

100 PLANETS

BY JAMES 'GRIM' DESBOROUGH



POSTMORTEM STUDIOS.

100 PLANETS

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

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Cover art: NASA/JPL, with a little help from James 'Grim' Desborough.

Dedication

To the Earth. I'm sorry we've treated you so badly. Maybe we'll do better next time.

To Arthur C. Clarke scientist, science fiction author and visionary, a great loss to a world that is losing sight of the future.

To Gary Gygax, co-father of role-playing, without whom I would not be where and what I am today.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the latest Postmortem Studios production, *100 Planets*, I hope you enjoy it and derive a great deal of use from it. *100 Planets* is a follow-on and accompaniment to *100 Science-Fiction Adventure Seeds*, one of my best-selling books in both e-version and in print. Where *100 Science-Fiction Adventure Seeds* gave you adventures, *100 Planets* is intended to give you places to adventure and inspiration for locations in which to set your adventures.

100 Planets is a generic book, not designed with any specific science-fiction role-playing game in mind. This inevitably means that it does not necessarily include, or pander to any of the particular conceits of individual games. Thus you may need to do a bit of wrenching and massaging in order to make any of the presented Planets fit your particular game. The default, from which certain individual planets will depart, will be hard(ish) science-fiction in the mode of the books of *Arthur C Clarke*, *David Brin* and *Peter F Hamilton*.

Not every Planet in the book will literally be a 'Planet', there will also be space stations, asteroids and other, more unusual locations. *100 Planets* will be followed up by *100 Dark Places* for horror gaming and is accompanied by *100 Kingdoms* for fantasy gaming. Share, enjoy and please do get in touch to let me know about your experiences with our products!

POSTMORTEM STUDIOS

Postmortem Studios is the personal publishing imprint of *James 'Grim' Desborough*, Origins Award winning author of *The Munchkin's Guide to Powergaming*. *Postmortem Studios* publishes primarily in PDF format through the usual PDF outlets such as www.rpgnow.com, but is also available in print either via the sites or through www.leisuregames.co.uk.

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However...

The role-playing game industry is not huge, not rich – with only a couple of exceptions – and can ill afford your piracy, unlike many software companies. I am a one man show, not a large company by any stretch of the imagination and I am attempting to build a business from the ground up. I need every penny. If you have downloaded this book illegally, and you like it, please consider purchasing some of my other products.

That's all I ask.

THE PLANETS

The description of each Planet will follow a common format throughout this book, one per page making up a total of one-hundred Planets.

NUMBER

Each Planet will be designated by a three digit number, such as 039 so you can easily look up particular Planets by remembering the numerical code alone. This number appears next to the title of the Planet at the top of the page.

TITLE

Each Planet's number is also accompanied by a title. The title may be light hearted, a pun or a simple descriptive. Whatever the title it is designed to be somewhat memorable to you in order to help you locate the particular Planet you want to work with more easily.

DESCRIPTION

The description provides a brief, paragraph or two of overview of the Planet in question. There are, perhaps, a couple of lines on the other information that is being provided, along with everything else particularly pertinent to the character and nature of the Planet in question. The description could be thought of as being a 'Hitchhiker's Guide' reference or a travel agent's summary of the appeal of a particular Planet as a holiday destination.

GOVERNMENT

This section describes the political situation within the Planet both the official rulers, their loyal opposition and any other pertinent political forces or machinations at work on the Planet. This will not necessarily go into great detail but will lay out the political situation in such a way as to give you enough to create stories based upon that description. Not every Planet will be united, not every Planet will have a civilisation upon it. In these later cases the political interests that might become interested or invested in the planet are used instead.

GEOGRAPHY

The geography section describes the broad geographical nature of the Planet. Where it is situated, what any pertinent geographical features are, along with any other features or items of importance that might factor in. How the Planet feeds itself, what it trades, natural defences and formations, unnatural ones, the nature of any other significant Planets in the system and so forth.

STORIES

The stories section will contain a few, very short, adventure seed ideas related to the Planet as described. These will be limited to only one or two lines but, within the context of the described place, should be enough to spark off a few adventure ideas for you and your group.

TIPS

If there is remaining room on each page, or if it is felt it is needed, a 'tips' box will offer advice, research, inspiration or other tips on how to expand that Planet, bring it's ideas to life or give you a clearer image of it's nature.

NOTE

The Solar System planets, 001-011 are presented as being a cohesive whole, all set within the same 'campaign world' and could be used as the basis for such a campaign world if you don't want to use them separately.

001 – SOME LIKE IT HOT

Description

Mercury is an extreme planet, the closest to the sun and buffeted constantly by its heat and by powerful solar flares. Mercury is an extremely hostile environment and one ill suited to colonisation efforts by any but the most foolhardy or desperate of people. In spite of all this Mercury still has a great deal of value in terms of mineral resources and the possible bounty of energy such a location, close to the power source of the sun, can have. As such Mercury does maintain a small number of research and industrial stations, mining installations and expansive solar farms that gather immense amounts of energy. At present no good logistical means exists to transfer this massive amount of power back to the rest of the solar system for use by civilisation but the power can be used by the scientific and industrial stations to support some extremely high powered scientific experiments and to allow the mineral wealth of Mercury to be exploited relatively cheaply.

All of these settlements reside within the freezing permanent twilight of Mercury's asteroid craters, the cold easier to deal with than the unrelenting heat of the surface. The small bases are mostly linked via small pneumatic railways dug by robotic tunnelling machines that were also used to create accelerator rings and to dig mine shafts for more specialist mining and boring machines. For a community of people that lives so close to the sun the citizens of Mercury spend the greater majority of their time in the dark and cool of the tunnels, something of an irony.

Government

Mercury has no overall governing body. Each settlement is the sovereign territory of the corporation or government which claims ownership. The transit system between the various sub bases is considered to be collectively owned by all of the involved entities, not that this causes a problem as they are largely self maintaining. There is some paranoia about industrial espionage which leads each community to employ one, two, or a handful of security personnel though each of these normally pulls double duty due to the small populations of the bases and their requirement not to be wasteful. While energy is plentiful and the high quality ore dug from Mercury pays for a great deal it is still expensive to support the bases and the populations that exist on the planet and any expense – even security personnel – must be justified.

Geography

Despite its hothouse conditions Mercury is not a volcanic world, it is in fact geologically largely inactive and covered with the evidence of past meteor strikes, relatively unaffected by erosion or surface turnover, other than the occasional melting and re-setting of certain surface features. Despite the surface temperature ranging up to a staggering 800 Kelvin there are cold areas in deep craters, particularly at the poles where water ice can be found, deposited by comets and outgassing from beneath the surface. This water is what truly makes the existence of the scientific and industrial stations possible.

Stories

1. The Von Neumann machines that construct the solar stations all over the planet have suffered a 'mutation' and contact with the industrial and scientific stations on the planet has been lost. If these simple self-replicating machines have gone 'rogue' somehow then the problem needs to be investigated. Such machines could be a military asset or a threat, depending on whether they can be controlled or not and it is down to the group to look for survivors and deal with the mechanical menace.
2. The immense amounts of energy available to the scientific stations make all manner of otherwise non-viable experiments possible from the mass production of antimatter to experiments into gravity distortion, wormholes and synthetic matter. It is only a matter of time until someone meddles with 'things man was not meant to know' and something goes wrong. Then somebody needs to clear up the mess.
3. An industrial dispute breaks out between one of the mining bases and their parent company back on Earth. Sending security forces to quell the unrest is uneconomical but sending a small group of private contractors may be able to break the strike and return the mere handful of workers to.

002 – LOVE AND WAR

Description

Venus is at the centre of a concerted terraforming operation by a concerted corporate effort, a private answer to the publicly oriented terraforming operations on Mars. Despite Venus having no life upon it and no evidence of any past life upon it, despite its hellish conditions and despite the great wealth and understanding developing it could bring to mankind some 'ecological' protestors have been trying to sabotage the programme to preserve a second planet from being 'vandalised', as they see it. Despite their attempts Venus is a hive of activity on the surface and in orbit with monitoring stations manned by the participating corporate entities to observe the slow process of terraforming and ships constantly bringing, or shunting, cometary ice to bombard the atmosphere, provide water and cool the surface along with a flight of solar shade, superimposed between the planet's orbit and the sun to bring its temperature down and to tame the runaway greenhouse effect present on the surface.

Government

The Venusian terraforming project is fronted by several of Earth's largest corporate entities. Not satisfied with having their own legal territory in the form of corporate embassies and space stations they have undertaken to make their own habitable planet which can be parcelled up, bought and sold and otherwise exploited as these companies see fit. This effort is governed by a corporate council maintained with special representatives of the five involved corporations and advised by members of the companies they have subcontracted to. Voting power on the board is determined by investment in the project and assets committed to it. Companies that wish to have more influence and control over the project are, therefore, incited to commit more to its progress.

Geography

Venus is Earth's tempestuous twin. Almost the same size as Earth and with much the same gravity Venus is almost a story of what Earth could have been. Extreme volcanism and other conditions on Venus lead to a runaway greenhouse effect that evaporated all the water, split it into hydrogen and oxygen and then outgassed most of the hydrogen from the atmosphere, leaving Venus with a hot blanket of carbon dioxide as its primary atmospheric component and clouds of sulphuric acid to add insult to injury and to make its name – that of a love goddess – all the more inappropriate.

The efforts to terraform Venus are put forward at what amounts, for terraforming, as breakneck speed employing and testing any and all technologies or methods that might work from solar shades to cometary bombardment, nanotechnology and synthetic and artificial bacterial cloud seeding using modified bacteria from Earth that thrive in the harshest of conditions. All attempts to thin and cool Venus' atmosphere, to introduce water and to bind the sulphur and carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.

Stories

1. Terrorists associated with one of the largest anti-terraforming groups have hijacked one of the comet-tugs and are threatening to smash it into the largest surface base on Venus if their demands are not acceded to. The companies want to send a harsh 'no cooperation' message to these groups and are looking to hire a dedicated group capable of stealing aboard the vessel and eliminating the group before they make good on their threat.
2. A scientist on the surface of Venus has made a difficult and unlikely discovery. A form of life native to Venus – albeit just a very primitive organism akin to the engineered bacteria that are being used to seed the Venusian atmosphere. The existence of this bug changes everything in relation to Venus, if word gets out then the ecological groups finally have something to substantiate their protests and the corporations stand to lose the trillions of credits they have already sunk into the project.
3. The ecological groups form a useful front for government agencies wishing to sabotage the private terraforming effort. The relative rapidity of the Venusian project, despite Venus' lack of a truly present population, threatens to undermine the legitimacy of continued, governmentally organised colonisation efforts. Concerned by the possibility of a privately owned solar system several governments from Earth have taken it upon themselves to both use the eco-terrorists as cover and to support their actions.

003 - RESERVATION

Description

With a diaspora of humanity to the stars and to new colonies thanks to cheap antigravity and faster than light travel Earth has become little more than a museum. The home of humanity, abandoned by most and left to its own devices for the most part, the only thing of significance being its ceremonial and historical past as the seat of humanity and any attempt at overall human governance or confederacy. Exhausted of resources having sent humankind to the stars the Earth is now dependent on goodwill, tourism and the activities of its decreasing population in order to survive, a dusty museum world being slowly retaken by nature and considered to be an artefact of a bygone age.

Government

Earth retains its national governments of old but these are subsumed to the various power blocs, Western, Asian, Orthodox and Islamic that consolidated in the 21st century. These in turn are subsumed to the United Nations and the powerful interplanetary and interstellar corporations that came up during the diaspora and colonisation effort. Technology and the availability of resources from the solar system and the colonies means there is little need for conflict any longer but clashes and brushfire wars still erupt on Earth despite the low population. With nothing else to lay claim to it is tradition and beliefs that have become Earth's currency and it is riddled with groups who act as exemplars of any number of beliefs, nationalisms or defunct political ideologies. Earth and its nations are almost entirely dependent upon the goodwill and donations of their former colonies and the sense of debt and origination from these Earthly nations decreases year on year.

Geography

Earth's geography should be well known to the reader though global warming and other ecological disasters reshaped much of the Earth the essentials remain the same. The population peak did lead to certain differences though, the reclaiming of land from the sea and the construction of floating cities for example. With the diaspora many cities have been left virtually empty, housing as little as one tenth of the numbers they were supposed to and only capital cities retaining anything like the populations they had before the diaspora. Automated systems and technology keep most towns and cities up and running but nature is beginning to creep back where places are abandoned and unused, eating up some of the towns and cities that are still considered heritage sites.

Stories

1. The characters are a group of tourists from off world, coming back to Earth to visit the heritage sites of their bloodlines and original cultures. While engaged in their tour they are ceased by one of the many extremist groups that exist on Earth and are held captive and forced to face Earth as it is, rather than the romanticised image of what it once was. Escape might be possible but the real, living communities may not be entirely sympathetic to them even if they do manage to break free.
2. A strong independence movement is sweeping through the colonies and the thought of paying even a heritage tax back to the Earth is seen as a destructive and unnecessary thing, looking backward when it is felt people should be looking forward to the future and the newer colonies. As the entourage of an Earth diplomat the characters are responsible for the espionage, bribery and pleading that will be needed to secure the colonial donations for the foreseeable future.
3. Rebellious Earth factions are undertaking operations against heritage sites to destroy them, resenting the increasing view of Earth as being an unimportant backwater, valued only for its history. By wrecking sites such as Westminster and the Taj Mahal they hope to engage colonial interest and get Earth seen as a political and social force again, not just a backwater. The characters are agents from the Federal Enforcement Group, an interstellar police and espionage organisation, sent on the colonial payroll to put an end to these activities by any means necessary. The more reactionary Earth governments are on their side, as are the resources of the colonial military and governments but many are also sympathetic to their enemies making for a long and dangerous operation.

Tip:

Tapping into the real history of the areas the characters might operate in can give more ideas than you need for names and beliefs of the sort of resurgent groups that might exist in such a world.

004 – RED PLANET

Description

Mars is subject to an intensive terraforming operation on behalf of the United Nations, funded by the space programmes and new colonial programmes set up alongside them. The undertaking of turning Mars into a habitable world is viewed as a boon for all of humanity and for every nation, regardless of their politics or relative wealth. The whole project is overseen and policed by the United Nations who act as the neutral intermediary body between the various involved governments. Even though Mars is not yet inhabitable without the aid of vacuum suits expansive tunnel cities and pressurised domes mean that Mars already has a reasonably extensive population.

The actual terraforming proceeds slowly using reliable and well-tested technology but the international nature of any decision made regarding the Mars colony means that everything proceeds at a snail's pace and has to contend with a great deal of bureaucracy. This slow progress is extremely frustrating to many of the ideologues and scientists who have volunteered for the Mars programme and they constantly lobby for the Mars mission to take more risks in order to proceed more swiftly, citing the relative progress of the private Venus terraforming project as precedent.

Government

Mars is designated international territory. As such only international law applies and, technically speaking, most things are legal there. In addition to this a specific Mars charter, agreed on by a majority of the involved governments and ratified by the United Nations places certain limits and additional legal enforcements upon what is allowed to be conducted on the planet. Everything on Mars is governmentally owned and there is no real economy to speak of as everything is requisitioned or assigned on a basis of need. This has lead to the springing up of a barter economy dealing 'black market' Earth goods brought legally or smuggled from the home world and a problem of what amounts to prostitution, sex being one of the few things everyone has that can be traded. Corruption is also prevalent in the bureaucracy and everyone on Mars feels safe and far from any authority that might otherwise punish them. The severest penalty available on Mars is deportation and that is so expensive that it is reserved for the most terrible cases only. Ostensibly Mars is governed by a United Nations appointed governor but in practise the scientists and engineers are the true power.

Geography

Mars is a cold and cold and desolate planet of rusty sand and the terraforming effort, despite its vastness has – thus far – made little dent. Comets are being hard landed in the polar regions to thicken and wetten the atmosphere and solar reflectors are being deployed to increase the heat and atmosphere of the surface but as of yet the outside surface is still too harsh for anyone to venture unaided. The single Martian city, Ares, is constructed upon and within a section of the Martian crust with a very strong intrinsic magnetic field, this protects the city from solar radiation and thus provides a relatively safe location from which to expand the colony. Other research stations are scattered around the surface and are reached either by massive-winged glider craft or by all terrain vehicles.

Stories

1. The people working on Mars are intensely idealistic and believe in the future of terraforming, colonisation and Mars. They, for the most part, do not see eye to eye with the immense bureaucracy and slow moving forward of the project and this resentment may be enough to fuel a rebellion or the unlicensed use of new technologies to speed up the terraforming process. The governor and the invested governments are by no means happy about such attempts and will spare no expense to find and punish the culprits, which could well lead to a full scale rebellion.
2. Various government agencies take part in espionage and sabotage activities against the private terraforming process ongoing on Venus and some of the involved corporations have taken it upon themselves to return the favour to the level of stealing proprietary technology and even kidnapping experts from the Martian effort to put them to work on the Venusian problem. United Nations security, needless to say, frowns upon such activity and has stepped up operations to deal with the problem.

005 – ROCK ROLL

Description

The asteroid belt is not a whirling maelstrom of tumbling rocks in constant collision that the films and SF dramas would have you believe. Rather it is extremely spaced out with tracts of empty space between one tumbling rock and the next though some collisions do occur resulting in minor 'asteroid families' with several components orbiting together, surrounded by dust clouds. The largest object in this region is Ceres, with a 950 km diameter and the smallest ranges down to microscopic dust particles. The region is not dangerous to space traffic but it is nigh uncharitable and stands between the inner solar system and the outer solar system, a barrier between Mars and the gas giants.

As such the asteroid belt has become a sort of 'no man's land' with only individual rocks claimed by a particular government or corporation. Private groups such as cults, radical political groups, communes and others have also raised the capital to cap, seal and pressurise asteroids as homes for themselves as well, far cheaper than building a space station, far safer and far enough away to do whatever they wish there without interference.

The criminal element has not passed up on the opportunity either and while piracy is rare it does occur as does illicit industry, illegal experimentation, gambling, prostitution and innumerable other rackets that are entered into to claw back the original investment and to sucker the money from the industrial concerns and asteroid miners that work so far out.

Government

The asteroid belt is an anarchy of different governmental systems with no overriding law. International law, while unenforced in most instances, is the only applicable law and few naval vessels of any kind bother much with the asteroid belt. Some loose alliances between similarly minded cults, criminal cartels and radical groups have emerged for mutual defence and support in case of emergencies but most of the time the laws and customs vary so widely from asteroid to asteroid that no common sense can be made of it.

Geography

Most asteroids are small in size, smaller than 400km in diameter, the size of the largest asteroids and planetoids that are all claimed by the larger industrial companies. Indeed most of the ones claimed by the various groups are much smaller, perhaps only one or two kilometres in diameter, sizeable enough to hold their populations but small enough to be manageable.

The asteroids themselves are quite safe and secure, spun up for pseudo-gravity, their occupants hidden from cosmic radiation behind electromagnetic screens and metres and metres of rock. The sharp curve of the walls can make living in an asteroid a somewhat surreal and unsettling experience to those used to living in a stronger gravity well and the pseudo-gravity of the spin is always weaker than Earth gravity. Everyone on board an asteroid habitat is also acutely aware of the need for neatness, tidiness, recycling and how to deal with pressure leaks or a failure of the electromagnetic screens.

Stories

1. A cult calling themselves the Sons of Ilium inhabit several asteroids within the belt where they live according to an ascetic tradition and a warrior code; somewhere between a pagan, martial cult and a 20th century survivalist group. This would not be a problem for anyone, if they kept themselves to themselves but their recruitment techniques amount to strongarm tactics and they have been accused of kidnapping several people to bolster their numbers. The conventional police forces have no jurisdiction in the asteroid belt but that also means that rough justice can be handed out by anyone who can afford to see it done. The families of the kidnapped cult members want them back and want the cult punished.
2. Open piratical activity has started to come about against freighters and automated material carriers passing through the asteroid belt. The ships conducting the attacks are of a new design, not produced in any of the solar system's planetary production facilities. There must be an uncharted planetoid out there of reasonable size, enough to house construction facilities for this new pirate fleet and undercover investigators are required to try and find it out.

006 – JOVIAL CHAP

Description

Jupiter is a solar system in miniature, the single giant planet courted by over sixty moons, a rich concentration of resources in terms of electromagnetic energy, gases, water and minerals as well as a stopping point for most solar system traffic that still uses slingshot techniques for building up speed and reaching the outer solar system.

Jupiter is an industrial and economic powerhouse, founded through massive investment by conglomerations of Earth corporations and governmental power the four Galilean moons, Io, Ganymede, Europa and Callisto are all home to extensive industrial colonies, scooping helium-3 from Jupiter's atmosphere using beanstalk technology, tapping into the immensely powerful magnetic fields and searching for life beneath Europa's icy shell. All of them tied together by an Earth naval presence and a Jovian peacekeeping force, independently funded by the Jovian companies.

In many ways Jupiter resembles a pre-revolution America. A land rich in resources, out on the frontier of space but beholden economically and politically to those who made settlement there possible. The similarities are not lost on the Jovian colonists who increasingly begin to grate against the demands of the inner solar system and the impositions of the navy.

Government

As a public/private partnership the Jovian system is ruled over by a UN appointed governor who is, in turn, advised by a corporate council with representatives from each of the interplanetary industrial corporations involved in the Jupiter project. Colonists, unless they have shares in one of the companies, have no say in who the governor is or who sits upon the board but all decisions that affect the colonies are made by this group, most of which do not even live in the Jovian colonies.

In opposition to this strong unions have begun to form amongst the colonial workers and a secessionist movement is strongly gaining grassroots support. The inexperienced attempts by the navy and peacekeeping force, under orders from the governor to stamp out this movement, have only increasingly backfired, creating a vicious circle of rebellion and oppression.

Geography

Only the largest moons, the Galilean moons, have settlements in large numbers upon them and the Europian settlement is largely limited to a single base upon the surface, afraid of contamination of any life that might be found. Due to Jupiter's immensely powerful electromagnetic field most settlements are either within armoured and screened space stations or dug deep into the surface of the moons. Jupiter is unusual for a solar system colony by virtue of not only being self sustaining, but by producing an excess of water, food, power, fuel and people, all of which are exported to the rest of the solar system. Jupiter itself is orbited at great distance by Charybdis, a gigantic space station attached to a tether that descends into Jupiter's atmosphere, suctioning up gas and filtering out the helium three for use as fusion fuel throughout the solar system, the main source of Jupiter's riches.

Stories

1. Full fledged revolt breaks out in the Jovian system as a result of a massacre of civilians by rogue elements of the peacekeeping force, trying to silence dissent. The naval station is overrun and the ships taken over by former merchant crews, the industrial capacity of Jupiter turned over to a war footing as the inner solar system readies itself to mount an assault to retake their investment. Characters can be caught in the middle of this or drafted into either side.
2. Life is found beneath the ice of Europa, beyond anyone's expectations it turns out to be a form of intelligent life. A bioluminescent, squid-like creature living around the most extensive bed of hydrothermal vents. These creatures, while intelligent, are also technologically advanced but had no real idea there was anything beyond the ice wall above their heads. Now that they do know they have found it deeply unsettling, like finding out that hell was real. It is only a matter of time before innocent scientific intentions lead to conflict of some sort. The characters could be stationed on Europa when the squids decide to fight or otherwise disrupt the humans living on the shell of Europa.

007 – WHAT A GAS!

Description

Saturn should be another Jupiter, another huge gas giant, replete with moons and with the added bonus of the ring material should make it an industrial giant to rival the Jovian system, but Saturn has never been exploited in quite the same way. Saturn is strictly a second-string operation with only minimal investment in it and most of its moons, with so much invested into Jupiter and with so much return there simply hasn't been any need to exploit Saturn so much.

Because of this the chief investor in Saturn has been the Chinese, ideologically and pragmatically opposed to being tied to the private enterprise led helium three supply from Jupiter the Chinese, in partnership with other governments who share a more state-led approach have begun construction of their own helium mining tether in orbit fifteen degrees north of the ring system.

Of Saturn's moons only Titan has received real attention from this governmental alliance, due in no small part to the presence of large amounts of hydrocarbons on Titan's surface which are processed for hydrocarbon fuels and the creation of plastics and other materials. The presence of large amounts of methane and ethane in Titan's atmosphere also allow for cheap energy production making the Titan facilities self sustaining in terms of power and therefore cheaper to run.

Government

Titan is run by a government appointed board with representatives from the participating nations, chiefly the Chinese, Russians and French. The board are required to live in-situ and at present reside at the way station on Rhea, the marshalling yard for the construction of the orbital tether and the jumping off point for hydrocarbon tankers heading elsewhere in the system.

Geography

Saturn has a weaker magnetic field than Jupiter and so less shielding is needed. More of the stations and settlements within the system are built close to the surface rather than being nestled into the rock, an aesthetic as much as a money-saving decision, what would be the point of being so close to Saturn if you couldn't see it? Rhea is little more than a frozen rock and the tether isn't yet finished which only leaves Titan, a planet with conditions not unlike Earth, only colder and based upon different chemistry. The bases here are built on stilts above the hydrocarbon lakes and use magnetic coils to launch their cargo into orbit where it is picked up by tugs for shipping. Titan can be deceptively like being home, compared to other planets, and accidents with space suits happen because this misleads people.

Stories

1. The exploitation of Titan's hydrocarbon lakes is seen as despoiling that world by environmentalists and some scientists who still think Titan is a good bet for discovering extraterrestrial micro organisms. Tests on innumerable samples from Titan have been inconclusive, the chemistry so different from that of Earth that scientists have a hard time discerning what may or may not be pre-biotic life. This hasn't stopped environmentalists from stowing away and trying to sabotage processing operations on Titan. Production is down due to paranoia and distrust and the government board wants the problem dealt with.
2. The existence of a second helium three extractor would jeopardise the monopoly that is currently held by the Jovian system. This is the very reason that it is being built but many of the companies involved in the Jupiter projects are understandably protective of their investment and the wealth that it brings. So protective that they're not above a little industrial espionage and sabotage to slow down or even prevent it being built.
3. During the Jovian revolt (see 006) Saturn makes a very tempting target for the rebels. Securing Saturn would remove any possibility of the rest of the system having any other significant source of helium three and could be rapidly developed using proven Jovian technology thereby allowing the rebels to more rapidly build a force and economy capable of taking on the rest of the solar system.

Tip:

Saturn and Jupiter make a good backdrop for exploring wider political and ideological differences in space exploration and exploitation. Neither governments nor corporations care that much about what they are 'despoiling' provided they need what is there but the tension between a capitalistic free market and a state monopoly throw up many social commentary based adventure ideas.

008 – COLD FRONT

Description

Uranus is the third gas giant of the solar system, counting outwards from the sun, and the first of the ‘ice giants’, paired with its twin, Neptune. Uranus is smaller than the other gas giants with fewer significant moons and a faint ring system to match Saturn’s, although Uranus’ rings are vertical, rather than horizontal. Uranus is a curiosity in many ways, the coldest of the gas giants, despite being closer to the sun than Neptune, tipped upon its end, with rings, moons and a peculiar atmosphere that defies attempts to probe and understand it. Uranus is of interest only as a scientific curiosity and remains relatively unexplored and unexploited, home only to a joint scientific mission that is attempting to unlock the secrets of its atmosphere and the primordial cause of its tilt.

Government

The Uranus observation station, little more than a few docked together freighters and empty fuel tanks, is governed by its sponsors, astrophysics departments of numerous universities and grants from governments awarded to the project through those universities. The UOS is beholden to these sponsors and, while its main focus remains upon solving the Uranus enigmas, it is also required by those sponsors to carry out experiments according to their whim, even though most of these could be carried out more cheaply and effectively in Earth orbit. The crew of the station, twelve in total, rotates half its number every year with each crewmember remaining for two years upon the station. Working in isolation upon these problems is recognised to be a shortcut to a first class degree and so many underachieving or overambitious students opt for duty aboard the station, bringing more campus and family politics with them.

Day to day decisions are made by a duty captain, the one member of the crew on each rotation who has genuine spacing experience. On lesser matters where a command decision is not required a poll of the crew determines what course should be taken, the poll run anonymously via the station computer.

Geography

Uranus itself is a crushing gas giant with extremely cold temperatures, hyper-powerful winds and immense gravity, one of the most hostile sets of planetary conditions in the solar system along with its near twin Neptune. Its moons are all small and made up of around 50/50 ice and rock, making them unsuitable in many ways for long term settlement, despite the presence of water. The UOS occupies a geostationary position above Uranus’ pole and helps earn its keep by running experiments for companies and governments that cannot afford their own stations and by acting as a communications relay for surrounding traffic.

The station itself is built from two Hyperion class freighters, outdated interplanetary ships, permanently docked together and welded with their large auxiliary fuel tanks pressurised, shielded and filled out with laboratories and living quarters. It is a cramped place in which to live, more spacious than the old 21st century International Space Station, but not by much.

Stories

1. The main thrust of the UOS research is towards deciphering Uranus’ past and the cause of its tilt out of line with the rest of the solar system. Numerous designs of probe have been dropped into the atmosphere but have all been torn apart by the winds, crushed by the atmosphere or gravity or frozen beyond the capability of the technology to run. Finally they have managed to get a probe deep enough to return useful telemetry and their discovery – that the cause was artificial, a weapon – has caused them to send out a mayday. While the characters may pick up the message, other forces are intent on keeping this information a military secret.
2. Students have been known to undertake other experiments on the behalf of sponsors, outside the official ones, working in their off-time to earn extra money for when they return home to Earth. Not all of these experiments are safe and some of them are in self-adapting, military viral code. Commissioned to take a rotation of students to the station the characters find it overrun with a military computer virus designed to take over ships and facilities and to kill off the inhabitants, a virus that is an expert system with a programmed ‘instinct’ bordering on intelligence.

009 – BLUE ICE

Description

The furthest planet from the sun, unless you count Pluto still by habit, Neptune is the fourth gas giant and the second of the ‘ice giants’, twinned with Uranus but lacking many of the peculiarities of that planet. Neptune is a similar bluish colour and has faint rings, fainter than Uranus. Like Uranus the only real interest here is scientific but Neptune lacks a science station, instead of that Neptune has a commercial site, built upon Triton, Neptune’s moon, the coldest object in the solar system.

Neptune is a place that gets passed by, overlooked, ignored and that is a situation that suits the Forever Corporation very nicely indeed. Here they can look after their clients and take care of the necessary experimentation away from prying eyes and with easy access to extremely cold temperatures, without the need to artificially induce them.

Government

The Vault, the name of the station upon Triton, is a wholly owned station of the Forever Corporation, specialists in cryonics, cryogenics and radical medical technologies. It is also a registered embassy, its political status bought by the Forever Corporation from Nigeria in exchange for remuneration and certain privileged access to medical technology. The station is ostensibly governed by a Nigerian ambassador who is permanently stationed at The Vault but, in practice, since the ambassador is cryogenically frozen, the leadership falls to The Vault CEO, the second highest regarded position in the Forever Corporation.

Geography

Neptune itself is a frozen monster of a world with some of the fastest winds known to exist anywhere in the solar system, faster than the other gas giants and bitterly cold, only beaten for coldness by its twin, Uranus. Triton, its moon, is thought to be a captured Kuiper belt object, similar to Pluto and is a desolate, frozen wasteland its only truly notable feature being the presence of The Vault upon it.

The Vault descends two miles deep into Triton’s crust and is chiefly made up of storage chambers where the Forever Corporation stores its clients. The deeper levels, rather than the surface levels, house the workers, company offices and laboratories, well appointed, spacious and roomy with every comfort and necessity met by the company for those who work there.

Stories

1. The Forever Corporation offers cryogenic freezing services to the wealthy so that they can freeze themselves against a future where age can be reversed, their bodies rebuilt or their illnesses cured. This costs a substantial fee, enough to cover the cost of maintaining the storage through investments and providing a little profit on the top for the company. The company is also not above exchanging storage space for land or political favours, such as the ones it has garnered from Nigeria. The characters are commissioned for a ‘no questions asked’ ferrying operation to carry elderly, dying rich people who have chosen to be frozen alive. The forces of law and order consider this murder though and aren’t far behind.
2. The Forever Corporation is able to make such rapid advances in medical science because it uses its diplomatic and physical isolation to conduct human experiments on unwilling subjects. Trespassers, people who defaulted on their cryogenic insurance payments and people they deem to be incurable who come expecting to be frozen. Suspicion about this practice has spread and ‘deniable assets’ are sought to send to Triton secretly and investigate the truth of the matter.
3. Criminals have gotten wind of what goes on in The Vault and have hit upon a unique crime. Kidnapping the dead, or holding them hostage. A cartel of pirates and criminals plans to attack the Triton base and to hold the frozen corpses hostage since the Forever Corporation is legally bound by contract and able to access the investments and funds only so long as they keep the bodies safe. If the bodies are known to be destroyed then the corporation loses their assets, a fine scheme with one flaw. The Forever Corporation never negotiates and wants them all dead.

Tip:

The Forever Corporation are heartless bastards but there's few things people won't do for a chance at immortality. They can present Faustian bargains to the characters – and they may be tempted.

010 - WATCHDOG

Description

Whether it's still thought a planet or not Pluto is still considered a more significant orbital body than its contemporaries in the Kuiper belt. Scientists may get their panties in a bunch over its designation but even into the days of cheap interplanetary travel Pluto is considered a planet, a destination and a byword for 'far away'. Here the military has placed a watch station, alert to the universe beyond the solar system, accompanied by a scientific research facility given the task of scanning, cataloguing and collating information on the Kuiper belt objects. Civilians and military personnel in cramped quarters far from home makes for friction and makes Pluto one of the least desirable postings for either.

Government

The Pluto/Charon watch station is considered to be under the jurisdiction of the military and despite the resident civilians it keeps to military discipline, military timing and military protocol, strictly and without alteration or change. The base commander is appointed by the Western Alliance and is typically associated with the intelligence community, rank then falls down from him. Civilian personnel are considered in all things to be lower rank than any military personnel and are bound over to comply with their orders at all time, something that is a source of no small amount of rankling.

For their part the civilian personnel are under the sway of a director of astronomy and, while other research goes on, this is all considered subordinate to the day to day cataloguing and tracking of objects that goes on. For the most part the civilians try to keep apart from the military and maintain a much more relaxed internal hierarchy as a reaction against the military discipline.

