

INFINITE STARS

THE STARS WITHOUT NUMBER FANZINE



ISSUE 03

Infinite Stars

**A Fanzine for Stars Without Number(TM), Traveller(TM)
And other Science Fiction Role-Playing Games**

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Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the third issue of Infinite Stars, the fanzine for Stars Without Number, Traveller and other sci-fi RPGs! This issue is mostly a Traveller one, bringing you a whole new adventure for Outer Veil and Mongoose Traveller by Richard Hazlewood, abstract combat rules for Classic Traveller Book 2 by Paul Elliott and the second part of Richard Hazlewood's Freeman's Belt story – and yet another instalment of Brian Pichelman's setting, Dawn Sector, for Stars Without Number.

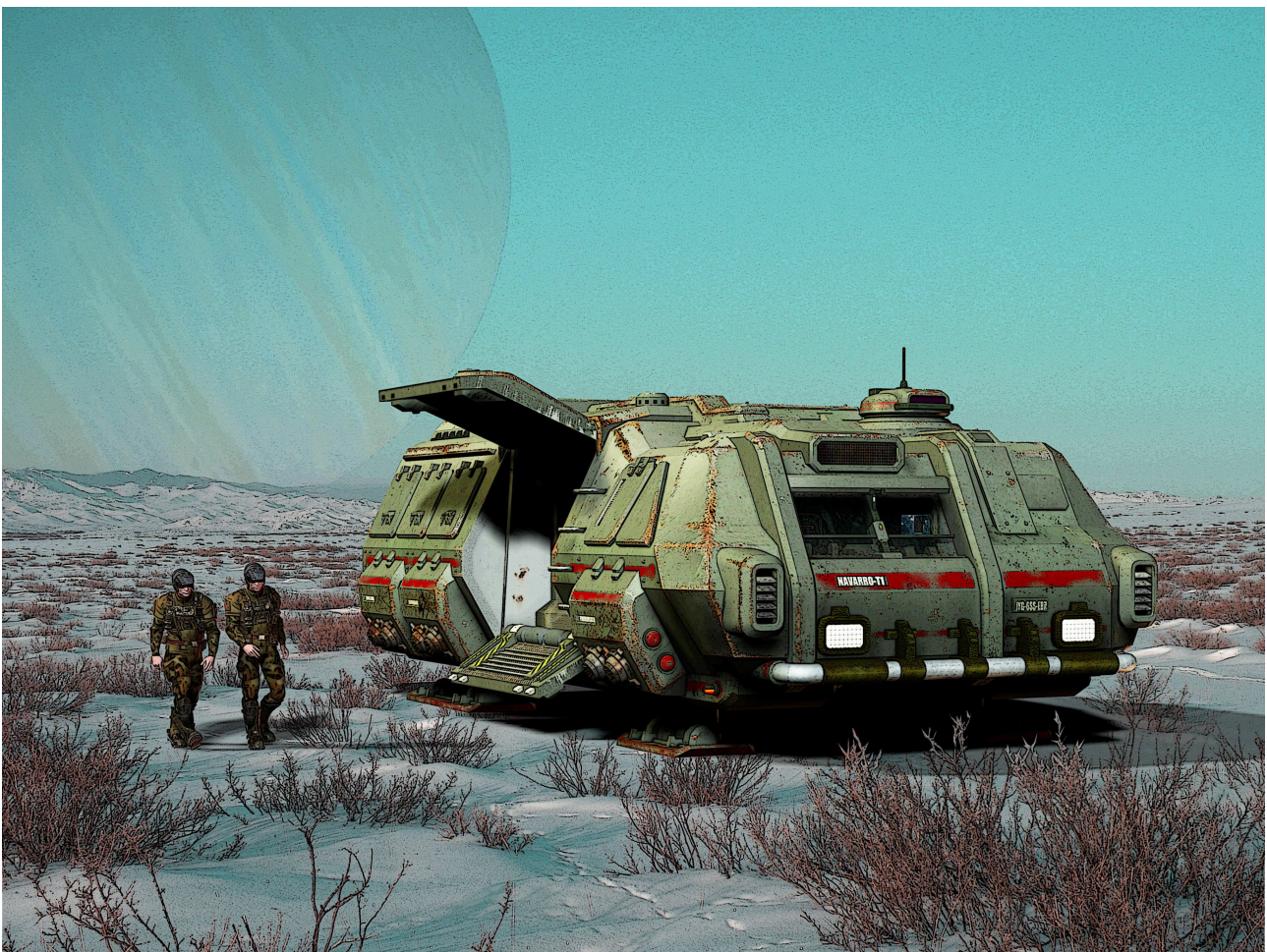
I also apologize for the delay in publishing this issue of Infinite Stars. This was due to an increased university work-load on me as I'm nearing the completion of my thesis in Geography and City Planning at the Tel-Aviv University. This has left me with less time for gaming in

general and editing IS in particular – but now, finally this issue is ready!

We are always looking for more submissions to our fanzine, from adventures and pieces of equipment to your opinions and always for artwork as well. You are encouraged to submit such material to golan2072@gmail.com, and we'll include it in our future issues as possible. The deadline for submissions for Infinite Stars #4 is May 1st, 2012, and the issue should come out later that month if nothing bad happens.

Our best regards,

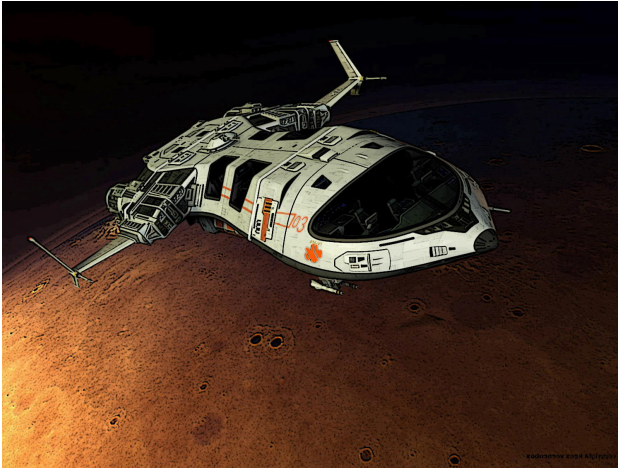
Omer Golan-Joel, Editor-in-Chief



High Adventure:

The Bronze Case – an Outer Veil Adventure for Mongoose Traveller

By Richard Hazlewood



Prolog – The Setup

The characters are visiting Novaya Pechenga (UWP C885649-7 Hot) a world orbiting 82 Eridani in the Beta Hydri subsector of the *Outer Veil* setting; but this adventure could be run on just about any mid-tech world. Their ship is having maintenance done. A failure of the life support system requires the complete shutdown of that system for several days. During the interim period, the characters are housed in a local hotel.

During the evening of the second night in the hotel, one or more of the PCs are exiting their room when they meet a couple entering the room next to theirs. The interaction in the hallway is a classic “move to the left, move to the right” attempt to avoid each other. With a wan smile the woman allows the PCs to pass. The woman looks like a supermodel and appears to be in her mid-twenties; the man, handsome, but not spectacularly so, is in his mid-forties. Both are dressed conservatively, but expensively. Make a Recon roll and use the Effect to determine what they notice. Note that they should be provided all information from lower Effect rolls as well.

