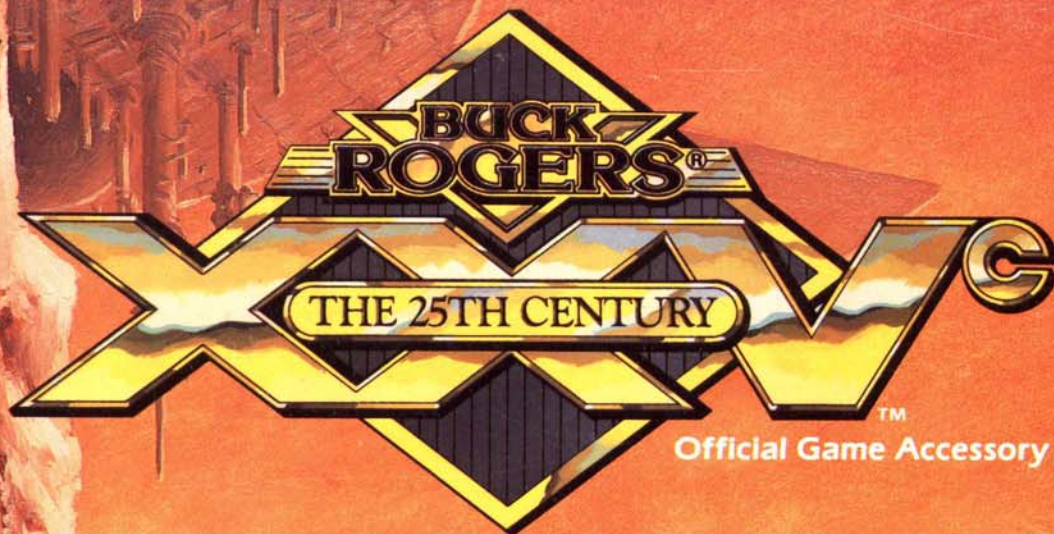
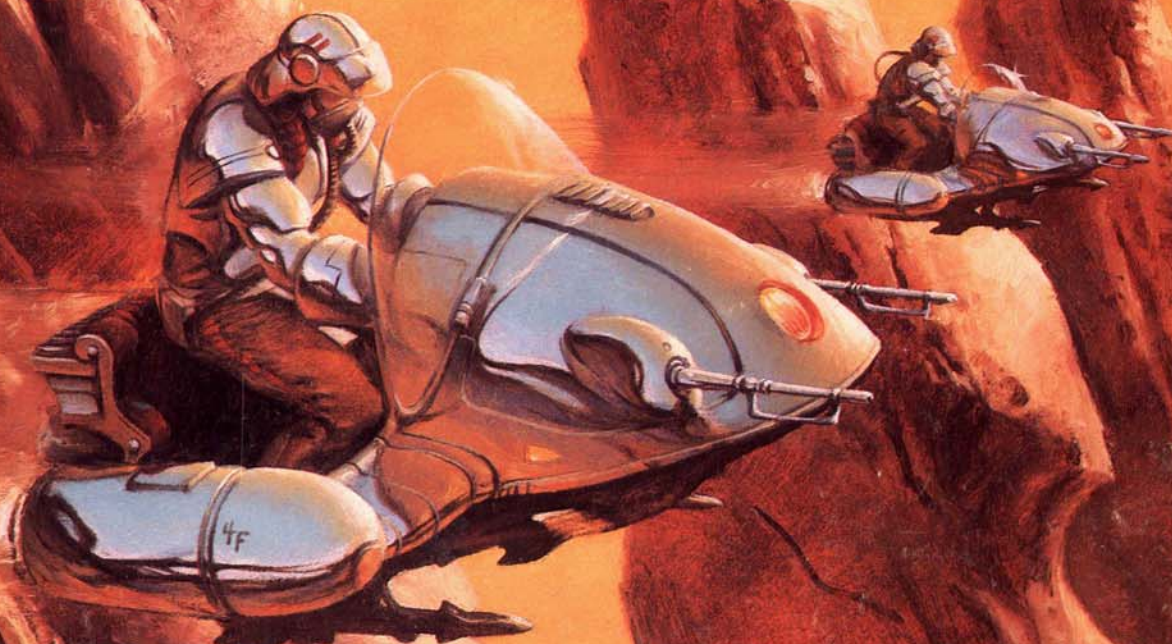
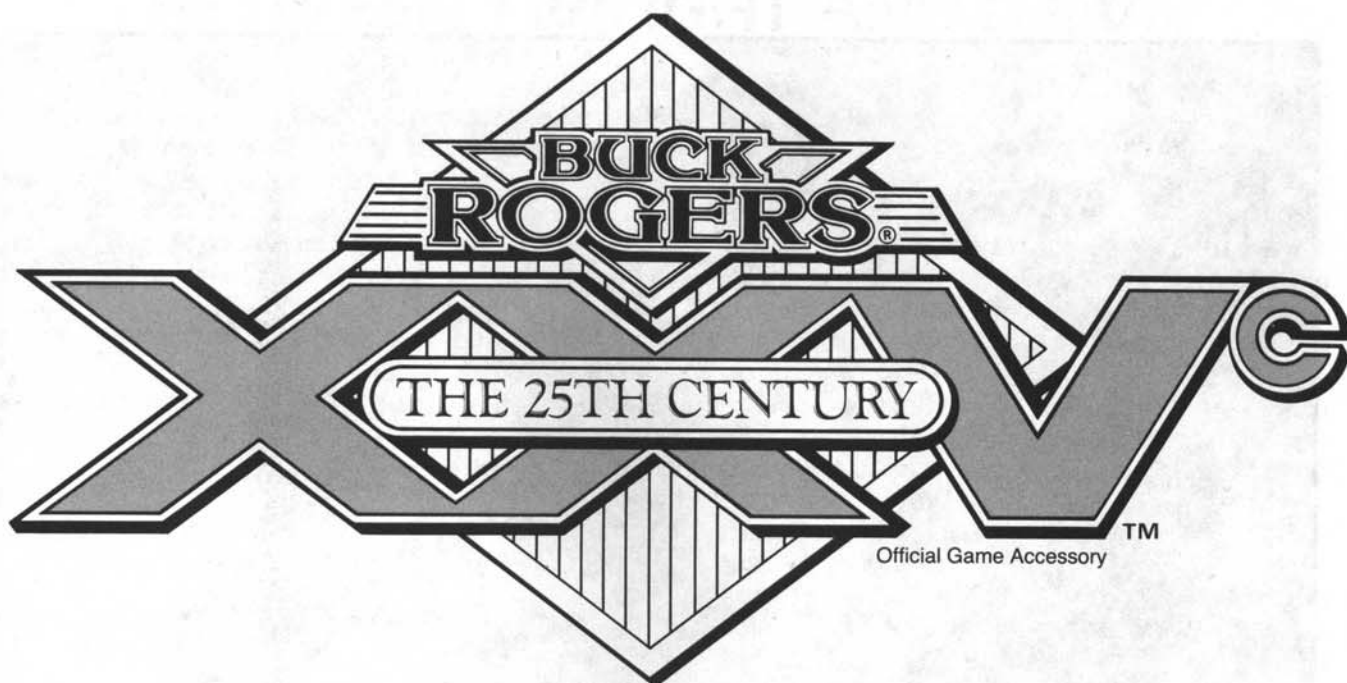




Inner Worlds

by William Tracy





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Printed in the U.S.A. Distributed to the book trade in the United States by Random House, Inc., and in Canada by Random House of Canada Ltd.
 Distributed to the toy and hobby trade by regional distributors.

Distributed to the book trade in the United Kingdom by Random Century Group.
 Distributed to the book and hobby trade in the United Kingdom by TSR Ltd.

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BETWEEN TWILIGHT AND DAWN

An athletic figure moves gracefully through the dark room and stands in front of the large plexiglass window. The man stares quietly up at the twinkling background of the night sky. A bright conglomeration of lights appears next to him, and it coalesces into the glowing form of an older man.

"Insomnia, Buck?" asks the elderly figure.

"Considering how long I've been asleep, does it surprise you, Doc?" Buck ruefully asks.

Buck continues to stare out at the starry sky for several minutes.

"A credit for your thoughts?" asks Dr. Huer, breaking the silence.

"Just thinking of all the changes on Earth and Mars you have told me about. But what about the other planets? How much has changed on them?"

"Quite a lot Buck, but I think it's too soon for you to digest any more information. You're still in a bit of a shock."

"Please, Doc, I can't sleep. And I want to know more about this whole new solar system I've woken up in. I haven't even seen one pizza delivery place since I woke up."

"What is pizza?"

"Never mind, Doc, just tell me some more. What about Mercury and Venus, the two planets closest to the sun?"

"All right, I'll give you a brief description of them, but then you must really go to bed and get some sleep. I don't think you have to worry about falling asleep for another few centuries again."

The tired rocketjock walks over to a nearby chair and sits down in it. As the special mem- plastic molds itself to fit his body's contours, Buck looks up at the holographic image expectantly.

Shaking his head ruefully, the digitalized personality clears his nonexistent throat and begins to speak.

"Mercury and Venus, known as the Inner Worlds, have both been colonized by the human race. Technically, these two planets are as powerful as Mars. Realistically, there exist too many opposing factions on each world to allow either of them to become as powerful as Mars. On the other hand, both planets produce special commodities that RAM can't produce, so RAM must remain friendly with both planets.

"Mercury is populated by four very different cultures. Beneath the burning surface of the desolate planet are the Miners, who live and mine the planet in huge, underground warrens. On the surface live the Desert Dancers, nomads who live in huge tracked cities that constantly move to stay ahead of the rising sun. They engage in strip mining and also repair the numerous solar energy collectors that dot the planet's surface.

"The solar power is collected from the sun and then beamed to solar satellites that orbit the planet. These satellites, known as the mari- posas, are owned by the aristocratic Sun Kings, the most powerful political and economic fac- tion of Mercury. The energy from these satel- lites is transmitted to the other planets of the solar system. Finally, there are the Musicians, the merchants who live in the underground warrens and in the satellite homes of the Sun Kings.

"On Venus, terraforming has enabled hu- mans to live on the continental plateaus, high above the acidic and high-pressure atmos- phere of the Lowlands. These plateaus are di- vided among two groups: Aphroditans and Ishtarians. The Ishtar Confederacy consists of a number of cities, peopled by humans who are known for their enlightened religious philoso- phy. These proud people are also known for their trade fleet of heavily armed merchant spaceships. The other group, the Aphroditans, is an arrogant people, mostly engaged in farm- ing and mining.

"The Aerostaters, clans of colorful nomads, roam the skies of Venus in huge, floating cities. Meanwhile, the lizardlike gennies known as Lowlanders inhabit the acidic swamps of Ve- nus. The Lowlanders harvest plants that are the only source of gravitol and lifextend, the two most important drugs in the system," con- cluded Dr. Huer.

"It's exciting and scary to think of this whole new frontier. I guess I've been cursed to live in many interesting times," muses Buck.

For a while, the man from the 20th Century and the digitalized personality of a man that had lived and died in the 20th Century stand together and watch the brilliant night sky of the 25th Century.



WELCOME TO THE INNER WORLDS

Special Note: The contents of this source book are primarily meant to be used by the referee of a XXVc™ game campaign. If you are a player, reading the complete source book could ruin the game for yourself, the referee, and the other players in the campaign. Your referee will let you know any facts about the Inner Worlds that he feels are generally available to your characters.

Your referee may allow you to read some portions of this book—portions that contain information that any general computer database in the 25th Century would hold. But until the referee says it's okay, please refrain from reading any further.

The year is 2456, and most of the solar system is now inhabited by humans, some of whom have been genetically altered to live in the various alien environments of the different planets of the solar system. In some cases, the planets have been terraformed, a costly process that requires many years of constant work. (Terraforming changes a planet's environment,

enabling normal humans to live on the planet with a minimum of discomfort.) Mercury and Venus have become the home of several different human cultures, each culture uniquely different.

Venus was terraformed so that normal humans could live on the higher elevations of the planet. The other inner world, Mercury (the hottest planet), was not terraformed. Instead, most of the colonists elected to live either far beneath the surface of the planet or above it in orbiting space stations.

Mercury, the closest planet to the sun, is still mostly a desert. Beneath the surface of the planet exists huge warrens, which serve as the homes and working areas for the Miners. These rough men and women claim to be even tougher than Asteroid Belters because the Belters can't stand "the heat of old Sol's kitchen." On the surface of the planet move huge, tracked cities, staying just a step ahead of the inferno of the rising sun. These tracked cities are inhabited by the pragmatic Desert Dancers. They gained their name from a unique martial

arts form, the Dance, that is an important part of their culture. The Desert Dancers move around Mercury's surface, repairing the many solar energy collectors that rest on the surface of Mercury. The Desert Dancers also scout out areas for future strip mining and inform the Miners of the location. The Dancers sometimes even engage in surface mining themselves.

High above the surface of Mercury float the mariposas. These large structures serve as huge solar energy collectors; they are also home to the aristocratic Sun Kings. The wealthy Sun Kings beam the collected energy out to the various planets of the solar system in the form of microwaves.

The final faction that exists on Mercury, known as the Musicians, lives in both the warrens and the floating cities of the Sun Kings.

The Musicians are so named because so many of Mercury's surface features are named after famous musicians and other artists. The Musicians serve as the merchant class of Mercury. The guild members serve as the shopkeepers, traders, and small business owners of Mercury.

Next out from the sun circles the cloud-shrouded planet of Venus. The terraforming of this planet has not been completely successful.

The planet is mostly covered by humid jungle and swamp areas that are inhabited by hybrid plants and animals. The atmospheric pressure is too high, and the composition of the atmosphere poisonous for normal humans. Humans are able to live high above the cloud line, on continent-size plateaus that tower above the deadly Lowlands. The atmospheric pressure at these upper levels is well within human tolerance, as is the composition of the atmosphere.

Huge cities have been built on these plateaus, and two cultures have arisen in these cities. The largest of the two cultures, the Ishtar Confederation, is known for the enlightened and benevolent religion that guides its people.

It is also known for its merchant fleet of heavily armed spaceships.

The other plateau culture, on the plateau of Aphrodite, is more closed and paranoid. The people mostly engage in farming and mining; they are led by a distinct upper class. The people of Aphrodite also seem to rely more on robots than do the other people of the solar system.

The deadly Lowlands are inhabited by the

gennies known as Lowlanders. These reptile-like gennies have been genetically engineered to live in the Venusian Lowlands.

Considered barbarians by most, the Lowlanders are the only source for the two most important drugs in the solar system: gravitol and lifextend. These two drugs can only be produced from plants that grow in the Lowlands of Venus.

This source book provides complete descriptions of the Inner Worlds and the cultures that inhabit them. This information should help the referee to design adventures in the many unique settings that exist on the two planets. Used with the XXVc™ boxed game, this source book will provide many hours of exciting adventures in the swamps of Venus and the deserts of Mercury.

So What's a Source Book?

A source book is not an adventure that is ready to be played. Instead, it is a reference book that aids the referee in designing his own adventures. This book provides descriptions of Mercury and Venus and the people that inhabit the two Inner Worlds. The information in this book will enable the referee to provide players with vivid setting descriptions for campaigns on the Inner Worlds. Some of the information provided might even give the referee a basic plot idea that he can expand into a full adventure.

The rest of this book is divided into two different sections. Each section describes one of the two Inner Worlds. The first chapter of each section provides a basic overview of the planet and its people. This information is considered general knowledge and will be available in most public information databases. The players should probably be allowed to read the first chapter on each planet, but the final decision is left up to the individual referee.

The next chapter on each planet provides more complete descriptions of the various cultures that inhabit that planet. This includes such information as government, religion, and way of life. Each of the two sections contains chapters describing the planet's armed forces and space fleet, important personalities, and native animals.

CHAPTER 1: FIRST ORBIT—MERCURY

Statistics

Capital: Hielo Orbital Station (a mariposa satellite)

Form of Government: Economic constitutional monarchy

Surface Area: 28,728,533 square miles

Orbital Radius: 36,000,000 miles (.39 AU) on the average

Difference Between Perihellion and Aphellion: 7,250,000 miles

Average Distance From Earth:
25,000,000,000 miles

Gravity: 33% Earth normal

Escape Velocity: 9,500 mph

Surface Temperature Extremes:
-280° to +800°

Atmosphere: None (trace elements of helium and sodium exist)

Day/Year: A Mercurian day equals 59 Terran days; a Mercurian year equals 88 Terran days

Natural Satellites: None

Elevations: Average highest points are the crater walls, the highest being about three miles above Mercurian sea level; the average low points are the bottoms of the craters, the lowest being about five miles below Mercurian sea level

Population: 20,000,000

Density: .06 persons per square mile

Distribution: 12% mariposas, 28% track cities, 60% warrens

Chief Products: Solar power, metals, raw ores (especially iron and lead), gold, silver, and fissionables

Imports: Luxury items, foodstuffs, drugs, and water

Spaceports: Two Class A spaceports (Hielo Orbital Station and Caloris on the surface), three Class B spacedocks (Beethoven, Vivaldi, and Mozart), four Class C spacedocks (Tolstoi, Raphael, Copley, and Michelangelo)

Currency: Konig (platinum coin equal to 20 credits), marquis (gold coin equal to 10 credits), baronet (silver coin equal to 5 credits)

Mercury is the solar system's closest planet to the sun. The surface of the planet is subject-

ed to daytime temperatures that liquefy iron ore and extreme sub-zero temperatures in the nighttime. The fact that humans have actually colonized this planet without the use of terraforming is a testament to humanity's stubbornness and ingenuity.

The largest percentage of Mercury's population lives under the surface in gigantic, underground corridors that are complete cities. A smaller portion of Mercury's population lives on the surface in huge tracked cities that constantly move to stay in the twilight zone between Mercury's burning day and freezing night.

The rest of Mercury's population lives in huge satellites that orbit the planet. These satellites, most of which were once asteroids, act as solar energy collectors.

The collected solar energy is transformed into microwave energy, which is then transmitted to various parts of the solar system. Mercury provides energy to all of the planets in the solar system and various outposts in the asteroid belt. Because of this energy monopoly, the people of Mercury exert a great amount of social, political, and economic power in the solar system. In addition to this, due to the planet's close orbit to the sun, many ships stop at Mercury while making a journey from one side of the solar system to the other.

This makes Mercury an important economic and military ally for the different factions in the solar system.

Adventuring on Mercury

The gravity of Mercury is only 33% of the normal Earth gravity. This means that something that weighs 100 pounds on Earth weighs only 33 pounds on Mercury. However, rather than dividing the weight of everything by 3, referees can save time simply by multiplying the character's Weight and Maximum Lift (from page 9 of the *Characters & Combat* book in the XXVc™ boxed set) when on Mercury.

To save time, the table below lists these changes to the Weight and Maximum Lift figures.

Table 1M: Strength on Mercury

Strength	Weight	Maximum Lift
1	3	9
2	6	15
3	15	30
4	30	75
5	45	120
6	60	165
7	75	210
8	90	270
9	105	300
10	120	345
11	135	375
12	150	420
13	165	465
14	180	510
15	195	540
16	210	585
17	255	660
18	330	765
19	600	1200
20	900	1500
21	1350	1950
22	1800	2400

Note: Referees should make sure not to divide Earth weights by 3 and multiply lift figures by 3—characters on Mercury aren't that strong! In addition to this, Mercury's lower gravity enables a character to move faster than he can on Earth. This is because the character's body is lighter while the strength of his arms and legs are still the same, so he can propel his body faster than normal.

The Movement Rates given in the XXVc™ game boxed set (on the Reference Screen and on page 63 of the *Characters & Combat* book) are used when the character is operating under standard Earth gravity. While on Mercury, the movement rates for running and climbing are increased, due to the lower Mercurian gravity. When adventuring on Mercury, the characters should use the altered movement rates listed in the table below.

Table 2M: Movement on Mercury

Race	Run	Climb	Air
Human	1800	450	—
Tinker	1440	360	—
Worker	1080	270	—
Terrine	2160	540	—

Delph	1440	360	—
Lowlander	1440	360	—
Runner	2520	630	—
Stormrider	1080	270	1200
Spacer	1800	450	600

Climbing Note: Due to the lesser gravity of Mercury, a character falling from a height on Mercury suffers less damage than if he had fallen from the same height on Earth. A character falling in a pressurized area on Mercury suffers 1d4 points of damage for every 10 feet he falls, up to a maximum of 8d4 damage. If the character is falling in the Mercurian atmosphere, the maximum falling damage amount goes up to 16d4, due to the lack of atmospheric drag. This information is listed on the Referee Screen from the XXVc game boxed set.)

Swimming movement rates are not changed by the gravity of a planet, but it is doubtful that the characters will discover a body of water large enough to swim in on Mercury. Also, flight rates for Stormriders and Spacers, who can fly under their own power, are not changed by the effects of Mercury's gravity. These rates are therefore the same as listed in the XXVc boxed set.

Movement rate adjustments caused by gravity affect only living beings; they do not change the movement rates of ground and air vehicles.

Geography

The stark surface of Mercury is a desolate wasteland of rock and dust. The most prominent features of the surface of Mercury are the impact craters dotting the rocky planet. The largest of these impact craters, Caloris, has a diameter of close to 180 miles. A large number of other Mercurian craters have an average diameter of over 120 miles.

The area of Mercury not covered with craters consists of flat plains broken by occasional low-lying foothills, mountains, and fissures. The highest points of the Mercurian surface are the towering scarps (the cliff walls of the craters). The lowest points of elevation on Mercury are the basin floors of the huge craters.

Directly opposite the Caloris Basin crater, on the other side of the planet, is a terrain unique in the solar system. This section of Mercury is a huge maze of boulders, shattered mountains, and deep ravines. Scientists believe that this

chaotic landscape was created when the meteor that caused the Caloris Basin hit Mercury. Seismic waves caused by the impact traveled through and around the planet and then collided at a spot on the planet directly opposite the Caloris Basin.

Atmosphere and Climate

The planet Mercury has no true atmosphere, but there are minute traces of sodium and helium above the surface. Anyone traveling on the surface of the planet requires a spacesuit to survive, not just because of the lack of atmosphere, but also because of the extreme temperatures.

Temperatures on the surface can reach up to +800°F when the sun is in the sky overhead, which causes streams of molten metal to flow across the baked surface. In addition to that, huge amounts of radiation bombard the surface when the sun is in the Mercurian sky. And when the sun is directly overhead, no spacesuit can completely protect its wearer from the heat and radiation. Even the hardy surface dwellers, the Desert Dancers, retreat from the fiery face of the sun.

The section of the planet that is turned away from the sun is subject to the utter cold of space, since the planet has no atmosphere. Nighttime temperatures on the planet can drop to -280°.

The different cultures of Mercury each have their own names for the daytime and nighttime periods. Daytime is called "S'melting Time" by the Miners, "the Dance of the Salamander" by the Desert Dancers, and "Golden Zenith" by the Sun Kings.

Nighttime is called "Hoarfrost Sky" by the Miners, "Rhyme of Penumbra" by the Desert Dancers, and "Eclipse of Radiance" by the Sun Kings. The practical and businesslike Musicians simply call it day and night. Since there is no actual atmosphere, there are no seasons or weather (except for the extreme temperature variations).

Over the ages, some natural rock erosion and dust movement have taken place, caused by the solar winds (streams of charged particles radiating from the sun).

Minerals

More than half of the planet is made up of

iron ore. In addition, gold and silver deposits are sometimes found. The planet is also a source for a number of other minerals that are used as fuel in the nuclear fission process.

The Miners of the warrens engage in mining the mineral resources found beneath the surface, while the Desert Dancers on the surface engage in quick strip-mining operations while avoiding the intense rays of the constantly moving sun. Sometimes the Desert Dancers discover flowing streams of molten metal ore, which they harvest. The various mining techniques are more fully described later in this book.

Population Centers

The population of Mercury is unequally divided between three types of living environments: the underground warrens, the track cities, and the mariposa satellites.

The Underground Warrens

The Miners, and the majority of the Musicians, live beneath the surface of Mercury in the warrens. The warrens are huge, underground corridors that are five to 10 miles wide and hundreds of miles long.

The larger warrens have ceiling heights of up to 100 feet, while the smaller warrens have ceiling heights of about 40 feet.

The warrens are laid out in gridlike patterns some 200 feet beneath the surface. The sides, ceilings, and floors of the warrens are plated with metal alloys. These precautions are just enough to shield the warrens' inhabitants from the sun's radiations.

Even with state-of-the-art life support systems, the intense heat of the Mercurian day (and the intense cold of the Mercurian night), is felt in the underground warrens. Due to the size of the warrens, miniature clouds sometimes form near the ceilings, while small fog banks sometimes hover near the floor. These atmospheric conditions occur mostly during the transition period between night and day. During the freezing nighttime of the surface, water vapor near the ceiling of the warrens freezes as hoarfrost on the roof.

The living quarters of a warren's inhabitants are usually located on the sides of the huge corridors, sometimes cut into the metal-plated, rock walls. Buildings in the larger warrens are

sometimes built on multileveled tiers cut into the side of the warrens, but for the most part they are located on the sides of the corridors.

The floor of a warren is dominated by the walkways and roads that allow travel through the corridors. Most of the inhabitants use tri-furies—electric-powered, three-wheeled motorcycles. A separate lane has been provided in larger warrens for large passenger vehicles, but only the wealthy can afford such transports.

A number of curbside businesses have set themselves up on the floors of the warrens near the numerous roads. These businesses include Inferno's (a fast-food chain that is well known for having the spiciest food possible, including its desserts), Dante's Place (a chain of wild nightclubs), and Mercury Mart (a chain of drive-through convenience stores whose aisles have been built to accommodate the tri-furies).

The ceilings of the warrens are dominated by the constant movement of ore car trains. Attached firmly to tracks set in the ceilings, the ore trains travel along quickly, propelled by magnetic force. These ore trains eventually arrive at the Caloris spaceport. The raw ore is then unloaded and placed aboard freighters.

The warrens have been individually named by the Miners, using a bizarre naming system. At first, the warrens were named after the crater or basin they ran under. This became confusing as more warrens were built under the larger craters. Over time, the Miner's came up with nicknames for the newer warrens.

It was decided that the largest of the warrens built under a crater or basin be named for that crater or basin. The other warrens have been named using a variety of methods. One of the more popular methods is to name a warren after a mythological underworld or the underworld's lord. Thus there are warrens named Purgatory, Hades, Tarterus, Limbo, Avernus, and Pluto. Other warrens have been named using terms for extreme weather conditions (such as Snowball, Iccube, Frostbite, Inferno, Wildfire, and Sirocco). Other warrens have been named using other methods or combinations of the above criteria (Dog Days, Swelter Pot, and Ardala's Frying Pan, for example).

Over 200 different warrens now exist under the surface of Mercury. More are being built every year as the underground system of mining tunnels is expanded to follow veins of ore.

A total of seven spacedocks and one Class A spaceport exist on Mercury, built into the warrens. These space facilities are found at the junction between two large warrens. The ship berths are built beneath the surface, with huge, sliding overhead doors opening out to the surface. The docking ship maneuvers through the open doors and into the underground space berth. Each berth is separated from the others, allowing it to be pressurized and filled with a breathable atmosphere.

The Caloris spaceport is the only facility that is built specifically for the loading and unloading of large amounts of cargo. It is also better suited for the embarking and disembarking of ships' passengers.

The doors to these rocket berths open only when they are facing away from the sun. If there is an absolute emergency, the port officials might be coaxed into opening the berth doors during the heat of the Mercurian day. Doing this will cause heat damage to the exposed berth and maybe even to the surrounding area. It better turn out to be a *real* emergency, or the rocketjock can expect to pay some heavy fines and perhaps spend time in forced mining labor.

The Caloris spaceport is placed at the junction of the two largest warrens, the Caloris warren and the Paradise Lost warren.

Since most visitors to Mercury see these two warrens, they are the entertainment and luxury strips of the planet. The 10-mile strip of the Caloris warren nearest to the spaceport is filled with first-class hotels, restaurants, and other entertainment facilities. Moving farther down the warren reveals residences for the upper-class Mercurians (Sun King representatives, mining officials, wealthy Musicians, and representatives of other planets and organizations).

The Paradise Lost warren is more of a middle-class area, though the five-mile strip nearest the spaceport is typical of the usual spacer town that grows up by a spaceport. The spaceship crews usually come here while their ships are berthed at the port. This area features middle- to low-class hotels and bars. The entertainment places in this area are a little rowdier than those of the Caloris warren.

This section of the Paradise Lost warren is also a known hotbed of crime and black-market dealings.

The warrens are powered by direct connections with the solar collector arrays on the sur-

face. Each warren also has a back-up nuclear generator in case of emergencies.

The Track Cities

The huge track cities, home to the Mercurian Desert Dancers, are marvels of engineering and testaments to human ingenuity and adaptability. These large arcologies move across the face of Mercury, constantly staying just ahead of the deadly rays of the rising sun.

These vast cities move on huge caterpillar treads that are made of a polymer plastic created by zero-gee RAM factories. These mobile arcologies move along the grid of solar collectors that have been built across the surface of the planet. As the track cities move, teams of Desert Dancers from the cities check the solar collectors, keeping up maintenance and repairing any damage the collectors have sustained.

There are over 100 different track cities moving across the surface of Mercury. Each track city is about two miles long, a mile wide, and usually about 2,000 feet high.

Constructed of light alloys, these vehicles can protect their inhabitants from the effects of the early morning of the Mercurian day, but they cannot completely protect against the full heat and radiation of the noon sun. This is why the track cities are constantly moving, staying just ahead of the rising sun.

The track cities are inhabited by the pragmatic and freedom-loving Desert Dancers. (These people are detailed later in this book.)

The track cities are powered by batteries. The lower levels of the track cities contain the huge batteries capable of storing tremendous amounts of energy. Every day, each track city stops for one hour and recharges the batteries by draining energy from the solar collector grid to which the city travels parallel. In case of an emergency, a track city also contains a back-up nuclear generator. This nuclear generator can supply enough power for minimal life support, lighting, and movement for three Mercurian years.

Over time, attacks by pirates and others have caused many of the track cities to invest in heavy weapons. A track city might be armed with any number of heavy weapons that are available to spaceships. The weapons are protected in sealed gun ports because prolonged exposure to the Mercurian environment could damage them. The guns are revealed only if

the track city is facing a definite threat.

The lower level of a track city is mostly taken up by the solar batteries, the emergency nuclear plant, and the mechanisms that run the city's treads. Huge cargo holds for mined ores are also located on the lower level. The rear of the track city features a pair of huge doors and an extension ramp that reaches down to the ground. The doors open into a wide hallway and a series of airlocks. The hallway eventually opens up into a gigantic garage where a number of vehicles are kept. These rugged and insulated vehicles are used to scout for raw ores on the surface and to aid in the maintenance and repair of the solar collectors. A number of mobile strip mining vehicles and special vehicles for the harvesting of molten metal are also kept here. (A full description of the mining techniques is given later.)