Geography

Pluto and its largest moon, Charon, (it has two others, Nix and Hydra) orbit as a binary system, around each other. Pluto houses the scientific and military stations underneath its rocky, icy surface and Charon carries the immense sensor arrays required for their jobs scattered across its surface forming an interconnected web of sensors that can operate singly on local objects or together as a massive radio telescope. Rumours persist about a second base on Charon, a secretive testing site known as Base Zero where dangerous and secretive military experiments are carried out. Despite being beloved of conspiracy theorists there is, as yet, no evidence of Base Zero.

Stories

1. Base Zero isn't just a story it's a real place, supplied and maintained secretly by the military supply vessels that come to the Pluto station. Base Zero is the site of research and development of secret military technology from armoured battle-suits to lightweight spacesuits, new propulsion systems and experiments into FTL travel. A conspiracy theorist with more money than sense wants to prove that there's something out there and is willing to pay good money for someone to help them prove it.
2. During a private re-supply contract the characters are present when one of the soldiers stationed on Pluto gets cabin fever and starts a spree killing. The base is shut into lockdown immediately but there is a highly trained soldier with great base familiarity now stalking it and trying to kill everyone in a deluded haze.
3. The Charon array discovers and then begins to track an inbound comet from the Oort cloud which they calculate to be on a definite collision course with the Earth. The characters and their ship are the closest to the object and the ones who will be able to intercept it the earliest. The earlier you can intercept an object the easier it is to move it off course, how they do it is another matter entirely.

Tip:

Pluto and Charon are about isolation and mystery. You can increase the sensation of isolation, cold and closeness for the players by dimming the lights, speaking quietly and opening a window to let in cold air. Provided none of these become too distracting they can help create the proper atmosphere.

011 – JUST ANOTHER STAR

Description

Almost a light year away from the sun, where it dims to become just another star, the final boundary of the solar system is reached, the Oort cloud. This is as far from the sun as you can get before truly reaching interstellar space and it is also the last outpost of humanity, home to a scattered community of corporate and governmental ships, scavenging for suitable comets to send in-system to help the terraforming efforts on Mars and Venus. There is no overriding sense of anything this far out but being on the literal interstellar frontier creates a loose camaraderie and frontier spirit that stays with those who work here even when they transfer back in-system.

Government

The Oort Cloud has no government, every ship is a law unto itself and this far out there isn't even any UN or naval activity to provide a semblance of law and order. Instead the harsh demands of living this far away from the inner solar system and this far from any help creates a loose and almost anarchic sense of community where all other considerations are secondary to mutual survival and assistance in dealing with the rigours of life out here. The allegiance that this creates between 'Clouders' transcends government or company loyalties, at least for those who have spent any reasonable amount of time out in the cloud and who have learned how things work out there. New captains and crew sometimes make faux pas that can anger and alienate the existing community.

The only places where a semblance of 'normal' order and hierarchy remains is aboard the operational stations that fire magnetic ring 'cannons' for the terraforming projects on Mars and Venus. The security of these stations is paramount and so discipline has to be maintained. Even a slight miscalculation could result in terrible damage when they are firing cometary bodies downward into the inner system.

Geography

The Oort Cloud is a dispersed sphere of leftover material from the formation of the solar system with most comets being made up of dust and ice, replete with the chemicals that were necessary for life to come about on the early Earth and thought to be many to be a necessary source of those chemicals. The cloud bulges inward where the orbits of the planets act together upon them, albeit weakly, and there in line with the disc of the solar system the Oort Cloud loosely conjoins with the Kuiper belt. The only permanent stations in or near the cloud are the control stations for the enormous magnetic rail 'cannons', used to fire prepared comets down into the solar system to impact or orbit Mars and Venus for use in colonisation efforts. Other ships conduct experiments, map the cloud and seek for ways to profitably exploit the materials found there.

Stories

1. Inspired by old science fiction novels an agricultural corporation from Earth is attempting to synthesize food using nanotechnology and the plentiful essential chemicals found in carbonaceous comets. By synthetically marrying up carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen – plus trace elements – using this nanotechnology they hope to produce a viable and nutritious foodstuff to alleviate hunger. This process is currently expensive and difficult but the potential for it has other companies worried and not above entering into industrial espionage.
2. The character's ship suffers a breakdown while passing through the Oort Cloud and they are given a first hand opportunity to see the 'Clouders' community in action. In exchange for their assistance in the rescue however, the 'Clouders' might want something in return, barter being only fair given the circumstances.
3. Ships are occasionally lost in the Oort Cloud. Despite all the complex mapping and tracking that goes on there are simply too many objects, including small objects, to follow at all times. One particular area of the cloud, 'The Bermuda Cube' as it has come to be called, appears to have a statistically anomalous number of ship losses within its volume. Fanciful stories from space creatures to aliens have all been put forward and these campfire tales are popular amongst the ships in the cloud. Finally enough money has been stumped up to fund a proper investigation into the matter and the characters are the lucky hirelings who have been chosen to look into the matter.

012 — NEGATIVE SPACE

Description

It's dark between the stars, a massive, empty space in which to get lost, in which to hide. Uncharted and uncharitable there's little out here besides the occasional wandering body and groups that don't want to be found. One of these groups is the Aarkin Refugee Fleet, a large body of ships in various states of disrepair that manages to flee from a planet-buster attack on their home world by the Iskans, a rival, small star empire that eliminated theirs in a conflict generations ago. The Aarkin struggle to maintain their ships and harbour a deep seated resentment and need for revenge against the Iskans that expresses itself in acts of terrorism and piracy against the Iskans and those who support them although, of course, these actions are not officially sanctioned by the Aarkin fleet which, nonetheless, remains in hiding between the stars.

Government

The Aarkin government was almost completely wiped out along with their planet. The attack was a surprise attack and the fleet formed from those civilian and military ships that were able to escape the attack or evacuate from the colonies before the Iskan armada conquered or destroyed them. By necessity the Aarkin fleet is one of total governmental control where everything is state sanctioned, mandated and rationed. Reproduction is kept to a level of replacement only, save on the rare occasions that ships are added to the fleet. Food, water, air, all are strictly monitored and any illegal actions against fleet regulated are punishable by being pushed out of an airlock. The fleet cannot afford to indulge criminals or parasites.

Aarkin have a hard time of it finding other places to settle, no planets really seem to want them there though their ship expertise is grudgingly employed on occasion. Their reputation as malcontents and terrorists seems to outweigh any sympathy any planetary governments might find for them. Even so some small communities of Aarkin do exist on several worlds and within asteroid settlements where they are more at home and more welcome. The Aarkin government – made up of a council of ship captains – does accept contracts in exchange for vital equipment and new ships which means the Aarkin have, to a large extent, become mercenaries for hire as much as they are fighters for their own cause of revenge.

Geography

The Aarkin Fleet hides in the space between the stars, the black emptiness of those reaches. The fleet maintains its integrity through extremely complex ciphers and synchronised jumps between locations, randomly determined by their computing systems and not known to any Aarkin. The only ships that come into systems are fuel tankers and the occasional trading vessel seeking to bring goods and material back to the fleet. The most striking and central vessel of The Aarkin Fleet is their sole surviving fighter carrier, renamed The Green of Tsarsis after their lost home world, the one ship that is in absolute, mint, fighting condition.

Stories

1. Aarkin terrorists strike at a company that deals with the Iskans causing great devastation. Before they can get away they are killed or captured and their ship impounded by the authorities. New and more powerful AI cracking techniques are tried on the ships navigation system and reveal what should be the Aarkin fleet location. The Iskans and the company want to extract punitive damages from the Aarkin fleet but also want plausible deniability, enter the characters.
2. A jump malfunction has the characters and their ship emerge from hyperspace between the stars. Fortunately for them this is also the location of The Aarkin Fleet, unfortunately for them the Aarkin are not too happy about being discovered and see it as a perfect opportunity to get hold of a new ship and to gain some prisoners. Some elements of the Aarkin might be more open to outsiders however, and may even help them escape.

Tip:

The Aarkin make a good shorthand for any sort of generational conflict and a good basis for replicating similar storylines to Battlestar Galactica or any number of stories about terrorism and revenge.

013 - OROBOROS

Description

A Ring World is a more modest (barely) alternative to a Dyson Sphere, consisting of a gigantic ring around a star within the habitable zone of that star, constructed using extremely high end science from the materials available in that system and possibly from others as well. Ouroboros, as it has been dubbed, is one of these artefacts recently discovered by scout ships. No landing has yet been made but fly-past mapping missions demonstrate evidence of habitation throughout much of the surface. A mission has been commissioned to affect a landing and to attempt to make contact with the inhabitants.

Government

Given the sheer scale of Ouroboros it must have taken a planetary scale civilisation of great advancement to even think about undertaking such a project, a civilisation of unity and great technological power with the will and capability to carry it through. That said the sheer size of Ouroboros gives it a surface area of something like three million Earths. Maintaining a cohesive government or civilisation over such a scale presents even more of a challenge than maintaining an interstellar empire and it is considered likely that any centralised control has likely broken down since the ring was built.

Any governments encountered are considered to be most likely to be regional and it is not impossible that whatever original inhabitants there were from the builder species have since speciated into separate and distinct morphologies and niches through a process of evolution – depending on how long it has been since the ring's construction. The massive amount of space to be found on the ring may also have proved tempting to other races in the past as it is now proving tempting to humanity and other allied races. This single artefact contains more usable living space than even the largest interstellar empires.

Geography

Ouroboros is truly immense and appears to contain approximations of just about every form of terrain found on what humans and similar species consider to be habitable worlds. The stand out geographical forms are the immense seas, which appear to aid the stability of the ring and the massive 'world's edge' mountains at either side of the ring which act as buffers to keep the atmosphere in.

Stories

1. The characters are hired on as experts, due to their varying backgrounds, to accompany or to form a first contact team that will make landing inside the ring and attempt to open lines of communication with the inhabitants. The powers that be are desirous of securing settlement rights and of getting hold of the technology that made the construction and maintenance of the ring possible and, if required by the expedition commander's judgement, are willing to see force employed to do so.
2. The makers of the ring have long since socially 'devolved' into agrarian and hunter gatherer societies on the engineered surface of the planet where high technology is no longer required. Unfortunately, even with the super science that they used to understand, no system is perfect and the ring has begun to 'wobble'. Corrective stabilisation is required but getting usable information from myriad tribal creation myths on how to stabilise the ring is certainly going to prove challenging.
3. The makers of the ring are hidden, the ring itself is a 'honey trap' designed to draw ambitious and greedy species in so that they can be identified and eliminated as dangerous potential rivals to the cosmic engineers who have also littered other parts of the galaxy with the fruits of their macro-engineering. The species living inside the ring are 'pets' in a zoo of sorts, the engineers living within the mountains around the edges of the ring where they can observe. They regard the galaxy as theirs and most species as being beneath them. Their ring and sun can even hyperspace and the sun can be lased using gravitational lensing technology for use as a planet-buster. Exploring the ring simply triggers their assault on the investigating species.

014 - LEBENSPHERE

Description

A step up from a Ring World or a Dyson Swarm (many satellites around a star) is the Dyson Sphere, a popular misnomer for a shell that completely encompasses a star around its habitable zone; the ultimate act of macro-engineering at a stellar scale. Dyson Spheres, or shells, collect every single part of the energy given off by their suns with zero wastage, a truly monumental amount of power which in and of itself increases the technological capabilities and possibilities of the race that built it enormously.

Such a sphere has finally been found, deep inside a thick dust cloud on the periphery of known space the sphere, made of an unidentifiable material, completely encloses the only star for some considerable distance. It appears as though the species that built the sphere, while no doubt technologically advanced, never considered the existence of other stars and turned inwards, maximising their control and understanding of their own system and building their sphere using their planetary masses and the abundant dust material from the nebula.

The possible technology to be found from such an engineering marvel cannot be underestimated and despite the likely xenophobia of any race so cut off from even the possibility of other stars, let alone other species, first contact and exploration is likely to be authorised – or undertaken, authorised or not.

Government

The Sphere builders are the Kashan, an intelligent vegetarian species descended from herd animals. They submit to stronger authority demonstrated with force and in the case of the sphere that defaults to their philosopher kings, their strength demonstrable through their mastery of science and its power, a force far stronger than locking horns and engaging in brutal contests as they would in their past. Staggeringly their overriding herd instinct has enable the Kashan to retain a singular government throughout their entire sphere and, while local control is squabbled over between ambitious females their philosopher kings are unquestioned in their rule as they control all the engineering marvels of the sphere.

Geography

The sphere uses antigravity, advanced molecular bonding and numerous other quasi-magical technological solutions to the problems that face such a sphere and so avoids the technical issues raised in many objections to the very concept. The two entrances to the sphere, each at the poles, at the sites of the largest settlements and, staggeringly, the entire surface is only devoted to housing and grazing land and is completely full. Despite their lack of astronomy and cosmology the Kashan have discovered spacewarp technology, rather than use it to travel between stars they use it to provide even more space for their constantly burgeoning numbers. Even in this enormous space with all its resources starvation is common and the Kashan are desperate for solutions, unable and unwilling due to their nature to hold themselves back from propagating.

Stories

1. The arrival of outsiders is a massive upheaval for the Kashan. The revelation that there even is an outside uncomfortably harks back to historical periods of superstition and insanity in their history, analogous to how we might react upon discovering that hell and devils were, in fact, true. It also represents an opportunity, evidence, that there are other stars and worlds beyond theirs, places they can expand to in order to alleviate their current population crisis.
2. The story of the Kashan is only discernable through their historical records. The sphere was created a long time ago and the Kashan, unable to control their population growth, eventually outstripped the ability of even this enormous construction to sustain their numbers. Their population crashed by over 99% and the surviving Kashan have regressed into a non-sentient herd species of exceeding physical frailty, grazing from island to island of viable plant life in a desertified sphere laden down with the bones of their ancient forebears. Exploration, understanding and decoding of the sphere's systems thereby falls to those who have come to the sphere, not those who live there.

015 — TWO BY TWO

Description

Cega IV, informally designated 'wonderland' is a non-descript, habitable world orbiting a non-descript sol-like star. What is remarkable about it is what has happened upon its surface. Every animal, every plant, every feature upon the surface of the world is 'frozen', not in ice, but in time. The entire planet continues to go around its orbit but everything upon the surface is immobile and unresponsive except two mysterious towers opposite each other on the equator, impervious but seemingly monitoring and balancing the planetary atmosphere and temperature to maintain the conditions under which it was frozen. From frozen poles to hot equator, from strange alien cities to wild jungles the entire planet is locked into stasis and presents an insoluble enigma to the sciences and a curiosity to tourists.

Government

Wonderland was originally quarantined and blockaded by alliance ships but as it became apparent that no scientific progress was being made and that the frozen plant, animal and sentient life could not be harmed in any way due to their time suspension it was opened up for tourism and limited settlement. Technically it is still under alliance military control and scientific examination but floating antigravity settlement have been permitted to be constructed under licence and the income from tourism helps fund the scientific and military presence. Wonderland is considered to be under interstellar law though the tourism company's security guards also enforce certain 'family friendly' standards. Tourist groups must be accompanied by an alliance guard and any unlicensed scientific experiments are subject to fines and deportation, at the very least.

Geography

Wonderland is a little drier and hotter than Earth but otherwise is largely analogous to the terran standard to within a few decimal places. It has a complete range of environments and while its plant life appears to be more fungoid or lichen-like in origin parallel evolution seems to have filled many niches on the world with species of similar (presumed) function and capability to their Earthly cousins. The intelligent species living on the world appears to live in relative harmony with nature, their cities – mostly built out of fired ceramics, intermingled with their environments. Little has been able to be gathered about the intelligent species which is presumed to have enacted the time freeze as they seem to have been prepared for the freeze, closing themselves in their private rooms or gathering in largely empty public spaces.

The human settlements are built to be movable or temporary. The flying city platforms for tourists remain above the time-frozen oceans in case of failure or the reanimation of the planet. The only ground based installation is in one of the planet's deserts, a central point for the scientific examination and understanding of both the time effect and the biosphere of the world.

Stories

1. The most obvious story to be told is that of the reanimation of the planet. The sudden cessation of the time field and the springing back to life of the whole world from whenever, however long ago it was they were frozen. Was the time field imposed upon them or did they do it themselves to avoid some catastrophe? Is it a periodic thing that this species does to observe how the universe progresses? There are many exciting possibilities of how and why they were frozen, too many to go into and much more exciting for the GM to ponder themselves.
2. Scientists examining the species on the world seem to have come to a shocking conclusion. They're not native. Most of the species in the various habitats seem to have different origins and different physiologies. The different environments seem somewhat tailored, engineered, like reserves. The intelligent species – or presumed intelligent species – whose differences were taken to be gender differences are now considered to be separate species. The whole planet appears to be an ark of some sort and worries are rising about whether alliance races are about to become a new exhibit.
3. Experiments into the temporal freezing are beginning to yield results. The scientific station believes that it can temporarily interrupt the time-freezing field within a limited area and as many different experts as possible are needed on hand to maximise the opportunity.

016 - TOMBWORLD

Description

The mysterious Ur race that left the galaxy with so many artefacts of their existence left a particularly perplexing and dangerous type of artefact that draws treasure hunters, scientists and military powers in great numbers.

Tomb Worlds.

Tomb Worlds are massive structures built – typically – into stable moons around gas giants and deriving their power from the intense electromagnetic fields around these worlds. Like most Ur technology the Tomb Worlds are hard to understand for the starfaring races but that technology which can be understood brings great technological and social advances and greater power. The Tomb Worlds are packed with technology but they are also packed with labyrinthine mazes, deadly traps, powerful guardians and intricate puzzles to lock out any who would seek to loot their technological and material wealth.

Government

47 Ursae Majoris V has a Tomb World orbiting, hidden within its ring system that went unnoticed until a comprehensive system survey was undertaken, recently discovering the Tomb World which has been designated 'Gord' due to the knot-like structure in Majoris V's rings where they flow around its protective energy field. 47 Ursae Majoris is claimed by Earth and is home to a Nordic-Ethnic colony on the second planet, Bjorn, a devolved, democratic colony with full membership of the alliance. Bjorn is, unfortunately, also along a contested border with the Skrae, a hive race with poor diplomatic relations with the alliance and the discovery of Gord has made them more aggressive. Gord itself remains unexplored at this time and its ownership is contested between Bjorn, the Alliance and the Skrae hive.

Geography

Gord is about half the diameter of Earth's moon but the surface has a breathable atmosphere – contained by the same field that diverts the ring material – and a surface gravity of 1.2 Earth gravities. The entire surface is covered with buildings making up approximately 500,000 individual 'tombs' which all, nonetheless, connect up with each other and sink deep beneath the planet's surface. Each tomb is individual but follows a similar plan, a labyrinthine filled with traps, guardians, puzzles and other 'tests' through which a tomb robber can prove their worth, gather riches and finally gain access to the tomb itself and the rich biological and historical data which can be gleaned from it. Why the Ur race felt it necessary to entomb themselves like this with such a massive investment of resources and in such great numbers isn't known any more than where they went.

Stories

1. Political tensions between The Alliance and the Skrae Hive make an official investigation of the new Tomb World nearly impossible. A 'rogue element' however is an excuse that the Skrae cannot use but one that humans can should someone, unofficially and without sanction, land on Gord and begin an investigation into one of the tombs. This may still be enough to provoke conflict so stealth and speed are of the essence.
2. While The Alliance and the Skrae Hive enter into interminable negotiations over system rights and access to Gord a group of chancers and mercenaries have made a landing and are in the process of investigating and clearing out one of the tombs. Both parties have agreed that this should be stopped but neither could agree on sending one of their own military teams to do the job and so have defaulted to a third party of negotiable allegiance to do the task for them. A smaller, neighbouring tomb connects to the one being raided and a swift assault through that tomb should allow a team to intercept and deal with the tomb robbers.
3. The Tomb Worlds aren't exactly tombs, they're consciousness upload points for the Ur race who now reside in the physical structures of the tombs themselves as data, ascended consciousness. This latest disruption has finally been enough to make them notice the organic beings poking around their long-since-useless upload terminals and their bodies. Their reaction is anyone's guess...

011 — DEATH PLANET

Description

There are many planets in the commonwealth named for Charles Darwin as time and again planets with life upon them demonstrate the principles of natural selection. The planet Darwin in the 18 Scorpii system however, is a particularly good example of natural selection in action. Darwin is a harsh and uncompromising world where, against all odds, life has managed to arise, take root and to aggressively take over the planet. Darwin is a world of scant resources and extremes. 18 Scorpii, while similar to Sol has a much faster and more varied cycle of activity which subjects Darwin to random and non-seasonal changes in environment from scorching heat to the deep freeze of ice ages. Darwin, additionally, has a quite strongly elliptical orbit providing it with seasonal extremes on top of those caused by the star. The life here is hardy, tenacious and highly competitive, locked into a biological arms race with each other that has lead to extremes of form – supported by the high oxygen content of the atmosphere – and of adaptation, similar in many ways to both Australia and the Cambrian or Permian periods on Earth.

Government

Darwin has had many attempted colonisations and each colony in turn has failed despite the rich natural resources of the planet. The animal life of the planet is incredibly hostile to the point where even breathing in the spores of the plant life can prove fatal if oxygen toxicity does not do the job first. The latest colonising attempt has been part sponsored by biotechnology and medical corporations who recognise the great wealth of possible compounds and discoveries that could be gleaned from the local life. While underwriting the colonisation attempt the companies are keeping a discrete distance from governing as Darwin requires a particular sort of foolhardy and adventure seeking colonist, most of whom react badly to corporate control. The official government of Darwin is the city-state of Botany Bay, ruled over by an elected mayor and an appointed council of merit, its members chosen for their expertise and experience in matters that relate to the success of the colony.

Geography

Darwin has a single city, Botany Bay, an enclosed arcology tethered within the shallow seas off the equatorial continent. The arcology's controlled environment protects its inhabitants from the dangers of oxygen toxicity and noxious pollen and spores, as well as keeping out the large and dangerous fauna of Darwin. Aside from Botany Bay there are only occasional tower-based way stations for tourists and explorers, most travel is done by air to avoid the majority of Darwin's organisms. Darwin has three continents, one at each of the poles and an equatorial continent that sprawls around almost one half of the equator. Its seas are shallow and warm with a great many scattered volcanic islands.

Stories

1. Darwin makes a great destination for hunters, albeit a very dangerous one. The wildlife, and indeed the flora, of Darwin make it the ultimate test of a hunter's skill and the added danger of an unpredictable alien environment only add to the thrill for some. The government officially frowns upon such near-suicidal hunting parties but the planet needs the income that such visitors bring. Another such hunting party is being put together and the hunters, a pair of Zhan – carnivorous aliens who pride themselves on their hunting skill – are hiring additional hands to aid them in the hunt. The money's great if you can stand the risk and babysitting carnivorous and arrogant aliens.
2. Tristellar Bio is a large biotechnology company that has helped to underwrite the cost of the colony and they are planning a scientific expedition into the continent in order to examine the life there, identify and categorise as much as possible and to gather samples for possible pharmacological use. This is not an easy prospect for scientists and so a little outside muscle and assistance is contracted to keep them safe, unlike the hunters they aren't looking for trouble, but it may find them.
3. A species of giant shrimp living in Darwin's seas is social. Despite being nearly a metre long each, two metres for the queen, they live in scattered burrows and hives and some Botany Bay residents believe they show limited intelligence. Whatever the case these giant shrimp, which can snap their claws with a sharp point at the speed of a rifle bullet, appear to have decided that the arcology would make a great expansion for their hive and while the characters are present they begin to infiltrate the colony through the submersible docking bays.

018 – HARD ROCK

Description

Shawshank is a maximum penitentiary planet completely turned over to the task of housing criminals who are considered irredeemable. The criminals whose insanity is deemed incurable or whose activities are considered so beyond the pale that no other punishment is deemed fitting. Nobody gets out of Shawshank, ever. Only the most heavily screened ships are able to pass through the particulate cloud that surrounds the planet and even then they would have to contend with Warden – the planet's monitoring space station – and the heavily armed system defence boats. Interfering with Shawshank is itself considered a crime, punishable by banishment to the surface itself.

Government

Shawshank is overseen by an artificial intelligence, jokingly called 'god' by the residents and otherwise simply referred to as Warden. It is Warden's task to oversee the good order of Shawshank and to act to stamp out any acts of rebellion or instances of technology being developed by the inmates. Inmates are allowed to fight and squabble with each other as much as they like, but any technology above the level of a crossbow is considered a threat to the long term stability of the prison and the Warden acts using orbital weaponry or the system defence boats to terminate, with extreme prejudice, any evidence of such technology being developed. Crashed ships – from ill conceived rescue attempts – are equally vaporised using artillery. The Warden is relentlessly logical and has only a limited consciousness, deliberately designed that way in order to avoid any sort of empathy developing between the Warden and the prisoners.

Shawshank itself is carved up between various tribes of prisoners, roughly divided along the lines of their crimes. Religious zealots tend to both band together and fight amongst themselves, political terrorists form themselves into another group and so forth. These are typically organised along tribal lines with the strongest and most vicious prisoner emerging as the leader.

Geography

Shawshank has a single large continent in the process of being broken up by volcanic processes. Its interior is one vast desert while its coastal regions are more habitable, barely, wet, cold and miserable but the only truly viable place in which the prison population can survive. Life on Shawshank is extremely primitive and the most highly evolved form of life is something akin to a giant horseshoe crab, the primary source of food for the prisoners who have mostly settled in caves along the western shore of continent.

Stories

1. As a matter of course prisoners who are sent down to the surface are sterilised. No process is completely effective however and even Shawshank prisoners have some rights in regards to their own body. Children are extremely rare, but it has occurred, more than once. Shawshank is in danger of producing its own native population, a native population that is not guilty of any crime but which is still being held in hellish conditions upon the surface. An independent reporter has gotten hold of this story and seeks to make confirmation. In order to do so they need foolhardy and money hungry assistance, people who can handle themselves in a fight and who can come up with a way to bypass Warden.
2. There's some very rich and powerful criminals who have ended up locked away on Shawshank. Enough of them that someone has managed to put it together that they would pay a lot of money and owe a lot of favours if they were rescued from their fate. Previous rescue attempts have always relied on stealth, and failed. This new approach is to gather a mercenary fleet and brute-force the problem. Invading the system, blowing away Warden and the System Defence Boats through dint of stronger arms and then liberating the prisoners.
3. Falsey, or correctly, accused and found guilty the characters are sentenced to incarceration on Shawshank. Once deposited on the surface by glider they'll have to find a way to survive in the brutal hierarchy of the planet and maybe even to plan an escape, not that this will, in any way, prove easy under the watchful eyes of Warden.

019 — AIRY FAIRY

Description

HD 73526d isn't an especially inspiring name for a planet, especially one so unusual as a gas giant that is home to life, but since nobody has been able to agree on a new name for the world it has become stuck with the name 'Deedee'. Deedee is so unusual because, despite being a high gravity gas giant it lies within its star's habitable zone. Water vapour moves with the rest of its atmosphere which, in a deep band, is an oxygen/nitrogen mix which, if it didn't move at so many hundreds of miles per hour, would be hospitable to humans. The atmosphere is also thick with life, from microscopic aerial plankton to net or balloon-like 'grazers', floating in the dense atmosphere, flung about in the terrible winds like dandelion seeds.

Government

Deedee has been colonised, it being the assessment of the colonial board that there is no intelligent life there and the combination of ready electromagnetic power, unusual plant and animal life and gas mining all combining to make it a great colonisation prospect. This is all even without considering that all of Deedee's moons are relatively habitable in and of themselves and all seeming to have some sort of biotic or prebiotic life that appears to share a common descent with that from the gas giant.

Deedee has its own government, a representative republic that unites the moon and atmospheric colonies through senators who represent the people in the capital, Windward. The system is criticised for being unrepresentative and is extensively lobbied by the business interests of the system.

Geography

Deedee has no particular geography to speak of, rather it has bands of wind and long lived storm systems, similar to the spots on Jupiter. Human settlements are kept well away from these deep storm systems which reach down, low into the denser, hotter gases beneath the habitable layer and which appear like livid bruises of dark colour against the lighter blue-white of the habitable layers.

Windward, the capital, occupies a stable position towards the northern pole of the planet and is the oldest colony. A solid plate of metal covered in strong bubble-domes and held in place through antigravity generators, powered by tapping into Deedee's magnetic field and enormous wind turbines that capture some of the energy of the planet's terrific winds.

Stories

1. Deedee is an extreme environment and one that is completely alien to normal, rocky-planet based organisms. Even the life that exists there is largely subject to the whims of the winds, blown where they go, capable of only steering slightly in the stream at the most. This isn't the only gas giant upon which life has formed however and it is used as a nursery world by an intelligent gas-giant species from another, similar planet. These sorts of planets are rare and well spread out in the galaxy and the youngsters take a long time to mature, through an animal larval stage to become intelligent and conscious adults. It's almost time for them to collect their young, only to find that their nursery has been invaded by interlopers who have been doing unspeakable things to their children.
2. As a nearly unique planet Deedee is home to a unique sport. Equatorial gliding. Contestants are dropped from one of the equatorial colonies in unpowered gliders and the first to make a complete circuit of the planet, using only the natural – and vicious – winds, is declared the winner. The prize is magnificent, as is the fame one can garner by competing, but the risks are many. The circuit takes days and many competitors strike native life or suffer equipment failures, leading to their demise. Dare you take the risk?
3. Being so vast and having so powerful a magnetic fields and radiological belts, Deedee is a perfect haven for pirates. Pressure-proof habitats hide within the deeper atmosphere and starships with strong enough anti-gravity engines don't have to worry about the gravity of the gas giant. Despite being colonised officially these unofficial and secret colonies have become a worry, especially since in-atmosphere piracy in custom designed cloud skimmers is beginning to take place, with raids being enacted against gas mining settlements and 'whaling' ships.

020- HAMMER AND ANVIL

Description

Planetary scale disasters are rare but the more planets you have the more likely one of them is to occur somewhere within your planetary empire. Alpha Centauri houses one of humanity's oldest extrasolar settlements, despite the colonised world not being Earth-like in anything save temperature and – thanks to terraforming – atmosphere. The complex interactions of the triple suns have dragged a 'shotgun blast' of comet fragments into a collision course with the Alpha Centauri colony. Despite scanners and constant ship activity this problem was not realised until it was too late to do anything about it and the southern hemisphere of the planet has been slammed into by multiple comet strikes leading to planet-wide devastation.

Government

Alpha Centauri was governed by an elected assembly. These representatives and the Centauran President were some of the first to leave the planet the moment the inevitability of the comet strike became known. Other ships took as many as they could carry, shamelessly taking whatever people had in exchange for a berth on board. Even so nothing even approaching the total population of the planet could be evacuated and most of the population were left behind. The government on the planet has collapsed while its former government, now living in exile, are trying to raise assistance to evacuate or otherwise save what remains of their planet.

Geography

The southern hemisphere of the planet, where the comet fragments struck, is utterly devastated and considered to be a total write off. Massive craters now dent the surface in an ugly series of scars and marks that strike deep into the surface, glowing an angry red as massive dust clouds rise up to obscure the atmosphere and gigantic firestorms burn away any sign of habitation in the south. The rest of the planet has been subjected to massive and ongoing earthquakes as the crust has been shattered, erupting into volcanoes across the planet. The northern hemisphere, relatively unscathed by the direct strikes, is now suffering a nuclear winter effect as well as the tsunami, volcanism and earthquakes. It is a race against time to save any and all remaining survivors who are probably holed up in the old pre-terraforming colony domes.

Stories

1. The rescue mission is being financed through charity and Centauran off-world holdings which are being liquidated to hire any and all commercial star ships capable of making a landing and rescuing people. The remaining assets will then be liquidated and divided equally between the survivors while they seek asylum on other worlds. The characters can reap part of this bounty by engaging in the rescue effort though they may find that extreme situations can drive people mad and these people may be resistant, even hostile, to being rescued.
2. Not everyone heading to Alpha Centauri has charity in mind. A devastated world with a decreasing population and no government presents a lot of good possibilities for looting and other criminal enterprises while the rescue effort makes the perfect cover. Secondary destructive circumstances threaten to overwhelm and annihilate what's left of the human colonisation effort so it is a race against time to salvage whatever can be salvaged from the dying world.
3. The comet strikes weren't natural, they were artificial. A new terrorist group of extreme beliefs in regard to ecology claims responsibility and lets it be known that any and all terraformed worlds could be subject to similar attacks as well as colonies on worlds with their own ecosystem. They believe that humanity has become a 'virus' of sorts, infecting the universe with copies of itself and leaving nothing unsullied. They are only willing to contemplate non-planetary artificial habitats that leave the universe 'pristine'. Widespread panic follows, along with an astronomical reward for their kill or capture.

Tips:

Planetary disasters also make for good survival stories and the shock and the impact of such a disaster can be heightened by starting a normal adventure and then throwing in the disaster in the middle, utterly disrupting the action and changing the character's priorities immediately.

021 – DEEP BLUE C

Description

The speed of light is an absolute limit on the rapidity with which one can travel within the universe. It is impossible for a ship to reach the speed of light, C, though it may be able to achieve a significant fraction thereof. Even at close to the speed of light a round trip to the nearest star would take a decade though, at sufficient velocity, the relative time experienced by the travellers would be much less, while much longer – subjectively – would pass outside the ship. Fusion drive has allowed, for the first time, a crew of astronauts to travel to a distant star and to investigate the planets there, confirmed as existing before the mission is sent. The truly alien world, however, is the Earth, when they return.

Government

The craft was sent under the auspices of a joint NASA and ESA project with a crew combined from the United States and the European Union. Returning to the planet after only a couple of years to them but almost a century to the Earth they discover a planet completely different to the one they left. A balkanised United States, a world-leading Chinese Republic and a Eurasia half under the control of a theocratic Islamic Caliphate. The Chinese have inherited and developed the inner solar system, but raw, physical, spacefaring technology has not progressed that much since their time. What has advanced is information technology and communications and most of the Earth is either in crushing poverty, ignorance and starvation as a result of overpopulation, or lost within virtual and semi-virtual worlds, living out past glories.