Effect	What was noticed
-6 or worse	Nothing else is noticed
-5 to -1	The man makes an effort to ensure that he keeps his body between the PCs and a bronze-metal case that he is carrying; it appears quite heavy
0	The woman is naturally beautiful, not the perfectly symmetric beauty of biosculpting
1 to 5	Both the man and the woman are wearing Diplo-Armor
6 or better	Both the man and the woman are armed with body pistols hidden in their clothing

Later that night, about 2am, there is a loud commotion in the hallway and in the couple’s room. If any of the PCs look out of their room, they will see Emergency Medical Services personnel working on the man. He has a cardiac monitor on his chest and an oxygen mask over his face. While they are watching, his heart will stop and the EMS personnel will have to defibrillate him. He will then stabilize and be wheeled down the hall to the elevators. The woman, dressed in pajama pants and a T-shirt will be told that she can meet them at the local hospital emergency room.

If the PCs keep watching, she will enter her room and emerge a few minutes later fully dressed, in the same clothes they saw her in earlier, and carrying the bronze case. She will quickly move down the hall and out of site. About an hour later, she will return to her room and all will be quiet.

Part 1 – The Attack

Just before dawn, the PCs will be awakened by the obvious sounds of a struggle coming from the woman’s room.

Decision #1: Do the PCs look out of their room into the hallway?

If NO:

The sounds will stop after a couple of minutes and nothing else will be heard that night. The next day, when the PCs leave their room, the woman’s door will be closed and the “Do Not Disturb” sign will be hanging on the door handle. When the PCs return that evening, the woman’s room will be taped off with police tape and a small crowd of police and hotel personnel will be milling around. When the PCs try to enter their room, they will be questioned by the police. The woman was found dead in her room and the police are questioning everyone. The PCs are not suspects and will not be detained, but their statements will be taken. No further actions will be taken and the adventure is over.

If YES:

When the PCs enter the hall, they will see that the woman’s door is slightly ajar and there are definite sounds of a struggle coming from inside her room.

Upon opening the door, the PCs will see the following:

- The woman is fighting with three men. All three men appear to be armed with Stun Batons.
- As the PCs open the door, the woman performs a complicated martial arts manoeuvre and one of the men (Intruder#3) goes down in a heap.

At this point the PCs must roll for initiative and enter the fight. The men will notice the PCs have opened the door

immediately and one of them (Intruder#2) will turn and attack the PCs while the other (Intruder#1) deals with the woman.

Combat should be run until either all three men are down, or the PCs are down. If Intruder#1 is taken out of action Intruder#2 will flee, leaving everyone behind.

The following intruder statistics are provided for reference. Credits and equipment reflect only those items on their person at the time of the encounter.

Intruder#1

Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 10 (+1) **End** 9 (+1)
Int 8 (+0) **Edu** 9 (+1) **Soc** 8 (+0)

Male, Age 32, 3 Terms

1 Term Planetary Army (Infantry, Lieutenant)

2 Terms Agent (Corporate, Field Agent)

Cr 2,000

Skills: Admin 1, Athletics (Co-ordination) 1,

Deception 1, Drive 0, Flyer 0,

Gun Combat (Energy Pistol) 1,

Hvy Weapons 0, Investigate 1, Melee 0,

Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1,

Tactics (Military) 1

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL10, armour 5) and Reflec (armour 10 against lasers), Augment: Neural Comm, Weapons: Snub Pistol (1 spare clip), Stunstick,

Description: Intruder#1 is the leader of the group and the only one that really knows anything. The other two intruders were hired by him as muscle. Intruder#1 is after the case and will kill to get it; but he is not careless. He will sacrifice the two hirelings to save himself. He is a fairly short man with blonde hair, blue eyes and freckles. If the fight is going against him, he will use his Neural Comm to bring reinforcements.

Intruder#2

Str 7 (+0) **Dex** 12 (+2) **End** 8 (+0)
Int 8 (+0) **Edu** 5 (-1) **Soc** 6 (+0)

Female, Age 22, 1 Term

1 Term Rogue (Enforcer, Rank 1)

Cr 150

Skills: Animals 0, Athletics 0, Deception 0,

Drive 0, Gun Combat (Slug Pistol) 1, Melee (Unarmed) 1,

Persuade 1, Recon 0, Stealth 0, Streetwise 0

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL8, armour 3) with Computer Weave, Weapons: Blade, Body Pistol (2 clips), Stunstick

Description: Intruder#2 is an ugly woman with nasty scars on her face and arms. She is tough and mean. She will be completely uncooperative and combative, even when defeated. She has dark hair and brown eyes.

Intruder#3

Str 9 (+1) **Dex** 8 (+0) **End** 8 (+0)
Int 6 (+0) **Edu** 5 (-1) **Soc** 6 (+0)

Male, Age 22, 1 Term

1 Term Rogue (Enforcer, Rank 0)

Cr 200

Skills: Athletics 0, Carouse 0, Deception 0,

Gun Combat (Slug Pistol) 1, Melee 0, Recon 0, Stealth 0, Streetwise 0

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL8, armour 3), Weapons: 2 Daggers, Body Pistol (2 clips), Stunstick

Description: Intruder#3 is a tall man with dark skin. He is unconscious on the floor and will not awaken during the encounter.

If the PCs LOSE:

They will be awakened, rather rudely, by hotel security and the local police. The woman from the room will be dead on the bed, her throat cut. All three intruders will be gone and so will the bronze case. The PCs will have a lot of explaining to do but surveillance cameras and forensic evidence will eventually clear them of any charges. The adventure is over.

If the PCs WIN:

The woman will immediately grab the bronze case and tell the PCs to come with her. "There are more of them on their way!" Each PC will have 2 combat rounds to gather whatever they can from their rooms. Remember, they are likely wearing their sleeping clothes, so actual clothes and footwear would be a good thing to grab. In general, each PC should be allowed to grab clothing and 1 additional item per Dexterity DM bonus; if a PC has a negative Dexterity DM, then they can only grab a pair of pants and shoes, not a full set of clothing.

If any of the intruders drew a gun, the woman will grab it as she runs out the door. She will not bother to get dressed, fleeing in her pajama bottoms and t-shirt, her only concern appears to be the bronze case.

If the PCs take longer than 2 combat rounds to gather equipment, three additional intruders will appear at the end of the hall. They will all be armed with Auto Pistols and wearing Cloth armour. If the PCs try to fight them, use the Attackers from Part IV – however, the PCs should be *strongly* encouraged not to fight these guys, remind them that they are in their pajamas and their opponents are in body armor.

She will lead the PCs down the hall to a service elevator (the PCs didn't even notice that elevator before...), down to the maintenance area, and out a service door into the cold morning. Across the small parking lot, hidden in a clump of bushes, she will extract a small black bag, and then she will ask the PCs if they have a car. She will follow the PCs to their transportation and once everyone is in the vehicle and moving through the startown; she will seem to relax and will answer some questions as well as thanking them for their help and asking them about themselves. While the PCs are leaving the parking lot, they will notice three more men exit the hotel through the service door, pistols in hand. Two will immediately head to a parked Air/Raft and begin searching around it. The third will notice the PCs leaving and raise his hand to his wrist and begin talking into a Comm device – they have been spotted.

