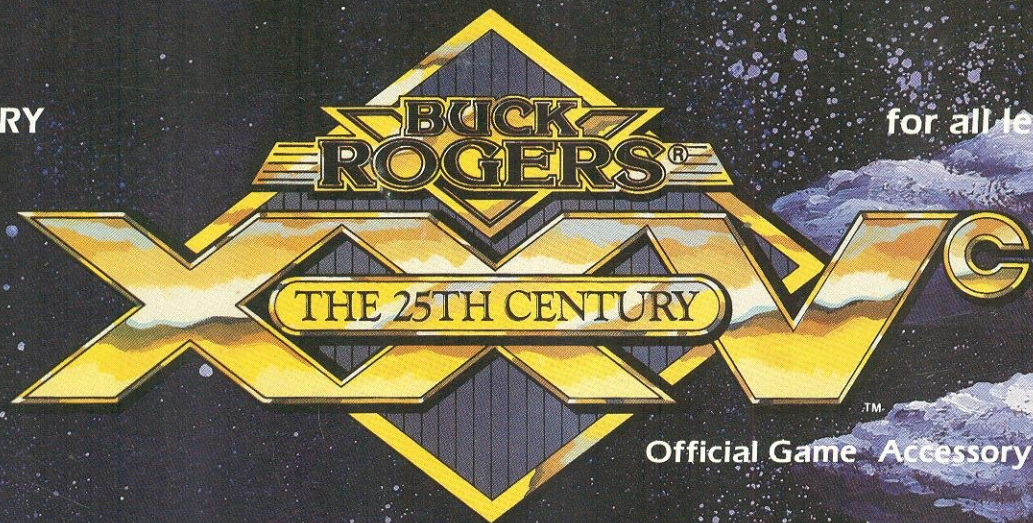


XXVCR5
ACCESSORY

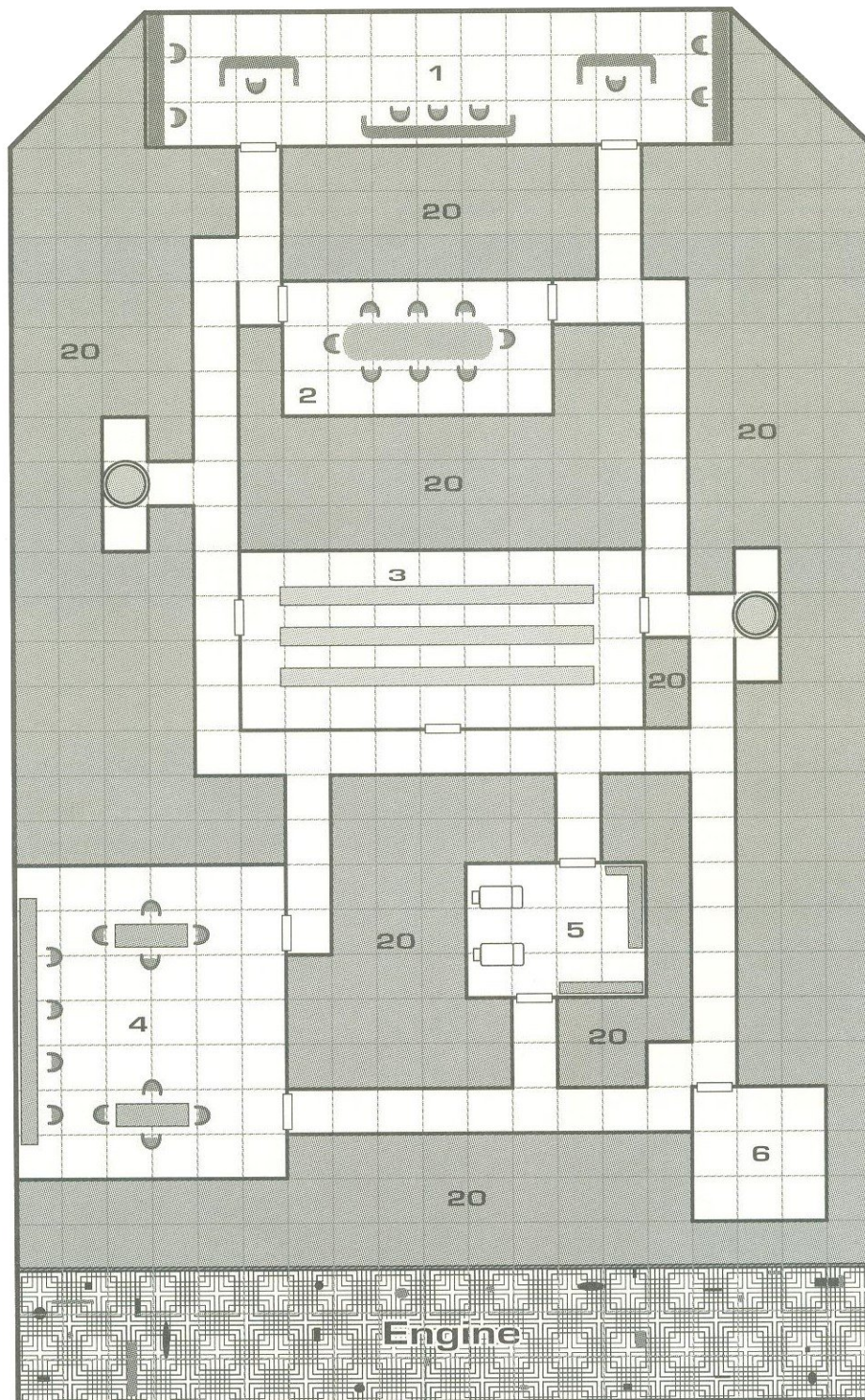
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The Belt



TYPICAL BOT

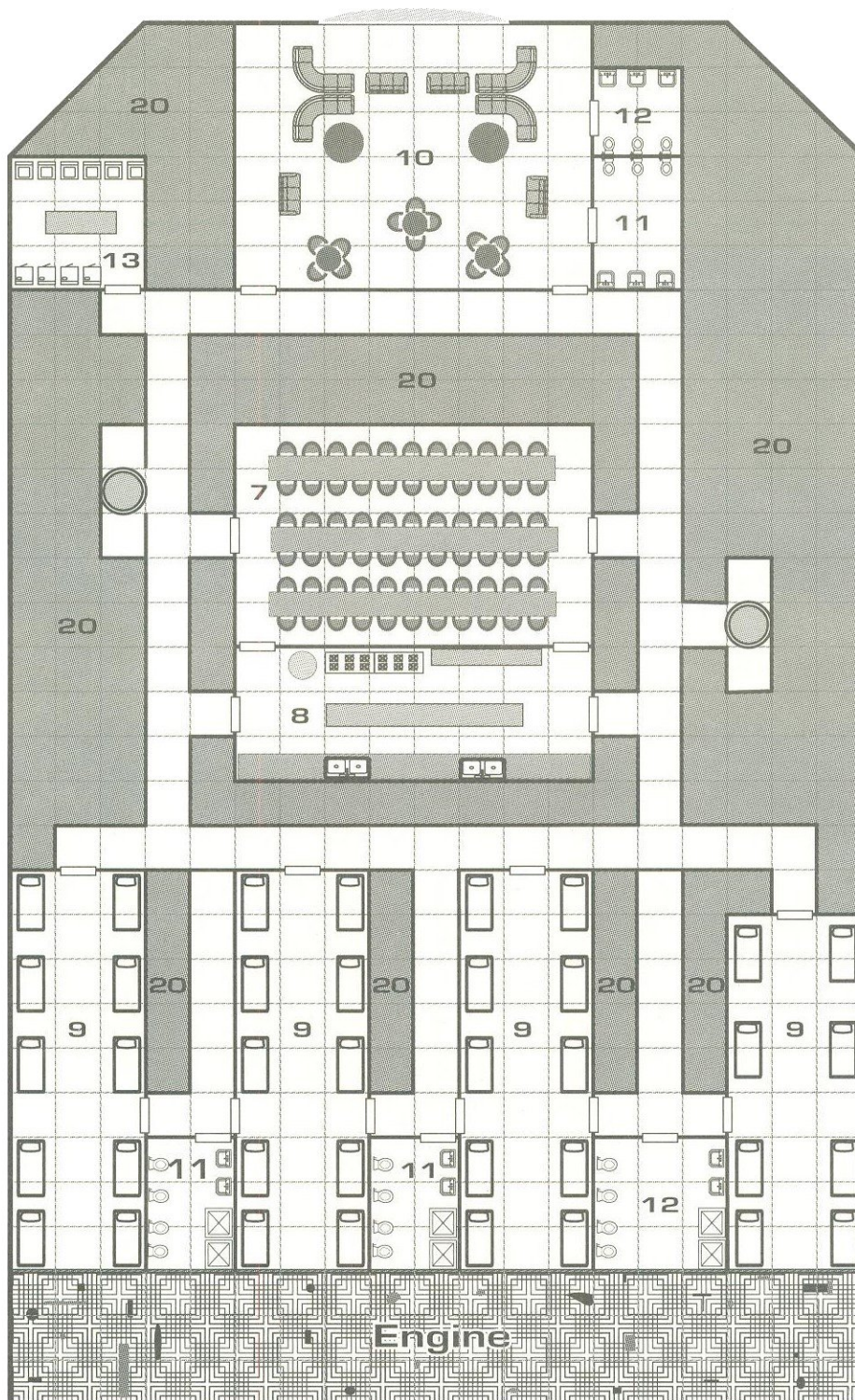


1. Control Room
2. Officers' Cabin
3. Primary Cabin
4. Lab 1
5. Auxiliary Machinery
6. Storage Area
7. Crews' Mess
8. Galley
9. Crew's Berthing
10. Observation Deck
11. Recreation Deck
12. Men's Bath
13. Women's Bath
14. Laundry Facility
15. Main Engine
16. Captain's Cabin
17. Officers' Quarters
18. Officers' Berthing
19. Auxiliary Cabin
19. Cargo Storage
20. Air Storage

Lower Level

TLE CONSTRUCTED AT THE JUNO SH

Room
 Conference Room
 Computer Room
 Medical Station
 Area
 Mess Hall
 Clothing
 Lounge &
 Center
 Bathroom
 Bathroom
 Facility
 Engineering
 Quarters
 Quarters
 Bathroom
 Computer
 Edge
 Storage
 e



1 Square = 5'



Elevator

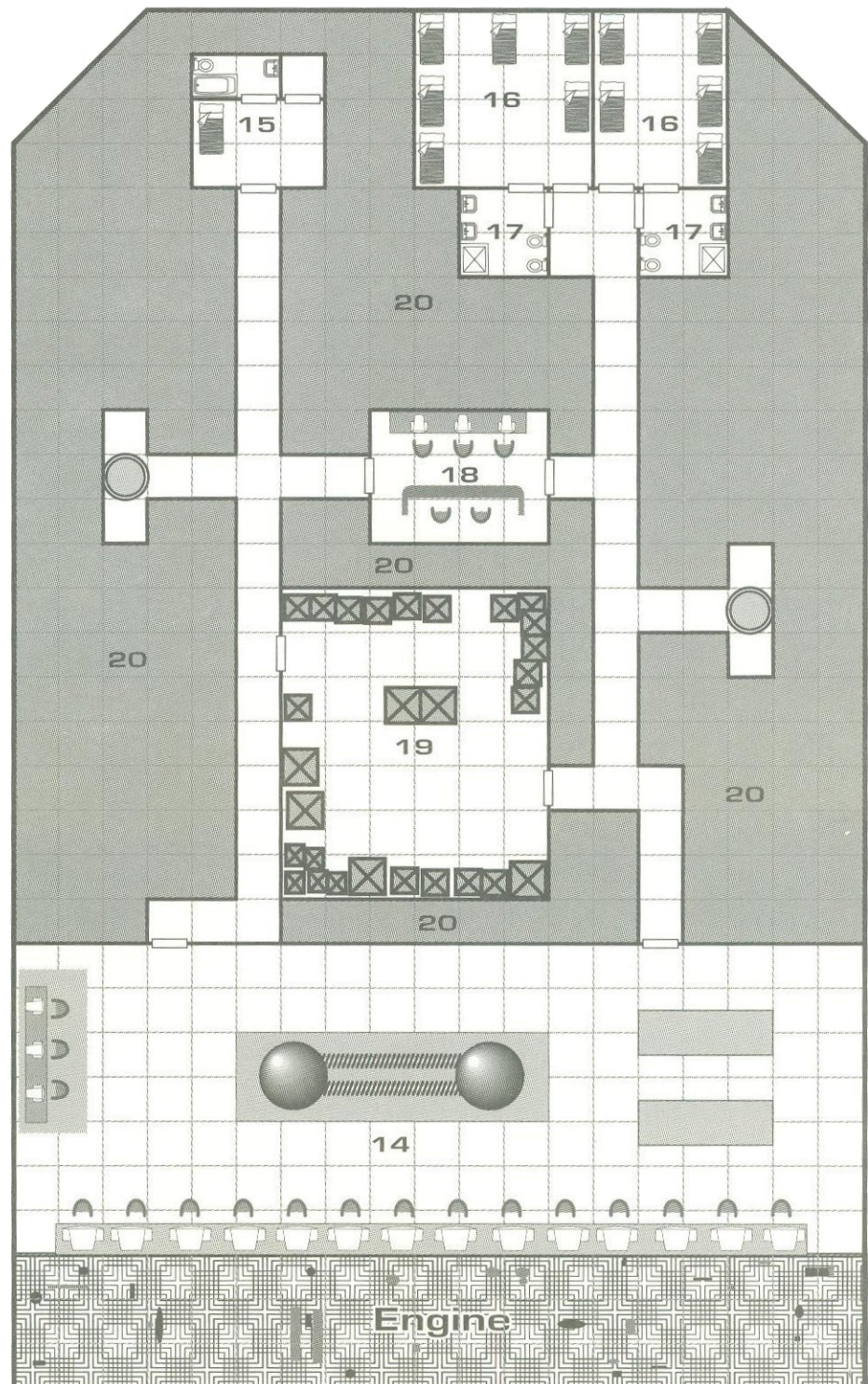


Door

Middle Level

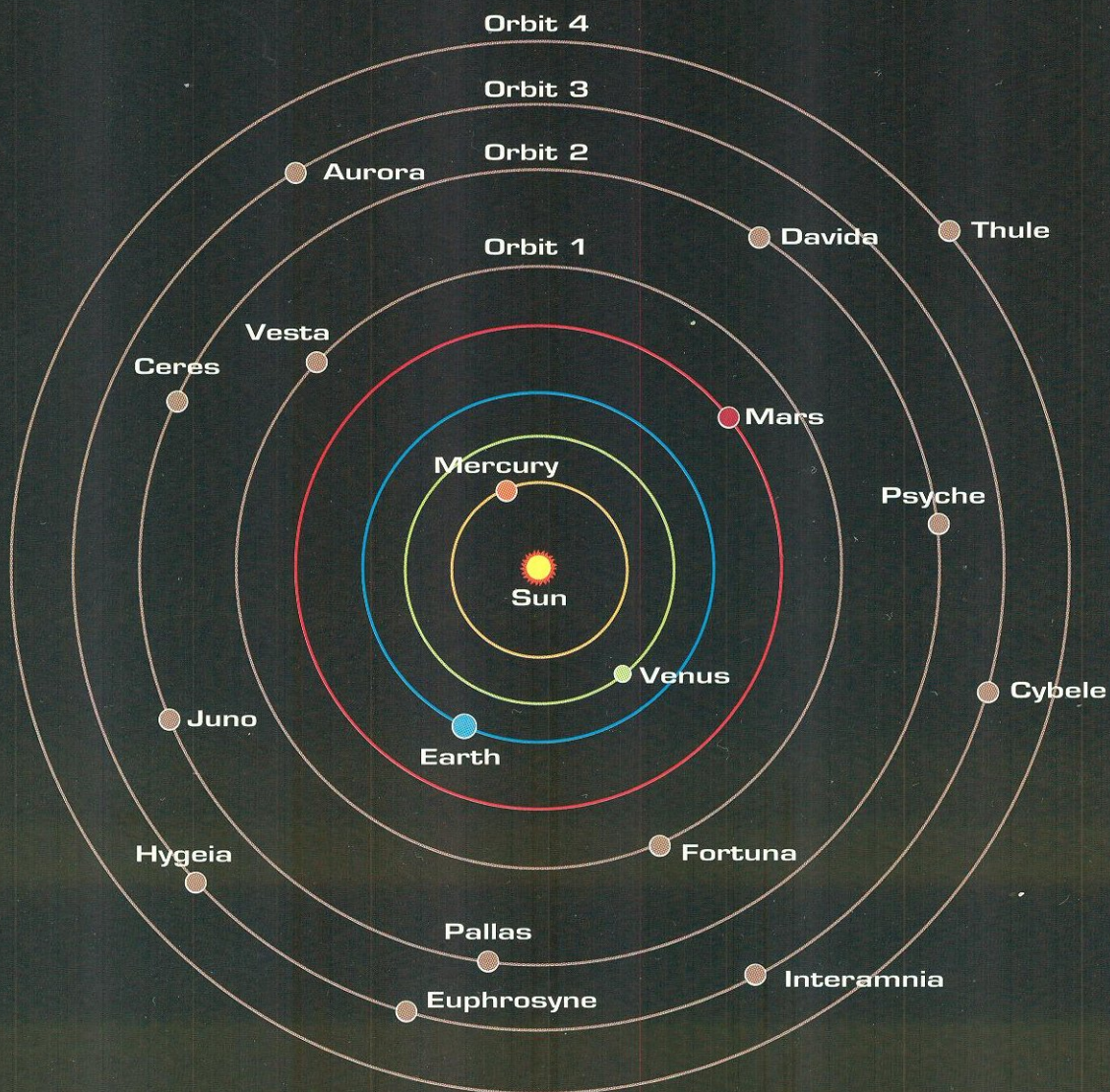
INO SHIPYARD

Square = 5'



Upper Level

ASTEROID GENERAL INFORMATION



NAME	DISTANCE FROM PRIMARY (AU's)	DIAMETER (Miles)	ORBITAL PERIOD (Years)	POPULATION (1000's)	GENERAL
Aurora	3.12	136	5.16	30	Pleasure Asteroid
Ceres	2.76	663	4.6	300,000	Belt Capital
Cybele	3.45	110	7.6	40	Pirate Stronghold
Davida	3.18	212	5.7	15	Diamond Mining
Euphrosyne	3.12	140	4.0	20	Nickel Mining
Fortuna	2.44	135	3.7	7	Science Outpost
Hygeia	3.15	254	5.09	180	McLaughlin Shipyard
Interamnia	3.06	210	5.4	25	Former RAM Outpost
Juno	2.67	145	4.6	55	Bottle Construction
Pallas	2.76	335	4.6	110	Mysterious Asteroid
Psyche	2.92	127	4.5	6	Interpan Shipyard
Thule	4.3	100	6.6	unknown	Prison Asteroid
Vesta	2.3	310	3.6	20-40	Major RAM Base

The Belt

"Belters love a good fight."
—Badinger's

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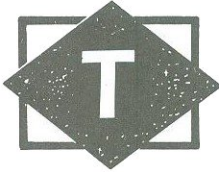


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GENERAL INFORMATION



Things were different in the year 1999. Wars were fought between nations—not groups like RAM and NEO. No gennies, either. Rocket pistols and mass drivers were simply ideas in the minds of the most imaginative engineers. Perhaps most important of all, however, Earth was still free and beautiful.

But the solar system is a smaller place now. That's not too hard a concept to understand—consider that at certain times in their orbits, travel from Earth to Mars is a matter of a day's time. Unfortunately, the free-spirited, independent personality of the 20th century Earth person has been nearly replaced by the law of the corporation: the bottom line.

But there's still a place where the brave and self-reliant can survive—the pioneer who's willing to carry his risks on his own back. It's a place where RAM can't buy out, sell out, or frighten out those hardy folks—a place where people are not slaves to money and greed, but, rather, live according to their raw, unfettered nature. That place is the Belt, in all its glory.

—Colonel Anthony "Buck" Rogers

Somewhere between Mars and Jupiter, between 180 and 280 million miles from the sun, with a seasonal revolution almost five times that of Earth, lies the asteroid belt. There are known to be at least 100,000 asteroids—also referred to as planetoids—in the Belt, most of which are uninhabited. Those with populations contain a diverse group of frontiersmen from nearly all walks of life. There are both independent and corporate miners, RAM spies, NEO operatives, high-security prison operations, secret pirate bases and

smugglers' hideaways, and countless other groups of men and women from everywhere in the solar system. It has been said that there are nearly as many cultures in the Belt as there are asteroids.

It should be noted, however, that although there are over 100,000 asteroids present in the Belt, they cover an orbital path some 1.5 billion miles in circumference. Estimates of the total mass of the asteroid belt indicate that even if all of them were clustered together into a single body, they would make a planet not much larger than Luna. It is a rare occurrence, indeed, for any two of these rocks to be visible to the naked eye at one time. The major exception to this is the occasional asteroid cluster. These clusters are fields of rocks—with perhaps 50 to 100 sizable bodies in the cluster and often including stretches of small rubble and gravelly debris—that create both a navigational hazard and a communication block.

Most inhabitants of the Belt—called Belters—refer to these asteroid clusters as "gauntlets," and many a young hotshot showboating in his rocket ship has lost his life in these deadly mazes.

Asteroids include bodies of many different sizes, with the largest of them—Ceres—some 663 miles in diameter. There are about 50 asteroids with diameters greater than 100 miles. The smallest asteroids are bits of rock and ice that are little more than rubble. These are more rare than one might expect, since even the minute gravitational pull of these bodies tends to cluster them into larger asteroids after a few million years. These smaller asteroids are the ones most likely to make up the dangerous gauntlets. Most asteroids are at least the size of a small building.

They are not necessarily solid, how-

ever. Indeed, more than one rocketjock has set his ship down on an asteroid to find the planetoid crumbling beneath his feet. Indeed, in a crash landing it is not unknown for a ship to scatter the loose rocks of an asteroid like a rack of billiard balls broken apart by a cue ball. Such loose asteroids are, fortunately, rare.

Asteroids also vary in shape. The larger asteroids tend to be mostly spherical. Since they generate small fields of gravity, this force has proven enough to mold them into a shape justifying their once-common name of "minor planet." Smaller asteroids, however, can be encountered in all shapes—long and narrow, spherical, disc-shaped, or simply irregular.

The Belt is actually several bands of asteroid orbits, separated by stretches of relatively empty space (known as Kirkwood Gaps). Most of the larger asteroids are found in the inner bands of the Belt, while the outer bands consist of asteroids containing more of the precious metals that draw miners to these remote outposts in the solar system.

Despite the scattered nature of the asteroids in the Belt, collisions between them are not unheard of. Every year or two a small outpost somewhere is wiped out by such a cataclysmic convergence. As often as not, would-be rescuers cannot even locate fragments of the once-inhabited asteroid.