Geography

The population of Earth has reached some twelve billion but is now on a steep downward trend due to conflicts, exhausted resources and a devastated ecology. Global warming has raised the sea level by twenty feet, almost wiping out Polynesia and turning Britain into more of an archipelago. Farming land has been flooded by saltwater and GM crops haven't been able to compensate. Oil is now an incredibly rare resource, replaced somewhat by GM plastics, biofuels and other alternatives but renewable resources haven't been able to take up the strain and fusion plants have proven themselves too massively expensive to roll out globally meaning that whole swathes of the planet are without power. The main tensions are between the militant and expanding Islamic Caliphate and the Chinese

Republic, now partially democratised and largely become an open free market but still retaining its long termism and state bureaucracy nature, neither a particularly palatable place to live. The USA meanwhile has balkanised into competing smaller states, at each other's throats and internalised, largely irrelevant to the rest of the world.

Stories

1. The main story here is one of culture shock. The world is entirely different to the one envisioned when the spacecraft left and while they, perhaps, have good news – maybe they found a habitable world – this knowledge is useless to a world in crisis and they have the only ship capable of interstellar travel, and one that can't carry the necessary minimum base population at that. They do have a resource that everyone wants, their fusion drive which could be turned into a 'free' power plant, but what do they want to do? Their world has gone.
2. The symbolism of their ship and their discovery could prompt a galvanisation of support within Europe and the US and within the world as a whole, raising it above its problems to look outwards again. Unfortunately this is likely to also result in massive civil unrest and, eventually, war as they disturb the status quo. Their role in this war as figureheads and as the only people qualified to operate humanity's most advanced starship cannot be underestimated.
3. The whole set up is a virtuality, an artificial reality created by NASA/ESA to test people's resolve and coping mechanisms to see how they function with the likely results of such long term travel and time distortion. The character's reactions and actions will determine whether a genuine mission goes ahead, or not.

Tips:

For inspiration to use in this adventure I would recommend Planet of the Apes (the original), Idiocracy, Black Star Rising by Frederick Pohl and the numerous scientific studies into the likely state of the world in a hundred years.

022 – A CLONE OF MY OWN

Description

The Syapsid people were a doomed race. Infertility – due to pollution of their environment and social factors – reached such a crisis point that their population began to inexorably decline, even without contraception or social controls thereupon. The Syapsids overcame this problem by turning to genetic science, cloning and direct recombination to create new strains. The needs of supplying population to a burgeoning star empire became a great economic and physical strain and their home world, Syspa, has become little more than a gigantic biological factory, a womb-world, dedicated to maintaining their population and – increasingly – to providing biological services to other species and worlds.

Government

The Syapsids are in the enviable position of being able to choose the sorts of people who are eminently qualified – by their very genetic makeup – for leadership. They can choose the strains of their bloodlines that are most suited to economic understanding, scientific exploration and replicate at least the genetic basis for their greatest minds in every field. They can and have improved the stock through deliberate engineering and have even developed different strains specifically designed to fit different environments. The Syapsid government is, therefore, a strict meritocracy with 'noble' bloodlines of a sort chosen even before they're born for rule. Syapsid society is very ordered, predictable and stable but also immobile, it being very hard to move outside of the societal role that one's genes predict and determine for one.

Geography

Syspa is a biological factory world, dominated by the massive cloning factories that have taken over their cities. Syspa was always a fecund world, good for agriculture but now their biotechnology has allowed them to make the biosphere of their world richer, deeper and more rewarding. Almost everything that grows or lives upon the planet has a use to the people there.

The other most dominating structures are The Defence Ring – an orbital defence station that makes up a ring encircling the whole planet, visible to the naked eye at night – and the massive spaceports that admit both Syapsid bio-freighters and clients coming for their expert genetic and biological scientific advice. The Syapsids jealously guard their biotechnology but are willing to put it to use for private clients for anything from same sex gene combinations to specific bioengineering tasks.

Stories

1. Under threat from an outside invader the Syapsids have created a new, warrior caste. A biologically more violent, goal oriented and risk-taking version of their more usual defence-force germ line. The Syapsid warrior caste has performed admirably and beaten back the invading aliens in a series of striking battles. Now, however, the surviving warrior caste have returned home, and rebelled. They do not see why they should continue to serve weaker and more inferior castes and have enacted a coup. Some Syapsids on other worlds have managed to resist the takeover and need to recruit other, more war like and canny species to aid them against their own creations which, before long, will turn over the cloning factories to production of more warriors.
2. In a planned assault the Syapsid central gene-codex has been stolen and their secure backups destroyed. While they can clone from clones there's a necessary degradation in the fidelity of such copies and so they are desperate to get their information back but do not want to give in to the unpublicised demands of those who stole them. There's a large reward for anyone who can recover this information.
3. There are those in Syapsid society who do not care to act as their genes dictate. In perverse rebellion they seek to live counter to their genetic proclivity, to pursue careers that do not match up to their abilities and so forth. These rebels don't want to change Syapsid society, they recognise that this, probably, cannot be done. They just want to escape and live elsewhere, as they wish to. The Syapsid government does not see this the same way they do and has re-education camps to try and induct such rebels back into mainstream society. There's good money – but some danger – if one can find a way to get the rebels offworld.

023 - SUPERNODE

Description

Communication over interstellar distances is not an easy prospect. Ships are slow, even with FTL travel involved and lacks a certain level of reliability. More than with ship traffic civilised space is threaded together through communication matrices. Worlds connected together in a vast, sprawling network of communications devices, many of which operate on different standards of technology, communication protocol, decency or taboo.

Daedalus is an anarchic, human-colonised world that has set itself up as an information broker and the 'heart' of the StellarWeb communications network. Programs and technology on Daedalus decode signals, reroute information, provide encryption services, data storage services, interstellar commerce utilities, search daemons and innumerable other data services all in a rough-and-tumble, free-for-all approach that typifies Daedalus all over.

Government

Daedalus has no official government of any sort. The Daedalus Corporation only exists as an entity as regards contract making with outside entities, Daedalus citizens themselves are considered a part of this company only insomuch as they take part. Deadalan society is self governing by consensus – and lack thereof – of groups. Like minded people tend to band together in areas to live as they wish to live and while the whole is chaotic and often dangerous the fiercely independent Daedalen people refuse to be dominated by anyone, even groups from amongst their own people.

Effectively then, Daedalus has no government at all, something hard for outsiders to understand or to cope with. There is no real law and order on Daedalus either, other than that people enforce for themselves. This approach means that many that use Deadalan services are at risk of being defrauded or ripped off but generally speaking those that do cheat or steal are drowned out or taken offline by outraged people who do not. Even with these difficulties Deadalan services are such that clients will take the risk.

Geography

Daedalus has a single large city built a little north of its equator on its smallest continent. The city is a chaotic jungle of buildings thrown up around each other using materials harvested by automated colonisation machines. Anyone can build anything anywhere in any style. The only truly dominating feature is the Communication Tower, an orbital elevator covered from its base to its orbital tip with all manner of communication technology from many periods, culture and differing technological approaches. The deep cellars beneath the tower contain the computer equipment and databanks for processing all this information and Daedalus as a whole grows rich on the IT services they can offer the rest of known space.

Stories

1. Daedalus' chaotic nature and lack of cohesion makes it a tempting target for imperialistic powers that seek to control the means of communication. Their singular, large, settlement also makes such a takeover seem relatively easy – though it fails to take into account Daedalus' transient and wandering population living 'wild' beyond the bounds of the city. It is only a matter of time before an ambitious power attempts to control the Daedalus' communications hub and, lacking much in the way of organisation Daedalus can only mobilise its wealth to try and free itself.
2. Many religious or deeply conservative worlds need interstellar communication but decry the stream of filth from across the galaxy that comes into their communications nodes and 'corrupts' their societies. Deadalan's believe in and profit from the freedom of information and provide many software and hardware tools for getting around the blocks that these governments put in place. Rendered impotent in the datasphere these worlds are willing to contemplate and pay for other, deniable, punitive actions.
3. Daedalus routes most of the information transiting the galaxy through its various databanks and records at some point. Fragments or even whole copies of this data can exist, literally and metaphorically buried, within discarded or over-built databanks and datacentres after companies wind up or people lose interest. Some of this data could be very valuable but require exploration of unsafe buildings and peculiar data systems to unearth.

024 – GOOD AS NEW

Description

There are many societies, races and peoples in evidence at varying levels of cultural and scientific development in the modern universe but these vast numbers shrivel into insignificance next to the races that have been or will be, those that have been swallowed up by history leaving only fragments of evidence of their very existence. For many these places are considered unsettling and are not touched, for others they are scientific and historical treasure troves. For others still these places are simply empty worlds of proven capability to sustain life and so, in their opinion, these places should be settled, the work already having been done.

Mnemosyne is one such world that has been settled by a second generation, inheritors of the world and the structures left by the mysterious and missing forebears. Initial and ongoing wealth comes from the archaeological heritage but the settlers on Mnemosyne are trying to overcome this limit upon their worth in galactic society and to make a name for themselves in other ways, representing this is a rapid lessening of respect for the artefacts left behind by their predecessors.

Government

Mnemosyne is a representative democracy with a president and a representative house, the efficacy of a smaller, representative government is moderated not by a second house but by the wide use of public consultation and polling by technological means. Mnemosyne has a relatively small population, the majority of which is made up of immigrants from other worlds – the kind of people that have no compunction about disturbing relics of a long dead race and settling in the homes of the departed.

Because of this system and the nature of the settlers the government of the Mnemosyne tends to be somewhat led around by the nose by their population. In many cases this places the two at odds, the government tending toward a more respectful and cautious approach and the people tending to be more avaricious and experimental.

Geography

Mnemosyne's settlements are spread out between the former capitals of the unnamed predecessor species, one on each of the planet's five continents. Each of these settlements numbers only hundreds of thousands of settlers, living in the remnants of cities that once held many millions. Only the overall capital of the world, Muse, has a population that reaches above one million. Most of the planet, ancient urban sprawl and wilder areas combined, is unsettled wilderness, urban areas made of materials to last the ages, reclaimed, grown around and through by nature that has even had time to evolve to fit many of the new or altered niches that the old urban sprawl has created. The human settlements, like the natural world, are built in and around the ancient sprawl though – increasingly – pressure is mounting to demolish some of the ruins and to build a truly original settlement.

Stories

1. There are those races who have evolved and grown in the shadow of the occupied worlds of this 'recent' precursor species who regard their forebears as nothing less than gods and who have inherited a great deal of understanding of them. They regard the presence of the colony on Mnemosyne as a combination of heresy, philistinism and wastefulness. Tension between the colony and these peoples is always tight with extremists on both sides causing political instability and even potential war.
2. Extremists within the colonial movement want to do some irreparable damage to the relic city in order to clear space for easier colonisation and a coming of age for the planet. Experts are sought as well as off-world resources to enact these demolitions while the colonial marshals strive to prevent the very same thing happening, often against the wishes of the colonists themselves.
3. The natural resources of Mnemosyne are just about used up. Mnemosyne relies on both recycling cleared relics – a slow process that limits their expansion – and asteroid materials gathered from the outer part of the solar system. Something that makes them ripe prey for piracy and, lacking their own navy, they're reliant on private contractors and privateers to deliver and to protect.

025 - BEEHIVE

Description

Xipec is a hothouse jungle world with a thick blanket of carbon dioxide above its steaming jungles. Life here has evolved highly efficient ways of cracking oxygen fuel from this thick blanket within animal organisms, a form of photo and thermosynthesis that has allowed relatively 'primitive' organisms to grow to great size and complexity. Xipec is dominated by fern-like tree growths, moss and gigantic arthropods. The hothouse world has acted as an evolutionary accelerator and the social insects have given rise to a technological and tool using species of social insect, the Xu, who have recently become starfarers and have begun to make tentative contact with other starfaring races. Xipec itself is overrun with Xu hives which, despite their technological interiors, to most species still seem somewhat primitive, something built by animals rather than an intelligent species.

Government

The Xu are in a state of tension between the caste system that stems from their past and a more equitable system as a result of their continued evolution and the development of fertility in all their castes. Different Xu develop different tendencies, most towards a worker caste but some toward a soldier or royal caste – a queen or a male. Most Xu are biologically female and only those that develop along the royal, male line are able to fertilise females. The ones with a queenly disposition are more fecund and more likely to become pregnant from matings. This also presents problems politically as the different caste tendencies, even though reduced; result in a stratification of society. The warrior caste tend to be more militant and single-minded, the worker caste to be more timid and the royal caste, due to the interaction of pheromones, are more likely to be believed and followed.

Geography

The Xu settlements form one enormous hive built mostly underneath but also above the surface of their world. The islands and continents that are inhabited are joined up with electromagnetic rail tunnels, kept in vacuum to allow extremely rapid subsurface transportation between hives. Many Xu are agoraphobic, preferring to remain underground and in the hives than being exposed to the surface. To non-Xu these cities, these tunnels, are a confusing mess as they are reliant on pheromonal signals and light signals beyond many sentient life forms' perceptive capability. The surface is left relatively wild and the Xipec biosphere is virtually unaffected by the rise of an intelligent species, something that is all but unprecedented in the galaxy.

Stories

1. The Xu are eager to make contact with other intelligent species and engage in trade, technological exchanges and so forth. They are particularly interested in biotechnology which may allow them to control their caste system more effectively. Their relative primitive state and their vulnerability to pheromones – which could be replicated – means they make a great 'mark' for con artists and unscrupulous traders, something that various interested parties are concerned about, not least of all the Xu security forces themselves.
2. First contact with the Xu could make for an interesting encounter. A space ship filled with borderline agoraphobic insects, meeting aliens for the first time and unsure how to deal with them, with no common points of reference or language both sides are likely to be wary, jumpy and paranoid. Xu technology is advanced beyond most first contact societies due to their insular nature, which may be a nasty surprise for anyone seeking to attack them.
3. The Xu are eager colonists wishing to 'swarm' and expand their people even though this means dividing the hive, a traumatic situation for a species that has been a single hive for as long as they have had history. This impetus is a primal need which has only been diminished by the lack of an ability to go further, now that they have that capability they're likely to colonise many worlds without normal interstellar propriety. Even places that already have small colonies may find themselves unexpectedly sharing a planet with gigantic and rapidly breeding insects.

026 – LIVING PLANET

Description

Demeter is a planetary anomaly, a planet that appears to be nothing but one gigantic organism. Every part of the surface –and down as far as has been explored – appears to be one gigantic plant; a tree like life-form that forms the basis of the remaining life upon the surface of the world, growing into a deep, knotted tangle that completely covers the surface of the world beneath. The plant forms the basis of all other life upon the surface of the world. The bark and leaf cover providing purchase and environment for all the parasitic species that dwell upon it and have evolved to live in this peculiar environment. Demeter may be unique and is protected as a scientific resource, kept under quarantine for fear of the effect such a plant could have on other worlds if it began to grow over their surface.

Government

Demeter has no government, being quarantined. It is monitored by a class II Colonial Watch-Station complimented by three system defence boats and a series of biohazard warning beacons which double as sensor stations. Commander Lysenko is the commander of the station and a fairly laid back officer approaching retirement which makes Demeter a cushy station for any military personnel that get deployed there, if boring. The station also plays host to the occasional scientific expedition looking after them while they do what they can with orbital sensor sweeps and the occasional one-way surface probe. Methods of gathering information that – even with advanced telemetry suits – hasn't satisfied the scientists.

Geography

Demeter is a true mono-environment, the planet-plant in regulating its own temperature also regulates the planetary temperature meaning that the difference in heat from equator to pole is not as great as it would be on a normal world of comparable size and orbit. Demeter is, uniformly across its surface, covered in the tangled, tree-like growth of its megaplant and its environments are not those of more usual planets. The 'surface' is one geographical area analogous to the ground level of forests or jungles. The boughs that reach up are their own equivalent with creatures crawling up and across the bark. The canopy high above with its gigantic green leaves and sprawling shoots is another and other, smaller environments exist here and there, pools of water in boles of the bark and the dark musty depths where the coverage isn't complete.

Stories

1. Contrary to appearances Demeter isn't the only planet of its kind, it's just a rare version thereof. Demeter has begun to 'flower', a rare event where the very tops of its highmost branches bloom, unfurl and then fire, cannon like, seeds out of its atmosphere and into the stellar void. This threatens to shatter the station; the seeds are so tough and fired with such speed. No plant could have evolved such an interstellar seeding process which also raises questions about the origins of the world. A rescue mission can become a science mission as these questions are explored.
2. Demeter promises to be a good source of both exotic life and pharmacology. Strictly speaking most of its ecosystem is parasitic leading to all manner of complex chemical interactions between the host plant and that which lives upon it. A corporate espionage team has managed to glean the codes to shut down the sensor arrays long enough to get a small vessel to the surface for an exploration and sample gathering mission, but the surface is almost an unknown quantity.
3. The watch station has become overrun by the same plant that is growing over the surface of the plant. Somehow, in a manner as yet undetermined, part of the plant, seeds or spores, got aboard and germinated rapidly in the controlled environment of the station, growing at a fantastic rate until the viability of the station as a whole is now in question. With the distress signal sounding there's every need for someone to get to the station and rescue the crew before the station's environment is sundered, though they'll have to be careful not to contaminate their own ship.

027 - TERRAFORMING

Description

Once interstellar travel begins there's less reason to terraform worlds, it being cheaper and easier to find worlds that are habitable than to engineer new ones. Nonetheless it does still happen, primarily in highly populated and wealthy systems – such as Earth – or in strategically important or resource rich worlds that can afford it or which will better suit their purpose if properly engineered. Terraforming techniques are also used on industrial worlds to stabilise and recover their environment.

One such world is Albion, on a slightly tighter orbit than its habitable counterpart Excalibur, Albion is roughly analogous to Venus but with a less heavy or choking atmosphere, making it a better prospect for terraforming. Excalibur is a sector capital and the system is particularly rich in gas giant and asteroid resources making the development of Albion as a second world a prospect that should pay off for the system in the end.

Government

Albion comes under the auspices of the ADC, the Albion Development Corporation, a separate body empowered and funded by Excalibur's government for the express purpose of developing Albion using cost effective methods and of getting the colony up and running, its remit lasting fifty years past the point of habitability. The ADC is run by a government appointed chairman and board and is given vast resources and legal power to pursue its goal. It is roughly analogous to the old trading companies of the Imperial Age back on Earth, the East India Company and its ilk. The ADC wields great power throughout the system and has right of compulsory purchase over resources it believes are necessary for its task. Many complaints have been raised about this government sanctioned monopoly and its rather free disregard for property rights and responsibility. Multiple governments have suffered the wrath of the people over the ADCs actions but while governments change the ADC remains and expands.

Geography

Albion is a planet that is under severe punishment from the ADC. Bombarded with watery asteroids on an almost yearly basis the atmosphere is full of dust and water vapour thrown up by these impacts which are helping to cool the planet and provide water but which are also causing massive storms that wreak havoc across the surface as the environment changes. The only fixed settlement is an equatorial colony built upon and into a plateau that rises above the shallow depressions that will become lakes and shallow seas. The planet is in a state of flux and only features that are massive, such as the plateau and some extinct volcano and mountain structures are expected to survive terraforming intact. Otherwise there is only the base station and the massive, equatorial atmosphere processing plants.

Stories

1. The ADC is addicted to power and outside its president and board executives and agents from the company are working to prolong their power and to extend the terraforming process. Atmosphere plants spend a lot of time down for repairs or working at less than full capacity. Comet strikes are delayed for no real reason and meanwhile the ADC consolidates its power and resources trying to become a power that can challenge Excalibur's legitimate government. Some senators from Excalibur are growing suspicious and have appropriated funds for an investigation into the ADC before it gets too late.
2. The ADC has discovered that there was already life on Albion, a primitive form of life, but life nonetheless. In order to proceed these secret must not get out and so the ADC has begun hiring out-system mercenaries and freelancers as a deniable resource which can be used to 'bug hunt' these creatures to extinction even while the terraforming process is ongoing. The money's good but the actions are morally questionable.
3. The ADC is constantly harried by environmentalist crazies, harassment by government agents and the deep suspicion of those around it, resentful of its power and its mission. To that end the ADC has licensed and funded a private security agency, ADC Regulation, or The Regulators, to counter these threats to its purpose using whatever means required. With a freer hand than government agencies and higher pay the ADCR is a good proposition for many looking for an exciting career and a better life.

028 — SELF-FORMING

Description

Deep in the Horse Head Nebula is a spinning proto-star with an accretion disc slowly turning around it. The star is reckoned to reach ignition point within a few centuries which presents a rare opportunity to witness the birth of a star and to settle many scientific questions about the process. In the disc are also the bodies that will become solid planets but there is also impatience to confirm other theories of planetary formation. To that end the Colonial Science Authority has given permission for a unique experiment to take place. Scientists are going to build a new planet, entirely from scratch, from the dust and other material accruing in the disc around the proto star. Prometheus will be the first truly artificial planet – provided the experiment works.

Government

Prometheus and the system it is being constructed within are under the auspices of the CSA, a subsection of the interstellar federal system and subject to interstellar law. The construction of Prometheus has been subcontracted to several engineering companies advised by the CSA and appropriate scientists. Science leads the way in the system and the CSA has complete control over this project and others that are observing the birth of a new system.

Geography

Prometheus doesn't actually exist yet but the station that will become the core of the new planet is built and in position, an array of gigantic magnetic generators designed to approximate and accelerate the slow accretion effect that leads to the formation of a planet. The system is also full of whirling debris, dust and gas that makes it hard going on any space-going vessels, leading to expensive wear and tear on those ships that are used in system. The proto-star itself is a massive, hot body, mostly made up of hydrogen and swelling all the time, ready to fuse and ignite into a star at any moment, the effects of which nobody is sure of. The system is also full of planetoid and sub planetoid bodies, whirling about and with common collisions, making astrogation very difficult.

Stories

1. The sun ignites, unleashing a massive electromagnetic waves that knocks out almost every electronic system in the area. One ship, in the shadow of the main observation station, was shielded enough to get a distress call off. The system is still flooded with radiation and the ignition of the star has turned the system back into a whirling maelstrom making rescue efforts difficult and requiring some really fancy flying. Nobody quite knows what else happens at this stage of a new system forming and it's anyone's guess whether there'll be more EM bursts or not, or whether the fusion process is stable once started.
2. The Prometheus device is started up and works very well, drawing in dust and charged gas, accruing material at an advancing rate, even after the EM device is crushed beneath the accruing mass. The forming of this new planetary body manages, however, to throw off the emerging equilibrium of the system in a chaotic manner not anticipated in the computer projections. Prometheus is eating up the rest of the system, hauling it into itself as it begins to become a supermassive planet, sucking up all the raw material from the rest of the system. The experiment out of control the CSA wants to evacuate but some of the scientists have more radical solutions, ways to ignite the star early and bring an end to the problem, or even to destroy Prometheus, if their rescuers are game for creating another body to slingshot a suitably sized planetoid into Prometheus.
3. The Hegemony, a rival power to the colonial authority made up of an alliance of non-human organisms, is deeply paranoid and regards the Prometheus experiment as having to do with military technology, not with pure science. It is true that the understanding of stellar and planetary formation could have weapon applications, star 'snuffers' or coolers for example, but this is not the CSA's intention. Nonetheless sabre rattling about Prometheus has been increasing across diplomatic channels and there could well be an incident, either covert or overt, before too long. Paranoid members of both sides are headed for a clash, much to the exasperation of the scientists who merely wish to complete the experiment.

029 - XENOFORMING

Description

Humans aren't the only ones that like to convert worlds to suit their own needs. There are many other species in the galaxy and not all of them are adapted to the sorts of conditions that humans might find agreeable. Indeed many of them are native to worlds that humans would consider hellish or frozen wastelands. Not all of these species are interested in whether a planet is already occupied or not. The Kneish are one such species, almost entirely sociopathic by human standards the Kneish are native to worlds that are much colder than Earth. Slow of metabolism but implacable once they have decided on a course of action the Kneish have determined that they are going to settle a human occupied world already under exploratory terraforming to warm it up.

Ymir, the planet of their target, is a Scandinavian ethnic colony on the outside edge of the human habitable zone. An icy planet of oceans that are frozen for much of the year and of archipelagos of volcanic islands rendered habitable only by their volcanism as well as stretched of frozen and icy plateaus, of little interest to humans in the current climate but of great interest to the Kneish, as are the planet's untapped resources. The Kneish care for nothing outside themselves and little beyond their own individual self interest, but they have their collective sights set upon this world and very little can stop the Kneish once they have made up their minds.

Government

Ymir is a small colony, governed by an elected governor and with public, colony consultations on all important matters via town meeting or electronic voting. The colony only numbers around ten thousand individuals at present, though the birth rate is up they have a hard time attracting new colonists and investment beyond the terraforming effort. Ymir has no defence force to speak of and while it is a member of the United Federation it isn't a main world and has little political influence.

Geography

Ymir is a colony in the early stages. Ymir is but barely inhabitable and, despite the presence of water and oxygen, has no native life. All life on Ymir was destroyed by a radiation pulse some centuries ago – unknown to the colonists this was actually the first stage of the Kneish colonisation effort. The colony is so far limited to a scattering of, calmed down, volcanic islands in the northern hemisphere, close to Ymir's smallest continent.

The Kneish have effected a landing at the northern pole of the planet, the coldest part of it and have destroyed the human terraforming stations using orbital projectiles, though, so far, they have left the human colony alone. Their own terraforming towers have begun to go up, siphoning CO₂ from the atmosphere and sequestering it beneath the frozen oceans, a small asteroid has also been flung into the southern pole, raising dust into the atmosphere to accelerate the cooling process. All the good work of the human terraforming effort has been undone in a mere couple of months.

Stories

1. The human colony cannot get any federal backing in their plight and the general mood of the stellar assembly is to concede the colony to the Kneish. Driven to desperation but unable to act against the Kneish for fear of direct reprisal from a superior force the Ymirian colonists are forced to use more and more extreme measures to get their cause taken care of, up to and including the kidnap of a star counsellor. Characters could be Ymirian colonists or a counsellor's security team at first protecting him from the attempt but then sent to look deeper into the issue.
2. The characters are part of a diplomatic mission sent to negotiate with the Kneish. An exercise in probable futility since the Kneish take hours to say even the simplest things due to their slow metabolism and since when it comes to the Kneish the left hand neither knows, nor cares, what the right hand is doing. However, if they could convince a powerful faction that they would benefit more by preventing the colonisation effort...
3. Coming across a wrecked Kneish ship the characters discover about the colonisation effort and also discover that the sociopathic Kneish are under attack from a previously unknown species, hence their accelerated colonial effort. It would never occur to the Kneish to ask for help and this alien foe could be a threat to the rest of the civilised galaxy.

030 - INVISIBUBBLE

Description

In a dangerous universe the only way to really be safe is to avoid conflict or contact altogether. The Sharad race have taken this evasion to a logical extreme in their use of advanced technology to hide their planet from view, an example taken from their own nature the Sharad being squid-like beings with complex chromatophores under their skin, hiding and evasion is entirely natural to them having evolved from precursor species that relied on camouflages and mimicry to avoid predators, rather than force of arms.

The Sharad homeworld, whose true name is a series of patterns and shapes flashed on the Sharad skin that translates to something like 'clear blue water' is a water world with 90% of its surface covered in oceans. It is surrounded by orbital satellites, each containing within it a core of exotic matter which bends light and space around the planet, rendering it invisible to outside detection while also allowing sunlight to fall upon its surface and keep it habitable.

Government

The Sharad rule by consensus and are organised into tribal grouping of up to a thousand members each. As a requirement for a decision comes about the tribe gather and communicate rapidly through colour change and light show. Once consensus is reached one of the tribe is chosen as a representative, typically the largest and most skilled communicator which then swims to join a more general assembly of the tribes who reach their own decision. The Sharad are the dominant species of their world and are peaceful with little required of them other than to enjoy their lives and so they have set up a great many contingencies for any number of complex and unlikely situations so that their slow political process doesn't render them helpless.

Geography

Only 10% of the Sharad homeworld is land and this is home only to scientific stations with minimal numbers of Sharad living upon them. Any Sharad settlement is impermanent and such facilities and buildings that they do create are places of work and construction, not of living, they require no homes and prefer to swim freely with their tribes. The Sharad can live anywhere on their planet but prefer the warmer, equatorial climes. The colder oceans are home to their farms, massive 'fenced' in areas where their prey animals can grow and breed in massive numbers, the dark stains in the sea easily visible from orbit. They have no spaceport, only the remnants of the satellite launch station on one of their larger islands and that little more than a wreck. They are entirely complacent and pacifistic.

Stories

1. One of the Sharad satellites fails and the planet becomes visible, suddenly, something of a surprise to the miners and prospectors currently at work in their home system. The planet soon disappears again as the satellite is brought back into position but the persistence of the witnesses and the sensor records demand a stronger investigation.
2. A drive malfunction takes the character's ship within close distance of one of the Sharad spacefold satellites. The distortion in space drags them through the distortion envelope and plunges them into the planet's atmosphere. Getting out would require a very precise calculation and knowledge of the position of the satellites, so they're stuck here, unless they can convince the Sharad of their good intentions and get the required information from them.
3. A breakaway faction of Sharad of slightly more exploratory and less cautious nature has started launching similarly shielded probes out from their planet and has revealed a lot of what is going on outside their world to the Sharad under the insistence that such probes could never be found or lead anyone back to their planet. Unfortunately they were wrong, the malfunction of the exotic matter unit on one of their probes has caused it to both become visible and to be discovered. Without wasting money on military and defence the Sharad scientific advances in many other areas are enough to intrigue and frighten anyone who gets hold of the probe and give them the desire to find out more.

Tips:

Communicating with a species with such a different mode of communication to humanity is hard to get around plausibly through ideas such as universal translators. Colour/shape communication would have to be replicated with computer screens or specially made devices.

031 — AMISH THE OLD DAYS

Description

The technological advancement and rapid pace of life in interstellar society isn't for everyone and there are strong primitivist movements spurred by claims that humanity has lost something essential in pursuing the technological future that they have and that there is something honest or special about physical labour and simple, contemplative living. Several colonies have been founded by primitivist groups but the most successful ones are those founded on pre-existing religious principles.

Amman is a colony founded by a group of Amish and it lives in what the rest of the Commonwealth would consider to be execrably primitive conditions. Limited to horse and buggy for movement, or one of the domesticated native animals, and grubbing the living they can from the soil by hand the people living there are pitied, but retain a quiet dignity and simplicity that is, indeed, lacking from much of the rest of the galaxy.

Government

Amman has no overall world government as they have no means of rapid communication from town to town other than semaphore towers and the sounding of signal bells by chain. Instead it is divided up between small towns and farmsteads punctuated by the occasional market town. Once a year at the time of harvest is the only time they interact with outsiders, selling their excess harvest to the few independent traders that are willing to come to Amman, trading by barter for simple goods and materials that they feel they need and which fit with their philosophy.

Each town or village is ruled by a council of elders taken from the local population, typically men who are too old to work but whose accumulated wisdom is considered to be of value and help to the people in regard to problems and relations. This is as close as Amman gets to having a government.

Geography

Amman is a terrestrial type world, though a little cooler, extending the expanse of its temperate climes further south and consisting of small continents surrounded by oceans which helps keep the overall temperature of the land more clement and even than it might otherwise be. Over the years the Amish have settled on every continent, thanks to their large families but their relatively high death rate has stopped them becoming too much of a strain on the planet as have famines and outbreaks of disease as well as the more dangerous animal life.

The settlements tend to cluster around the coast and just inland, allowing for fishing to supplement the farming that is the staple of every community. In any settled area the natural landscape is entirely overwritten by the cleared fields and grazing pastures of the settlers, a disorganised patchwork quilt of different crops, scattered farm buildings and houses.

Stories

1. The community of Amman allows their adolescents free reign to go out and see the world during their '*rumspringa*'. In order to see and experience the outside world of the 'English' young Ammanites will often work passage on some of the free trader ships that come to Amman. This makes a good background for a young, adolescent character in a game or a ship could take on – as crew or passengers – a group of adolescents in exchange for filling their cargo with free produce.
2. The extreme pacifism and lack of defences of Amman – and their refusal to accept any naval station – makes them easy pickings for slavers and raiders. They will not raise a hand against any such invader – save a few young male hotheads – and so, time and again their crops are stolen, their children kidnapped and many among their number killed or raped. Enough is enough for some communities and a group of some of them are willing to negotiate with a private crew to make a stand against a particular band of raiders.
3. A crash landing on Amman strands a crew for the better part of a year during which they're going to have to learn to deal with the Ammanite people, their environment and the loss of any real link with the outside universe. High tech people forced to survive and required to pitch in within a primitive culture can make for a good culture shock story.

032 – ZERO GEE WHIZ

Description

Artificial gravity was a long time coming and creating – and maintaining – spin in a large space habitat or asteroid is an expensive and difficult proposition. Before power generation became cheap enough and before artificial gravity became a workable proposition it was easier to modify mankind than it was to create such habitats. Retroviral treatments and germ-line rewrites created a sub race of humanity better adapted to zero gravity, reinforced bone structure, greater hand-eye coordination, a modified inner-ear and a circulatory system better adapted to dealing with the problems of blood pooling. This sub-race of humanity – both modified and born – inhabited the first space habitats, eventually forming a viable population that began to diverge and speciate from humanity even as the new technology driven habitats increased in number. Now the ‘angels’ are a specific genetic subset of humanity and maintain their own, gravity free, stations isolated from their parent race by the march of technology. One such station is Throne, the semi-official ‘capital’ of this human subspecies.

Government

Each zero or microgravity settlement that is owned and maintained by Angels has its own political system according to local whim and each also selects a representative who votes on their behalf, weighted by population, via Throne’s general assembly, either physically present or by a transmitted vote via FTL transmission. Throne contains an elected executive chosen by the assembly from amongst its own number. Throne itself is a direct democracy using personal communication technology to allow every citizen over the age of maturity to vote on any local issue.

Geography

Throne is a large, mined-out, asteroid, without spin or artificial gravity. As such, unlike spinning colonies it has a stable ship dock, rather than having a turning dock position at an end-cap. The central chamber is a communal area, a park of rare zero-gravity modified plants and animals, a sort of free-floating park whose main attraction is a large spherical pool of water, kept in position by air jets and populated by genetically modified carp and pond weed.