Part 2 – The Interlude

The woman will identify herself as Amy (no last name); this will obviously be an alias, but she will not give any further personal information. She works for a megacorporation (again, she will not give details) and will say that she and her partner, the man in the hospital) have been assigned to deliver the bronze case to a small research facility about 1000 kilometres away from the starport.

Their original plan was to take the rented air/raft (the one being searched by the other men) and fly to Antoli Bay, taking turns sleeping so they could make the entire trip non-stop. However, her partner had a heart attack; he will be fine in a few days, but he is out for this mission.

Amy is willing to pay the PCs Cr. 10,000 to help her deliver the bronze case to the facility at Antoli Bay. If they refuse, she will thank them for their help, leave the vehicle with the black bag and the bronze case and the adventure if over.

If the PCs accept, they will need to come up with an alternate plan to get Amy and the bronze case to Antoli Bay. The following things should be considered in their plan:

- Amy's Air/Raft has been identified and will be unusable.
- The PCs vehicle has been identified and will probably be traced/tracked.
- Amy will not take public transportation (Mag-Lev train or Aeroplane) due to security screening affecting the bronze case.
- Air/Rafts come equipped with integrated Air Traffic Control computers and navigation systems. Amy believes the people chasing her have the ability to use this system to track her movements.

If no one comes up with the idea, Amy will suggest that they rent a ground car and drive straight through to Antoli Bay. The trip will take approximately 10 hours. The GPS/Navigation system on the vehicle will have to be disabled to prevent tracking.



Kalina Bakelyte (Amy)

Str	8	(+0)	Dex	10	(+1)	End	9	(+1)
Int	9	(+1)	Edu	8	(+0)	Soc	8	(+0)

Female, Age 26, 2 Terms

2 Terms Agent (Corporate, Field Agent)

Cr 5,000

Skills: Animals 0, Computers 0, Deception 1, Drive 0, Flyer 0, Gun Combat (Slug Pistol) 1, Investigate 1, Life Science 0, Melee (Unarmed) 1, Recon 0, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1

Equipment: Augments: Neural Comm (TL10), Subdermal Armour (TL11, armour 3), Ally: Jack (Hospitalised Agent)

Description: Amy (an alias) has been a corporate agent for one of the larger megacorporations for the last eight years. She is tall with raven black hair and pale gray eyes. She is strikingly beautiful, supermodel beautiful, but it is natural, not the product of biosculpting. She is graceful like a dancer, and even when she fights, it is like watching a dance.

Amy has two items in her possession after the incident in the hotel, a Black Bag and the Bronze Case. Each are described below:

Bronze Case: The bronze-coloured case is not actually bronze. It is about the size of a standard briefcase, but very dense; it masses about 10 kg. The case has a biometric lock on it that would take 1-6 days to break, so essentially the case will not be opened during the course of this adventure. Amy does not know the contents of the case (nor does anyone else in this adventure).

Black Bag: This duffle-sized bag is Amy and Jack's emergency bag. It contains the following items:

Clothing – A complete set of clothes for a man and a woman, fitted to Jack and Amy – the clothing is made from Smart Fabric and contains Improved Computer

Weave (TL11) with integrated Computer/1 capabilities. A variety of programs are available for incorporation; the Referee should assume that any reasonable program of TL11 or lower from the list on page 92 of the Mongoose Core Rulebook is available for use.

Armour – Two (2) lightweight Flak Jackets (armour 6) with several integrated pockets.

Medkit – A TL11 Medkit as described on page 93 of the Mongoose Core Rulebook. Additionally, the kit contains the following drugs: 2 doses of Panaceas, 2 doses of Anti-Rad drug, 4 doses of Stim drug, 1 dose of Fast drug.

Weapons – Two (2) Snub Pistols with silencers and six (6) clips of ammunition each (12 total clips); and two (2) ceramic daggers balanced for throwing.

Part 3 – The Chase

Once the PCs rent a car (Amy will pay for it), they can begin the journey to Antoli Bay. Events will seem quiet during the trip, however...

The PCs are being tracked by a Probe Drone (see Page 95 of the Core Rulebook). The drone will track the PCs as they rent the car and travel towards Antoli Bay. The drone has a range of 500 kilometres, so it will not be able to track them all the way to their destination.

The PCs may make a Recon check every hour to spot the drone:

Identify Probe Drone Tracking them, Recon, Intelligence, 10-60 minutes, Difficult (-2)

If the drone can track them for four hours, the people chasing them will be able to determine their destination and set a trap.

Details of how (if) the PCs deal with probe drone are left to the Referee.

The weather on the trip is stormy and rainy, making the roads slick and treacherous. The PCs should make a Drive (Wheeled) check every hour to avoid a mishap.

Avoid Road Hazard, Drive (Wheeled), Dexterity, 10-60 minutes, Routine (+2)

Mishaps should be relatively minor and non-life threatening, but should delay the PCs in their trip. Suggested mishaps include:

- The Ground Car hydroplanes and spins out of control. The driver must make a Difficult (-2) Drive (Wheeled) check to avoid crashing the car. If the car crashes, assume it is going 1d6*10 km/h and use the rules on Collisions (page 66 of the Core Rulebook) to assess damage.
- The Ground Car blows a tire. It will take one hour to replace it.

- The Ground Car begins to overheat. The PCs must reduce their speed to keep the car from overheating, doubling the trip time remaining.

Part 4 – The Ambush

If the PCs do not detect the probe drone in the first four hours of their trip, the people chasing them will be able to organize an ambush about 2 hours outside of Antoli Bay.

The PCs will be travelling through a series of rugged, forested hills. The rain will be falling imposing a situational -1 DM on all laser weapons and equipment, the roads will be wet. The forest is composed primarily of Earth-based evergreens, but there are a few native plants eeking out an existence within the alien forest.

The ambush had to be hastily set up, so the attackers are not heavily armed. There will be four Attackers, two on each side of the road using the trees to provide ½ hard cover (-1 Cover DM). The attack will begin with Attacker#1 firing his Rocket Launcher and then everyone will attack with their melee weapons while Attacker#2 covers them with his pistol. The attackers will not retreat until 2 of them are unconscious or dead. If Attacker#1 is still functioning, he will not retreat; this has become personal for him. Even though Attacker#1 is using a Rocket Launcher, it will miss the vehicle but should be close enough to force the vehicle off of the road – the intent is not to kill all of the PCs in one shot.

The local Law Level is 9, so all weapons are banned. If the PCs are somehow heavily armed, then the weapons of the Attackers should have to be improved – Auto Pistols and Auto Rifles are suggested as likely upgrades if needed.

