than 200 tibapes here, but only about two dozen actually live in the area ... if "living" is the right word.

Something has happened to these ground-dwelling tibapes. While most tibapes appear energetic and skittish—jumping and running even at the slightest noise sometimes—these creatures are sluggish. Their vacant stares and mechanical motions are zombielike, and though they eat and maintain their "homes," they appear to have little interest in the world around them.

If any heroes approach these tibapes, the primates simply stop what they are doing and watch the heroes until the newcomers pass. If addressed in any way, a tibape will shamble up to a hero and stand there, as if waiting for instruction. This seems incredibly bizarre, especially since tibapes have little if any native speech.

Examination of the tibapes reveals them to be undernourished and lethargic. A Medical Science—*xenomedicene* check (with a +4 step modifier) reveals that these tibapes appear to have a strange substance in their bloodstreams—strange enough that a doctor would recognize it without having any normal tibape blood to compare it to.

The crevice to the north of the village is almost 20 meters wide and 200 meters deep at its narrowest point. Close examination of the area where the path meets the crevice reveals signs that there once was a bridge here. Even more interesting is the fact that the bridge, while narrow and probably made primarily of rope, was constructed from modern, off-world components.

The ruined settlement (Area 7) is visible from the village, as is the tall, overgrown pyramid structure (Area 8).

6a. The Flying Scorpions: *This encounter occurs only if the Gamemaster is running "The Rescue of Calesque" adventure.*

After the heroes have had time to look around the village, they begin to hear a humming sound coming from the north. Any animals or native creatures in the area immediately flee into the jungle (or attempt to if they are restrained). All native animals follow this behavior, except the village tibapes—they simply lie down in the open. If any tibapes are in their lean-to dwellings, they walk outside and lie down.

This confusing behavior becomes alarming when the source of the humming appears. Flying over the crevice from the north comes a swarm of giant insects, each about the size of an adult human's hand. Up close, they look like

gold metallic scorpions. They attack anyone in the village, stinging with their tails.

These flying scorpions are not true living creatures, but rather incredible constructs. They resemble scorpions in almost every way, except they have tiny, clear dragonflylike wings and their stingers bend down, below their bodies, and not up over the back. Their method of attacking is to swarm individuals—3d4 of them at a time—and grab hold with their limbs and claws while stinging the victim repeatedly.

There are 44 scorpions in the swarm. They attack once per round (on the Ordinary phase) with an Unarmed-brawl skill of 14/7/3. If they hit, they have latched onto a hero, automatically doing 1d6s (LI/O) damage every round. They continue to sting their victim every phase until he is rendered unconscious or they are killed. Any damage destroys a scorpion, but they have +5 resistance modifiers to melee or ranged attacks while in the air. This resistance modifier is reduced to -1 once they have latched onto a victim. They do not flee.

The scorpions have a type of mind-destroying poison in their tails. If this attack penetrates their victim's armor, the poison is injected. Poisoned victims must make a Resolve-mental resolve check every time they are hit or lapse into a state of unconsciousness. Each scorpion can poison a victim six times before its venom runs out. Each time a victim is poisoned, add +1 to the modifier of the Resolve check.

Once a victim who has failed a Resolve check (through the poison, and not simply being rendered unconscious by the stun damage of the tail) awakens, the scorpion's venom shows its true nature. The poison victim suffers +5 to his Intelligence and Will resistance modifier for a number of hours equal to the number of injections he received, minus his Constitution minus 10. (Heroes who have lower Constitution scores actually "add" time to this suggestion period.) During this period, the person appears normal but will automatically follow even the most ludicrous instructions from anyone he can understand. Even if talked to in a language he cannot comprehend, the victim will endeavor to understand what the person talking to him wants, and then do it.

This extreme suggestibility gets worse if a poison victim is subjected to a second scorpion attack within a few days of the first. The active chemical remains within the victim's bloodstream for about a week, and a second dose reinforces it. The victim remains suggestible not for hours at this point, but for days (one day per successive dose, rather than one hour). If a third attack happens within a week of the second, the days become weeks. After that, the effect becomes permanent. The village tibapes are examples of what could happen to the heroes, should they be foolish enough to remain around long enough to be attacked repeatedly by the golden scorpions.





7. The Ruined Settlement: Camouflaged from above, this collection of small buildings was obviously built by humans or their allies. Heroes investigating the ruined settlement quickly find signs of Verge and Concord gear and a few broken weapons that have been lying here undisturbed for more than ten months. The settlement is built right up against the Alien Pyramid (Area 8), and any scout worth the name will recognize the settlement as a small archaeology dig site.

What is also apparent to any knowledgeable scout is the fact that this settlement was destroyed a little less than a year ago. Its survival domes are torn asunder and its tool sheds and storage vessels are broken.

Investigation of the site reveals the following information:

Investigate—search (–1 step modifier): The remains of picks, shovels, and even some powered archaeological equipment are lying around, though there are no signs of any artifacts other than a few stone weapons (similar to the ones carried by a few of the tibape natives). On an Amazing result (or three successful skill checks), a sealed, plastic box can be found in one of the overgrown buildings. Inside is a “dissected” flying scorpion and a drawing of the alien pyramid. The drawing began as a quick sketch but there is a more detailed schematic showing the view from the side. It depicts the long eastern staircase, and there are circles drawn about halfway up the northeastern and southeastern corner. A successful

Knowledge—deduce check reveals that whoever drew the map thought the flying scorpions came from those areas of the pyramid. There is an intact vial containing the scorpion poison (with six full doses).

Knowledge—deduce (+2 step modifier): Careful examination of this site reveals an earthquake destroyed the dig buildings. An Amazing result (or three successes) indicates that no one inhabited the site at the time. A follow-up **Physical Science—planetology** check (at a –2 step modifier) reveals that the earthquake occurred some six months ago, long after the settlement was apparently abandoned.

8. The Alien Pyramid: Beyond the ruined dig site lies the object of that archaeological endeavor—an alien pyramid. Smooth and apparently constructed of one, solid piece of rock, the pyramid rests on a platform more than 250 meters square and 15 meters high. The pyramid itself, overgrown with vegetation, must be at least 200 meters high. The only oddity about the pyramid is that it is flat on top—a fact the heroes might not even notice because of the vines and other vegetation covering the structure. The pyramid ends not in a point but in a flat, 50-meter-wide surface.

The eastern section of the platform has been cleared away, revealing long, low steps along its entire width. These steps were obviously cleared using the same defoliant that

made the path—discarded canisters lie partially hidden in the undergrowth—but there are no other signs of human or humanoid interest.

Investigation of the eastern edge reveals the following information:

Investigate—track (+4 step modifier): There are tracks in the dirt and rotten vegetation along the steps. A Good result (or two successes) reveals the tracks go the width of the platform. An Amazing result (or three successes) indicates the tracks concentrate around the southeast corner.

If heroes probe the area of the pyramid closest to the southeast corner, they may find signs of prior searchers. A successful Awareness—*perception* check by any hero allows that scout to see small chips and cracks in the stone around a particular area in the base of the pyramid. The chips and cracks are arranged within a 2-meter-square area, but they are almost invisible to the naked eye. (This is the “entrance” to the pyramid.)

The pyramid and the platform are made out of the hardest rock the heroes have ever encountered. Physical Science—*planetology* checks (at –3 step modifiers) indicate that this stone did not come from this planet, but was imported. It is possible the heroes have seen something like this substance before as it is an artificially enhanced stone that shares many of the properties of diamonds and other hard gems. The pyramid has a slightly purplish cast.

This purple shading becomes more intense about an hour after the heroes have spent some time investigating the pyramid—regardless of whether they have found the entrance. The pyramid actually begins to glow slightly; though this glow isn’t discernible through the vegetation growing over the rock, it is visible in the clear areas. The glow at the southeast corner is the brightest.

There is no appreciable change in background radiation or heat—no apparent explanation for the change at all. However, after the pyramid has glowed for about ten minutes, heroes anywhere near the structure hear a loud, grinding noise—the sound of stone pushing against stone. A 2-meter-square section of the pyramid near the southeast corner slowly moves backward into the pyramid. An opening roughly 2 meters deep forms in the pyramid. This opening remains for one hour, whether the heroes go through it or not.

If the heroes enter the pyramid, refer to the map entitled “Inside the Obelisk” for the following descriptions.

1. Entrance: This 1-meter-thick stone door operates on a remote-control sliding hinge. It can be pulled open from the inside (with a successful Strength check at a –2 step modifier), but it is impossible to open from the outside. Examining the door mechanism reveals a remote control device of indeterminate origin. A Technical Science—*technical knowledge* check (at a +4 step modifier) made by a hero that has seen the disassembled scorpion shows that the two mechanisms could be of similar origin.

Once opened, the door cannot be manually shut—it remains open for approximately one hour and then closes on its own. While it is open, the door glows with a faint purple luminescence.

The passageway that the entrance opens to is perfectly symmetrical but very dusty. Even casual examination reveals footprints in the dust and dirt. A set of hand tools (picks and shovels) lie discarded in the dust near the southern corner. The passage seems to run all the way around the interior of the pyramid.

2. Interior Airlock: Midway along the passage to the north on the western interior wall there are five identical doors. The doors appear to be made not out of stone but of metal—a metal similar to cerametal. In the center of each door is a keypad with sixteen strange symbols on sixteen small buttons (arranged in four rows of four). The keypads glow with a faint purplish light and the keys look very worn.

It is possible to “pick” the keypad lock without knowing the proper entry code. To do so, a hero (or multiple heroes working together) must succeed at a Security—*security devices* check (at a +4 modifier) and a Manipulation—*lock-pick* feat (at a +5 modifier).

Another method for gaining entrance would be to examine the keypads very carefully. Anyone who searches the keys up close (perhaps looking for fingerprints) may notice—with an Awareness—*perception* check (no modifier)—small, bluish dots on certain keys. Each door has dots on the same keys, and each key so marked has the same number of dots. There are three dots on the first key in the top row, two dots on the third key in the second row, four dots on the first key in the third row, five dots on the last key in the third row, and a single dot on the last key in the fourth row. A Knowledge—*deduce* check (at a +2 modifier) reveals to the heroes (if they haven’t figured it out), that they should push the keys in ascending order of the dots. Pushing the keys in the wrong order has no effect other than to make the keypads stop glowing for a few minutes (during which time they are unresponsive).

If a keypad’s “numbers” are punched in the correct order, the door opens up. Each door rises up into the ceiling if its keypad is activated correctly. The doors stay open for about ten minutes at a time. They can be opened from the inside by touching a single glowing panel on the back of each door.

Steps lead down away from the door. There are bumps on the walls on either side of the stairs that heroes might deduce (correctly) once served as light fixtures. If they still work, there is no apparent way to turn them on. In the southwest corner of the room lies a discarded, spent lantern. It was obviously manufactured in the Verge, for it bears a recognizable logo of the Gamemaster’s choice.

3. Statue Room: This long room is almost completely clear of rubble or dirt. The sole exception to this is near the northeast door. There lies the partially mummified corpse of a

tibape. A successful Medical Science—*forensics* examination reveals the creature has been dead for several months. The cause of death was apparently some sort of electrical shock. There are burn marks on the back of its head and shoulders.

But the mummified corpse is not the most eye-catching thing in the room—the two 3-meter-tall glowing statues are. Glowing with a bright purple light, these statues appear to be of some alien creatures the heroes have probably never seen before. The aliens appear humanoid (if very tall and thin), and they have legs and arms not that dissimilar from humans or fraal—except their arms and legs are much longer in proportion to their torsos than a human's would be.

The foremost statue appears to be kneeling and reaching upward toward the ceiling in the direction of the farther statue. That statue stands rigidly erect, and in its four-fingered and two-thumbbed (one on each side of the palm) hand, it grasps what could only be lightning bolts. The first statue looks like a supplicant ... the second looks like an angry god. The second statue also appears to be of some semi-translucent plastic or metallic compound; at its base is a button of dark purple stone. Neither statue looks much like any creature found on Tibalt.

3a. Statue Trap: The second statue is actually a mechanical energy-generated trap; it houses a powerful battery inside its torso. The trap will release a powerful bolt of energy out of its lightning bolts in the directions of the two doorways to the north and south of the room. When heroes approach either doorway, they may notice—with successful Awareness—*intuition* checks at a -2 bonus—that the second statue glows brighter as they near the doors. If they back away, the statue fades.

If a hero touches either doorway, the statue immediately launches a lethal attack. Energy beams shoot out of the statue's lightning bolts toward both doorways but are actually directed at the foremost hero. The statue's "skill" is 18/9/4 and the damage of the lightning bolt is $d6+2w/d8+2w/d4+1m$ (HI/G) if it hits. The statue will continue to shoot its bolts as long as a hero remains within half a meter of the door.

The only way to stop or prevent the lightning attack is to press the large button at the base of the statue. A hero would probably have to kneel down or bend completely over to push it with the right amount of force—almost as if worshipping the statue. This disarms the trap for about ten minutes. It also unlocks the doors to the north and south.

4. Secret Room: The doors to this room are built to resemble the softly glowing purplish stone of the rest of the passageway. Pressing hard on the center of the doors and then releasing them sharply causes them to open outward into the corridor. Accidental impact could trigger this mechanism. From the inside, the doors can simply be pushed open.

Inside the room are two chairs built for humanoids obviously taller and thinner than human beings—more the height of weren and with the build of fraal. The only difference in surface texture is 2 meters up, where a small panel of one-

way glass has been installed. This tinted glass is extremely hard to spot (a casual observer will miss it), but a careful searcher could spot it using Awareness—*perception* (at +3) or Investigate—*search* (at +2).

If the Gamemaster is running "The Rescue of Calesque" adventure, the room is not empty of other life. Two tibapes, armed with power cestus and trained in their use, are present. They have been completely taken over by the flying scorpion venom and are under orders to attack anyone who passes this way. They will leap out of the doors at any heroes who walk by.

The drugged tibapes have Melee—*powered* skill values of 10/5/2, and the power cestus is a LI/O weapon that does $d4+2s/d4w/d4+1w$. The tibapes cannot be persuaded or scared into not fighting, but they do suffer a +2 step penalty on any actions that involve Intelligence, Personality, or Will.

5. The Offering Room: Near the center of this room is a large, open stone box. The stone is apparently some form of white marble and the box's sides are a uniform 1 meter high. There are stains on the inside of the box and there may be rotten fruit or meats in there as well (if the "Rescue" adventure is being run).

The walls of this room are ornately decorated with pictures of jungles, mountains, and creatures native to Tibalt. In the center of the wall behind the marble box is the image of a large, glowing pyramid. The purple light from the pyramid is unobstructed by vines or overgrowth, and the door above the steps is open. Near the door stands an alien resembling the statues in the outer hall (Area 3); it wears white cloth robes and bears a glowing staff (the one found below in Area 5a). There are snarling kanites bound with leashes to the pyramid and a large number of bowing tibapes presenting offerings of foodstuffs and gemstones to other tall, thin aliens standing on the pyramid's platform steps.

Investigation of the mural may reveal that the pyramid in the picture has a sharp, pointed top—not a flat surface like the pyramid actually has. If no one examines the picture close enough to reveal this, each hero should make an Awareness—*intuition* check (no modifier) to see if he notices it on his own. (This assumes he noticed the pyramid actually has a flat top and didn't miss that as well.)

The doors at the corners of this room are all concealed and open in the same fashion as those leading to Area 4. The part of the painting that conceals the door to the north-west has been slightly chipped, and there are old stains on it. Close examination reveals a slightly uneven crease in the door's shape.

5a. The Trap Door: Behind the offering box is a trap door in the floor. The door has not been concealed in any significant way, but it is completely obscured to anyone standing in front of the box. Opening the trap door reveals a small room below. There are tattered pieces of white cloth and what appears to be a sort of ancient, alien-looking staff. The staff is almost 3 meters long and has a large, purple gem set

into its head. When grasped for more than one minute by bare or thinly gloved hands, the gem starts to glow. The intensity of the glow increases slowly until it shines like a bright purple lantern. Scouts interested in alien archaeology should find this artifact extremely interesting. In-depth analysis could eventually reveal that this staff is only a few hundred years old.

If "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, there is a dead fraal (once known as "Tibalt"), bound hand and foot, in this room. The fraal apparently died only a few weeks ago of starvation and thirst. Details of who he was and what he was doing here can be found in the adventure section.

6. Living Quarters: Both of these areas are equipped with long, flat tablelike objects that were once used as beds. They are thin and narrow but almost 3 meters in length. There is an actual table in each room and chairs that were obviously built for creatures taller and thinner than human beings.

If "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, the living quarters to the north are not abandoned. The four beds have been pushed together into two close pairs and dirty sleeping bags lie on top of them. Around the table are the remains of ration packs and rockfruit husks, and there are unopened supplies in the northeast corner.

6a. The Closets: These small rooms each have two footlockers in them. The chests are of high-tech construction, but bear no clue as to their origin—other than the fact that they seem to be made out of the same tough material as the doors and furniture inside the pyramid. They are very old—more than a century or two—and probably sealed up tight. (See below for details.)

Each chest has a keypad similar to the ones found on the doors to the airlock (Area 2)—sixteen buttons in four rows of four. Opening the locks is not easy, and not entirely safe. The original owners were perhaps a little paranoid; each chest is trapped. Heroes who succeed at a Security—*security devices* check (with a +3 modifier) detect the presence of this trap.

Punching in the incorrect code three times in a row (easy to do if the heroes have no idea what the code is or even how long it is) results in springing the trap. The security device releases a colorless, odorless gas into the air from seven different concealed nodules built into the chest's lid. Heroes who breathe the gas (even through a filter mask) must make Stamina—*endurance* checks at a +5 step modifier. Anyone within a 3-meter radius of the chest when the trap is triggered is affected. An environment suit or self-contained air supply naturally blocks this. Each chest has four canisters of this gas inside. Each discharge of a trap depletes one canister.

On an Amazing result, the hero somehow realized something was happening (perhaps he heard the faint hiss of the gas canisters) and is able to get out of the gas radius without breathing any in. On a Good success, the hero only suffers d4 fatigue points of damage, while Ordinary success means the hero takes d4+2 fatigue. A Failure indicates that the hero got

a full lungful of the gas and suffers 2d4+2 fatigue points, while a Critical Failure reveals the hero has some sort of reaction to the gas—suffering 2d4+2 fatigue as well as 1d4 wounds to his lungs and respiratory system.

Successfully opening the chest requires a Manipulation—*lockpick* check (at a +3 step modifier) to defeat the physical components of the lock and a Technical science—*juryrig* check (no modifier) to bypass the electronics.

One of the chests in the northern closet actually has its five-digit combination scratched into its underside (the chest would have to be flipped over for this to be visible). Apparently, its owner had a faulty memory.

Each of the chests contains some interesting artifacts:

- A short scepter (about 1 meter long), similar to the staff found in the room below Area 5. When held in a thinly gloved or uncovered hand, the gem at the top of the scepter begins to glow with a reddish light that is dissimilar to the purple light of the staff. If touched to a living being (but not an inanimate object or the wielder, even accidentally), the head of the scepter delivers a powerful energy charge. A hero using Melee Weapons—*powered* can inflict d6w/d8+2w/d4+1m with this En/G weapon. Examination of and experimentation with this "power scepter" reveals it is obviously PL 8 technology. The "battery" for the device is in its handle, and it seems to recharge off the bioelectric energy produced by carbon-based lifeforms. The scepter can deliver six hits before it needs to be "recharged"—and recharging it simply means holding the scepter for three rounds without using it in combat. Unfortunately, the scepter does one fatigue point to its wielder while it recharges (whether it did this to its alien creators is unknown, but humans and their allies suffer this damage automatically).
- A crudely made leather pouch containing 3d4 large, rough gemstones and d4 faceted stones. Probably taken from the northern mountains or even the volcanoes nearby, these gems should prove valuable to almost anyone. Each rough gemstone is worth *200 to *800 (2d4x100) while the cut stones are worth about *2,000 to *6,000 apiece (1d3x1000).
- White robes designed to fit a tall, slim humanoid. These robes are identical to those pictured in the mural in Area 5.
- A few other personal belongings of alien origin can be found in each chest. These items are not particularly valuable—except for the fact that they come from a species the heroes have never encountered before—and are identical in purpose to items they themselves carry (pocket knives, lighters, a stylus and pad, etc.).
- One of the chests (a random choice) contains a small notebook made of a material similar to plastic. Scratching on the pages of the notebook with anything remotely sharp (even a stick) turns the scratched portion



red for about ten minutes. If rubbed over during that time (say, with a finger or piece of cloth), the red disappears. If the scratching is left alone, however, it fades to a deep purple and becomes permanent.