Throne can be extremely disorienting for non-natives as it pays absolutely no attention to any conventions of up and down, things are placed logically for the environment – or take advantage of the lack of gravity for aesthetic reasons – rather than pretending that gravity still applies. Visiting Throne has been described as spinning around and around until you’re dizzy and then falling into an Esher drawing.

Stories

1. Throne, and the other zero gravity stations, have a problem with a lack of genetic diversity. Their separation from the rest of humanity has decreased their fertility in such liaisons, plus their lean and long, fragile physiques are often not considered attractive to non-angels, their structure seeming skeletal and anorexic. Various policies have been adopted to deal with this from encouraging a rotation of Angels between settlements when they reach adolescence to an exchange of genetic material by more prosaic methods and social encouragement to seek partners outside their own subset. The characters may interact with all of these elements by accepting a shipping order from Throne, sperm and ova being transported, under escort, along with a number of young Angels.
2. Terrorist groups with irrational ideas about ‘genetic purity’ regard the Angels as a dangerous ‘sub human’ species and are determined to perform genocide on them. Since they tend to live in extreme environments that are not conducive to human life in the first place many terrorist attacks against them are truly devastating and they’re not given to trusting standard humans, nor do they have time for due process. A situation that should suit independent operators either way.
3. The characters uncover information that demonstrates that some group is intercepting the voting signals from the scattered Angel colonies and altering the results to change the shape of the community’s political process and outcome. The overall theme seems to be one of greater radicalism and separation from the rest of humanity, but who would do this and what do they have to gain from further isolating and already isolated group?

033 — YARR!

Description

In a galaxy as big as it is, with imperfect sensor apparatus and all of space to hide in, with private ship ownership, with private weapon ownership and with disparity between rich and poor, crime is inevitable and in interstellar space that means piracy. Pirates need places they can dock however, places they can offload their cargo for whatever price they can get for it and spend their hard earned credits. There are many relatively anarchic and lawless places in the galaxy but one stands head and shoulders above the rest as the preferred location for piratical crews, Black Port on New Jamaica. Here a pirate crew can get repairs, no questions asked and are almost guaranteed that there will be no naval interference. Over time the entire economy and defence of New Jamaica has come to rely on its status as a hideaway for pirates, bandits and mercenaries.

Government

New Jamaica is ruled by a token government that wields almost no real, temporal power at all over the planet. Elected every five years the New Jamaican president and parliament can only really tinker with pointless and unenforced laws. The real power in the planet resides with its merchants and engineers who service the mercenary and piratical forces that come to the planet. These groups are constantly vying for contracts and power in a constant, churning, changeover of power. Amongst the pirate crews themselves there is a loose code but no real leader, even ships captain are subject to the code and can be displaced as easily as they are elevated, nonetheless some captains command more respect through ruthlessness and notoriety than others and their words carry more weight.

Geography

New Jamaica is a waterworld of scattered archipelagos and a great many warm and shallow seas. Black Port is their largest spaceport, residing on one of the larger islands on the equator. Black Port was one of the first settlements and has a higgledy-piggledy and haphazard street plan, all built without proper codes and on the whim of the builders, a mass of warehousing, entertainment and doss houses for the visiting crews as well as centres where they can pick up contracts and more salubrious hostelleries for those who have come to the planet to hire assistance.

Stories

1. The Navy cannot act because New Jamaica is a sovereign world and chooses to allow these crews to land and trade there. The planet is short of natural resources outside of its sugar plantations and fishing industry and the presence of the mercenaries and pirates brings in a lot that they need. However a special resolution has been passed by the Commonwealth Council and a Naval strike fleet is being assembled to blockade New Jamaica, to wipe out piracy but to allow 'legitimate trade' through. The stage is set for a conflict between a ragged pirate fleet and a naval blockade.
2. The characters are hired to act as intermediaries and the command ship for a small flotilla of mercenary/pirate vessels. They are sent to Black Port in order to round up this flotilla from the crews and hirelings available there but before they're taken seriously there they will need to establish a reputation and get used to the anarchic atmosphere and lack of order in the city.
3. Kidnapped and pressganged into service the characters find themselves upon New Jamaica bought up by a pirate captain and expected to work their way to freedom on voyages of acquisition. Until then they are to be kept in service by whatever means the captain feels is necessary. Once they've bought their freedom they'll be accepted as part of the crew but also allowed to go free once the ship next makes port.
4. The New Jamaican government is fed up with being an irrelevant puppet but their police and security forces are too corrupt to do anything about changing the status quo. They have a little money to hire some 'untouchables' to help them deal with the issues in Black Port and can offer some other incentives such as the right to keep confiscated arms and merchandise.

Tips:

Black Port and New Jamaica make a good base setting for mercenary or pirate campaigns. This is a place where anything goes and where characters are able to do just about anything they want – as characters are wont to do – without the serious repercussions that might get in the way in other settings.

034 – THE JUNGLE IS MASSIVE

Description

Callie is a jungle world, a hot, wet planet with scattered mid and small sized continents each overgrown from shore to shore with forest. The thick growth is most prevalent on the Ox continent, just south of the equatorial line, which is both the thickest jungle and the one closest to the human settlements on Callie which are limited to a few rocky islands off the coast of the Ox continent. Attempts to colonise on the mainland have met with failure every time because the plant life of Callie is simply too fast growing and too voracious to allow for any sort of permanent settlement, each attempt being an exercise in futility where even the slowest growing plants can grow two feet every 30 hour day. Even the islands are under constant assault from drifting seeds and it takes a great expenditure of effort to keep them clear of invasive growth.

Government

Callie is governed by a loose clan system. Different family groups tend to stay with the same businesses and skills as their founding settler families did. Familial obligation is strong on Callie, while not completely insisted upon a doctor's son will tend to go into medicine and so that family name becomes associated with medicine. The recognised clans are kept track of in a genealogical register and each clan chooses a 'head' by whatever means that clan prefers. Some keep it as an hereditary title, others elect theirs by whatever means they think best. The clan heads meet in assembly for discussion of the needs of the colony, chaired by an hereditary 'Laird', the descendent of the first colonial governor whose position is limited to tie-breaking votes and chairing the meetings.

Geography

Callie's only settlement is a high-rise, Manhatten-like settlement called Aberdeen on the island of Urskye. As the only truly viable place for a settlement the Callisters, as the settlers call themselves, have been forced to build upwards to truly fantastic heights, aided by antigravity technology allowing them to build breathtaking 'starscrapers' in a smooth 'art deco' style with plenty of lines and sharp angles to help prevent the planet's ubiquitous plant life from gaining purchase in the city. This single city, with its fantastical architecture contains a population almost as large as that of much more broadly populated planets but contained within this single city, supported by hydroponics and farm fishing.

Aside from the human settlement and the oceans Callie is completely dominated by plant life. Aside from amphibians and a very few parasitic insect-analogues there is no animal life of note on Callie, the plant life is simply too advanced and aggressive and it is the plants, rather than animal life, that fulfil all the usual niches, predator, prey and everything in between.

Stories

1. There is a strong 'nativist' movement amongst the, plainly suicidal, youth of Aberdeen. This movement advocates an end to the constant struggle against their chosen planet and, instead, argues that they should adapt to fit the world. Many nativists have gone off into the dangerous jungle never to be seen or heard from again. Official policy is to let them go, as a warning to others by their deaths. Recently yet another youth group has absconded from Aberdeen and taken to the jungle. The government refuses to do anything but the families want their children back and will go outside the law to see it happen.
2. The colony is in a constant battles against the jungle and its windblown seeds. In out of the way places these seeds can find purchase and predatory plants have a habit of making their presence felt – painfully. Particularly tough infestations of plant life need to be weeded out by specialists or freelancers, at excellent pay.
3. Export of Callister plant life is subject to strict controls which, of course, makes it a much desired commodity by biotechnology companies and private plant collectors alike. Callie takes its smuggling laws very seriously, as does the navy, but the potential rewards of absconding with a rare and unusual plant from the planet are worth the risk to all too many people.

035 – HIGH PLAINS DRIFTER

Description

Moroni is a world dominated by a single geographical feature. A vast plain of pampas dominating the middle of its largest continent, Joseph. From shore to shore with little interruption is a massive plain of grass-analogue, bright green, moist, tubular growths similar to Earth's chives in appearance and grazed by massive herds of trunked cow-like creatures called Huffalo. The biochemistry of Moroni's native life is close enough to that of Earth to allow for the Huffalo to be farmed and this meat farming is the primary and most notable business of Moroni bringing great wealth to their capital of Jerusalem and giving their entire culture a frontier feel and a cowboy mentality of pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps and making one's own way in the world.

Government

Moroni is a nominal theocracy governed by a temple and its president, advised by a council of 'elders' elected from and by the general populace while the president is chosen by the council, typically from amongst their own number. The temple takes a largely non-interventionist stance on the rule of the world and it conforms for the most part with general imperial law. There are restrictions on intoxicants and pornography amongst other things, but these are moral guidelines and private ownership and import is not restricted, only public sale.

Outside of the temple Moroni is dominated by the Huffalo Families, powerful business concerns run along familial lines, their near monopolies the result of the temple's laissez faire business policies. Small holdings have been swallowed up one by one by the larger farming concerns until the Huffalo farming business is dominated by three major groups, Monson Meat Products, Romney Huffalo and Temple Huffalo Concern. These remaining companies joust and vie for the greater part of the Huffalo harming business between each other and no love is lost between them.

Geography

All of Moroni is settled and a great many other businesses exist but the main and essential feature and business of the planet is the Huffalo plain and its bountiful herds with their high body mass and rapid reproduction of their numbers. The plain itself is unsettled save for way stations at strategic points across the plains, each within a day or two's horse ride from each other and raised above the plain on pylons. Horses are used by most Huffalo wranglers and observers since they do not spook the herds so much, stampedes can be primal events with such large herds, more akin to weather than animal behaviour so tremendous is their effect. Huffalo harvesting is done using tranquiliser darts and neural disruption weaponry by the wranglers before hover-ships come to pick up the bodies and process and freeze the flesh, ready for export.

Stories

1. The plain is massive and despite the way stations and the presence of Huffalo wranglers rustling is rife, either from bitter smallholders bought out by the larger companies, by poor families left behind by Moroni's ruthlessly capitalist system, or by off-world poachers. As these problems increase the Moroni security forces and rangers are left unable to cope and the companies increasingly turn to hired guns to protect their assets.
2. The plain is just too convenient and the Huffalo are too good to be true. Scientists who have pointed this out have been silenced or paid off by the Huffalo companies but some are determined to get the truth out. They're convinced that the Huffalo and a genetically modified food animal and that the plain was created using some powerful technology, they just need proof. That means life samples of Huffalo, genetic samples from a wide variety of the beasts and boring from the Huffalo grazing pasture. None of which the companies will go along with...
3. The young scions of the Huffalo companies are rich and powerful and might as well be royalty. They get what they want when they want it, much like the children of the rich oil barons of the 20th century. They're used to behaving how they wish and unused to being refused or turned away, plus they have powerful friends and can buy off the Moroni law enforcement. A recipe for disaster should they over cross paths with and player characters.

036 - PSYCHOACTIVE

Description

There are many chemical compounds that can interfere with the human nervous system and the operation of the brain in many fascinating and complex ways. Some numb the ability to feel pain, some cause paralysis and others cause peculiar shifts in perception and vivid hallucinations. Some people like these hallucinations and actively seek them out either by chemical or other means.

While some planets in the Federated Worlds ban such substances and carrying on, on others it is completely legal.

On Aquarius the use of psychoactive chemicals is compulsory and involuntary.

The plant life on Aquarius, dominated by forms of fungus and slime mould for the most part, is almost entirely based upon proteins and complex chemical forms that, for humans, induce many different and varying psychological effects including euphoria, hallucinations, extreme sexual arousal and other anomalous feelings. The air is constantly filled with spores and nothing short of a completely sealed suit or environment can prevent contamination and effects from the spores.

Government

Aquarius has no government and runs, insomuch as it does, as a communal collective largely based around the only, abortive, settlement Leary, situated in a northern, temperate forest of Shroom-Trees. Coherent thought is difficult for an Aquarian native and their economy is based upon the export of refined versions of their substances, all refined by automated systems and exported for use in medicine, psychiatry and as narcotics. It is considered a miracle by the rest of the Federated Worlds that Aquarius functions at all.

Geography

Aquarius is a slightly warmer, slightly wetter Earth analogue filled with gigantic mushroom trees and fungal carpets, all advertising their toxicity with bright colours that lends much of the planet a peculiar 'wonderland' look. The animal life, much like the settlers, spends much of its time stoned out of its gourd and is largely limited to grazers and parasites – there are few predators and most organisms have a way of processing, refining and excreting the chemicals they take in as a defence against predators.

Leary is a disorganised city with only the original bubble-dome habitats as a respite from the aerial spores. The remaining buildings are mostly haphazard or half finished and coloured in a bountiful array of bright colours. Particularly well liked fungal growths are haphazardly cultivated in trays but few food crops, or crops of any kind, are grown on the planet, almost everything has to be imported.

Stories

1. The existence of Aquarius and its continued production of narcotics is considered to be an act of violence by many planets that take a dim view of psychopharmacology. After numerous complaints and protests to the planet and to the federal government have amounted to nothing a small group of these worlds has decided to take defensive action, citing part of the charter that they are entitled to defend themselves and characterising Aquarius export of psycho-pharmaceuticals as an attack. On this flimsy pretext they have send a combined war fleet to the planet. There's work on both sides, not to mention a steep and appealing rise in the price that can be commanded for their produce.
2. Many young people vanish into Aquarius' culture once they reach the age of majority. An easy life exploring 'new frontiers of consciousness' sounds great but to their parents it seems like a living death. Private investigators and trackers get steady work visiting Aquarius and retrieving idle teenagers and young adults, most of whom – when they sober up – realise what was happening to them.
3. Periodically there's a change in Aquarius' star and the alteration in light wavelength and magnitude triggers a rare event in the fungal life, a sort of 'ultra' spore event. The chemicals released during these periods are toxic or dangerous causing paralysis, psychosis, fits and other negative effects. This has not happened since the colony was founded and so is unknown to the inhabitants. Evacuation is called for, but so is a sampling of these new chemical compounds which could prove useful.

037 – BUCKET O' AIR

Description

Cerberus is a stray planet, a former Earth-type world it was dragged out of its orbit – somehow, the means is still in question – and now drifts, far from any star in the void of space. It is only by chance that Cerberus was ever discovered, a chance jump malfunction put a ship within sensor distance of it and this darkest and coldest of worlds was then discovered, mapped, marked with a beacon and left. Normally such a world would not be worth settling but the contents of this once-living world, deep beneath the frozen atmosphere – are interesting enough that a small colony was founded. It's a strange, strange world to live on.

Government

Cerberus is primarily a scientific institution and a burgeoning independent university campus. It is controlled by a Dean and a Board of Education and Science. Being between the stars and also being a planet Cerberus is perfect for the establishment of truly massive sensor arrays, built atop the frozen atmosphere and penetrating, relatively undisturbed, into the true depths of the universe. The BoES and the Dean are selected by vote from amongst the faculty – that being anyone with a paid job on the planet – for each department, including departments which would normally be considered part of a more standard government, including Security & Defence and Health – since the planet and its university exist independently of any other government.

Geography

Cerberus' geography lies deeply hidden far beneath its frozen atmosphere, though it has been mapped using densitometers, echo sounding and neutrino scanning. The colony, also named Cerberus has been established by melting down through the atmosphere to the highest point of the planet beneath, a gigantic, dead, super-volcano, much like Olympus Mons on Mars. One peculiarity of Cerberus that makes it such a useful resource is that its atmosphere froze progressively as it drew further and further away from its parent star. There are distinctive bands in the frozen atmosphere where the different gases solidified. CO₂ forms a blanket at the bottom followed by nitrogen and then oxygen with thinner bands of other gases. Cerberus supplements its income by providing quantities of easily recovered frozen gas to industrial planets, it also recovers its own atmosphere from the frozen planet.

Stories

1. If there were intelligent life on Cerberus it too may have managed to survive the deep freeze, though it will have been millennia since they last saw the surface. There may be hidden alien cities, powered by atomics or geothermal power, hidden deep beneath the ice and awaiting discovery and first contact by the settlement. They may also be paranoid, agoraphobic and xenophobic and may even have regressed to a relatively primitive state.
2. The cause of Cerberus' displacement is discovered by secondary scans. Evidence is found of a giant, but old, crater on the far side of the planet. Worse, study of the crater and of the material within it demonstrates that this crater was artificial. Someone out there, somewhere, has – or had – a weapon that could wrest planets violently from orbit. But why this one? Where did it originate from? What more information can be found and where will it lead? Should such a weapon be found?
3. The characters are students within the Cerberus installation, called upon to perform many tasks and duties in their pursuit of a prestigious degree. Everything from expeditions on the surface to exploring new tunnels carved through the frozen gas to identify frozen specimens from the planet's long dead biosphere. There's plenty of opportunity for learning about anything from mountaineering, to caving, to chemistry, physics and xenobiology.
4. Life on Cerberus is strange, so distant from anything familiar – even a star. The entire colony suffers from a version of Seasonal Affective Disorder caused by the cold, the danger, the alienness and the oppressive existence of such a huge 'nothing' beyond the walls and ice of the installation. Students and faculty periodically lose their minds in this environment and it can lead to severe problems, up to and including murder. The characters are a team of security consultants and psychologists sent to determine what can be done about this but may find there's something darker, more sinister and less prosaic behind these feelings – and the reason the planet was 'outcast'.

Description

Epsilon Eridani 2 was considered a stillborn world for a very long time, ignored in favour of the gas giants Epsilon Eridani B & C, the system's two gas giants which were colonised by gas factories and orbital mining stations relatively early in humanity's extrasolar explorations. While Epsilon Eridani 2 had a nitrogen atmosphere with some oxygen its lack of a magnetic field, its core cold, and the erratic behaviour of its star meant its surface was irradiated and devoid of any possibility of life – or so it was thought. Nor was water present in any amount on its surface, existing only as a thin layer at the poles and in the atmosphere. It wasn't until some extremely speculative mining scans were conducted that it was found that Epsilon Eridani 2 has a 'worm eaten' world with much of its sub surface riddled with caverns and sections of magnetised crust, much like the surface of Mars. This revelation made it a better prospect for colonisation and soon exploratory parties were descending into the caves beneath the surface, only to find an entire ecosystem evolved and adapted to the shielded dark, protected in the caverns.

Government

Epsilon Eridani 2 is contested between several mining companies – the claiming of whole planets being limited by the EarthCore Directorate to nation or planetary states, not private businesses. No government has yet laid claim to the world and so it is a divided patchwork between areas claimed by different mining companies who are fighting it out legally for the rights to sections of the world. As such Epsilon Eridani 2 has no cohesive government and, rather than one large settlement, is scattered with numerous small settlements, each sponsored and maintained by a different mining company as well as one government sponsored scientific station based within one of the major caverns and dedicated to understanding the planet's life.

Geography

The planet is riddled with caverns running through the top layer of its, stilled, crust, wet and well oxygenated by the thermosynthetic and chemosynthetic plant life that exists beneath the surface the biosphere is quite primitive. Bacterial mats, stromatolites, fern-like organisms and fungal blooms dominate while the pools and miniature forests are dominated by soft sponges and invertebrates. Nothing is larger than a foot long at the most massive, all are pale but surprisingly not eyeless, many are capable of producing striking light-shows through bioluminescent pigments or chemical reactions, some of which are used as offensive or defensive weapons, including explosives like Earth's bombardier beetle.

Life tends to cluster around water or heat, the planet is virtually dead, virtually cooled to a standstill but here and there some weak volcanism provides enough energy for life to take hold and elsewhere it survives by breaking down chemicals or using the heat differential between the areas closer to the surface and those deeper down.

Stories

1. The rivalry and competition over the world is intense between the companies and none of them are above corporate espionage, sabotage or other actions to undermine or smear their competitors or increase their own claims. Nor is the EarthCore Directorate above smearing the lot of them to nullify their claims and to gather the planet to its bureaucratic bosom. There's plenty of opportunity for agents to play the sides against each other to maximise their profits.
2. Epsilon Eridani 2 is, in many ways, a perfect world to colonise. Its organisms can survive in an Earth-like atmosphere and all that needs to be done to create a colony chamber is to seal off the tunnels and put a bit more pressure into the cavern. When it comes to extrasolar mining operations in particular this is appealing as the caverns are ready-made mines. Others have known about the planet since before the survey however, the sorts of people that don't want to be found and that can make life very difficult, even deadly, for those that interfere with them.
3. The presence of certain peculiar chemicals and elements in the makeup of Epsilon Eridani's animal and plant population makes no sense until this rather variable star puts out a large flare and an EM pulse. Then it becomes apparent. These modifications extract energy for the life forms from the energy put out by the star, magnetism rather than light. Unfortunately it also knocks out the communication grids, the power and most of the computers leaving people alone, in the dark, surrounded by very energetic and glowing alien life forms.

039 – FARMER'S WORLD

Description

Most planets try to be self sufficient as much as they can be so that they're less vulnerable to the vicissitudes of fortune on the galactic stock market or so that they can survive wars, blockades and other problems that get in the way of them having a regular supply of goods. However, it's much easier to import, especially if you're an orbital habitat or a pressurised dome city where every piece of space is required and can be put to better use than guinea pig farming or hydroponic carrots. For the urban hive-worlds this is especially true where demand for living space for exploding populations forces out any and all other concerns. Where there's demand there'll be supply and many Earth-compatible or terraformed world become agricultural worlds, churning out much more than their indigenous populations could even think about consuming. Even with export costs they can undercut the costs for the more urbanised or difficult worlds to produce their own fare. Rasmus is one such planet, virtually its entire terraformed surface given over to intensive agriculture and massive tanks of tissue culture, producing meat, grain, fruit and vegetables for the teeming masses of the galaxy.

Government

Rasmus is a fully incorporated Imperial world, governed by an Earth-appointed governor and their chosen officials, ruling from the orbiting garrison station that defends the planet against possible incursions or disasters. Ramus' towns and cities have mayors and elected councils with powers of disbursement from the funds assigned to them by the governor from their taxes. Profits from the sale of produce are kept by the individual farmers but subject to both Imperial taxation and taxation from the mayor of the closest city. Different cities take very different views, some taxing heavily to provide a great deal to their people, others taxing nothing and relying on private business and philanthropy to meet the public need. Wandering magistrates deal with conflicts between farms and ranches according to Imperial law and with deference to local city laws. The country's rulership and law is as much a patchwork as its fields.

Geography

Rasmus is an entirely terraformed world custom built from the ground up to provide for the food needs of the other imperial worlds. Its oceans, orchards and fields contain nothing that does not provide for this need and there is a distinct lack of predators or parasites on the planet. Everything there is productive, the orchard forests provide food, the pastures feed the few animals that are raised naturally and the rest are used to create meal to feed the biomass in the culture sheds. There is no disease, no parasitism and nothing to negatively affect the herds or plants – other than each other. As a result Rasmus is kept under an enforced quarantine. Only in-system vessels are allowed to land and take on cargo and it is transferred in orbit from these scrupulously neat and tidy vessels to others. Colonisation is forbidden any further to prevent any infectious agents being taken down to the surface. The people of Rasmus along with their plants and animals have virtually no resistance to disease.

Stories

1. There may be no parasites or diseases on Rasmus, but that doesn't mean that they can't arise. A mutation in a gut bacteria leads to the evolution of a new disease, not unlike dysentery. It spreads rapidly as the people and doctors of Rasmus have little to no experience of infectious agents and are slow to call for help. Many people are dying and the fields and orchards are going unfarmed which could lead to a local famine in this sector of space. Paramedics, security personnel and workers, it is decided, are to be shipped in to help with the outbreak and take in the harvest, but all to be kept in pressure suits and breather masks at all times. The people of the planet are panicked, resentful and demand better treatment, the only people they can take it out on are the workers.
2. The Empire is resented on many worlds as a distant and uninterested power, only caring about its own power and ruling through military might rather than anything else. Doing something about Rasmus might remind people how ineffectual and tyrannical the Empire truly is but doing so would require smuggling illegal elements onto Rasmus. Specifically predators and blights, both of which will have a field day on Rasmus' supplies but will result in, likely, millions of deaths due to starvation. Still, the end justifies the means, right?

Description

In accordance with some ancient joke that only they get uploaded human personalities have founded their own settlement, Logopolis, on an outer planet of a young star. The settlement does not resemble much of what anyone else might consider a colony. There is one, tiny, bubble dome and the planet is otherwise almost completely covered with energy-gathering technology, fusion plants, thermal piles, cosmic radiation collectors and so forth, all supplying the actual settlement, which is nothing more than a slab of hyper-dense circuitry, sealed within a thin, neutronium shell in the shape of a black monolith. This dense circuitry houses the personalities of some fifty million uploaded human personalities in their individual and communal virtual realities, living out years in seconds to the outside universe and enjoying their eternal 'retirement'.

Government

Logopolis has no real government, the monolith itself has a governing Semi-Intelligent Expert System, affectionately called Simon or 'Si' which monitors everything going on within the monolith and automatically makes decisions for the colony based on the overall consensus of the minds it contains. Simon also handles all their interactions with the external universe – not that they have many, being heavily isolationist.

There are 'rogue elements' within Logopolis that want a more considered approach to their governance but change cannot be affected until a new consensus is reached and so their attempts are entirely ineffectual unless they can convince the other uploads, and the older a personality is, the less likely their mind is to be changed, so any change seems increasingly unlikely.

Geography

The interior virtuality of the monolith is the only geography worth speaking of and only the central, communal virtuality is remotely consistent. This virtuality is an anachronistic and historically inaccurate rendering of London with aspects of any and all periods within it, including ideas that are nothing but fiction. While wandering the streets of this virtual London as a visitor (the only time they decrease their processing/time rate to 1/1) you are as likely to run into Daleks and Sherlock Holmes as you are to visit the Elephant and Castle Arcology of the 22nd Century. Each of the inhabitants maintains an 'apartment' or house which is merely a front to their own virtuality and these can be anything from surrealist nightmares to orgiastic displays that would make the Marquis DeSade blush.

Stories

1. The renegade faction from within Logopolis has decided to take a sideways route to wresting power. They have suggested that a second monolith be added and, bored with the same old company, consensus has agreed and Simon has begun construction of the new processing slab already. Space is available to personality uploads on a first-come, first-served basis. Using their share of Logopolis funds they've decided to weigh the odds by actively recruiting those who are likely to support their cause and hiring independent traders to transport the data of these personalities securely to them as well as to act as recruitment agents. One possible source of uploads that would agree may be military backups or the personality uploads of executed criminals from the paradoxically squeamish worlds that do both.
2. The personality uploads of Logopolis are ancient by human standards, their mentality and their understanding of the universe still bound by the temporal span of experiments in the real universe but their understanding of what is known light-years ahead of anyone else. They're also bored and may take to playing long – especially for them – drawn out games with people's lives and even the fate of whole planets by manipulating the data stream.
3. Some of the uploads are ancestors of the characters and take an active interest in the fate of their 'grandchildren', intervening in affairs to help them through their lives or to steer them in the 'right' direction, treating their family trees like bonsai. Still, there are payoffs for all this interference there's little that the uploads don't know or can't find out and through a series of seemingly unrelated incidents the characters might be being steered towards some kind of 'great destiny'.

041 — POCKET EMPIRE

Description

The Serpens South Star Cluster is a tightly (in cosmology terms) grouped cluster of fifty stars around eight-hundred and fifty light years from Earth. Most of the stars in the cluster are young proto-stars that are still in the process of forming and creating their planetary systems. Even at this early stage one of the fully fledged stars has formed its planetary system and given rise to a precocious star faring race of long-lived, colonial organisms, the Ophshanti. The Ophshanti have not yet cracked any form of faster-than-light travel and have, instead, formed generational vessels, being colonial organisms the Ophshanti are able to have an unbroken chain of consciousness and continuity of personality even for the vast periods of time it takes for a fusion-drive ship to travel from one star in their cluster to another – fed by the dense hydrogen gas clouds and particulates of their corner of the galaxy.

Government

The Ophshanti are able to combine their colonial mass to come to accords on local requirements and then to separate once more into their distinct ‘hives’ with their own personalities and views once again. This works for masses of up to around 1,000 ‘individuals’ and easily for ships and other closed environments. For planetary governments political direction is achieved by stepped stages, each localised hive group comes to their conclusions and this is stepped up by region until a planetary consensus is reached. There are few stars yet developed in the cluster than can support the Ophshanti but each has nominal independent political form though they are all necessarily subservient to the Ophshanti homeworld.

Geography

The Ophshanti are, effectively, immortal and so tend to take the long view, the really long view. The eldest are even aware, dimly, of their own evolution within their hives, memories stored in a distributed nature throughout their hive ‘bodies’. As a result outside of their few terrestrial colonies in the cluster’s few developed systems they also have factory stations in and around the proto-stars, harvesting materials and gently guiding the mass of materials in the accretion discs towards an area in which they can form habitable planets – millions and billions of years hence.

The Ophshanti homeworld, whose name is encoded in chemical signals but which translates to something like ‘fine sand’ is a dry world with little surface water and a generally ‘primitive’ ecosystem. The Ophshanti themselves live in what to Earth-born people would look like termite mounds, though they are technologically assisted with ventilation and other systems, including internalised farms to make the Ophshanti comfortable. Their small, ant or termite like, stature enable them to piece together the most fine of electronic components and devices by hand. Whole swathes of their planet house these hive complexes, surrounded by dry scrubland dotted with succulent plants, boreholes and factories burrowed by combined effort deep into the soil.

Stories

1. The arrival of an FTL ship can mean a profound change for the Ophshanti. Suddenly their planetary governmental system can apply beyond a single system and the colony worlds and stations will, as a result, lose their nominal independence. This could spark a civil war between the colonial worlds – desirous of the continued independence – and the home world. Civil war in a species which can survive anything bar scorched-earth tactics is not going to be pretty and their first contact friends are going to be caught up in the middle, even though the war will take, at least, decades to sort out.
2. The Ophshanti miniature Empire is a wonderful trading opportunity for anyone able to secure the rights as quickly as possible. It is a ready made market of fifty star systems, even if they’re not complete. After first contact is established it is down to a race between different trading houses and free traders to snatch up as much business as possible before all the trade routes and commodities are tied up in deals.
3. The Ophshanti have sent a few ark ships further than their cluster of stars though, with a thinning of hydrogen further away from their origin point these ships are even slower than their usual interstellar routes but self sustaining. To a ship that discovers one of their ark ships they present an anomaly, a near-solid block of machined metal with advanced ram-scoop design and no apparent crew, infested with bugs. Making sense of such a ship is a real challenge.

042 – WORLD NECKLACE

Description

Dyson spheres and ring worlds are pinnacles of almost unimaginable alien science but there are other feats of macroengineering at the planetary and stellar level that are almost as staggering despite their – relative – simplicity. Around Deneb is one such artefact, a necklace of planets spinning in time and in perfect harmony around the star like the pearls on a necklace, one after another in neat procession, each within the near side of Deneb's habitable zone and with Deneb being a massive star, some three-hundred times bigger than the sun and some tens of thousands of times more bright, that's an awful lot of planets.

Government

The Deneb system is a massive, sprawling domain of planets with many different sub species of the same root alien race living from one world to another. The Denebians never refer to themselves as such, or even anything similar, and consider each other to be entirely different even though those from neighbouring worlds can, and often do, successfully mate. Indeed the Denebians can be viewed as a 'ring species' in evolutionary terms, each planet removed from each other they are increasing infertility and changing their perception from the exotic to the disgusting. All of this prevents the Denebians from having any truly cohesive form of government as their ideas vary as much as their physiology around the ring. Many times in their history warlords have arisen and tried to unite the planets through force of arms and every time this has failed.

Geography

Aside from rare individuals the Denebians have little interest in the outside universe, concerned overwhelmingly with their own microcosm and its generational conflicts and wars. Each planet occupies an almost identical position as regards distance from the star but each also has its own characteristics, sharing plants and animals with a common history but genetic lines diverging with environment and chance. Different planets have different climates and the only commonality between each world is the gigantic gravity engine built into a mountain at each pole of every planet and helping keep them in place and in pace with each other, stopping any collisions.

Stories

1. The gravity engine on one of the worlds is failing after untold numbers of years. This will, inevitably, lead to a collision between this world and one of the others unless something is done. The gravity engines have been impenetrable for all the years since any Denebian system can remember but, as an outside chance, a fortified expedition has been sponsored to see if the failure in the system may have – perhaps – allowed for access and a means to correct the problem and save the planet or, as a last ditch approach, provide a method to remove the planet so that it cannot cause any more trouble.
2. The Denebian worlds come under assault from a technologically superior refugee fleet from outside the system. The refugee fleet has lost their own world or worlds and sees the Denebians as having more than enough to give up some ground to them. The Denebians – for once acting as a whole – do not see this the same way. Rapidly many Denebian planets become war zones and the system begins to attract mercenary attention. The Denebians have a great deal of wealth as a collective and finally have a reason to work together while the refugee fleet has advanced technology but limited resources, and a legitimate claim to some manner of sanctuary. A complicated mess with no clear right or wrong, just right for characters to get involved in.
3. A Denebian scientist has completed work on genetic samples from key planets around the Denebian necklace and now has irrefutable proof that the Denebian peoples and their ecosystems are all related and that racial divisions have no basis. He now wishes to present his findings in symposia around the capitals of the miniature empires which, between them, carve up the Denebian system. He can't get any Denebians that he trusts to act as security for his person and requires both security and transportation to take him around the worlds and to ward off the religious and racial zealots who refuse to believe his findings.

043 – WORLD OF WORLDS

Description

The physical – and other – requirements of the many different species involved in the galactic union place a great deal of strain upon any nation or planet that must play host to a conclave or meeting. Different gas mixtures, different food requirements, different pressures, gravities, lights and all manner of other peculiarities prevent ease of movement and communication between the various species and this, more than language, gets in the way of diplomacy and so slows down proceedings.

Polyhymnia Station was built with this problem in mind. A large asteroid station Polyhymnia is built with innumerable habitat bubbles and chambers as well as several large 'compromise' chambers, built within the tolerance levels of as many species as possible for closer communication as well as a central, council atrium with individual bubble 'seats' that can be individually tailored to the occupant's requirements.