What is it about these barren, lifeless rocks that attracts so many a brave frontiersman? The answers are varied. The vast majority of the Belters are miners who daily extract the rich minerals and precious ores that are prevalent and relatively easily accessible in so many asteroids. The great number and isolation of the asteroids allow a person to stake out a claim here with less threat of interference than anywhere else in the solar system. Others come here for the solitude, peace,

and freedom from persecution that Belt colonies provide. The opportunity to live as one wants to live is a rare treat in the 25th century—those who put up with the hardships of the asteroid belt tend to exploit this freedom to the fullest.

And make no mistake: hardships abound. Every necessity of life, from food and water to air itself, is scarce and valuable. Water, perhaps, is less so than the rest—since some of the planetoids have proven to contain large blocks of ice. The mining and selling of this commodity occur between Belters. It is one of the few necessities of survival that is not imported to the Belt.

The colonized asteroids all have self-contained atmospheres. Sometimes these are located within the body of the planetoid itself, otherwise they are in domed settlements on the surface. Supplies of air are commonly brought by the great ore-carrier ships on their journeys outward from the Sun—the massive size and powerful engines of these ships allow them to carry great quantities of compressed oxygen.

Power is another costly resource. In general, the asteroids are too far away and too scattered to justify the cost of energy beamed from the great Mariposas solar collectors of Mercury, although the largest and most populous asteroids (such as Ceres and Vesta) do receive such energy.

Nuclear fusion, however, can be employed as a power source on an asteroid with less risk than on a planet, since the gravitational pull of an average-to-small asteroid is virtually nonexistent. Thus, most outposts—even small mining operations—are equipped with fusion reactors similar to those used upon large spaceships.

Mass drivers, also, are less inhibited by gravity in the Belt than elsewhere in the system, allowing them to be much smaller than the drivers on, say, Luna. Such

launchers exist in the Belt, on Ceres, Vesta, Hygeia, Psyche, Aurora, and Davida. The rails for the mass drivers in the Belt tend to be only a mile or a mile and a half in length.

More than any place else in the system, the Belt has provided a haven for pirates and outlaws. Many a fortified hideout has been carved from the interior of an iron-bound planetoid. Often these bases are located near or in the midst of gauntlets, where paths through the continually shifting rock fields are recorded on computer programs that are guarded like the important keys that they are. But even among these pirates there is a sense of honor and, to a lesser extent, dignity. Generally they will not prey on the individual miners and settlers trying to make a living on their own—most pirate activity is directed against the merchantmen who make their way to and from the Belt. Even the sleek vessels of RAM and NEO are not immune to their unwelcome attentions.

Still other residents are unwilling inhabitants of the Belt, locked away within one of the vast, high-security prison complexes buried deep within the hearts of the most remote asteroids. Thule is the most famous prison asteroid. These prison outposts, operated by Ceres in the name of all the Belt, are the point of no return for the most feared or unlucky prisoners. Only rarely does one of these notorious or forlorn souls ever get any closer to the sun before he dies.

Whatever their reasons, all inhabitants of the Belt—except the aforementioned prisoners—enjoy one thing that can be found nowhere else in the high-tech, push-button world of the 25th century: freedom from the corporate boss.

Although many asteroids fill the Belt, thirteen major colonies will be covered in this text: Aurora, Ceres, Cybele, Davida,

Euphrosyne, Fortuna, Hygeia, Interamnia, Juno, Pallas, Psyche, Thule, and finally, Vesta.

These colonies, while the most populous of the Belt's asteroids, remain, in total number, a small fraction of those which are inhabited. By and large, the frontier outposts—especially in the distant reaches of the Belt—are small settlements of a dozen or two miners and their families. Some small asteroids, in fact, are home to only one or two intrepid loners. These individualists survive with little more than an occasional video message for external human comradeship.

Even in these outposts, however, the Belters take pride in their far-flung realm. They are citizens of this anarchistic society every bit as much as are the leading businessmen of Ceres. Like all Belters, they take their voting duties seriously and tend to be very well-versed in matters pertaining to their livelihood and government.

In addition, there is a fierce solidarity here. It is manifested in a distrust of outsiders and their motives, and a willingness to fight—even against great odds—to prove a point of honor or conviction. Some asteroid governments are brutally suppressive on their own worlds; however, when the whole Belt is involved, even the leaders of those harsh locales embrace the democratic ideal. In battle or in times of need, Belters will unselfishly aid other Belters and not need to ask why—the fact that a fellow frontiersman needs help is enough of a reason.

In a way, the sobriquet applied to the Belt by Belters themselves—the Anarchy—describes correctly this chaotic collection of varying attitudes, peoples, and activities. Anarchy is, of course, the ultimate form of individuality. But curiously enough, the people of the Belt form the most democratic population in the solar system.

NEO INFLUENCE IN THE BELT



e were running a RAM gauntlet in the Invincible, a scrap-heap flying wreck we salvaged from a junkyard on Lu-

na. Two RAM cruisers were bearing down on us fast and things looked really bad. Then my navigator noticed an asteroid cluster on the scanner and—despite groans from the other crewmen—I immediately headed into it. We managed to not only lose the RAM ships, but also discovered a pirate base, where we were able to trade in the Invincible for something a little more reliable.

As a side note, one of the cruisers took a boulder in the main thruster. I hear it had to be towed all the way to Mars!

—Colonel Wilma Deering

The asteroid belt holds profound importance for NEO as an organization. Lack of material resources has forced the New Earth Organization to develop a number of strategies and operating procedures that are unorthodox at best, downright desperate at worst. The Belt offers many ways for NEO to implement these tactics.

The relationships between the New Earth Organization and specific asteroid governments is discussed in the following sections of this book. Outlined here are some of the major features, as well as an overview of the philosophy that links the freedom fighters with the Anarchy.

NEO Ship Combat in the Belt

Because NEO does not possess a particularly strong space force, it must choose the time and place for battles against RAM with care. In an open space combat, RAM's superior resources and great num-

bers would prevail almost every time. In the closer quarters of an asteroid cluster, however, the story is different—maneuverability and daring can sometimes overcome brute force and numbers.

On a secret base on the asteroid Vesta (and located about 80 miles from a large RAM military base) is Excellence, a NEO school for pilots. At Excellence, NEO pilots learn the intricacies of flying and fighting in the tight asteroid clusters. Although graduates of this prestigious NEO academy are likely the finest rocketjocks in space, Excellence has about a 50% survival rate—a cost that has led to criticism from some of the more humane-minded NEO leaders. Military personnel, however, are adamant in their belief that the school is well worth the attrition.

More information about the school is located in the section on Vesta (pages 60-62).

Additionally, the asteroid belt is a common hiding spot for NEO vessels. The thousands of small, unnoticed asteroids in the Belt make superior hiding spots for NEO war fleets. Also, as it rings the entire system, NEO fugitives can always reach some portion of the Belt simply by flying away from the sun.

The Grand Council

On rare occasions, and usually only in emergencies, NEO will call a meeting of its Grand Council. Comprised of the top-level administrative hierarchy, representatives of the major arcologies, and NEO's military leaders, this council meets under the most secret conditions to discuss NEO military, economic, political and resource policy. If a successful full-scale attack was made by RAM against a Grand Council, NEO would be dangerously, perhaps per-

manently, crippled.

The council will usually not meet more than one or two times in any year, and certainly not more than once every few months in any but the most extreme circumstances. These meetings are never held in the same place twice and require the tightest possible security. This makes the Belt an excellent meeting ground. Because there are thousands of uncharted, unremarkable asteroids in the Belt, it would be impossible for RAM to search them all looking for a Grand Council meeting.

NEO Resources and the Pirates

NEO does not ignore the tremendous value of the pirates as allies—albeit of the mercenary variety. The New Earth Organization is often in need of supplies, such as warships and weapons, that cannot be purchased openly for fear of discovery by RAM. The pirates are a good source of business: cash and carry, no questions asked.

Pirate organizations (most notably the Black Brotherhood) abound in the Belt. There are hundreds of small, independent operations and several that are quite large and influential ones.

NEO typically obtains rocket ships from Belt pirates. Although NEO credits are often given in exchange for the needed ships, there is one other powerful bartering tool that always interests pirates: information, which is a vital resource to the space buccaneers. NEO routinely gains intelligence on the routes and cargoes of RAM ships, which they might trade to a pirate band in exchange for a ship or something else of value—allowing the pirates to intercept a plump target. The resulting raids aid NEO, as well as the pirates, by disrupting RAM economically.

Other items typically purchased by

NEO include personal arms, heavy weapons, ground vehicles and tanks, and mercenaries. At times, NEO will also pay handsomely for asylum at a secret pirate base.

Freedom of the Skies

Located on Hygeia is a major NEO outpost called the Freedom of the Skies base, home to a large number of NEO military leaders. This huge base is the greatest center of NEO activity in the Belt and a frequent gathering spot for the organization's leaders and recruits alike. Several large cruisers and a multitude of destroyers are housed at Freedom of the Skies, and the base occasionally services a NEO battler. More information about this major base is given in the section on Hygeia.



RAM INFLUENCE IN THE BELT



here really was no resisting those guys. Brath was my partner on that run. He got off lucky—he was killed

by terrine blaster fire. Went out in a blaze of glory, the way a Belter should.

When they took me prisoner, I knew things were going to get rough. Their interrogation techniques are ingenious—and very, very nasty. Yeah—they made me talk. And nothing makes me talk. Those RAM interrogators have redefined “persuasion.”

—Captain Trevor Morgant, NEO

RAM's activities in the Belt have the same tints of corruption and destructiveness that mark its dealings with communities on Mars and Earth. The sinister corporation's operations among the asteroids, however, show an even greater degree of savagery and ruthlessness, due to the remoteness of the environment. With no large governmental group to track or condemn their actions, many RAM groups—particularly their dreaded Internal Affairs department—work in what they consider to be a “refreshingly unrestricted environment.”

There is, to be sure, a flip side to this. The opponents of RAM—be they pirates, NEO agents, or simple frontiersmen defending their way of life—give no quarter to the operatives of RAM. Identities are concealed, and in an environment where the losing side often has no survivors left to tell the tale, many an ambush or savage firefight is chalked up to the hostile nature of the Belt. This bitter antagonism sees to it that, on the outer asteroids in particular, parties of RAM representatives travel in large, well-armed groups.

Hunting NEO

One of RAM's key activities in the asteroid belt is the hunting of NEO. The Mars-based corporate entity systematically tracks down and destroys NEO interests wherever they may be identified—or, indeed, suspected. Any operation that NEO runs in the Belt is in constant danger from RAM.

As previously noted, RAM enjoys greater freedom in the Belt than in inner space. Therefore, if RAM discovers NEO bases, outposts, or other operations on any asteroid, it will not hesitate to use whatever means are available to annihilate the enemy center of operations. If an asteroid is small and lightly populated, the mere suspicion of NEO connections is often enough to bring about a lethal RAM strike.

RAM's Internal Affairs department has a special Belt Task Force, whose existence and operations are even more secret than those of the parent department. The sole purpose of this task force is to flush out NEO wherever it may be in the Belt. To this end, the Belt Task Force possesses 2 battlers, 30 cruisers, and 60 or more fighters. This impressive force receives priority support from RAM and therefore always has the latest equipment.

In addition, several landing squads of terrines are permanently assigned to the Internal Affairs team. These are ready at a moment's notice to land upon a planetoid, quickly and ruthlessly securing it to the corporation's satisfaction. The landing squads vary in size—some are merely a half dozen terrines or so, perhaps commanded by a RAM officer. The largest two, assigned to the battlers, each muster 60 terrines (organized into three companies) and three hovertanks; they are armed with a full complement of blasters, grenades, and plasma throwers.

Vesta

RAM has a major military outpost on Vesta called Out Station Adam. This base, which serves as the home port for most of the RAM warships assigned to the Belt, is also the headquarters of the Belt Task Force.

The public purpose of Out Station Adam, according to RAM, is to protect the citizens of inner space from possible alien intrusion into the solar system. This, of course, is merely a smoke screen.

Out Station Adam has extremely high security. Also, because of the financial resources the RAM base brings into the local community, no one complains about the harsh protective measures used there. The military base on Vesta is used by RAM for a great many military and secret operations. One of its primary purposes is the development of new gennies. More information about the station is included in the section on Vesta (pages 60-62).

Icesteroids

RAM makes intensive use of icesteroids to further terraform Mars. These massive boulders of solid ice are used to selectively bombard certain areas of Mars' surface.

RAM has taken these icesteroids from the Belt in large numbers. Because the icesteroids also hold trapped pockets of rich minerals—and because they are the sole source of water in the lonely reaches of the asteroids—Belter miners often take exception to RAM's plundering these valuable resources. RAM uses two methods to handle the miners: large amounts of money and large amounts of force. To date, both methods have proven very effective.

RAM will buy out these mining groups when possible—about a 50% prospect.

The cost is high, for it seems that each and every Belter in the community willing to sell out of the icesteroid is looking for a quick fortune.

Conversely, because of the stubborn, territorial nature of most Belters, they often cannot be bought out even for large amounts of money. Many Belters, on principle, object to any dealings with RAM. That's when the great conglomerate's secret police or terrine landing forces come in, depending on the size of the resisting population.

If it's a small group (say, less than 100 people), the matter might be handled with sabotage and treachery. These mining groups tend to encounter strange "accidents" and other various and often fatal mishaps. A larger group, however, might find itself facing the full might of a RAM battle fleet, complete with landing force.

Commonly, these mining families have no method of retaliation and little means of self-defense. Occasionally, they will enjoy the protection of a pirate band or some staunch NEO outpost, and the situation can turn into a battle tougher than RAM expected. More often than not, however, the brave colonizers are dispatched, little more than a footnote on the list of tragedies in this rugged environment.

One problem still remains with RAM's icesteroid collection. Because it has been gathering so many of them for so long, the very large icesteroids (i.e., 50+ miles in diameter), which are the most useful for terraforming, are becoming increasingly rare.

Financial Influence

Since there are so many planetoids with large amounts of valuable metals and alloys in them, RAM is attracted to the wealth these asteroids offer. The corporation will commonly send groups of miners

to asteroids where they will initiate a program of Stage Four mining. There are two major effects of this type of mining. First, it is so destructive that it leaves the asteroid completely useless for any further exploitation. Second, it often forces smaller, less well-equipped mining groups and families out of business.

These RAM-bought operatives are called "corpers," corporate miners, and are hated by all free mining companies in the Belt. The corper-free miner conflict has result in many feuds with individual free miners. For corporate miners—who are little more than mercenaries to begin with—these feuds are no big deal. But for free miners, they close down business and eat up what little resources the miners possess.

RAM also maintains a large network of corporate spies to keep an eye on free mining companies. These spies can be encountered in the form of shop owners, ship hands, workers, gamblers, or any other type commonly found in the Belt. This makes the spies extremely difficult to ferret out and quite effective in their work. Corporate spies will typically report on such things as major veins of metals discovered, new and valuable mining spots, and the strategies of the mining companies.

Prison Planetoids

The dungeonlike prisons maintained by RAM in the asteroid belt are the equivalent of an old French vacation spot known as Devil's Island. They are designed for minimum comfort—not even, necessarily, at the survival level—and maximum protection against escape. The largest of these is located on an outer belt asteroid known as Camilla. It is typical of, though on a greater scale than, the four other prison asteroids located in the Belt.

Camilla is a relatively flat, disc-shaped asteroid some 150 miles in diameter, though less than 40 miles thick. The prison cells are located in the center of the asteroid, at least three or four miles below the surface. Each block of cells consists of rooms excavated in the solid rock, with one prisoner per cell, and some 100 cells per block. Access to the surface is gained by elevators, which are guarded at the top and bottom by squads of six terrines.

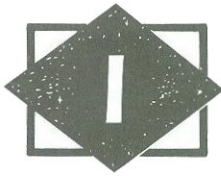
Food and water are brought to the cells once per day by robot attendants who pass the sustenance through narrow slots in the doors. The prisoners are not let out of their cells for any purpose except to serve as slave labor.

Occasionally, RAM will require the services of these hapless souls, usually for some grim and high-risk task in the asteroid belt for which gennies and robots are deemed too valuable. Then, prisoners are recruited on a volunteer basis. (There is never any shortage of volunteers.) Typical tasks include salvaging damaged or destroyed vessels, charting and exploring the gauntlets, and serving as workers for corporate mining operations when mercenary volunteers are too few or too unreliable.

RAM Involvement with Pirates

The peculiar sense of honor guiding pirate behavior insures that they do not work with the generally despised corporate agents. Small groups of independent pirates, however—those exceptionally lacking in scruples—will occasionally and furtively sell out their brothers to RAM, always in exchange for tremendous profit.

THE BLACK BROTHERHOOD



know they're pirates. I know they'd steal the shirt off my back if I gave them half a chance. But the Black

Brotherhood is one of RAM's most determined foes and, in my book, that raises them a couple of notches higher on the moral scale than those Martian tyrants!

—Colonel Anthony "Buck" Rogers

The Black Brotherhood is a group of bootleggers and renegades that evades the common law and commits acts of robbery in the space lanes. Their outlaw status forces them to survive from day to day within the confines of the asteroid belt. From there, however, they run a lucrative business.

It should be noted that despite the seemingly violent nature of their work, the Black Brotherhood is not a group of musclemen toting around large weapons, looking for an excuse to blast somebody. Rather, their greatest strength is knowledge. The Brotherhood runs an extensive information network by which they carefully select targets for raiding. They also might barter that information to others who might be interested—not excepting the potential victims themselves.

The Black Brotherhood will often work closely with NEO. One of the most influential members of the Brotherhood, Black Barney, owes his life to Buck Rogers—a fact that has reinforced this relationship. Both organizations share a common hatred for RAM and will strike against the corporate entity at every opportunity. The Brotherhood also considers NEO an excellent source of information. It gladly provides coordinates, dates, and cargo lists used to plan pirate strikes against RAM ships.

Bulgath Shipyard

Located on an obscure and unremarkable asteroid called Bulgath, this shipyard is owned and operated by the Black Brotherhood. The shipyard takes stolen vessels and remodels them, rendering them untraceable and unrecognizable to the authorities.

This refurbishment work often includes installing new weapons and defensive systems, engine improvements, and other work that requires extensive rebuilding. Many NEO warships are products of the Bulgath shipyard—just as many of the ships brought here were captured as a result of information that NEO provided.

Bulgath is a secret base whose existence and exact location is not known outside the Brotherhood—except, of course, for Buck Rogers, who once tricked Black Barney into revealing this information about the shipyard.

Relations with the Belters

The Black Brotherhood, while a pirate organization, does not wantonly kill. This fact, combined with their respect for the property of the Belters and their hatred of RAM, makes them fairly popular with the asteroids' inhabitants.

From time to time, the Brotherhood is hired by Belters to thwart the plans of RAM or some other corporate entity. Although the Black Brotherhood charges large sums for these services, they do increase the Brotherhood's popularity with the otherwise defenseless Belters. In general, the Brotherhood is considered to be a part of the Belter "community" and as a part of their pirates' code, they never wrong their own.

AURORA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 293,000,000 mi. (3.12 AU)
DIAMETER: 136 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,860 days (5.16 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: Less than 300 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 30,000 (permanent, plus many transients)
PORTS: One Class B

The planetoid of Aurora is the liveliest center of recreation anywhere in the Belt. Aurora sports all the latest entertainment and gambling facilities, rivaling even those at RAM headquarters on Mars.

The facilities on Aurora are famous throughout the solar system. A great many wealthy men and women travel long distances to come to the pleasure palaces of Aurora and partake of their wonders.

Major Features

Of all the recreational facilities found on Aurora, the gambling halls are most famous. Every type of advanced technology gaming den one could hope to find can be encountered here (usually in several varieties and appealing to all price ranges). Losing money is an easy task, and even winning is quite possible.

One would expect to find here a great deal of corruption and cheating. The opposite, however, is true. Aurora is famous for the fairest and most impartial gambling halls in the solar system—indeed, the asteroid employs an special task force whose sole function is to investigate charges of cheating or corruption.

Gambling is not the only way visitors to Aurora can enjoy themselves. Also lo-

cated here is the renowned Pleasure Dome—a massive, domed area several hundred acres in size. The entire landscape under the Pleasure Dome has been terraformed and developed into a veritable paradise, with lush vegetation, beautiful natural features, and, of course, a central resort hotel and casino complex called Hedonia.

The richest, most influential people in the solar system travel many millions of miles for a brief stay at Hedonia, often after spending five years or more on a waiting list. Hedonia caters to all the pleasures of the flesh and mind. A three-day stay in Aurora's famous resort costs 25,000 credits.

There is a wealth of other activities on Aurora. The asteroid is well known for its recreation parks, including a varied-gravity water slide three miles long. Huge aquariums, topiaries, terrariums, and other "natural" wonders (all of which are designed for maximum beauty) all attract the affluent visitor.

One of the most intriguing of man-made wonders on Aurora is the Beltway, a long tunnel bored 13 miles and more into the asteroid. This "strip" of high-priced casinos and resorts, reserved for the richest guests, is continually being expanded at the far end. The farther one goes toward the end of the tunnel, however, the worse the quality of the establishments. The very far end of the Beltway is known as the Dark End, and it bears a strong resemblance to many Earth slums. Only the poorest and seediest of inhabitants on Aurora live at the Dark End.

Aurora maintains extremely cheap labor to continue digging the Beltway in an unusual manner. Those who lose large amounts of money in the asteroid's casinos and cannot pay their debt are forced

to work on the digging crews of the Beltway until their bill is paid.

Politics and Government

The leading governmental body on Aurora is the Supreme Presidency. Heading the Supreme Presidency is, of course, the Supreme President: Sylvia Carnish. Having previously worked, under a different name, as a clerk for a major RAM shipping and finance company on Mars, Sylvia retired to Aurora with a fortune she amassed through various blackmail and embezzlement schemes. Money being one of the major indicators of quality on Aurora, Sylvia had little trouble buying her way into the presidency. Sylvia, more than any other individual, has turned Aurora into the successful pleasure planetoid that it is.

There is little in the way of politics on Aurora—except, as noted, that money equals political power. Those with the money make the rules and policies. There is no set term for the presidency. Once someone comes along with sufficient wealth, they simply pay for another election. Any the newcomer who can also pay the voters enough will be elected the new Supreme President of Aurora.

There is a strong and active police force on Aurora. Called the Justices, these police are very strict—except with the rich. For most of those apprehended, simple offenses are punished by immediate and permanent exile from Aurora. More serious offenses result in formal arrest. There are no jails on Aurora—most prisoners are sentenced to terms on the work gangs. The most desperate criminals are taken into the Justice Building for lengthy interrogation and are seldom seen again.