The next higher level of a track city is a huge storage area for the parts and materials necessary to keep the track city and solar collectors in working condition.

The level above contains the living quarters, which consist of small communal apartments for single adults and larger suites for families.

The next level of the track city is used for entertainment. Compared to the Miners, the Desert Dancers' idea of entertainment is more cultured and sedate. While there are a few nightclubs on a track city, most of these are refined and quiet.

The entertainment level contains a number of theatres, libraries, and performance halls as well as gyms and athletic stadiums.

The next level is a huge, self-contained park that is tended very carefully by full-time gamekeepers and botanists. Holograms of various scenes and a highly efficient (and energy expensive) life-support system maintain the illusion. The keepers of the natural parks have managed to sustain a number of Terran plant and animal species that have been classified as extinct on Earth for a long time.

The next higher level of the arcology contains the educational facilities. These facilities range from simple classrooms for young children to advanced labs for a number of different scientific subjects. This level also contains the training halls for the ritualistic and dangerous Combat Dance, which is an important part of the Desert Dancer heritage.

The top level of each track city contains the administrative and business offices that keep

the city running. This level contains the main memory storage area for the computer that runs the track city.

Here also is the city's bridge, from which the city is steered. The bridge serves as a communications and navigation center.

The roof of the track city usually has a large landing area for jetcars and other air vehicles. In case of emergencies, energy collecting arrays have been built on the top of each track city. These collectors can intercept microwave energy beamed down from the mariposas if all of a track city's power systems break down for some reason. The roof also features a number of communication and sensor devices.

Each of the track cities is named after either a famous historical figure who fought for freedom for his people or after a famous philosopher. Track city names include Washington, Cromwell, Socrates, Sung Tee, Gorbachev, and Mandela.

The routes taken by all the track cities ensure that every part of the ground-based solar collector grid is checked at least once every three Mercurian years. During this three-year time period, each track city arrives at Caloris Basin once. Here the track city is placed in a special underground berth. The berth is pressurized so that major repair work can easily be done on the outside of the arcology.

The docked city remains at berth for about 10 Earth days. While the arcology is being overhauled, new supplies are bought and loaded. Also, the raw ores mined by the Desert Dancers are sold and traded for a variety of items needed by the arcology.

The Mariposa Satellites

While only a small fraction of the Mercurian people live in the orbiting mariposas, this is the most influential faction of the Mercury population. The mariposas are owned and inhabited by the powerful and aristocratic Sun Kings.

The mariposas were mostly created from captured asteroids towed in from the Asteroid Belt; the asteroids were plated over and covered with solar energy collectors. There are close to 500 mariposas, ranging in size from tiny moonlets less than a mile in diameter to huge planetoids that are dozens of miles in diameter. The moonlets are independently owned and operated, while all of the large planetoids are owned by one of the individual

Sun Kings or jointly owned by a Sun King family.

The smaller, independently owned mariposas are often hollowed out and used as living quarters by their owners. The larger mariposas are hollowed out as well—they contain small cities.

In addition to the mariposas themselves, there are a number of other space habitats orbiting Mercury, including the Hielo Orbital Station, which contains a Class A spaceport.

Hielo is considered to be the seat of the Mercurian government because the most powerful and wealthiest Sun King family, the Gavilans, owns the orbital station. Also, the Gavilans use Hielo as their business and administration center, maintaining a huge residence on the station. The inside of the orbital station has been decorated with gold and silver filigree, and filled with replicas of ancient Terran interior designs, artwork, and furniture. Because of this, the Gavilans' personal security force roams the orbital station, dealing harshly with any sort of thievery or vandalism.

Another important orbiting station of Mercury is also owned by the Gavilan family: Mercury Prime. The outside of this cylindrical orbital station is made of a special alloy that is highly resistant to heat and radiation. In addition to this resistance, the unique alloy has a high rate of plasticity. This has allowed the entire surface of Mercury Prime to be artistically carved with baroque ornamentation and carvings, including likenesses of many famous Gavilan family members.

The inside of Mercury Prime is filled with exotic and ancient decorations that are even more outrageous and expensive than the ones in Hielo. In addition, most of the artwork and ancient furniture in Mercury Prime are not reproductions—they are original pieces stolen from Earth.

Mercury Prime is the ancestral home of the Gavilan family. Many people believe that the true seat of the Mercurian government is not on Hielo, but on Mercury Prime.

The other Sun King families either live inside one of the mariposas or have their own orbital space station, if they are wealthy enough.

Like the Gavilans, the other Sun King families indulge in expensive decorations for their homes and businesses. The decoration styles depend on each Sun King family's history. For example, the mariposas and space stations

owned by the Minafar Sun King family are known for their Arabic palace motif.

While the mariposas and the orbital stations are owned by the Sun Kings, they are not inhabited solely by Sun King family members and their followers. A constant stream of travelers, rocketjocks, adventurers, and businessmen pass through the mariposas. In addition to these transients, a number of representatives from various planets, corporations, and other organizations have made the mariposas their homes while they deal with the Sun Kings.

The mariposas are also home to a large number of Musicians who are not directly working for the Sun Kings. The Musicians operate a variety of businesses and perform various menial tasks.

The People of Mercury

The people of Mercury, divided into four distinct cultural groups, each have their own customs and way of life.

The tough Miners live in the huge warrens underneath the surface of Mercury. The Miners (so called because the vast majority of Mercurians work in the mines) excavate raw ore from the rocks.

The courageous Desert Dancers live on the surface of Mercury, moving across the land on nomadic arcologies. The Desert Dancers are so named because of two reasons. The first is that all Dancers learn a graceful martial arts form of unarmed combat and knife fighting known as the Dance.

The other reason is that a number of Desert Dancers have become famous performing artists in the fields of music, literature, and the visual arts.

The wealthy Sun Kings arrogantly control Mercury from their orbiting palaces. The aristocratic leaders of Mercury named themselves Sun Kings because of the solar power they control and because of certain references to an ancient ruler of Earth's France, who was known for his wealth and flamboyance.

Lastly, the Musicians are the middle-class businessmen, merchants, and craftsmen that do all the nonphysical tasks in the underground warrens and the orbiting mariposas. The Musicians are not so named because of outstanding accomplishments in music, but rather because a number of Mercury's surface features are named after famous musicians of

ancient times.

Except for a few individual differences, the four cultural groups of the Mercurian race have the same basic physical traits. The original colonists of Mercury were a mixed pot of Terrans, some Martians, and a few Venusians.

Interbreeding over the years has eliminated the distinctive Martian and Venusian physical traits, causing the Mercurians to mostly look like average humans.

Mercurians have been genetically altered slightly, making them rather stocky and short. This was done to save space in both the underground warrens and the orbiting mariposas, where space is an important consideration. The genetic alterations also enable Mercurians to live more comfortably in the lower gravity of Mercury.

Over the years, Mercurians have also developed some other distinctive features, but these were caused by natural adaptation to the Mercurian environment.

The average Mercurian ranges in height from 5 to 5-1/2 feet tall, and weighs 120 to 250 pounds. The Miners are usually the shortest and stockiest of Mercurian peoples, while the Desert Dancers are usually the tallest and slimmest. The skin of Mercurians is generally hairless and smooth, except for the normal hair on their heads. Their skin is usually shaded in tones of brown, red, tan, or beige.

Over the years, Mercurians have developed a natural resistance to intense heat and radiation. They have also developed a hardy constitution from dealing with the extreme environment of Mercury. In addition, they have developed good reflexes, since they usually work with many mechanical tools in areas of limited space. Also, quick reflexes are needed for continued survival in the harsh environment.

Mercurians use many tools in their work, but in general they are not as strong as normal humans (though many of the Miners are an exception).

Way of Life

The basic lifestyles of the different cultures of Mercury vary a great deal, mostly because of the different types of living environments with which each faction must deal.

The Miners

The Miners, who live in the underground warrens, lead a rough-and-tumble life of hard work and even harder entertainment. Miners believe themselves to be the toughest and most independent people in the solar system. They feel that they are even tougher than the asteroid miners, who don't have to deal with the intense heat of old Sol.

As their name implies, these people mine the raw ores that exist beneath the surface of Mercury. Ten-hour (Terran hours) work shifts constantly toil to release valuable ores from Mercury's embrace.

The Miners don't usually have to physically mine the ores out; they employ a number of different excavation machines to do that. Using these machines requires a dexterity and intelligence that many outsiders do not attribute to the Miners.

The work is tiring and risky. Cave-ins are a danger, perhaps even more so than on Earth because the planet surface above contains no breathable atmosphere.

Because of the lack of atmosphere above, the mines of Mercury are broken up by portable air locks set up in the tunnels about a mile apart. The mining suits worn by the Miners contain a face mask and a three-minute supply of breathable air. This fear of sudden loss of air has led to an old miner tradition of carrying animals along to detect either a lack of air or poisonous gas (which is occasionally encountered by the Mercurian Miners).

Instead of the traditional birds, a special species of genetically altered cats, called alchemcats, have been created by genengineers. The small cats had their already keen senses enhanced. Not only can they sense air leaking out to the surface and the presence of pockets of poisonous gas, they can also sniff out veins of ore. And they are sensitive to vibrations and changes in pressure, allowing them to sometimes sense impending cave-ins before they happen.

Since new mines have to be drilled so that veins of ore can be followed, special digging vehicles must be used. Called Mercury moles, these boring machines create new tunnels that are then reinforced so that they can be safely mined. Driving a Mercury mole is one of the higher paying mining jobs because it has a high casualty rate—many mole drivers have

been killed in cave-ins or have vanished in deep rifts that they accidentally bored into.

The system of mine tunnels branches out from the warrens and is constantly expanding outward and downward to follow new ore veins. To avoid conflicts, each warren has its own mine system that does not connect to any other warren's system.

Miners live in the same warren that they mine. The Miners of each warren call themselves the "(name of the warren) Company," even though they are not officially a separate business company. The senior member of each warren is called the Head Sap. A Miner's life is divided into periods called drudges by the Miners.

During one drudge period, a Miner works for 10 Terran hours, sleeps for about 10 Terran hours, and then rests and relaxes for 10 more Terran hours. After four successive drudge periods, a Miner spends the next two successive drudge periods "relaxing." Since a Miner gets paid after four drudge periods of work, his two drudges of relaxation are often spent having a good time.

Despite their wild life, Miners take their families very seriously. Married Miners get larger apartments than single Miners, thanks to combined incomes. Miners and Musicians often marry, which sometimes enables a Miner to enter a less risky and more profitable profession. The children of Miners are treated with overt love and affection, but at the same time they are expected to become tough and independent at an early age.

While Miners insist that they are not bothered by the heat of Mercury, it is a statistical fact that more fights and other acts of violence break out in a warren when the Mercurian sun is overhead.

Miners wear mostly functional, rugged clothing, especially when working. The standard Miner outfit is heavy boots and coveralls made of a material that is known for its toughness and insulation qualities.

Miners have a tendency to weary gaudy clothes and jewelry (gold and silver chains) when they are out for a night on the warren.

The Desert Dancers

The daily life of a Desert Dancer is much more diverse than that of a Miner. The techie nomads lead a much quieter life than Miners,

but their life is just as hard. The majority of the Desert Dancers work as technicians and maintenance crews for the solar collector arrays that their track cities travel beside.

As a city moves slowly across the desolate land, mobile teams of technicians check the nearby sections of collector arrays for any damage that needs repairing or for any worn-out parts that need replacing. This is a grueling job because the maintenance checks and repairs must be done efficiently and quickly. The mobile technician teams, called Sweep Companies, work in periods of seven Terran hours. The Sweep Companies are divided into shifts so that there are companies working around the clock as the track city moves past the solar arrays.

A smaller portion of the track city's technicians maintain and repair the inner workings of the track city itself. A number of Desert Dancers work in a nontechnical and nonphysical tasks because the track city is a complete ecology.

Desert Dancers who do not normally work on Sweep Companies are still expected to spend three shifts per Mercurian year working on a Sweep Company.

The most dangerous and most tasking Desert Dancer job belongs to the Stream Scouts. The Stream Scouts travel across the surface away from the protection of the track cities in dune dancers and sunrays.

Dune dancers are small, two-man land vehicles that are able to travel over most types of the rough Mercurian terrain. Dune dancers are heavily insulated and armored, and many carry concealed heavy weapons.

Sunrays are one-man jetcars, also heavily insulated from the heat and radiation of the Mercurian environment. They are also often armed with deadly weapons.

The Stream Scouts constantly look for mineral deposits and veins near the surface. Often they find these deposits by following streams of molten metal to their source. After discovering the source, they contact the nearest warren and tell the Miners that there is a possible vein of ore that leads beneath the surface.

If the Miners find the underground source of the molten stream, they pay the Stream Scouts a commission based on the estimated value of the ore vein.

If the Stream Scouts have enough time and if it looks like most of the vein is near the surface,

they will contact the track city, which sends out mobile strip-mining machines that excavate as much of the ore as possible before it is time to move on.

In addition, the Stream Scouts dredge as much of the molten ore as possible. A huge mobile machine, called a crucible, has a ceramic scoop that is extremely heat-resistant. The machine scoops up vast globs of the molten metal and pours it into spherical containers that are made of the same heat-resistant ceramic material.

The round containers are then towed in by the crucible and other Desert Dancer vehicles. Once they have been taken into the track city, the now-solidified hunks of ore are handled by specific robotic cargo handlers and placed in a special cargo hold of the track city. The floor of the cargo area features round depressions into which the ore "eggs" are placed.

Some of the ores are used in the manufacturing plants of the track city to make spare parts for the solar arrays and the track city. The remaining ore eggs are sold when the track city makes its regular maintenance stop at Caloris.

Desert Dancer family life is filled with much honor and respect for each member of a family. Desert Dancers are usually monogamous, but each couple is limited to one child because of the finite resources of a track city. Desert Dancers consider all the inhabitants of their track city to be a second, larger family. This means that Desert Dancers treat each other with politeness and respect, unless actions by another Desert Dancer indicate that he is not worthy of such treatment. Desert Dancers often call each other "cousin" because of this clannish attitude.

The lifestyles of the Desert Dancers seem harsh and boring to outsiders. Those allowed to enter one of their track cities see another side. The Desert Dancers relax with a number of cultural and intellectual pursuits that make their difficult life worthwhile.

Desert Dancers on the surface of Mercury wear special spacesuits built to insulate their wearer from heat and radiation. These suits are even more durable than those worn by the asteroid miners.

The rest of the time, Desert Dancers wear loose and colorful robes over tight fitting protective outfits. The tight fitting clothes are usually smart suits.

The Musicians

The lives of individual Musicians vary a great deal according to whether they live in mariposas or the warrens and according to what kind of work they do.

The Musicians serve as the small store owners, merchants, craftsmen, and other tradesmen of Mercury. They perform most of the retail and business functions on the planet. The Sun Kings might control most of the money of Mercury, but the Musicians are the ones who truly keep the Mercurian economy moving. Many Sun Kings, and some of the wealthier Miners, hire Musicians to take care of their business and personal finances.

Unlike a Miner or a Desert Dancer, the average Musician does not work with equipment rented from the Sun Kings. In addition to that, a Musician usually owns the land his business is located on, after buying it from a Sun King at an inflated price. Poorer Musicians must rent business space from the Sun Kings.

Musicians in the warrens keep their businesses open all the time since there are always Miners out buying and having fun. Musicians in the mariposas keep hours that parallel those of the inhabitants of each mariposa.

Musicians working on the mariposas usually have to pay a higher rent fee, or tax fee, to the Sun Kings, but they make up for this by charging higher prices, since their main customers are the wealthy Sun Kings and their followers.

Most Musicians marry and have children, with the eldest child destined to take over the family business when the family head retires. The other members of the family usually help run the family business until they are old enough to strike out on their own.

If for some reason a child is not interested in the family business, the family head arranges for the youth to be apprenticed to a Musician whose business interests the youth.

Musicians wear a variety of clothing styles, with no real cultural costume. Most of the time they wear colorful robes over protective clothing.

Richer Musicians, especially those in the mariposas, tend to wear more flashy costumes but they take care not to make them more elegant than those of their Sun King customers. Many of the more wealthy and successful Musicians wear business suits similar to those worn by Lunar officials and RAM executives.

The Sun Kings

The Sun Kings live in an opulent lifestyle that leads many to think that they are dandified fops. Many people have become victims of that misconception. While there are a number of fops among the Sun King families, most of these people are highly educated and have a shrewd business sense.

Even though the Sun Kings have many servants to wait on their every need, most Sun Kings are in top physical condition. Many young Sun King family members spend time at the John Carter Military Academy at Mars.

Those Sun Kings who are not physically inclined counter this lack with intense educational training and natural cunning.

Individual members of Sun King families are encouraged to do more than just lounge about. While the head of a Sun King family takes care of the major business decisions, a number of minor business decisions are left up to junior family members. Other Sun Kings have chosen professions as leaders in the Mercurian Imperial Spacefleet.

Members who are not blessed with a good business sense or an interest in the military often become artists or scholars.

The remaining Sun King family members are simply lazy rakes who live luxuriously off their family allowances.

The head of a Sun King family has absolute control over the other members of the family. He controls their family allowance, who they can marry, and what they will do with their lives.

A number of the Sun King families have adopted the lifestyles and trappings of an ancient Earth royal family or time period. For example, the most powerful of the Mercurian families, the Gavilans, has adopted a baroque style similar to that which existed in medieval times. The following is a listing of some of the more well-known Sun King families and their chosen lifestyles.

Minafar Family: Descended from Middle Eastern ancestry, the Minafars live in Arabic palaces and act like the Arabic royalty described in Middle Eastern history and legends.

Venetius Family: The Venetius family lives like the Italian merchant princes from the Renaissance period of Earth history. Although they hold the least amount of property and mariposas, they are one of the most powerful

and wealthy of the Sun King families.

Houston Family: The Houston family originally made its money on Earth in the 20th Century as oil barons in Texas. Over the centuries, the family made sure that it always sunk its money in energy supplies. The members of the family have an affected Texan drawl that no one else in the solar system still practices. Their lifestyles and fashions are vaguely based on information about the Old West of Earth.

Toledo Family: The Toledo family first made its fortunes as plantation owners in Central and South America. Rumors hint at dabblings in the growing and selling of illegal drugs in 20th-Century Earth. Members of the family still speak the dead Spanish language. Their lifestyle is based on a variety of Mexican, Central American, and South American traditions.

Ming Family: The Ming family traces its ancestry back to a number of ancient Asian Earth cultures, especially the Imperial Chinese dynasties. Members of the family are polite, and they try to always remain honorable. Their lifestyle includes training in Asian methods of combat and studies in philosophies and the arts.

There are about 10 other major Sun King families, who are always trying to gain the upper hand over these leading families. Beneath them are about 50 lesser Sun King families whose wealth doesn't even come close to those above. Finally there are about 100 smaller families and individuals who each only own a few (or even one) of the smaller mariposas.

The clothing of an individual Sun King mostly depends on the lifestyle or culture his family has been based on. For example, the clothes of the Gavilan family feature high collars, embroidered bell-sleeves, and pseudomilitary designs. All the Sun Kings seem to prefer clothing in shades of yellow and purple.

Food

Mercury has no major means of food production. A few hydroponic gardens exist in the warrens, track cities, and mariposas, but they do not produce enough food to feed many people. Also, radiation often reaches even the most shielded gardens, killing the plants or spoiling them. The lack of space in the Mercurian population centers rules out raising livestock for food. This means that one of Mer-

cury's major imports is foodstuff from Venus, Earth, and Mars. This causes food prices on Mercury to be higher than anywhere else in the solar system. But any type of food is available on Mercury—for the right price.

The Sun Kings often pay even higher prices for various delicacies such as Martian stuyken (Martian crab), Venusian fizz berries (the berries of a flowering Venusian plant that is a major ingredient in gravitol), and fresh fruits and vegetables from Earth (flash frozen to maintain freshness during the long journey).

The Miners have a liking for spicy, hot foods. Though there is no strictly Mercurian cuisine dish, a well-known dish is Miner Smelting Pot Stew. Many Miners, after a hard day's work, simply come home and make a stew with whatever is in the kitchen.

Potluck stews all over the system have been called Miner Smelting Pot Stew. Because of the nature of the dish, there is no official recipe for the concoction.

Desert Dancers prefer to eat fruits and vegetables and a high protein soup known as Manna, which is manufactured in the track cities. The Musicians simply eat whatever is available to them whenever they are ready to eat.

Recreation

The Miners' main form of recreation is going out to a local bar and having a wild time that typically ends in a barroom brawl. Sadly enough, the Mercurian Miners have a higher incidence of alcoholism than any other group in the solar system, including pirates and asteroid miners.

The warrens feature a number of other forms of recreation too. The higher class warrens have gambling casinos and excellent nightclubs with live entertainment. Some of the best comedians in the solar system got their starts in the warren nightclubs. The fanciest nightclubs and casinos are in the Paradise Lost and Caloris warrens, near the Caloris spaceport.

The wealthier warrens also feature various cultural forms of recreation, including art galleries, museums, and theatres. Warren inhabitants also have access to the latest 3D-TV shows beamed from the RAM entertainment studios. Local Mercurian broadcasts include a lot of time covering Mercurian Survival Games.

The Mercurian Survival Games are simply

bouts of unarmed combat between opponents. Any form of unarmed combat is allowed, as long as no weapons are used by the opponents. A number of renegade, or exiled, Desert Dancers have made a career out of the sport.

The bouts can be either one-on-one or team matches with up to 20 people on each team (all of them fighting on the field at the same time). To make things interesting, bouts are played in various types of playing fields. The playing fields range from fenced-in rings to large arenas to mazes filled with obstacles (with cameras placed at strategic points in the maze so that viewers can watch the bout).

Another, less popular sport on Mercury is the alchemcat pits. Some alchemcat owners train their pets to be bloodthirsty berserkers through the use of savage treatment and hunger. The usually peaceful and semi-intelligent cats are turned into murderous and cunning beasts as a result. Though most warren people frown upon the game, it is not illegal. The games are not publicly advertised, and they are usually held in the rougher warrens. The sport is mostly supported by jaded Sun Kings, who travel to the matches incognito and make expensive bets. A small number of alchemcat pit fighters are actually owned by Sun Kings, who also use them as personal bodyguards and pets.

The quiet and more sedate Desert Dancers prefer less boisterous recreations. Desert Dancers enjoy listening to music, watching plays, and reading. The only real physical recreation Desert Dancers partake of is the Dance. Desert Dancers spend at least an hour every day practicing this activity.

When a young Desert Dancer first begins his Dance training, he picks a child in the same class with him to be his Dance partner. The two partners become lifelong friends, and they usually practice the Dance together. The Dancing couples often compete in tournaments, with the most graceful couple winning first prize.

Musicians seem to prefer recreations that involve their whole family, since Musicians have a basic tendency to be more family oriented than many. Musician families enjoy staying at home and playing games or watching 3D-TV. Musician families also go to plays and attend concerts.

One of the best-liked Musician recreations

are holo-adventure games. A special holo-display and linked computer programs enable the players to role-play and control the actions of heroic figures in various adventures. The movements and actions of the heroes and their surroundings are projected on a table-top-sized projector.

The Sun Kings' recreations, like themselves, are usually extravagant and expensive. Sun King families are constantly throwing expensive parties that all the fashionable Sun King families are invited to. Sun Kings also enjoy attending high-priced plays and concerts.

The younger and more impetuous Sun King family members engage in various sports, especially mono sword dueling. These duels are usually played until first blood is drawn. Many Sun King youths consider dueling scars to be a mark of maturity and respect, and they refuse to let the scars be removed with cosmetic surgery.

Some of the younger Sun Kings choose military careers, but a larger number of lazy ones join the military as a part-time hobby because they enjoy honorary military titles.

These military Sun Kings like to engage in target shooting matches using a variety of missile weapons. A recent trend has caused an interest in the use of the Martian desert runner crossbow.

Holidays and Festivals

The diverse cultures of Mercury share only one common holiday—Liberty Day. On the 39th Terran day of each Mercurian year, all the Mercurians celebrate for one Terran day (three drudges to the Miners). Everybody but the most essential workers are allowed off, and everyone celebrates.

On this date, the first of the freedom-seeking would-be Mercurian colonists had supposedly entered orbit around the sun-scorched planet.

Each cultural group celebrates in its own way. The warrens are filled with huge parties of Miners that spill out onto the corridors. During this day, all the warren restaurants serve free food and alcohol (which is later paid for by the Sun Kings). Meanwhile, most of the Musician families stay at home and eat huge meals and give thanks for their freedom.

The Desert Dancers also celebrate quietly, spending the early part of the day with their immediate family. The younger Desert Dancers

are told stories showing how important freedom is, no matter what the cost. Later on, the Desert Dancers go out into the corridors of their track cities and greet each other with warm smiles and calls of "Live unfettered, cousin." The Desert Dancers then attend free plays and concerts, all featuring the theme of the hard-fought Desert Dancer liberty and freedom.

Various Sun King families throw wild parties, while the younger members make it a habit to travel to as many parties as possible. The other inhabitants of the mariposas throw gaudy and flagrant parties, trying to imitate the rich eccentricities of the Sun Kings.

Since the Sun King families have different cultural backgrounds, each family has a number of ancestral holidays that they still celebrate. Often this just means that the Sun King family throws a theme party and invites other Sun Kings to attend.

The Miners, on the other hand, don't really need an excuse to celebrate. Each warren usually has a number of individual holidays, such as a holiday for when the warren was first built or when the best bar in the warren first opened its doors.

The Musicians, who mostly descended from refugees out of Earth's North America, celebrate a number of family-oriented holidays. Many of these holidays, especially the one called Yuletide, have even been forgotten by the current populace of Earth.

The Desert Dancers have no other holidays, since they feel that every day of their independence is a holiday that should simply be accepted for what it is worth.

Education

All the people of Mercury are provided with a free primary education, which lasts until they have reached the Terran age of 19. The children of the Miners and the Musicians in the warrens attend these schools together. Even the Miner parents encourage their children to do well in this early schooling.

The track cities of the Desert Dancers contain primary and secondary schools, which also provide beginner classes in the Dance.

Younger Sun King family members are provided with personal tutors who are hired by elder family members. Most Sun King family tutors have held their positions for several dec-

ades.

University-level schooling is also available to the people of Mercury. Unfortunately, it is not as easily attainable by everyone. A large section of the Caloris Basin warren is taken up by the prestigious Caloris University of Mercury. This well-run college offers courses and degrees in a variety of subjects.

Many well-off Musician families send their children to the university to get a degree in business or a special vocational or technical degree. The Caloris University is known for having the finest engineering school in the solar system. Even rich RAM executives have been known to send their offspring to the Caloris University for an engineering degree. Unfortunately, the majority of Miners and Musicians cannot afford to send their children there. A small number of scholarships are available, but competition for them is very stiff.

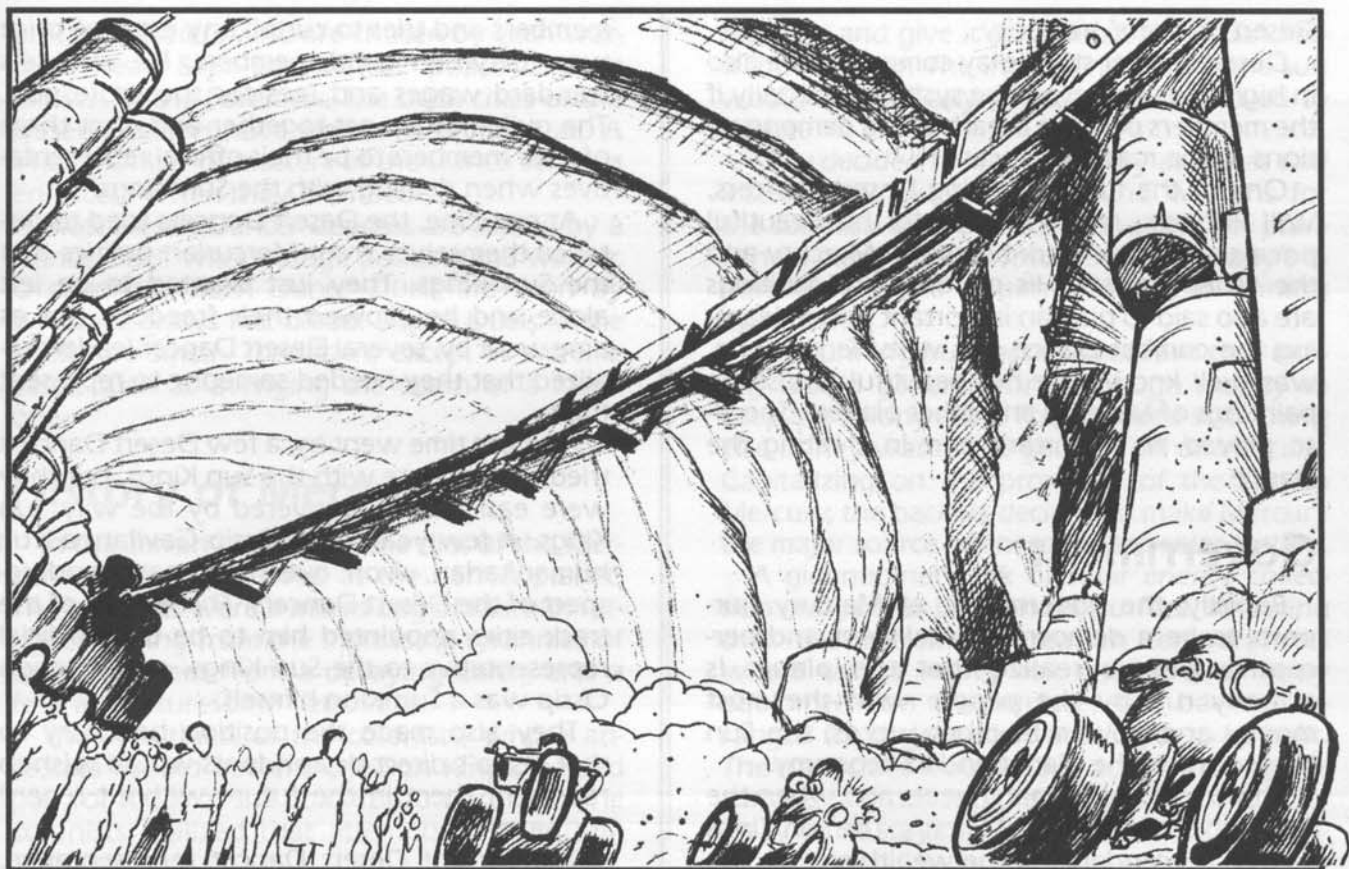
Once a Desert Dancer youth finishes primary school, he must attend a special technical course that lasts one Mercurian year. The school teaches the youth how to repair and perform maintenance on various electronic and mechanical devices (including the solar array collectors and various track city mechanisms).