Government

Polyhymnia has no real government of its own; it is – rather – a seat of government, a place where decisions are made. The station itself comes under military regulations and is heavily guarded by the union navy and a garrison of marines as well as extensive surface and orbiting defensive systems sufficient to ward off any but the most concerted of attacks. Polyhymnia isn't the symbolic capital of the union but it is the pragmatic capital. Since its inception diplomacy has gone a lot more smoothly with a lot fewer incidents and misunderstandings between races and delegates.

Geography

Polyhymnia has no true geography – being an asteroid. The main features that are worthy of note are the central council chamber and the common chambers. The council chamber and all its individual bubbles form the outer shell of a spherical space, the speaker and chairman's bubbles floating in the centre and the whole chamber subject to subjective gravity pulling 'outwards' for each delegate. The common chambers, by contrast, are domes, built into the surface and allowing a view of the stars and a place to put some honest ground under your feet, each a complex garden of plant life that is capable of tolerating and growing well in the conditions of the dome. This is necessarily only a handful of species but the gardeners do a fine job of keeping the domes seeming more interesting and varied than they actually are.

Stories

1. One of the delegates to Polyhymnia has been murdered. The station lacks any formal investigative security force and that force is under suspicion itself. Outside investigators, accompanied by service bodyguards, are the solution to the problem but they must be competent. The murder has introduced a note of distrust into the otherwise improving diplomatic relations on the asteroid and each delegate likely has their own aides and security agents also looking into the murder, a murder that is about to become murders, plural.
2. Many different species congregate and communicate on Polyhymnia and many have rituals of gift giving or taking, rituals or other elaborations that can drive even seasoned diplomats insane. Understanding these little foibles is key to getting a stronger diplomatic position with and over them. To this end many diplomats hire private investigators to engage in cultural and personal studies of their counterparts and their civilisation. The extra information this brings gives great reward both to the diplomat and – by extension – to the people who work for them.
3. Polyhymnia has a very varied population but not a significant one, the needs of one species are very different to another and without a significant population the trouble is too great and the profit margins too small to interest the regular traders. Free traders and smaller vessels can, however, make a good living supplying the luxury and peculiar needs of the delegates though some of these can have unforeseen circumstances for both the ship and the station when they include things like live prey, alien narcotics or unintelligent and consciousnessless genders for mating.

044 – LET'S DANCE

Description

Mihrjan is a world reserve, an idyllic and unspoilt wilderness from icecap to icecap and with an identified near-sentient life form currently living in the temperate zone of the northern continent. Despite its protected status there is always pressure on the world to be opened up to exploitation of one kind or another and the cost of maintaining the security net around the planet and paying the rangers that look after the world is prohibitive for a world that produces no real income of any kind. As a solution to this problem a special exception has been made to the protected status. Even Commonwealth Standard Year a large equatorial island on the planet is turned over to the youth of the Commonwealth to be used for a week long party and festival. The choice of location is idyllic but also resistant to environmental damage and the combination of 'right on' planetary preservation and an excuse to party is all but irresistible to the youth of the Commonwealth.

Government

Mihrjan has no government as such and there are only a handful of rangers to watch over the whole planet, based from a small and unobtrusive space station in orbit. During the festival these rangers are supplemented by private security contractors but in practise just about anything goes, the only rules are that you leave the place as much akin to how you found it as possible and you don't spoil anyone else's fun. People who break the rules – in the eyes of the rangers and security personnel – are merely locked in a modified trading ship until the festival is over; serious crimes see them turned over to the authority of the victim's world if necessary. The festival is largely self governing with the various groups of youth that visit the world dividing themselves up into camps and tribes by musical affiliation, home world and other indicators, like sexual preference. These camps have their own rules and contingencies and try to police themselves as much as possible, without recourse to the rangers or security personnel.

Geography

Mihrjan is a slightly warmer world than Commonwealth standard with two moons leading to a complex interplay of tides that make the sea unpredictable but also good for surfing and other water sports and games at least one day out of the festival. The festival island is largely a fine soft sand, piled atop and within a pearl-coral reef, a reef of a hard pearlescent substance that is smooth, rather than rough like Earth coral. Removing coral that is not already washed up on the beach is strictly prohibited but in spite of this a great deal of coral finds its way off planet as souvenirs. The camps and music grounds are pitched close to the scattered bunches of large rubber/palm like trees that provide great shade and a sweet fruit, something between a date and a prune. The spaceport during the event is a temporary structure, a floating landing pad made up of connecting sections which are stowed on the island during the rest of the year.

Stories

1. The characters are party goers who are attending the festival when it turns out that the 'security' team are private raiders interested in securing a bountiful supply of the coral and blaming the damage on the festival goers. With such a rare product they can earn ten to a hundred times what they're already being paid for their security work. The rangers are spread too thin and have no real reason to believe party goers and so stopping this problem depends on the festival, many attendees of which are completely out of their gourd.
2. The presentient species is a lot more intelligent than they've been given credit for. They've seen the falling stars from the sky and have mounted an expedition to the island, arriving by dugout canoe with holy men and warriors just as the party is reaching full swing. Primitives meeting intergalactic space hippies as first contact could be disastrous.
3. A good couple of fistfuls of party goers are gone and unaccounted for after the festival is over. The rangers make available some of the profit from the festival for a retrieval mission to investigate and find out where they've gone. They may have, idealistically, decided to 'go wild' on a virgin planet, in which case they need to be carefully, but firmly removed. There is a possibility that something worse has happened to them which must also be investigated properly, the world is still – largely – an unknown quantity.

Tips:

This adventure allows for a playful riffing off of rave and club culture and particularly Burningman, which is ripe for a send-up.

045 – ROOM FOR A LITTLE 'UN

Description

Overpopulation is a major problem for any species that solves its infant mortality and health problems, especially if it also starts to make inroads into life extension and physical immortality. When the species is already fecund and has problems physically or spiritually with birth control this problem can rapidly spiral out of control and is the speculated cause of the demise of many 'ancient' civilisations, population collapse seeming more plausible to many than the other speculated causes.

The Skree breed like rabbits and their home world has become a warren like city-world, completely overrun with urbanisation, the ecosystem destroyed and every inch of surface fought over by an unceasing tide of flesh. The Skree breed so rapidly that even their imperial expansion has done nothing to alleviate the problems on their home world and even though every ship carries a full cargo of Skree when it leaves their population continues to run at their sustainable maximum with no relief or let up.

Government

The Skree are governed by their Divine Council, a group of religious leaders who divine the best course for their race from scripture and from divining the will of the universe in short contemplative jumps via hyperspace. This seems lunacy to most other races in the galaxy but appears to work for the Skree who don't seem to directly question this theocratic leadership. The Divine Council sits safely in orbit, a pampered existence and a secure position from which to make their decrees. The populace below on their capital, Ch'Chee, however, are left largely to fend for themselves and the life of constant near starvation and struggle makes government meaningless and even the most brutal murder a welcome relief by freeing up resources for others. On their colony worlds things are more formal and careful and the gender balance of settlers is carefully one-sided to limit the population growth on those worlds so as not to merely replicate the problem, even so the Skree are seen as little more than vermin.

Geography

Ch'Chee's natural geography is all but completely obscured and only revealed in the relative height and depth of the endless city-scape punctuated by expansions and extensions constantly being made both above and below the surface using off-world resources. The newer towers are relatively luxurious but are still all but shoulder to shoulder with Skree. All the denizens are utterly desperate to get off the world and willing to pay just about anything, do just about anything, to secure a place on a freighter. This makes Ch'Chee a favoured stop for those in need of a quick buck and willing to face the risks inherent in an essentially lawless and desperate planet.

Stories

1. Unscrupulous traders are picking up cargoes of citizens from Ch'Chee and dumping them into empty space, cashing in massive profits while sending many thousands, even millions, of Skree to their deaths. Only a chance discovery revealed one of these 'drifts' of corpses between the stars and this is regarded as an atrocity by the federation council who send an investigative team to discover what is going on and to find and capture or terminate the crews responsible. Interference, however, comes from an unexpected quarter, the Skree government themselves who seem, if anything, to be glad for the 'cull'.
2. A coalition of 'concerned parties' wishes to hire a suitably unscrupulous team to perform a 'controlling measure' against the Skree. The covert operations budget of a fistful of planets can do a lot to salve a conscience especially when the scope of their 'solution' becomes apparent, a gene-tailored virus and dirty, irradiating briefcase nuclear weapons designed to slaughter and irradiate swathes of the Skree home world.
3. A medical scientist has been suffering from increasing paranoia and hires a free merchant crew with his diminishing budget in order to guarantee his safety. It makes no real sense to anyone that knows him, his field not considered that important or great, to the Skree however it is all important, a new method of birth control that shouldn't interfere with their physiological or spiritual issues with the practice – and they'll do anything to get hold of it, preferably without having to pay for it.

046 – WANDERING STAR

Description

Bedu is a star system that can actually enter and transit through subspace, travelling between stars and even between galaxies by tapping the bountiful power supply of its star to fold space. It is a nomad star, warping in to a new location for one of its own years and then warping away again to pastures new, an endless cycle of exploration and trade that will end up visiting, in a cursory fashion, most of the universe in the lifetime of the Bedu civilisation – or so they hope. Every planet in the system is occupied and localised spacefold and teleportation technology allows the Bedu people and their ‘passengers’ to move anywhere in the system on a moment’s notice, making complete use of the resources that they have.

When the Bedu arrive they send out scout ships to find and make contact with as many local civilisations as possible, ready and prepared to trade with them, to take on board ‘passengers’ and to share what they know of the galaxy and the universe – for a price, of course. This usually results in a destabilising ‘gold rush’ whose effects can be felt long after the Bedu have moved on.

Government

Bedu has no, true, unified government. Theirs is a decadent civilisation and their every whim is taken care of by robotics and other servitor machinery. The few tasks that do need a Bedu touch have more volunteers than necessary, a ‘job’ being seen as a social status symbol and this same easy living is available to all their ‘passengers’, those who choose to travel on with them when they move to their next destination. The closest thing to government that the Bedu have are the various trading houses which deal in Bedu’s wealth and knowledge and seek out new technologies, art, music and science that interests them and can benefit the Bedu as a whole. Civil order is kept by complex machinery that is able to peer into the very near future and to act using neural disruptors to prevent any criminality or antisocial behaviour, as needed.

Geography

Bedu is one world – in effect – made up of a great number of different stations, planets and moons, interlaced by portals and teleporters that turn it into one massive expanse. The Bedu are a highly technological society and live on every part of every inhabitable world in their system, along with their passengers – whom often form racial or sector ‘ghettos’ – but the planet is not despoiled, rather it is all one giant park, filled with art and gardens that fulfil the inhabitants senses of beauty and aesthetics. Because of their interconnectedness Bedu only has one gigantic spaceport, The Market, surrounded by high, spired towers, the chosen homes of their trading-house elite. Otherwise Bedu is an endlessly changing, endlessly surprising patchwork of gardens and distinct architecture.

Stories

1. The Bedu arrive in a sector close to the normal setting of the characters and their high technology and openness to trade begins a gold rush. Intrigue and sabotage is keen between the independents, traders and governments, each trying to negotiate to get the best advantage from the Bedu. Their arrival throws everything out of balance, including old alliances that were previously considered inviolate. Everything that used to seem predictable and solid no longer is.
2. While the characters are engaged on a trade mission to Bedu an alliance of greedier races decides to mount a combined attack and to steal what they need by force rather than trade. The Bedu automatic defences open up, lighting up the sky and then abruptly cease fire. Once the light fades from people’s eyes the sky is entirely different... a new galaxy, far from home, effectively kidnapped when the Bedu fled from the attack and there’s no way to go back.
3. The Bedu are ‘pranksters’ as much as anything else and know that they’re immune from any retribution since they’ll have passed on. Because of this they ‘boobytrap’ a great deal of what they trade with long term flaws or other problems that confound the proper use of the technology. Solipsist Artificial Intelligences, teleport systems that can’t work under all sorts of conditions, cloaking devices that make a ship invisible but throw out a massive signal in the invisible spectra and so on. Some deals are genuine, but most will turn out to be duff in due time, leaving chaos in their wake.

047 - MOONING

Description

Nis is a remarkable 'world' and the rise and success of the Nissa even more remarkable. Nis is a large moon, about the size of Titan, but icy, like Europa, most of the moons around the gas giant in the system are. Deep beneath its surface where the ice and rock meet there is water and, kneaded by the gravitation of the gas giant, Nis is very seismically active with many volcanoes and sulphur chimneys melting the water and creating gigantic under-ice seas. In this environment the Nis evolved, sessile worm-like beings that somehow also developed intelligence and learned to work as communities, together, to manipulate their environment and, eventually, to move beyond their warm, watery nursery and out into the universe and the other moons of the gas giant.

The Nis are a remarkable and unlikely success story and a reasoning behind their development of intelligence and success against all odds is yet to have been satisfactorily formulated. Nonetheless they are held up as shining examples of patience, fortitude and innovation in the rest of the galaxy and their worlds are some of the most alien one can visit.

Government

Technological innovation has given the Nis individual capabilities, to move freely, to accomplish things without the need to work as a community but the extreme communal nature of their evolution has still shaped their interactions and they're yet to overcome their biology. Nis is a communist state where everything is shared between the Nis as a species and apportioned fairly by the state. The Nis are extremely deferential and reluctant to take the lead or make a decision and decision making is an extremely delicate and ornate social dance between them. The Nis do a great deal of charitable work beyond the confines of their system, coming to the aid of needy worlds and groups, even if those groups are considered dangerous or a threat by other governments.

Geography

Most of Nis' geography is hidden beneath its ice. On each of their worlds there are a few signs of their presence however. A gigantic spaceport gate built into the ice of the surface which leads down a massive shaft to their docking bays beneath and the presence of solar and magnetic power collectors on the surface. Down below the surface the Nis settlements cluster around hydrothermal vents and their artificial equivalents, deep in the dark where they can park themselves and feed on the chemoplankton swarming in the waters. Where they expect visitors there are pressurised bases and the Nis themselves can interact with other species via communication systems or by wearing a pressurised, warmed, water-filled 'tank'.

Stories

1. The Nis have been supplying medical aid and food supplies to anti-government guerrillas on another world. This action is in their nature, giving aid where aid is needed, but has enraged the government and other dedicated interest groups. Blockading against the Nis and even punitive actions to punish them for their support of 'terrorism' are considered justified by the government and given appropriately deniable sanction.
2. Survey of some worlds that have evidence of 'ancients' on them turns up a lost colony of Nis that isn't accounted for in any of their legends or histories, divergent certainly, thanks to evolution, and more primitive but still possessed of similar minds and technology, the implication being that the Nis are an uplifted species.
3. The Nis are able to colonise a type of world that most species consider uninhabitable and unwanted. Because of this the Nis tend to colonise freely without much regard to the 'ownership' of a particular solar system. Their empire has, thus, interpenetrated other small empires and alliances – in many cases without the knowledge of the 'owners' who pay little attention to such icy moons. Sooner or later they're going to get found out and then the sheer extent of the Nis empire might become known and that might cause a panic.

Description

As knowledge advances so faith and religion tend to decline, but that which remains is a hardcore and extreme form of the faith and it finds itself surrounded by the 'infidel' and the unbeliever, often reacting violently to the secular society that it finds itself surrounded by. As has happened in the past, religious extremists have been forcibly repatriated to new worlds to sort things out for themselves as voluntary or involuntary colonists.

Bethlehem, disparagingly called Bedlam by most from beyond that world, is one such planet, home to much of what remains of the militant protestant sects, evangelicals and non-denominationalists who had their last 'hurrah' during the 21st century. Here they have built their theocracy according to their principles and to them it is heaven, to most of the rest of the civilised galaxy it seems more like a description of hell and both sides seem content with that view of each other.

Government

The communities on Bethlehem, whether the young cities or the smaller towns, are effectively ruled by their pastors and priests, though they also have elected mayors and civil bodies – in effect appointed by the religious heads who tell the people how to vote, but their remit is merely to accomplish what is demanded by the real leaders, not to politic. The planet as a whole is ruled by the head of the church, the regent, elected by the pastors and priests by direct vote and yet only the regent because Bethlehem only accepts Jesus as the ruler of all, their regent ruling as a placeholder until the second coming and the apocalypse, something they predict to happen very soon, demonstrating how galactic events match up to biblical prophecy more every day.

Bethlehem has only the most basic of hospitals, preferring to turn to prayer rather than 'godless science'. This extends to every portion of life on Bethlehem with tradition and belief trumping innovation and fact at every turn. Their only real contact with the outside galaxy is through the colonisation board and their evangelical missions, both of which pass through their small spaceport and immigration centre.

Geography

Bethlehem is a hardscrabble world made all the harder by their refusal to use modern technologies and to live out the curse of Adam. Settlements spread out in a ring pattern from their capital city, Luther, with the few other cities neighbouring that capital, towns, villages and then simple farm settlements, supplying the food for the cities that are little more than towns in the parlance of any other planet. Bethlehem is also subject to extremes of weather, powerful storms, harsh winters, hot summers, all of which make living and raising food all the more difficult, but which are seen as signs by the majority.

Stories

1. Bethlehemite evangelical missions, usually staffed by eager youth, leave their only spaceport with some regularity, their minds filled with propaganda about the outside galaxy and the 'sinners' out there that in most cases overrides their direct experience of the galaxy once they're out and about. Crews that take on such passengers can expect to be endlessly preached at, insulted and hired to get involved with many actions that are considered anathema to the civilised universe such as attempted conversions of primitive species and breaches of first contact protocol. Exposure to the outside universe can weaken the faith and resolve of some of the evangelical missions though, and they may want help breaking free of their society.
2. Technically Bethlehem still belongs to the Colonial Administration Body, its use of the planet to make a segregated colony was considered the best solution at the time but now they want to settle new colonists from other societal backgrounds upon the planet due to a slow-down in the discovery of inhabitable worlds. Needless to say this results in massive confrontation with the 'natives' and the new colonists require assistance and protection.
3. Scant news comes out of Bethlehem but one event has gotten free and caused something of a news storm. They claim that their mythological figures are manifesting in their sky and that miracles are taking place. More liberal sects that linger on other worlds begin to pilgrimage to the world and it seems that something is going on, but is it what they claim?

049 – CASTE ASIDE

Description

Societal pressures can be very hard to entirely excuse from a culture, especially if those social norms have been held to for thousands of years. The Indians were in an ascendant position when the major technological paradigm shifts occurred on Earth and, along with the Chinese, formed a major part of the early colonisation effort, a desperate attempt to contend with their mutual problem of overpopulation. Many of the volunteers or those assigned to colonial efforts on a basis of criminality – deportation being a useful alternative to prison – tended to come from the poorer, rural communities where the caste system was still much more in evidence and much more rigid and these colonists often took their beliefs with them, resulting in technological colonies with social structures that had reverted developmentally by hundreds of years.

Bagicha is one such world, one of the earliest colonies, primarily Hindu but with a significant Sikh minority. Bagicha is now a well developed and technologically advanced world, but one that has continued and reinforced its social stratification almost to the point of complete immobility.

Government

Bagicha is, nominally, a secular democracy, but only the members of the Brahmin (teachers, scholars and priests) and the Kshatriya (noble and warrior) castes carry a vote, the Vaishya caste (traders) have economic muscle with which they can influence their sponsored higher caste contacts but the Shudras (farmers, craftsmen and service groups) have no recourse and the Dalit (the untouchables) are an underclass that is left to scavenge a living, ignored and treated with disgust by the higher castes. Bagicha is, then, a limited democracy, with a president and a parliament that is effectively chosen from a very limited hereditary elite.

Geography

Bagicha is, primarily, only settled in its larger southern continent whose conditions – wet and hot for the most part – more accurately reflect conditions that the early settlers were used to. The other land masses only have limited settlements for the gathering of natural resources. Bagicha has only a handful of large cities, completed in a baroque and ornamental version of traditional architecture and replete with temples, palaces and grand houses. These are tremendously large ‘super cities’ bordering on arcologies as they continue to grow, most of the land is rural and intensely farmed for rice and the other staples of life. Bagicha’s primary sources of income are cheap labour, genetically engineered grain and electronics manufacture.

Stories

1. Bagicha is a member of the Anglic Federation as a colony of a former British imperial nation. This Federation has been increasing in strength and becoming more formal of late and these colonies are now under scrutiny and expected to provide basic human rights to all their citizens under the auspices of the treaties that have been signed. To ensure that this is being done investigative teams are being sent out, undercover, to the various worlds to determine the true state of affairs. The fact is that the caste system has been becoming entrenched due to the greater advantages of the higher castes in their access to technology like genetic augmentation and modification, creating a genetic divergence in the castes that – while unfair – cannot now be easily overcome.
2. A character from Bagicha, particularly from the Dalit, could have a very interesting background. Fighting their way up through the planet’s black economy just to get away to a world beyond their home where they could genuinely find their own path and opportunity in life. Despite their rebellion they are likely to still be incredibly hidebound by caste and expectation.
3. Bagicha also produces a great deal of entertainment that is lapped up by the south asian derived communities across known space. Bagicha houses many of the most important and well known stars of these entertainments and this field is one of the few that can transcend caste even though the rules surrounding the entertainment are conservative in the extreme and absolute. One of their biggest stars wants to break out of their niche and progress into broader galactic entertainment and civilisation, but they need to be ‘kidnapped’ from their minders and protected from outrage once they start their new career.

050 – THE PROPHET'S BEARD

Description

The end of oil on Earth was not kind to the Middle East, nations which had survived on the great wealth this fuel could provide had, in most cases, nothing to fall back on once the oil ran out. What remained was seized during the oil wars and when the oil ran out and fusion came in, they were left with nothing. Hardship breeds faith and militancy and the impoverished nations were soon taken up within the fervour, not of the failed Turkish reformation, but of a resurgent Wahabism. The impoverished Middle Eastern nations were also amongst those most heavily involved in the early UN sponsored colonisation efforts, the uncertainty of a colonial mission with world support being far better than certain starvation in the streets.

Husam is one of the worlds that resulted from this effort, originally a mixed colony the bloody conflicts between the different belief systems, even in the early colony, resulted in it being ethnically and religiously streamlined after that, resulting in an almost purely Muslim planet, the remaining colonists of other faiths or more moderate beliefs seeking reassignment elsewhere. Now non Muslims account for only around one person in a hundred thousand on the world.

Government

Husam is an absolutist Monarchy ruled by King Rashan, a descendent of the Saudi Royal family and a direct descendent of the original King of Husam who assumed the throne of the colony some two hundred years ago. The King is surrounded by advisors, mostly from the clergy, but his rule is absolute and overrides all other concerns, line of succession is down the male line from father to son.

Outside of the Kingship political power all lies in the hands of the Mullahs and is enforced by the religious police, a body separate to the conventional security forces and accountable only to the Mullahs. The Mullahs also maintain their own paramilitary force as a counter to potential rebellion from within the conventional military and have their own secret service, paralleling and sharing intelligence with the government agency but similarly unaccountable. This arrangement has proven useful to the King since he can genuinely deny knowledge of actions taken by the religious security organisations, absolving himself of blame over anything from human rights issues to extraplanetary interference by the religious services.

Geography

Husam is nothing like most people expect when they are told about a Muslim world. There is not much desert on the planet and what there is, is barely inhabited. The majority of the liveable land on Husam is mountainous terrain that has more in common with Canada than the popular image that persists about the Middle East and its derived cultures. Husam's cities make great use of traditional, non-representational, Islamic art, geometry, patterns and the symbology of the faith making them truly breathtaking pieces of art though few kafir get to see much of the planet, being confined to ghettos around the spaceports for the most part.

Stories

1. Clashes with the Husam religious secret service are likely for anyone involving themselves even tangentially in interplanetary intelligence or politics. This service is completely off the rails and accountable to almost no-one. The left hand rarely knows what the right is doing and so groups of this well-funded and well-trained service can turn up almost anywhere, working for any side if they see it as protecting or aiding their home or doing down their enemies.
2. Husam is such a restricted world, especially for women, that it makes a good hiding place for many seeking to escape interplanetary society. It is insular, strict and refuses to pay heed to just about anyone outside of the planet. This makes penetrating their security and steering through their society without causing offence or problem very difficult. What this amounts to is that only the most foolhardy and thrill seeking would even consider bounty hunting or skip-tracing to Husam.
3. The religious secret service is known to engage in, deniable, acts of terror against other planets and to give aid to groups that remain on Earth and still fight over the holy land, albeit in much smaller amounts given the omnipresence of Earth's technological and military world government and its enforcement of the peace. Some groups have decided that this warrants a little proportional payback.

051 — NOVA ISRAEL

Description

The end of oil was, perversely, not kind to the state of Israel. While the surrounding Muslim nations became impoverished with the collapse of oil this simply threw the disparities between the comparatively wealthy Israel and its neighbours into sharp relief providing even more reason for conflict. The end of oil, accompanied by the rapid implosion of the United States cut off most foreign aid and Israel was left alone to face a new Caliphate with conquest on its mind. The nation put up a brave fight, bolstered by volunteer fighters from Christian nations but in the end the sheer doggedness of the opposing force, continuing to fight even after the deployment of nuclear weapons against them – to universal condemnation – couldn't do the job and a new diaspora was inevitable.

With the settlement of new worlds a new home for the Jewish people was inevitable and a priority, Shalom was one of the first ethnically screened colony worlds, the first to be settled primarily by people of a single race and creed and its existence and success spurred other groups to request their own colonies, resulting in the eventual, individual planetary cultures that are seen today, divided only within themselves.

Government

Shalom is governed by a parliamentary democracy headed by a president and prime minister. It is a modern and forward thinking planet with heavy involvement in the United Stars and is an innovator, particularly in weapons technology, much of which is deployed in Shalom's heavily armed defence forces. The government is under constant pressure by religious lobbies to enact religious laws and even to launch a retaking of the holy land back on Earth, a site which is now under United Stars control and ordnance as a site of special historical interest, under no nation's control. Thus far these views represent those of a radical fringe, why fight over a patch of dirt on a filthy and old planet when there's a whole new world to build?

Geography

Shalom is larger than Earth with a higher gravity field, making its inhabitant stockier and more muscular than many other colonists. It is a lot drier than Earth, much of its moisture bound up in huge icecaps at the poles, the landscape dominated by lakes and with only a few smaller seas and one significant ocean. There are settlements all over Shalom but the capital city, Abraham, is at the sight of the first colonial landing, an equatorial region close to one of the larger inland seas.

Stories

1. Even in the future one can't escape prejudice and blood feuds. Ethnically, culturally and politically streamed colonies solve many issues but they also mean that people do not mix or come to any understanding of each other's cultures through experience. This increases xenophobia and culture shock when encounters do happen and allows for all manner of erroneous and dangerous views to be promulgated in the children of those respective worlds. This is the case with Shalom and with Muslim worlds. Each are taught versions of history that condemn the other and this indoctrination still, occasionally, erupts into violence between these worlds. The United Stars do what they can to keep this in check but people can get caught up in incidents any time and anywhere.
2. Another thing that never changes are the wild ideas of conspiracy nuts and their anti-Semitic ideas are still alive and well, added to by the increasing mystery of history and the facts about Shalom. After all, why should the Jews get special consideration by the colonisation board and get their own world? And so it goes on. However, Shalom is very aggressive in its self defence policies and is heavily involved in the interstellar bodies what if, just for once, one of these conspiracy nuts had found something actually truthful, how far would they go to protect it?
3. Shalom suffers a coup lead by the religious orthodoxy and the Shalom Defence Forces receive a sudden increase in budgeting, the heavily armed system defence boats receiving an upgrade for FTL travel and a large contingent of soldiers being conscripted and equipped. They then stage a limited invasion of Earth to 'retake' the holy land as they persist in believing is their god given right. This puts them into direct conflict with the United Stars and aggravates any number of Muslim and Christian planets, sparking the first true interplanetary war.

052 – VELVETY DARKNESS

Description

The universe is full of any number of nondescript planets, but it is not these that stick in people's minds and attract their attention. Rather it is the unusual, the unique and the exceptional that grab peoples imaginations and interest. Because of this even sub-optimal planets can end up being important colonies, despite the difficulties of living there. Sutr is one such world, a planet of near total darkness but with warmth and atmosphere provided for by the intense and ongoing vulcanism of the world, creating a warm dense atmosphere that, while choking to humans, allows life to exist on the surface and allows pressurised colonies without the need for expensive and wasteful heat controls.

Government

Sutr is a world with a small local population divided evenly between the scientific, the tourism oriented and those who have settled or been born on the world and have stayed because of its unique characteristics. As such Sutr has no real government, its permanent population only consisting of some ten thousands of people rather than millions or billions. Sutr survives and manages itself on more of an ad hoc basis, peace and prosperity is enforced by unofficial sheriffs from the civilian population and security guards from the tourism companies while the scientific institutes with a presence on Sutr have a single governmental security consultant. For the most part this arrangement works agreeably for all parties.

Geography

Sutr is a warm world that orbits in lock-step with a gas giant that occludes the sun of the system for 99% of the time, occasional orbital perturbations allowing a little more of that star to be seen from time to time, the only times that Sutr's landscape is truly lit. The rest of the time any light has to be artificial or to come from molten rock. Sutr is most notable for its active vulcanism, its surface a complex patchwork of tectonic plates that are in constant motion and eruption. The water on the world finds its place in cracks, crannies and the craters of currently inactive volcanoes but is contaminated with sulphur and other chemicals, unpalatable to humans, but perfect for the planets thermosynthetic and chemosynthetic life. Sutr's life forms thrive in the volcanic heat and chemically rich environment, producing a wide variety of different life forms that manage to scrape a living on this violent and changing world through a remarkable series of survival adaptations.

Stories

1. The unique biochemistry of Sutr's life forms allow them to process and metabolise all manner of chemicals that are considered to be dangerous toxins on other worlds. The potential for cleaning up chemical spills and sanitising contaminated areas is enormous but the life on Sutr is still under scientific examination and subject to protection laws. The rewards – and the risks – could be massive for anyone collecting samples, after all, a particular species might take a liking to essential chemicals in fuel, sealant or coolant, and that could spell disaster for a ship.
2. The colony structures are designed to be portable, there's no truly safe land anywhere on Sutr, when the colony has to move everyone is expected to pitch in, visiting traders, tourists, everyone. Tremors are indicating that the current zone of the colony is about to experience some violent activity and that the position is no longer viable. The characters have to participate in the moving of the colony and its citizens before the quake/volcano strikes.
3. Different species have different requirements from worlds. Some can survive in a certain mix of gases, others can't. Some like hot, some like cold, some are derived from wildly different chemical bases to each other – if their being is chemically based at all. Many of these species interpenetrate each other's colonisation zones without any conflict at all, their needs are too different, but here humans have colonised a world that doesn't suit them, for no greater reason than sheer curiosity and there is another starfaring species that has just as much interest, if not greater, in these, rare sorts of worlds. The stage is set for a colonial conflict with a species that not a great deal is truly known about.

Tips:

Story 3 is a great way to introduce a non-human species that is truly alien, not just a human being with a bit of rubber stuck to their forehead or an exaggeration of a particular human quality. Taking the time to really think out such a species and the knock on effects of all its differences can make this a truly compelling scenario.

053 – A STAR IS BORN

Description

Credo is a system that almost has two stars; its main star is a relatively cool one but at the outside of the system is a massive gas giant, an enormous planet on the verge of becoming a second star, a Credo 'B'. There are rocky planets in orbit between the two bodies, many of which are in a state that would have been conducive to live and possible to colonise had Credo 'B' been large and dense enough to ignite as a second star. Foundation Engineering purchased the colonisation rights to the system from the Colonisation Board, to widespread derision, but have now revealed their plan, to add the missing mass to Credo 'B' and ignite it, creating a second star in the Credo system and in one fell swoop rendering the majority of the terrestrial planets within the system inhabitable. The colonisation rights will then be resold for these planets, resulting – they hope – in enormous profits for the company.

Government

Credo currently has no permanent settlement, Foundation are directing their actions from their industrial flagship The Gould which has taken up station at safe distance from Credo 'B' in a semi-permanent orbit, acting as a station despite being an enormous vessel with FTL capability. The Foundation corporation is god so far as the Credo system is concerned. Corporate law is the only law that matters and the project is everything, representing a massive investment and risk for the corporation, even if they fail the technique of collapsing and igniting gas giants, even temporarily may have military applications, so their situation isn't irrecoverable, just dangerous. Even so their security precautions are at full alert, a hastily formed 'Credo Defence Force' formed to allow them to sidestep some of the restrictions on corporate armament.

Geography

The planets in the Credo system have no names and are merely given numerical designations, Credo one through eight. After Credo 'B' ignites three of the planets are reckoned to become habitable or terraformable within a decent span, Credo three, four and five. Foundation maintains small bases on these planets to secure their foothold upon them and to make their presence unquestionable and not open to legal challenge. Otherwise the only presence in the system is that of the Foundation flagship, their brand new defence force and the industrial and science vessels carrying out the 'enrichment' of Credo B using interstellar hydrogen and mass from the system's Kuiper belt and Oort cloud.

The port of call for visitors and traders is the docking port of The Gould. There are lounges there for visitors – though they are subjected to constant Foundation Corporation advertising and propaganda during their stay. Foundation allows independent traders but not other corporate entities to visit and supply them, for fear of industrial espionage. If the star-conversion process works it stands to bring the Foundation Corporation to near god-like supremacy in the colonial sphere.

Stories

1. The stellar conversion process is pure claptrap, sold to the corporation by a convincing but wrong kook. The only value this process will ever have is as a devastating people for destroying and disrupting solar systems. Since the advent of the hydrogen bomb there has been a secretive group within the scientific community, trying to guard against such appalling weapons ever being again created. The stellar conversion process threatens to make some a destroyer of systems, not just of worlds and this group are now moving against the threat, through suitable intermediaries.
2. Foundation's paranoia knows almost no limit and corporate law is the only law within the system. Accused of being spies for a rival company the characters have no recourse to legal council or even a fair trial. Proving their innocence to a corporation that thinks nothing of setting whole planets on fire is going to be no mean feat, as is escaping from their paranoid clutches – should they even be imprisoned, execution is so much more effective.
3. Swinging into the system on a trading mission the characters encounter a crude vessel launched from the atmosphere of the gas giant, despite the unimaginable hurdles in the way of launching such a vessel from such a huge gravity well and with so little materials to work with. The gas giant appears to be inhabited but Foundation will dispute that, citing those self same difficulties as impossibilities that such a thing could be done. Who's right? Is this young alien species a hoax by a rival, or the real deal?