Attacker#1

Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 10 (+1) **End** 9 (+1)
Int 8 (+0) **Edu** 9 (+1) **Soc** 8 (+0)

Male, Age 32, 3 Terms

1 Term Planetary Army (Infantry, Lieutenant)

2 Terms Agent (Corporate, Field Agent)

Cr 2,000

Skills: Admin 1, Athletics (Co-ordination) 1, Deception 1, Drive 0, Flyer 0, Gun Combat (Energy Pistol) 1, Hvy Weapons 0, Investigate 1, Melee 0, Recon 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1, Tactics (Military) 1

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL10, armour 5) and Reflec (armour 10 against lasers), Augment: Neural Comm, Weapons: Snub Pistol (2 spare clips), Rocket Launcher (TL9, 1 round)

Description: Attacker#1 is actually the same person as Intruder#1 from the hotel; any damage he sustained from the hotel fight will have been treated, but he will still be wounded. He is a fairly short man with blonde hair, blue eyes and freckles. At this time, he wants everyone in the party dead.

Attacker#2

Str 7 (+0) **Dex** 9 (+1) **End** 8 (+0)
Int 7 (+0) **Edu** 6 (+0) **Soc** 6 (+0)

Male, Age 22, 1 Term

1 Term Planetary Army (Infantry, PFC)

Cr 100

Skills: Athletics (Strength) 1, Drive 0, Gun Combat 0, Hvy Weapons 0, Melee (Blade) 1, Recon 1, Survival 1

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL7, armour 3), Weapons: Autopistol (1 spare Clip)

Description: Attacker#2 is of average height but very stocky. He has close-cropped dark hair and swarthy skin.

Attacker#3

Str 9 (+1) **Dex** 8 (+0) **End** 6 (+0)
Int 7 (+0) **Edu** 7 (+0) **Soc** 8 (+0)

Male, Age 38, 5 Terms

1 Term Planetary Army (Infantry, Private)

4 Terms Rogue (Enforcer, Rank 4)

Cr 500

Skills: Athletics (Co-ordination) 1, Drive 0, Gun Combat (Slug Rifle) 1, Gun Combat (Slug Pistol) 2, Hvy Weapons 0, Melee (Bludgeon) 1, Melee (Unarmed) 1, Persuade 2, Recon 0, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1, Survival 1

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL10, armour 5), Weapon: Blade

Description: A veteran of the local criminal gangs, Attacker#3 is the leader of the enforcers hired by Attacker#1. He has brown hair and cold, brown eyes. He never smiles and speaks very little.

Attacker#4

Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 9 (+1) **End** 10 (+1)
Int 9 (+1) **Edu** 8 (+0) **Soc** 7 (+0)

Female, Age 26, 2 Terms

2 Terms Rogue (Enforcer, Rank 2)

Cr 1,000

Skills: Athletics (Co-ordination) 1, Deception 1, Gambler 1, Gun Combat (Slug Pistol) 1, Melee (Unarmed) 1, Persuade 1, Recon 0, Stealth 0, Streetwise 0

Equipment: Armour: Cloth (TL10, armour 5), Weapons: 4 Daggers

Description: An up-and-comer within the local criminal gangs, Attacker#4 is second in command to Attacker#3 and the most ruthless of the hired enforcers. She has dark brown hair and green eyes.

Epilog - Delivery

If the PCs win the battle, or there is no battle, they can proceed to Antoli Bay and deliver the bronze case. The building that they deliver the case to is a non-descript four-story building at the edge of an industrial area. There are no signs outside the building indicating the name of the company. Amy will go inside by herself and return about 10 minutes later. If the PCs try to spy out the name of the company, they must make a Recon check and a Stealth check to not get caught. Getting caught will reduce their payment by 50%.

Determine the Name of the Company, Recon, Intelligence, 1-6 minutes, Average (+0)

Not get Caught Looking for the Name of the Company, Stealth, Dexterity, 1-6 minutes, Difficult (-2)

Both rolls must be made by the same PC.

If the PCs succeed, they will learn the name of the company "AmalaCorp" which with a trivial amount of investigation will be a local FEconA subsidiary specializing in materials research and high tech fabrication.

The PCs will never learn the contents of the case.

If the PCs are caught trying to snoop around the company, Amy will only pay them Cr. 5,000. She will however, reluctantly agree to pay for any medical treatment for injuries sustained during the ambush.

If the PCs complete the mission, Amy will happily pay them the full Cr. 10,000 and any pay for any medical expenses. Additionally, Amy will reveal her real name, Kalina Bakelyte, and that she works for FEconA; she is now a Contact for the PCs and a possible Patron for future missions.

Dawn Sector: The Hippaflicks

By Brian Pichelman

The Hippaflicks are the pacifist fish-people of Flicker. They are very cumbersome on land, but not in the water. They move up to 100 meters/minute (3mph) on land, and 360 meters/minute in water (20mph). They also speak Bladish, and many also speak English.

Appearance and Biology

Hippaflicks are usually 5' long and have huge flat palms with almost immoveable fingers, which they use for paddling. Their feet are short and flat, because their hands reach to the ground. They have 2 antennae with glowing pink bulbs at the end; the glow is equal to a flashlight. Their gills are at their sides. They are very streamlined.

Hippaflicks have lungs, but they also have gills, and spend most of their lives underwater.

Unusual Biologic Abilities

Hippaflicks have an armor class of 7 due to their thick skin and cannot wear armor due to their physical oddities. Hippaflicks have a minimum Strength requirement of 14 and minimum Intelligence requirement of 12.

They are the most intelligent race on Flicker, having invented antimatter drives and the theoretical concepts that lead to the development of the wormholes.

They have two glowing pink bulbs on stalks coming from their heads. This provides 10 meters of illumination in all directions. These bulbs can be turned “on” or “off” at will.

History

The Hippaflicks are the newest intelligent race to emerge on Flicker. They stayed “hidden” from the semi-aquatic Bladish for many centuries because Hippaflicks lived in the trenches, a place not many Bladish dared to go. They now live in cooperation with the Bladish, on account of the fact the Hippaflicks cannot make tools on their own. They are the only race that spends the majority of their life in the water.



They travel off-world less often than the Bladish. Most Hippaflicks are Psychics; they developed their mental powers to overcome their physical limitations. They live in the deep oceans, and so the Bladish are not concerned with their powers. Their Psychics emerged around one hundred years before human contact, so while Flicker was never hit by the Scream, the Hippaflicks haven't gotten much of a chance to develop their powers (about postech level Psychics).

They are the smartest race on Flicker, but they require the Irons to manufacture their technology. Hippaflicks gain a +1 DM to their Intelligence characteristic.

Psychology

Hippaflicks are a pacifist race, and their religion reflects that. The Gilled God represents the peace that must be, no matter what (many non-Hippaflick historians believe this to be because of their complete hopelessness in a fight). The Shark is the opposite, being like a... shark.

Other Notes

NPC Hippaflicks will have 8 h.p. and an AC of 7. Randomly encountered Hippaflicks have a 50% chance of being a Psychic, a 35% chance of being an Expert, and only a 15% chance of being a Warrior.

Hippaflicks are of fish decent; i.e. they are more closely related to lungfish than to a dolphin.

Hippaflicks live a mostly hermitic existence in relation to other races. Their cities are ruled by singular leaders, considered some of the smartest beings in the known universe. Each City-Leader is part of the Council of Flicker. (There are 13 cities).