Gifted youths are sometimes sent to the Caloris University for advanced technical and engineering training. Their tuition is paid by the track city's communal funds. All of a track city's Stream Scouts have obtained advanced metallurgy/geology degrees from Caloris University.

Each of the track cities maintains a small School of Arts and Literature. These small universities are well known throughout the solar system for the artistic geniuses that have studied at them. Interested Desert Dancers may attend the courses for free, but outsiders must pay high tuition fees. A number of rich Martian and Sun King families have sent their children to the track city schools.

In addition, classes of the Dance exist at various levels of expertise. Only Desert Dancers are allowed to take these martial arts classes.

The mariposas contain a few small universities, most of which are average at best. The Solis University, located on Hielo station, is attended exclusively by young Sun King family members, thanks to exorbitant tuition fees. Solis provides degrees in a variety of subjects, many of which are totally ludicrous. However,



Solis is known to produce the deadliest mono sword fighters in the system, and it is also known for producing the best interior decorators.

Sun King youths who show interest in a military career are often sent to the prestigious John Carter Military Academy at Mars.

The Arts Mercury, a school in the track city Socrates, is well known in the system for its contribution to the arts—mostly due to the work of many talented Desert Dancers.

Very few Miners have contributed to the arts over the years, and most of them have had more of a popular entertainment value than an actual artistic value. For example, "Miner Moe's Database of Lyrical Limericks, Poems, and Bawdy Riddles" has become a popular form of entertainment for the system's masses (especially the limerick about the blind RAM executive and the Venusian Lowlander princess). Moe Carson, the Miner writer, is working on a sequel.

Lenny Jankowitz, a Miner turned comedian, has become famous for his blunt satirical humor on politics. His sharp tongue has earned him the wrath of RAM and the Sun Kings alike,

which forced him to seek NEO shelter several years ago. And several decades ago, Martiv Guder, a Miner, gained some fame for his folk songs about the common laborer.

A number of Musicians have earned fame in the entertainment business over the years. Like the Miner artists, most of them were involved in more media-related artistic endeavors. Examples include popular singer/composer Mikhal Mozart and the popular stage and holograph actress Phoebe Carmichael.

A number of self-proclaimed Sun King artists have tried to become famous over the years. Very few of these actually went beyond simple mediocrity. The only outstanding example is Anton Gavilan, who lived 50 years ago. A prolific writer, he is best known for his insightful books on history and philosophy and his heart-touching fictional novels (such as "Eclipse of a Sun King").

The Desert Dancers have sired a number of famous artists over the years. These artists and performers are constantly touring and performing in shows across the solar system. These tours and performances are often a major source of income for the performing Desert

Desert Dancers' track city.

Desert Dancer stage-play companies are also in high demand across the system, especially if the members perform breathtaking demonstrations of the martial Dance.

One of the first colonizing Desert Dancers, Will Phoenix, is still famous for his beautiful poems about the stark beauty of Mercury and the other planets. His philosophical writings are also said to play an important part in learning the combat Dance. His wife, Terri Lynne, was well known for her beautiful landscape paintings of Mercury and other planets. She also played an important part in creating the Dance.

Government

Publicly, the government of Mercury purports to be a democracy. Intelligent and perceptive people realize that the planet is actually run by the people with the most money and power. In other words, the Sun Kings control the planet and its economy.

This trend began many years ago when the first colonists arrived at Mercury. The Sun Kings are the descendants of the wealthier colonists who sunk the most money into the Mercury colonization effort. The Sun Kings own the mineral and land rights to the whole planet, and they also own the various mining machines that the Desert Dancers and the Miners use.

The Gavilans, the richest and most powerful of the Sun King families, are the true monarchs of the planet, with the other Sun King family members serving as their toadying nobility.

The government of Mercury is actually an economic constitutional monarchy. This means that there is a set constitution of laws, but it is written so that those who are richest can rule the rest of the people like monarchs.

The various factions of Mercury have elected representatives who talk to the Gavilans and the other Sun Kings. But all these representatives can do is make suggestions and plead their cases. The Sun Kings pretend to listen to them and then do as they please.

The Miner representative is elected by the Head Saps of the warrens, usually from among the Head Saps. The Musicians are divided into guilds, each one representing a different profession. The members of the guild elect their guildmaster, who settles disputes among guild

members and tries to curtail any extreme price wars between guild members. He also sets standard wages and fees for the profession. The guildmasters get together and elect three of their members to be their official representatives when dealing with the Sun Kings.

At one time, the Desert Dancers tried to distance themselves from Mercurian politics and the Sun Kings. They just wanted to be left alone and be allowed their freedom. But as time went by, several Desert Dancer leaders realized that they needed someone to represent them.

As more time went by, a few Desert Dancers tried to negotiate with the Sun Kings, but they were easily outmaneuvered by the wily Sun Kings. A few years ago, Ossip Gavilan, a true humanitarian, won over the hearts and respect of the Desert Dancers. The leaders of the track cities appointed him to be their official representative to the Sun Kings, even though Ossip was a Sun King himself.

They also made the position honorary so that Ossip's direct descendants would wish to represent them in the future without regard for payment.

The current Desert Dancer representative, Kemal (Ossip's son), has spent many years in voluntary exile from Mercury. Kemal has become famous as one of NEO's bravest warriors. Many Desert Dancers feel that Kemal has forgotten that he is a Mercurian and that he is their official representative.

The Sun Kings and the other people of the mariposas are governed by an elected Board of Governors. In actuality, the Board of Governors is just a puppet for the current head of the Gavilan family, Gordon.

The laws of Mercury are fairly straightforward and simple, except for a number of economic laws that help keep the Sun Kings in power. Small offenses, such as drunken brawling, warrant a brief period of incarceration. More serious offenses, such as theft, cause the perpetrator to serve time as a worker on one of the warrens' strip-mining machines on the surface (without pay).

More serious crimes, such as murder, are punishable by exile to the surface during the Mercurian high noon.

The laws of Mercury are enforced in the mariposas by the Sun King's personal honor guards and members of the Imperial Spacefleet. Laws in the warrens are enforced by a

group of Miners who are chosen by each warren's Head Sap. The Miners' police force is known as the Foremen. The track cities of the Desert Dancers have almost no crime at all. A small number of masters of the Dance serve as enforcers when they are needed.

Most Desert Dancer disputes are settled by a Dance Duel, with a judge deciding the winner. Occasionally, such Dance Duels are won by whoever draws first blood. Dance Duels to the death are strictly forbidden, except in extreme cases, such as avenging the death of a loved one.

History of Mercury

In the Terran year 2310, the first of the Mercurian colonists arrived at the barren planet. The colonists were a mixed bag of Martian refugees fleeing from the increasing tyrannies of RAM, refugees from a decaying Earth, and a few adventuresome Venusians.

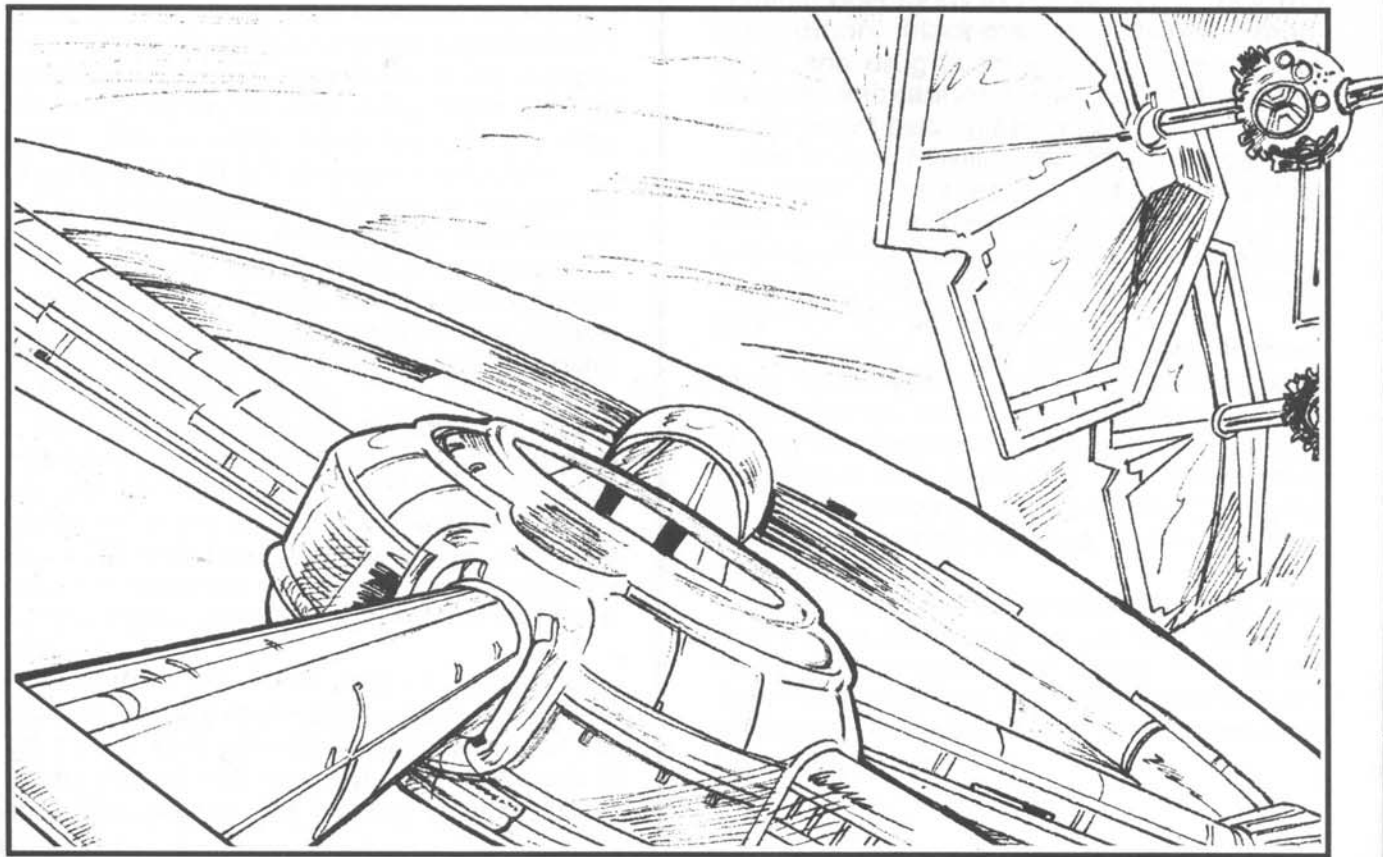
The wealthiest of the colonists, whose ancestors would become the Sun Kings, helped pay for most of the colonization process. The colonists realized that attempts to terraform

Mercury and give it an atmosphere would result in disaster. The intense heat from the sun would boil off any atmosphere they tried to create.

They decided to leave Mercury as it was and instead build vast underground warrens for the colonists to live in. Knowing that the planet held many mineral resources, the colony's financial backers began a massive mining operation.

The cunning businessmen realized that mining would generate only enough money to keep the colony alive. They needed something else if they wanted to get rich off of Mercury. Capitalizing on the proximity of the sun to Mercury, the backers decided to make Mercury the major source of energy in the solar system.

A gigantic network of solar energy collection arrays was built on the surface. Knowing that the extreme Mercurian temperatures would take a heavy toll on the solar array equipment on the surface, the backers arranged for huge tracked arcologies to be built. The track cities would move across the planet's surface, maintaining the workings of the solar array while staying just ahead of the full inten-



sity of the sun.

As time went by, the magnates realized the required upkeep of the track cities would still keep them from the kind of riches they wanted. The backers themselves had refrained from moving to Mercury up till then; they preferred living in orbital stations above the world.

The head of the Gavilan family at that time, Bahlam (who is now known as the first Sun King because he was the first to call himself that), came up with the idea of placing even more solar collector arrays in orbit around the planet. Bahlam and the other backers paid to have a number of asteroids towed in from the Asteroid Belt, and they were carefully inserted into a stable Mercurian orbit. The asteroids were then plated over and fitted with huge solar collector arrays.

As the years passed, the backers' wealth and power increased. Soon, Mercury became the supplier of 55% of the energy in the solar system. The so-called Sun Kings became richer and more powerful, while at the same time ensuring certain economic and political sanctions that kept the other inhabitants of Mercury from really sharing in the wealth.

Even though the majority of the Sun Kings

had been Martian dissidents, an uneasy alliance has sprouted between the Sun Kings and RAM in recent decades. Martian troops have even been sent to Mercury to help quell small outbreaks, such as the Miner Walkout of '40.

The Miners, Desert Dancers, and Musicians have begun to grow tired of the Sun Kings' oppressive control and their close ties with RAM. The example set by NEO's rebellion against RAM has fostered a new interest in freedom on Mercury. Mars is worried by a military buildup of Mercurian forces and by talks of control over the entire Mercurian orbit. Control over the crucial sunward passage route is an important tactic if war in the solar system breaks out. In addition to that, everyone knows it would not take many adjustments to make the mariposas powerful weapons that could raze whole planets.

Special Note: If you are a player, you should not read any more of this source book's section on Mercury. The subsequent chapters on Mercury should be known only to the referee at first. At the referee's discretion, the remaining information on Mercury may be discovered by player characters as they investigate and adventure on this deadly and exotic planet.)

CHAPTER 2: OTHER FACETS OF MERCURY

This chapter deals with a variety of special information that only the referee should know at first. This includes information on the criminal underground of Mercury, more details and special rules for the Desert Dancers' deadly combat form known as the Dance, technical stats on various machines mentioned in the first chapter, and information on the Mercurian war machine.

As a campaign moves along, adventures on Mercury (and on other planets) will slowly reveal some of the information presented in this chapter. The referee should become an expert at tantalizing his players with bits of information before providing his players with a complete picture of the truth.

Twilight Crime Organization

Like anywhere else in the solar system where people dwell, a criminal underground exists on Mercury. This organization, known as Twilight, is ruled by a mysterious man known as the Twilight King. Most of the organization's dealings take place in the warrens since this is the seamier side of Mercury. The organization's members run a few operations in the mariposas, but they try to stay away from the Sun Kings. The criminals have gained very little ground in the Desert Dancers' track cities.

The headquarters of Twilight is secretly located in one of the smallest and most lawless warrens—Loki. This warren is connected to only one other warren. It is located beneath the twisted area of Mercury's surface known as Loki's Playpen, on the other side of the planet from the Caloris Basin.

To the curious visitor, Loki appears to be a run-down warren filled with the poorest people on Mercury. The Twilight organization takes care of the people of the warren, providing them with food, energy, and alcohol. The Lokians return this particular favor by keeping up the facade and treating outsiders with hostility.

The offices and other parts of the organization are actually in the mining tunnels connected to the Loki Warren. The minerals in the mines played out many years ago, which is why the warren has become a slum. Using

mining equipment, Twilight miners have enlarged the tunnels and added many secret and secure areas.

Unknown to most people, the Loki Warren also has a very small spaceport, with only one freighter-sized berth. A relatively clear area in Loki's Playpen above provides access. This berth is mostly used by ships of the Black Brotherhood, which come there for repairs, refitting, and refueling. They also deliver a number of black-market items, such as narcotics, to Twilight. Since the dock is located underneath one of the least accessible areas of Mercury and since Twilight has bribed various mariposa inhabitants, no one has detected the secret spaceport yet.

Twilight has used mine equipment to connect its secret tunnels to the mine tunnels of the other warrens. The network of secret connecting tunnels makes it possible for Twilight operatives to travel secretly to any of the warrens. Various Twilight-owned buildings in each warren feature secret doors into the passage system.

The Twilight organization is involved in all criminal operations in the warrens. They run prostitution, black-market activities, smuggling, and drug pushing. They own most of the gambling casinos, luxury hotels, and many of the larger bars on Mercury.

The leader of Twilight has kept his true identity secret from everyone but his second-in-command, Thor. Thor has his own secret, too. Unknown to everyone, even the Twilight King, Thor is one of the few surviving Barney gennies in the solar system.

The identity of the Twilight King is even more shocking. The Twilight King is actually Miguel Toledo, one of the younger sons of the Toledo Sun King family. On the surface, Miguel pretends to be a dandy fop who cares about nothing but having a good time. In actuality he has a sharp, predatory mind, and he is a dangerous killer.

He and Thor make a perfect team, and they plan to one day rule all of Mercury. Miguel is currently making plans to kill the head of the Toledo family and his two older brothers. Their accidental demise would place him at the head of the Toledo family.

Venetius Family

The Toledo family is not the only Sun King family to harbor astonishing secrets. The Venetius Sun King family owns only a few small mariposas, yet a shrewd observer will notice that they wield quite a bit of power for such a poor family. Anyone who actually managed to check their secret Luna bank accounts would find out that they are one of the richest Sun King families.

Only the family heads of the top 10 Sun King families, a few top RAM executives, and various rich and powerful people around the solar system know that the Venetius family members are the best assassins and spies in the solar system.

The family head, currently Anthony, examines each business request, making sure it does not interfere with any current Venetius assignments, and then sets a price and assigns a Venetius agent to the project.

Every Venetius family member, male or female, from the eldest son to the most distant cousin, is trained from birth to be a skilled spy. They are also trained in a number of assassination methods, from poisoning to killing with their bare hands. A renegade Desert Dancer, known as Blade, trains the Venetius members in the combat Dance. Blade is also accomplished with every weapon known to man, and he trains his pupils in their uses, too.

Outwardly, the members of the Venetius family appear to be effeminate and lazy buffoons who make it a point to go to all the social occasions. These social functions have helped them in various spying and murder assignments. The other Sun King families have hired them for various projects, including jobs against each other. Currently, several of the Sun King families have pooled their resources and hired the Venetius family to find out more about Twilight and the identity of its leader.

The Dance

Special Note: The following special combat rules are optional. Their inclusion in a campaign is up to the individual referee. A referee not wishing to use these rules can simply say that Desert Dancers use a special unarmed combat and knife-fighting technique known as the Dance, without providing special rules. A referee using the Bonus Skill option can allow

Desert Dancers the Dance combat bonuses and the bonus skill. Optionally, the referee might allow only a special NPC warrior character subclass to use these special combat rules.

If a player chooses to have his character come from Mercury, have him choose which Mercurian culture he comes from before even mentioning the special combat rules for Desert Dancers.

All Desert Dancers have at least a minimal knowledge in the art of the Dance.

All Desert Dancer player characters and NPCs get the following combat bonuses (except for warriors, who get special bonuses described later).

Those trained in the art of the Dance learn the art of unarmed combat and knife fighting (especially the mono knife).

This gives the Desert Dancer character a bonus to his attack roll in unarmed combat and when he uses a knife in melee combat. The amount of the bonus depends on the character's experience level.

Experience Level	Attack Roll Bonus
1-3	+1
4-7	+2
8 and up	+3

The graceful motion of the Dance enables the student to dodge attacks with acrobatic skill. All students of the Dance get a -1 bonus to Armor Class against all attacks, except for those from behind or if the Dancer is surprised. This ability also gains the Dancer a +1 bonus to his saving throw vs. explosions/plasma.

When fighting in unarmed combat, the Dancer can make two attacks per round. Each attack causes 1d6 points of damage, and the Dancer must state beforehand whether the damage is subdual damage or to be counted as normal combat damage.

Because of the Dancer training, all Desert Dancers begin with a skill rating of 25 (plus Dexterity score) in Acrobatics. Beginning Desert Dancer characters do not have to spend any skill points to receive this skill rating. If a character wants the Acrobatic skill rating to increase as he advances in level, he must pay the normal skill point cost.

Desert Dancers who choose to be warriors get the above bonuses plus the following extras. A Desert Dancer warrior causes 1d8

points of damage, +1 per experience level, with his fists and feet. The warrior must state whether the unarmed combat damage is subdual damage or normal combat damage before he makes the damage roll. The warrior specialization bonus cannot be used with the mono knife or with unarmed combat.

In addition to that, Desert Dancer warriors can attack with a mono knife in each hand. This enables them to make two mono knife attacks per round, with no penalties. But they are not allowed their normal Dancer attack roll bonuses when they do this.

Finally, all beginning Desert Dancers start out with one mono knife, at no cost.

Mercury War Machine

One would think that one of the richest planets in the solar system would have one of the largest war machines. In Mercury's case that is not true. Its military forces are small compared to those of Venus and Mars. Recently, however, the Sun Kings have begun to build up their space fleet, but many wonder if it is too late.

Another problem with the military forces of Mercury is that the planet is fractured and lacks a stable command network. This problem is caused by the Sun Kings themselves.

The Imperial Ground Forces of Mercury are made up of 10 separate battalions of about a 150 soldiers in each. Each of the battalions is backed and under the command of one of the 10 highest ranking Sun King families.

This means that the tactics, weapons, uniforms, and training of each battalion vary a great deal. For example, the Gavilan battalion, known as the Knights of Mercury, is made up mostly of combat terrines bought from the Martians. The leaders of the battalion are Gavilan family members. The Knights are equipped with the most up-to-date modern weapons and armor.

Meanwhile, the Ming's battalion, known as the Emperor's Samurai, is made up completely of humans who are fiercely loyal to the Ming family. They possess very modern weapons and equipment, but they are highly stylized in the manner of ancient Asian troops. They carry mono blades made to look like ancient samurai swords. Of all the battalions, the Samurai are probably the most tactical and organized.

The muddled command structure also ap-

plies to the Imperial Sun Fleet, which is split into 10 different Squadrons (called rays).

Each of the rays is owned and backed by one of the Sun King families. The names of the individual ships reflect their ownership. Each ship is also marked with the coat of arms of the family that owns it.

The Mercurians, who realized a long time ago that they were not good ship builders, bought most of the rockets from the Martians. The majority of the fleet is made up of heavy and medium cruisers, with about 25 ships in each ray. The Mercury fleet possesses no bat-tlers and very few fighters. For some reason the Mercurian leaders decided to stay with the versatile cruiser design. The Martian cruisers bought by the Mercurians were only slightly modified before being put into service. The Mercurians use the Argyre-type medium cruisers and the Chryse-type heavy cruisers. (These are described in the XXVc™ game boxed set.)

Crystal Flowers

A unique discovery was recently made on the planet Mercury. For the first time ever, a form of native Mercurian life was found by Desert Dancers. In a small hidden valley, the Dancers discovered a form of crystalline flower that seemed to live off of sunlight.

The Desert Dancers sold some of the unique and beautiful flowers to art dealers across the solar system. They tried to keep the flowers a secret from the rapacious Sun Kings, but eventually the secret was found out and the Sun Kings took over the valley where the crystals were discovered.

Even before they found out where the hidden valley was located, Sun King scientists had gotten hold of a sample flower. Sun King scientists soon found a way to make a synthetic version of the crystal flowers that not only absorbed heat and light energy, but also magnified the energy a hundredfold. So far they have used the crystal only to make modified personal laser weapons. The personal laser weapons powered by the crystal flowers inflict double the normal listed damage.

The Sun Kings are currently working on a plan for a satellite-size laser weapon powered by the crystals, which could raze entire planets. Rumors abound that RAM, and Princess Ardala, have created their own plans for similar weapons.

Vehicles

This section provides game statistics for the vehicles mentioned in the first chapter.

Tri-Fury

Cost: 900cr Weight: 400 pounds
Size: 4' x 2' x 2'

This versatile and durable vehicle is a common sight in the warrens of Mercury. Driven by an electric engine, tri-furies resemble the small, three-wheeled all-terrain vehicles that were popular in the 20th Century. Able to reach a maximum speed of 40 mph, tri-furies can carry up to two passengers. Most are built with a large hollow area under the seat for carrying small items.

Dune Dancer

Cost: 20,000cr Weight: 3,000 pounds
Size: 18' x 6' x 6'

Spare Fuel Canister

Cost: 200cr Weight: 50 pounds
Size: 1' long cylinder, 10" diameter

The dune dancers are two-man all-terrain vehicles used by the Desert Dancers. These tanklike ve-

hicles run on two caterpillar treads. The cumbersome vehicles are able to reach speeds of 30 mph over the roughest terrain.

They are insulated and heavily shielded against the radiation and heat of the sun. This shielding gives them an effective Armor Class of 5. They have a small air lock, and their cabin is pressurized with a complete life-support system. Dune Dancers are usually armed with a plasma thrower (see *The Technology Book* in the boxed set) kept in a concealed gunport.

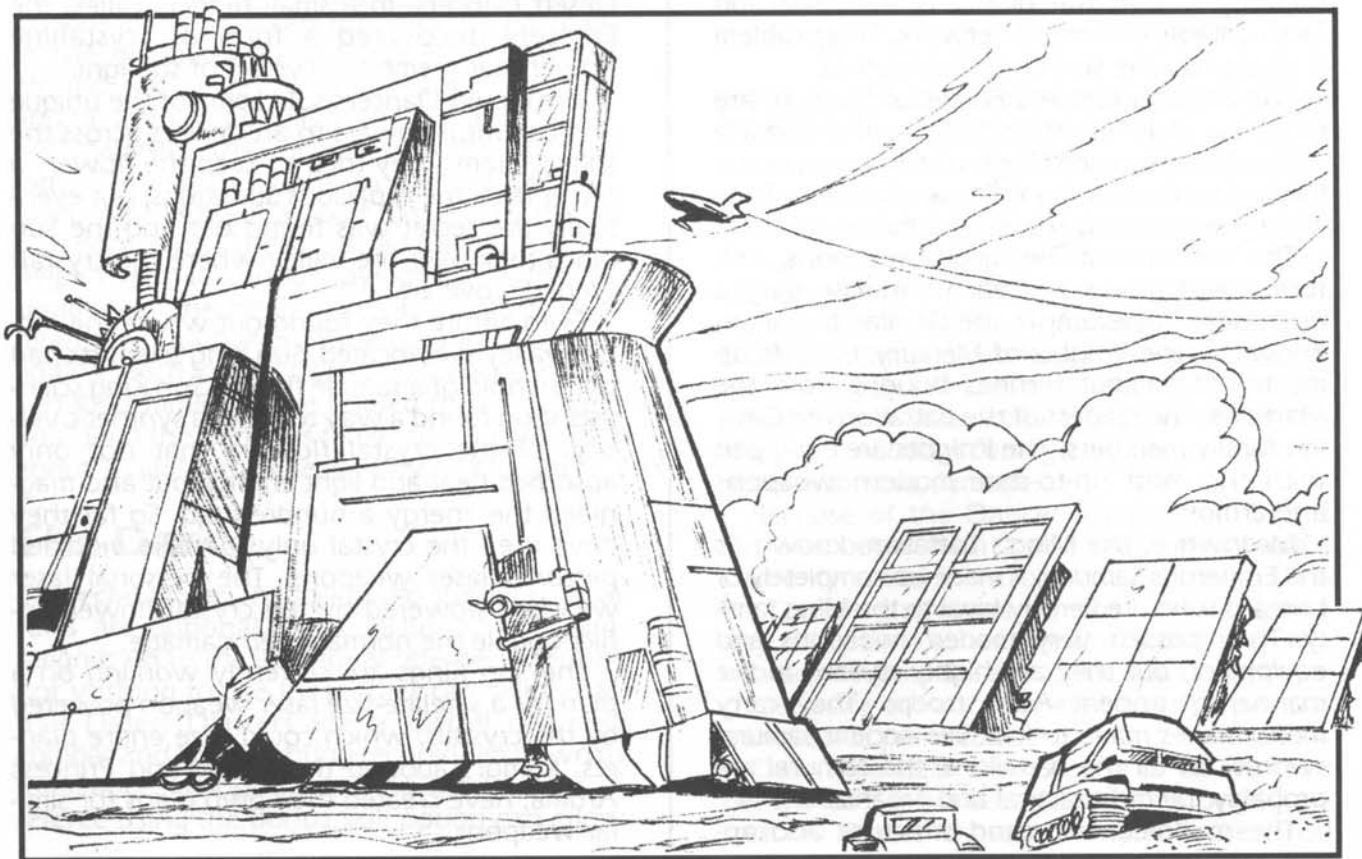
Sunray

Cost: 35,000cr Weight: 2,000 pounds
Size: 15' x 6' x 4'

Spare Fuel Canister

Cost: 200cr Weight: 50 pounds
Size: 1' long cylinder, 10" diameter

The sunray is a modified version of the jetcar. Heavily shielded to protect it from radiation and heat, the extra weight has dropped the maximum speed to 75 mph, while providing it with an Armor Class of 5. It is armed with either a gyro cannon or a light acceleration cannon kept in concealed (and protected) gunports.



CHAPTER 3: MERCURY PERSONALITIES

Kemal Gavilan

Mercurian Sun King and NEO Rebel
7th-Level Mercurian Rocketjock
Hit Points 47
Armor Class 4 (Smart Clothes)
THACO 17
Str 13, Dex 17, Con 15,
Int 14, Wis 14, Cha 17, Tech 14
Career Skills: Maneuver in Zero G 77, Drive Jetcar 47, Drive Groundcar 72, Notice 79, Pilot Rocket 107, Use Rocket Belt 47
General Skills: Bypass Security 24, Demolitions 29, Jury Rig 29, Astrogation 24, Battle Tactics 34, Law 19, Programming 24, Ship Lore 39, Act 27, Etiquette 27, Leadership 32

Kemal Gavilan, a member of the Gavilan Sun King family, is quite different from his brethren. A brave pilot, he has helped the fighters of NEO in their battle for freedom.

Kemal's father, Ossip, became the leader of the Gavilan family while Kemal was still young. A humanitarian, Ossip was best known for his honorary position as the official representative of the Desert Dancers.

While Kemal was away at school, Ossip was killed in some sort of accident. Many people, including Kemal, feel that Ossip's brother, Gordon, had him murdered. Gordon became the new Gavilan family head and made it clear that Kemal could never get the position.

Kemal stayed away from Mercury and attended various private and prestigious schools (Gordon could not deny Kemal's portion of the family fortune). Kemal then graduated from the John Carter Military Academy at Mars.

At one point, while he was still away in school, he had to return briefly to Mercury. An important vote was coming up—one that would affect the Desert Dancers greatly. As the representative of the Desert Dancers, he had to speak against the law.

Before he could prepare his presentation, he was kidnapped by some of Gordon's men, who were ordered not to hurt him. The kidnappers were just to hold him until the vote had been taken. A young Desert Dancer girl, Duernie Madison, accidentally found out about the kidnapping. She freed him and got him to the council chambers in time to vote in

the Desert Dancers' favor.