The Justices are equipped with the following:

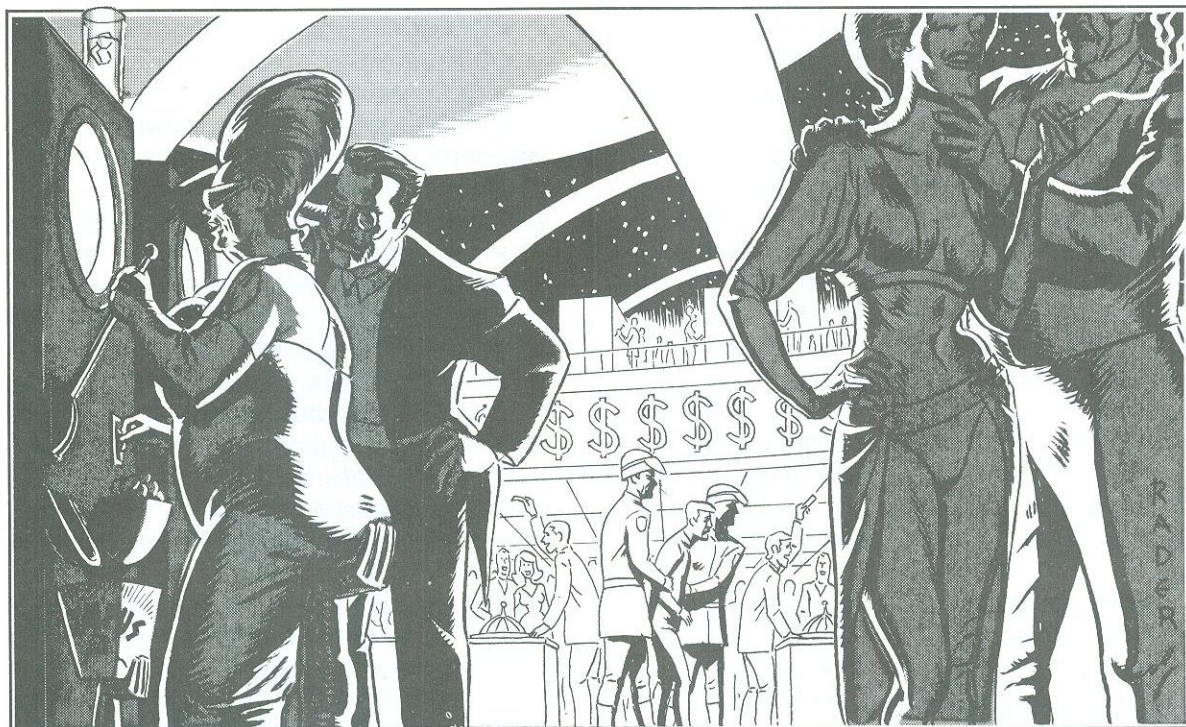
- 1 standard cruiser
- 10 fighters
- 350 field officers with smart clothing
- 50 jetcars

The Justices tend to remain in the background as much as possible. They overlook a great deal so as not to offend people of very high social and economic standing. The one major exception to this is cheating. As noted previously, “rigging” games and cheating in any form is not tolerated on Aurora. The Justices will go to great lengths to stamp out such activities.

There are two classifications of cheating on Aurora: minor and major. Minor cheating is defined as that act of knowingly altering a game or gambling event such that the odds favor the cheater or the cheater’s associates, and the winnings are less than 10,000 credits. Minor cheating is a misdemeanor on Aurora and results in a fine and permanent eviction from the asteroid for the cheater and his family for three generations.

Major cheating is defined as that act of knowingly altering a game or gambling event such that the odds favor anyone the cheater chooses, and the cheater charges for this service; or any cheat for winnings of greater than 10,000 credits. Major cheating is a felony offense on Aurora and results in immediate arrest. Arrest for a felony on Aurora likely leads to execution or imprisonment on Thule.

The citizens of Aurora, alone among the populous asteroids, take little interest in the larger occurrences in the Belt. They are content to govern their own planetoid and get rich in the process. Although it is against the law not to vote in any Belt-wide election, most residents of Aurora will usually vote “abstain.”



Economy

Of all the asteroids, Aurora has the most stable economy. It has no competition in its league of high-class resorts, so is in no danger of losing business. As Supreme President Carnish is fond of saying, "As long as there are people living in the solar system, there will be people losing money on Aurora."

Not all of the people of Aurora are guests of the various resorts, gambling halls, and high-class hotels. A small number of long-term residents live on the asteroid. For the most part, these are the richest citizens, for the cost of living on Aurora is high indeed—a typical dwelling would cost about 10,000 credits per month. Food, clothing, and other necessities are generally quite costly also—though various shops in the Dark End cater to the nearly destitute.

There is one exception to this cost of living: the workers. All the hotels, resorts, and gambling halls need people to run them. Guest service, custodial duties, health care, and other various positions must be filled. These individuals fall under a special social class called "workers." The workers on Aurora live in relative luxury (compared to how they could live in their income bracket in other places in the solar system). The costs of their daily needs are much lower than the norm due to their lower status.

The nature of the gambling and resort business insures that Aurora will always try to entice people back to the tables with their winnings. A prestigious gambling house might give a wealthy guest who has just won a large sum of money a three-day extension to their stay free of charge. Such special treatment makes a longer stay on Aurora that much more

attractive. The gambling houses know that even without cheating, the odds are stacked against the customer and sooner or later, he will lose his money.

As noted in the RAM Relations section on the following page, RAM has sunk a tremendous amount of money into Aurora. When the asteroid was first being developed by an Earth entrepreneur named Alexander Lafgeld, the funds for the project were sadly lacking. Lafgeld was a dreamer, poorly experienced in the business world. Although his vision was high, he did not expect the great costs involved. With his life savings already sunk into the project, Lafgeld hovered on the edge of financial ruin—until RAM stepped in.

Seeing a golden opportunity to create a legitimate business with which they could suck dry the pockets of the rich, they offered a large grant to Lafgeld. The developer, of course, jumped at the chance. As more and more of RAM's money poured into the project, the corporate conglomerate began to take greater and greater control of the project. RAM's goal was to make the development a RAM project in all its facets, with Lafgeld merely a figurehead. Though not entirely successful, the conglomerate still receives 15% of all house winnings at the Starlight and Imperial Palace casinos, which are located at the entrance to the Beltway.

Military

The Belt, in general, does not have much in the way of organized military forces. Aurora, in particular, is poorly equipped for any sort of military operations. The asteroid has a local militia, whose members fall under the class of workers. The force is used for basic asteroid defense and consists of the following items:

- 2 heavy cruisers
- 5 standard cruisers
- 20 fighters
- 1,000 assault troops with full battle armor

The militia is rarely used and exists more as a convention than anything else.

On a few occasions, the military has proven necessary. These have been defensive actions against independent small pirate groups that mounted what were, in effect, large-scale raids against several of the larger gambling houses. Every time, the attacking pirates have been quickly outclassed by Aurora's militia and soundly defeated. It is assumed that, because of their agents located there and their vested interest in Aurora, RAM would come to the aid of the pleasure asteroid if the need arose.

NEO Relations

NEO is not strong enough to take more than a minimal interest in Aurora. The gambling asteroid is well known for its integrity, so the operations of RAM here are observed, but not interfered with, for the most part.

There is, however, one thing that Aurora can provide that NEO is often in desperate need of: capital. Many a young rocketjock has been seen winning large amounts of money on Aurora, only to leave with it and never be seen there again. These young bucks are NEO members who brave the odds to win money for the organization. Large amounts of money are not risked there by NEO due to the great uncertainty of winning.

On occasion, NEO will plant operatives on Aurora to mix in with the crowds. These operatives go from gambling hall to gambling hall, bailing out those who are in grave financial trouble (and obviously

heading toward a grueling digging term in the Beltway) in return for information. NEO will only bail those out whom they know to be able to provide them with useful information or services and they will always obtain the information or binding guarantees before paying any money. NEO's close relationship with many pirate groups means that bands of buccaneers might also be found on Aurora as NEO operatives, collecting valuable information.

NEO also takes an interest in the inner economics of Aurora. The freedom fighters know full well RAM's financial infiltration of the gambling asteroid. They are constantly on the lookout for signs that Aurora may be in need of RAM's financial help. Although this is not substantiated, rumor has it that NEO may have operatives working in the internal accounting departments of various gambling houses. NEO would like to be warned well in advance of any impending financial upheavals so it can be prepared for any attempt by RAM to extend its influence.

RAM Relations

RAM has a much higher stake in the future of Aurora than does the NEO. Actually, the situation, if it ever became publicly known, would be a source of great embarrassment to RAM. When Aurora was first established, RAM saw the pleasure asteroid as a source of illicit income and powerful political manipulation, which are common tools of the Martian corporate power. Therefore, RAM sank unimaginably huge amounts of money into the development of Aurora.

However, RAM did not count on the raw, unquenchable spirit of the Belters taking a hold on the pleasure asteroid. As time went on, the Belters on Aurora re-

sisted the influence of RAM, squelching cheating and illicit activities wherever they showed themselves. Despite all its power, RAM is stuck in a quandary—if it crushes the people of Aurora, it might fatally damage its own investment and waste all the money put into it.

Nevertheless, RAM is always looking for a way to corrupt the government of Aurora. Its agents try all manner of covert attacks: blackmail, threats, kidnapping, and so on. They have found, however, that the government's personnel are well protected and most public officials are above reproach.

Pirate Operations

Aurora is the principle no-man's land for the pirate bands of the Belt. It is often used for meetings between rival leaders, for an unwritten truce has existed on the asteroid for many decades, specifying that members of the various brotherhoods shall not do harm to each other on Aurora.

This truce has proven beneficial for all concerned—Aurora likes it, because buccaneers fresh from a lucrative raid are among the wildest gamblers in known space. The pirates enjoy the opportunity to get some R&R without worrying about the activities of their rivals.

Another tacit part of this truce requires that no pirate use Aurora as a base of operations. The Justices keep a watchful eye on their piratical guests in order to insure that this remains the case. So far, no one has tempted fate by abusing the planetoid's unique status.

CERES

ORBITAL RADIUS: 257,000,000 mi. (2.76 AU)
DIAMETER: 663 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,680 days (4.6 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 1,100 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 300 million
PORTS: One class A, three class B

The center of civilization in the Belt is the asteroid Ceres. All matters political, economic, and social that pertain to the Belt as a whole—or, at least, to more than one individual asteroid—will usually come to the attention of Ceres. Ceres also serves as the gateway to the Belt, where new arrivals and departing goods are often assembled. In short, if the Belt can be said to have a capital, Ceres serves in this role.

Major Features

Besides being the most important asteroid in the Belt, Ceres is the largest and most densely populated. What was once a spacious, almost luxurious, planetoid has become an overcrowded, sprawling city-world. Great stretches of the surface of Ceres are covered by domes and buildings, such that the available supplies of air, food, and water are stretched to the limit. Ceres's problems include overpopulation, underemployment, disease, hunger, and a high crime rate.

That isn't to say that all of Ceres is a slum. The rich, as always, live well. They have spent a great amount of credits ensuring their luxurious comfort and safety from the common masses. The upper class area of Ceres is called Upside. The wealthy have seen to it that strict rules and laws have been created to protect

their domain. It is, for example, a crime to enter Upside unless you live there or are visiting someone there. (More information on this is provided in the Politics and Government section.)

The major port on Ceres is the Southland Space Port. It is the largest space port in the Belt, covering approximately 2,500 square miles and catering to over 100 independent commercial and industrial transportation companies. Well over 80,000 employees staff the Southland Space Port, making it the largest single employer in the Belt. Both RAM and NEO have large interests in the affairs of the Southland Space Port (more information is provided in those group's individual sections).

From a tourist's point of view, there is really only one reason to visit Ceres—the Grand Fountain. This massive water fountain is perhaps the largest of its kind, with a water spray of well over 300 yards straight up. Because of the lack of gravity on Ceres, the fountain is completely enclosed in a huge building with its own artificial atmosphere and gravity. Although Ceres is generally considered to be an ugly place with no aesthetic value, the Grand Fountain attracts thousands of tourists each year.

A significant development on Ceres is that of the huge shopping areas and markets. They are the most complete of their kind in the Belt and, indeed, rival those on Mars or even Earth's New Frontier Bazaar. Anything—legal or otherwise—can be bought there. The marketplace covers several square miles of area and contains over 3,000 shops. It was developed to cater to the tourists who come to see the Grand Fountain.

The marketplace has great value to the many pirate groups of the Belt. It is a cen-

ter of the black market and is commonly used for the import and export illegal goods. The pirates, who commonly fight for their lives every day against enemies such as starvation and disease, use the marketplace as a forum for the exchange of large quantities of medicines and food-stuffs. While none of these commodities are technically illegal, the purchase of mass quantities by an "unknown buyer" would raise suspicion anywhere else but in Ceres' marketplace.

Politics and Government

Money. That is the one great qualifier on Ceres. Here, living space, food, clothing, and entertainment are at a premium. Only those with money can have adequate supplies of any of them. Consequently, the people who have the money also have the power.

Ceres City (the collective name for the massive city-world of the asteroid) is headed by Lucas Managua. He is the general leader and chairman of the various bureaus that rule in Ceres City.

In the city, there are 13 bureaus, each with a different sphere of influence. The 13 include:

- Bureau of Trade
- Bureau of Defense
- Bureau of Education
- Bureau of Executive Affairs
- Bureau of Health
- Bureau of Internal Security
- Bureau of Justice
- Bureau of Labor
- Bureau of Legislation
- Bureau of Public Affairs
- Bureau of Public Works
- Bureau of Transportation
- Bureau of Weights and Standards

Each bureau oversees all affairs in Ceres

related to its specialty. For instance, the Bureau of Education handles all training-related matters, public school concerns, adult education, and other such matters.

The 13 bureaus are each headed by a president who is in charge of its affairs. The president heads five board members who are his direct subordinates and in charge of subtasks for the bureau. For example, the Bureau of Education has the following five board members: Director of Adult Education, Director of Public Schools, Director of Universities, Director of Special Education, and Director of Materials. These five directors run the day-to-day affairs of the bureau and report to the president.

With such a neat and orderly system of government, it is not surprising that those in power have found ways to corrupt things. The presidents of the bureaus rarely concern themselves with bureau affairs, rather leaving all the chores to their overworked, underpaid subordinates. The chairman and his presidents tend solely to their own affairs and look toward amassing even more wealth than they already possess. They often redirect funds to their own coffers and order untimely ends for those who oppose them.

A number of very strict laws on Ceres show how deep the corruption of the rich runs. Examples of Ceres laws and their punishments are as follows:

- *Murder (of a Ceres citizen):* death or up to life in prison.
- *Murder (of an Upside resident):* death by slow torture.
- *Improper entry into Upside:* Up to 5 years in prison or exile from Ceres.
- *Battery (of a Ceres citizen):* Up to 5 years in prison.
- *Battery (of an Upside resident):* Public whipping and up to 10 years in prison.
- *Theft:* Up to 10 years in prison (depend-

ing on the value and nature of property stolen).

- *Theft (from an Upside citizen):* Disfigurement and up to 20 years in prison (depending on the value and the nature of the property stolen).

It is clear that the people with the money strongly influence the lawmakers, and in fact the president of the Bureau of Legislation is very powerful on Ceres.

Economy

The economy of Ceres is the most delicate in the Belt. Unlike most of the other asteroids, Ceres has no product to offer. No mining occurs on Ceres—the asteroid was drained of usable materials long ago. No public research occurs here, nor grand entertainment spectacular. Ceres has nothing tangible to sell.

It is in intangibles, however, that Ceres has much to offer. The marketplace on Ceres is unrivaled and offers the opportunity to acquire nearly anything that money can buy. Information is also a resource offered on the asteroid, thus making it attractive to such organizations as RAM, NEO, and the Black Brotherhood.

How a belt of asteroids so far separated from each other that—with few exceptions—no two of them are ever in sight of each other can have a center or “capital” is difficult to understand. In many cases, to divert to Ceres before going to another asteroid is a very long trip out of the way. However, a combination of the power of Ceres’ leaders and the availability of goods through its marketplace keeps people coming here.

Diversion to Ceres can usually be justified because of the marketplace. Most traders only make their rounds of the asteroid belt but once every two years or so. Curiosity, if nothing else, compels a stop at Ceres to see

what wares are available.

Military

Ceres exerts much of its control in the Belt economically, and much of the economic power of the Belt is focused through Ceres. No entity (not even RAM) would blatantly attack Ceres, due to the unpleasant economic ramifications of the action. Ceres, however, has a powerful military force in the event its economic connections are insufficient to guarantee its security. Naturally, this force is controlled by the Bureau of Defense. The First Army of Ceres (there are no other armies) is a potent military force that can be mobilized with minimal notice. It consists of the following:

- 8 battlers
- 13 heavy cruisers
- 24 cruisers
- 300 fighters
- approximately 1 million active duty military personnel

The First Army has never been known to muster its forces for any true military action. It will, however, occasionally deploy for training or for various maneuvers in a show of military strength.

NEO Relations

NEO is especially involved in the affairs of Ceres. The Terran rebellion has many vested interests there. NEO maintains several task forces on Ceres (detailed below) to look out for its interests and, incidentally, to thwart the plans of RAM.

For reasons of security and protection, no NEO task force on Ceres (except Task Force M) knows of the existence of another. In the event that RAM should cap-

ture and interrogate members of one group, their agents will learn nothing of the others. While this sort of "limited knowledge" setup may be in some respects inefficient, it is the only way to ensure the organization's security.

The NEO task forces on Ceres are named alphabetically, but not in sequence. That way no one can determine how many task forces exist by learning the name of any one group. The groups currently active include:

- **Task Force C:** This group is responsible for all NEO intelligence gathering on Ceres. They do everything from public record source analysis to covert spy operations. Considered a high-risk group, Task Force C is the most popular and many a young NEO recruit requests duty there. It is also the highest priority task force on Ceres.

Task Force C has its headquarters in a branch office of the Bureau of Internal Security (gained, naturally, through bribes paid to the President of Internal Security). Its resources include access to records of virtually all large-scale transactions on Ceres and hence, in most of the Belt.

- **Task Force G:** Any military action is carried out by this group. Task Force G is responsible for the protection of allied dignitaries, covert opposition to RAM's military forces on Ceres, and an assortment of other combat-related missions. Task Force G has very little in the way of outright force, so their actions are limited to guerilla-style warfare.

Task Force G operates from a secret base located in the poorest, most run-down section of Ceres, concealed behind a front of ancient shipping warehouse-domes. Battered signs proclaim the area as System Exports, Ltd. The domes are actually sophisticated canopies that can be swiftly opened to reveal complete ship-

launching pads. The entire Task Force G is based here and includes:

- 1 heavy cruiser
- 4 standard cruisers
- 25 fighters
- 200 troops in full battle armor

- **Task Force L:** By long tradition, NEO and the various Belter pirate groups have enjoyed a strong relationship. Task Force L is responsible for liason with all pirate groups on Ceres. Theirs is a difficult task, for they must simultaneously build stronger relations with the pirates, while being wary of treachery. The excessive caution that a posting to this task force requires is an inconvenience that pays off in the long run with the valuable information the pirates can offer.

Task Force L maintains its headquarters in a huge saloon and nightclub complex near the Great Fountain, called the "Galactic Flamingo." Three different stages offer simultaneous zero-G floor shows, but more significantly the club provides dozens of private dining and meeting rooms where illicit deals can be arranged. The club maintains, under the guise of "bouncers," a security team of more than 100 skilled fighting men armed with a variety of small, personal weapons.

- **Task Force M:** Task Force M is the most secretive and powerful of the groups. It is the command task force, and thus is the only group that has access to definite information about the other task forces. It is the duty of Task Force M to coordinate the other groups and act as a liason between them and NEO headquarters on Earth. If RAM ever overtook Task Force M, they could gain substantial knowledge of NEO's operations on Ceres.

Task Force M is the smallest of the task forces, composed of no more than 24 agents. They maintain their headquarters

in the same Internal Security Complex housing Task Force C—though no member of Task Force C is aware of this fact.

- **Task Force T:** The last of NEO's task forces on Ceres, this group handles all transportation needs. If NEO needs to move personnel of any type (military, leaders, defectors, etc.) in or out of the asteroid belt, they turn to Task Force T. This group has a large amount of money at its disposal, as well as access to ground cars, space ships, and other forms of transportation.

The task force maintains its headquarters in a huge hanger complex in the farthest outer reaches of the Southland Spaceport.

Besides their task forces, NEO also controls a merchant house in charge of miscellaneous activities. Called House Blacksmith, this NEO group poses as importers of "ill-gotten" goods such as narcotics, pornography, and quasi-legal items.

NEO chose to pose House Blacksmith as an importer of such things to provide a cover for covert channels and subterfuge. If RAM agents should discover House Blacksmith operatives acting suspiciously, nothing would arouse undue attentions. After all, a merchant house smuggling contraband is expected to be surreptitious.

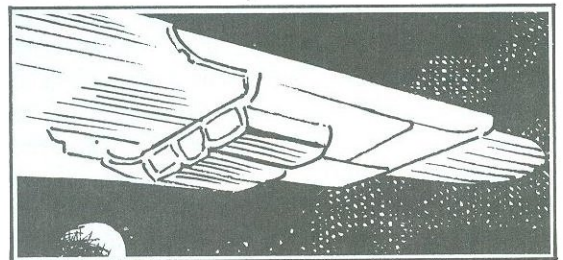
RAM Relations

In matters covert, RAM finds its element. On Ceres, perhaps more than anywhere else in space, RAM is free to extend its influence. The Martian organization is involved in all manner of corruption on Ceres. Rather than using force to extend its power, RAM employs another element which it possesses in quantity: wealth. Money is the key to RAM's power on the

capital asteroid.

RAM has been very unimaginative in its dealings on Ceres. Its agents have spread bribe money too freely and have thus become a source of ready credits for many of the planetoid's poorest and most disreputable residents. As a result, the information it gains tends to be unreliable, often outright fabrication. RAM's actions have become predictable and cyclic, giving NEO an edge over the theoretically more powerful conglomerate.

RAM has also made a potent enemy on Ceres—the merchant house Syracuse, which controls all weapons imports to Ceres. Any weapon more powerful than a basic knife must go through them by contract. RAM made a large purchase of their weapons, carried out a guerilla attack on another leading merchant house, and left some weapons—complete with serial numbers—at the scene. These were traced to House Syracuse. The massive investigation this started caused a loss of both profit and face to the influential merchant house. Now RAM cannot directly purchase weapons from House Syracuse, and this causes the conglomerate a great deal of trouble. It cannot openly import its own weapons onto Ceres because they would first need to go through House Syracuse. It cannot directly attack the house without raising the entire Belt against RAM. The tacit compromise is that RAM secretly pays them great bribes, simply to supply weapons to its forces here. The house continues to tweak RAM's tail as much as it safely can.



CYBELE

ORBITAL RADIUS: 321,000,000 mi. (3.45 AU)

DIAMETER: 110 mi.

PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 2,770 days (7.6 yrs)

GRAVITY: Negligible

ESCAPE VELOCITY: 220 mph

ATMOSPHERE: None

POPULATION: 40,000

PORTS: One class C

Cybele is an asteroid that, to surface inspection, seems to be a typical mining colony. In truth, however, it is one of largest pirate strongholds in the solar system. This truth is carefully masked by an extensive—and thus far successful—masquerade.

Major Features

The surface of Cybele is pocked with domes, each marking the mouth of a deep mine tunnel. Most of these excavations are pressurized, since the high iron content of the asteroid's body allows little leakage of air. Several dozen mines, each a relatively small operation of one or two dozen workers, are scattered across the asteroid.

