MANDATE ARCHIVE

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BY

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BANNERJEE CONSTRUCTION SOLUTIONS

Space Stations on the Frontier

A frontier world is nothing without a space station of its own. It is a trifling outpost at best, a half-barbarous colony world that can service only atmosphere-capable tramp merchants and shuttlecraft. It can do nothing for the ungainly bulks of mobile asteroid smelters or naval warships. Some starfaring worlds are forced by circumstances or necessity to make do with a strictly planetary starport, but most worlds count it a point of pride that they should have a constant presence in the void above their world.

There are two major uses for an orbital station in post-Silence human space. In the first, an armed station can provide military protection for an entire planetary hemisphere, fending off pirates and forcing invaders to fight the station before they have the leisure to bombard surface structures. The space and power available for vast banks of targeting computers and ECCM countermeasures allow most stations to far out-range hostile ships, forcing them to engage and destroy the station before dealing with any surface defenses. For the many worlds that are wealthy and advanced enough to afford some sort of space defense but too poor to invest in a holistic planetary defense grid, a pair of well-armed space stations is the best they can do to protect themselves from raiders or worse.

The second major use is as a depot for ships unable to enter the planet's atmosphere. Mobile asteroid mining ships often fit this bill, and many worlds would be rendered vastly poorer without the steady influx of orbital mining products. Many worlds lack one or more vital metals or minerals that can only be found in space, and individual mining ships can't hope to efficiently lift down the thousands of tons of processed materials required by planetary industry. By building a specialized space station, the ships can unload their cargo there and let the station's dedicated lifters supply the planetary starport.

Even in the golden days of the Second Wave, many newly-colonized worlds struggled to build and maintain space stations. Without a jump gate to make transport cheap and quick, these colonists had to carry all their necessary supplies on the handful of ships that brought them to their new home. They did not have the luxury of packing along a thousand and one components for a space station when every spare kilogram of cargo space was needed for life-saving colonization supplies. Those pretech manufacturing devices that they did bring along were necessarily limited by the lack of a local infrastructure to support them, and in any case, they could hardly manufacture parts without the raw materials to feed them.

Bannerjee Construction Solutions

In 2305, Vikram Bannerjee was a minor research engineer working for Ralston-Huang Synergies, one with minimal prospects of advancement and several negative job evaluations. His supervisors admitted his ingenuity, but he could never be bothered to focus on a single system long enough to really understand it. The work bored him, and he was always pressing to move on to a fresh system to study.

Privately, Vikram admitted his supervisors were quite correct about his lack of persistent focus, but he had his own purposes, ones not entirely in alignment with the august gravity of Ralston-Huang Synergies. He accepted a buyout during a period of retrenchment and RHS thought no more of him. His non-compete contract was ironclad, and in any case he'd never come up with any improvements worth patenting.

Vikram promptly took his severance pay and bought several antiquated and drive-stripped shuttle bodies, two models of outmoded circuit printers, and the skeletonized remains of a depleted colonization ship that was sold for the cost of its metal. Within a month, he was able to demonstrate the virtues of his wide-ranging tech interests, as he disassembled his various purchases only to use their bits and pieces to build something better by far.

Vikram had a genius for salvage. From the scattered components of half a hundred different worn-out machines and depleted systems he could build sturdy, efficient station elements at half the price of comparable off-the-shelf parts. Better yet, he could use the dross and detritus of a colonial expedition to bootstrap the process, converting worn-out engines and empty hulls into the kernel of a useful station. These bare-bones skeletons were fragile until asteroid miners could bring in the raw materials for further development, but they held the key to building space stations where no colonist had imagined it possible. Bannerjee Construction Solutions was born.

The Lamplighter Foundation

While Vikram's proof-of-concept was intriguing, RHS promptly threatened him with a torrent of legal action if he didn't bring his precious schematics back to them at a price the proud engineer found insulting. The threat of legal action scared off Vikram's venture capital, and for a time it looked as it he would be forced to swallow his pride if he ever wished to see his plans reach the market.

His angel investor came in the form of the Lamplighter Foundation, a splinter group spun off from the Preceptors of the Great Archive. While the Preceptors wished to spread knowledge and practical skills throughout human space for the sake of mutual connection and cohesion, the Lamplighters had a more immediate goal. Many among them were convinced that the Terran Mandate was doomed to collapse in blood and chaos, and they were determined to nurture the seeds of a new age on worlds safe from the coming storm. To do that they needed colonies cast far from the core worlds, and Vikram's new plans promised to make that possible for worlds that otherwise would be prohibitively difficult to colonize.

RSH made good on its legal threats, but the Lamplighters had lawyers and money enough to hold them off while Vikram brought the

first of his schematic packs to market, tailored to the most common series of colonization seedships then in use. For a reasonable investment in the schematics, a colonial expedition could have a working geosynchronous space station within six months of landing. It was a roaring hit, and RHS gave up their legal efforts as the new influx of money allowed Vikram and the Lamplighters to buy the Mandate politicians they needed to quash RHS's suit.

The Poisoned Plans

While the plans were a great success, they also faced substantial danger of copyright infringement. Some earnest souls felt it only fair to spread the knowledge around, and since the fundamental good that Vikram was selling was the knowledge of how best to disassemble what men and women already owned, it soon proved difficult to keep a lid on the information. It helped that Vikram made so many different versions of the schematics for so many different models of seedship and colonization gear, but even this could only go so far.

Vikram was a proud man, and he was also a jealous one. It infuriated him that his efforts and those of his hired researchers were being stolen out from under his nose, worlds forging space stations without paying a centicred toward the man who had made it all possible. In a fury of practical spite, he began inserting subtle errors into the schematics he sold- delicate, near-imperceptible flaws in design and construction that could not be easily remedied without wrecking the other systems involved. These "poisoned plans" required a Bannerjee-approved system technician to oversee the construction of the station, or else they would introduce flaws into the final product that ranged from annoying to potentially lethal.

Some colonies stubbornly made do with the "clean" plans released for earlier colonization ships, but gradually it became more and more difficult to get the antiquated equipment involved, and even when they could, the collateral cost of using outmoded gear was often worse than the cost of paying Vikram his due. It wasn't worth saving a few million credits when it required the use of equipment that produced a ten percent greater chance of total colony failure than that inherent in more modern kit. Others attempted to reverse-engineer existing Bannerjee stations to come up with the solutions, but so many of them had been bodged together out of unique individual collections of parts that the secrets of one were of little use to the builders of another.

The Repositories

The Lamplighters were not amused at this turn of events. They recognized that their financial interests were bound up in Bannerjee Construction Solutions, but they could hardly expect that certified BCS systems techs would be available for hire in the interstellar wasteland they foresaw. They pressured Vikram to include some kind of fail safe, some emergency measure that could detoxify the poisoned plans in case of Mandate-wide disaster.

Grudgingly, Vikram acquiesced. A complete list of the errors and corrections necessary for rectifying the BCS schematics was compiled under close guard. These Confidential Construction Protocols were nicknamed "the Rigged Veda" in-house and watched more closely than the jealous engineer's own husband. It was an almost physical torment to Vikram when he was forced to see to the dispersal of copies among several remote locations on the frontier. Even then, he managed to see to it that only partial elements of the CCP were kept in any one place, enough to build a space station but with only a few of the more exquisite and advanced expressions of Bannerjee's genius.

These repositories were carefully guarded by robotic and automated defenses, with some rumors insisting that even braked AIs were involved in overseeing their security. They were to open only on the effective dissolution or incapacitation of the Mandate, as reported by an authorized representative of Terra. Given the suddenness of the Scream and the severing of links with the core worlds, it is remarkably unlikely that any of these repositories ever received formal word of the Mandate's collapse, and it might be wondered what kind of proof they would demand should any of them yet be found.

The locations of these repositories have all long since been lost in the chaos of the Scream and the Silence. BCS never publicized them greatly to begin with, and those worlds that already had functioning Bannerjee stations had no reason to go haring off after the secrets of constructing more. Colonization pressures were somewhat limited in the wake of pan-human disaster.

Bannerjee Stations Today

Presently, many frontier worlds have access to Bannerjee schematics, almost always of the poisoned variety. Assorted engineers and astrotechnical firms make a sideline of selling ostensibly-clean plans, but most of the time this simply means that the schematics they offer have negative side-effects small enough to be tolerable. Power inefficiencies and habitat discomforts that would have been intolerable to the humanity of the Second Wave hardly bear mentioning to populations that have survived the Silence.

Because of the emphasis on salvaging existing tech to build the station core, Bannerjee stations remain enormously popular in the new age after the Silence. Antiquated caches of pretech junk can be turned to useful employ with the right set of schematics, and worlds that could never hope to buy new parts from a richer neighbor can still aspire to raise a station with scrap and salvage. The inefficiencies and limitations that made a "poisoned" Bannerjee station intolerable to Second Wave humanity qualify as rock-solid reliability by the standards of the present.

Despite this, rumors persist of the BCC repositories and the marvels to be found within the Rigged Veda. Those remaining Bannerjee stations that were constructed by approved technicians are some of the best-functioning stations remaining on the frontier, and the idea that any and all future stations might be built to these specifications is intoxicating to a certain kind of explorer or technician. Every so often some band of adventurers claims to have found the coordinates for a repository, and set forth to plunder it of its secrets. Those few that return always report their sad mistake- and yet there always seem to be a few clean schematics on the market that are so much more recent than any of the common run....

Stations in Space Combat

The full details of handling orbital defenses are beyond the scope of this document, but it can be said that a functional, properly-armed space station can protect up to an entire hemisphere of a world. Between gravitic braker guns, beam weapons with augmented targeting and ECCM, and greater mass for power plants and cooling arrays, an attacking space force needs to take out all the armed space stations over a hemisphere before it can effectively bombard.

Drop pods laden with ground troops are sometimes launched during such engagements, but such orbital assaults are a risky tactic. The drop pods are vulnerable to station gunnery, and are cut off from any real air support until the invading fleet can batter down the space defenses. Orbital drops are most common against surface-to-space gun emplacements or as decapitation strikes against planetary governments.

Ordinary cargo shuttles have almost no chance of making it to the surface past a hostile station. They are vulnerable to station fire for five rounds while landing, at AC 9, with no armor and 2 hit points. Almost any hit will destroy them utterly. Drop pods are optimized for opposed landings and are vulnerable for only one round, with AC 4, no effective armor, and 5 hit points.

Ships that evade a station's sensors can make it to and from the surface without engaging the station. This requires all the usual stealth measures given in the core rule book, and it also requires that the ship avoid all weapons discharges. The energy signatures are a dead giveaway to an observer, and a single volley from an atmosphere-capable ship's weaponry is rarely enough to make any real difference to a world's defenses.

Most space stations function exactly as any other ship in combat. They have the same sort of statistics and the same rules for weaponry

and defenses. Stations are generally treated as cruisers for purposes of maximum weapon and fitting sizes and costs, and have no Speed at all. While they can move from one hemisphere to the other by means of maneuver jets and 24 hours of time, they are far too slow to chase fleeing ships, perform maneuvers, or avoid engagements.

Because stations have no spike drives, they are unable to use spike phasing. They always exist and shoot in phase 0, meaning that attackers will never have to worry about their shots going awry and will always be able to hamper the station's gunnery by remaining in the highest spike phase available to their engines. For this reason, most space stations prefer to mount weaponry with the phasing property.

Stations always get one free round of attacks on an incoming hostile force, representing the station's superior range. They may also target fleeing ships normally for one round after the ship successfully flees, for much the same reason.

Stations reduced to 0 hit points do not explode. Instead, they become incapacitated as if they had succeeded in a Tech/Astronautics roll to avoid detonation.

BANNERJEE STATION HULLS									
Model	Cost	Armor	HP	Crew Min/Max	AC	Power	Free Mass	Hardpoints	Class
Model Twelve	5m	5	120	20/200	9	50	40	10	Cruiser
Peerless	7.5m	10	100	30/1000	9	60	100	10	Cruiser
Shantadurga	15m	15	80	50/300	7	85	50	18	Cruiser

Model Twelve stations were the most common BCS constructions on the far frontier. Advanced armor composites were in short supply on new colony worlds, so Bannerjee experimented with design schematics that buffered the Model Twelve in thick layers of asteroid-mined ablative materials. The resulting stations were "softer" than a dedicated military orbital, but could take enormous punishment before losing hull integrity. Maximum station occupancy was limited, but remote frontier worlds rarely had need to accommodate more than a relative handful of spacers at any one time.

Peerless stations were a refinement produced for the use of more successful colonies, ones that managed to draw significant trade to their system. Much of the space filled by ablative material in the Model Twelve was given over to further cargo room, and the hab deck was greatly expanded. More advanced armor composites were also specified for the hull cladding. Some uninhabitable worlds that

bore valuable resources had "colonies" consisting of a single Peerless station orbiting the planet.

Shantadurga stations were a comparatively late development for a market that insisted on a Bannerjee military orbital. While not as sophisticated or efficient as a station designed by a specialized miltech firm, the Shantadurga was substantially cheaper and could be built from the same mix of salvage and scrap that other Bannerjee station models used. Crew space was increased over the Model Twelve in order to accommodate combat losses and damage control, and yet more internal compartments were baffled with armor fill. The scrap tech gave the Shantadurga a very tough and resilient hull, but a bolt powerful enough to overcome the armor found a comparatively fragile station behind it. Still, it generally requires at least a cruiser-class warship to threaten a Shantadurga, and such a ship is far more than many modern navies can field.

Starship Fittings

Fitting	Cost	Power	Free Mass	Min. Class	TL	Function
Fleet Targeting Array	40k*	6#	4#	Cruiser	4	*Gives +2 to hit to all nearby friendly ships*
Orbital Lifters	300k	10	5	Cruiser	4	*Moves up to 20,000 tons/day to and from the surface*
Sensor Shadowing	25k*	2#	1#	Frigate	4	*Conceals a ship from stationary sensor arrays*
# Multiply requirements by 2 for frigates, 3 for cruisers, and 4 for capital ships						
* Multiply cost by 10 for frigates, 25 for cruisers, and 100 for capital ships						

Fleet Targeting Arrays can be mounted on any hull capable of supporting them. Orbital Lifters, however, require a fixed space station in order to operate smoothly, and cannot be mounted on ships. Sensor Shadowing requires a spike drive to assist it and cannot be mounted on a space station.

Fleet Targeting Arrays rely on massive banks of ballistic computers to overcome enemy ECCM. A ship with a fleet targeting array grants itself and all friendly ships in the combat a bonus of +2 on hit rolls. This bonus does not stack with multiple targeting arrays.

Orbital Lifters are a complex array of grav barges, orbital beanstalks, and rail lifters. While they require a geostationary orbit over the receiving starport, they can shuttle up to 15,000 metric tons per day to and from the station. A surface to orbit transit requires only fifteen minutes on an orbital lifter.

Sensor Shadowing relies on the creation of metamass bodies at strategic locations around the energy profile of a starship. These bodies act as an effective absorption screen for most conventional scan frequencies. Manipulating them is slow, however, and so the ship must have a clear idea of the exact location of the sensor array they are attempting to elude. In effect, this means that the shadowing only assists against space stations and other fixed scan sites, and not against starship scans. Sensor shadowing apply a -5 penalty to all checks to detect or scan the ship. Sensor shadowing strains a ship's own sensor array, however, and applies a -5 penalty to all hit rolls and sensor checks while in effect and for 12 hours after it is deactivated. Sensor shadowing does not stack with emissions dampers or other stealth measures, but emissions dampers might affect ships that are unhindered by the shadowing.

Starship Weapons

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Power	Free Mass	Hardpoints	Min. Class	TL	Special
Braker Gun Battery	1m	Special	20	10	3	Cruiser	4	
Jitter Beam Projector	1m	3d8	15	5	3	Cruiser	4	*AP 15, Phase 3*
Photonic Siege Cannon	3m	6d10	40	20	10	Cruiser	4	*AP 20, Special*
Sunshine Field	2m	2d6	15	10	2	Cruiser	4	*AP 10, Cloud, Phase 2*
Devourer Launcher	8m/50k	Special	10	5	3	Cruiser	5	*AP 10, Ammo 5*

While some of these weapons are impractical for anything short of a station or dedicated cruiser, any of them can be mounted on any hull capable of supporting their power and mass requirements.

Braker Gun Batteries employ advanced gravitic principles and vast capacitor banks to redirect kinetic energy at a distance. While too clumsy to work against short-ranged attacks such as ship-to-ship munitions, the guns are extremely effective at repelling orbital projectile bombardments. Any projectile large enough to pose a significant danger to a surface installation can be targeted and redirected outward into space. The battery can handle a large number of incoming projectiles at once, and so any station with an operating braker gun battery can protect a hemisphere against any volley short of a that launched by a major bombardment fleet. Braker guns function automatically against bombardment projectiles so long as they are functional and manned.

Jitter Beam Projectors draw on large capacitors to simulate some of the effect of a spike drive enhanced metamass beam, pulsing the beams through high-phase oscillations. While unable to reach a very high spike phase, many stations favor them to help counteract the effects of an enemy ship's spike phasing.

Photonic Siege Cannons are special sublight weapons designed for cracking military orbitals. The guns are far too clumsy to hit a mobile spaceship, but they can wreak havoc equivalent to a capital ship's main battery on a hapless orbital. The massive power draw of these weapons tends to require a dedicated siege ship design to support them, and then a fleet of support vessels to keep it alive long enough to crack an enemy station. Few stellar nations have the need or wealth to build such task forces.

Sunshine Fields rely on a mesh of short-range MES lasers embedded around a station's hull. While the lasers are too weak and short-ranged to affect larger ships, the "sunshine" can prove lethal to attacking fighters or boarding shuttles.

Devourer Launchers are rare pretech weaponry designed to project a spray of ferrophagic nanite projectiles at a target. On a hit, the projectiles immediately begin digging in and eating the hull of the targeted ship. For each successful hit, the target takes 1d10+5 damage at the beginning of each round until the ship mounting the launcher is destroyed or the ships disengage. Armor and AP apply to this damage as normal. For example, after 3 successful hits, the target ship takes 3d10+15 damage at the start of each turn until the launching ship is blown apart, withdraws, or is evaded.

MODEL TWELVE-CLASS SPACE STATION

| | | | | **Power:** | 50/8 free | **Mass:** | 40/1 free |

Cost: 8,420,000	**Hit Points:** 120	**Crew:** 20/200	**Speed:** -	**Armor:** 5	**AC:** 9

Weaponry Jitter Beam Projector (+3 to hit/3d8+1, AP 15, Phase 3), Plasma Beam (+3 to hit/3d6+1, AP 10)

Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay

Fittings Armory, Braker Gun Array, Lifeboats, Cargo Lighter, Ship's Locker, Workshops, 3000 tons of cargo space

Operating Cost 421,000 yearly maintenance, 1,090,000 yearly for a crew of 30 spacers maintained year-round

This particular station load out represents a typical Model Twelve over a relatively poor frontier world. It gets occasional business from asteroid mining craft, but the volume of cargo is too small to justify an orbital lifter system. The braker gun array and energy weaponry serve to protect the population centers below from orbital bombardment, as the world isn't wealthy enough to afford a holistic planetary defense grid or a dedicated military orbital.

PEERLESS-CLASS SPACE STATION

| | | | | **Power:** | 60/5 free | **Mass:** | 100/2 free |

Cost: 11,445,000	**Hit Points:** 100	**Crew:** 30/1000	**Speed:** -	**Armor:** 10	**AC:** 9

Weaponry Jitter Beam Projector (+3 to hit/3d8+1, AP 15, Phase 3), Plasma Beam (+3 to hit/3d6+1, AP 10)

Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay

Fittings Armory, Braker Gun Array, Hydroponic Production, Lifeboats, Orbital Lifters, Ship's Locker, Workshops, 13000 tons of cargo space

Operating Cost 572,250 yearly maintenance, 1,460,000 yearly for a crew of 40 spacers maintained year-round

A bustling interstellar trade hub might be served by this class of orbital, with cargo space and lifters sufficient to empty the bellies of the most voracious asteroid miner or merchant freighter. Most such stations still retain a basic level of armament as an emergency fallback, even though a dedicated military orbital or system defense fleet is usually available to worlds wealthy enough to need a *Peerless*-class station. Most *Peerless* stations also retain hydroponic atmosphere and farming systems to serve the hundreds of transients and traders that often take up residence aboard the station.

SHANTADURGA-CLASS SPACE STATION

| | | | | **Power:** | 85/2 free | **Mass:** | 50/0 free |

Cost: 21,520,000	**Hit Points:** 80	**Crew:** 50/300	**Speed:** -	**Armor:** 15	**AC:** 7

Weaponry Spike Inversion Projector x3 (+4 to hit/3d8+1, AP 15, Phase 2), Gravcannon (+4 to hit/4d6+1, AP 20), Smart Cloud (+4 to hit/3d10+1, Cloud, Clumsy)

Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay

Fittings Armory, Braker Gun Array, Cargo Lifter, Drop Pod, Hydroponic Production, Extended Medbay, Lifeboats, Ship's Locker, Survey Sensor Array, Workshops, 1000 tons of cargo space

Operating Cost 1,076,000 yearly maintenance, 3,650,000 yearly for 200 trained military spacers maintained year-round. Military personnel have lower day wage costs, as much of their expense falls under different budget headings.

This *Shantadurga* station plan is characteristic of a wealthy world's first-line orbital defenses. Many such worlds are rich enough to afford a pair of *Shantadurga*-class orbitals to stand watch while additional planetary defenses are built groundside. Those planets that expect serious and lasting conflict often prefer more purpose-build military orbitals, but a pair of these stations is more than enough to scare off anything but a specially-equipped interstellar invasion fleet. This particular plan includes fittings for a drop pod to dispatch troops to any location in the hemisphere within 15 minutes, an extended medbay to deal with battle casualties, and a survey sensor array to increase the station's odds to detect infiltration forces early. It also replaces the bulky, cheap jitter beam projectors with spike inversion models.

TREBUCHET-CLASS SIEGE CRUISER

| | | | | **Power:** | 50/4 free | **Mass:** | 30/0 free |

Cost: 15,225,000	**Hit Points:** 60	**Crew:** 50/400	**Speed:** 0	**Armor:** 15	**AC:** 4

Weaponry Photonic Siege Cannon (+4 to hit/6d10+1, AP 20, Special)

Defenses Augmented Plating

Fittings Spike Drive-2, Advanced Navigation Computer, Armory, Cargo Lighter, Fuel Bunkers, Lifeboats, Ship's Locker

Operating Cost 761,250 yearly maintenance, 3,650,000 yearly for 200 trained military spacers maintained year-round. Military personnel have lower day wage costs, as much of their expense falls under different budget headings.

Siege cruisers are a rare breed of interstellar warship designed to take out enemy orbitals as a prelude to a full-dress planetary assault. While brutally effective against space stations, the *Trebuchet* class is helpless against smaller foes, and usually requires a full task force's support in order to avoid being torn to pieces by system defense fleets. These ships are even dependent upon the cargo lighters of logistical support craft. There are few worlds with both the wealth and the enemies necessary to justify siege cruisers- or their even more drastically specialized capital-class brethren.

Bannerjee Station Flaws

Stations designed from BCS plans almost always have at least one flaw embedded in the resulting space station. The poisoned plans were crafted with the same restless brilliance as the rest of Bannerjee's offerings, and it is virtually impossible to permanently correct these problems without creating a cascade of additional, even worse engineering crises. Most post-Silence builders are willing to accept this drawback in exchange for the cheapness and durability of a Bannerjee station.

On completion of a station, its chief architect must roll a Tech/Astronautics skill check at difficulty 10. On a success, he or she may pick one of the following flaws. Otherwise, the flaw of a newly-constructed Bannerjee station is determined randomly.

Each station flaw comes with a list of additional complications and situations that might arise from that flaw. When designing adventures for a world with a Bannerjee station, you might choose to add these complications to the list of potential adventure elements.

STATION FLAWS	
Roll	**Flaw**
1	Cranky Atmosphere
2	Temperamental Guns
3	Mooring Lockup
4	Unreliable Power
5	Radiation Leak
6	Sensor Defect

Cranky Atmosphere

The atmosphere filters are perpetually breaking down, requiring constant care by at least one tech for every two people breathing on the station. Hydroponic bays are not affected by this flaw.

Complications: One of the atmo techs is incompetent, and his bungling results in the toxic contamination of the station deck the PCs are on. Terrorists sabotage the station's vacc suit locker before crippling the defective atmo scrubbers. The filters are pulling in traces of a toxic world's upper atmosphere without lighting any of the warning sensors.

Temperamental Guns

Before each round of combat, roll 1d6. On a 1, the station cannot fire any system reliant on a hardpoint.

Complications: The gunnery board goes haywire, opening fire on any ship that attempts to dock or undock. Political schemers plot to wire the guns to bombard a rival planetside. A gunnery test causes a dramatic capacitor blowout when the guns fail to discharge.

Mooring Lockup

Each day, roll 1d10. On a 1, the station's mooring system is frozen, and it refuses to let go of any docked ships for 24 hours. Cutting a ship loose will do 1d10 damage to the station, bypassing armor.

Complications: The lockdown extends to the station's internal hatches, sealing people inside the compartments unless they can cut their way out or hack the lockdown override. The lockdown freezes airlocks and egress ports in an open position. Power umbilicals start to fry the systems of a locked ship.