After graduating from the John Carter Academy, Kemal joined NEO and fought hard for the freedom of Earth. Kemal at one point returned to Mercury briefly, but he was again captured by Gordon and tortured. He was saved by the efforts of Duernie, the digital personality Doc Huer, and Buck Rogers.

A more recent trip to Mercury, accompanied by Black Barney, has enabled Kemal to convince Gordon that he has changed. Gordon believes that Kemal is now just as corrupt and greedy as the rest of the Gavilan family. In actuality, Kemal is trying to stop his uncle from developing a powerful new laser weapon that uses the crystal flowers recently discovered on Mercury.

Traits: A good-natured young man, Kemal finds it easy to smile and joke in the toughest situations. His years with NEO have made him a little less naive than he was when he was younger.

Locations: Kemal might be encountered anywhere on Mercury, including a Desert Dancer track city or Mercury Prime. He might also be encountered on or around Earth while on a mission for NEO. There is also a chance of running into him elsewhere in the solar system while he is on either personal or NEO business.

Trademarks: Kemal is usually well groomed, with a clean uniform. He possesses a subtle sarcastic wit that sometimes goes over a person's head when they aren't paying attention.

Gordon Gavilan

Head of the Gavilan Sun King Family
9th-Level Mercurian Rogue
Hit Points 60
Armor Class 4 (Smart Suit)
THACO 16
Str 15, Dex 13, Con 17,
Int 16, Wis 15, Cha 14, Tech 13
Career Skills: Bypass Security 83, Fast Talk/Convince 99, Hide in Shadows 73, Move Silently 73, Notice 125, Open Locks 48
General Skills: Maneuver in Zero G 18, Economics 76, Law 26, Memorize 41, Act 24, Intimidate 64, Leadership 34

Gordon Gavilan is the current patriarch of the Gavilan Sun King family. An ambitious and

ruthless man, he secretly rules Mercury with an iron fist.

When he was younger, he was very jealous of his older brother Ossip because Ossip would one day become leader of the Gavilan family. Gordon also despised his brother because he thought Ossip's kindness to others was weak and demeaning.

These emotions stayed with Gordon as he grew up. A few people secretly believe that Gordon arranged for his brother's accidental death.

When Ossip died, Gordon wasted no time making himself the new Gavilan leader. He consolidated his position and made it clear to Kemal, Ossip's son, that he was not welcome on Mercury. Although he now believes Kemal has abandoned his former altruistic ways, Gordon still fears that Kemal might one day be able to take over the family.

Traits: A large and handsome man, Gordon fools many with his charming exterior. A forceful man, he is used to being obeyed.

Locations: Anywhere on Mercury, especially Mercury Prime.

Trademarks: Always wears an elegant gold and purple business suit. His big smile is predatory looking, and his harsh laughter is very chilling.

Dalton Gavilan

Leader in the Mercurian Imperial Spacefleet

Member of the Gavilan Sun King Family

7th-Level Mercurian Warrior

Hit Points 89

Armor Class 4 (Smart Clothes)

THACO 14

Str 17, Dex 13, Con 18,

Int 11, Wis 9, Cha 12, Tech 10

Career Skills: Battle Tactics 91, Leadership 47, Maneuver in Zero G 53, Notice 34, Repair Weapon 50, Use Rocket Belt 73

General Skills: Pilot Rocket 53, First Aid 20, Commo Operation 25, Sensor Operation 25, Ship Lore 46, Intimidate 42

Dalton Gavilan is the eldest son of Gordon Gavilan as well as a high-ranking commander in the Mercurian Imperial Spacefleet. Dalton is ambitious and cunning like his father, but his arrogance and temper get in the way of his ambitions. Dalton is already planning for the day when he will take over the position of

family leader from his father. He despises people who show kindness to others, believing that to be a weakness.

Dalton attended a number of military schools, making him an expert tactician, but he sometimes lets his emotions get in the way of the battle.

Traits: Arrogant and impatient, he has a quick temper. He views everything in terms of a military campaign.

Locations: Anywhere on Mercury, especially on Mercury Prime or a Mercurian cruiser.

Trademarks: Usually wears a fancy, gold-colored military uniform with many ribbons and medals. He has a big, booming voice.

Tacitus "Tix" Gavilan

Member of Gavilan Sun King Family

0-level Mercurian Artist

Hit Points 6

Armor Class 10 (Normal Clothes)

THACO 20

Str 7, Dex 19, Con 9,

Int 16, Wis 9, Cha 9, Tech 10

Skills: Paint/Draw 79, Play Instrument 39, Cook 25, General Knowledge (Interior Decorating) 116, Literature 66, History 91, Etiquette 49, Sing 24

Tacitus ("Tix" to his friends) is the youngest son of Gordon Gavilan. Tacitus is a frail and nervous young man who is terrified of his father. Unlike his brother Dalton, Tix prefers more intellectual pursuits. Tix is an accomplished interior designer and a well-read historian. All the Sun Kings acknowledge that the interiors of Mercury Prime are truly gorgeous, thanks to Tix.

Tix has been befriended by Kemal, even though the scared youth has been unable to free Kemal the two times he has been captured by Gordon.

Traits: Tix is a nervous and shy young man who loves talking about his work in interior decorating.

Location: Usually he is only encountered on Mercury Prime.

Trademarks: Frail with receding hairline and a nervous stutter.

Ossip Gavilan

Digitalized Personality of the Former Head of

the Gavilan Family
7th-Level Digitalized Personality
Hit Points 60
Armor Class 3
THACO 14
Str n/a, Dex n/a, Con n/a,
Int 15, Wis 17, Cha 15, Tech 15

Ossip Gavilan, a few days before he died, sensed that he was in danger. As a safety precaution, he translated a digitalized personality (DP) of himself and secretly placed it in the Mercury Prime computer system. The DP had orders that if Ossip died, it was to try to find out who killed him. It was also to aid his son, Kemal, if it was able to do so without revealing its presence.

When Ossip did die, the DP began a long and secret search for the identity of Ossip's killer. Over the years, the inhabitants of Mercury Prime have detected the DP's presence but have been unable to locate it. They have taken to calling it the Ghost in the Machine. Recently, the DP was finally able to reveal its presence and purpose to Kemal.

The characters will probably not be detected or contacted directly by the DP. If they are definitely friends of Kemal, it might help them secretly, but it will not reveal itself to the player characters.

Traits: Quiet and intense, with a friendly smile.

Locations: Mercury Prime only.

Trademarks: Gentle voice.

Duernie Madison

Desert Dancer Scout and Leader
5th-Level Scout
Hit Points 35
Armor Class 4 (Smart Suit)
THACO 16
Str 10, Dex 18, Con 12,
Int 10, Wis 15, Cha 15, Tech 10
Career Skills: Climb 68, Move Silently 83, Notice 90, Planetary Survival 70, Planetology 65, Tracking 65
General Skills: Drive Heavy Ground Vehicle 38, Hide in Shadows 38, Geology 20, Law 15, Leadership 40, Shadowing 35

Duernie Madison is a young and determined female Desert Dancer. When she was younger, she helped free Kemal Gavilan, the Desert

Dancer representative, from captivity. Since then she has been thrust into the role of liaison with Kemal, a role that she is not completely comfortable with. Her natural distrust of Sun Kings, and the fact that Kemal spends a lot of time away from Mercury, has caused her to be very wary of Kemal's true motives.

Until recently, Duernie's feelings toward Kemal were growing softer. Unfortunately, Kemal had to pretend to betray Duernie and the Desert Dancers to his Uncle Gordon so as to uncover a scheme that threatens all the free people of the solar system. Considering the Desert Dancers' general attitude of isolationism, it will be a long time before they trust Kemal again, even after he explains the situation.

Traits: Stubborn and temperamental, Duernie finds it hard to trust anyone.

Locations: Track City 122 and the Mercurian desert.

Trademarks: Lean and athletic, Duernie moves quietly and gracefully. She has a tendency to make cynical and sarcastic comments.

Old Harry

Terrine Gennie (Altered)
Head Torturer of the Mercury Prime "Dungeons"
4th-Level Rogue
Hit Points 25
Armor Class 7 (Light Body Armor)
THACO 19
Str 19, Dex 9, Con 19,
Int 12/20*, Wis 10/15*, Cha 4, Tech 13/18*
Career Skills: Fast Talk/Convince 54, Notice 70 (115*), Move Silently 39, Hide in Shadows 39
General Skills: Intimidate 44, General Knowledge (Torture) 32 (120*), General Knowledge (Drugs and Chemicals) 120*

* Half of old Harry's brain has been replaced by microchips and electronics, plus a special link to Mercury Prime's computer system. The attribute score and skill ratings with asterisks beside them represent Old Harry's abilities when he is on Mercury Prime and the main computer is working. He can use this link to see other parts of the space station that are watched by security cameras.

Old Harry is a twisted, old terrine that Gordon acquired from the Martians several years ago. Intricate surgery has replaced half of Old

Harry's brain with electronics, providing him with a mental link to the Mercury Prime mainframe. Anything that the Mercury Prime computer notices, especially if the computer catalogues it as dangerous to Mercury Prime, Old Harry notices.

Traits: Loud and boastful, Old Harry is a true sadist who loves to describe what he is going to do to a victim before he does it.

Locations: The dungeons of Mercury Prime.

Trademarks: Old Harry has a powerful, but twisted and gnarled body. Old Harry seems not to believe in hygiene, since he is always dirty and smells.

Miguel Toledo

Member of the Toledo Sun King Family
Secret Leader of the Twilight Organization

7th-Level Rogue

Hit Points 40

Armor Class 4 (Smart Suit)

THACO 17

Str 11, Dex 17, Con 10,

Int 18, Wis 18, Cha 17, Tech 15

Career Skills: Bypass Security 70, Fast Talk/
Convince 92, Hide in Shadows 77, Move
Silently 72, Notice 98

General Skills: Disguise 38, Economics 48,
Memorize 28, Programming 23, Act 47,
Etiquette 37, Intimidate 27, Leadership 27,
Read Lips 23

Miguel Toledo was born the third son of the patriarch of the Toledo family. Ignored and looked down upon by his brothers and the rest of the family, Miguel grew into an angry young man. At an early age, he realized that he wanted more power and money than a third son could have. Unfortunately, the murder of his father and two brothers would be a rather obvious move. He decided that he would try another way.

As he grew up, Miguel played the fool, pretending to be a dandy only interested in having a good time. In secret he honed his mind and body, and spent a lot of time studying a variety of subjects. He created a secret identity, Twilight, and used this fake personality to make contacts with various Mercurian criminal elements.

He soon encountered Thor, one of the Barney model terrines, who was setting up his own mob in the warrens. He contacted Thor

and offered him a partnership. Thor was suspicious at first, but Miguel's financial backing and contacts soon convinced Thor that maybe they would make a good team.

In a few brief years, their Twilight crime organization took over all the other crime rings in the warrens and the mariposas. They secretly run all of the illegal, and many legal, action on Mercury. Miguel has taken care to keep his identity from everyone, including Thor. So while Miguel pretends to be a useless idiot, his alter ego, the Twilight King, is building an empire that rivals that of any of the Sun King families.

Traits: Miguel acts like a complete fool around his family and the other Sun Kings. As the Twilight King, Miguel is cold and business-like.

Locations: Miguel can be found at any Sun King party in the mariposas. As the Twilight King, Miguel is encountered only on view screens. Not even Thor has met him in person.

Trademarks: Miguel wears gaudy and flashy clothes, along with extremely ridiculous hats. As the Twilight King, he prefers a black smart suit and hood that covers his face. The hood has a built-in sound distortion device that makes his voice sound electronic and twisted.

Thor

Modified Barney Terrine Gennie

Second in Command of the Twilight Organization

4th/6th-Level Terrine Rogue/Warrior

Hit Points 90

Armor Class 2 (Heavy Body Armor)

THACO 17

Str 19, Dex 18, Con 18,

Int 13, Wis 14, Cha 9, Tech 12

Career Skills: Repair Weapon 52, Battle Tactics
53, Leadership 44, Maneuver in Zero G
48, Use Rocket Belt 33, Bypass Security 82,
Notice 64, Move Silently 63, Hide in
Shadows 68, Fast Talk/Convince 59, Open
Locks 47

General Skills: Drive Motorcycle 38, Commo
Operation 32, Economics 43, Disguise 33,
Programming 38, Intimidate 44, Leader-
ship 39, Shadowing 34

Thor is one of over 40 surviving modified terrine gennies known as the Barney series. After

escaping from the Draconis Combine with his other brethren, he joined the pirates for a while. He soon realized that he was not thrilled with the life of a pirate. The intelligent genie realized that he wanted something a little easier in the way of a profession.

After some thought, Thor ended up on Mercury and set up a crime mob in the underground warrens. After a year, he had done pretty well, but he wasn't doing as well as he had hoped.

It was then that he was contacted by the mysterious Twilight and offered a partnership. Thor was suspicious at first, but the backing money sent in by Twilight, plus the use of Twilight's high contacts, soon smoothed over his doubts. In less than a year, the Twilight mob was one of the most powerful mobs on Mercury. Four years later, it was the only Mercurian mob.

Thor has now learned to trust Twilight, even though Thor is still curious about who he really is. The partnership has worked out very well, so Thor is content with it.

Traits: Intelligent and thoughtful, but with a bad temper that arises if things go wrong.

Locations: Any of the warrens, especially Loki or the secret passage network underneath Mercury, built by the Twilight mob.

Trademarks: Thor has long blonde hair, is seven feet tall, and typically carries a huge Miner's hammer with him (he enjoys using it on people).

Anthony Venetius

Leader of the Venetius Sun King Family
12th-Level Rogue

Hit Points 65

Armor Class 4 (Smart Suit)

THACO 15

Str 12, Dex 19, Con 15,

Int 15, Wis 16, Cha 14, Tech 14

Career Skills: Bypass Security 124, Climb 79, Fast Talk/Convince 74, Hide in Shadows 99, Move Silently 109, Notice 126, Open Locks 64

General Skills: Demolitions 34, Jury Rig 19, Cryptography 45, Disguise 55, Mimic 45, Act 44, Hypnosis 19, Read Lips 36, Shadowing 54, Tracking 34

Anthony Venetius has been the Venetius Sun King family patriarch for many years, and

probably will be for many more years. His sons and other family members feel that he is the most competent person to lead the family and its special business activities.

The Venetius family is one of the richest and most powerful of the Sun King families, even though they own only one of the larger mariposas. This is because the family members are the best trained spies and assassins in the solar system. They sell these services to the highest bidders, with Anthony making sure that a new assignment does not conflict with a current assignment. They always keep the word of the contract.

Anthony became the leader 20 years ago when his father resigned of his own accord.

Anthony has kept a tight rein on the business, and he has managed to increase and expand its influence and money.

Traits: Anthony seems to be a warm and friendly man, until it's time to do business. Then he becomes cold and efficient, not easily intimidated by threats. He dotes on the younger children of the family (they call him Unca' Tony).

Locations: Anthony no longer goes on assignment himself, so he will usually only be encountered in the family's mariposa satellite, Little Venice.

Trademarks: Anthony likes to dress in dark and somber business suits, but he also likes to wear hats in the style of Renaissance Italy. He has a weak spot for authentic Italian cuisine.

Mike "Red" Granite

Head Miner Representative

8th-Level Engineer

Hit Points 70

Armor Class 7 (Light Body Armor)

THACO 16

Str 16, Dex 10, Con 18,

Int 12, Wis 16, Cha 12, Tech 17

Career Skills: Jury Rig 77, Notice 76, Repair Electrical 117, Repair Life Support 37, Repair Mechanical 117

General Skills: Drive Motorcycle 20, Demolitions 37, Drive Heavy Ground Vehicle 35, Geology 32, Economics 22, Metallurgy 37, Intimidate 22, Leadership 52

Mike Granite was born to a large family of Miners in one of the poorer warrens. Mike's large size and short temper got him into a lot of

trouble when he was younger. As time went by, the red-head learned to control his temper. He also learned how to get out of fights with cunning bluffs and intimidations.

Mike was bright and earned a scholarship to Caloris University, but he had to drop out to help support his family when his father died in a mining accident. Mike worked hard and soon became the Head Sap of his warren.

Using common sense, and what he had learned during his brief stay at college, he turned his warren's mines around. Years later his warren was one of the richest ones on Mercury.

Older and wiser, Mike decided to use his abilities to help out all the Miners. He became politically active and soon became the head Miner representative. He has butted heads many times with the arrogant Sun Kings, and he has earned the grudging respect of Gordon Gavilan. Mike has created a Miner scholarship at the Caloris University, in his name.

Traits: Mike is a large and friendly man who loves to laugh.

Locations: Loadstone Warren, Caloris University, or up in the mariposas arguing with the Sun Kings.

Trademarks: Mike is a huge man with a shock of unruly red hair, which is now touched with gray. He has picked up a horrible Irish accent from old 3D-TV shows.

Thom "Trump" Michaels

Leader of the Musician Representatives

8th-Level Rogue

Hit Points 30

Armor Class 4 (Smart Suit)

THACO 17

Str 8, Dex 12, Con 10,

Int 15, Wis 18, Cha 16, Tech 15

Career Skills: Fast Talk/Convince 176, Notice 178, Move Silently 42

General Skills: Drive Motorcycle 22, Economics 75, Law 20, Memorize 55, Act 21, Etiquette 26, Leadership 46

Trump Michaels came to Mercury with a little money and a lot of moxie. Within a few years he had become a well-known business entrepreneur who had made quite a bit of money. Most people were fooled by his slick good looks and snappy patter.

Trump is a successful con man who has sud-

denly found himself thrust into a position he did not want. Trump had become so popular that the Musician guilds elected him one of their official representatives to the Sun Kings. He couldn't refuse, knowing it would anger his new, influential friends.

Trump was a little scared at first, but he soon realized that his new position could lead to some interesting little side benefits (i.e., con jobs).

Traits: Trump has a tendency to speak with flowery and emotional language, at a rate so fast that many people have trouble keeping up with him. He is a true con man who would sell his own mother's jetcar out from under her.

Locations: Mercurian warrens or the mariposas

Trademarks: Trump likes to wear elegant and expensive business suits from Luna. He has a tendency to snap his fingers when he is upset or nervous.



CHAPTER 4: MERCURIAN CREATURES

This chapter describes various genetically altered animals that the player characters might encounter on Mercury. The referee can use the creatures as they are presented, or he might change them for his own campaign.

These creatures are good examples of the variety of creatures that can be created with a little imagination. Pages 44-51 of *The World Book* (in the XXVc™ game boxed set) provide some sound advice on how the referee should go about creating his own genetically altered creatures.

Remember, however, that to create believable Mercurian life forms, referees must consider the tremendously harsh environment of this fiery world. Current Mercurian creatures provide a good example of environmental adaptations possible for creating other creatures.

For example, a referee who wants to create

a being that lives on the surface of Mercury should consider the only life form able to survive there—the crystal flower. Any other creature that would call the desertlike surface home should be at least as durable as this flower.

Referees should also keep in mind that the other Mercurian habitats—the warrens, track cities, and mariposas—were created by and are heavily patrolled by humans, who generally take exception to the presence of gigantic clairvoyant monsters.

Alchemcat



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Warrens and mines of Mercury
FREQUENCY:	Common
ORGANIZATION:	Mostly solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Adapts to activity cycle of owner
DIET:	Any
INTELLIGENCE:	Average
NO. APPEARING:	1 or 1-10
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	180
HIT DICE:	2d8
THACO:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	3
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d4
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Rake with rear claws for 1d4 each
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Never surprised

Genotype: The alchemcat species is a genetically altered version of the common feline. The alchemcat is slightly larger and longer than a common house cat. Its eyes are slightly larger, while its ears have been set back closer to the skull. Finally, the cat was bred for a higher intelligence, and special electronic implants allow the cat to speak.

The alchemcats are specially bred to accompany the Miners when they are out working the mining tunnels. Their heightened senses prove invaluable in pinpointing danger. Their heightened intelligence and rudimentary speech facilities enable them to warn their Miner companions of danger.

As time passed, the Miners not only began to think of them as pets, but also friends.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: Three feet long including tail, 15 pounds

External Covering: Short fur, skin is sensitive to vibrations

Eyes: Feline, with increased night vision and nictitating membranes that drop in case of eye irritants in the air

Ears: Feline, extremely sensitive to vibrations

Mouth: Feline, no special abilities

Nose: Feline, extremely sensitive, can actually sniff out certain valuable metals

Special: Over the years, the high amount of Mercurian background radiation has caused a favorable mutation in some of the alchemcats. These cats have a rudimentary, and limited telepathic power that works only with other alchemcats. These telepathic alchemcats have also been granted a higher



intelligence. No humans know of this power yet.

Cultural: The alchemcats were created to be work companions for the Miners of Mercury. Over time, most Miners grew to truly care for their work companions. It became customary for a Miner to take his alchemcat home with him as a pet.

The alchemcats generally get along with each other, and their increased intelligence has reduced the number of fights that usually occur between felines. When a new alchemcat is brought into a house that already has some living there, there is usually a brief scuffle among the cats, to determine the pecking order. After that brief period of fighting, there are no more problems or fights, with all the alchemcats respecting the order of seniority.

The few cats that have recently gained a limited form of telepathy have begun to talk to each other about the future of their race. They have decided to keep their abilities secret from humans. They work together to protect their people and the warrens.

A few Miners who abuse their alchemcats have found themselves in dark warren sections facing hordes of angry cats with a burning hate in their eyes. These injured Miners are accused by other Miners of being drunk and accidentally stepping on an alchemcat's tail.

Advantages/Disadvantages: The night vision of the alchemcats enables them to see in very dim

light. Their ears are so sensitive that they cannot be surprised by beings trying to sneak up on them. Their ears and sensitive skin enable them to sense vibrations in the air and ground (e.g., before a cave-in or earthquake).

Their noses are incredibly keen, and their increased intelligence even enables them to sniff out certain metals (such as gold and silver). They can also smell the presence of dangerous gas in the area, or the presence of leaks causing the loss of breathable atmosphere. Their vocal cords have been altered so that they can speak in raspy voices, and their increased intelligence enables simple communication with the Miners.

These enhanced senses make them more susceptible to sonic attacks, paralysis, stun attacks, electrical attacks, and flashes of bright light (an 18 saving throw vs. those types of attacks).

Combat: Each round the cat can attack with its two claws and bite, for 1d4 points of damage per attack. If the cat had initiative during a combat

round, it can make an attack roll to see if it can jump on its opponent. If the roll is successful, the cat can attack with all its normal attacks, plus rake with its rear claws.

Habitat/Terrain: Alchemcats are mostly found in the warrens beneath Mercury. Their owners allow them to roam freely, since they seem to know exactly how to get back home. A few are found in the mariposas as pets.

Ecology: The alchemcats are omnivores who are fed by their owners most of the time. Sometimes, an alchemcat will catch one of the elusive Mercurian rats.

Special Note: As mentioned in the text earlier, a few alchemcats have been trained to be ferocious fighters. These cats are then forced into combat with other alchemcats, for sport. These are normal alchemcats except for their viciousness, which gives them a +2 to their attack and damage rolls.

Pandora's Rat



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Warrens of Mercury
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Small packs
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Nocturnal
DIET:	Any (but they prefer meat)
INTELLIGENCE:	Semi-intelligent
NO. APPEARING:	1-4
ARMOR CLASS:	6
MOVEMENT:	220
HIT DICE:	3d8
THACO:	18
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Lock jaw
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Camouflage

Genotype: Pandora's rats are the descendants of a small rat horde accidentally bought to Mercury many years ago. The freighter Pandora had come to Mercury carrying foodstuffs from Earth. The captain had bribed the Earth officials and the Mercurian officials so that he could avoid the usual lengthy custom checks. He was in a hurry to pay off some gambling debts.

Unknown to anyone, the whole foodstuff shipment was infested with rodents. These rats escaped after the freight was unloaded, and scattered throughout the warrens. For many years, the rats were occasionally sighted, and then they disappeared from sight. Most people believe that they have died out. In fact they almost had, but mutations caused by background radiation produced a new breed of rat that was larger and deadlier. The few sightings by Miners of this new breed have been put down to drunken nonsense. The telepathic alchemcats have recently learned of the new rats, and they have begun a planet-wide hunt for them.

Recently, the telepathic alchemcats have been mentally contacted by a telepathic rat who has gained control over the rats. Unknown to the human inhabitants of the warrens, a war for their survival has begun.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: Five feet long, 100 pounds

External Covering: Hairless, rough skin in various dark brown colors

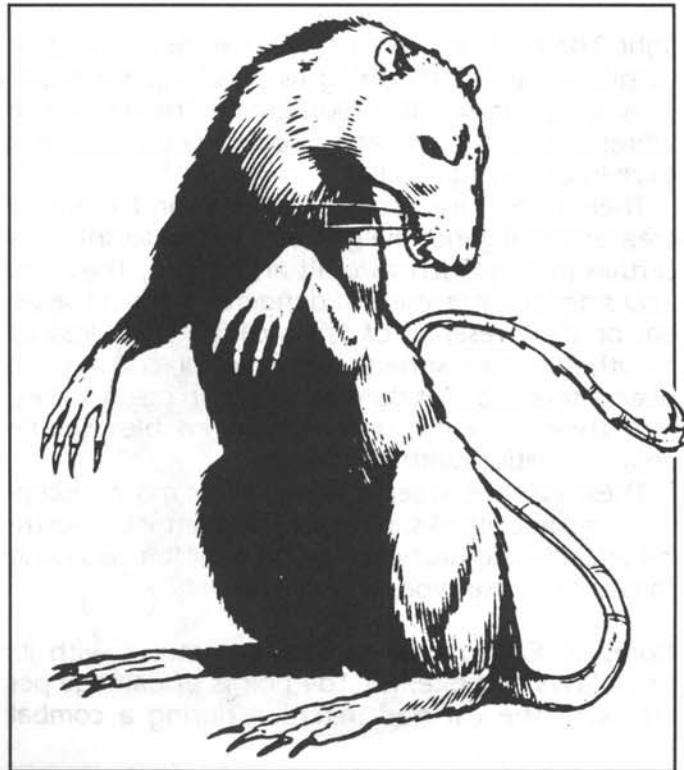
Eyes: Large eyes with red pupils, excellent night vision

Ears: Typical rodent

Mouth: Long snout with hinged jaws that can open very wide, many sharp teeth

Nose: Typical black rodent nose on end of snout

Cultural: The rats range out in small packs of one to four members, with each pack having its own distinct territory. Recently, under the influence of the telepathic rat, groups of neighboring packs have been working together. The rats attack only lone humans or alchemcats in dark and isolated areas.



Advantages/Disadvantages: Pandora's rats are larger than their original ancestors, and they have become extremely vicious. With the increase of their size came an increase in their mental capacity. The members of a pack work together in deadly cooperation that helps bring down their prey. They have night vision that might even be better than that of an alchemcat. This means that they are also sensitive to bright light, which blinds them (-2 penalty to their attack rolls). Their skin is shaded in various earth tones, enabling them to blend into the colors of the mine walls. In the mines, the rats gain surprise on a 1-3 on 1d6.

Combat: The rats possess a terrible set of sharp teeth capable of causing deadly damage.

Their powerfully hinged jaws and sharp teeth are capable of gnawing through tough plastic in a matter of minutes. Once a rat sinks its teeth into its prey, it holds on, causing 1d10 automatic damage each round. The rat does not let go until either it or its prey is dead.

Habitat/Terrain: The rats have chewed out intricate networks of small tunnels throughout the mines and warrens. They roam the darker recesses of the warrens, scavenging for food.

This food sometimes turns out to be solitary alchemcats or drunken Miners.

Ecology: The rats are rapidly changing from scavengers to dangerous carnivores. If they continue to multiply, they could possibly one day become the rulers of the warrens.

CHAPTER 5: SECOND ORBIT—VENUS

As with the first chapter on Mercury, the first chapter on Venus contains the general information player characters would already know, or could easily find out through general research. The information in the other chapters on Venus should be revealed to the players only during campaign play, by the referee.

Statistics

Capital: No official capital

Form of Government: Ishtar is ruled by a Theocracy, Aphrodite is ruled by the dynasties of 12 rich families, the Aerostates are governed by a family-oriented clan system, and the Lowlanders are ruled by a primitive tribal chieftain system

Surface Area: 177,660,000 square miles

Orbital Radius: 67,270,000 miles (.72 AU)

Difference Between Perihelion and Aphelion: 60,000 miles

Average Distance From Earth: 93,500,000 miles

Gravity: 90% Earth normal

Escape Velocity: 23,000 mph

Surface Temperature Averages: 300° F (Lowlands), 100° F (Highlands)

Atmosphere: The atmosphere is highly acidic, containing diluted sulfuric acid; the air pressure is extremely high, especially in the Lowlands; humans at elevations below 5,000 feet require protective suits

Day/Year: Venusian day equals 243 Terran days; Venusian year equals 225 Terran days

Natural Satellites: None

Elevations: Highest (Mount Maxwell), 11 miles above the Venusian sea level; lowest (Lowlands), 1 mile below Venusian sea level

Population: 90,000,000

Density: 1.9 per sq. mile

Distribution: Highlands 65%, Aerostate Cities 23%, Lowlands 12%

Chief Products: Drugs, bioengineered animals, exotic foods, chemicals, plastics and metals

Imports: Technology, spacecraft, weapons, metals, alloys, and gems

Spaceports: One Class A at new Elysium; two Class B at Tellus Regio and Hestia; some Class C in Aerostates

(Currency: Tang (a gold and silver coin worth 20cr), tak (a silver coin worth 1cr) and the tael (a copper coin worth 0.5cr)

Adventuring on Venus

Like on Mercury, the lesser gravity of Venus enables characters to carry and lift greater weights than normal and to move faster. The following two tables present these changes in movement rates and Strength-related game effects.

Table 1V: Strength on Venus

Strength	Weight	Maximum Lift
1	1.1	3.3
2	2.2	5.5
3	5.5	11
4	11	27.5
5	16.5	44
6	22	60.5
7	27.5	77
8	33	99
9	38.5	110
10	44	126.5
11	49.5	137.5
12	55	154
13	60.5	170.5
14	66	187
15	71.5	198
16	77	214.5
17	93.5	242
18	121	280.5
19	220	440
20	330	550
21	495	975
22	660	880

Table 2V: Movement Rates on Venus

Race	Run	Climb	Air
Human	660	165	—
Tinker	528	132	—
Worker	396	99	—
Terrine	792	198	—
Delph	528	132	—
Lowlander	528	132	—
Runner	924	231	—
Stormrider	396	99	1200
Spacer	660	165	600

Climbing Note: Falling damage on Venus is

1d6 points per 10 feet, up to a maximum damage limit of 18d6.