Each of these mines, to casual inspection, is a normal tunnel, with appropriate housing and stockpiles for just that number of miners. About 75% of them are, in fact, real mines.

The other 25%, however (nine primary sites), are actually well-camouflaged pirate bases. False mining tunnels extend for at least a 1,000 feet below the surface. Beyond that, the mines branch into well-furnished barracks, entertainment centers, planning rooms, and ship docks—including small-scale repair facilities. Near each base, on the surface of Cybele, is a crater with a false bottom. These can be opened to pro-

vide access to hidden spaceship bays. Most bays can accommodate only small vessels, but two—one on each side of the asteroid—are large enough to take ships of cruiser size.

Cybele is the battle base of the Black Brotherhood. Its true function is known to very few outside that band. Other pirates, agents of NEO, and RAM operatives all would love to know about Cybele, but have not even begun to suspect the truth.

The following vessels can be launched to defend Cybele if it is attacked:

- 2 standard cruisers
- 40 fighters

Cybele occupies the center of a shifting asteroid cluster, or "gauntlet," making any approach extremely hazardous for those ships with computers not programmed to the orbital pattern of the gauntlet. (Rocketjocks of these unequipped vessels must make five piloting skill checks to reach the asteroid; each failed check results in 1-10 points of damage to the ship.)

The best defense of Cybele, however, is not on the asteroid itself. The wreckage of a destroyed battler (to all appearances an abandoned hulk) drifts through a solar orbit in the vicinity of Cybele. Gaping holes in the hull, and lack of any energy emissions, confirm its ruined status.

However, the ship is actually fully garrisoned and armed. Thick screens prevent emissions from the ship's reactor reaching any external sensors, and the crew compartments are fully pressurized, isolated from the damaged sections. In an emergency, the battler can be activated in as little as five minutes to join the asteroid defense force.

DAVIDA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 297,000,000 mi. (3.18 AU)
DIAMETER: 212 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 2,082 days (5.7 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 448 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 15,000
PORTS: One class C

Davida is a mining asteroid. It is an archetypical frontier mining colony with relatively few inhabitants.

Major Features

Davida, although sparsely populated, has become an influential asteroid, owing to an extremely hard, carbon-based compound known as starite. Davida's carbonaceous crust is the only place in the solar system where starite has been discovered. These deposits were probably created when Davida collided with another asteroid sometime in the distant past. The heat and pressure of the crash fused the carbon into diamondlike starite. The compound is valuable for a number of reasons: it is harder than diamond and can be worked into sheets as thin as a single molecule! Starite is found amidst deposits of actual diamonds, but is by far the more valuable substance.

Vast tunnels, containing literally tons of unmined diamonds and starite, were waiting to be plucked from the ground. This gave the miners an excellent source of income, and the mines have attracted some of the roughest and most independent miners in the Belt.

A problem has arisen for the mining companies on Davida, however. Over the years, as the wealth and reputation of the

miners increased, more and more miners have come to the carbon-rich planetoid. As time has gone by, the richest veins of starite have begun to run out. Some believe that soon the entire supply may be depleted. This fear has caused much tension between the companies.

Besides its mines, Davida is the source of the compound "neurisium," a scarce and valuable chemical used in medicine to advance the study of neurology and to treat certain disorders of the central nervous system. The production process requires a small amount of starite. This medical commodity, while valuable, does not fetch nearly the price that raw starite does. A growing concern, however, is that if the starite becomes too scarce, the mining companies will increase the price of neurisium to make up for their lost profits.

Politics and Government

When Davida was first populated (in the year 2395), there was little need for a government. There were only three founding mining companies then: The Frontier Mining Company; Diamond Gems, Inc.; and Just Us Two Mining Company. For only three companies, the asteroid was large enough and life was peaceful. As time went on, however, more companies began to congregate on Davida. As of the year 2454, there were 35 mining companies and approximately 60 small, independent operations. Besides a starite shortage, the increased number of inhabitants has created political and social problems.

First sign of difficulties manifested as small raids against neighboring holdings. As centralized market and entertainment sectors opened, bar fights, street brawls,

and other minor altercations broke out between members of the various mining companies.

Besides causing lost work days due to employee injury, these initial fights didn't really have much effect on life on Davida. After all, Belters love a good fight! But time brought restlessness and as the good lodes became increasingly rare, the tempers of the miners began to shorten. It was time for a government to regulate mining operations. So on May 25, 2412, the United Alliance of Miners (also called the UAM) was founded. The three initial mining companies on Davida were given ruling seats in the UAM, as well as all mining companies with 100 or more full-time employees. All told, 25 ruling seats were created and remain to this day.

By order of the UAM, no mining company may create a new mine or leave pre-determined boundaries of existing mines

without a charter from the Alliance. To obtain a charter, the company must apply, be accepted by the UAM, and then pay 1,000 credits for the documentation. With a charter, the company is entitled to mine a five cubic mile area of asteroid as long as the exploitation of that land does not interfere with or cause damage to anyone else's bordering land.

When the UAM was initially founded, charters cost just 200 credits. In 42 years, the cost has increased 500 percent! This is due, mostly, to the greatly increased mining population. Given the continuation of this pressure, additional price increases are expected.

Also, there are fewer areas available for mining than there used to be. All 1,000 credit mining charters are not equal since some areas of Davida are productive and others are not. This creates grave problems. Mining companies fight



amongst themselves to determine who gets to apply for what charter, and the UAM is rife with corruption as bribes are paid and accepted with regularity.

The UAM has discussed assigning variable prices to charters based on how rich the land being chartered is. This would mean expensive surveying, however, thereby driving the price of charters still higher!

When first created, the UAM was to be an organization to regulate mining and nothing more. Now, as the threat of attacks by other mining companies has increased, the UAM has become a police force. To meet the demands for protection by many of the smaller mining companies, the UAM has hired professional security personnel. Less than 50 years after its inception, the UAM has become a strong-arm organization, and the asteroid Davida has developed into a dangerous war zone in a state of martial law.

Economy

As might be expected, the economy of Davida resides solely on its ability to produce starite, diamonds, and—to some extent—neurisiam. If the mines ever dried up, the communities of Davida would vanish overnight. A number of places import starite from Davida:

- **Earth** (*The Edinburgh Arcology*): It is not surprising that Edinburgh, with a largely creative population and many musically inclined persons, has developed some of the most intriguing and original musical instruments ever created. A rare and valued instrument—produced only in Edinburgh—is the Dolingiers Harp (named after Antoine Dolingiers, the harp's creator). The harp uses starite vibrated by strings constructed from human hair to create a harmonically perfect and

beautiful tone.

- **Venus:** The theocratic Ishtar Confederation uses many rare and precious gems to create religious symbols and decorations. One of the primary sources of such gems remains the mines of Davida. Both starite and diamonds are used by the Venusians.

- **Mars:** RAM's Planetary Assault Corps is perhaps one of the most feared groups in space. The sight of these bio-engineered warriors rocket-jumping into a battle is enough to make even the most battle-hardened veterans pause to reconsider the odds. RAM is always attempting to lead the way in military and weapons technology to support the PAC. Their plans, however, are top secret and none but the most powerful of Martian officers are privy to them. Whatever weapon is being developed for use by the PAC is not known, but sizable quantities of starite (the hardest substance known) are being imported by RAM for military research and development.

- **The Belt:** Aurora, the pleasure asteroid, also has a number of high-priced souvenirs available to guests of the various hotels and gambling houses. They import large amounts of starite from Davida and account for perhaps 20 percent of the asteroid's mining business. Aurora's craftsmen then take the starite, make it into exotic trinkets, jewelry, and clothing, and then sell them at an incredible markup to their rich and pampered patrons.

As noted earlier, the sale of neurisiam has become an increasingly important source of income for Davida. In the past five years alone, the total income from starite sales has decreased 30 percent, and that includes price increases! The Belters of Davida realize that they must find an alternate source of income or be ruined. They have turned to neurisiam as

that source.

In the past, Davida has always sold the life-giving compound to medical companies relatively cheaply. Now, however, with decreasing income beginning to threaten their livelihoods, the miners are strongly considering increasing the price of neurisiam dramatically.

An increase in the price of neurisiam would have several effects. First, the purchasing companies would not be able to afford the quantities of the compound that they normally purchase, so less of the life-giving drug created from neurisiam would be available. Second, with the increased costs of import, the companies would be forced to cut costs elsewhere, possibly affecting the quality of the final drug produced. Last, the resulting conflict between the miners and the medical companies would create added tension on Davida, an asteroid already headed toward ruinous internal conflict.

Military

Davida has no organized military force. In fact, it has no planetary defenses other than the private ships and vehicles of the mining companies.

These, however, are nothing to laugh at. Many established mining companies go to great lengths to protect their territory and their claims. One outfit—The Frontier Mining Company—has a battler orbiting Davida. Many larger companies have cruisers and large destroyers. Most companies have impressive squadrons of fighters.

Despite the great collective firepower of Davida, it is unlikely that these forces would ever be used to anywhere near their maximum potential. The various companies feud so badly among themselves that close cooperation is unbelievable. It is a miracle that the asteroid has

not been overrun by RAM (more on this in the RAM Relations section).

Davida has a force of police run by the UAM, called the Planetary Security Patrol (PSP). These UAM-controlled forces are responsible for the "protection" of the various mining companies and enforcement of UAM directives. What it's turned into, however, is altogether different. The PSP is widely believed to be responsible for the eradication of several small mining companies. When the UAM sees a company that is becoming a problem—whether they are becoming uncomfortably powerful, nosing around in the affairs of others, or mining on land to which they have no right—the PSP is often used in force. With their superior arsenal, the PSP can hold its own against some of the larger companies and destroy the smaller ones outright.

The Planetary Security Patrol consists of the following:

- 1 heavy cruiser
- 3 regular cruisers
- 50 fighters
- 300 jetcars
- approximately 1,000 patrolmen

They are situated throughout Davida so as to be able to quickly respond to any threat. Their average response time anywhere on the asteroid is five minutes.

NEO Relations

NEO has minimal interest in Davida. Of course they'd rather not see RAM gain power there, but NEO simply does not have the resources to be in all places where RAM is expanding. So, for the present, NEO has written Davida off.

The New Earth Organization does, however, have a mining company on Davida that it uses to augment its income.

The company—called Endless Vistas, Inc. (or EVI)—is relatively small and quiet so as not to attract the attention of the Davida authorities or raise the suspicions of RAM. It simply mines small areas, making a small but respectable profit.

NEO does not want to see the price of neurisiam to go up, realizing that the short- and long-term effects of such an increase could be economically disastrous for the smaller and more independent concerns. Thus NEO opposes any widespread price increase. On several occasions, EVI has taken large profit cuts to offset financial downturns in Davida, hoping to avoid an increase in the price of neurisiam. Thus far, the organization has been successful, but matters continue to get worse. Sometime soon the EVI may not be able to avert a financial crisis.

RAM Relations

Davida is a veritable playground for RAM. The giant conglomerate has been spreading its influence there for many years. A number of hot spots on Davida, however, are of particular interest to RAM.

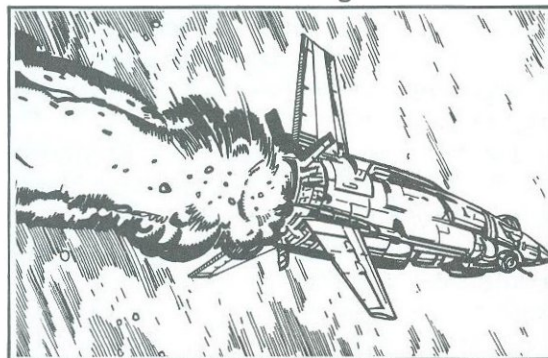
First, in order to spread its influence, RAM has procured a ruling seat in the United Alliance of Miners by starting a large company. RAM's company is called Davida Mining House. It has over 1,000 employees, making it the sixth largest mining house on the whole asteroid. This gives RAM a relatively forceful say as to what does and does not happen on Davida. The Davida Mining House has also, through shrewd manipulation, put the Just Us Two Mining Company, the second largest mining house on the asteroid, at its mercy.

On September 8, 2455, the Just Us Two Mining Company was on the edge of ruin. The president of the company, Norton

Billia, one of the two founding members, had died. His son Peter took over and things began to decline steadily. The inept bumbling of Peter rapidly brought about the decline of the company. Just Us Two was in deep debt and foundering; Peter began to look to alternate sources of quick money. He made the mistake of borrowing from Anthony Costigliano, a notorious loan shark. The mistake was not in the borrowing itself, but in his inability to repay the amount.

RAM would normally have let the company fold, thus bringing itself up into the fifth slot of Davida's hierarchy, but instead the corporate entity saw an excellent opportunity to put itself in the second slot! They intervened and bailed Peter Billia and his mining company out of trouble—but not without cost. Peter now answers to a RAM agent, who visits the company once per month. Major decisions about company policy must go through this agent, and thus RAM ensures its best interests are served.

One interesting fact about Davida is that its "miraculous" immunity to attack from outside forces is actually due to RAM. The Martian powerhouse has too many interests in Davida and too much money sunk into it to allow it to be attacked by pirates or other independent groups. And, as long as the money rolls in, RAM itself has no interest in moving in on the asteroid and taking it over.



EUPHROSYNE

ORBITAL RADIUS: 290,000,000 mi. (3.12 AU)
DIAMETER: 140 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,460 days (4 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 300 mph
POPULATION: 20,000
PORTS: One class C

Euphrosyne is a workers' asteroid, a mining colony where the inhabitants work hard for a living, prosper, and disdain outside involvements. For the most part, its history is a remarkable tale of success in coping with adversity.

Major Features

Euphrosyne is the largest asteroid that has been completely "drilled through"; i.e., one can enter the asteroid through a tunnel on one side and emerge on the other. This is possible in several different locations, for the metals that have drawn miners here for many decades tend to occur in long, slender veins. Naturally, the mine tunnels have followed these veins.

Nickel is the major product mined here, though gold, silver, platinum, iron, and uranium have all been discovered in smaller amounts. Hundreds of small mining operations have been established at various points on the planetoid's surface, each following its own vein inward until Euphrosyne has become a beehive of plunging, crossing, and converging tunnels.

Only rarely do two of these operations come into conflict, in part because of the narrow, twisting nature of the veins—they rarely intersect. A strong tradition against claim-jumping insures that the first group to start working a vein is enti-

tled to see it through completion.

On occasions when two concerns do contest a claim, they are encouraged to resolve it between themselves. A council of miners will adjudicate any differences that cannot be so resolved, but the council charges 50% of all subsequent profits from the claim from *both* concerns as the price of its judgment—strong motivation for the miners to settle the matter by themselves!

This streak of individualism runs through the asteroid's entire culture. There is no government, per se, nor any significant presence from RAM or NEO. Pirates stop here occasionally and are sheltered and allowed to purchase provisions—as are any other visitors.

Military

Euphrosyne has a military uniquely in keeping with its rugged character. The force draws its name from an ancient American fighting force, calling themselves the Minutemen. Although there are no asteroid taxes assessed, each mining group, however small, is required to contribute one fighter, and a pilot to fly it, to the Minutemen. (This has led to a lot of lucrative employment possibilities for rocket jocks who don't mind a little loneliness.)

The fighter must be launched within 10 minutes of any alarm. The total force numbers nearly 300 fighters, each piloted by a rugged individualist and lacking any overall command. The Minutemen have shown remarkable tenacity and coordination on those few occasions when they have been called upon to defend the asteroid—so much so that, now, potentially hostile forces are well inclined to leave Euphrosyne alone.

FORTUNA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 227,000,000 mi. (2.44 AU)
DIAMETER: 135 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,364 days (3.7 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 300 mph
POPULATION: 7,000
PORTS: One class C

Fortuna, a small planetoid, has remained a zero-gravity environment. The several stations that have been built here are used by various scientific laboratories and pharmaceutical companies to perform experiments and perfect processes best suited to zero-G. Its citizens and administrative staff are some of the most enlightened people in the Belt.

Major Features

The most prominent feature of Fortuna is the Response medical research station, the largest medical research facility in the system. This massive construction is a joint venture by several corporations on Earth, Mars, and Jupiter. It employs well over 10,000 people and is responsible for most of the major contemporary medical breakthroughs.

Some of the projects currently being developed by Response are as follows:

- **Gravitol II:** The Response scientists believe that they can develop a more effective, cheaper, and more easily prepared variety of gravitol. If this could be done, the valuable drug would be less expensive and more accessible across the system. Currently, gravitol can only be prepared using plants grown on the Venusian lowland plains. This gives the Venusians a virtual monopoly on a drug that

is essential for interplanetary space flight.

- **Symphum:** Medicine has mastered most of the body. Nearly every organ is fully understood and most problems that arise with them can be treated. The major exception, however, is the brain. Even in the 25th century, science does not fully understand the brain. Thus, medical problems with this organ present a major challenge and are usually met with little more than educated guesswork.

Symphum presents a major step forward in the treatment of brain-related medical problems. By using this drug, medical researchers hope to be able to track brain functions: to literally follow a thought from inception to action and to see which areas of the brain and nervous system process thought itself. Although the drug offers great promise, there are still a great many technical problems to be resolved.

- **Synthetic organs:** Although transplant methods have been nearly perfected, the problem of finding suitable donor organs still exists. With the improved medical techniques of the 25th century, people live longer lives. In spite of cloning and aggressive donor programs, there are relatively few organs to be found. In fact, over 10 million people die annually in the solar system due to lack of necessary organs.

Fortuna intends to do away with this problem. Through gene development technology, synthetic organs are being developed. Hearts, livers, kidneys, and many other vital organs will be artificially constructed for the purpose of organ transplants. The benefits of a successful research program are obvious.

Politics and Government

Two words can be used to describe the government of Fortuna: peaceful and productive. Fortuna is governed by a council of scientists and businessmen. These individuals are responsible for determining the direction of the various projects on the asteroid and the distribution of the funding made available by the many independent sources that donate.

The steering organization—called the Administrative Council—is composed of seven scientists and four administrative personnel. Four of the scientists and three of the administrative personnel are employees of the Response medical research station. The others are employees of some of the minor facilities on Fortuna. Despite the obvious dominance Response has on the council, there have yet to be any problems with lack of objectivity. All the men and woman are obviously dedicated to the cause of science first and their respective facilities second.

The Administrative Council is primarily responsible for setting policy. They gather together (often inviting any who care to attend) and make decisions based on the capabilities of the various facilities as to what projects should be pursued. Although they often debate this matter at length, a mutual decision is always sought and usually achieved. The council will then assign the projects to the facilities based solely on the stations' resources and who is best for each individual job.

The second major function of the council is fund distribution. A large number of independent companies and hospitals donate money to the stations of Fortuna. These organizations, although charitable in nature, expect to see results from their money. Therefore, careful control of the money and meticulous record keeping is necessary.

Economy

Although it is primarily a medical facility, Fortuna is, in several ways, a money-making organization. The Administrative Council has three major sources of income.

First, the scientific stations themselves make a profit. They contract their facilities to independent researchers who need a fully equipped and functional zero-G environment for work. These contracts are expensive, and the stations bring in a lot of money doing this. Fortuna has been the target of much media criticism due to their contract policy, but the Administrative Council is quick to point out that they never allow the contracts to interfere with normal station projects, and that the contracts allow many independent researchers the opportunity to conduct experiments that would otherwise be far too expensive.

Second, the export of various medicines and knowledge gained in medical development on Fortuna is a source of profit. As the largest and best equipped station of its kind, Fortuna often develops products that are not available anywhere else in the solar system. The council on Fortuna has special agreements that give it a share of the profits for any of the products developed there.

Third, Fortuna offers many corporations and financial organizations a viable option for donation (with applicable tax deductions). In some circles, it is the vogue to donate research money to Fortuna and, of course, the Administrative Council never complains.

Fortuna, however, is in a very dependent position. Although it supplies much advanced medical technology to the solar system, Fortuna itself needs many supplies: food, clothing, entertainment, and the raw materials for medical research.

Therefore, the council is careful not to charge too much for the products produced by the asteroid's medical facilities. The council does not want to be in a position in which the buyers could take undue advantage of the planetoid's needs. Although delicately balanced, Fortuna's economic system brings maximum benefit to the greatest number of people.

Thus, Fortuna is a power in the system-wide medical community. The asteroid is at the cutting edge of medical technology, leading the way in nearly all major medical research and development. Besides giving the council a great deal of prestige and power, this also makes Fortuna an obvious target for espionage and exploitation. The Administrative Council recognizes this and takes great precautions to guard itself.

Military

Fortuna has no intrinsic military of any kind. The council has decided that the direction of funds toward a military force would not only be unethical (considering the source of Fortuna's funds) but would be against the Hippocratic oath, to which most of the asteroid's inhabitants have sworn.

That is not to say that Fortuna has no military protection. A large number of terrorist and pirate organizations would like to gain control of the asteroid, and a completely defenseless population would be easy prey. Fortunately, Fortuna enjoys the protection of the combined militaries of most of the planets in the solar system. Even ruling groups that are normally enemies join forces to protect the asteroid. Such groups include RAM, the Albany arcology on Earth (and through them NEO), the Martian Free States, the Ishtar Confederation, and the asteroid Ceres.

The Administrative Council recognizes

the need for such military protection, but does not condone the violence associated with a large military force. They are very careful not to let the fact that any individual group or nation is providing military aid affect their judgment when providing medical research or supplies. The council believes that everyone should be given fair and unbiased treatment.

The total military force independently protecting Fortuna consists of:

- 5 battlers
- 7 heavy cruisers
- 12 standard cruisers
- 400 fighters
- approximately 50,000 troops

Ironically enough, Fortuna, an asteroid with no military forces or budget, may be one of the most well-protected places in the solar system. No attack has ever been made on the asteroid, nor is there any recorded outbreak of violence. It remains an island of peace in the troubled Belt.

NEO Relations

NEO places a great deal of emphasis on its relationship with Fortuna. The freedom force has been very careful to develop strong ties with various of the research stations on Fortuna. It has been a strong donor (of both money and military protection) throughout the years. Several NEO scientists are working on Fortuna, keeping the freedom force on the cutting edge of medical technology.

Although RAM is an outright enemy of NEO, NEO makes no effort to attack RAM forces on Fortuna. RAM would most likely be extremely pleased if NEO ever launched such an attack. The corporate giant could then play the innocent victim and bring a large amount of political propaganda to bear against NEO.

That is not to say that NEO does not try to thwart RAM's plans on Fortuna. RAM enjoys the ability to openly participate in the support of Fortuna, whereas NEO must do so through covert channels. This openness on the part of RAM, however, benefits NEO. The freedom force is constantly striving to show that the funds provided by RAM to the research stations are from unethical sources and should not be employed. On several occasions, NEO has succeeded, and the particular funds in question have not been used. Although this has caused some loss of face on RAM's part, Fortuna still cannot afford to turn down further funding from RAM. The conglomerate's resources are just too great and their donations too generous.