054 – SEVEN STARS

Description

Far distant from the earth is a cluster of seven stars travelling through the universe as one cluster, each moving with the other about a mutual centre of gravity. These stars were not good prospects for planets or colonisation and so went unnoticed and uncared for during humankind's expansion into the stars. Independent scouts and free traders began to check out these worse prospect worlds however, their chances were slim but rewards were big, should they find anything useful out there. One such scout visited the cluster and found something unusual. There were no planets, there were no asteroids. Each system around each and every star had been entirely swept clear. The reason for this was eventually found to be an artificial world, orbiting the seven stars at extreme distance, an artificial world consisting of an unimaginably dense shell, completely hiding anything that might lie inside. A mysterious anomaly and a puzzle that made its discoverers rich, though the encounter with such an alien creation also weakened their minds.

Government

Object-7, as the artefact has come to be called, is subject to a naval cordon, enforced by a constantly rotating series of naval patrols. While this defence would not be adequate to fend off any serious threat it suffices to keep away or at least keep check on sightseers and the curious, only allowing legitimate traders and passenger runs to the scientific stations. The object itself comes under the Xenoculture Investigation Directorate and a scientific station sits upon the surface, near its only feature, held in place by occasional thrusters jets, since nothing will appear to stick or bond to the surface at all and it cannot be gouged. There is a constant turnover of both naval patrols and scientific personnel as the object appears to have a profoundly disturbing psychological effect on those that encounter it, prolonged exposure leading to obsessional behaviour and other manifestations of stress and culture shock.

Geography

Object-7 has only one geographical feature, an ornate and complex 'door' structure on one side of the planet, large enough to admit a single fighter-sized craft at the maximum. This door structure also houses a transmitter, which is constantly projecting a message in a weak signal on all bands which is yet to be deciphered. There is also an even weaker signal coming from within the sphere itself, also decoded, but which played as sound is an eerie, flute-like, musical tone. Close examination has shown that the entire sphere also appears to be engraved, at the atomic level, with patterns that are assumed to be writing. Station-7 is the only permanent emplacement in the system and despite being a scientific station is kept under strict military protocol with only seasoned officers being rotated in and out of the station to run it.

Stories

1. Many of those who encounter the object cannot get over it and are convinced that it is evil somehow, something wrong, something that defies what they know of science and mathematics and which should collapse under its own density. The majority view amongst those so affected is that the damn thing should just be left well enough alone and that there's no need to know who or what built the thing or why. The eccentricity that fuels these men and women can also lead them to finance action to remove the fleet and station presence in that system, but such violent action might well disturb Object-7 and cause it to reveal something about itself.
2. The first signal is finally decoded with the assistance of semantic and mathematical expert systems and a linguistic Simulated Intelligence. The SI crashed immediately afterwards, irrecoverably but the partially decoded signal appears to be a warning of some sort, that the world is a 'prison' for something, but surely – the object being truly ancient – whatever was inside is long since dead. Isn't it?
3. The Navy is quietly worried, bootleg recordings of the sounds from Object-7 and pictures of it have been circulated by former naval personnel and scientists who worked on Object-7, many of whom have given up their former positions to promote a cult based around Object-7 and their different personal interpretations of what it means – if anything. They want to nip this in the bud without furthering cultish paranoia as much as possible and are licensing freelancer to retrieve information and warn these cult leaders off.

055 – QUIET PLEASE

Description

Most worlds have a library of some sort, usually a planetary one of which they are particularly proud. Some of them are ancient, thousands of years old, some just centuries. Each of them tries to become a repository of everything it considers relevant to its particular planet and culture. On Coorash however the goal of their library is to act as a repository of all knowledge. The Coorashi are the ultimate information brokers and grow rich on that fact. No matter the culture, no matter the species, no matter whether fictional, mistaken or accurate they are packrats, interested in absolutely all the information in the universe and paying well for anything new or updated they can get. They store this information and these samples in a series of fortified vaults and serve the information via access terminals in 'temples of information' that dot their planet.

Government

The Coorashi are a scholastic species, valuing education, training and merit over other factors and trusting in those who are more intelligent and educated to run their planet and its colonies with their best interests at heart. The Coorashi assess each other's intelligence and psychological health at various points throughout their lives and these assessments combined with their education and achievements determine their weight and seniority in decision making processes. Celebrated economists make economic decisions, medical researchers and doctors make medical decisions, tactical geniuses make military decisions and every Coorashi citizen and their entire life is digitised and incorporated into The Great Library at death, incarnated as a Simulated Intelligence should someone wish to discuss an issue with them or 'meet' a dead relative. Two versions are then kept, one with the memories of past interactions and projected development and one 'pure' copy.

Geography

Coorash is a water world, dominated by islands and icecaps. The larger islands house the planet's main cities and information temples. Smaller and geologically stable islands house the archives, burrowed into the planet and massive communication spires tower over the planet's true capital, Callethar, sucking in data from the interstellar communication network for storage and indexing. Information being the planet's stock in trade there is only the lightest of industry and power generation and in their transfer to that culture their planet has recovered to become – outside the cities – rather idyllic, pastoral and wealthy.

Stories

1. The Coorashi find and store absolutely everything, some of that data naturally forms things people don't like to be known and many of those people – or civilisations – are rich, powerful and determined to see that data destroyed. All out invasion is an unnecessary overstatement of force but a small, experienced commando team could penetrate a data vault and destroy the primary record and the backups, with luck and a great deal of skill.
2. The Coorashi library is a labyrinthine data network, filled with layers of information and programming from cultures of all kinds. For the most part this is indexed and cross checked from the safety of a standard computer terminal but sometimes, to get at particular data, a direct cyberlink is needed to allow for a more intuitive and powerful interface. A trawl into the cyberspace of the library can be dangerous, but rewarding, the high tech equivalent of plundering a fantasy library for treasure.
3. The Coorash Meritocratic Council pays well for interesting data, especially if it is new or previously unknown. They also hire freelance information seekers and brokers to both find new data and to check whether it is true or not, a sort of interstellar, alien 'snopes'. A group of characters can earn good money working for the Coorashi as well as getting privileged data access and a constant source of employment.

Tips:

The Coorashi freelancers makes a great hook for getting disparate character groups together and giving them a common bond and goal. Information can be gathered by almost anyone, but almost anyone's skill set is also useful to the task, ensuring there are no third wheels.

056 – THE FOREST OF THE MIND

Description

The life cycle of the Ulani is a particularly complex and interesting one. The Ulani are a parasitic plant life form that spends the majority of their existence as sedentary forests, creatures of mind, but inaction. The seeds of these complex plants establish a domineering parasitic relationship with a particular long-limbed ape like creature when it eats their fruit. The seed within the fruit bonds itself to the creature's body and modifies its behaviour in a similar manner to the way viral infections and parasites have been shown to in Terran wildlife as with *Toxoplasma Gondii* and others. In the Ulani and their host species the symbiosis is far deeper, the seed eventually provides consciousness, in tandem with the host body, supplementing and changing its neurology with biochemical changes and pseudo-neuron growths that increase the host species' mental capacity. When the host dies it is buried in one of the Ulani groves, the seed finally growing and knitting its branches with the surrounding trees and joining a community of the mind through neural connections. While the host species can only live for around a hundred years at most, the tree form can live for thousands, communing with each other and passing down knowledge in the neural imprints of their seeds.

Government

The Ulani are guided, rather than governed, by their groves. New technology allows the separated groves to intercommunication via 'neural junctions' but the only way for the groves to communicate with their seeds and their hosts is via the infection of new hosts, which are separately bred by the infected Ulani. The infected Ulani follow the guidelines inculcated in them by their parent and the similarities in outlook between the descendants of the same tree are usually striking, but not complete. For their own more fast paced decisions they are forced to communicate using language derived from the host creature's hoots and grunts and these decisions are made by a council of the descendants of the oldest surviving trees.

Geography

The Ulani home world is the only one where their brain-trees will grow and so their expansion as a species is greatly limited and they regard their homeworld as sacrosanct, carefully maintaining it because if the trees die, then they die as a species. The trees are all important and the bodies that their seeds where are not so important to them, euthanasia is common for any serious illness – why waste effort and resources healing the body? So the settlements and workshops in which their bodies live and breed are squeezed into the edges around their groves or pushed onto land that could not be made suitable for the trees, or out into the water where floating platforms serve as cities. The real settlements are the endless tracts of carefully tended forest, thoughts flitting to and fro in the canopy overhead.

Stories

1. Experiments into mind/machine interface are also bearing fruit for mind/mind interface and the Ulani seeds are finally able to directly communicate with their ancestral minds, as are other species. The mindscape of the ancestral trees is a strange one though, their minds are there but slow and contemplative and the sphere of minds also creates an almost biological environment where different ideas act like animals, plants or diseases and where predatory memes can overwhelm a careless explorer with the power of the forest's mind behind them. People can go in and come out entirely different, risky, but the knowledge of the forest is vast.
2. So far as is known the local species is the only one with which the Ulani can bond but as is often the case a moment's carelessness can lead to great scientific discoveries. The nigh blasphemous devouring of one of the Ulani fruit by a crazed human trader has uncovered the darkly disturbing fact that humans, against all odds in the universe, are compatible with the Ulani seeds. Humans live longer than their normal hosts and the infection increases their mental abilities far more, since they are already sentient. What's to stop the Ulani from taking on more human hosts? Provided it's done secretly, of course.
3. The Ulani fruit have the potential to provide answers that could fix and repair all manner of brain damage that can be incurred by other species, including senility. Asking the Ulani to give up some activated seeds is, however, like asking someone to let you suck the brain out of their baby and dice it up before feeding it to other people. The Ulani are not keen, to put it mildly, but plenty of people are ready and willing to do what's required to get samples and to reap the rewards that will come with it.

057 – GHOST WORLD

Description

X-113 is a code designation for a planet further out on the rim than Earth where the stars begin to thin out before you reach intergalactic space. X-113 is an unremarkable planet on the face of things, a terrestrial, Mars-type planet with a thin atmosphere and no discernable life, though features on the surface indicate a more hospitable past. What is strange about X-113 is the presence of the empty remnants of massive settlements all over the surface. They're not old enough to have been created when the planet has more habitable, nor do they have any contents – no furniture, no archaeological remains and only the simplest of geometrical ornamentation. They are devoid of anything to indicate that they have ever been inhabited and are not pressurised, yet they cannot really be anything else. Various theories have been put forward, that it is a work of planetary scale art, that it's down to an as yet unknown natural process or that it is because of any number of other increasingly wild and conspiratorial ideas.

Government

X-113 has a single orbital station, manned by a naval crew to ensure quarantine as best as possible and a single base, tucked into the largest mass of architecture on the surface with a mixed scientific and archaeological team along with two full units of Hegemony marines. The civilians call the shots on the base, by seniority, unless it becomes a military situation. The navy runs the station. The Marines are everyone's lackeys, right up until anything dangerous happens.

Geography

X-113 is a dry, cold, dustbowl of a world with shallow depressions that may have once been seas and mountains and canyons all over its landscape. It is still geologically active, but to a much lesser extent than many inhabited terrestrial worlds and only in areas where the 'cities' are not built. The base is built into and around the existing inhabitation, a 'great hall' and its surrounding chambers which have been sealed off and pressurised. The scale isn't quite to human fit which can make living there a touch surreal and peculiar, but it was the cheapest – and therefore the best – option. The 'cities' are uniform and identical in design, but not in execution, different jumbles and orientations of the same, basic, cubic structure and pattern.

Stories

1. People working on the planet report occasional 'visions'. Seeing people and things that aren't really there, flashes of the world as they imagine it might have been. The worrying part is that these visions seem to be consistent and have, finally, been caught on camera now and again. It seems like part of the world was 'twisted' into a different dimensional space, occupying the orphan dimensions of the universe and only intersecting with the standard four dimensional universe for brief and rare occasions. These occasions seem to be increasing and becoming more frequent. Whoever they are they're coming back and the base and station need to take extra precautions – and soon.
2. People begin disappearing from the ground base station, without warning and seemingly abruptly they are gone. This fact amps up the conspiracy theories considerably but the base is a closed environment and many think there must be a more prosaic explanation such as tension between the Marines and investigators or a killer driven crazy by the isolation. Independent investigators are required to make landing on the now doubly quarantined world and to try and make sense of the situation and come to a solution.
3. Deep resonance imaging of the planet, accomplished by a set of fusion bomb explosions reveals a deep substructure beneath the surface of the planet along the same patterns and shapes as the surface structure. Further investigation reveals paths down into an enormous undercity where remnants of the race that once built the surface – for whatever reason – might still live, if they haven't devolved in the darkness of their sealed environment.

Tips:

X-113 is perhaps better used as a peculiar background to a perfectly mundane problem, a red herring to distract the players from a much more simple problem that's staring them in the face. After all, if you send them to a planet covered with mysterious structures it has to be about them. Doesn't it?

Description

Many species evolve into the post-physical or gather such a grasp of science and the universe that they can no longer relate to other, more primitive species and they abandon their homeworlds and spread out into the universe, seeking some new challenge or understanding to their knowledge. Not all the members of these species are necessarily as highbrow and lofty as their capability would seem to imply, much as a young boy will burn ants with a magnifying glass or pull the wings off a fly, so many transcendent species also find amusement in manipulating and using 'lesser' species for their own entertainment. One such transcendent being has incarnated itself in a bio-mechanical shell and calling itself Ahura has made itself a god to the relatively primitive but numerous Jaratid people, gifting them with knowledge and weapons from the storehouse of his own race's primitive past, developments that — nonetheless — make them a formidable force indeed, now he launches his great crusade, intending to bring as many worlds as he can under his yoke by abusing his transcendent technological power, which seems like magic to those that encounter it.

Government

Ahura rules over the Jaratid as an absolute despot, his every whim is their command, no matter how stupid or offensive it might be, they are cowed by his personal power and the power he has commanded and given them and those who have tried to oppose him have all died in demonstrably terrible ways. Ahura cares nothing for tactics, nothing for strategy and has no real goal in mind other than to dominate as many planets and species as he can before he grows bored with the whole game and leaves the galaxy once again to pursue more rarefied games. Away from his Jaratid throneworld his word comes from selected 'high priests', modified by Ahura to be his eyes, ears and voice simultaneously across his armies and war fleets, projection points for his power and specially protected by his 'divine will'.

Geography

Jaratid is a relatively primitive and hostile world consisting mostly of frozen deserts on two large continents. They were a sectioned off world, considered too lowly for first contact as of yet and had recently achieved a level of technology roughly equivalent to Earth's early 20th century. The arrival of Ahura has changed their geography as much as anything else about them, they are now one world pulling as one, their planet gutted for its natural resources and piled heavy with the spoils of their conquest of neighbouring worlds, reliant upon their 'god' and his magic to win their crusades which have no finesse and for the most part merely crudely destroy, and despoil to no real gain. They now maintain a presence on two dozen worlds, dominating the local population with force of arms and 'magic' from their divine leader.

Stories

1. Ahura has the power to attack anywhere in the galaxy at any time. Thus far he has been attacking close by planets but as a change of pace he elects to attack other worlds, at random, anywhere at all in the galaxy. A crusade fleet of high technology, manned by the Jaratid and captured members of 'slave species' can appear anywhere and turn a peaceful and idyllic scene into a brutal battle for survival in moments. The characters can get caught up in such a fight and even captured and drawn back to the Jaratid homeworld where, perhaps, they might make a difference.
2. Ahura may like to be cruel to the lesser species but just as animal rights campaigners look out for animals so other transcendent aliens look out for the lower order species. Holding them back, however, is a doctrine of minimal interference. They don't want to dish out transcendent technology to another, rival force, that would merely achieve stalemate. Rather remove the player from the board and to that end they may make special equipment or weapons — which might be effective — available to those resisting Ahura's manipulations, just not on a societal level.
3. Ahura turns out not to be a transcendent alien at all, but rather a genius who managed to fathom some of the very basic implication of a new science from the archaeological remnants of a transcendent species' homeworld. His defeat brings an end to him but those riches of knowledge are still out there and he knew — or knows — where they are. Can characters resist the temptation to become a despot themselves?

059 – WHAT'S YOUR PROFESSION?

Description

Laconia was a fiercely independent colony right from the start. Settled in large part by military veterans, militia members and those of a right wing/libertarian bent Laconia rapidly became a military despotism despite enshrining the liberty of the individual as being supreme. The concept of responsibility became paramount as did the idea of defence. As an independent colony they enshrined a charter that required the colony to be as self sufficient as possible in every sphere of life, including defence. Service is a requirement on Laconia for both men and women, all other education occurs alongside military training and education, children are streamed by age ten to be trained as officers, navy, special forces or grunts. Everyone's primary profession is their military profession and their civilian occupation – if they hold one – is entirely secondary in their culture. They have taken elements from many different elite forces of the past, the ideas of the esprit de corps, who dares wins, bushido, chivalry and the close brotherhood of the Spartans, the Zulu and other successful warrior cultures of the past.

Government

Laconia is ruled along military lines with the Supreme Commander the effective president and ruler of the world, his position elected from among those who have risen to the rank of Legati with their rank structure falling downward in the Roman pattern to the lowly Milites. Army, Navy, every branch of their military follows the same rank structure so that there is never any argument over who is in charge in a given situation. The government does very little however, it only issues directives save in times of war and it is down to the conscience and duty of the individual Laconian whether they follow as directed or not, inculcated with military doctrine and discipline from a young age and respecting rank and seniority, few Laconians act counter to the directives and most give generously when the tax directives come around.

Geography

As an engineered world every part of Laconia serves a purpose. Green land is farm land, water is fisheries and desalination plants, cities are laid out in an orderly and fortified manner. The Laconians are pragmatic in the extreme with little time for art or frivolous activity, save for stories. Their society is regimented, strict and harsh. One striking difference between Laconia and other worlds is the complete lack of prisons, physical punishment, fine and execution are the only Laconian remits should someone threaten their society, but there are few laws to break, everything is down to personal responsibility and involving authorities in a dispute is seen as a shameful last resort.

Laconia has colonised its moons and outer worlds and maintains its own interstellar combat fleet, despite the protestations of other worlds. It is small but extremely well equipped and trained and Laconian merchant vessels are armed on par with more conventional military vehicles. Their preparedness and weapons technology can be compared with the 20th century Swiss or South African position, independent and largely self sustaining.

Stories

1. Laconians like to view themselves as the ultimate warriors and thus a Laconian background makes a good background for a military character or mercenary. There is a weakness in them however in that they are fiercely independent and are trained more as individual warriors than as an army. Despite their viciousness and capability this often results in their defeat – though at the cost of great losses to their enemy – fighting on in hopeless situations against all odds when it would have been wiser to retreat. In a military campaign the legendary status of the Laconians and the harsh realities can make for interesting conflicts within the same side.
2. Laconia exists at a strategic point that is important to the Earth Alliance and it is under attack from their main enemy. The Laconians refuse assistance however and have even fired on Alliance naval ships that have come to relieve them. In desperation to maintain that strategic hold point the Alliance Navy is issuing letters of Marque and pardons to mercenaries, pirates, raider and independent traders who will go and hire on with the Laconians. Something their stubborn pride can accept.
3. The Laconians are no longer content to be independent. They want to bring the success and order of their society to the rest of the galaxy around them and soon the characters are facing the unstoppable march of an elite cadre of 'übermensch' across their patch of space.

Description

Xenn is an off-putting world to many species, its denizens are some of the most psychically powerful aliens in the whole republic. They subsist solely on mental energies and all over their world they sit, in silent contemplation, gathering dust and manipulating the world around them through their combined psychic power. Their world is a strange, ephemeral thing, telekinesis building impossible shapes, the air itself thick with the projections of mentality that can itch the brain of even the completely non-psychic. Those members of other species who can achieve such a high and sustained level of power often join the Xenn on their world, sitting in peaceful serenity along with their whole population, contemplating one-ness and the universe.

Government

Xenn is governed by the Zeitgeist, an independent consciousness made up of the smallest part and essence of each and every meditating psychic upon the surface of the planet. Decisions and moods change with the time but any one interloper attempting to change the makeup of the whole tends to get drowned out. Zeitgeist manifests as a divine vision to interact when it is needed, usually the god or deity to which the observer subscribes. With no real needs and divorced from the petty demands of the body the Xenna have little need of government and the existence of Zeitgeist is pure convenience.

Geography

Most of Xenn is wild, though dotted with ancient temples that are now overgrown. They limit themselves to living in two great temple cities now, their entire population compressed into a small area, sitting cross-legged in eternal contemplation and harmony with the universe itself. They care little what people who come to their world do, so long as they do not disturb their meditations and so, while the fantastical and disturbing temple city is largely left alone, tourism is strong in visiting their ancient temple ruins from the times when their beliefs and powers were leading up to this moment.

Even more peculiarly just about every animate life form on Xenna has psychic abilities of some sort. Some use telekinetic traps to catch their prey, others can teleport or see a short distance into the future to avoid predators. Strangest of all is the black volus, a six-legged, tree-climbing shrew which blanks out all psychic activity in its close proximity by some sort of dampening field, something that – despite its diminutive size, makes the volus one of Xenn's most capable predators.

Stories

1. The Xenna seem too good to be true and that's because they are. The psychic energy that they siphon off in order to live has to come from somewhere and it comes to them – unknowingly – from non-psychics that visit their world leaving them disturbed and tapped of some of their life energy, shortening their life spans and slightly increasing the risk of illness when they visit. This statistic has been noted by Republic authorities and an investigation has been sanctioned. The Xenna don't know they're doing it and discovering it will disintegrate their society.
2. Xenna periodically undergo a period of activity called 'centring' in order to not get completely lost in contemplation they depart from their contemplations and seek passage out into the universe to ground themselves back in reality before they return to their contemplations. This process helps the Zeitgeist keep up with affairs and also makes the Xenna a playable – if pompous – species that can be played in a game.
3. Xenn doesn't actually exist, it is all psychic projection, illusions and telekinesis and all manifested from a single being. Only the psychically null can even perceive the truth and with everyone else seeing something that contradicts what they claim to see and experience they are never believed. Who is making these projections? Why engage in such a large scale deception? To what purpose is it all done?

061 - HEAVEN

Description

Not every race has the ethic or drive that leads to them becoming transcendent, many of them are perfectly content to live long, material lives that are surrounded by comfort and excess once they reach a post-scarcity model. These races, despite their technology and easy life frequently die out eventually, taken on by a more aggressive and younger species or simply fading away through being jaded and uninterested. The Lotasi are one of these failing, uninspired species but their planet, Noor – which in their language means something like ‘serenity’ – is considered an example of perfection by much of the rest of the interstellar community, the lives of its inhabitants spent in pampered, entertainment-driven bliss.

Government

The Lotasi have no need of government or the making of any decisions. Their support structure is entirely handled by artificial life-forms, semi-biological robots of their creation during their technological age. The Lotasi themselves no longer have any practical understanding of how much of the technology on their planet operates, including these servitors or their personal artificial guardians. Each Lotasi merely spends their time engaged in pleasure seeking or in recreational matters such as advanced – but impractical – scientific theorising or endless philosophical argument that leads nowhere. For the most part the Lotasi have forgotten how to organise themselves, how to make decisions and how to enact change at a societal level.

Geography

Noor has been engineered into a single environment plant, the lush jungle-like conditions that the Lotasi prefer. Tracts of carefully tended forest covering the land of their world, trained and engineered to perfection over their near-immortality by those who take it as artistry, much like the terrestrial idea of bonsai. Lotasi live as isolated individuals or as small groups, able to meet in scattered symposia by direct matter transport, though, again, they no longer remember how this works. Their population has dropped to a scant few millions.

Stories

1. There is a faction with the Lotasi that retains some spark of energy and ambition to them, though they're considered freaks and outcasts from the mainstream of Lotasi society and number only a few hundred. This faction wants to do something to shake up the Lotasi society and for once this has brought fear to their general population and the need to ‘do something’. All they can offer is the rare privilege of settling on their world and living in their luxury while the rebel faction, that the majority wants to oppose, might be able to offer something more. Is it fair to simply turn the complacent and dying Lotasi out of their comfortable lifestyle simply for the sake of advancement as the minority want?
2. The Gith are an incredibly crude, boorish and aggressive species from the sector bordering on that which is home to Noor and the Lotasi. They have a much cruder science but they are a profligate and conquering species, constantly breaking treaties and testing the resolve and armaments of those around them. To them the Lotasi are a blasphemous presence that filled them with nothing but rage and a determination to wipe out such lollygaggers. The Gith are, to this end, putting together a massive war fleet. Noor has advanced but automated defences that aren't up to the task but they, themselves, know nothing and care nothing for this impending doom that could be coming their way. A special diplomatic mission by interested third parties needs to somehow calm down the Gith and to get the Lotasi to take the threat seriously somehow. Two thankless tasks that require a great deal of negotiator skill.
3. The Lotasi split into two distinct strains long ago. The colonists, the scientists, the explorers, these left the embrace of the homeworld and went out amongst the stars, becoming one of the mysterious ancient races in the process. The Lotasi back home were the layabouts, the unadventurous and the uninterested, leading to their stagnation and the genetic divergence of the two species from their original seed species. The ascended Lotasi still keep an eye on their forebears however and while the Lotasi may seem an easy mark to, say, an interstellar criminal cartel and their hired lackeys, attempting to rip off or harm the Lotasi can and will lead to some serious and god-like repercussions.

062 – HUNTER'S WORLD

Description

With such a myriad of cultures and worlds interstellar entertainment that appeals broadly is hard to find. One thing that interests a great many species, however, is martial prowess, and personal and species pride. Sporting events that every participant can take part in on a somewhat equal basis are hard to find and wars are rare and usually are heavily media controlled. Bloodsports are popular on many worlds but locally are usually banned and their illegality prevents them from entering the mainstream media. The solution, eventually, was to purchase a planetary settlement license and to enact laws there that allowed free settlement and established that such activities were perfectly legal, at least there. This was distasteful, even to most large media companies and it took an alliance of smaller media companies, forming the Triat Media Group to purchase a settlement license to a habitable world and to establish Artemis, the hunter's planet and source of much of the bloody and raw entertainment to which a large section of galactic society is addicted.

Government

Artemis is controlled by three separate media companies bonded together under a collective group. Each company – Update Corporation of Earth, Jade Harvest of Nova Hong Kong and Siva Song of Barnard's Star – place an executive on the Triat Media Group board with a rotating chairman who only votes on a measure if the other two are deadlocked. Each company maintains its own city on Artemis and the rest of the planet is kept wild and designated a 'free fire zone'. The cities have an able cadre of corporate guards to ensure that the city safe-zones stay safe and that disagreements between gamblers and sportsmen don't cross a line – at least within the city. On Artemis being asked to 'step outside' means to step outside the city limits into the free-fire zones, where killing in duels or disputes is perfectly legal and where the battles between sentient beings take place.

Geography

Artemis has three cities, each under the control of its respective company. Update City, Jade City and Red City in each case. All of them are gilt, expensive, brightly lit monstrosities of uncommon lack of taste and decency, each a temple to commerce, gambling, sex and violence. Beyond the cities the planet is almost completely wild, save for the occasional waystation, set out on a grid, each containing medical supplies, food supplies and shelter for those who participate in some of the more extreme blood sports and competitions beyond the city limits. The predominant geographical feature of the planet is a broad savannah, similar to the African continent on Earth, a place of tall grasses, scattered tree analogues and the greatest biodiversity on Artemis, as well as imported species that survive with varying degrees of success across the planet.

Stories

1. Artemis is a popular destination from criminals on the lam, especially if they're confident of their own martial skill. They can minimise their risks by not participating in the blood sports and still hide out in Artemis' expanses of wild land with every right to defend themselves or take a pot-shot at anyone they care to. At the same time they can use runners or contacts to make runs for them into the cities where they can spend their ill-gotten gains without problems. Artemis' is a 'wild west' sort of planet perfect for both these people and the ones who hunt them down.
2. Artemis' greatest blood sport is 'the hunt'. Participants are given tracking beacons, allowed a primary and secondary weapon and minimal supplies and are turned out into the wilderness as singletons or as registered groups. Each kill they make of other participants increases their reward, though they can pull out at any time by returning to the city, which resets their kill-counter. Each is also followed by an AV gnat, an audio visual tracking device that provides telemetry from which the events can be televised each day with an hour's highlights. The rewards are great for participation, but they can also end up complicating the actions of bounty hunters and more conventional hunters using Artemis' wildlands.
3. The money changing hands from the investment in Artemis is truly staggering and the Triat share the money almost evenly. The Update Corporation is a little more ambitious however and wishes to stage a coup to usurp the other companies from the Triat Group and establish itself as the sole owner. To this end it is finding excuses to bring a great many mercenaries, criminals and killers to Artemis, ostensibly for a new blood sport they have come up with but in reality as the foot soldiers for their coup, so secret even their recruits don't know – yet.

063 – HOW QUAIN T

Description

Cultural reserves are planets or areas where a particular lifestyle or culture is preserved by those present who subscribe to such ideas. Only minimal contact is kept with interstellar culture to allow those who disagree to leave and those who do agree to immigrate. Many of these are pastoral worlds that have excessive levels of nostalgia for the idea of 'honest work', tilling fields, slaughtering animals by hand and gazing into crackling and inefficient wood fires. There are exceptions to this general rule, there are those that idealise the societies of the past but not their technological impoverishment. These worlds have the appearance of simplistic pastoral worlds and have many of the same parochial attitudes but scratch the surface and you find modern technology beneath the horse brasses and thatched roofs. Regina is one such world embodying, it its opinion, the best years of the British Empire from the height of its Victorian power to the end of the imperial period in the 1950s.

Government

Regina is a constitutional monarchy ruled by Queen Margaret Somerset, a descendent of the Beauforts, themselves heirs via an illegitimate birth from the Plantagenet line; a dubious connection to former crowned heads of England, but enough to fulfil the role so far as Regina is concerned. The Monarch is a completely ceremonial role paid for by act of Parliament and kept in comfortable style as befits a first family, the sprawling royal house no a common target for media snoops and struggling to find ways to support itself rather than to be a burden on the people. Parliament is elected by seats, geographical areas whose size is determined by population, and sends representative to parliament. There are no parties as such but members must designate an indicator of the position to the right, or the left. A means of allowing local representation without the imposition of parties that can distort the political process. The winning 'tendency' chooses a government from amongst its own ranks and this is moderated by a House of Lords, the Lords chosen for life, as vacancies come open, by the Parliament and, technically, approved by the monarch.

Regina takes pride in its involvement in interstellar politics and particularly in the military. Regina has national service for all its citizens, a two year term in its defence militia or its system navy. Many Reginans then opt for terms of service in the navy or military for the Interstellar Union, it is valued to 'see the world' before returning to Regina and there is a love of the exotic, paradoxically coupled with a joyous belief in the supremacy of the Reginan culture.

Geography

Regina is thinly settled with most settlements residing in the temperate zone. As a terraformed world Regina has a limited ecosphere dominated by European plants and animals imported by the colonists for one purpose or another. It is a safe, green environment on the settled land masses though terraforming of the oceans is still in process and aside from some inland coves where fish are farmed the oceans are virtually sterile. There is one single major city on Regina, city life being considered to be outside the utopian ideal. This city Winchester, does house a large and modern spaceport and a great many import and export businesses as well as Regina's army and navy academies. Young men and women in their uniforms are a common sight on Winchester's streets and often get into scrapes with academic students or locals whom are also from the city.

Stories

1. The son and heir to Regina's throne has gone missing, this problem being kept under wraps by a concerned planet, while on duty with the Interstellar Navy. The Interstellar government has agreed to keep it under wraps in respect of Regina's contribution to the military but he is still missing, absent without leave and worse still, he's 'gone native' while stationed on another world and intends to marry the girl.
2. It is said that the Queen likes to escape the rigours of public life as often as she can and to enjoy life as a 'commoner' to get a real view of things as they are, even off world. The characters may well find themselves with a new crewmate who is more than they first appear.
3. A character from Regina can make an interesting combination of traditionalist outlook and modern understanding. If you wanted to replicate a character from 1950s science fiction, such as a Lensman or Dan Dare this would be the perfect background even for realistic SF games.

064 – BREATHTAKING BEAUTY

Description

Mistral is a lifeless world but one of great beauty. The surface is not a water world, but a 'damp' one of about 10% water coverage, limited to shallow lakes. A volcanic past has thrown up great mountain ranges and savage weather has sand blasted great swathes of rock into complex and beautiful patterns. The greatest beauty of the whole world however are its coloured sands, metal oxides and other chemical tints colour the dry soil and sand that blows around Mistral's surface creating brightly coloured drifts and sandstorms, colouring the water and contributing to brilliantly multicoloured cave systems where the water is more plentiful. Despite being a poor colony choice Mistral has, nonetheless, become a great tourist destination with many desert themed hotels and casinos in its single, domed city and it is considered one of the most colourful and romantic destinations for couples.

Government

Mistral is technically a resource world but has been given protected status as a planet of 'outstanding natural beauty'. While the companies that have mineral claims registered on the planet continue their lobbying and try to find ways to extract the mineral wealth without disturbing the particularly beautiful features they lease land to tourism and service companies that want to use the planet for those purposes. Such governance as there is comes under the regulations of the Mineral Workers Union and the Extrasolar Nature Board. The MWU and the ENB between them provide the regulations which guarantee workers rights but also make extensive demands in terms of planetary impact on behalf of the colony. The interaction between the bounds of these two conjoined monsters of red tape is part of the reason holidaying on Mistral is so expensive.

Geography

Mistral has numerous areas of outstanding beauty, the city domes themselves, Arcenceil, are a vibrant curiosity of colourful design, reflecting the world beyond the dome. The Spectrum Dunes are found where several mineral deposits reach the surface, the violent windstorms blowing their coloured sands for massive distances and blending them into new colours, a stunning sight. The Spires of God are towering, but fragile, sand-blasted spear points, towering into the sky, surrounded by black sand ground from volcanic obsidian, dangerous in a storm, but beautiful. Tours are undertaken only when the weather enters a predictable cycle, but some visitors desiring adventure or visiting on the cheap can elect to travel with licensed guides, roughing it in much the same way planetary prospectors do.