The lesser gravity does not affect a being's swimming rate, or the flight speed of Spacers. Also, the movement rates of vehicles are not affected by the weaker gravity of Venus.

For many centuries, the cloud-enshrouded world of Venus kept her secrets from the prying eyes of mankind. Even now, centuries later, the colonized world of Venus is still enshrouded by her veils of mystery. But now the clouds hide the colonists' secrets from the prying eyes of the rest of solar system.

The planet was colonized by people from the Indo-Asian Bloc of Earth. At first, they lived in orbiting stations, since Venus was uninhabitable. Even after years of terraforming, the planet is still very inhospitable.

The atmospheric pressure at the lower elevations of Venus is still too high for unprotected humans. This forced two groups of colonists to settle on the highest points of the continental plateaus high in the upper atmosphere, where the atmospheric pressure was more acceptable.

The Ishtarian plateau became the home of a passionate people ruled by a hereditary council. The other large plateau, Aphrodite, became the home of a group of wealthy dynastic families who rule the rest of the populace. Higher in the atmosphere dwell the gypsy-like clans of the Aerostaters, who live in huge floating cities that ride the powerful jet streams of the upper atmosphere.

The remaining inhabitants of Venus are a reptilelike, gennie race that has been bred to live in the dangerous climate of the Lowlands of Venus.

The Land and Its Resources

The planet Venus is an exotic world rich with fantastic wonders and fantastic resources. The highland plateaus feature graceful cities under glass domes and huge forests of bioengineered conifers. The Lowlands are filled with jungles and swamps, teeming with multicolored plants that are weird combinations of minerals and vegetation.

Meanwhile, overhead in the thick cloud cover float graceful Aerostate cities and clumps of bioengineered algae. Venus is a world of alien landscapes and bizarre dangers.

The geography and flora of the planet are

not the only exotic things about Venus. Venus, unlike most planets, rotates in a counterclockwise motion. This means that the Venusian sun rises in the west and sets in the east.

In the Lowlands, even though terraforming has been going on for several decades now, the atmospheric pressure is still very high. The sheer density of the air in the Lowlands enables a viewer to see beyond the actual horizon. While doing so, he will get the impression that he is at the bottom of a large depression.

Even though the planet is covered by eternal clouds, it is by no means dark. A good amount of illumination gets through the cloud cover. Daytime of Venus is almost as bright as a clear day on Earth.

The slow rotation of Venus means that a Venusian year has two sunsets and two sunrises, even though technically one Venusian day is longer is than one Venusian year.

Geography

The geography of Venus consists mostly of three different features: the Highlands, the Plains, and the Lowlands. A feature common to all of these regions of Venus is impact craters, which dot the surface. The largest of these craters are up to 155 miles in diameter, with depths down to 2,000 feet.

The Highlands cover about 10% of the total surface area of Venus. The Highlands consist mostly of variously sized mesas and plateaus that tower several miles above the Lowlands. The two largest of these plateaus, Ishtar and Aphrodite, are the sites of the two largest cultures of Venus.

Ishtar is roughly the size of the Terran continent known as Australia, while Aphrodite is roughly the size of the Terran continent once known as Africa. These plateaus are also the sites of towering inactive volcanoes, like the twin volcanoes that exist on the smaller plateau Beta Regio. The plateaus also feature incredible mountains, like the impressive Mount Maxwell on the Ishtarian plateau.

A large section of the Aphroditan continent is crisscrossed with incredible trenches. These trenches are several miles deep, hundreds of miles in width, and thousands of miles in length.

The Plains of Venus roughly cover 70% of the total surface area of Venus. These plains, which have been largely ignored by the colo-

nists, are flat and desolate. The Plains are covered by a bioengineered grasslike vegetation that is blue in color. This grass constantly works to absorb the acid in the moisture and the air. The algae then converts this into breathable oxygen and releases it into the atmosphere.

The Lowlands of Venus, which cover about 10% of Venus's surface area, are about a mile below the Venusian sea level. The Lowlands are dominated by marshy jungles and swamps filled with metallic-colored vegetation that is partially mineral in nature.

The ground of the jungle is covered by blue mosses and lichens that absorb the acidic rains and produce oxygen. Many of the jungle trees are lightning-rod trees, huge yellow crystalline trees that absorb and ground the huge lightning strokes that batter the surface of Venus. Pools of glowing acid and huge boulders also dot the surface of the Lowlands.

One of the more noticeable land features of Venus was created by Martian terrorism. In 2285, Martian terrorists destroyed a space elevator that was being built on the Aphroditan continent. The remains of the gigantic construction project are scattered across part of the Aphroditan plateau and the lower elevations nearby.

Thanks to terraforming, Venus now features three large bodies of water: the Sea of Rhea, the Alphane Sea (the largest) and the Sea of Hathor (the smallest). These seas were once low-lying plains. Unfortunately, the waters of these seas are tainted by huge amounts of sulfuric acid and other toxic chemicals, making the water undrinkable until it has been subjected to a lengthy distillation process.

The average depths of these seas range from 10 feet to two miles. These seas are home to a number of bioengineered aquatic animals that have been bred for food.

Atmosphere and Climate

Even though terraforming has created a somewhat breathable atmosphere, Venus is still a dangerous world. The air of Venus contains a trace of sulfuric acid, and higher amounts of carbon dioxide than found in Earth's atmosphere. Travelers to the planet notice a slight sulfuric tang in the air.

The air and climate near the cloud level, some 40 miles above the surface, is the most

livable. The clouds still contain some sulfuric acid, so they are a yellowish brown in color. The graceful floating cities of the Aerostaters ride the wind currents at this height.

The major jet streams and air currents travel in an east-to-west direction, because of Venus's unique rotation. Some of these air currents reach speeds of up to 220 mph. The temperatures of this area are usually around 80° Fahrenheit.

The upper atmosphere is also home to huge floating clumps of bioengineered algae, which absorb the poisonous atmosphere and give off breathable oxygen.

Moving farther down in the atmosphere, you reach the plateaus of the Highlands. The air pressure and atmosphere here are still acceptable for human life. The temperatures in these areas stay around 100° Fahrenheit.

Traveling below the Highlands, you pass a lower level of clouds that hides the Lowlands and Plains below. The atmosphere and air pressure of the Plains and Lowlands are not livable by human standards. Humans visiting these areas must wear protective suits. The temperature in these areas can reach 300° Fahrenheit.

The whole planet is constantly subjected to heavy acidic rainfalls from the clouds high above. The planet is also subject to a number of intense and permanent thunderstorms that are hundreds of times more destructive than thunderstorms on Earth.

The planet is home to a number of permanent storms that move slowly across the planet in a counterclockwise pattern. These storms feature winds of several hundred miles per hour, driving rain, and destructive lightning bolts. In the past, the thunder of the storms has been so loud that it has cracked the plastiglass domes that cover the plateau cities.

Venus is still very active geologically, with a number of huge, belching volcanoes dotting the surface. Venus is also subject to powerful venusquakes. Several years ago, a small Ishtar-ian city near the edge of the plateau dropped over the edge because of one such intense venusquake.

Soil

The soil of Venus is highly acidic and it contains traces of poisonous elements. Thanks to the use of terraforming and bioengineered mi-

croorganisms placed in the soil of the highlands, the soil of those areas has become more agreeable to specially bioengineered plants.

A number of bioengineered plants have been created to grow in the highland soil. Venus is now a major source for the luxury of real wood in the solar system, ever since Earth's forests were mostly destroyed by pollution. The wood of the Venusian conifer is popular because of its strength and dark blue color.

A number of bioengineered vegetables and fruits thrive in the Highlands. Unfortunately, trace elements in the soil cause the fruits and vegetables to have a bitter tang to them. A small number of exportable chemicals and drugs are by-products of various bioengineered Highland plants.

All attempts to lessen the acidic content of the Lowland soil have failed. Desperate, the bioengineers tried to create crystalline and metallic plants that might survive in the poisonous soil of the Lowlands. While creating these fantastic plants, the bioengineers accidentally discovered the drugs gravitol and lifextend.

The most expensive and important drugs in the system, gravitol and lifextend are made from the various weird plants that were created to survive in the Venusian Lowlands.

Minerals

Venus is very metal poor. Small deposits of iron, aluminum, and magnesium have been discovered on the tops and sides of the plateau and mesas of the highlands. The planet has a large number of silicon deposits on the surface. Silicon is still a vital element in computers, making it an important Venusian resource.

Venusian scientists have discovered ways to produce a number of petroleum products, such as plastics and other polymers, from silicon.

Population Centers

Most Venusians live on the plateau continents of Aphrodite and Ishtar, high above the Lowlands. The oldest cities (New Elysium, Rupes, Rhea, and Sappho) are built on the highest points of the plateaus, and they are covered by glassteel domes. These cities, and their domes, were built before terraforming made the air breathable in the upper atmospheres. No effort has been made to remove the domes of the older cities though the upper

atmosphere has been made tolerable.

Buildings are made of spun glass and ceramics, which resist the slightly acidic atmosphere. The architecture of the Highland cities is highlighted by minarets, rounded towers, and onion-shaped domes. This type of architecture leaves no flat areas where acidic rainfall and humidity can collect and settle.

Most buildings on Venus are not painted, since the acidic atmosphere and rain usually eat away any surface coating over time. Most buildings are a bleached, silvery white.

The cities of the Ishtar Confederacy are recognizable because of the huge cleared areas in the centers of the cities. These areas are used for debates, religious ceremonies, and other community activities. The buildings surrounding the community squares consist mostly of graceful community temples and worship areas. The other buildings near the community squares are government offices and community buildings.

The rest of an Ishtarian city features wine shops, open air markets, bazaars, communal baths, huge auditoriums (for plays, concerts, poet recitals, debates and athletic contests), and the usual homes and businesses.

The largest and oldest of the Ishtarian domed cities is New Elysium, which is also the site of Venus's only Class A spaceport.

New Elysium is located on the highest point on Venus, the peak of Mount Maxwell. The structure of Mount Maxwell indicates that it was once an active volcano.

The other two largest and oldest domed cities are Rupes and Freya. A few smaller and newer Ishtarian cities are located on some of the nearby, smaller continental plateaus. Ishtarian cities exist on the Highlands of Rhea, Alpha Regio, and Sappho.

Cities of the Aphroditan continent are similar to Ishtarian cities, except for a few details. Aphroditan cities do not feature a community square, and the cities contain no temples or religious buildings. Instead, the centers of the larger Aphroditan cities are taken up by the huge estates of the dynastic families that rule the Aphroditan continent. None of the Aphroditan cities have domes, because the Aphroditans lived in orbital space stations until the planet's atmosphere was made tolerable.

The largest Aphroditan city of note is Hestia, which contains a Class B spacedock.

The rest of the Aphroditan cities are rather

small compared to the cities of Ishtar. A large number of Aphroditan citizens work and live on plantations owned by one of the 12 wealthy families that rule Aphrodite.

These plantations are small cities in which everybody works for the ruling family. All the businesses, such as retail stores and bars, are owned by the family. This means that most of the money the controlling family pays the workers ends up back in their pockets. The plantations are mostly involved in mining, cutting down Venusian conifer trees for the lumber, and harvesting various bioengineered fruits and vegetables.

The small plateau of Tellus Regio is the home of a neutral city, named Liberty, that is not politically connected to any of the other Venusian cultures. The city, and the nearby Class B spaceport, are ruled by a mysterious group of backers. The city has become a free port, with rogues all across the system congregating there. Many believe the city is secretly controlled by the Black Brotherhood of Space Pirates.

A smaller portion of the Venusian population lives on the floating cities of the Aerostaters. The cities of the Aerostaters float in the upper atmosphere of Venus, among the clouds that enshroud the planet. The floating cities, located about 40 miles above the planet's surface, are swept along by the powerful jet streams of air that rotate counterclockwise around the planet at speeds of up to two hundred miles per hour.

The cities are made up of five to 10 individual sections tethered together by large, enclosed walkways of strong plasti. Each section is surrounded by a bubble made of plasti. The lower portion of the bubble is bisected by the sturdy platform that the buildings rest on. The section below this platform is filled with a special gas mixture that causes the cities to float in the upper atmosphere.

Connected to the cities are various-sized landing platforms for hovercraft and small rockets. The landing platforms are also maintained by pockets of the special inert gas. Unlike the cities, these platforms are not protected by a bubble. When a ship lands, a retractable access tube made of memory plasti connects itself to the ship's airlock. Special larger access tubes are available for cargo handling.

The Aerostater cities are sealed off from the Venusian atmosphere even more than the

domed cities. The little bit of Venusian atmosphere that leaks in is not as acidic as that in the lower elevations. This means that the buildings of the Aerostater cities are built in a variety of styles, instead of being dominated by the curved architecture that the cities of the plateaus have to conform to. Their buildings are also painted in a variety of bright shades, since they don't have to worry about the color fading because of an acidic atmosphere.

The buildings of the Aerostater cities vary a great deal, and hold a variety of homes and businesses. The Aerostaters are a very social people, who love to get together for huge social events. Every Aerostater city has a number of large buildings, called convocenters, that hold nothing but huge rooms filled with cushions. Citizens gather in these rooms for feasts, debates, and trade shows.

Over 50 different Aerostate cities float around Venus. Each Aerostate is given the clan name of the people who inhabit the floating city.

Close to 1,000 Venusians work in a few orbital space stations circling Venus. These space stations were habitats for the first colonists, before the highlands of Venus became habitable. Originally owned by the wealthy families of Aphrodite, the stations were sold to the Ishtar Confederacy.

These orbital stations now serve as military outposts and orbital factories for the Ishtarians. The stations orbit in specific paths that keep them in a twilight zone, between Venus's night and day periods.

The smallest portion of the Venusian population, the reptilian Lowlanders, live in small tribal villages. The villages are set up in small clearings, and contain 10 to 20 small huts made of the metallic and crystalline plants that thrive in the Lowlands. The center of a village is kept cleared for tribal meetings.

Yellow crystalline trees are usually planted around the outside perimeter of the villages. These trees serve as lightning rods, drawing any nearby lightning strikes to them, channeling them into the ground.

While no clear numbers are known, Venusians estimate there are about 50 existing Lowlander villages.

The People of Venus

The people of Venus are a hardy and stub-

born lot, who barely get along with each other.

Ishtarians are a passionate people ruled by the leaders of their religion and a council made up of special hereditary posts. They are friendly with the Aerostaters, and often trade with them. They do not trust the Aphroditans at all; indeed they are involved in a cold war of espionage with them. They barely tolerate the Lowlanders, considering them to be repulsive and uncivilized beasts. Still they trade with the Lowlanders, since they are the only source of gravitol and lifextend.

The people of Aphrodite are led by 12 rich families who rule the rest of the Aphroditan population using a strange system of intermarriages. The settlers of Aphrodite are a stubborn and hot-tempered group. They are jealous of the Aerostaters' colorful gypsy lifestyles and of the peaceful lives of the Ishtarian theocracy. Like the Ishtarians, they are repulsed by the Lowlanders, refusing to deal with them at all.

The Aerostaters are a social people who try to get along with all the other cultures of Venus. They are a clannish people, who obey the orders of the senior clan member.

The hideous Lowlanders don't try to get along with anybody, and they don't seem to care. The Lowlanders deal with the Ishtarians and some of the Aerostate traders. They are a cold and distant people, highly paranoid of strangers.

Physically, the humans of Venus possess strong body frames, with heights between five and six feet, and weighing between 120 and 250 pounds. Their skin is hairless, except for their scalp, and it is shaded in various tones of brown, tan, or beige. Their hair is very thick, and they usually let it grow long.

The colonists have been slightly genetically altered, artificially and naturally over time by their environment.

They tend to have Asiatic features, with small, narrow eyes. The humans of Venus have a clear nictitating membrane that they can use to consciously cover their eyes. This membrane was created to protect them from the acid rain and other irritants in the Venusian atmosphere.

Their ears are smaller and set closer to the skull, because of their tendency to live at high altitudes, and because of the overall higher air pressure of Venus. The rest of the colonists' physical features conform to typical human

standards.

The dangers of Venus have caused the human colonists to develop an introspective attitude, making them wary of hasty decisions. The colonists were gene-tailored to withstand the high pressure of the planet, providing them with incredible stamina.

Over the generations, the environment of Venus has made the colonists more resistant to heat and acid than normal humans.

On the other hand, the colonists of Venus have a number of disadvantages. The high air pressure makes it hard to perform delicate or quick movements, causing the colonists to react slowly. Their tendency to be thoughtful and quiet makes them appear to be arrogant and uncaring at times. Because of the high temperatures of Venus, the colonists are extremely vulnerable to cold.

These descriptions apply only to the human colonists of Venus: Aerostaters, Ishtarians, and Aphroditans. The Lowlanders are very different.

The Lowlanders are a special race of gene-tailored humans who were created to colonize the lower land areas of Venus.

Lowlanders are short and heavily muscled, with heights between four and five feet, and weights between 200 and 300 pounds.

The reptilian Lowlanders have scaly green skin and are hairless. Their skulls are elongated and bulge out over their necks, which are powerful and long. Flexible vertebrae enable Lowlanders to rotate their heads 360°.

Their eyes are very large, with black or green pupils that are almost catlike. Their vision is very good, enabling them to see in bright light and darkness.

Their ears are small, cuplike membranes set on each side of their narrow skull.

Their mouths are narrow, with either large molars (if they are a vegetarian branch of the species), or with hundreds of sharp teeth (meat eaters). Their speech is low and rasping, filled with sibilant hissings and clicks.

Two narrow nostril slits are located between their eyes. These slits can be completely closed when they submerge. Lowlanders possess gills on their necks, which they use to stay underwater for an indefinite period of time.

Lowlanders were gene-engineered to live in the lower elevations of Venus, so they were created to be very strong and they don't tire easily. This gene-engineering has also made

them very resistant to heat, poisons, acid, and other forms of physical damage.

Unfortunately, because of their environment, they are highly susceptible to cold. They are used to having a lot of air, so they are also more vulnerable to suffocation.

A Lowlander venturing out of the Venusian Lowlands must wear a special breathing apparatus, which is good for 72 Terran hours.

A Lowlander dies in 10 Terran minutes if his breathing apparatus is not working, or if he is out of high-pressurized air.

The Lowlanders are a stubborn and paranoid race that does not trust strangers. Their appearance and coldness make them very repulsive to the humans who deal with them.

Way of Life

Even though three of the cultures of Venus are very human, their cultures and ways of life are very different, as the following paragraphs will reveal.

The lifestyle of the Ishtarians revolves around their religion. Their religion, simply called the Faith, admonishes them to enjoy life to its fullest. This has made them a passionate people in everything they do, even war.

While the Ishtarian city has its usual share of physical laborers, most of the people are involved in some sort of trade or retail business. The Ishtarians are the most accomplished traders in the solar system. Products from all across the system can be found in the marketplaces of an Ishtarian city.

Most Ishtarians' lives are broken up into periods of 30 hours, called cycles. When an Ishtarian first wakes, he spends an hour meditating and praying. He then eats a light morning meal and goes to work.

He works for about five hours, and then takes a break to eat a light meal. Most Ishtarians eat this meal at one of the many wine shops and restaurants that are in an Ishtarian city.

This light meal lasts from one to two hours. The meal is a social event with friends meeting at the wine shop and discussing various topics (including trade, philosophy and politics).

The Ishtarian goes back to work for another five hours, and then he heads to the local temple for evening services, meeting his family there. The services last for two hours, and no Ishtarian skips these services unless he has a

very good reason. All the cities of the Ishtarian Confederacy close up during the religious services. Even Ishtarians on other planets, and on ships, take the time to pray during this time (except during times of battle).

A family-oriented people, Ishtarians gather the whole family together after the services for the evening meal. The rest of the evening is spent in a variety of social activities, at home or elsewhere. They then spend a few more minutes praying and meditating before they go to sleep for eight to 10 hours.

After six normal cycles of work and rest, the seventh cycle is considered to be a holy time. Early that day everyone attends the local temple for several hours of meditation and prayer. There is very little preaching done in the temples, though the priests host a variety of religious and philosophical classes. The rest of the cycle is spent in rest and various intellectual pursuits.

An Ishtarian prays and meditates on a small rug that he created himself. He always carries this around with him, strapped to his back. When a young Ishtarian turns 13, he is taught how to make his own prayer rug. Until then, the young Ishtarian must pray on a small pillow that is made for younger worshippers.

As mentioned earlier, Ishtarian spaceship crews also adhere to this basic schedule of prayer and work. Ishtarian spacers take care to face Venus when they are praying and meditating in outer space. The only time these religious observances can be overlooked is when the ship is in the middle of battle. Missing the prayer period during a battle is not considered sacrilegious.

The people of Aphrodite lead similar lives of work and rest, but they have no periods of meditation and prayer. Most of the people work for one of the 12 wealthy families that run the continent.

They spend most of their lives working hard for low pay. The rich families enjoy various extravagant activities, such as throwing and attending fancy balls. The other Aphroditans entertain themselves by getting drunk and gambling.

The people of Ishtar and Aphrodite dress in flowing robes, which are treated with acid-resistant chemicals. Underneath, they wear baggy clothes (often smart suits) that protect them from the intense heat and humidity. They prefer wearing shades of light green, gray,

white, and silver. The wealthier colonists have a weakness for flashy gems and jewelry, since these do not occur naturally on Venus. Such adornments are only worn inside, due to the acidic nature of the atmosphere.

The Aerostaters, on the other hand, live nomadic lives and act like flamboyant gypsies of old Terra. Their lives are dominated by their families, since they are a clannish people. All the people of an Aerostate belong to different branches of the same clan.

Each Aerostate is a complete city within itself, containing a wide variety of businesses and homes. A large number of Aerostaters serve as herders for the kraken, a special herd beast that floats in the air.

The kraken herds ride along the same wind currents that the Aerostates do. The herders venture out in small sailplanes and occasionally herd a kraken to one of the city's landing platforms. There it is quickly slaughtered and taken inside the city for butchering.

A number of Aerostaters also serve as traders for Venus. The cities' landing platforms prove valuable to the large aircraft and light rockets of traders. As they move about, the Aerostates trade with any Highland cities they pass over. They also do some minimal trading with the Lowlanders. Small cargo ships from the few remaining orbital stations dock with the Aerostates to do business with the wily traders. The Aerostater traders also do a lively business selling information to the various cultures of Venus.

The Aerostaters live a free life, answering only to the clan chief, called the Archein, and his immediate family. They love social events; large open areas of the Aerostates are devoted to such gatherings.

The Aerostaters stay in their sealed cities and vehicles most of the time, hardly ever venturing out into the acidic atmosphere.

They favor light and loose clothes, colored in a variety of bright shades and hues.

Very little is known about the life of the Lowlanders. They live in small villages of 20 to 50 members, ruled by a tribal chief. They spend most of their time harvesting and tending to the unique Venusian plants that are used to create gravitol and lifextend. The rest of their time is spent in hunting native wildlife for food. They wear very little clothing since their reptilian skin protects them from the ravages of the environment.

Food

Thanks to the terraforming process, the people of Venus do not have to send to other planets for food. The plantations of Aphrodite produce most of the fruits and vegetables that are eaten on Venus. Like all the food produced on Venus, the fruits and vegetables have a tang to them, due to certain trace elements in the air and soil of Venus.

The most popular of the fruits is a mutation of the Terran apple, called Aphrodite's golden apples. This succulent fruit is considered a delicacy by people all over the solar system.

The Venusians depend mostly on the Aerostaters for their supply of fresh meat. The Aerostaters serve as herders and butchers of kraken, a bioengineered herbivore that floats in the upper atmosphere. The kraken live off the floating colonies of bioengineered algae that exist in the upper atmosphere. The meat of the kraken is tender and sweet in taste, though blue in color.

The seas of Venus are home to a number of different edible aquatic species. The most popular of these is the blue-gilled toxic. This fish lives off the more toxic chemicals that exist in the Venusian seas. The fish can be prepared only by trained butchers who know which parts of the fish are free of poisonous flesh.

The Lowlanders live on a number of the weird plants that grow in the Lowlands. These metallic plants are poisonous and inedible to anyone other than Lowlanders. The same goes for most of the Lowland animals that the Lowlanders hunt for food.

Recreation

The people of Ishtar enjoy a wide variety of recreational activities. Their cities are filled with small wine shops, communal baths, theatres, art galleries, and large auditoriums. The large auditoriums host musical concerts, poetic recitals, athletic events, and ritual martial arts combat. They also spend a lot of time with friends, discussing and debating philosophy and other topics.

Every Venusian year, the best athletes of the Ishtarian Confederacy meet at New Elysium for the Games of Olympus. The athletes compete in a number of different athletic contests, winning special medals and recognition. A number of martial arts contests take place dur-

ing the Games. The most popular of these contests are the battles between the warrior priests of the Ishtarian religion, using electrical stun weapons called the kryptx.

Ishtarrians spend a lot of free time in recreational religious activities. These include meditation, philosophical discussions, and singing choral hymns.

The people of Aphrodite spend most of their recreational time in less cultural activities. Though the wealthy families that rule the continent are always throwing balls and other extravagant social events, the poorer Aphroditans enjoy simply going out and getting drunk while gambling. They also enjoy various bloody sports, like gladiatorial combat.

One of the more popular Aphroditan sports is blood quest, loosely based on the old Terran game of football. The players of the game wear heavy armor and are allowed to use a variety of melee weapons on members of the opposing team. Each of the 12 families sponsors a blood quest team; competition between these family-sponsored teams is intense.

The Aerostaters enjoy huge social gatherings during which they can feast and talk. The favorite pastime of Aerostaters is storytelling. Whether the story is humorous, sad, or makes a point, they consider storytelling to be an art form. They also enjoy music with a quick tempo so that they can dance wildly to it. Smaller get-togethers enjoy word games and riddle contests.

The Aerostaters also race the special sailplanes that the herders use. The bizarre racing courses require the pilots to take their sailplanes through a number of wild acrobatic maneuvers.

No one really knows what the Lowlanders do for recreation, and the Lowlanders aren't telling anybody.

Holidays and Festivals

The Ishtarrians celebrate a number of religious holidays and festivals. Some of the holidays are quiet and somber, with special ceremonies held at the Temples of the Faith. Others are wild festivals celebrating the passions of life.

The largest of these festivals is called the Festival of Life. This long festival begins the Venusian year. The first cycle of the festival is a period of religious gatherings and quiet medi-

tations, as people give thanks for their lives. Wine shops and other businesses are closed during this time. The people fast, not eating or drinking anything the whole day.

The next day begins with the usual prayers and meditations, followed by a large morning meal. The children of the household are given various presents of toys and candy after the meal. Family members spend the day together, as this day is set aside for the celebration of the family. The whole family goes out and spends the day eating at a park or attending a small carnival or circus set up in the streets.

The next day is a celebration of the arts. Ishtarrians spend the whole day attending music concerts, art galleries, and theatres. All of these activities are free on this day. To make sure that no one is left out, various art functions for all ages are set up.

The next cycle features a celebration of the physical pleasures. On this day the Ishtarrians drop their usual sense of decorum, and go out of their way to have a good time. The whole day is filled with parties spilling out of the wine shops and into the streets. The day is also filled with a number of athletic contests held at the auditoriums of the city. Everyone has a chance to sign up for the various sports events and martial arts contests. A number of special sports contests are set up for the youngsters too.

The next cycle is spent resting and staying at home. After that the quiet Ishtarrians go back to their normal daily schedule.

The people of Aphrodite celebrate a number of holidays and festivals, none of which are religious in nature. The rich people attend and throw various wild parties at their family estates, while the poor people just go out and have a good time at the local bars.

The largest and wildest of these holidays is the Eve of Alias. During these eight hours of night, everyone wears flashy costumes and masks, acting as wild as they want while they hide their identities behind the masks. The parties of the rich are even wilder than usual, and at times some of the poorer folk have been able to sneak into such parties.

It is rumored that some of the brasher members of the rich families go out into the city streets and celebrate with the commoners. Many brief romantic liaisons between commoners and aristocratic family members have taken place during this holiday.

The Aerostaters are constantly looking for a reason to have a party, so their culture features a number of holidays and festivals.

For example, the birthday of the clan head, the Archein, is celebrated with wild parties all day. When it is the period of birthing for the female kraken, the Celebration of Birthing takes place.

The largest of the Aerostater celebrations is the Celebration of Homecoming. This holiday is held when an Aerostater city has completed its entire circuit around Venus.

Because the cities travel at different speeds, each city's Homecoming Day is different. The holiday celebrates the fact that they have completed another season of safe travel.

No one knows if the Lowlanders celebrate any holidays or festivals.

Education

The youths of the Ishtar Confederation attend free primary and secondary schools run by the theocracy. While a portion of the studies are devoted to the religious and philosophical tenets of the Faith, the schools also teach the basics of math and other important subjects.

After his secondary education is finished, an Ishtarian youth has a number of educational choices. If he is bright and wishes to enter a career that requires more schooling, he can attend the New Elysium Temple of Learning.

This university-level school is known throughout the solar system for a number of special courses. They are considered to have one of the best liberal arts schools in the system.

The Temple has even lured a few Desert Dancer scholars into teaching there for brief tenures. The school offers a number of diplomas in music, visual arts, theatre, literature, and philosophy. The Temple of Learning is also well known for offering an advanced degree in bioengineering. A number of RAM bioengineers have gotten their degrees from this advanced school.

One branch of the Temple of Learning is the Celestial School of Trade. This special school is built near the New Elysium Spaceport; it is partially maintained by the Ishtarian military fleet. This advanced school offers a number of special courses for those who plan to make space travel their career. The school produces all of

Ishtar's engineers and pilots.

The school also teaches a special course on system economics. This course describes the complete economic network of the solar system and its inhabitants. This special course is taken by those students who plan to join Ishtar's merchant fleet. Anyone graduating from the Celestial School is guaranteed a position with Ishtar's military or merchant fleet.

The Aphroditans are provided with free primary and secondary schooling for their young, but the school system is severely overcrowded and few youths gain a quality education. The youths of the wealthy families are taught by special tutors that the family hires. Each family's central estate has a special building that serves as a schoolhouse for the younger family members and their tutors.

The largest Aphroditan city, Hestia, has a small arts and science university that is mediocre at best. The children of the rich are usually sent to more prestigious schools on other planets, while most other children don't even attend a university. The public university of Hestia is not free, and most poor families cannot afford to send their children to it. A few of the rich families give out scholarships, if the student signs a five-year contract to work for that family after graduating, usually at a lower pay scale than usual.

The children of the Aerostaters attend free secondary and primary schools. These beginning schools are the best of their kind on Venus. Even the Ishtarrians admit this. The teachers are taught to show a personal concern for every child and make sure he receives a good schooling.