NEO also has a vested interest in the commonplace medical supplies which are readily available through Fortuna, especially through the Response medical research station. One serious obstacle facing NEO has always been the lack of sufficient medical supplies to support their agents and troops. Through Fortuna, however, those simple supplies are often made available.

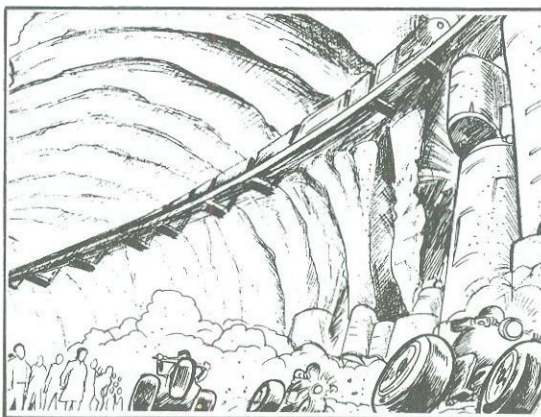
RAM Relations

RAM found several ways to exploit Fortuna. The most obvious—and least harmful—is the procurement of extremely inexpensive medical supplies. Due to the large number of military operations RAM takes part in, medical supplies are essential. RAM's coffers are not bottomless, and the organization must find ways to obtain these much-needed supplies for a reasonable cost. By using its influence with the Administrative Council, RAM is able to do just that. In fact, it always seems that the money RAM donates to Fortuna is less than the amount they save on medical supplies.

RAM also has a great interest in the development of various military drugs—chemical agents that increase the quickness, strength, or savagery of its troops. Such drugs typically have deleterious side effects, ranging from addiction and withdrawal to permanent brain or muscle damage. Those effects dissuade NEO from using similar drugs—but RAM doesn't care. Not only that, but RAM is willing to use its troops as test subjects to discover the side effects of new drugs.

However, if RAM tried to directly force the council to hasten the development or availability of the drugs, the political backlash would be swift and perhaps the drugs would never be made available to them. RAM, therefore, has to support this effort covertly. One of its primary methods is to bribe the scientists themselves. There are some doctors—a minority on high-minded Fortuna, to be sure—who gladly take extra money simply to more quickly develop the projects the council has instructed them to pursue anyway.

RAM has tried on several occasions to obtain a seat on the Administrative Council. Each time, the corporate giant has met defeat. It is clear that the council will deal with RAM, but they will not tolerate direct RAM influence on their work. Such is the price RAM pays for its infamous reputation.



HYGEIA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 292,000,000 mi. (3.15 AU)
DIAMETER: 254 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,860 days (5.09 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 500 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 180,000
PORTS: One class B

Hygeia is a large shipyard asteroid and is possibly one of the top three shipyards in the solar system. The production facilities on Hygeia specialize in the construction of small orbital colonies—independent self-contained ecological systems called “bottles.” Across the entire solar system, Hygeia is considered the acknowledged authority on the construction of bottles. Other facilities make them, but Hygeia makes them best.

Bottles

Bottles are among the smallest orbital colonies made. They are extremely useful when a quick construct is necessary to house research or reconnaissance personnel. Also, exploration of hostile environments offers many unique challenges, and bottles make very useful bases of operation for such tasks.

These made-to-order, self-sufficient environments range in size from 70 feet long by 40 feet wide up to several hundred feet in each dimension, at a cost ranging from 300,000 credits to several million. While very expensive, bottles are dirt cheap when compared to space stations.

Bottles include the machinery and electronics to generate food, water, and air for a limited population—on the average,

about one resident for every 10 feet of length and width. For example, the 70 × 40 bottle can support 11 humans indefinitely.

Major Features

Hygeia's primary feature of interest is the McLaughlin Shipyard, named after Randall McLaughlin, the ingenious engineer who developed bottles. McLaughlin Shipyard is enormous, covering some 6,000 square miles and containing the most up-to-date equipment and best-trained engineers. It is an engineer's, mechanic's, and machinist's dream.

Interestingly enough, Hygeia imports most of its equipment and supplies from the famed Petropavlovsk Shipyard on Earth. Although McLaughlin and Petropavlovsk would seem to be in direct competition, the latter does not make bottles and thus feels no threat from McLaughlin. That does not, however, stop Petropavlovsk from charging slightly inflated prices for the supplies and equipment sold to McLaughlin.

As well as being a top-notch shipyard, McLaughlin also houses a very fine engineering school. It is not uncommon for young students to come from as far away as Earth to learn at the McLaughlin School of Engineering. Randall McLaughlin himself taught several classes there until shortly before his death in 2435. Graduates of this school are considered to be leaders in their field.

Located on the southern edge of the McLaughlin Shipyard is the Museum of Spacefaring Technology. This museum contains a complete history of nearly five centuries of space travel, from the early Soviet Sputnik missions to a collection of theoretical space craft that may someday

allow man to travel at faster than light speeds. Some of the artifacts in the Museum of Spacefaring Technology are beyond price. The recovered remains of an old Russian space probe that crashed on the surface of the moon in 1959 are an example of ancient technology that has been preserved in the museum. The Museum of Spacefaring Technology is responsible for the preservation of much of what is left of old technology. Many scientists still come to it to study its ancient exhibits.

The museum has one other interesting function: it hides a NEO base. The existence of this super-secret base is known to very few. Only NEO members considered to have a "need to know" are informed of it. There are no non-NEO members who know of its existence. For more information on this, see NEO Relations.

Politics and Government

The asteroid has no formal government. It is ruled by two independent groups, each with control only over its own territory. One, as might be expected, is the McLaughlin Shipyard, which controls not only the yard itself, but several thousand square miles of underground land which has become primarily residential in nature. The McLaughlin Shipyard has developed a special Human Interest Department in which it has vested the power of day-to-day affairs. The HID essentially acts as a form of micro-government, managing matters such as economy, employment, health matters, foreign affairs, etc.

With the exception of foreign affairs, the HID takes no interest in outside matters. It seems mostly concerned with the management of the affairs of its people and is at best lukewarm toward outsiders. Although it seems unfriendly, there is a reason for its coldly professional attitude

toward outsiders. It helps the HID maintain its cover and keep the NEO base hidden.

The second ruling group is the New Day Movement. This is a conglomeration of artists, musicians, and philosophers who wish only to maintain a freedom from artistic and religious persecution. They bother no one and expect the same lack of interference from others. The New Day Movement is a peaceful group.

The existence of the New Day Movement is no accident. The HID knew that it would have to share Hygeia with someone else, since the asteroid was too large for just one organization, so they made it a point to assist the Movement when it was struggling in its infancy in the expense of relocating the group to Hygeia. The HID worked through covert channels so as not to arouse any suspicion. With the New Day Movement's exclusivity and HID's reputation with strangers, Hygeia has little to worry about in terms of being bothered by outsiders (particularly RAM).

Economy

The economy of Hygeia hinges on the sale of bottles. All industry on the asteroid is related—directly or indirectly—to bottles. Fortunately, these high-priced exports are in high demand, so Hygeia does not experience any problems with its one-product economy.

There have been a few occasions when RAM has attempted to disrupt Hygeia's bottle business. The reasons for this are unclear, but no doubt RAM was devising some way to move in on the profitable business. On those occasions, RAM's plans were thwarted as the independent companies came to the McLaughlin Shipyard's assistance. The yard's ability to make bottles is well known, and it is generally considered that no one—not even

RAM—can make them as well.

Ironically, RAM also has a great interest in seeing the yard continue to prosper. In the year 2344 a RAM holding company purchased large amounts of land on Hygeia, hoping to mine the planet. The plan failed, however, because Hygeia proved to have no resources worth mining, beyond a few traces of iron near the surface. RAM was not anxious to see its profits drain away, so in 2366 it drafted a contract with Randall McLaughlin to lease the land to him for his shipyard. The lease was for the life of the company and was based on a percentage of the yard's profits. So RAM is legally unable to cancel the lease or raise the price. The more money the McLaughlin Shipyard makes, the more money RAM—through its holding company—collects.

The Black Brotherhood, the notorious pirate organization, will commonly (but covertly) purchase bottles from Hygeia. These bottles are used when a new outpost is being set up on an asteroid. Because the asteroids have no atmosphere, the best way to house people while permanent installations are being constructed is with bottles. Thus, the Black Brotherhood is responsible for a large number of bottle purchases, although this fact remains hidden from the McLaughlin Shipyard (and the rest of the solar system, for that matter). The Brotherhood acquires something on the order of two to six dozen bottles per year.

Military

Hygeia houses a fairly respectable military force. One of the main reason for this is that it can afford to. Ship construction is all done in the yard, so vessels are relatively inexpensive, and there is no lack of people willing to serve in what is perhaps the highest paid military in the Belt.

The main purpose of Hygeia's military force is to protect the shipyard and the bottles from outside attack. RAM and pirates are considered the primary enemies, although neither of these have, as yet, made any moves against the facility. Although the HID maintains the army and military personnel are always raised from HID citizens and off-planet volunteers, the military offers full protection to the New Day Movement.

The military force consists of:

- 2 battlers
- 4 heavy cruisers
- 12 standard cruisers
- 450 fighters
- approximately 7,000 active duty personnel

Hygeia is constantly producing more ships to be sold. However, once per three years the asteroid replaces every ship in its military with a brand-new one. As a result, Hygeia's military has the most reliable and up-to-date ships in the Belt.

The military is less than an active duty force, but more than a simple militia. It is a unique arrangement in which the tasks of military training and active duty enlistment are shared by personnel with other tasks. For example, a man might be a lieutenant in the military and in charge of training materials for the McLaughlin School of Engineering.

This practice allows military personnel to hold productive positions in the society as well as belong to the asteroid defense force, but the practice makes for less than elite fighting forces.

NEO Relations

NEO has a great interest in Hygeia. The freedom fighters have a large and complex base there called Freedom of the

Skies. The base is extremely important to NEO. It houses a large proportion of their forces in the Belt. Outside of Earth, this may be the single most important NEO base in the solar system.

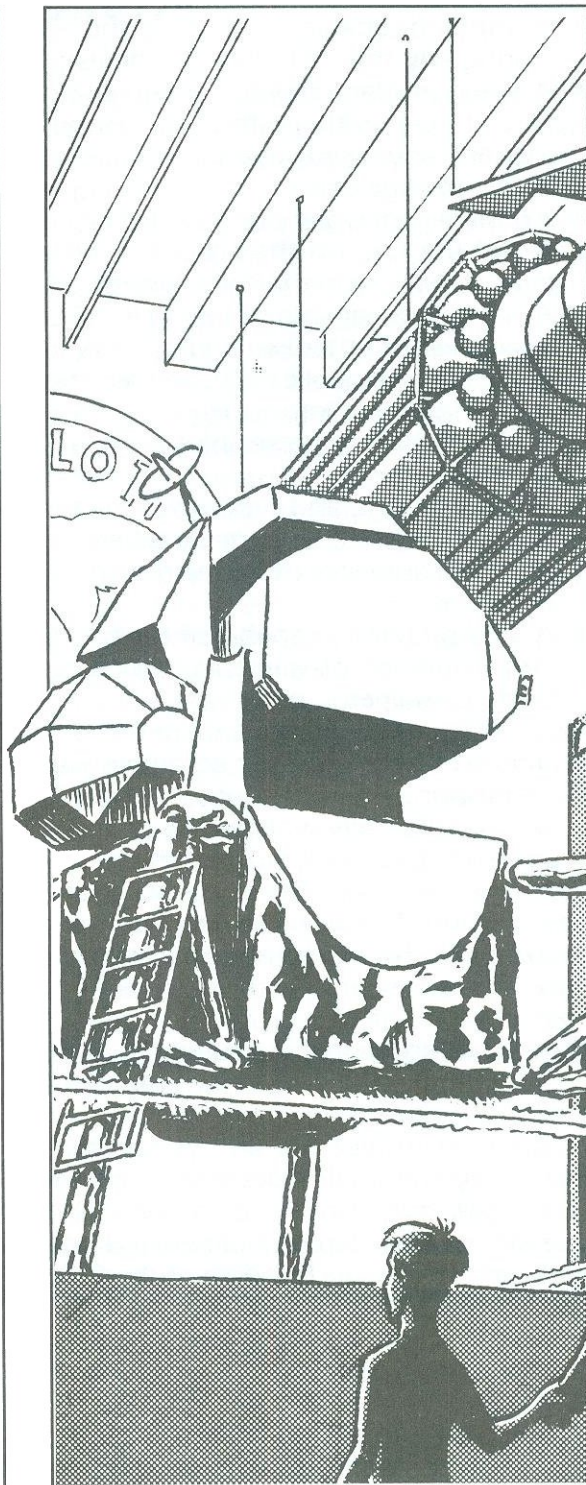
Freedom of the Skies has several main purposes and many lesser purposes. The base was conceived, developed, and made a reality by now-retired NEO general Teresa Pierce in 2445. By carefully manipulating funds from several sources and by cleverly playing politicians and military leaders off against each other, Pierce was not only able to secure the funds for the project, but to be placed personally in charge of it.

In the beginning, many NEO officers opposed the construction of Freedom of the Skies. They stated that to trust an independent company—in this case the McLaughlin Shipyard—to protect NEO's secret would be utterly foolish. In the end, however, Pierce won and the base was founded.

In order to disguise its existence, the Museum of Spacefaring Technology was created. This, in itself, was another amazing feat on the part of Pierce. If the disguise was to be effective, the museum had to be set up properly. This required many hundreds of thousands of credits to recover and restore many of the artifacts now found in the museum. In the end, NEO has come to rely heavily upon the Freedom of the Skies base, and its continued welfare is paramount.

The primary mission of the Freedom of the Skies is to provide a platform from which NEO can launch any mission it needs to perform anywhere in the solar system.

In order to accomplish this, the base must provide all of the following:



- A shipyard capable of repairing and restoring any ship of battler size or less;
- A weapon plant capable of equipping NEO forces with up-to-date, technologically advanced weapon;
- A fuel storage depot;
- An intelligence gathering center capable of tracking on the actions of enemies anywhere in the solar system;
- A safehouse capable of taking in NEO operatives or other key figures, removing them from public view, and secretly reentering them into society;
- A hidden base to store ships of cruiser size or less;
- A food storage and production center capable of feeding large numbers of NEO personnel for extended periods of time; and
- A medical facility capable of treating a large number of ailments, including battle casualties.

Freedom of the Skies can accomplish all these missions. The McLaughlin Shipyard, which is not closely watched by anyone, supplies the base with much of the equipment necessary for ship repair, weapons construction, fuel storage, and food synthesization. The base also has several large, subterranean caverns used for both ship storage and the growing of special plants that do not require sunlight.

Other missions entrusted to Freedom of the Skies include emergency meetings of NEO council members or officers, safe storage of important NEO documents, detention of politically dangerous prisoners, and research and development of new technologies. In all respects, Freedom of the Skies performs these missions admirably.

RAM Relations

As noted earlier, RAM has little involvement on Hygeia. Even the seemingly

endless resources of RAM have their limits, and the huge Martian conglomerate organization cannot be in all places at once.

RAM sees Hygeia as a small, uninvolved asteroid that has little to offer them and even less to offer their enemies (most notably NEO). It is true that Hygeia makes good money from the sales of bottles, but that amount is a tiny droplet compared to RAM's ocean of wealth and resources.

The contract that RAM holds over Hygeia's head is now of almost no consequence to the asteroid. It was negotiated in the earliest days of RAM's reign and McLaughlin secretly designed it to give his shipyard a lifetime lease. As much as it would like to, RAM cannot increase the amount that the shipyard pays and cannot change the terms of the contract.

RAM is basically unaware of NEO's presence on Hygeia, but some people in RAM's ranks believe that Hygeia is hiding something. In January of 2455, RAM executive Paul LaForce passed a directive that Hygeia should be investigated soon for "possible subversive activities." LaForce suspected NEO influence on Hygeia for quite some time, but never had the power to act on it. When he received a promotion to Deputy Commander of Belt Affairs, he immediately set his plan into motion.

After an extensive report and several months of planning, LaForce turned the project over to his Belt Task Force. The task force spent nearly six months in planning and searches, only to find nothing of significance on the asteroid. The manpower, time, and money spent on the project was nearly as great as RAM's displeasure with LaForce. It is believed that LaForce is now working in the commo room in some obscure outpost on some equally obscure icesteroid.

INTERAMNIA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 285,000,000 mi. (3.06 AU)
DIAMETER: 210 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,972 days (5.4 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 447 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 25,000
PORTS: One class C

The tragedy of Earth and the near destruction of that glorious planet have been repeated on a smaller scale upon the asteroid Interamnia. The once beautiful planetoid was RAM's first attempt at terraforming a free asteroid and giving it an artificial atmosphere.

In early 2408, RAM established a special project team to develop machinery capable of creating an artificial atmosphere for an asteroid. RAM figured that if the project was successful, an asteroid with an atmosphere would be a huge money-making opportunity. It could be developed as a corporate area, as high-priced luxury residences, or even as a commercial site for hotels, restaurants, casinos, etc.

RAM's plans might have been successful were it not for the basic human nature. At the beginning of the operation, RAM was very secretive and protective of the project, allowing only its own people to have access to the site. Many highly talented and motivated scientists and colonists outside the project would have been glad to help, but they were not of RAM. The conglomerate refused to let them take part in the project and thus sealed its fate.

RAM saw amazing initial success with its efforts. Scientists and engineers of the corporate giant worked around the clock,

attempting to perfect an artificial asteroid atmosphere. Within months they had prepared an atmospheric system that was totally functional.

Then colonists started to arrive, wave after wave of them, in a daily deluge that flooded Interamnia. After all, the asteroid was RAM's pet project, and anyone who took a part in it would be guaranteed recognition and possible advancement from the company. As time went by, the colonists began bickering among themselves, fighting for prestige and scarce resources with increasing energy and frequency. Soon, the asteroid was in complete disarray, and the once neat and orderly colonization sites were little more than independent city-states engaged in constant conflict with their neighbors.

By the year 2410, just two years after the foundation of Interamnia, the colonies had succumbed to total chaos. RAM Central, seeing its efforts wasted, declared the project a failure and abandoned Interamnia altogether. The heads of the project at RAM recalled their scientific crews and engineering teams and withdrew from the asteroid. The teams took with them their ships and equipment, leaving almost 15,000 colonists stranded on Interamnia without transportation and with limited food supplies.

As time drew on, the situation became increasingly worse. Soon, people began preying on each other for food and supplies. Then the colonists divided into about twelve factions, each organizing themselves and attacking other groups. It seemed that RAM had doomed 15,000 men, women, and children to a terrible death.

There followed a time of despair in which the existing technology on the asteroid began to break down from lack of

care. The factions began making savage, large-scale attacks on their neighbors. This period lasted from 2410 until 2416. During these six years, the fate of the colonists seemed set—they would destroy themselves.

Fortunately, human spirit intervened. One of the groups, calling themselves Unity For Tomorrow, realized the cruel fate to which they were apparently destined and decided they would try to overcome it. Gathering together all the colonists who had technical and mechanical knowledge, they began collecting pieces of the broken-down and long-neglected mechanical, electrical, and electronic equipment and began stripping them for parts. This process was complicated and time-consuming, and for a long time Unity For Tomorrow seemed destined to fail. Attacks were made against the group, and their casualties were far greater than those of the more warlike bands. The simple fact was that many of the members of the group refused to fight and were slaughtered as a result.

In the year 2418, Unity For Tomorrow began producing new technology at a rapid pace. Weapons, communications, food synthesizers, and all manner of other machinery were rebuilt. New weapons allowed the group to defend themselves against the hostile groups. New communications equipment allowed them to send out distress calls, and the new food synthesizers allowed them to create much-needed food and water supplies.

Initially, Unity For Tomorrow did not try to make peace with the other colonists. Its leaders realized that the hatred of those people ran deep, and it would take much to dissipate it. So they began using their newly developed energy weapons to defend themselves against attacks. The results were phenomenal. As the other groups attacked they were quickly and ef-

fectively repelled.

After a time, the attacks ceased. The bloodshed had been too much even for the most violent colonists. Many of the groups came to Unity For Tomorrow seeking terms for surrender. They were shocked to find out that Unity had no desire for the other groups to surrender—they simply wanted peace.

That is not to say that the idea caught on right away. In fact, the opposite was true at first. Many of the chaotic colonists believed that Unity For Tomorrow was weak, and that despite their superior firepower, they could be beaten. For several more years, random attacks continued, but each time they were repulsed with ease. The warriors of Unity For Tomorrow, although loathe to kill, never backed down their resolve. They continued to defend themselves surely and strongly. In the end, that—if anything—won the respect of the other groups of colonists. By August 18, 2421, the fighting had ceased.

On August 18, 20 men and women met in a historic summit that would dramatically change the society of Interamnia. They decided to consolidate the asteroid and bring together the finally unified colonists. From that day forward, no fighting has occurred between the colonists.

In order to further break down the barriers between the various colonists, all of the individual groups were outlawed and all the Belters on Interamnia were considered citizens of the asteroid. The wisdom of those 20 men and women gathered together in what was later called the Hofsteg Conference (named so for Chaligan Hofsteg, the chairman of the meeting) was far reaching. By dissolving the groups and unifying the colonists, they were able to focus their attentions on a common enemy: RAM. After all, it was RAM that had left them stranded and it was the greed of RAM that had begun

their plight.

In honor of the group that brought about the unification of Interamnia, the new government was named UFT, although the actual words "Unity For Tomorrow" were dropped.

Major Features

There is really not very much of interest on Interamnia. The asteroid is in a shambles, the lands are scarred from constant fighting, and there are many ruined and abandoned buildings. The effects of the battles between colonists remain visible and will likely scar the asteroid's surface for years to come.

The site of the Hofsteg Conference later became the capital of Interamnia. A large structure was built on this area with the dual purpose of housing the capital staff and commemorating the historic conference held on that spot.

The Chaligan Hofsteg Memorial Building is nearly 20 stories high and is a tribute to the brilliant engineers, machinists, and mechanics who joined together, despite their differences, to construct the building. The sides are made of a gleaming metal alloy shined to nearly mirror brilliance. The three domes at the top of the structure are used for different functions.

Dome One faces the "west" (this term is given in relation to the sun, for there are no polar directions on Interamnia). It is an emerald green. This dome is used for all official functions of state that the ruling body of UFT must perform. Things such as board meetings, hearings, and public councils are held in Dome One.

Dome Two faces the "north" and greets the rising sun each morning. The dome is completely transparent, for the designers did not want to taint the light of sun. Sunrise in this dome is beautiful.

Usually, the ruling body will meet in Dome Two for breakfast several mornings a week. Formal dinners and other such affairs are frequently held there as well.

Dome Three faces "southeast." This dome was constructed to honor Chaligan Hofsteg. His body is entombed in this dome and no one ever enters there. Local legend has it that so long as the dome remains intact and its surface stays unmarred, the peace on Interamnia will continue.

People will often travel to Interamnia to see this building, considered to be among the most beautiful ever built. The landscape of Interamnia—broken, desolate, and ugly—is also a tourist attraction. Many people feel that great lessons can be learned from what has happened on this asteroid.