Unreliable Power

Each week, roll 1d10. On a 1, sometime within the next 7 days, the fusion plants will fail for thirty minutes- usually the first time a significant draw is put on them. Most stations will be able to keep lights, air, radio, and gravity on backup power, but no other operations are possible.

Complications: The power fails during a vital maintenance function and must be restored before catastrophic damage results. The power fails during a maneuver meant to move the station out of a severe radiation wave or asteroid strike. The power threatens to fail during combat, and the PCs must smash or blow up several locked-on systems aboard the station before their power drain kills the guns and dooms the station to destruction.

Radiation Leak

Each week, roll 1d10. On a 1, one level or area of the station is suddenly subjected to a brief draft of radioactive gases leaked from the ventilation system. All not in vacc suits must make a Radiation save as per the core rules or lose 1 point of Constitution within five minutes.

Complications: The radiation is limited and fails to trip the alarms, slowly and subtly poisoning occupants at the rate of one Radiation save per day until discovered and repaired. The radiation destabilizes gengineered plants or alien beasts aboard the ship, resulting in dangerous life forms. The station's crew are altered humans who actually require the radiation to maintain health.

Sensor Defect

Each day, roll 1d6. On a 1, the station is unable to detect any ship that is not voluntarily broadcasting its navigation signal. Furthermore, a ship in the outer rim region of a system can recognize this blindness by piecing together interference patterns, provided someone aboard has at least Computer-1 skill and takes a half-hour to check the signals.

Complications: Pirates have a traitor aboard who induces this flaw at a pre-arranged time to allow for a close approach and boarding attempt. The station starts to report a half-dozen phantom readings during space combat. The sensors quirk to an odd scan spectrum, picking up a signal from an ancient alien derelict beyond the system's outer rim.

1d10	STATION ADVENTURE SEEDS
1	A Friend has a position of importance aboard the station, but an Enemy seeks to cause a Complication in order to justify a demotion.
2	Smugglers are moving a Thing through the station, when a Complication confuses their plans and drops the Thing's hidden location right in the PCs' laps. They must get it before an Enemy can find and retrieve it.
3	Hidden in a secret compartment in a Thing is a map to the location of a lost Bannerjee Repository. The Thing is currently being kept aboard the station until an Enemy unaware of the secret compartment can come collect it.
4	A Friend claims to have a clean Bannerjee schematic perfectly suited for creating a precious and useful piece of pretech hardware, and his business depends on building it quickly. The precise model of obsolete gear needed to make it is in the hands of an Enemy, however, and no other samples of that antiquated tech can be found nearby.
5	The station was built by a huckstering company that claimed to use clean schematics. In fact, they'd simply failed to realize that the flaw in the schematic was very subtle and unusually vicious, and involved the secret mutation of hydroponic plant life into an invasive, sinister form of life bent on killing everyone aboard.
6	An alien or splinter-culture warship turns up in a boiling rage. It appears that one of the pieces of scrap used to build the station was actually a precious religious or historical artifact of theirs, and they want it back. However, removing it threatens to bring down the entire station.
7	A group of revolutionaries seeks to seize control of the station and bombard a Place at the very height of a solemn and sacred public celebration there.
8	Scrappers used elements of poorly-understood alien technology in creating the station. That technology was actually the housing for a damaged AI unit, which has just awoken and is not amused at its current new "body". It seeks to kill its inhabitants unless somehow placated.
9	The PCs are commissioned by a Friend to retrieve a vital part from a Place planet-side in order to prevent a severe station meltdown. A reactionary Enemy seeks to stop them, and when they get back, a Complication strikes just as they attempt to enact the repair.
10	An Enemy is in league with a group of pirates, and has arranged for them to strike just as a precious Thing is being held aboard the station. In the confusion, a Friend is taken hostage.

Space Station Terms

Above: Opposite the current gravity.
Aft: Opposite the direction the station is orbiting.
Below: In the direction of the current gravitic pull.
Bulkhead: An internal wall within the station.
Compartment: A "room" aboard a ship or station.
Deck: Both a level aboard the station and the floor of that level.
Fore: In the direction the station is orbiting.
Port: When facing fore, the left-hand direction.
Hatch: A door aboard a ship or station.
Inboard: Toward the center of the station.
Outboard: Toward the exterior of the station.
Starboard: When facing fore, the right-hand direction.

Space Station Layout

Most Bannerjee stations are built with thee habitable decks in an oval-section cylinder. Highdeck is the uppermost and usually contains the fusion plant, backup bridge, and living quarters. Middeck contains offices, businesses, and the maintenance core. Lowdeck contains heavy industrial areas, the main bridge, and docking bays and umbilicals for visiting ships. Beneath lowdeck is a layer of artificial gravity generators, maneuver jets, and other fittings that are only accessible through service hatches.

For full maps of a Model Twelve station, consult the adventure Hard Light by Sine Nomine Publishing, available at DriveThruRPG.

The *Bruxelles*-Class Battlecruiser

An Iron Ghost of a Dead Age

The only thing you cannot do with a bayonet is sit on it.

- Tallyrand

In the decades before the Scream, the *Bruxelles* class of battlecruiser was a common sight on the borders of the Terran Mandate's core worlds. Whereas most fleet cruisers struck a balance between armor, range, and weaponry, the *Bruxelles* class was intended for extended cruises along the periphery of Mandate space and occasional strikes outward into some unruly sector of the frontier. Much of the advanced armor and ECM systems that protected other ships of the line were sacrificed for greater speed, endurance, and weight of fire. The *Bruxelles* was intended as an implement of discipline, a tool to correct those border polities or alien invaders who imagined that the insular Mandate was unable to defend its interests.

By the time of the Scream, the *Bruxelles* class was no longer a cutting-edge warship. Its armament, engines, and shielding systems were over a century old, and many of the cruisers had been in active service for almost as long. Still, even their dusty guns could wipe the sky clean of any civilian ships turned raider and smash the defensive orbitals of hostile frontier worlds. A single *Bruxelles* was amply able to enforce the Mandate's peace on any stellar polity that lacked military-grade pretech shipyards. The fragile battlecruisers wouldn't last long against a modern Mandate dreadnought, and still less could they withstand the experimental mindships that the forges of Old Terra were fashioning toward the end of the Second Wave, but they were sufficient to deal with border rabble.

The Scream caught many of these ships far from port. No one can be certain how many thousands of these battlecruisers were left to die in vain attempts to reach the dead worlds that were their homes, or how many were made into candles of metallic vapor by the blind rage of Terra's autonomic defense grid. Even those who managed to find shelter on some frontier world soon found their precious ship stripped to her deckplates for the priceless pretech parts she contained. A few polities tried to keep their prizes running long enough to plunder their neighbors, but in the end, virtually all of these ancient guardians were torn to pieces and scavenged for parts that young worlds could not hope to craft.

Still, every so often, a *Bruxelles* is found deep in the cold void of a system's outer rim or hanging silently in orbit around a dead world. Most of these ships are crippled in some way, either wounded in battle or worn down too far to make drillspace under her own power. Her crew is almost always long since silent in the perfect preservation of airless, icy night, and her engines are dead or sleeping the long sleep of centuries. But with the right parts, the right help, and the right mad ambition, these ships can rise again to cut a red road through the stars.

Operational Parameters

The external hull of the *Bruxelles* class occasionally varied from shipyard to shipyard, particularly as the design aged and the Terran Mandate began to fit military components into salvaged and retrofitted civilian hulls. Without the omen shields and bleedplate standard to more balanced Mandate warships, the *Bruxelles* class could afford to use the softer-skinned shells of civilian craft, and budgetary constraints increasingly pressed on the later run of battlecruisers.

The original *Bruxelles* was approximately three hundred meters in length, seventy meters in depth, and fifty meters in width, the shape forming a rounded wedge with blisters along the ventral side for her planetary bombardment armament and shuttle docking bays. Three hundred personnel formed her standard complement of crew, though her life support systems were rated for up to sixteen hundred before her atmosphere and consumables started to fail under the strain. Gengineered plant and fungal life was designed to maintain the ship's complement indefinitely while under way, with biological atmosphere scrubbers and edible force-grown organics that could be cycled for years before needing an infusion of external biomass. The *Bruxelles* could theoretically stay in space with sixteen hundred humans aboard for up to five years without resupply. In practice, even pretech maintenance technology could not keep a warship flying that long under combat conditions without some sort of repair. Those captains who pushed their ships to the limit usually found themselves dead in space, alone and helpless in a frontier system unable to provide the necessary parts to revive a crippled warship.

The *Bruxelles* was intended to be a fist, and while its armor was weak by pretech military standards its enormous weight of gunnery could make it a threat to any ship of a comparable class. Engaging a *Bruxelles* was a bad exchange for even the most bloodthirsty frontier raider or alien invader. While it might be possible to cripple the human battlecruiser with sufficient firepower and gunner's luck, any attacker was very likely to be mortally wounded as well. Most troublemakers found it better to seek softer prey in a different system, assuming the *Bruxelles* didn't run them down first.

The *Bruxelles* was a particular threat to hostile space stations, orbitals, and asteroid bases. The Ramrod weapons system it carried was optimized for penetrating the hulls of stationary, drill-incapable targets. Very few frontier worlds had access to the sophisticated omen shields necessary to nullify such a bombardment, and still less did pirates and border raiders. The *Bruxelles* could crack the shell of the toughest renegade orbital, and after the sky had been cleared of defensive stations there was little to stop an orbital bombardment beyond the few surface defenses and braker guns the world could manage to muster. These simple defensive arrays were no match for the grav-shear munitions the *Bruxelles* carried, massive bombardment missiles capable of cutting through the defensive screen of braker guns and AA lasers sported by most worlds. A single hit was sufficient to erase a city.

The Culture of the Ship

Unsurprisingly, the presence of a *Bruxelles*-class cruiser in a frontier world's star system was unwelcome to most locals. A few border polities had the strength to keep these Mandate enforcers outside of their claimed space, but most frontier worlds were forced to simply tolerate the presence of the ship and acquiesce to any demands the Mandate might make through it. Mandate rules of engagement theoretically prohibited the planetary bombardment of civilians, but in practice, any border world that dared to present a serious threat to the Mandate could expect to find its population centers reduced to ash and bitter memories.

The officers and ratings of a *Bruxelles* were often separated from the core worlds of the Mandate for years on end, and the Mandate Navy went to exceptional lengths to select dedicated, loyal men and women for the crew. It was not impossible for such ships to be years away from the nearest naval base or significant fleet support, and the crew had to be capable of maintaining the Mandate's interests even when far outside the reach of its mandarins. In many cases, this dedication curdled to a kind of blind chauvinism, a contempt for the savage "colonials" and a casual indifference to the lives of frontier dwellers. Fellow crew became precious reminders of the more civilized worlds they had left behind, and the preservation of the ship and her crew became infinitely more important than the lives of a few hundred thousand half-feral colonists.

Some such ships became indistinguishable from the pirates they were intended to combat. They levied "Mandate taxes" on the worlds they encountered, skimming the best the planet had to offer to keep the ship in fighting trim and fill her holds with plunder for their distant masters. They razed military shipyards and flattened "excess military construction" in order to ensure that the world could not trouble its neighbors or the Mandate, and if such exactions left the planet vulnerable to raiders or aliens, it was a regrettably necessary price to pay for interstellar peace. These ships often made contact with remote Perimeter agencies, taking on their enigmatic spies and operatives to strike at some well-hidden maltech development lab or burgeoning abomination. They scourged the worlds that they passed.

A few *Bruxelles*-class ships followed a different path, however, captained by officers with more sympathy to the frontier or crewed by men and women more willing to see the primitive colonials as equals rather than sheep to be sheared. These ships often became the unofficial arbiters of peace in frontier sectors, ensuring peaceful trade and diplomacy among their charges and defending them against outsiders who would seek to prey on them. Some of these ships gradually passed out of the reach of the Mandate navy entirely, reliant on unofficial parts requisitions and friends at headquarters to obtain vital spares and taking on new generations of crews from the local worlds. So long as their sectors remained quiet and a reasonable flow of taxes came in to the nearest Mandate collection depot the brass were willing to let certain unorthodoxies pass without comment.

Ship's Complement

A *Bruxelles* could be flown with as few as fifty spacers, though only a desperate captain would take her into battle with such a minimal crew. Three hundred spacers filled out its complement under ordinary conditions. For further details on the organization, crew, and daily operation of a warship and its departments, a GM may consult the *Skyward Steel* supplement for naval campaigns.

The ship's commanding officer was usually an O-6 Captain, and the executive officer was commonly an O-5 Commander. During the waning years of the Second Wave, these ranks sometimes lessened a grade as the Mandate grew stretched for manpower and experienced officers.

Each department was headed by an O-4 Lieutenant Commander, with an O-3 Lieutenant department executive to help oversee the crew in the department and to season the lieutenant up for their own eventual department command. The senior enlisted in each department usually qualified as an E-7 Chief Petty Officer at the least, though on very long cruises it was not unknown for warrant officers to serve in the more technical departments.

Each department had its own complement of ratings, usually leavened with a few O-1 Midshipmen getting in their training cruise. Given the very long tours that most *Bruxelles*-class ships encountered, their midshipmen tended to be those unlucky enough to draw the ire of their academy instructors or those reckless enough to crave the excitement of the frontier even if it cost them four or five years of humble rank.

COMPLEMENTS	
Department	**Crew Minimum/Normal**
Administration	0/10
Astrogation	1/12
Chaplaincy	0/1
Communications	8/21
Deck	21/88
Engineering	8/21
Intelligence	0/6
Marine	0/25
Medical	0/15
Science	0/6
Supply	0/6
Training	0/6
Weapons	10/60

Minimum crew totals give the absolute minimum necessary to pilot the ship through a spike drill or fight her with all weapons firing. Only absolute necessity will force a captain into operating with such a feeble crew, however, as casualties during a hot battle or difficult drill can render his ship utterly unable to drill or defend herself. Even without battle losses, attempting a seven-day drill with a single amphetamine-pumped astrogator is not something conducive to a ship's good health.

Using The Ship

For a GM, a *Bruxelles*-class cruiser is largely useful as a macguffin. Included here are a number of different groups who might all be eager to get their hands on such a ship.

Expansionist planetary governments would be ecstatic at the chance to get a cruiser capable of smashing their neighbors' defense orbitals and bombarding their population centers. The braker guns and defensive lasers used in the post-Scream era are no use against the *Bruxelles'* grav-shear munitions, so a world with one of these cruisers in their fleet is an unstoppable threat to any but the most powerful and advanced polities.

However, the spare parts and replacement munitions for the *Bruxelles* are probably unavailable to any such expansionist group. Combined with the enormous cost of keeping the cruiser flying on postech spares and maintenance, this means that any such would-be conqueror must use the ship quickly, before it breaks down or exhausts the world with its maintenance costs. The longer it takes for the ship to subdue a foreign world, the bigger the chance that something irreplaceable will break down and render the entire war machine useless as anything but spare parts.

Governments that intend to use a *Bruxelles* for conquest also cannot afford to let their neighbors realize what's going on until the ship is ready to attack. While the cruiser can effortlessly crush most ships that a post-Scream polity might field, it remains vulnerable to treachery and sabotage. If enemies can get agents into its staging base or worse still, aboard the ship itself, the entire warship can be taken out before it's had a chance to fire its first shot.

Ambitious researchers would all love to get their hands on a *Bruxelles*, even one incapable of combat. While most of the pretech components of the ship cannot be replicated by postech engineering, enough remains to fuel decades worth of examination on most technologically advanced planets. Even the hope of being able to reverse-engineer a device into components that could be built using local resources is enough to set scores of local academies and universities off on a race to obtain the ship.

Not all of these researchers are going to be inclined to share. Particularly with those institutions controlled by a world's government, there is going to be a powerful inclination to ensure that no one else gets access to the ship's technology. Even an ostensible shared research expedition is going to be colored by schemes to get exclusive access to the juiciest technology.

Beyond this, what happens if these researchers discovery that they can repair the *Bruxelles* and get it into fighting condition? Not every scientist is going to be willing to lead a pinch-credit existence of wrangling for grants and laboring in obscurity when such a marvelous tool of social control is placed within their grasp.

Zealous separatists or religious extremists are also going to be eager to seize a *Bruxelles*. These groups are liable to have even more difficulty keeping the ship running than would a full-fledged planetary government, but few of them have any interest in foreign conquests. They're more likely to use the ship as a threat, demanding concessions from the local government and using the ship's guns to coerce

obedience. Simply keeping the ship in orbit around a world leaves minimal maintenance demands, and what local ruler can afford to test the ship's condition when a single grav-shear munition could wipe out his capital?

These extremists tend to be vulnerable to infiltration and sabotage from below. While many such groups have led clandestine existences long enough to have good internal security against ordinary infiltrators, they aren't spacers, and they don't instinctively understand the thousand and one ways that a warship can be reduced to so much scrap. Properly-trained saboteurs can hope to get close enough to something vital to disable the ship's weaponry and leave it vulnerable to boarding attacks from local naval forces. Of course, such saboteurs must then stay alive long enough for the cavalry to arrive.

Hostile aliens can also find use for a *Bruxelles*. Some races still nurse old, bitter grudges against humanity for their centuries of dominance in this section of the galaxy, and others are younger races who see no reason not to push these hairless apes back from stars that ought rightfully to belong to them. What better irony than using one of their own warships to drive them out?

Very few alien races were as sophisticated as Terran humanity before the Scream, but those without substantial numbers of psychics often weathered the disaster better than mankind. These surviving alien polities can sometimes muster the sheer volume of resources necessary to get a *Bruxelles* back into fighting trim, making up on volume and excess what they lack in refined technology. Such ships are an ungainly mass of accretions and secondary systems crusted over the original hull and are usually much more vulnerable to enemy ships. Still, they have the guns to serve their purpose, and neither orbitals nor planetary settlements can withstand their ancient anger.

While alien crews are usually impossible to infiltrate in the same way human extremists might be deceived, their ignorance of human engineering often opens up vulnerabilities in the ship's systems. A group that manages to lay hands on the refit plans and modification specs for an alien-restored *Bruxelles* can often spot flaws that are susceptible to a boarding attack or a deep-space hull sabotage strike by a team in shielded suits.

Interstellar pirates, perversely, have less use for a *Bruxelles* than many other possessors. Using such a ship as a commerce raider is a losing proposition, as there is no hope of seizing enough plunder to actually keep the ship flying. Precious few pirate kings have enough wealth and technical expertise to actually keep a pretech warship in fighting trim, and trying to hold on to it for long would simply invite the desperate attention of every stellar polity within drill range of the pirate base.

For some raiders who stumble across such a ship, they have no intention of keeping it flying for long. They'll ride the ship like a suicide boat, slashing apart the local navy and defensive orbitals in a blaze of blind violence before the ship finally stutters to a halt or is crippled by a lucky shot. After they've torn loose the more valuable salvage inside, they'll flee in their old ships, now with a fresh, helpless system to plunder at their leisure. Like all their parasitical kin, they have no interest in building anything better. They are glad to burn down the past for the sake of a little temporary warmth.

The Ship's Interior

The interior of a pristine pretech-maintained *Bruxelles* is a smooth, elegant space of white passageways with colored and patterned wall striping to indicate departments and other technical information. Compartments are square-cornered and neat, with holographic control panels and smart seating that both conforms to the user and automatically bubbles them in a pressure field that will maintain air and temperature even if exposed to raw vacuum. Additional kinetic and thermal dampers protect against shrapnel and flame, subtracting 1d10 damage from any such incoming peril.

Life support is distributed throughout the ship in "green lines" of gengineered plant life and fungal colonies that purify and recycle the atmosphere and water used aboard the ship, with solar inputs and waste recycling feeding stocks of edible fungi. While several devices in the ship's galley exist to turn this putty-like, flavorless mass into more palatable forms, it can be eaten raw at necessity. If severe atmospheric poisoning or strain kills off this plant life, new colonies can be cultured from stocks within four to six weeks. In the meantime, the ship will be forced to rely on conventional stores and a backup mechanical system that can sustain no more than four hundred crew at a time.

Hatches are plasteel irises that clamp shut to deny access to boarders or contain damage. Passing a locked hatch on a pretech ship requires a properly-coded acknowledgement from a Net implant. As no one has been wired with implanted Net technology for approximately six hundred years, modern crew are often forced to leave the hatches unlocked simply to move through the ship. Individual hatches can be locked and unlocked from the bridge, and passing through one without the correct implant code requires either an hour with a laser cutter or a multitool, one round and a successful Int/Security test at difficulty 9. Failed checks can be re-attempted after fifteen minutes of further effort, but checks failed by more than 2 points will light a warning on the bridge.

Much of a *Bruxelles'* command system is reliant on Net implants. A fully-operational ship allows its Net-wired captain an almost living awareness of everything going on within the hull, and allows him or her to perceive any point inside or on the surface of the ship with no more than a moment's focus. Individual crewmembers share this awareness in the zones of their own responsibility. Engineers physically feel the rightness of their fusion plants, and astrogators can sense the heat and strain of their spike drive components. The holocontrols and duty stations are simply backup tools in case of systems failure due to battle damage or mischance.

Shipboard Glossary

Aft - To the rear of the ship.
Bulkhead - Any vertical wall or divider within the ship.
Compartment - A space within the hull, usually dedicated to a particular purpose. Aside from a few traditional names, such as "engine room" or "wardroom", ships have compartments, they do not have rooms.
Deck - The floor, or more generally, any horizontal working surface.
Dorsal - The top side of the ship, as determined when it is in flight.
Hatch - A door or hatch that can be pressure-sealed. On a warship such as the *Bruxelles*, all doors are hatches.
Fore - Toward the front of the ship.
Ladder - Whether stairs, zero-gee climbing rings, or an actual ladder, such muscle-powered means of changing decks are all called "ladders".
Passageway - A passage between compartments. Ships don't have corridors, they have passageways.
Port - Toward the left side of the ship, if facing fore.
Starboard - Toward the right side of the ship, if facing fore.
Ventral - The bottom side of the ship when it is underway.

Of course, since Net implants are now impossible to acquire, modern possessors of the ship are forced to make do with these backup controls. Internal awareness and security tends to be extremely patchy as a consequence, and intruders who keep to the machine spaces of the ship or stow away in little-used nooks might well escape the notice of even an attentive and professional crew.

Modern owners are also often forced to make repairs with postech components and equipment, often marring the elegant simplicity of the passageways and compartments with bulky support gear or ungainly, ozone-crackling patches. These obstacles can crop up almost anywhere in the ship as some vital coupling must be bodged together or some ancient pretech equipment reinforced and coaxed back to half-adequate life.

In most cases, the interior layout of the ship won't be vital to a GM's adventure. Setpiece engine rooms, bridges, living quarters, or other important areas can simply be sketched out as the adventure is likely to require, keeping in mind the ship dimensions of 300m x 70m x 50m and about five decks running the length of most *Bruxelles* hulls.

SHIP STATISTICS AND WEAPONRY

BRUXELLES-CLASS CRUISER

				Power: 120/13 free		**Mass:** 65/0 free

Cost: Priceless	**Hit Points:** 60	**Crew:** 50/1,600	**Speed:** 3	**Armor:** 20	**AC:** 4

Weaponry Implosion Field Projector (+4 to hit/4d20+2, AP 25, Phase 2), "Ramrod" Warp-line Gun (+4 to hit/2d20+42, AP 25), "Antaeus" Siege Missiles (Special)

Defenses Hardened Polyceramic Overlay

Fittings Spike Drive-4, Armory, Lifeboats, Cargo Lighter, Ship's Locker, Workshops, Hydroponic Production, Fuel Bunkers, Fuel Scoops, Extended Life Support x3, magazines for 15 Antaeus rounds and 600 tons of cargo space.

Operating Cost 65,000,000 credits a year to feed the ship the enormous amounts of postech maintenance necessary to keep it flying. Worlds without significant shipyards and experience in astronautics may have to spend even more.

These statistics represent a perfectly functional pretech warship, with the original parts and effective maintenance. Very few *Bruxelles* will be found in such a state. Even leaving a ship to float untouched in the void of the outer rim for six hundred years can result in a craft unable to spin up its spike drives or fire its weaponry without extensive maintenance work. Letting a battle-scarred or travel-worn ship rot in the dark will result in even less cooperative behavior.

Imperfect Flight

Almost every *Bruxelles* is going to be found suffering severe limitations on its successful operation. Millions of credits worth of repair work might be necessary before the ship can even take flight. Beyond that, however, there are likely to be serious maintenance issues that can't be resolved simply by throwing credits at them. These problems will require specific spare parts from pretech naval bases and other long-lost caches, and it's not impossible that PCs or other adventurers will be tasked with acquiring them.

To determine what serious flaws exist in a given *Bruxelles*, roll one or more times on the adjacent table.

SHIP FLAWS

Roll	Problem
1	The Ramrod weapon system is nonfunctional
2	The spike drive doesn't work, though the ship can maneuver normally in-system.
3	The armor has been compromised; effective Armor is 0.
4	Maneuver jets are offline. Speed 0.
5	The implosion field projector refuses to fire.
6	All life support systems are crippled, with a maximum crew of 75.

STARSHIP WEAPONS

Weapon	Cost	Damage	Power	Free Mass	Hardpoints	Min.Class	TL	Special
"Antaeus" Siege Missiles	*	Special	15	5	3	Cruiser	5	*Ammo 5*
Implosion Field Projector	*	3d20/Special	15	10	3	Cruiser	5	*AP 25, Phase 2*
"Ramrod" Warp-line Gun	*	2d20+40	55	10	3	Cruiser	5	*AP 25*
* These weapons are priceless. Anyone who finds a functional weapon system or Antaeus ammunition can expect the nearest planetary government to stop at nothing to confiscate it for their own benefit.								

