Quickstart Guide

COLD AND DARK

Quickstart

This quickstart guide is a severely slimmed down version of the original game. Rules, Abilities and Aptitudes may differ somewhat as they have been adapted to suit the simple and short format. Naturally, there are a lot more background material and expanded rule set available in the full game. There will be no information on avatar creation as the story Darker Than Most will contain ready to play avatars.

Some of the examples will sport Aptitudes and Abilities that will differ from those mentioned in the quickguide. This is also due to the slim down. For example, in this document the two Abilities Shooting and Close Combat which are explained in the core book has been substituted by the Ability Combat. Piloting and Driving has been condensed into Vehicles and so forth. Also, in the core book there are eight Aptitudes which in this document have been reduced to only five. But overall you will still be able to follow and understand the examples as the main game mechanic is the same.

Regards from Sweden,

Mischa L Thomas

The Church of Infinitology
Embrace the Life of All

COLD AND DARK

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WICKED WORLD GAMES

MÖDIPHIÜS ENTERTAINMENT

Glossary

AES: Adaptable Encounter Skin

AI: In Cold & Dark the AI is an abbreviation for Adaptable Intelligence and is a title used to describe the person managing the game (juxtaposed to Artificial Intelligence in computer games). Some call this person storyteller, game master, dungeon master, director (or whatever really).

AR: Armor Rating

Avatar: The alter ego/gestalt the player controls in the game.

BD: Base Damage

Belinium: A very energy rich crystal that is used to fuel short range ships, appliances and auxiliary systems.

BIE (Bureau of Interstellar Exploration): This branch of the GIC is responsible for exploratory space operations.

Big Black, The: Space as a whole.

Big Empty, The: Sometimes space as a whole but more often the reaches between planets and solar systems. Interstellar Space.

CAV (Caliphrian Aggression Virus): An utterly dangerous pathogen that kills and reanimates the victims. The abbreviation is pronounced like the word *cave*.

Chapter: The AI creates the stories and in order to get an overview (while playing and while designing them) the story is divided into chapters. And in turn, each chapter is divided into three levels which are even smaller pieces of the story.

Ghost Lines: A faster than light way of travel that uses (a sort of) dimensional distortion.

CIM (Clandestine Industrial Militia): A fringe group that fights the rule off the GIC using whatever means necessary.

COG (Customized Operation Gear): A collective name for a highly advanced type of upgradable nanotech supported suit, vital in the world of Cold & Dark.

Coreanium: An extremely valuable source of energy that is harvested from the molten core of planets (destroying the planet in the process). This substance is what allows mankind to travel the reaches of space (with such extent).

CSNC (Cortex Stimulation Node Cauterizations): An alternative to the death sentence, leaving the criminal as a docile, simple-minded but productive member of society.

D: 8 sided dice.

DU: Durability.

E&R (Evacuation & Retrieval): A network of rescue units that usually are the first one on the scene when a ship/station/colony is in trouble. This is a combination of the triple A and 911 of deep space. They're funded by the GIC and are not allowed to salvage wreckage.

EES: Enemy Encounter Suit

GIC (Governmental Industrial Complex): This is the ruling body of the Sirius galaxy consisting of a Chairman, Senate and political forum.

GLC (Ghost Line Calculations): This is the algorithms and equations used when travelling through the extra dimensional plane known as the Ghost Lines. The GLCs are fed into the Ghost Drive.

Grav-cuffs: A system of artificial gravity tethers working off a receiver/transmitter system. This is often used in automatic docking procedures.

HUD: Head Up Display.

IMC (Interstellar Mining Corporation): One of the largest corporations.

Infinitology: The largest religion in the C&D universe. They believe that everything in the universe is connected and that all the energies of sentient beings will end up in the *Great Stream*, a sort of heart blood of existence and only by leading a good and pure life will a person's energy grow into a strong and positive influence to the universe. Infinitologists strongly oppose the aggressive mining industry, believing that it harms the universe and in the end will harm mankind.

ISA (Interstellar Security Agency): This clandestine agency works directly under the GIC senate and chairman and handles all kinds of operations.

ISS: Internal Seal System.

ITS: Internal Tram System

JB (Justice Board): The GIC branch that handles everything that has to do with the law and due process.

LED (Law Enforcement Division): This is the main arm of the Justice Board when it comes to dealing with criminal elements.

LSA (Line Signal Amplifier): Also known as "the scare" or "scare box". This device is used to send and receive transmissions through the Ghost Lines.

MEC (Military Economic Corporation): A fringe group that opposes the GIC, similar to the CIM.

MPG: Mining Prospector Gear.

MRG (Medical Research Group): Beyond handling all medical responsibilities this GIC branch oversees DoX 2 (Department of Xenomorphology).

MSU (Military Strategy Unit): GIC branch in charge of the Consolidated Fleet, Marine Corps and all military operations.

NETSS: Nano Environmental Tactical Stealth Suit.

NFVH: Nano-Flex Visor Helmet.

NIS (Nano-Interface Screen): The most common way of displaying information and managing button controls. This is a pressure sensitive holographic nano system.

NPA: Non-Player Avatar, an avatar controlled by the AI.

OMCP (Office of Mining and Core Purification): All operations having to do with mining and core purification within the GIC is handled by this branch. OMCP also includes the sub-branch. DoX 1 (Department of Xenoarchaeology).

PCR: Planet Construction Rig, a multi-purpose vehicle used in mining, colony construction and similar industrial work.

PNR: Polymer Nano Repair

PSD: Per Success Damage

PSG: Polymer Sealant Gun

Rippers: A deadly insect/reptilian-like alien species.

RMD (Resource Management Division): GIC branch in charge of economics and gathered resources.

SAC (Simulated Atmosphere Containment): The self-sufficient life support system used in larger ships, stations and colonies.

SCT (Standard Core Time): The 24 hour day used in the Divius system. It's used as a standard in most colonies and ships to measure work days and time.

Segment: Period of time which represents three seconds in the game world. It's often used to keep track of the action oriented parts of in-game events.
SER: Standard Exploration Rig.
SES (Space Exploration Salvagers): The biggest corporate competitor to IMC.
SRS: Scientific Research System.
SWG: Standard Work Gear.
TARGET (Tactical Armed Response Group and Explosives Technicians): The SWAT teams of the C&D universe and they work under the Law Enforcement Division, LED.
TCI: Tactical Command Immersion
TIS: Tactical Investigation System
VAC: Visual Audio Communication
VPS (Void Psychosis Syndrome): A psychological ailment of unknown origin which can affect people that are involved with deep space travel and those who are isolated from human contact when in space or on remote colonies. VPS will in the end result in paranoia, hallucinations and homicidal/genocidal/suicidal tendencies and behaviors.
VES: Vacuum Environmental Suit
VIN (Virtual Intelligence Network): The advanced computer systems employed in the C&D universe. They operate off a nanotechnological core and can emulate sentience, emotions and intelligence.
Void, The: Space as a whole but this epithet is usually thought of as having a mystical and even religious connotation.
ZGE: Zero G Engineering

Timeline

+12 years: Japan sets a plan in motion which entails establishing a colony on the Moon and one on Mars shortly thereafter.

+15 years: The first colony is established on the Moon.

+18 years: The first colony is established on Mars.

+50 years: During these years the technology is rapidly evolving. As there's now a monetary interest in travelling to space for mining purposes the largest companies with a vested interest invest in space research. During this time world governments develop and build their first large mining ships in orbit. The first self-contained eco environment is created which enable a colony to be more or less self-sufficient. People are now born on the off world colonies, some have never been to Earth. Earth has suffered tremendously under the rule of mankind. Pollution and the environmental effects resulting from it were extreme.

+60 years: The mining company Roscoe Minerals lose their mining ship *The Queen* when a radical group of interstellar environmentalists (believing that we're not allowed to venture into space with the intent of exploiting it when we can't even manage our own planet) slam a high-jacked space shuttle into it in a suicide mission.

+61 years: China constructs their first armed space fighters and use them to escort their most valuable cargos.

+62 years: Japan builds the first space station with a rotating main section in Mars orbit with established gravity, the *Hiroshi*, which houses 500 miners and scientists. The station is armed and has a small squadron of armed fighters as well. All of this has been produced on Mars.

+65 years: The first ships with rotating sections are constructed and fuel efficiency has been upgraded, making it possible to travel further as the mining and use of helium 3 has been perfected. Genetic engineering has resulted in the first oxy-algae, opening the possibility for ships to have a self-contained air supply.

+68 years: USA constructs the first battle cruiser in space.

+70 years: Large veins of gold and titanium are discovered on Mars, and soon after they find oil and large quantities of helium 3 deposits. The oil means that there had indeed been life on the red planet. Smaller skirmishes between the corporations erupt on Mars, and the conflict spreads to Earth. Most major powers have battle cruisers in space at this time.

+72 years: The small skirmishes continue. The discovery of fossil fuels on Mars has led to new theoretic scientific disciplines such as xenoarchaeology and xenomorphology as the existence of alien life on other worlds seems possible.

+80 years: The world governments have lost much of their power and the major companies continue to battle each other. Spacecrafts, colonies and space stations are in multitude and the so-called *Resource War* breaks out. The corporations battle each other on Earth as well as in space. The governments try to contain the situation.

+95 years: The war has raged for 15 years, with only a year or so in-between with temporary truces. Some places on Earth have become uninhabitable after nuclear downfall from cruisers that crashed into the atmosphere. Both the Mars and Moon colonies wish to break away from the corporations and Earth. Most have been born in the colonies and claim that they have the right to them, not the earthers. Some of those in space whom wish to secede from Earth and the corporations have formed small cells which perform acts of terrorism, striking at the government and the corporations. They call themselves the OWA (Off-World Allegiance).

+100 years: All the major powers of Earth governments come together. All have tried to negotiate with the corporations (which basically run things by now) to cease fire, but to no avail. They realize that the corporations need to be stopped and that these have little to do with nationality or religious convictions. Even the monetary worth is exceeded by the escalating violence and the impeding catastrophe. In secrecy they come together and form the *GIC* (Governmental Industrial Complex), a united earthen governmental institution with joint interests. They pool their resources and start to create their army with as much secrecy as possible. While this is going on *The Doppelganger*, a large mineral hauler belonging to the Ferock Corporation, with a crew of 500, falls off the grid just outside Mars. It disappears without a trace. Most blame the OWA, but they deny any involvement.

+102 years: GIC hit the corporations hard without warning on all fronts. The war escalates to epic proportions. Millions are killed.

+103 years: The Doppelganger impossibly reappears just outside Earth's atmosphere. Before anyone has time to react it crashes into the ocean outside the US east coast. Minutes after, something alien starts to attack Florida. Humanity has its first ripper encounter and the infestation spreads fast. Within weeks humanity realizes that their internal conflicts need to end if Earth is to be saved. At first those born in space, with little interest in saving Earth don't care, but as the infestation was also discovered on a ship heading for Mars but stopped they changed their minds. The Resource War officially ends and the *Ripper War* begins.

+108 years: The Ripper War rages, but is never really won. Humanity manages to gain control of the planet but ripper presence is still strong. The rippers are a primitive species with carapace, teeth and claws that use no technology whatsoever. But their reproductive cycle is fast and they seem to be immune to gas, biological pathogens and radiation. Earth is more or less a war torn ripper infested planet with large radioactive zones. But humanity is still the ruling race. Earth starts to negotiate with the OWA concerning the independence of the Moon and Mars colonies. At the very same time the GIC starts negotiations with the corporations. Even though they're not at war with each other they still had several issues that had to be resolved.

+110 years: After two years of negotiation the GIC manages to sway the corporations to abide under their rule (somewhat more), conforming under the mining rules of the GIC. But the largest corporations have during this time come together, creating two factions. The IMC (Interstellar Mining Corporation) on one side and the SES (Space Exploration Salvagers) on the other. OWA is resolved after the Moon and Mars colonies reach a consensus with Earth. They have to obey under most of the criminal laws of the GIC legislation but Earth no longer has any rights to their resources. They have to buy drilling and mining rights. This automatically takes away much of the power from the now two corporations, which was part of GIC's agenda all along.

+113 years: GIC is being hailed by an unknown source. Soon, in human languages, the source of the transmission explains that they are an intelligent race that wishes to establish a lasting communication with humanity. They call themselves the *Gerions*, and they also say that they have encountered the creatures that humanity call rippers before. GIC agrees to a meeting and it will take place in Earth's orbit. Within minutes a huge ship of an unknown configuration bursts out of nowhere through a strange wave of electromagnetism and a dense black cloud of smoke. The ship is permitted to dock with a GIC orbital defence station called *Willows*. One being emerges from the ship, and humanity laid its eyes on a Gerion for the very first time.

+120 years: The Gerion presence is low; they only interact with us through a few emissaries. No one gets to see them outside their bio-suits, but it's clear that they're an extremely advanced race. They never share much of their bio-tech, or any of their weapons or defence systems, but they do give us the technology needed to open and travel through Ghost Lines, as well as the gravitational cube technology and they also upgrade our fuel efficiency. They show us *Belinium* and how to mine and use this new fuel source. Earth is now badly torn up by pollution, but the belinium with its low emissions, our evolving eco enclave technology and the aid of the Gerions managed to set in motion a stabilisation of the environment. But with the ripper menace, Earth is a very dangerous and constricted place to live.

The ghost lines enable us to expand vastly. GIC declares this year to be the start of a new era, and with the boom in space travel which will ensue they declare it year 0 of the coming years of interstellar travel (IT). So effectively the year becomes 0 IT.

0-100 IT: During this time a barrage of things happens. Our ships become extremely advanced, and we master the art of terraforming. With the ability to travel through the ghost lines we find hundreds of new systems with unexploited resources. We establish mining colonies and terraform suitable planets. The Gerions shows us the Sirius galaxy, a vast one with a lot of planets having the gravity of Earth norm already. It takes time to travel there but a large portion of humanity establishes a strong presence in Sirius in 80 IT, quarantine procedures are harsh to ensure that the ripper menace don't follow us out in the black. Earth is liveable but still a warzone.

101 IT: GIC sets down on the planet RV-36 in the Sirus galaxy in the *Mal* system, having their mining ship *Kari*, in orbit. After establishing that there are a lot of useful minerals under the surface they start to dig. After four months they find something, an extremely large object covered with odd symbols. It's in the form of an enormous ring. It also has parts which seem to be mechanical and slots which might be some kind of power inlets or outlets. They tow it onboard the Kari, transport it to a science station in the farthest region of the Mal system. Xenoarchaeologists and top physicists start to work on it. The whole operation is classified.

189 IT: Gerion presence is almost zero, they have withdrawn more and more as humanity reached further and further into space. During the decades that passed humanity spread, explored, discovered and mined new worlds almost obsessively. The scientists finally manage to understand the artefact they found and they started to back-engineer it, creating their own versions. It was the main siphon of a planet harvester. By drilling down to the liquid core of a planet, and then pump the hot and molten materials through the contraption (disposing a large portion of it) there was a chance that the remaining material consisted of a never by humanity seen substance. And so, still in all secrecy, they started to look for a suitable planet to test their theory.

Humanity was now travelling the reaches of space, prospecting, fighting and exploring. The ghost lines and the more or less self-contained ships seemed to grant endless possibilities; the only thing stopping us was fuel. Even with the Gerions help we couldn't make our fuel efficient enough.

191 IT: GIC had back-engineered the harvester and converted one of their largest mining ships into a harvester ship. The ship was named *Victoria*. They had chosen the planet H-09 (in the Cradle system) in the Sirus galaxy. It had a liquid core, and not much minerals. They drilled to the core, which took several weeks and then they connected the harvester unit. They began the process, which took several hours. Most of the molten magma was released into space, while the siphons caught a vestigial material. After the process they examined the hard purple and dark hued semi-glowing substance that remained. They ran tests for an entire year and in the end they discovered that it was a material with an extremely high energy content. With the right processing it could be used to fuel ships for a tremendously long time. They couldn't wrap their minds around it. The material had an energy output that seemed to be scientifically impossible. It made all other sources of energy seem inferior by comparison. But a secret like this couldn't be kept for long, and soon this knowledge spread. At this date the Gerions disappeared without a word.

200 IT: The planet harvest method was now widespread and GIC, SES and IMC used it frequently and the production of a whole new line of ships was designed. The new fuel was dubbed *Coreanium*, and battles broke out in several places over the rights to mine and harvest planets in unregulated space between the factions. However, there had been no outright war as such. Most put their military strengths in their navy fleets, the need for ground units were minimal.

205 IT: Several security forces and mining overseers from GIC, SES and IMC convened in a secret meeting without the involvement of the factions they represented. They were tired of all the regulations of mining and harvesting rights. There were always buyers who didn't care where they got the goods from. Together, they founded the MEC (Military Economic Corporation) and broke loose from their former allegiances.

207 IT: MEC started to raid mining ships and conduct illegal mining operations which they defended with deadly force.

210 IT: All new ships came with a coreanium reactor and most old ships had been converted. Depending on the size of the coreanium mainstay in the reactor, a ship could be fuelled from a year to ten years without having to change the core. Of course, this created a whole new independence among space travellers. C-class ships could now stay out for some months or so if stocked with nutrients. D- and E-class ships were fully self-sufficient with their protein pools, hydroponics gardens and completely self-contained ecosystems and could in theory stay out as long as the reactor held. The need for a home planet, colony or station lost much of its meaning. Some were born on ships, not setting foot outside it for years.

216 IT: MEC has grown and become a force to be reckoned with. They're viewed as terrorists and live out in hidden away colonies, stations and ships. They had also begun to infiltrate the GIC and the corporate scene.

220 IT: While the MEC is still going strong, a similar organisation dubbed the CIM (Clandestine Industrial Militia) was born. The information around the creation of CIM is sketchy at best, but it's believed they were formed from a large and splintered cell hailing from the MEC. The CIM employs similar methods as their sibling organisation.

230 IT: The two fringe organisations MEC and CIM are strong and through guerrilla tactics they access resources and wage small battles against each other, corporate security and GIC patrols. Even though their numbers and resources are much smaller than that of the GIC, they're still able to cause havoc due to their stealth tactics, infiltration and blitz attacks.

250 IT: An unidentified field of electrical disturbance appears, apparently everywhere. It lasted for ten minutes and during this time there was a complete communications blackout. When the disturbance was over everything seemed to function normally, but within minutes the first report came in: The Ghost Lines seemed to be disabled. The disturbance was dubbed the *Ghost Storm*. A blackness that became known as the *Dark Rim* appeared all around the Sirius galaxy, enclosing it.

For three months the lines were down and fear and panic spread, we were now isolated and those who had been travelling in the ghost lines at the time had disappeared. But after three months the lines became active. However, our ghost navigation had been skewed and so had the efficiency of the lines. Soon it was clear; the ghost lines were unable to take us outside the Sirius galaxy. Still, most of mankind out there did not react with horror and dismay about this.

Earth was millions of light years away from the largest part of humanity, and many had never seen it, just read of it in files as "the planet where humanity came from" and it was in fact more dangerous to live on Earth than living on a ship most of the time due to the conditions on our home planet. The fact that a "home planet" as such had lost its importance showed there was no real interest in Earth. Overall, humanity was more interested in killing planets by harvesting them (after they had mined them dry) than terraforming them.

300 IT: The harvesting process had now killed off a multitude of planets. This year humanity gets to witness the first case of the phenomenon which became known as *void psychosis syndrome* (VPS). IMC science- and archaeological excavation ship *Archimedes* suddenly went to a communications blackout while in the Hardek system. When the E&R (Evacuation and Retrieval) ship *Ugly Helen* arrived two weeks later they found that most of the crew had killed each other and then themselves. Of 243 people there were 20 still alive, most quite insane, suffering from VPS . In the debriefing, seven of them were cogent enough to be interviewed. It had begun when some of the crew had reported sleeping disorders, then some had started to have nightmares. This seemed to spread and soon people started to have waking nightmares, followed by paranoia and violent tendencies. Over 200 insomniacs suffering from waking nightmares and paranoid delusions trapped in a ship in the middle of space could only lead to one thing: Extreme violence and death. Some of the survivors said that *the others* were coming and that those from the void had awakened in order to punish humanity for its sins. This was contributed to mass hysteria and extreme isolation.

304 IT: More and more of these cases were reported, seldom in such large scale, but VPS had become widespread enough to present a problem. Psychological screening became more common. The three main factions (GIC, IMC, SES) tried to turn a blind eye to the problem and weren't willing to accept that there could be any risks in leaving ships out in space for extended periods of time (this would slow down exploration which in turn would slow down mineral mining and harvesting, not that there was any real shortage).

310 IT: In secrecy a group of medical technicians (49 of them) from GIC, SES and IMC had come together and performed a study on the syndrome and dubbed it VPS. At one of the yearly summits held by the three factions four representatives from this hidden group demanded the floor. They then revealed their findings. VPS was on the rise, and there were three distinct groups susceptible to it: Crews on ships that had been out for more than six months, those who were awake and not in stasis while travelling the ghost lines and people living on isolated space stations with a small crew. Incidents on planetary colonies occurred but they were negligible. Their proof was irrefutable but no one could explain why this had started to happen in the last ten years, after centuries of deep space travel without incidents of this scale. All agreed that something had to be done.

312 IT: After two years of discussions, arguments and a lot of bureaucracy passing new laws and legislations the *Medical Research Group* (MRG) was formed. This was a branch of GIC that had the authority to step in and make executive decisions when severe outbreaks of a medical or psychological nature were in effect. The presence of psychiatric technicians on ships became more common, as did regular psych screenings of crew members in rotation.

314 IT: Having an actual home planet seemed more appealing now as VPS had popped up and with this several terraforming projects were set up, by all major organisations. It was at this point people started to realize that no one personally knew anyone that had actually been to Earth in the last 50 or so years. Last report indicated that it was still a patchwork of semi-radioactive warzones crawling with rippers, and little official information was still on file about our alien enemy. Wars, travels, a third of a millennia and several million light years had done a good job in dispersing and destroying tangible knowledge of our planet of origin.

315 IT: *The Church of Infinitology* is founded by *Elaine Kendrin*. They oppose the exploitation of the universe and the harvesting of planets, stating that it's damaging the whole of the universe, of which we are part, and it would lead to the destruction of mankind if nothing changed.

320 IT: We had managed to terraform two major planets in the Divius system. Claret and Mondus. The terraformers and early settlers were the only ones on the planet, still working on the ecosystem.

322-335 IT: A GIC survey crew discovered several alien artefacts in the Valdis system on the planet Kerrion. More would to be discovered.

340 IT: Both planets now had a working ecosystem and flora and with that the animals started to thrive. Previously, mankind had mostly terraformed in order to make the air breathable, relying on temporary atmosphere processors, but now the race of man had a higher purpose. Man was creating new home planets.

360 IT: Claret and Mondus were completely terraformed, the fast rate didn't only adhere to the prime conditions of the planets and the technology. All factions had poured tons of resources into the project in order to secure the future of mankind. People started to settle down somewhat as many were afraid of spending too much time in space. With this the power of the GIC and corporations became more centralized. It didn't take long for the CIM and MEC to infiltrate the two planets in order to spy and gain access to information that was vital to their agenda.

400 IT: Claret and Mondus were now home to several billion humans and was officially the new home-worlds of humanity. Both planets were about the same size of Earth, and now had roughly the same climate as the distance from their sun was approximately the same. Still, space travel and exploration hadn't really slowed down, but many people had learned the value of spending time on an actual planet. But through the Ghost Lines new worlds were discovered and new planets were harvested.

404 IT: Some 35,000 light years away from the Divius system shuttles belonging to the SES survey ship, *The Talon,* set down on one of the many unexplored worlds, looking for minerals and the chance to harvest a liquid core. The planet was unnamed and located in the *Verbios* system. After two weeks of surveying they determined that the small planet was useless, they also reported that one of their crew members had suffered an injury in a fall. Two days after this they reported that they were taking off. Three months later they should have arrived and sent six check-off transmissions during the trip back to base. But they never reached the Divious system and not a single transmission was received. They had simply disappeared. The E&R ship that was sent found no trace of them.

410 IT: Mining colony RT-67 in the Murion system sent out a distress call, they were being attacked by an unknown alien force. The transmission was cut off. Two weeks later the GIC fleet arrived. When they landed they encountered heavy resistance by the alien forces. After sustaining heavy casualties they had to retreat as they were completely unprepared for the enemy. As most of the colonists were dead, they decided to bomb the site, annihilating all life. Footage from the attack was sent to GIC HQ and it had several clear shots of the monstrous enemy. After scanning the records they managed to find scraps of information from centuries ago. These were indeed the creatures dubbed rippers who had attacked Earth 513 years ago. Most of the original information of the old enemy had been lost. But the threat was real. The infinitologists said that this was just the beginning and that it was only one of the coming reactions that the universe had in store for us. *We are harming the universe and so it rightly reacts.*

411 IT: Terraforming colony E-13 on the planet Catheras in the Berion system was attacked by rippers. There were no human survivors and the planet's surface was carpet bombed by the GIC fleet. Later that same year the small scientific space station *Serendipity* in the far reaches of the Berion system was attacked. There were a few human survivors but the fleet hadn't the training needed to successfully board, sweep and rescue the personnel. All previous battles had been against human adversaries, and mostly conducted from cockpits and command bridges. GIC gave the order to blow up the station and the survivors to halt the ripper infestation.

412 IT: Due to the loss of resources as a result of having to bomb installations being infested by rippers, and wanting to have a real line of defence against them, the *GIC Marine Corps* were created. The fleet had tactical boarding crews and planetary assault teams, but the marines were to be trained and drilled in a different way. These men and women would be specialized in dealing with dangerous extractions, the securing of GIC property and the eradication of rippers, and any other hostile forces they encountered. The CIM and MEC suddenly had to tread more lightly.

444 IT: The rippers hadn't become a common thing, and had never been inside the Divius system, but they had attacked several colonies during the years. The marines had done a formidable job in dealing with the problem. They had access to the best equipment and the best training.

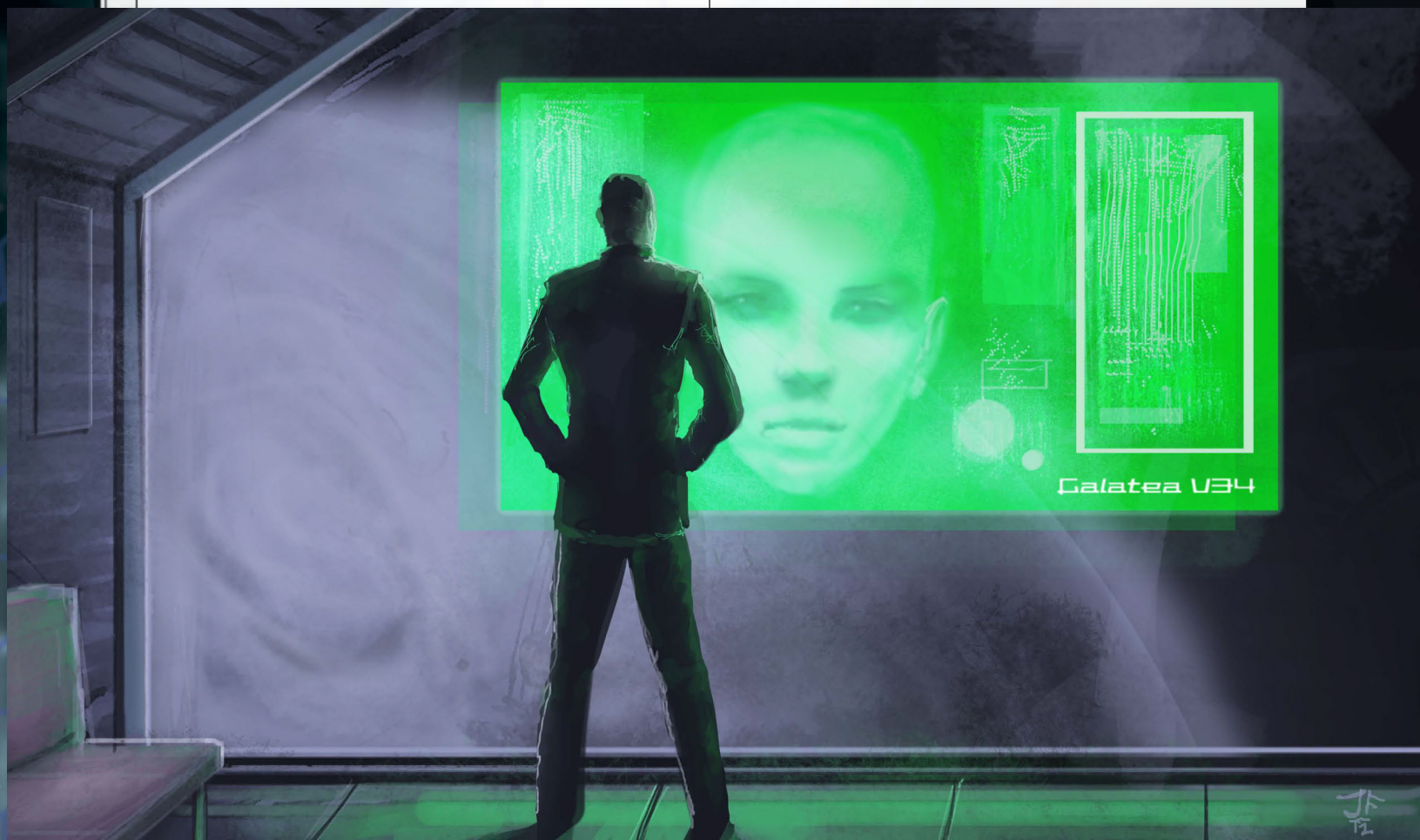
459 IT: The first outbreak of *CAV* (Caliphrian Aggression Virus) is discovered. The harvest ship *Injiro* returns from its mission in the Caliphrian system under radio silence. Marines boarded the ship and were soon attacked by crazed members of the crew. They seemed extremely aggressive and capable of withstanding an enormous amount of injury before dying. The enemies were incapable of any form of communication and used simple

tools, bare hands and even bites to attack the marines. In the end the marines were successful, but only after losing several of their own men. The bodies were all hauled down to the planet Peldios to the Haze settlement. When the bodies of the dead marines came to life again and started to attack people the first colony outbreak of CAV was a fact. The situation was contained by the fleet and additional marines (and all bodies incinerated) and it's unknown how CAV came to spread further. It has been speculated that it in fact laid dormant in someone only to surface later.

490 IT: During a planet harvest in the Sylvian system, on the dead planet Y-34, the crew of the core harvester *Orion* (IMC) communicated that they had found an alien structure beneath the surface. They decided to dig it up and tow it home. Some days after they had dug it up they reported a sudden epidemic of VPS in the crew. Four days after this report they had hauled the alien structure (which they simply referred to as *the arch* at this point) on board and due to the increased unstableness in the crew they decided to come home, rotating the crew and delivering the artefact. Six days later they sent a distress call. Through the static one of the now crazed crew members screamed that something from the abyss had clawed its way up and that they all had to pay. In the background there were screams of pain and panic. The crew member yelled into the camera that there were a lot worse things than rippers in the great black and that the race of man would fall. After that the transmission cut out. The Orion disappeared. This in combination with the recently discovered CAV had the Church of Infinitology saying that we had to mend our ways. They sent out even more of their pilgrims, the so-called arbiters, to help mankind to better its ways. Due to the Infinitologists open minded faith and their tactful approach to things most people had come to respect and trust them.

491-500 IT: The Gerions return, they have sent two hundred emissaries to mankind for reasons unknown and have station themselves on our new home worlds and largest ships and bases. Mankind is getting used to their presence once again, even though the Gerion refuse to say why they left or why they returned.

501 IT (Now): Several ships have disappeared during the years. Some had been infested by rippers and made into hives which the marines cleared out, while others had been found and on them there had been nothing but blood and no signs of ripper activity. Some blame VPS, MEC or CIM, while others don't have an opinion of what happened. The infinitologists say that there's something else out there, a reaction of the universe that will cast its shadow over mankind. No one really knows what's going on, but the big empty is a place of great mystery, fear and danger. There are billions of unexplored worlds and systems, and one knows where the intricate web of the ever changing ghost lines will take humanity.



Introduction

Dying is easy, living is hard and pain is a given...

Centuries from now mankind lives on in the Sirius galaxy, an enormously vast and dense system of stars. It's a greedy industrial society run by corporations and the Governmental Industrial Complex. The onslaught of strip-mining has stirred something terrible best left buried and forgotten.

The sci-fi universe of Cold & Dark is a frightening and violent world. In the reaches of space the protagonists have to face known as well as unknown horrors.