This notebook is about one-third full of purple sketches and alien writing. Depicting an alien ship orbiting a planet, the sketches are fairly crude, but heroes should guess that the planet is Tibalt. In subsequent drawings, the heroes discern that a smaller, tetrahedron-shaped ship detaches from the ship and comes down to the planet's surface. A group of aliens in strange suits explore the planet, encountering the tibapes and the kanites, then clear an area of the jungle using powerful portable machinery. A pyramid (without a point) is pictured next (with no clue as to how it was built) and the tetrahedral ship lands on its flat top. After that, the pictures become sketches of the various creatures and plants of Tibalt. One interesting sketch depicts a kanite lying on a table with some sort of cybernetic device being implanted in the back of its head. Another shows a rough schematic of the "flying scorpions" the heroes encountered outside the obelisk.

If the alien language can be deciphered (unlikely, but eventually possible), the sketches are annotated with notes that confirm the image descriptions above. The notes are incomplete and fairly dry, but a hero who deciphers them may attempt a Culture or Interaction check (at a -1 step modifier). Success indicates the artist apparently feels something like contempt for the creatures and world of Tibalt. Apparently, whatever group the artist belonged to felt it only just to intimidate, enslave, and manipulate the creatures of this world.

If the Gamemaster is running "The Rescue of Calesque" adventure, these chests are open and the scepters and two of the sets of robes are missing. One of the chests was actually forced open by being shot several times through the lock. The personal belongings and sketchbook are scattered around the closets, and only two pouches of gems can be found (in the northern closet). The others are missing (they are in Area 13).

7. Control Room: The doors to these rooms are particularly sturdy and usually unlocked (see below). They can be barred from the sides nearest the control rooms.

Each control room contains a single chair (built for the same tall, thin creatures as the rest of the furnishings in the pyramid) and a large, "C"-shaped desk. On the walls facing the northeast and southeast corners of the pyramids are six video displays. The controls for these displays are on the desk and are marked with symbols similar to those found on the keypads in Area 2 and the chests in Area 6a, only there are many more of them. Analysis and experimentation with the controls can be done using a few different skills: Computer Science—*hardware* (+4 step modifier), Knowledge—*deduce* (+4 steps), Security—*security devices* (+3 steps), System Operations—*sensors* (+2 steps), and Technical Science—*tech-*

CONTROL ROOM SUCCESS LADDER

Success No.	Information Learned
1	Nothing
2	Some controls are for video displays, some are not
3	Some video displays are broken (see below)
4	Other controls release flying scorpions
5	Flying scorpions can be sent to any area within a 10-kilometer radius that the operator can "zoom in on" (see below)
6	One set of controls seems to have something to do with a mobile camera

CONTROL ROOM FAILURE LADDER

Failure No.	Result
1	No result
2	All (12–48) flying scorpions are released inside the pyramid (see below)
3	Control room's ancient wiring shorts out and melts controls

nical knowledge (+3 steps). Working with the controls is a Good complex skill check (six successes required). The success ladder is presented on the next page.

The six video displays can be used to observe the following areas:

Display #1: The exterior of the pyramid to the tibape village.

Display #2: The "roof" of the pyramid. The camera is partially obscured and shows a flat, overgrown area. Heroes must make Awareness—*intuition* checks (+3 penalty) to realize what they are looking at unless they have already noticed that the top of the pyramid is flat.

Display #3: The Offering Room (Area 5).

Display #4: The Arena (Area 9), from a ceiling perspective. Only a little of the Seating Area (Area 10) can be seen. If "Rescue" is being run, there is a 1 in 6 chance the heroes notice movement in the arena while they are looking at the display (roll each time a hero looks at this particular screen).

Display #5: A mobile camera. If "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, the camera is moving rather jerkily around the arena (Area 9) and the heroes watching this screen will see—at eye level—at least two kanites with cybernetic implants on their necks. (The camera is actually a cybernetic eye attached to a female kanite.) If the adventure is not being run, the display is dark.

Display #6: The Liftoff Ready Room (Area 14).

There is a 25% chance that each of the displays or controls to individual displays will be broken by the time the heroes investigate them. Roll d4 each time a display is activated for the first time. On a 1 the display is broken. Heroes who wish to spend an hour or so (per display) may be able to repair it temporarily using Technical Science—*juryrig* (at a +2 step modifier), but the display has a 1 in 4 chance of shorting out permanently whenever it is turned on again.

The flying scorpion controls are linked to all the displays. A hero who has discovered the controls can target the scorpions at any area he can see. After releasing these mechanical creatures, it takes 13–30 minutes for them to reach their destination. There, they attack any mammal they can find, then spend another 13–30 minutes returning. Up to three “swarms” of these technological arachnids can be sent out at any one time. They must spend a day in their mechanized lair (somewhere near the exterior of the pyramid) to recharge, however, so once three swarms have been sent out, a hero must wait 24 hours before sending them out again.

There is a 1 in 8 chance that a swarm of flying scorpions will be lost every time it is sent out—either it is destroyed, or the ancient mechanism breaks down. Whatever occurs, that swarm is lost permanently if a 1 is rolled.

If a swarm is released inside the pyramid accidentally, the scorpions begin flying around the exterior corridor until they find their way in (this was a security measure the aliens installed in case tibapes or kanites ever found their way into the pyramid unescorted). They fly around for about two hours and then return to their lair. If they find an opening into the center of the pyramid (the airlock may have been jammed open, or there may be a hole caused by some other means), they enter the interior and look for something to attack. The scorpions are extremely sensitive to noise and movement, so it will not be long before they find prey.

The last set of identifiable controls is linked to kanite packs. If “The Rescue of Calesque” adventure is not being run, these links have long since eroded. If the adventure is being run, though, a hero can make System Operations—*communications* checks (at a +5 step modifier) to control a kanite female (the one with the cybernetic camera eye mentioned above) and, through her, a small kanite pack. Controls are relative—as long as Display #5 is working, the hero can see through the kanite’s eyes and “nudge” it in general directions. The kanite will attack any non-kanite it sees unless directed not to (with another nudge). The kanite can be ordered not to move as well. The males of the pack follow the female’s lead. There is a 1 in 4 chance every time a new command is entered that the screen or the kanite control will short out and need repair.

“The Rescue of Calesque” adventure changes the look of the control rooms slightly but significantly. The northern room is inhabited by a sesheyan named Seskut d’Sene. While the heroes were exploring the pyramid, d’Sene has been following Calesque’s orders (see “The Action” part of

the adventure for descriptions of what he might be doing). He is the one who sent the swarm of flying scorpions after the heroes as per Calesque’s orders, but that caused the swarm control and all of his displays to short out. He never saw what happened next and may have no idea that the heroes have entered the pyramid. If he does know, perhaps by hearing them in the northern living quarters (Area 6), then he could be anywhere doing anything—including setting up explosive traps for the heroes. Seskut has the equivalent of ten concussion and ten fragmentation grenades’ worth of explosives in the control room, as well as timers, detonators, and other demolition gear.

Complete stats for Seskut d’Sene can be found in “The Rescue of Calesque” section at the end of this chapter.

8. Primitive Armory: Bits of rock, dirt stains, and darker stains of more dubious origin litter the floors of these large rooms. The steps that lead down out of them to the west are steep, and the doors leading back into Area 5 lock automatically when closed. Reopening the doors is simple, however—several catches need to be flipped and there are no security devices on this side. It may take heroes a few moments to figure out, but no skill checks are necessary.

The doors and the floor are not the most striking features of this room. The north and south walls of these rooms are lined with hooks, racks, and shelves built into the walls. Examination indicates that these accoutrements were installed after the walls were built, but they were fused into them so tightly that they appear almost seamless. Only a century or so of collected dust and dirt makes the seams visible at all.

However fascinating the racks’ construction, the objects these shelves and hooks hold may prove of more interest for the heroes. Only about a third of the holders in each room are filled, containing primitive melee and missile weapons of varied construction. Simple wooden staves, clubs, and stone axes, and bows, slings, and even crossbows line the shelves. Quivers of arrows, boxes of bolts, and pouches of smooth stones lie alongside. Most of these weapons have fallen into disrepair and are atrophied with age, but not all.

Among the rotting wood and blunt stone weapons are items of quality. Strangely shaped swords (long, thin, and curved, but needle-sharp), spears with cruel hooks and detachable heads, and double-bladed metal axes with spikes on their handles also fill the racks. While any human or humanoid could identify these weapons as somewhat familiar—and anyone with skill in using Melee or Primitive Ranged Weapons could use them—their designs are subtly different from those of human, weren, or even sesheyan origin. Still, their simple construction and obvious purpose is centuries beyond anything any creature of Tibalt could devise.

Along the east walls of these rooms, however, rest dead-end evidence of these weapons’ efficiency. The skulls and bones of several of Tibalt’s native species have been placed

here, and there is a stuffed, preserved tibape in each room. The tibape "trophy" holds a primitive weapon and faces a stuffed, lunging kanite. The mounts are in disrepair. All of the bones and the stuffed corpses are easily decades old—perhaps more than a century.

If "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, there are a few fresher bones here, and one of the tibape stuffed mounts (the one in the northern room) has been shot several times with some sort of laser weapon. The shots destroyed its fake eyes and ripped apart its lower abdomen and groin.

9. The Arena: The only way into this sunken room is down a steep set of stairs and through a one-way (in only) door from Area 8—and the only way out seems to be over the 5-meter-high transparent walls surrounding the floor of the arena. The walls themselves are smooth until they reach their highest point—then they turn inward and their edges become jagged and sharp. A pool of fetid water, 1 meter wide and deep and partially covered in algae, lines the base of the walls, compounding the problem. Perhaps once long ago it refreshed the combatants in the arena, for the water is renewed automatically (or it would have evaporated long ago), but it no longer does so regularly for it to be pure.

Trying to climb up the walls is nearly impossible without some sort of special gear (they are much like climbing glass), and getting over the jagged edges without being cut is a difficult feat (Athletics—*climbing* at +4 steps). A hero who somehow reaches the top but fails to get over untouched takes 2d4+1w for a Failure and d4+1m damage with a Critical Failure. Apparently, some beings tried to scale the wall in the past. There are old stains on every part of the transparent wall, and a few bones lurk in the pool.

There are other things in this area besides stale water and a jagged wall, however. Several partially mummified corpses (tibapes, kanites, and a few other predators from Tibalt's surface) litter the floor, and broken or discarded weapons lie in and around the water—identical to those found in Area 8.

From the floor of the arena the heroes can see high-backed narrow seats all around beyond the top of the walls—including one large, ornate chair directly to the west. Statues of a kanite and two tibapes are barely visible behind the chair. To the east, up the staircase, they see a statue similar to those found in Area 3—but instead of lightning bolts this one holds a sword and a spear in its upraised hands. That is all the heroes see if the Gamemaster is not running the accompanying adventure.

In "The Rescue of Calesque," however, the arena is not devoid of life. Three kanites, two males and one female, are present, as are the remains of two more kanites and several partially consumed tibapes. The tibapes all have (or had) weapons, but it is quite apparent that few figured out how to use them in time.

The kanite female has a cybernetic eye (a camera that links to a display in Area 7) and a cruel-looking implant in the back of her neck. She is being controlled by a rather mad-looking human looking down on the arena from Area 10.

10. The Seating Area: Located about 4.5 meters above the surface of the arena (Area 9), this theaterlike seating area contains several chairs built for the thin, tall aliens that apparently constructed the pyramid. There is one larger chair (with gemstones set into the armrests) directly to the west of the arena's entrance. Three statues behind the seat of honor depict a kanite female flanked by two tibapes.

There are a few other notable items in the seating area. Unless "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, scattered bits of white cloth, some personal belongings, and more than a few discarded plates and glasses litter the area. It appears as if a large group of people—the tall, thin aliens—were sitting here when something caused them to leave, and in a hurry.

If "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, the seating area remains relatively unchanged, except the area around the four seats nearest the throne and the throne itself have been cleaned up. More recent signs of use are visible, including discarded rockfruit rinds, ration packs, and empty bottles. There may even be a discarded and empty pistol or two.

Heroes entering the chamber will be unlikely to notice all that before they see the area's sole occupant: a human in dirty, white robes who carries a long, glowing purple staff. If taken by surprise (unlikely if the heroes enter from Area 8, but possible if they come through the southeast corner), he is throwing bits of meat (perhaps parts of a dissected tibape) to the kanites in the arena and cackling wildly. This is Captain Xavier Calesque, and he will do his best to kill anyone who intrudes on his "fun." Calesque is aware that the heroes have entered the area, but may not know they are in the pyramid (at the Gamemaster's option).

Captain Calesque's description can be found in the adventure section.

10a. The Statues: Any hero examining the three statues behind the throne may make an Investigate—*search* check (at a +2 step modifier) or a Security—*security devices* check (at no modifier). Success reveals that each statue has a moving part. By reaching in the kanite's open, snarling mouth, a person could move the statue's tongue. The heads of the two tibape's can be turned completely around. If this is done, a door nearly indistinguishable from the wall opens up directly behind the kanite statue. This door leads to Area 11.

11. The Tac Center: Similar to the control rooms (Area 6), this tactical center is the eyes and ears of the pyramid structure. Unfortunately, someone got a chance to blind and deafen it before departing—several explosions have ripped through the controls and display screens in the room, rendering all of its electronics completely useless.

It is possible to figure out what happened to the tac center. A Security—*security devices* skill check (at a -3 bonus) reveals that a self-destruct mechanism was activated (probably on a timer), causing charges to blow out several criti-

cal sections of the control room without completely destroying the whole setup. Indeed, a Technical Science-*repair* check (at a -1 bonus) indicates that while the critical systems were completely and utterly destroyed, linking systems and cable loops are still intact. If the heroes don't figure it out on their own, a successful Knowledge-*deduce* check (no modifier) tells them that this security device was apparently designed to cripple the tac center ... but make it easy to fix if someone brought in replacement parts.

Unfortunately, there are no replacement parts for this alien control center anywhere on the planet. Someone working for weeks or even months might be able to juryrig some connections and cannibalize parts from the other two control rooms to get the tac center up and running again, but it is unlikely the heroes would want to take the time.

However, if "The Rescue of Calesque" is being run, that's exactly what someone was trying to do here. In fact, someone at least partially succeeded. A display unit has been restored, and considerable information is encoded there; it has been heavily encrypted. It would require an Amazing complex skill check (8 successes) using Knowledge-*computer operation* or Computer Science-*hacking* to be able to read the data.

Should a hero be so lucky, he learns the following:

- Someone (a tech op named "Robertson," according to the files) was able to not only repair this part of the tac center but actually decrypt and translate some of the aliens' files. He learned the history of the pyramid and its purpose (see "The Rescue of Calesque"). His notes indicate that he has several companions, including Captain Xavier Calesque, a sesheyan named Sesket d'Sene, and a fraal they call "Tibalt" (apparently not the fraal's real name).
- There are schematics on the pyramid (including a complete map without Area 13 or the secret door in Area 12 on it), but no indication as to how it was built. There's also a reference to a "landing pad" on top of the pyramid. According to Robertson, the top of the pyramid was a disguised alien ship.
- There is some speculation regarding why the aliens left. The group seemed to think some disaster occurred. Robertson thinks it was the eruption of the nearby volcanoes while Calesque thinks they were attacked by others of their species. Whatever the cause, the aliens left in a hurry.
- Robertson includes in his log that Calesque and d'Sene are searching the pyramid for some "lost treasures" they feel the aliens left behind. They have repeatedly tried to get Tibalt to use his "psychic powers" to search the pyramid for secret doors, but apparently the fraal has no abilities that will let him do that—or he has chosen not to oblige for his own reasons.
- Descriptions and schematics for the flying scorpions and the cybernetic implants the aliens used on the

ALIEN ROBOTS OF TIBALT

Designed as bodyguards for the alien leader, these tall, relatively thin robots still appear in good condition, but that is only a credit to the quality of their chassis design. The mechanisms inside have deteriorated through dust, and lack of maintenance has rendered them "iffy" at best. Still, they do their best to follow their function: protect the leader (or whoever has the control device) and protect his quarters.

These robots are very similar (statistically) to the Janus-series Sentry Robots found in the *Dataware* supplement. They are tall, humanoid robots, however, and they look like bulkier versions of the aliens that created them.

There are special rules in *Dataware* describing how robots are used in the Alternity game and in combat, but even Gamemasters without that book can run these robots as "creatures" with the statistics listed below and the basic information on robots and androids found in the *Gamemaster Guide* and *Player's Handbook*.

STR 14 INT 9

DEX 7 WIL 7

CON 16 PER 4

Durability: 16/16/8 Action Check: 10+/9/4/2

Move: Sprint 18, Run 12, Walk 4 No. of Actions: 2

Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Attacks

Stun baton Melee Weapons-powered

d4+1s/d4+3s/d6+4s En/0

Grenade, pulse Athletics-throw

4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s En/6

SMG, laser Ranged Weapons, Modern-smg

d6w/d6+2w/d4m En/0

Defenses

+2 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks

0 resistance modifier vs. missile attacks

0 (INT), 0 (WIL) resistance modifier vs. encounter skills

Immune to most nonphysical attacks (gas, mind blast, poison, etc.)

Skills

Athletics-throw [15]; Melee Weapons-powered

[16]; Ranged Weapons, Modern-SMG [12];

Stamina-endurance [17]; Security [9];

Awareness-perception [10]

kanites are here. Robertson seems to have been working on reconstructing the implants (electronically,

anyway), with the help of d'Sene when something interrupted Robertson. The log entries simply stop.

12. The Leader's Quarters: This spacious room contains only a few items of furniture—a bed, a dresser, a table, and two chairs. It housed the leader of the alien expedition to Tibalt, and its size—especially when compared to the other living quarters (Area 6) shared by multiple aliens—testifies to the leader's importance.

An even greater testimony relates to the room's sole form of "decoration": five tall statues placed in alcoves set inside the walls. Made of some sort of extremely hard metal and decorated in silver and gold, these bulky, humanoid statues do not have the delicate construction of the alien statues. Heroes who have seen the other statues throughout the pyramid and the mural in Area 5 might doubtfully wonder if the aliens, too, constructed these crude works of art.

The answer is yes, the aliens constructed these "statues," but also no, for these are not works of art at all. Instead, they are robots—dangerous robots that were the aliens' last line of defense should anything threaten their sanctuary. The statue in front of the secret door to the north is not actually a robot, but only a chassis.

If the heroes begin poking around the living quarters of the alien leader, the action qualifies as "threatening" and the robots come to life.

These robots are almost 3 meters tall, humanoid, and somewhat more bulky than their creators (if the mural and the statues are anything to judge by). They are very dangerous, however, and can only be controlled by a small, hand-held keypad located in a cabinet in Area 12. The keypad remote has sixteen digits and simply pressing random buttons won't have much effect—it could take weeks to figure out what causes these robots to respond correctly.

If Area 12 is violated—that is, if the heroes start searching the place—one of the four robots will activate and say something in a deep, unknown language. It is asking for vocal confirmation of the heroes' identity—in case one of them is actually the alien leader. It will repeat this request on the following round, then wait another round and warn the heroes to leave (it is unlikely the heroes will cognitively understand the robot, though on an instinctive level the words ought to be clear). It will attack at the start of the next round if the heroes are still in the room.

The remaining three robots may activate, one at a time, depending on how undamaged they are by a century sans movement or maintenance. Roll d4 every round after the first robot attacks. On a 1, another robot activates and heads into the fight, regardless of where it is taking place. On a 4, one of the remaining robots is too damaged to activate again. As long as a fight is going on, the robots that are not completely beyond repair will attempt to activate once per round. If no robots are active at any time (that is, they've been destroyed or disabled), the sequence stops until Area 12 is violated again.

In "The Rescue of Calesque" adventure, Captain Xavier Calesque (encountered in Area 10) has found the control device that allows him to command these robots, and he and his remaining crew have figured out how to use it. The device remains on his person at all times. He may bring the robots out of these chambers and into Area 10 or 11 if he finds himself in danger. The first time he "calls" a robot, it comes immediately. After that, every time Calesque tries to activate another robot, roll d4 and check its status as described above.

Attacking robots will use their stun batons and pulse grenades to incapacitate enemies unless they themselves are attacked with deadly force. Apparently, the alien programmer did not want them to slay someone who simply wandered into the wrong area and was too stupid or unable to walk out again.

13. Treasury: Behind a spare robot chassis in the leader's quarters (Area 12) is a concealed door that leads to this room, the alien leader's treasury. Unopened for centuries, the door cannot be forced without a good deal of difficulty.

Built into the wall of the pyramid, the concealed door is almost impossible to find (even if the heroes are looking for it). An Investigate-search check (at a +3 step modifier) will locate the door but not reveal how to open it.