This quality is overshadowed by the fact that none of the Aerostates have college-level schools. All their cities have a number of technical schools that feature specialized courses in a variety of subjects important to the Aerostaters. These schools are free and available to all Aerostaters.

The Archein usually sends his eldest son, his successor, to the New Elysium Temple of Learning for a basic degree.

As far as anyone knows, the Lowlanders have no school system.

The Arts

The Ishtarrians are noted as the most artistic of the Venusian cultures. They are most

known for their works in literature and philosophy. Several decades ago, a philosopher named Sudatt gained some fame. He wrote a series of thorough historical books about the philosophies of mankind through the ages.

Another Ishtarian writer, Rusaad, wrote a book of parables and fables that are known for their wisdom and humor. The parables and fables also provide an in-depth look into the Faith.

The Ishtarrians are also noted for the number of musical composers that they produced, such as Ahmed Gandhi and Lee Din.

The religious choral music and hymns of the Ishtarrians' Faith are popular around the solar system, even to those of other religions. The best of the Ishtarian choirs have toured the system to packed crowds.

The people of Aphrodite are mostly a hard-working people who have no interest, or time, for the arts. The one bright point has been the current playwright, Andrei Millus. His thought-provoking plays on society have become popular almost everywhere, though he is not very popular with the wealthy families of Aphrodite, thanks to his caricatures of them in his plays. His most famous play, "Venus Under an Alias," is the tragicomedy of a commoner and a rich girl who fall in love during the Eve of Alias.

A few members of the wealthy families have tried to use their families' money to finance artistic careers, but all their artistic attempts have been mediocre at best.

The Aerostaters' culture as a whole has produced more popular works of art than individual artists. The nomads' folk music and legends have become popular all over the system. One of the Aerostaters, Anton Sakrohv, has taken many Aerostater legends and turned them into children's books that are enjoyed on many different planets.

As with many other parts of their lives, it is not known if the Lowlanders produce any form of art, or if they are capable of even caring about art.

Religion

The members of the Ishtar Confederation practice a unique religion that is a mixture of old Earth's Islamic, Bahai, and Taoist faiths. The government of the Ishtar Confederacy is a partial theocracy, with the Elders of the Faith play-

ing an important part in the government.

The Faith teaches its members to live life to its fullest, enjoying the simple pleasures of life. They are taught to develop their bodies through exercise and a good diet (most are vegetarians), and their mind through meditation and the arts.

The Faith is passionate, but it also teaches that others have a right to their own ways and faith, as long as this does not threaten the people of Ishtar. If their way of life is threatened, they may feel the need to start a holy war.

Economics

The economic system of Venus is a closely knit circle, with all the cultures depending on the others. The Ishtar Confederacy is the cornerstone of the economic system, since it has the merchant fleet. These ships carry the other cultures' products to other planets, in return for a small commission fee.

The Lowlanders produce gravitol and lifextend, and trade them with the Aerostaters and the Ishtarrians for various technical items and other products.

The Aerostaters serve as the traders for the planet itself, as their cities float through the skies. Their small platforms allow hoverships and small rockets to land.

They trade with the inhabitants of the plateau cities and the inhabitants of the few remaining orbital stations. They are also the herders of the kraken, a major source of meat on the planet.

The Aphroditans serve as the farmers and miners of the planet. The food and minerals that are not used by Venusians are sold off planet with the aid of the Ishtarian merchant fleet.

Government

Each of the cultures of Venus has a different type of government. The Ishtar Confederacy is led by its religious leaders and a small council of hereditary leaders; the Aphroditans are ruled by 12 rich families; the Aerostaters are led by clan chiefs; and the Lowlanders are led by tribal chiefs.

The Ishtar Confederacy is led by the Elders of the Faith (high-level church officials) and a special government council. Each Ishtarian city is led by one of the Elders, who is elected by the

other Elders when an opening appears.

Realizing that the religious leaders needed to stay away from the taint of politics, the Elders of the Faith created the Council when the Ishtar Confederacy was first founded.

They chose 10 intelligent Ishtarrians and appointed each of them to a special post in the Council, such as Director of External Affairs. They then made each appointment hereditary, with the offspring inheriting the post when the parent resigned or died. One post on the Council, that of the Military Commander, is not hereditary. The Military Commander must rise through the ranks of the military fleet by means of bravery and sheer survival. The Commander holds just as much political power as the other Council members.

The Council runs the day-to-day affairs of the Ishtar Confederacy as a whole, aided by numerous government employees. While the Council members are supposedly free of intervention from the church, the Elders of the Temple may unanimously oust a member from the Council and appoint a new Council member. The Council meets in the Government House at New Elysium.

The government of Aphrodite is almost nonexistent, thanks to the control of the 12 family dynasties. There is a legal system and a bureaucracy, but these are tightly controlled by the 12 families. The people are heavily taxed to pay for running the government, but the families really run it and appoint its officials. The 12 families own all of the land in the cities and the estates.

Each family has its own security force that polices its estates. The police forces of the cities are made up of underpaid Aphroditans who are easily bribed. Most are usually on the payroll of at least one of the families.

Each of the Aerostates is lead by the senior clan chief, known as the Archein. His eldest son is destined to become the new Archein when the current Archein dies or retires. The Archein makes all the important decisions for the city, while close relatives control other parts of the city government. In all the history of the Aerostate clans, not one Archein has been overthrown by his people.

All that is known about the Lowlanders is that each tribe has a chief. It is not known if this position is hereditary, or if it is decided by some sort of election or contest. The tribal chiefs always appoint one among them to

serve as the speaker for all Lowlanders when dealing with outsiders.

History

In 2100, the System States Alliance granted a colonizing charter for Venus, to the Indo-Asian Bloc. The first group of colonists were wealthy members of the Indo-Asian Consortium, whose descendants would later colonize Aphrodite. At first, they had to live in the orbital habitats while the planet was being terraformed by RAM (for a steep price).

For the first 200 years, the planet was bombarded with icesteroids. After this, and some judiciously placed fusion explosions, several seas were created. The end result was a drastically decreased greenhouse effect, which had caused the temperatures and air pressure to be so high.

Afterward, the temperature slowly dropped to a barely tolerable level, as did the atmospheric pressure.

In 2275, Venus and Mars signed a non-aggression pact during RAM's war with the System States Alliance. In 2285, several years after the war, RAM broke the pact when they had saboteurs blow up a space elevator that was being built on Venus.

By this time, bioengineered bacteria had been seeded into the clouds. These bacteria would eat the sulphur in the atmosphere and release water in the process.

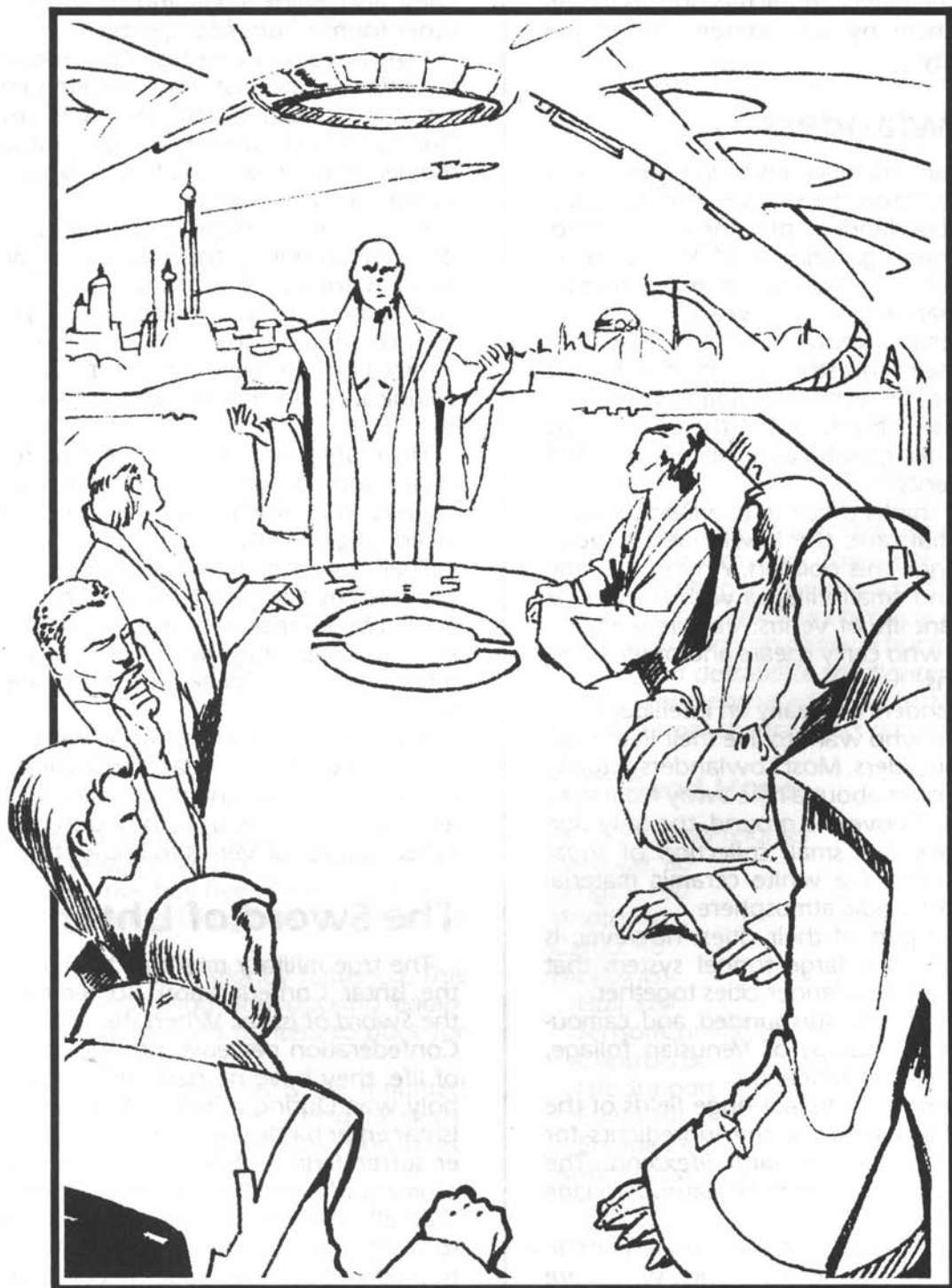
The first of the domed cities was placed in the highest elevations of the planet during the year 2330. It would be many years before the atmosphere in these upper elevations would become habitable without life support. At the same time, the first of the Aerostate cities was built and launched.

A special bioengineered species of floating algae was then introduced into the atmosphere, while a special moss was placed on the surface. They both absorbed the acidic and toxic traces in the atmosphere and water, and in return released oxygen. After many more years, the highlands of Venus were made habitable without having to worry about protective suits.

Rather than spend any more money and time on terraforming, the Venusians turned to bioengineering. They created a number of species and plants that could survive in the uninhabitable Lowlands of Venus.

As time went by, the four distinct cultures of Venus grew and became more powerful.

Recently, the Ishtar Confederacy officially joined NEO in its bid for freedom from RAM. Thanks to the Ishtarian fleet's intervention at the Battle of Vesta, NEO won its freedom from RAM.



CHAPTER 6: BENEATH THE CLOUDS

This chapter contains much information that would not be known by the general populace of the 25th Century. Nor would it be in the public information computer networks. The information presented in this chapter should be learned by the player characters only as it is revealed to them by the referee, during the course of play.

The Lowlanders

The Lowlanders of Venus aren't quite what they seem to be on the surface. The repulsiveness of the Lowlanders, plus the natural arrogance of the Highlanders of Venus, have allowed the Lowlanders to get away with an elaborate charade for many years.

The humans of Venus have overlooked the fact that their ancestors bioengineered the Lowlanders to be technically adept. They have also overlooked the fact that the Lowlanders produce refined gravitol and lifextend, not just raw ingredients.

Everyone thinks that the Lowlanders are a primitive tribal race; the Lowlanders haven't tried to change this opinion. Anyone visiting them will find small villages with huts made from the plant life of Venus. Visitors see paranoïd lizards who carry spears and other primitive weapons.

The Lowlanders are really an intelligent and crafty people who want to live their lives insulated from outsiders. Most Lowlanders actually live in small cities about a mile away from their fake villages. Above the ground, the only sign of these cities is a small collection of squat buildings made of a white ceramic material that resists the acidic atmosphere.

The largest part of their cities, however, is underground, in a large tunnel system that connects all the Lowlander cities together.

The buildings are surrounded and camouflaged by huge clumps of Venusian foliage, cultured by the Lowlanders.

The Lowlanders cultivate huge fields of the Venusian plants that are the ingredients for the two drugs, gravitol and lifextend. The fields are made to resemble natural foliage growing wild.

The Lowlanders spend most of their time cultivating and harvesting the plants, which are then processed in the Lowlanders' under-

ground labs. A small number of the Lowlanders serve as hunters for the rest, hunting down the animals that exist in the Lowlands.

They have few forms of recreation. They love to tinker with machinery and gadgets. They also enjoy engaging in wrestling and other forms of physical sports.

They have only one festival—Homecoming. On this day, the first bioengineered Lowlanders were placed in the Venusian Lowlands. During this holiday they simply rest and give thanks for their way of life, and vow to make sure it does not change.

They have no organized schools. The children are taught by their parents how to perform various important jobs, such as cultivating the plants and processing them for their chemicals. Those Lowlanders who are interested in tinkering are provided with various technical books that the Lowlanders have acquired.

The reptilian Lowlanders have no real forms of art, and have no real interest in intellectual matters. They don't have any interest in organized religion either.

Their government is very simple, with each city ruled by a tribal leader. All the Lowlanders are led by a Speaker, who represents the Lowlanders when they deal with outsiders. The tribal leader and Speaker positions are hereditary.

The Lowlanders secretly deal with the shadier traders of the free spaceport of Tellus Regio. In return, the Lowlanders get a lot of technical items and supplies that they don't want the other cultures of Venus to know they have.

The Sword of Ishtar

The true military might of Venus rests with the Ishtar Confederation (sometimes termed the *Sword of Ishtar*. When the warriors of the Confederation perceive a threat to their way of life, they have no hesitation in declaring a holy war. During a holy war, the warriors of Ishtar enter battle with a burning passion, never surrendering. (Rules Note: When the government of Ishtar has officially declared a holy war, all Ishtar soldiers receive a +1 bonus to attack rolls in combat.) Ishtar has the best trained and outfitted space fleet in the system, rivaled only by RAM's space fleet. Their fleet

consists of star battlers, heavy cruisers, armed freighters, and fighters. The fighter is described on the inside cover of this source book, while descriptions of the rest of the ships follow.

All of the ships are covered with a white ceramic glaze, which protects the ships from Venus's acidic atmosphere. To enable them to function in the denser Venusian atmosphere, the ships are shaped like heavy, flattened cylinders.

SI Pennant

Type: Star Carrier

Tonnage: 5,000

Length: 10,000

Width: 2,500

Cargo: 2,500

Hit Points:

Hull 20,000

Sensor/Commo 5,000

Controls 5,000

Life Support 10,000

Fuel 15,000

Engine 15,000

Armor Class: 0 (Battler Class)

Weapons:

100 Beam Lasers

100 Gyrocannons

50 Fighters

19 Pumped Lasers

6 Heavy Acceleration Guns

Crew: 1,800

Speed: 1

Reaction Bonus: +2

AC Defensive Adjustment: +5

The Ishtarian military fleet has six of these behemoths, which are equal to RAM's battlers.

Each star carrier has five retractable docks, each one containing 10 fighters, for a total of 50 fighters.

The top of the ship is slightly flattened. This area contains grappling and docking equipment, enabling damaged fighters to dock for quick repairs and refueling.

The heavy acceleration guns are mounted with one pointed to the bow, one to the stern, and two each on the starboard and port sides.

SI Valor

Type: Heavy Cruiser

Tonnage: 500

Length: 1,000

Width: 250

Cargo: 250

Hit Points:

Hull 2,000

Sensor/Commo 500

Controls 500

Life Support 1,000

Fuel 1,500

Engine 1,500

Armor Class: 4 (Military)

Weapons:

10 Pumped Lasers

10 Gyrocannons

5 Catch Nets

5 Beam Lasers

2 K-Cannons

Crew: 400

Speed: 1

Reaction Bonus: +1

AC Defensive Adjustment: +2

A major part of the Ishtarian fleet consists of heavy cruisers. Ten cruisers are assigned to each squadron, with 10 cruiser squadrons assigned to each star carrier.

Sometimes cargo nets are attached to the bottom of the cruisers. The catch nets are fired by a pilot trying to ensnare a small fighter (-5 penalty to the attack roll because of difficulty).

The net inflicts no damage but it can foul the rockets and destabilize the fighter's flight (+2 to AC while ensnared; a successful Pilot Skill roll at normal chances gets rid of the net).

IMF Good Hope

Type: Armed Freighter

Tonnage: 80

Length: 160

Width: 40

Cargo: 40

Hit Points:

Hull 320

Sensor/Commo 80

Controls 80

Life Support 160

Fuel 240

Engine 240

Armor Class: 6 (Military)

Weapons:

4 Beam Lasers

4 Light Acceleration Guns

Crew: 20

Speed: 3
Reaction Bonus: 0
AC Defensive Adjustment: 0

The ships of the Ishtarian merchant fleet are heavily armed freighters that can be called into active military service at any time.

These ships were first used in the System Wars many years ago, but they have been kept in perfect condition.

Final Note: Squadrons of cruisers and flights of fighters are named after weapons (e.g., Arrow-Cruiser Squadron, Dagger-Fighter Flight).

New Items

Sailplanes

Cost: 8,000cr
Size: 10' x 2' x 5'
Weight: 700 pounds

These small, enclosed, one-man planes resemble the ultralight planes of the 20th Century. The miniature electric motor provides some power, but most of the planes' speed comes from the wind currents they ride, enabling them to reach speeds of up to 200 mph.

These small planes are used by the Aerostaters to scout ahead of the floating city's path, and to guide the aerial herds of kraken.

Venusian Helicopters

Cost: 40,000cr
Size: 45' x 24' x 18'
Weight: 3,000 pounds

These small helicopters are used by the people of the Ishtarian and Aphroditan continents. The helicopters' pressurized cabins can hold four people. The specially designed craft even work in the Lowlands of Venus. The craft are powered by atomic batteries, providing about 30 hours of flight time, at a maximum speed of 50 mph.

Security Robots

Str 22, Dex 15, Con 20,
Int 10, Wis n/a, Cha n/a, Tech n/a
Hit Points: 100
Armor Class: 0
Weapons:
 2 Laser Pistols
 2 Rocket Pistols
 2 Bolt Guns
 Grenade Launcher
No. of Attacks: 3
Cost: 35,000cr
Size: 3' x 6'
Weight: 900 pounds

These security robots are humanoid in shape, with six arms ending in hands with four flexible digits. The weapons above are built into the body of the robot itself. In addition, it has a number of special sensors, making it capable of hearing and seeing much farther than a human. It also can see into the infrared portion of the electromagnetic spectrum (basically enabling it to see in the absence of visible light).

The members of the ruling families of Aphrodite often have at least one of these robots as permanent bodyguards. Recent assassination attempts by disgruntled citizens have resulted in these paranoid security precautions.

CHAPTER 7: VENUS PERSONALITIES

The following people are important political and social leaders of Venus. Player characters visiting Venus might be contacted by them, or come into conflict with them, while adventuring on Venus. All of the different cultures of Venus are represented in this section.

Mariana Almisan

Director of External Relations, Ishtar
7th-Level Rogue
Hit Points: 30
Armor Class: 4 (Smart Suit)
THACO: 17
Str 8, Dex 13, Con 9,
Int 17, Wis 18, Cha 15, Tech 9
Career Skills: Fast Talk/Convince 145, Notice 148, Hide in Shadows 43, Move Silently 43
General Skills: Economics 27, Law 37, Etiquette 45, Leadership 75

Mariana Almisan has been the Director of External Affairs of Ishtar for over 30 years. Like the other members of the ruling council of Ishtar, she inherited the post from her father, Jamal.

Her father made sure she had a well-rounded education in psychology, history, government, and economics. She spent a year of her life just touring the other planets of the solar system, so she could see the ways of life of the different people of the solar system.

All of this training is needed in her special post, in which she serves as Ishtar's main liaison with the rest of the solar system.

She is a true lady of Ishtar, gracious and polite to everyone. She also has a mind like a steel trap, and she is very cunning. She always has the best interests of Ishtar in mind when she makes any official policy decision.

Traits: Soft spoken and polite, gray hair, long delicate fingers.

Locations: New Elysium Government House, anywhere else in Ishtar.

Trademarks: Always wears snow-white robes; she carries a long blue staff made from Venusan Conifer.

Paris Dabaran

Director of Internal Security, Ishtar

10th-Level Rogue

Hit Points: 49

Armor Class: 4 (Smart Suit)

THACO: 16

Str 11, Dex 18, Con 14,

Int 14, Wis 13, Cha 16, Tech 13

Career Skills: Bypass Security 73, Fast Talk/Convince 116, Hide in Shadows 68, Move Silently 68, Notice 112, Open Locks 68, Pick Pockets 68

General Skills: Acrobatics 48, Pilot Rotorwing Craft 38, Demolitions 43, Jury Rig 33, Disguise 44, Act 36, Distract 36, Shadowing 27, Tracking 24

Paris holds a unique rank in the Ishtarian government. Officially she is an assistant to Mariana Almisan, but she is actually the Director of Internal Security. She is not an official member of the Ishtarian ruling council, but her opinions are highly valued by the Council members.

Mariana is really her superior, and Paris keeps her informed of all her department's activities. Mostly Mariana trusts Paris's judgment and lets her take care of her department without interfering. The Department of Internal Security is a catch-all branch of the Ishtarian government that takes care of all espionage activities, within and outside of Ishtar.

Paris began her career in the Ishtarian military, where her intelligence and bravery came to the attention of Al Marakesh. Marakesh arranged for Paris to meet Mariana, who was very impressed by her sharp wit.

Mariana hired Paris as a low-level agent with Internal Security. After eight years and many commendations, Paris had gained a formidable reputation (especially with RAM and Aphroditan agents). Mariana then made Paris the Director of Internal Security, when the old director retired.

Paris looks much younger than her 35 years, and she has learned to use her good looks to their maximum advantage.

Traits: Paris is very pretty, with a sultry voice. She moves very gracefully, thanks to her acrobatic training.

Locations: The Government House at New Elysium, Ishtar. She might also be encountered anywhere on Venus, depending on where her duties take her.

Trademarks: Paris prefers not to wear the robes favored by most Ishtarans. She prefers a comfortable pants suit that does not restrict her movement. She will always at least have one weapon secreted somewhere on her person.

Al Marakesh

Military Commander, Ishtar
10th-Level Warrior
Hit Points: 75
Armor Class: 4 (Smart Suit)
THACO: 11
Str 15, Dex 12, Con 18,
Int 14, Wis 17, Cha 15, Tech 13
Career Skills: Battle Tactics 114, Leadership 113,
Move Silently 62, Notice 116, Maneuver
in Zero G 37, Use Rocket Belt 37
General Skills: Pilot Rocket 82, Commo Operation 17, Sensor Operation 17, Astrogation 64, Memorize 34, Ship Lore 54

Al Marakesh comes from a long line of brave Ishtar warrior warriors. He is the first of his family to gain such a high rank, and he is secretly very proud of it.

Starting out as an ensign in the fleet, Marakesh rose slowly but steadily through the ranks. He gained the reputation of being a caring officer and a good leader. He also became known for his brilliant, and often bizarre, battle tactics, which have ruined many RAM and Aphroditan raids.

As the Military Commander of Ishtar, Marakesh is a member of the ruling Council. Unlike the others, who inherited their positions, Marakesh had to work for his title. This makes him more blunt and less diplomatic than the others, but the other Council members know enough to listen to him when it comes to military matters.

Traits: Long silver hair, beak-like nose, olive skin, and clipped black moustache.

Locations: Government House at New Elysium, Ishtar. The star carrier Pennant, or any other Ishtar military ship.

Trademarks: Deep voice, likes to describe military problems by using Ishtar religious quotes, simple uniform with a minimum of medals.

Onapsian Helicon

Patriarch of Helicon Family, Aphrodite
4th-Level Rogue
Hit Points: 30
Armor Class: 4 (Smart Suit)
THACO: 19
Str 14, Dex 13, Con 18,
Int 13, Wis 16, Cha 14, Tech 12
Career Skills: Fast Talk/Convince 105, Notice 100
General Skills: Economics 43, Botany 33, Geology 33, Leadership 25

A big man, Onapsian strikes an imposing figure. Because he was the black sheep of the family in his younger years, everyone was surprised when his father appointed him the leader of the family.

His father later told Onapsian that it was because of his wild early life that he appointed Onapsian. Onapsian's father felt that a new type of patriarch was needed, since the times were changing rapidly. The family needed someone that would be willing to take chances, and someone who would be able to hold his own against the growing power of the Ishtar Confederacy.

Thirty years later, Onapsian has turned his family into the wealthiest of the Aphroditan families. He has recently acquired two RAM security robots from an undisclosed source. The robots were purchased just after an assassination attempt on his life by unknown persons. The robots accompany him everywhere he goes.

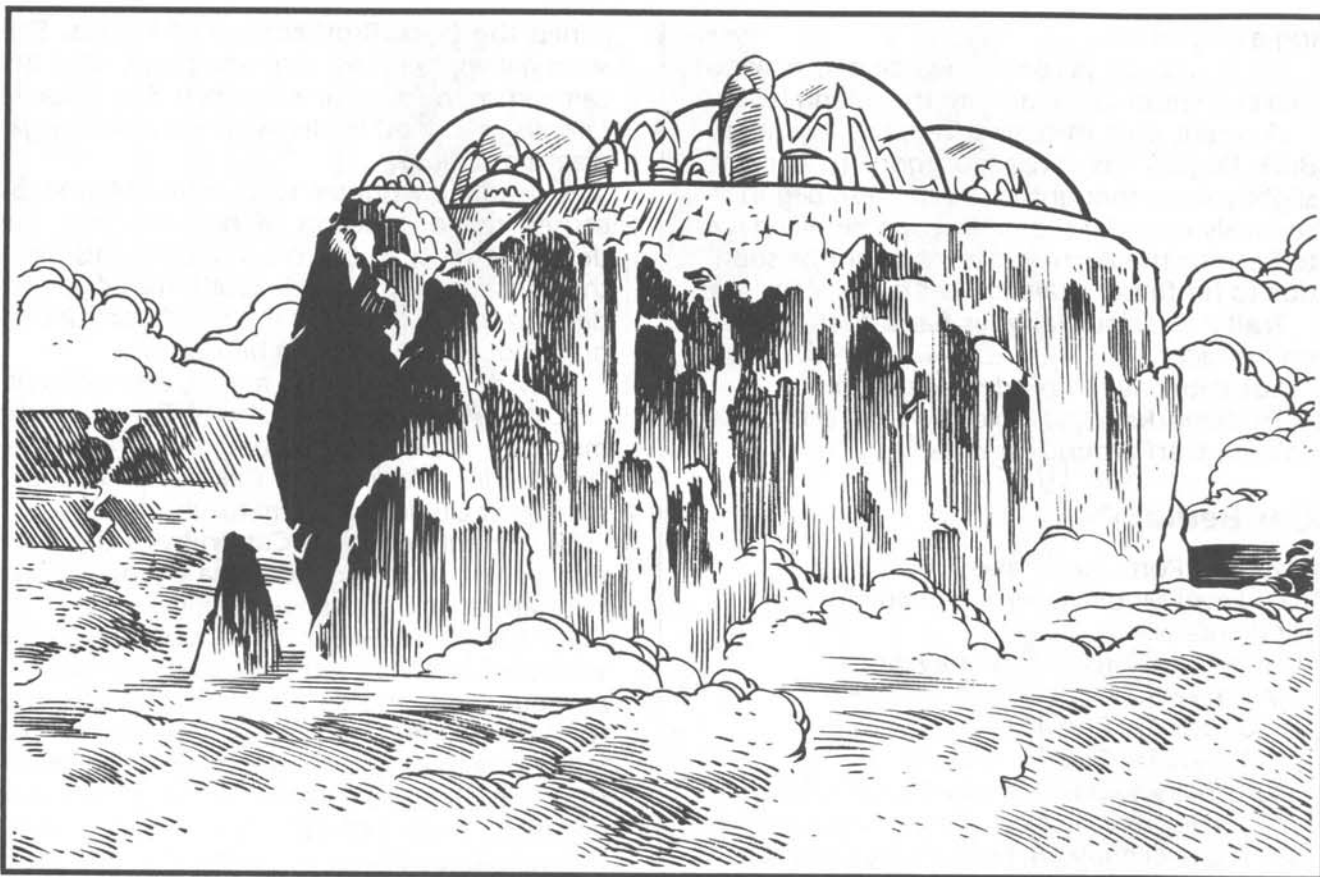
Traits: Tall and big boned, slightly paranoid.

Locations: Helicon family estates, Hestia.

Trademarks: Always accompanied by two security robots.

Llockn

Leader of the Lowlanders
4th/6th-Level Lowlander Warrior/Engineer
Hit Points: 94
Armor Class: 7 (Skin Armor)
THACO: 17
Str 20, Dex 15, Con 17,
Int 12, Wis 15, Cha 8, Tech 18
Career Skills: Battle Tactics 32, Leadership 68,
Move Silently 35, Notice 75, Jury Rig 58,
Repair Electrical 118, Repair Mechanical 118



General Skills: Hide in Shadows 35, Open Locks 38, Commo Operation 48, Sensor Operation 48, Botany 42, Act 58, Tracking 35

Llockn is the current leader of the Lowlanders of Venus. Many Lowlanders believe Llockn to be the brightest and most cunning leader that they have ever had. He has kept up the illusion of the Lowlander's supposed barbaric ways, while increasing their living standards.

He has cemented relations with RAM and with the Black Brotherhood representatives of Tellus Regio. He is even considering certain offers recently made by the Aphroditan families. He plays all of these factions off against each other, while gaining a profit for his people and maintaining their way of life.

Llockn knows he is playing a deadly balancing act on a razor's edge, but he remains cool and calm. Llockn does all the talking for his people when they are contacted by others.

Traits: He is larger than the average Lowlander.

Locations: Lowlanders' fake villages and their real quarters.

Trademarks: Necklace of blue crystals, and green ceremonial robes that mark him as tribal chief.

Gregory Phorn

Son of the Archein of Saint Brenden
6th-Level Rogue

Hit Points: 30

Armor Class: 4 (Smart Suit)

THACO: 18

Str 12, Dex 14, Con 10,

Int 15, Wis 13, Cha 17, Tech 12

Career Skills: Fast Talk/Convince 107, Notice 105, Move Silently 104

General Skills: Leadership 67, Pilot Fixed Wing Craft 34, Etiquette 37, Sing 47

Gregory Phorn is the son of the Archein of Saint Brenden, one of the Aerostater cities.