The players take on the roles of people who have chosen to live on the edge as site engineers, corsairs and deep space salvagers. Only out there in the big empty, on the verge of disaster facing the horror, do they flourish and realize their full potential. This is sci-fi at its darkest.

C&D is a game about dark and gritty science fiction. The big empty is a place that *should* be explored, but the dangers are extreme, incomprehensible and horrifying. In many ways the world of C&D could be a bright one, but Man will be Man. What we do and *how* we do it will decide our fate.

To a certain degree, the universe in C&D is a lonely and empty one. Sure, the cities in the core systems, especially Claret and Mondus, are shining beacons of technological advancement and civilization. But this is a society where everyone has their place and the GIC monitors every move. Only outside it, in the vast emptiness of space can one attain true freedom. Yet this, too, has its price. The great black can drive you mad, while dangers known and unknown can rend your soul and body to shreds.

There aren't dozens of civilized alien species out there in the galaxy, waiting to become our allies. There are only two known alien races: the rippers, which to those safely snuggled on the core planets are a distant threat, and the highly evolved (but probably deeply disturbed) Gerions. The rippers are a parasitic race that seems to share characteristics with both reptiles and insects. They attack without warning, without reason, using nothing other than their natural weapons. They are fearless and merciless, seeking to destroy all other life.

The Gerions are our allies, something that many quietly dispute. They have given us our most valuable technology and improved our way of life, but they keep a lot from us and none have seen them outside their horrid cephalopod-like bio-suits. What lies underneath is speculated to be even worse and we haven't even seen their home world, or know if they have one.

We have found traces of ancient and highly evolved civilizations, even more evolved than the Gerions. Some of their artifacts can be used for good, others are utterly dangerous and veritable deathtraps. All are fashioned out of the unfathomably advanced material dubbed "bio-metal". This is a living, and, according to some, sentient alloy of an unknown origin.

All the worlds we find are devoid of life, except those we colonized decades or centuries ago and abandoned. There we find genetically engineered flora and fauna. In all of this are riches to be found, fantastic discoveries to be made.

The vastness is out there, waiting...

Style and...eh...Science

When the game was developed the focus was on *style*. The aesthetic and thematic design choices we made are a mix of all those games and movies we so love (many of which had already mixed together to start with), but when doing a project such as this you always put your own touch on it. Some aspects became lighter, others darker, and hopefully it all meshed well together. Our goal was a kind of dark industrial feel. The design progressed and it *looked* cool, but then came the "science".

We haven't tried to create a scientifically probable future. Rather, we have created a set of fictional scientific realities that we have used as guidelines so that the science make sense within the context of the fictional game world and scientific set pieces. Admittedly, we put the industrial heavy feel and grittiness first.

Rusted metal, smoke and sleek, shiny nanotechnology. In some respects this sums up the feel of the world. Of

course, each gaming group will add their own veneer and world description, but this is an essential part. At the same time an engineer is greasing cogs he will check the diagnostics on his Nano Interface Screen. Imagine a dirty industrial park with futuristic high tech elements and you've got the idea.

About the Game as Such

We have tried to create a comprehensible game mechanic that at its core is quite simple and fast, but leaves the possibility for advanced play. Certain things have received more attention, things that probably wouldn't make sense in another type of game (such as how long it takes to cut through or weld shut a pressure door; hey, it can save your life!). Generally we have aimed to create a system that makes good use of task resolution, but does so in support of the narrative and in benefit of suspense.

Mainly the players portray individuals that are a bit more exploratory (or maybe plain crazy) than the average person, which will lead to a lot of travels and expeditions into deep space. The milieu and its possibilities have been devised in such a way that it should be quite easy to hold game sessions. However, even though there should be enough in this book for anyone to grasp the C&D world, the game *is* aimed at players that have seen or played (and liked) at least one of the titles in our inspirational list. So, with that out of the way…

Avatars

In order to get playing, the players need to create an avatar. This is their alter ego in the game world. The avatar has a personality, a background and knowledge and skills he can use. These details are recorded on the interface, which the player uses to keep track of the avatar's stats and vitals. There are several things to record on an interface, but foremost there are two vital things: *Aptitudes* and *Abilities*.

Aptitudes

Some things you're born with, such as innate intelligence, strength or a way with people. These are the things that Aptitudes represent. If you're naturally smarter it will be easier to use Abilities that require a certain intellect. There are eight different Aptitudes: Attention, Brains, Brawn, Clout, Cool, Gut Feeling, Quickness and Reaction. The scale below gives you an insight into what the numbers mean.

** Poor*
*** Average*
**** Oh, you're good.*
***** You're a credit to the human race.*
****** Who's the perfect specimen? You're the perfect specimen!*

Attention

This measures a person's overall perception and represents the five senses as well as the talent to catch details. Sharpshooters and investigators alike can make good use of this Aptitude.

Brains

Logic and book smarts is the realm of this Aptitude. It is often combined with Abilities when theorizing, remembering information or finding solutions to intricate problems with multiple angles to consider.

Brawn

Brute force and toughness. Brawn represents raw physical power and endurance. How much you can dead lift, carry and how much physical punishment you can withstand is determined by Brawn.

Cool

Cool measures willpower, focus and psychological resilience. Space is a dangerous place, and if you want to stay alive you'd better keep your head. In order to do that, you need Cool.

Quickness

Agility, dexterity and nimbleness can be very useful. This Aptitude makes a person quick on his feet and gives him a natural grace. Whenever you need to move fast, quietly or engage in athletic activities such as climbing, Quickness comes in handy.

Abilities

Abilities represent skills and knowledge a person can learn. No one is born with them, but one can train, study and practice in order to gain them. Abilities very much decide what an avatar can do. Is he a good pilot, a political genius or a master of repairs?

Combat: *Simply put, you know how to fight with melee weapons, your bare hands or firearms. But the end result is the same and that is that the Ability gives you the proficiency to defend yourself or knock someone out. Rifles, shotguns, SMG:s and whatever weapon that shots projectiles can also be fired using this Ability. You can maintain most standard weapons and have theoretical knowledge about them as well.*

Engineering: *Being able to fix something that's broken can save lives in space. A faulty airlock or a crack in the ships coreanium reactor can really mess up your day. With Engineering you can fix computers and busted open hulls as well as COGs, weapons or whatever else needs fixing. In the high-tech world of C&D this Ability is quite useful and it's the bread and butter to an engineer or a gear jammer.*

Infiltration: *This involves the capability to bypass mechanical as well as electronic locks and security systems. Infiltration also grants the skill to utilize stealth.*

Interaction: *Fast talking, negotiating and the capacity to socialize are skills governed by this Ability.*

Medic: *You can administer first aid and if you have rank 4 or higher you can perform surgery and conduct medical experiments.*

Movement: *This Ability is used whenever you need to engage in any form of athletic or acrobatic activity.*

Search: *This reflects how well you've honed your active perception. You can look for an enemy in hiding, pat someone down effectively or search a room.*

Science: *The discipline of science gives you a deep understanding of physics, ghost line displacements and advanced mathematics as well as xenoarchaeology.*

Technology: *With this Ability you can hack computer systems, use scanners and other pieces of advanced technology.*

Vehicles: *You can drive ground vehicles and hover crafts, at rank 3 and above you can pilot aircrafts and space ships.*

Actions

This is a broad term that is used to describe when an avatar or NPA does something of consequence to the story that involves the mechanics. Hacking a computer system is an action, and so is firing a gun. Actions can be of any length. Firing a gun takes but a second, while hacking a computer system takes much longer. Many actions are resolved using rolls.

Rolls

In order to assess if something succeeds, C&D makes use of rolls. The dice employed are eight-sided dice. These are used for every roll and are hereafter simply referred to as a "D". So "2D" is equal to two eight-sided dice.

When you want to make a roll, you combine the appropriate Aptitude with the Ability to create a dice pool, then roll a number of dice equal to the value of those numbers. When making pure Aptitude rolls, you count the Aptitude as double and make the roll. So if you have to roll your Brawn and have a score of 2, it would count as 4.

There are two basic types of rolls: Aptitude rolls and Ability rolls. If rolling for an Ability in which you have no score, you would roll the active Aptitude alone. This, however, would still count as an Ability roll and you wouldn't double the Aptitude, as you would with an Aptitude roll.

Aptitude rolls: Aptitude x 2

Ability rolls: Aptitude + Ability

Example 1 (Ability roll without an Ability score): *The scout, Gith, is driving a terrain car and he's under fire from some CIM militia. An explosion erupts just a couple of meters in front of the buggy and he has to swerve in order to avoid it. The AI decides that the Aptitude in question is Reaction and the Ability is of course Driving. However, Gith don't have any points invested in Driving, so he must use his Reaction alone, which is 3. So with that the player gets to roll 3D. He scores 4, 8 and 2, one success total.*

Example 2 (Ability roll with an Ability score): *Gith is a marksman and he's about to snipe a CIM guard. He has an Attention score of 3 and a Shooting score of 4. Attention 3 + Shooting 4 gives him a dice pool of 7. He scores 7,6,4,8,7,1 and 2, which makes three successes.*

Example 3 (a straight Aptitude roll): *Gith walks into an apparently empty room. The player doesn't state that he's looking for anything, but there's a guard in hiding. Even if the avatar isn't actively looking, there's a chance that such a thing will be discovered reflexively. The AI decides to roll Gith's Attention in order to see if he discovers the guard. Gith has 3 in Attention. When used in an Aptitude-only roll, Aptitudes are doubled, so the AI rolls 6D for Gith's Attention.*

Modifiers

The difficulty of an action depends on the circumstances. When things get easier, a positive modifier is applied. This adds a varying number of dice decided by the game rules and/or the AI. An increased dice pool also means an increased chance of success. If something is harder a negative modifier applies, which decreases the pool and makes it more difficult to succeed. Modifiers are cumulative.

If a dice pool is ever reduced to zero or less, the player still gets to roll 1D. If this roll fails, it counts as a "botch", as the circumstances are so extreme.

A dice pool can never exceed 8. When it does, every extra die is counted as a success after a successful roll has been made. These surplus dice have been locked. When negative modifiers apply, this "surplus" is reduced first.

Example 1 (negative modifier): *Gith is sneaking past a guard post. He has a total pool of 8 in Quickness + Stealth. But the guards are high-strung and on their toes since they received a report that there might be an intruder about. The AI decides that Gith gets a -2 to his dice pool, reflecting the guards' alertness, leaving him at 6D.*

Example 2 (positive modifier): *Having survived the rippers with a piss-and-vinegar attitude and his trusty heavy handgun, Rook sees a lone ripper feeding on the corpse of a fellow Marine. Rook levels his handgun and aims. The AI*

tells the player that he gets a +1 modifier because he took the time to aim. His Attention + Shooting rank is 6, but with the modifier his rank increases to 7. Rook smiles as he has the bastard in his sights.

Example 3 (a pool beyond 8): *Gith has an Attention + Shooting score of 7, and he aims at a guard long enough to get a +2 modifier. This gives him a pool of 9 dice. The player gets to roll 8 dice and on a successful roll he gains an extra success for the surplus above 8. If he would have had a pool of 10, he would have gained two extra successes after a successful roll. If a negative modifier would be applied, the surplus dice would be the first to drop.*

Automatic and Obvious Successes

When there's no stress, an avatar can succeed automatically at an action. If the player's dice pool (including modifiers) exceeds or equals the target number, it's an automatic success (any combat action is considered stressful and thus cannot automatically succeed). The success is minimal and takes the maximum amount of time, but it gets done. If the avatar wants to hurry things up, he can take a chance with a dice roll. This is a mechanic that the AI can use to calibrate the flow of a story, shifting it from dice-heavy to a more narrative style when it suits the gameplay.

Then there are obvious actions. Climbing up a perfectly good ladder without any stress or hindering conditions can be done by anyone, even if they don't have the dice pool to pull it off automatically. Use common sense regarding obvious actions.

Example: *Operative Eric Starkwood is bypassing a lock. He has a total score of 8 for this action. Starkwood is currently in an abandoned, closed down service tunnel and there are no guards, stress or any other factors that might put pressure on him. As his dice pool more than equals the target number (7) and there's no stress, he can automatically bypass the lock. However, it takes some time since he's working slowly and methodically in order to get it right.*

Example 2: *Janice Mael, a med-tech, is trying to fix up her bio-scanner after it was damaged in a laboratory accident, and it's the only one to which she has access at the moment. The device isn't too badly damaged and she has high-quality tools. However, she only has a total dice pool of 4 for the roll. But since she's in no hurry, has the right tools and the AI knows that they will need the device to move the story forward, he decides to give the avatar a +3 modifier. Since the final number is equal to the target number, 7, she succeeds.*

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Contested Rolls

Contested rolls are relevant when two opposing parties are pitted against each other. The two involved parties make a roll with the appropriate dice, and whomever acquires the most successes wins. This can also be done as an extended contest, where the involved parties try to accumulate the highest number of successes over a period of time. Extended contests are best used to heighten suspense with the aid of the game mechanics.

In the event of a tie, the one with the highest Ability score wins. If it's still a tie, the one with the highest active Aptitude score wins. If both Aptitude and Ability are tied, each participant rolls 1D and add their Ability score until the tie is broken.

Example 1 (contested roll): *Gith tries to hold the door shut while a CIM guard tries to push it open. Gith has a Brawn score of 2 (which gives him 4 dice, since Aptitudes are doubled when making pure Aptitude rolls) and the CIM guard has 3 in Brawn which gives him a pool of 6 when rolling. Gith rolls his 4D while the CIM guard rolls his 6D. Gith scores 2 successes, while the guard scores 4. Gith tumbles back as the door is busted open.*

Example 2 (extended contest): *Lee Wei, a freelance pilot, is flying side by side with a raider ship. Both are trying to get through to the other side of an asteroid field, but two asteroids are about to collide and only one of them will be able to make it through the closing gap; the other will crash and burn. To heighten the suspense the AI declares that the pilots will make three rolls each (instead of doing just the one). Whichever side accumulates the most successes wins. They start to roll. On the* first roll, they're tied with two successes. On the second roll, Lee Wei has managed to accumulate four successes, while the raider has five. There's one roll left. Who will get through and who will crash and burn? Both sides roll their dice.

Working Together

Up to four people can work together on a problem at the same time. The one with the highest Ability score acts as the anchor, making the roll. Each participant beyond the anchor adds +1 to the roll. Not all actions can be done together, and generally no more than four people can work on the same action at once. The AI must decide what is appropriate, as it varies depending on the situation at hand.

Example: *Senior LED officer Rorec is investigating a murder scene in a space station. He has two junior officers assisting him. Officer Rorec has a total pool of 6 in Attention + Forensics. However, since he has two assistants (both of them have a lower score than Rorec) that are skilled in the art of forensics, he gains +1 for each assistant, for a total +2 bonus. They work as a team and have a combined pool of 8 (Rorecs pool of 6 + 2), increasing the chance of success.*

Note on Brawn: When Brawn is pooled, every extra person adds +1 to the "power chart", +2 if he or she possesses a Brawn score of 4 or more. Then it's just a matter of making a normal Brawn roll, counting successes from the new level on the chart.

Lifting and Breaking Stuff

The scale below shows how much a person can break/ dead lift according to his strength. No roll is required to manage it as long as the Brawn score matches the feat. If an avatar wishes to lift/break stuff that's above his Brawn rating on the chart he gets a -1 for every score above his own capacity he tries to lift and has to pass a Brawn roll. A human can manage to lift 2 scores higher than his Brawn normally allows. Remember, even if a person can do something physically it doesn't mean that it won't hurt them. Punching through sheetrock will break your hand while ripping metal will require armoured gloves, but it can be done.

Reduction Time

Some actions have a reduction time and a base time attached to them. Base time measures how long it takes to perform the action, while the reduction time measures how much time each success diminishes the base time necessary for the action. Then there is a minimum time. This gauges the minimum amount of time the action must take, no matter the result on the dice. If a minimum time isn't stated, it's counted as half the base time of the particular action.

Brawn Power Chart

o Break a small and poorly constructed wooden box/ 40 kilos

oo Bust a wooden chair/ 60 kilos

ooo Kick down a hinged apartment door/ 100 kilos

oooo Punch trough fifteen centimetres of compact sheet rock/ 150 kilos

ooooo Rip a radiator off the wall/ 200 kilos

oooooo Bend a four centimetre thick iron rod/ 250 kilos

ooooooo Break down a security door/ 300 kilos

oooooooo Rip open a sheet of metal/ 400 kilos

+1/ + 50 kilos

Rules Excerpt: Security Systems

The systems are divided into three types which are decided by their advancement and scale. If the roll fails the avatar has one chance to circumvent it (counts as an environmental stress type situation). The same system is used as with the contested test done to determine if a computer discovers a hacker. Security systems have a set defensive pool according to types.

Example: *Eric Starkwood is bypassing a security system. The base time for doing so is 10 minutes and the reduction time is 1 minute. This means that each success shaves off 1 minute from the base time. The player of Eric scores two successes which means it takes Eric a total of 8 minutes of fiddling around with the system's circuitry before the door opens and the alarm is disabled.*

The Do-Over

This rule for successive attempts at an action should be used with some care. It's never in play when executing attacks, flight maneuvers, sneaking or in any other situation where a failure will result in a direct and swift consequence, but it should apply when the avatar is engaging in something that is time-consuming and in need of some focus. This includes actions such as picking a lock, fixing an engine or performing a ghost line calculation. If the first roll fails, the player can roll a second time, only

Security Chart

System type	Base time	Minimum Time	Reduction Time	Defensive Pool
Simple: Mechanical lock, simple electronic lock or alarm.	1 min	20 sec	20 sec	3
Standard: A more advanced system or electronic lock mechanism.	10 min	5 min	1 min	5
Advanced: System, military grade mechanisms.	30 min	10 min	5 min	8

he will get a -2 on the roll. If this fails as well, he can try a third time, but now gets a -3 penalty. After this, he's too frustrated and has to take a step back. If the action has a base time, half of this time is required as a "cool down period" before the avatar can start over with a clean slate.

A Measure of Success

Every die that comes up a 7 or an 8 is counted as a success. If it's not a contested roll, one success is enough for the action to be considered successful. Additional successes (multiple 7s or 8s) indicate a greater degree of success: additional damage if attacking, reduced time for repairs and so on. Not every roll will benefit from additional successes, but most will. Just a handful of the myriad of possible situations are covered in this book, which means that you as the AI will have to come up with appropriate solutions at times.

For example, when conducting a crime scene investigation you might decide that each success will turn up a piece of forensic evidence or clue. When conducting an interview, each success might represent an additional piece of information.

Failures Can Be Interesting

You should always be able to imagine where a failed roll might lead. Sometimes a failure doesn't result in anything special, other than a missed shot that gets lodged in the wall or a missed chance to up the selling price in a negotiation. But at other times a failure will yield an interesting story twist or circumstance.

Example: *The rogue operative Anya has breached an abandoned underground GIC base. She is working on the security lock on an interior door. She has a gang of marls tracking her down and closing fast, so she has to hurry, meaning she can't take an automatic success. She fails miserably. The AI tells the player that Anya noticed an overgrown service hatch some steps back. She has a chance of reaching it before the marls see her, if she makes a run for it. She hauls ass and manages to dive down the vent seconds before the marls run past it, barely missing her. She lands in dirty knee-deep water. She stands up, finding herself in a wide sewage tunnel. Strange roots and vines cover the walls. Suddenly she hears a screeching hiss...and it's not from a marl. Something big is alive down there with her. The installation is an old bio-weapon lab, God knows what kind of botched, mutated military experiment might have escaped. She doesn't have to worry about the marls for now, but as she draws her SMG and sees movement further down the tunnel, she realizes that she might have been better off fighting them instead.*

The example above shows how a failure can lead to an interesting situation. The tunnel will lead to the same place as the door she couldn't get through, but the journey is far more perilous. You can plan for some of these failures but at other times you can wing it by keeping alert and concentrating on building entertaining scenes.

Sequence Zones

These are used as a means to make certain scenes more compelling and narrative. They have a time and a place where they should be used and the AI is the one who decides when they will be useful. In essence, they're a sort of macro mode which leaves much of the narration to the players (if they wish).

Sequence Zones are always connected to a physical place and physical actions in that area; in most cases predetermined things. For example, they're excellent to use when it comes to large-scale battles, stealth missions, or when you wish to speed some scenes up without taking away the suspense. They can represent everything from an area with security in place that needs to be taken down to waves of attackers trying to breach your defensive line. The zones are in the form of a circle (but can be in any form, if the AI needs to change them) and

each zone has a modifier attached to it. This modifier applies to the Abilities used to pass the zone. These rolls are simply called sequence rolls. When a zone is successfully passed, the player gets to narrate (within the constraints of the zone that the AI has set up) how it all goes down.

The simplest way of illustrating it is to take an example which involves a stealth mission. The avatar has snuck aboard a planet harvester and he is trying to get to the hydroponics without being detected, by using air ducts and access tunnels. But there are a lot of guards. Every zone represents two hundred meters or so of sneaking, and for every zone he passes the player makes a short narration: "I can hear the two guards: they stopped at the corner where I'm standing. They talk about some strip joint in Claret City as they light up a smoke. Silently I manage to open the access hatch and slip down the vent. At the same moment I close it, they come around the corner. I crawl down the shaft." The important thing is that the narration is in line with how the avatar operates and what the roll represents. Successfully passing a sneak zone won't end with all the guards killed, etc.

This can be very effective, as a special ops team can have different tasks in a sequence zone. One must make a Search roll to identify where the guards are from his position, while another must pass a Shooting roll in order to snipe them, and the third needs to pass a Security roll to cut the alarm and breach the door. When a roll fails, it usually means that the game moves to normal play, where the opposition makes rolls (Attention-related for discovery, combat-oriented for battles, and so forth) in order to see if the avatar is discovered or the squad injured or whatever is appropriate to the action. If the avatars manage to overcome the zone in a way that they can continue through the zone, they make a sequence roll for the next zone. It's possible to create extremely advanced zones which hold information on the number of successes needed and, if in a large-scale combat, units damaged and lost, depending on the outcome. When the Norm is reached, the sequence is over. The sequence can of course end earlier, like when a stealth sequence zone goes south.

Example: *Gith is sneaking into a CIM base. The base is fenced and has an inner perimeter of guards, then he has to breach a door and sneak passed an additional perimeter of guards before he's in the actual base. The AI constructs the zones as follows.*

Zone 1, jump the fence and sneak past the guards: Quickness + Stealth, modifier +/- 0.

Zone 2, take out one of the guards in close combat in order to get to the door: Quickness + Close Combat, modifier +2 (the AI has decided that the guard is a bit drunk).

Zone 3, bypass the door and alarm, Attention + Security, modifier -2 (it's an unusual alarm type that Gith has never dealt with before).

Zone 4, sneak past the guards on the inside, Quickness + Stealth.

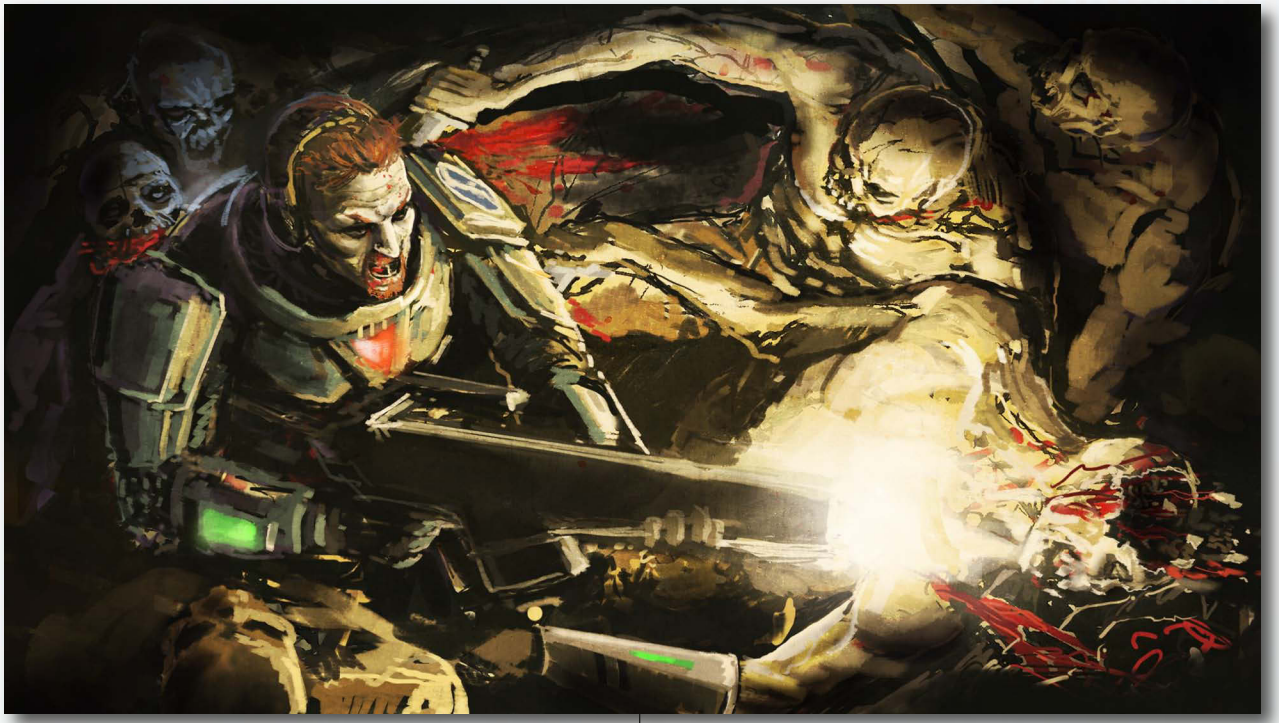
Whenever Gith passes a roll, he narrates the details of the zone to add his avatar's style and flair. He might jump up and do a split, holding onto a pipe as the guards sneak past below (I swear I've seen that somewhere…). If he messes up, the game shifts to normal mode for that zone. Maybe he has to stealthily kill a guard that he failed to sneak past, and if he fails or makes noise he has to shoot it out with the entire guard squad, effectively ending all the zones as he's discovered. If he succeeds, the game reverts to zone mode until he messes up again or clears the zones. When inside the base, the game flow is normal and will remain so until the AI says otherwise.

Handling Hordes

There are some tricks you can utilize when using Sequence Zones to simulate larger battles, or battles where the story and mood do well with fewer details and a more epic battle (such as when holding the ground against impossible odds).

Every avatar (or allied Non-Player Avatar) that's involved in the battle gets to make a roll. It's important to decide beforehand what will happen if an avatar fails his roll. Does he suffer damage due to counterattacks, expend extra ammo or damage his equipment? You should also decide how many total successes the avatars need to defeat the enemy (or keep them at bay, or whatever fate hangs in the balance) and what each success represents. If the enemy is advancing, the avatars might only have a number of tries before they're overrun or have to escape (like when a hoard of rippers is storming them). This system can be combined with the Strategy Ability to great effect, since direct strategy successes are added to the dice pools of the people under the command of the strategist (see direct strategy rules). This system greatly reduces rolls and allows a game where larger battles are frequent to run smoothly. But keep in mind, these rules are meant to be fast and cinematic and are much less accurate and detailed. To a certain extent one can say that they toss the game balance out the window for the benefit of epic narrative.

Example: *The AI decides that the four avatars in his story are going to be attacked by a large group of cavers. The cavers are at a range of eighty or so meters, while the avatars have taken up positions behind a chest-high wall. Behind them is a security door which leads into the research facility. However, the door is locked and one of the avatar's allies is bypassing the system from the inside. The door will open after six segments. The cavers (if not killed) will reach*



the avatars in four segments. The AI has decided that the difficulty starts at normal, as the targets are moving in a direct line toward them.

Every Sequence Zone after the first will give the avatars a +1 to their dice pool as the cavers move in closer. There are about thirty cavers and the avatars are armed with auto carbines. After some thought, the AI says that each success will kill (or otherwise disable) two cavers. This symbolizes how the avatars will blast away with their weapons using full auto (expending about half a clip per segment). So if an Attention + Shooting roll results in 3 successes, in this instance it would kill off 6 cavers (instead of inflicting detailed damage on only one or a few). If the avatars don't manage to kill them off after four segments, the combat switches to normal rules, which means they might have to face several cavers up close until the door opens after the sixth segment.

If the enemies had been individuals armed with firearms, the AI could have decided that each failed roll would result in damage suffered by the avatar who failed the roll (since the enemies would counterattack at range). Also, if the enemies were heavily armored, the AI might have required two successes to disable one enemy (as opposed to two disabled enemies per one success in the above example). It's time to start rolling in order to mow down the cavers.

Each player rolls the dice pool for his avatar (Attention + Shooting). In total they generate 7 successes. This means that 14 cavers are down (2 down per success). The AI narrates how the auto fire roars across the stony dark plains and rips a fourth of the horde to shreds. The players feel confident. In the next segment, the avatars get +1 since their targets are closer. But they're not so lucky on their next attack. One roll fails, and one of the players is really out of luck and botches (his avatar's weapon jams). In total, the two remaining players generate four successes, taking down 8 cavers. They'd better step up their game or they might be overrun and killed (or at least seriously injured) by the frenzied army of cavers. The group has two more chances, but they're one gun short. Time to roll again…

Combat

Combat is handled in segments. Each segment is comprised of a three second period. Within this time, all involved parties get to perform an action. When violence erupts, the one with the highest Reaction is the first to act in a segment, then the one with the second highest, then the third and so forth. This is called Initiative. However, maneuvers like hitting the deck or going on the defensive can be done at any time (this is true for all evasive maneuvers), no matter your Initiative, as long as you haven't yet acted in this segment. You can always try to avoid an attack if you see it coming. Every player declares the action of his avatar, starting with the player who goes last. It's also possible to delay an action, acting later in the segment. When everyone has acted in the segment, if the skirmish is still ongoing, the next segment begins and everyone gets to act again.

If there's a surprise attack, the one with the highest Reaction on the defenders' side gets to make a Reaction roll. If successful, he will be able to run for cover, hit the deck or dodge/duck when being attacked. So do the rest of the defenders if he has yelled a warning to his comrades. If not, they will be defenseless to the first attack.

If there's some uncertainty about who goes first (or if you need to up the suspense), you simply roll 1D for both sides, adding their individual Reaction to the roll. The one with the highest number goes first.

Time & Movement

As mentioned, all involved combatants act during a series of three second periods called segments. During a segment, everybody involved can complete an action that takes no more than three seconds. The movement rate of a human during this period is Quickness + 10 (with a -2 modifier to Shooting rolls if running and shooting at the same time). While sprinting, the speed increases to Quickness + 20. Trying to hit someone that sprints (if he's not running straight at the shooter) gives a -3 modifier, and the runner can't generally hit anything if trying to shoot while running at full speed. When walking, engaging in stealth or dragging a heavy object, the movement rate is only 5 meters per segment.

Note: *Exact movement is only listed to use when it becomes important and the group feels that it's significant for a specific situation. Generally, there is seldom a need to keep track of exact movement and distances. This will in most cases just hamper the flow and turn an otherwise suspenseful scene into a nitpicking over exact details. The same goes for all mentioned distances when it comes to combat and movement.*

Defense in Combat

When in close combat, the avatar does everything in his power to stay out of harm's way. He ducks and parries and bobs and weaves to avoid deadly blows. In game mechanical terms, his defense acts as a negative modifier which applies to attackers that try to engage him in close combat (hand to hand or melee). It also applies to thrown projectiles, but not to firearms. If the avatar faces multiple opponents, his defense is counted as one less for each separate opponent beyond the first. However, defense only applies to enemies that the avatar is aware of and can see.

Example 1: *Rook is tearing it up on his leave and has ended up on the business end of a knife in a bar brawl. Rook has a defense of 3. This means that his opponent gets a -3 modifier to his attacks when trying to hit Rook.*

Example 2: *Without breaking a sweat, Rook took out the guy and snapped the knife in two. But the guy has friends. Three of them, in fact. They gang up on Rook. As there are two additional attackers beyond one, his defense is lowered by 2. This means that his defense is reduced to only 1. Each attacker will get a -1 to his attack as Rook has a hard time keeping up with the hail of blows and kicks. He's in trouble.*

Bullets vs. Hoofing It

Pulling a trigger or throwing a knife takes far less time than running a few meters or opening a door. If you do not have the option to perform a ranged attack, and if you are standing at a distance of two meters or more from a combatant that can perform a ranged attack, the ranged attacker will be able to attack you before you can act. This disregards Reaction score. *When fitting, this rule can be bypassed as slitting the throat of a grappled hostage or pushing a button is just as fast as pulling a trigger.* If the shooter has his attention diverted from the close combatant, the close combat party is allowed to make a Quickness + Close Combat roll. If he gains two successes, he has successfully attacked the shooter before being shot (use this roll as the attack roll). This works from a distance as far as up to four meters.