Hippaflick as Player Characters

Due to their bulkiness and inability to function well outside of water, I would not recommend them as viable PC.

A Less Travelled Road: Abstract Classic Traveller Space Combat

By Paul Elliot

There was nothing really like Traveller's original ship combat rules, with its acceleration vectors and computer-programming-on-the-fly. For me, though, the novelty was soon replaced with the burning desire to get on with the story and find out how it all ends. One screenwriter in Hollywood is a critic of the car chase, describing it as a gap in the plot, a gaping hole that leaves the audience waiting for the outcome. I'd been wanting to plug Traveller's 'plot gap' for years, but only recently come around to the task when I decided to jump into a Book 1, 2 and 3 only, universe.

The system I developed is an abstraction of the Book 2 space combat rules as they stand. An important point to make is that it leaves the starship construction rules unchanged; any book 2 design can participate in these abstract combats quite easily. I wanted to know very quickly, 'who wins?' without deciding which programs to feed into the computer, or which turrets should fire on which targets. There involves a short assessment procedure for any participating craft which assigns each a number, a Combat Rating (CR).

Assessment Table	
1-2G Drive	+1
3G Drive	+2
4 G Drive	+3
5-6G Drive	+4
Small Craft Weapons	+1
Single Turrets	+1
Double Turrets	+2
Triple Turrets	+3
Equal or Over 10 Turrets	+2
Equal or Over 20 turrets	+4
Equal or Over 30 turrets	+6
Equal or Over 40 turrets	+8
No Sandcasters	-1
Computer 4+	+2
Computer 6+	+3
Computer 7	+4

Assess

First assess the spacecraft to create a single Combat Rating (CR). This assessment is designed to provide a rough guide to the power and potential combat ability of a starship, not to track every weapon and fitting. Assessment can be done following construction, with the CR written down on the construction sheet. Please resist the temptation to look at the 'break points' in the Assessment Table and go on to design ships from there, angling to gain the maximum number of bonuses. The CR is a 'rough guide' and should be done after construction. Always add a +3 to the final total to create the Combat Rating. The lowest possible CR for an undamaged craft should therefore be 3.

Avoiding a Fight

If one ship wishes to avoid a fight then it may attempt escape to beyond long range. Roll 10+ *every turn* to succeed. Add +2 if higher G rating than the pursuer; +4 if the G rating is twice as high; -2 if the pursuer has a G rating twice as high or more, than the evader.

Combat

In each 10 minute round all participants get one attack. It is the ship with the highest CR that goes first. When ships engage in combat, the attacker (on a round by round basis) must compare his CR to the CR of his target on the table below. This comparison table gives a target number that must be rolled equal to or above, and if successful a hit (or hits) is scored.

Once it is determined that a hit has been made, check the result of the target roll to see how much damage was done. The hit location table in Book 2 is used to determine damage. Ships take turns in trying to inflict damage on one another. An escape attempt can be made if desired at the start of the next combat round. Remember that CR may change if a turret, computer or maneuver drive suffers damage.

Comparison Table	
Ratio	Target Number (2D)
Enemy CR Quadruple or Over Yours	12+
Enemy CR Triple or Over	11+
Enemy CR Double or Over	10+
Enemy CR Over Yours	8+
Enemy CR Equal to Yours	7+
Enemy CR Under Yours	6+
Enemy CR Half or Less	5+
Enemy CR 1/3 or Less	4+
Enemy CR 1/4 or Less	3+

Ship Damage Table	
Target Roll	Damage Inflicted
Roll Target Number Exactly	1 hit
Roll 2 more	2 hits
Roll 3 more	3 hits
Roll 4 more	4 hits
Roll 5 more	6 hits
Roll 6 more	1 critical and 2 hits
Roll 7 more	1 critical and 4 hits
Roll 8 more	1 critical and 6 hits
Roll 9 more	2 criticals and 2 hits
Roll 10 more	2 criticals and 4 hits

The Three-Way Fight

When a ship is in combat with multiple foes then the outnumbered ship has to reduce its CR by 1 for every additional foe. The limit on how many foes can be engaged simultaneously is limited to *one half* of the computer number (round up).

Hit Location Tables

Use the Hit Location tables given in Book 2, with the following changes; Small Craft, Crew and Hull hits.

Small Craft: A cabin hit may injure crew. Everyone onboard rolls 1d6, if the result is 5 or 6, that person is badly wounded or killed. Three hits on a small craft cabin result in the craft's break up and destruction. Any critical result on a small craft indicates Explosion.

Crew: A crew hit indicates decompression, fires, hydrogen or powerplant leaks and, more likely, hypersonic fragmentation effects. Up to 1D-1 crew are injured and unable to help in the combat. The ship can only act next round if a 9+ saving throw is made on 2D. This roll can be attempted at the start of each round.

Hull: The hull is smashed, air lost, structure damaged and interior components disabled. Lose a corridor or two, plus one of the following:

<i>ID</i>	<i>Hull Location Affected</i>
1	Grav-plates are disabled
2	An airlock is destroyed
3	Life support fails in 1-3 rounds
4	Inertial compensators disabled. Limited to 1G acceleration (2G if military)
5	Comms disabled
6	Long-range sensors are disabled

<i>Sample Combat Ratings</i>	
Ship Type	CR
Scout/Courier (double turret)	4
Free Trader (double turret)	6
Subsidized Merchant (double turret)	6
Subsidized Liner (no turrets)	3
Yacht (no turrets)	3
Mercenary Cruiser (6x triple turrets)	9
Patrol Cruiser (4x triple turrets)	8
Leviathan Merchant Cruiser (6x double turrets, 3x triple turrets, 4xsingle turrets)	9
Kinunir Battle Cruiser (8xtriple laser, 2xtriple turrets)	14
Launch (3xweapons)	5
Fighter (3xweapons)	6
Cutter (3xweapons)	6
Aslan Escort (8xtriple turrets)	10
Aslan Cruiser (10xtriple turrets)	11
Zhodani Escort (6xtriple turrets) plus 2 fighters (CR 7)	10

Other rules

All other rules regarding detection, decompression, abandoning ship, damage control, repair parts and so forth can be used directly from Book 2 as required.

Outer Veil: Freeman's Belt – Part II

By Richard Hazlewood

AUTHOR'S NOTE: The background for this story is based on the *Outer Veil* setting developed by Omer Golen-Joel and published by Spica Publishing and is used with permission of the author. In no way should the events or specific descriptions in this story be considered "official" or "canon" to the published setting. Any differences between the official published material and this story are the fault of the author. I would also like to send a special thank you to Omer for allowing me to play in his sandbox.

One hour before their arrival at Freeman's Station, Drake ordered the Maneuvering Watch set. Normally, she would have only set this watch during the final approach to the station, but with things as confused as they were, she wasn't taking any chances.

As she entered the bridge, she noted that all the work stations were occupied, including the weapons station. Normally that station was not manned during the Maneuvering Watch. She turned to her XO, who was sitting in the command chair, with a questioning look. He glanced over at the Weapons Station and then back to Drake and nodded his head slightly. She smiled in response, liking his thinking and initiative. Maybe he was going to develop faster than she thought.