Concealed in the statue outside the door (in Area 12) is a small box. Inside the box is a single button. When pressed, the button swings the door inward, allowing the fresher air of Area 12 to mingle with the stale, dank atmosphere of the treasury.

Inside the treasury rest six chests. Two are empty, two are full, and two are trapped—it seems the alien leader did not trust his fellows to keep their long, skinny hands off his share of the loot.

The traps are particularly nasty two-stage devices built into the outside of the chests. If the chests are moved or any attempt is made to open their mechanically locked lids, the traps are sprung. (The alien leader had the key, but he is now long gone.) The traps can be found with a successful Security-security devices check (at a +1 step modifier).

The first stage of each trap is a minor explosion with the force of a pulse grenade. In addition to doing pulse grenade damage to anyone in the area of effect, the explosion sprays a highly corrosive acid on anyone inside the immediate blast radius (2 meters, centered on the box). This acid will burn just about anything for d6+2 wounds ... including armor or an environment suit.

The second stage is prepared for by the acid. Gas jets from the trapped chest fill the room with an extremely toxic poison, and a device in the chest's bottom activates, suddenly closing the door by remote control and locking it. The room is also radio-shielded. If all the heroes are inside the room when the trap is sprung (or if some of the heroes are inside the room and one of them carries the remote control box that was used to open the door), the heroes will have to find another way out ... and soon.

For every round a hero remains in the room with the poison gas he takes d4+2 wounds. A successful Stamina-*endurance* skill check (at a cumulative +1 step penalty per round) allows the hero to somehow avoid getting the extremely pervasive gas into his lungs, eyes, ears, or nose, and he only suffers d4+2 stun points instead.

Disarming the trap before (or after) it has been sprung requires complex skill checks. Two Security-*security devices* checks (at a +2 penalty) are required to deactivate the grenade, while either that skill or Technical Science-*juryrig* can be used to keep the door from shutting automatically. Finally, another Security-*security devices* check (no modifier) will prevent the gas jets from activating. Opening the mechanical lock is comparatively easy, requiring only a single Manipulation-*lockpicking* skill check (at a +1 penalty).

Assuming the heroes don't collapse from the poison gas (or if they check these chests first before activating the traps), they find the following items inside the full, untrapped chests:

- An energy scepter identical to the ones found in Area 6a.
- An alien-looking PL 8 pistol (the equivalent of a maser pistol) with three full "clips" of ammo.
- A purplish "jumpsuit" with strange, reflective weave throughout its stitching. This PL 8 "clothing" is, essentially, a combination displacer softsuit and energy web (see the Chapter 11: Weapons and Armor of the *Player's Handbook*). The displacer function only works for five rounds before its battery is drained, but it can be recharged using Technical science-*juryrig* (at a +2 step modifier) and any conventional power source. Assuming a Critical Failure does not destroy the battery, the hero performing the recharging can learn how to do it, making recharging one step easier (cumulatively) after every two attempts. The suit can fit a fraal or a tall, thin human or mechalus.
- About \$15,000 in gemstones, precious metals, and rare ores.
- Two dozen strange, alien artifacts. A Knowledge-*deduce* check (at a -3 bonus) tells the heroes that these items did not come from Tibalt and were not manufactured by the aliens who created the pyramid. Apparently, the alien leader kept them as "souvenirs" from planets he and his team visited before coming to Tibalt. Most of the artifacts are very primitive, and few have any inherent powers (unless the Gamemaster desires otherwise). All come from civilizations the heroes have probably never heard of or encountered before, making them extremely valuable to collectors. The price of each artifact should vary widely depending on the market—though heroes with the Interaction-*bargain* skill and some decent contacts could probably expect to get anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000 for them fairly easily.

14. Ready Room: This large room has a giant, circular staircase leading up to a sealed hatchway. There are several pegs and racks around the room; most are empty, but a few contain spacesuits and air tanks of alien design. The tanks contain pressurized air that humans could breathe (perhaps a little more nitrogen and oxygen than normal), and the suits would fit a tall, thin human or a tall fraal without too much difficulty.

The hatchway is sealed from the outside but can be opened from the inside. It leads out onto the top of the pyramid. The area above is thick with vines but very flat. There are old burn marks on the top of the pyramid underneath the vegetation where someone may have used an old-style thruster mechanism to launch an air- or spacecraft or perhaps even break away from the top of the pyramid.

THE RESCUE OF CALESQUE: AN OUTBOUND ADVENTURE

Keyed entirely to the planet Tibalt and the area around and inside the alien pyramid, this ground-based adventure should illustrate for heroes the dangers they face in exploring inhabited planets—the danger to themselves and to the creatures on those planets.

GETTING INVOLVED

One of the heroes' regular contacts informs them of an "easy mission" he or she would like done as "a favor." It seems a new star system with at least one habitable planet was discovered and partially charted, but the original scout party never finished the job. The CSS representative (or whomever the heroes normally scout for) wants the heroes to confirm the existing report and expand on it, completing the System Survey Report Form. Parts 1 and 2 of the form are done, and some of Part 3 has been started; the field agent will turn this information over to the heroes if they agree to take on the task. The star, Calesque, and the three known planets of the system have been named, but the field agent will ensure that the heroes get credit for finishing the report.

If pressed, the field agent will reveal he has several interested parties who want to pay for the completed and confirmed survey right away. He is prepared to offer a substantial bonus (Gamemaster's option as to what "substantial" means, but probably a few thousand Concord dollars) if they take the job.

The field agent has never met the scouts who initially surveyed the system, and says only that they turned in their first report a year ago—perhaps they are finishing up themselves and just taking a long time about it. If that is the case, the field agent will still guarantee the heroes' payment if they help out. The field agent does have the scouts' names, however, and he will give the heroes pictures of them, though again, only if they ask. It is up to the heroes to find out about the first group.

**XAVIER CALESQUE
SCOUT CAPTAIN**

Level 10 human Free Agent

STR 8 (+1) INT 11 (+1)

DEX 11 (+1) WIL 12 (+1)

CON 9 PER 9

*Free Agent bonus

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action Check: 14+/13/6/3

Move: sprint 16, run 10, walk 4

No. of Actions: 2 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Last Resorts: 1 Perks: Ambidextrous

Attacks

Unarmed 10/5/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Power scepter (2) 12/6/3 d6w/d8+2w/d4+1m En/G

Pistol, mass 14/7/3 d6w/d8+1w/d6+1m En/G

Defenses

CF softsuit d6(LI)/d6(HI)/d6-1(En)

Skills

Athletics [8]-climb [9], Melee [8]-powered [12],
Unarmed [8]-brawl [10], Acrobatics [11]-dodge
[12], zero-g training [12], Modern [11]-pistol [14],
Stealth [11], Vehicle Operation [11]-air [12], land
[12], space [13], Movement [9]-trailblazing [10],
Stamina [9], Business [11]-illicit business [12],
Knowledge [11]-computer op [12], language
(unknown alien) [12], Life Science [11]-xenology
[12], System Operation [11], Awareness [12],
Culture [9]-first encounter [10], Interaction [9]

Captain Xavier Calesque has been just about everything at one time or another: a hero, a villain, a rogue, and now an explorer—or, from his perspective, a god. As his good friend and partner Sesket d'Sene could tell anyone (though he probably would not, being loyal and somewhat reticent), Calesque was growing less and satisfied with his life even before he turned to exploring.

Unfortunately, this mission may prove to be Calesque's last. Tibalt, the fraal who convinced him he could get rich by coming to this alien planet, did something to the captain's already unstable mind. Now, stark raving mad, he intends to keep his "godhood" status at any cost.

If the heroes ask around, make a few contacts, and generally roleplay the situation well, they can gain the following information:

- Captain Xavier Calesque has been hanging around "this area" of space for a few years now, doing all kinds of jobs, from small shipping deliveries to pas-

**SESKET D'SENE
EX-ASSASSIN**

Level 6 sesheyan Tech Op

STR 8 (0) INT 12 (+1)

DEX 12 (+1) WIL 11 (+1)

CON 9 PER 8

Durability: 9/9/5/5 Action Check: 14+/13/6/3

Move: sprint 20, run 12, walk 4, glide 20", fly 40"

No. of Actions: 2 Reaction Score: Ordinary/2

Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed 9/4/2 d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s LI/O

Power cestus 10/5/2 d4+2s/d4w/d4+1w LI/O

Pistol, mass 13/6/3 d6w/d8+1w/d6+1m En/G

Defenses

Battle vest d6-3(LI)/d6-2(HI)/d4-2(En)

Special Abilities*

If conscious, never suffers damage from a fall

Night vision

Light sensitivity

Skills

Melee [8]-powered [10], Unarmed [8]-brawl [9],
Acrobatics [12]-zero-g training [13], Manipulation
[12], Modern [12]-pistol [13], Stealth [12]-sneak
[13], Vehicle op [12]-space [13], Stamina [9],
Demolitions [12]-disarm [13], scratch-built [14], set
explosives [14], Computer Science [12]-hardware
[13], programming [13], Knowledge [12]-computer
op [13], Technical Science [12]-repair [13], techni-
cal knowledge [13], Awareness [11]-intuition [12],
perception [12], Interaction [8]

*Special sesheyan ability

A former assassin for VoidCorp specializing in explosives, Sesket d'Sene escaped from their corporate clutches many years ago. He apparently owes his freedom and perhaps his life to Xavier Calesque, for he has never left the captain's side since becoming free.

It's possible that Sesket may not have given up his profession when he gained his freedom. Although he has not been on any stellar nation's "wanted" lists for questioning regarding a death in the years he has been with Captain Calesque, mayhem nevertheless seems to follow the quiet d'Sene. He is certainly not shy about putting his skills to use for his or his captain's benefit, however.

senger running. Some individuals express surprise that the middle-aged human Calesque has taken up

scouting—it always seemed the captain was biding his time, trying to make “one big score,” and scouting seems too much like hard work. If the heroes really investigate, they hear rumors that Calesque had a reputation for performing jobs “with no questions asked” on a regular basis. There are also stories that he was a war hero in GW2 but became disillusioned with his superiors and resigned his commission.

- Sesket d’Sene has been knocking about with Calesque as long as anyone can remember. A sesheyan, it is not surprising that people think he escaped from VoidCorp. While no one has ever known d’Sene to do anything illegal, there is talk that he may have been some sort of VoidCorp operative in his youth ... of course, that rumor’s circulated about every sesheyan anywhere. A little digging reveals that d’Sene would occasionally disappear while Calesque was in port and return a few weeks later—usually with enough cash to pay off any gambling debts or bar bills Calesque had rung up.
- Derren Robertson was just recruited by Calesque and d’Sene before they left on their scouting mission. A native of Aegis, Derren is a young human with a gift for engineering and navigation—according to several spacers who worked with him a year or so ago. Derren seemed to be an energetic, excited young man who was using his skills to trade his way out to the frontier. No one is surprised that he might want to turn explorer. Further questioning reveals that someone saw Derren after the Calesque party turned in their survey form—he was buying shovels, picks, and other digging equipment as well as some high-tech tools and supplies. He was very tight-lipped about why.
- “Tibalt” is the only name given by the humans to the fraal who joined up with Calesque’s crowd about the same time as Robertson (apparently the two new recruits didn’t know each other beforehand). There are rumors Tibalt had something to do with Calesque going on this particular mission, while others think Calesque had a particular interest in Tibalt. Prying information out about the mysterious Tibalt is almost impossible—he arrived in the system only a few days before Calesque departed and didn’t socialize much.

WHAT THE HEROES DON’T KNOW

The background for this adventure is a bit long and convoluted, and it is possible the heroes will never learn the full back story. Still, the Gamemaster should know what led up to the events that occur in “The Rescue of Calesque.”

THE ALIEN OVERLORDS

More than a century ago, a large alien ship came to the planet now known as Tibalt. The creatures on board—tall, thin humanoids with advanced technology—discovered the evolving species on the planet and decided to observe

them. These aliens built the giant pyramid and placed a ship on top of it. They left a small group of their fellows to watch the tibapes and the kanites.

Whether it was the aliens’ initial intention or not, the observers decided to “get involved” soon after their mothership left the planet’s orbit. First, they brought a shipment of kanites to the Western Reaches and put them in conflict with the arboreal tibapes. The ferocious canines almost wiped out the primates before the tibapes learned to hide more effectively ... and to fight back. After a century-long war, there are only a few packs of kanites in the Western Reaches and the tibapes there have developed tool use faster than their cousins to the east and south.

The aliens did not stop there, however. Rather than gather supplies themselves, they developed a drug (and a dispenser, the flying scorpions) that allowed them to enslave tibapes and kanites alike. While these primitive servants were of only menial use (they could dig for gems and gold and gather food), they were very amusing to the aliens. The observers set themselves up as gods and turned their pyramid into a temple. They even staged gladiatorial fights between tibape tribes, kanite packs, and enslaved tibapes and cybernetically controlled kanites for their amusement. This went on for at least 20 years.

But then a natural disaster occurred. Two mountains to the east and west of the pyramid exploded, and a great rift threatened to open up in the earth and swallow the aliens and their slaves. The aliens fled the pyramid, taking their disguised ship with them and abandoning their treasure in their haste. Even though their pyramid survived the eruptions and the earthquakes, for some reason they gave up on Tibalt, and its natives had peace for a time ... nevertheless, they remembered the visitors from the sky.

CALESQUE’S CREW

Captain Xavier Calesque was recruited by the fraal Tibalt for this particular mission. Tibalt came to Calesque with a story, a legend of alien artifacts, strange creatures on other planets, and vast riches to be had. Calesque took little convincing (especially since Tibalt was willing to pay for his services up front).

Calesque talked to d’Sene and they recruited Robertson, and off they went to the unexplored system. Tibalt’s information appeared right on the money—after performing a cursory survey, the party landed south of the pyramid and headed toward it.

Unfortunately, they ran afoul of the kanites, the normally peaceful tibapes, and even the spiny bushes. Calesque’s crew sustained wounds and had to retreat to the relative safety of the area around the camp. There, after several days of arguing about the dangers of the planet, they went back to civilization, filed a quick report, and used the cash to get more and better equipment. They returned with, among other things, a military-strength defoliant.

Armed with modern weapons, Calesque’s crew made

short work of the primitives who attacked them then. By the time the party made it to the pyramid, they had scared away all opposition. They set up a new camp on the side of the crevice nearest the pyramid and began exploring.

It did not take long for Tibalt to discover the entrance—revealing that he knew more about the pyramid than he had originally let on. Still, this didn't upset Calesque and company—they were inside the alien temple, and that's what counted.

After that, things moved quickly. The party managed to bypass most of the security systems, and Robertson and d'Sene were able to uncover and translate many of the aliens' computer files. Even better, Tibalt seemed to have an uncanny knack for figuring out how to make the aliens' artifacts work for them.

While these newfound gizmos excited Calesque, they worried young Robertson. He spent most of his days working alone with the alien technology, though occasionally he was joined by d'Sene or Tibalt. The fraal usually disappeared for hours outside the pyramid, apparently searching for the alien treasure he insisted was there.

Robertson was disturbed when he discovered the secrets to the flying scorpions—and even more so when Tibalt revealed he knew how to create kanite implants from the schematics Robertson had discovered. The young human argued with Tibalt over the morality of the situation, but Calesque overruled him. At this point, Robertson withdrew from the rest of the party, delving further into the technology of the aliens.

Weeks and months passed and supplies ran low. Tibalt, however, found a solution. By donning the white robes and wielding the scepter the party found, he—with d'Sene's help—was able to use the flying scorpions to trap several kanites and many tibapes. Tibalt enslaved them, forcing them to bring foodstuffs and gemstones as tribute.

Robertson objected and this time Calesque backed his younger colleague. A confrontation ensued and both humans were hurt badly. Robertson was left to die outside the pyramid, but d'Sene saved the captain's life. The former VoidCorp slave managed to trap Tibalt in the small room below the altar, leaving him there to die.

The sesheyan tended the captain but when Calesque recovered from his wounds, he had gone insane. Apparently, Tibalt's dreams of treasure and godhood had somehow been foisted off on him. Calesque now believed he was a god (and d'Sene his messenger) and that they had "cast down the evil Tibalt" and would bring salvation to the universe.

Secretly, d'Sene warned Robertson of their captain's madness and helped the young man get back to the ship. Robertson took off and has not been heard from since—presumably, he went to get help, but it is not revealed here what happened to the young engineer.

Meanwhile, d'Sene continues to "serve" Calesque and has long since given up hope that his friend will ever regain

his sanity. All d'Sene hopes to do now is keep his friend from being killed by his own madness. He serves his "god," occasionally forcing kanites or tibapes to do Calesque's bidding, and he will not betray the captain. However, if he sees a way to rescue Calesque, he may take it.

THE ACTION

When the heroes first encounter the pack of kanites (including a few cybernetically enhanced ones), d'Sene and Calesque become aware of their presence. While d'Sene hopes they are here to rescue Calesque (and himself), he will not betray his captain. Calesque, unfortunately, just happened to be conversing with d'Sene when the heroes were revealed. He ordered the sesheyan to send the flying scorpions after the heroes and has also directed the "defense" of the pyramid.

Depending on how dangerous the Gamemaster wants the adventure to be, Calesque may be more or less lucid. This text places him at the seating area in the arena of the pyramid, but he could be anywhere the Gamemaster chooses. Likewise, he may or may not have ordered d'Sene to use his demolitions skills to plant mines and grenades in various strategic locations. While d'Sene hopes the heroes have been sent by Robertson, he won't take any chances with his captain's life if the party seems belligerent or mercenary—he'd rather kill the members if he thinks they might slay the mad captain and then figure out how to get Calesque to their ship.

D'Sene could be either ally or dangerous foe by the time the heroes reach him ... the choice is up to the Gamemaster. In any case, the heroes have to deal with d'Sene and Calesque if they want to search the pyramid for the treasure.



A SCOUT'S RESOURCE

This section provides some hints and materials scout and explorer heroes may find useful during the course of an exploratory campaign. Some of the information can be used directly by player characters, but much should be filtered through the Gamemaster.

SCOUT TECH

The *Player's Handbook* contains basic equipment suitable for nearly any STAR*DRIVE campaign. The following lists of equipment are designated as especially useful for scouts and explorers. Other equipment may, of course, be useful or even necessary, but the equipment on this list should be considered highly recommended.

Included with the listing are reasons why certain pieces of equipment can be particularly useful. Drawbacks of certain types of equipment are also noted. Equipment found in the *Arms & Equipment Guide* is marked with an asterisk (*) for easy identification. All other technology is drawn from the *Player's Handbook*, unless otherwise noted.

GENERAL EQUIPMENT

No other profession takes advantage of the wide range of gear available to STAR*DRIVE heroes as does the scout. Since the scout always has to prepare for the unexpected—an oxymoron at best, an impossibility at worst—many heroes who walk the exploratory paths have hard choices to make when it comes to stowing or abandoning certain types of equipment.

ACCESSORIES AND CLOTHING

What a scout can carry on his person is especially important, since sometimes an explorer must abandon all other trappings to survive. The following table details recommended items for the scout, as well as a few not recommended.

Nonhumans should consider special accessories, such as the ayaishe (sesheyan), beishen (sesheyan), de'sya (t'sa), gailghe (sesheyan), nleer na'o (mechalus), rurrka (weren), and shaansi (t'sa). Some of these items counteract vulnerabilities these nonhumans may face, but most provide unique aid to these alien explorers.

In addition to the above list, there are a few new items developed by EdgeTech Outfitters and other scout- and explorer-oriented equipment providers, as detailed in the following text.

A.S.I.S.T. Collar (PL 7): For those scouts not interested in cyberware but who feel the need for quick-response nutrient, medical, and stim/relaxant technology, the Auto-injecting Serum-Intelligent Survival Technology Collar ("A.S.I.S.T." or "assist" for short) is a definite buy. A thin, flexible collar less than 1 cm thick and only 3 cm wide, it fits tightly around the scout's neck and can hold a variety

RECOMMENDED ACCESSORIES AND CLOTHING

Item	Comments
Antiscan Weave	Useful for avoiding high-tech surveillance but not recommended for normal scouting missions because, if detected, the scout may appear to be a spy.
Bioholster	Keeps the natives (or enemies) from using your weapon against you.
Carbonate Fiber*	Light armor protection without the appearance of armor.
Climate Weave**	Makes layered clothing obsolete, adjusts to extreme temperatures.
Gloves	Consider paying extra for gloves made of climate weave or carbonate fiber.
Goggles, protective*	A necessity in most environments; consider low-light and auto-tint features.
Jewelry	Never underestimate the value of trinkets to trade with the natives or valuable jewelry as a last-resort bribe.
Merrick Industries Neutralizer Coat*	Do not wear on high-precipitation worlds.
Repellant Weave*	Protection against normal precipitation.
Stealth Weave*	Better than antiscan weave in that it is more likely to be confused with good camouflage.
TrailTech Backpack*	Better quality than average backpack with more support.
TrailTech Parka*	Better than repellant weave and can double as a small shelter.
Uniform, any*	Avoid like the plague; scouts may gain benefits from a military-style uniform on some worlds, but it is infrequent at best.
Watch	Get one with a link to your spacecraft and your colleagues.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

**Listed under "Survival Gear" in the *Player's Handbook*.

of serums, emergency nutrients, and helpful pharmaceuticals in tiny, compressed packages.