Example 1: *Lemi has a Reaction score of 2, while Kylia has a Reaction of 4. Lemi has a gun pointed at Kylia, who is standing three meters from her. Kylia tries to go for the gun, but even though she has a higher Reaction than Lemi, the latter gets to act first since she has the gun. Lemi squeezes the trigger as Kylia comes at her. This goes to show that even a high Reaction seldom beats a bullet. If Lemi would have been distracted, say by a sudden flash of light, Kylia would have been allowed to make a Quickness + Close Combat roll, since she stands within four meters. If Kylia had rolled two successes on this roll, she would have been able to attack Lemi up close, maybe even wrestling the gun from her, before Lemi managed to shoot her.*

Inflicting Damage

When determining how much damage an attack causes there are two damage classifications involved: Base Damage (BD) and Per Success Damage (PSD). The base damage is inflicted on the hit and is a static value attached to the weapon. The per success damage is also attached to the weapon and is multiplied by the attackers successes. Let's say that an attack has a base damage of 4 and a per success damage of 2. If the attacker scores 2 successes the damage inflicted would be 8. He would get 4 for the base damage while each success generates 2 points worth of damage. There are some damage types (accidents, explosives etc) that work a bit differently but this is the norm when dealing with most direct attacks. It is often written out like this: 4/2. This weapon would have a base damage of 4 and a per success damage of 2.

Example: Anya fires her handgun (Attention + Combat) which has a base damage of 5 and a per success damage of 2 and scores 2 successes. Her target sustains 9 points worth of damage. 5 for the base damage and an additional 4 for the two successes as each success inflicted 2.

Damage Points2

At times the text says that someone can sustain a certain amount of damage opposed to losing hit points. Basically this is the same thing as losing hit points. If someone sustains 5 points worth of damage he has lost 5 hit points. It's just semantics.

Damage and Healing

An avatar regains 1 hit point every 24 hours. If injected with a Regen (medical drug), the avatar regains 5 hit points within 1 hour. After the avatar has lost half his hit points, he gets a -2 modifier to all rolls. When he only has 3 hit points or less remaining, he suffers a -3 modifier and can only hobble about. If reduced to 0, he is dying and will be dead within 5 minutes if someone can't pull off a successful Quickness + Medic roll or boost them with a shot of Regen. If an avatar receives damage which is greater that his (Brawn x 2) +3 in one blow, he will be dazed for three combat rounds, suffering an additional -2 modifier on top of other possible modifiers.

Fire, Corrosives, Electricity and Extreme Cold

These do damage for every three seconds a person is subjected to them. How much damage depends on how powerful the source is (or how severe the exposure is). To simplify things the severity/exposure has been divided into four types: Mild, Harsh, Extreme and Incinerating. It takes a fire/corrosive about nine seconds before it starts to eat through armor if mild and six seconds if harsh. After this the individual will suffer the full damage and the durability will be diminished by the amount of damage inflicted as well. If extreme or incinerating it eats right through the armor and the effects are immediate. Armor as such doesn't shield the wearer from cold or electricity but COGs can be equipped with insulating properties.

Severity Chart

Severity	Armor Effect Delay	Dmg/3 sec
Mild	9 sec	3 HP
Harsh	6 sec	6 HP
Extreme	0 sec	8 HP
Incinerating	0 sec	10 HP

Armor

Armor has two values. Durability and Armor Rating. The Durability measures how much beating the armor can take before it falls apart while Armor Rating shows how much damage is reduced from damage taken.

Example: *A border guard is shot by a CIM commando and the bullet inflicts 12 points of damage. However, the guard*

is wearing a flak suit which has an Armor Rating of 7 and a Durability of 25. This means that the damaged is reduced to 5 as the Armor Rating was deduced from it. The Durability is also reduced by 5, leaving it at 20.

Falling

Falling is a pretty good way of ending up dead if the drop is long enough. If lucky something might soften the blow, such as water, cardboard boxes or whatever. The falling chart isn't measured in exact distances but instances. Armor reduces the damage by half its armor rating.

The falling system can be used to decide damage from crashes. The AI decides how severe he thinks a crash is and then pick a damage from the falling table. Crashes are more unpredictable and the damage can be deemed as bashing even if using "third story free fall" for example.

Falling Chart

Fall	Damage
Roll down a stair.	1D+4 (Bashing)
Fall from the second story.	1D (Deadly)
Thrown of a highway overpass.	1D+4 (Deadly)
Third story free fall.	2D+2 (Deadly)
Fifth story free fall.	2D+4 (Deadly)
Seventh story or worse.	2D+8 (Deadly)

Vacuum

Usually, people die from the cold, heat or radiation long before they succumb to the vacuum when subjected to outer space. However, if a human is subjected to the vacuum and there's no other environmental hazards that can kill him off, he can survive a vacuum for a short while. For every segment of exposure the avatar will sustain two points of fatal damage until he's saved or expires. He will be severely bloated after about thirty second and many of his superficial blood vessels will be ruptured but his eyes won't pop out of his head, nor will anything similarly dramatic occur. Severe (incapacitated) vacuum damage often requires a medi-tank to completely recover from.

Package Excerpts

An avatar comes from somewhere. He has a background, things he's good at and people he knows. Each player has to select a package for his avatar. Every package comes with some bonus features, set of base Abilities and Aptitude recommendations. Within the description there's a hint at a background, life views and experiences. These just describe what an avatar with this package might be like. This means that the player's avatars may vary greatly in personality, experiences and views from the package description. ***There are 19 packages in the full game.***

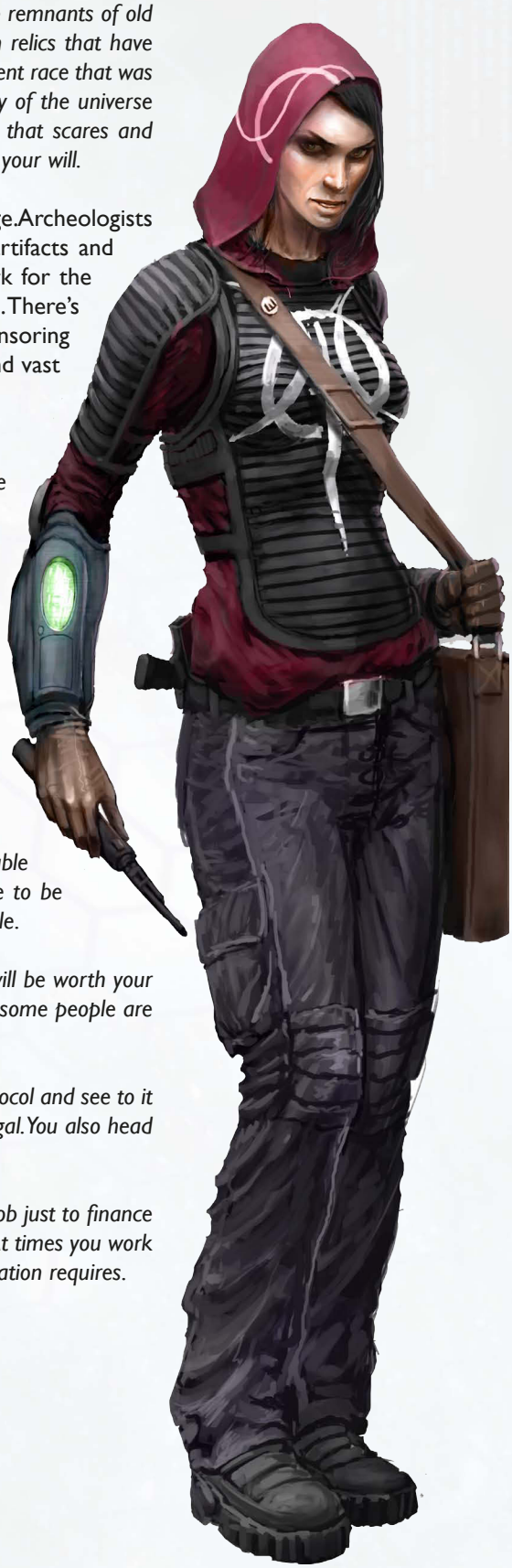
Something to keep in mind is that a package is basically a job/ lifestyle description and the avatar doesn't have to be in that line of work anymore. The package Raider describes a lifetime as one, growing up jacking ships and smuggling. But a Raider might work as an operative nowadays (but using the Raider package). A LED-officer might make a living as a Raider. Main point being that the package represents from which walk of life the avatar comes and not necessarily what he does now. Under each package there will be some suggestions on optional variations of jobs/positions someone with a package background might go for. Feel free to devise your own.

Even though many packages hint at a background exclusive to the GIC (such as Operative, Commanding Officer and LED-Officer) the avatar might as well performed similar duties exclusively for a corporation, criminal organization or one of the fringe groups, MEC or CIM. Often he's completely freelance nowadays and this is usually suggested in the typical variations. Just see to it that the players choose avatars from backgrounds that can (at least in the end) form a functional team.

Archeologist

For hundreds of years mankind has known that there are other sentient beings out there. The Gerions live among us and the Rippers have become a dangerous part of the lives of men. Your call in life is to puzzle together the remnants of old civilizations, or groups, both human and alien. The ancient alien relics that have been found fascinates you and points to the existence of an ancient race that was even more evolved and advanced than the Gerions. The mystery of the universe just waits to unfold. There's a strangeness to it all, an eeriness that scares and intrigues you. Somehow you have felt the weight of it strengthen your will.

Archeology is a discipline that holds a lot of power and prestige. Archeologists travel all over the universe in order to search for alien artifacts and relics. Many have started up fractured businesses and work for the highest bidder, accompanying mining crews and prospectors. There's a lot of money to be made, but it's a game of chance and sponsoring is needed. There are rumors of artifacts of untold power and vast knowledge that must be unearthed.



Bonus Features

- ***Strong Mind:*** *All interval levels of Black Resonance are counted as one less.*
- ***Knowledgeable:*** *+1 to all Xenoarcheology rolls and can never botch these.*
- ***Favorably Inclined:*** *An archeologist will always buy/sell artifacts for 20% less/more to his favor.*

Important Aptitudes: *Attention, Brains, Gut Feeling.*

Abilities: *Driving, Piloting, Scanners *, Science, Search, Xenoarcheology **, Xenomorphology **

Typical Variations

Artifact Dealer: *You engage in the highly illegal but profitable activity of smuggling artifacts from forbidden systems. You have to be very careful as you meet and work with a lot of dangerous people.*

Evaluator: *You're sent out to finds in order to determine if it will be worth your employer to invest in a certain dig. It's a cutthroat business and some people are ready to walk over your dead body to keep a claim.*

DoX I Researcher: *As an employee of the GIC you follow protocol and see to it that illegal artifacts are restored to the GIC and that digs are legal. You also head up and discover many sites.*

Explorer: *Credits, fame, you don't care. You take the odd paid job just to finance your trips but the true payoff is the rush of making a new find! At times you work within the law but at other times you don't. Whatever the exploration requires.*

Delegate

Power is measured in money, resources, and strength of arms. But the sway over these things is decided in courts, boardrooms and by backroom deals. You have always been able to get your point across clearly and also been able to get others to see things from your point of view. And it didn't take you long until you turned your talents into a commodity.

You took a job as a delegate and you love it. Your clients send you all over the universe to broker their deals. You handle contracts, negotiations and you even appear in court at times. Multimillion credit deals stand and fall on your words.

Delegates are extremely versatile. They're like the operatives of the corporate world. They head hunt, negotiate and draw up contracts. A delegate has to be very ambitious and able to adapt. In many cases they're sent far away, without any chance of contacting their employer, and have to make hard decisions on their own. A trusted delegate wields an impressive amount of power as he is backed by the resources of his employers, acting as their voice.

Bonus Features

- ***Believable:*** *+5 to credibility.*
- ***Silver Tongue:*** *+1 to Fast Talk and Rhetoric rolls and can never botch these.*
- ***Business Sense:*** *He will always buy/sell any merchandise or service for 10% less/more to his favor.*

Important Aptitudes: *Brains, Clout, Gut Feeling.*

Abilities: *Administration *, Computers, Fast Talk **, Interrogation/ Information Gathering, Politics, Rhetoric **

Typical Variations

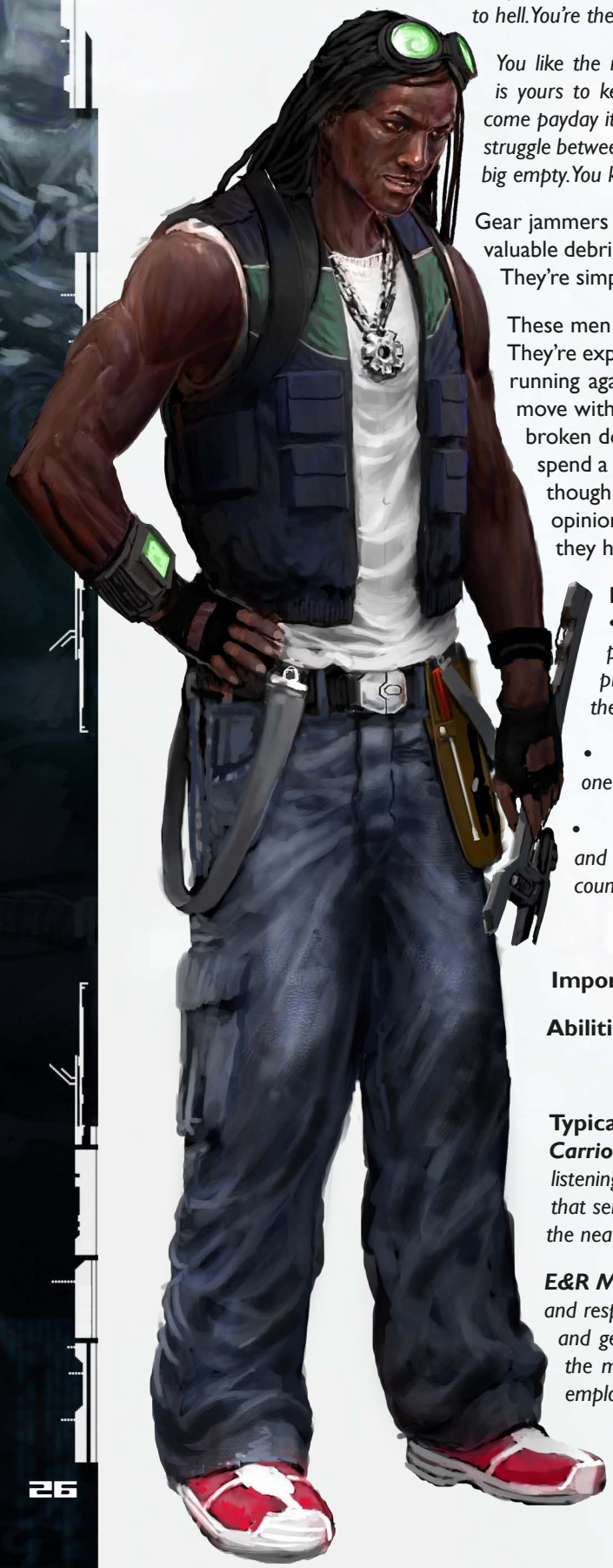
Corporate Lobbyist: *You travel across the galaxy to strengthen the hold of the corporation you represent. You negotiate, bribe and manipulate the world around you to see to it that you open the way for corporate progress.*

Travelling Escort: *As a registered Escort at the Guild you have been trained in the art of seduction, rhetoric and physical pleasures. But you have discovered that your position can generate a lot of power. Pillow talk and people's dirty fantasies, combined with some social pulls and tugs make you a very effective diplomat and negotiator.*

Jaded Fringe Negotiator: *The crew you travel with might be first grade gunmen, aces at the helm and have the ability to fix a broken reactor with duct tape but they don't have the means to make money off the loot they steal. You negotiate pricings, deals and act as the face outward for the crew.*

Gear Jammer

Thousands of people work and travel the vast reaches of space. In some cases they leave things behind, at other times they get attacked and their ship, colony or station gets blown to hell. You're there to pick up the pieces…and sell them.



You like the roads less traveled, since everything you pick up in unregulated space is yours to keep. You can be out for months and it can be a lonely existence, but come payday its all worth it. There's a certain beauty to gear jamming. The solitude, the struggle between you and the metal. Tons of hardware against your flesh, out there in the big empty. You know that this is what you were born to do.

Gear jammers are deep space salvagers. They fix up old ships, or clutter together valuable debris, and haul them back to ports where they can find potential buyers. They're simply "gear jamming".

These men and women have developed a special relationship with technology. They're experts at getting the most rundown piece of junk derelict ship up and running again, or are able to tie together massive amounts of metal as they move with ease in zero-g. They also seem to have an uncanny ability to force broken down machinery to do their bidding when the shit hits the fan. They spend a lot of time in unregulated space, scouting for things to salvage. Even though everyone knows that they're the best at what they do the general opinion is that gear jammers are crazy. And in order to do what they do they have to be a bit wrong in the head or have brass balls.

Bonus Features

- ***Perfect Jury-Rigging:*** *When a gear jammer jury-rigs a device or part of a device (that hasn't already been jury-rigged once and not fixed properly) there is no need to make a roll on the Wear & Tear chart when the thing breaks down.*
- ***Speedy Mechanic:*** *Duration for all jury-rigs are counted as being one level less complex/severe than they are.*
- ***Gremlin Kick:*** *Three times per story a jammer can yell, curse at and actually hit a broken down mechanical or electrical device after which it counts as jury-rigged for half the needed duration.*

Important Aptitudes: *Attention, Gut Feeling, Quickness.*

Abilities: *Athletics*, Computers, Explosives, Fringewise*, Repairs**, Scanners*

Typical Variations

Carrion: *People think you're the lowest of the low. You sit out in the black listening for distress calls, when you find one you jam it and wait for the people that sent it to die. Then the salvage is yours. You cut it up and sell the pieces at the nearest station or port.*

E&R Mechanic: *The Evacuate & Retrieval teams work to save lives and ships and respond to a variety of distress calls. You have the job of breaching the ship and getting it ready for retrieval and put together a report of the failures in the mechanics and structure in a short period of time and send it to your employers.*

Resident Gear Jammer: *You have taken up the role of mechanic and salvager on a freelance ship. You might not have the same finesse as an engineer but you can keep a bird in the sky with very little resources.*

Marine

Rippers are filthy fucking vermin, roaches that by a fluke of nature grew bigger and a bit smarter than their smaller relatives. When you saw your first GIC- Marine Corps infomercial on the circuit at the age of six you knew you wanted to join. "GIC- Marine Corps, Been Killing Since We Were Born". The slogan stuck with you.

You joined when you were eighteen and after three years of training you were sent on your first mission: Clearing a colony from Rippers, retrieve GIC research data and rescue any survivors. The battle was fierce, you even got wounded, but nothing could beat the rush. Since then you've kept going from mission to mission. You like the feeling, the feeling of being part of something bigger and making a difference. Mankind needs a line of defense that takes on the Ripper menace head on. And you're it.

The Marines are the toughest hombres around and they know it. Marines are one of the few humans that ever come face to face with a Ripper, or a horde of cavers, and have the job of standing their ground in order to take them down. They get six weeks a year off and their contracts run for six years, not counting stasis sleep. Wherever the GIC points out danger the marines go. Often they get dropped smack down in the middle of a shitstorm. And in most cases…they love it.

Bonus Features

- ***Tough as Hell:*** *They get a +1 modifier to withstand death, permanent damage and unconsciousness when subjected to critical hits and the target number is set at 6 instead of the standard 7.*
- ***Weapon Expert:*** *Can never botch a Shooting roll and they gain +1 to them.*
- ***Scanning Specialty:*** *Marines get +1 to the Ability Scanners when they use movement trackers.*

Important Aptitudes: *Attention, Brawn, Cool.*
Abilities: *Athletics, Close Combat*, Driving, Explosives, First Aid, Scanners, Shooting**, Stealth, Strategy*.*

Typical Variations

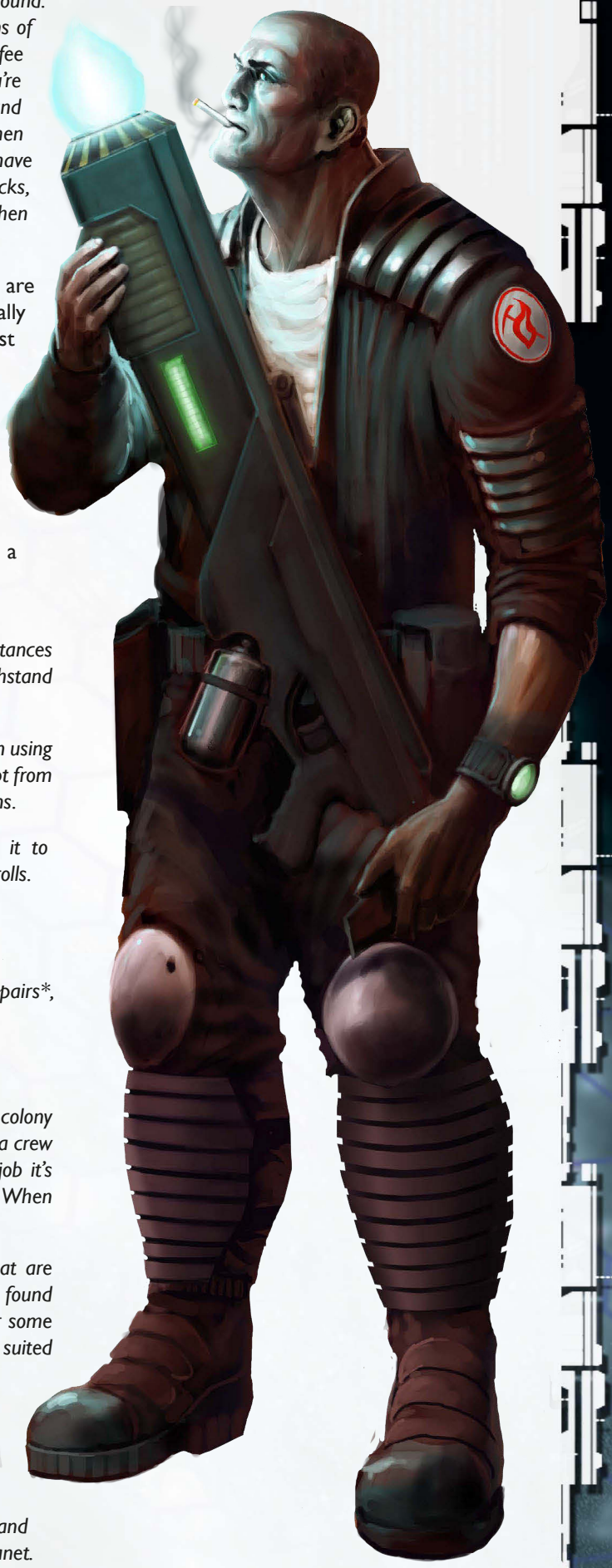
Lifer: *The corps is your life and you have nothing else. Killing Rippers is a must and you're put in this universe to kick ass. Your squad is your family and being on your way to the next LZ is one of the best things you know.*

Soldier of Fortune: *When your contract was up you realized that if you were going to bleed you would prefer to get paid a whole lot more. As a SoF you might be part of an outfit for hire, take on illegal one man jobs or work as the source of violence on a freelance ship.*

Retired Veteran: *You have had your shares of battles and seen things no man should be forced to survive. Now you work with a freelance crew, acting as their muscle. Your looks and attitude is enough to fend off most troublemakers but those who do want to mix it up seldom live to regret it.*

Prospector

Mining and planet harvesting. These make the universe go around. Early on you wanted to be a prospector. You find the fat veins of ore and the hot pulsating cores and get a fat prospector's fee for your trouble. The actual mining is a dirty business and you're happy to leave that to the dig crews. You prospect, survey and often oversee the installment of the main mining colony and then you move on to the next job. You meet a lot of people and have seen some strange worlds in your line of work. Ripper attacks, strange artifacts and actual warzones is all part of the job when working far beyond the traveled lanes on the fringe.



The art of prospecting is a highly valued skill. There are thousands of prospectors but only a handful of really intuitive and good ones. Prospectors work and spend most of their time in really dangerous environments. They handle power tools, explosives and investigate unstable cavern systems and drill deep down into planetary crusts. All this dangerous work is often done months away from backup and without a chance of getting a message through to the employers, or anyone else for that matter, with any expediency. A lot of things can go wrong on the fringe, and only by keeping cool can a prospector survive.

Bonus Features

- ***Always Calm:*** *Due to being used to the worst of circumstances all prospectors get a +1 modifier when trying to withstand environmental circumstance stress and Cold.*
- ***Improvised Weapons:*** *They get +1 on attack rolls when using hand held mining power tools as weapons and are exempt from the penalty some of these impose when used as weapons.*
- ***Geologist:*** *They gain +1 to Know-How when using it to prospect and evaluate finds and can never botch these rolls.*

Important Aptitudes: *Attention, Cool, Reaction.*
Abilities: *Athletics, Know-how**, Explosives, First Aid, Repairs*, Scanners*, Search, Xenoarcheology.*

Typical Variations

Mining Operator: *The job is to establish the basic colony parameters and decide the first initial dig sites. You go in with a crew and set up shop. After the main survey team has done its job it's down to you to do the fine calibration and find the fat veins. When all is operational you go on to the next job.*

Habitat Evaluator: *There are many worlds out there that are quite liveable, those where water, vegetation and animals are found have been terraformed by humans but left and forgotten for some reason. Your job is to find these worlds and explore them. Is it suited for a mining operation, settlement or other endeavours?*

Survey Specialist: *Your job is the most basic but vital one. You get sent to a part of space and told to survey a planet. You have to go down to the surface, take samples and research and investigate them onboard your ship. The findings will act as a basis for your employers and will decide if they will start up an enterprise or not on the planet.*

Scout

Becoming a scout seemed to be the right thing for you. Ever since you were born you had a natural aptitude for being observant and quiet. When you came of age you went through the GIC scout program and were surprised to learn that only one out of a hundred even got passed the recruiting test. For you it was so damn easy.

In the program you got some ISA training, a bit from the Marine Corp and some from the fleet, along with the stealth module algorithms. All focused on recon and stealthy long range takedowns if necessary. After three years you could be as quiet as a ghost and moved in and out of enemy territory with ease. At times you just went in for recon and at other times to tag a mark so that the fleet could bomb the crap out of it. What you see, what you report and what you mark can be pivotal in winning a war.

Scouts are not an official command of their own in the MSU, but they're not a part of the fleet, the corps or the ISA for that matter. They do have their own training facility and base of operations. Sometimes a scout is called in for a short while to be a part of a military or ISA unit. Their special training makes them more adapt at stealth, perception and sniping. Most fleet crews and marine squads have a scout or two. When they wish to have additional scouts they make a request with the MSU senator staff. Scouts are the only ones capable of handling the NETSS (Nano Environmental Tactical Stealth Suit). The mental strain of being a scout takes its toll and they have a rumor of being withdrawn and quiet. Some refer to them as shadows and think that they're down right creepy.

Bonus Features

Infiltration Training: *+1 to all Stealth rolls and they can't botch these.*

Heightened Senses: *+1 to all Search rolls and they can't botch these.*

Scout Training: *They are the only ones that can use NETSS.*

Important Aptitudes: *Attention, Cool, Quickness*

Abilities: *Athletics, Close Combat, First Aid, Interrogation, Scanners, Search*, Shooting*, Stealth**, Strategy.*

Typical Variations

Sentinel: *As a sentinel you're trained to work with marines and other soldiers and actually take part of the battle. You only scout ahead and give them an overview of the situation and act as their eyes and ears. When combat breaks out you often take a sniping position but have no problems with being in the thick of it.*

Hunter: *After you quit as a GIC scout you discovered that your abilities were well suited to hunt and track down animals. With all the mutant hybrids out there you realized that you could make a living of hunting down rare specimens for the highest bidder.*

Infiltrator: *Working alone is your thing, no distractions or messy entourage. You're a long range scout, often getting far behind the enemy lines where you collect data, isotope mark bomb targets or plant explosives. At times you also perform assassination jobs, freeing of prisoners of war and other types of black-ops work.*

Structure of the GIC

In the Divius system's main hub GIC runs a pretty tight ship. Most travel lanes are marked and ghost line entries and exits have to be reported and done in one of the many space docks in the *ghost jump yard* (affectionately called graveyards). The *LED* units patrol all the known routes, and perform routine controls outside these lanes as well. But the further one comes from the core the less the law applies as the GIC presence declines. Whenever a large GIC colony, or station, pops up the GIC presence increase. As it can take months to travel to certain destinations there are a lot of backwater colonies which are run by local criminals as if they were their own private fiefdoms. The odd GIC patrols in these areas are often paid off as they have little choice as they're months from any significant backup.

The GIC is the organization which runs things in the world of C&D. They legislate, uphold laws and regulate space and grant mining and planet harvesting licenses to corporations.

The GIC is a democratic institution which consists of a senate led by a chairman. Every ten years a new chairman is elected by the people and every forth year the people get to elect new members of the senate, of which there are six. Most decisions are discussed and voted on in the senate and they have monthly meetings. The vote of the chairman counts as two, which grants him a bit of leverage. The chairman is also considered to be the commander in any war situation and have the power to command the entire Consolidated Fleet and Marine Corps. Voting for proposals and legislations is the norm but in war times the chairman has complete control and the senate acts as a supportive think tank.

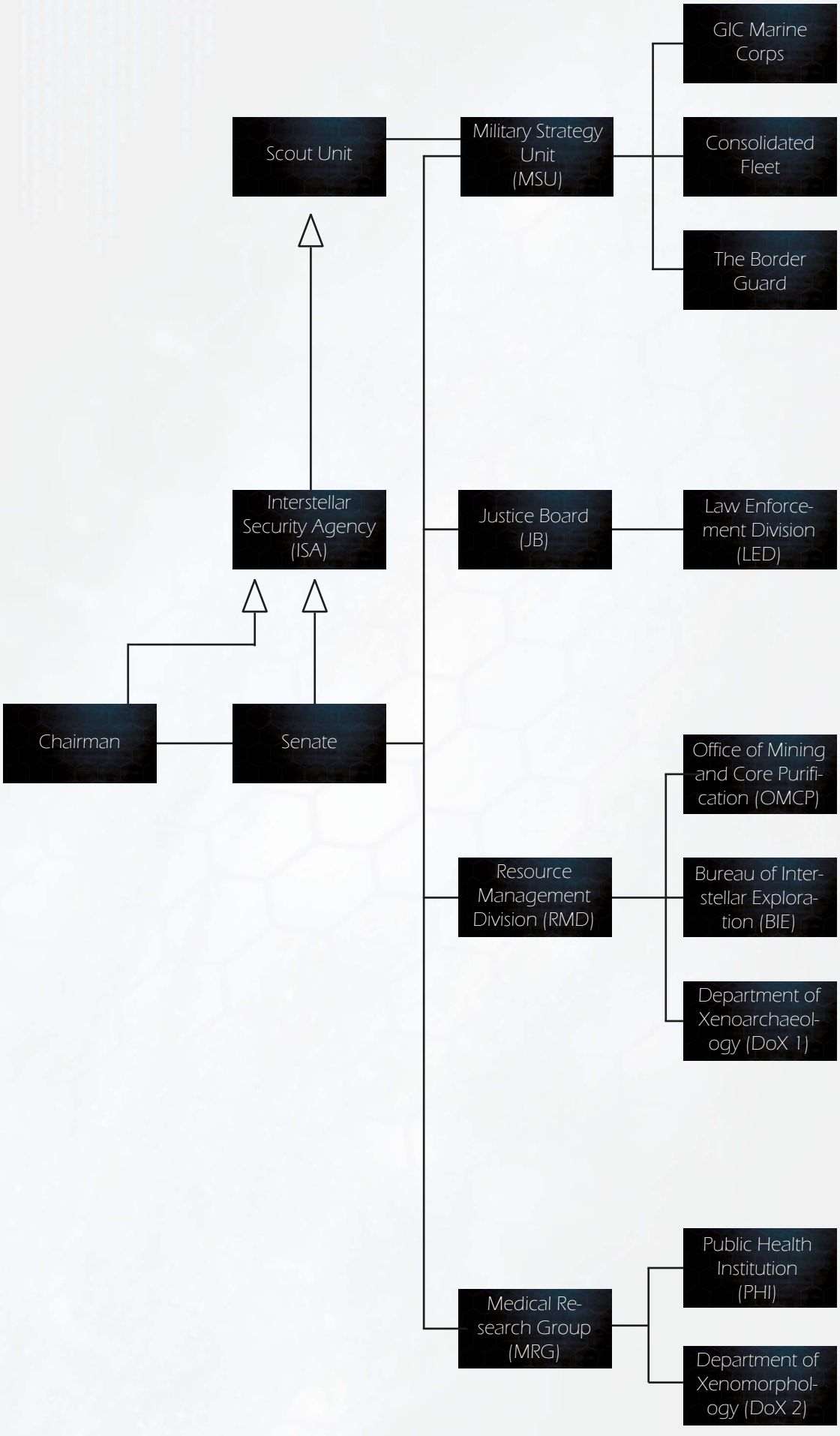
Half of the senate is always positioned in Mondus City while the other half spends most of its time in Claret City, as does the chairman. One of the senators have the position of vice chairman and he is by law required to live and work out of Mondus City, as are his two other senators . This is done so that if one of the planets is attacked, and the chairman or vice chairman is killed, the other can hold together a functioning government and military structure. Vice chairmen are elected every forth year in conjunction with the senate election. Of course, there are hundreds of other positions and people involved in the senate such as vice senators, resource management division, military strategy unit, the justice board and many others. The current chairman is the thirty nine year old Miaku D´Charnas. She has been in office for two years and is the youngest person in history to have been elected leader of the galaxy.