"Mister Quetel, I have the Conn." She said loud enough for everyone on the bridge to hear and also to ensure that it was automatically recorded in the ship's log.

"Captain has the Conn, Aye." Came the young Lieutenant's response as he got out of the Command Chair and moved over to take the Pilot's station from Sveglanova as Drake took her seat.

Drake glanced out at the holoscreen, quickly updating herself on the situation around the station. As she expected, nothing had changed. The station image was displayed in the center of the screen. Freeman's Station wasn't really much to look at. It was made up of five standard modules: two for docking, one for power and command and two for habitation. Two Phaeton-class small craft were docked at the station, one at each module. The Phaeton's were universally called 'Slow Boats' for their minimal performance. One Boat looked battered and badly in need of repairs, but the other looked almost new, with the FNH logo prominently displayed on the small vertical fin.

"Comm, have we received any new messages from the station?" She asked.

"Nothing but routine docking instructions Ma'am."

The normal buzz of activity proceeded on the bridge for the next half hour as the Wyvern used her gravitic thruster plates to match orbital speed with the station and then started moving slowly in to docking position next to the station's Boat. Drake said very little, using the time to observe her crew in action. This was the first time she had seen them operating in any situation other than drills. She was very pleased with what she saw.

Things just didn't feel right about this situation. She had never been to any station where there was no banter between orbital control and a docking ship, even with a military ship like hers. There just weren't enough ships out here to make these things completely routine. But Freeman's Station was all business. All messages were curt and short and completely to the point. There was no personality at all. Everyone on the bridge could tell that things were not right on Freeman's Station.

When the Wyvern was within one kilometer of the station, Drake pressed a button on her Command Chair. "Sergeant Albani, proceed."

After receiving the acknowledgement, she raised her voice to the bridge crew. "We are going to launch our shuttle and use it to cover us while we dock. Should things go south, they will have our back."

"Captain!" Her Engineering Officer, Petty Officer First Class Armand Soliari, spoke up suddenly, "The aft airlock has just been activated."

"That's OK, Petty Officer Soliari; Sergeant Albani's people are going outside for a bit."

At the aft airlock, Sergeant Albani was making his final checks on the armoured vacc suits of his squad of marines. In groups of two, they were cycling through the airlock and regrouping on the ship's hull. Once everyone else had moved outside, Albani made a quick silent prayer to Allah and moved through the airlock to join his troopers.

From the outside of the ship, Freeman's Station was a bright, irregular blob hanging in the sky. The eight marines waited quietly as the blob got bigger and resolved itself into five connected modules. When the ship was within a hundred meters of the station, Albani gave the hand signal and the marines deactivated their magnetic boots and jumped from the ship's hull towards the station. The marine's vacc suits were equipped with small thruster packs. The marines, using small puffs of compressed gas, moved over the docking module and headed for the junction unit that connected the various modules of the station together. Two pairs of marines carried large boxes between them, guiding them towards the station.

The standard modules used to build the station had an opening at each end. These openings, called Iris Valves, were airtight but they were not airlocks. The various modules were connected together using junction units, objects resembling six-sided dice that had openings on each face allowing up to six modules to be connected together. Freeman's Station had been constructed using two junction units. One unit connected the two docking modules to one end of the command module while the other unit connected the two habitat modules to the other end of the command module giving the station the shape of a capital letter 'I'.

The marines moved under the two docking modules. The artificial gravity of the station was oriented so that the

floor of the modules was above the marines, but the artificial gravity plates built into the floor and ceiling confined the gravity field such that it was only within the module; all areas outside of the modules were in microgravity. Using only hand signals, the marines opened one of their boxes and began assembling a clear plastic bag over the unused iris valve on the junction unit. Once completely assembled, Albani's tech specialist, Corporal Jenna McKarty, moved inside the bag and activated the pressurization system. Corporal McKarty was a very short redhead; she was barely a meter-and-a-half tall and most of her equipment had to be specially ordered to fit her small frame; but she was one of the best techs that Albani had ever worked with. Slowly, the bag filled with air.

When the bag was pressurized to one atmosphere, McKarty opened another bag and began working on the external controls for the iris valve. Iris valves were designed so that they could not be opened if there was a differential pressure between the two sides of the door. Additionally, since this iris valve was not connected to a module, as an extra safety precaution, it was electrically disconnected so that it could not be accidentally opened. McKarty worked on the operating mechanism to provide power to the door so that the marines could open it.

After several minutes, McKarty had successfully connected her computer to the door's operating mechanism and disabled the alarm that would have notified those on the station that the iris valve had been opened. She gave Albani a thumbs up and waited.

While McKarty had been working on the iris valve, the other marines had been busy assembling the second bag and attaching it to the first. The second bag would be used as a crude airlock to allow the marines to enter the module without depressurizing the area immediately next to the iris valve. Once the second bag was assembled, three marines squeezed into it and began the pressurization process.

Once all four marines were within the first bag, the second bag was depressurized and the remaining marines scrambled inside and began pressurizing it again. After the bag had completely pressurized, the marines opened the door connecting the two bags, creating one large pressurized area with all eight marines together. Albani unzipped his flashlight and aimed it at the Wyvern hovering overhead. He blinked his flashlight three times, then returned it to its zippered compartment, double-checked his weapon, he signaled McKarty to open the iris valve.

Aboard the Wyvern Ensign Killig, acting as the Sensor Operator as well as the Navigator, reported the signal to his captain. Drake then gave the order to begin the final docking sequence with the station. Above and just behind the Wyvern her shuttle, a Caracal-class assault shuttle, drifted several kilometers "above" the station, oriented so that her laser cannon covered the station and all three docked ships. The Caracal was designed to support planetary landings and assaults and carried several close support weapons but she was also equipped with a

starship grade beam laser giving the design a lot of flexibility and some teeth in a fight.

As the iris valve opened, McKarty stuck her vacc-suited head "up" through the opening. She felt a moment of disorientation as her head was in normal gravity while the rest of her body was in zero-g; however, years of training had taught her how to adapt to this unusual situation and she quickly adjusted to the gravity shear. Seeing that the junction was clear and no one could see her, she moved up into the junction. The iris valve to the command module was closed, but the ones to the two docking modules were open. McKarty checked both docking modules quickly. The module to be used by the Wyvern was full of armed men, the other module was empty. The junction wasn't huge, only a dozen or so cubic meters, but with her small frame there was enough room for three of the marines to move up out of the pressurized bag. McKarty moved over to the iris valve separating the junction from the docking module for the Wyvern. When the marines were in place, she led the advance into the Wyvern's docking module, moving quietly hoping to catch the armed men unaware.

As she moved into the module, two of the marines that were in the junction with her followed her and veered to the sides, fanning out in the entrance to the module, moving away from the door and covering more area of the module; the remaining marine moved over to the entrance to the other docking module, covering their back. The four remaining marines in the bag quickly vaulted up into the junction and out into the module after the first group of marines. Albani was second from last through the door, behind him the last marine took up a rear guard position, covering their exit as well as the iris valve to the command module.

Within the module, things were relatively quiet. The first group of marines had encountered no resistance and had quickly found cover behind desks, piled up boxes and other items that were normally found in a docking module. As Albani moved into the module and took cover behind the same box as McKarty, he surveyed the rest of the module.