Its computer brain can be set to operate almost like a medical sensor for one specific person. For example, if a deadly toxin is introduced to a victim's bloodstream, the ASIST can detect the poison and inject the antidote in less than a second—assuming it has been programmed to do so. If a scout suffers from dehydration or nutrient fatigue, the ASIST will automatically supply a small dose of the necessary substance and warn its wearer (with either a slight vibration or a low, buzzing sound) that something is amiss.

The ASIST can hold up to 24 different drugs (in very small doses), which its electronic brain can inject into its wearer singly or in preprogrammed combinations. The ASIST can even respond to its wearer's voice or tactile commands to deliver its payload on demand. Serums and pharmaceuticals are available separately. See the *Player's Handbook* and the *Arms & Equipment Guide* for sections on "Medical Gear and Supplies" for some of the most popular goods. The ASIST collar runs \$2,500 and has a mass of about .2 kilograms fully loaded.

Second-Skin Drysuit (PL 7): The only clothing that comes in a can, the second-skin (SS) drysuit must be worn underneath all other clothing. It is sprayed on and taken off with a special remover (be careful not to get it in any orifices).

The SS drysuit keeps all manner of liquids and gases (even toxic ones like those you'd find in an A3 environment) off the wearer's skin. It does nothing to prevent damage to outer clothing and bonds only to skin and hair. The SS drysuit can be applied to a naked creature in one round and lasts for about 12 hours, or until the solvent is applied. It is not recommended for overuse, as it tends to dry out skin and lead to rashes and chafing. However, it can be wonderful "just in case" protection on worlds with unfriendly atmospheres. A can of SS dryskin costs \$1,500 but contains 20+1d4 applications for characters of approximately human size.

MEDICAL GEAR

A scout ventures into the frontier at his own peril. Those who go it alone are the few, the mavericks—and, quite often, the first dead. Trapped on a frontier world without modern medical supplies can be deadly. Even a broken bone can mean infection and death.

But Gravity Age technology can provide for the scout as well as the civilized patient. The following medical equipment should be used by an explorer who has some medical training or, better yet, by a scout's friend who is a medical practitioner.

The following item was developed by EdgeTech Outfitters in conjunction with Mu'ray Medical Investigators. It should be of special interest to exploration-oriented heroes.

Forensics Gauntlet (PL 7): Basically a redesigned medical gauntlet, the forensics gauntlet actually goes the medical version one better. It can be used to augment a

RECOMMENDED MEDICAL GEAR

Item	Comments
Forensics kit†	Can be used to enhance lifeform survey reports and to investigate danger.
IM Neural Stimulator*	Avoid using it to bring natives back to life or suffer being mistaken as a god.
IsoMed Artificial Blood*	Keep it on the ship.
IsoMed Artificial Skin*	Keep it on the ship.
Life support pack†	Can keep a patient alive until help arrives or found by a rescue party.
MCI Life Support Pack*	Requires only basic first aid use to save a life.
MedCare One First Aid Kit*	Learn how to use it.
Medical gauntlet†	Unusual diseases and toxins can kill if they are not detected early and treated.
MedTech Robot*	Expensive, but worth it, buy it ASAP!
Pharmaceuticals**	Avoid overuse.
TimeOut Stasis Stretcher*	Another way to keep someone alive until they can be moved to competent help.

†If you know how to use it.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

**Found in both the *Arms & Equipment Guide* and the *Player's Handbook*.

character's Medical Science-*forensics* skill (giving a -1 step bonus to any attempt), or it can even be used by a character without the skill or the specialization to analyze data and process it for general dissemination.

After being used to examine a wound or corpse, the forensics gauntlet can be plugged into a computer programmed with the accompanying software. The data provided should give even untrained heroes some understanding of what caused the damage or death. The forensics gauntlet and accompanying software has a Medical Science-*forensics* skill of 14/7/3.

Unfortunately, it is not very versatile. When used to examine a creature unfamiliar to its software (such as a creature not described in the *Alien Compendium*), the software sustains anywhere from a +1 to +5 step penalty in its analysis. This penalty is not applied if the character wielding the gauntlet has the Medical Science-*forensics* skill and is simply using the tool to provide a bonus to his

own skill (though the Gamemaster may decide other penalties apply). The forensics gauntlet masses 2 kilograms; the software bundle is negligible in size and weight and can be installed in any shipboard computer. The gauntlet costs about \$2,000 because of its newness on the market.

RECOMMENDED PROFESSIONAL EQUIPMENT

Item	Comments
BerTek Excavation Projector*	While you should also carry a shovel, this gem of Gravity Age excavation is worth taking along.
Generator, fusion*	Without power, much of the best technology is just junk; this one runs off water.
Instrument Pack	Essential for completing any planetary or lifeform survey.
Rescue Pack	You never know when someone will fall in a pit or get trapped by an avalanche.
RPV Kit*	Great for looking around without leaping first.
Toolkit, general	Minor repairs and even extensive survival construction can be accomplished with this item.
Toolkit, specialized*	Depending on the specialty, this could be essential.
TrailTech Solar Generator*	Works on sunlight (when available).
TyKo Carbide Shears	A cut above your average knife.
Weight Neutralizer	Useful, but do not depend on this powered weight-lifter; anything you cannot carry on your back becomes disposable junk if this breaks or gives out.
Workshop, portable	If possible, have one on the ship.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

PROFESSIONAL EQUIPMENT

Most scouts have a variety of skills and abilities, for no career is more versatile. As a result, some scout groups may have access to unexpectedly useful talents. When that is the case, they should carry with them the gear that allows them to use their skills to fullest effect. Only the most obviously useful professional equipment is listed here, however.

One other piece of gear has been developed with the scout profession specifically in mind, as detailed in the following text.

MPBP Support System (PL 7): The Muscle-Powered Back Pack Support System sounds like a strange name for a backpack harness, but it is really an ingenious kinetic battery linked to a miniature weight neutralizer system. A light backpack harness with a small energy converter and muscle-feed adapter, the MPBP actually runs off its wearer's exertions. The battery recharges from pickups worn around the wearer's torso, abdomen, and upper legs. As the wearer carries the pack and walks, the battery recharges. The converter then powers the small weight neutralizer.

Worn on a person's back, the MPBP has a smaller capacity than most weight neutralizers. It can only neutralize up to 1,000 kilograms and can carry only those items that fit inside or strap onto a backpack, but its battery lasts indefinitely. It is also extremely portable—unlike many weight neutralizers that were built for flat terrain, the MPBP can go anywhere the scout can travel. Its weight is 10 kilograms, but that is negated along with up to 1,000 kilograms of cargo. The cost is \$750—more expensive than its more powerful counterparts, but that is mostly because of the energy conversion system.

SENSOR GEAR

This is a simple list to make: All scouts should buy and store all the sensor apparatus they can afford and carry. From the simple compass to imaging goggles to weapon detectors, anything listed as a sensor should be on the scout's "must buy" list from day one. Of course, the average scout cannot afford every piece of sensor apparatus available. The following list consists of the best, most versatile, and most highly recommended personal sensor items.

One other important sensor item was developed long ago, but is seldom employed any more. It should be brought back into use, as laid out in the following text.

Watchdog Relay Units (PL 6): The "watchdogs" are small, unobtrusive sensor units that have extremely smart reactive computer brains. They can be placed around the perimeter of a camp, a landing zone, or even in a fencelike line. Their range is line-of-sight—either to each other or to a specific target. Some of their features extend beyond that.

The Watchdogs can be linked to one or more sense-monitors. These monitors can be a watch-sized portable computer worn by the scout, the computer on a ship, or virtually any other AI or computer within 100 kilometers of a single Watchdog unit. They do not necessarily have to be in the line of sight.

RECOMMENDED SENSOR GEAR

Item	Comments
Binoculars	Simple, nonmechanical, and reliable.
Compass, gyroscopic	This avoids the "what is 'north'" problem of alien worlds.
Detector, any*	Specialized versions of the sensor gauntlet; these are most useful if you have some idea what you're looking for.
Goggles, various*	Light and useful—buy different pairs and carry them with you for different circumstances (low light, no light, thermal, etc.).
Holorecorder	3D images can be very convincing (and valuable) to a patron who couldn't make the trip.
Sensor Gauntlet	Don't try to perform a detailed planetary analysis (especially of lifeforms) without one.
Tracker, signal & sonic*	Both can be used either to help a scout find his way or to warn him of approaching danger.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

The Watchdogs act as electronic sentries. They can be programmed to watch for movement or to broadcast images. They can detect sounds or smells within 100 meters (given normal atmospheric conditions), and they can send data back to a computer with a sensor software package for analysis. Watchdogs have even been built with weapons (like mines or direct-fire missiles) to "respond" to intrusions—though this last option is not provided by the companies that produce them.

The Awareness-*perception* skill of a single Watchdog is 18/9/4 within line of sight (for visual or motion detection) or 100 meters (for sound or smell detection). The Watchdog can be programmed to respond to changes or to provide continuous feedback.

When two Watchdogs are within line of sight (or 100 meters for sound and smell) of each other, they gain a -2 step bonus to detecting anything that passes between them. A third Watchdog can be added to increase this to a -4 step bonus. Further unit placements gain no additional benefit.

Each Watchdog unit costs \$750 and masses only 2 kilograms. They come in a variety of designs—the most popular

appear similar to brown or gray rocks. The system monitor costs an additional \$250 (software included), but is usually thrown in free with a purchase of three units or more.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communication is important to all explorers, assuming they have someone to communicate with—and they'd better. A teammate or even a ship's helpful AI can mean the difference between a successful scouting mission and certain death. Of course, without being able to call for help, death is more of a certainty.

The best communications gear is always recommended, but scouts need to stay away from equipment that relies heavily on satellite or grid support, since neither is likely to be available.

One other item of equipment was used (and is still used) by the military but has become available to civilians as well.

Helmetvid (PL 6): Attached to a helmet or shoulder harness, the helmetvid broadcasts continuous audio and video playback to a command center or slaved screen. It can be turned off and on by its wearer or by remote and many even have zoom, low-light, and other options. The helmetvid is terrific for scout teams that need to split up but want to have continuous reports from all sides—usually with a coordinator back at the ship ready to relay information and advice.

RECOMMENDED COMMUNICATIONS GEAR

Item	Comments
Beacon, any*	Also covered under survival gear, beacons are the last resort (emergency, automated) of the desperate scout and the first resort (marker) of the careful one.
Communicator, multiband*	Keeps unfriendlies from listening in.
Communicator, subdermal*	Keeps unfriendlies from knowing you're broadcasting, of course, if they find out, they'll cut it out.
Comm gear	General gear and very useful for keeping in touch with group members or the ship.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

The helmetvid, simply put, sees everything its wearer sees and hears everything its wearer hears. The viewer looking "through" the helmetvid must take a +1 step penalty when making Awareness checks through the camera, but he can assist the wearer with such checks by providing instantaneous feedback.

Some military units have been made to fit over goggles or in other camouflaged configurations, but these are not available on the civilian market as yet.

The helmetvid unit weighs 1.5 kilograms (unattached) and has a 36-hour rechargeable power source. Its broadcast range is approximately 10 kilometers with no interference. It costs \$250. The central command units can be built into a spaceship's standard sensor array and cost about \$500. Each command unit can handle up to six helmetvid cams.

SURVIVAL GEAR

A scout who doesn't live to report does no good (well, maybe they'll name a planet after you if they find your remains on it). Getting back alive is important. Some equipment listed above (particularly under "Clothing and Accessories" and "Medical Gear") is intended to keep the scout alive, but the following gear is designed to ensure it.

Consider the following piece of equipment for the exploring enthusiast. It could save a scout's life.

RECOMMENDED SURVIVAL GEAR

Item	Comments
Climbing Gear*	TrailTech has some superior equipment that scouts who have extra money might wish to consider.
Emergency Beacon	Lasts longer than a flare and can be programmed to broadcast on specific frequencies.
E-suit, soft or hard	All scouts must have one for hostile environments.
Habitat Dome	Useful and comfortable—a better alternative than the portable cabin.
Rope	Don't go anywhere without it.
Vacuum Mask	More versatile than the respirator mask.
Water Purifier	Not very useful where there isn't water, bring your own water but bring one for the ship.
Weather Monitor	Can be good to track climatic changes, but only as useful as its programming.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

Survival bag (PL 7): Similar to the more primitive sleeping bag but more advanced than the bolthole CD sleeping bag (described in the *Arms & Equipment Guide*), the survival bag has all the qualities of a habitat dome except for the airlock. It can be folded into a 1-kilogram, .25-meter-square bundle.

The survival bag seals over its single, human-sized occupant. (Custom sizes can be made for a 10% to 25% price premium.) The bag provides enough protection for that individual to survive any conditions a person in a habitat dome could—ranges in temperature from H0 to H4, for example, to protection up to A4 toxicity, and even relief from pressure up to P3. The survival bag is clear, but can be made one-way (the inhabitant can see out) or two-way opaque upon touching an interior stud (usually reverting to flat black, but different colors are available). The life support of the survival bag is limited at only about 24 hours of air, but it comes with hook-up for air tanks and nutrient bags. One nutrient bag (available separately for about \$5 apiece) can sustain a human comfortably for up to three days. The survival bag costs \$1,000 but is extremely portable and essential in an emergency. Don't leave home without it!

WEAPONS AND ARMOR

While most scouts would probably just as soon avoid confrontations with natives, pirates, or others who don't care for the spread of information throughout the galaxy, it is a fact of life that conflicts will arise. The prepared scout has to be ready to survive such conflicts and escape ... perhaps to bring back bigger guns to settle the problem.

OFFENSIVE GEAR

It is most important for scouts to remember that when they venture into an unknown or uncharted system, they are not there to spread the Concord's influence (or whatever political doctrine they subscribe to). If a scout thinks it is his duty, he may wish to rethink his chosen profession—or get a lot better at fighting.

The following "offensive gear" is well named. These items of varying lethality are recommended because they give the scout the best chance of getting out of a bad situation alive—and without damaging whatever alien ecosystem he has stumbled into and without killing what could be an important individual or species.

Development of nonlethal weapons is usually considered the task of urban police forces, but the CSS has actually asked EdgeTech and SekureTek Group to come up with something they can use to stun, but not kill, wild beasts and deranged natives, possibly with a view toward capture and study. The following item is what they have come up with.

Claymore Energy Net (PL 7): Its name sounds more lethal than the weapon actually is. Built into a small, box-shaped unit, the Claymore Energy Net is a mine that works

RECOMMENDED WEAPONS

Item	Comments
Bayonet	Large enough to inflict decent damage or to be used as a digging or cutting tool.
Grenade, stun	Incapacitates a large number of opponents; can be set for timed release, hard to obtain legally.
Hand axe	Requires no technology and little training; can be used as a tool.
Pistol, .38	Easy to use, repair, and reload, seldom needs maintenance; however, uses bulky ammunition and is loud.
Pistol, stutter	Incapacitates but seldom kills at range.
SMG, stutter	Almost certain to knock out hostiles before they get to you.
Stun baton	Excellent for rendering most opponents unconscious without actually killing them, does require power.
Tong Fe*	Not always perceived as a weapon, nonpowered and usually nonlethal, it does require some training to use.

*From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

in combination with a sensor unit not unlike the Watchdog unit (see above). When a target comes within a preprogrammed distance, the unit explodes outward, almost silently, hurling a thinly threaded but extraordinarily strong net at its target. The guidance system behind the net limits its effective range to about 10 meters (assuming no obstructions between the Claymore and its target), but it has a Modern Ranged Weapons skill of 20/10/5 to hit within that range.

Once the Claymore Energy Net hits its target, it wraps around it snugly—and magnetically—and then jolts the target if it struggles. Creatures struggle once, but the jolt is enough to deter most from making a second attempt. The target must make an Endurance—*stamina* skill check or suffer Energy damage. On an Amazing success, the target only endures d6s. On a Good success, the damage is d6+2s. An Ordinary success means d8+3s, while a Marginal success inflicts d8+5s. On a Critical Failure, the target takes 2d6+4s. The net will continue to jolt the target until the creature stops struggling (once per round, at the end of the round) or until the net is turned off. Minor movement does not result in a shock.

The net has a strength equivalent to an ability score of 20 and a durability of 26 (wounds). The Claymore Energy Net unit costs \$1,000 and masses 5 kilograms. Additional

prepacked nets may be purchased for \$50 apiece. As long as they are not damaged, nets may be reused.

DEFENSIVE GEAR

Scouts, with all the other things they have to carry, must try to travel light where armor is concerned. While walking around in a body tank would certainly protect most scouts, such armament would be cumbersome to say the least. It would also send the wrong message to any colonists or natives the scout encountered. While those the explorer is likely to meet may want to kill or injure him (and the scout's first duty is to avoid being killed or maimed), it is important to remember the tragedies of too militant a presence in times past.

The following items of armor are recommended because they offer maximum protection for minimal bother—either physical or mental.

Combining and adapting existing types of gear to scout-

RECOMMENDED ARMOR

Item	Comments
CF Long or Short Coat	This armor is comfortable and does not look like armor to most eyes; it is not weather-resistant, so a short coat with a parka may be the way to go.
CF Softsuit	Even better than the coats, this armor can look like almost any type of suit the scout wants, though it still won't protect against a hostile environment.
Deflection Harness*	While only useful for short periods of time, this armor can protect against missiles and some environmental conditions.
Scout 230 AET Assault Gear	This may say "Scout" in its title, but it refers to a military scout and is a very military piece of equipment; if a scout can get his hands on it, he should only wear it in uninhabited or very hostile systems.

*Variants on the standard deflection harness can be found in the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

ing use is a habit for exploration-minded engineers. The newest development along those lines comes from the personal armor catalog, as follows.

Deflection Glove (PL 7): Worn like a sensor gauntlet, the deflection glove operates under the same principles as other deflection screens—only it isn't built into a suit of armor. Rather, it works almost like an assault shield, though it is virtually useless in melee. By turning on the glove, which requires an action, and interposing it between the wearer and a ranged attack, the wielder can put up a temporary deflection screen. This shield covers an area 1 meter wide and 2 meters high—just large enough to cover a single body from one direction only. The shield cannot be seen unless a projectile tries to pass through it, in which case it shimmers.

The deflection glove's energy screen slows or reflects projectiles and energy attempting to pass through it. Like a true deflection screen, the glove's shield makes it more difficult for an attacker to hit—adding +1 to the defender's Dexterity resistance modifier. If the attack still hits, the damage is unaffected.

The deflection glove's power source can sustain its high energy output for only d3+3 rounds of combat because it is extremely unstable—hence the inexact burnout time. When used up, it must actually be replaced instead of recharged. The glove itself costs \$1,500, but replacement energy cells only run \$10 apiece. The glove, loaded, weighs 1 kilogram.

CYBERWARE

Scouts used to avoid cybergear like they avoid urban areas while working, but that has begun to change. Cybernetics have become an important part of the Gravity Age, and explorers don't want to be left behind. There are many pieces of cybergear scouts will find useful, but a few of the most interesting are listed here.

The following piece of equipment is recommended only for scouts who have already lost a limb and had it replaced with a cybernetic attachment.

Subdermal Toolkit (PL 7): Built into a cybernetic arm, hand, leg, or foot, this casing contains enough shielding to fool most detection units. Its components are made of the same material as the limb and are placed to "shadow" existing cybergear mechanisms. As long as the detector has no objection to cybergear—or even if he deactivates the limb—the toolkit should go unnoticed.

The toolkit contains small tools and a few power cells that can be used to pick locks, recharge small powered weapons or cybergear, and even make some repairs. Removing the tools requires the temporary deactivation of the cybergear but, once removed, the gear can be reactivated normally—the tools do not form an integral part of the system.

The toolkit is good enough to provide a -2 step modifier

RECOMMENDED CYBERWARE

Item	Comments
Biowatch*	You'll never forget to wind it.
CF Skinweave*	High protection at relatively low cost.
Cyberware, sensory**	Enhanced or new sensory feedback without bulky equipment.
Data Slot, passive*	Stores a lot of information from a variety of sources.
ER Slot	With a Trauma Pack II, this takes care of self-repair.
Nanocomputer	Necessary for most active cyberware.
Optic Screen	Can be used to display critical data to the wearer only.
Self-Repair Unit	Can keep the scout alive and even fix him without medical attention.
Subdermal Comm*	For keeping in touch with teammates.