Senators and Departments

There are six major organs of the GIC: Resource Management Division, Military Strategy Unit, Medical Research Group, The Justice Board, Bureau of Interstellar Exploration and Office of Mining and Core Purification.

Each senator that goes up for election comes from a background (or at least tries to convince the voters of this) that makes him suitable for one of the six institutions. Each senator acts as the chief supervisor over one of the six governmental branches. They oversee the dispersal of resources, argue for increased budget if needed and keep up the structure of their branch. At the monthly meetings they report to the rest of the senate and the chairmen. These organizations are massive and a senator naturally delegates most of the work and only handles the key issues and the most important bits that needs to be taken care of.

Every month the so-called Forum is convened. Here the senators (or their representatives) convene and meet up with three hundred representatives of the people. Forum delegates vote on issues and legislations and argue for their needs and demands. They have no direct power as such, but how they vote and what they say act as a guide for what the common man on the street thinks, wants and needs. The forum election is done in clusters, several local delegates run for the position, six are chosen by the people and these six then hand picks forty nine (often predetermined already) forum members.


GIC Marine Corps
Scout Unit
Military Strategy Unit (MSU)
Consolidated Fleet
The Border Guard
Interstellar Security Agency (ISA)
Justice Board (JB)
Law Enforcement Division (LED)
Chairman
Senate
Office of Mining and Core Purification (OMCP)
Resource Management Division (RMD)
Bureau of Interstellar Exploration (BIE)
Department of Xenoarchaeology (DoX 1)
Public Health Institution (PHI)
Medical Research Group (MRG)
Department of Xenomorphology (DoX 2)

Example of GIC Branch: Military Strategy Unit (MSU)

Every military action and strategic positioning of defense outposts is planned by the MSU. This branch is responsible for military research, tactical planning and oversees the Consolidated Fleet and the Marine Corps. Their different departments always have at least one ISA liaison that has total insight into the operations and projects. The core of the MSU is run by the joint commanders, which consists of twelve members. These are the brightest and best of their fields (weapons research, defensive and offensive tactics and strategy). The MSU have hundreds of departments and subdivisions of think-tanks and researchers but whatever weaponry they come up with, or whatever strategy they choose to employ, there are three well known external resources that make use of them.

Consolidated Fleet: The fleet is an old institution and was from the beginning the only military force that the GIC needed. Most of their military actions off Earth were won and lost in the void. The fleet had army tactical ground and ship breach teams on board. When supported by a well coordinated fleet this was enough. But after the interstellar ripper infestation, things changed. Today the fleet is just that, a fleet which sole purpose is to patrol and conduct their business in the air/space. Their onboard ground team was cancelled the day the GIC-Marine Corps were created. Nowadays the marines take care of the ground and breach teams, which have created a bit of rivalry between the two institutions since the GIC-Marine Corps were created in 412 IT.

The fleet is a force to be reckoned with as they command the GIC armada. They patrol the borders of space, transport the marines to their destinations and keep watch, always looking into the darkness in hopes of being ready to stop the next threat before it reaches the rest of mankind.

GIC Marine Corps: Even though this group only has about a hundred years of history they're rightfully known as the toughest military unit that has ever existed. From the beginning they were created to board space stations and ships, and breach colonies that had been infested by rippers. But nowadays they handle any military operation of importance. They're an elite group specialized in handling rippers, violent outbreaks of VPS and they are sent in to handle special threats. Where space ends and the planet, colony or infested ship begins the job of the GIC-Marine Corps commences. The corps got a hard time at its inception from the fleet that more or less heckled the "rookie" organization. But what the fleet didn't realize was that the corps had a whole different angle and training. The corps proved their worth and nowadays they heckle the fleet back, saying that they're not much without their ships. Bar brawls between the fleet and the marines are not an uncommon sight. However, when the shit hits the fan they got each other's backs, even though they don't skimp on the un-pleasantries even when cooperating. Of course, not every fleet member and marine dislikes each other but it's a common thing, especially among rookies.

The Border Guard: These men and women have gone through basic training and are the most common type of soldier. They usually have a standard two year contract (a marine contract runs on for six). The border guard patrol outposts, smaller colonies and engage in larger scale battles where expertise isn't needed in the same degree and they represent the "run of the mill soldier". This organization was created due to the increased need for military presence at mining colonies and other outpost as a result of increased ripper infestations and raider activities. This is another reason why the fleet has a problem with the marines. The border guards were originally formed from the onboard strike teams of the fleet after the corps was created. Now they represent the general army of the GIC.

Senator: Gorman Elkins

Law

When millions of light-years and beyond is to be governed by a government the law can often be hard to implement. A city is hard enough to manage, a country harder. Imagine managing a galaxy.

The GIC tries its best to bring the law and the justice system to all the dark corners of the galaxy. But out on backwater colonies and small terraformed worlds the law is quite…flexible at times. In some places it's basically nonexistent. When a patrol only swings by every six months or so for a quick look there's not much stopping people from breaking the law. However, most places have individuals that have a sense of justice and they often set up a makeshift law enforcement system, which sometimes holds up quite well. These law men more or less abide by the GIC but often skip a few steps in order to dish out their own brand of justice. Sometimes they're very humane and at other times they're cruel. There are basically three names for these types of "officers of the law": Regulators, Marshals or Sheriffs.

The death penalty is still in effect but is mostly used in the marines or the fleet as a way to deal with traitors. But the traitor has to have done something off the charts in order to get executed. Desertion isn't enough but selling secret battle plans and launch codes to those outside the MSU would be something that most definitely would lead to the death penalty. The most common means of execution is by firing squad or by "spacing" (shot out an airlock while still alive). Violent and sexually driven repeat offenders (rapists, pedophiles, murderers) are "cool burned". Cool burning (official name *cortex stimulation node cauterizations*, or CSNC) is a precision nano-surgical procedure in which the different parts of the brain were the lust for these crimes has manifested in the individual is burnt. The memory of the person is burnt as well. The criminal is left very docile and has no recollection of what they have done and are physiologically incapable of ever feeling the urge again. But the procedure causes damage to the short term memory system, sexual drive (a zero libido) and the learning and coordination system.

The individual is only capable of handling quite simple tasks which they were capable of performing before the cool burning. They can run simple computer system checks, drive or fly taxis, assist in engineering tasks and so forth. After the procedure they're put in stasis, flown to a place far away from the people who remember them or the crimes they committed and put to work. They are highly suggestible and find themselves content in the work situation they're put in.

Piracy (as in shanghaiing a spaceship) is a quite common crime. There are a lot of raiders out there and they attack whatever they come across and sell the goods. Sometimes they do contract jobs, stealing and kidnapping from ships selected by an employer for whatever reason. Until recently, the penalty for piracy was death or cool burning. The Chairman of that time (Rachel Zerganov) had deemed the crime especially heinous as an attack on any ship in space risked the lives of every one on the attacked ship. One little tear in the hull could kill every passenger. But the current chairman D'Charnas has changed the punishment. Nowadays the crime is punished by thirty years of work camp prison. Only if someone dies as a result of the crime can the guilty parties (everyone on the pirate ship who participated in the coup) be sentenced to death or cool burning. D'Charnas instituted the change as pirates didn't risk anything extra by shooting a hole in the hull of the ship, killing everyone onboard, and take the payload. Today they can risk the death penalty or being cool burned if they kill anyone. Of course, if one person dies they can kill the rest to get rid of witnesses. But the mortality rate connected to victims of pirates has gone down significantly after the new legislation.

Another crime which can be punished with cool burning is trespassing on a coreanium processing plant with the intent of sabotaging. The same goes for unregistered and illegal coreanium processing.

Prospecting Laws: Mining without a license is a crime. Steep fines to three years in jail, additional to the fines, can be the result. Not including the GIC, only franchised and splintered (with its business plan and structure leaning toward the mining industry) are allowed to apply for mining rights. Franchised get access to entire planets (and harvesting rights) while structured gets a time bound license (usually one year from the first dig, not including the establishing of a mining colony) to mine a site and can't get harvesting rights. The license itself is costly and then the GIC takes eight (mining fee) percent of whatever they find, plus income tax (all and all they take thirty three percent).

Salvaging Laws: Ships and debris that are found in regulated space are the sole property of the owner (company, private person) to whom it belongs. This only holds up if the logs and/or registration number/logos can be established and traced back. If the wreckage is found in unregulated space, it's finder's keepers. However, the one salvaging it has to have a salvaging license. A private person has to have a fraxnse in order to apply for one. This license is more expensive than the actual fraxnse and is purchased for 5000 credits. It has to be renewed every year for the price of 1500 credits. If someone without a license finds debris and reports it, the salvager that shows up is required by law to pay the one who reported it with a 10 percent finder's fee. And of course, if the ship is found with onboard survivors the wreckage has to be reported to the GIC and is not eligible for salvage. If whole ships are found they are seldom sold as a whole but rather hacked up and sold for parts. Selling these is a hassle. First of all you need a salvage sales license which cost 10,000 a year, and then you need time, contacts, logistics and storage. Because of this most salvagers sell their findings to a broker who does an estimate of what he will get for the parts and gives the salvager twenty five percent of this. Of course, the salvager has to pay full tax on this as well if going by the law, so basically the salvager gets one eighth of the profits when all is said and done.

Weapon Laws: Due to the danger of raiders, rippers and possible CAV outbreaks, it's legal to carry firearms. Those whom have been convicted of violent crimes or severe sexual crimes are not allowed to carry or own a firearm. The firearm has to be carried openly (in a holster visible to the naked eye). The license only includes pistols and heavy pistols. When visiting larger cities such as Claret or Mondus City or a ship, space station, or colony located in a non-life sustaining atmosphere, weapons are confiscated on arrival and given back on departure. Only the facility/transport security personnel are allowed to carry firearms in these locations (if not having special dispensation, as being a marine on duty or an ISA agent). In order for the weapon to be legal, it has to have been bought in a legitimate gun store (with an official GIC registration).

Most establishments (bars, stores, etc) have a no weapon policy and all weapons are checked in at the door and given back when exiting the locale. Carrying a weapon without a license can give up to six months in prison. Carrying a concealed registered weapon gives a 500C fine and also results in the license being revoked for a year. Each new offence adds 250C and six months to the suspension.

Sexual Trade: In order to legally sell sexual services the sex worker has to go through the Escort Guild and become listed. It's not everyone who can get in. It takes a certain panache. The schooling period is two years during which time the escort to be learns everything from seduction to rhetoric and details about different sexual preferences. The escort is then free to work, choosing his/her own clients. Once a year (not counting stasis) they have to get a medical and psychological examination and can be subjected to random controls. No illegal drugs are allowed. Escorts are exempt from taxes, paying ten percent to the guild who in turn pays taxes to the GIC. Listed escorts are in most cases a rather respected line of work. According to surveys, fifty-five percent of

the citizens of the core planets see it as an honest and respected line of work. Illegal prostitution is still about, and in many cases these people fare pretty bad as they can't make official complaints when being harassed by pimps or beaten up or abused by "clients". Also, there are many who engage in illegal prostitution to support drug habits.

CIM and MEC

Even though they've been a factor in the society for almost three hundred years, very little is known about them. What is known is that they harvest the odd planet and mine ore illegally. In many cases they also attack corporate and GIC ships.

CIM and MEC waged war on each other for the first hundred years, after that they called a truce (this is unknown to anyone outside the organizations at the moment) as they were beset on all sides by enemies. The last twenty years or so they have begun to exchange information and the odd favor.

During the last ten years, both MEC and CIM have started to have other motives than sheer greed. They have begun to question the entire authority of the GIC and the corporations. Most people on the core planets have a decent life (but extremely controlled) but those on other worlds often have it scarce, living under the boot of a local criminal or corrupt Consolidated Fleet commander. They want to change things.

They are divided into small cells all over the galaxy and they work through infiltration, terror attacks and covert operations. Effectively, they have formed a sort of resistance that wants to give more power and rights to the people. They often have a high interest in gaining access to GIC and corporate labs and research facilities as they want to get their hands on new weapon technology as well as information on genetic engineering, artifact research and other experiments that are kept from the people. Their structure and methods really make it hard for the corporations and GIC to deal with them. The GIC often runs anti MEC and CIM infomercials on The Circuit. The two fringe organizations respond by hacking info nodes at times, sending out a short burst of info that hits The Circuits screens in the homes of the people, spewing propaganda back.

The Independence Movement

A lot of self-sufficient colonies and systems outside the core have begun to question why the GIC should lay claim to them. They want to secede from the GIC and strike out on their own. However, the GIC won't budge. The movement isn't really official or organized but it's heading that way. The CIM and MEC has started to take an interest in the movement. If they can get it organized there's a chance that the Sirius galaxy will be plunged into all out war. Here and there one can find messages scrawled on walls "The Independence War Is Coming".

Claret and Mondus

These two planets were the first we settled down on in the system and are the most developed. They had a gravity

of Earth norm and they were ideal for terraforming, even containing water frozen deep within its surface. It was about two hundred years ago mankind became more centralized and the majority moved to these two planets, leaving smaller colonies. Today, Claret is home to five billon people while Monuds houses four billion.

The planets are not divided in any form of counties or regions, only sectors but people are extremely centralized and most live within the walls of Mondus- and Claret City. The concept of a rural lifestyle isn't something that's particular popular or widespread on the two planets. People band together for reasons of safety.

Mondus and Claret City are gargantuan masses formed in cylindrical shapes surrounded by high walls. The two core cities are built upward, higher in the center and lower in the *Outer Ring*. The *Inner City* is the nerve center where all the political and economical decisions are made. Here the forum is located, the senate and all important corporate headquarters. Surrounding the Inner City lies the *Nimbus*, luxury homes situated high up where the rich and famous lives. After that comes the *Ribbon.* The majority of people live here and its considered to be the middleclass area. Closer to the Nimbus means higher middle class and the outer areas of the Ribbon which is close to the *Outer Ring* is considered the lower middle class. The Outer Ring is a combination of slums and production units. A lot of mined ore gets shipped here to be refined, vehicles are built and food is grown. Many people work here, but only the poorest actually live here. In rough figures there are about a thirty percent unemployment rate among the city population, and about two thirds of these people live in absolute poverty (overall pretty acceptable numbers). Just outside the Outer Rings lies the *Perimeter*. This is the two hundred meter high wall that surrounds the city and is patrolled by LED and the Boarder Guard. There's not a savage world waiting beyond the walls, as such, but their have been reports of the odd ripper, CAV victims and the like, so most people just don't venture outside, there's no need and it's quite unnecessary.

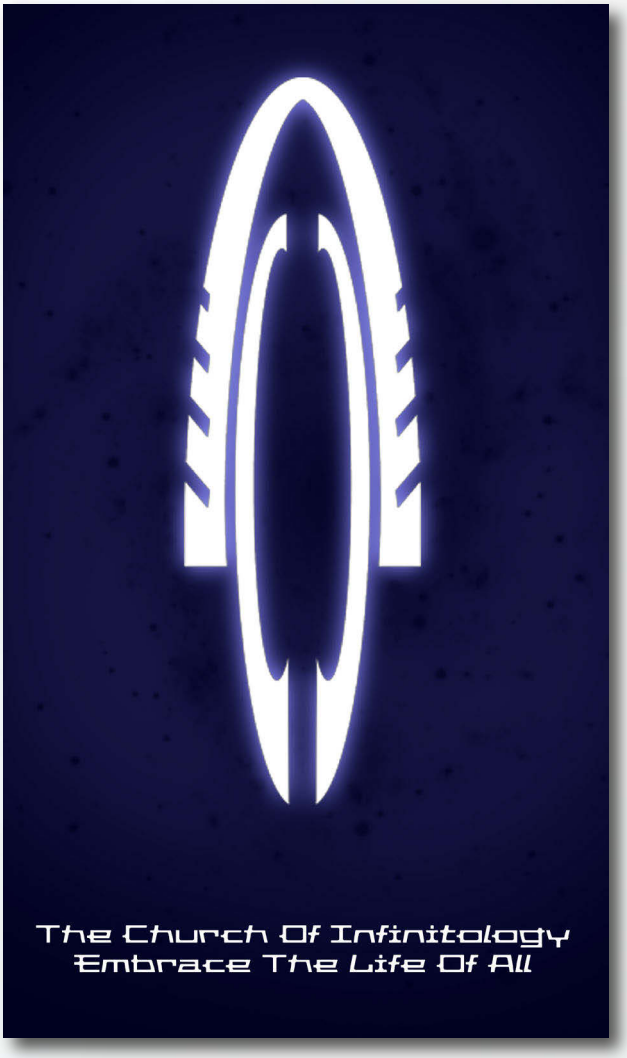
The cities of Mondus and Claret also have three levels. Sky, Midpoint and Below. Sky is up on high, being higher up also indicates how much money you have. Below is a fog riddled system of power stations and sewage, all over the city. People in their right mind don't venture down there. LED does the odd patrol just to keep an eye out. Below came to be when the cities were built. A lot of things got left behind and forgotten after the main build up and nowadays no one cares that much. Below runs under all of Claret and Mondus and the rumors speak of both Cavers and all kinds of inhuman individual banding together down there. When workers have to go there they often do so armed and in the company of a LED TARGET team. Due to the structure, crime rate differs from area to area and can get pretty high out in the Outer Ring.

The weather is very much like that of old Earth. The cities on both planets have been built on the southern part of the western hemisphere, giving it a year around warm weather and moderate rainfall. Roads connect the different levels, and there's a lot of flight traffic as well but only registered taxi flights, LED and GIC official crafts are allowed to fly in the city and only A-class flying crafts are permitted for civilians outside the flight docks.

GIC tries to keep tabs on their citizens and on the streets and in the air they have surveillance cameras. The Inner City is riddled with them, the Nimbus is packed, the monitoring of the Ribbon is so-so and the Outer Ring is basically unmonitored and then it picks up again at the perimeter with pretty good security and surveillance. It also happens that they place cameras in more out of the way colonies at times just to get an overview of things.

Church of Infinitology

Infinitologists (Infinits for short, Infinit singular) believe that every particle of the universe is connected. And not only that, they perceive the entire universe as a single living being. Sentient beings that are of flesh make up the flesh, blood and organs of the void. Creatures that have mastered bio-tech and integrated their bodies with it



are of a higher order and constitute the nerves and the impulses. And those whom have left their bodies behind and managed to become pure energy and one with the universe have become a part of the thought process. They have truly joined the Life of All.

Infinits are not hypocrites (well, no more than your average Joe) and they're fully aware that even though beings might have become elevated to a higher state, they can still be in the wrong and in the need of guidance. Infinits don't struggle for perfection, only for unification and harmony.

Even though they believe that the universe reacts to the actions of sentient beings, all sentient beings are responsible for their individual actions. A human is a part of the universe and if a human is wronged she will react, still part of the universe. But she can still choose how to react. The Church of Infinitology has amassed a great deal of trust from the GIC since their arbiters often have acted as mediators in tough situations without any ulterior motive.

One big difference between infinitology and many other religions is the fact that they don't believe that there's a reason behind everything. They see no reason for an innocent child to become sick and die, or try to find meaning in accidents that kill hundreds. This only happens because the universe is in fact a cruel place for beings that haven't reached the state of pure energy. Also, as sentient beings it's the duty of infinitologists to react to these events and try to make a difference. When someone dies horribly for no reason other than chance you will never hear an infinit say "The universe has a plan for us all, even this is part of a bigger plan that we cannot comprehend and you can find comfort in that.". An infinit is more likely to say "The universe can be as cruel as it can be beautiful, but you can only react to what has happened. Will you be crushed under the weight of sorrow, or will you harden and grow, enabling you to one day react in a way that may spare others the sorrow your loss has instilled in you?"

When a sentient being dies his essence is splintered, transferred and assimilated into the *Great Stream*. The Great Stream is what lies between life and death. Here all the energies that wait to become injected into a physical being linger. New energies are sometimes added from other parts of the universe. Only when a race as a whole has evolved will the stream start to change and pour the essences into a higher evolved state. Thus, the infinitologists do not believe that one and the same person will be reborn or that they will end up in a paradise. When you die, you as a person and your thoughts will truly end. But if you have done good in your life by helping the universe and the species of man to get closer to harmony by reacting in such a way during your life that you helped others, your essence is purer as it runs down the stream and mixes with it. Even if it's just a little, this will make the stream and those born of it as a whole, purer and stronger which will move the race as a whole toward joining the true core of the Life of All.

As they believe the universe to be an organism that reacts, they also realize that when parts of its body turn against it, like tumors if you will, it will react and fight it. Infinitologists believe that mankind's exploitation of the universe, such as the extreme mining and planet harvesting, has turned us into such a cancer. VPS and CAV are reactions to this, the universe regards us as an illness and its immune system is ridding it from us. If we don't better our ways we will be wiped out. So they struggle to mend, heal and help humanity to understand this. Their wish is that we stay in the Divius system (or wherever system people choose) since there's no need to travel using coranium as we do, and without the extreme travels the alternate fuel sources available to run cities and on surface technology, we wouldn't need coreanium.

This means that a true infinit tries to do as good as he can while alive so that the race as a whole can benefit. They follow ten creeds in their work. They don't follow the words blindly but try to follow their meaning.

Sayings and proverbs of the church

Kendrin be blessed
Embrace the Life of All
By the Great Stream
Mend the mind, heal creation
May the age of purity come
The Joining awaits us all
Creation is divine and the divine is creation
Walk in harmony
In the name of Kendrin

Technology

VINs

Computers are very sophisticated and can be programmed to have an array of protocols. Artificial intelligence has never been achieved, nor is there any need to develop it. Most computer systems of any significance (ship computers, main hubs, etc.) runs on a VIN (Virtual Intelligence Network, pronounced *win*). VIN systems have been designed to respond and adapt to situations that may occur and can give off the semblance of real intelligence, but in reality it's all about clever and complex programming. VINs on main hubs and onboard computers are by law prohibited to be programmed to emulate personalities in the working environment since it has been proven to distract crew members. However, when crew members are off duty and in their private quarters they may request to run a personality protocol that allows them to chat with the computer, interacting vocally as if it would be a person. On smaller vessels, or privately owned vessels, many engineers name their computers and give them a personality even though discovery by the GIC will lead to heavy fines.
VINs are incapable of making a decision that will directly

kill or harm a person. Contamination, quarantine and automated decompression security procedures are controlled by a system of sub-routines that runs on pre-programmed triggers. These systems can be accessed manually through the VIN by a human with the right access codes but the VIN can't affect these on its own in any way. This structure is used so the VIN won't risk running into logical paradoxes.

Even with the immense development of technology, the VIN core is a massive thing. The main stem is a large five hundred cubic liter cylindrical tank that contains the actual board of the VIN. This is in the form of an adaptable nano-board, that's actually liquid. It fuses, merges and diverges as the intricate calculations works on. The liquid is violet blue and luminescent, usually contained within an extremely strong titanium alloy. The built in shock absorbent material makes it extremely strong and it can even withstand a crash.

A VIN is fully capable of piloting a ship under normal circumstances (has about 3 dice and can't botch) and will alert the crew of strange scans, proximity warnings and the like. So when in calm waters so to speak the crew can play cards, work out or whatever as the VIN will tell them when they need to get to their stations or when a threat shows up. However, having a human running the scanners is much safer as the VIN only uses the rudimentary scans and is incapable of fine tuning the system or read abnormalities using instincts as a human can. After all, it's only a computer and can malfunction...

Nanotech

Nanites are used for an array of applications, in many cases they're used in a supportive capacity in technology. Nanites are always pre-programmed to perform a specific task, and act as a part of much larger machines. The programming of nanotechnology is quite delicate and the technology has been put to good use. Dry nanotechnology is controlled and sustained by electromagnetic fields and there is no such thing as free-ranging nanites or "gray mass". The most common type of nanotechnology comes in the form of nanomaterials and alloys.

Electromagnetism

This technology has become quite advanced and is used for a lot of things. This is something the Gerions taught us. The combination of magnetically conductive nanites and magnetic fields are used for a variety of applications. Everything from plasma tools to the so-called "grav-cuffs" use this technology and it has opened the door to a lot of possibilities. For example, it's vital in the harvesting, shaping and use of coreanium.

Genetics

Most hereditary, mutagenic and viral ailments of any significance have been eradicated and a lost limb or organ can be restored. The technology to clone individual limbs and organs has been perfected, and with the application of artificial stem cell therapy the doctors can fix most injuries. The process is quick and uses a combination of nanotechnology (nerve attachment and stimulation) and genetically engineered growth hormones. But it's not cheap, and many can't afford it. The cloning of humans is illegal but quite possible.

Artificial Gravity

The technology was provided by the Gerions but the scientists still have little knowledge as to how it actually works. The first step in the process is to manufacture crystals comprised by several different minerals. These are then cut in a very specific way and bombarded with an array of designed isotopes all the while they're subjected to several bursts of magnetism. In the last step they're coated in a titanium/wolfram/osmium and magnesium alloy. This process is extremely dependent on timing (down to the nanosecond). The end result is a silvery cube with sides that measures 11.26 cm. These are the so-called "grav-cubes". The Gerions provided us with blueprints to build the production units for these. Even though we can put them together and produce the cubes we have no idea exactly how the production unit works. However, scans have shown that the cubes generate a gravitomagnetic field and affect organic materials (including living creatures) through an advanced form of diamagnetism. So the human scientific community has a rudimentary understanding of the theoretical physics behind the technology. Basically, it's the reversal of diamagnetic levitation but the scale and intricacy of the process is way beyond anything human science has been able to achieve.

The cubes are usually fitted in a grid (about fifty cubes per grid is necessary, a grid is formed in a square with sides of 1 meter) that is installed in the floor of colonies, ships and stations. As long as there's an electromagnetic field (which only takes a small electromagnet running on 100 or so volts to maintain) they create a gravity equal of Earth norm. Every ship designed for space travel (as well as space stations) has these as do every colony where it's necessary.

Planet Core Purification

Core purification is the official name for the process but most people call it core harvesting or planet harvesting. The ships that have been designed for this purpose have the official title of "purifiers", however the titles *core harvesters, planet harvester* or *planet reapers* are what most people call them. The PR departments of the GIC, SES and IMC prefer that their official high ranking employees (and the crew members of these ships) use the title "purifier" as it has a much more "user friendly" tone. A core harvester is basically a modified ore hauler. It has been fitted with the *core filter* and offered up some

of its ore storage capacity for this. Though, newer models use a gigantic external grav-cuff array for this.

The first step is to survey the planet in order to assess if it has a liquid core. This can take several weeks. If there is ore on the planet (enough to make setting up a mining colony profitable) mining ensues. The mining can take several years and at the same time the crew digs downward towards the core in a previously surveyed area. When the mining is over a core harvester is called in. Grav-cuffs are used to remove a large piece of the planet crust over the core dig. Then the crew continues to dig manually. If the planet is small and unstable the colony is evacuated (and often disassembled) before the final stages are commenced. Powerful explosives do the rest of the job and blow away the final sediments, exposing the core. Now it's time for the core filter.

The core filter is composed of several hundred powerful electromagnetic rings filled with conductive nanites. The rings are one hundred an fifty meters in diameter. When put in use they're extended in a straight line down, held some hundred meters apart by the magnetism. This makes up a structure which acts as a tube. It's plunged into the molten core, still connected to the harvester in orbit. Then the actual harvest sequence commence. The core is pumped up through the enormous tube, fully visible as it's kept in check by the nanites and magnetic fields. The tube leads to the sifter. Approximately 50% to 80% of the core is sent into space where it cools to floating masses of hard lava rock. However, the sifter has secured the most important part. The substance which the harvest is all about: Coreanium.

Coreanium

This has become the lifeblood of the universe. It powers long range spaceships, ghost line entries, larger colonies and basically the whole of Claret City and Mondus City. It has a scientifically unexplainable energy efficiency when used as a fuel. Coreanium is an extremely dense material, approximately seventy times as dense as osmium. Coreanium in its raw form is a crystalline material which is jet-black, shifting to a glowing orange in flowing stripes as if containing a florescent liquid. Before it can be used it has to be formed into a perfect sphere. The shaping process can only be performed in zero-g. The material is heated to 5,982.3 (exactly) Celsius and shaped into a sphere by the means of an electromagnetic field. At this stage it's also divided into smaller bits depending on how large they wish to make the final cores). It has to stay heated for five days in zero-g after it has been shaped. After this it is subjected to an intense bombardment of Beta rays for twelve hours (still heated). The radiation

is completely absorbed in the material and it emits no harmful radiation. Directly after it has been radiated it's rapidly cooled by being emerged in liquid nitrogen. It's left there until its frozen solid (time depends on amount). However, if the process is disturbed it can result in a coreanium explosion which is a devastating thing indeed.

When the process is complete, an inactive coreanium core immerges. It's completely harmless in this state, and virtually indestructible. It is still jet-black but it has now shifted from orange flowing stripes of glowing orange to red. When coreanium is combusted at a low rate it emits an orange to red glow. When combusted in a high rate it becomes bright blue, or white with a hue of blue.

Coreanium processing plants are located far from human colonies and space stations, surrounded by heavy security. There are about five hundred people working in a coreanium processing plant. They live on the facility and are rotated every two months.

"Coreanium is a clean and stable energy source. Its energy output and efficiency makes helium 3 look like lighter fluid by comparison…"

- Dr Darren Fujikoma, Energy Department, OMCP

The Reactor

The coreanium reactor is basically a giant led-weave polymer encased electromagnetic chamber. The core is suspended in the field. The core is then activated by a twenty thousand volt jolt. It is now active and emits a dangerous field of radiation, which is kept in check by the led-weave. When active it is capable of generating an extremely combustible gas which emits no pollution whatsoever when burned. However, the gas (cardion gas) is extremely poisonous and radioactive before it's burned. The amount of current run through the core after it has been activated decides the output. And no current results in zero output. After the core has been activated it has become a self contained system. The combustion is used to (beyond acting as a propulsion system) charge the ships spools and generators to produce electricity, which in turn is used to fuel the core and the ships electrical grid. A leak in the reactor is extremely dangerous as both radiation and gas can escape.

The core hangs very steadily in its self-contained magnetic field. If a reactor is destroyed, as by an explosion, the core becomes inactive (if not destroyed). It loses seventy percent of its remaining power life and has to be reactivated. The surface of the core becomes grey, dim and still and it emits no radiation whatsoever when inactive. This means that the core never can explode, creating a radioactive wasteland or field. But leaks in the cardion gas processing system or malfunctions in the gas cooling system can cause the cardion to go critical and explode. A short-circuit that makes the current produce excess cardion can also result in dangerous situations.

There's also the possibility of replenishing a reactor core by a process called cardion assimilation. However, if a reactor has thirty percent or less of reactor life left it cannot be refueled. The reactor is hooked up to a so-called *disperser*. In turn, this device feeds of another coreanium core (dubbed assimilation nucleus). Each five percent reactor life increase in the reactor being replenished strips two point five percent of the life of the core used for this process. The assimilation nucleus has to be a core of double the size as the core being "re-fueled". An assimilation nucleus undergoes a special process which enables it to be used in this way. The downside is that this process renders it quite unstable and unable to be used in any other way (and the assimilation nucleus itself can't be refueled). Disperser stations come in the form of ships that lay in orbit or in well travelled lanes controlled by the GIC. The GIC, SES and IMC has license to own and use these commercially. The MEC and CIM also have a few. Reactors usually are refueled every couple of months or years, but the amount of ships and space station that use coreanium are plenty so an average disperser go out on calls a couple of times a week. This means that they rake in a lot of money as the customers pay a small fortune for this service. Needless to say, a disperser is escorted by heavy security.