Politics and Government

The ruling body of UFT consists of three men and four women, each selected for his or her position by the predecessor. When someone is selected for a seat on the ruling body, he serves for two years, after which he selects a successor. The replacement must be approved by the remaining council members by a majority vote. No one may serve on the UFT for two terms in a row, although they may serve again in a subsequent term.

The UFT is in charge of all governmental functions on Interamnia. Its representatives have great power and exert exacting control on the asteroid. Some believe that the members of UFT may have too much power, but so great were the colonists' fears when they set up the UFT, they put much control into the hands of the new organization.

The exact limits of UFT power are actually very loosely defined. By charter, they have control over "matters of state, as de-

creed by the majority decision." The UFT certainly does have great power, but there have been no signs that the power is being abused.

Traditionally, the UFT makes decisions on matters of education, economics, labor, public works, and foreign affairs. All decisions made by the council must be reached by majority vote.

Economy

Probably the most independent of the asteroids in the Belt, Interamnia has an economy based on an advanced barter system. This form of economy developed from necessity. In its early development, civilized Interamnia had no way to incorporate a monetary system of economy.

At first, the inhabitants of the asteroid were struggling, and it was all they could do to survive. The tasks that needed to be done were divided up among the colonists. People earned trade credits for their labor or goods produced. These trade credits could then be used to purchase needed items such as food, clothing, and other necessities. For quite a few years, this method of bartering and trade credits worked very well. It not only provided a viable economy for the asteroid, but also a means of the colonists to work together for the first time since Interamnia's inception.

Recently, however, the UFT has found need to change the system slightly. As more and more people from off-asteroid discovered Interamnia, they became inspired by the plight of the colonists there. The population of the asteroid has increased, in both permanent and temporary residents. For permanent residents of Interamnia, the economy has changed little. However, the UFT has had to develop a way to transfer other forms of currency into trade credits. This was needed to

make the asteroid more accessible to outsiders. The preferred method of payment is still pure trade credits, but there are several "banks" that will exchange credits or other currency for trade credits. The exchange rate is usually very poor, because it's based upon how much it would cost the bank to go off-asteroid, purchase needed goods, and ship them back to Interamnia.

Military

With the rapidly growing prosperity on Interamnia, there is a growing need for a military force to protect it. If nothing else, a military force is necessary for any sort of successful interworld trade or negotiation. Bargaining from a position of obvious weakness—especially with ruthless governments or corporations such as RAM—is a difficult prospect.

Interamnia faces a problem, however. It has only recently crawled out of its hole of near destruction. The asteroid's economy, though stable, is weak at best. These factors make the purchase of military equipment and the hiring of personnel a great problem. The question is not whether or not to build a military, but from where the funds might come.

The asteroid enjoys the wisdom of several very profound and energetic leaders, not the least of whom is Scott Caldwell. Caldwell, originally a member of a group that opposed Unity For Tomorrow, is now the chairman of defense for Interamnia. He has developed a viable solution to the defense problem of the asteroid.

Caldwell has proposed that every inhabitant of the asteroid serve a mandatory two-year term in the asteroid defense force. During this term, the family of the recruit will be given a certain amount of food and building supplies (very valuable commodities on Interamnia) to compen-

sate the loss of their family member. This solves the manpower problem of the military and takes advantage of the greatest resources that UFT possesses—and, incidentally, is quite in keeping with the barter-based roots of the asteroid's economy. Scott's plan has gone before the UFT and will likely be approved.

NEO Relations

An assumption can be made that any enemy of RAM's is a potential friend of NEO's. While this is frequently the case, Interamnia and NEO have never shared a friendship and probably never will.

In August of 2448, a NEO delegation secretly went to Interamnia to attempt to sway the loyalties of the people there. The NEO group, led by top ambassador James DuVar, arrived under a cloak of secrecy. Their paranoia upon being discovered combined with the ambassador's haughty attitude—who thought NEO held a superior position over Interamnia—caused the UFT to take an instant dislike to him and NEO. From that point on, NEO and Interamnia have not shared a close relationship.

On several occasions, NEO groups have secretly traveled to Interamnia in attempts to repair the damage done with UFT. Their efforts have been in vain. The government has a long memory and a fierce pride; its emotional defenses are strong and its hatreds long lasting. The only consolation is that RAM fares little better here.

Interestingly enough, NEO unknowingly has an "inside man" on Interamnia. NEO Group Leader Skarla Morinth, a human rocketjock from Earth, has been working closely with some contacts she has on Interamnia. The contacts provide Skarla with information on RAM's plotting on the asteroid, and she has provided

the Belters with some much needed vaccines from Jupiter. Skarla has not told her NEO superiors of her contacts as she does not wish the relationship to be exploited by the often over-zealous NEO command.

RAM Relations

Of late, RAM has begun taking an interest in Interamnia. Years ago, RAM left the people here to die and showed no further concern for Interamnia's affairs.

That was, of course, when the place was nothing but a barren, empty rock that could no longer be exploited. Now Interamnia has begun to develop into a significant entity with a large enough population to have a voice in Belt affairs. This, in itself, is enough to attract the attention of RAM, which desires to gain increased power in the Belt.

Ironically, the one group that Interamnia has spurned has been responsible for keeping the asteroid free of RAM domination. Although RAM has an interest in retaking Interamnia, they have not yet classified it as a priority. Therefore, the resources now allotted to the project are relatively small—small enough that NEO can easily oppose the takeover.



JUNO

ORBITAL RADIUS: 248,000,000 mi. (2.67 AU)
DIAMETER: 145 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,680 days (4.6 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 400 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 55,000
PORTS: One class A, one class B

Juno is an asteroid in the Belt that seems a little less "out of the way" than the others. That is not to say that Juno is any closer to the inner solar system than the other asteroids, but rather it has some attractions that draw people to it.

Major Features

Although not nearly as prestigious as the McLaughlin Shipyard, the Juno Shipyard is most certainly the second best shipyard in the Belt. It actually outpaces Fortuna in bottle production, but its bottles are not as good.

Juno is known for putting out consistent, quality products at reasonable prices. This reputation has kept the inhabitants of the asteroid in a good living environment as well as put the Juno Shipyard on the map. Bortron Glann is the driving force behind the Juno Shipyard. Bortron Glann, Hosson's father, established the yard in 2360.

Bortron was just 19 years old at the time. Taking his meager savings and abundant dreams, Bortron relocated himself to the harsh environment of Juno. Knowing full well that he could not just open a shipyard for business, he set about building himself a reputation.

Bortron's first act was to open the Juno Mining Company. At that time, Juno was

thought to be an empty rock with little in the way of minerals or other materials worth mining. Bortron thought differently. Sure enough, Juno turned out to be rich in an as-yet undiscovered isotope of uranium (later named *uranium bortrus*) that could be used as an excellent power source.

With the capital generated from his uranium mine, Bortron was able to construct a small, class C spaceport on Juno. Although the port was not very large, it did allow for independent carrying companies to transport the uranium off-asteroid, thus creating a wider market.

Eventually, Bortron's reputation grew and more and more investors became interested in him. The class C space port was upgraded to class B status, and later a class A space port was added.

As time passed, however, Bortron realized that his interests in mining were waning nearly as quickly as the *uranium bortrus* supply deep in the mines of Juno. He knew that he would have to act quickly or his plans wouldn't succeed.

Collecting all his assets together and bringing several investors on board for the project, Bortron raised enough capital to found the Juno Shipyard. At the time, the shipyard was very small. It was incapable of performing any major work on warships and even minor work on anything larger than a small cruiser. But the work was good and the prices were fair. The Juno Shipyard began to blossom.

At present time, Juno has the honor of being the second largest yard in the Belt. Although it certainly could be considered small by the standards of the rest of the solar system, that status grants Juno considerable power in the world of the Belt.

The asteroid Juno is also known by another name: Academy. The nickname is

applied to Juno because of the school for rocketjocks located there. Students from all over the solar system attend the Academy.

The Academy has a 12-month training program called Basic Piloting. The basic training has a curriculum that trains rocketjocks in the following areas:

- basic ship handling
- basic navigation
- history (choice of two planets or the Belt and one planet)
- business administration (rocketjocks frequently hire out their services)
- basic battle tactics

The Basic Piloting program costs 2,000 credits to attend and takes 12 full months of time to complete. In game terms, the following skills are gained after successful completion of the program:

pilot, rocket:	10 points
navigation:	10 points
history, 2 areas:	10 points each
economics:	10 points
battle tactics:	10 points

The school also offers an Advanced Piloting program. The advanced program has more stringent entry requirements than the basic. The initial requirement is successful completion of the Basic Piloting program, or the passing of an equivalency exam given by a strict Academy instructor.

Entrance also requires the rocketjock to be sponsored by (quoted from the course curriculum): "an individual or organization that can vouch for the piloting excellence of the candidate." What this frequently translates into is "an individual or group that can pay a large sum of money to have the pilot accepted."

Because of the unorthodox method of

entrance into the Advanced Piloting program, there is no set amount for entrance, but it is recommended that the GM require the person or organization to be influential and pay no less than 15,000 credits.

The course curriculum for the Advanced Piloting program is:

- advanced piloting
- advanced navigation
- advanced battle tactics
- security system electromechanics
- basic electrical system maintenance
- basic mechanical system maintenance
- personnel management training
- basic psychology

The Advanced Piloting program takes 24 full months to complete. The course is very difficult and has a drop-out rate of 55 percent. The GM may require the PC to make a success roll or an Intelligence check, at his discretion. The following skills are gained after successful completion of the program:

piloting, rocket:	20 points
navigation:	20 points
battle tactics:	20 points
bypass security:	15 points
repair, electrical:	10 points
repair, mechanical:	10 points
leadership:	15 points
fast talk/convince:	15 points

Graduation from the Advanced Piloting school is a highly prestigious accomplishment. Rocketjocks from this school are all but guaranteed jobs for the largest and most influential organizations in the solar system. RAM is rumored to have almost 100 rocketjocks that are Advanced Piloting trained.



Politics and Government

Although Juno is not by any means the largest asteroid in the Belt, its governmental structure is the most like other planets. Juno is divided into eight different zones that call themselves countries—though they are more akin to small cities and towns in size and population.

Two countries are dominant on Juno. One is Alghenia and the other is Reorland. These two countries represent the original inhabitants of Juno. Alghenia developed from Bortron Glann's people. Alghenia controls the shipyard and is led by Hosson Glann.

Reorland developed from the original founders of the Academy. This country, of course, controls the famous rocketjock training base.

There is no fighting between Alghenia and Reorland. The two countries—located on opposite sides of the asteroid from each other—interfere little with each other's affairs. There is, however, a noted enmity between them. Juno is, after all, a relatively small hunk of rock in space and both Alghenia and Reorland would like to control that rock.

The remainder of the six countries are too small to be of notice to either Alghenia or Reorland. Since neither of the two dominant countries would use force to control the holdings of the minor countries and none of the small countries have anything of note to offer, both Alghenia and Reorland leave them alone. Briefly, the minor countries are:

Aagrivel: Founded in 2454—just two years ago—Aagrivel is a community of religious zealots banished from Mars by RAM. They believe that their leader, Reverend Lucias Aagrivel, is the embodiment of God. Aagrivel allows no one to enter their small community unless the rever-

end himself grants permission.

Delcius: This small community is a retirement home for the wealthy. Those who wish to live the rest of their days in comfort, accompanied by boredom, can move to Delcius. A plot there costs 1,000,000 credits for 20 years.

Laganon: Why this wretched little area of Juno is even named is unknown. Laganon was created some 30 years ago when Christian Balthazar, falsely convicted of murder, escaped from the prison asteroid of Thule and came to Juno. Although he is not charismatic, fortune has sent ruffians and lowlifes to join him. Laganites bother no one and no one bothers them.

Mithrum: Of all the minor countries of Juno, perhaps Mithrum is the friendliest. Once miners on Juno, the settlers of Mithrum came upon hard times when the uranium ran out. Since then, they have become subsistence farmers in their vast, artificial city-farm. The inhabitants of Mithrum often go to Alghenia for supplies and entertainment.

Sog: The estate of Sogeli Varidenci, Sog has little to do with Juno. Sogeli is a rich young man who has left his family's estate on Mars due to a dispute there. Sogeli now maintains his home on Juno and is very happy living there with his lover and his servants.

Ulith: This community is an example of misfortune combined with incompetence. Ulith was started by a group of miners who arrived on Juno just as the uranium was drying up. With their funds depleted and no way to return home, those men and women were forced to stay on Juno and form a community of subsistence farmers.

Unfortunately, every time the original group would begin to accumulate enough wealth to return home, mismanagement of the farm cost them their savings.

Economy

The economies of Juno are as varied as the eight countries that control them. Suffice to say that the only two economies of importance are those of Alghenia and Reorland. Not surprisingly, both Alghenia and Reorland use the standard credit system. Their prices for services and goods are roughly average compared to similar services and goods in the solar system.

Military

Alghenia has an impressive military relative to its size. As a shipyard, the country will often purchase used warships at low rates and keep them in its own stockpile. At present, Alghenia has the following warships in its fleet:

- 1 heavy cruiser
- 4 standard cruisers
- 85 fighters

The country also supports a total military force of about 7,000.

Reorland has no formal military. However, the Academy has well over 250 fighters attached to it and more than enough rocketjocks to man them. Battling 250 Academy instructors in the latest in fighter technology would not be a pleasant thing for any military force.

NEO Influence

NEO has a decent relationship with Alghenia. As a small country, Alghenia has reason to fear the typical RAM response to small but promising governments: annihilation. As such, Alghenia has eagerly sought to maintain good relations with all sorts of powers, from the Sun Kings of Mercury to NEO, to counterbalance any

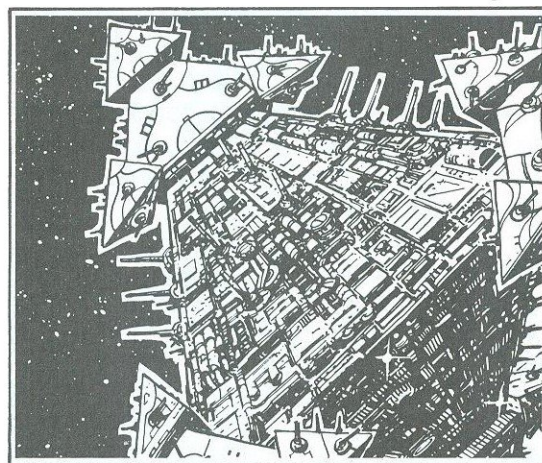
threats.

The Earth freedom fighters have a secret ambassador on Juno who maintains relations with Alghenia. It should be noted, however, that Alghenia does not have a strong loyalty to NEO and keeps relations with the freedom fighters because it suits them.

RAM Influence

RAM has little interest in Juno. Although successful in Belter terms, both the Juno Shipyard and the Academy do not generate sufficient revenues to warrant RAM's close attention.

On one occasion, however, RAM took a particular interest in Juno. On December 7, 2452, RAM launched a small attack on the Academy with a hastily organized planetary attack force. This was done because the Martian power feared interference by the Academy in a covert operation RAM was performing on an icesteroid that was close to Juno at the time. In reality, RAM's intelligence was faulty. The Academy had no knowledge of RAM's operation and had no plans to interfere. The attack was a complete fiasco and the incident closed forever relations between RAM and the Academy.



PALLAS

ORBITAL RADIUS: 257,000,000 mi. (2.76 AU)
DIAMETER: 335 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,680 days (4.6 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 1,100 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 67,000
PORTS: One class B

Pallas was long ignored, since the first surveying teams discovered it to be bereft of valuable minerals. With other planetoids such as Davida to be exploited, Pallas seemed doomed to anonymity among mining companies—except when one heard of a depleted world described as “barren as Pallas.” The asteroid’s relatively remote location prevented it from attracting other sorts of settlement; it would never be a popular resort world like Aurora, nor a marketplace and meeting ground like Ceres.

In fact, the asteroid Pallas most resembled was Thule—the prison world. And sure enough, a string of circumstances brought some enterprising Martian bureaucrats to set up the obscure asteroid as a penal colony.

Pallas received its first inhabitants nearly a century ago. They were unusual prisoners, deemed by RAM unfit for the harshness of Thule—not that RAM was being kind-hearted. It was merely a matter of practicality. The first Pallathites were crimelords—powerful, well-connected, and masters behind much of the evil in the solar system. Somehow, conscientious public servants and unswerving investigative reporters brought to light evidence against these individuals. Although key government officials were in fact on these crimelords’ payroll and happily served

their interests, public outrage was such that RAM would have faced serious problems if nothing at all were done to “punish” the criminals.

The answer, brilliant yet simple, was Pallas. A young RAM executive proposed it: Announce sentences of life imprisonment on a penal colony in the Belt, and everyone will think of nightmarish Thule—more than ample vengeance on the wrongdoers!

In reality, RAM would set up a new colony on a backwater asteroid—Pallas—with the crimelords themselves providing much of the funding for their new home in exile. The compromise would placate the public, without causing undo damage to the criminals, nor, consequently, RAM itself. Without an acceptable arrangement, the crimelords—having nothing left to lose—might turn on RAM, to devastating effect. Full disclosure of the extent of corruption and cover-up would have been as dangerous to RAM as letting the criminals go free.

Thus Pallas was inaugurated as the most opulent prison in the Solar System. Self-sufficient, and soon forgotten by RAM, it prospered, and new generations of criminal geniuses have been born and bred to rule the asteroid—and perhaps more.

Obviously, Pallas seems to be a spiritual community—a place for retreat from the business of the solar system, where one may find peace and harmony through the most subtle and sophisticated methods of meditation. According to the history books, a group of philosophers known as the New Athenians set out for Pallas 50 years ago. The same qualities that befit a prison world, they explained, provided sanctuary from the concerns of life, and thus would be a perfect setting for culti-

uating intellectual and spiritual perfection. They also appreciated the name of the asteroid—from Pallas Athena, the mythical Greek goddess of wisdom, from whom their group derived its name. In fact, the New Athenians were a ruse—a front that was designed by the second-generation Pallathites. It is not surprising, then, that the New Athenians reported finding no trace of the almost-forgotten penal colony, and the “mysterious disappearance” of the original inmates was duly recorded in the histories of the solar system. Thus, the Pallathites had cleverly engineered a new identity. With it they could explore new means of pursuing the goal that has inspired them since the days when they were petty white-collar thieves and computer bandits on Mars: to control the solar system.

Major Features

Two major architectural features grace the surface of Pallas. The first, known as the Palace of Light, is the official home of the New Athenians. Aptly named, the Palace is a beautiful, shimmering structure constructed of bright metal and the strongest glass. Thirty stories high, it is mushroom-shaped, larger at the top than the bottom—an unlikely form to those used to normal planetary architecture. With the minuscule gravity of the asteroid, however, the Palace is a perfectly viable structure.

Adjacent to the Palace of Light is the Pallas Spaceport, a class B facility and the only point of access on the asteroid. It is well guarded, and all exits lead through the Palace.

Very few people are permitted to visit Pallas. Those who do are mostly merchants bringing their wares to the port, where they are amply compensated for their trouble.

Sometimes would-be initiates of the community—misled by the “New Athenians” ruse—seek entrance. They are given a series of “tests,” but somehow they are always denied. “In our best judgment, we do not feel that you would acquire wisdom on Pallas and should thus seek enlightenment elsewhere,” purrs the “examiner” as the reject is steered onto the next rocket out.

Inside, the Palace of Light appears as a peaceful, harmonious environment, conducive to thoughtful meditation—pleasing to the senses, but not overly stimulating. This is part of the “philosophers’ community” disguise (but also makes a pleasant place for some of the solar system’s greatest criminal minds to hatch their plots). No mere visitors can hope to see more of Pallas than the spaceport and the Palace of Light.

If someone did get a chance to explore Pallas, they might find, on the opposite side of the asteroid, a place known as the Cave. This was the site of the original penal colony of a century ago. It has been considerably modified, as one might expect. What one might not expect is that the modifications have actually made the Cave *less* habitable! The old crimelords had it decked out in splendor in their heyday, but since the construction of the resplendent Palace of Light, the Cave has come to serve other functions.

It includes dirty barracks and living quarters for the less wealthy inhabitants of the asteroid, many of them mercenaries and cutthroats hired for various tasks. They are based in the Cave to insure that they do not mingle with the people serving around the Palace as the asteroid’s elaborate cover. In particular, the Cave is a laboratory for scientific research, the results of which serve the Pallathites’ dastardly goals.

One secret project currently pursued in

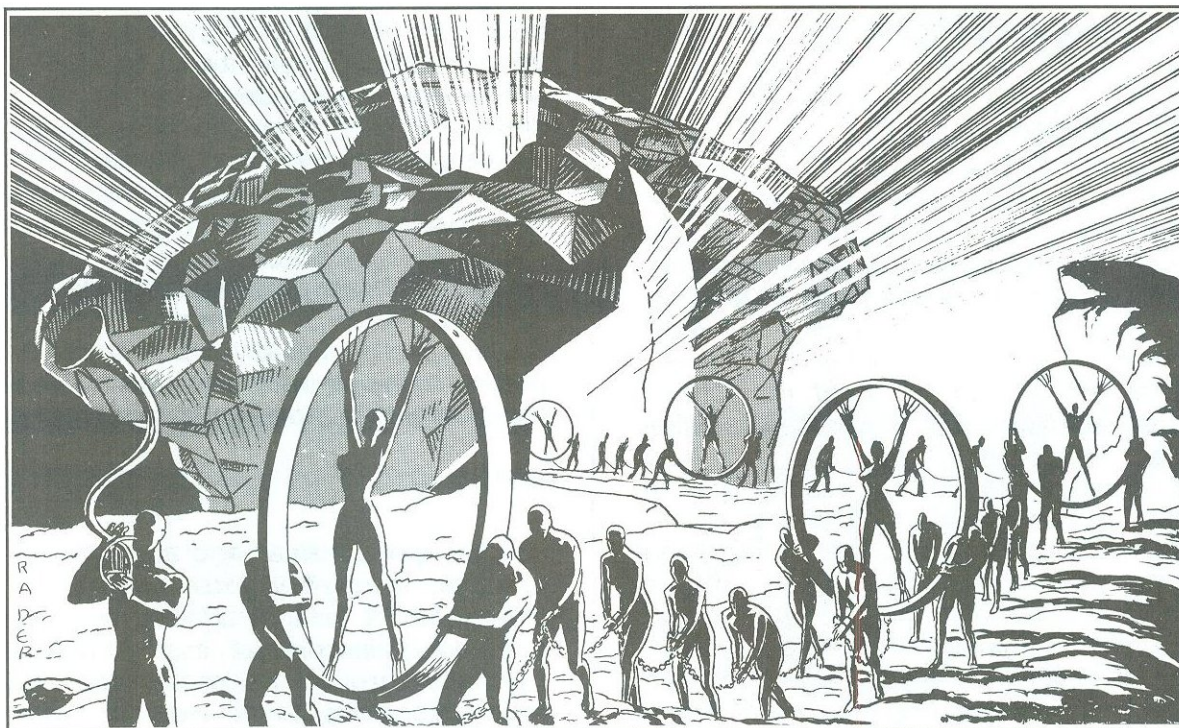
the Cave is the development of a new breed of gennies, the Cadrites. (A description of the Cadrites, including game information, is at the end of this book, page 63.) No one outside the innermost circle of power on Pallas—not even the scientists themselves—knows precisely what plan is in store for the Cadrites, but to judge from their behavioral characteristics, it can't be good. They are powerful, if relatively mindless, fighters, capable of suicidal defenses and savage, swarming onslaughts.