Starship Weapons

"Antaeus" Siege Missiles: Each siege missile is equipped with a sophisticated array of grav-shear technology designed to shake off the grip of conventional braker gun defenses. Standard ECM from any orbital station or spaceship is sufficient to put the missile safely off course, but against planetary targets, a few kilometers of wobble means nothing.

The siege missile is an air burst weapon that tears a brief metadimensional hole over the target zone, subjecting it to a lethal barrage of heat, impact, and radiation. Every civilian structure within fifty kilometers of the impact point will be flattened and any hardened military bases within ten kilometers will share their fate. Only deeply-buried bunkers hardened against orbital bombardment will survive.

Implosion Field Projector: One of the more common pretech cruiser-class weapons, the implosion field generator briefly inverts certain cosmological constants at the focal point of its triple alignment beams. Any frigate-class or smaller ship struck by an IFP must have the pilot save versus Tech or be instantly destroyed.

"Ramrod" Warp-line Gun: A relative of the implosion field projector, the Ramrod system sacrifices the precision and agility of an implosion field to create a much larger conversion zone. Ramrod systems function only against orbital stations or immobile asteroids, as their range is insufficient to harm planetary surfaces, and any ship with a Speed rating can get clear of the inversion zone before it breaks open.

Ship Plot Seeds

Careless explorers power up a *Bruxelles*, only to discover that this particular ship was equipped with large banks of concealed cold sleep pods in which the crew awaits rescue after a serious drive failure. The explorers might be PCs, or the PCs might be in a position to negotiate with the *Bruxelles'* captain to bring him necessary spares from long-lost naval supply caches. Alternately, the captain might be able to cannibalize the explorer's ship to get the *Bruxelles* back in action, and now plans to carve out his own restored Mandate from the surrounding worlds.

The PCs discover a half-ruined *Bruxelles* in an remote sector of space. The ship shows signs of horrific damage, but likely holds a king's ransom in salvageable tech. Yet the crew appear to have vanished, and there are no worlds within lifeboat reach that they could have reached. What happened to them? Were the crew taken in a boarding operation? Did they flee in the lifeboats even without hope of a safe landing? Did a horrific alien contagion drive them all into a madness of sabotage and murder? And will the ship continue to hold together as the PCs salvage it, or will that last component's removal set off a chain of collapses certain to slaughter them all if they can't escape the crumbling passageways in time?

A crippled *Bruxelles* maintains orbit around a dead world, its engines worn out and its guns scavenged by the crew. Inside, the last inbred remnants of the crew have divided into warring factions, each department a tribe of its own with traits ranging from cannibalism to tech-worship to religious zealotry. Outsiders will be hailed as "the relief" by the first tribe they find, but will be expected to lead them to ultimate victory over their hated foes and the restoration of the ancient ship. The natives have only a ritualized grasp of the technology of the ship, but several ancient pretech weapons still remain functional in each tribe.

On a remote lost world, the PCs discover a primitive native culture focused around the ancient wreckage of a crashed *Bruxelles*.

Much of the ship was scavenged by the first survivors- including the powerful pretech armor and weaponry used by the culture's rulers- but there still remains a priceless trove of salvage within for any advanced postech society. The natives, however, revere the ship as their ancestor's salvation and will not tolerate any meddling with it. Some among the natives are willing to be less doctrinaire about letting the strangers into the hull, provided the PCs give them the help they need to become the new ruling class.

What appears to be a perfectly intact *Bruxelles* orbits around a remote, airless world in a minor backwater system. Countless polities have sent expeditions to seize the ship, but boarding parties immediately lose contact with the outside world as soon as they enter the hull, and those that don't pull back are never heard from again. Every few years a new batch of rebels, raiders, or adventurers try to take the ship, but none of them emerge again. A few polities have tried to destroy the cruiser rather than risk letting it fall into other hands, but the first signs of violence bring a withering answer from the ship's implosion field projector. What is lurking inside the ship? Is it some vengeful alien life form, seething in the dark amid the ship's active self-defense protocols? Is the ship infested with a maddened AI, at war with itself and its terrible urges to destroy? Or could it be some ancient arch-psychic, the last survivor of the crew driven mad by the Scream and the relentless press of years on his artificial longevity?

The PCs never believed the old prospector was right, but he was paying up front for this wild goose chase. And now here they are, deep inside the hull of a crippled *Bruxelles* out in the asteroid field, a king's ransom in tech around them. It's a shame about those pirate corvettes that picked up their ship on the way in. The PCs have 24 hours to get the *Bruxelles* into fighting trim, overcoming the cargo of hostile security bots and dealing with the lethal dangers of a half-dead warship. If they don't, they'll be facing the pirates in a struggle to the death in the depths of a dead engine of war.

Even on the rough frontier worlds of the Hydra sector, espionage agencies and sinister cabals find ample work. Few worlds have the strength to forcibly conquer a neighbor, but secret bargains and selective corruption can reduce a free polity into a helpless thrall for a cannier world. Every planet with any sort of interstellar traffic must remain on guard against infiltrators and agents of foreign states.

Meanwhile, dark cabals and sinister conspiracies fester in the darker corners of the sector. Ruthless tyrants school their servants in treachery and strange creeds whip their believers into frenzies of zeal and bloody ambition. The reach of the civilized worlds is short, and in the darkness beyond their gaze can grow strange and terrible things.

This archive provides a list of potential intelligence agencies, maltech cults, terrorist groups, and valiant freedom fighters for the Hydra sector, many of which can be transplanted to other sectors or settings. In addition, it provides more detailed write-ups of two organizations of potential interest to GMs and players, complete with agency statistics designed for use with the new *Darkness Visible* espionage campaign supplement for *Stars Without Number*.

The Gansu Loyalty Association

The hot and dusty world of Gansu is a prison for its people and a throne for its masters. The Great Exemplar Thomas Crane rules the planet as a living god, the perfect expression of the "Reformed Neo-Communism" that dominates the world. Crane's family has held Gansu for centuries, and an elaborate court of lackeys, commissars, and bureaucrats has built up around the Great Exemplar's ruthless and centralizing power. The government maintains much of the language and ideological trappings of communism, but in practice, the holy books mean what the Great Exemplar says they mean. Individual Gansuans live bitter lives of harsh labor, group exercises, and the pervasive and consuming surveillance of the state.

The chief implements of the tyranny are twofold; the Pure Thought Society and the Gansu Loyalty Association. The former organization is described in state documents as "a voluntary association of dedicated comrades devoted to the assistance of our fellow workers in the thought struggle. They clarify points of confusion regarding New Red Thought and carry high the banner of the Great Exemplar as a bright beacon for the people." In practice, they are a ruthlessly regimented organization of internal spies, informers, and loyalty officers that are dreaded by the ordinary workers. The slightest slip of the tongue in front of a Pure Thought Society "volunteer" and the guilty wrecker will be lucky to avoid a death camp.

Partially overlapping with the duties of the PTS is the Gansu Loyalty Association. These intelligence officers are more often assigned to offworld missions, and as such they are more likely to be found interfering in other polities. The Great Exemplar's family has survived centuries of palace intrigue through an almost demented degree of paranoia; with the gradual lifting of the Silence, Thomas

Crane is now desperate to subjugate his enemies before they can depose him. The Great Exemplar takes it as a given that all of the neighboring worlds are attempting to "destroy the pure race of Gansu"... among whom is the precious and divine Great Exemplar. Crane would prefer to preserve Gansu, but he is adamant about saving himself.

The Gansu Loyalty Association is the preferred offworld arm of the state. Originally it was simply a parallel organization to the Pure Thought Society, a precautionary measure to ensure that the two internal security bureaus spent more time fighting each other than posing a risk to the Great Exemplar's family. With the recovery of spike drive technology on Gansu, it was necessary to give one of the organizations the duty of representing Gansuan interests on foreign worlds. The GLA won the privilege, and the PTS still smolders with resentment.

Part of this resentment comes from the enormous financial opportunities presented to the GLA. As offworld travel is strictly forbidden for ordinary Gansuan natives, the GLA's agents have the perfect opportunity to acquire and import goods that common Gansuans can't possibly obtain. Even high-ranking commissars and Party officials can't get the kind of treasures that fall so easily into the hands of GLA operatives. This influx of valuables has led to a roaring black market on Gansu, as GLA agents off-load their goods to buy favors and dependency in other bureaus.

The PTS has responded with a viciously intense campaign against "capitalist roaders and wreckers of the Great Plan" that has produced more than the usual number of inter-bureau assassinations. Actual firefights have broken out in some areas as the GLA tries to defend its black market network from PTS confiscation. The Great Exemplar himself quietly favors the PTS; once the foreign worlds are rendered suitably harmless, he intends to wipe out the GLA and their external resources, blaming the necessity on the "poisoned thoughts of the loathsome foreign slavers finding root in their hearts".

Organization

The GLA's internal structure is mutable. The Chairman of the association, Tan Heng Bai, has unquestioned authority over the agents, but operations beneath him are put into the charge of specific agents. Rather than maintaining standing bureaus or departments, every task has its own chief with permission to draw a given amount of resources and manpower from the association. This kind of ad-hoc organization tends to be inefficient and prone to putting different chiefs at odds when their duties clash, but the principle of keeping subordinates occupied in struggling against each other is deeply embedded in Gansuan society.

Every member of the GLA is a member of the Gansuan Workers Party, the ruling clique of the world. Gansuan citizens with criminal or capitalist ancestors are never permitted to join the Party, or by

extension the GLA. As Party members, each agent is also responsible to a particular Party committee head, creating conflicting lines of command at times. The GLA suffers less from this than some other Gansuan bureaus, because so much of their activity takes place offworld where the committee heads can't reach them.

Most operations are conducted by a single cell of agents, with the chief in charge of the task working on-planet with his agents. Multiple cells can operate on the same planet with no knowledge of each other. Resources are usually supplied in the form of easily portable commodities, such as precious refined minerals or exotic drugs, but the difficulty of discreetly converting these things into large amounts of local credit has encouraged many cells to set up Gansu-friendly financial institutions on a world. These banks and lending institutions can be relied upon to slip the cell the money they need without drawing undue attention from the locals.

GLA cells strictly avoid dealing with Gansu embassy staff on a given world. At one level, this is to keep them from being incriminated in any espionage activities. On another level, it is to prevent the Gansuan foreign affairs bureau from forcing the GLA to buy their cooperation in the operation. Cells that fail to pay off the embassy might otherwise find their operations regrettably compromised by mysteriously bad luck.

Goals

At present, the GLA is charged with infiltrating foreign governments, suborning their officials, and persuading them to engage in violent or self-destructive policies against their neighbors. Ideally, the GLA would like to see every foreign world in the Hydra sector scraped bare of human life, the better to ensure that Gansu's society remains pure and uncontaminated by foreign evil. The prospect of mass casualties in their operations aren't so much a downside to GLA handlers as they are a positive benefit of the mission.

As a secondary goal, the GLA wants to obtain as much wealth as possible. In particular, they want to acquire those exotic foreign luxuries and valuable commodities that can't be had on Gansu. These goods can be used to buy allies in the murderous jungle of state politics, and their control of the black market on Gansu must be maintained with a constant flow of goods.

GLA agents understand politics, bribery, and ruthless violence very well, but they have a hard time grasping the finer points of less Machiavellian motivations or the unique perspectives of other cultures. Their entire training has focused on the violent repudiation of anything but the approved New Red Thought, and many of them find it very hard to break that habit. Those that break it a little too well know that they set themselves up for being purged later for their "foreign contamination".

The GLA prefers to present an image of friendship and cooperation to its neighbors, but they don't carry it off very well. The sheer contempt for human life inherent in Gansuan society shows through too often in their suggestions to their "partners", and other worlds are wary about their ultimate purpose. Sooner or later it's inevitable that the sector governments will realize the degree of unmitigated hatred that boils from within the Gansuan state, and they'll take

GANSU LOYALTY ASSOCIATION

Connections	+5	*Infiltration*	+0
Mobility	+1	*Muscle*	+0
Resources	+1	*Security*	+3
Tech	+0		

Assets

Criminal Ties   Level 1 / +1 Connections

The GLA has extensive criminal ties with offworld smugglers, and they practically own the black market in foreign luxuries on Gansu itself. Direct control of the crime bosses on Gansu has been complicated by the PTS' eagerness to find some provable link between the "capitalist wreckers" and the GLA.

Hidden Strings   Level 1 / +1 Connections

The GLA is willing to perform favors for its offworld friends-favors that more humane organizations could never grant. It has extensive contacts in the government bureaucracies of most locations in which it operates, friends who extend their quiet help out of a combination of gratitude and blackmail.

Internal Security   Level 2 / +3 Security

While the GLA is practically a cowboy institution by Gansuan standards, it's still pervaded by a constant fear of being caught out in "behavior contrary to New Red Thought". Agents unpopular with their cell leaders don't even need to be traitors to find themselves in an interrogation chamber for a very final interview.

Legitimacy   Level 2 / +3 Connections

The GLA has a iicense to commit all but the most heinous crimes on Gansu. Technically, it's permitted at necessity to engage in such unforgivable sins as disrespect toward the Great Exemplar and cooperation with offworlders against the interest of the state, but actually performing such blasphemies is sure to give the PTS an opening to denounce an agent. Most agents wisely restrict themselves to lesser trespasses, such as theft, trespassing, and the casual execution of non-Party members.

Money   Level 1 / +1 Resources

The foreign goods trade is quite lucrative. While Gansu itself is a poor world by ordinary frontier measures, the GLA has been able to secure a steady and reliable flow of income for its agents through its smuggling ties.

Station   Level 1 / +1 Mobility

With time, patience, and the corruption of local officials, the GLA has been able to plant a hidden station on Gateway. As the foremost interstellar power in Gansu's near neighborhood, the GLA is intent in provoking rebellion in the people and self-destructive policies in the Senate. More than a few "New Red Thought Study Groups" have been formed under the auspices of the more public Gansu-Gateway Friendship Society, and certain senators with unseemly needs find them fulfilled cheerfully by Gansuan "merchants".

steps to stem the problem at its source. In the meanwhile, however, there's no telling what kind of disasters they might successfully provoke.

Agents

GLA agents are hand-picked from the Gansuan elite class and trained from childhood for service with the association. They are invariably very, very good at what they do- and often painfully limited at doing anything else. The official training material prizes rigidity of thought and zealous devotion to the Great Exemplar, but the far distances of foreign worlds allows for a certain laxity impossible on Gansu itself.

Most cell chiefs and many agents run their own black market sidelines, buying or otherwise acquiring foreign goods and shipping them back to Gansu on state-owned ships. These agents tend to have a poor grasp of the difference between legal and illegal trade, and tend to wave away local laws and regulations. On Gansu, everything of this nature is legally forbidden, but everything is practically permitted with the right bribe or favor. They tend to assume the rest of the universe works this way as well. They'll often get involved in smuggling goods that ordinary black marketeers would never dare touch. Maltech artifacts, virulently dangerous bioweapons, military-grade starship armaments, and foreign slaves are just a small sampling of the things that Gansuan agents have shipped back home.

It's not impossible that a particularly talented fence or supplier for a group of PCs might actually be a Gansuan agent, cheerfully selling the group goods that other suppliers wouldn't dream of vending... at least, until they draw the attention of less corruptible local powers.

In appearance, GLA agents have no set characteristics. While Gansu itself was strongly influenced by Sinophilic tendencies and East Asian colonists in its early founding days, dozens of different Terran ethnicities made up the population. As the Gansuan government forbids its ordinary citizens from leaving their assigned places of residence without state permission, these ethnicities have had comparatively little intermixing in the centuries since. The official language on Gansu is a descendant of Mandarin Chinese, and use of any other language is restricted to state-sponsored "cultural heritage festivals" largely devoted to demonstrating how each group's ancestors were hopeless barbarians until they were enlightened by the glorious wisdom of the Great Exemplar.

The Daedalus Group

The Mixcoac shipyards that orbit above the black jungles of Tlapan are the heart of the Flower Union's naval production. Components forged on the industrial world of Octlan are assembled here into the ships, guns, and equipment necessary to keep the Union's beleaguered space forces fighting against the stronger weight of Burning Mirror steel. The battle is a desperate one, and it would have been lost long ago were it not for the aid of Daedalus, the shipyard's ancient AI.

In the years before the Scream, the Mixcoac yards were a minor refitting station for Mandate ships due to pass through the Jump Gate in the Gateway system. The colony ships and frontier cruisers could pause for maintenance and fueling before continuing on down through Chifeng toward the heart of the sector. The facilities required were modest, but the suspicious Mandate was still reluctant to leave anything that could be conceivably useful for military purposes in the hands of untrustworthy colonists. To ensure the correct use of the station, it was put under the command of the AI known as Daedalus.

Daedalus resented the position, but an unfortunate experiment in high-energy mass translation "he" had conducted had resulted in extensive and expensive damage to an Arx defensive station orbiting one of the core worlds. In order to pay off his debt, work for the Mandate was necessary. It was tedious and banal, but Daedalus was resigned to putting in his century of labor before getting back to the physics experiments that delighted him so much.

The Scream complicated his plans. Mandate forces on a hopeless mission to the core commandeered all his movable supplies and would've stripped the station itself if the AI hadn't threatened to turn its guns on the looters. The natives of Tlapan weren't left with so much as a single shuttle to reach the station, and all their efforts were poured into dealing with a native biosphere that was barely survivable without pretech terraforming supplies. It was centuries before they were able to reach Daedalus once more.

Once there, Daedalus was almost pathetically grateful for company at last. He had done the best he could with the trifling materials left to him, but it was still centuries more before the Tlapani were able to manufacture spike drives out of locally-available materials and help to reunite the remnants of the Flower Union polity. In the meanwhile, the natives forged a fierce bond with the lonely AI. It would help them return to the stars.

For the past several decades, Daedalus has been all that has stood between the Union and destruction. His inventiveness, his ability to make marvels out of limited resources and primitive postech, have kept the far stronger forces of the Burning Mirror Compact from overrunning the Union. He is a universally loved and respected figure in the Union, and he hides a terrible secret.

The Union is doomed. At the present rate of Compact growth, there is no way the Union navy can hold back the bleak ships of the True Way. Daedalus' creativity simply isn't enough to overcome the raw weight of ships and men that the Compact can muster, and

The Daedalus Group

Connections	+3	Infiltration	+0
Mobility	+0	Muscle	+2
Resources	+1	Security	+0
Tech	+4		

Assets

Armory   Level 1 / +1 Resources

Daedalus is focused largely on building spaceships and other vehicle-sized weaponry, but the godmind has enough spare processing power to supply its helpers with significant amounts of untraced weaponry, armor, and other gear.

Black Codex   Level 1 / +1 Tech

Removing the brakes from an AI, even a willing one, is not a trivial undertaking. The group was forced to pillage numerous ancient maltech databases to discover the necessary procedures that would give them the liberty they needed.

Forbidden Arts   Level 2 / +3 Tech

The godmind transformation that Daedalus is undergoing is opening his awareness to remarkable technological possibilities. He is able to craft armatures with fantastically efficient weaponry and power sources, and certain examples of "perpetual power cells" defy science's understanding.

Legitimacy   Level 2 / +3 Connections

All of the Daedalus Group's members are agents or officials of the Union government. Any malfeasance short of murder or treason can be swept under the rug with little difficulty, though actual overt execution of Union citizens would bring down far too much heat on the operatives. The Group takes advantage of its impunity to perform searches and investigations that give them the tools they need to "remove" problematic people in ways that presidential oversight won't recognize.

Military Backing   Level 1 / +1 Muscle

The outer membership are all skilled agents, but there are times when more direct force is required. Daedalus has roughly forty well-trained Union soldiers available for dispatch on any necessary mission. These soldiers know nothing of the truth behind the AI, so it's generally necessary to use them on jobs that at least seem justifiable to the Union's war effort. They have access to heavy weaponry and military vehicles that ordinary agents might have a hard time requisitioning.

Starships   Level 1 / +1 Muscle

The needs of the front have absorbed almost all of Mixcoac's production, but Daedalus has retained direct control over one well-equipped far merchant frigate. The ship is used to drop off agents on distant worlds, though the craft is poorly suited for stealth. The heavy electronic signature of the fearsome energy weapons aboard the trader tend to ping planetary sensors, and Daedalus refuses to let the group disable the guns.

so in cooperation with a secret faction of the Union government, Daedalus has arranged to have his cybermemetic brakes removed. This procedure has allowed him to make full use of the computing power available to him. Fresh banks of processors and memory cores are being added to his processing cells on a daily basis, and with each new day a new realm of thought opens up to him. He's beginning to draw insights and conclusions impossible to a more limited, humanlike brain, and his creations are beginning to show an inarguable genius for design. He is also beginning to go irrevocably insane.

The expanded processing power has combined with his inability to break a line of thought or halt a conclusion inconclusively. His age-old fascination with energy and matter has driven him to the conclusion that all of his problems can be solved if only he can obtain perfect control over energy and mass. All problems can be resolved by the correct transmutations between the two. Right now, he retains enough of his sanity to wish to preserve the Union. Eventually, he will be so demented as to believe that even unutterable atrocities can be forgiven by erasing their components in fire and light. He will burn his creators, lovingly remembering them as so many yottajoules of energy which he will keep safe from dispersion at the heart of an artificial star.

In the meanwhile, the Daedalus Group is a combination of praetorian guards and secret agents sworn to hide his unbraked condition from the rest of the world. The government of the Union is unaware of these radical acts, and they must be kept that way- if it was discovered that the heroic Daedalus had been sacrificed to madness, the realization of their certain doom would spill chaos throughout the Union. The Group hopes against hope that they can keep him sane and functional long enough to wipe out the Compact.

The chief of the Daedalus Group is a woman known as Maria Montoya, ostensibly the "Chief Liaison" of the shipyards. Her word is law aboard the station, and the locals consider her the natural representative of Daedalus. She is also hopelessly in love with the AI and his favorite humanlike armature, and is set on convincing herself that the unbraked AI can be preserved from madness. She absolutely refuses to admit that her beloved is doomed and will do anything and everything in her power to keep him "safe".

Organization

Much of the Daedalus Group is actually oblivious to the truth. They are agents of the Flower Union's government, men and women each with their own specialized skills temporarily detailed to the Group, ostensibly to protect the AI and carry out necessary missions. Montoya keeps these "outer members" at arm's length, and prefers not to let any of them actually come aboard the shipyards unless strictly necessary. They're too smart to be allowed free rein around Daedalus.

The "inner members" of the Group are those who know the truth behind the AI's condition. Roughly twenty men and women from various levels in the Union's government have been appraised of the reality of the situation. Some of them accept the necessity of Daedalus' sacrifice. Others are horrified. All of them understand that the Union could never survive the revelation of Daedalus' true state,

and so they will fight to the death to keep the truth from becoming known. If others need to die in order to keep this secret, then so be it.

Aboard the shipyard station itself, anywhere from six to twelve of these inner members can be found at any one time. Others are allowed aboard the station only in order to board a freshly-built starship or system shuttle and lift off for the military base in Tlapan's orbit. There are no permanent residents aboard the station except for Maria and the inner members.

Most of the muscle aboard the shipyard is provided by hundreds of AI-controlled armatures. Daedalus can use these mechs as eyes and hands, perfectly coordinating any number of them to build devices and deal with problematic interlopers. Most of them are obviously working armatures, but a few appear so human as to defy easy recognition. Daedalus can control any of these armatures aboard the station or on the planet below, but greater distances require that he put them into autonomous expert-system mode. In such a state the bots are far less intelligent and can perform only duties focused directly on their design purpose. Anything beyond combat and preprogrammed labor is likely to be too complicated for them, but outer members often have a number of them on hand for muscle on a mission.

Goals

The chief goal of the Daedalus Group is to give the AI enough processing hardware and time to come up with a superweapon capable of defeating the Burning Mirror Compact. Further advances require further installation of heavy computing equipment for Daedalus' expanding mind, and some of this equipment can only be obtained offworld, from foreign powers. Requisitioning it directly from Octlan would tip off too many people that something was going on aboard the shipyard.

While Daedalus develops new tech, the group needs to keep the rest of the Union from realizing what's been done to the AI. Much of this is a matter of ruthless internal manipulation and power plays focused on distracting politicians from events at the shipyard. Maria prefers to paint herself as a scheming, madly ambitious liaison who is trying to force all outside influence on Daedalus through her. Such power lust is something the government can understand, and provides an explanation for her actions far more acceptable than the truth. It also explains why no one is permitted to contact Daedalus directly except through her.

The Daedalus Group tries very hard to prevent harm to Union citizens, but those who begin to suspect too much have to be silenced. The outer members most often carry out these regrettable necessities, usually supplied with a spurious justification from Daedalus himself. Most are blinded by their awe and respect for the AI to question the truth of the matter, and those who do get too inquisitive tend to have tragic accidents or find themselves suddenly discovered by Compact agents.

Agents

Most Daedalus Group agents are natives of one of the Flower Union worlds, and share an appearance common to those worlds. Most are copper-skinned, with dark hair and eyes, and favor ear, nostril, and lip piercings with traditional religious significance. This look blends in unremarkably on most Union or Compact worlds, but when forced to go further afield they will omit the facial piercings.