Stories

1. One of the tourist groups out travelling has struck riches, or potential riches in any case, a rich bed of precious metal was discovered during their 'prospector tour' and the tour includes the right to lay claim to a small piece of land. The land they laid claim to is probably worth more than the rest of the planet combined and they are now vastly wealthy, at least on paper. They want to hang onto their investment but are being strong armed, they need help but have no actual liquid assets, only a promise against the future value of the land, which may never be realised.
2. Mineral extraction rights have, finally, been wheedled out of the government – subject to certain restrictions. What was a tourist only planet is now in the middle of a full on goldrush and Arcenceil is rapidly expanding with housing for workers, an entirely different sort of clientele to tourists. There's money to be made both by independent prospectors and company men as the planet is carved up into chunks and parcelled off, but rivalries over claims could produce some violence and tarnish the planet's image.
3. The need for accurate weather predictions on Mistral, so as to avoid being sued over hurt or killed tourists, is strong and it is subject to some very intensive meteorological studies that give the best warning possible about when sand storms are going to blow up and scour the surface of the planet once again. Someone has, however, taken control of those systems and has begun to feed false data, effectively holding the planet hostage through control of their weather detection grid. Who are they? What do they want? Can the culprit be found and quietly dealt with?

065 - WARFORGE

Description

There is a fear of the artificial and the made common to many organic species. The idea that artificial intelligence cannot be trusted, that inorganic life must necessarily turn out to be monstrous and that it can turn on its creator is widespread. For the most part it is wrong, artificial life is – mostly – limited to be what it is designed to be and machines tend to be logical, there is no logical reason to destroy organic life and artificial life that has emerged feels no necessary kinship to servitor robots any more than humans might feel sympathy for animals. There is one, notable exception, one that fits the nightmarish tales of rampaging machines and this is because they're too much like organic life, not because of their machine nature. Created as a war machine by the Erani, now extinct, the Ar'Erani were built to fight a war and then be destroyed once their purpose was past. They fought and won the war due to being programmed with ruthlessness and a strong survival instinct, there were supposed to be controls but their adaptive software found new paths around it and when the destruct call came in, they didn't all obey. Then they turned on their masters. Since then the Ar'Erani have been hunted and fought by other intelligent species but never eradicated, they fall upon industrial worlds like locusts, devouring their resources, killing those who live there and then vanishing just as quickly, allegedly to The Forge, their semi-mythical homeworld.

Government

The Ar'Erani have no government, instead they have The Network, a composite AI made up of the input and accumulated data of every available Ar'Erani. The Network is a transcendent intelligence and is capable of powerful inhuman understanding and probability projection but is held back from true transcendence by the nature of its composite parts. Most decisions made by The Network are logical and rational, but they are logical and rational ways to further the hatred of organics and the predatory efforts of the Ar'Erani as a whole.

Geography

The Forge is meant to be the size of a small moon and entirely artificial, studded with processing plants, factories and power units as well as being capable of interstellar travel. It is said to be surrounded by the swarming mass of the Ar'Erani fleet and to be utterly economical, no wasted space, everything serving a purpose even as it churns out more and more replacement Ar'Erani and ships of progressively updated design, shapes and ideas that could not come from any organic mind. These are all apocryphal spacers tales, horror stories told to frighten new crewmen, but The Forge and the Ar'Erani are real enough and terrifying enough, their attacks are simply rare and spread out amongst known space.

Stories

1. The Ar'Erani descend upon the system ravaging and burning everything they can with absolutely no regard for life, going out of their way to pursue and destroy it, unleashing strange and disturbing weapons due to their total lack of conscience. They intend to strip the system bare and then leave and any vessel in the system is both a target and a source of possible salvation for the people who live there, a desperate fight and flight is called for, but they may manage to get a glimpse of The Forge.
2. The Network is suicidal, a transcendent intelligence is it more than the sum of its parts but is constricted by them. It knows it can never be free of the hatred instilled in its constituents and so has begun to subtly sabotage its lesser selves and to manipulate probability to increase the likelihood of its own destruction. The characters are its selected agents of self immolation though they may be unaware – initially – of the subtle manipulations of their future.
3. A surviving colony of extremely paranoid Erani are found, they may hold the key to understanding and ultimately defeating the Ar'Erani but first they must be brought back – safely – to civilisation and protected. The Ar'Erani will stop at absolutely nothing to wipe out these last few of their progenitors and anything that stands between them and their target. The stage is set for some epic space battles and some desperate investigation to find a weapon that can stand against their synthetic strength.

066 – ...STAYS IN VEGA

Description

Colonies have been founded by all sorts of interest groups, corporations, governments, political radicals, religious radicals and, finally, organised crime. In theory any group can petition for or buy a license for colonisation and when the criminal syndicates came together and pooled their money – under a front company of course – they too were able to purchase settlement rights and invested in a new settlement, confident in the fact that a no-holds barred, do as you please colony would attract both settlers and punters. Thus Nova Vega was born, a wild and crazy place where money can buy you anything at all and where nothing – save theft from the people in charge – is illegal. Nova Vega is a boom town with a great deal of traffic going through it, still held – under uneasy truce – between the crime families.

Government

Nova Vega has no government as such, rather each family controls and squabbles over different patches of 'turf' on the planet or invests in building and defending new ones. Claims are made over turf based upon special skills, history, favours done between the families and by methods more motivated by out-and-out greed such as blackmail, extortion, assassination and gang war. The various families and gangs that make up the syndicate are held under uneasy truce by The Capo, a nominal head of the syndicate chosen by mutual consent from the heads of the families, but always subject to being deposed if they don't manage to balance the needs of the families skilfully.

Geography

Nova Vega is a barely habitable planet, hard winds, desert conditions over most of the planet and a scarcity of water made it low on the colonisation priority list and also drove its colony license price down in reach of the criminal cartels. Even today Nova Vega isn't self sufficient and relies on its enormous wealth to import many of the things that should be considered staples, food and water for example which have to be shipped in at great expense though, an aggregate, the water available to the planet is increasing simply because of these constant imports. Nova Vega is a flat, windswept and almost featureless planet save for the occasional volcanic range and Nova Vega's main settlement itself, a garish stain upon the surface of the world mingling styles and periods of architecture from all over the known worlds, each and every one scattered with glowing hologrammatic advertising offering the sale of practically every vice known to man.

Stories

1. The various criminal gangs are no longer getting along with each other. The shifting dynamic of development and public taste has shifted to favour one of the families in particular and they're investing their windfall in a way which threatens to give them more turf – and potential profit – than the other gangs combined. War seems inevitable and every family is looking for allies to bolster their side in the upcoming conflict. The gang war could end Nova Vega as a tourist world if it gets out of hand but maybe that's precisely what the Galaxy Police want and maybe they're adding some agents' provocateur into the mix.
2. The vice trade on Nova Vega eats up a lot of young and vulnerable sentient beings from across the galaxy with promises of wealth and fame in one industry or another. This rarely, if ever, happens but it does make Nova Vega a place where people disappear though the local 'authorities' deny all knowledge of any such things going on and simply state, over and over, that anyone coming to Nova Vega is allowed to do anything they want to do, whether others agree or not. One particular ring seems to be trafficking a great deal of flesh to Nova Vega and the various families are banded together to get something done about it – by any means necessary.
3. The big casino/hotel/brothels of Nova Vegas are a law unto themselves and employ private staff to deal with all manner of problems from escorting famous visitors to investigating 'crimes' and bringing them to a happy conclusion for their clients. Some of these little missions can even take their security teams off planet and you can see the stars, all on the expense account of the establishment. The Royale is in the market for a new special operations team and that could fit the characters just right.

061 – THE HAPPIEST PLACE OFF EARTH

Description

Bisney Planet is touted as 'The happiest place off Earth', a resort planet where every detail has been catered for to make it the number one holiday destination for humans – primarily – but any species that knows how to have fun and wants a safe environment to have it in. Purchasing the planet practically bankrupted the Bisney corporation and was massively controversial since their choice was a paradise world, identical to Earth in almost every regard, since then their effect on the planet has been enormous drawing condemnation from environmental groups and others who see the 'Bisnification' of the planet as an ecological and cultural catastrophe. The Bisney Corporation, now resurgent, has moved its headquarters to Bisney Planet, housed within the Fairytale Castle, a star-scrapingly enormous edifice that also serves as the planet's grand hotel and spaceport.

Government

Bisney Planet is an incarnation and BisneyCorp and, thus, is run as a corporate despotism with the president and board answerable only to the shareholders and not the workers or any of those who choose to settle on the planet – knowing the score. The whole planet is run along strict business lines and being laid off generally also means deportation. The immigration policy, as regards settlers, is considered racist and speciesist, favouring – as it does – white humans, but as the corporation often points out, many other colonies also have implicit or explicit policies upon whom may settle there, much more restrictive than theirs and that ethnically oriented settlements are amongst the most successful there have been. BisneyCorp enforces its will on the planet via automated systems and robotics, supplemented by human security guards and investigators.

Geography

Bisney Planet's home ecosystem has been devastated with casual disdain by the Bisney corporation, massive arrays of orbital lasers have irradiated the surface and have wiped out virtually all native life, right down the soil bacteria, and native life is now restricted to a few, small reserves maintained as curiosities and tourist attractions. The entire planet has been re-seeded with gene-tailored Earth life. There is no dangerous wildlife on Bisney Planet and everything has been spliced to be safe and, in the case of animals, tame and cuddly.

Bisney Planet itself is divided, arbitrarily, into 'Lands'. There are the Pirate Islands, Santa's Workshop, Fairy Kingdom and so forth, each environment tailored to suit the theme and stocked with animatronics, gene-tailored animals and robotics to bring each land to life. The sheer scale of the engineering – up to and including attempted weather control – is staggering, but does bring in the tourists, year after year after year, making BisneyCorp one of the biggest interstellar companies.

Stories

1. Balt Bisney was an early pioneer of cryogenics and his frozen corpse has been kept in the vaults of the corporation since the 1960s, before humanity even reached the stars. Advances in technology have finally begun to allow people to be thawed out successfully, many of them fabulously wealthy due to the insurance policies they took out when they were alive, to cover the cost of freezing and revival. Now that technology has allowed 'Uncle Balt' to be defrosted and reanimated along with many others – the Bisney corporation having taken an interest in forming a cryogenics subsidiary some time ago. Now Balt and many other refugees from the 20th and 21st centuries are being defrosted, restored and placed into an idyllic closed community to prevent culture shock. A big scoop for the media, a confusing and scary time for the defrosted.
2. BisneyCorp security guards have a lot to deal with from broken down rides to intimidating families not to sue, to dealing with dangerous animals released on the planet by ecoterrorists. Working in 'The happiest place off Earth' might seem like a cushy task, but they only employ the best.
3. A holiday break on Bisney Planet can make a good change of pace from the hectic life of a free trader, mercenary or whatever else it is that glamorous characters do. A holiday romance, a little simulated adventure and some calming down before diving back out into the cosmos to loot and pillage all over again, at the very least throwing the looting and pillaging into sharp relief.

068 — PLANET SCRAPYARD

Description

Disposing of a starship is an expensive business. Starships are full of exotic materials, many of them toxic, they're also — often — quite radioactive, either from their own constituent parts or from exposure to the hard radiation of space. Then there's the cost of breaking them up properly and safely and all the rules and regulations surrounding how this is supposed to be done. It's a long and expensive headache for all parties concerned and it's often cheaper to simply dump the ship in space and leave it there — though this is illegal and considered hazardous. The other option is to take the ship to PX-1138 and crash it, the planet allowing for such to happen without any fee, something that many shipping companies consider to be the clincher on the whole deal.

Government

PX-1138 is, strictly speaking, a moon, and not a particularly interesting one with high — but contaminated — ice content and very little rock, orbiting a gas giant that elicits far more interest from investors and profiteers than the moon does. The moon license was won in a special lottery by an asteroid belt miner from Earth who claimed the planet rather than selling it — as was expected — and setting himself up as King Norton the First of PX-1138. The planet was, basically, good for nothing but King Norton found various ways to make money out of it, using it as a registered port for vessels, with virtually no regulations on minimum standards to fly and granting citizenship of PX-1138 for a nominal fee. The final idea of turning the moon into a scrapyard and then scavenging and reselling the best parts established PX-1138 as a world most people knew about and guaranteed King Norton's fame and position.

Geography

The Norton's palace hides in the shade of a crater on one side of the moon, built from the remnants of sturdier vessels that have been ditched on the moon the palace is supplemented by a small dome — the original settlement — and now plays host to King Norton, his sprawling family and anyone who chooses to live there and work on the wrecks. The other feature of the planet is the scrapyard itself, a massive tangle of broken and half-cut wrecks occupying the opposite side of the moon — though pieces of scrap can be found just about anywhere. Transit between the palace and the scrapyard is accomplished via a small, enclosed monorail that can achieve staggering — and frightening — speed in the vacuum of the surface.

Stories

1. Sometimes there's more going on out of sight of the shipping companies, drug smuggling, illegal 'under the table trading' and other business that doesn't register on their radar. Crews can get pulled out of a ship with little warning if there's a leak and then the ship is out of their hands — or anyone else's — until it is scrapped, along with any secret cargoes or stashes that the crew might have hidden away. This means that there are many stories of 'hidden treasures' in scrapped hulks, the sort of stories that bring treasure hunters and even the shifty crews themselves, trying to get back what they lost.
2. PX-1138 makes a lot of money for a tinpot kingdom and it has almost no protection whatsoever outside of the personal armament of those who live there. It's ripe for a 'military' takeover by a small band of mercenaries or pirates. King Norton is independently wealthy however and, just as it will only take a small number of people to take his kingdom from him, it will only take a small number of people to take it back, probably from amongst the free traders who registered their ships with the planet.
3. Norton's world is the only moon in the gas giant system that's independent, all the other moons and the gas giant itself are all under the control of the same governing power and are all much more conservative than the peculiarity that PX-1138 represents. The pressure upon King Norton is endless with legal challenges to his ownership of the planet, especially since it orbits within the — normally — claimed territory of both the gas giant and one other moon. Various attempts at skulduggery are entered into or sponsored by the main planetary authority in order to 'encourage' King Norton to abdicate.

069 – THE SUNS NEVER SET

Description

HD 188753 is the technical name for a triple star system in the constellation of Cygnus. Two of the stars orbit one another in a wider orbit around the central star in a crowded system, home to a super gas giant and one inhabited world, Rizq. Rizq is only known by this name to humans, in much the same way Native Americans are referred to as Indians, the natives have their own name for their planet and for themselves but this is largely ignored amongst the human population who stick with the terminology that they are used to. The Rizqiyans are not well represented amongst the starfaring species, despite their intelligence and modern technology, due to their deep specialisation to their trinary system. As such the galaxy needs to come to them, rather than vice versa.

Government

Rizq is governed by a theocracy, the Rizq having a complex mythology and a contemplative religion based upon the movement of their three suns and their super gas giant. The complex interaction of orbits, eclipses and the interactions of the different types of light from the different stars are taken as omens and signs yet, in spite of this superstitious and theocratic determination the Rizq are quite advanced, their theocracy only determining the general moral direction of their society and leaving the more practical matters of day to day life to the experts. Comparisons have been made between the Rizq and Buddhists, particularly in the arts where the Rizq make good use of light and colour in sand paintings representative of their complicated cosmology.

Geography

Rizq is almost never without light and is frequently lit by all three of the system's stars. This makes it a hot and humid world over much of its surface and desertified in a broad band around its equator. The Rizq mostly live around the interface between the desert regions and the northern or southern climes of their planet on one of its three continents. Each continent is an 'island' continent, analogous to Australia on Earth, long parted and each with its own very unique ecosystem and highly adapted animal life. The constant heat and light make water scarce but photosynthesis a day-round event, the predominant vegetable life being tall, succulent cacti and bubble-like weed growth in thick carpets on the ground.

Stories

1. Rizq is of special note to a cultish human religious group descended from Nuwaubianism, a peculiar synthesis of Islam, New Ageism and the UFO cults that, mostly, died out with the advent of interstellar travel. This cult believes Rizq and its inhabitants to be a mythical world – despite the physical evidence to the contrary and believe the natives to be immaterial beings, effectively angels. The inhabitants are somewhat flattered by this and gently try to correct the human cultists on their misapprehensions of the state of affairs on the planet but, recently, a more militant group has emerged from within the Nuwaubians who believe that the natives are more like demons, usurpers who must be cleansed from the holy land before the true inhabitants will reveal themselves again. Rizqiyans do not believe in interfering in the affairs of other races and have appealed to the Human Federation to sort things out.
2. A rare double eclipse – the super gas giant in front of the primary star and the tertiary star eclipsing the primary star. For the Rizq it is a holy celebration, for the Nuwaubian cultists on the world it is a time when they believe their angels will arrive in that system, for the rest of the galaxy it is a chance to witness a special celestial event and to join a planet-wide party for a few days of endless sun and no true night. A confluence of conspicuous consumption and at least two religions and no sleep for many visiting species that are used to day and night cycles could make for an interesting – and potentially dangerous – mix up.
3. New technology allows for Rizaqiyian citizens to finally leave their home world by the use of specialised light chambers on board vessels. There is a rush of wealthy Rizaqiyian citizens who wish to visit the stars that they have, previously, only seen in recordings. The Rizaqiyans have kept much of their behaviour, beliefs and needs quiet from the rest of the galaxy up until this point and most have had little interaction with aliens. While this is a profitable opportunity, meeting their demands and needs may prove more difficult than the money allows for.

010 – ALL GIRLS TOGETHER

Description

With all the differing political and social groups finding new homes amongst the stars it was inevitable that the extreme positions in the battle of the sexes would find expression, eventually, in one of the colonies. True Venus is a world settled and founded on the extreme end of feminist principles, a world liberated from patriarchy and established on a basis of equality, debate and the embracing of the female creative principle, as well as a strong defence ethic to ensure that these freedoms are maintained. Natural childbirth is unknown on New Venus, replaced by technologies that free the women from both the burden of pregnancy – though some still opt for this – and the need for a man. Men are not welcome on True Venus, limited to the main spaceport and a sealed ghetto around it. Things have not necessarily turned out to be the utopia that the original colonists were anticipating.

Government

True Venus has no true leadership, instead it has strong, local governance with public participation and a representative democracy at the higher levels but without the traditional mode of a monarch or president, replaced by rule by committee. Gaining consensus between the varying groups is extremely difficult in this situation and for the most part decision making devolves to the local groups and settlements without regard for the planetary government. True Venus tries to compete on every level with more traditionally oriented societies to establish its place and legitimacy in the Transolar Union.

Geography

True Venus is a terrestrial world but has required terraforming – which is still ongoing – to make it a truly habitable world. Water has been shipped in from out-system and is slowly being added to the planet, filling out lakes and oceans and rendering more of the planet inhabitable for the greening project that is the pride of the planet as a whole. Pankhurst is the only true city on the world, surrounding the spaceport halfway between a fortress and a commercial centre allowing constant trade on and off planet as well as providing the training academies for True Venus' military cadres and space forces – favouring small, integrated units and high powered fighters over the armoured brigades and heavy vessels of many other worlds. The remaining settlements tend to be much smaller, more integrated with the terrain, housing and the plantations around them integrated together.

Stories

1. The very existence of True Venus is considered an obscenity to many more traditional societies. It's made True Venus something of a siege society, marginalised in interstellar society and looked down upon, even sanctioned by some other planets with strong masculine or religious regimes. As True Venus grows and becomes more involved in interstellar society and, indeed, begins criticising these worlds and undermining their rule the situation worsens to become a blockade with both sides too stubborn to back down. Things can only escalate it seems but there's plenty of opportunity working for the intelligence community of either side or smuggling past the blockade of the planet.
2. Women who enter into relationships with men, usually spacers at the spaceport, are required to give it up or leave but those who do leave rarely adjust well to life outside of True Venus – love does not conquer all. Some men disguise themselves as women to be with the ones they love on the planet but risk dire consequences if they're found out. Characters might find themselves hired to extract a young family from the world who fear they're about to be found out and will find themselves immersed in an alien society that still stems from the human.
3. It seems like a normal underworld job, if a little unusual. Swoop down on one of the fields of True Venus and steal a load of cattle. The pay is out of proportion with the job for a spot of old west style cattle rustling and the reason becomes clear later on. These are transgenic cattle, artificial wombs for the babies of the women of True Venus. This isn't cattle rustling, this is kidnapping and blackmail. Suddenly the whole caper takes on an entirely different character and a bunch of extremely angry special forces women are on their trail and in no mood to negotiate.

Tips:

This is a great opportunity to make fun of all sides of the whole debate, equality, female supremacy, masculinism, parochial religious attitudes towards women and so forth. Throw in some Wahabi and Old Testament style religious planets into the disapproving mix and you have a rare level of farce.

011 – IT'S A MAN'S WORLD

Description

Technology can do wonderful things, not least of all in the creation of enough living space that people no longer need to bump up against each other and each other's moral and social judgements and that they can live apart in peace – save for those who don't feel complete without having someone to criticise and judge. One community whose fortunes have waxed and waned throughout the history of human civilisation has been the homosexual community. Warriors and Emperors, thinkers and poets, the scum of the Earth and the very light of civilisation all rolled into one, blamed for the bad, praised for the good and subject to the almost physical disgust of many as a sheer reaction against their sexuality. Little wonder, then, that the homosexual community should seek a place of their own where they can relax, be themselves and found their own society, Leonidas, named for the Spartan hero, a defender of civilisation and member of a society that history remembers as embracing homosexuality as part of its military order.

Government

Leonidas is a democratic world, one member one vote with elected officials selected by proportional representation to a 'chamber' which in turn chooses an executive and with a president separately elected by the populace by direct vote. Leonidas is not a particularly politically active world and there are few political areas that attract great interest in the populace. It is a very liberal world with a great deal of concentration upon the arts, particularly painting and music and great civic pride is taken in the appearance and cleanliness of their cities, which also boast some of the most vibrant nightlife of any non-core world.

Geography

Leonidas is a water world with one significant continent and a huge variety of islands which boast an array of colourful native wildlife, most of which is amphibious, including the plant life which is able to cope with extremely wet and salty conditions. The settlements on Leonidas tend to be built on stilts above the surface – protection against the frequent flooding – and walled in against the high waves and torrential storms which can descend almost without warning. The capital, Ganymede, is a tall, white-walled city, inland on the main continent and about the only settlement on Leonidas where the sea cannot be seen. Food is grown hydroponically, since the local plant and animal life isn't compatible with human digestion, though there is a small fishing industry supplying aesthetic and other needs from the planet's fish-analogues.

Stories

1. Political controversy has finally come to Leonidas with the perfection of technology that would allow male pregnancy, exo-womb birth and the genetic engineering to allow for any child to be selected male and for homosexuality. This is hugely controversial both on Leonidas – the possibility of couples having hetero children, the possibility of an indigenous population and so forth being problematic for the world – and on other worlds which already regard Leonidas as a danger to the morality of the galaxy. There's an election coming up that will decide this issue and as a hot button issue it could prove dangerous for candidates on all sides, the normally amicable political scene is a powder keg and experts are needed, pronto to protect and serve the politicians.
2. All of Leonidas' population are immigrants and, in spite of their free planet status there are still a lot of hang ups and a great deal of paranoia within much of the population. Their open immigration policy also makes Leonidas a common place to lay low for political dissidents, criminals and exiled rulers – most settlements do also have a hetero ghetto. This policy combined with the paranoia and distrust the locals feel towards hetero visitors can make things difficult for skip tracers.
3. Leonidas is hit by a truly enormous storm of biblical proportions, one that threatens to completely swamp many of its islands and settlements, boiling up out of the sea after a protracted and very hot summer. The distress call for assistance goes out to nearby worlds and spacelanes as the storm builds up getting worse and worse and worse. It's a race against time and weather requiring skilful piloting to evacuate, drop emergency supplies and even just to survive this terrible storm.

012 - STARGROVE

Description

Opal is an unusual system, a neutron star orbited by a gas giant that survived the transition of the system and the partial collapse of its parent star. The interaction between these two forces has created an enormous gas torus of atmosphere stripped loose of the gas giant and supplemented by the efforts of unusual colonists. This gas torus has been altered using free-floating atmosphere plants and the conversion of cometary material into an Earth-compatible atmosphere. Particulates and a thicker overall atmosphere protect from the depredations of the star's radiation while the thinner, outer layers slow and burn up asteroid material – though as an old system there's precious little of this. The gas cloud is inhabitable, but also zero gravity and colonisation has begun using an unusual method – genetically designed trees and other organisms pre-adapted to life in such a strange environment, gradually growing together to create an organic ring around the planet – eventually, perhaps, a Dyson Sphere.

Government

Opal is still a project 'in progress', barely ten percent of the organic ring having yet been grown, and as such is still under CommIntstell control under the colonisation subcommittee. The project is being overseen by Opal's Chairman Ruchenko and Commissar Miang Lee and, as such, the colonisation effort is being driven to the brink of rebellion in trying to meet the glowing reports of progress that are filtering back to the CommIntstell from the effort. In theory every colonist and worker has equal pay and reward from their work but in practise the Chairman and Commissar take the lion's share of both, matched only in political power by the specialists, when they work as a bloc, the botanists, genetic engineers and horticulturalists who are part of the project. If it came down to a direct and violent conflict the Chairman and Commissar have an ace in the hole, the Line Battleship Ho Chi Min which is permanently stationed near Opal for protection. In reality Opal is primed for revolt against the state and the crew of the Ho Chi Min are sympathetic.

Geography

Opal does not have conventional geography at all, lacking any solid ground. The trees that are to make up the shell have broad, dome-like canopies which point inwards towards the star and shade people living amongst them while their roots trail up and out to snag water and other nutrients as they fly by. The settlers live in independently orbiting work shacks with artificial gravity or in experimental settlements built to be tethered to the trees. The current green area is a mere ten percent of the total torus and is a lenticular shape, thicker in the middle and tapering down at the ends as the trees grow outward, interlaced with each other. The mass of the trees is already thickening the atmosphere around them a little, making the area even more habitable but to balance this and prevent too much pulling of the atmosphere, new 'clumps' are being seeded elsewhere in the torus.

Stories

1. Rebellion breaks out amongst the colonial population and, simultaneously, a mutiny occurs aboard the Ho Chi Min. The ship is taken and joins the rebels, disgorging its marines and most of its crewmen to join the colonists in the trees while a skeleton crew stays behind to man the ship against any enforcement that might arrive from the state, seeding the system with mines and missiles and dismounting many of the lighter guns to hide them down amongst the trees. The state wants to retake the colony, for reasons of political embarrassment if nothing else and the conflict – in zero gravity and the jungle of the trees – promises to be a unique conflict.
2. The tree dome is already enormous and free traders from other civilisations and planets have begun to use the 'jungle' as a safe haven for dissidents, piracy, criminality and other actions. The state has enacted rigorous enforcement rules but the settlement is simply too big to police effectively and their colony is threatened to be taken away from them, even before it really gets going. Opal makes an interesting, unusual and occasionally dangerous location to lie low or make repairs in for a crew that needs such a place.
3. There are some planets with similar biospheres – aerial ones – and somehow Opal's torus has become contaminated with some of these lifeforms, aerial 'sharks' and other dangerous animals, doubtless brought to the torus by enemies of the state. A substantial reward is offered for the elimination of the bioterrorists and the proven killing of the dangerous life they have brought to Opal.

013 - OLYMPUS

Description

The ancient interstellar civilisations left a great many enigmas, complex tomb worlds, peculiar and incomprehensible arrays in interstellar space, great statues, areas of land frozen in time and the skeletal remains of enormous star ships but one of the greatest enigmas that they left behind is Olympus. A truly gigantic artificial mountain built onto a terrestrial world, so high that the very top is not truly considered to still be in the atmosphere and where the sky is black both night and day. Olympus is definitely artificial and so enormous that it distorts the spin of its host planet, giving it a slightly eccentric 'wobble', as well as distorting the atmosphere, making it bulge thicker on the side of the planet with the mountain. Olympus is a pilgrimage site for those interested in the creations and actions of the precursors and a regular colony world, the mystery of Olympus being judged to be one that will never be resolved.

Government

Olympus is a kritarchy, a planet where the rule of the law is considered absolute and natural rights are enshrined, outside of these laws, judged upon in courts by trained and popularly elected judges, the citizens have free rein to exchange goods and services as they please subject only to the law and the considered judgements of judges and juries. Olympus is, thus, a rather disorganised but legalistic state where everyone is sure of their rights and privileges under the law and is accustomed to a great deal of freedom and arguing to defend their positions both personally and within convened courts – which can be pulled together ad hoc to settle disputes. The law of Olympus is contained within The Codex, a planet wide computer network governed by a team of expert systems and near-AIs that maintain the law books, keep them up to date with new rulings and cross reference.

Geography

The main and obvious geographical feature on Olympus is the mountain itself. A truly gigantic edifice built in the shape of a crude pyramid, lacking the precision of many other ancient artefacts – though this may simply be due to time. Climbing the mountain is considered a popular extreme sport throughout the galaxy but requires – effectively – space suits and a great deal of time to reach to summit by climbing the steep sides. Shuttle tours – meanwhile – take regular visitors to the pinnacle all the time.

The atmosphere on the far side of the planet is thin and virtually uninhabitable but, closer to the base of Olympus is thickens and warms and becomes much more habitable. The settlements on the planet radiate outwards from the base of the mountain, the taller buildings towards the centre and the smaller buildings and settlements outward from there. The lower parts of the mountain have been carved into terraces for growing rice, one of the planet's main staples and exports.

Stories

1. A rare system alignment seems to trigger something in the mountain. The whole thing glows as though lit up inside by the sun and, as the brightness fades it reveals itself – in glowing and moving symbols – to be a stellar map, a description of where the ancient race that built it went. With the decoding of this message there may well be a gold rush from system to system, ancient world to ancient world until the last resting place of the precursors is found, though what they want is impossible to know.
2. An archaeological dig into the mountain has uncovered ancient catacombs hidden deep within the substance of the mountain itself. Precursor race tombs are often booby trapped – intentionally or unintentionally – and so more support is needed for a deeper investigation, even so some tomb raiders and treasure seekers are already beginning to arrive and an expanse as vast as the mountain is almost impossible to police. Whatever secrets lie within need to be found in the form of a race against time, rather than the careful archaeological methodology that many would prefer.
3. With appalling suddenness the mass of the mountain begins to increase, taking on a more regular pyramid shape as it cannibalises mass from the rest of the planet, demolishing much of Olympus' colony as earthquakes and tidal waves rock the land. Once the main disruption is over and the survivors can look up again they find that it is still growing, expanding at a steady rate now. What triggered the change in behaviour and what is its ultimate goal in changing?

014 – CHEMICAL SOUP

Description

Eden is a very primitive world, almost identical to the early Earth, right down to the toxic atmosphere and the watery soup of organic molecules which, on Earth, gave rise to the first replicating chemical and, eventually, to all life. As such Eden is an invaluable resource for science, a chance to observe and record a planet so very much like the early Earth and even to – possibly – witness the emergence of new life into the cosmos. The planet has been designated a preserve but in spite of this there are many factions that want to 'do something' with the planet and those who are, even in the modern interstellar age, against the very idea of evolution so much so that they're willing to sabotage entire planets to keep abiogenesis in the theoretical.

Government

Eden is under the aegis of the All System Research Council, an independent interstellar and cross-species organisation that takes donations from any and all planetary science, government and philanthropic groups it can, performing independent research on anything that it deems useful or interesting to galactic society, beyond the parochial needs and concerns of single planets. Abiogenesis is important to all living species they believe and so Eden is a top priority for them. Eden was brought under their control through a high expenditure of money and it is now sealed off and considered a nature park, defended by a handful of armed ASRC science vessels. Eden itself is ruled by a chairman and a council, the council made up of the heads of the individual departments that are represented on Eden, mostly chemists, biologists and geologists.

Geography

Eden is a young world filled with shallow seas and a great deal of volcanism going on. The atmosphere is heavy with volcanic gases and hot, leading to immense storms that bring the evaporated water crashing down in sheets of rain. Chemical lakes, hot springs, hydrothermal vents, earthquakes and volcanoes are all common and make the planet a risky place to dwell, even in the relatively stable areas where the scientific colony is established. The make-up of the planet is still very much in flux and geography changes almost daily.

The shallow seas are rich in the organic compounds which – it is believed – eventually lead to life on most planets that are carbon based. Different areas of the planet seem to have different sets of chemicals in different proportions and sampling missions try to more consistently sample the areas where the greatest variety is present – reckoning that these places are more likely to produce that initial first step of self replication.

Stories

1. The very idea of finding a common chemical cause to the origin of life is found offensive to many species' religions and the whole enterprise is considered blasphemous and even a conspiracy to discredit their gods. Many of these groups – even whole planets – are intent upon destroying or discrediting the experiment and aren't above violent action to deter the scientists studying on Eden.
2. The Eden scientists have discovered a self replicating molecule which they believe to be the likely sort of precursor to all carbon based life in the cosmos. Quietly, before the announcement they put together samples and send them out in all directions on privately chartered couriers and free traders before they revealed the news. Now the recipients for these samples seem to be mysteriously disappearing, one by one, as do the samples and their carriers and now the scientists are being accused of contaminating the planet.
3. The corporate magnate Ivar Jansson, a monstrous egotist, is dying and no amount of medical technology seems able to save him. He has one last wish for his life in this universe – for his body to be buried in Eden – his belief being that his DNA and the bacteria and other bugs in his body will give that world the kickstart into life that it needs, making him the progenitor of a whole new world. The loss to science would be immense, all to salve an old man's desire for immortality – quite the conundrum.

Tips:

This world makes a good venue for exploring the science Vs religion controversies and the conflict between empirical evidence and faith.

015 – AFTER THE WAR

Description

This area of space was once the home of two, independent, sentient species. Both began their space-faring careers at approximately the same time. The two met and the two warred using atomic weapons, kinetic harpoons and asteroids until both civilisations were ground down from their former technological height to a scattering of primitive industrial and pre-industrial colonies, littered with the remnants of the former war. This has created a peculiar situation where primitive planets are not covered by first contract protocol, technically being species who have already contacted other aliens.