Government

The subdued, carefully cultivated image that Pallas projects is that of a small, peaceful community devoted to understanding and exploring the great truths of the universe. To achieve enlightenment, one must abhor worldly concerns, ex-

plains the literature put out by the New Athenians, including such meaningless concepts as "freedom" and "private property." Leadership is itself of dubious value; the community has simply a group of concerned, wise individuals, who represent its interests to the outside world—dealing with Ceres and the other asteroids, trading with merchants, managing the asteroid's investment portfolios (which provide all its income), and so forth. These are unpleasant, worldly tasks—but fortunately some community members are willing to postpone their spiritual aims to perform them.

In fact, Pallas is governed by an oligarchy of crime "families," each comprised of the descendants of one of the master criminals first imprisoned here. Each family has a leader—known as the Patriarch (or, if female, the Matriarch)—who is a member of the Inner Circle. This group



has the most knowledge, power, and ambition and deals officially with the rest of the solar system. The Patriarch is not necessarily the oldest member of his family; on the contrary, gaining the post is a matter of ingenuity and savvy that might permit someone as young as 21 to be a member of the Circle. Sometimes the Patriarch isn't really the power in a family, either, since the family mastermind might not wish to put himself at risk by even being in the presence of the other crime-lords.

Needless to say, there is a great deal of internal strife on Pallas.

What is the goal of the Inner Circle? One thing: power. In the 25th century, power is often tied up in two things: money and knowledge. These are the commodities in which the Pallathites trade (see Economy, below). By gradually increasing their tight grip on these two things, the Pallathites expect that their plan of eventual, subtle, and thoroughly pervasive control of the solar system will be realized.

Economy

Officially, Pallas produces nothing; it relies solely on its investment portfolio, which includes ventures from financing the projects of the Sun Kings of Mercury to backing explorations of the Jovian moons. Unofficially, Pallas is productive—after all, its thousands of inhabitants don't actually spend their time in meditation. What they do produce are new technologies that can be carefully placed so as to benefit the Pallathites.

Coordinating both the investments and much of the research and design work is a massive Artificial Intelligence, named Moriarty. This computer structure was built by the first crimelords of Pallas, who had started their nefarious careers in com-

puter crime. Moriarty is supposedly just an advisor to the Inner Circle, which must approve all decisions. In practice, the Inner Circle has lately been most concerned with its own politics, and Moriarty has done an even better job without their incessant meddling. Some younger family members are wondering if perhaps the real criminal mastermind of the solar system is Moriarty.

The methods of the Pallathites are subtle and refined—none of the RAM-style planet-busting! Every intervention will bring some sort of loss; the trick is to find the right combination of events that will maximize the ultimate gain. These are equations at which Moriarty excels. In the Pallathites' hands, seemingly random and purposeless events become tools of conquest. They engineer chaos and destruction for ulterior goals, working to bring themselves profit and power through the most convoluted machinations. Something as seemingly accidental as an outbreak of disease in the agriculture of the Venusian lowlands might stem from a Pallathite plot—driving down the supply of lifextend, and perhaps tripling overnight the value of the Athenian Colonial Trust's pharmaceuticals investment portfolio. Selling when the prices are highest, Pallas might even conspire to have a "cure" emerge—at exactly the right moment for stock values to fall through the floor, enabling other Pallathite holding companies to buy up the pieces of the industry at bargain-basement prices.

Military

Pallas sports a small and aggressive, if irregular, mercenary force—mostly for show and for defense against minor pirate raids. Pallas protects itself more substantially through its knowledge and insider controls; its network of spies,

informants, and bribed “friends” can be expected to, at the very least, warn of any major power’s attack plan, if not find a way to thwart it first.

Patrolling Pallathite space, and warning off (or, if need be, destroying) any would-be visitors who stray from a direct path to the spaceport is the following military force:

- 2 battlers
- 4 heavy cruisers
- 13 standard cruisers
- 200 fighters
- 9,000 men and women

When the members of the military are stationed on the planetoid, they are strictly segregated by rank. Noncommissioned officers (sergeants and corporals) and the enlisted troops are stationed in the Cave. There, a network of saloons, brothels, gaming halls, and other raucous entertainments are located, catering to the troops’ rather brutish form of recreation. The troops are supervised by a rough cadre of officers who, as a rule, hate their duty (often it is used as a punishment) and take their anger out on the soldiers who are their charges.

The bulk of the officer corps, meanwhile, is quartered on the other side of the asteroid, in and around the Palace. There, they can partake of the full flower of Pallas’ cultural life—and do not have to mingle with the ruffians and scoundrels who make up the body of their force.

NEO Relations

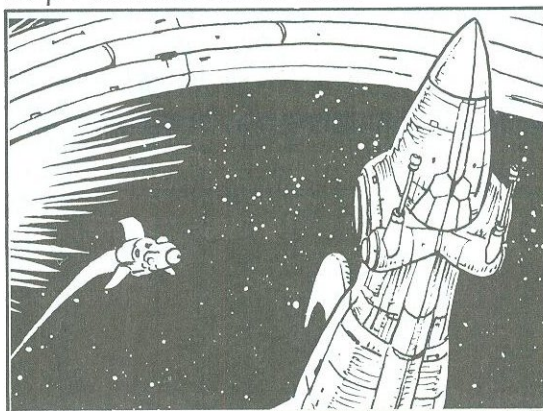
NEO frustrates the Pallathites, because the freedom fighter organization is not (yet) very well infiltrated. Pallas despises NEO, not because of its values or intentions (in Moriarty’s eyes, romantic delusions of freedom and honor shared by

plenty of childish humans), but because NEO is a wild card—an element in the solar system Pallas does not well understand or easily control. A major part of Pallas’ ongoing plans involve the infiltration and study of the New Earth Organization.

Player characters relatively new to NEO might be targets for Pallathite agents. They may unwittingly become pawns in the Pallathite game for control of the solar system. This makes for a great long-term series of adventures—and a hidden foe whose discovery and defeat would be a suitably climactic goal for an entire limited campaign.

RAM Relations

The Pallathites were spawned in RAM’s seamy underside—and that conglomerate remains the institution most thoroughly infiltrated, and most easily manipulated, by Pallas. It is simple enough to understand that profit and greed motivates RAM. Then it’s a simple process of altering circumstances so that, predictably, RAM does what Pallas wants, but apparently for its own self-interest. The trick to maintaining control is to never let RAM realize how much its “self-interested” activities actually do more to help Pallas than RAM itself.



PSYCHE

ORBITAL RADIUS: 272,000,000 mi. (2.92 AU)
DIAMETER: 127 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,633 days (4.5 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 300 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 6,000
PORTS: One class B

Psyche is home to the renowned Interpan Shipyard, also called the Boatyard. Although certainly not the largest shipyard in the Belt, Interpan may very well be the most famous.

Psyche also has one of the oldest and most colorful histories of all the asteroids. For the most part, the asteroids have all been settled within the last century. Psyche, however, is different. The Boatyard was founded in 2138 by Christopher Osgood, a settler from Earth.

Originally, Osgood was an engineering genius. He lived a quiet life on Earth, respected in his field. His company, however, made the mistake of taking a contract with RAM.

RAM—then still an Earth-based entity called the Russo-American Mercantile Combine—contracted the small engineering research company to develop a particle converter. This device would be able to change one type of matter into another. RAM claimed that such a device would revolutionize existing medical procedures. Perhaps under normal circumstances, the company would have turned down the contract. But the soon-to-be Martian conglomerate funded the unlikely project with more credits than the company had made in the previous five years. The prestige resulting from success would put it on the map!

Although the concept of a device that could take matter and instantly convert it to another type of matter seemed little more than a fancy, Osgood—the engineer who was then in charge of the project—set about creating it. With the aid of the tremendous funds available and a team of top developers, Osgood began making serious advances in particle conversion technology.

After many months working on the project, Osgood began to grow a little curious at RAM's zeal for the completion of the design. With RAM's growing reputation for a lack of ethics and the outrageous amounts of money being poured into the project, Christopher decided that it could only be planned for one use: a weapon. Osgood then made the mistake of asking questions in all the wrong areas. Demanded answers not forthcoming, Osgood hid his designs and prototypes and threatened to stop work on the project completely.

The Russo-American Mercantile allowed this to go on for nearly a month without actively interfering. They did threaten to cancel their contract and demand repayment of the extensive funds they had provided. Not meeting success, however, they soon took more drastic measures.

One evening, Christopher and his wife Allie were visited by six individuals who did not identify themselves. These men forced entry into Osgood's home and demanded that he begin work on his project immediately or suffer dire consequences. Osgood, being a man of principle, refused to be intimidated by the threat. That proved to be his downfall.

Helplessly, Christopher was forced to watch his wife beaten and nearly killed, and then he, too, was savagely beaten.

The men—no doubt the forerunners of RAM's shadowy Internal Affairs force—told Osgood that if he did not begin his work again, he and his wife would be murdered.

In a fit of blind rage, Christopher went to the place where he had hidden his nearly completed particle converter and destroyed both it and the plans. In the meantime, his wife died of the injuries she had sustained during the beating. Then, stealing a large amount of credits from the project fund, Osgood purchased enough supplies to survive on an asteroid for the rest of his life. Taking off from Earth, he headed off into the asteroid belt. He landed on the then-deserted Psyche, an unremarkable asteroid believed to be devoid of minable materials.

Osgood set up his living structure and lived for two years on Psyche in solitude, mourning the loss of his wife and his previous lifestyle. But too keen was his mind to sit idle for long. In 2140, Osgood began to disassemble pieces of his living area and use the spare parts.

He constructed a small ship repair facility. Under the pseudonym Narbor, Osgood took off in his aging ship and spent several months moving about the solar system, spreading the word of his new ship repair facility. In small numbers at first, ships began to come to Psyche for maintenance and repair. At the time, ship repair facilities were at a premium, so people were willing to travel to have repairs done.

At first, business was very slow for Osgood. He was unable to keep up with even the few ships that showed up for repair work. Those he did work on, however, were done with such expert care, they always came back. Of course, a ship rarely had the same problem twice!

By 2145, Christopher's small ship repair facility had expanded into an eight-man

operation and was servicing a half dozen ships of light cruiser size and smaller each week. Word began spreading of Psyche's new shipyard and more and more vessels began to arrive.

From there, Osgood's story progressed something like a fairy tale. The yard kept expanding and was eventually named the Interpan Shipyard.

As of 2456, 318 years after the founding of Interpan, Nicholas Osgood, descendent of Christopher's adoptive son, is running the yard at the tender age of 18. All things considered, he is performing his job admirably.

The Interpan Shipyard has developed a reputation as a place of high quality repairs. Prices for ship repairs and ship construction run on average 50 percent higher at Interpan than at other yards. In return for this, ship systems repaired at Interpan will last up to 30% longer than at other yards. Ships constructed there will have between 10 and 20 percent more hit points than standard ships.

Major Features

The only major feature on Psyche is the Interpan Shipyard. The yard is a work of engineering excellence that still shows the absolute genius of its founder. In an area smaller than many other yards in the solar system, Interpan has a vast array of equipment and supplies for ship construction and ship repair.

As the single important factor of Psyche's financial well-being, the shipyard is the center of activity. No people living on Psyche are not somehow connected with the shipyard or a part of the small asteroid defense force (see the following Military section for more details on this).

Many of the technologies used on Psyche are the most advanced of their kind. Every type of equipment from

cranes to high-capacity engineering computers is state-of-the-art or even further advanced, even compared to the largest shipyards in the solar system. Many of those yards would do almost anything to gain access to Interpan's technology.

Government

Since Psyche is essentially a shipyard asteroid with no population other than shipyard employees, their dependents, and a small number of workers and laborers, there is little need for a structured government. Consequently, the job of asteroid government was passed along to the military. In this respect, Psyche is in a state of martial law. This is not to say that Psyche lives under a strict military code, however, for the asteroid defense force is loosely structured and unmilitaristic.

There are strict laws, however, regarding shipyard conduct. This comes from the early days of Interpan when Christopher Osgood began hiring new people to work at the yard with him. Chris's dedication to high quality was unswerving. Those original employees, however, did not always share his zeal. At the time, even though the asteroid belt was undeveloped, people did not just pick up and go work on an asteroid. Rather, the Belt attracted a breed of misfit or ruffian who usually had a good reason not to want to be around society. Commonly, they were criminals and other social outcasts. The early days of Interpan were very rough indeed as Osgood attempted to mold the yard to his exacting specifications.

As a result, rules that were later formed into laws were made regarding the yard. They include:

- **Quality control:** Anyone caught cutting corners or otherwise providing

less than perfect quality on their work was dismissed immediately from Interpan and ordered to leave Psyche. Those who did not comply were arrested and jailed. With the rough style of worker found here, however, this frequently meant being killed in the process—they did not "come along quietly."

- **Theft:** Another serious charge in Interpan was theft. As the yard was up-and-coming, resources were rare and materials were also hard to come by. Theft of tools or materials resulted in an automatic demotion in work station. Second offenses resulted in dismissal as above.

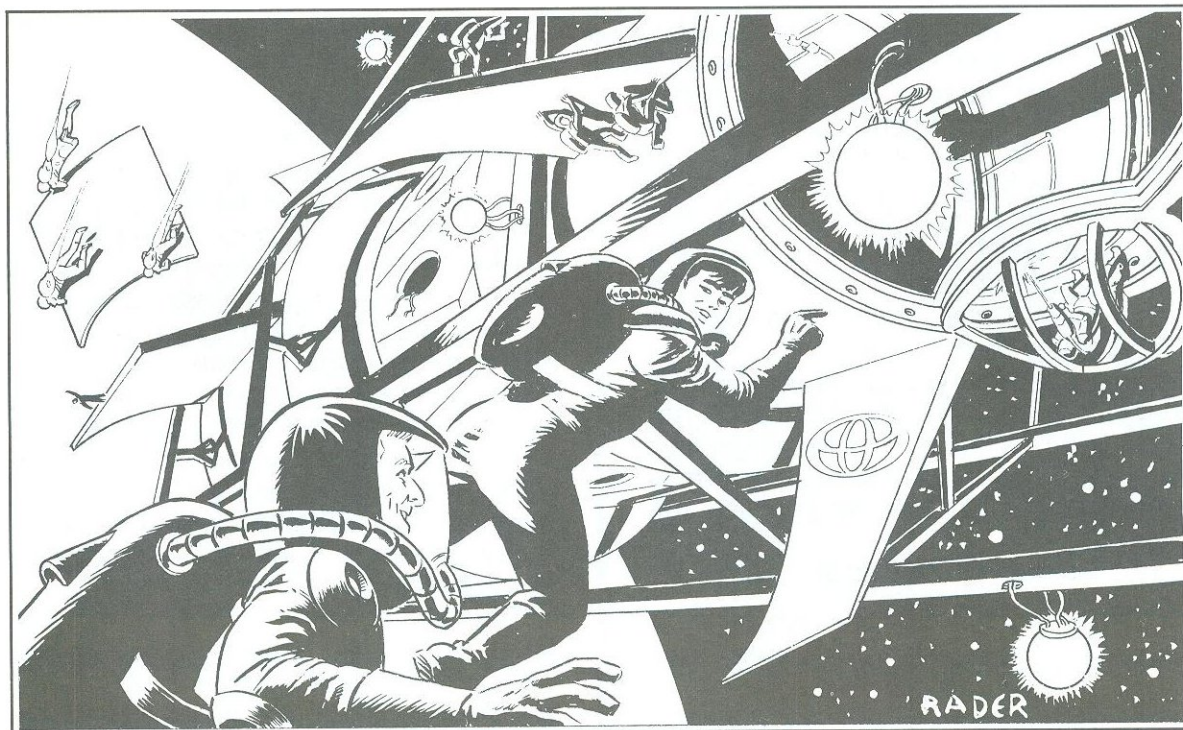
- **Misappropriation of funds:** Anyone caught skimming from the profits of Interpan was put into a mild form of slave labor until the offender paid back double the amount stolen. In addition to the labor period, a demotion in work station resulted. Second offenses resulted in dismissal.

- **Safety standards:** Hired help was difficult to find in the early days of Interpan. This meant that the loss of personnel to accidents was a double blow. Two violations of safety standards was punished by demotion in work station. Additional violations resulted in dismissal.

These early laws of the shipyard were very strictly enforced—they had to be for Osgood to build the kind of yard he desired. None of those laws were actually dropped from the books, but they are not enforced quite as strictly anymore.

Economy

The economy of Psyche is a strong one. It is based on the standard planetary



credit system. Interpan generates large amounts of revenue which are then redistributed to benefit the yard.

The Interpan Shipyard has reached a plateau of growth. The yard cannot be made any larger due to terrain restrictions on Psyche. Therefore, today's profits are being invested in "outside interests."

In order to oversee these investments, accountants have been brought on board at Interpan. These accountants are rather unrestricted in their investment choices as they seek maximum returns in minimum time. Examples of their investments include military development, genetic engineering programs, and space exploration.

The use of the yard's funds in this manner is viewed by some as misuse. A great many people who have been with Interpan for longer than Nicholas Osgood has been alive oppose this approach to money investment. This has created a cer-

tain degree of polarization among the inhabitants of the asteroid.

As of yet, this polarization has not caused any serious problems at Interpan. In the future, however, any number of things could happen. There is even talk of an overthrow at the yard.

This will not likely happen until there are severe financial problems, and so far, Interpan's new staff of accountants has chosen its investments well. Over the course of the past six months, Interpan has realized an amazing 20 percent return on its investments.

Military

In order to protect itself, Interpan has built an asteroid defense force. This force is medium-sized compared to other asteroids, but is relatively well trained.

The asteroid defense force is called the

1st Reserve. It actually was established in 2170 when Owen Osgood, Christopher's adopted son, hired a retinue of mercenary troops for the yard's protection. As time went on, the mercenary troop was staffed with more and more people who had been born and raised on Psyche. This created a sense of loyalty in the group and they developed into a military force rather than a mercenary troop. The 1st Reserve was born.

Now, some 286 years after the hiring of that mercenary troop, the 1st Reserve has become a small, but very well-organized defense force. They are well trained in all aspects of combat and are excellent soldiers.

The 1st Reserve consists of:

- 1 battler
- 1 heavy cruiser
- 4 standard cruisers
- 80 fighters
- 2,000 personnel

Since the 1st Reserve acts as the asteroid's government as well as its militia, entry requirements for the army are strict. Only those individuals of very strong moral fiber and sensibility are allowed in.

NEO Relations

NEO has very little personal interest in Psyche. As a group of freedom fighters, they would do what they could to assist the asteroid in times of trouble, however.

There is a NEO think tank on Earth that plans many of NEO's strategies. This organization is fully aware of the roots of the Interpan Shipyard and the ties that Christopher Osgood had with the Russo-American Mercantile. NEO keeps an eye on Psyche in the event that RAM decides to "take back what is theirs."

RAM Relations

Fully aware of Psyche's and Interpan's roots, RAM has been planning a corporate takeover for many years. They view Interpan as a money-making organization and excellent tactical location in the Belt.

RAM attorneys have been carefully collecting records and reconstructing past events. They feel that, by proving that Christopher Osgood stole their funds from the research into particle conversion to create the Interpan Shipyard, they will be able to legally take possession of the yard—or at least show enough justification such that none of the solar system's major powers will step in when they attempt to take the asteroid by force.

The main challenge faced by the Martian conglomerate is existence of a widely assumed connection between RAM and the death of Allie Osgood. It is very likely that when they can find a way to "disprove" their attack on the Osgoods, they will make a move to take over Psyche.



THULE

ORBITAL RADIUS: 400,000,000 mi. (4.3 AU)
DIAMETER: 100 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 2,400 days (6.6 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 250 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 120 on-duty guards and an unknown number of prisoners
PORTS: One class C

Thule is a prison asteroid, run by Ceres, where the most vile or unlucky of criminals are sent. Sentence on Thule is life without parole. No one ever leaves.

Major Features

The surface of Thule has been transformed by many years of human and genie labor, such that none of the original rock is visible to the approaching visitor. The outermost layer of surface is a flat, featureless plain of metal that extends as far as the eye can see in all directions. Only in about a dozen places can anything be found to break the smooth, almost unreal metallic expanse.

These places are the twelve guardhouses where, at each, ten heavily armed guardsmen are on permanent station. These guardhouses are extremely well protected and only a very powerful surface bombardment might be able to breach these structures from the outside.

Inside, the guardhouses are equally well protected. As the only places on all of Thule where holes exist down into the prison below, these one-way portals into the hellish prison world are constantly monitored not only by guards, but by the most sensitive computer scanning equipment money can buy.

When a prisoner is sent down into the prison, he passes through a number of checks. First, he is checked for weapons. Common possessions (books, writing supplies, etc.) are allowed, as it is generally acknowledged that the prisoner is going down into the underworld to die.

Following these searches, a large metal door in the guardhouse is opened and a 10' by 10' room is revealed. The prisoner is put into the room and the door is shut. On the opposite side of the room, another door is opened and the prisoner has ten seconds to exit into the prison. If the prisoner does not exit within ten seconds, or if other prisoners attempt to climb up through the hole, computer operated lasers open fire.

The interior of Thule is a horrid place. Endless catacombs extend in every direction. The world is nearly lightless except for an occasional red lamp casting an eerie glow. The air in the catacombs, though recycled, is always dry and stale.

Food is relatively rare. There are hundreds of food stations scattered about the catacombs. At predetermined times, each ejects dozens of food units, but unless a prisoner is near one, he or she will probably not eat. This method of feeding the prisoners has led to the formation of food gangs. These groups band together and remain near a food dispenser. When it's feeding time, they take the food units and eat them, consuming more than their allotted portions. Food gangs often fight pitched battles, as each vies for control of a particular food machine.

Medical problems receive no care on Thule. Prisoners are never checked after their entrance into the prison. (It is possible, though not confirmed, that some gangs may have cobbled together some crude medical machinery.)

Deep within the asteroid itself, nearly at its center, is the computer and power source that runs the prison. It keeps the food units producing, the air recycling, and the alarms functional. The computer—called Megalyth 9000—also repairs itself, the red lights, and the food units. Megalyth 9000 is a remarkable machine, even by 25th century standards.

Indeed, Megalyth 9000 may be one of the most powerful and productive computers in the solar system. Some feel that there are better ways to use the machine than to run an asteroid full of wretched, dying prisoners.