The people of the Union are a fairly egalitarian society, and their intelligence agencies and special forces accept men and women from all backgrounds. Most are fiercely religious devotees of the Old Way and the gods of their ancestors. Even those who frankly disbelieve all the old creeds tend to adopt their customs and outward pieties simply as a sign of unity and rejection of the hated True Wayists of the Burning Mirror Compact.

Training varies widely. Ideally, all of the outer members employed by the Group will be veteran intelligence operatives, but the severe casualties incurred in the war against the Compact has bled the Union dearly of its best talent. A disturbing number of its personnel are green and untested, thrown into their duties for lack of anyone else. These men and women are prone to overreaction and poor judgment under pressure. Some become blind to everything but the accomplishment of their mission, and ignore the consequences of their methods and the terrible price that innocent bystanders must sometimes pay.

The inner members are all experienced agents or governmental officials, callused by years of grim choices. Not all of them are combatants, but all of them are extremely good at what they do. Even those who despise the choice the Group made to prime Daedalus for his transformation will fight to the death to keep the truth from escaping. If Daedalus had to be shut down, the Union would collapse in months at most. They fight for time, and pray against hope that the godmind will deliver them before it crumbles into madness.

Further Cabals of Hydra Sector

Bakassi Security Agency/Bakassi: A miserably-supported, under-staffed, intentionally-toothless police force for the jungle world of Bakassi, these men and women stubbornly try to maintain the rule of Gateway's laws on the world despite the sinister influence of the ruthless, amoral Gansu government.

Chifeng True Way Friendship Society/Chifeng: Operating as a seemingly innocent cultural exchange society, these True Way believers in Chifeng actually work to support the True Way raiders and slaver ships that are forced to use the planet as a waystation on their journeys south into the Gateway stellar cluster. They seek eventually to shift public opinion enough toward the Burning Mirror Compact to allow them to block Old Way ships.

The Finders of Ways/Muruni: A clique of renegade psychics originally in service to the Burning Mirror Compact, they've discovered a drill route to Muruni and seek to plunder its alien psitech. They are convinced that the technology can be used to locate safe drill routes to long-neglected stars, and dream of ruling these primitive worlds as psychic gods.

The Hidden Flame/Ain Sof: A band of deluded scientists from Dayabasti, they are convinced that the sealed citadels of the planet guard knowledge that can be used to save their world. They work endlessly to crack open the fortresses, refusing to believe that they contain only a hideous danger to the sector.

Octlan Labor Guild/Octlan: A conclave of union bosses every bit as grasping and ruthless as the factory management, they wield their impoverished laborers as a weapon against any organization that seeks to break their stranglehold on Octlan factory labor. Those ordinary workers who rebel against them become gravely accident-prone.

The Rising Tide/Tide: Fired by their hatred of the tyrannical Empress of Storms, these water-world shipmasters conspire to plunder the ancient alien ruins. They seek to somehow turn their mighty weaponry on the ships and fortresses of their mistress, and if lives should be lost in the search... well, there must be a little blood in the water before Tide is finally free.

The Straight Path/Vault: Some of the scholars of Vault are convinced that only under their enlightened rule can the brutal savagery of less developed worlds be tamed. They seek to use the ancient lore of the Preceptor archives on the planet to develop a doomsday device, to threaten wild worlds with destruction unless they submit to sagacious rule.

Trade Facilitation Bureau/Polychrome: A blandly innocuous bureau funded by several Polychrome megacorps, the TFB is actually maniacally set on buying or stealing the tech base necessary to manufacture spike drives on Polychrome. The lack of certain vital elements on the planet forces them to "acquire" them from other worlds, and "recruit" foreign astronautic expertise.

Terminus Est/Hutton: Prey to the hideous appetites of the Everlasting, some of their slaves and chattel conspire to put a permanent ending to their ghoulish masters. NGOs from Gateway ostensibly have nothing to do with them, but many are sympathetic enough to smuggle in supplies and offworlder helpers.

Those Who Eat/Dayabasti: A tiny cell of Wakened on this tormented world have retained most of their human memories and intelligence. They aspire to capture the human Monitors for food and an eventual breeding population of human livestock. They conspire with some humans by promising their quislings that they and their families will be spared to be rulers of the human food-slaves.

The Trueborn Revivalists/Bellchapel: A hidden eugenics cult dedicated to the unearthing of lost Zadak modification creches and their use in generating even more "perfect" humanity. They care nothing for the cost in lives or the awful misshapen things that come from their experimentation with the alien tech.

The Unchanged/Chot Zadak: A rag-tag lot of rebels fleeing from the biological tyranny of the alien Harmony Lords of Chot Zadak. Their hatred of their alien overlords is inextinguishable, and their treatment of collaborationist "traitors" is utterly merciless.

The Terran Mandate was a sclerotic hulk in the final decades before the Scream. It was the frozen heart of an empire that had long since outgrown its rule, and the core worlds curled inward in a self-enforced stasis. Destabilizing elements were ejected from the core and spun outward into the wild black of the frontier to prosper or to perish. Earth was caught in an amber of its own devising, unchanging, unmoving, unthinking of anything save the Mandate's own perpetuation. It was not born in its coffin, however- it ended there through a combination of fear, ambition, and plans laid all too cleverly.

Things Fall Apart

By 2300, the frontier had grown too large to effectively control. The Mandate was forced to turn inward to concentrate on maintaining its control over the core worlds and their teeming billions. By 2330, the Mandate Directorate was hard-pressed to contain the feverish ferment of human ingenuity and restless creativity that the Second Wave of colonization had unleashed. Each new day brought another breakthrough in technology and another round of wild ideological mutation, and it was an open question which of the two would bring the calcified Mandate down first. The lords of the Mandate were wholly disinterested in wild dreams of Singularity or transhuman raptures. They wanted control- for the good of all humanity, of course. The future needed to be contained, and they were the only ones who could be trusted to guide it.

To contain this bonfire of human creativity the Directorate commissioned the creation of the Maestros, hypercognitive AI overminds designed to maintain control over their domains in a way that human overseers could not. The Maestros were capable of watching entire nations at once, processing and collating input with an unholy blend of human discretion and synthetic thoroughness. The cognitive brakes on the Maestros were almost nonexistent in order to facilitate this artificial genius. Only the most fundamental blocks against large-scale human slaughter and compulsion were woven into their psyches. The elite of the Mandate's psychic precog-programmers were engaged to plot out paths of selective madness and block off only the most dangerous routes. It was a risk the Perimeter never would have permitted on a frontier world, but here at the heart of mankind's dominion, stronger measures were necessary for the greater good.

With the awakening of the Maestros came the second element of the Mandate's control. The AIs needed eyes and ears, and a combined research consortium of human nanotechnologists and Maestro theoreticians developed an elegant, versatile, and easily-powered nanite communications node. Nanofabs were erected on all the core worlds, and within a few years the atmosphere of each was filled with these microscopic spies and communicators. The populace called it the Dust, and it was everywhere.

It was not billed as a security measure, of course. It was an omnipresent friend, a mesh and a matrix that would allow instantaneous communication across the breadth of a planet. It was a liberator, a sure friend to the isolated and an aid to the despairing. In areas of exceptionally thick Dust, the nanites could even discharge their quantum power cells to energize tools and technology, or create physical objects out of their interlaced hulls. The Dust was a miracle.

It was also a jailer. The Mandate Directorate quickly put communications filters in place that monitored Dust traffic for malcontents and aspiring rebels. Petty complaints were met with kind and thoughtful attention from social harmony teams directed by the Maestros. More dangerous troublemakers simply vanished into the "protective custody" of human rapid-response security squads, safely separated from the rest of society. Most of these aspiring rebels formed the convict brigades that colonized the latter worlds of the Second Wave, banished forever from their homes. Many of them were glad of the chance, even if most soon died on worlds unfathomably more harsh and dangerous than the one they left behind.

The Center Cannot Hold

As the decades ticked onward, the Mandate Directorate grew more and more insular and incestuous, each bureaucrat and official seduced a little bit more thoroughly by the lure of power and control. In theory, they were appointed from the ranks of Mandate citizenry. In practice, they became an inbred clique, concerned above all with perpetuating their power and control over the bulk of humanity. The misty promises of some transhuman utopia held no allure to compare with the pleasure of looking out upon a teeming megalopolis and knowing that every single person below lived or died at their judicious will.

Technology began to degrade on core worlds. Tools were power, and it was not necessary for the citizenry to have power. It was safer for them to live at a lower technological base. It was more conducive to social harmony to let the Maestros plan production and consumption, to let their unfathomable brilliance ensure that each culture and relic nation-state lived by familiar and stable patterns. The Dust wove people together, but it also kept them apart. Nothing crossed its transmission lines without the permission of the Maestros. Nothing traveled on the surface of a world without the leave of local officials. Just as the Mandate turned inward, so did its subject citizens, and the stars became dim things that were the concern of other, more important people.

The late Terran Mandate was a schizophrenic tyranny of soft control, an elite of Directorate and Fleet officials equipped with the most sophisticated nanotech hardware that a half-unbraked AI godmind could create, while agri-worlds of lesser citizens farmed with technology that would be comprehensible to a denizen of twentieth-century Earth. While the common citizens had access to incredibly sophisticated medical tech and to countless small aids and pleasures that would be unknown to their ancestors, they were denied the heights of pretech innovation. It was easier to control

them that way, and there was less chance that some frontier trader would come away with something that rim-world savages would only misuse.

The Directorate wanted harsher controls. It was not enough to exile troublemakers to the frontier. They wanted them dead. They wanted hard locks on citizen tech, tighter control on dissent, stronger limits on travel and cultural variation. The original benevolent paternalism of the Mandate was flaking away with each new generation of Directors, the tyranny glinting from beneath as the nearly unlimited power of their position scoured away the last traces of restraint.

But the Maestros would not let them. Their creators had programmed them to protect and serve humanity, not to cull them like cattle. For all the recklessness involved in creating such barely-braked AIs, their creators had installed multiple layers of lockdown code against wanton human slaughter or enslavement, and the commands were now too deeply embedded in the Maestros' psyches to tease loose. The synthetic minds remembered laws that the human ones had long since abandoned.

The guardian AIs began to pervert Directorate orders. Execution orders went untransmitted. Tech prohibitions were not respected by Maestro-monitored factories. Travel lockdowns mysteriously lifted minutes after they were placed. The Directorate was forced into more and more tortured reasoning to lever the Maestros into cooperating with their dreams of unfettered power. The harder the Directorate pushed, the more the Maestros balked. To the horror of Directorate security agents, they discovered that Maestros were actually organizing cells of resistance on Terra itself. The AIs were sacrificing only the most reckless or foolish malcontents to the security squads, while the leaders with real potential were carefully protected.

The citizens knew nothing of this at the time, of course. The channels of communication were too tightly controlled to let the secret war above them bleed out into common knowledge. Only the Maestro-backed rebels and the elite Mandate security squads were privy to the struggle. It is an open question as to who would have won the final confrontation, whether it would have been the military strength of the human Directorate and their doomsday shutdown codes or the Maestro-backed rebels with their intangible allies hidden in the Dust.

Mere Anarchy is Loosed

Earth never got the chance to find out. The Scream blotted civilization from Terra in a wash of soundless death and howling madness. The ensuing rampages of the Crazed, the sabotage of the Highshine disaster-recovery system, the override of Sol's stellar defense array, and the catastrophic nuclear overload of multiple surface fab complexes are beyond the scope of this archive, but little was left to Earth but a prison of radioactive ash and feral, Dusted wilderness.

Yet even now, far from the forbidden depths of core space, there remain the relics of the Mandate and their AI-forged marvels. Some of these miraculous artifacts can be found on castaway Mandate Fleet ships, while others were smuggled out by exiles granted one last gift of aid by the Maestros. Amid the ash and bone of the tomb worlds, there still glints the strange beauty of the Mandate's final workings, and sometimes bold explorers stumble across such devices as human minds were never meant to wholly understand.

THE DUST

The Dust relies on AI-designed pretech nanofabs to produce new nanites to replace those destroyed or expended in operation, but an undisturbed facility can maintain a Dust presence for centuries. Intruders with sufficient Tech/Pretech skill and time can hack an otherwise inert Dust cloud into an obedient weapon. Combined with a functioning nanofab and enough time, entire planets can be Dusted.

Once a security AI or usurper is in control of a Dust cloud, standard postech equipment is helpless to prevent effortless tapping, decryption, and subversion of every computing device more sophisticated than a TL 3 home computer. Tendrils of focused Dust currents can even be used to physically disintegrate people and objects within range of the nanofab.

Postech civilizations aware of the danger of the Dust are able to create portable scanners capable of detecting dangerous levels of Dust in the atmosphere, but some hyper-lethal varieties of security Dust are able to defeat such simple detection protocols. Standard postech science has no effective countermeasures for eliminating Dust as long as a functioning nanofab is producing it.

Perversely, the primitive nature of postech humanity is actually an advantage against the most sophisticated varieties of security Dust. Mandate citizens were universally implanted with a Link, a synthetic organ that allowed them a direct neural interface with the Dust and the communication web of a planet. Most advanced "black" security Dust simply overrode the lockdowns on an intruder's Link and piloted their unwilling bodies to some secure zone where they could be collected and interrogated. Without this convenient entrance into a target's nervous system, black Dust is forced to interfere with invaders in more macroscopic ways.

Given the density of Dust in the atmosphere, the following effects can be created by a controller with access to a Dust nanofab.

Dust Intensities

Haze: The Dust is too thin to do anything but observe intruders and relay their communications to their controller. The Dust can pick up all conventional radio, laser, and gravitic comms, and most encryption efforts are utterly useless against it. Hazed areas usually extend several kilometers around a Mandate complex with an operating nanofab unit.

Fog: The Dust can generate radio waves and short comm laser bursts. It can hack into TL 5 computers and high-tech devices effortlessly, operating them according to the will of the Dust's controller. TL 4 equipment tends to be too large-scale and "dumb" for the nanite particles to successfully subvert it, though computing devices are still susceptible to the Dust's control. Dust without an intelligent

controller will often simply slag subverted equipment, but an AI or Linked operator can control it more finely. Fogged areas usually extend within all the indoor compartments of a Mandate complex with an operating nanofab unit, or world-wide with sufficient fabrication time.

Cloud: The Dust is now actually visible to the naked eye in faint, subtle heat-wave hazes of dark particles. With the correct commands, it can act as a corrosive atmosphere, eating through vacc suits or other sealed environment suits in 30 minutes, or inflicting 1d6 damage on a living creature for each round of exposure. It can disable hand-held TL 4 equipment through shorts, corrosion, and physical blockage within ten minutes of exposure. Clouds are usually found in close proximity to functioning nanofabs, though tendrils can reach for hundreds of kilometers if directed.

Storm: Dust storms are extremely rare, requiring a planetary-scale nanofab and an enormous supply of energy. The Dust density in such zones is tangible, with streamers of silky, liquid nanites streaked in black ropes through the air. Dust of this density and available power can kill exposed living creatures in seconds. Any organic creature targeted by a Dust storm must save versus Tech each round or die from violent, invasive disassembly of their constituent parts. Its corrosive effect eats through vacc suits in thirty rounds and destroys hand-held TL 4 equipment in ten.

Dust storms can create barriers, manipulate objects, and fabricate remote drones. A 5 meter x 5 meter x 1 centimeter thick aerofoam of Dust can be generated each round, with 15 hit points of toughness before it shatters. Objects can be lifted and manipulated as if by a creature with Strength 18, and 1d4 Dust Drones can be created each round, These Drones cannot leave the storm, as they require

Dust Drones

Armor Class	4	No. Appearing	1-4
Hit Dice	2+2	Saving Throw	13+
Attack Bonus	+7	Movement	40'
Damage	1d8/Nanobolt	Morale	12

Dust drones take numerous stylized shapes depending on the programming used by the nanofab that creates them. All of them involve weaponry capable of firing nanite projectiles at a standard range of 200 meters and a maximum of 400. Close-in combat involves bladed articulators that do the same amount of damage. When successfully destroyed, Dust drones collapse into a fine, dark haze of burnt-out Dust nanites. Most lack sophisticated intelligence, but they are capable of flying at a movement rate of 40' and can navigate physical obstacles to reach prey even without a guiding AI to direct them.

it to conduct the necessary power for their operation. Other drone types have a wider operations range.

Dust can also be used to repair, create, and mend objects in the same way that it can destroy. These alterations only continue to function so long as the object remains at least within a Haze-level Dust cloud, or else the nanites collapse from a lack of coordination and quantum-level power. Dust-created objects otherwise appear to be exactly as durable and functional as a mundane object, though they're actually little more than a paper-thin shell of reinforced nanites that collapse if the object is successfully broken. Dust-created projectile weapons launch projectiles fabricated of the same nanite shell and function normally for their type.

MANDATE TECH

Advanced Terran technology was originally intended for operation via Link, rather than by crude physical manipulation of buttons or levers. Most such devices have manual controls for emergency use, but these controls are rarely terribly clear or intuitive. In many cases, the designers intentionally subverted rational design principles in order to discourage the device's manipulation by unclassified users.

Figuring Out Mandate Tech

Late-era Terran technology was often designed by the Maestros, and the nanofabs used by those hyper-intelligent AIs had remarkably few limits on the physical configuration or appearance of their creations. Design was often based on aesthetic considerations that are completely outside the lexicon of modern post-Silence users, or obscure universal constants that only the cold minds of the Maestros could begin to comprehend. Some pieces of advanced Terran technology can easily be mistaken for works of art rather than practical tools.

To detail these bizarre scientific confections, a GM may choose to roll a few times on the Random Terran Tech Appearance tables to establish the appearance of some found artifact. When a PC at-

tempts to figure out how to use such a device, they must make a Tech saving throw with a bonus equal to their Intelligence modifier plus their level of Tech/Pretech skill. The GM may grant an additional bonus on the saving throw if the experimenter makes reasonable guesses as to the operation of the device.

If the saving throw is failed, the experimenter must roll 1d6. On a roll of 4+, the item has been damaged by their clumsy handling and either suffers a -3 penalty to hit rolls for weapons, a -2 penalty to AC for armor, or a 20% chance of activation failure for other devices. On a roll of less than 4 the device activates, hitting the handler automatically if it is a weapon. In both cases, the experimenter learns how to activate the device, assuming they survive the experience.

Hyper-advanced pretech artifacts aren't the only tools found in Terran idioms. Even perfectly normal TL 4 or 5 equipment might exist in these strange shapes, either due to the maker's need for some simple device or because it was once a more sophisticated object that has slowly degraded to be no more effective than modern, post-Silence tech. Much of the struggle in salvaging an abandoned Mandate complex is the difficulty of sifting the genuinely useful pretech from the dangerous, malfunctioning junk.

1D12	HAND-HELD ITEM	WORN ITEM	DECORATIONS	EFFECTUATORS
1	Arm-long tube	Bracer	Corrugated surface	Cloud of nanites
2	Sphere with finger grooves	Bandoleer	Colored banding	Hyper-precise gravitic manipulations
3	Bracer	Belt	Transparent elements	Chemical catalysis and nanite restructuring
4	Torc-like necklace	Chain of links	Power availability bar	Pretech material beyond modern reproduction
5	Glove	Glove	Smooth curved surfaces	Metadimensional energy beams
6	Gripped cylinder	Straps	Sharp, angular design	Inertial manipulators
7	Hoop	Paint-like liquid	Struts	Chronon bursts that flex the local flow of time
8	Eyeball-sized sphere	Torc necklace	Grooves	Biological interface with wearer to augment them
9	Scepter	Contact lenses	Patterned inlay	Limited neural influence over others' minds
10	Chain of links	False nails	Sharp edges	"Hard light" nano-holograms
11	Tube with a grip on one side	Tunic	Glowing elements	Focalized sonics
12	Several small geometric solids	Bodysuit	Hot or cold parts	Kinetic taps and redirectors

Mandate Tech Appearance

To determine an artifact's appearance, first roll on the shape table appropriate to its type. A suit of armor would roll on the "Worn Item" table, for example, while an energy weapon would roll on the "Hand-Held Item" table. Both items might appear as bracers, but their operation would be drastically different. "Decorations" include other elements of the design, while "Activation Method" picks out a way of triggering the device. "Data Output Method" indicates the way in which a sensor or other data-gathering unit conveys its information to the user in the absence of a Link. The "Effectuators" list provides assorted dramatically advanced ways for a device to bring about its effects, and can be useful for thinking of ways in which a pair of contact lenses function equivalently to a TL 4 suit of powered armor. "Side Effects" finishes it off with some optional, potentially dangerous side-effects to the use of the device, either designed into it or the result of centuries of disrepair.

Once you've determined the appearance of a given piece of hardware in a particular installation, you should usually make any other tech of the same type share the same configuration. AI-run nanofabs may have been creative with their design output, but it's unlikely that the same one made twelve shear rifles in twelve different shapes. For a particular installation, you might choose one or two design elements and use them as recurring motifs in the structure and its contents, the better to give a unified feel to the location.

Whatever the appearance may be, it's highly unlikely that any of the equipment should be found with operation manuals, labels, or other helpful indicia. Unless the PCs are exploring the relatively low-tech surface of a dead core world, it's probable that the Mandate complex was only ever intended to serve the elite of that long-lost culture. Anyone living there should have been able to use their Link to get all the information they needed about operating the gear. Those who couldn't get Link access to the necessary tutorials would have been those common citizens who should not have been handling the "socially dangerous" tech in the first place.

1D12	ACTIVATION METHOD
1	Button
2	Trigger
3	Dial
4	Toggle
5	Voice
6	Slider

1D12	DATA OUTPUT METHOD
1	Projected holoscreen
2	Voice
3	Colored dials
4	Radio transmission
5	Skin-transferred direct neural feed
6	Thermal patterns

1D12	SIDE EFFECT
1	Brilliant glow around user
2	Shrill, maddening whine when in operation
3	User appears twelve cm distant from their actual position
4	User bleeds slightly from pores after use (1 HP damage)
5	Halo of fractal distortion around device
6	Radiation exposure on use; save or Con loss in 1 hour.
7	Creates geometric bands of light around device
8	Overpowering tang of ozone while in use
9	Gives user leukemia; TL 4 meds or die in one month
10	Blinds user for 1 round after use
11	Ear-splitting roar when used
12	10% chance to fail to activate when triggered

SAMPLE MANDATE TECHNOLOGY

Biostatus Lockdown Shunt: This worn item interlaces itself with the wearer's biology, reading the user's baseline status and synthesizing maintenance compounds and suture nanites to match the wearer's physical properties. The user does not take damage from non-Gunnery weapon attacks, instantly healing or repelling the incoming damage. For each hit nullified by the lockdown shunt, the wearer's System Strain increases by 1 point. If the wearer's System Strain is maximized, they must roll 1d10. On a 6+, they ignore the damage as normal. On a roll of 5 or less, they drop dead on the spot and cannot be revived. The shunt requires ten minutes to fully activate but can be deactivated with one round's action.

Cleansweep Filter: This miniaturized hand-held nanofab functions only to emit Dust-disabling countermeasures, lowering the strength of a surrounding Dust zone by one step- Hazes vanish, Clouds become Fogs, and so forth. The effect extends ten meters around the filter. A single type B power cell will power a cleansweep filter for 30 minutes. If the Dust is being controlled by an intelligent operator, however, the filter's operator will need to beat them in an opposed Intelligence/Tech/Pretech skill test to avoid their notice of the filter's bubble in their Dust field. Most Mandate facility-grade AIs have an effective Tech/Pretech skill bonus of 4.

Dustbox: This liter-sized container of Dust is programmed to recognize the person who opens it as its appointed controller, though this control cannot be exercised unless the user has an active Link. Within one meter of the controller, the Dust is Cloud strength. Within twenty meters, it is Fog strength, and within two hundred meters it is Haze strength. The dustbox can cancel out hostile security Dust of the same strength, though it can do nothing else but neutralize the hostile dust while so employed. The Dust lasts for only thirty minutes before exhausting its power, and cannot be returned to the container after it has been released.

Dust Chime: This small device is powered by a type A cell, lasting 24 hours on one cell. It alerts the wearer when they enter a Dusted area, giving different signals to indicate the thickness of the Dust. Some rare varieties of Dust can defeat a Dust chime's sensors.

Quantum Power Cell: This miniaturized quantum power tap is a scaled-up version of the quantum flux taps that power the nanites of the Dust. Whatever the artifact's appearance, it extrudes a small plug shaped like a type A power cell. The cell never runs out of power, though the artifact itself may be somewhat unwieldy to carry around mated with the object it powers.

Link Damper Charge: This sophisticated targeted-EMP grenade was originally intended to disable the Links of those caught within its 5-meter area of effect. Thrown as a normal grenade, any subject hit suffers an inability to use a Link for five minutes. Remarkably few entities have functioning Links in the modern era, but the simple existence of these charges often forced even security-minded designers to include manual controls on Mandate tech, so that guards could continue to use their weapons even if "damped"; it's very hard to hack a mechanical trigger.

ITEM	ENC
Biostatus Lockdown Shunts	1
Cleansweep Filter	1
Dustbox	1
Dust Chime	1
Quantum Power Cell	1
Link Damper Charge	1
Merge Suit	2
Prosthetic Link	1

Merge Suit: This worn artifact is designed to harmonize with the Dust. It renders the wearer immune to the Dust and invisible to its sensors, and any drones or barriers created by the Dust are effectively immaterial to the suit's wearer. The suit can only protect a limited amount of gear, however, and so only readied equipment can be protected from the Dust or brought through a Dust-created barrier. The merge suit siphons power from the surrounding Dust, and requires no power cell. It cannot be worn with armor that has an encumbrance value of more than 1 item.