Gregory is a typical young Aerostater who thinks life is a simple game. Even though he is the son of the Archein, he still enjoys a number of tasks that he is not required to do, such as kraken herding. He enjoys the kraken herding mostly because he loves the freedom of pilot-

ing a sailplane.

He is also an accomplished singer, making him even more popular with the young ladies.

A recent dose of reality from the legendary Buck Rogers has caused Gregory to become slightly more thoughtful. He has also begun to seriously consider the time when he will have to become the Archein, which might be soon, due to his father's failing health.

Traits: Gracious, always has a friendly grin on his face.

Location: Saint Brenden Aerostate.

Trademarks: Bass voice, wears a brightly colored scarf around his neck.

Cat Bedlam

Mayor of Port Liberty and Tellus Regio

10th-Level Modified Terrine Rogue

Hit Points: 72

Armor Class: 2 (Heavy Battle Armor)

THACO: 16

Str 20, Dex 18, Con 18,

Int 14, Wis 16, Cha 15, Tech 12

Career Skills: Bypass Security 62, Climb 68, Fast Talk/Convince 125, Hide in Shadows 68, Move Silently 68, Notice 126, Open Locks 66

General Skills: Economics 44, Law 34, Library Search 64, Memorize 64, Act 35, Leadership 45

Cat Bedlam is one of the 14 surviving members of the modified line of Terrines known as the Barney series. Like most of the Barney genies that escaped the Draconis Combine, she

joined the Black Brotherhood of Pirates. She soon gained her own ship and crew, who became known for their efficiency. She became famous as a good leader with incredible organization abilities.

A deadly encounter with some RAM ships caused the destruction of her ship and the deaths of most of her crew. About this time, the captains of the Black Brotherhood jointly decided that the current mayor of Port Liberty on Venus was slacking in his duties.

They got rid of the old mayor, and appointed Cat the new mayor of Liberty. The surviving members of her crew accompanied her as assistants. In a few years, Cat has turned the small port city into a boom town.

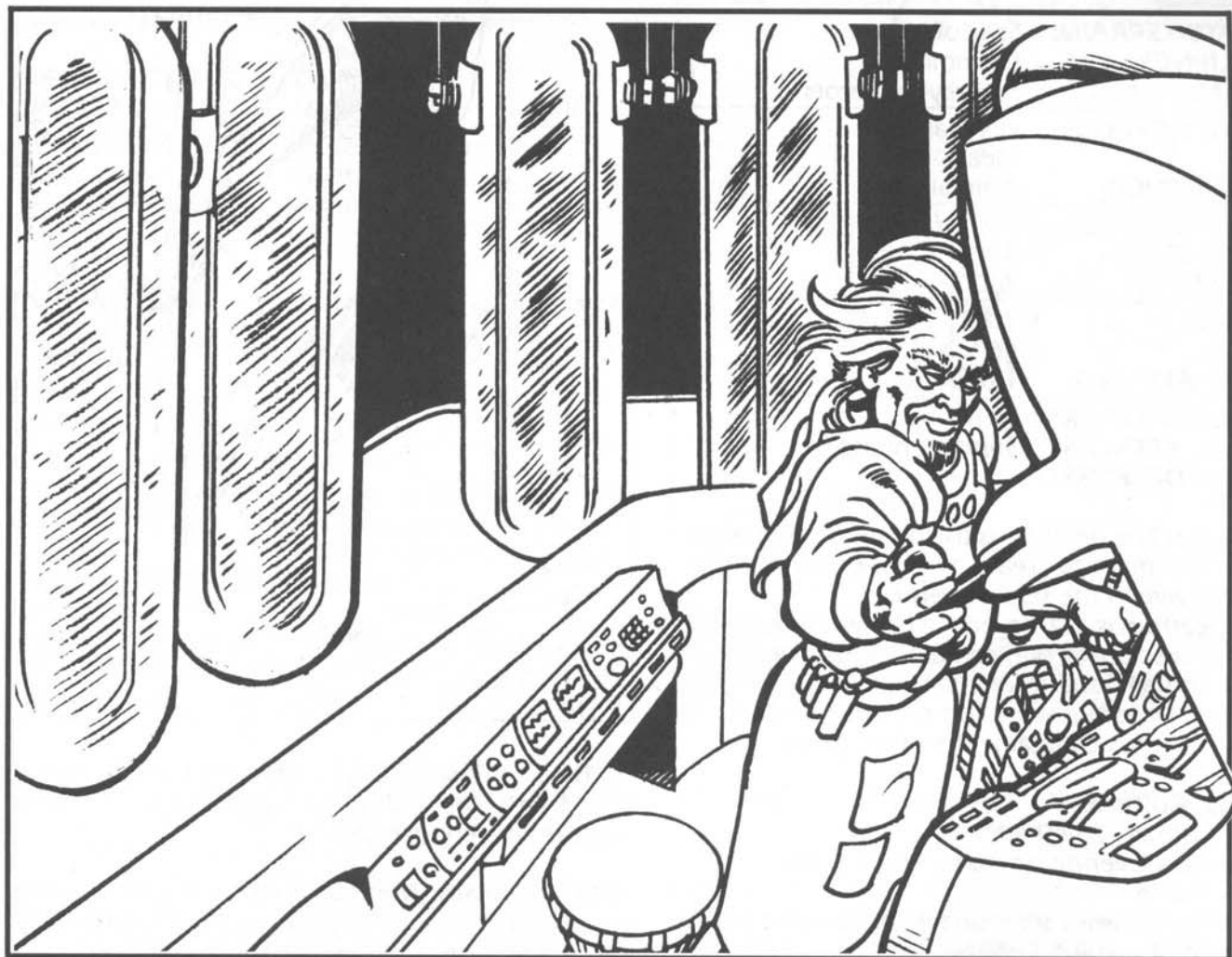
Surprisingly enough, Cat enjoyed the new assignment since it gave her a chance to use her natural administrative abilities.

She has increased the amount of secret trade with the Lowlanders, trading them technological equipment and supplies for doses of gravitol and lifextend. At the same time she has made sure to keep the city itself in good condition. She even has a trained security force that keeps the rogues of the city in line. She tolerates no overt criminal acts in her city, and she is completely unbribable in this matter.

Traits: A large woman, Cat moves with the grace of her namesake. She is a quiet, friendly woman with an even temper.

Locations: Port Liberty on Tellus Regio.

Traits: Cat always wears a tight-fitting suit of heavy battle armor, black in color. She always has a short-range communications headset on, and a compdex strapped to her belt.



CHAPTER 8: VENUSIAN CREATURES

This chapter describes various animals players might encounter on Venus. None are indigenous: all came from the stainless steel and silicon labs of genetic engineers, like the one pictured above.

Though the following creatures represent the best that 25th-Century bioengineers have to offer, referees should not feel restricted to these species. Some referees will want to simply modify a few of these creatures' stats, while others will don lab coats to create species of their own.

Referees so inclined can find sound advice for developing new species in *The World Book* (see the BUCK ROGERS® XXVc™ game boxed set) on pages 44 to 51.

When applying these guidelines, referees should make sure new creatures are especially suited to life on Venus—a chancy proposition

at best. Species should be molded so that their genotype, appearance, culture, combat ability, strengths, weaknesses, habitat, and position in Venus' fragile (and hostile) ecology complement the creatures that already exist.

Finally, because Venus already has sapient creatures on all levels—from the harsh and acidic Lowlands, through the plateaus, to the nomadic Aerostates—referees should be very cautious about introducing sapient (let alone clairvoyant) life forms on Venus. Incautious introduction of such creatures is tantamount to committing ecocide.

Deathfin



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Seas of Venus
FREQUENCY:	Uncommon
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary predators
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Constant
DIET:	Meat
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
NO. APPEARING:	1-2
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	700
HIT DICE:	10d8
THACO:	16
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1 bite
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	4d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Sonic stunning
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	None

Genotype: The deathfin is the disappointing result of an experiment to create a large, edible fish that could survive in the seas of Venus.

The deathfin is a large, edible fish with a bad attitude. It resulted from combining the genes of sharks and various Terran sea mammals, like the porpoise. Unfortunately, the predatory nature of the shark genes overcame the other genes.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: 25-40 feet

External Covering: Smooth, rubbery skin

Eyes: None

Ears: Membranes set inside its mouth and along the side of its skull

Mouth: Huge, with many rows of sharp teeth

Nose: Two narrow slits on the snout

Cultural: These huge predators have no real culture. They are solitary creatures that attack each other on sight. The only other time two are found together is during mating season.

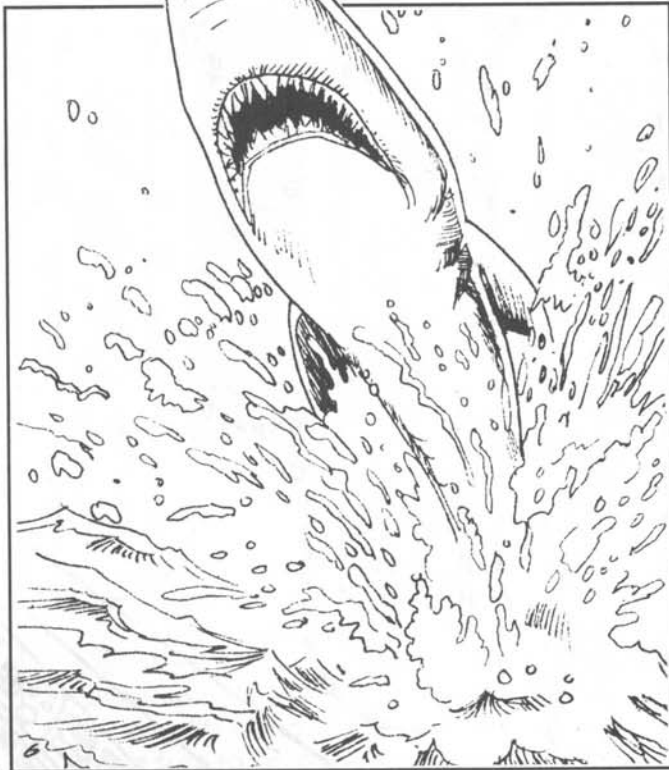
Advantages/Disadvantages: The creatures have no eyes because of the high acid content of the sea. Instead, they have been given the ability to "see" using a natural form of sonar.

They can even use their sonar screams to protect them. They can pitch their sonar beams so that they act as a sonic stunner weapon, affecting everyone within a radius of 20 feet.

They are extremely resistant to heat, acid and poison (saving throws of 8).

They are mammals, so they cannot breathe underwater. They must surface every 15 minutes to get another breath of fresh air.

Combat: These predators are known for their fearsome bite, which can tear through metal and plas-



tic. Their sonic stunning abilities (see page 21 of the boxed set's *The Technology Book* for effects) also make them very dangerous.

Habitat/Terrain: These animals are found hunting in the seas of Venus. They are usually found in shallow water, or just below the surface of deeper areas. They are also encountered on the surface, basking in the sun.

Ecology: Deathfins are the most dangerous predators in the Venusian seas. They are still hunted by humans because their flesh is considered a delicacy around the solar system. Their ivory teeth are also sold as collectors' items.

Kraken



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Upper atmosphere of Venus
FREQUENCY:	Common
ORGANIZATION:	Herd
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	15 Terran hours
DIET:	Floating algae
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
NO. APPEARING:	10-100
ARMOR CLASS:	7
MOVEMENT:	Independent 10, otherwise speed of air currents
HIT DICE:	6d8
THACO:	18
NO. OF ATTACKS:	6 + special
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Squeeze with two tentacles automatically for 1d20 per round
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Blinding gas

Genotype: The kraken was developed to fill a special niche in the bioengineered ecosystem of Venus. First of all, it was created to serve as a source of fresh meat for the colonists, especially the Aerostaters. It was also created to eat the floating algae that is helping terraform the planet; this prevents the rapidly multiplying algae from becoming so thick that it poses a hazard to air travel.

The creature was created using the genes of certain Terran aquatic animals—squids and octopi.

A few twists in the DNA make it possible for a kraken to separate large amounts of helium and hydrogen from the air. It then deposits these gases in small sacs located on its underside, enabling it to float. It can even jet these gases out in special vents in its tentacles to somewhat control its floating movement. The kraken resembles a large Terran octopus, but it has only six tentacles.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: 20 feet in length, from tip of head to tip of tentacle, each tentacle is 10 feet long

External Covering: Smooth, rubbery skin

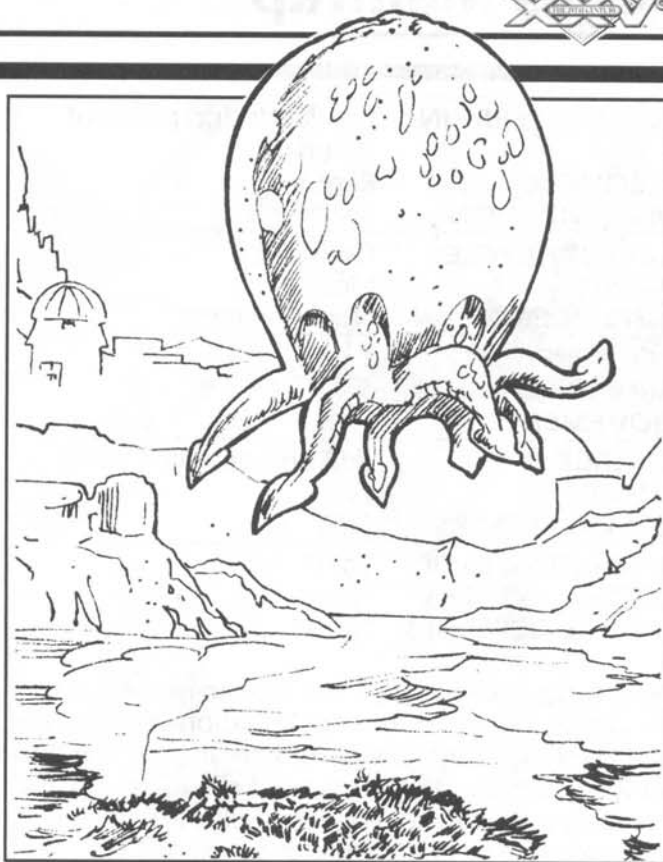
Eyes: The midsection of its body has a row of small eyes that go all the way around its body, giving it 360° vision

Ears: None

Mouth: Wide-open mouth on its underside, it has no teeth since all it eats is algae

Nose: Two nostril slits at the upper tip of its body

Cultural: The kraken really has no organized structure within the herd. It simply floats along in large groups, most of the time paying little attention to other kraken, except during mating season.



Advantages/Disadvantages: None besides those mentioned in the rest of the text.

Combat: A kraken enters into combat only if it is badly hurt or if its young are threatened. It strikes out with its tentacles, slapping at the attacker. Every two tentacles that hit automatically wrap around the opponent and begin squeezing him automatically every round. If a kraken is badly hurt, it releases a blinding cloud of yellowish gas from its mouth. The gas cloud lasts for six rounds.

Habitat/Terrain: The kraken can be found only in the upper atmosphere of Venus, just below the upper cloud level.

Ecology: As mentioned earlier, the kraken is a source of fresh meat. It also serves to ensure that the floating algae population does not get out of hand.

Venus Mantrap



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Lowlands and plains of Venus
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Constant
DIET:	Meat
INTELLIGENCE:	Non-intelligent
NO. APPEARING:	1
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	0
HIT DICE:	3d8 flower, 4d8 mouths
THACO:	18
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1d8
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d10
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	None
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	None

Genotype: Like most of the bioengineered plants on Venus, this plant is a combination of plant life and crystals. Originally it was created as a guard for the colonists. The plants were going to be planted at the edge of the colonists' fields and town, to kill small vermin and dangerous animals.

When it was finally decided that humans were not going to live on the Lowlands, the experiment was dropped. Unfortunately, before the prototypes were destroyed they were able to pollinate. The lethal plants are now sometimes encountered on the Plains and Lowlands.

The central part of the plant is a huge, crystalline flower that is very beautiful. Underneath the ground, within 10 feet of the central flower, grow the roots, which are connected to mouthlike appendages that surround the flower on the surface. When the mouths are closed, they appear to be the surface of the ground. As soon as someone steps on one, it opens up, revealing sharp teeth that begin chomping.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: Flower five feet high, the mouths are about 10 feet in diameter

External Covering: Crystalline

Eyes: None

Ears: None

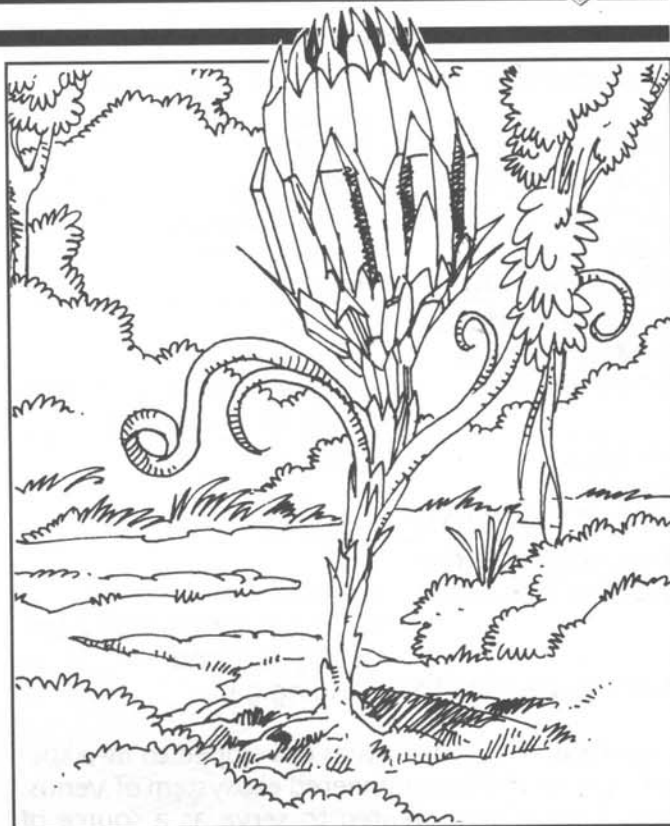
Mouth: Large with rows of sharp teeth

Nose: None

Cultural: The Venus mantraps are solitary plants with no real minds.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Like most creatures of Venus, they are extremely resistant to heat, acid, and poisons (saving throws of 8).

Because of their crystalline structure, they are im-



mune to lasers, but sonic stunners do hurt them, causing 1d10 points of damage with each successful hit.

Combat: They can attack only by surprise when someone accidentally steps into one of their mouths.

Habitat/Terrain: These creatures are found only on the Plains and Lowlands of Venus.

Ecology: The Venus mantrap serves as an unwanted predator on Venus. After death it serves no purpose, except for the blooms of the crystalline flower, which are sometimes sold to collectors. Unfortunately, these blooms have a tendency to grow new mouths.

Venusian Dinosaur



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Lowlands of Venus
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary hunters or mated pairs
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Nocturnal
DIET:	Any
INTELLIGENCE:	Animal
NO. APPEARING:	1-2
ARMOR CLASS:	5
MOVEMENT:	50
HIT DICE:	10d10
THACO:	11
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2 (bite and tail swipe, or trample and tail swipe)
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	4d10 bite, 1d12 tail swipe, 7d10 trample
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	None
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	None

Genotype: The Venusian dinosaur was created at the whim of a wealthy Venusian. He hired a rogue bioengineer to create some sort of dinosaurlike creature that he could hunt for big game. Using lizard genes, the bioengineer created a male and female pair and let them loose in the Venusian Lowlands. During a hunt, the mated pair killed the rich Venusian and the bioengineer that had created them.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: 40 feet (head to tail tip), 15 feet tall

External Covering: Hard scales

Eyes: Set close together on the head

Ears: Small and cuplike, on the side of the skull

Mouth: Huge jaw with rows of sharp teeth

Nose: Two nostril slits placed between the eyes

Cultural: These huge beasts are rarely encountered on Venus. Sometimes a mated pair is encountered with a small baby. They have very small brains and thus have no culture.

Advantages/Disadvantages: These huge beasts are killing machines, with incredibly tough natural armor. Their brains are so small that their reaction time is very slow. This means that they always go last in a combat round.

They are highly resistant to acids, poisons, and heat because of their natural environments (saving throws of 8 vs. those forms of attack).

Combat: In combat the creatures usually bite with their huge mouths of sharp teeth. If they are attacked from behind, during the next combat round they sweep their tails around, trying to hit their tor-



mentors. Their tail attack has a -4 penalty to the attack roll since they are not really aiming the attack.

If angered, panicked, or badly hurt, they stampede and crush everything in front of them. People in the path must roll successful Dexterity checks to avoid being trampled by the beasts.

Habitat/Terrain: The Venusian dinosaur is found only in the swampy Lowlands of Venus.

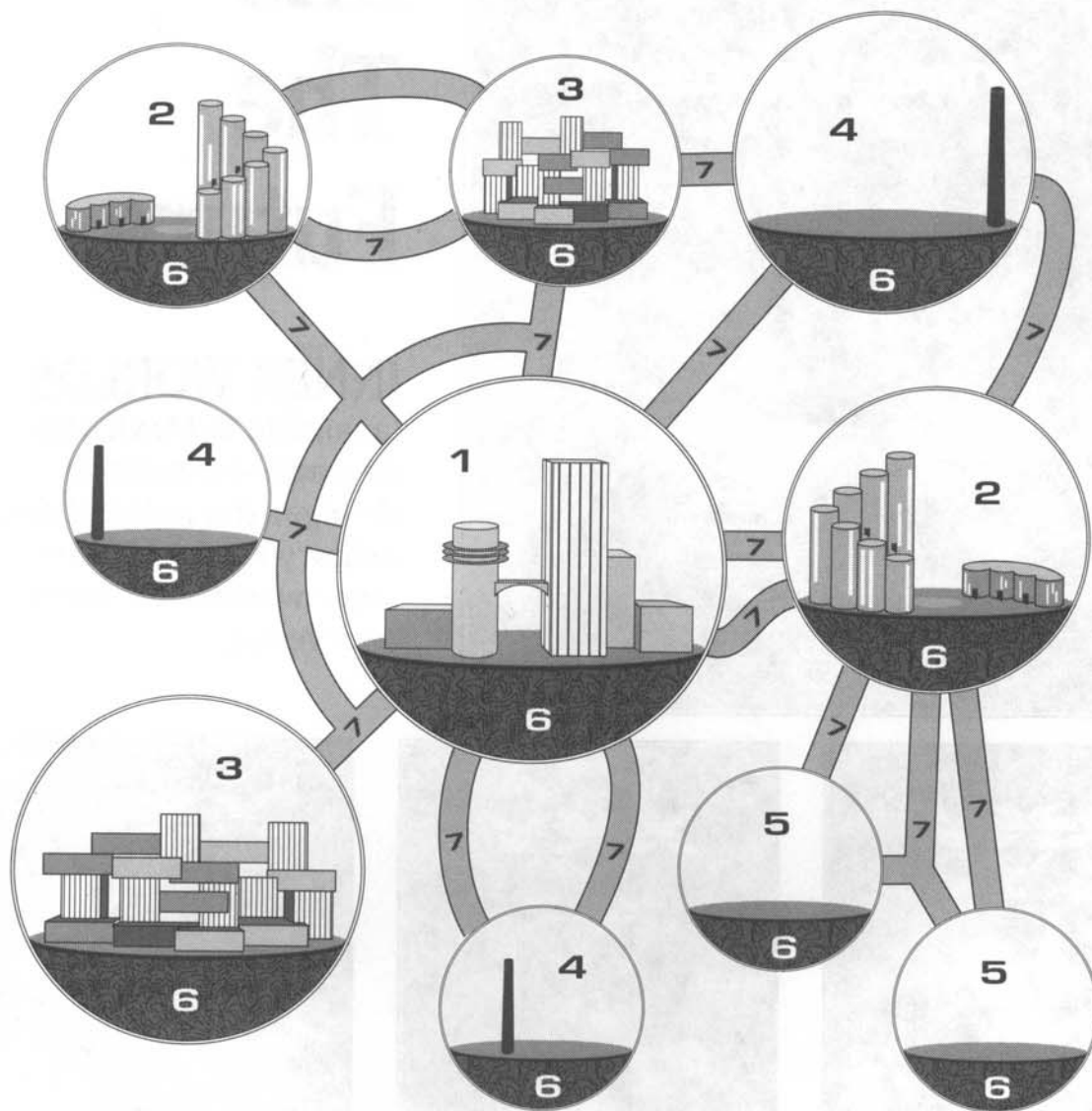
Ecology: The Venusian dinosaur is a menace to anyone visiting or living in the Venusian Lowlands. The Lowlanders are extremely wary of the beasts, which have devastated a number of Lowland villages. It seems the creatures find the Lowlander's flesh very delectable.

The meat of the beast is highly prized by the Lowlanders, who immediately send out huge hunting parties if one is sighted nearby. The Lowlanders sometimes sell the meat to the Ishtarrians, who hawk it across the solar system as a culinary delicacy.

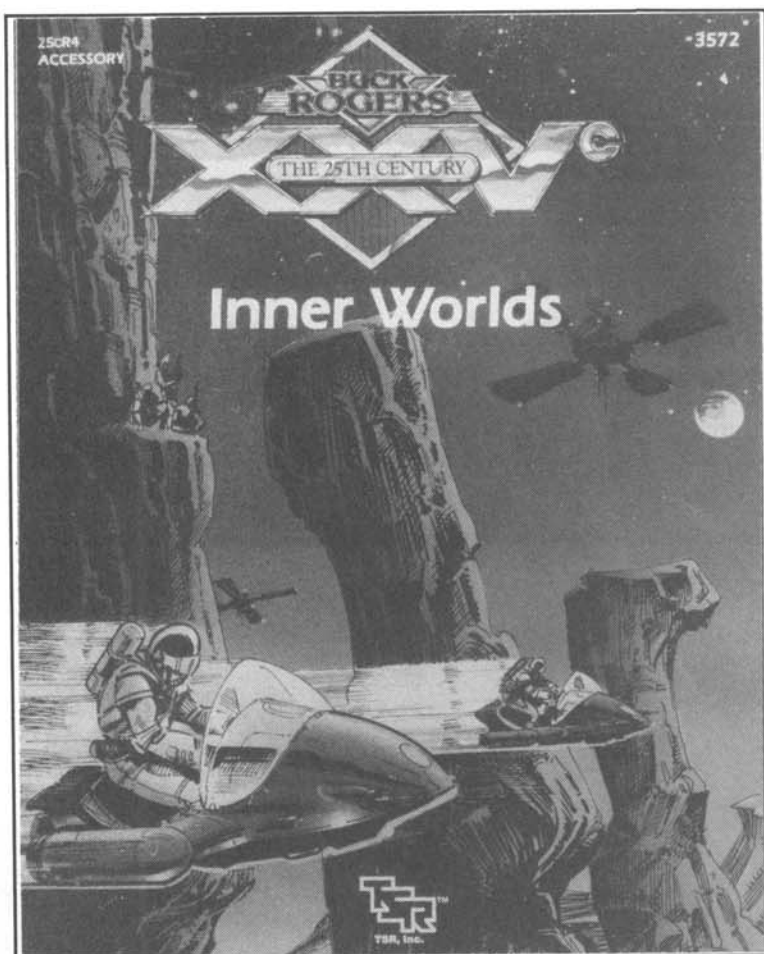
The scales of the beast are sometimes sold to the Ishtarrians, who resell them as collectors' items. The bones of the beast are often sharpened and used as primitive weapons by the Lowlanders.



Saint Brenden Aerostate



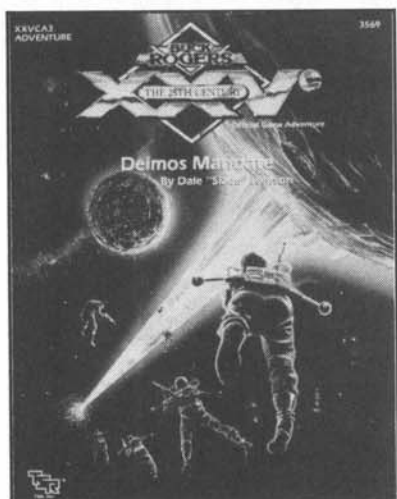
- 1 - Central Bubble:** Archein's Residence, Government Administrative Buildings, Convocenters and other Community Activity Buildings.
- 2 - Business Bubbles:** Business Offices and Retail Stores.
- 3 - Living Quarters:** Homes, Apartments, Parks, Stadiums, Night Clubs, Museums, Galleries.
- 4 - Landing Pads** for Hovercrafts and Small Rockets.
- 5 - Kraken Slaughtering Platforms.**
- 6 - Flotation Gas Compartments.**
- 7 - Access Tubes.**



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INNER WORLDS

(available in May): This 64-page sourcebook divulges the political and military secrets of the inner worlds—Mercury and Venus.