*These items are especially appealing because they do not require nanocomputers.

**From the *Arms & Equipment Guide*.

to most Technical Science checks and a -1 step to many Manipulation—lockpicking or Security—security devices feats. Heroes can even specify special equipment that might be included in the toolkit, such as tiny weapons, small doses of medicine, or other gear. The total weight of the toolkit cannot exceed 1.5 kilograms, and the size of any individual tool cannot be larger than .25 meters in length and only about one-third that in width. The toolkit must be built into an artificial limb and adds \$500 to the cost. The tools themselves can vary in price, but seldom cost more than \$100 total.

GETTING PAID

While most scouts explore because of their love of adventure and their desire to be first, few of them turn their up noses at fair payment for services rendered. The guidelines presented here can be used to determine what that fair payment might be.

WHEN THE CONCORD FOOTS THE BILL

The Concord Survey Service makes every effort to reward its scouts as fairly and equitably as possible for their efforts. Unfortunately, since the CSS considers itself something of a

nonprofit organization and was founded on the principle of expanding knowledge rather than the purses of either scouts or corporations, it is not interested in paying bonuses or extravagant sums for exciting or valuable discoveries. Its payments are based primarily on the newness, thoroughness, and accuracy of the information.

Even the CSS does have its preferences, however. Encouraged by the Concord government to continue reuniting the Verge and reporting threats to Concord safety, the Concord itself supplements scout payments based on certain types of information.

The CSS Scout Payments table can be used to generate basic payments for scouts when they come from the Concord Survey Service. Begin with the Survey Type performed and add or subtract any Situational Adjustments that apply. Unless otherwise noted, all payments are cumulative.

Remember that payments made by the CSS usually come only after confirmation of information. This can take anywhere from a month to a year in some cases, though scouts who have a reputation for honesty, prove that their information is valid, or have other extenuating considerations may expect either partial or complete payment upon completion of their mission.

The Survey Types are all linked to the System Survey Request Form presented in the chapter on "Star Surveys 101" at the beginning of this book. Thus, filling out all the forms completely renders a minimum payment of \$3,585—assuming there is only one planet in the system with any number of moons and no more than one lifeform to analyze.

A Contracted Survey is one where the CSS, usually in the form of a field agent, approaches a scouting group with a specific system survey in mind. Sometimes, the Contracted Survey is of a system on the very edge of the frontier (perhaps one scheduled for possible colonization or exploitation efforts), other times it is one where other scouts may have failed to bring back complete or reliable information. The scouts may be asked to perform either a complete or partial survey. The variance in payment depends on how valuable the system is likely to be.

When scouts go into a known danger zone (as posted by the Concord Survey Service or even some local authorities), they receive a bonus for bringing back reliable information. The variance depends on how dangerous the system is supposed to be (note that all unexplored systems are considered dangerous, but few are designated as "known danger zones" because that means the presence of a confirmed threat).

A +20% payment usually means some sort of natural or nonintelligent phenomena, or perhaps one localized to a specific planet (such as a black hole in the system or hostile primitives that can't be avoided). The payment increases depending on how much these dangers are likely to inhibit the survey. The CSS has, on occasion, paid out this bonus for surveys of systems where danger did exist but was not confirmed (ie, only rumored). The CSS resorts to

GAMEMASTER NOTE: PAYMENTS TO SCOUTS

All monetary rewards described here are meant as a proportional base. If, in your campaign, you find these values are too low or too high to justify the risk of adventure or the interest of your exploring heroes, feel free to adjust them as you see fit. The justification that the Concord, as a governing body, occasionally changes its rates without notice is a simple rationalization. The important thing is to reward scouts for their efforts but not make them filthy rich off just a few expeditions. In general, the Concord Survey Service wants its payments to be enough for the average scout to pay for its expenses, occasionally upgrade its equipment, and have a little money left over to enjoy between missions. It is not paying to make anyone wealthy!

CSS SCOUT PAYMENTS

Base Rate for Survey Type	Payment
Basic system information	\$1,000
Individual planetary information (by planet)	\$250
Moon and orbital information (by planet)	\$100*
Basic lifeform analysis	\$1,000**
Situational Adjustment	Payment Adjustment
Contracted survey	+10 to +25%
Known danger zone	+20 to +50%
Known enemy present	+50 to +100%
Partial survey requested	-10 to 30%
Partial survey completed	-20% per missing item on form
Survey confirmation expedition	-50%†

*Note that confirmation of no satellites still rates the \$100 payment. A planet with 10 moons, however, likewise only rates a \$100 payment.

**Usually, this payment is made by planetary ecosystem, but discovery and cataloging of multiple, distinct higher lifeforms may result in multiple payments. Confirmation of "no lifeforms" is also worth a single payment per system.

†Not cumulative with the Contracted Survey.

this practice if the explorers neutralize the danger or catalog it so that it can be avoided by later visitors.

Scouting a system or planet where there is a known enemy present is extremely dangerous, and the payment increase is well earned. It can be cumulative with survey done in a known danger zone, but only if the system presents more dangers than just the enemy itself. A known enemy includes pirate vessels, a hostile colony world (that can fight surveyors), or even a powerful hostile alien presence. A system where clicks are present (even if only occasionally) would be a +100% bonus.



Partial Survey Requested means either another scout failed to achieve a complete survey or reports have been confirmed about some, but not all, of the system's information. It is quite likely a Contracted Survey—the CSS has been known to post partial surveys for anyone to fill in the blanks. Partially completed forms always accompany these surveys with what is known about the system. Note that a partial survey does not include those where one form was completely filled out but others were left completely blank. Each form is considered a separate form. So, if a scout filled out Part 2b of the System Survey Report Form (Individual Planetary Information) but did not survey all the planets or did not get all the information about them, filling in the holes is a Partial Survey. The variance in payment usually has to do with how much information has been left blank on a survey and how useful the documented information is likely to be.

Survey confirmation expeditions are occasionally contracted but, more often than not, are done by scouts who just happen to survey the same system at roughly the same time (but not in conjunction with each other). By conducting an independent, "second" survey, the explorer loses 50% of the value of his survey, but does get payment for his redundant effort. His confirmation also happens to speed payment to the other scout, and explorers don't usually forget favors

like that. Unofficially, it's not unusual for scouts who find out they filed their reports just a few days or weeks before another scout accidentally "confirms" their information to reward the second explorer, whether monetarily or otherwise. The reward, if monetary, is seldom more than 25% of the survey's value, but it pays to make friends.

Neophyte scouts hate to leave a job unfinished, but veteran explorers realize that sometimes someone else must finish what they started. This is especially true of first contact situations or danger zones. When a scout fills out only part of the information on a survey form, he still gets paid for what he did catalog. Officially, his survey is docked 20% per item missing from the survey form (so missing five items from a form makes the survey valueless, monetarily anyway).

Unofficially, though, the CSS has been known to take circumstances into account. Take, for example, the situation of a scout who rushes back with no information at all except for the fact that a heavily armed group of pirates is hiding out in the system he just surveyed. The CSS isn't going to short-change the scout for warning the Concord. Showing common sense in first contact situations is also rewarded. After all, typical explorers simply aren't capable of establishing relations with a new culture, and the CSS doesn't want to dock their pay if they are wise enough to

recognize that. As a result, this -20% per item is often partially deferred or even overlooked—as long as the reason for the omission was wisdom and not sloppiness.

All Situational Adjustments are made to the base survey payment (all the surveys of the system added together) and are not inclusive of each other. For example, say a scout performs the following surveys:

Basic system information:	\$1,000
Individual planetary info (3 planets):	\$750
Moon and orbital information (3 planets):	\$750
Basic lifeform analysis (2 ecosystems):	\$2,000
Base Survey Payment:	\$4,500

And the survey had the following Situational Adjustments:

Contracted survey (+10%):	+ \$450
Known danger zone (+20%):	+ \$900
Total Adjustment:	+ \$1,350

The total payment made to the scout is \$4,500 + \$1,350 = \$5,850.

OTHER PATRONS

There is nothing preventing scouts from working for a variety of employers. In fact, most do so. Only the CSS pays for all new information, but their payment rates are less than top dollar, except in extreme circumstances. An explorer who shops his skills around in the private sector can almost always find a better deal—but also more restrictive terms.

The following examples include just a few patrons who might be interested in buying a scout's services. You'll learn what they'll pay for (and how much), as well as some of the advantages and drawbacks an explorer can expect to deal with when working for these parties.

RIGUNMOR STAR CONSORTIUM

As "traders to the stars," emissaries of the Rigunmor Star Consortium are always on the lookout for new markets and new commodities to buy and sell. They are particularly interested in lost colonies and new civilizations just a Progress Level or so behind the rest of the Verge. They pay their scouts to find colonies or civilizations with something worthwhile to trade (it doesn't matter what, as long as it is valuable) who are lacking in an area that the Rigunmors can provide.

Of the patrons other than the CSS, Rigunmors pay the most consistently. Already wealthy, the Rigunmor Star Consortium and its agents are willing to "take a flier" on new markets and commodities, as long as they perceive a long-term benefit. Even if they end up breaking even on a deal with a rediscovered colony or lesser civilization, the

Rigunmors feel the good PR will do their interests some good. Of course, a scout who leads them down the "break even" road more than once in a row seldom gets another chance to make good.

When using the Rigunmors as a patron to a scouting mission, consider the following elements.

Wants: New markets and new commodities (in volume).

Payment Terms: Finder's fees equal to the CSS's normal pay rate for a survey, plus up to 200% if commodity or market appears especially valuable.

Alternate Payment Terms: Goods and/or services from Rigunmor distributors and retailers at up to a 20% price break as long as the commodity or new market is hot.

Advantages: Payment usually is proffered before full confirmation occurs.

Disadvantages: Mistakes or opportunities that don't pan out often blacklist the scout from future surveys. Markets and commodities not deemed viable garner no payment whatsoever.

STARMECH COLLECTIVE

Fascinated with technology, always in need of raw materials, and almost always outward-looking, the StarMech Collective appears to be an almost perfect patron for the tech-minded scout team. It is a rarity when StarMech will send out its own operatives in search of new civilizations or interests, but that doesn't mean the engineering-obsessed Stellar Nation won't pay for someone else to risk gathering that information.

StarMech is fairly reliable in its payments but somewhat short-sighted and, of course, obsessive. A scout who makes a new discovery while exploring for StarMech had better find another patron fast if that discovery has nothing to do with whatever StarMech's Information Services Bureau is currently interested in. Of course, that scout had better fulfill his contract or StarMech might become obsessed with tracking him down and canceling the deal.

Here's how to incorporate a StarMech patron into your campaign.

Wants: Unpredictable, but usually new sources of rare ore and new technology are accepted. Alien artifacts are almost always of interest.

Payment Terms: Upon receipt of first shipment. StarMech may employ separate transportation for the scout's find but, quite often, it is up to the explorer to bring his discoveries to StarMech. However, the Collective will pay full market value as well as a substantial bonus for continuing supplies (usually 1% of whatever one shipment of the material is going for). See TABLE S2: COMMODITIES in the STAR*DRIVE campaign book and use the location of the StarMech agent as the reference.

Alternate Payment Terms: In the case of alien artifact discovery or technological need, StarMech will often barter its engineering and technical knowledge for rights to new discoveries. Heroes could learn how a particular artifact

works, or upgrade their ship, or even acquire robots from StarMech.

Advantages: StarMech is often obsessively looking for something—and willing to pay highly for the right something.

Disadvantages: StarMech may change its mind, mid-contract, about what it's looking for or what it will pay. Making this hedonistic Stellar Nation stick to a contract is very difficult.

THULDAN EMPIRE

Not the easiest employer in the Concord to work for, the Thuldans tend to be unpopular where they do not hold power and arrogant where they do. Often ignoring or disparaging the work of independent scouts, the Thuldans are still forced to employ them for information gathering and exploration.

Working for the Thuldan Empire's representatives can be profitable and even easy on occasion—though it may leave a scout feeling a bit unclean sometimes. Actually, not all Thuldans are arrogant thugs who treat non-Thuldans like lesser beings ... but the ones freelance explorers are likely to run into will be.

Still, the Thuldans will pay for a variety of information, and they usually pay well. They accept a wide range of surveys from independent scouts and do not require confirmation. It has been rumored that the Thuldans have even paid for redundant or false surveys that they knew were redundant or false—though no one knows why they did so.

To use a Thuldan patron for scouts in your campaign, consider the following elements.

Wants: Thuldans always want information about habitable systems that they can expand their empire into. They are primarily interested in information on indigenous lifeforms (particularly military strength), and they will also pay to hear that other concerns might be scouting the same area. Thuldans will also occasionally pay for information on cataloged Verge systems—especially information on military strengths.

Payment Terms: Thuldans almost always pay a part of the money up front. They like to use the CSS's payment terms, plus 50%, to show their generosity. They pay unexpected bonuses for particularly useful information (about lifeforms, military installations, valuable properties of the surveyed system, and the like)—and they also pay for silence.

Alternate Payment Terms: The Thuldans will sometimes offer particularly talented or reliable scouts full-time employment with lavish benefits. These benefits may decline or cease over time (unless the scout continues to produce to high standards).

Advantages: The Thuldans will pay for almost any type of information.

Disadvantages: Thuldans will not tolerate duplicate sale of information, and they have been rumored to eliminate



scouts they feel they cannot trust. The Thuldans have no compunctions about subjugating or evicting natives or colonists from surveyed systems that they take an interest in, so scouts who have a conscience may shy away from working with them.

REDMAN-SMITH TRADING CORP

One of the most well-known organizations in the Verge, the Redman-Smith Trading Corp (R-STC) specializes in tracking commerce. Its price index is the basis for Verge economy. Without reliable trade information, R-STC cannot maintain its reputation.

Of course, most corporations provide their financial information to R-STC freely, and many even allow Redman-Smith to send its own reviewers in occasionally. Moving up on their corporate index is a PR and financial dream—and dropping down is an indication that a firm needs to reevaluate its position.

But Redman-Smith is also interested in new profit centers. Many, many Verge operations—especially mining concerns and agrifarms—are not tracked or cataloged by the Concord or the local system governments. Redman-Smith is willing to pay to know where the next big rhodium strikes will be, or who has developed the next planet-wide agricultural zone farms. If the corporation can get this information before it is released to the public, it can ensure accurate pricing of commodities throughout the Verge.

Use the following information when working R-STC into your campaign as a scouting patron.

Wants: Information on existing or potential big money interests. Particularly, Redman-Smith would like to know about ore-rich systems and those with habitable, but generally uninhabited, planets that can be turned into food producers. Bonuses will be paid for information on undocumented but already working claims.

Payment Terms: Since Redman-Smith usually only pays for information on other corporation's activities, it pays a flat fee equal to about 200% of the CSS's own pay scale. Bonuses are paid for confidential or valuable information.

Alternate Payment Terms: Substantial finder's fees are paid on those interests Redman-Smith can itself allocate. Up to 3% of the first shipment's commodity value (for ongoing concerns) will be paid to scouts who accurately report new claims. To determine this approximate value, find the commodity and its most likely destination in the Verge using TABLE S2: COMMODITIES from the STAR*DRIVE campaign book. Multiply the figure by .03 and then roll d20. That is the number of cargo units—10 cubic meters—shipped out of the concern during the commission period. Ten cargo units of rare ore shipped to the Aegis System, for example, would be worth *920,000. The scout who supplied the information could garner from *9,200 to *27,600!

Advantages: Redman-Smith is highly respected and seldom cheats its freelance employees. It also seldom

sends them into areas of great danger, though corporate espionage is not uncommon.

Disadvantages: Redman-Smith is almost completely disinterested in the Concord Survey Service's scouting information. While it will use that data to base payments on, what it wants is financial information on existing corporations or on new, upcoming concerns. It does not pay its scouts to be first, but to watch those who are financial movers and shakers.

INDEPENDENT MINING CONCERNS

Most mining corporations are always on the lookout for new sources of ore. With rhodium in such great demand, it is the most prominent substance searched for, but not the only one. Gold, silver, uranium, gas, iron, nickel, and even gemstones continue to be of noteworthy value. And, with the demand spread out over hundreds of star systems, miners know that regardless of how rich a source is today, tomorrow it will probably be gone.

As a result, mining concerns, independent or affiliated, will pay well for good, hard data on new sources of valuable material. They are willing to send their employees (or go themselves) to work these mines, and danger has never deterred these tough rock-eaters. They may cry for military protection after trouble starts, but the scout who gets them accurate information on valuable mineral deposits will be long gone by then.

Miners tend to discriminate against nonminers, so they tend to be suspicious and wary of independents. They are always worried about their claims being jumped and will not hesitate to threaten or use violence to ensure their rights.

Refer to the following when using a mining concern as a patron for scouts.

Wants: Miners look for mineral wealth, that's obvious. However, they are also interested in any competition (mining or survival-oriented) they may face in a system, and they want detailed information on what challenges they'll face in-system while they set up and execute their operations.

Payment Terms: Because most mining concerns want valid, complete information, they will pay for full system surveys at five times the going CSS rate. However, they do not pay for any situational adjustments—just the flat fee. In addition, miners almost always make it a condition of payment that the scout travel back with them to the system, making the scout wait to be paid until verification of the find. At that point, a bonus of up to 10 cargo units of ore is almost always paid (as long as the scout is willing to wait for it to be mined and can arrange for its transportation out-system). Miners will not pay for duplicate information unless they can be reliably assured that no other mining concern will try to compete with them for the claim.

Alternate Payment Terms: Smaller organizations will often offer to take scouts on as partners or employees

for a cut of the total profits. The scout team that finds the claim site must continue to work for the miners (either scouting new locations, continuing to monitor or scout the existing system, or doing whatever work the organization needs), but the rewards might be worth it. Up to 5% of the total profits of the mining venture is usually negotiable—until the mine plays itself out. For even modest strikes, this could result in anywhere from tens of thousands to millions of Concord dollars.

Advantages: Reputable mining organizations pay well, on time, and in hard currency or easily tradable ore. They are a great source for future employment as well as other considerations. A scout who does a few good jobs for a mining corporation can count on support throughout his career—legal, moral, and even economic.

Disadvantages: Miners seldom care about nonmining-oriented discoveries. While this means a scout can often sell them a partial report (as long as it includes details about the mining concern itself), it can lead to trouble. If a strike appears too costly to take advantage of or is not as promising as it first appeared, the miners tend to blame the scout who reported it and will often back out of the contract. Worse, they will spread the word that the scout is unreliable if they don't get their money back.

BIOLOGICAL AND MEDICAL FIRMS

The greatest source for new treatments, biological discoveries, and solutions to existing medical problems does not lie in the laboratories, but on the planets and in the jungles of unexplored systems—or so many biotech and medtech firms believe. They are, however, willing to put their money where their theories are, and they pay scouts to investigate systems that might yield new lifeforms and ecosystems to analyze.

These firms are often a collection of small laboratories and research facilities that cannot compete with the megacorporate giants of the health- and biocare industries of the Concord and even the Verge. They rely on new breakthroughs and startling discoveries to attract funding. They look to independent scouts to find these things for them, to supply them with their dreams.

As a result, many of these firms range from optimistic to pessimistic with regard to independent exploration—and often individuals within the firms represent both extremes. They have little respect for independent surveys, yet they rely heavily on them for their data. This love/hate relationship with scouting can make working for biological and medical firms both frustrating—and occasionally profitable.

Consider the following information when setting up such a patron for scouts.

Wants: New lifeforms of any kind attract the biotechs and medfirms. They are particularly interested in plants and lower lifeforms that they can experiment upon, and most will not balk at forensic examinations of higher lifeforms either. They are also interested in lost or separated

colonies that had to survive on hostile worlds for more than a few generations. Mutations and genetic engineering interest them greatly.

Payment Terms: The payment terms for these firms are based on their current grants. They often pay exorbitant sums for trivial information—that a planet has a Class 1 or Class 2 environment, for example—but haggle over more striking discoveries, such as a new alien species. This unpredictability is based solely on how popular a particular discovery is with their current funding backer. As a result, payment commensurate with CSS terms is usually +10 to 500 percent. Bonuses for discoveries that back up these firms' current theories (or even refute them) can amount to thousands or even tens of thousands of Concord dollars. For instance, the discovery of a new type of heavy-gravity amoeba recently fetched a scout upwards of *25,000 because it turned out to be exactly the sort of deviation one xenobiologist predicted on a particular world.