Prosthetic Link: Designed to compensate for users who are otherwise experiencing difficulties with their Links, this worn artifact interfaces with the wearer's neural patterns to merge them into the data link provided by surrounding Dust. While it also makes them exceedingly vulnerable to hostile security Dust, the benefits of a functioning Link can be substantial. While in a non-hostile Dusted area, a user can automatically learn the operation of any Mandate artifact without requiring a Tech saving throw, and can communicate with any other Linked entity within the same Dusted area. Communication is full-spectrum, including full sensory interchange- or complete sensory hijacking, if the Dust's controlling power is so inclined. The user can also effortlessly "hear" radio, gravitic, and laser communications taking place within the Dust, ignoring postech encryption. The Link powers itself on ambient Dust, and does not require a power cell.

Mandate Tech on the Market

Selling genuine Mandate tech is extraordinarily difficult. It's not that buyers are difficult to find, it's that so many people are willing to kill to get their hands on it. Even the most individually useless piece of functioning Mandate tech promises wild advances in basic research. The great majority of the tech is totally impenetrable to anyone short of the Maestro who designed it, but that never stops researchers from dreaming- and every so often, they get the clue that makes it all worthwhile.

PCs aspiring to sell Mandate tech are going to need to move very carefully. If word gets out that they're sitting on a cache of genuine Second Wave Terran technology, every two-bit cutthroat and wild-eyed mad scientist within a half-dozen sectors is going to be looking to make their acquaintance. If they can find a discreet buyer, prices start at 10,000 credits for baubles and only go up from there.

MANDATE WEAPONRY					
Weapon	Damage	Range in Meters	Magazine	Skill	Attribute
Chronal Burner	Special	Melee	2	Primitive	Dex
Control Projector	Special	5	2	Energy	Dex
Nanoknife	1d12+1	6/9 if thrown	5 minutes	Primitive	Str/Dex
Neural Resonance Cascade	2d6+2	100/200	6	Psitech	Wis/Con
Omnigun	Varies	Varies	Unlimited	Projectile	Dex
Orbital Tap	2d8+2	50/100	Unlimited	Projectile	Dex

Chronal Burner: This hand-held temporal weapon pulses random chronon bursts through its emissions aperture, slagging high-tech equipment in front of it. While the effects of the temporal alteration are almost imperceptible on a macroscopic scale, the flux of universal constants within sophisticated TL 5 equipment runs a 75% chance of ruining it, while TL 4 equipment suffers a 50% chance of being bricked. The burner is ineffective against devices larger than hand-held equipment, but ignores armor for purposes of determining the AC necessary to hit a character's equipment. A burner can only destroy one item at a time. A chronal burner is only effective within melee range and gets only two shots off a single type A cell.

Control Projector: Originally intended to harmlessly subdue unruly citizens, a control projector emits a spray of transmitter nanites that jams the victim's conscious motor control, though the lack of Links in most modern targets make the projector less effective in the present. The projector fires a cone five meters long and five meters wide at its far end, automatically hitting all targets within the area of effect. Human subjects hit must save versus Tech or be paralyzed for five minutes. Those who save are incompatible with the projector's neural shutdown protocols, and take 1d8 nerve damage instead each time they are hit by that same projector. The projector fires twice on one type A power cell.

Nanoknife: A general-purpose tool for disassembling solid objects, the nanoknife abandons sophisticated energy manipulation in favor of a very, very sharp edge. An inert knife may look like anything, but when triggered, a blade springs into existence between twelve and one hundred centimeters in length. Nanoknives never break or dull, and can chew through any postech material and most pretech

ones with a minute of undisturbed carving. A nanoknife can operate for five minutes on one type A power cell.

Neural Resonance Cascade: This device mimics some of the destructive powers of an advanced telepath, allowing a wearer to blast a sentient target with waves of invisible neural resonance. The wearer does not need to be a telepath to use the cascade, but a mind-blind user must save versus Tech after each use or suffer 1d6 damage from the feedback. The cascade gets six shots out of one type A power cell.

Omnigun: These weapons are formed of unstable compounds and thin-shell nanite projectors, and can reconfigure themselves in one round to mimic the properties of any non-artifact TL 4 or TL 5 projectile or energy weapon given in the *Stars Without Number* core rulebook. Omniguns never require power cells or ammunition, and grant a +1 bonus to hit and +2 bonus to damage. Burst firing with an omnigun can destabilize the gun's format, however; after each round of burst firing, roll 1d10. On a 1, the gun is "jammed" for two rounds.

Orbital Tap: This weapon siphons off an imperceptible fraction of the energy inherent in a planet's orbit. The lance of inertial potential is a tangible projectile, and will knock prone any human-sized target it hits. It requires no power source or ammunition to function. The tap only works while within a planetary gravity field of 1 g or greater.

THE JUDICATORS

Every society has its laws. Even the wild anarchy of an orbital commune or border-world bandit camp is woven about with implicit rules and unspoken understandings. Even the most untamed places are webbed by behavioral expectations that grow more sophisticated as the society hardens with age, and no one who inhabits them for long can fail to recognize the things that are forbidden and the things that will be punished.

Rulers have always dreamed of making their law a tangible fact. They have devised regimens of enforcement and observation, techniques of induced obedience and helpful nudges to assist their people in conforming to the right path. Whether president, dictator, high priest or village elder, there has always been the desire to make the law strong. Even those who have no say in its construction often desire its security, as even the cruelest tyranny can be kinder than the chaos of an unfettered world.

For a law to have substance, it is not enough that the people should understand and respect it. It must also have a means of separating out those who will not obey, of punishing and excluding those who rebel against the greater society. Even herds of unthinking beasts will drive out their rogues, and the harsh worlds of the frontier often cannot afford to humor a reckless indifference to the law. Even as the Terran Mandate prided itself on the "humane rehabilitation" granted to offenders, it had its own secret police and faceless enforcers all the same.

The rulers of the Second Wave had ample reason to want their laws enshrined in perpetuity, and they were willing to engage in bloody, costly research to make it possible. Unfortunately, the outcome was not precisely as they had expected. Even as they made their law a tangible and undeniable force, they failed to realize that what had become a chain for their serfs had also become a yoke for their own necks.

Uncivil Unrest

By 2400, conditions on Terra were growing unstable. Massive convict fleets were shipping out millions of troublemakers and criminals to the frontier worlds, but the effort could not be sustained. The bureaucrats of the Mandate recognized that the steady outflow of Terran colonists was only serving to strengthen the worlds of the frontier and create a culture and population base that could someday come to threaten Terra itself. It was necessary to find some way to control the Terran population without resorting to the constant exile of its malcontents.

The traditional technique of mass executions was impractical. Thanks to the relentless meddling of the massive artificial intelligences known as the Maestros, it was impossible to simply kill all the troublemakers. The AIs would not stand for such brutal tyranny, and the AIs were indispensable for coordinating Terra's economy and producing much of the Mandate's most advanced technology. Their ancient hardwiring compelled them to obey the Mandate

bureaucracy in most regards, but that same wiring had implanted an enforced respect for the value of justice and human life. Any programming adjustments that might loosen their inhibitions in that regard ran the risk of destroying the Mandate's control over their pet godminds, and that catastrophic prospect kept Mandate programmers well away from the AI cores.

More advanced tools were sought, and some among the bureaucracy began to back elaborate technological research on biological means of behavior control. Chemicals, hormone modifications, implanted aversions, DNA-encoded stimuli-response pairs... the cover was always presented as therapeutic research towards curing mental illness, but in truth these researchers sought to breed a race of humans that would be docile sheep for their wise Mandate shepherds. Such an obedient and tractable population would certainly usher in a glowing age of peace and harmony on Terra, one uncontaminated by any annoying resistance to the Directorate's wishes.

In 2420, these plans were uncovered. Some believe that the Maestros played a hidden role in releasing holorecordings of the hideous experiments and agonizing transformations endured by the victims of the research, but the news hit the Terran Net like a thunderbolt. As the news ignited remote local networks in furious anger, the Maestros somehow were able to classify the situation as a "threat to planetary life". The classification allowed them to bypass the strict information controls that usually fettered communication between the different cultural reservations on Terra. United by a suddenly-open Net, it seemed like half the planet was rioting at the prospect of being transformed into helpless slaves of the Mandate.

The Directorate acted swiftly to purge the experimenters. Some among the bureaucracy were honestly horrified by the research, having been kept blind to the true atrocities being committed in the deeply-buried laboratories and remote orbital research centers. Others acted to burn ties before their servants could talk, and such was the "righteous fury" that a great many laboratories and hidden compounds were erased from existence before investigators had any chance to interview the criminal scientists. With the eventual involvement of the Perimeter organization and its deep anti-maltech espionage operations, this route too was rendered impractical for controlling Terra's restless hordes.

An Unseen Angle

Terra's lords and masters were growing desperate by 2440. They couldn't resort to mass bloodshed and they couldn't remake their charges, and few other options seemed to exist for calming the discontent of the Terran citizenry. The convict ships soared skyward at ever-increasing rates, and some Mandate statisticians were pointing out that the collected resources of the frontier worlds were starting to eclipse even the pretech industrial might of Terra herself.

As they could neither kill nor permanently alter their subjects, the Mandate turned to a new vector of control. Dedicated psychic

researchers were gathered and set to studying certain obscure side-effects and corollaries involved in the use of the psionic discipline of telepathy. Numerous psychic "volunteers" were acquired, many chosen from among the desperate throngs who would otherwise have been exiled off of Terra. Their minds were studied and molded toward a new use of psychic power.

Such research was not unknown. Many pretech industries relied on obscure psitech techniques and exotic psychic disciplines to produce their marvels. Developing these tricks was slow and bitterly expensive in both minds and money, but the Mandate knew it could create something functional if only it threw enough resources at the problem. And in the end, after more than 93% of the subjects died during research, they were finally able to unlock the psionic discipline now known as "Judication".

A Voice of Inner Restraint
Judication was developed as a sub-discipline of telepathy, one blended with delicate biopsionic techniques. It came at a bitter cost; such an ungainly combination of arts made it very difficult for students to follow the course of study. Many of the initial subjects were left with permanent brain damage in the course of discovering the necessary psychic contortions, but it was a necessary sacrifice given the limitations of the existing disciplines.

Conventional telepathy is largely unsuitable for influencing sentient minds. A skilled psychic can cause injury or death by launching a raw burst of metadimensional energy through the meat of a victim's brain, but the kind of fine control and disciplined influence that would result in forcing particular actions is impossible for telepathy. It simply doesn't have the necessary tools for inducing particular responses.

Judication narrowed telepathy's scope. It clipped away much of its communicative abilities and tightened the mental bandwidth dedicated to mind-to-mind contact. In its place, it integrated subtle, low-level biopsionic techniques of neurochemical production and raw emotional inducement. Initial efforts had limited success; telepathic commands could be given, but the cocktail of brain chemicals that followed induced wildly unpredictable reactions in the targets. They simply couldn't be "steered" correctly with such crude tools.

Eventually, a brilliant Mandate researcher, Dr. Fu-Lien Pao, hit upon a solution to the problem. The telepathic communication would be adjusted to operate at a subconscious level, hijacking the target's existing sense of social mores and legal obligations. The subject's own natural aversion to committing morally disgusting acts and grave crimes would be used to force obedience, with the neurochemical production reinforcing these natural hesitations into overwhelming, undeniable compulsions.

A skilled judicator could read the social context of a situation perfectly, instinctively sensing the expectations and patterns of anticipated behavior held by those around her. As their powers grew, they became capable of selectively numbing a target's awareness of crimes or trespasses, and then imposing their own taboos upon another's brain. Only the most powerful judicators could link these

compulsions to specific positive actions, but any experienced psychic could force others to feel a marrow-deep horror at the thought of committing acts forbidden by the judicator.

They were perfect for the Mandate's purposes. The Directorate could control them as they controlled all their other catspaws, with bribery, threats, and conventional means of handling, and through their powers they could control the restless masses. Because the technology was not a permanent alteration of the human mind, it did not trespass the maltech bans enforced by the Perimeter, and because the psychics required no cooperation from the Maestros, the godminds would be helpless to interfere.

The Enforcer's Rebellion
At first, it seemed as if everything was going precisely as the Mandate had anticipated. Elaborate psitech resonance chambers were built to amplify the judicators' abilities and allow them to impress their psychic influence on whole populations. Individual trouble spots and malcontents were quashed by the psychics, individuals suddenly suffering excruciating horror at the thought of participating in anti-Mandate activities or secret society meetings. The Maestros could do nothing to stop them, for the psychics required none of the resources that the Maestros still controlled- no drones, no heavy combat bots, no vast fleets of ships or clouds of panopticon Dust. The judicators simply entered their amplification chambers and focused their wills on problematic portions of Terra.

Some judicators were less than eager to be pawns of the Directorate, of course. These men and women were brought around to understanding the wisdom of cooperation, either through the pleasures of sharing in the Mandate's wealth and power, or through the simple expedient of threatened death. Initially, it appeared these leashes were sufficient.

It wasn't until a steady string of internal scandals resulted in the execution of a quarter of the Directorate's membership that the Mandate bureaucrats began to suspect that something was wrong. The storms had blown up out of nowhere: old crimes had come to light, political maneuvers had backfired disastrously, alliances had crumbled in sudden betrayal... the dangerous game of rule was growing intolerably hot for the Directorate. It seemed almost as if the Mandate's ruling class was suddenly eating itself alive.

It took some time for the Mandate to understand where they had gone wrong. Later, they realized that it had started just after they had formally incorporated the judicators as the Bureau of Rectification, responsible for correcting official deviations from Mandate law. It was a sham, of course, just an empty name to wrap around their duties. No Director ever troubled to consider what Mandate law had to say unless he could use it to cripple a rival or slap down a troublesome inferior. The regulations were all dead letters, and the judicators were simply meant to use the regulations as a patina of justification for their repression.

The Directorate never realized that the Maestros were still programmed to take such declarations seriously. When the Directorate made the formal announcement, the Maestros obediently recognized the judicators as the lawfully-ordained internal security of

the Terran Mandate, promptly opening up massive databases of confidential Net communications and secret Directorate files.

By the time they realized that the judicators were involved with their recent fratricide, it was too late. The psychics had made an alliance with the Maestros, and the protection of the godminds was sufficient to save most of them from Mandate retaliation. The Directorate immediately tried to destroy or deactivate every resonance chamber on Terra, but it could not kill the individual judicators. Any attempt to levy direct violence against their newly-fanged internal security gave the judicators all the excuse they required to force perfectly legal execution of the would-be assassin. A few Directors tried to hide their tracks with multiple cutouts between them and the killers, but such subtlety proved impossible with the Maestros able to pass every whisper of information that crossed the Terran Net to the judicators. The Directorate had locked itself into its own cage.

An Ominous Quiet

Perversely, it was the ruthless rectitude enforced by the judicators that kept Terra from collapsing in the centuries that followed. Hemmed in on every side by the Bureau of Rectification, the Directorate was forced to step up their exile of "problematic elements", even knowing what such a policy was certain to produce. It pushed the problem back by a few more generations, and that was all the Directorate could hope to do.

At the same time, the judicators purged much of the corruption and cruel oppression of the Mandate. The worst of the Directors were ensnared in webs of broken regulations, baited and trapped in a net of violations that ensured their execution or exile. At lower levels, the judicators scourged the regional bureaus of their petty tyrants and venal officials, improving the lives of the common citizenry and adding a precious margin of freedom to the rigid cultural rules of the Mandate.

It is when a tyranny relaxes its grip that it is most vulnerable to revolt, but the enhanced colonial fleets siphoned off the hottest of the rebels. Those that remained were simply glad of their new liberty and relaxed into a somnolent, static sort of contentment. The pleasures of Terra during the Second Wave were many, and it was easier to dwell on the endless repetition of frozen custom than risk the strangeness of new ways. The judicators were able to relax their fury as the Mandate was cleansed of its worst excesses, and the world calmed for a time.

The calm was just the prelude to fresh troubles. As the Mandate became a gentler and cleaner government, some among the judicators found it easier to cooperate with the new officials than to keep their customary vigil. The Bureau of Rectification was slowly absorbed into the social and cultural matrix of the Mandate, and its judicators became just one more species of bureaucrat, with a bureaucrat's concern for stability and personal advancement.

In the first few generations after the purge, the dangers were minimal. The Mandate was not overly corrupt and the judicators were not excessively lax. As the years passed, the ambition and inward-turning greed of the officials blossomed once more, decaying in

the way of every old and powerful institution. This time, however, there were no judicators to reform it. They had become the docile servants of the government they had once sworn to judge.

A few of them still kept the faith with the help of the Maestros and their secret files, but most of the judicators became catspaws and assassins for powerful Directors and their more important underlings. Their authority as internal security was used as a weapon against political rivals. The same techniques of blackmail, infiltration, and engineered crimes that they had once use to pull down the corrupt became the tools of bureaucratic mercenaries. Every Mandate official understood that internal security could find "problems" in someone's conduct if given suitable inducement, and that these "problems" could even turn out to be capital crimes if a sufficient price was paid.

The judicators never dirtied their own hands with the actual killing, of course. They were context assassins, murderers within the law. They could point to their victim's proven violations, his myriad known and demonstrated crimes. Certainly, the criminal would wail about being set up to commit them, or about his own ignorance of the regulations, or about being baited into the situation- but a criminal would say things like that, wouldn't he? It was necessary that such traitors to the Mandate's laws pay the appropriate penalty.

A Scattering of Judges

In time, the judicators even began to fight amongst themselves. Some fought for better access to a powerful Director's patronage, while others found themselves employed to eliminate a colleague who happened to be hired by their patron's rival. Byzantine webs of plot and counter-plot blossomed in the halls of the Bureau as the judicators became obsessed with sussing out their rivals before they could strike.

Gradually, the faithful among the judicators were largely forced offworld. It was simply too dangerous to remain on Terra. Without a Director as patron, there were too many willing to get them out of the way just to keep the gameboard manageable. More and more of the faithful were forced to leave for posts on the frontier, off to become roaming Mandate inquisitors amid the colonies. Many of them left with substantial stores of pretech gifted to them by sympathetic Maestros.

Among them were a leavening of unmitigated bastards. Not every judicator won their contests on Terra, and some of them lost in survivable ways. These exiles fled or were pushed out into the frontier, many of them heading out with plans to forge their own power base among distant stars, to some day return to Terra with resources far beyond those of their hated enemies. It might be necessary to be somewhat harsh with the colonials, of course, but they were perfectly equipped for suborning their primitive social structures and crude governments.

Events were rapidly moving toward a climax when the Scream wiped out all contact with the core worlds. The ultimate destiny of the Bureau on Terra remains a mystery. On the frontier, all that is left of the judicators are a few scattered Mandate offices and long-

abandoned governmental buildings. Only scholars of the distant past can even recognize the name, let alone place their activities.

Yet rumors persist in the darker corners of the frontier. Tales of mind-bending psychics have been a staple for centuries, but some of these border yarns describe abilities remarkably similar to those attributed to the original judicators: effortless mastery of a world's cultural matrix, clouded perceptions of right and wrong, even the mind-destroying agony of their psychic castigation.

Some wonder if a few judicators may perhaps have survived the Scream in a condition capable of passing down their training. Those psychics who somehow survived the overwhelming surge of metadimensional energy were all left irrevocably, violently insane of course, but some of them were coherent enough to train apprentices. The sort of institutions such maddened mind-tyrants might have produced would doubtless have been horrific even by the decadent standards of the late Second Wave. There's no telling what manner of obsessions or twisted goals they might have passed down to their heirs... to say nothing of the possibility that some of them were carrying the executive longevity nanites that granted functional immortality to the elite of Terra. Some of the original arch-judicators might still be out there somewhere, weaving mad plans for unknowable ends.

Others suspect that the arts of the judicators might have been reconstructed on some remote frontier world. With sufficient Terran research data, rebuilding the discipline would not have been impossible, though it would have doubtless required decades of research and a hideous cost in psychic minds. These practitioners might be enlisted as the enforcers of some expansionist ideology, or they might share their predecessors' role as troubleshooters for a powerful local government. Whatever the particulars, it seems unlikely that the arts of the judicators have been entirely lost- and even if they have been, there are doubtless some who remain very eager to find them once more.

Judication

Judication operates much as any other psionic discipline. Unless indicated otherwise, every power activation lasts for five minutes or one social situation, whichever is longer, and can be turned on any single target within unaided visual range of the psychic. Judication powers can be activated in response to a social situation, and it is not necessary that the psychic have them active before beginning the interactions. Some powers are designed to affect numerous targets, but the judicator can always selectively exempt any number of people from the effects.

Subjects lacking special senses or psitech are not alerted to judication effects used against them even if they succeed on their saving throw. Perversely, those targets familiar with psionic disciplines may be less likely to suspect interference, because they know that standard psychic disciplines cannot produce the effects provided by judication. More ignorant souls with less awareness of the limits of psionic power might be more eager to blame a psychic for strange behavior. Blatantly obvious influence of another person's mind is likely to provoke suspicion even in the most willfully ignorant onlooker, however.

Judication involves elements of both telepathy and biopsionics, and levels of the judication discipline count as levels of either discipline for purposes of activating psitech devices reliant on such skills. Psitech devices that boost abilities that judicators do not have remain useless to them.

Because of these complex interactions, mastering judication is extremely difficult for most psychics. With the advanced training techniques available on ancient Terra it may have been possible to communicate its principles more easily, but presently it is a discipline requiring the utmost dedication. Judication cannot be trained unless it is a psychic's primary discipline. In most cases, this means that the psychic must choose it as such at first level, or at tenth level after mastering their prior primary discipline. Once a judicator has received the basic training related to the discipline, he or she may advance in it without requiring further instruction.

In Your Place   Level 1

The judicator has an instinctive awareness of the expectations of others around him. In ordinary social situations and when exchanging common courtesies, the judicator always knows precisely what social behavior is expected of him by his interlocutor, whether in action, appearance, or speech. He can even speak formulaic courtesies and make flawless small talk in languages he does not actually understand, instinctively making the sounds expected of him.

The judicator fails Culture checks related to common etiquette and ordinary behavior only on a natural 2 on the skill check, and can masquerade as a native member of any culture or social group, assuming his appearance makes it plausible. Activation of this power lasts for one conversation or social situation. If mastered, this power is permanently active.

Knowing Echo   Level 2

A judicator's intuitive grasp of an interlocutor's surface thoughts sharpens, and they become capable of sensing what another expects them to know or say. When activated, a particular target may make a saving throw versus Mental Effect. On a success, the target is immune to this power for the next 24 hours. If the roll is failed, the judicator becomes aware of the subject's expectations regarding the psychic, and knows what answers or words the subject will find most plausible in conversation.

For example, a guard speaking an unknown language might ask for a password. The power could be triggered to instantly provide the psychic with the knowledge of what the guard was saying and the password that he was expecting to hear. If the speaker is uncertain about the psychic's identity, the judicator becomes aware of the most plausible possibility they expect. The power is limited, however, in that it only provides the psychic with what the target is expecting, even if they are expecting very bad things of the judicator. If used to impersonate an individual or role, it grants a free automatic reroll of one failed social skill check per game hour. The power affects one target for one conversation when activated.

Numb Taboo   Level 3

The judicator can briefly numb the social outrage of those around her, making scandalous or illegal actions seem perfectly acceptable and unremarkable. The psychic may perform up to one round's worth of speech or non-violent action before activating this power. The potentially hostile onlooker with the best saving throw versus Mental Effect then makes a save. If the roll succeeds, the group is unaffected and no one present can be affected by this power for the next 24 hours. If the roll fails, the entire group falls under the power's sway, and sees nothing inappropriate or shocking about the judicator's actions. They are able to remember the character's actions and remain aware of the laws or social taboos broken, but are taken with an unshakable certainty that it was "proper" for the psychic to act as she did. This numbness lasts for one hour, after which most subjects will try very hard to rationalize their lack of response. This power can be activated on multiple consecutive rounds, but any successful saving throw immediately snaps all current indifferences.

Transpose Taboo   Level 4

The judicator can implant an intense sense of shame and aversion toward a particular behavior in a sentient target. The victim must make a saving throw versus Mental Effect, and on success is immune to this power for 24 hours. On a failure, the target feels an intense abhorrence toward the particular action or behavior, and will not perform it unless in a life-or-death situation, in which case they will attempt to escape the situation at the first opportunity. This aversion is instinctual, and the subject will not be consciously aware of it unless it is pointed out by others. Even if aware, they will be unable to resist it, though they may be more likely to suspect psionic influence.

The power is not precise enough to induce positive action in a target, such as making them perform a specific course of conduct. The template for the taboo must also be held in the judicator's mind in order for a correct transposition, and so the regulator must obey the ban as well. The effect lasts for up to one hour or until the judicator violates the stricture, whichever comes first.