Within the relatively small space, about a dozen armed individuals were surrounding one of the airlocks; the Wyvern's airlock. The group was a ragged bunch in mismatched clothing and bits of uniforms. Most of the group was men, but there were several women as well, just as ragged as the men. None of the people had noticed that the area behind them was now filled with armed marines. A quick scan of their weapons and armour showed mostly small arms with a couple of men armed with advanced combat rifles. Most of the group was wearing some kind of armour, although nothing heavier than ballistic cloth. The heavier weapons were not well deployed around the airlock and very few people seemed to be taking advantage of the available cover.

"Amateurs" thought Albani when he noticed the lack of a rear guard and poor use of cover and firing arcs. His marines could have come right through the airlock and

probably taken minimal casualties dealing with these idiots.

As the last of his marines moved into position, Albani gave the signal and using the voice amplification feature of his vacc suit he yelled out "FNH Marines! You are surrounded, drop your weapons now or you will be fired upon!"

The people jumped and looked around, several of them swinging their weapons, looking for a target. One short man with a pistol raised it and fired at the box Albani was using as cover. Two quick shots rang out from the closest marine and the man dropped to the ground red spots spreading across his chest.

"Anyone else? You have five seconds to drop your weapons or we open fire!"

After a couple of seconds hesitation, first one, then the other people dropped their weapons and raised their hands. One woman tried to use her personal communicator, but one of the marines moved quickly and grabbed her arm, preventing her from completing the call. The marine practically lifted the woman off of the deck as he held her hand over her head. She struggled in his grip and balled up her fist like she was going to hit him but the marine must have said something because she got quiet in a hurry and stopped resisting. The look she gave the marine could have melted tungsten.

Albani moved over to the airlock, which was still open on the station side and seeing the closed airlock of the Wyvern, banged on the door three times with the butt of his combat rifle, after a pause he banged again twice. Stepping back, he closed the airlock and allowed the crew of the Wyvern to cycle over to the station.

Drake was the first one through the airlock, fully suited with the helmet sealed and pistol in hand. Albani smiled behind his faceplate in approval.

"Report." She said briskly, flipping up her visor with one hand while her other hand held her service pistol and her eyes scanned the inside of the module.

"Sir, we have taken eleven armed personnel prisoner. They were preparing for your entrance. They have been detained at the far end of the module." Albani pointed to his left and Drake's eyes moved over the prisoners.

Two marines were standing guard over the group of prisoners who were all sitting on the deck with their hands tied behind their back.

"None of the prisoners are talking so we don't know the situation in the command module, but the other docking module was unoccupied. We did not attempt to enter either of the Slow Boats."

Drake nodded and said, "Good job Sergeant. I have four people with me. I would like to leave a couple of them here with the prisoners while we use your marines to deal with whatever is going on in the command module."

Albani motioned for two of the vacc suited figures who had just come through the airlock over towards the prisoners. When they had taken up guard duty for his marines, he directed those marines to guard the airlock of

the Wyvern, which was closed again now that everyone was through it. Under no circumstances would he let anyone get onto his ship that didn't belong. As he and Drake moved towards the iris valve, he organized his marines and used another of his marines as a guard at the entrance to their docking module. That left him with four marines and himself for whatever Drake had in mind. Unconsciously, Albani had discounted the Captain and the two other ship's crew from any kind of combat operation.

Drake paused at the entrance to the junction, planning her next move. She wished the Wyvern had enough of the docking bags to allow her to send a group of marines through the other junction box and cover both entrances to the command module, but space was limited and if it hadn't been for the ingenuity of Sergeant Albani, they wouldn't have gotten onto the station the easy way.

While she was deciding what to do, one of the confiscated comm units beeped and a voice came out of the speaker box. "Jeskins, what is your status? Have the Funnies docked yet. What is going on?"

The urgency in the man's voice indicated that he didn't like not knowing what was going on. Drake smiled as she took the proffered communicator from Albani.

"Jeskins and all the rest of your pirate buddies are now prisoners of the Federated Nations of Humanity. You will surrender now. We have control of both docking modules. You have no way off this station. Surrender now."

Albani and Drake could both hear the cursing coming through the comm, along with what appeared to be a furious, multi-sided argument about what to do. At least one of the voices, a woman's, was urging surrender and several seemed to be advocating using the crew of the station as hostages to secure passage to their space craft.

While Drake listened to the argument going on through the comm unit, Albani signaled to McKarty and she went to work on the activation panel for the iris valve to the command module. Before the argument had come close to ending, McKarty signaled that she was ready.

Drake saw the signal from McKarty to Albani and gave him a wink and a small smile.

Pressing the mute button on the comm unit, Drake told Albani what she wanted the marines to do. Albani immediately started moving his marines and the two remaining Wyvern crew into the necessary positions. He used the two Wyvern crew to cover the remaining docking module and got his marines into assault formation. Within five seconds he would have what was left of his squad through the iris valve and into the command module.

Drake eventually grew tired of listening to the pirates argue amongst themselves. "Listen, you have 10 seconds to surrender or we are coming in there."

She held up one hand and as she started counting down from 10 to the pirates, she actually started counting down from five on her fingers to the marines.

With no change in her voice, she reached five and punched the air with her empty hand. Without waiting for word from Albani, McKarty activated the iris valve controls and before the door had even completely opened, she and two other marines were already through with the other two marines right behind them.

The command module was divided into two sections, the power section, containing the small fusion reactor that powered the station, and the command section which was designed like a starship bridge. Two-thirds of the module was taken up by the command section. The marines stormed through the iris valve and spread out through the command section.

The pirates were caught partially off-guard, but they reacted quickly. Two pirates, hiding behind control consoles, opened fire on the on-rushing marines with their sub-machine guns. The spray of bullets whizzed around the enclosed space, but missed their intended targets completely. Several bullets hit one of the control consoles sending a shower of sparks and shrapnel flying. At least one bullet hit a soft target with a dull, wet thud. The victim began screaming as she fell to the floor adding to the general mayhem. With quiet precision, the marines returned fire and both pirates were hit by several bullets which ripped through their light body armour and dropped them in their tracks.

Several other pirates started to raise their weapons and the situation was quickly degenerating into an all-out war when the leader of the pirates shouted, "We surrender! Don't shoot!"

The marines froze, their combat rifles shifting from one target to another, covering the six people still standing. First one, then the rest of the people dropped their weapons and raised their hands. Without any apparent communications, two of the marines moved to quickly separate the armed pirates from their weapons and then began searching them for any hidden weapons. A small assortment of knives and pistols were removed from their owners and then all of them were handcuffed and moved to one side of the command section.

During this entire event, Drake had remained outside of the command module and out of the line of fire. She much preferred to be inside with her people, but Sergeant Albani had been most insistent; even threatening, and reluctantly Drake had admitted that he was right. The station's crew had remained at their consoles, ducked down as far as possible to avoid the firefight.