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SARGASSO OF SPACE
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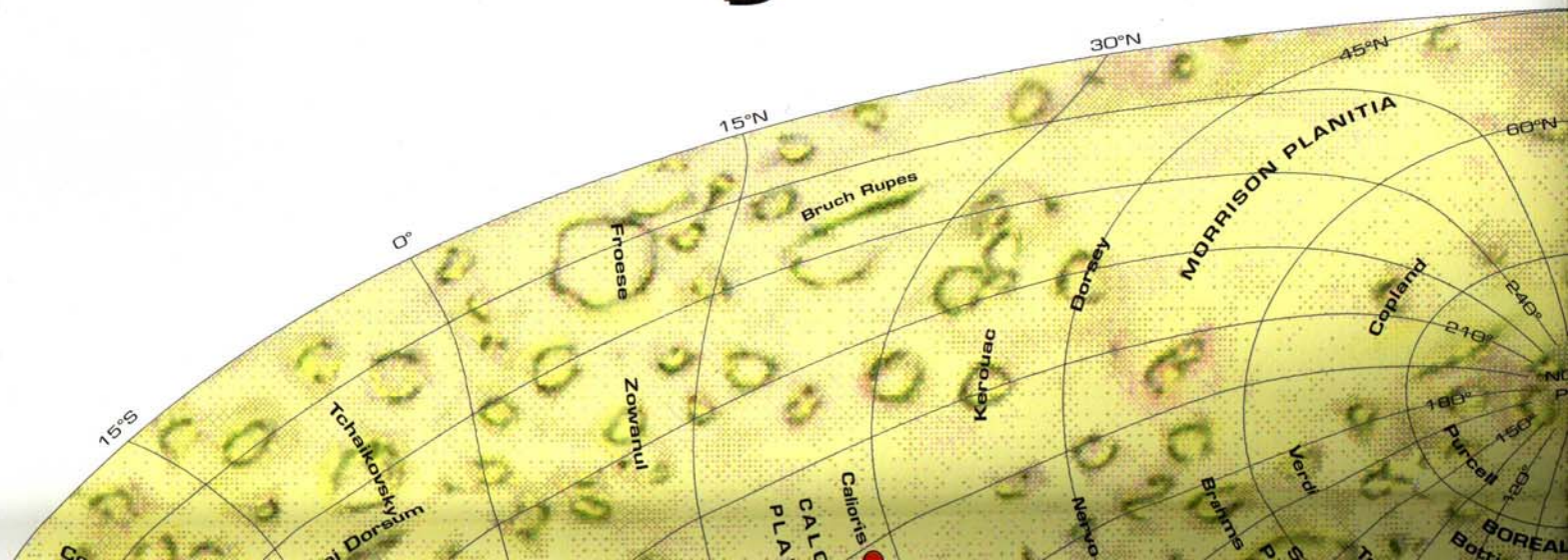
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Mercury



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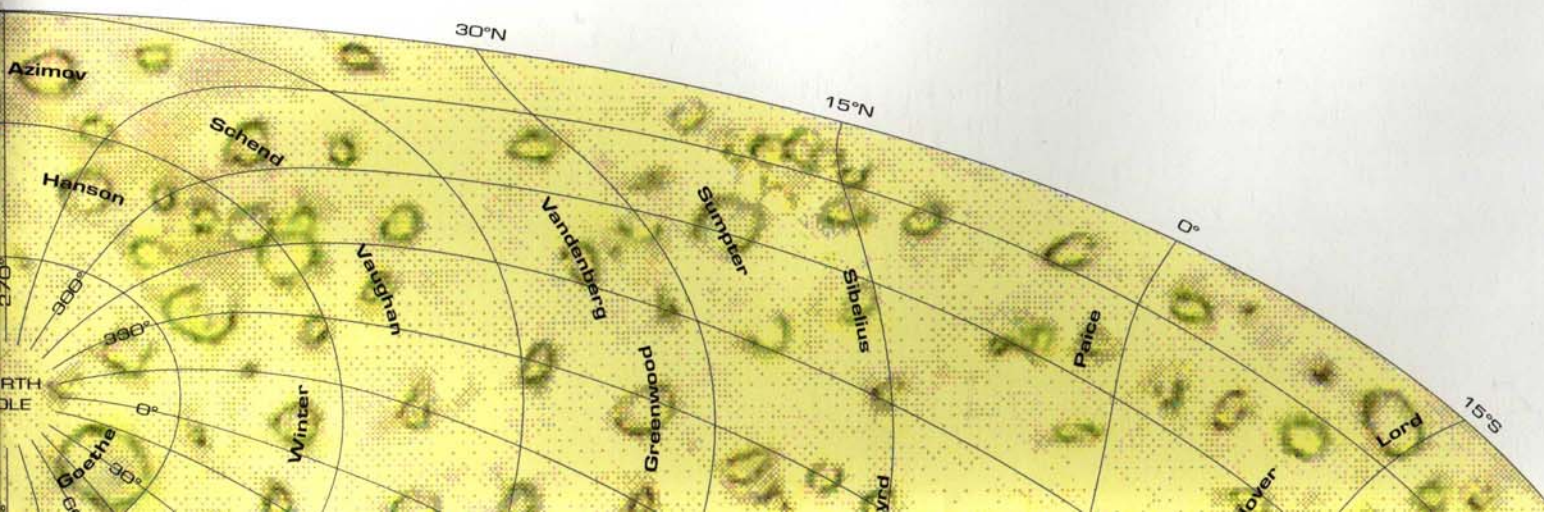
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Role-Playing Game



Hielo Orbital Station



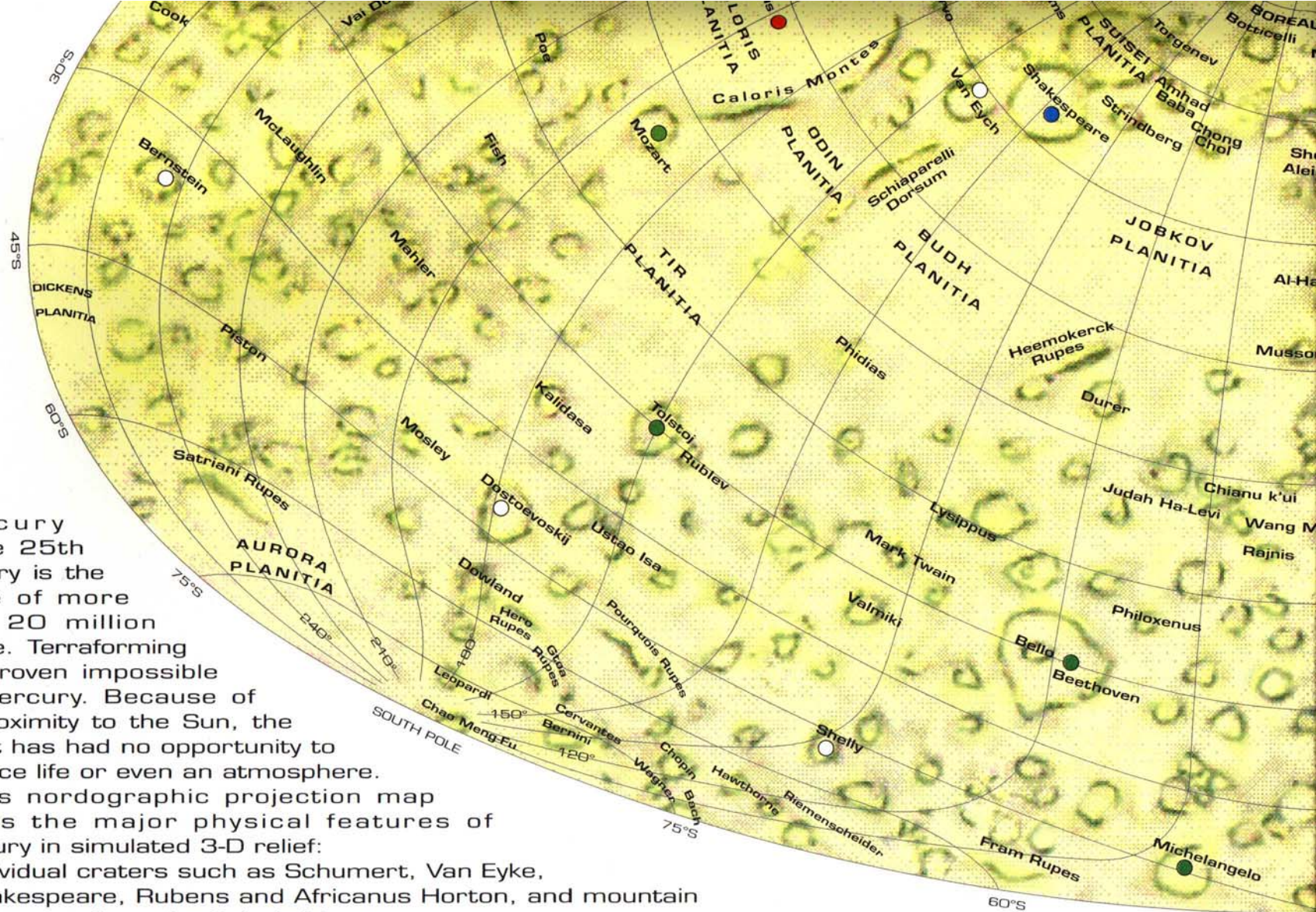
Mercury in the 25th Century is the home of more than 20 million people. Terraforming has proven impossible on Mercury. Because of its proximity to the Sun, the planet has had no opportunity to produce life or even an atmosphere.

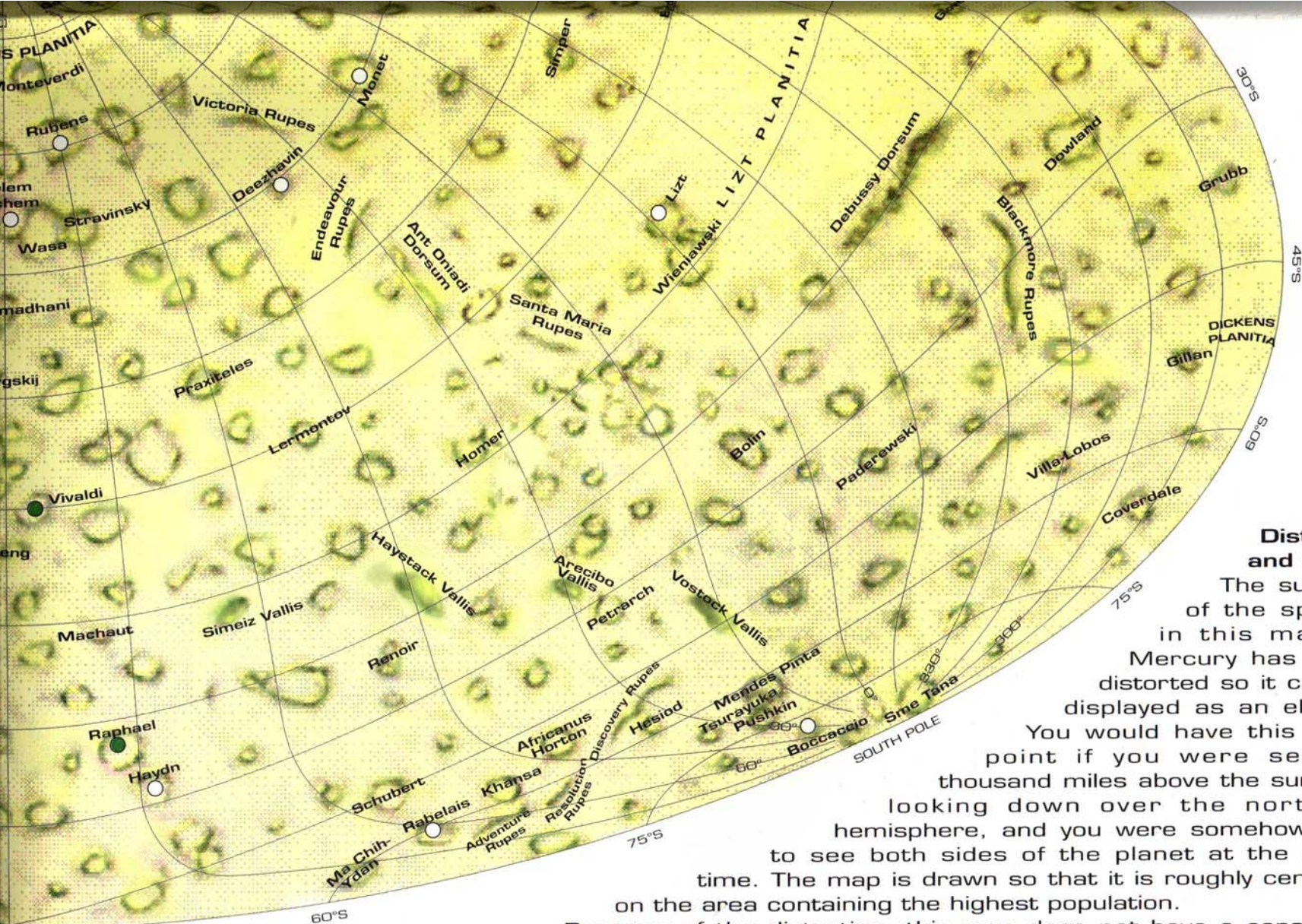
This nordographic projection map shows the major physical features of Mercury in simulated 3-D relief:

- Individual craters such as Schumert, Van Eyke, Shakespeare, Rubens and Africanus Horton, and mountain ranges such as the Caloris Montes.
- Chasms such as the Arecibo, Discovery, Goldstone and Haystack Vallis.
- Flat plains, also known as Planitias, of which Odin, Budh, Caloris and Tir are examples.

Major underground and above-ground cities are shown as dots, using the same color coding as the smaller planet maps included with the XXVc™ game boxed set. **Red** depicts Class A spaceports (Caloris and Hielo Orbital Station are the only ones); Class B spaceports are in **green**; class C ports in **blue**; and all other locations in **white**.

The names of many physical features are given in Latin (their original form), while some are in English. In fact, both forms are used interchangeably. It is proper to say either "Antoniadi Dorsum" or "The Ridge of





Distance and Scale

The surface of the sphere in this map of Mercury has been distorted so it can be displayed as an ellipse. You would have this viewpoint if you were several thousand miles above the surface, looking down over the northern hemisphere, and you were somehow able to see both sides of the planet at the same time. The map is drawn so that it is roughly centered on the area containing the highest population.

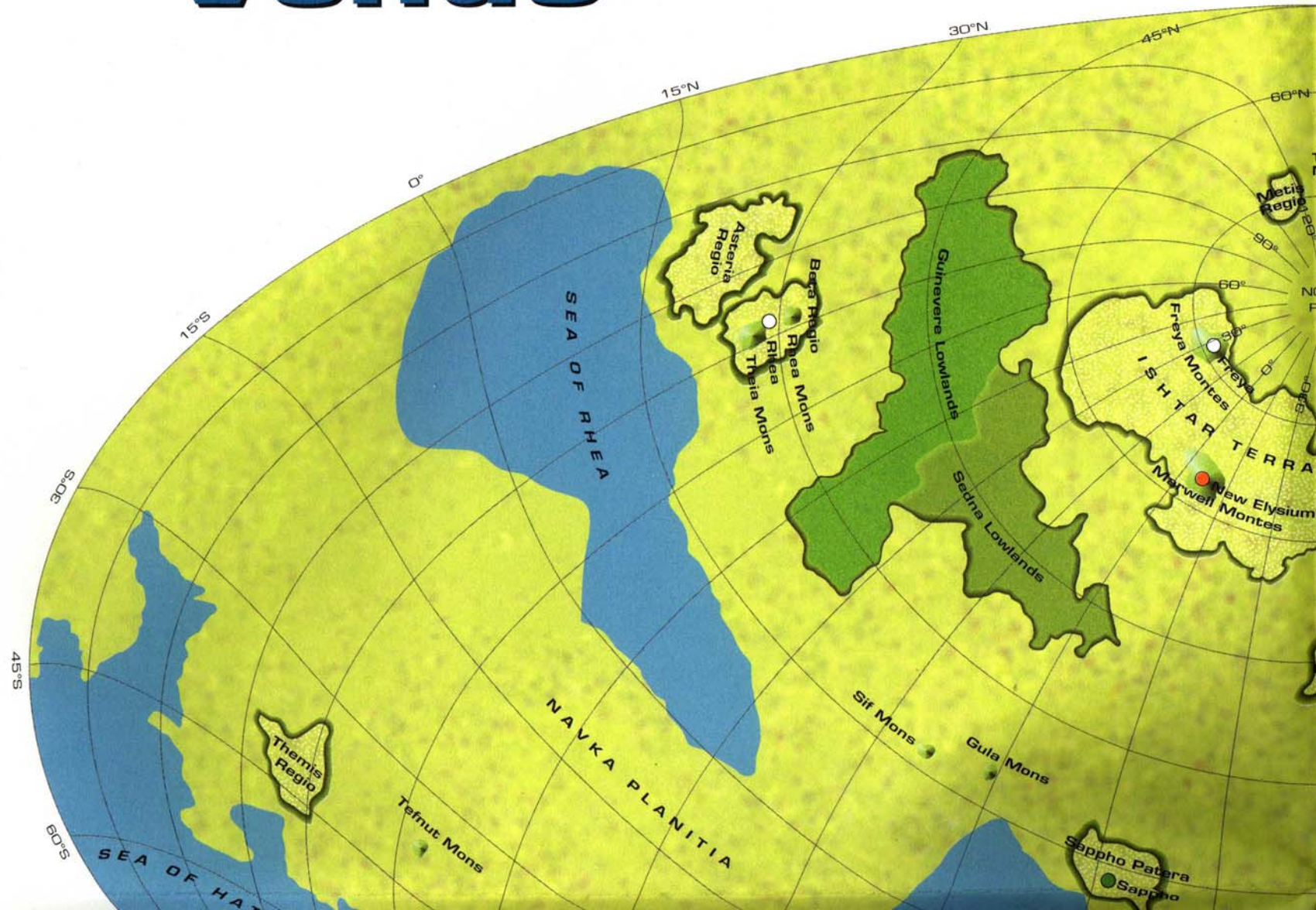
Because of the distortion, this map does not have a consistent scale for measuring distances. However, it is possible to calculate (or at least estimate) the distance between two points by using the latitude and longitude lines for reference.

For north-south travel, the distance between two adjacent latitude lines is 400 miles. For example if you were to travel from the equator (0° latitude) to the 15° north latitude line, that is a distance of 400 miles. It is also 400 miles from the south pole to any spot on the 75° south latitude line.

East-west measurements using the latitude and longitude lines are not always the same, but they are not difficult to calculate. Along the equator, the distance between two adjacent longitude lines is 400 miles. For every 15° north or south of the equator, the distance between each pair of longitude lines decreases by one-sixth of 400 miles. Doing the arithmetic (and rounding off the results a bit) produces the following

know what you are talking about.

Venus



figures.

N-S Location

0°
15°
30°

Distance between Longitude Lines

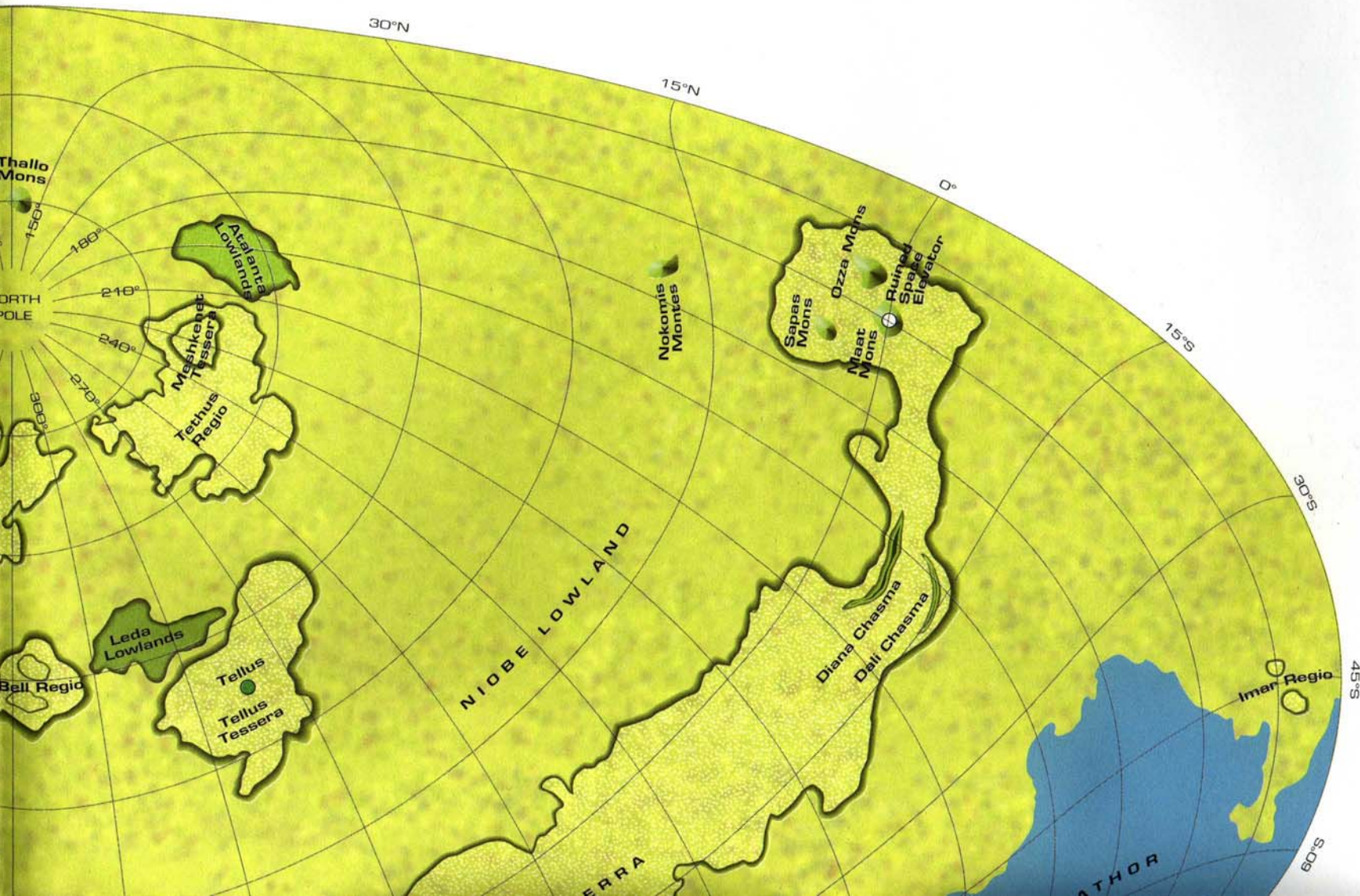
400 miles
333 miles
266 miles

N-S Location

45°
60°
75°

Distance Between Longitude Lines

200 miles
133 miles
66 miles



Venus in the 25th Century is home to more than 90 million people. Years of terraforming make small portions of the planet hospitable to non-genetically altered humans. The natural high pressure and acidic quality of the atmosphere choke the rest of Venus.

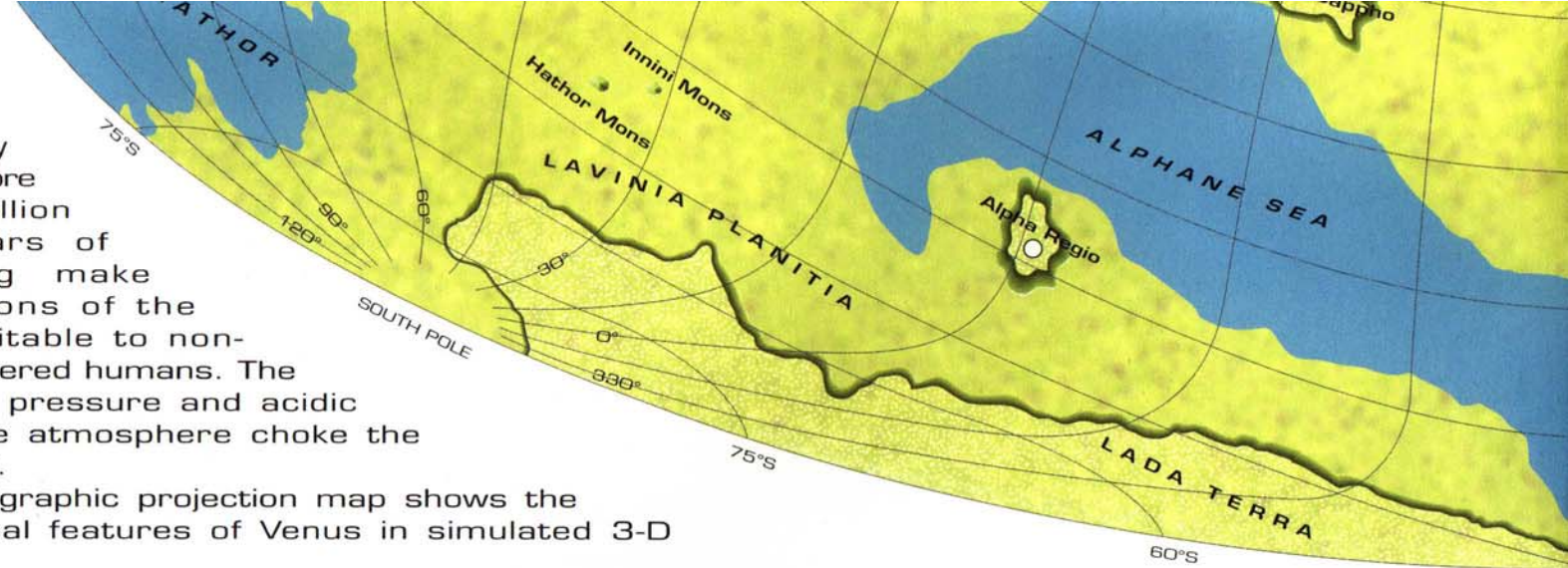
This nordographic projection map shows the major physical features of Venus in simulated 3-D relief:

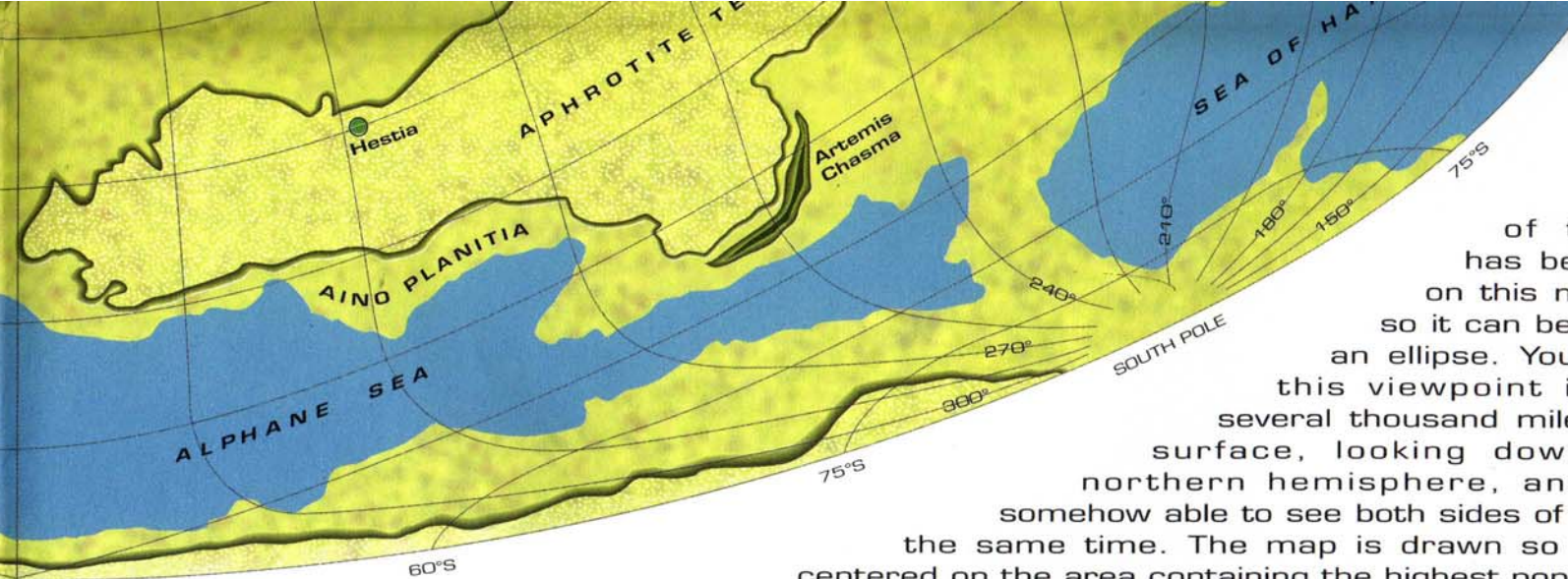
- Individual mountains such as Theia, Rhea and Maat, and mountain ranges such as Beta Regio and Maxwell Montes.
- Great Canyons such as the Artemis, Diana and Dali Chasmas.
- Flat plains, known as Lowlands, of which Niobe, Guinevere and Senda are prime examples.

Besides these features, the map depicts the effects of man's colonization of the planet: areas such as the Sea of Rhea, Alphane Sea, the Sea of Hathor, and the destroyed remains of the space elevator at Maat Mons, which have only come into existence in the last few hundred years.

The dots show the locations of major cities, using the same color coding as the smaller map of Venus included with the XXVc™ game boxed set. **Red** signifies Class A spaceports (New Elysium is the only one); Class B spaceports in **green**; Class C ports in **blue**; and all other locations in **white**.

The names of many physical features are given in Latin (their original form), while some are in English. In fact, both forms are used interchangeably. It is proper to say either "Plains of Navka" or "Navka Planitia," either "Maat Mons" or "Mount Maat." In both cases, a native of Venus will know what you are talking about.





Distance and Scale

The surface of the sphere has been distorted on this map of Venus so it can be displayed as an ellipse. You would have this viewpoint if you were several thousand miles above the surface, looking down over the northern hemisphere, and you were somehow able to see both sides of the planet at the same time. The map is drawn so it is roughly centered on the area containing the highest population.

Because of the distortion, this map does not have a consistent scale for measuring distances. It is possible, however, to calculate (or at least estimate) the distance between two points using the latitude and longitude lines for reference.

For north-south travel, the distance between two adjacent latitude lines is 987 miles. For example if you were to travel from the equator (0° latitude) to the 15° north latitude line, that is a distance of 987 miles. It is also 987 miles from the south pole to any spot on the 75° south latitude line.

East-west measurements using the latitude and longitude lines are not always the same, but they are not difficult to calculate. The distance between two adjacent longitude lines at the equator is 987 miles. For every 15° north or south of the equator, the distance between each pair of longitude lines decreases by one-sixth of 987 miles. Doing the arithmetic (and rounding off the results a bit) produces the following figures:

N-S Location	Distance between Longitude Lines	N-S Location	Distance Between Longitude Lines
0°	987 miles	45°	493 miles
15°	822 miles	60°	329 miles
30°	658 miles	75°	164 miles



TM

Inner Worlds

by William Tracy

Mercury and Venus: The two innermost planets in the solar system. Their names evoke a romanticism of an earlier era, of the speed and beauty of gods. However, in reality there is little to romanticize about.

Mercury: Perhaps the place-names based on musicians, writers, artists, and intellectuals were chosen to reflect the culture which has grown to prominence on this sun-ravaged planet. The rift between the decadence of the Sun Kings (especially the Gavi-lans) and the Spartanism of the Miners is great and widening daily.

Venus: The loveliness evoked by the place-names found on Venus stands in stark contrast to the harshness of reality. A world

like Earth in type only, the planet is enveloped in a highly acidic atmosphere. Bizarre mineral-plant jungles cover the lowlands. Civilization is found only on the high mesas of Ishtar and Aphrodite.

In *Inner Worlds*, you will find information on all this and more. Details about the economies of both worlds, their peoples, their relationships with RAM and NEO and the delicate balances of power caused by those relationships are all within these pages. Background on the physical geography and native races is also here. In addition, you will find a full-color map of both planets, providing excellent reference for all pertinent planetary information.



Official Game Accessory

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120 Church End, Cherry Hinton
Cambridge CB1 3LB
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ISBN 1-56076-089-3



\$9.95 U.S.
£6.50 UK

3572XXX1401