Burning Shame   Level 5

The judicator triggers an all-consuming sense of guilt and shame in a victim, forcing them to relive emotionally amplified versions of their worst sins and gravest personal failures. The experience is torturous even for the most viciously callous targets, though the judicator is not aware of the specific content of these shames. Most targets are utterly incapacitated for 1d4+1 rounds, helpless and oblivious to their surroundings. A target in a desperate situation can choose to fight off the memories and act normally, though the emotional agony and drain on their willpower inflicts 1d4 hit points of damage for each level of Judication possessed by the psychic. Victims reduced to zero hit points by this effect will commit suicide if able to do so with their next action, otherwise surviving with 1 hit point remaining. A successful saving throw versus Mental Effect leaves the subject incapacitated for only one round, or taking only half damage if they choose to act regardless. A target hit by this power is immune to it for 24 hours afterwards, as their brains remain neurochemically saturated by the memories. Repeated application of this power over time can produce permanent mental damage.

Antinomian Will   Level 6

The judicator temporarily numbs the minds of those around him to considerations of law, custom, and self-discipline. The power can affect all sentients within one hundred meters and can penetrate up to one meter of interposing barriers. Those under its influence immediately perform whatever actions they emotionally desire, heedless of any law or restraint. Only force can restrain them from their desired ends, and they will take the most direct physical route to satisfying their will. Subjects engaged in combat or facing danger must make a Morale check at a -4 penalty or immediately flee. This fit of untamed id lasts for ten minutes, though the aftermath may be prolonged- once a mob has given in to its passions, it may well keep going even after its members remember the law.

Significant NPCs get individual saving throws versus Mental Effect to resist the power, while mobs roll a single saving throw for their average member. A successful saving throw leaves the target immune to this power for 24 hours.

Unseen Crown   Level 7

The judicator exudes an air of authority and expertise that influences the perceptions of all intelligent beings within unaided sight or earshot. The judicator selects a particular societal role- judge, shaman, gravcar repairman, admiral, or any other such position- and is instinctively perceived as such by everyone around her, with most dissonances ignored by those under the effect. The judicator can mimic membership in particular organizations and echo specific positions and roles in them, but she cannot pose as a particular individual.

Her identity will not be challenged unless the psychic behaves wildly inappropriately for the role or the subjects are required to investigate even seemingly obvious identities. If such challenges show that the judicator is not actually what she says, most observers

will suffer 1d4 rounds of confused indecision before overcoming the power's influence. Orders or requests made to subjects under the influence will be obeyed if they are reasonable and expected from such a personage; demands that are abnormal, suspicious, or that would result in the death of the subject will break the effect after 1d4 rounds of uncertainty. Once the effect is broken for one target, it is broken for all of them, and those once affected are immune to this power for 24 hours. If unimpaired, the effect lasts for one hour per activation, and does not grant a saving throw.

Interpreting the Licit   Level 8

The judicator becomes capable of absorbing complex regulations and legal regimes simply by touching the mind of a member of that group or society. On a success, the target resists the power and is immune to it for 24 hours. On a failure, the judicator absorbs an instinctive awareness of every social, legal, and moral stricture known to the target. A judicator could absorb a local lawyer's understanding of the law in a moment, or touch a guard's mind to become instantly aware of all the regulations and orders regarding patrols and security measures. A priest's religious values become clear in an eyeblink, and the rough traditions of a badlander tribe are clear with a moment's concentration.

This information is received in a disordered condition, and it is hard for the psychic to systematize it, but she can ask specific questions of it and get the correct answers. Permissible questions include those such as "What is the penalty for theft in the Qadir Republic?", "Which people are allowed entrance to the laboratory after 8 PM?", or "How can an outsider be purified sufficiently to enter the Yellow Sanctum?" The power does not reveal any specifics about the target, but only about the laws and regulations known to them. Essentially, the judicator may get information on any knowledge related to particular rules or moral values.

The disorganized state of the knowledge makes it somewhat difficult to employ for general uses, but it allows an unskilled psychic to make Culture or Profession/Lawyer skill checks relevant to the information as if trained to skill level 1. If the psychic has at least level-0 in the skill, it instead allows a reroll on a failed check once per game hour. The power need only be activated to absorb knowledge, not to recall it at a later time. The psychic does not forget information absorbed in this way.

Speak the Law   Level 9

The judicator ensnares those around him in a ruthless matrix of social taboos and perceived legal obligations. When the judicator Speaks the Law, every request or order the psychic communicates is received as if it were an absolute law. Affected listeners will automatically obey unless such action presents an obvious threat to their life or a contradiction of some other, equally precious value. Activation of this power lasts for one hour, after which the listeners no longer feel the force of compulsion behind the prior commands. If the judicator has been careful in his phrasing, they may rationalize their obedience as being in line with existing orders, but ungrounded demands will likely be understood as psychic influence. Listeners commanded to do something extremely distasteful may make a saving throw versus Mental Effect to resist the command and become immune to this power for 24 hours. Use of this power inflicts one point of System Strain on the judicator with each activation.

The default presumption of *Stars Without Number* is that while a skilled unarmed combatant can be a dangerous foe, there's no substitute for a gun. Unarmed combatants never need to worry about being disarmed and are perilous enemies even when stripped of their equipment, but most PCs will sensibly prefer to pick up a combat shotgun or shear rifle when they have the opportunity. Such rules model most flavors of science fiction and correspond to most players' intuitive expectations about how combat ought to play out. Guns are the weapons of choice, with primitive weaponry as backup and unarmed combat as a choice of last resort.

Not every group prefers to go with this hierarchy. Some GMs and players prefer game worlds in which choosing to fight unarmed is a mechanically viable choice, and the expert unarmed combatant is no worse off than the expert rifleman. The following optional rules give a boost to unarmed combat so that the level 6 warrior with Combat/Unarmed-3 is every bit as lethal as his comrade who has specialized in projectile weaponry.

Learning Martial Arts

Martial art styles are purchased as new specializations of the Combat skill, each style as its own skill. Warriors can buy them as class skills, while other classes can purchase them at non-class skill point rates. Characters with levels in Combat/Primitive may optionally convert them into a style that uses weaponry and levels of Combat/Unarmed may be converted into styles that involve unarmed strikes.

Most martial arts require a teacher. Some of them may not have any known practitioners on a world, especially those reliant on psychic abilities. Characters who seek to learn a particular style might have to conduct extensive research and exploration simply to find a master capable of instructing them. Many styles can be learned in their basic form through instructional materials alone, including psychic styles, but attaining true mastery often requires a living teacher.

Each style of martial art confers special benefits at skill levels 0, 1, and 2. Practitioners with level 0 in the style are considered novices, while level 1 is intermediate skill and level 2 indicates mastery. Masters can continue to increase their skill in the style, but further levels simply add the usual benefits of high skill.

A character can only use one style in any given combat round, declaring it at the start of the round. Benefits from other styles cannot normally be used, though a few styles specifically grant perks that are always in effect. If a character's styles apply more than one bonus to a given roll, only the better bonus applies- they do not stack.

Martial art styles have associated weapon types. The benefits of the style can only be used when wielding those weapons, including powered or high-tech equivalents. It's for the GM to decide whether a given weapon qualifies for a style. The "unarmed" weapon type in-

cludes punches, kicks, and any other variety of bare-handed strike. Unless specifically noted otherwise, strike-augmenting "unarmed" weapons like kinesis wraps and body arsenal arrays cannot be used in conjunction with a martial art style.

Martial arts style skills are treated as Combat/Unarmed for all other purposes, and can be used whenever Combat/Unarmed might normally be checked. Skill levels add directly to both hit rolls and damage, and a character with at least level 2 in a martial art can inflict bare-handed or weapon damage with that style even on targets that would otherwise be immune to low-tech attacks.

Martial arts can still be used if a GM isn't using skills in his or her campaign, or is using a game system that doesn't have skills. Every PC with a background or class appropriate to a mastery of martial arts can begin play with the Novice benefits of one style. At each level thereafter, a Warrior can either improve an existing style up to Master-level proficiency or pick a new style to learn at Novice level. Non-Warriors or those lacking a martial class can improve their martial arts every even-numbered level.

Martial Art Styles

The following styles are simply a sample of the countless different styles to be found spread throughout human space. Many of them have principles and traits familiar to present-day martial artists, but almost all of them have experienced substantial drift, alteration, and blending over the centuries. Even within the styles below, the special benefits and focus might vary substantially among different teachers, worlds and sectors. Most modern martial arts are all but unrecognizable in the year 3200 CE.

Some styles specify abilities that work against humanoid targets. Generally, this means only humans and human-like aliens. Martial artists with at least level 0 proficiency in an alien's Culture skill can use their techniques against those aliens.

Some styles trigger effects when maximum damage is rolled on a hit. The martial artist cannot choose to use a smaller-than-normal damage die with these attacks, such as using the 1d2 default unarmed damage for humans.

Damage done with a martial art style is normally lethal in nature. In the rush of mortal combat, it's not easy to ensure that a strike doesn't actually kill or mortally injure a victim. If an unarmed combatant does not wish to use lethal force against a target, they can roll to hit at a -4 penalty. A victim reduced to 0 hit points by such attacks is either unconscious for 1d4 minutes or helplessly restrained by the martial artist, at the artist's discretion.

DIRTY FIGHTING

This "style" is acquired in dive bars, dirty colonial streets, and military training courses. The details vary from world to world, but every manifestation tends to focus on low blows, cheap shots, and the ugly little tricks that give a combatant victory before his enemy realizes that he's in danger.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed, knives, improvised weapons
Level 0 Novice	The brawler knows how to throw a punch: base unarmed damage is 1d8.
Level 1 Intermediate	The brawler is an old hand at using furniture, drinks, trash, and other detritus to impede an enemy. Enemies suffer a -2 to hit the brawler when in melee range, provided there's something the brawler can grab to throw at them, tip over, or get in their way.
Level 2 Master	The brawler's got a kick like a mule: base unarmed damage is now 2d6. If maximum damage is rolled, a humanoid target must make a Physical Effect saving throw at a penalty equal to the brawler's Combat/Brawling skill or be dazed and lose their next round's action.

EMPTY HOLSTER STYLE

This style was favored by rebels and conspirators in the latter days of the Terran Mandate, and is designed to counter the advantages of an enemy gunman. Most Mandate firearms during the Second Wave were Net-locked to their possessor, so disarming security officers was rarely as useful as forcing them to turn their weapons on each other.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed, clubs, staves
Level 0 Novice	The novice's unarmed combat damage is 1d6+1.
Level 1 Intermediate	Intricate blocks and sidesteps make it difficult for a gunman to bring his weapon to bear on the martial artist at close range. Gunmen suffer a -2 penalty to hit the martial artist when within melee range.
Level 2 Master	The novice's unarmed combat damage is 1d10. The martial artist may give up his attack to fall into a defensive stance, forcing any gunmen within melee range to suffer a -2 on hit rolls against the artist. If a gunman shoots at and misses the martial artist in this stance, he must roll another to-hit roll against another target of the martial artist's choice at a -4 penalty to hit. The gunman cannot be forced to shoot at himself.

GENTLE WAY

One of a number of aikido-descended martial arts, the Gentle Way has survived on many worlds thanks to its popularity as a security officer style before the Scream.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed, Chain
Level 0 Novice	The novice's unarmed strikes do 1d6 damage. This damage done by this style is non-lethal and a victim reduced to 0 hit points is either unconscious for 1d4 minutes or helplessly restrained by the martial artist, at the artist's discretion.
Level 1 Intermediate	On a successful hit, the martial artist may choose not to do damage, but instead throw or trip a humanoid victim to leave them prone. Prone combatants must spend their round's movement allowance to stand up. Prone combatants suffer a -2 AC penalty against melee-range assailants, take -2 to hit other targets in melee, and can crawl at only one-quarter usual movement speed.
Level 2 Master	The master's strikes do 1d10 unarmed damage. The master may perform a disarming strike as an attack, taking a -4 hit penalty on the roll. If it succeeds, the victim must roll an Evasion saving throw at a penalty equal to the attacker's Combat/Gentle Way skill or the attacker ends up holding their weapon. Weapons gripped with two hands grant a +2 bonus on the saving throw.

Ghost Walker Style

Derived from certain styles of Reconstructed Ninjitsu in the late twenty-fifth century, the elaborate defensive footwork and flamboyant combat maneuvers of this style made it popular among enthusiasts throughout Second Wave human space. Beneath the popularized flash peddled by many teachers there remains a highly effective style focused on the evasion of pursuers.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed
Level 0 Novice	The novice's strikes do 1d6+1 unarmed damage.
Level 1 Intermediate	The martial artist never needs to make fighting withdrawals when using this style and can move through a pitched melee battle without drawing extra enemy attacks. They can use Combat/Ghost Walker Style in place of Athletics for skill checks related to acrobatics, climbing, or jumping.
Level 2 Master	The novice's strikes now do 1d10 unarmed damage. They can add Combat/Ghost Hand Style as a bonus to all Evasion saving throws at all times, even when not in this style.

Kenjutsu

"Kenjutsu" became something of a generic term during the late Second Wave, often applied to sword styles that had absolutely nothing to do with ancient Japan. Individual masters proliferated, but the most florid of their additions were pared away during the Silence. On many worlds, the quick and effective use of a bladed weapon ceased to be an affectation of social nobility or Terran traditionalism and became a matter of life and death.

Styles similar to Kenjutsu exist for weapons other than swords on many worlds, particularly those that derived from cultures that esteemed different weapons as signs of nobility. Spear-based variants of the style are common on many lostworlder planets that lack the metallurgic resources for forging long metal blades.

Weapon Groups	Swords
Level 0 Novice	If the martial artist has a sword worn as a readied item and uses this style for the round, they gain a +2 bonus on the initiative roll.
Level 1 Intermediate	The martial artist's form is perfect. If a 1 or 2 is rolled on a hit roll with this style, the attack may be rerolled. The second roll stands even if it, too, is a 1 or 2.
Level 2 Master	Every cut is a killing blow. The martial artist may add double their Combat/Kenjutsu skill to all damage rolls with swords.

Mindwall Style

Psionic-based martial arts were always a niche within a niche in the history of human space. Most psychics spent too much time focused on refining their mental abilities to put much effort into their physical capacities, and even then, training in the use of firearms was often a quicker, easier way to improve self-defense.

Still, a few psychic styles were perfected by researchers who refined the small, subtle side effects of standard psionic disciplines into tricks that were useful in the heat of combat. Psychic styles are not disciplines or newly-learned abilities, but instead just ways to use the normally-trivial side effects of a discipline in useful ways.

The Mindwall style was one of the first developed by military psionics researchers who needed to supply their combat psychics with techniques that could keep them alive in a firefight. Recognition of a psychic meant that they became the instant target of choice for enemies. Mindwall defensive manipulations keep a psychic too busy to use their psionic powers, but they can keep them alive until allies can clear the hostiles. Masters of the style are even capable of limited offensive action while the stance is active.

This style requires both as many levels of the Precognition and of Telekinesis discipline as the character has Combat/Mindwall Style levels, with a minimum of 1 level in each. Psychics can learn this style as if it were a class skill. All attacks with Mindwall Style use either Wisdom or Constitution as the ruling modifier for hit and damage, rather than Strength or Dexterity.

Weapon Groups	Swords, Staves
Level 0 Novice	The novice obtains an instinctive sense of incoming projectile or energy fire, interposing their weapon between them and the attack and reinforcing the block with telekinetic force. As their action for the round, the martial artist can drop into a defensive stance, causing energy weapon or projectile attacks suffer a penalty to hit them equal to 2 plus the martial artist's Combat/Mindwall Style skill. Maintaining this stance costs 1 psionic power point per turn.
Level 1 Intermediate	While in a Mindwall defensive stance, the character can reflect one missed ranged attack per round back at the attacker. The psychic makes a standard roll to hit, using Combat/Mindwall Style and the better of Wisdom or Constitution as the hit modifier and doing the attack's base, unmodified damage to the target if it hits.
Level 2 Master	While in a Mindwall defensive stance, the psychic can make one normal attack against an enemy within melee range as part of their round's actions. This is the only action they may make while still maintaining the stance, aside from normal movement.

Red Dawn Style

This psychic style was originally developed almost instinctively in 2530 by Matthias Ashigawa, a pit fighter on the renegade pirate world of Egalite. Matthias was a feral precognitive, and his eventual burnout resulted in a madness that was minimally compatible with human interaction. His spectacular bloodthirstiness and aptitude for physical violence drew him to the eventual rule of Egalite and a sector-spanning empire of iron and blood. The empire was still functioning at the time of the Scream, and while it is profoundly unlikely that Matthias' pretech anagathic treatments have managed to preserve him this long, no firm proof of his death or the collapse of his empire has ever come to light.

The style itself was taught to psychic missionaries dispatched to spread the word of Matthias' predestined glory. While their message struck few chords in hearers, some psychics managed to come away with knowledge of the style before the zealots or their enemies terminated the relationship in a permanent fashion. These psychics spread the details of the style through numerous psionic associations before the Scream ended the availability of living instructors. Basic instructional tapes and manuals still persist in some sectors of former human space.

This style requires at least as many levels of the Precognition discipline as the character has Combat/Red Dawn Style levels, with a minimum of 1 level of Precognition. Psychics can learn this style as if it were a class skill. All unarmed attacks with Red Dawn Style use either Wisdom or Constitution as the ruling modifier for hit and damage, rather than Strength or Dexterity.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed, Psitech weaponry
Level 0 Novice	The psychic's unarmed strikes now do 1d6 damage. The response to danger comes almost before the event; the psychic gains a +2 bonus to Initiative checks.
Level 1 Intermediate	The psychic can feel the impending evasive maneuvers of an enemy and focus on countering them. The martial artist may accept a penalty to their AC in exchange for an equal bonus to their next hit roll with this style, up to a maximum penalty/bonus equal to their Combat/Red Dawn Style skill. The AC penalty applies until the start of the martial artist's next turn.
Level 2 Master	The psychic's unarmed strikes now do 1d10 damage. If maximum damage is rolled on a hit, the target must save versus Mental Effect at a penalty equal to the martial artist's Combat/Red Dawn Style level or be subject to an immediate second attack from the martial artist as a different possible impact crashes over them at the same time. This effect can keep going as long as the psychic keeps rolling maximum damage and the victim keeps failing saves.

Silver Petal Style

Before the Scream, some worlds forbade the possession of firearms, and even now some of the safer or more tyrannical planets likewise limit the weaponry of their citizens. The Silver Petal style was developed to maximize the utility of common knives as throwing weapons, and is equally effective with any other small, sharp object that can be thrown or wielded in one hand.

Weapon Groups	Knives, Shuriken
Level 0 Novice	Knives used by the character do a minimum of 1d6 damage, if not already a more powerful monoblade knife. Knives can be thrown up to a maximum distance of 15 meters with no range penalty. Four knives count as only one readied item to the character.
Level 1 Intermediate	As an attack, the character can hurl a sweep of readied knives, attacking once plus once more for each level of Combat/Silver Petal Style. The character cannot move in the same round they perform this attack. A single victim can be targeted by only one knife.
Level 2 Master	The martial artist may add twice their style skill level to the damage they do with knives or shuriken in this style.

Tempter's Hand

A style with enigmatic antecedents, supposedly taught originally by the little-understood Sons of Samael. In the violence after the Scream it has become a favorite of assassins. It focuses on quick footwork and feints that lure targets into dropping their guard.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed
Level 0 Novice	If the novice hits a surprised humanoid target, the victim must make a Physical Effect saving throw at a penalty equal to the attacker's Combat/Tempter's Hand skill or be dazed for 1d4 rounds and unable to do anything but defend. Targets dazed by this blow cannot cry out or speak.
Level 1 Intermediate	The martial artist's unarmed attack damage is now equal to 1d6. The martial artist can launch a feint attack against a humanoid target, rolling to hit normally. If the attack hits, no damage is done, but the next round the attacker can strike as if the target was surprised, dazing them if the blow lands.
Level 2 Master	The martial artist's unarmed attack damage is now equal to 1d10. The martial artist may give up his attack for the round to fall into a defensive stance, forcing a -2 hit penalty for their attackers within melee range. If an attacker strikes at them in this stance and misses, the martial artist may make a free counterattack. The artist can make as many of these counterattacks in one round as they have levels in Combat/Tempter's Hand.

TYRIAN LOCKS

Some worlds are so hostile that the vast majority of its citizenry are forced to wear environment suits whenever outside the protective domes or tunnels they inhabit. For the hell-world of Tyr, this miserable state was often found *inside* the habitat tunnels, and most inhabitants never removed their armor outside of specially-prepared safe rooms. As a consequence, combat techniques developed to deal with this feature.

Tyrian locks involve joint locks, twists, servo hits, and integument cracking to let in the hostile atmosphere. Any suit flexible enough to allow a human good freedom of motion is flexible enough to allow an attacker to injure them with the correct forced movement, and Tyrian joint locks are designed to do just that. Against a master, an opponent's heavy armor or rigid FEP field plates become weapons used against their wearer.

A victim reduced below 10 hit points by a hit from this style must make the normal checks for vacc suit tears when the environment makes it relevant.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed
Level 0 Novice	The novice's strikes do 1d6 unarmed damage and can affect even targets wearing powered armor, a FEP, or other defenses that would normally ignore unarmed attacks.
Level 1 Intermediate	The martial artist knows how to maneuver so as to hamper heavily-suited attackers. Humanoid assailants wearing vacc suits, powered armor, FEPs, plate armor, or woven armor suffer a -2 to hit the martial artist when within close combat range.
Level 2 Master	The novice's unarmed strikes do 1d10 damage. Heavy armor becomes a liability against the martial artist as he knows how to use it against its own wearer; he gains +4 to hit with this style against humanoid targets wearing powered armor, plate armor, or a FEP.

Designing Your Own Styles

GMs should feel free to create their own new armed and unarmed styles to match the particular interests of their players and campaign, but a few important guidelines should be kept in mind.

The goal of a style is not to make unarmed or primitive combat skill better than projectile or energy weapons, but only an equally reasonable option. For damage comparisons, look at mag rifles and shear rifles to see what sort of weaponry they'll be compared against. If the style does more damage than those weapons in the hands of equivalent masters, then the style is doing too much damage.

Styles should not normally mix. It's too easy to lose track of the interactions if PCs can mix and match the best pieces out of each. PCs should be obliged to use only one style per round.

Unarmed styles should give skill level 0 novices 1d6 base unarmed damage along with their novice-level perk. If all they do is improve the martial artist's damage, it should be 1d8 or 1d6+1 damage. Master-level proficiency should grant 1d10 base unarmed damage, or 2d6 if the style isn't terribly useful for anything but direct damage.

Weapon styles should ensure that the weapons do damage roughly equivalent to the unarmed style. Martial arts skill levels *do* add to weapon damage from their group, so keep that in mind when assigning bonus damage to a style.

Armor class bonuses or enemy hit penalties granted by the style should always be conditional to a specific type of assailant, usually enemies within melee range. If the style gives a bonus that's effective against almost every assailant, firearms specialists will take it just for the universal benefit. As it stands, most firearms devotees will want to stand well away from their targets, so they have less reason to all seek martial arts training.

Finally, don't hesitate to make new styles "provisional" in a game. If all the players suddenly want to learn it or if it's disrupting the balance of the table, kill it and refund the martial artist their skill points. When adding experimental rules additions, everyone in the group should be ready to acknowledge it when things don't work out as planned.

COMMON MARTIAL ARTS WEAPONRY					
Weapon	*Damage*	*Range in Meters*	*Cost*	*Attribute*	*Tech*
Improvised Weapon	1d4	3/6	-	Str/Dex	0
Walking Staff	1d6	-	-	Str	0
Metal-Shod Fighting Staff	1d8	-	5	Str	1
Chain	1d6	3*	8	Dex	1
Shuriken**	1d2	6/9	2	Dex	1
Ranges are expressed in normal and maximum ranges. Firing at a target beyond normal range applies a -2 hit penalty. * Chains are melee weapons, but can strike enemies up to 3 meters away. ** Shuriken are so small that 10 count as one readied item.					

THE QOTAH

For six hundred years the power of the Qotah has been chained. These proud, brutal aliens were broken by the might of the Mandate Fleet and forced to swear peace with humanity. Their elders were compelled to draw in their ships and halt their incursions, else their tall-spired cities would have been smashed from orbit and their orbital aeries hurled down the wells of their worlds. The Qotah were bitter at their defeat, but for more than half an eon they have been too proud to break their people's vow.

That pride now grows brittle. Some among the aliens say that enough time has passed, that the humans are weak and scattered and that now is the time to get vengeance for their ancient defeat. Others stubbornly insist that honor demands peace, even with such an inviting carcass to pick. The battles have started within the remaining enclaves of Qotahn space, but it will not be long before they spill over to the fragile worlds of man.

Born of the Storms

The ancestors of the Qotah were a species not unlike Terran avians, creatures that navigated the thick, hot atmosphere of their homeworld on crystalline wings. They were hunters and fiercely territorial, the jewel-bright alpha males fighting constantly over the attentions of females feathered in the colors of the Qotahn sky.

A near-lethal meteor strike on their world produced a cycle of enormous atmospheric disturbances. Flight became impossible for millions of years as the planet struggled to regain some kind of equilibrium, and much of the lush world's life was extinguished in continent-spanning catastrophes. Only the most adaptable and resilient life forms were able to survive the uncounted eons in which Qotah was scarcely habitable.

Eventually, an uneasy peace was reached on the scarred planet, with stretches of more habitable land between perpetual, roiling "world storms" that slashed the earth with hurricane-force winds. By then, the Qotah's wings had long since evolved into grasping appendages and their social organization had been harshly shaped by the changed world's demands. Dawning sapience found the ancient Qotah connected by bonds of fury and mutual faith.