Belinium & Capacitance

Short ranged space- and air crafts (and ground vehicles) use Belinium fuel. As does all electronic devices that are independent of being plugged in. Belinium is a mineral that, after refined and converted into *Capacitance*, becomes a very effective fuel. It has a very low pollution output when combusted (1/100 of today's fossil fuels) and a very high energy efficiency. Capacitance comes in the form of power cells of different sizes. It can be used in two ways: produce electrical power or combustible energy. When used to produce combustible energy the rod of capacitance is actually used up. They glow blue when used, and if producing combustible energy it heats up to about 300 Celsius.

The belinium gas that is produced and the rod itself are very flammable when activated and used to produce combustible energy. Direct hits on the gas reserve or active cells can result in an explosion. When a cell has been used, even just the slightest, to produce combustible energy it can never be used to produce electrical energy.

When used to produce electrical energy the cell isn't used up. The glow of the rod gets fainter and fainter and when empty the rod looks like deep blue glass without a glow to it. However, cells used this way can be recharged if plugged in to an external power source and used again. It takes about an hour to fully recharge a battery of cells (which might have the juice to power a tank for eight hours). A cell can be recharged and used up to thirty times if undamaged. Most ground and water vehicles use electrical energy as they are independent of

a combustible propellant. Belinium was one of the major sources of fuel used in space travel before discovering core purification. It's still a valuable resource and MEC and CIM have had many run-ins with the GIC and the major corporations on backwater planets, fighting for the control over the precious mineral. In its raw form belinium is a brightly blue colored crystal that can grow as high as one meter. It's harvested through mining, often by mining crews using Planet Construction Rigs. These vehicles are called PCR by some, but the most common epithet among miners and work crews is the less charming *Pecker*. When harvesting belinium a very dangerous radiation runs the risk of being released. This generally happens when the mineral is harvested to quickly or if the material is cut using the wrong method, causing friction along the wrong cutting angles. Wearing radiation resistant COGs is necessary when working with belinium mining. The radiation has been a source of constant conflict as large companies and at times the GIC mine claims near smaller settlements. This has resulted in radioactive dust blowing across the habitats, causing deaths, radiation poisoning and mutations.

Plasma

Many cutting tools use plasma technology. Plasma is a partly ionized gas which is an effective conductor of electricity. The plasma is contained by electromagnetic nanites that have been programmed to keep a certain pattern when activated. The plasma is set ablaze by a charge of electricity and contained and shaped by the magnetic nanites. The actual combustion is contained within the magnetic field but the immense heat is directed outward. This system means that the tools can't ignite volatile gases or other materials (if the combustion containment chip hasn't been disabled). The density of the nanites also gives the plasma density. So what you end up with is a bright blue shaped beam of plasma with a density, edge and enormous heat. These tools are often used for mining.

Plasma technology has never been developed into weapons as such since the devices are quite bulky and heavy, which is a result of the plasma containment system. The bigger the plasma beam the bigger the device. It is possible to shoot plasma, but these "bolts" can only maintain stability for five meters before they dissipates, which doesn't make them adapted for weapon use. Only when employing electromagnetic stabilizers is plasma an effective long range weapon. But these take a lot of space and therefore only vehicles employ plasma as a weapon in this way. An active plasma tool emits a hum and a slight screeching crackling noise when used.

Gravitational Chains

Gravitational Chains, called grav-chains or grav-cuffs by most ("let's slap on the grav-cuffs" is a common phrase used), are employed in order to make docking procedures and mining easier. Larger ships (and space stations) have grav-cuff emitters while smaller ships have grav-cuff receivers. When a small ship wishes to dock and has permission to do so (or if they have the docking code) the ship with the hangar emits the grav-cuffs while the smaller ships open its receivers. The cuffs lock on to these and then guide the ship on an automatic docking route. A small ship can always choose to disengaged, as can the hangar. But it is possible to hack and override these procedures.

The system is used to minimize accidents. It can get pretty crammed at times and some space stations are very busy. Having this system in place lets the computer keep track of all the comings and goings (under human supervision of course) and organize dockings in a safe way. It's like an automatic valet parking service.

When used in mining and construction the receivers are attached to the materials that are to be lifted and then a ship (can be in orbit or within the planets atmosphere) uses its emitters to latch on and elevate the object. While the docking emitters generate a short range field which can reach all around the ship, emitters designed for lifting requires a direct line of sight to the receivers and uses concentrated beams. Docking cuffs are invisible to the naked eye most of the time. Occasional ripples (like heat waves over a hot object) can surround the receiving ship in small bursts. In mining this technology is used to move and lift enormous amounts of stone and minerals. This is very effective when creating the first main shaft for the core harvesting process. The expression "gravitational" is quite wrong since the system works off powerful electromagnets, but it simply stuck.

Simulated Atmosphere Containment (SAC)

Space stations, large colonies and D and E ships have a SAC. These are self-contained systems which, if not malfunctioning, can sustain a ship crew for years on end. The SAC produces air, food and recycle water. As long as the coreanium reactor is online (or ample solar energy is available) the system is on the go. The reason why only D and E ships can have these systems is due to the fact that they require some space in order to work. Of course, there are a lot more to them than the functions listed below but these are the main pillars of a SAC system.

Oxy-Algae: These genetically engineered and nanite infused algae absorb CO_2 and convert it into breathable air. The name "oxy-algae" was from the beginning a nickname since the algae produce breathable air and not pure oxygen, but the name stuck and became official rather quickly. The algae have an extremely effective photosynthesis process and they're submerged in a solution of UV florescence nanites and different nutrients. The algae pools are often located in an enclosed system running under the hydroponics garden and due to the UV the pools glow a bright violet/blue and protected

goggles are needed to look straight at them up close. These pools are huge and hold thousands of tons. Larger ships also have a back-up system of air tanks and CO_2 scrubbers which can support the crew for four days if not damaged. Smaller ships relay solely on CO_2 scrubbers and air tanks. These hold much longer than four days, but this is because D and E ships only has room for a small back-up (relying on SAC) while smaller ships have much bigger (in comparison to ship size) systems as these are the only things keeping the crew alive.

Hydroponics Garden: Here they grow the so-called *adaptable greens*. This is a plant with thick moist leaves. The plant has been genetically engineered and by providing different nutrients (which in fact are produced by combining proteins with the plant itself) the plant can take on the taste and composition of most vegetables and fruits. They are highly nutritious and contain everything that the fruit or vegetable they're emulating does.

Protein Pool: Large pools of liquid protein take care of the "meat". The protein is maintained by feeding it water and adaptable greens. This protein is then treated so that it's water content, and density is changed to simulate the taste and texture of different meats. Both the greens and the protein does a good job when it comes to providing a healthy and nutritious meal but the simulation of taste and texture is only so-so, and miles apart from the splendor of the real thing.

Water Recycling: All water is recycled, but the SAC can also take in gases and materials from outside sources that has trace amount of water and filter this water out through nano-filters. All in all, and if not damaged, the water recycling is a self-contained system.

Note: *Every type of contained system where breathable air is upheld by technology is highly resistant to lesser forms of contamination as the scrubbers take care of these things. So simply put, of course your avatar can smoke cigarettes and such onboard the ships, space stations and colonies. Smoke em' if you got em'!*

Stasis Sleep

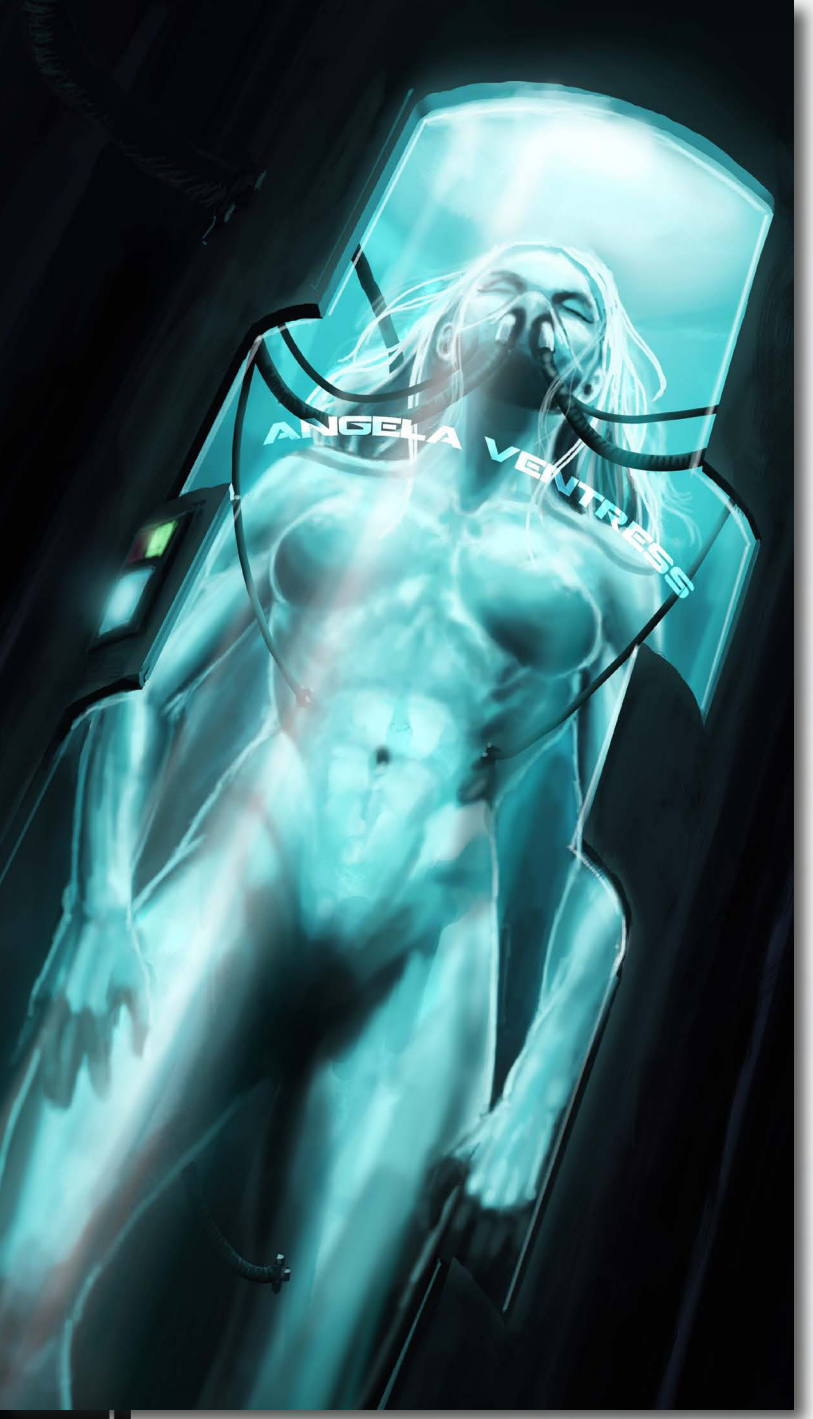
When traveling for a long distance months can tick away, in order to preserve the lifespan of crew members (and on C-class ships to preserve rations and air supply as well) the crew goes into stasis. Additionally, staying awake inside a ghost line can have extremely adverse effects. When going into stasis, the crew lays down in stasis tanks. In the tank three things happen. First off, the artificially grown alkaloid metrocomexhan is released in a gaseous form (invisible to the naked eye). The metrocomexhan is loaded individually in each stasis tank, since having a large tank of this kind of substance is a bad idea in any contained environment. Within a minute a human is put in an induced coma.

After this a concentrated swarm of nanites is released in the tank. They enter the body through osmosis. These are programmed to kick in as soon as the core body temperature goes below 36 Celsius. The tank is then filled with rapidly cooling air, which in the end reduces the temperature of the body to 1 degree Celsius. When hypothermia sets in the nanites performs one of their main tasks. They position themselves in strategic areas in the body and provide oxygen stasis, neural stimulation and other vital tasks which keep the body alive. Secondary they halt the effects of free radicals, in effect halting aging all together. This process only works when the body heat is reduced to 1 Celsius. It takes about three hours before the body is brought fully into stasis. But the actual process of waking up takes a week. The ship computer will begin the process of waking the person one week before he's suppose to be fully awake.

Waking up from stasis is somewhat disorienting and it's quite the ordeal. Imagine waking up with an extremely nasty hangover, a migraine and a bad case of arthritis and you get the idea.

Going in and out of stasis too rapidly is not a good idea. The body needs time to readjust. First off, stasis shouldn't be entered if the sleep will last less than a week (this can severely affect a person's sleeping patterns, short term memory and overall health). Secondly, a period of at least one week should pass before a person goes into stasis again after waking up. Going in too early after awakening will have the same effects as waking too early. Being exposed to early awakenings and early stasis on a reoccurring basis will in the end lead to a total organ failure and death. While in stasis a person can't heal, but on the other hand are the effects of wounds and illnesses temporarily halted as well.

In Game Stasis Effects: *Upon awakening on scheduled time the human body is weak. For eight hours minus Brawn the person suffers a -2 modifier to all rolls due to pain and weakness. If being roused prematurely the aftereffects of the stasis will be much worse. Proximity warnings or life threatening ship malfunction can set off the VIN which in turn will jostle the flight crew from their stasis prematurely. This has the extreme adverse effects of short term but rather acute memory loss, minor hallucinations inspired by negative experiences and occasional bouts of vertigo and possible vomiting. The memory loss is very selective. It strips everything but skills and general knowledge of the world. A pilot will know how to fly and remember other flight missions, but he will be incapable of remembering his name or why he's on his current mission or any real personal details. This memory loss can last for as short as an hour or as long as seventy two hours. The memory comes back in flashes bit by bit. This is a powerful and classic tool that can be used to build your levels and chapters. The negative modifier is unchanged by premature stasis interruption and lasts as with normal awakening. Those in stasis have no need of air or nutrition whatsoever.*



A Horrifying Rebirth2

There are no specifics on how a person has to prepare before entering into stasis. This has been kept open for a reason. You have to decide the particulars of the stasis, how slight or gruelling is the process?

Sure, it says that the person in stasis don't need any nourishment but does his blood need to move around and does this require him to have tubes of anticoagulants and similar substances inserted into his body? Can the avatars wear clothes while entering stasis or do they have to be naked, or covered in a film of micro-proteins as a part of the process? Or maybe the stasis cache is a bit larger, containing a sludge of artificial stem cells in which the avatar is suspended during stasis. Each awakening will be like a messy and painful expulsion from an unforgiving steel womb as seen in Lost Redemption.

How you set this up goes a long way when it comes to how light or dark your game is, and as it's a part of travelling the ghost lines it will factor in to the already reprehensive attitude most people have towards ghost jumps. You have to tweak your world details and design it until you have created a world that suits you and your gamers.

Nano-Interface Screen (NIS)

Some static keypads and displays are still used at times but NISs are the norm. These are comprised of a low current, electromagnetic field and incandescent naniets. They are set up to take on various shapes (usually a square or rectangular shape) and digital information is sent to them which provide them with color and shape data. This results in a one millimeter thin screen with projected images. These are used as gauges, keypads and screens. They can be made to look solid or more transparent. Solid objects can be run through these screens, with a pressure of only 250 grams. The screen is still maintained and undisturbed by this. Most keypads are projected so that they have a solid background (a wall, desk, etc) but screens usually hang in mid-air. The 250 gram pressure is in place for touch screen functions as it's much more comfortable and easy to be able to feel the screen when pushing projected buttons. Keypad controls (especially in ships) benefit greatly from NISs as new functions can get an added key if needed and every pad can be personally customized as the buttons can be moved around from the default settings, formatted to fit the user.

The NIS system is also used to project full free floating 3D holographic images which are extremely useful when navigating in a 3D environment such as space. The system is very well adapted at performing simulations such as engineering tests by manipulating simulated components in 3D.

Weapon Technology

Firearms are still ballistic in nature. Bullets are usually made of titanium alloys. The bullet casings hold a small amount of cold resistant nanotech supported oxygen infused gunpowder which gets the bullet moving. This composition assures that extreme cold and vacuum won't present a problem while firing the weapon. The weapon mechanism itself is also adapted to extreme environments. The barrel is mainly composed of a hyper charged magnetic coil which uses the small kinetic energy and accelerates the bullet. In effect, all firearms are *coil gun hybrids*. When fired there's a small bang followed by a short metallic "whooshing" sound.

Missiles come in many forms; one of the most effective is the plasma hybrids. These have a main plasma detonation which ignites a secondary combustible fuel and results in a powerful blast. The plasma detonation does a lot of damage on impact, actually capable of softening the metal before the secondary explosion sends out a shockwave filled with shrapnel.

Plasma and photon technology has been developed for weapons usage, but the technology requires a lot of power and room to operate and these weapons are limited to larger vehicles as a result.

Terraforming/Planet Engineering

Terraforming is a process that takes a lot of money and often a lot of time. The time span depends on the individual planet's atmosphere. If the atmosphere is very hostile and far from what humans need to survive, it will take about twenty years to terraform a planet, while it could take as little as five years to shape a planet that's already close to the conditions of old Earth.

The process is basically done in two steps after the planet has been okayed. To begin with, huge atmosphere generators are set up all over the planet (ranges from 10 to 200 in numbers depending on the size and condition of the planet). Colonists stay on to monitor these. The generators produce (or recombines local gases) breathable air little by little and simulates a growing eco system that adapts to the conditions. When the atmosphere is breathable the generators are deconstructed and phase two is initiated. Phase two involves several ships that bombard the surface with enormous amounts of oxy algae, water and fauna. The colonist then sees to it that it takes hold. And this is basically how it's done. As the technology available isn't capable of changing the gravity of a planet it's lucky that there are so many planets in the Sirius system that have Earth norm gravity, or thereabouts. But in cooperation with the Gerions the research into the production of planetary gravity stabilizers has begun.

Ghost Lines

The GIC dubbed these FTL (Faster Than Light) Lanes but the term ghost lines became popular quite soon, and not without a good reason. When first introduced by the Gerions the ghost lines were thought to be a successful application of the theory of the Alcubierre Drive (a theory proposed in 1994 by physicist Miguel Alcubierre) but it soon became apparent that this was not the case.

The ghost lines have never been fully understood, the only thing the scientists know for sure is that they're extra dimensional pockets in which distances can be "skipped".

"It's like switching the gears of space. When moving in normal space everything goes on the small gear, the cog need to spin very fast in order to get anywhere. But slipping into a ghost line is like switching gears. Very little movement of the cog is needed to travel faster and further. Very much like a bicycle."

- Alessa Barkley, second grade teacher at Claret City south youth learning institute.

While traveling a ghost line it looks like hurtling down a tunnel made out of dark swirling smoke raging with electrical storms. The space in-between the tunnel walls is filled with a thin mist-like atmosphere. A quite unnerving thing about traveling in the ghost lines is the fact that colors seem to disappear. It's just not the ability to perceive color that is lost, video recording and video-logs of ghost travels sent or brought into normal space are also shown to be black and white. All ships have a ghost mode, which means that indicators which rely on color switches to symbols, clear shades of gray, voice protocols and letters. Then there's the shadow effect. All shadows cast by a living being have a two second delay. The shadow is "stuck" where it's cast and fades out after two seconds. This means that shadows will leave a fading trail on walls and floors as a person moves. These effects were the reason why the name ghost line caught on.

When a ship makes a ghost jump a jet-black cloud surrounded by an unidentified electrical disturbance appears and engulfs the ship after which it seems to dissipate, taking the ship with it. This happens about a second after the *ghost drive* have been activated. Before a jump can be made (well, it can be made anyway if the security protocol is overridden, but that's basically suicide) a ghost line calculation (GLC) has to be done. When jumping through established and plotted out lines it's a pretty simple task to do the calculation. However, if plotting out a new course and arriving at a never before known destination it's always a more arduous task. One thing that has to be understood about ghost lines is that they're not travel lanes that move the ship a distance in a direction like a road or normal space travel. They move the ship between dimensions. So a miscalculation will not result in being brought "half way there" rather it can result in being brought to the wrong system, or worse, beyond the *Dark Rim* from which no one has returned as of yet. There are many ships that have gone missing in the lines.

The actual calculations are made using the onboard computer which feeds off the ghost drive's weaver unit. The ghost drive is a device given to us by the Gerions, like most the technology they have given us we're capable of using it and back engineer it, but we can't really figure out how it works. The drive weighs about a ton. It is composed of an intricate web of nano filament wires and nano circuit boards which are tightly packed together (using nano-tube technology). The drive's core is made out of an extremely complex alloy which is kept in liquid form and suspended in a magnetic field, when activated for calculation the core splits into billions of microscopic components. The weaver unit is a highly advanced laser scanner which is connected to the ship's scanners, and transmits the calculations to the core. When the drive core splits up it actually creates an extremely complex (and without translation, incomprehensible) extra dimensional map which the weaver unit translates into mathematical calculations that can be interpreted by a human. By adjusting these calculations and running them back and forth to the weaver unit a GLC navigator will in the end (if not very unlucky) get an accurate and safe route. It is unknown how the drive's core gets a signal out to these dimensions and accurately scans them

within seconds, but no transmissions can be picked up from the core as it is activated. The drive is surrounded by a cooling unit (without which it would blow up when activated) as the drive heats up to near 3,000 degrees Celsius when activated.

An established lane uses a set of algorithms and calculations already on file, but there are always small adjustments which means that even established lanes require the navigator to make calculations. Someone who wants to make a jump but has no idea how to calculate can only try to take the calculations on file, copy and paste them (four to twelve algorithms have to be combined before the drive can make a jump) and hope for the best. Using this method there's no way to tell where the ship will end up, or if it will make it at all.

The "speed" by which a ship can travel wile using a ghost line changes depending on the distance. It is unknown why these distances are the ones in place and why the "speed" seems to change violently depending on the distance traveled. The time cut off is always done according to a set multiple measured in light-years with the margin of error of 500 meters of the final destination, which makes it extremely accurate. It would be quite possible to make several short jumps, stopping and jumping repeatedly, in order to make better time but there are two things to consider. The drive has to cool down for about four hours after a jump (some ships comes with dual drives, one for emergencies) and then there's the fact that each new jump requires a new calculation which involves an unnecessary risk. But it is possible to jump with a hot drive, but the risk is that the ship blows up or ends up outside the black rim. Beyond this, the risk of VPS seems to increase if jumping in and out of the ghost lines.

A ghost jump can't be "cut short" while ongoing without consequence. The drive isn't active while traveling in the lines, only when getting in and out. So when you jump you better be damn sure you have it right and that the ship is prepped and stocked because you can't turn back in mid jump so to speak…at least not without major risks.

Before performing a jump the ship has (should) be at least five hundred meters from any objects (or tight clusters of several small ones forming one) that weighs a ton or more. This includes surfaces on planets or surrounding atmospheric gases. If these requirements are not met there's a 50% chance that the object/gases merges with the ghost drive. This can result in everything from a nuclear explosion to hull breaches or erratic jumps.

Before the Ghost Storm the ghost lines were much more effective, but this is the maximum ranges that we can travel today in one go.

Medical Care

The technology has done amazing progresses due to genetics (see above) nanotechnology and stem cell research. Cancer, MS, Parkinson, Alzheimer, AIDS and all those other illnesses that plagued the 22th century are all but eradicated and curable. There are only a few incurable diseases left in the galaxy. But the most infamous and feared is the Caliphrian Aggression Virus (CAV, often pronounced *cave).* And of course people still suffer from the odd cold and mild flu. The basics of healthcare are still the same but the organization and technology has vastly improved. Beyond the astonishing ability to cure most illnesses, there are three major additions to health care technology which are worth mentioning. They're all variations of the same technology: Nanotechnology and artificially grown stem cells.

Regen

This has been a godsend, especially to the military. The regen comes in the form of an injection, which when injected straight into the wound will stabilize and heal it somewhat within thirty seconds. The artificial stem cells and nanites combine efforts and restructure the damaged area using nutrients within the solution. This process can close up knife cuts, bullet wounds and even grow back damaged parts of organs. But it can only be used in moderation, after which it actually can harm the body instead. Regen cannot heal or repair any form of brain damage.

Neuro-Worms

These are about one centimeter long and have a diameter of one millimeter. They're brightly blue colored and have one objective and that is to heal brain damage. The worms are injected into a small drilled up hole (if the damage hasn't exposed the brain that is) in the skull. From here they move around carefully in the brain tissue and restores damaged parts, even rebuilding entire sections.

Medi-Tank

Every hospital and well supplied medbay has a medi-tank. The tank is only used for emergencies when the damage is extreme. The injured person is submerged in a viscous reddish solution of nanites, artificial stem-cells and oxygen enriched nutrients. These encase the body and start to reconstruct the damaged area. The nanites can apply pressure by which they can reset bones and then graft and heal them. A person can come in to the hospital with several broken bones, and severe organ damage and walk out perfectly healthy just some days later. A medi-tank is necessary if replacing lost limbs and organs.

COGs

COG stands for **C**ustomized **O**peration **G**ear and has become a vital part of everyday life and space exploration. From the beginning people used a lot of equipment that they carried around, but naturally it would be much smoother if most of the gear could be fitted and incorporated into a single unit. And with that the COG was born. There have been several versions of a COG unit, but the last twenty or so years there has been a standard model in use.

The basic COG comes in different template forms depending on the usage. Different work groups have their own customizations. For example, those working in an engineering capacity have interlinked tools while most military personal have flak plates and weapon links installed. However, there are many standardized COGs that corporations lend to their employees. The employees can buy these out and all upgrades they have made to them on their own are theirs to keep if they quit and don't buy out the COG. COGs are a very common sight and are very important pieces of equipment involved in space exploration and mining.

Powering the COG

Generally speaking, you don't need to keep track of the power supply of a COG. The suit recharges itself whenever it has access to one hour of ample sunlight or when the user moves around in an environment which uses grav-cubes for half an hour. The COG is designed to use sunlight to recharge its power cells as well as siphon current through the mag-boots through the electric grid used by the grav-cubes. It's also possible to physically plug the COG into any electrical grid available on a ship, solar power array or other facility with access to power.

A COG works for 48 hours before it needs to be recharged. After 48 hours without power everything will go offline, except the repair system, HUD and vital systems such as heating. These will remain active as long as the avatar can move around for at least four hours out of a twenty four hour period as it is recharged by nanogenerators woven into the absorption fibers. This works off a piezoelectricity system which converts kinetic energy into electrical. COGs that have shock armor installed will lower the movement of the user by 5 and give him a -2 to all Athletic rolls when running in low energy mode. This is due to the failing of the Ionic Polymer Metal Composite (IPMC), which when active generates artificial muscle activity, compensating for the weight of the shock armor.

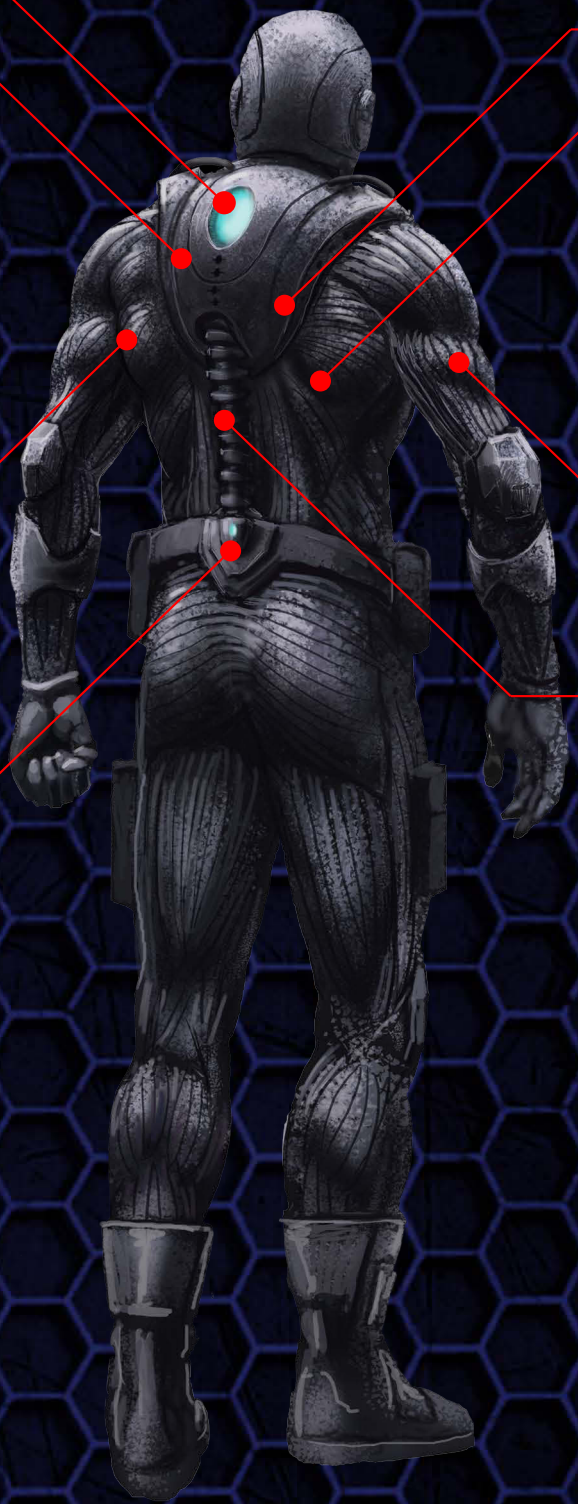
The Etiquette of COGs: *COGs are basically worn when in use. People who use them don't wear them as clothing but only as a part of their job. Pilots wear their COGs (if linked) when behind the helm, engineers use them when working in an environment that requires them and so forth. So basically, people wear COGs when they need to use them. Off shift flight crew or military personnel won't wear them on the ship.*

COGs are prohibited in most social locales such as bars, restaurants and the like. It's the equivalent of wearing a full army get-up (with helmet and all), construction gear with all the tools or a flight suit complete with the helmet and mask. Space harbor bars and some space stations allow them as there are a lot of travelers. But they are a common sight on the streets as LED-Officers wear them as a part of their job. It takes about 10 seconds to put on a COG if in a rush.

Legionary in heavily modified older model EES COG.

COG Example

EES - Enemy Encounter Suit V 1.3


Breather
Solar Power Array
NavComp
Capacitance Cells
Ionic Polymer Metal – Augmented Brawn
Interwoven Shock Armor
ISS
Nexus

COG Setup - Gear Excerpt

All COGs have a number of slots that can be fitted with a certain type of equipment. Each type can be fitted with a variety of equipment depending on the design specs. COGs are very tough, but the technological and structural balance within these systems is a delicate thing. It's a matter of energy consumption, room and equipment coordination. An engineer might be able to fix and make minor changes to a COG given the right tools, but to upgrade them for real, adding new equipment, a nano-matrix and the right components are needed. Some upgrade types are only available to specific COG types. If this is the case, these will be listed within parentheses after the upgrade description. Below is described the standard setup of every type of COG, followed by a quick overview of COG types and add-on equipment.

The basic configuration below makes the COG work from the get-go. Beyond this, some COGs (like the NETSS) comes with some extra features built in as well. Those extra features are standard and don't hog any slot space.

VES (Vacuum Environmental Suit): This suit is no more than one and a half centimeter thick and has a "one size fits all" configuration (adaptable absorption fibers). When it's put on, it adjusts to the wearer's size and comes to a slim fit. It's over this that the rest of the COG is fitted. The suit comes complete with a NFVH, which is connected to a breather. On its own, the suit has an armor rating of 2 and a durability of 30 (Lean armor). When Shock armor is installed, these ratings are ignored and you only count the ratings of the new armor in question. However, if buying Lean armor, it's a matter of upgrading, starting at armor rating 2 and adding to it. Wearing extra armor on top of a COG will severely encumber the wearer.

Of course, it comes with a powerful flashlight attached to the left side of the chest. The flashlight is detachable and even comes with a dimmer. A smaller flashlight is built into the helmet.

The suit has a built-in self-contained heating system which keeps the wearer warm in the reaches of space. When it comes to pressure, the outer shell can withstand a pressure equal to that generated at 200 meters depth of water in standard Earth gravity.

The "Normal" space suit: The normal space suit is basically a VES with an air tank on its back (-1 to all Quickness related rolls) and has no upgrade possibilities. The normal space suit only costs 1000 credits and most ships have several of these scattered about for emergencies or everyday work. They also sport mag boots. Those who can't afford to have COGs simply have to make do with these suits. The air tanks cost 100 credits and have an air supply of six hours.