Alternate Payment Terms: These firms almost always have access to valuable or even prototypical medical treatments that they can make available at cost to those who do them favors. Medical treatment or medical gear acquired through these firms can be as low as one-tenth the prices normally listed.

Advantages: Most of these firms send along trained biologists, medtechs, and other specialists to do the intricate biomedical analysis scouts aren't capable of. Free medical treatment and even preventive medical gear often goes along on these missions.

Disadvantages: The advantage is a double-edged sword, for the additional personnel can often be a problem. Most of them have not been out of a hospital or lab in decades, and they resent being told what to do by a lowly independent scout. Also, payment for scout services can suddenly fall through with the collapse of a foundation or the withdrawal of funding.

MILITARY POWERS

Of all the patrons, inter- and intrastellar military powers are the least likely to hire independent scouts on a regular basis but, as was proven during the Second Galactic War, sometimes the military must do this in order to obtain reliable, timely intelligence.

When military powers hire scouts, they usually do so for two major reasons: either they want to confirm rumors about enemies or threats in an unexplored or relatively unknown star system, or they wish to check up—surreptitiously—on their rivals or even their own allies. The first reason is called scouting. The second is out-and-out spying. All scouts and explorers perform the former service; only a few independents have any hand in the latter.

Still, sometimes patriotism, circumstance, or money forces a scout to spy for a military power. In that case, the scout should be very careful. Most navies are not so desperate for spies that they recruit independent scouts for

the purpose—they have much more reliable operatives. That is, unless they want to use personnel they can either disavow (if something goes wrong) or dispose of (if it goes right).

On the other hand, there are military powers simply concerned with confirming rumors or checking up on nearby systems. This happens especially often when a Stellar Nation or Verge system adds a new section of space to its sphere of influence. The first thing most military powers try to establish is what lies within their new borders; the second thing is what lies just beyond.

Use the following parameters when creating a military patron for scouts in your campaign.

Wants: In most cases, military powers hire scouts to do their jobs: follow up reports and confirm rumors about unknown or unfamiliar systems. Occasionally, they want spying done. The two jobs are very similar, and both have their risks. In either case, the military power wants a complete survey—and anything more the scout can provide.

Payment Terms: Payments vary widely depending on circumstance. If a scout is hired to chase down a rumor about an unexplored system, he can expect as much as ten times the value of the standard contracted survey from a military power. However, he will almost always have to take along an observer—maybe more than one—and he will have to be more thorough than usual ... unless the military observer has another agenda entirely, as mentioned in "Disadvantages," below.

Alternate Payment Terms: Often, military powers manipulate scouts into working for them. Perhaps the scout was caught in a criminal activity (whether the scout was committing it or not), or the scout is a patriot who can be appealed to. Either way, payment can still be offered, but it is usually no more than the CSS would pay for the information ... sometimes less. The alternative is seldom worth more.

Advantages: In most cases, military backing and rearmament isn't a problem. Further, when a scout performs a mission for a military power and survives, he can sometimes count on calling in a favor later on. Even if navies don't particularly like freebooting explorers, they tend to pay their debts.

Disadvantages: When a military power hires an independent scout, it usually has very specific instructions that it wants followed to the letter. Sometimes this means military personnel will be assigned to watch over the scout (which can be helpful in a firefight), but most often the military power goes to great lengths to make sure the hold it has on the independent is multilayered. Promise of payment isn't always considered enough to "encourage" scouts to do their job. Finally, military powers seldom send scouts into safe areas. After all, why would they need to?

GAMEMASTER NOTE: USING PERKS AND FLAWS

The rules for integrating new uses for old perks and flaws and for bringing new perks and flaws into an existing campaign remain consistent with the guidelines laid out in the *Player's Handbook*. The Gamemaster is the final arbiter when decisions need to be made concerning which perks and flaws can be taken, and how they are enforced. The new suggestions for old perks and flaws are not meant to supercede the rules presented in the *Player's Handbook*, but rather to supplement them and make them more interesting. Read Chapter 5: Perks and Flaws of the *Player's Handbook* before using any material in this section.

PERKS & FLAWS

Scouts and exploration-oriented heroes enter new worlds and unique situations every day of their lives. As a result, they may earn special considerations—or special hindrances—others might not, even in the same situations. This translates into some entirely new perks and flaws available to exploratory heroes—with a few new twists on old ones.

SOME INTERESTING OLD PERKS

The following perk options (from the *Player's Handbook*) may be used—with the Gamemaster's permission—in the allocation of existing perks to new scouting-oriented heroes. The game effects are essentially the same, but the perks have been customized to suit explorers specifically.

ALIEN ARTIFACT

Cost 8, —, Special

No hero type is more suited to possess an alien artifact than a scout. For an interesting twist, the Gamemaster may wish to rule that the scout found the artifact on a world where it obviously did not belong—and the scout is now searching for the artifact's origin. Perhaps the artifact is part of some larger construct, or maybe its very nature implies that there is more technology of its kind out there. Whatever the case, the scout desperately wants to find where it belongs.

Recommendation: No one ever knows everything about an Alien Artifact perk, and a trained scout should be no different. However, for the artifact to work in a role-playing sense, the scout should feel he is learning about it every few adventures. This might be just another clue as to its likely origin, function, or construction, with occasional major resolutions thrown in.



ANIMAL FRIEND

Cost 4, WIL, Conscious

Those scouts who spend a lot of time alone or in small groups tend to pick up animals, from the conventional trained dog to the bizarre alien equivalent. There can be any explanation for a scout having a strange "pet." Introducing a new alien species or genetic experiment in this manner can be very interesting.

Recommendation: Reduce the cost of the Animal Friend perk by 1 or even 2 points and make it clear the scout knows very little about the creature's nature or origin. Introduce new and perhaps problematic characteristics to the animal when appropriate. Remember it is a perk, however—these new characteristics may be uncomfortable, embarrassing, or even slightly dangerous, but they should not negate the creature's value.

CELEBRITY

Cost: 3, PER, Conscious

Despite their reputations as mavericks and loners, few scouts truly shun the spotlight when it is thrust upon them—and who is more likely to gain Celebrity status than someone who has just discovered a new alien species or found a mineral-rich system? A few scouts have stars, planets, or even systems named after them (granted, this is usually posthumous). Celebrity, whenever possible, should be tied to exploration triumphs.

Recommendation: Other scouts and possible patrons should recognize the scout as famous for some discovery or other. While this may be annoying or occasionally uncomfortable, mostly it means higher expectations and greater latitude of options. The Celebrity explorer is more likely to gain partial payments up front, contract work, and assistance from other scouts on the basis of his fame. The Gamemaster may wish to increase or decrease the cost of this perk, based on how well known the scout is and what benefits he can expect (1 point could mean only other scouts and really dedicated patrons know anything about the scout's Celebrity status; 6 points could mean virtually everyone's heard about the scout).

FILTHY RICH

Cost 6, PER, Conscious

Wealthy scouts usually gain their riches from prior discoveries and contracts that really panned out. Often represented by a steady influx of cash from a mining operation or an agriplanet, this wealth shows no signs of petering out soon. The scout can probably afford the best gear and support staff—and he probably knows how to use it.

Recommendation: The Gamemaster and the player should make every effort to establish connections between the scout and some successful, ongoing concern that could have

benefited from his past efforts. The scout should have to keep in contact with this interest to keep milking his wealth (the price he must pay), and this can lead to further adventures.

POWERFUL ALLY

Cost 4, PER, Conscious

While anyone can benefit from friends in high places, the independent scout often has the opportunity to really make this perk work. Perhaps he has a friend in a local military organization, or a field agent in the CSS who owes him a favor, or even a retired scout who is now living off the profits of his career; any of these could be just the sort of ally an explorer needs. Establishing the parameters of this ally's influence is key to this perk's worth.

Recommendation: Reduce the cost of the perk by 1 or 2 points if the scout is unlikely to be able to take advantage of it very often. Scouts spend much of their time beyond the frontier; even the leader of a powerful system might not have a reach that far. If the scout can call on the ally once every few adventures, then the perk is still worth its cost.

REPUTATION

Cost 3, WIL, Active

Similar to Celebrity (at least for a scout), the Reputation perk is even better in many cases. Instead of simply being famous for a past discovery, the explorer with a Reputation has the background that inspires confidence in others. Those not interested in exploration may not have heard of the scout before, but those who know their way around have—and they respect what they've heard.

Recommendation: Like the Celebrity scout, patrons and other scouts will be more likely to offer contract work and payments up front. However, the scout with a Reputation has no influence beyond his profession, though he has more within it. Even knowledgeable patrons (perhaps specialists in other fields) tend to yield to this scout's expertise when he makes judgment calls. Obstinate miners, snooty professors, and rich patrons who think with their bank accounts will back down when this scout makes the call—even if he is occasionally wrong (or bluffing).

AND SOME INTERESTING NEW PERKS

These perks have been designed with the scout or explorer in mind. Only the Gamemaster can say whether they are appropriate for his or her campaign. The Gamemaster might allow them to nonscouting heroes as well.

ALIEN INTUITION

Cost 8, WIL, Conscious

When confronted with an alien creature, artifact, or environment, sometimes the hero has absolutely no idea what to do. He may not have a clue how to communicate, or how to make any headway at all. A scout with Alien Intuition, however, gets "hunches" that may make things easier.

When a hero first encounters something alien, he may use his Alien Intuition to make a Will check. If he succeeds, he gets some hint as to what to do. This might not mean the hero actually can perform whatever is necessary, but he can assist others in doing so (if they have whatever's necessary). Each level of success provides a -1 step modifier to whomever is making the attempt: Amazing -3, Good -2, Ordinary -1, Marginal +0, and Critical Failure +1.

In situations where no one has the appropriate skill or piece of equipment, the hero should still gain some understanding of the situation. For example, if the hero encounters an alien creature that appears to be trying to communicate, a successful Alien Intuition check means the scout at least knows that and may have some idea of what the creature is trying to say—but only in the most basic terms, since the scout doesn't know the alien's language.

More than one check is allowed per encounter, as in the situation of a complex skill check. Multiple successes may lead to more information, but three failures ends the scout's chance to learn anything about this alien with this perk.

CAVALRY

Cost 10, PER, Conscious

This is a combination of good luck and Powerful Ally. With it, the scout can, once per adventure (more often during very long adventures or at the Gamemaster's option), attempt to "call in the cavalry." While this does not have to be a conscious effort on the scout's part (he may activate an emergency beacon or call out for help), it usually produces tangible results. On a successful Personality check, "help" arrives to save the scout from whatever danger he is in. The help could actually be the Gravity Age equivalent of the Cavalry (such as a military vessel or passing transport), or it could just be a well-timed circumstance (like an earthquake that throws the hostile natives off their feet).

The extent of the help depends on the success level of the roll. On an Ordinary success, the aid that arrives gives the hero a chance to escape whatever danger he is in. It might not be a good chance or even a permanent one (like finding a vine he can use for a rope to swing over a great chasm; the vine may not hold him, and he could still fall), but it is at least a chance. A Good success usually implies either a step bonus or an addition to his resistance modifier is associated with the aid (as appropriate). An Amazing success almost always means the hero is rescued from the danger.

There may always be a price for whatever assistance arrives, but it should be one the hero can pay. For example, if escaping from a dangerous environment, the hero might have to leave behind valuable equipment or artifacts. If being rescued from a space battle, the hero might have to give the rescuers a substantial reward. This may keep the hero from calling in the Cavalry except in truly dire circumstances.

Optional Rule: This perk can be abused, and the Gamemaster may wish to introduce a mechanic that can cut down on this potential. Every time the hero attempts to call in the Cavalry, the Gamemaster can decide whether the

**GAMEMASTER NOTE: INTEGRATING
NEW PERKS & FLAWS IMMEDIATELY**

If, as a Gamemaster, you find you like some of these new treatments of old perks and flaws, or some of the new options, you may want to work them into your game immediately, without making the players create new heroes.

If this is the case, first check with the players. Allow them to read this section and see if they are interested. Then, find an appropriate situation to make the change. If you are changing from another type of campaign model to an exploratory model, you may want to do it during the transitional adventure.

You have two choices at this point, each with its own set of benefits and drawbacks. The first one is to simply swap the old perks or flaws for new ones. Don't let a player rewrite his hero, but switching a single old flaw with a reworked or entirely new one should be fine. Work up a story reason for the situation to have changed and integrate it into the transitional adventure. Of course, this can be difficult, but it might invest the heroes more completely in their new exploration-related campaign.

The other method is to simply allow the heroes to gain a few new perks or flaws during that first adventure. They must still pay or gain skill points to add these new wrinkles to their characters, but this method can help jump-start the campaign. Gaining flaws, in particular, gives players a chance to pick up skill points that they may need to direct their heroes in a more exploratory direction.

Naturally, the use of these revised and new perks and flaws is an optional rule that the Gamemaster can choose to use or ignore at his or her discretion.

hero got into the situation because of circumstance or because of his own stupidity. If the latter, the Gamemaster should keep track. When the hero has attempted to use the perk three times over the course of a campaign to make up for bad decisions or roleplaying, the Cavalry is done coming to the rescue. The Gamemaster should give the hero 5 skill points (as compensation) and have the player cross the Cavalry perk off his sheet.

OLD FLAWS REVISITED

Some would say being an explorer or a scout and leaving known space to fly off into the unfamiliar would be enough of a flaw for anyone. Scouts would disagree, of course, seeing this "disadvantage" as the reason for their being. However, they can pick up some much-needed skills by choosing a few flaws. These flaws, presented in the *Player's Handbook*, seem particularly appropriate.

ALIEN ARTIFACT**+5 Bonus Skill Points**

As with the perk of the same name, scouts are particularly suited to finding alien artifacts and gaining this flaw. The artifact should still be something the scout keeps around, mostly because it could be a clue to a greater discovery, but this time its drawbacks outweigh its benefits. It may have a few positive features, but the scout's life should be better if he could get rid of the artifact.

Recommendation: In order to help the hero put up with this flaw, the "powers" of the alien artifact may be entirely beneficial or inert—but those around the scout want the artifact badly. This "Maltese Falcon" approach keeps treasure hunters and thieves always at the scout's back, even following him on his scouting expeditions in the hopes that they can gain possession of the alien artifact. The scout, however, feels compelled to keep the item (or may be unable to give it up and live). The Gamemaster can even reward good roleplaying on the player's part by increasing the utility or value of the artifact itself as time goes by—but the treasure hunters' intensity may increase as well.

CODE OF HONOR**+3 Bonus Skill Points, WIL**

As generally independent individuals, many scouts see little need for honor—they come into contact with others so seldom. Other scouts believe it is the only possession they have. Tying a Code of Honor to a scout's personality can be a powerful motivator and a good flaw.

Recommendation: Give the scout a set of principles he simply won't violate. These could be professional ethics: perhaps the scout will not "survey jump" (steal another's discovery), or perhaps he will always assist other scouts in need (whether they would do the same for him or not). Maybe the scout must always protect his discoveries to keep them from being used wrongfully, such as keeping primitive aliens from being exploited or agrifarms from terraforming and ruining an ecosystem. Whatever the ethical motivation, the scout feels very strongly about it and will not bend.

INFAMY**+2/4/6 Bonus Skill Points, PER**

Most often, a scout with this flaw is perceived as having no scruples, no honor, and perhaps even a criminal past—all tied to exploration. True or not, this Infamy flaw follows the scout from system to system and job to job. An explorer with this reputation almost never gets offered preferential contract work (though he may get the "do this or else" jobs), nor is he ever paid up front. The only exception to this rule is when a patron with an equally infamous reputation wants a scout who fits the Infamy description.

The best use of this flaw is for the CSS (6 points) or some other prominent patron (2 or 4) to have blacklisted the hero

for fraudulent surveys or unethical scouting practices. The scout may still have a warrant on his head, but even if he avoids that, he'll have a hard time making a living.

Recommendation: Other scouts, patrons, and even civil authorities (depending on how strong the flaw) will not trust the hero and may try to obstruct or arrest him. Make the hero wait the maximum amount of time for confirmation of his finds, unless the hero takes special pains to make sure his data is well documented and irrefutable. Supporting cast characters usually give the hero a hard time; other heroes may or may not trust the hero based on their experiences. While not necessarily contaminated by the black cloud hanging over the hero's head, they cannot avoid accruing something of an unreliable reputation if they stick with him.

OBSESSED

+2/4/6 Bonus Skill Points, INT

Some would say most scouts are already obsessed with their profession. Who else would abandon the comfort and safety of modern life to venture into the unknown reaches of space? But that could be said of any heroes. Obsession goes beyond the normal adventuring impulse. Scouts become obsessed with certain goals—tangible or otherwise.

Recommendation: The Gamemaster and the player should create a goal for the scouting hero, one that consumes much or all of his concentration. The scout should have some tie to that goal, but must then follow up any leads that point him in the right direction. Examples include "proof" of an undiscovered alien civilization, partial coordinates to a legendary lost colony, or treasure maps to worlds that don't seem to exist. Every adventure should take on, for the scout, another avenue of pursuing his goal. Even if the scout has to go in the wrong direction sometimes, everything eventually becomes another means to his stated end.

PHOBIA

+2/4/6 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

Because of their exposure to strange situations and alien environments, scouts may contract the most bizarre phobias. This actually makes this flaw easier on the Gamemaster, since the Phobia itself may not have to be specifically defined. It could be a type of atmosphere, a certain coloration of soil, or a classification of creature—anything that the scout may stumble upon at any time. Basically, it just has to be something the explorer could run into with reliable frequency.

Recommendation: Since the scout's main concern is actually investigating alien worlds and new systems, the Phobia flaw doesn't have to be as common as in other campaign types. A hero in another campaign who is afraid of working in a toxic atmosphere could avoid that fairly easily—a scout, however, cannot. Any world he goes to could have a toxic atmosphere and he wouldn't know it until he got there. Control of the flaw rests in the Gamemaster's hands.

POWERFUL ENEMY

+2/4/6 Bonus Skill Points, PER

A scout-specific Powerful Enemy could almost be retitled "Well-Positioned Enemy." Deciding on who the enemy is should be the most important thing when instituting this flaw. The enemy could be a field agent for the CSS who processes contracts and surveys for the scout; a veteran explorer who regularly performs confirmations for the scout; or even another scout could be an enemy—if he has the connections and desire to make the first scout's life miserable.

Recommendation: Using this flaw can be very interesting for the Gamemaster since position, not power, is the number one requisite for a scouting enemy. If possible, the Gamemaster should detail who the Powerful Enemy is but only give the player a vague idea as to who it might be. For example, telling the hero that it seems to take twice as long as anyone else's for his surveys to be confirmed implicates a variety of individuals, some of whom the scout likely trusts. A subplot of any exploratory adventure then becomes the scout trying to figure out who is playing games with his profession.

NEW FLAWS

While scouts and explorers may have some of the same problems as other heroes, there are a few flaws especially designed with them in mind. The Gamemaster may wish to use these new flaws for nonscouting heroes as well.

COMPETITIVE

+2/4/6 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

The hero who has this flaw feels the heat of other explorers' breath always on his neck and must beat them to the next greatest, richest, or most interesting discovery. When the explorer who has the Competitive flaw hears of a new contract being offered or rumors about a new system that features some sort of unique characteristic (even if that characteristic is simply that no one has been there before), he must make a successful Will check to resist. If he fails, he will do anything to follow up the lead, gain the contract, or otherwise beat out the "competition" for the discovery.

The different levels of Competitive relate to both how desperate the scout will become and whether others are actively competing with the hero. For 2 bonus skill points, the hero is not really competing with anyone specific (except on a case-by-case basis).

At 4 bonus skill points, there are actually those who actively compete with the hero. These supporting cast members could be scouts, patrons, or other appropriate individuals. They may not even be the same people every time—the hero just has the bad luck to draw a crowd when coming upon a new discovery.

At 6 bonus skill points, the Competitive spark becomes desperate for the hero. Not only is there real competition staring at him, but he has to make additional Will checks to

avoid cheating to win whatever prize is at the end of the discovery. Depending on the explorer's moral attitude, this could range from recklessly putting others in danger to falsifying survey reports to blatant criminal activity. These additional Will checks must be made when the opportunity to cheat presents itself.

Particularly valuable or exciting exploratory opportunities may cause step penalty modifiers to the Will check, at the Gamemaster's option.

SLOPPY

+4 Bonus Skill Points, WIL

So caught up in the excitement of exploration, the scout with the Sloppy flaw has trouble taking accurate readings and documenting his findings. He tends to skip over details to get to the "important stuff." In roleplaying terms, the Sloppy explorer seldom bothers with complete surveys but only documents the most obviously interesting observations. When taking sensor readings or performing other Intelligence or Will survey-related activities (communications, sensors, or, occasionally, Awareness), the hero receives a +1 step penalty on all checks.