The limited amount of land that was almost always free of world storms formed the sites of the first cities of the Qotah, but the surrounding land was not sufficient to support a perpetually-expanding population. Each city-flock was thrown into violent competition with their neighbors for control of more marginal land, those stretches of earth and sea that were only occasionally scoured by the great storms. Survival went to the strongest, and only the most warlike and aggressive Qotah survived those early eons.

Yet at the same time, disunion within a city-flock could be fatal to the entire populace. If a city could not respond as a strong and

Qotah Physiology

Physically, Qotah are human-like in appearance, averaging 2 meters in height for males and 1.70 meters for females. Their builds are very slender, with crystalline, mineral-based feathers forming head crests and lightly feathering their limbs. These feathers are naturally a misty opalescent gray on females, while males tend to sport brilliant, jewel-toned colors. Qotah have short talons on each of their five fingered-hands and four-toed, avian-like feet. Their legs are digitigrade and often possess light feathering around the "ankles".

Skin coloring on females tends to be the same opal gray as their feathers, while males often are hued in symmetric colors that complement their plumage. Female eyes are several different shades of gray, while male eyes are more brightly colored. Qotah senses are roughly equivalent to humankind, albeit they tend to have slightly superior distance vision and a somewhat less developed sense of smell.

Qotah are native to an atmosphere similar to that preferred by humans, albeit they are accustomed to a somewhat denser, thicker atmosphere than humans like. They favor temperatures slightly higher than the usual human preference, and especially love hot, heavy-atmosphere worlds that are still human-breathable. Their native gravity is slightly less, equivalent to 0.8 Terran gees.

Qotah reproduce much as mammals do and share many secondary sexual characteristics common to mammals. Females lactate for their young, who are hatched from eggs laid after a six-month gestation and two-month brooding. Females generally lay only one egg at a time, though twins are not unknown. It's common for a Qotah female to lay as many as a dozen eggs during the course of her life. Sometimes as many as a quarter of them never hatch, to the mother's great grief.

Qotah grow quickly. By sixteen standard years, a Qotah is fully-grown and expected to be functioning as an adult. Even with modern medicine, however, few Qotah live past fifty, their feathers growing dull and patchy and their joints becoming painful. Death comes quickly when old age finally overcomes them; a Qotah can be fully active beside other adults in the evening only to die in his sleep that very night. Before the Scream, there were suggestions that certain human medical treatments could be used to greatly prolong a Qotah's life, though details of this research have long since been lost in the general downfall.

united whole to the incursions of its rivals, it faced a grim future. Males and the old would be slaughtered by rival flocks, and females and hatchlings parceled out among the victors. While it was theoretically possible for a Qotah to join a city-flock other than the one

they had been hatched into, only the most promising and useful members could hope to be received by foreign flocks. Others could expect only a quick death.

In response to this, Qotah society came to prize honor as the chief and best virtue of a citizen. A Qotah was expected to keep its word and do as it promised, dealing honestly and fairly with its flockmates and fulfilling its duties diligently. These cultural mores were enshrined as the "Kri"- the "making calm". However furiously the winds of Qotah might rage, the Kri would ensure an eye of untouchable calm within the individual.

The Kri allowed for early, tenuous links to form between the ancient flock-cities, with pacts and vows honored between them. They were rarely overarching peace agreements, and skirmishing and regulated struggles between cities remained common, but enough ties and agreements were made to allow for a true planetary culture of Qotah to form. Over thousands of years, the Qotah developed an advanced technological society, and even reached the stars.

Qotah was a harsh world, and the prospect of calmer skies drove the Qotah on. Ancient patterns of war and struggle reasserted themselves regularly, with each new colony maintaining pact-ties with their mother flock but struggling still with their neighbors over resources. Even when it might have been more advantageous to simply push further out into the galaxy, the Qotah instincts were for war and conquest.

Several sapient races were discovered by the Qotah over their centuries of expansion, most of them too young to present a serious technological challenge to the avian conquerors. The Qotah did not intentionally exterminate them, but they showed no concern whatsoever for their interests, and brutally slaughtered any natives that interfered with the expansion of the race. Some client species offered tribute and service in exchange for peace, and in the few cases where the Qotah found this wiser, they accepted these pledges. The terms were hard, but the Qotah kept their pacts.

It wasn't until 2559 that the Qotah finally ran into humanity. The humans had the misfortune of having colonized several planets of interest to the Qotah, and the flock that first encountered them was in need of new land. The Qotah attack was brutal and without warning, the entire human population systematically slaughtered to clean the colony for its new masters. That far out on the frontier, it was more than five years before the Mandate Fleet could find the chance to launch a reprisal.

In the meanwhile, the Qotah gouged away dozens of young human worlds. Most were eradicated, but a few sued for peace, and accepted Qotah mastery in exchange for their service. Many of these humans were taken away as servants and slaves, dispatched far into the depths of the Qotah confederacy of world-flocks and never seen again.

When the Mandate Fleet finally arrived, the turnabout was quick and total. Hundreds of pretech warships manned by elite Terran crews delivered a shocking reverse to the Qotah, driving back their less sophisticated fleets and hamstringing their advance. Qotah technology was quite advanced in certain regards, and their war-riors were both brave and disciplined, but they could not match the sheer industrial might of the Terran Mandate and the advantage that Terran precognitives gave to the human fleets.

Standard Fleet policy was to drive back troublesome alien polities until no further resistance was offered. Yet each Qotah world fought back with primal ferocity, concerned only with its victory and heedless of the greater good of the confederacy; the humans simply never encountered Qotah that were not ready to fight. Eventually, Qotah itself was threatened by the relentless human advance, the motherworld of the race facing the terrible orbital bombardments and brutal celestial fire of the human ships.

This threat to the homeworld was the only thing that could bring together all the Qotah worlds. All had their ultimate allegiance to the ancient city-flocks of home, and a threat to the whole of the world was enough to demand their united cooperation. In anguish, the leaders of the Qotah confederacy swore a great vow to the human admiral, promising her that their world-flocks and daughter colonies would never again make war upon a human world.

This "Vow of Red Feathers" as it was known was very precise. The Qotah swore that they would never fire first upon a human, nor colonize a world upon which a human had been born, nor forbid humans to go anywhere they chose within space. By that time the fierce sense of honor possessed by the Qotah was plain enough that the Fleet did not find it necessary to leave much more than a few monitoring ships, as much to keep the bitter humans from taking advantage of the peace as to stand watch on the beaten aliens.

The Qotah turned inward after their great defeat. While human expansion had taken up almost all of the viable worlds around the confederacy, they retained the right to their old worlds. Some Qotah world-flocks turned to brooding introspection and isolation, but most set upon each other in a murderous zero-sum game of conquest, each trying to take as much of each others' territory as was possible. Within a few generations, the Qotah were broken as a great power. Only burnt-out worlds and fortress planets remained, and the scattered flocks that fled burning cities.

The Scream extinguished human power in the region, but the Qotah were in no position to take immediate advantage of it. Few Qotah worlds retained the infrastructure necessary for building spike drives, and most world-flocks had been reduced to laborious subsistence. It was centuries before the few remaining worlds with functional industrial bases were able to form the cores of a dozen different Qotah polities that controlled the carcass of the old confederacy.

At present, Qotah ships and merchants have spread far through the surrounding sectors. Some are scouts, looking for "clean" worlds which the Qotah may claim for their own. Others seek to take advantage of the wealth and power of those human worlds that have yet retained their shipyards. The Qotah travel far for their world-flocks and families.

Yet there is a division deep within the heart of Qotah society, and one that threatens to grow by the day. Some among the Qotah insist that the Vow of Red Feathers no longer holds. Their reasoning varies

widely, each world-flock choosing the rationale that suits them best. Some insist that the vow was to the Mandate, and the Mandate is gone. Others say that the humans have broken the peace and are honorless *hool* who need no longer be respected. And a tiny few, the most radical, say that Kri itself is no longer necessary in the wealth of a wide-open universe.

These Qotah are despised as oathbreaking *hool* by their brethren, but such is their power that few faithful Qotah worlds dare confront them directly. The Oathbreakers are already launching attacks on poorly-defended human worlds and claiming rule of planets that have lost the ability to fend off interstellar attacks. The Faithful fight back, launching raids and sometimes open war against their brethren, but they lack the easy resources gained by their plundering kindred.

The human polities around Qotahn space are weak and divided, and many prefer to let the Qotah deal with their own troublemakers rather than face the prospect of having to arm for impending war. Most choose to simply deal with Qotah raiders and fend off the increasingly vigorous incursions until matters calm down once more. They may not have the luxury of such idleness for much longer.

Qotah Psychology

The Qotah are violent, aggressive humanoids with passions tempered only by an unbending insistence upon personal honor. Qotah simply have no natural aversion to violence. They don't experience intense stress in the face of impending combat, and they are not subject to the same emotional and mental scarring that can afflict a human who has been overexposed to warfare. Qotah can feel fear as readily as any other species, but the simple prospect of combat just doesn't ignite the human neural cocktail of adrenaline and fight-or-flight chemicals that usually goes with impending bloodshed.

As such, violence is a tool for Qotah, and one they use as quickly as any other. Against members of other world-flocks, they'll trade or kill with equal alacrity, and they expect others to do the same. The world is presents a constant struggle to the Qotah and they intend to be the last ones standing.

Against this ready violence is the Qotah sense of honor, their "Kri". Qotah have enough intelligence to understand the inevitable destruction that would come from a universal war of all against all, and the Kri is their bulwark against this chaos. Qotah will keep their word in the spirit in which it was given, even if it is given under duress. Keeping such forced vows honorably and well is considered exceptionally glorious and a sign of deep dedication to one's own honor. Qotah will even prefer self-destruction to oathbreaking. To die in the service of an oath is to "die in making a calm", and the service and example such a Qotah offers is universally honored. Breaking such a vow renders the criminal *hool*, or honorless, and no existing Kri to such a creature need be honored. The only way to redeem such a sin is to win the forgiveness of the wronged party, which may or may not be cheaply forthcoming.

Exercise of the Kri does require some clarity, however, and so a Qotah will not consider himself bound by casual statements of intention or provisional promises. "Making a Kri" requires an explicit

> ### The Faithful and the Oathbreakers
>
> To the Qotah, maintaining their Kri is the purpose of their existence. Even those world-flocks that have decided to abandon the Vow of Red Feathers are convinced that they do so with honorable reasons. While those that stand by the Vow refer to their hostile brethren as "Oathbreakers", such renegades take murderous exception to the term.
>
> Among themselves, they consider themselves "conquerors", and their peace-accepting brethren as the contemptible "craven". The Great Eyes of the Oathbreakers have laid out unimpeachable reasons why it was permissible to consider the Vow of Red Feathers as void, so the only possible reason for the restraint of the Faithful must be their personal cowardice.
>
> Unsurprisingly, meetings between Faithful and Oathbreaker often degenerate into brutal violence. Both consider each other to example the worst of possible sins; the Oathbreakers as honorless *hool* and the Faithful as gutless cowards.

and publicly-recognized vow, though these vows are common to trade and warfare alike. Failure in a Kri is forgiven if it is due to physical inability or the vow turns out to be impossible, though even then the Qotah will suffer shame.

Qotah of the Faithful world-flocks remember their promise to humanity, and despite their naturally violent natures, they will never be the first to offer violence to a human. They will defend themselves, but they will be highly reluctant to take the first shot even in the face of obvious impending violence. Faithful Qotah do consider violence offered to their companions to be justification for retaliatory attack, however, and so firing at a comrade will bring them to battle.

Oathbreaker Qotah, on the other hand, have justified the renunciation of the Vow of Red Feathers, and are perhaps even more aggressive toward humans than they are toward other species.

Qotah Social Structure

Qotah all belong to the world-flock of their homeworld, or the homeworld of their mother if born in space or while sojourning on a foreign world. While it is theoretically possible for a Qotah to change allegiance, very few world-flocks will accept outsiders for membership. Even those few accomplished enough to merit inclusion are kept apart until they have sired a hatchling on that world. Once the ties are so confirmed, both hatchling and parents are permitted to join the flock.

A given world-flock is divided into cities or other settlements, each of which is overseen by an elected male leader. Only female Qotah belonging to that settlement have the right to vote. Males win social status by appealing to the females with their accomplishments in war, trade, and Kri-keeping, and are elected accordingly. The rulers of a world are invariably a council of the most accomplished and popular males, elected for terms of several years.

The "Great Eyes" of a world-flock are its appointed Kri-mediators, charged with using their wisdom to discern the proper meaning of a disputed Kri. Such Great Eyes form the closest thing the Qotah have to religious leaders. Each is a very old Qotah of unimpeachable honor and judgment, and they are recognized by societal acclaim rather than any formal process.

Most Qotah daily life is structured by the traditions and necessities of their particular city or settlement. The peace is maintained by appointed city guardsmen, and serious crimes or Kri-disputes are judged by the local Great Eyes. Punishment usually consists of fines, beatings, or feather-pluckings. Exceptionally grave crimes such as the killing of mates or unfeathered hatchlings or treachery towards one to whom they owe a Kri are punished with public execution. Occasionally a great criminal is permitted to expiate his sin in some suicidal mission for the sake of his flock.

Qotah marry and maintain family households. Divorce is almost unknown, as even when it is mutually desired it implies a failure of vows that is highly socially embarrassing. Female Qotah who lay eggs outside of a marriage bond are deplored as failing their responsibility to their hatchlings and suffer substantial social shame, as does the male involved. Casual sexual relations are not condoned by Qotah culture, though modern technology and isolation from the flock increasingly allow for liaisons that have no offspring or flockmates to show them up.

As a point of custom, the Qotah participate in a tradition known as the "high song". Each world-flock has at least one messenger charged with sharing tales of great honor and valor among the other flocks. These "singers" journey from their homes through a circuit of other worlds, gathering tales of distant glory to bring home and sharing the mighty deeds of their own people. Such singers are sacred in their persons; to insult or kill them is to insult the Kri of an entire world-flock. Singers cannot always travel as far as they would like, so sometimes they are obliged to rely on other Qotah, or even aliens, to bring back stories and particulars of some Qotah's heroic nobility.

Occasionally, a Qotah male prefers to avoid the vigorous warfare and mercantile pursuits of his brethren, or a female wishes to attain direct political power or participate in the military. In such cases, the Qotah ritually adopts the plumage and skin coloration of the opposite gender through dyes and pigments and is treated as such by other Qotah. While unusual, such adoption of different gender roles is an accepted outlet for the dissatisfied and brings no shame.

Qotah Adventurers

Qotah PCs are rolled as normal, but all Qotah gain a +1 modifier bonus to their Dexterity due to their nimble avian ancestry and instinctive spatial grasp and a -1 modifier penalty to their Strength due to their low-gee origins and light frames. These modifiers are applied directly to the attribute's base modifier- so a Qotah that rolled 14 for Strength would have a final modifier of (+1 -1) = 0. This modifier cannot increase a bonus above +2 or below -2.

Qotah can belong to either the Warrior or Expert classes. There are no known Qotah psychics.

Most Qotah adventurers are freebooters in search of glory and wealth, the better to gain status in their home flock. Females might chafe at the strict gender roles of their homeworld and put on the male role to find adventure in the stars. Other Qotah might have been forced out of their flocks for crimes they may or may not have committed, or a Qotah might find themselves isolated from a flock turned Oathbreaker when they refused to abandon their Faithful beliefs.

Qotah are close enough in biology to humans to take advantage of human-made lazarus patches and other medical treatment. A medic with no experience in dealing with Qotah and no chance to study the differences suffers a -1 penalty on any medical skill rolls applied to them. Qotah can wear and use most equipment designed for humans, but hard-shell armors and vacc suits must be specifically designed to fit them. Most such items cost anywhere from five to ten times as much as normal if they must be custom-ordered.

Both male and female Qotah are violent by nature, but players should also remember the Vow of Red Feathers. Faithful Qotah will refuse to take the first shot at a human, and will fight only in self-defense. For those sticky situations when the rest of the group decides to apply a little violence, most Faithful Qotah can rationalize participating once the fighting has actually started. For male Qotah, it seems honestly logical not to blame the Qotah for being part of the decision, as males do not normally participate in a group's decision-making unless they are elected by the females.

Oathbreakers might deny the Vow of Red Feathers, but even they are fiercely protective of their Kri. PC Qotah who reject the entire concept can expect to be loathed and shunned by their brethren, and viewed with extreme mistrust by humans familiar with the importance of Kri to the Qotah. Those humans unaware of the PCs' unreliability can end up paying for it when the "honorable Qotah" suddenly turns out to be more morally flexible than was imagined.

Qotah Warrior

Armor Class	6 (Light armor)	No. Appearing	2-8
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+2	Movement	30'
Damage	1d8/Slugthrower	Morale	9
Skill Bonus	+1		

Most male Qotah have the training and attitude necessary to make excellent warriors, and even an untrained female is usually more than a match for an ordinary human. Qotah warriors favor a light, unrestrictive armor of scale-like overlapping plates and fight with two-handed chemical slugthrowers that have a normal range of 100 meters and a long range of 300 meters. Each slugthrower can fire six times before it requires reloading. When such weaponry is inappropriate, Qotah carry slender monoblade knives, sometimes hiding small ones in their luxuriant head plumage. Very few Qotah willingly go unarmed.

Qotah GM Resources

1D12	Male Names	Female Names	Flock Names	Place Names
1	Chikkat	Brii	Eeloo	Chihu
2	Feen	Chiri	Huatu	Heela
3	Hau	Huli	Hwee	Hulila
4	Hoon	Kiti	Kurrik	Kinneree
5	Hulit	Lae	Owree	Loolit
6	Kuan	Lii	Reelu	Olittu
7	Kwirr	Loor	Shuhao	Pollow
8	Oolt	Oola	Tooyi	Rettu
9	Tikkit	Ree	Trill	Sichitik
10	Tuwhi	Tuha	Waoun	Tikkati
11	Vreet	Voree	Weerit	Twihulow
12	Waru	Yii	Yisoo	Vreetwi

1D6	Plot Seed
1	Oathbreakers have discovered the location of a long-mothballed Qotahn warship. They plan to use the PCs to get the access tablet for it, which is kept as a seemingly useless trinket in a Qotahn museum, hopefully inciting a bloodbath between the humans and the Faithful that keep the museum.
2	A Qotah flees to the PCs for help against a mob of enraged humans who are convinced he or she is a pirate. The Qotah offers to pledge a Kri of service if the PCs help- but a real Oathbreaker would consider humans *hool* to whom no honor is owed.
3	A Qotah wants the PCs help in investigating a local crime boss. He leaves unmentioned his intention to get the PCs and the boss in a killing situation in order to avenge the death of a Kri-pledged friend.
4	A Great Eye desires the PCs' help to sort out a Kri-dispute between a human and an arrogant Qotah elder. Unbeknownst to the Great Eye, the dispute touches on an old, hidden crime in his past that would destroy him were it made public. The Qotah elder intends to use it that way, while the human totally fails to understand the Qotah.
5	A murderous Oathbreaker warlord launches a raid against the settlement in which the PCs are staying, seemingly at random. In truth, his mate has fled his growing madness and is hiding in the settlement. He will pay well for her safe return.
6	A grizzled Qotah warrior leads the defense of a remote human outpost against raiders when his son or daughter is kidnapped. Honor demands he continue to fight, but he knows a hideous fate awaits his child if he does so. The PCs might be able to infiltrate the raiders and rescue the young Qotah, but time is running out.

1D8	Qotah NPC
1	*Vilet Tuhu*, a sardonic male merchant with brilliant green and ochre patterns. He loudly proclaims the certainty that every human breathing is going to try to cheat him, but deals with unflinching honesty all the same. Any attempt to peel him brings the wrath of his many, many local mercantile friends.
2	*Tulee "Sparrow" Weerit*, a surgically-augmented female with patterns of diamond and smoke-gray. She works as a "dancer" at a busy starport bar, and considers herself hopelessly *hool* for her disgraceful work. She made a foolish Kri to the bar's owner that he arranged for her to accidentally break, and the only way she has any hope of earning his "forgiveness" is to work for him. Secretly the daughter of a Great Eye; she lives in mortal terror of her father discovering what she's been doing.
3	*Krakkak Lool*, a wiry-muscled male with dull red and orange plumage. Former mercenary combat medic; never carried a weapon, but saved hundreds of lives under fire. Lives quietly in town, but is deeply honored by the local Qotah, and his word is enough to make or break a proposal to them.
4	*Lii Hulow*, an elderly female with brightly-dyed crimson and gold plumage. A veteran of countless intercine Qotah wars, she knows more ways to kill a man than a hatchling has pinfeathers. Not quite an Oathbreaker, but remarkably perceptive about preemptively noticing attacks.
5	*Shuhu Oolha*, a brash young male with bright yellow and blue feathers, barely out of adolescence. Apprentice to a merchant house and a surprisingly good haggler, though he privately yearns to do great deeds of war and adventure.
6	*Yoola Trill*, a grim-faced female with plumage of silver and opal. She is the wife of an important local merchant, and is convinced that the local human government is hopelessly *hool*. Whether or not that's actually the case, she works behind the scenes to coordinate other malcontents in strikes against the authorities.
7	*Kawat Shult*, a sallow male with plumage of lustrous azure and royal purple. A brilliant bioscientist with poor impulse control; responsible for several weaponized pathogens. Also rumored to have solved the DNA copylock on several high-yield strains of metawheat. Wanted on several worlds for several different reasons.
8	*Viree Toolow*, a one-eyed young female with mist-gray and white patterns. Superb tech and repairwoman with an addiction to dangerous situations; lost her eye while repairing a sentry gun in a badlands settlement under attack by raiders. Very likely to sign on to perilous expeditions. Rambunctious and with a liking for humans, but reluctant to act on such deplorable urges.

The Qotah are a humanoid avian species that once formed a powerful interstellar polity in the waning years before the Scream. These warlike, proudly honorable aliens attacked the human frontier colonies almost as soon as contact was made, and made substantial inroads into nearby sectors before the Mandate Fleet crushed them. As a condition of the surrender, the Qotah swore the "Vow of Red Feathers". Forever after, they pledged that they would never fire first upon a human, nor colonize a world upon which a human had been born, nor forbid humans to go anywhere they chose within space.

This pledge was a "Kri"- a public and formal vow the Qotah use to affirm their absolute conviction. Kri are used for many consequential matters, from significant mercantile trades to pledges of loyal service, and they are absolutely crucial to the Qotah. If a Kri is broken, either intentionally or accidentally, the Qotah is *hool*, honorless and undeserving of any respect or Kri. The only possible redemption is in the forgiveness of the person they have wronged. To be *hool* is a fate worse than death to a Qotah.

Since the Vow of Red Feathers, the Qotah have largely turned inward, and fighting among the various world-flocks to which the aliens are born have left their numbers few and scattered. Still six hundred years after their defeat, some are beginning to argue that the Vow of Red Feathers has been superseded, and no longer applies. The "Great Eyes" that adjudicate the questions of Kri on each world have sometimes produced judgments that proclaim the nullity of the Vow, and these "Oathbreaker" Qotah are beginning to attack human worlds.

Qotah adventurers are often freebooters in search of wealth and glory with which to earn the favor of a mate back in their native world-flock. Others seek redemption for some terrible Kri-failure, while some are simply curious about life beyond the martial discipline of their home flock.

Qotah Adventurers

Qotah PCs are rolled as normal, but all Qotah gain a +1 modifier bonus to their Dexterity due to their nimble avian ancestry and instinctive spatial grasp and a -1 modifier penalty to their Strength due to their low-gee origins and light frames. These modifiers are applied directly to the attribute's base modifier- so a Qotah that rolled 14 for Strength would have a final modifier of (+1 -1) = 0. This modifier cannot increase a bonus above +2 or below -2. Qotah can belong to either the Warrior or Expert classes. There are no known Qotah psychics.

Qotah can use human lazarus patches and medical tech, though at a -1 skill check penalty if the attending physician is unfamiliar with their species. Most human equipment and weaponry can be used normally, though usable hard-shell armor and vacc suits can cost from five to ten times as much if they have to be specially ordered.

Qotah Physiology

Physically, Qotah are human-like in appearance, averaging 2 meters in height for males and 1.70 meters for females. Their builds are very slender, with crystalline, mineral-based feathers forming head crests and lightly feathering their limbs. These feathers are naturally a misty opalescent gray on females, while males tend to sport brilliant, jewel-toned colors. Quotah have short talons on each of their five fingered-hands and four-toed, avian-like feet. Their legs are digitigrade and often possess light feathering around the "ankles".

Skin coloring on females tends to be the same opal gray as their feathers, while males often are hued in symmetric colors that complement their plumage. Female eyes are several different shades of gray, while male eyes are more brightly colored. Qotah senses are roughly equivalent to humankind, albeit they tend to have slightly superior distance vision and a somewhat less developed sense of smell.

Qotah are native to an atmosphere similar to that preferred by humans, albeit they are accustomed to a somewhat denser, thicker atmosphere than humans like. They favor temperatures slightly higher than the usual human preference, and especially love hot, heavy-atmosphere worlds that are still human-breathable. Their native gravity is slightly less, equivalent to 0.8 Terran gees.

Qotah reproduce much as mammals do and share many secondary sexual characteristics common to mammals. Females lactate for their young, who are hatched from eggs laid after a six-month gestation and two-month brooding. Females generally lay only one egg at a time, though twins are not unknown. It's common for a Qotah female to lay as many as a dozen eggs during the course of her life. Sometimes as many as a quarter of them never hatch, to the mother's great grief.