Breather: This five-by-thirty centimeter tube connects to the NFVH and can be used to breathe. It is usually installed over the left shoulder blade on the COG. The breather is a delicate system which combines nanotech with biotech to create a CO2 scrubber and a network of oxygen saturation cells. The breather only provides the user with 60 seconds worth of air supply on its own, but when it's used in an oxygen-rich environment (or connected to an air tank), it replenishes itself at a rate of 10 seconds worth of breathable air every 20 seconds. This sleek unit only weighs three kilos (two when empty) and is easily connected to one's NFVH. Of course, it is possible to connect an air tank to the COG when in need (see the air tank penalties above). The small size is necessary for the contained system, though minor upgrades are possible. If recharging it by siphoning air from a tank, the breather will drain a whole twenty minutes worth of air from the tank due to its saturation needs (it will actually vent out a large portion as part of the process). Of course, it comes with a timer which is linked to the HUD. A breather is used as an emergency air supply. Those 60 seconds can give you the time you need to get out of an environment that suddenly has been deprived of air.

Nano-Flex Visor Helmet (NFVH): This helmet consists of three main parts: the front armored inner glass visor which covers the face, the protective metal visor and the back-end shell. The back-end shell (everything except the visor and glass of the helmet) rests inside the actual visor when the helmet isn't in use. In this stage, the helmet is a front mask that's usually kept in a protected pocket on the outer side of the left thigh of the suit. When the helmet is needed, the back-end structures itself with a push of a button, making the helmet ready to wear. NFVH can't be "dismantled" while someone wears it. When worn, a nano-seal connects it to the rest of the suit, closing it shut. The helmet has a built-in gasmask and atmo-breather as well. For an additional 500 credits to the COG price, the NFVH can come interlocked with the suit's collar, building itself up around the head and face of the user on command using nanotechnology. This is very effective and it takes about three seconds for the helmet to deploy in this manner. The command is a mental one; the suit responds via the neural interface.

The NFVH also comes with a HUD (Heads-Up Display). Through this, the wearer interacts with most of the COG functions. The HUD is an interface filled with different icons which are controlled through voice and/or eye movements (the user can choose which at any time), and supported by a neural link. Switching modes and using scanners and other features which are connected to the COG is done totally handsfree.

NavComp: These tools are vital parts of any expedition. First off, the COG comes with a gyro gauge. The user can manually set what is up and what is down when in zero-g, or go by gravity when this is available. This is used to keep track of direction and is also a good tool to employ while deep underwater. There is also a compass, which naturally is only useful on a planet with a magnetosphere. The nav-tools come with a built-in distance meter. This can track and measure the distance of ten objects at the same time, but only if they are in line of sight and

no more than 2000 meters away. If the object ever falls out of sight (if the user turns his head, for example), the distance can't be measured until he looks at the object again. Schematics and maps can be uploaded to the NavComp. Lastly, there's a beacon tracker. Beacons have different frequencies, and if the user has access to the beacon, he can home in on it. This gives him the distance and direction of the beacon. Most D- and E-class ships have multiple beacons in place (bridge, engineering, medbay, etc.), to which the crew of the ship has access. This is a very useful thing in an emergency, as the crew can use these to navigate when the ship systems are down and when explosions and similar events have "reconfigured" the layout of a ship or station. When boarding a ship or station, it's a good thing to sync up to their ABN (Automated Beacon Network). Some places have an open ABN policy which syncs automatically with any COGs that come onboard, while other places (such as secure ships and stations) require a sync-code. It's possible to get access to this by unlawfully plugging into the ship's terminal system and hacking for the code if it's restricted.

VAC (Visual Audio Communication): The VAC system features a small camera mounted on the NFVH (which can film in all the spectra installed in the visor), internal and external microphones, earphones and a comm-link. The system can be used for normal radio communication, but the user can also send his video feed to whomever he wants. This allows members of a team see and hear what the other members see and hear at any time, which can be pretty useful. The built-in comm-link transmitter has a range of 10 kilometers, but can be routed through any transmitter within this area (if the user has the right codes, accesses and frequencies). This can also act as a beacon which allows teams to track members, and the bridge on a ship to keep track of the crew members using a NavComp. The beacon function can be shut down or set to any frequency, according to the wish of the wearer. The VAC also allows COG wearers to send NavComp information such as schematics, maps and any files on store in the nexus to one another.

ISS (Internal Seal System): In a hostile environment, the tiniest of tears in the COG will kill you. Whenever the COG is breached, the nano-fibers will instantly (as fast as the hole is made) seal it, protecting the wearer from environmental conditions such as a vacuum. This system is shut down when half of the COG's durability has been lost, as the damage is too much for it to handle and a Polymer Nano Repair (or other means) are needed to seal tears.

Nexus: The nexus is a nano-board-based computer. It keeps track of all the COG functions and displays them on the HUD. The actual computer is about as big as a shuffle puck and is located in the lower spinal area of the suit, encased within a titanium alloy casing. The nexus also contains a COG status interface, which lets the user keep track of damage the COG has sustained, and it also includes information on what components/tools are needed to fix it. It has a storage space of five terabytes, in which the user can store any information that's being routed to his COG. In the front of the COG, in the belt so to speak, there is a memory chip slot. This is often used as a backup system when the COG is out of range of a remote upload point, and when the user wants to backup collected data when his memory bank is getting full. The nexus can be set on different loops, for example recording every information feed for 24 hours before recording over it, effectively acting as a black box in the suit.

Mag-Boots: These can be activated at any time and can be used to walk on anything metallic, such as the hull of a ship, or the metallic floor of a ship or station when the gravity is off. The boots are not strong enough to allow the user to walk up walls or ceilings if the gravity is more than half of Earth norm gravity, and it's impossible to sprint when the boots are activated.

The Border Guard is testing out experimental jump packs.

DNA Analysis

Anomalous Nucleotide Configuration

Accelerated Cell Division Markers

Mutation Indicator

Unknown Genetic Aberration

Ripper Drone Basic Profile

High Density Muscle and Ligament Clusters

Dual Rows of Serrated Teeth

Sharp Retractable Spines

Angled Regenerating Claws

All-enclosing bullet resistant flexible outer carapace

Powerful, Muscular Legs

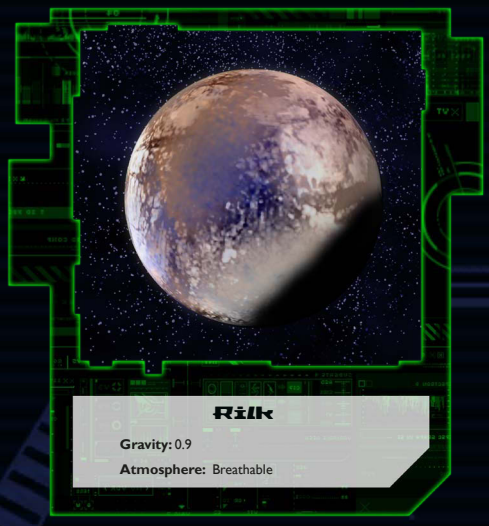
Claws, teeth, carapace and spines are composed of a naturally formed silicon carbide.

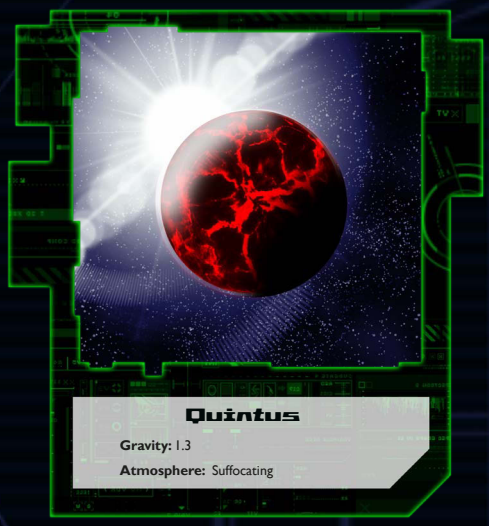
The structural strength of this material allows the ripper to resist high-velocity projectiles and tear through armor and metal sheets.

A science researcher is conducting energy efficiency research.

Flight computer initialized.....»

Standby for navigational instructions.....»





Logged By: Divina Larkin

Date: 501 IT, 6th of June

Status: Freelance navigator

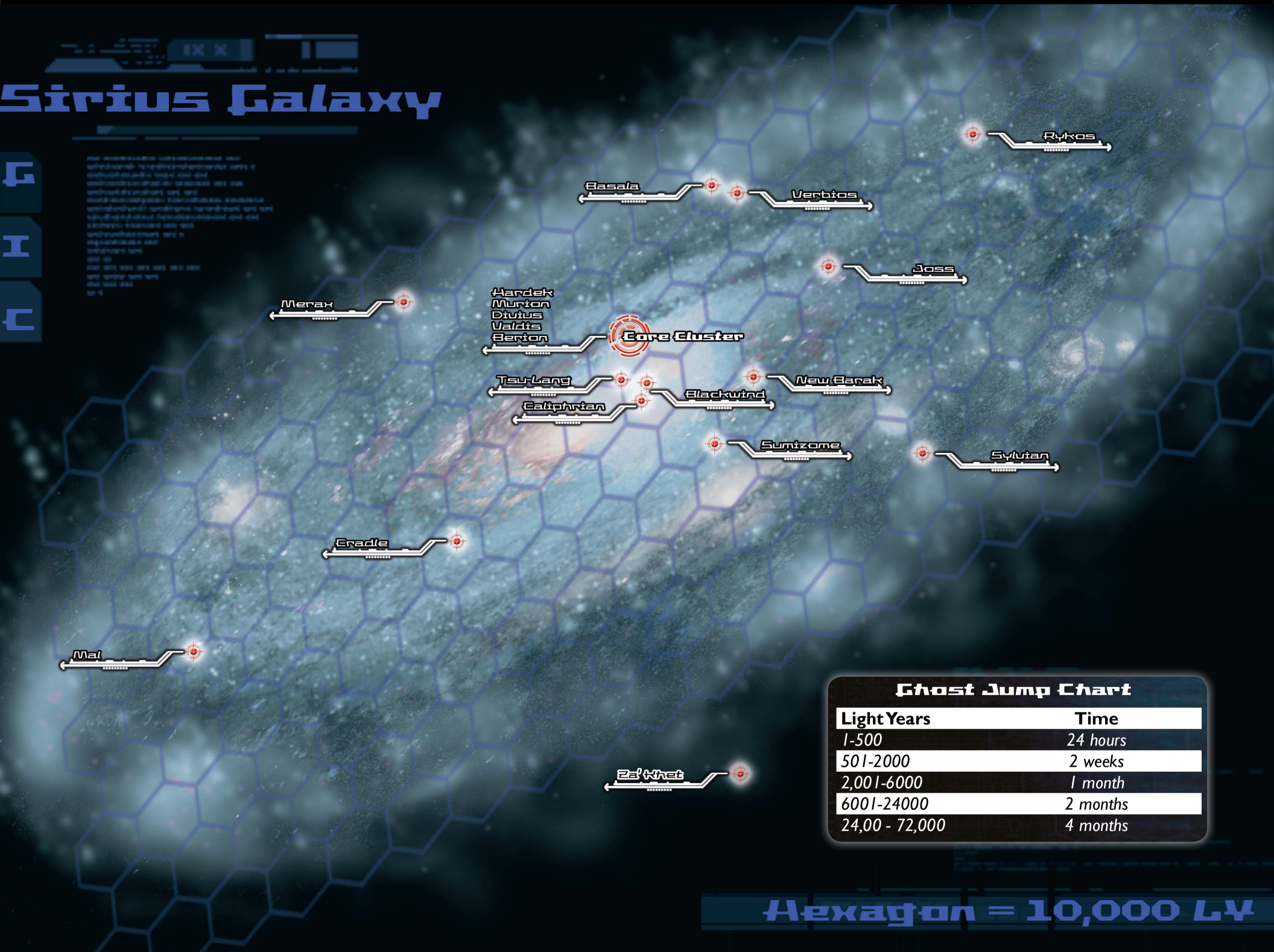
The Sirius galaxy is massive. It's approximately 180,000 ly wide and 20,000 ly thick and has about 800 billion stars and somewhere around 500 billion systems. Even with the technology we haven't explored a tenth of it. The Sirius galaxy ends with what is called the Dark Rim. This is as far as the ghost lines will take us. Those whom have ventured beyond this have never been heard from again and no one knows why or how the physics of it works. Looking out at the dark rim is unnerving. There's nothing but blackness. No stars, no life, nothing in sight. This appeared when the ghost storm hit. Probes have been sent and they just go black and never return. Those who have stared into it and travelled close to it for to long are said to be struck by instant VPS. The Gerions have never commented or answered any questions regarding the dark rim. It might be that they don't know, or they might know more than they like to share…

Mankind as a whole is concentrated in one system with heavy interest in four others close to Divius (Hardek, Murion, Berion and Valdis). There are of course several far away systems that we harvest, but these four are close to Divius which makes ore hauling faster.

The systems here are the ones made public by the GIC. Thousands of system are only available to the GIC and corporations and there is no official number as to how many dead systems the core purification has created. Only those working on deep space missions (which per capita is pretty low) ever travels beyond the core systems. The discovery of new systems has to be reported to the GIC and the information is considered classified. Failure to do so (or to sell non-standardized starmaps) is considered a criminal offence and can result in steep fines or imprisonment. The GIC claims this structure is in place to protect society from rippers and dangerous pathogens (so they don't run across another CAV situation with a new virus I guess). I can't talk about them but I know for a fact that there are myriads of systems out there.

This map is in standard format but my notes will give you some extra insight at times. And speculations and theories aren't illegal last I checked.

Sirius Galaxy



Ghost Jump Chart

Light Years	Time
1-500	24 hours
501-2000	2 weeks
2,001-6000	1 month
6001-24000	2 months
24,00 - 72,000	4 months

Hexagon = 10,000 LY

The Dark

The Dark is a measure of both the psychological effects of being subjected to weirdness and horror in space, and the effects of Voiders and Viscutropes (see core book for more information on these beings). The Dark makes people more and more paranoid, and then delusional. In the end they become violent and crazy. It takes on a certain expression depending on which powers that are close by. The Dark affects the roleplay and also allows the AI to "fool" the player into acting out things with his avatar, which is a result of the paranoia.

At level 4 the afflicted develops an obsession. Often this is a twisted version of whatever they were sent to do (or what they do for a living, covet or believe strongly in) and their reasoning in connection to this is warped. A squad leader wants to complete the mission no matter the risk to his squad or anyone else and can even kill people for "treason" as they refuse to follow his insane and suicidal orders. An engineer can get fixated on increasing the power in the reactor in order to get the ship going again, not seeing that this might cause a reactor leak which can kill the entire crew. The person obsessed often sees his actions as something that will save or greatly benefit the group (or the whole of humanity), and when people try to tell him that it's pure madness or illogical his paranoia kicks in and he finds himself surrounded by "enemies" that wish to sabotage his efforts, harm him or outright kill him. Mankind has dubbed the effects of The Dark as VPS (Void Psychosis Syndrome).

The Dark can at times create group hallucinations, making the affected see the same things for brief moments which can lead to extremely dangerous situations.

Levels of Dark

1: A bit less social.

2: Spends a lot more time alone and is a bit socially weird and is generally mistrustful of others. Has some trouble sleeping.

3: As above but the victim often stares blankly out into space and can mumble to himself. The AI may provide small paranoid bits and hallucinations. The person often suffers from nightmares at this time and is often suffering from bouts of insomnia. Onsets of severe headaches are also common symptoms.

4: As above but the paranoia goes further and the avatar becomes a bit more delusional. This is regulated by the AI. Starts to have an aggressive disposition and often finds an obsession. Nightmares are thought of as being flashes of things that will come to pass if the individual doesn't stop them.

5: Can become outright dangerous in the sabotages, intentionally harming others indirectly and at times directly.

Craft ID: D-class mining ship

Ship Name: Rimtur

Date: 4th November, 498 IT

Logged By: Tatiana Goreman, kitchen staff.

I don't know how many of us that are still uninfected or alive. As far as I know I might be the only one. I have no idea what happened. We responded to an emergency beacon, it came from a c-class cargo freighter. I don't know the details but I think the captain decided to bring the ship into our dock. After a close examination we concluded that the ship was empty. According to the security logs I managed to read they found a lot of blood in the ship but no bodies. It also seemed that something had trashed the main controls and crudely rerouted the wiring. What they had plugged it into I don't know. The log states that the wires were hanging loose over a pool of blood in front of the controls. The life support system was offline. Apparently Captain Fletcher decided to keep the ship and sell it as salvage.

I'm convinced that these alien beings were hiding on the ship, maybe inside the ducts or even on the outside of the ship, inside the turbines as these were shut off. It seems that they are completely unaffected by the cold or the vacuum. It's my belief that they can generate heat as a means to stay mobile and avoid being frozen.

From the first attack it only took them about four hours to overrun the entire ship. Something had tapped into our communication which made it impossible for us to contact base. They killed everyone. Somehow those who were killed came back to life, but not as…neat as in the case of CAV. They changed, they mutated into more of these things. They're at my pressure door now. Good bye.

Darker Than Most

An Introduction Story to Cold & Dark

Darker Than Most

Foreword

In order for you to fully understand and use this story setting as the AI, it's recommended that you read the short illustrated story ***Lost Redemption*****.** There will be references to places and names which you won't be able to put into context without the background information contained in *Lost Redemption*. Players only need to understand the fundamentals of the **Cold & Dark** universe, through which you can guide them by sharing the information given previously in the quick-guide.

This story setting was written for two reasons. First, it's a way to demonstrate the basics of the game mechanic in play, and secondly, the story deals with the aftermath of *Lost Redemption*. There are some pre-determined dice rolls in place. However, these are in place to show where one *might* find it meaningful to use the task resolution system. Feel free to skip these rolls or make up others for whatever situation you come across. After all, this is your game, so use the system and this story to create a fun and entertaining game session.

As most players will be new to the system, you as the AI can (at least in the beginning) use the captain as a way to get the players to make rolls. For example, the captain can ask an avatar to make a scan and then you simply explain which Aptitudes and Abilities to use. This will ease the players into the system.

The avatars will arrive at their destination with the intent of completing a task, but this task will be overridden by their attempts to survive as they are confronted with the madness onboard the *Kagetsu*. It's possible that all of them will survive, but it's equally possible that they will turn on each other, get killed by the sickening entities or driven insane by the forces at work. *The Remnants of the Kagetsu* will work as a micro-setting which allows the players to get a feel for one of the many playable facets available in C&D. How you as the AI decide to run it and what choices the players make will determine the outcome of this scenario.

Backstory

The avatars are part of a corsair/illegal salvage crew. Captain Victoria Demidov used to be a cutthroat pirate, running wild and hitting all manner of ships. She disposed of the witnesses, caring little for the death of others. But as the years progressed she grew a conscience, as well as an impressive list of warrants and bounties on her head. For the past five years, she has only taken on precision corsair work, hitting non-civilian targets (corporate and GIC targets) with extensive target information and minimum force. The loss of innocent lives as well as the risk has gone down significantly. However, most of her time is spent engaging in illegal salvage and mining operations. Less risk, seldom any violence and an impressive profit margin. She's in charge of a C-class ship named the *Valhalla*. Demidov lives on the *Valhalla*. She runs her operation with a small crew, of which the avatars are a part. Acting on reliable information, she has taken her crew into orbit over the planet Terus 8 in the Za´keth system, in order to pick up salvage and ore from an unknown source.

Za´keth is an extremely isolated system and it's restricted, meaning that just being out there is punishable by ten years in prison, which is if the place isn't under a "GIC shoot on sight" order. So the crew as a whole are expecting to get paid very well for the risk. And in and of itself, being this far out is risky and very unnerving. Not a single crew member, including the captain, has been this far out before.

Captain Victoria Demidov is the elder sister of Dr. Seeley Fujiko. In reality, she isn't acting on any information regarding salvage, rather she's acting on information regarding her sister's whereabouts. No one in the crew even knows that she *has* a sister. She has simply told the crew that she bought information which will lead them to a rich salvage opportunity located in a distant system. Even though the crew is loyal to her, she doubts that all of them would follow her on a personal mission that could result in jail time or death, and she needs her crew on this one. Even though the crew is willing to go out on a limb for cash, they would probably hesitate to follow a captain who has a personal stake in the mission, as this could override her professionalism. Demidov might be giving her crew too little credit, but she doesn't want to risk telling them the truth.

The Crew of Valhalla

Cpt. Victoria Demidov (NPA)

Cpt. Demidov looks to be in her early thirties, though counting stasis she's about ten years older. She's a fair captain, but she won't take any crap and expects her crew members to follow her command without question. She is always open for suggestions when there's time, but when the heat is on she barks out her orders and everyone better do as she says. Even though she takes on jobs which involve as little violence as possible, it doesn't mean she shies away from confrontation. She can still kill a man without batting an eye if it's necessary. Of late she has become quite a devout infinitologist; this is something she keeps to herself.

Sgt. Andrew Jensen (playable)

As an ex-GIC Marine, Jensen is as tough as they come. He has fought rippers, CIM commandos and seen both incredible and terrible things. Demidov picked him up from a space station overrun by rippers. Jensen's squad had been killed and GIC command had left him for dead. After this defeat and betrayal by the very institution he protected, Jensen went off the grid and became a pirate.

Jensen is Demidov's second in command and has worked with her for five years. He owes her his life and is extremely loyal. He has a dark and cynical demeanor, but he's often able to give it a humorous (misanthropic and sarcastic as it might be) slant in order to keep up morale. Subconsciously, he sees the crew as his new squad and he would go to great lengths to protect them.

Pilot David Xi (playable)

Xi has always loved to fly. As a kid, he just watched spacecrafts dock and take off from Xindos station where he was brought up. When he came of age, he earned his pilot license. He worked as a commercial pilot for SES for a couple of years, but he was discharged after being suspected of smuggling illegal artifacts. He had a reputation of being an ace pilot and was soon contacted by Demidov. Xi is a bit of a comedian and even quite the risk-taker (loves to gamble), but he's good at what he does. He will defend his crew members and himself if needed, but violence isn't his thing and he tries to avoid it. He lives to fly, and working for a crew where he gets to stiff the GIC, SES and all the other big players suits him just fine.

Site Engineer Jessica Copalis (playable)

From the beginning, Copalis worked in the core systems doing routine array checkups on GIC stations and ships. During a job, one of the ships she was currently working on was attacked by pirates, and she was kidnapped. GIC simply cut their losses and didn't even send an extraction team. For several weeks she was pretty much used as a slave, living under death threats. Luckily, Demidov's team had been sent to loot the pirates in question. She was saved by the *Valhalla* crew and since that day she served as their engineer. Copalis is quite young, but she's a genius when it comes to mechanics and computers. She has also picked up some medical skills over the years. Copalis is easygoing and has a way of seeing the positive aspects of most situations.

Prospector Miguel "Cookie" Zachariah (playable)

Zachariah has always been a freelancer, prospecting for a finder's fee or leasing out his expertise. Demidov hired him to assess and evaluate finds, ore hauls and similar things. He was efficient, discreet and price-worthy. After they had been working off and on for about two years, Demidov made him an offer to become a part of her crew and he accepted. Zach is in charge of everything that has to do with mining, ore evaluation and the like. He's a hard worker and Demidov puts him in command when a mining operation, or any other endeavor which requires his expertise, is to be undertaken. Zach likes being out in the black and feels at home with a tightly-knit crew. No one knows his background and he doesn't really want to talk about it. In general, he keeps a pretty low profile, but when he's put in charge of an operation he is extremely efficient and commanding. Zach is prone to utter words of wisdom in one-liner formats, earning him the nickname "fortune cookie" or "Cookie" for short. The nickname clashes with his huge, lumbering frame. Zach has been an infinitologist for years. The crew knows of his faith but he seldom talks about it, and as of yet he hasn't let it affect his work.

Security Officer Kauri Hansson (playable)

Trained by the IMC to be an assassin and security operative, Hansson served them with fierce loyalty. But after years of service, the IMC decided to "retire" her with no other motivation than that she had seen too much and might become a risk. She survived their attempt on her life, boosted a ship and went out into the big black as a freelance industrial spy. After some years she came across Demidov and sold her information. Hansson soon realized that Demidov often pulled one over on the IMC and that was something that she respected. Hansson later offered her services as a security specialist. After being hired to manage the security for a dozen or so jobs, Demidov took her on as part of the crew. Hansson comes off as detached and cold, but she's a classic example of being scared of rejection, so she keeps people at arm's length and prefers to work alone whenever possible. She has no difficulties cooperating and there's no question of her loyalty, she just has a hard time showing that she…well, actually *likes* the people she works with.

Group Dynamics: *Besides the description of the crew members, there isn't a whole lot to go on when it comes to the exact group dynamics. Main thing is that the crew is pretty tight and they trust each other, but there might be some minor interpersonal difficulties or extra-strong bonds between some of the crew. Instead of having to follow an exact dynamic that is pre-written, it's actually easier for your group to pick which avatars they wish to play, after which you sit down as a group and create a quick dynamic in order to make the crew your own and get a feel that you've actually worked together for a while. There shouldn't be any real animosity, but there can be smaller, unsettled scores, love affairs or even a life debt. A pre-written description can only go so far. Make the crew come alive. Doing so will make the role-play much more rewarding and intense.*

The Valhalla

The *Valhalla* is a Gargon model, C-class, heavy freighter. She's old, dirty and needs a good kick from time to time in order to get the job done. She's equipped with a ghost net for those really big jobs. She's an unregistered vessel. The VIN onboard is simply named "Valhalla" as well so the crew is talking to the ship itself when they're "talking" to the VIN.

Type: *Gargon model, C-class, heavy freighter.*

Length, Width, Height: *80 m (+50), 20m, 15m*

Description: *This is one of the more popular ships used for hauling cargo within the core systems. The Gargon model is an extremely versatile vessel. The actual ship is 80 meters, but it comes with a 50 meter long detachable barge which is used to haul massive amounts of ore, ships or whatever material is being transported. The barge usually has no life support or gravity when transporting things such as metal and mining ore, but it can be configured in a number of ways.*

The ship has four decks. The bottom is an actual freighter/ docking bay and the ship has its own grav-cuff transmitters and room for eight A-class ships, or four B-class ships if the hangar is empty and used for this purpose alone. When connected to the barge, all piloting rolls involving Speed, Handling and Acceleration suffer a -2 penalty. The barge is actually locked onto the front of the ship using the forklift-like attachment. The Gargon Model can be flown within an atmosphere, like all other C-class ships, but absolutely not with the barge.

Ghost Net

Not a facility per se, the ghost net is an extension of the ghost drive and is used to salvage objects. Salvage ships are usually of C-class size and can't stow away whole ships and large parts. So they haul it after the ship in big bundles. This is no problem in normal space, but the debris (or whatever they're hauling) can't follow through the ghost lines. This is where the ghost net comes in. It is an electromagnetically-charged nanofiber net big enough to enclose a D-class ship. This device is attached near the back of the salvage ship. When the net is deployed, a crew member (or sometimes several) has to go out and physically enclose the debris. This process can take a couple of minutes to several hours depending on the size of the haul. The net feeds off the ghost drive and will carry the debris along when the ship jumps, as well as tow it.

Chapter 1

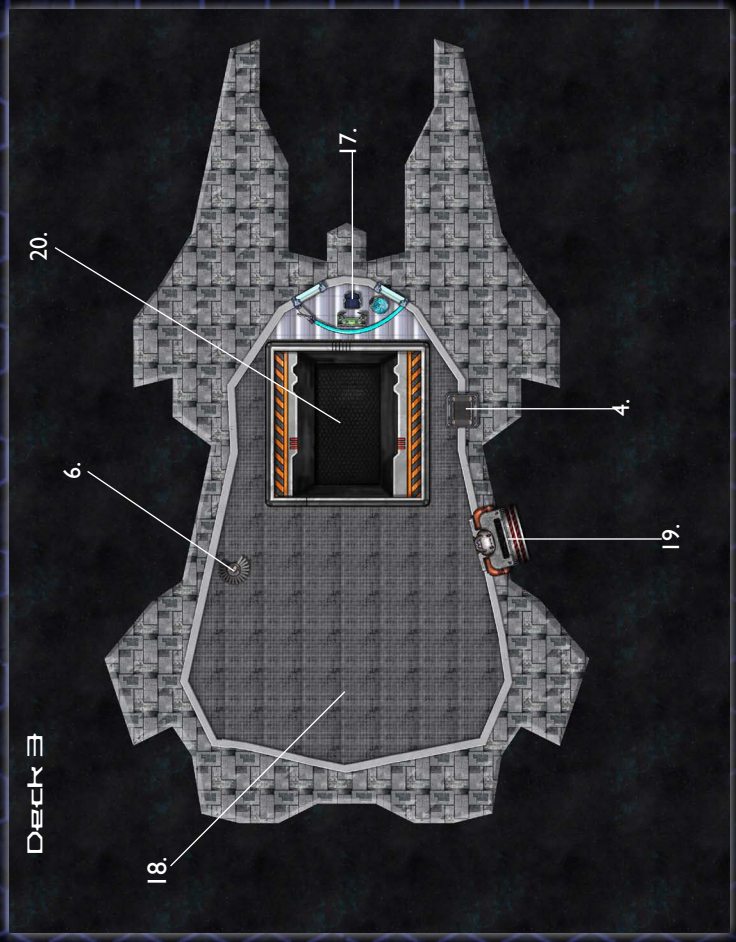
Level 1: A Rude Awakening

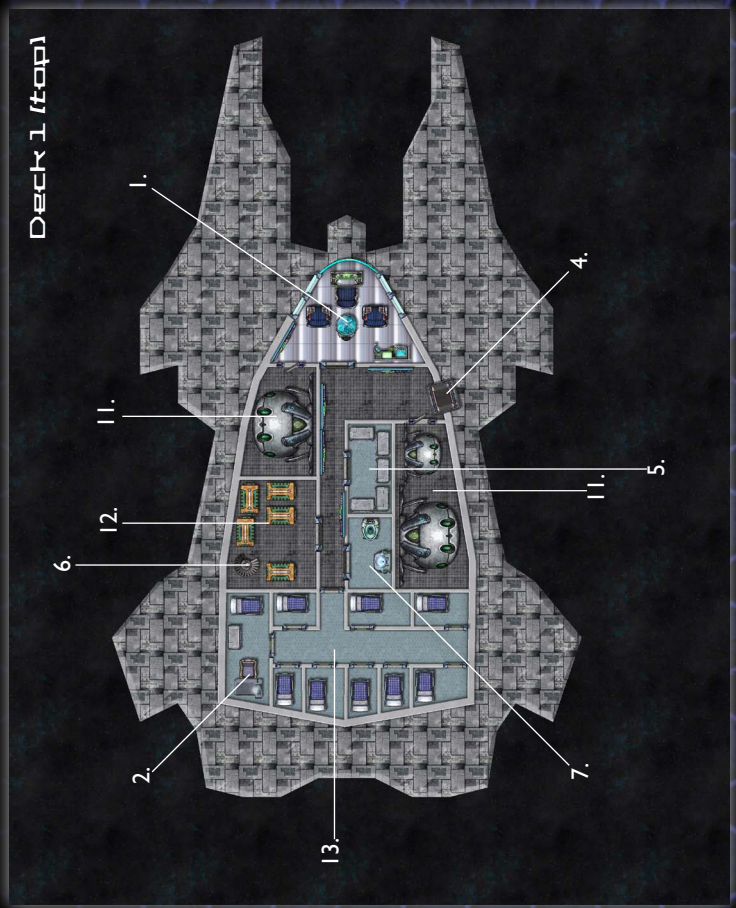
The *Valhalla* comes out of the ghost a couple of kilometers from the broken wreckage of the *Kagetsu*. They've come out in a field of ship debris. The whole crew is still in stasis and the ship's VIN rouses them. They will all suffer from stasis sickness: headaches, nausea and vertigo. Valhalla informs them of the following: *"You have arrived at your destination after two months of stasis. You are currently inside an unspecified debris field and the hull integrity is at risk. It is recommended that all crew members take their stations."*

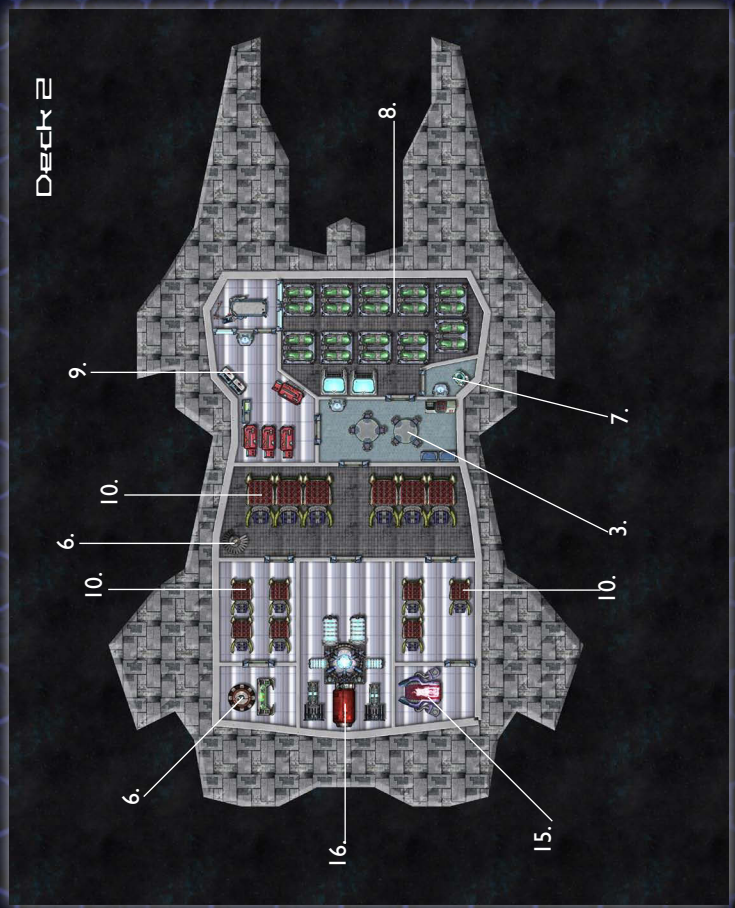
The crew must reach the command bridge, except Cookie and Copalis, who are stationed in engineering and have to get down there as soon as possible. This scene is basically about raising heart rates. There are proximity alarms going off, flashing warning lights and the whole damn ship is shaking like hell due to it hitting small pellets of debris. They're all a bit disoriented as a result of just waking up from stasis. Take inspiration from whatever sci-fi ship panic scene you want.