Scouts who have the Sloppy flaw are more likely to turn in incomplete System Survey Report Forms (whether they know it or not) and may overlook important information that they consider minor details.

NEW CAREERS

Both the *Player's Handbook* and the *STAR*DRIVE* Campaign Setting provide suggestions for careers that different heroes might choose. The scouting and exploring careers outlined below provide more well-defined options than those presented in the *Player's Handbook* or the *STAR*DRIVE* Campaign Setting. Recommended skill choices and signature equipment accompany the Ability Recommendations and Perks & Flaws notes. None of these choices are mandatory—they are simply suggestions players may want to follow or modify when constructing certain types of scout heroes.

Note that some of the general skills may be those allowed to certain species for free (Athletics, for example). If that is the case, simply deduct the appropriate skill points from the Cost of the Skill Package.

COMBAT SPEC CAREERS

The warrior profession might appear to be the furthest from the most suited to scouting and exploration, but that is actually not the case. True, a solitary Combat Spec would probably not have the necessary temperament or skills to make a good explorer, but out on the frontier where exploring and survival go hand-in-hand, a hero who's good in a fight can be helpful to have along.



The spacehand career is the most suited to exploration. With versatile skills and useful signature equipment, the spacehand makes a great member of any scout team.

RANGER

Trained primarily in combat but also an excellent survival specialist, the ranger balances lethality with awareness and tactics with trailblazing ability. Often the first explorer into a presumed-hostile environment, the ranger does not balk at danger and is seldom intimidated by opposition.

Usually trained to work as part of a team or to operate alone for long periods of time, the ranger is not simply a gun-toting soldier, but a thinker whose main goal is to survive. Rangers who leave the service (or are put in reserve) often join scouts rather than mercenary bands because they like to use their brains as well as their guns.

Rangers try to split their skill choices between the physical and mental. On the physical side Athletics and all its specializations are important. Unarmed Attack (particularly *power martial arts*) becomes more important than Heavy Weapons, however. Movement and Stamina are coveted skill choices, and Survival is essential. Rangers may forgo versatility with Modern Ranged Weapons to pick up at least one Primitive skill and some Acrobatics.

On the mental side of the equation, the ranger often learns Demolitions (like other Combat Specs), but most also pick up *deduce* and *first aid*. Investigate and its specializations are helpful, as is Resolve.

Ability Recommendations: Rangers need high Intelligence scores to get enough skill points to round out their versatility. As stated above, they rely on their mental abilities as well as their physical natures. Rangers tend to have more balanced scores than other Combat Specs—Strength and Constitution are still their primary abilities, but they should not try to “max out” either of these.

Perks & Flaws: Cavalry, Danger Sense, Fortitude, and Tough as Nails are all obvious choices for Perks. Powerful Ally also fits well. For Flaws, Rangers sometimes have a Code of Honor, an Old Injury, a Powerful Enemy, or Temper.

Signature Equipment: Mass rifle, cerametal armor, backpack, first aid kit, combat knife.

Skill Package: Athletics—*climb*; Melee Weapons—*blade*; Stamina—*endurance*; Survival—*survival training*; Modern Ranged Weapons—*rifle*; Knowledge—*first aid*; Awareness—*perception*. Cost: 42 points.

DIPLOMAT CAREERS

Having someone who can talk fast and negotiate intelligently is at least as important as finding a person to read the ship's sensors and fill out the survey report forms. Diplomats offer tact, intelligence, and versatility to a scout team.

The first contact consul is one of the few heroes actually trained to make contact with new alien species and to

negotiate. While not all exploratory teams have such a consul, they arrive on the scene eventually. Or perhaps an interstellar war erupts first!

REUNIFICATION SPECIALIST

A career seemingly built entirely for the situation that currently exists within the Verge, the reunification specialist is one step away from the first contact consul. Instead of dealing with alien species to break new ground, the reunification specialist's job is to make second contact with lost colonies and fringe elements that scouts discover. The reunification specialist has spent his career studying Verge and Concord history, delving into old ship's logs, and following up on rumors of lost or fled vessels. The reunification specialist who finally figures out where the original human colonists of Bluefall went will be set for life.

Knowledge is the reunification specialist's expertise, followed by Interaction. The reunification specialist must learn as much *history* (specific) and *etiquette* as he can manage so that when his scout teams find signs of lost or disconnected colonies, he can identify them and make the right second-contact choices. He must understand that some of those who lost contact with the Stellar Ring did so accidentally, while others lost touch deliberately, and still others fled for mutually hostile reasons. The reunification specialist can keep heroes from being executed as spies just as often as he can get them applauded as universal heroes.

Ability Recommendations: Not meant to adventure on their own, reunification specialists should rely on the physical qualities of those they travel with. Strength, Dexterity, and even Constitution (to a lesser extent) can be neglected in favor of a high Intelligence and Personality.

Perks & Flaws: The Perks Good Luck and Observant are both useful, as is Reputation (as a good negotiator). For Flaws, Clueless can be both amusing and dangerous, and Code of Honor can be heroic. A hero Obsessed with finding a specific colony can be interesting and tragic, while a reunification specialist who has a Temper might make second contact lively for everyone.

Signature Equipment: Microcomputer (with files on lost colonies), climate weave clothing, respirator mask, holorecorder.

Skill Package: Knowledge—*computer operation*, *Concord history*, *colonial history*, *language (specific #1)*, *language (specific #2)*; Medical Science—*psychology*; Awareness—*intuition*; Investigate, Culture—*etiquette (specific)*. Cost: 41 points.

Note: Depending on the Diplomat reunification specialist's second profession, the cost will go down. Tech Op is recommended. Cost: 38 points (for Tech Op heroes only).

FREE AGENT CAREERS

The ultimate jacks-of-all-trades, Free Agents tend to have an independent nature and a versatility that makes them ideal for scouting and exploration. They often surround themselves with specialists from other professions but make excellent scouts themselves.

As its name connotes, the explorer career is ideal for scouting heroes. Equipped with his own ship and with a variety of useful skills, the explorer is necessary to a scout campaign, and what could be more useful than a free agent scout?

INTEREST AGENT

Unlike the generalist explorer, the interest agent reports to a specific patron most of the time. The interest agent might be a mining agent, agricultural agent, alien agent, or any number of other types of agents—but he is a specialist in a generalist category and he is highly valued by the right patrons.

The interest agent's skill choices are based primarily on what sort of agent he is. For example, a mining agent should know something about ores and mining, while an agricultural agent needs to be able to analyze weather patterns and learn Life Science—*botany*. Fortunately, most interest agents do not need so many specialized skills that a general career can't be laid out. The skill package below may lack a few specifics, but they can be filled in easily.

Ability Recommendations: In addition to their prerequisites, interest agents should have high Intelligence scores so that they can use the necessary sciences effectively.

Perks & Flaws: An interest agent who has a Powerful Ally may have a patron with some pull. Alien Intuition can keep the interest agent from putting his patron's workers at risk. As far as Flaws go, the interest agent might be forced to work against (or for) a Powerful Enemy and could be Competitive with rival interest agents who work for other patrons in the same or conflicting lines.

Signature Equipment: Patron-provided scout ship (must be signed out for missions), 11mm charge pistol, CF softsuit, sensor gauntlet, specialized toolkit (used to collect samples for specific interest).

Skill Package: Survival; Stealth—*sneak*; Knowledge—[*specific interest*]; Navigation—*drivespace astrogation*; Investigate; Physical Science—[*appropriate specialization*] OR Life Science—[*appropriate specialization*]. Cost: 32 [+10] points.

Skill Notes: Most interest agents will need either Life Science (and a specialization) and/or Physical Science (and a specialization). The additional cost numbers correspond to the purchase of those skills and specializations.

TECH OP CAREERS

Invaluable on exploratory surveys, Tech Ops make the machines work and keep the humans alive. They fly the ships and make them run. Without Tech Op support, an exploratory adventure might never be possible.

Several Tech Op careers are already oriented toward scouting. The doctor, engineer, pilot, scholar, and scientist are all welcome additions to a scout team.

ARCHAEOLOGIST

A specialist Tech Op devoted to studying relics of the past, the archaeologist makes the exploration of ruins, artifacts, and ancient cultures possible as well as less dangerous. The archaeologist may be able to figure out how old signs of civilization may be, whether that civilization was destroyed or simply moved on, and what usefulness any of its existing artifacts may have. Learning to cope with the present through studying the past is the archaeologist's specialty.

Archaeologists who join scout expeditions have to be somewhat hardy and ready to get their hands dirty. They may pick up Athletics and Stamina skills as well as Movement—*trailblazing* or even Survival if they spend a lot of time in specific environments. But the archaeologist's forté is knowledge and study. Life Sciences are important as are some Physical Sciences. Even Medical Science—*forensics* and —*psychology* play a part, as the archaeologist must be half-coroner, half-psychiatrist to figure out how extinct cultures and individuals may have lived and died.

Ability Recommendations: Dexterity may not be as important to the archaeologist as other Tech Ops, but Will skills certainly are. Strength is not as valued as Constitution.

Perks & Flaws: An archaeologist who has Alien Intuition is one that has spent much time studying nonhumans or just has a connection with the very strange. Observant is recommended. Obsessed and Competitive are both Flaws that can be taken to fill out the "tunnel vision" mentality of the dedicated archaeologist, for living in the past might certainly blind the hero to the future.

Signature Equipment: Backpack, specialized toolkit (digging and dusting tools), sensor gauntlet, forensics gauntlet, holorecorder, weight neutralizer.

Skill Package: Stamina—*endurance*; Manipulation; Life Science—*xenology*; Medical Science—*forensics*; Investigate—*search*. Cost: 36 points.

MINDWALKER CAREERS

Mindwalker heroes are very rare, and mindwalker scouts are almost unheard of. Yet they are among the most useful heroes to have along when encountering an alien situation or a new environment. By utilizing their unique talents and mental powers, the scouting team can gain infor-

mation in moments that could otherwise take days, weeks, or years.

None of the existing Mindwalker careers are especially appropriate for scouting, though none would be useless.

CONTACTOR

The contactor Mindwalker specializes in making contact with, well, anything. From reading situations to auras to past impressions, the contactor can pick up on mental "footprints" that cannot be found by normal detection. More than just a psychic detective, the contactor has to be something of an empath crossed with a scout with a little bit of scientist mixed in.

Skill choices for the contactor, as always, begin with psionic abilities. Many psi powers are simply too specific to be useful for scouting purposes but none are without value. ESP, *empathy*, and *mindreading* are all useful for first- and second-contact situations. *Postcognition* might appear to be of value, but with its limited range into the past it is seldom applicable—*psychometry*, on the other hand, is extremely useful almost all the time (though the results may be imprecise). *Navcognition* can also be very useful, especially in unusual or unfamiliar star systems.

Telepathy, *contact*, and *suggest* can all make scouting a little bit safer where hostile natives are concerned.

To be a successful scout, however, a contactor should not rely entirely on his psi powers. Knowledge of Technical Science, Life Science, and Medical Science can all make sense of impressions he gets from environments, minds, or objects. Awareness and Investigate can fill in the gaps.

Ability Recommendations: Intelligence, Will, and Personality will most likely be the contactor's favorite ability scores. Constitution should not be neglected, however.

Perks & Flaws: Having Alien Intuition seems like a natural Perk for a contactor. Concentration and Psionic Awareness complement the mindwalker's innate abilities. As far as Flaws go, Dirt Poor could explain why the contactor is performing scouting duties instead of being paid huge sums elsewhere for his services, and Primitive might suggest some connection to the past or an interest in learning about other cultures.

Signature Equipment: Audio recorder, CF short coat, vacuum mask.

Skill Package: ESP—*empathy*, *postcognition* 2; Telepathy—*suggest*; Life Science, Medical Science, Physical Science, Awareness. Cost: 45



THE CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

Humanity's push out into the greater universe has been marked, from the beginning, by a series of starts and stops. The limits of technology, the outbreak of war, and periods of self-satisfied prosperity hinder exploration from time to time, but the outward push never ceases entirely. Like the tides, mankind's desire and capability for exploration sometimes reaches a low ebb, but just as surely as the tide changes, so too does the interest in exploration grow again. One such rise in interest has occurred with the ending of the Second Galactic War and the reestablishment of contact with the Verge. This resurgence is coming to the fore in many places throughout the human-dominated yet alien-infused space. However, nowhere is it more visible than in the founding of the new Concord Survey Service, or CSS—humanity's latest bid to reach out and grasp the unknown.

THE HISTORY OF THE CSS

The very nature of the Second Galactic War (GW2) turned the attention of those concerned inward, toward their own home systems and the chaos within. The Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti and the use of superweapons that could destroy the populations of entire planets hampered expansion and narrowed the visions of would-be explorers. Survival became the predominant concern of those on all sides; looking outward toward the frontier was a luxury one could ill afford.

Even during GW2, a few brave souls refused to hunker down and become xenophobic. Most of those willing and able to venture beyond the relative safety of their home systems became scouts, couriers, and occasional privateers for whichever side held their loyalties. Exploration for its own sake ground to a halt, but the value of information on enemies' bases and movements was at a premium. The stellar navies found it much more economical to employ independents as scouts rather than to send their own forces. Mortality rates among the scouting organizations reached incredible highs, but those who survived knew their worth—and prospered.

By the time the Second Galactic War drew to a close, many independent scouting organizations roamed throughout what would soon become Concord space. Most were loosely tied to the various stellar nations, but a few gutsy independents survived on their own. When peace loomed on the horizon, a few of these independents reached their own accord and built an alliance that would survive the armistice—the Stellar Survey Corporation.

THE STELLAR SURVEY CORPORATION

They called it the "Stellar Survey Corporation," or SSC, and though one of the smallest, it quickly became perhaps the most widespread interstellar corporation in the history of known space. With only a few thousand permanent employees, the SSC made use of veteran scouts, retired naval officers, and even the occasional merchant to broker what the corporation realized was the hottest commodity going: reliable reconnaissance information.

The SSC billed itself as the only independent information organization in the new Galactic Concord. It could be hired by any stellar nation, by the Concord itself, or even by individuals. The SSC would survey and chart new, unexplored planets; catalog "lost" or "starleaped" systems; or update data on overlooked or otherwise forgotten worlds—particularly those in the Verge.

In the years following GW2, the SSC provided a much-needed and valuable service, but it soon became apparent that the information corporation's operational parameters were fundamentally flawed. First, the SSC left the coordination of freelance contracting and assignments up to its field agents. Often, these agents would contract multiple independents (or "indies") to survey the same system. While this duplication of information made the SSC's files that much more complete, the SSC's board refused to pay for data more than once. More than a few spacers left SSC field offices unpaid and angry at the information corporation's practices, yet they had no legal recourse. As freelance scouts, they were paid only upon acceptance and verification of their intelligence reports.

Verification quickly became the second sticking point for the SSC. The founding members of its board were themselves ex-scouts and independents, so they knew how willingly they had padded their expense reports. They knew, too, that independents are prone to occasionally filing reports on systems where they had done less than stellar survey work. The founding members understood the temptation for the indy spacer was always there—and they refused to be bilked. As a result, no payments would go out to a freelancer without confirmation that his or her report was fundamentally accurate. Such verification could take months—or, if the system in question didn't appear particularly valuable, might even be "back-burnered" for years.

Finally, the SSC itself was an "on spec" corporation. Once it collected information from its freelancers, verified it, and passed it up to the board, the board's agents approached those the SSC thought might profit from the data gathered, and the agent's negotiated a price for that data. Some data would, at this point, be evaluated as "negligible" and archived—never to be passed on to anyone. Other information would be deemed "near priceless" and brokered mercilessly to all concerned parties. The SSC always sold data to the highest bidder—and, as rumor had it, would occasionally pass along "edited" data to the bidder's competitors (for a reasonable fee, of course).

These unethical practices garnered the Stellar Survey Corporation a less than sterling reputation among independent spacers and its own field agents (who had to deal with the frustrated and angry freelancers). Distrust also developed in the stellar nations, corporations, and individuals it served. Unfortunately, the SSC was still better, less biased, and more reliable than any other fact-finding entity out there. So soon after GW2, few stellar nations had the wherewithal or the inclination to found their own scout services (except for specific missions), so the SSC prospered for quite some time.

THE INFORMATION REBELLION

In 2495, however, just before the rebuilding of the Kendai drive-space relay and contact with the Verge was renewed, the Stellar Survey Corporation experienced an uprising of its own. Bureaucrats had replaced much of its original board, and the number of positions occupied by middle-management "deadwood" swelled to record highs. The SSC's field agents and the pool of indy spacers it used as freelancers remained stable, but the verification bureaucracy had slowed payments to a crawl; moreover, remuneration had become increasingly smaller over the last few years. There were even rumors that the board occasionally created "phantom surveys" that directly conflicted with authentic efforts so that it could avoid paying its scouts their finders' fees.

None of this made the independent surveyors happy, but what could they do? Most of them worked for the SSC only as a sideline, usually to offset the costs they accrued running or leasing their own spacecraft. Few ever met each other, and most only knew what was going on in the SSC through their field agent representatives. The SSC had always counted on this lack of contact, knowing that they could easily replace disgruntled freelancers with new spacers. After all, the field ops would have to bear the brunt of training replacement freelancers, not the middle and upper management of the SSC. That level simply didn't care.

Unfortunately for the management level, the field agents did care.

In 2495, Samantha Thirdway, an experienced field operative and former scout in her own right, found herself unable to defend the Stellar Survey Corporation's practices to her freelancers anymore. Coordinating with the most experienced and reliable field agents she could contact, she organized a break from the SSC. Thirdway and company refused to pass any more information on to the SSC; they explained to their freelance scouts that an information blackout was necessary if the SSC were ever to reform its ways. Ms. Thirdway was remarkably successful—between the field ops' defection and the independent resources they took with them, the SSC lost nearly 85% of its information-gathering arm, virtually overnight.

If Ms. Thirdway had tried to set up a rival corporation on her own at this point, the combined weight of the SSC's financial and legal apparatus would have come down on her and her partners like a hard starfall. But she had planned her break-out carefully. Samantha Thirdway offered her new organization's resources not to a private organization or even to a single stellar nation, but to the Galactic Concord itself. The SSC protested, and nearly a year of negotiation followed, but by the time the *Monitor* discovered the ruins of Silver Bell, the new Concord Survey Service was formed.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

In 2496, Samantha Thirdway became the first Acting Director for the Concord Survey Service (dubbed "CSS" by its independent scouts in deference to the respect they had for Ms. Thirdway and to avoid confusion between the Survey Service Corporation and the Secret Service). She laid out the basics of how the CSS would run. These directives were later dressed up in legalese and built into every freelancer's and field agent's contracts, but the original

outline remains a staple of the Concord Survey Service's doctrine. The original draft of the CSS's basic operational parameters is presented in the accompanying sidebar.

By the way, legend has it that Samantha Thirdway and her first two SSC defectors—human neophyte scout Rafael Sing and the sesheyan ex-VoidCorp spy turned drivespace hotshot Keiy Ssushan—penned the original outline on two bar napkins and a cancelled receipt. These tales grow in the telling, but the part about the cancelled receipt is true. By the way, that was one receipt not submitted to the SSC for reimbursement!

The CSS still operates on a what could be considered a skeleton staff for a Concord-wide organization. It relies on the efforts of independent freelance scouts for more than 90% of the information it gathers, and its field agents travel from star system to star system in an effort to recruit more such indy spacers for their efforts.

One boon to the CSS came shortly after its founding. The Galactic Concord attached Samantha Thirdway and her scout service to the Bureau of Public Information in 2497. Now, in addition to its exploratory efforts, the CSS attends to internal census-taking and system updates. While this forced Ms. Thirdway to nearly double her staff, the relatively routine work guarantees the Concord Survey Service a rather generous budget and a freedom of action within the Concord rivaled by only a few other GC agencies.

CSS AND YOU

As in the worst heydays of the SSC, most of the CSS's freelance scouts take on surveying only as a sideline to whatever other occupation they have. While it's true that the CSS cuts more frequent and more generous payments for information than did the SSC, few spacers have the temperament to become full-time scouts—especially on a freelance-only basis. However, since Samantha Thirdway values these independent, responsible staffers more than any other position in the Service, being a field agent for the CSS has gone from a thankless position to a sought-after one. Unfortunately for those who would like such a position, Ms. Thirdway and her agents carefully screen any applicants when a new position does open up, and it is rumored to be one of the most difficult civil service jobs to come by.

On the other hand, anyone can file a report with the CSS and have a reasonable expectation of getting paid something for his or her information. It takes a long time, though, or more than a little luck for an indy scout to get on a field agent's "gold list," which is the list of scouts who actually get contract work and partial payments in advance. Most indies work "on spec": Nothing up front, payment only upon confirmation.