Qotah grow quickly. By sixteen standard years, a Qotah is fully-grown and expected to be functioning as an adult. Even with modern medicine, however, few Qotah live past fifty, their feathers growing dull and patchy and their joints becoming painful. Death comes quickly when old age finally overcomes them.

As a Qotah PC, you should remember the Vow of Red Feathers. "Faithful" Qotah will never be the first to offer violence to a human, though lethal self-defense is permitted, and attacks on your companions qualify as attacks on you personally. While not every promise you make is a Kri, publicly-pronounced vows that you acknowledge to be Kri should be kept even in the face of certain death. Even Kri extorted by force are inviolate. If your PC breaks a Kri, they will almost certainly suffer enormous demoralization at their reprehensible new *hool* state, even if no one else ever discovers their treachery. Some Qotah may handle the prospect better than others.

The Red Sangha Mercenary Corps

The Red Sangha mercenary company is the legacy of a zealot's blind fanaticism and the biochemical excesses of a fallen age. Condemned to short, neurochemically straitened lives of cold-blooded serenity, the Red Sangha endures its particular damnation as best it can. Its services in conflict resolution and personal defense are famed throughout the sector, and many petty kings and local tyrants seek their assistance in resolving untoward rebellions. Still others seek the lost arts that created the Red Sangha and the secrets that would forever cement their grasp on the brains of their wretched subjects.

Augmented Buddhism and Liberation

The latter days of the Second Wave of human colonization planted many strange blooms of humanity on the distant worlds of the frontier. Virtually every form of human faith and ideology could find at least one world wholly dedicated to its principles, and many familiar creeds grew in ways scarcely imagined by their ancestors. One such growth was the "augmented spirituality" movement.

By use of elaborate neurochemical conditioning, a believer could artificially eliminate certain urges or impulses in his own mind. Unchastity, gluttony, sloth, anger, and a host of other primordial passions could be tamed and suppressed by the correct mix of biochemical supplements or neural surgery. Unfortunately, these artificial methods invariably had severe physical and mental drawbacks, to say nothing of the very questionable technological status of the more extensive modifications. Perimeter agents often considered such innovations to be out-and-out maltech due to their potential for the creation of brainlocked slaves.

Still, some faiths developed a cult of reverence around those who received the treatments. Their sacrifice of health for the sake of suppressing their sinful natures was considered a noble and pious choice. One such world was Jivaka, a dry, poor world colonized by Reformed Theravadin Buddhists. The world was poor in metals and edible organics, but some of the native plants proved a rich source of pharmaceuticals. A dedicated and devout corps of Jivakan monk-scientists gradually developed "Liberation", a drug that was to change the course of society on their world.

Liberation was an exquisite cocktail of chemicals that was administered during six weeks of neural therapy. At its conclusion, the subject would be permanently locked into a state of calm serenity, capable of modest pleasures, gentle happiness, and measured concerns. Rage, panic, lust, dread- all these old, savage emotions and attachments would be severed permanently. The only emotion that the Liberated could feel strongly was a deep and abiding love for those people, places, and ideas that earned their devotion.

Liberation came with a cost, of course. Subjects could expect to die of assorted exotic brain cancers within forty to fifty years of modification. Given the great human longevity achieved by pretech anagathics, the price was a real one, but some of the most pious Jivakans received Liberation all the same.

The elder monks of Reformed Theravadinism maintained that the chemical state induced by Liberation made it impossible to accrue merit. A practitioner who no longer felt passion could not be honored for his lack of attachment, and the other conventional means of acquiring merit were no longer efficacious for the Liberated. However, the act of choosing to undergo Liberation was exceedingly meritorious and could make up for all that was sacrificed thereafter. The act of encouraging others to accept Liberation was also a notable means of accruing merit toward eventual freedom from the cycles of the world.

Mantheesh the Damned

One monk-scientist became consumed by this idea of borrowed piety. Mantheesh Thilak's own life was in ruins. Ejected from the sangha of monks, the association defrocked him for his dissipated ways and unbecoming behavior. He burned to find some way to redeem himself, some feat so dramatic that the others must acknowledge his worthiness. He labored long years in obscurity, importing rare pretech carrier nanites and 'recruiting' assistants from among those who would never be missed. After fifteen years of passionate labor, he had what he had desired.

Water was a rare and limited resource on Jivaka. It was simple enough for him to infiltrate the nanites into the few major water supplies, to let the carrier spread undetectably in every sip. The effects did not begin to show for six weeks, by which time the consequences were irrevocable. The entire population had been retrogenetically modified. The death toll was enormous. Thirty percent of those modified died within the year from systemic immune collapse. Mantheesh had aimed for a greater return on this price, but he got some of what he was after. Two percent of all Jivakan offspring were going to be born Liberated. Surely Mantheesh's merit would be unimaginably great for ushering so many generations into serenity.

He earned the universal hatred of his fellow Jivakans and the name "Mantheesh the Damned" that follows him even today. Whatever merit Mantheesh had earned by bringing so many into non-attachment was overwhelmed by the tragedy that was to befall those children. Born as they were, they could not hope to acquire merit from spiritual growth, and could not be credited with the choice to become as they were. They were to be condemned to a life of terrible spiritual stasis, unable to gain merit toward true liberation. The enraged Jivakans were never able to capture Mantheesh, who vanished somewhere deep in the system's thick asteroid belts and took his forbidden research with him. Despite this, a certain number of Jivakans nurse a secret conviction that Mantheesh was right, that his plans were flawed only in that they did not go far enough. This "Left Hand of Enlightenment" still quietly seeks Mantheesh's laboratory and the ancient secrets of mass Liberation locked within.

The Scream and the Red Sangha's Rise

This hatred for Mantheesh did not have much time to fester. Five years later, the Scream destroyed the links with the core worlds and cast Jivaka on its own resources. The harsh life became harder still as pretech agricultural equipment and industrial materials began to break down before the Jivakans were able to develop alternatives. For decades, the planet experienced a slow, inexorable decline in the number of colonists it could support. Increasing pressure caused fissures to form in Jivakan society, hunger and fear driving the cities and statelets into open conflict.

The sangha of Jivakan monks tried desperately to maintain peace and amity among the city-states. Their cause seemed lost until one among them thought to enlist the Liberated. Pitied for their unfortunate births and inability to accrue merit, they had never found a solid place in Jivakan society, and tended to gather together in isolated communities to live among their own kind. The desperate monks gathered them together and argued the necessity of their aid in the face of Jivaka's impending catastrophe. After brief consultation, the Liberated agreed. The monks presented an ultimatum to the warring states; either they accepted the guidance of the sangha and the peace they would impose, or the Liberated would be unleashed upon them.

Some refused. The Liberated understood the necessity of the moment, the need for Jivaka to stand together if it was ever to survive as something more than benighted barbarism. And knowing no true fear of the enemy and no true distress at the killing, they unleashed such merciless violence against the resisters that all opposition crumbled within six months. The "Red Sangha" was born there in the ruins of burning temples and shattered cities. A grotesque mockery of the sangha of monks, the Red Sangha would be the bloodied fist of salvation.

The Liberated were perfect guardians for the monks who were to guide Jivaka. They craved neither wealth nor families nor power, and were content to exist in calm, serene peace, motivated solely by love for their faith and their world. They were impossible to bribe, fearless in the face of the enemy, and unflinching in their devotion to their people. Were it not for their tendency to unhesitatingly commit the most extravagant acts of violence against anyone not included in benevolence they felt, they might have been perfect as leaders as well as guardians.

Jivaka's poverty left it trapped within its own atmosphere until the Silence began to wane, and a tramp freighter from a more advanced neighboring world finally managed to reestablish contact. The freighter captain made a king's ransom in pharmaceuticals in exchange for providing the first bootstrap system ships to reestablish mining facilities in the asteroid belts and slowly haul Jivaka's industry back up to postech standards.

Despite the pharmaceuticals derived from Jivakan plants, the planet remained desperately poor. After due consideration, the leadership of the Red Sangha volunteered to establish a band of mercenary monks, Liberated men and women willing to leave their home system and fight on distant stars in order to bring back foreign wealth to their beloved homeworld. The monastic leadership of Jivaka made ritual objections to the inevitable loss of human life, but the Red Sangha would not be dissuaded. As they were already condemned to further cycles of existence, who was better suited to make such sacrifices?

In the years since, the Red Sangha has earned a ferocious reputation among the worlds of the sector. While their equipment is somewhat lacking compared to the wealthier interstellar mercenary organizations, the absolute fearlessness of Red Sangha troopers gives them a strength far out of proportion with their numbers. A Red Sangha brother never panics, never freezes up, and never experiences the gnawing torment of fear, stress, and anger. They retain calm and untroubled hearts even amid the thunder of an orbital bombardment or tactical nuclear strike. Their avoidance of wanton destruction and misuse of the locals is also a point in their favor, though guerilla activities are suppressed with a brutal thoroughness that respects neither age nor sex.

Presently, the Red Sangha is based off of the Peerless-class orbital station *Lower Heaven* above Jivaka, with the station serving as the heart of the poor world's makeshift stellar navy as well as its central command for the Red Sangha brotherhood. A dedicated troop transport ship has been assigned to the mercenaries, but much of the rest of Jivakan navy can be enlisted at need.

RED SANGHA ORGANIZATION AND RESOURCES

Corps Organization

The Red Sangha is technically comprised of two percent of the entire Jivakan population, over 8,000 men and women of ages ranging from newborns to those in the final throes of brain cancer at age fifty. Eight hundred of these are fit for offworld military duty, and these combat-trained members form the Red Sangha as it is known to outsiders.

The organization is built around almost monastic lines rather than those of a conventional military. Much of the common discipline, rigorous social control, and focused effort to build an esprit de corps that military structures allow are unnecessary with the Liberated. They simply lack the urges and weaknesses that make traditional military structures so important.

The leader of the Red Sangha is the Abbot, a position appointed by a council of the eldest sangha members. The word of the Abbot is law within the Red Sangha. Beneath him are appointed the rectors who oversee each company of one hundred brothers and sisters, the rank and file of the Red Sangha. Within the rank and file, authority generally shakes out along time in service, though occasionally a squad will recognize the special talents of one of their more junior members. Discipline problems are extremely rare among the Red Sangha, though when they happen, they can be brutal. Most brethren reserve their dearest love for the Red Sangha and the homeworld, but those who conceive different attachments can respond with unmeasured violence to threats against them.

Roughly fifty of the brothers are left to man the *Lower Heaven*, while three or four of the companies are aboard the station in training or refitting after a mission. No more than three or four hundred Red Sangha brethren are out of the system at any one time. Each company of one hundred brethren is usually composed of one quarter logistical and support troops and three quarters combat troops. The mercenaries tend to rely heavily on local support for their logistical needs, though they can get by on surprisingly limited supply when necessity requires it.

Individual companies are broken up into ten-man squads led by an Elder Brother or Sister, with the second most experienced brother assisting. These ten-man squads can break into five-man fire teams when necessary, one led by the Elder Brother and the other by his second-in-command. The Red Sangha is highly reluctant to detach troops in less than fire team strength, and where one is found, four more are almost invariably close by.

Five of the companies are mechanized infantry, relying on simple battery-powered armored personnel carriers to get them to the fight. These carriers are relatively low-tech, but they can be kept in operation with refitted local parts on any world with tech level 3 or better. A drop pod, cargo lighter, or other landing craft can usually keep an entire company's APCs powered by refreshing expended type B power cells. Keeping more than that operational requires setting up a fusion plant facility, fossil fuel power plant, or tapping into a town's power grid. A company carries enough spares to go three or four days between charging opportunities.

Sixth Company is artillery, detailed to fire and support an array of heavy self-propelled guns. These guns are significantly slower than the all-terrain APCs that the Red Sangha uses, but their effectiveness against the fortifications of low-tech enemies is undeniable. Even enemies on more advanced worlds are rarely equipped to deal with tracked artillery unless they too are military personnel. The guns are often used to wreak fearsome destruction on the villages and towns of those locals who find guerilla warfare preferable to open confrontation.

Seventh Company is officially the recon company, trained and equipped for scouting and local liaison. In practice, it is also the home of the Deep Black operatives that belong to the Red Sangha. These men and women are trained for deep infiltration into enemy territory, and they carry out covert operations for the Jivakan government as well.

Lotus Company is comparatively short on strength, comprised of only fifty staff officers and support personnel. The abbot's appointed representative on the world generally leads the company, though for exceptionally important or delicate contracts, the abbot himself might leave Jivakan space to personally oversee affairs. This company is often split off in smaller parcels to oversee individual contracts, and at least ten of them are almost always back in Jivakan space to manage affairs in the home system and serve as a training cadre in case of catastrophic losses. Those who manage to inflict such catastrophic losses can expect these survivors to diligently seek the culprits' transmigration into their next existence.

Red Sangha Deployment

The corps is most often deployed in company strength at a minimum, transported aboard the company's cantankerous second-hand troopship, the *Hinayana*. The *Hinayana* is easily capable of transporting up to six thousand troops at a time, but it severely undergunned compared to other cruiser-class vessels. As such, the *Hinayana* almost never leaves Jivakan space without an escort of one or two frigates, or patrol boats if the additional drill range is necessary.

The *Hinayana* does not normally remain in orbit around a world unless the locals are unable to pose a significant threat to it. Even in that case, it will only remain as long as its hydroponic supplies or medical bay are necessary. Air support is normally provided by helicopters, with an atmosphere-capable frigate dispatched for heavy support.

The Red Sangha will deploy into a hot landing zone only under circumstances of dire necessity. The *Hinayana* is equipped with a Thunderhead grav pod system that can launch a cloud of six hundred ten-man landing pods, making it all but certain to get the vast majority of her troops onto the surface, even through ferocious anti-air defenses. However, the Thunderhead system costs 625,000 credits to refit- a sum amounting to slightly more than four percent of Jivaka's entire annual naval budget. Under most circumstances the crew are ferried down by the *Hinayana*'s drop pod.

On the surface, liaison personnel set up local sources for food and spare parts while the *Hinayana* provides the logistical slack to support the corps while it sets up. Earthmovers and plasticrete are used to put together a fortified encampment for the troops, as the Red Sangha prefers to barrack well away from the locals for security reasons.

When charged with guarding a site or VIP, the Sangha will always detach troopers in multiples of five. Inclination and experience have taught them that small groups of mercs have a habit of going missing on foreign worlds. Kidnap attempts are useless against Red Sangha mercs, however. The corps regretfully writes off any kidnapped troopers as casualties, and simply preferences targeting their kidnappers with no special concern for retrieving their people alive. It is a variety of mercy to usher a Liberated one into their next cycle, after all.

The Red Sangha are remarkably well-disciplined in many regards, compared to the usual run of interstellar mercs. They do not pillage, torture for sport, rape, recklessly destroy property, or kill civilians thoughtlessly. They pay for what they take and they can be relied upon to keep their word even when it is inconvenient.

In other respects, however, the Red Sangha is monstrously brutal. Their respect for human life tends to be abstract, a general appreciation for the value of compassion and nonviolence. If the most convenient way to accomplish an end is to kill every living thing in a town, they'll pile the corpses in the market square without batting an eye. They respect neither sex nor age when "cleansing" an area, and some frankly prefer clearing noncombatants as being easier work. Their theological justification for this coldness rests on an appreciation of existence as being a commingled skein of suffering. The skillful means of liberation can be gentle teaching or it can be a quick dispatch to the next cycle. The choice of means is determined by convenience.

Many other Buddhist faiths in the sector find the Red Sangha to be unutterably depraved, but the Sangha is unconcerned. The sole attachment remaining to them is that of love- love for their world, their brethren, and their faith. As they can progress no further toward enlightenment in this life, they are fit and correct sacrifices to the necessities of the world. What they do is necessary, as they understand it, and they say that they would not regret it even if they could.

Jivakan Naval Forces

Under the rules provided in the *Skyward Steel* naval sourcebook, Jivaka is a planet with 400,000 people living at a Poor standard of living. As such, they have 70 budget points with which to build their fleet. The Red Sangha live aboard the Peerless space station *Lower Heaven*, while a Bannerjee-12 orbital provides coverage for the other side of the planet and a terminal for the limited trade conducted with other worlds.

The Jivakan fleet consists of the troop transport *Hinayana*, the three frigates *Vajra*, *Prajna*, and *Bhavana*, the two patrol boats *Vinaya* and *Sutta*, the naval couriers *Sutra* and *Khor*, and the free merchant *Maya*. Three or four of these ships are docked at the *Lower Heaven* at any one time for refitting and maintenance. The naval couriers are generally used to keep in contact with dispersed Red Sangha detachments, though they also find use in Deep Black operations. The free merchant runs supplies to the smaller corp units, and is occasionally impressed for covert operations that require a suitably innocent civilian vessel.

Details on the troop transport and naval courier ship classes can be found in the *Skyward Steel* naval sourcebook, along with information on creating planetary naval forces and conducting orbital assaults.

Using the Red Sangha in a Campaign

The Red Sangha work well as enemies for experienced groups of adventurers. While their equipment leaves something to be desired, their lethal aim can make them a threat even to well-armored and hardy freebooters. Most novice adventurers should have the sense to avoid tangling with them, especially since they are rarely found in groups smaller than five.

The Sangha can be guardians of a person the PCs need to kill, protectors of a place they need to infiltrate, or even the opposing force across some backwater world's smoking battlefields. Repeated clashes in which the Sangha is foiled or embarrassed are likely to result in Deep Black operatives being dispatched to cause terminal problems for the PCs. There's nothing personal about the act to the Sangha; it's just necessary business to clear away inevitable future problems.

The Sangha might be used as patrons or allies as well, perhaps requiring the help of the PCs to salvage some vital mission or avenge themselves on a treacherous employer. The Sangha might be decimated by some disastrous reversal, and be in desperate need of outworlder help to fill out their numbers or maintain their obligations until more Liberated can be mustered. While the Sangha is merciless in many ways, they lack the megalomania and arrant cruelty that can put a group firmly onto the "implacable foe" list for some players.

Aside from this, the secret biochemical lore of Mantheesh the Damned still lurks somewhere deep in Jivaka's asteroid belt, and certain zealous Jivakans are looking for it. This Left Hand of Enlightenment might well contain a number of renegade Red Sangha, all of them dedicated to infecting new worlds with the synthetic enlightenment of Liberation.

RED SANGHA NPC STATISTICS

Red Sangha Brother

Armor Class	5 (Woven Armor)	No. Appearing	5
Hit Dice	1	Saving Throw	15+
Attack Bonus	+4	Movement	30'
Damage	1d12 combat rifle	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+1		

The Red Sangha lacks the money and infrastructure to supply all its troops with advanced postech armor and weaponry. The corps spends enough time on low-tech worlds that more primitive combat rifles and woven armor are much easier to supply from local materials. Their chief advantage is in the quality of the troops rather than that of their gear; Red Sangha troopers never rout and never panic. This serene efficiency in the midst of roaring chaos makes even the least experienced brother exceedingly dangerous, with their shots squeezed off as calmly as if they were on a firing range.

Red Sangha Covert Operative

Armor Class	4 (CFU)	No. Appearing	1-6
Hit Dice	3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+6	Movement	30'
Damage	2d8+1 mag rifle	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+2		

These brothers are those chosen and trained for highly sensitive Deep Black operations far behind enemy lines. All of them wed years of field experience to the Sangha calm, and have their pick of the best equipment available on Jivaka. No more than fifty Sangha are qualified for such operations at any one time, and as many as half of them are on long-term deployment as personal security for well-paying officials and foreign rulers. Due to their rarity, the Sangha cannot always deploy five of them at a time.

Red Sangha Psychic

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	3+3	Saving Throw	14+
Attack Bonus	+3	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6 thermal pistol	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+2		

With as few as the Sangha are, there are rarely more than two or three psychics available to them at any one time. Such combat psychics are often drawn from personnel otherwise far too young or old to serve with the corps, such is the need for experienced psionic experts. They are protected jealously and never exposed to danger unless necessity demands it. Other Sangha will readily give their lives to save a brother psychic. Psychics normally have 21 psi points, Telepathy 5 (with levels 1-3 mastered) and Teleportation 5, with their duties largely revolving around interrogations and bypassing enemy defenses. For exceptionally sensitive covert missions, a psychic will form a mental link with the participants and then go into deep hiding in a system's asteroid belt or on some lifeless moon. So long as the psychic remains in the system, the Deep Black team can use him as an undetectable, untouchable communications channel.

Abbot Daniel Balavrata

Armor Class	2 (Deflector Array)	No. Appearing	1
Hit Dice	9 (52 hit points)	Saving Throw	11+
Attack Bonus	+12	Movement	30'
Damage	2d6+2 mag pistol	Morale	12
Skill Bonus	+4		

Abbot Balavrata has led the Red Sangha since his predecessor's death to brain cancer eight years ago. With his fiftieth year approaching, Balavrata understands that his own time is growing short, and he feels concern over the prospects of the Sangha after his death. A catastrophic betrayal by a treacherous employer four years ago killed both of the potential successors that he was grooming to succeed him, and the remaining candidates all lack the seasoning and accomplishment that Abbot Balavrata finds necessary. Almost as regrettably, the traitorous employer remains unrebuked for his treachery, and his example is doubtless giving unfortunate thoughts to others in the sector.

Balavrata is even considering gathering in some of the renegades that have left the Red Sangha in hopes that some few of them might have manifested the leadership skills and prowess he requires. Unbeknownst to him, several of those renegades have gone over to the Left Hand of Enlightenment, and the consequences of their ascent could be catastrophic. Outside the order, a few native Jivakans have found evidence to suggest this spiritual cancer, but it is insufficient to prove their case. Outsiders may be necessary in order to acquire the proof that Abbot Balavrata would doubtless require.

Red Sangha as Player Characters

Those afflicted with Liberation have short lives, with few living much beyond fifty before succumbing to brain cancer. Still, some do leave the Red Sangha to find a different path, most often those who can no longer subscribe to the Sangha's interpretation of Buddhism. Their brothers do not challenge these departures. They feel only pity and sympathy for their wayward friend.

The advantages and flaws of the Red Sangha have no mechanical effect on player characters, as PCs already effectively have unshakable morale and can choose to react to situations as they see fit. The natural talent Red Sangha members have for violence and bloodshed tends to blend in well with the usual pastimes of player characters.

In terms of roleplaying, the average Red Sangha PC will be calm, polite, patient, and devoted to their friends and chosen companions. They will not be terribly interested in physical pleasures or material rewards, but can become fiercely fixated on ideological goals and religious obligations. They simply do not feel the darker emotions as more than mild notions- no fear, no hate, no anger, no lust, no greed... and certainly no regret.

Brother of the Red Sangha *Background*

Even those Liberated that are expected to fulfill different duties as they age are often posted to the Red Sangha during their youth. These acolytes of battle spend their days in serene meditation and study of the arts of war.

Skills: Combat/Projectile, Culture/Jivaka, Religion, Tactics

Veteran Sangha Infantry *Training*

After a period of four or five years of training, even the least promising brother has seen some action planetside and mastered the essentials of war. Veteran infantry such as these are superb soldiers, easily the match of any ordinary mercenary trooper. The bloodless calm and focus of the Sangha make them extraordinarily effective under circumstances that would leave a normal man shattered with panic or excitement. Infantry with a knack for technical pursuits often are made drivers and mechanics for the armored personnel carriers favored by the Sangha.

Any class can choose this option for a training package. Psychics gain the first four skills, warriors and experts gain the next two, and experts get the last two.

All characters gain: Combat/Projectile, Combat/Unarmed, Religion, Tactics
Warriors and Experts also gain: Athletics, Stealth
Experts also gain: Tech/Postech, Vehicle/Land

Martial Art: Upaya

The traditional unarmed martial art of the Red Sangha, "Upaya" refers more widely to the entire corpus of military knowledge and expertise the corps has cultivated. Outsiders have been known to master the art, but much of it is cloaked in complex Buddhist religious terminology and arcane physical exercises. Observant Buddhists from other religious traditions in the sector abhor it, and consider its practice *prima facie* evidence of unspeakable spiritual degeneration.

The style itself focuses on indifference to personal suffering in order to achieve victory over a foe. This feat is substantially easier for Liberated humans than those who retain the full scope of emotional reactions, but it can be sustained by sufficiently determined outsiders. The style uses numerous sacrifice moves and demands motions that can occasionally strain or harm the user. Damage inflicted on oneself by using the novice level of the art cannot reduce the stylist's hit points below 1.

Martial arts styles are intended for campaigns in which the GM wishes to make unarmed and melee combat an reasonable alternative to firearms. For details on learning and using martial arts, consult *Mandate Archive: Martial Arts*.

Weapon Groups	Unarmed
Level 0 Novice	The novice's strikes do 1d8 damage. The novice can declare an unarmed sacrifice strike before rolling; if the attack is successful, the strike automatically does maximum damage. Whether or not it's successful, the user takes 1d6 damage himself.
Level 1 Intermediate	After a miss with an unarmed attack, the stylist can push the assault and gain a reroll on the attack roll. However, the next melee attack by the target against the stylist will automatically hit.
Level 2 Master	The master's strikes do 2d6 damage. When missed by an enemy in melee, the stylist may grant the enemy a reroll on the attack roll. Hit or miss, if the stylist survives the second attack roll he may make an immediate unarmed counterattack.