The estimated average life expectancy of a prisoner in Thule is three nightmarish months. Life inside Thule is marked by starvation, madness, chaos, food gangs, beatings, sickness, and disease. For all that, a planetary government usually pays Ceres 1,000 credits per year per pris-

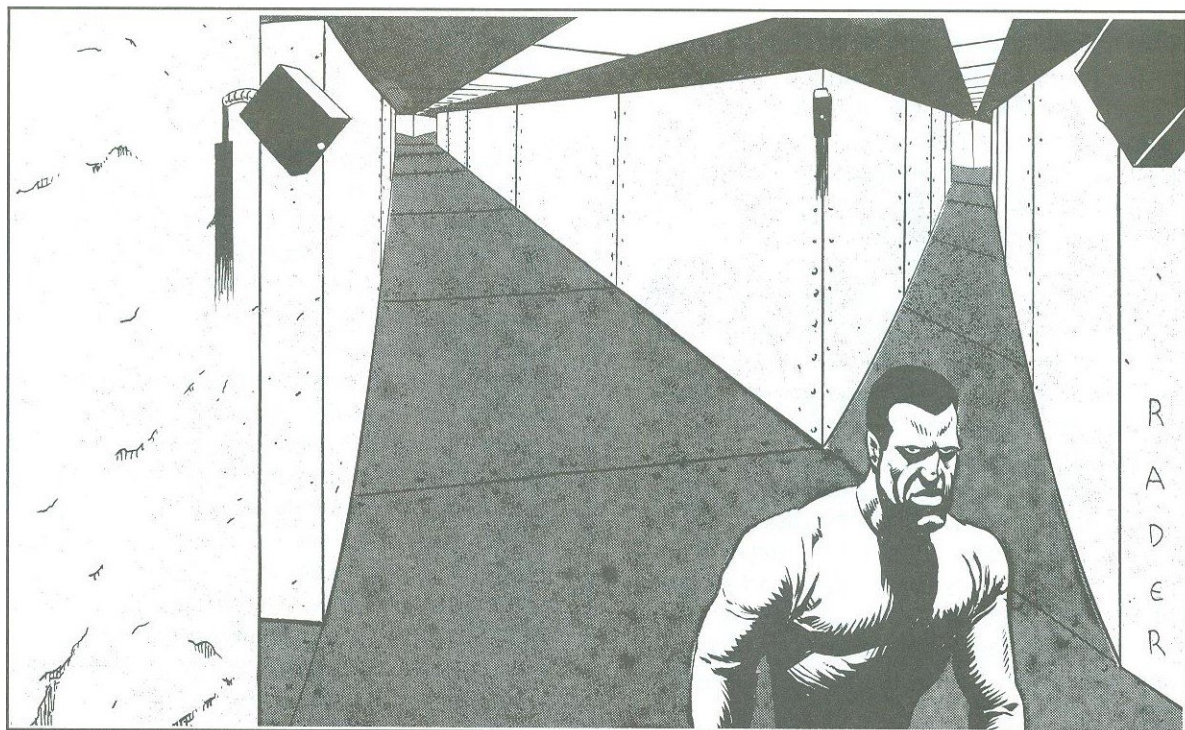
oner, though the price might go as high as 5,000 for special cases.

Government

Technically, Thule is controlled by the Belt and thus by the Ceres government. The Bureau of Justice on Ceres is in overall control of Thule. It decides when to admit a prisoner and keeps track of who owes money to Ceres for prisoners.

The president of the Bureau of Justice keeps Thule active as a prison asteroid, in spite of the fact that many people would like to see it destroyed. Once again, the issue comes down to a matter of money—like so many issues in the Belt. Thule is profitable, and many Bureau of Justice people think of it as a business. If the asteroid keeps bringing in profits, then it should be supported.

So, media wars are waged between the



Ceres government and millions of liberal human-rights activists across the solar system. As so often happens in 25th century space, the corporation usually wins out.

The human-rights activists have made several small strides, however. There are now fewer crimes for which criminals can be sentenced to Thule than ever before. In the year 2400, there were 37 crimes for which Thule was a possible punishment. As of 2456, there are eight, including premeditated murder, kidnapping, first degree extortion (use of deadly violence in the pursuit of extortion), sexual abuse, sedition against a legitimate government (occasionally the legitimacy of a government becomes a matter of debate), marooning (casting someone adrift in space), torture, and piracy.

A Martian adventurer named Christian Balthazar is the only person rumored to have escaped from Thule. How he managed this feat is unknown. Balthazar is reportedly still alive, though quite old.

Economy

Thule generates large sums of money for Ceres. As long as that remains the case, the prison asteroid will remain in service. Perhaps this, more than anything, typifies the harsh conditions of the Belt.

Military

Thule is nearly impregnable. The exposed surface of the asteroid is sheathed with a depleted uranium material that is almost impossible to penetrate.

There is no formal military defense force for Thule. Ceres considers the automatic defenses of the guard towers sufficient. These are rumored to be at least powerful enough to destroy a cruiser.

Thule does face danger from attack,

however. For a great many years, RAM has been capturing pirates from the Belt and sentencing them to life on the prison asteroid for high piracy in the space lanes. Although exact figures are impossible to verify, it is estimated that more than 50,000 pirates have been sent to Thule over the years.

Consequently, pirate groups have been devising ways to destroy Thule. Already they have attempted to take ships to the asteroid and blast it with firepower. Unfortunately, the outer hull of the asteroid is too tough. Energy weapons and explosives simply have no effect.

NEO Relations

NEO opposes the existence of Thule, although there is likely nothing they can do about it. In June of 2455, NEO Captain Alasdair Reed was captured on Mars, but not before he got to the press. From the moment Internal Affairs arrested Captain Reed, journalists from across the system hounded RAM. They wanted to know the status of Captain Reed. They demanded interviews.

Reed would have been interrogated and quietly killed by the Internal Affairs people. However, since the arrest had become public, this course of action was no longer possible.

RAM tried and convicted Captain Reed for sedition. He was given a life sentence on Thule. Before NEO could stage a rescue, Reed was taken to Thule and thrust into the prison there. To this day, NEO does not know if he is alive or dead.

RAM Relations

RAM is one of Thule's biggest users because Thule offers RAM an opportunity to legally make someone disappear forever.

VESTA

ORBITAL RADIUS: 219,000,000 mi. (2.3 AU)
DIAMETER: 310 mi.
PERIOD OF REVOLUTION: 1,320 days (3.6 yrs)
GRAVITY: Negligible
ESCAPE VELOCITY: 500 mph
ATMOSPHERE: None
POPULATION: 20,000-40,000
PORTS: One class B, one class C

Perhaps one of the most civilized and pleasant of asteroids, Vesta represents a rare peaceful coexistence between RAM and an independent civilian population.

Approximately 150 years ago, on July 23, 2305, Brezhuli Garichev, a RAM ambassador, came to Vesta to speak with the government of the asteroid. The meeting had been scheduled far in advance, so both parties had the opportunity to prepare.

The people of Vesta knew full well the reputation of RAM. They were not naive and they were not ignorant. The people of the asteroid were, however, in need of financial assistance, as Vesta was attempting to recover from a series of natural disasters.

Nearly a generation before, in the year 2236, entrepreneur Michael Lance had traveled from his home on Mars to the then-uninhabited asteroid Vesta. Lance, the son of a wealthy attorney, had gathered some money and started his own mining company, based on a tip that the asteroid had iron-rich soil. Upon his arrival, however, Lance discovered that Vesta had a hard, basaltic soil that was poorly suited for mining. For many years the failing Vesta Mining company strove to make ends meet. The company ran a deficit but managed to keep its holding. Eventually, the meager supply of minerals gathered from Vesta's soil ran dry and the company

had to close down.

The people of Vesta, however, were determined to stay on the asteroid. They formed a tightly knit group and began working to keep themselves alive. Their hard work and perseverance paid off; the Vestians managed not only to survive in the harsh environment, but to actually thrive. The accomplishment instilled within them a stubborn pride.

At the time RAM approached Vesta, however, the asteroid was in trouble again. A series of collisions with small tiny asteroids had caused considerable damage. The Vestians needed financial help and they knew it. They were determined not to let their need, however, force them into virtual slavery. Thus, the Vestians were wary and skeptical when the plans were made for the RAM meeting.

They were surprised when RAM's ambassadors arrived at Vesta and observed all of their customs. The Vestians were so enamored with Brezhuli Garichev that they soon accepted RAM's proposal to build a military base there. Construction began immediately.

The RAM base, called Out Station Adam, became a major military base rather than the outpost that had originally been planned. RAM added a generous sum to the agreed payment to Vesta, and everyone was happy.

The combination of RAM's large monetary contribution to Vesta and the revenues generated by the base ensured that Vesta not only climbed out of its financial hole, but once again began to prosper—until it had earned its current sobriquet, Jewel of the Belt. The jewel rests firmly in RAM's crown.

So far, RAM has not tried to go back on any part of its treaty with Vesta. The giant conglomerate has been cooperative

with the Belters and compliant to the Vestians' wishes.

Major Features

Vesta's communities are fairly plain, nondescript gatherings of an independent and peaceful people with nothing of great interest to outsiders. The Vestians prefer things this way, as it tends to keep things quiet.

Out Station Adam, however, is a different story. The RAM base is large and deluxe in every sense of the word. Every kind of RAM vessel and ship stops or bases at Out Station Adam, many sporting the latest technology. The base allows RAM a quick response to any trouble spot in the Belt or inner solar system.

Government

As per the Vesta-RAM treaty, the Vestians are to maintain their own government. That body retains, at least nominally, control of Out Station Adam. The highest governmental official on Vesta is the Governor Lakeland Aggly. He runs all governmental affairs and has near-dictatorial powers in some ways.

Representatives of the other asteroids have privately predicted that the long-time peace and good will between RAM and Vesta will end with the corporation attacking (whether it be physically or financially). Many of those living elsewhere in the Belt feel that RAM wants to eventually hold all of Vesta, and that may well be the case.

RAM has little in the way of "official" governmental presence on Vesta. A small core of officers involved with the day-to-day operations of the planetoid have some significant position with RAM, the highest ranking of whom is a colonel.

RAM is careful not to interfere with Vesta. It seems to show no desire to have a say in the governmental issues of this particular asteroid.

Economy

Currently, Vesta's local economy is both stable and strong. This is largely due to the huge RAM base there, and the Vestians know it. They are seemingly anxious to make RAM's stay on Vesta comfortable and private. That is just how RAM wants it to be.

Although not the standard credit system, Vesta's local system combining stone coins and bartering works very well. The stone coins themselves are individually numbered: no two are the same. When a service is performed or goods given to someone, immediate barter is always preferred. If barter is not possible, a stone coin might be used. A small contract is drawn up saying the owner of the coin can exchange it for a given product or service (e.g., repairing a bubble-dome, 10 pounds of sugar, etc.) at any time the owner wants.

This economy has developed over the years since Vesta's founding and it has worked very well. The people of the asteroid have always stuck together through the easy and difficult times; that is how the asteroid survived. Because of this closeness, no Vestian has been known to go back on a stone coin contract. Often the contracts are not even used between people who are closely related in a family, neighborly, or business sense.

Military

The asteroid itself has little in the way of a military. Vesta's small police force is

mostly custodial, since crime is almost nonexistent on Vesta.

RAM, obviously, maintains a strong military force at Vesta. This force is constantly performing exercises and drills and can often be found on alert status. Naturally, given the importance of its base here, RAM has taken responsibility for the planetoid's defense against external aggression.

The 8th Martian Task Force is proud of its roots, and that pride shows in its sharp, elite-quality military units. The task force is comprised of the following:

- 4 battlers
- 6 heavy cruisers
- 13 standard cruisers
- 20 light cruisers
- 450 fighters
- 30,000 personnel

At a moment's notice, RAM can mobilize many of these ships and be en route to any trouble spot in the solar system. Approximately half the force can respond instantly; the remainder can follow within 24 hours.

The military personnel of the force enjoy much the same rights as citizens of Vesta. They are welcomed in most of the bars and entertainment clubs—indeed, their presence on the asteroid is the only thing that makes many of these establishments profitable.

NEO Relations

As mentioned in the "NEO Influence in the Belt" chapter (on pages 5 and 6), NEO has secretly put a training base for their topnotch rocketjocks on Vesta. The base, called Excellence, is used to train the best pilots in the NEO.

Excellence's specialty is asteroid cluster or gauntlet training. Once a pilot has

graduated from Excellence, he is among the elite of the spacelanes. In game terms, there is very little chance that a PC will be accepted into Excellence. First and foremost, he must be a hero of NEO. He must have performed several great feats for the freedom fighters and earned himself a significant reputation (usually 4th level status).

Second, he must be a rocketjock of the highest caliber. This means that his Pilot Rocket skill must be at least 60. Even a single point less indicates that the staff of Excellence will reject the candidate, though he might be told that he has potential.

Some think that being accepted into Excellence is the easy part, for the school's course of study has a 50 percent washout rate. A great many students lose their lives or are disabled in the asteroid clusters during training. The specialized training takes 16 weeks to complete. Upon graduation, the pilot adds 20 to his Pilot Rocket skill and will add a +10% bonus to any piloting or navigation roll made in an asteroid cluster.

The story behind NEO establishing the school on the same asteroid as a major RAM base is a study in irony. NEO secretly sent a delegation to Vesta to seek the planetoid's permission to establish the base. The NEO representatives explained the need for such a base and provided undeniable proof of RAM's wrongdoings across the solar system. The Vestians immediately accepted and have since allowed both RAM and NEO to remain on Vesta. Perhaps money is not the bottom line after all.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Rare
ORGANIZATION:	Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
NO. APPEARING:	1-6
ARMOR CLASS:	4
MOVEMENT:	150
HIT DICE:	5 + 2
THACO:	18
NO. OF ATTACKS:	2
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	1d8
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSE:	See below

Genotype: Cadrites are genetically engineered humans developed by Pallathite scientists. They are created with a hive mentality and exceptionally strong physical features.

Physical/Cultural:

Physical Size: 5 to 6 feet tall, 120-250 lbs.

External Covering: Smooth, relatively hairless skin, usually in shades of brown, dark brown, red, tan, or beige

Eyes: Human normal

Ears: Human normal

Mouth: Human normal

Nose: Human normal

Cultural: Bred for discipline and obedience, the cadrites have little in the way of culture. When not "in service," they tend to sit in a meditative posture or sleep. They speak in a flat, monotonous voice. Their psychology revolves around the ability to fulfill commands set by their masters. If circumstances beyond their control prohibit them from fulfilling their orders, they sit and shake, experiencing the events through the collective hive mind. Should a single cadrite be completely unable to function, the hive cuts off all mental contact. This usually kills the lone cadrite in 1-4 days.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Cadrites are nearly impossible to physically distinguish from a standard human. However, their hive mentality make them easy to control and quick to respond to orders. This same hive mentality leaves the cadrites lacking in ingenuity and makes them nearly incapable of independent thought. If not under orders, these creatures literally do nothing.

Combat: Created with very dense muscle fibers and a strong skeleton, cadrites are capable of attacking with their powerful fists for 1d8 points of damage. They always have two attacks per round in unarmed combat. Cadrites never use weapons.

They resist extremes of heat and cold, gaining a +2 bonus to their saving throws against these conditions. These creatures have specially altered nervous systems that make them very resistant to energy attacks (lasers, electricity, etc.). These only inflict half damage upon cadrites.



The cadrite hive mentality makes them individually immune to mind-affecting attacks (such as hypnosis). This hive consciousness also gives them a seemingly uncanny ability to coordinate attacks against enemies. Whatever one cadrite sees, the others instantly know about. Thus, large numbers of these creatures can converge on and coordinate attacks on even a highly mobile and elusive opponent. Likewise, if a weapon or tactic proves ineffective, all the cadrites in the area know this as well.

Habitat/Terrain: Although very similar to humans in appearance, cadrites are actually unique in many ways. They can survive easily in almost any environment. Due to their altered nervous system, cadrites are not as subject to effects of cold or heat as standard humans are. Only extreme temperatures affect cadrites.

Ecology: One interesting turn of events has recently occurred in the Cave (on Pallas), where the cadrites are undergoing development. The newer breeds of cadrites have become increasingly independent and less "in tune" with the hive mind of older specimens. This shows itself in a slow response to orders. If this trend continues, the cadrites may no longer be controllable by the Pallathites. Considering the physical power of the creatures, the Inner Circle is not anxious for this to happen.

CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any low illuminated locales
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Troops
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Omnivore
INTELLIGENCE:	Average (8-10)
NO. APPEARING:	2-12
ARMOR CLASS:	2
MOVEMENT:	180
HIT DICE:	4 (d10)
THACO:	19
NO. OF ATTACKS:	1
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below

Genotype: A fierce combination of human, terrine, and grizzly bear elements, the devastators have the potential to be the perfect warrior. If the welfare of free space is to be maintained, the development of devastators should be curtailed. Fortunately there are some problems with the devastator, including controlling them during non-combat situations and finding certain instabilities in the genetic matrix.

It is not known how close RAM is to completing their devastator gennies, but the program has been delayed several times due to problems with the genetic coding and poor secondary helix cross-bonding. Also, the over-worked genes' mitotic replication breaks down prematurely. (This problem resembles an accelerated aging process.)

Physical/Cultural:

Physical size: 7 feet tall, 260-310 lbs.

External Coverings: dark, greasy skin

Eyes: White, colorless eyes; cannot see beyond the green light spectrum—bright light blinds them for 1d6 rounds

Ears: Large and highly developed

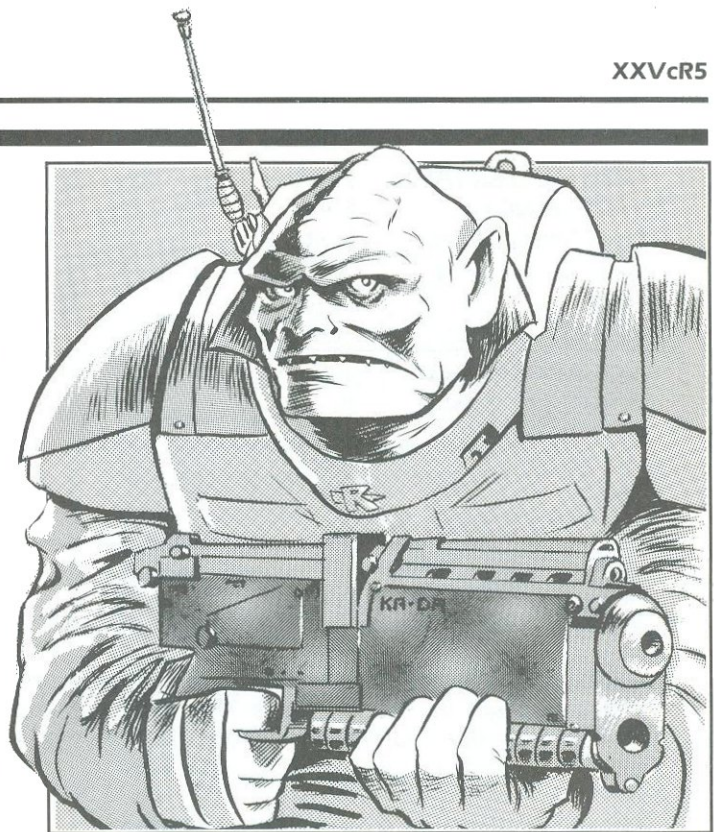
Mouth: Human normal with very sharp incisor and canine teeth

Nose: Human normal but slightly less functional

Cultural: Although few devastators have been created, laboratory specimens have demonstrated extreme loyalty to one another, and yet individuals remain quite competitive among themselves, often fighting among themselves to establish ranking.

Advantages/Disadvantages: Devastators are fearless warriors who live for competition and fighting. They have displayed exceptional morale and probably can be sent to fight to the death, regardless of the odds. These same qualities can also make the gennies difficult to use. The creatures require a fierce and charismatic leader. If there is fighting to be done, they become extremely restless and irritable. They may have extremely short lifespans and might be subject to degenerative psychological effects over time, but the strain is too new for this to be confirmed.

Their white, colorless eyes make them susceptible to



light. In locations where the light exceeds the illumination of Mars, they cannot see. They close their eyes, screaming for the light to be dimmed. Because of this, they have a natural ability to see in complete darkness. They can see deeper into the infrared spectrum, though they cannot see the infrared radiance from living beings. This sight ability also makes them unable to see above the green light spectrum. All light stronger than green does not register for them. All objects painted blue, indigo, or violet appear black to them. Combinations of colors, like blue-green, appear a dark blue to them.

Combat: Devastators can use any weapons available to humans. Their understanding of combat seems instinctive. Devastators also have a slick, greasy skin. This, combined with the genetically reinforced skeletal system, gives them a superior armor class.

Once per combat, a devastator can go berserk, gaining double normal attacks per round, +2 to hit, +4 to damage, but their armor class is penalized by 6. This berserk state lasts for 1-4 rounds.

Habitat/Terrain: The only devastators known to exist live exclusively in the RAM-operated laboratories of Vesta. None have lived long enough, due to their accelerated aging, to transplant to any other location. The devastator can survive with little food and water on any world with an oxygen atmosphere. Engineering could theoretically allow these gennies to survive years in both high and low gravities.

Ecology: Devastators, though still early in the experimental stage, are the product of RAM research on Vesta. Deep in the inner sanctums of Out Station Adam, work continues on the development of these super gennies. If this program is successfully completed, the devastators will number among the mightiest warriors in space.

The Belt

Belters. The wild, wooly frontiersmen (and women) of space in the twenty-fifth century are alive and well in the asteroid belt.

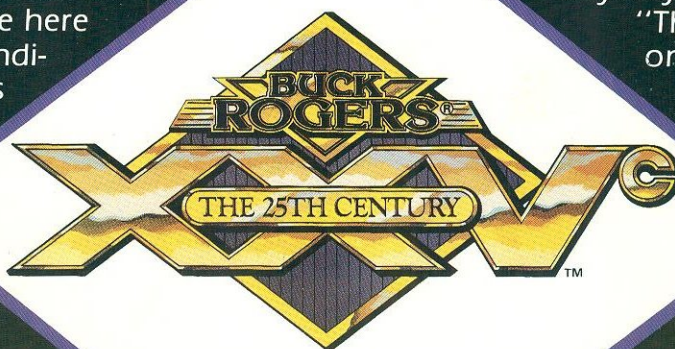
Listen to what an anonymous longshoreman from Juno has to say about life out on the edge.

"It takes a special kind of individual to carve out a life here in this ring of rocks, an individual who knows what's important in life and is willing to work for it. Not that everything here is uncivilized, oh no. Ceres is the seat of government and civilization for the entire Belt; Fortuna is known far and wide for the medical research conducted in its zero-gee labs. You want wild? Head for the casinos of Aurora, or better yet to Interamnia—that's where the *real* wildlife is!

"There's fortunes aplenty to be made out here, what with the shipping trade on Hygeia (that's where they make the bottles, you know?) and here on Juno, and the mining on Davida. I hear it's best to keep away from Pallas and Thule, though—of course, no one goes to Thule *voluntarily* anyway.

"Then there's the RAM base on Vesta. Only place I know of where the locals aren't upset with folks coming and going, ordering them around... but then, I've never been there myself. Hearsay, y'know?"

Think you'd like to visit these space rocks? Read the information in this guidebook before you make your final decision, friend; sometimes it's easier to get there than to get home again.



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