Valhalla Deckplan

1. Command Bridge
2. Captain's Cabin
3. Mess Hall
4. Airlock
5. Crew Lockers
6. Stairs
7. Bathroom
8. Stasis Chamber & Showers
9. Medbay With Med-Pod
10. Life Support
11. Escape Pods
12. Nutrient Storage
13. Crew Quarters
14. VIN Core
15. Ghost Drive
16. Engineering Bay, Belinium Backup, Reactor
17. Docking Control Room
18. Cargo/Docking Bay
19. Ship-to-Ship Docking Access
20. Belly Cargo/Docking Shaft







It will take the crew about thirty seconds to get to their stations from the stasis chambers.

When they arrive at the command bridge, the pilot must make a quick decision: fly with the blast shield up as it is, using the outer camera and the screen to fly, or to deactivate it. Flying with it will negate the risk of the front window being blown out, exposing them to decompression for a couple of seconds before the blast shield is activated again. But using only the screens to navigate while the shield is up will give the pilot a -2 modifier to all Vehicle rolls while piloting the ship.

There is a lot of debris in the area and the pilot has to safely navigate through the debris field. This requires a successful **Attention + Vehicles** roll. On a success, they will make it with just some scrapes. On a failed roll, they slam into a lot of junk (again, shower the scene in panic and alarms). This will crack the windshield if the blast shield is down. All of the avatars on the command bridge are strapped down in their seats so they won't go flying off in an impact. The blast shield will be activated within three seconds, but about 15% of the air will be lost. The damage to other parts of the ship involves propulsion and the computerized steering. If the engineer (in the engineering room) manages to make a successful **Brains + Engineering** roll (which takes about two hours in game time) after the hit, the damage to the ship will only cause a -1 to Vehicle rolls. If the roll fails, the modifier to all Vehicle rolls involving the ship will be at -2. When they have cleared the field, the crew probably has to put out some fires and run a diagnostics check. The ship is a bit banged up, but it's not too badly damaged. They've arrived at their destination. Thirty clicks from the planet Terus 8, in the remote Za'keth system. This system is just on the edge of the dark rim. It's restricted and the GIC policy is basically "shoot on sight" out here.

Interlude – A sit down with the captain.

This interlude is in place in order to introduce the players to their own avatars, and to the other avatars, as well as the situation. They will sit down and have a meal, simple self-heating nutrients with a chemical taste, and be given a chance to interact. After a while, Captain Demidov will break down the situation for them. Demidov won't tell them how she came about the information. In reality, she managed to intercept some transmissions from the *Kagetsu* made by an engineer named Johanna Heisler. Demidov knows that something is terribly wrong but won't disclose this to the crew. Keeping her crew in the dark isn't like her, but she's not thinking straight as she's looking for her sister, her only living relative. You shouldn't read the following word for word. Rather, you should get a feel for how you want to portray the captain and convey the information as she would. The important thing is that you relay the information to the players.

"Alright, crew. We have never been this far out before, so we need to be careful. And keep in mind that this is a highly restricted system, which means that we're committing a crime just by being here and odds are that the GIC will just shoot us down on sight if they see us.

"The information I got is reliable, and we're here to salvage the wreckage of a D-Class mining ship which should be located close to the planet Terus 8. We already had a run-in with some debris from it. The first thing we will do is to go inside what's left of her and investigate. I doubt that there will be any survivors. If there are any, it means that the ship has life support and in that case we will simply keep them trapped or in stasis and let them go when we get back. Beyond looking for survivors, we have to sweep the ship for valuable goods and other things we want to keep for ourselves before we pawn her off. Like always, we go in armed, and keep in mind that we have no information on what happened to this ship or why she broke down, so be on your guard. First off, let's see if we can get her on our scanners."

As loot, a D-class mining ship is very valuable, even as scrap, so the crew probably won't question why they're taking the risk. And besides, their captain hasn't led them astray so far.

Ship Ahoy

Any avatar who is on the command bridge and has the Technology Ability can make an **Attention + Technology** roll to use the scanners in order to get a reading on the *Kagetsu*. If unsuccessful, the avatar just reads a faint energy spike which indicates that the ship is within a couple hundred kilometers. It will take them about an hour to find it. If the roll is successful, the avatar reads a clear energy spike which indicates that the *Kagetsu's* auxiliary reactor is probably online, but running on low output. Going by this clean scan, the pilot can navigate to the *Kagetsu* with ease, getting the group there within thirty minutes.

The pilot slowly steers the *Valhalla* toward the energy spike, and as the sun breaks over the edge of Terus 8, they see the broken shape of the *Kagetsu*. It's been blown in half, the front half remaining in space. It lumbers like a massive, broken metallic beast in the void. Here the crew starts to see bodies; some are caught in wires and cables, while others just dislodged and float silently in the dark.

Most of the corpses have an expression of utter fear, and almost all of them have been severely mutilated. Arms have been ripped off, torsos torn open and abdomens eviscerated. Every member of the crew can easily deduce that most injuries couldn't have been caused by the explosion, rather someone or something else caused it. With his background in the Marines, Jensen can determine that the damage *hasn't* been caused by rippers or cavers, as the wounds are different from those he's seen. It could have been marls. If a player wishes to make an **Attention + Search** roll to take closer look at the

bodies, they will see very large bite marks if successful. For Jensen this roll is reflexive, even if the player of the avatar doesn't state that he wishes to take a closer look at the bodies. If an avatar rolls a success and shares the information with the others, they see the bites as well. Mainly, if Jensen lays eyes on the bites, he can establish with certainty that it couldn't have been rippers, and of course not cavers or marls, as the bites are too large and uneven. All visual information is also available to those in engineering as it's routed from the front cameras to the screens below.

If someone uses the bio-scanners of the *Valhalla* on the wreckage and succeeds with a **Brains + Technology** roll, the result will show unspecified and weak signs of biological life. They're impossible to pinpoint, but something is alive and moving around inside the ship. On the top hull, near the break, they see a B-class survey ship. It's banged up and offline. It's the ship Rook, Gith and Seeley used to escape Terus 8.

Cold hard cash: *An estimate of the value of the* Kagetsu *(which the crew engineer can make rather quickly) is that they might bring in as much as two to four million credits for the haul. In today's economics, it would be the equivalent of the same amount of Euros. If they pull it off, each crew member could afford to buy their own C-Class ship if they wanted. This is the biggest haul they have ever had the chance to lay their hands on.*

Breach – Entering the Ships

Entering The *Kagetsu* is easy since the crew can use the manual door hydraulics system to get into the main corridor airlock. The survey ship is a bit trickier. It's locked up tight and in order to get inside it, a successful **Quickness + Infiltration** roll must be made. From the inside, the avatars can bring the survey ship online. With a successful **Brains+ Engineering** roll, an avatar can run a diagnostics and determine that the survey ship has two hours worth of fuel left and six hours of life support. The outer hull is damaged, and the engine has a tendency to misfire. Even so, when disassembled and sold for scraps, it can fetch a good price. It's a simple matter of setting it down in the *Valhalla* cargo hold and securing it. This operation requires one person and can be completed within fifteen minutes. If there are two people on it, this time is halved. If the crew can't get into the survey ship, the captain says that they'll get it after they've investigated the *Kagetsu*. In any event, the captain wants the crew to enter the *Kagetsu* as a group, for security reasons. The *Valhalla* has been programmed to stay within ten meters above the hull of the *Kagetsu*. The VIN will use the docking thrusters to adjust the distance.

Zero-G Movement: *The crew doesn't have any jet boots, so they move about using grapple guns and their own maneuverability. The normal procedure is to attach a line to the hull and then attach one to the avatar and simply climb/walk on the hull using their magnetic boots. The lines are in place as a means to secure the person in question so they don't drift off if they make a mistake. If for some reason you would feel it necessary to have the players make rolls to move about in Zero-G at any point, the dice pool used in most cases is* ***Quickness + Movement****.*

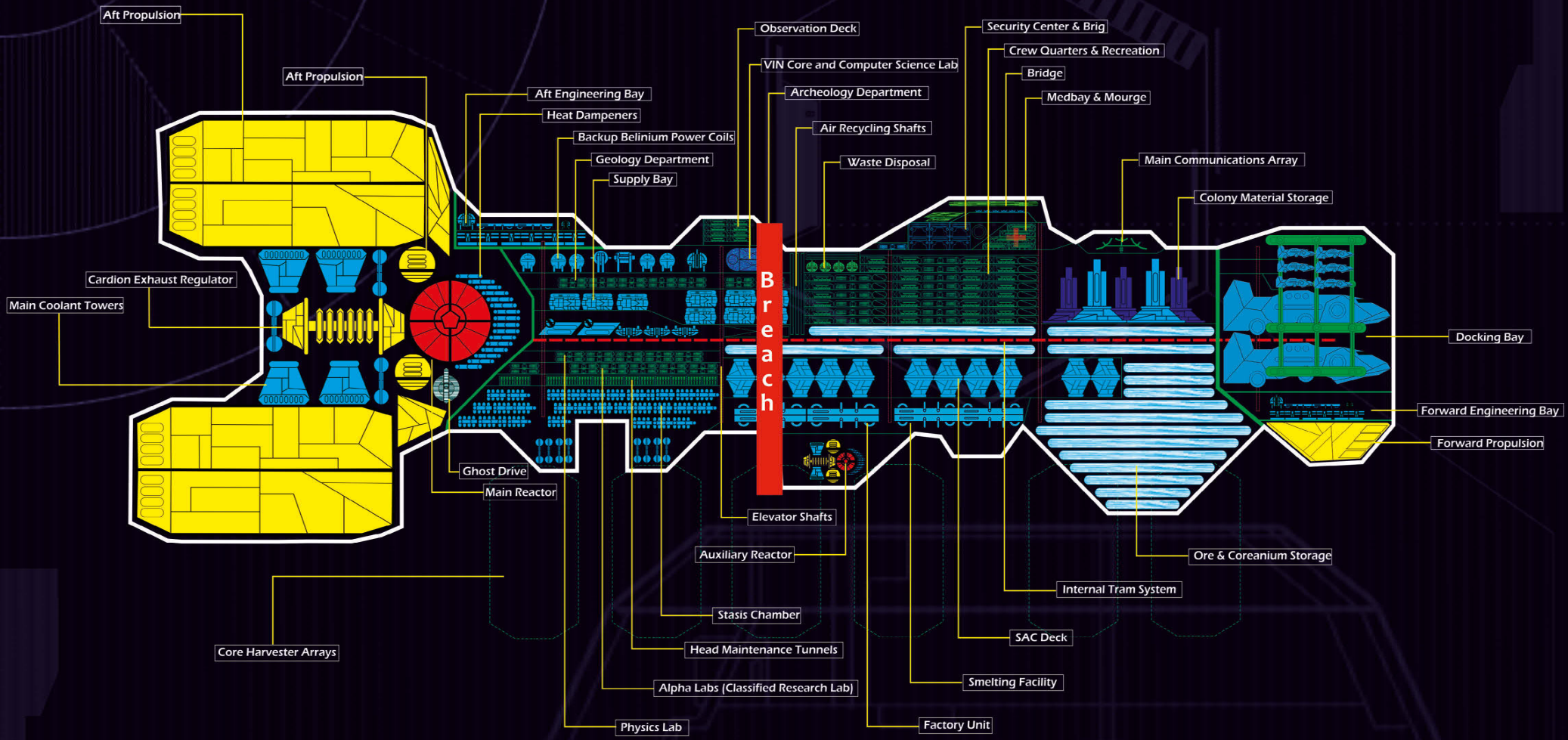
Level 2: Where the dead speak

After they've opened and closed the door manually behind them, they'll find themselves in a small airlock. The auxiliary power is functioning, which means that the most vital inner systems will work: life support, primary heating, gravity and the floor lights in the main corridors. Doors and elevators are included. Once inside, they can cycle the airlock and enter the main corridor. The environmental scanners in their VES will flash green, which means that the air is breathable.

The first thing they'll see when they have entered the corridor are walls spattered with blood. There are a lot of weird glyphs painted in blood all over the walls as well. The ship is saturated with Black Resonance (a type of undetectable and immeasurable energy which affects the mind), and the AI should roll a hidden **Cool x 2** roll for each avatar. They'll need to accumulate two successes on the roll. A failure means that they'll gain a point of the Dark. Non-player controlled characters will gain a point of the Dark automatically. Avatars that failed the roll will hear a high-pitched grinding noise in their comm-links, woven together with the words "Never Alone" whispered in a distorted voice. If they mention it to the captain, she'll just shrug and blame it on a faulty transmitter on the ship.

There are a lot of shell casings on the floor. A successful **Brains + Combat** roll will reveal that the ammo is high-powered and armor piercing, auto-carbine size. This is often used by the GIC military outfits, mainly the Marines (something Jensen will pick up on automatically). There is a second type of shell casing which is used in long ranged high-velocity sniper rifles, especially by scout units. If anyone studies the glyphs, a successful **Cool + Science** roll will reveal that these are glyphs sometimes found on alien artifacts. A **Brains + Medic** roll will reveal that these symbols have been scribbled by people suffering from severe VPS. It is quite obvious that something really horrible has transpired and the findings should put the crew on edge. If someone tells the captain that they might be better off just hauling it back and investigating with some extra backup, she simply says that they've got a job to do and that they should press on. After all, the ship is worth **a** *lot* of money.

Cross Section Deck Schematic Kagetsu



Accessing the Layout

There is an access terminal right by the airlock where they came out. Through this, anyone can access the main status of the ship and the blueprints. The whole ship was 800 meters in length, which means that the remaining part is about 400 meters. The ship has six decks and is 60m in height and 100m wide. As you might imagine, the actual ground the crew must cover is enormous. Especially since the tram is busted and only about half of the elevators are online. There won't be a detailed blueprint over the decks, only the one you see here. It shows where the most important sectors are located. It's your job to envision and describe the exact layout when needed. Each section will be described below in regards to condition and possible incidents. The captain will order her crew to start at the bottom and work their way up. She will lead them to the docking bay area last. If a player goes AWOL and tries to get to the docking bay, access to the Forward Engineering Bay, the Docking Bay and Front Engine is cut off by secure bulkheads. These areas will be accessible after they have explored the rest of the ship, as what they will find there is the beginning of level three.

If you wish, you may let the players take their avatars and explore the ship in whatever fashion they would like as they spread out, but it's much more plausible that a seasoned salvage crew would work in a team, or at least two groups. It's highly unlikely that they would split up (at least before the madness starts) with all the risks involved in doing so. But if you're lucky enough to have a group of players who haven't seen enough horror movies, by all means let them split up.

The Scary Chore of Getting Around

When the avatars walk from one point to another, especially in the beginning, you have to convey the eerie mood of the walkways, corridors and elevators. The lighting is sparse, flickering at times. If everyone onboard is dead, it should be quiet and still, but the characters can still hear weird sounds. Faint voices or growls echo through the ductwork, and the odd shadow moves in the corner of the eye before it disappears. You may decide that just one or two of the avatars notice these things at different times. Cooling valves spring a leak with a loud hiss just as they open a pressure door and a circuit board shorts with a bang at the same moment they pass it. Use the environment to create tension and mood. This is not a place which inspires wanderlust.

Unknowingly Stranded

At the same moment they leave the vicinity of the airlock, the crazed engineer Calleigh Beryl, who is responsible for sabotaging the Kagetsu, will use it and make her way to the Valhalla. Using her knowledge of engineering, she manages to enter the ship. She's under the sway of the shards and so she sabotages Valhalla's reactor and ghost drive core, making it impossible for them to leave. This is something the crew will notice when they return to their ship and try to start her up. The VIN will notify them as they try to start up the engines.

"I'm sorry, but my automated diagnostic system detects a complete reactor failure; switching to auxiliary power. Warning, the diagnostics also show extensive damage to the ghost drive core. Either way, a jump would be impossible without a functioning reactor. I require critical repairs immediately, but the inventory from my engineering bay shows that we lack most of the parts needed in order to restore me to a fully operational status."

Calleigh will hide out in the ship down by the ghost drive and attack the first person who enters the area with a fire axe (damage 4/2). She has a dice pool of 4 when attacking. If the crew subdues her and tries to question her, they won't get anything out of her. She is stark raving mad, talking about "the divine ancients". She pretty much acts as a violent paranoid schizophrenic.

Air Recycling Shafts

Most of the air recycling shafts have been blown to hell and those that work are separated with emergency sealant hatches. It's possible to access them by burning through the hatches with a fusion cutter or by removing a security panel and overriding the security on a hatch (**Brains + Infiltration**). However, as every engineer can tell you, the only thing in those shafts are gigantic rotating vent fans and CO_2 scrubbers. The units are huge shafts, creating a 50 meter free fall from the top through 20 active metal fans. Not the safest of environments. The shafts are fifteen meters wide.

Ore Storage

What's left of the ore storage is a gigantic structure. It's approximately fifteen meters to the ceiling and the walls are filled with extendable grapplers designed to hold ore prisms in place.

The *Kagetsu* was called from an active mining operation. She had just begun to haul ore onboard when she was called out with a GIC senate executive order, so she was only able to bring aboard a couple of tons (five tons). The ore has been compacted into a large rectangular prism about the size of a small bus, and is tethered electromagnetically in a storage slot. If Zach, with his prospector background, gets a firsthand look at the prism and uses his mineral scanner, he can determine that the ore contains molybdenum, titanium and copper. Given some time, Zach can appraise the load at approximately 100,000 credits. In order to haul it to the *Valhalla,* they have to use a plasma burner, splitting the prism into about twenty pieces, and then use a magnetic hand-driven trolley to get the pieces to the *Valhalla.* There's an automated plasma burner arm and grappler in place, and with a successful **Attention + Technology** roll, it can

be set to automatically divide the ore into the twenty bits and place them in neat rows on the floor. It will take the system about ten minutes to complete the operation.

Crew Quarters and Recreation

The first thing the group will enter is the plaza, which is a square with stores, bars and coffee shops. Severed human limbs lie decomposing in the flickering lights. There are blood spatters and glyphs painted in blood all over the walls. The place is a mess, with smashed windows, littered with overturned chairs and tables. There are some bullet holes and casings that likely come from handguns. If the PCs check some of the crew quarters, they will find some broken doors, but they won't find any bodies, only blood. Also, some of the larger vents (one square meter or larger) have been smashed out from the inside and there are blood trails leading into them. It seems as if something smashed its way out, killed a bunch of crew members and dragged their bodies inside. If someone moves in closer and investigates, making an **Attention + Search** roll, they can notice signs of a struggle, broken fingernails and scratch marks on the edges of the vent openings and on the insides of the drums in some places. This means that some of the victims were alive when grabbed and desperately tried to hold on.

Captain Demidov will spend extra time in the crew quarters, going through the corridors and navigating to the officer's deck. Here she will (nervously and eagerly) start going from door to door, looking at the names. She stops at a door which is busted in and enters the rather large room to check it. If anyone checks the nametag outside the door, it says "Dr. Seeley Fujiko". The room is in a shambles and yields nothing of interest. Demidov is cursing and trembling after she searches the room. At this point, Demidov accumulates two points worth of the Dark.

Demidov's behavior during the search for the room and her reaction to the state of the room is a dead giveaway that something is off. Demidov is generally cool and collected. If the crew members ask her about her behavior, why the room was important, who Seeley is or any similar questions, Demidov just says that she was acting on information her source told her and that this person she's looking for might be in the possession of something valuable. It's likely that some of the crew won't believe her, and if they press her, she will start to tap into their personal connections, especially banking on the fact that she saved the life of Jensen and Copalis.

"I saved your life and I trust you with mine. So why won't you believe what I'm telling you now?"

This is the general direction she will take in order to get supporters. If things should heat up, she will sternly ask anyone (with her hand on her sidearm) who continues to question her if he/she really wants to go down the road of mutiny. Either the person backs down or violence will shortly ensue. Both the situation and the Dark are affecting her.

Command Bridge and Main Security Station

Command Bridge: It's a complete mess. There is a lot of damage to the command stations. Some has been caused by bullets and some by blunt force and grenade blasts. Blood spatters, drag marks and bloody handprints can be found all over the place. Severed limbs litter the floor. Some are human and some are...*partly* human. A **Brains + Medic** roll will conclude that some form of intense, yet controlled, mutation has occurred in these limbs. Bones have twisted and been turned into deadly spikes and jaws. But the limbs are too few and too mutilated for the avatars to get a full picture of the creature to which they belonged. The only thing they can ascertain is that it used to be human. Then there's the fact that whatever they belonged to seems not to have bled when they were cut off. The fully human limbs are surrounded by spatter patterns and pools of coagulated blood. This is not the case with the mutated limbs.

The flight computer and VIN are messed up and all scrambled, but some functions remain. Anyone with a rank 2 or higher in Technology can gain access to the following.

Unspecified Log Entry 1: This is made by the mining engineer named Tamara Jeeky; there is no date, as the file is scrambled. It's a blurred video log, and from what's she's saying, the team can gather that the log was made shortly after the *Kagetsu's* entry into the Za'keth system. Jeeky looks tired and worn down, which shows that she probably created the log just a few minutes or hours after waking up from stasis. She talks slowly and sounds a bit disoriented, all normal signs of stasis sickness.

"Yeah, so...eh...I'm not entirely sure why the hell we're out here. And 'out here' is the Za'keth system. The GIC sent us to Kellios in the Sumizome system to set up shop in a new GIC mining claim. Full crew and everything. Three weeks in, just as we got our first haul after setting up the damn thing, we get a call. 'Leave most of the crew to continue mining and set off to the Za'keth system some sixty THOUSAND light years off'. What are we going to do here? The brass can't tell us. Why the rush? Brass...can't...tell us. The only thing I know about Za'keth is that it's restricted for everyone except the GIC employees with special dispensation. I got a friend up in navigations and he told me that we're in orbit over a planet called Terus 8. Never heard of it. But like I said, I don't know the first thing about this system. Like most people.

Anyway, I was one of the 'lucky' ones to be chosen to come out here. Frankly, it creeps me out. I mean, we're like what? A thousand or maybe five hundred light years from the dark rim? That's way too close for comfort. Well, as a mining

engineer, I guess I have to go down to Terus 8 and build or keep a mining colony running. I hope this isn't like the Lery job, it lasted for two years. Well, wherever the GIC points we go...I guess..."[Cuts to static]

Unspecified Log Entry 2: This scrambled video log has been made by Captain Venjamin Elijah. He sits by his desk. He is unshaven, his uniform improperly buttoned, and this in combination with the dark rings under his eyes gives him a tattered and generally dishevelled impression. He is drinking a glass of whiskey and he has his honorary platinum-plated fleet revolver on the table.

"If there is a Hell, this damn place lies at its gates. We have been here for nearly two weeks...the Za´keth system. Our brig is filling up, as is our medbay. The crew is coming apart."

[He empties his glass and pours a new one]

"I've seen VPS before, but not like this. It's like an epidemic. We've had several murders and suicides. Shipmates who have known each other for years have killed one another for no reason. And these goddamn dreams and headaches. And then *there are those in the crew who swear they have seen something...alien...something* horrid *on the ship. They might be crazy, but then again they might be right. We shouldn't be out here, not this close to the dark rim. The ´maddening blackness´ my father called it. The wrath of the universe...I'm inclined to agree with him.*

Dr. Seeley Fujiko...I've told that damnable woman several times that we need to pull the plug on this whole thing but she always has an excuse, a classified lie and the executive GIC order to back it up. Soon I won't care. I'll throw her in the brig and jump us home. Whatever she's really looking for out here...it isn't worth the loss of my crew."

[In the log, alarms start to wail and flickering emergency lights are engaged and the ship shakes. The captain looks around and then swigs the whiskey]

"The maddening blackness..."

[Cuts to static]

Crew Manifest

The crew manifest contains 243 names. About half are mineworkers signed to work planetside, while the other half are ship crew. The last update was created on 500 IT, 20th of June. By this point, a dozen of the crew planetside had been killed, while several others had been taken off duty as a result of being mentally unsound or one of the murderers. It's the same when it comes to the crew of the ship. The log is organized in sections and by alphabetical order, so there are names under Engineering, Mineworkers, Flight Officers, and so on. The status is shown behind the name.

For example:

Engineering	
Name	**Status**
Caprice, Daniela	*Deceased [Suicide]*
Darhaas, Marcus	*Active Duty*
Devo, Stephan	*Confined To Brig [Murder Charge]*
Etaris, Elain	*Active Duty*

Captain Demidov is very interested in the crew manifest and she almost immediately scrolls down to the Scientific & Medical section.

Scientific & Medical	
Name	**Status**
Bristol, Natasha (Chief Medical Officer)	*Active Duty*
Cheapundra, David (Nurse)	*Confined To Brig [Suicide Watch]*
Fujiko, Seeley (xenoarchaeologist)	*Active Duty*
Pak-Lin, Akiko (MT)	*Active Duty*

Main Security Station

In order to get to the station, the avatars must take the elevator or the service ladder one floor up. The main security station seems locked but the screens show that the doors are unlocked. This indicates that they're broken or welded shut from the inside. It's basically impossible to use a fusion cutter to get inside as the material is security alloy, forged to withstand such attempts. There is, however, a small vent shaft one can crawl through after removing the hatch. Zach and Jensen can't possibly fit as they're too big. Once an avatar has started to crawl, it's impossible to turn around. The vent is narrow, dark and claustrophobic. Through the shafts, the one who crawls in can hear eerie sounds. Whoever goes first will have to manage a **Cool x 2** roll with a -2 penalty. If the character fails, he or she will gain a point of the Dark and see the walls of the shaft fill with glyphs in blue flashes, and as they do, the whispers reach a crescendo, ending in a high-pitched screech. Everything ends as quickly as it began and only the person experiencing the phenomena notices the whole thing.

The vent leads to the control room, and as soon as the avatar has fully exited the vent a woman will appear, rounding a corner with a gun in her hand, aiming at the avatar. She looks to be in her thirties and wears a tattered and bloodstained medical staff uniform. Her name tag says "Natasha Bristol, Medical Officer".

The main part of the security station is made up of a large control room with twelve stations, each a monitoring array for a section of the *Kagetsu*. There's a lounge area, armory (basically empty), and a brig. In the lounge area, there is a dead man propped up in a chair by a table. His arms and legs have been cut off with surgical precision and lay under a table cloth on the floor in the corner of the room. The man has been secured to the chair with electrical wires, his eyelids have been stapled to his forehead and his mouth forced into a chilling, bloody smile with the aid of thin copper wire and staples. He's in a state of decomposition and it looks like he's been shot in the head.

The brig has been sealed off due to a faulty security door, but it can be simply overridden by someone with a background in security from the inside. The brig can house thirty people. Some of the cells are empty; in five there are corpses, one suicide (banged her head into the wall repeatedly) and the rest have succumbed to thirst as no one was there to feed them or give them water.

Meeting Natasha Bristol

She's twitchy, on edge and wide-eyed. Her first words are agitated and disoriented: *"Are you here? Are you in there? Are you alone in your head?"* Bristol has basically gone mad after surviving for two months on the *Kagetsu*. The creatures have killed off most of the crew and the avatar will be the first living human she has seen in a month, since she was forced to kill her friend and colleague, Giang Drestd, a computer linguist. He grew paranoid and homicidal and she had to defend herself. Due to what she has seen (battling the entities) and experienced, she has gone quite insane. Bristol has been isolated in the security office for two months, with no one to talk to for the last six weeks. She has disengaged the door from the inside. For the past few weeks, she has lived on nutrient bars, and luckily the water system is still up and running.

If Natasha sees that someone else is trying to crawl out of the vent behind the first avatar, she will promptly explain that she will shoot the avatar in front of her. When spoken to, Bristol will be very skeptical and repeat phrases such as *"How can I be sure that you're alone in your head? Are you life or death? I just want to go home…"*

In order to calm her down, the avatar must talk to her, expressing that he's not hostile and that he can bring the crazed woman to safety. Beyond roleplaying this, a successful **Cool + Interact** roll is required. If successful, she will lower her gun. First she will ask the avatar to tell his comrades to close the vent hatch outside. After this, she will look at the monitor which displays the feed from outside the door to make sure that the group really *are* sane humans. After confirming this, she will open the door, hurry them inside and shut and disengage the door as quickly as she can. If the roll is unsuccessful, Bristol will try to fire her gun at the avatar, but it's jammed and will only click. Afterward, she will jump behind the

corner and run and hide in the brig. The avatar is free to open the door and let the rest of the crew inside. When they catch up with Bristol, she will simply sit on the floor in a fetal position. In either scenario, interacting with Bristol will be as follows.

When she has calmed down and accepted the avatars as non-hostile, she will lead them to the lounge area. Here the crew of the *Valhalla* will see the body propped up in the chair. This sight is unsettling, to say the least. This is Mr. Giang, the computer linguist and personal friend Bristol was forced to kill. She shot him in the head as he attacked her, but about three weeks ago she propped him up like this after amputating his legs and "arranging" his face. The isolation in combination with the maddening resonance influencing the ship has caused her to suffer from a combination of mild VPS and severe cabin fever. When she's alone, she actually talks with the corpse. If asked about it, she will simply tell them that the man's name is Giang, and that he *is* a genius when it comes to computer linguistics. She also states that he's shy around new people and that's why he's so quiet. If they ask how he died, Bristol will tell them that she shot him in the head because the things inside his head tried to kill her. If anyone inquires about the dismemberment, she says that she didn't want him to be taken by the others as they would force him to try to kill her again. It's important to understand that she hasn't done all this as part of some morbid desire, her mind is simply denying that he's dead. On some level, she also understands that he's dead and might be subjected to the infection which transformed the other crew members into monstrosities. So in order to prevent him from being a viable victim for mutation, she cut off his limbs.

In her state of mind, Bristol can only give a fragmented version of what's happened, at best. Basically, she re-tells parts of what transpired in *Lost Redemption*, the events that she knows. They were ordered here to conduct a classified archeological dig under the leadership of Dr. Seeley Fujiko. They used an old mining colony as a base, and parts of the old mining crew were found dead. She had no idea of what they were looking for, only that it induced VPS in the crew and that the dig unleashed some kind of hostile alien life form. She also says that the ship was sabotaged, causing it to plummet toward the planet, but some kind of explosion cleaved it in twain, sparing the front end of the ship. She just wants to get out of here. If asked to describe the life form, she simply says that *"It's us, yet different. Alive but dead, and it's not a matter of a CAV outbreak. This is something ancient, the beginning of an apocalyptic wave of destruction. People killed each other, the medbay and morgue stacked up…then they came. They came from the dead."* Demidov won't ask Bristol about Seeley Fujiko, but if any of the other crew members asks her, Bristol will only rant that Dr. Fujiko was the one who led the operation and that she's responsible for bringing *them* back into our world.

Demidov informs the crew that she wants Bristol kept awake and safe for now. It's up to the avatars whether they want to take her with them or leave her in the security station for now.