The rules for surveying new or "starleaped" old systems are simple: Go there, get the information, come back, and make a report. The CSS even provides software and information packs on how to perform a basic survey. Veteran scouts always expand on these basic forms, of course—the CSS may not pay out rewards for particularly valuable information, but it does give bonuses for especially detailed data.

CSS BASIC OPERATIONAL PARAMETERS (ORIGINAL DRAFT)

"The role of the Concord Survey Service is to collect information in an effort to expand the Galactic Concord and catalog its holdings. It is primarily concerned with the collection of new information on unexplored star systems, but it is also in charge of concerned with verifying possibly obsolete or speculative data regarding previously cataloged systems.

"The Service will pay anyone—*independent scout, stellar nation, or unrecognized alien*—for verifiable, useful information on any of the above subjects. The Service is not and never will be a 'spy' organization, however, and will not tolerate the breaking of the Galactic Concord's laws or the violation of any of its treaties in the gathering of this said information. The Service is a part of a branch of the Galactic Concord government and supports the Concord's laws, treaties, and policies. It will report any violation—*intentional or unintentional*—of these laws, treaties, and policies to the appropriate authorities. Its scouts representatives are not, however, responsible for enforcing the Concord's laws or policy. They have no authority as police, policy-makers, or first contact specialists of any kind.

"The Service will make every effort to pay its independent operators and information collectors immediately upon receipt as quickly as possible. Reliable agents may expect partial payments upon report, at the Service's field agent's discretion. Advance (partial) payments may be made for contract work. Expense reports for damage, wear, or loss of a freelancer's own equipment may be filed but will only be paid at the discretion of an authorized CSS representative. Such reimbursement should not be considered standard, but the CSS will operate in good faith.

"Duplicate information, when gathered, may be paid for if it is necessary for verification purposes, but independent contractors are responsible for seeking out original information. In the case of conflicting or redundant information gathering, the field agent(s) assigned to the problem will make all judgments regarding fair payments. Appeals to the Service's review board may be made independently at any time and will be reviewed with all due process. In general, redundant scouting reports submitted within six months a reasonable period of time will be paid at full value. However, if any evidence of information fraud (or collusion) is found, the scouts in question will be prosecuted to the full extent of Concord law and banned from future scouting contracts or payments until such time as the Concord Survey Service chooses to rescind its judgment.

"It is not the policy of the Service to 'reward' agents for particularly valuable information. However, the Service will notify its field agents and their independent representatives of any rewards or bounties offered by the Stellar Nations, the Galactic Concord, or other allied interests for particular information. The Service does not endorse or guarantee any such offers and provides this information as a courtesy to its freelance employees.

"The Concord Survey Service is not a qualified 'first contact' agency and does not expect, anticipate, encourage, or reward its agents for making first contact with alien species (or 'renewed contact' with lost colonies or unrecognized Verge elements). The Service will not be held responsible for the actions of any freelancer who makes first contact with such species (or groups) and reminds such freelancers of the Galactic Concord's newly revised first contact policies, articles, and treaties. Check with local governments for first contact directives."

—Samantha Thirdway
Acting Director, Concord Survey Service

The Concord Survey Service did not (and still does not) expect its freelance scouts to be scientists or bookkeepers when it outlined its parameters for surveying a typical star system. It did, however, expect them to give their best attention to the task, and the CSS's field agents are not amused by lackadaisical efforts. While the CSS values its freelancers more highly than the SSC ever did, it is more than willing to refuse reports from independents that have a less than professional attitude.

That being said, most field ops do everything they can to make surveying star systems easy for the would-be scout. They have organized a few forms (presented in this chapter) for the scouts' use, and the field ops are more than willing to help the indies fill out the forms. A sample standard Concord Survey Service Report Form is at the end of this section, along with other useful tools for the would-be independent scout.

THE SURVEY FORM

Scouts should use the Survey Report Form as the basis for any exploratory venture. It lists the information most sought after by the Concord Survey Service—as well as by those agencies willing to pay for independent surveys (such as stellar nations and megacorporations). Four guidelines should be considered when filling out each part of the form.

PART I: BASIC SYSTEM INFORMATION

This data can usually be obtained by any scout able to operate a spaceship's standard sensor apparatus. It may take some time, but it is almost always the simplest part of the survey.

System Name/Designation: Many of the star systems CSS scouts are asked to chart have already been named. Most bear the name of the primary star in the system. However, one perk dedicated scouts relish is that of naming or renaming a system. Since many Verge and frontier systems have outdated or meaningless designations—like "System X92-Zed-Zed-Alpha"—or are simply described by their relative stellar coordinates, the Concord Survey Service often allows its scouts to register new names for these systems. "Bertram's Hope," "Red Crossing," and the "Tremaine System" are examples of former frontier systems (now deep in Concord space) that benefited from more colorful designations.

Number of Stars in System: Multistar systems are not unheard of, or even very uncommon. The number of stars is important to the surveyor.

Organization: Single-star, binary, trinary, or whatever type of stellar organization is found in the system should be described here.

GAMEMASTER NOTE

The CSS Survey Report Form is used to record the information about a star system based on the system and planetary design information presented in the *Gamemaster Guide*. The GRAPH system discussed in Chapter 3: *Gamemasters in Action* and the information on Star Systems in Chapter 14: *Campaign Architecture* are particularly pertinent.

To make filling out these forms easier, an example has been filled out in this chapter, taken from an existing STAR DRIVE system. The Tendril System has been "surveyed" to show how the parts of the form should be filled out. Follow along with the example and the Gamemaster Notes.

Star Name, Single or Binary, Class, Color, and No. of Planets: All this information can be determined easily by the scout. Again, it will take some time, but after all, that's what the scout is being paid for.

Non-Main Sequence Stellar Bodies: For the second half of Part 1, the information is similar—Body Type, No. of Planets, and Special Notes should all be recorded here. There are likely to be some blank spaces (black holes don't have planets or orbit tracks, for example), but the Concord Survey Service field agent will understand. The Special Notes column should include any unusual information about the Stellar Body that the scout can think of to record.

Additional Observations/Phenomena Observed: Anything unusual that comes up during the initial survey of the system should be recorded. If there are signs of other space travelers, perhaps, or if the scout noticed any unusual energy read-

Concord Survey Service Survey Report Form Part 1: Basic System Information

System Name/Designation: Tendril
Number of Stars in System: 1
Organization: Solitaire

Star Name	Single or Binary	No. of Class	Color	Planets
1 Tendril	Single	F1	Blue	4

Additional Observations/Phenomena Observed:
Solar flares engulf the star every 65–75 days for a period of 10–15 days. Radiation in the system interferes with communications and sensors.

GAMEMASTER NOTE: BASIC SYSTEM INFORMATION

All the basic system information the heroes need so they can fill out Part 1 of the Survey Report Form can be generated by the Gamemaster using the rules presented in *Chapter 14: Campaign Architecture* of the *Gamemaster Guide*. If you are running the exploratory adventures found later in *Outbound*, then this material has already been generated for you.

In order to learn all the information necessary to fill out the form, however, the heroes need to use their ship's sensors and succeed at a System Operation—sensors complex skill check. The complexity of the complex skill check relates to how much information is out there and how difficult it might be for the scout to find it.

For example, to learn all the basic information about a single star system with four planets (one of which has a single moon) would probably be a complex skill check of Ordinary complexity (3 or 4 steps). There's nothing that unusual about a single star system with only four planets.

However, if the star system had three stars (two organized in a binary pair and one farther off), with several planets (some with moons), and a cometary belt, surveying that system could be a task of Good complexity (5 to 7 steps).

Only extremely barren systems (one star, fewer than two or three other stellar bodies), or those with very unusual characteristics (a black hole or other non-main sequence stellar body), should require Marginal (2 step) or Amazing (8 to 10 step) complexity.

Every time the hero makes a successful check, he should learn a little more about the system. The information could be very general ("there are multiple planets") to fairly specific ("the second planet is orbiting at 4.5 AU." The information tendered should all conform to Part 1 of the Survey Report Form.

If the hero using his System Operation—sensors skill fails at a particular check, he may get contradictory or perhaps even false information. Further successes or closer investigation may be necessary to clear up any mistakes made during the initial survey (moving in closer to a planet may reveal that it isn't actually orbiting at 4.5 AU from its star, but 5.4 AU). After three failures, however, the scout should feel he has all the information he can get from the initial survey (correct or not) and must either continue with Part 2 of the survey (and perhaps discover his mistakes there) or finish up and move on.

ings from parts of the system, these things are important, even if the scout doesn't know what caused them. It is important to be as detailed and specific as possible when recording this raw data.

GAMEMASTER NOTE: BASIC LIFEFORM ANALYSIS

The information regarding lifeform categorizations can be found in *Chapter 14: Campaign Architecture* of the *Gamemaster Guide*. The classifications listed there can serve for filling out a standard CSS form—though they do not begin to scratch the surface when describing different species and cultures. Part 4 of the Survey Report Form, more than any other, is simply a modest guideline for scouts who encounter new lifeforms of any kind.

PART 2A: PLANETARY INFORMATION

This data can be collected when the scout moves toward the interior of the system. Traveling around each of the planets or stellar objects in the system is necessary if the scout wants accurate readings, so this procedure can take a long time in large or extensive systems.

Planet, Orbital Distance, Length of Year, Axial Tilt, Length of Day, Density, and No. of Moons: All this data needs to be clearly recorded for each individual planet. Ring systems and comet belts obviously do not require some of these entries, but they must be explored as well.

The CSS does not expect its independent scouts to spend years surveying any particular system, so much of this data can be approximated. Even registered star systems (especially on the Verge) don't always have completely accurate data under these categories.

Additional Observations: Noted by planet or orbital body, additional observations might include speculation regarding

Concord Survey Service Survey Report Form Part 2a: Planetary Information

System Name: Tendrill
 Star Name: Tendrill Class: F1
 Color: Blue

Planet*	Orbital Distance	Length of Year	Axial Tilt (°)	Length of Day (hrs)	Density (Earth = 1)	No. of Moons
1 Delphin	2.74 AU	3.38	2	16.01	2.78	2
2 Sperous	3.67 AU	5.24	14	2106.4	2.26	3†
3 Atlas	5.74 AU	10.22	21	33.64	0.54	0
4 Pox	16.01 AU	47.69	13	17.0	0.24	33

*Note ring systems and comet belts with an 'r' or a 'c' as necessary. Fill in other information as possible/pertinent.

Additional Observations:

†One of the moons orbiting Sperous appears to be terran in nature. Its stats follow:

(Alaundril) 362,014' 30.84 days 11.3 77 1.88 0

*From Sperous

GAMEMASTER NOTE: PLANETARY INFORMATION

At this point in a survey, the heroes have to get "up close and personal" with the system and the planets inside it. The specific scientific information required for Part 2a can be found in most system-wide descriptions created for the StarDrive campaign setting, but the data can also be extrapolated from the information found in *Chapter 14: Campaign Architecture* in the *Gamemaster Guide*.

Each basic characteristic of a star system is discussed in that chapter, along with some examples for why the numbers come out the way they do. From a Gamemaster's perspective, it is only really important that these numbers approximate realism. Currently, we (in real life) only have one star system to base our theories on why planets have the characteristics that they do. If you aren't sure whether a particular planet in a star system you create should have an axial tilt of 22 or 27 degrees, it probably isn't that important. Your planet has a tilt close enough to that of the Earth's (at 24 degrees). All you really need to know is that the more dramatic the axial tilt, the more radical the shift in seasons.

This is where Part 2b of the form becomes more important. *Chapter 3: Gamemasters in Action* of the *Gamemaster Guide* outlines a very simple system for determining the basic information about a planet: the GRAPH system. The information on this part of the form can be filled out using the GRAPH system—except for the Planet Type and the class and extent of Land and Oceans (both of which are determined in Chapter 14). These are general descriptions of the planet that you can expand upon, but they are usually all you'll need to describe the planet to your players.

The heroes will need to survey the planet in order to gain this information, of course. As in Part 1, they will need to perform some complex skill checks. In fact, to fill out Part

2a, the heroes need to make several complex skill checks, using System Operation—sensors as well as Physical Science—astronomy and planetology. Skills that can be used to assist the scientists include Navigation—system astrography (to get just close enough to the planets to get the best possible reading) and Computer Science (to catalog all the information and organize it correctly).

Depending on how difficult the operation (and how long the Gamemaster wants to roleplay the situation), the scouts may have to make one set of complex skill checks (of Marginal or greater complexity, depending on how unusual the planet) per orbital body to successfully fill out Part 2a. This takes quite a bit of time, but is meant to be a fairly realistic representation of the time spent—after all, this is actually a lot of data to chart.

Usually, however, the Gamemaster should be satisfied with only a few such complex skill checks per system—the computer banks and sensors on a scout's vessel have enough information to extrapolate data, directing its operator toward any anomalies. In roleplaying terms, the Gamemaster could give the data for most of the planets to the heroes after a few skill checks—leaving the others blank, saying they require "further investigation," ideally leading into whatever adventure the Gamemaster has planned.

As far as Part 2b is concerned, the scouts are almost certainly going to have to visit each individual planet to learn all this information. They will have to orbit each planet to learn about the Planet Type and the dispersion of Land and Oceans. Likewise, they would have to enter the atmosphere and take samples for analysis if they want to learn anything beyond what their sensors tell them. This part of the Survey Form can usually be filled out from inside the ship and analyzed using the Physical Science skills.

unusual data collected—for example, an unusually large planet close to the sun or another with an extremely high axial tilt could be of interest. Noting possibly artificial satellites or the "footprints" of other visitors to the system is of crucial importance at this stage.

PART 2B: INDIVIDUAL PLANETARY INFORMATION

After determining the relative placement and characteristics of each orbital in the system, the scout has to investigate individual bodies to determine some basic information. This is often the most interesting (and most dangerous) part of the survey, because it may put the scout directly in contact with hostile environments. Only by penetrating the atmosphere of a planet (or coming close to a planet that has no atmosphere) may the scout arrive at the information necessary to fill out this part of the form.

Planet Name, Diameter, Class, Gravity, Radiation, Atmospheric Composition, Heat and Cold, Oceans, Climate, and Land: Possibly the most important set of data the scout can collect on a planet, this information often requires extremely close analysis on the part of the scout. Such details are usually very worthwhile, however.

Additional Observations: As always, any anomalies detected—especially preliminary signs of life or of other visitors to the planets in the system—is of extreme interest to the CSS.

PART 3: MOON AND ORBITAL INFORMATION

Few moons or other satellites require the sort of detail listed below in the example, but scouts must nevertheless be prepared for those rare events. The directions for filling out Part 3 of the System Survey Form are identical as those for Part 2b.

Concord Survey Service Survey Report Form Part 2b: Individual Planetary Information

System Name: Tendrill Star Name: Tendrill

Planet Name	Diameter	Class	Gravity	Radiation ¹	Atmospheric Composition	Heat & Cold	Oceans (CI/Ext) [*]	Climate (CI/Ext)	Land (CI/Ext)
1 Delphin	8,406 km	3	G3	R4-5	A3	H5	none	3/violent	3/smooth
2 Sperous	10,432 km	2	G3	R2-3	A4	H5	unknown	2/turbulent	2/unknown
3 Atlas	6,178 km	2	G1	R3-4	A0	H2	none	none	2/rugged
4 Pox	50,100 km	5	G2	R3-4	A1	H1	none	none	none

^{*}CI/Ext = Class/Extent

Additional Observations:

¹The higher radiation reading is for periods during a solar flare-up (a "Burn").

The primary atmospheric compositions of the planets are: Delphin (CO, CO₂, Fe(CO)₅), Sperous (CO₂), Atlas (CO₂), Pox (H₂, He)

PART 4: BASIC LIFEFORM ANALYSIS

Whenever a scout encounters lifeforms of any type, the CSS recommends that the scout contact his or her field agent as quickly as possible so that a trained first contact team can be dispatched ASAP.

Naturally, this is not always possible or even advisable, and the CSS understands there may be circumstances that make it difficult or impossible for a scout to avoid first contact (or renewed contact) with a newly discovered lifeform (or lost colony). So just as naturally, the CSS provides Part 4 of its System Survey Form to all its freelance agents in case just such an emergency arises.

These forms are usually used to describe the primary species (singular or plural) found on any given planet or orbital. Multiple copies of the form can be used to document additional species.

Lifeform Series, Breathes, Ingests, Hostility Level, Progress Level, Civilization Level, and Law

Level: While the CSS does not expect its scouts—unless they are trained in first contact—to make definitive judgments regarding these characteristics of a species, it does supply its agents with guidelines for filling out this form in a simple layman's fashion. Further analysis of the species encountered may produce conflicting or irregular information, but the CSS finds it important to start somewhere.

Cultural Observations: If the scout interacts with or observes the culture of any sapient species, he should record any observations he may make. It is important to reiterate that the CSS does not recommend such interaction unless the scout is a fully trained first contact specialist.

Additional Observations: Notes on population density, planetary or orbital dominance, unusual technology, or any other countless observations should be recorded here. The scout must be prepared to expound on any of these observations to his or her field agent.

Concord Survey Service Survey Report Form Part 3: Moon and Orbital Information

System Name: Tendrill Star Name: Tendrill Planet Name: Sperous

Moon Name	Diameter	Class	Gravity	Radiation	Atmospheric Composition	Heat & Cold	Oceans (CI/Ext) [*]	Climate (CI/Ext)	Land (CI/Ext)
1 Alaundril	7,726 km	1	G2	R2-3	A2 (N ₂ , O ₂)	H2	1/sparse	1/active	1/rugged

Additional Observations:

Alaundril has at least three oceans/seas, some rivers, and a few forests, but is primarily rugged desert.

Part 3: Moon and Orbital Information

System Name: Tendrill Star Name: Tendrill Planet Name: Pox

Moon Name	Diameter	Class	Gravity	Radiation	Atmospheric Composition	Heat & Cold	Oceans (CI/Ext) [*]	Climate (CI/Ext)	Land (CI/Ext)
1-24+									

—See below—

Additional Observations:

All of Pox's moons are small, lifeless, and unremarkable. They may have mining possibilities.

CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

SURVEY REPORT FORM

PART I: BASIC SYSTEM INFORMATION

SYSTEM NAME/DESIGNATION: _____

NUMBER OF STARS IN SYSTEM: _____ ORGANIZATION: _____

Star Name	Single or Binary	Class	Color	No. of Planets
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				

NON-MAIN SEQUENCE STELLAR BODIES

Body Type	No. of Planets	Special Notes
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS/PHENOMENA OBSERVED

CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

SURVEY REPORT FORM

PART 2A: PLANETARY INFORMATION

SYSTEM NAME: _____

STAR NAME: _____

CLASS: _____

COLOR: _____

Planet*	Orbital Distance	Length of Year	Axial Tilt (°)	Length of Day	Density (Earth = 1)	No. of Moons
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						
7						
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
13						
14						
15						
16						
17						
18						
19						
20						

*Note ring systems and comet belts with an 'r' or a 'c' as necessary. Fill in other information as possible/pertinent.

Additional Observations:

CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

SURVEY REPORT FORM

PART 2B: INDIVIDUAL PLANETARY INFORMATION

SYSTEM NAME: _____

STAR NAME: _____

Planet Name	Diameter	Class	Gravity	Radiation	Atmospheric Composition	Heat & Cold	Oceans (Cl/Ext)*	Climate (Cl/Ext)	Land (Cl/Ext)
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1									
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

2									
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

3									
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

4									
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5									
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6									
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7									
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8									
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9									
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

10									
----	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

*Cl/Ext = Class/Extent

Additional Observations:

CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

SURVEY REPORT FORM

PART 3: MOON AND ORBITAL INFORMATION

SYSTEM NAME: _____ STAR NAME: _____ PLANET NAME: _____

Planet Name	Diameter	Class	Gravity	Radiation	Atmospheric Composition	Heat & Cold	Oceans (Cl/Ext)*	Climate (Cl/Ext)	Land (Cl/Ext)
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									
13									
14									
15									
16									
17									
18									
19									
20									

Additional Observations:

CONCORD SURVEY SERVICE

SURVEY REPORT FORM

PART 4: BASIC LIFEFORM ANALYSIS

WARNING: Private citizens are advised against exploring first contact situations with unidentified lifeforms. If lifeforms are encountered, contact your nearest CSS representative ASAP.

SYSTEM NAME: _____ STAR NAME: _____ PLANET OR MOON: _____

Lifeform	Chemical Base	Breathes	Ingests	Hostility Level	Progress Level	Civilization Level	Law Level
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							

Cultural Observations:

Additional Observations:

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Ed Stark

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