When Albani allowed Drake to enter the command module, she came in with her pistol still in her hand but not *exactly* pointed at anyone. She quickly surveyed the module. All of the station's crew seemed to be dressed in identical jump suits with the Freeman's Station logo on the right sleeve and the pirates appeared to be dressed in mismatched military fatigues and civilian shirts, most with light body armour, but Drake was taking no chances.

She raised her voice, making sure everyone in the module could hear her. "I apologize in advance for any inconvenience to the station's personnel, but right now, I don't know who is who. Everyone will now stand up very

slowly and raise your hands. Move nice and slow people and we can get this straightened out quickly.

"Sergeant Albani, secure the rest of the station. I want everyone moved to the docking bay while we figure out who's who and what is going on."

Albani took three of his marines and moved to the far end of the command section and into the power section. After clearing the rest of the module, his team moved into the two habitation modules.

Flicking her tongue to activate her suit's radio, she said, "Mr. Quetel, please send the medic over along with Petty Officer Lingle and anyone else who can help identify the station's personnel."

One of her crewmembers had moved over to the wounded woman and begun administering first aid while the other covered the mix of pirates and civilians.

While everyone was getting sorted out, searched and moved into the docking module, Drake received a private message from Albani, "Captain, habitat modules are secure, but we have wounded people back here. There are three GSW's and someone who looks like he's been beaten pretty badly. I think it is the Station Manager."

Drake cursed under her breath, and moved past the few remaining people in the command module towards the habitat modules, radioing Quetel to have anyone with medical training to her location. She did the mental math as she moved to the iris valve. Her ship only had a crew of sixteen, plus the eight marines. Of those twenty-four people only a handful had any real medical training and she only had one qualified Corpsman. But she now had to deal with five injured people, guard the prisoners and she still had crew on the Caracal.

As she was about to step through the iris valve the entire station shuddered. Vacuum alarms sounded and red lights started flashing. She jumped back quickly as the iris valve in front of her slammed shut, almost cutting off her nose. Behind her, she could hear the other iris valve slam shut. Rushing back to the command section, she moved over to the station manager's console, which was almost identical to her own command console on the Wyvern. The two other people still in the module with her, one civilian and one marine were standing near the iris valve with a look of shock on their faces. On the deck, part of someone's shoe, and foot, was sitting on the deck, a small pool of blood spreading away from it.

Drake brought up the internal monitors for the docking modules as well as the external sensors. She was afraid she knew what had happened... Sure enough, the pirate's slow boat had broken away from the station, ripping out the airlock and tearing a gaping hole in the docking module. All of the iris valves on the station had slammed shut with the explosive decompression. The boat was rotating around and as she oriented herself with the sensor readings, the slow boat ignited its maneuver drive and accelerated away from the station. With grim satisfaction, she noted that her own assault shuttle was already accelerating into an attack vector and the Wyvern was cycling through her emergency undock procedures and should be clear of the station in a couple of minutes.

As she was assessing the external situation, another alarm sounded through the command module; the double-whoop of the Instability Alarm. When the pirate's Phaeton ripped away from the station, the resulting torque had put the station into a tumble that her modest stabilizing jets were having trouble controlling. As Drake scrambled to collect the data regarding the station's tumble, thoughts of what was going on outside faded from her mind. There were still over twenty people on the station and if the tumble was not stopped quickly, the station could rip itself apart.

Aboard the Wyvern Lieutenant Quetel was torn between taking the helm and taking the command chair. He knew he was the best pilot on board, but with the Captain on the station, he was also in command... He hesitated, unsure which position gave the ship its best chance of survival. Before he could make a decision, it was made for him.

Ensign Killig, from his Navigators Station, said, "*Captain* what are your orders?"

Taking a deep breath, Quetel moved back to the Command Chair and sat down, quickly surveying the rest of the bridge. "Emergency Undock! Get us some maneuvering room!"

Sveglanova and the rest of the bridge crew responded to his voice like he was the captain, which technically he was right now, whether he wanted it or not. With only a slight shaking of his hands, he reached down and punched up the external tactical display as well as the status of the ship.

Over a private line Killig sent him a message, "Arden, should we go to Battle Stations?"

With a start, Quetel realized he had forgotten the golden rule of a changing situation: Battle Stations is your friend.

Reaching down and pressing the 'all-comm' button, he said in as strong a voice as he could muster, "All hands Battle Stations! Battle Stations! Prepare for combat! This is not a drill!"

With the same hand, he raised the cover and flipped the switch that activated the Battle Stations alarm throughout the ship. Luckily, the ship was still at Maneuvering Watch stations, so activating Battle Stations didn't require the bridge crew to change positions. The only major change was the manning of the ships weapon systems and he had made sure that the Fire Control station was manned before docking, just in case.

Within a few seconds of the announcement, Chief Samataman Palahari, the Chief of the Boat and the Weapons Officer, reported from the Fire Control Console that Battle Stations was manned, minus the personnel on the station and that all weapons were ready. Apparently Quetel wasn't the only one who had planned ahead. With half of the crew on Freeman's Station or on the Caracal, they didn't really have a Damage Control Party, but all required positions were filled.

Quetel pulled up full tactical on the main display board so that everyone could see the situation around the station.

Things did not look good. The station was in an uncontrolled two-axis spin; her maneuvering jets trying to stop the rotation. The rogue Phaeton was moving away from the station at her full thrust of 2-gees. Their own Caracal was in pursuit and asking for permission to fire on the fleeing boat.

Sensors showed that the Phaeton was not armed and had three people aboard. His Caracal only had a crew of two but did have its laser cannon. Quetel's didn't hesitate with his response here, procedure was clear.

"Alpha-One, capture the Phaeton, do not attack the vessel. Harassing fire is authorized."

The pilot of the Caracal, designated Alpha One when away from the Wyvern, Petty Officer Chevien, acknowledged and changed course from an attack vector to an intercept vector. The Caracal had twice the acceleration of the Phaeton so while it might take some time to get the slow boat to surrender, the outcome was inevitable.

Quetel moved on to his next crisis. As he watched, the station was slowly coming under control.

Just when it seemed like things might be getting back under control, Petty Officer Senji Nakamura made a startling report. "Sir, we have bodies floating outside the station!"

Quetel cursed under his breath. He should have thought of this! When the Phaeton pulled away from the station she had ripped an airlock out. While the iris valves would have prevented the explosive decompression from exposing the entire station to the vacuum of space, those within that docking module would not have been so lucky. Switching the primary display to the area immediately around the station, he saw the two vac suited figures floating away from the station.

Nakamura, pulling double duty as both comm and sensor operator while Chevien was piloting the shuttle, pushed the status display from the two suits up onto the master display without really looking at them. After they were pushed, he had a chance to look at the actual read outs and realized that he had made a mistake. The display for Karin Deschard, the love of his life, indicated no life signs.

Quetel felt a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach but he still had a crewmember out there that needed help. The vital signs for Spacehand Beatrice Ruark, backup gunner, were weakening, but she was still alive.

"Helm, bring us around and pick up Ruark!" he yelled, too loud he realized to himself.

Petty Officer Sveglanova, now the primary pilot with Quetel in the Command seat, swung the Wyvern around the station and moved towards the lonely figure floating through space. Quetel could only grip the arms of his seat and wait.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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