Medbay & Labs

Like most of the ship, the medbay is in a shambles. Some of the beds are soaked in blood and the lockers with medical supplies are all but emptied out. A successful **Attention + Search** roll will result in finding enough Regen (medical drug with regenerative properties) to restore up to 12 total hit points. The medbay looks like it has been in the forefront of a warzone. The morgue isn't any better. There are about a dozen bloodstained gurneys but no corpses.

The door to the labs has been pried open. The two-inch metal has been bent outward in an impossible way and it's heavily bloodstained. Most mining ships of this size have a small lab devoted to archeological research in case the crew comes across a finding. All who enter the lab will gain a point of the Dark automatically.

In front of a work station lies the body of a woman. The remains are barely recognizable as a human female, as she has been torn limb from limb and ripped to shreds. Most of the room is dark, but in the center an artifact shard hangs within a magnetic field generated by a powerful electromagnetic platform. It's one of the shards Seeley brought with her. She dropped it while she was fighting Rook and Gith in the main corridor. The woman on the floor is named Trin Beccura. She was a mining foreman and a competent xenoarchaeologist. She found the shard and brought it to the lab as she realized that it might be one of the things affecting the crew. Beccura managed to get hold of some nutrients and locked herself in the lab. As the crew died and the creatures ravaged the ship, she desperately tried to find a way to reverse or at least halt the effects by performing experiments on the shard, as well as trying to decipher the glyphs on it. She created several logs, but only two are accessible to the crew of the *Valhalla*. Beccura was in her mid forties, with red hair and green eyes. She had an athletic build and she tries to keep her voice steady. From the angle, one can tell that she made the log at the work station by which she is found. The shard can be seen suspended in the background.

Handling the Shard: *Okay, swiping this hellish thing is a VERY bad idea. The crew can agree that it's probably worth a couple of hundred thousand credits if sold to the right people, but if they listen to the log before they discuss taking the damn thing, they might have second thoughts. If they grab it, the following applies.*

The one holding it (or carrying it in a case) will gain +2 to Brawn, +1 to Attention and +4 hit points. The downside is that when the shard is removed from the magnetic field, everyone within fifty meters will gain a point of the Dark automatically

and the one who picks it up first will gain two points of the Dark. The one handling it will also have to make a ***Cool x2*** *roll each hour. A failure will result in the avatar gaining a point of the Dark. Bonuses and drawbacks will apply as long as they hold it or stay within five meters of it, or until someone else picks it up (the gain of Dark is permanent though). Every three times it changes "owners", the person next in line to grab it will have to make a successful* ***Cool x 2*** *roll or gain a point of the Dark. If no one picks it up, Demidov will. Beyond the stated effects, Demidov will gain a point of the Dark every subsequent hour she's handling it without the chance to make a roll, and also gain the ability to regenerate 1 hit point per combat round. This is due to her DNA, which she shares with her sister. A genetic anomaly makes the sisters more susceptible to the influence of the shard.*

Log 1: *This is mining foreman Trin Beccura. I'm certain that the artifact shard I found in the corridor after the explosion came from the planet. It's probably a part of whatever that xenoarchaeologist Dr. Fujiko was looking for.*

I majored in interstellar prospecting science but minored in theoretical xenoarchaeology, so using what I know, I've tried to make some sense out of all this.

The shard is, like most relevant alien artifacts, composed of biometal. However, this sample has a much higher density than usual. Like many of its ilk, it gives off a positive reading in the bioscans, which is an indication of life. But the reading I get off this thing is much stronger. I've run all manner of scans on it and found that it has a very strong but fluctuating range of energy signatures. I just can't understand it. It's also adorned by five glyphs and I have no idea what they mean as my xenolinguistics is a bit rusty.

[There's a loud bang, followed by several more and she turns in the direction of the door which is out of the cameras view, holding her breath. A muffled growl follows, then it grows quiet. Beccura turns back to the camera. She is now shaking, almost in shock and when she continues she does so quietly, whispering.]

They're out hunting again. They seem to do so in cycles. They can be quiet for days and then go out on a rampage.

Yes…back to my report. I put the shard in the nanoscope and got a good look at the bio-fibers. I've never seen such complexity in an artifact structure before and there's something else. There seem to be traces of a different biological material in the fiber. I'm no biologist, but it looks like a spore of some kind. I plan to extract it and see if I can run some tests. It might be possible that the strange energy patterns and resonance it gives off is the source of the VPS and that the spore is the source of the contagion. But I'm just shooting in the dark here. As of yet, I haven't felt any side effects of being close to the thing.

END OF LOG

It is impossible to say how much time has passed since log one, but Beccura is a much more broken woman in the second log. She has dried blood on her clothes and in her hair. She shakes uncontrollably and seems incoherent and rambling at times. It seems as she struggles with inner turmoil, as if something inside her is trying to take over. She rocks back and forth, smacking herself in the head at times to get back on track when she notices herself drifting into a rant. When she tries to make a cogent point she uses few words, making it sound primitive. It's like she's afraid that any unnecessary words will derail her train of thought. When she starts to derail, her talking speed accelerates and she talks a lot with her hands.

Log 2: *It changed my blood. Not while it was in me. The blood I mean….God. I have to focus... My mind is slipping away. The spores that I found. Put them in a sample of my blood. Violent mutation. The symbols are in my head. They want something. Purity. God!*

[She bangs herself repeatedly on the head with both hands]

Get out of my head! It's like a progressive dementia. Paranoia. I'm seeing things. Not seeing. Yes. No, I mean feeling. Focus.

[Pauses and takes a deep breath]

I think the energy patterns are creating a resonance. It's like when sound makes glass vibrate and shatter. But this resonance shatter our minds. It has a purpose. It thinks. It plans. Is it the voice of the universe singing praises to its own greatness? Is this the face of the divine? The glyphs, they sing to us and tell a tale of purity. No. Fuck. I'm slipping. This isn't me. Please help me. I don't want to disappear into nothingness.

[After this the camera seems to shake violently as there's a loud bang at her door. She stares at the door as if paralyzed. After some more bangs and vibrations, the avatars will hear a loud growl in the log followed by the metal door being pried open. The scream of Beccura is more akin to a wailing. Within a second something huge rips into her and knocks out the camera and it cuts to static. It's impossible to get a look at the thing as it's just a dark blur.]

Auxiliary Reactor

The reactor core is intact, but the power coil couplings are shot to hell and it's basically impossible to fix. The ship gets its power from this and its solar cells, making it run on low output. The Auxiliary Reactor room is a large place. The glowing core hangs suspended in the middle and is surrounded by walkways and power stations.

Colony Material Storage

This place is basically a large industrial storage chamber, in which the mining ship carries smart metals, portable reactors and SAC material, all of which is used in the initial setup of a mining colony. Since the *Kagetsu* already unloaded their material at Kellios, it's basically empty.

Factory Unit

This is used to produce things that might be needed on the ship as well as on colonies. As long as they have the raw material, the crew of a factory unit can produce basically anything from small vehicles to clothes. This looks like an indoor industrial park with several levels, walkways and robotic production units. There are some traces of blood here and there, but overall it's quiet and all the machines are still.

Smelting Facility

When active, this facility runs itself with the aid of the VIN. While the crew of the mining ship sleeps in stasis on the way home, the facility brings in ore from the ore storage, extracts the pure minerals and metals from it and discards the scrap material such as lava and simple rock. It then repacks the purified materials in prisms and delivers it back to the ore storage. When the crew wakes up, the precious metals and minerals have been extracted, stacked and categorized and are ready to be sold and shipped. The whole process works off a robotic arms system, heavy duty conveyor belts and automated magnetic hover trolleys. Just like the factory unit, this facility is dead and silent. It's very cold in the facility since this place isn't prioritized by the ship when running on low output; there's seldom any crew actually working inside the smelting facility. And when it's operational, the system must actually regulate the heat in order to keep it down, due to the nature of the smelting process. Also, a screen on the outside of the main door indicates that the artificial gravity has been turned off.

SAC

The Simulated Atmosphere Containment has taken one hell of a beating. First off, half of it went up in flames when the aft crashed into the planet. The remaining part is running on 43% capacity. This is more than enough to sustain the few survivors that are left. However, it smells foul, as a lot of the protein pools and oxy-algae have been shut down. This means that it has started to rot. The parts of the pool that still work seem undamaged. The only light comes from the active oxy-algae pools (UV-infused nanites), which beams upwards through the floor grates and casts its light on the plant hubs in the hydroponics garden. The eerie light in combination with trickling water makes it rather unsettling. At times, a loud metallic clang followed by a hum can be heard. This is the sound of the automated water filters shifting places. What the crew of the *Valhalla* are clueless about is the fact that most of the monstrous hostile entities (about 140 of them) lie dormant on the bottom of the inactive protein and algae pools. The fluid is as thick and viscous as pea soup, so it's impossible to see them. The pools are also five meters deep and the creatures rest at the bottom.

Main Communications Array

This facility is basically a giant amplifier for all outer antennae, and also contains the main transmitters. It's a big facility, ten meters from top to bottom. The array actually consists of dozens of couplings which boost the signals, and there's no gravity in this place as only engineers come here to adjust the settings or fix minor problems. The whole thing is shaped like an oval bowl, with the couplings running along the entire structure from the main signal charger in the middle up to the top, like a giant metallic octopus with its arms evenly spaced. The system is offline, as many of the couplings have been torn into, wires and circuits hanging loose. A corpse floats in the middle of it all and dried blood floats as beads in the air. It's a woman in her early twenties who has cut her own wrists. She has connected a small log to the main array. This is the body of Johanna Heisler. After getting the word out she killed herself, unable to cope any longer.

Level 3: Surviving The Dead

From a conveniently nearby terminal, the crew of the *Valhalla* will be notified that the docking bay doors have opened and then Demidov will order them to the docking bay.

Docking Bay

The docking bay is virtually empty, beyond two C-class ships. They're the same model as the *Valhalla*. One seems to have been the subject of several explosions: the hull is riddled with holes and the aft engines are ripped clean off. The second ship is in better shape, but the aft engine is damaged.

The docking facility is a huge, open space with a gigantic airlock used to cycle in ships. The walls are covered with giant robotic arms and gravity emitters used to dock and secure ships. It's about forty-five meters from floor to ceiling, so it's a pretty awesome sight. Both Gargon ships lie on the floor, and by the looks of it they were dropped from the top, as if someone had overridden the docking procedures and simply pushed them down using the robotic arms. On the floor, near to where the crew of the *Valhalla* entered the bay, they can see more of the Marine and sniper-issued shell casings lying among mutated limbs. Rook and Gith have made the least damaged ship their base of operations and are closely monitoring the newcomers, ready to pull the trigger.

Rook and Gith

Seeley became infected and became a human-alien entity-shard hybrid. As Rook and Gith opened fire on her in the main corridor two months ago, she managed to flee down a vent shaft after hurling the active fusion cutter at them. It was at this point she dropped the shard that Beccura found. Rook and Gith decided to head for one of the Gargon ships in hopes of using it to jump home.

They were met by heavy resistance by the creatures. After hours of hiding, fighting and sneaking, they managed to reach the docking bay. As they arrived, they saw the now barely human Seeley as she was about to enter a ship. Rook, in an attempt to stop her from taking the contagion with her to the core systems, fired a plasma grenade. Seeley managed to get out of the way as the grenade hit a crate of capacitance cells which stood by the ship. This resulted in a powerful explosion which damaged the ship and dropped it to the ground.

They managed to get up to the second ship and enter it, but as they were about to embark, someone hacked the docking arms and made them plummet to the floor. The impact took out their engine. Rook and Gith contemplated using the stasis units in the ship, but the idea of lying helplessly unconscious with Seeley and those other creatures around didn't sit well with them. The Gargon ship had food and water enough to last an entire crew three months; it could be locked up tight and made pretty secure as long as someone kept an eye out. So they decided to stay, awaiting a rescue team. They have been sleeping in shifts, and every time the creatures have come out to hunt they have powered down the ship and laid low.

Rook will open the door to the ship and come out with his weapon trained on the player avatars. Gith is in stealth mode and circles the *Valhalla* crew, keeping his distance on higher ground, with his sniper rifle aimed at the group. Rook is sporting his full hard shell GIC combat suit with his helmet deployed. The gist of his 'introduction' is as follows: *"Who the fuck are you, why are you here and most importantly...do you have a way off this shitbucket?"*

If any of the crew gets belligerent, Rook will remind them of the devastating power of his high-powered carbine and its attached grenade launcher. Also, from atop a walkway a laser sight will come alive and plant itself on the forehead of the most rowdy one.

Within seconds, Rook will focus on Captain Demidov (if she's still with the crew), and he doesn't seem pleased.

"You look just like her...a bit older, though. Sister? Don't tell me you're here for those fucking shards. If you are, *you're gonna have a hell of a time getting your hands on them. It seems that the good doctor has become permanently attached to them."*

If no violence ensues, Rook suggests that they all should continue the conversation inside. As soon as they start to walk into the ship, Gith appears behind them, deactivating his stealth module. And needless to say, Demidov will be quite upset by Rook's statement. The avatars will likely have questions of their own regarding Demidov's connection to Seeley.

Regarding Seeley, Rook says that he only has seen her once, a couple of weeks ago. He only got a quick glimpse out in the docking bay, but she's barely human. She has developed some form of alien muscle mass and the shards seem to have bonded with her flesh. She's much bigger than a man, has grown wicked claws and monstrous jaws filled with rows of inch-long black teeth. He doubts that she is sentient as we understand it anymore. Of course, Demidov will be distraught, but the Dark feeds her obsession, which will make her want to find her sister even more. She keeps her obsessive notions to herself for now.

The Situation

Beyond the information above, Rook and Gith tell the crew of their situation. The first Gargon model ship is all but destroyed (ghost drive, propulsion and so forth), while there are some minor engine problems with the *Claire* (the ship they've been living in). However, the weaver unit of their ghost drive is completely trashed. Without the weaver unit, it's impossible to feed jump coordinates into the drive core, resulting in a random jump which in all likelihood would kill them. So what they need is a new weaver unit and a patch job on their engine and propulsion system.

What's Next?

The crew will likely recommend taking their fully functional ship and escaping. This is only if they haven't discovered that the *Valhalla* is sabotaged. Rook's and Gith's ship, the *Claire*, has the parts needed to get the *Valhalla* up and running and vice versa, and both repair jobs will take about an hour.

The problem is transporting the parts from one ship to the other. In order to do this, the group needs to get their hands on one of the magnetic trolleys used down in ore storage. It's probably the consensus of the crew that they'd rather fix the *Valhalla* as it's their livelihood and home, as well as the fact that they will probably go to jail if they arrive at the core systems in a GIC registered vessel which has been to a restricted system and back. Then again, some of the crew (after learning of Demidov's duplicity) might just want to get out alive and take whichever route is the easiest, taking their chances with the consequences. In any event, Demidov, who most likely is a bit unhinged by now, wants to find her sister.

She will try to split up the group (one half should guard the ship they're leaving in while the other retrieves the parts) and then she will order the smaller group to help her, saying that they won't get to use her ship or parts of it until they find her sister. At this point, it's quite obvious that she's starting to descend into some form of demented obsession. There's no way to tell how this will play out. It will take about an hour to fix any of the ships when they have the parts.

Cycles of Death

When it's time to transport the parts, the creatures will have awakened and attack the group sporadically. How it all goes down depends on what kind of gameplay your group prefers. If they want high-octane action, the Gargon ship was the Marine ship in which Rook's squad arrived, and it will subsequently have an armory which contains combat armor and carbines. If you're using this approach, the creatures will attack frequently and level three will be a warlike gauntlet.

If you want to keep it more in line with survival horror, you will cut off the terrain, closing security doors and the like, which means that the group will have to take alternate routes and at points split up. Some must head for the security section to hack the protocol in order for the doors to open, while another group guards the parts, and so on. In this scenario, there's no armory on the ship and the creatures strike using blitz attacks from hiding with much less frequency. The building of suspense or the knowledge that they might attack is often more horrifying than the attack itself. Exactly how long it takes for the avatars in each scenario to get back and forth is up to you to decide, and you must use a pace that suits your style of play.

The Dark and the Avatars

It is recommended that you keep track of the avatars' Dark score without the players having access to it. This will keep them unaware of how unhinged they're becoming. Each avatar will also have a description of an *obsession*. This will be activated when they have reached an appropriate level of the Dark, and you should take the player in question aside to explain how this affects his avatar and the avatar's actions.

As mentioned in the beginning of the text, it's quite possible that the avatars will turn on each other as one obsession feeds another. And some avatars might be perfectly fine, while others will turn into raving lunatics. Keep in mind that the Dark causes hallucinations on the higher levels and these are often linked to obsessions and traumas (old and ongoing). Avatars might hallucinate that another crew member is doing or saying something they're not, which in turn will feed their obsession even more.

Ending

Those who survive will have to go into stasis in order to cope with the journey through the ghost. In all probability, they will search the ship and conduct a thorough sweep to assure that they didn't bring anything with them.

When they have entered the stasis tubes and initialized the process, just as their vision starts to blur and paralysis claims their bodies, several or all of them will her faint whispers and see how blue glyphs drape the insides of their tubes. Through blurry eyes, through the glass of their tubes they will see the shape of one of the twisted creatures as it approaches. Then everything fades to black. Did it happen or was it a hallucination induced by VPS? Either way, it's the end of the road. The end of the story.

Dr. Seeley Fujiko

The mutated version of Seeley is barely recognizable as human. The creature does, however, retain some of the doctor's memories, such as the rudimentary application of technology. This gives the creature a predatory intelligence which allows it to sabotage doors, short circuit the lights and similar things. This creature is best used for flavor or as a plot device, as a direct confrontation would in all likelihood lead to the death of the avatars.

Aptitudes

Attention: 3, **Brains:** , **Brawn:** 7**, Cool:** n/a,
Quickness: 3

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence 2*,* ***Hit Points*** 30
Armor: 7

Abilities

Combat: 3 (Close Quarters)***, Engineering:*** *n/a,* ***Infiltration***: 2 (Stealth)

Interaction: *n/a,* ***Medic:*** *n/a,* ***Movement:*** 2***, Search:*** 1
Science: *n/a,* **Technology:** *n/a,* ***Vehicles:*** *1*

Attacks: Claws 5/2, Bite 4/1

Spec: Regenerates 1 hit point each combat round and registers no pain.

The Entities

These alien creatures seem to enter the bodies of humans, mutating them into horrid rampaging monstrosities. There are rippers, marls and genetic aberrations in the galaxy, but no one has laid eyes upon the monsters infesting the *Kagetsu*. No one has lived to talk about it. They feel no pain, have no fear and are hard as hell to kill.

Aptitudes
Attention: 2, **Brains:** 1, **Brawn:** 5, **Cool:** n/a, **Quickness:** 3

Secondary Aptitudes
Defence 2, ***Hit Points*** 23

Abilities
Combat: 3 (Close Quarters)

Engineering: n/a, ***Infiltration***: 2 (Stealth), ***Interaction:*** n/a, ***Medic:*** n/a, ***Movement:*** 2, ***Search:*** 1, ***Science:*** n/a, ***Technology:*** n/a, ***Vehicles:*** n/a

Attacks: Bone spikes 5/2, Bite 4/1

Spec: They only sustain a quarter of the damage from hits that strike the torso. Dismemberment is a good way to go when bringing them down. However, all of them can function for several minutes without their head, slashing wildly. Fires and corrosives do full damage and is an excellent method of dealing with them.

Marine Ship Armory
The armory contains combat armors and carbines. Each crew member can lay his hands on a set.

VES hard shell combat armor: Armor rating of 4, Durability 30.

Marine Carbine: Base Damage 6, PSD 2, Clip 50, Spare clips 3. These fire volleys of five rounds and all armor is considered 2 less when hit, as these are loaded with armor piercing ammunition. A volley can hit two enemies if they are standing close enough to each other and deals the same damage to both targets (within 2 meters).

Cpt. Victoria Demidov (NPA)

Aptitudes
Attention: 3. ***Brains:*** 3, ***Brawn:*** 2, ***Cool:*** 3, ***Quickness:*** 3

Secondary Aptitudes
Defence: 2, ***Hit Points:*** 13, ***The Dark*** :00000

Abilities
Combat: 2, **Engineering:** n/a, ***Infiltration***: 1, ***Interaction:*** 2, ***Medic:*** n/a, ***Movement:*** 2, ***Search:*** 3, ***Science:*** n/a, ***Technology:*** 1, ***Vehicles:*** 2

Obsession: She wants to find her sister and she will go to any length to do so. She views people who stand in the way of her goal as obstacles. She will try to play them against each other if possible, but will resort to violence if there are no other options.

Rook (NPA)

Aptitudes
Attention: 3. ***Brains:*** 2, ***Brawn:*** 5, ***Cool:*** 3, ***Quickness:*** 2

Secondary Aptitudes
Defence: 2, ***Hit Points:*** 16, ***The Dark*** :00000

Abilities
Combat: 4, **Engineering:** n/a, ***Infiltration***: 1, ***Interaction:*** 1, ***Medic:*** 2, ***Movement:*** 2, ***Search:*** 2, ***Science:*** n/a, ***Technology:*** 2, ***Vehicles:*** 2

Obsession: Full on war psychosis. He will see Rippers and other enemies everywhere and become very, very violent.

Gith (NPA)

Aptitudes
Attention:5. ***Brains:*** 3***, Brawn:*** 2***, Cool:*** *4****, Quickness:*** 5

Secondary Aptitudes
Defence: *3,* ***Hit Points:*** *12,* ***The Dark*** *:00000*

Abilities
Combat: 4**, Engineering:** 2, ***Infiltration***: 4***, Interaction:*** n/a***, Medic:*** 2***, Movement:*** 4***, Search:*** 4***, Science:*** n/a***, Technology:*** 1***, Vehicles:*** 2

Obsession: Gith will find an assassination target randomly and go into hiding, sniping. He might also find other objectives and become secretive, believing that he is to acquire classified information. This might lead to him abducting people, interrogating them about things they couldn't possibly have any information on.

Note: Rook has a marine carbine with attached grenade launcher and Gith has a sniper rifle. The sniper rifle has twelve shots and does 7/2 in damage. When Gith uses his stealth module all attack rolls and rolls to spot him is done with a -3 modifier. Only a trained scout can use the module. Grenade launchers do 1D+4 to anyone standing within three meters from where it detonates and any armor is counted as -2.

The Avatars
Each avatar will have the following equipment. Special equipment will be listed under the individual avatar.

Standard COG

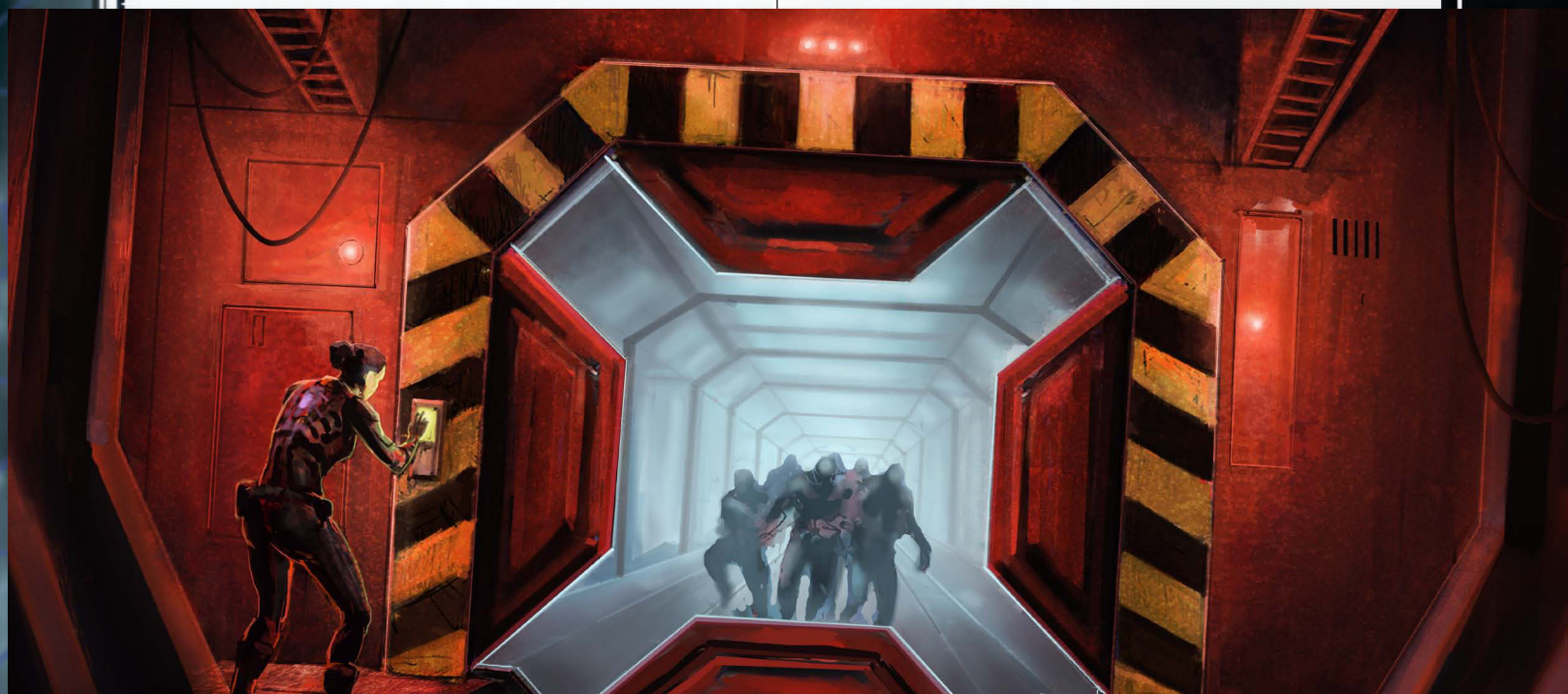
VES *(Vacuum Environmental Suit*) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30, *Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner, Comm-Link*

Communications Unit/Comm-Link
This is an advanced headset walkie-talkie. It has about fifty frequencies and a range of 10 kilometers. The signal can be routed through communications antennae and satellites, like all other types of communication, in order to be effective in long-range situations.

Environmental Scanner
This is a combination of the radiation and atmosphere scanner. This can take a sample of the air within a ten meter radius. It can't give a percentage of the air to substances/gases ratio, but it can separate all the different elements and identify them (if they're something which has been encountered by modern science and catalogued). However, it does give a ratio, which at least gives a scale to indicate the amount of the substances relative to each other. The scanner can be used to lock on a certain substance, using the substance density as a homing beacon. This is very practical when searching for the source of a substance emission. If the density is low, a Scanners roll (determine an appropriate base time) can be done to determine how long it takes (and if they manage) to find the source. Of course, substances can be sampled and put directly into the scanner as well. It can also be set to warn when the levels of a certain chemical (can hold six different chemicals in this warning "pattern") goes up or down in density. This is used to warn work crews when chemical levels rise to a dangerous density. Other than substances, it can also measure gravity and radiation levels.

Flashlight
Flashlight (COG shoulder, head and handheld).

Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2



Security Officer Kauri Hansson (playable)

Aptitudes

Attention	*3*
Brains:	*2*
Brawn	*2*
Cool:	*3*
Quickness	*4*

Abilities

Combat: *2*	***Movement:*** *3*
Engineering: *1*	***Search:*** *2*
Infiltration: *4*	***Science:***
Interaction: *2*	***Technology:*** *1*
Medic: *1*	***Vehicles:*** *1*

Gear

VES *(Vacuum Environmental Suit) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30. Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2, Flash light (shoulder and handheld), Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner Comm-Link, Lock Picks, Electronic Lock Bypass Kit.*

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence *3*

Hit Points *18*

The Dark **OOOOO**

Obsession: Utter paranoia. Hansson gets the idea that the crew might be spies and that her whole stay with them has been an elaborate ruse just to get her to the *Kagetsu*. She thinks that the creatures are some kind of GIC experiment. She will become antisocial at times and then emotionally reconnected, believing that something was in control of her. At times she can throw fits where she accuses someone of being one of "them". She can even pull a gun on her own crew members one second, and in the next focus on the situation at hand. She is anything but stable.

Sgt. Andrew Jensen (playable)

Aptitudes

Attention	**2**
Brains:	**2**
Brawn	**4**
Cool:	**3**
Quickness	**2**

Abilities

Combat: 4	***Movement:*** 2
Engineering:	***Search:*** 2
Infiltration: 1	***Science:***
Interaction: 1	***Technology:***
Medic:	***Vehicles:*** 1

Gear

VES *(Vacuum Environmental Suit) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30. Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2, Flash light (shoulder and handheld), Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner Comm-Link.*

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence *2*

Hit Points *20*

The Dark **OOOOO**

Obsession: With his background and all it entails, Jensen will become extremely prone to a sort of military paranoia. He will start to hear and see enemies that aren't there, accusing teammates of being MEC or CIM sympathizers and insurgents (especially if they disagree with his planning). There's a rather big risk that he will fire at shadows and into thin air. Overall, he will become very unhinged and dangerous.

Pilot David Xi (playable)

Aptitudes

Attention	3
Brains:	3
Brawn	1
Cool:	4
Quickness:	3

Abilities

Combat: 2	**Movement: 2**
Engineering: 1	**Search:** 2
Infiltration: 2	**Science:**
Interaction: 3	**Technology: 1**
Medic:	**Vehicles: 4**

Gear

***VES** (Vacuum Environmental Suit) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30. Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2, Flash light (shoulder and handheld), Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner Comm-Link.*

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence 3

Hit Points 17

The Dark OOOOO

Obsession: David will become fixated on odds and upping the stakes. If he sees a chance to take the crew members on a more dangerous route, he will do so. He might even sabotage the crews attempts in order to "up the stakes". He will of course keep his attempts and intentions secret. If confronted, he will start to ramble about the uncertainty of the universe and that he must see to it that the natural order of things are enforced. He won't stop his attempts even when people have become aware of them, and it might be safest to restrain him.

Site Engineer Jessica Copalis (playable)

Aptitudes

Attention	3
Brains:	4
Brawn	2
Cool:	2
Quickness	3

Abilities

Combat: 2	**Movement:** 2
Engineering: 4	**Search:** 2
Infiltration: 2	**Science:** 2
Interaction: 2	**Technology:** 3
Medic: 3	**Vehicles:** 2

Gear

***VES** (Vacuum Environmental Suit) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30. Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2, Flash light (shoulder and handheld), Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner Comm-Link.*, Engineering Repairs Kit. Fusion Cutter (compact handheld welding/cutting tool): Base Damage 3, PSD 2, Clip 15 minutes of use, close combat only.)

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence 2

Hit Points 18

The Dark OOOOO

Obsession: She will become completely obsessed with building and modifying things. The only problem is that her modifications turn out dangerous (overloading circuits) and she often gets sidetracked at the wrong moment, holding up while the group is stressed, fiddling with something. The biggest danger is that if given a chance, she will try to "modify" any reactor she comes across, which might result in it blowing up. She might also run off on her own if she feels that something must be tinkered with. The need to modify and recalibrate anything electronic or mechanical is overwhelming. She has no understanding of the danger, even when confronted with disastrous results over and over again.

Aptitudes

Attention	*2*
Brains:	*3*
Brawn	*4*
Cool:	*3*
Quickness	*1*

Abilities

Combat: *3*	***Movement:*** *2*
Engineering: *2*	***Search:*** *3*
Infiltration*: 1*	***Science:*** *2*
Interaction: *1*	***Technology:*** *2*
Medic: *1*	***Vehicles:*** *2*

Gear

VES (Vacuum Environmental Suit) with ISS and 1 hour air supply. Armor Rating 2, Durability 30, Merko L45 (Pistol): Base Damage 4, PSD 2, Clip 12, Spare clips 2, Flash light (shoulder and handheld), Mag-Boots, Environmental Scanner, Comm-Link., Mineral Scanner, Mining Pick: Base Damage 4, PSD 2.

Secondary Aptitudes

Defence *1*

Hit Points *20*

The Dark OOOOO

Obsession: Infinitologists oppose the aggressive mining industry, and being both a prospector and an infinitologist has left Cookie (like many other believers in the mining community) with some conflicting emotions. Cookie's obsession centres around his inner turmoil and his faith. In his obsession, he believes that the entities on the ship is a part of a new beginning, a simpler existence. By their careless ways, mankind has brought this upon itself. Cookie will at times preach of the "holy entities", that they have come to bring Man closer to the Life of All through The Joining and Age of Purity. At times he can refuse to harm the creatures, actually pulling down the guns of others. His obsession comes in bouts, but it's clear that he's a danger to the crew.