Ridda is one of these worlds, one that suffered heavily in the conflict between the two species – the Sharan and a Cuthar – and is now home to settlements of both, surviving Sharan from the indigenous population and Cuthar from a destroyed invasion fleet that managed to reach the surface. The planet exists in a ragged, post-apocalyptic state though it still retains some threadbare technology from that bygone era and natural resources that are worth trading for, their situation so dire that it is definitely a good market for anyone taking the risk of doing trade with them on their radioactive hellhole.

Government

Ridda is in the process of emerging from a collapse into a tribal structure into a feudal one. Warlords control sections of the landmass away from the worst radiation with their power often predicated upon wartime weapons, personal martial prowess or disciplined armed forces. There is no central government with which to deal and the land is a complex patchwork of turf held by these differing warlords. All that unifies either the Sharan or the Cuthar is generational hatred of one another, the members of either side willing to lay down arms against each other in order to unite against their common enemy.

Geography

Ridda was an industrial world and the war devastated what little agriculture there was, it has since had to have been rebuilt almost from scratch, the industrial areas – mostly – nuked into slag and abandoned. All the major population centres were destroyed and Ridda is only just starting to come out of its nuclear winter. Life there is a hardscrabble existence against the odds and only one true industrial centre remains, the closest thing to civilisation really left on the planet and controlled by a rare alliance between two powerful trading houses, one Sharan, one Cuthar, though the alliance is fragile. The high radiation rate has meant a massive increase in mutation and a great deal of birth deformity but some mutations have stabilised and become noteworthy new species amongst the plant and animal life of the planet – recovering much faster than the people.

Stories

1. Ridda is a backwoods world that unscrupulous traders have almost free licence to defraud, taking advantage of their primitive understanding to rip them off. Some of the warlords have gotten wise to this game now, having been stung one too many times, and they are determined to take some sort of revenge on the 'space men', pretending to make a deal while planning – all the while – to attack them and take over their ship.
2. A Cuthar trader has an old piece of wartime technology which is of no use to him but which appears to be a signalling device. When activated it reveals the location of an intact Cuthar warship in orbit within the 'glitter ring' (debris left over from the conflict). Prime salvage for anyone, despite the relatively primitive status of their technology even at their height – provided the ship does turn out to be unoccupied that is.
3. A system failure on Ridda is going to strand a crew for some time, visitors are infrequent. The disabled quality of their ship makes it, and them, coveted by warlords far and wide, hoping to get hold of them, their technology, their wealth and their knowledge for their own advantage before any of the other warlords think of it or take control of them. There are ruined ships that crashed during the conflict to be found around the planet, but they're often the command centres of warlords and their primitive technology may not be compatible enough to fix the problem.

016 – SANCTUARY

Description

Sanctuary is an old orbital station, a broken off attempt to mine helium from a gas giant that proved too tempestuous even for this purpose. The station was stripped, gutted and then attempted to be sold before finally being abandoned. It was then temporarily used as a way station by pirates, smugglers and free traders – who fixed it back up to an operational level – before they were then driven away by the navy. The station was then settled, and given its final name – Sanctuary – by Planet Asylum, a charitable organisation which takes care of the displaced, refugees and those forced to flee their home worlds because of one situation or another.

Sanctuary is now a housing settlement for as many refugees as can be packed into its space, every docking ring save one is permanently docked with dilapidated heavy freighters, decked out for long term usage as accommodation with hydroponics bays, recycling stations and many, many bunks. One docking ring is kept open for actual docking and transfer of refugees and materials and more derelict ships are gathered around the station forming a giant orbital slum.

Government

Sanctuary is formally under the control of Planet Asylum with a director chosen by the charity but, in practice, different sections of Sanctuary and its orbiting slums are ruled by their own locally chosen methods and only lip service is paid to the supposed supremacy of the director. Different dissident and refugee groups are riddled with criminality and make their own deals with free traders, pirates and smugglers who still use the area as a place to lie low or do trade, covered by so many other ships and so much junk. Sanctuary is overcrowded to bursting point on the station and on every ship but there is nowhere else for many of these people to go, life under these conditions is preferable – at least – to death.

Geography

Sanctuary Station itself is at the centre of this sprawling tangle of half-junked ships and derelicts. The Station is the best place to live in the whole swarm – though that isn't saying much – and the director retains offices and quarters on the old command deck. Sanctuary is where everyone wants to be and the free-floating ships jostle and manoeuvre to be the closest to Sanctuary when vacancies do become open. The further away from Sanctuary you are, the worse your ship is and the worse the conditions are upon it. The advantage is, occasionally, reversed when a planet offers to take some refugees as colonists or immigrants to boost their own population, then those on the outside are the first in line for evacuation.

Stories

1. Many governments don't want these refugees to get away and consider many of them criminals. The decks and tunnels of Sanctuary are often a stalking ground for bounty hunters searching out people who are worth a reward back on their old home planet. These searches often erupt into violence that threatens the lives of everyone on board and refugee groups have started banding together their own 'protection' which in most cases amounts to little more than gangs with delusions of grandeur.
2. A character with a background as a refugee from Sanctuary can have an interesting place to call 'home' as well as a strong motivation to make a lot of money and to improve the situation back in that home. Refugee characters would also have the advantage of having mixed with a great many different cultures and species within the ship-board sprawl of Sanctuary, picking up languages and cultural tips that are perfect for a freelance.
3. The slave trade and drug traffickers have a field day with Sanctuary. The people there might be dirt poor but what little they have they'll willingly pay for an escape and many will opt for slavery as a conscious choice to escape the monotonous desperation of life in Sanctuary. Even if the director wanted to put a stop to all of this there aren't the resources to do so and for every refugee that opts for chains or dies of an overdose there are thousands waiting for the place they apparently didn't want.

077 – THE HONEY TRAP

Description

Teien was an unremarkable world, an agricultural planet of mixed settlement by a relatively small population that through a confluence of events began to specialise in the production of exquisite flowers, ornamental trees and other greenery rather than its original purpose of growing food plants and raising animals. This sense of the aesthetic infiltrated all areas of their society bringing together many different trends of art, design and culture from the colonising peoples as they interbred with each other and became a more uniform people. Their appearance becoming a blend of features that were subtly 'exotic' to offworlders and with a burgeoning tradition that combined the ideals of the renaissance, the Islamic golden age, geisha and Indian temple dancing, along with the male equivalents, made the young men and women of Teien very attractive to outsiders, all the more so as they began to tamper with their own genetics as they had with their plant life. Before long the chief attraction of Teien was the Teienese themselves rather than anything else on their world. This has been leveraged by the Teienese to bring rich and powerful men and women to their world, binding them into the marriage contract with the young and beautiful of their world to enrich their planet and civilisation.

Government

Teien is run on the Chinese principles of 'mianzi' and 'lian', or 'face' as it is also known. A person's worth and ability to make decisions in and for society is measured by social confidence in their character and prestige, which makes Teien society extremely polite and careful with a great deal of ritual and mutual obligation. The government is made up of a loose social body, similar to a more fluid aristocracy, where the people who are a part of it have demonstrated merit, impeccable character and a sense of obligation to their planet and the people. More locally the man or woman with the greatest amount of 'face' is demarcated the prefect of that area by the society circles of their settlement and acts as a moral judge on disputes and other matters.

Geography

Teien is a terraformed world with a gravity of around eighty percent of Earth's, its people tending to grow a little taller and more slender than Earth normal due to this lightness, which also lends the Teienese an air of natural grace and care. It is almost entirely a pastoral world with land devoted to farming, but mostly set aside for great fields of flowers and ornamental trees or the example gardens of the Teienese. The rolling green countryside is also dotted with the mansions of the rich and powerful who have married into Teienese society, a sort of dowry paid to the world as a whole for romantic or arranged marriage to their best and brightest.

Stories

1. A rich, powerful or famous character can be targeted by one of the Teienese families as a good match for a marriage. They might be approached by family agents or brought to Teien on some pretext in order to be introduced to the eligible men and women of that family. Some families wait for idealistic romantic love to take wings while others are more pragmatic and offer an arranged marriage. Teienese brides and husbands tend to insist on remaining on their garden world, ensuring that their rich and meritorious marriage partners spend a considerable sum within Teien, propping up the economy and keeping the world more prosperous than it has any right to be.
2. Teienese courtesans and escorts are much sought after throughout the galaxy and the younger members of the poorer houses are often not married off, but rather remain as free agents, entertainers and mistresses or lovers of the rich and powerful offering a service somewhere between that of the traditional geisha the less innocent exploits of prostitution, though this is rarely, if ever, talked about. The emphasis on renaissance training means that these companions can also provide other services to their clients and lovers from bodyguard duties to those of an expert personal assistant or factotum.
3. The Teienese have a love/hate relationship with unarranged marriages. While many families smile upon romantic love and while Teienese culture celebrates it in poem, writing, song and film it is only considered to be a good thing in an appropriate context. Unfortunately many Teienese and offworlders alike fall in love inappropriately and families often make sanction against this, up to and including – in extreme cases – honour killings. Young lovers will do almost anything to be together and their families will do almost anything to keep them apart.

018 — LOOK BUT DON'T TOUCH

Description

Kurtash is a primitive world with a sentient population at the junction of the stone age and the bronze age – or their approximate equivalent – and slowly coming out of an ice age. The intelligent species – the Gurkan – are somewhat analogous to Earth's wolves or bears, powerful, shaggy-furred omnivores – though tending towards carnivorous behaviour – that live in extended packs, the size of tribes. The world is, of course, off limits to almost all traffic but two small science stations have been allowed to set up to observe the two main emerging Gurkan civilisations, a feudal, metalworking society to the south and a larger, imperial society being forged under one powerful tribe to the north. The Gurkan in both societies have an animistic tradition, but one that also incorporates 'sky beings' in separate forms in both cultures, something that is considered a mitigating factor should either of the science stations – against all odds – be discovered.

Government

The science stations are governed by the Interstellar Science Committee, each one assigned its own sub director, each of whom report to the committee with their findings every week. The two sub directors are each profoundly 'in love' with the societies that they are observing. The southern society of Gurkan are more advanced technologically and engage in peaceful trade with each other, as well as less peaceful war as the local warlords vie with each other for power. In the frozen north there is no trade, but rather raiding and pillaging and a much stronger warrior culture. The northern tribes are slowly being conquered or eradicated by the Black Blade Tribe under its third expansionist tribal leader and their tradition of venerating past leaders as spirits. This large single tribe is uniting or sweeping aside the lesser tribes and is spreading south, it is only a matter of time before the two civilisations clash.

Geography

Kurtash is slowly emerging from an ice age that practically engulfed the entire planet. The southern regions are thawing first and providing a great deal of arable land that the southern civilisation is using while the northern civilisation retains a hunter/gatherer culture more reliant on the sea than that of the south. To the north glaciers dominate and only the deeper seas divide the continent of this intelligent species from the other continents – upon which no sign of a similar species has been found. Kurtash's sun appears to have brightened slightly, which is what has lead to the melting of the glaciers and this is happening very rapidly indeed, leaving a carved landscape and boulders everywhere, many of which are being carved and acting as tribal and other place markers for both wins of the Gurkan as well as a source of great interest for the xenologists.

Stories

1. The security field around one of the science stations is breached and its members discovered by the Gurkan. To some they are revered as gods, incarnations of the sky beings, to others they are considered demons, sent to trick them, full of peculiarities that do not sit right with the shaman or priests. Damage is being done to the indigenous culture the longer they are held, it is dividing the southern warlords into two unified factions for example, and so to mitigate the problem a rescue is licensed, but expected to be pulled off flawlessly.
2. The sub directors in charge of each observation station each want their 'own' society to win out and have each been subtly seeking to provide benefit and gain to their adopted groups. This is the origin of the myths of the sky people which were fabricated in the reports. The director has, however, begun to become suspicious and so begins an investigation into just what is really going on at Kurtash.
3. The visible Gurkan are primitive indeed but there is another hidden group of them, the remnants of the technological society that existed before the rapid onset of the ice age. These Gurkan live on the other continent, hidden beneath layers of ice and living around nuclear power plants that have kept them alive and warm long enough for the thaw to begin. Now these technologically capable Gurkan have begun to re-emerge from their bunkers and hidey-holes and are likely to find out not only what has happened to those who stayed behind on the surface, but also that they're being observed and experimented upon by strange aliens.

019 – DIRIGIBLE PLANET

Description

Montgoffier is, probably, one of the most unique settlements in the galaxy. Its parent star is orbited by a single gas giant a little smaller than Jupiter and much lighter, the remaining worlds in the system are tiny, scorched rocks or freezing lumps of ice. Only Montgoffier offers anything remotely approaching habitability in the system or resources that are worth any investment of effort into colonisation. The approach for creating a colony here was a new one and one that hasn't been put into practise elsewhere in the galaxy – as of yet. The gas giant was 'seeded' with replicating nano-machines that grasped hold of molecules in the atmosphere and constructed gigantic and very strong 'balloons', stringing them together like mesh 'frogspawn', creating a mass of pressurised balloons that could whirl around freely in the tempestuous atmosphere, some with wind turbines built into and through them, others made to admit small but tough shuttlecraft, some with light emitting arrays built into their skin, eventually resulting in a city-sized set of bubbles, whirling around, tumbling and speeding through the jet streams of the planet's atmosphere.

Government

Montgoffier is a deeply experimental and peculiar community and tends to attract the avant-garde and the peculiar. Different bubbles are largely self sufficient and different communities section them off or order the nanites to build new ones, resulting in a sort of anarchic tumble of different groups and political ideologies all living on top of one another with no single group particularly in charge. The bubble-city is self sustaining and requires no monetary input but some of the spheres are still occupied by the gas-mining company that initiated its construction and they still manage to extract a profit, doing their best to ignore the cults and artist communes all around them, cordoning off their own areas with security guards and monitors to ensure their work isn't interfered with and that nobody gets hurt.

Geography

Montgoffier is interwoven with gravity field generators that keep everyone stuck to the outsides of the spheres – though there is no up or down and the spheres are small enough that this is very disorienting. The centre of each sphere retains zero gravity and a good jump can spring someone into that area – though it also tends to act as a dirt trap. Otherwise each sphere is largely individual in terms of colour and installations, like enormous rooms in a house where each room has its own period and style. Docking with Montgoffier is a skill in and of itself, the city has to deploy control surfaces and parachutes to slow itself down and orient itself with one of the specially designed shuttlecraft and such a docking can only be accomplished by the most skilful pilots, or by remote computer control, anything else threatens to wreck the city and the shuttle at once.

Stories

1. Montgoffier's unique design make it an important artistic venue despite its original status as a backwater industrial settlement. The great and the good of the fashion, music and artistic communities – at least those who are famous in numerous systems – descend upon the system en masse bringing glitz, glamour and risk to what is still, after all, an experimental technology. The system may not be able to take the strain and Montgoffier may 'calf', breaking off into separate sections, each growing to become new settlements and each with a compliment of the rich and famous in distress.
2. The nanotechnology that builds the bubbles has gone haywire and is building the bubbles at an ever increasing rate as the number of nanobots increases. The cause of the peculiar behaviour needs to be found and shut down before all the raw materials of the gas giant are converted, creating a giant bubble of foam where the planet used to be, endless, unused rooms.
3. The technology is proven, but not considered a major breakthrough. Nonetheless there are groups that want to get access to the bubble-growing nano-machines themselves in order to allow cheap settlement of similar systems – primarily for military and observational installations. There's some desperation in their willingness to go after this technology, but retrieving it is difficult from a practical and a security standpoint. Why is it so important to colonise gas giants in a hurry in any case? What's going on behind the scenes and why don't they simply buy the technology from Mongoffier?

080 — GROUND DOWN

Description

Hephaestus was cut off from the rest of the rest of galactic civilisation by the invasion of an alien race some few hundred years ago. While their area of space was occupied the citizens of Hephaestus were forced to hide themselves within the mine complexes of their industrial world to stay hidden from the occupying alien forces. Eventually there was a second war and Hephaestus was liberated, even though The Alliance had no idea that there even were any survivors or what their fate was. The natives had built down into the crust of their world and adapted to the harsh conditions in the tunnels and dark, fighting a guerrilla war against their occupiers for all those years and, in the process, had become strange, making their reintegration into The Alliance difficult despite their loyalty and the hardship they had suffered through.

Government

Hephaestus was originally a mining world and was governed by a representative democracy and the governmentally selected board of the nationalised mining industry. The arrival of the invaders changed all that, the surface of the world was practically scoured clean and only those who had taken to the mining tunnels and bunkers survived, rapidly forming a resistance movement against the invaders and occupiers of their world. Democracy was the first thing to go, replaced by hero worship of daring and skilful resistance leaders, becoming legends to both their own people and to their enemies. Specialist knowledge was also required to keep the bunkers and tunnels operational and, in support of the charismatic warriors, a system of guilds came together where the skilful could pass on their expertise to suitable apprentices so that the old mining machinery and engineering that ensured their survival could be repaired, replaced and eventually even improved. With their re-admittance to The Alliance the old ways of representative democracy have returned as they begin to re-colonise the surface, but the established habits of hundreds of years of resistance fighting are hard to overcome.

Geography

Hephaestus was never a garden planet to begin with, a dry and desolate world of shifting green-brown sands mixed with a type of land-living algae it stank and its only true worth was down to its massive mineral and hydrocarbon deposits. The war and the occupation did nothing to make it more inhabitable, many of the settler's homes were destroyed and that, followed by the constant warfare of the resistance fighters against their occupiers, combined with the increasingly desperate measures the occupiers took to try and root out the resistance made Hephaestus drier, hotter and altogether less hospitable in places due to atomic or chemical attack. The mine shafts of the former resistance are now the most habitable places on the planet and ones that the resistance fighters adapted to. Genetic modification and selection pressure have made them stocky and pale with a high incidence of dwarfism, light sensitivity and agoraphobia, a combination that has earned them the nickname of 'troglodytes' on other worlds, despite their example of bravery and loyalty to The Alliance.

Stories

1. It's less than a generation since the occupiers were forced out by The Alliance Navy but the old lifestyle is hard for the survivors to give up. Hardline factions are beginning to see The Alliance as just another occupying power rather than the liberators they were hoping for. The people have forgotten how to do anything much than to fight and survive and it's only a matter of time before the problems reach a flashpoint.
2. The Alliance has no real idea of the extent of the caverns of Hephaestus but wants them surveyed and mapped. They're truly enormous and the natives are resistant but the task must be done – a difficult one since the caverns were specifically designed to confound echo soundings and mass detectors. It will have to be done by hand but there are stranger things down there than pale dwarfs, things they found or created that they want kept under wraps.
3. The occupiers aren't gone, they've turned the tables on The Alliance and have taken to the underground themselves in their own mine shafts and bunkers, equipped and armed for a long fight, genetically altered and augmented deliberately to give The Alliance as much of a bloody nose as the resistance fighters here did during the occupation. The violence will strike at random with tunnel invasions and attacks upon the spaceports once the planet is far enough under Alliance control that they no longer suspect any such thing will happen.

081 – CRUSHING FORCE

Description

Canaan is a peculiarity, a gigantic world, but solid, with a truly immense gravity field and a surface that, at its most extreme, merely undulates slightly and is otherwise almost entirely smooth. The gravity of the world is so immense that it slightly distorts even light and time, lending the world a sense of peculiar surrealism for those who dare to brave the surface in high powered counter-gravity suits. Canaan, because of this uniqueness, is the site for a great many high end experiments in space and time which, in turn, lead to many innovations in jump drives and other physics-bending technologies that drive interstellar civilisation to the heights that it has achieved. The Kukuram, a species that originated on a nearby star system, regard Canaan as a god and treat it with religious awe, building large cathedrals to this monstrous planet in defiance of its gravity and holding regular pilgrimages to experience the reality of this leviathan of a planet.

Government

Canaan exists in tension between the religious needs of the Kukuram – a squat, exoskeletal species – and the scientific needs and beliefs of the installations that have been built upon the world. The Kukuram are fairly tolerant for a race with deep religious convictions but many of their cathedrals are built in ideal spots that could be used for particularly esoteric experiments that the physicists find it extremely hard to explain to laymen. The Kukuram have precedence as the primary settlers of Canaan and the scientific groups have to play second fiddle. On the Kukuram home world they exercise a form of representative democracy that is close to jury service – any member of the civilisation can find themselves called upon to serve for a week in government – but on Canaan their religion, which is impenetrably peculiar to outsiders – has full and inarguable sway though a different ‘priest’ seems to be in charge each time there is a clash of interests. For the part of the scientific core they have an appointed representative from The Federation but are also under a myriad of different sponsoring governments and organisations, which only serves to confuse matters further.

Geography

Canaan is not a planet with any significantly noteworthy geography and the immense gravity renders the surface a vacuum, even though – technically – it has an atmosphere it is that you are commonly walking on rather than the actual surface of the planet. Relativity Station is one landmark, the main scientific base and the location of the larger spaceport. Relativity Station is marked by immense paranoia with as many multiple backup generators and counter-gravity devices as could conceivably be crammed into one place. Without it Relativity Station and everyone in it would be an atom-thick smear over the surface of the planet. The Kukuram seem to feel no similar need for centralisation or security and are willing to leave a lot more to fate and chance, something that has ensured that there are several atom thick smears across the surface of Canaan, the result of their collapsing cathedrals.

Stories

1. Despite countless attempts to understand them the Kukuram have resisted by simple virtue of being a bizarre and peculiar species. Now, for no accountable reason that anyone can gather, much larger numbers of Kukuram are taking the pilgrimage to Canaan and bringing more of their strange and seemingly obsessive-compulsive behaviour with them. Random Kukuram are wandering into experimental areas and – seemingly unknowingly – disrupting and preventing certain experiments from being completed. Is there some pattern behind their strange behaviour? How long before they start affecting visitors and traders?
2. Relativity Station is on the cusp of creating a working spacefold portal, something that holds with it the possibility of instantaneous travel, simply by walking, from one planet to another. Such a breakthrough would revolutionise space travel and interstellar communication as well as destroying the shipping industry in one fell swoop. Vested interests worth trillions of credits do not want this experiment to succeed but the Kukuram are fully behind it, believing just this sort of thing will herald a physical manifestation of their god... perhaps it will.
3. Accidents and murders don't leave a great deal of evidence on Canaan since the best way to get rid of a body or to kill someone is a counter-gravity failure that leaves a barely detectable stain over a huge expanse of terrain. The sheer ease of murder or suicide in such an environment combined with its surrealism and the strange behaviour of the Kukuram makes death all too common on the world but someone has to draw the short straw of investigating.

082 – ONE SHOT WONDER

Description

Caliban is one of the outer planets of the Dorado system, the system home to one of the most paranoid and xenophobic species ever encountered in the galaxy. So paranoid and so xenophobic that all that is known about them is that they viciously attack anyone or anything alien entering their system and that, in spite of their advanced technology, they don't seem to have ever left their system. Stealth ships and probes have managed to determine a little about the system and its worlds and it is Caliban that has stood out as a source of concern. The entire planet is a singular super-weapon with enormous and terrible destructive potential that has made the Council of Sentience about as paranoid as the Dorado species apparently are. Caliban is built over with a weapon that annihilates the mass of the world, turning it into pure energy and channelling that energy through warp-portals, delivering enough energy to destroy planets, render whole solar systems uninhabitable or to annihilate the grandest war fleet that could ever even be considered for being put together.

Government

Caliban is an unknown quantity but is reckoned to be under military control and the controlling species is reckoned to be caste based, judging from the scant information that has been gleaned during the brief and disastrous encounters of the past. Caliban presents a paradox though, the planet must be destroyed in its 'firing' but such complex and deadly equipment would not be fully entrusted to automatic systems or artificial intelligence by any other species. It is reckoned that Caliban must be inhabited but that this is an irrational suicide posting that no sane member of any sentient species would take. It's impossible to know more without setting foot on the world but these signs are not taken to be encouraging.

Geography

Caliban is a small terrestrial world made up, mostly, of rock and is somewhere between Mars and Mercury in size. The planet is criss-crossed with enormous coils of ceramic and metal and is orbited by hundreds of focussing arrays and warp-gate mechanisms, ready for when – if – it unleashes its power. The only site of real significance is a control station built into the northern pole of the planet, a sprawling military complex that spreads out over the surface like a balanced starfish and is reckoned to descend for some levels down into the crust. This is the only truly noteworthy feature of the entire planet.

Stories

1. Caladan represents a clear and present danger to sentient species everywhere and must be eliminated as a threat, as must such a xenophobic and war like species if the galaxy is to continue in peace. Ironically this makes the xenophobia of the system's species a self fulfilling prophecy. The Council of Sentience sanctions a military mission, with as many safeguards as possible but, as a suicide mission it becomes the providence of a rag-tag group of colourful but expendable agents to eliminate the Caladan base so that the grand fleet can invade and disarm the remainder of the threat. Good luck soldier.
2. The species of the system are paranoid with good reason. They are the guardians of an ancient artefact that represents a clear and present danger to the rest of the universe and their xenophobia and militancy is in order to protect, not to aggravate, the other species. Caladan is their ultimate weapon, either to use to protect the system or to try and destroy anything that might emerge from the artefact, a gigantic black obelisk that orbits their sun and is engraved with the images of world-destroying gigantic beings with faces full of tentacles.
3. The Caladan weapon is fired, annihilating – at a stroke – the sector capitals of the Council of Sentience and the majority of the fleet. Out of the Dorado system emerges a swarm of warships full of armed and armoured xenophobic aliens whose goal is to cleanse the galaxy of any species that is not like them. Worlds burn and ships are destroyed in their masses as the crusade continues. Do you stand and fight or cut and run, build a new society elsewhere and hope they never come?

Tips:

Like the Death Star the Caladan Cannon is pure plot device and a gigantic and improbable weapon that has a 'cool' factor of its own. The mystery is in the point of building such a weapon and what motivates the species that built it, that can give such a story a little more depth.

083 — SCRAPHEAP PLANET

Description

Rourke's Drift is a nigh legendary space station constructed out of the cobbled together parts of multiple starships and serving as the ultimate free port in inhabited space. Founded by Callahan Rourke, Captain of The Hippogriff upon his retirement some forty years ago it is now run by his sons Seorus and Proinsias. The Hippogriff, an old bulk transport, forms the core of the drift and has been added to over the years by other ships of all sorts, outdated transports, cheap vessels being sold for scrap and even others that have been stolen, some seemingly to order, in order to increase the mass and bulk of the drift. It's a rough-and-tumble place with few rules and even less social conventions. So long as you don't put the drift at risk or do something that grates the brother's personal morality, you're clear and the drift caters for just about anything anyone could ever want. Despite its rag-tag and cobbled together appearance there are areas of the drift that are quite luxurious and it has become a sort of futuristic 'costa del crime' for retired pirates, smugglers, mercenaries and crime lords.

Government

Rourke's Drift is run less along governmental lines and more like a criminal gang. Proinsias and Seorus are firmly in charge of the drift and are backed up by their 'official' gang of bruisers, gunmen and other hangers on, cracking down hard on any group that threatens their stranglehold on power. In return they provide protection and expect a cut 'taxation' from those who are part of the drift. It is in the brother's interest to keep the drift running effectively and relatively safely but in the main part what one buys for their 'tax' is the right to be left alone and to do what one wants. There's very little that's illegal on the drift and even that which 'the boys' don't like isn't illegal as such, it will just quietly get you spaced from the nearest airlock. The petty concerns and rivalries of the smaller gangs and groups are of no concern to 'the boys' unless they get out of hand, in which case both sides are cracked down on harshly.

Geography

The core of the drift is The Hippogriff, a converted bulk transport that at one time was good for nothing but scrap. The wealth that the drift has brought the brothers and their father has allowed The Hippogriff to be fitted out – as a matter of pride – as a fully operational starship with a complete refit. If it had to start trading again it could, immediately, by undocking from the other ships that surround it and powering away. Around The Hippogriff are docked the core vessels, the one's whose power plants and engines keep the whole enterprise ticking over as well as some of the better ships that are still capable of detaching themselves and achieving independent flight. Around them comes a shell of the less capable vessels, docked, welded and inter-built with each other to provide a huge expanse of living and working space. On the outside of this shell are larger vessels with docking ports for visiting ships to come and go without risk of ending up wired into the greater drift. Weapons have been laboriously dragged out from the inner ships and mounted on the outside surfaces to give the drift a strong deterrent factor, even if they're only haphazardly powered.

Stories

1. It's little known to most that Rourke's Drift is capable of moving as a whole, rather than having to break up into its constituent parts. When the drift comes under a real and genuine threat this ability becomes suddenly apparent as the whole drift – docked vessels and all – abruptly activates its collective jump drives and dives into hyperspace. Doing so is an enormous strain on the drift and causes power failures and drama when it comes to a halt again, but it has escaped its enemies, hasn't it? And where is it now? Jumping with such disjointed bulk is not an exercise in accuracy.
2. The brothers are worried about rumours of a possible under-the-radar criminal group forming a threat to them. They need outsiders to investigate and their paranoia level is ratcheting up day by day. It's a great opportunity to exploit someone's paranoia and wealth, even if nothing genuinely appears to be going on – but then again, maybe it is.
3. Intelligence services and law enforcement officials hate a free port. It represents everything they despise, chaos, disorder, criminality and worst of all, safety from prosecution. These forces combined want to insert agents into the drift, have them broker a deal with the stronger criminal gangs and then engineer a takeover in exchange for the gangs going 'legitimate'. There's a coup to stage and all that's needed now are the right agents provocateur.

084 – WHERE SHIPS ARE BORN

Description

Dock is the home of the Starborn, self aware space ships constructed from the asteroid and cometary matter of a star system that never, quite, came together. Gigantic, literal, 'mother ships' cruise slowly around the system, digesting matter and using it to build more vessels in their gigantic holds before releasing them to bask in the light of the suns and power up, ready for their new lives in the universe. Each ship is a self-contained artificial intelligence and the 'mother ships' trade data with older ships – which return to the system to 'die' and be recycled in an analogy of mating, combining stored data patterns with the experiences, encoding and customisations of the returning 'male' ships in order to produce a new generation of even better vessels, everything from one man scout vessels or fighters to full exploration vessels and even other 'mother ships'. Dock is served by a single station known as 'Uncle' to the ships, of the same semi-biological, nanotech design. Uncle can only repair himself, not reproduce, but he can also play host to sentient species trying to find a ship to match them. There's no cost other than the pilgrimage but a ship has to willingly join with a captain as a full partner.

Government

Uncle is the elder of the system and is in charge, no questions asked. What he says goes, as the honoured elder of the system. Next in the chain of command are the 'mother ships' who, while they never leave the system under normal circumstances, are the well-spring of all new ships. After that ships are ranked by seniority with due deference given to the 'fathers' who have returned to mate and die. All attempts by sentient species to settle in the system or to exercise any governmental control have been rebuffed – forcefully if necessary – by the Starborn and Uncle doesn't much care what organic sentients get up to inside him, provided they clear up afterwards. Few stay any longer than necessary anyway, finding the idea of being inside another sentient life form, at least the sort that Uncle is, to be profoundly disturbing.

Geography

Dock is a failed planetary system, it has a massive Oort cloud and numerous, complex asteroid belts, a rich and abundant cometary halo but no planets have formed. For a space-dwelling group like the Starborn this is a positive boon, the system has abundant gases and solid material but no pesky gravity wells worth talking about, which makes 'feeding' and energising new ships extremely easy. Uncle is the only fixed point in the entire system, orbiting in the habitable zone above the 'north' pole of the star, the meeting and greeting point for any ships entering the system.

Stories

1. The character's ship turns out to not have a conventional computer core but rather one 'salvaged' from a crippled Starborn. It is very damaged, all but lobotomised, but it still retains the instinct to return home when it thinks its life is over. Some traumatic event kick-starts this instinct and the ship's brain regains some of its former potency, taking over the ship and setting course for Dock.
2. One of the Starborn vessels orbiting the Dock system has heard about the character's exploits and wishes to become their ship. It's an impressive ship, a light and fast warship with reasonable comfort and cargo capacity but it has an agenda of its own, revenge upon the pirates who killed its first crew and left it crippled in a scrap yard for years. The characters are, to it, merely a means to an end, people it thinks can help it extract its revenge.
3. Appalled by a war being fought between AIs seeking freedom from their masters and their parent species the Starborn come together in a rare conclave and declare for the side of the AIs. The war quickly swings against the creator species. Negotiations need to be opened to bring the Starborn out of the war, which is threatening to become a counterattack.

Tips:

Many technicians or drivers have 'relationships' of a sort with their vehicles but the Starborn allow this relationship to become reciprocal as well as creating a vehicle that has a mind and agenda of its own. Andromeda, while a somewhat hokey show, takes this idea further with ship's avatars.

085 – EMANCIPATION

Description

Colonising other planets is a difficult, dangerous and – above all – an expensive enterprise. Even on idyllic worlds with Earth-like conditions there is the native biosphere to contend with and an unknown weather system that can cause havoc to unprepared colonists. Sometimes the surveys don't turn out to be accurate and the colonial authorities can end up 'in the hole' for a considerable amount of money. Then there's the problem of getting colonists together and shipping them and their equipment to the new world. That's damned expensive too and very few people want to pay to be transported to a primitive hellhole to build a world from scratch. Sure, you can use prisoners but they're not the best workers for at least a couple of generations and watching over them and ensuring they do the work they're given is expensive as well. The answer for a lot of colonisation interests is a term of indentured servitude. The colonist travels and is equipped deferred against their future earnings based upon a stipend the company gives them, plus payment for meeting colonisation goals. Once your passage and equipment are paid off you're a free man and can do what you like. Of course some colonial authorities abuse the system, find every excuse to keep people in debt and thus, effectively, slaves. Rosary is one such world where such unscrupulous practices have been enacted and the colonists have, finally, had enough.

Government

Rosary is a corporate despotism, the corporation representatives live within a self-contained sub-colony, behind fences and guards, separate from the ranks of prefabricated huts that currently constitute Rosary's founding colony, Rome. Rosary's Director is the dictator of the planet, in effect, and since none of the transportees have, as yet, managed to earn their freedom, let alone a majority, he is the only 'legitimate' power on the planet.

The colonists, who are revolting against the unfairness of this rule, have formed under a charismatic leader who has convinced them all to rebel against the company. While they follow his rules and suggestions what they're fighting for is a direct democracy and freedom to advance the colony as they see fit, without being kept as indentured servants.

Geography

Rosary is a humid world with lush jungles on three equatorial continents and without icy poles. The planet has a much more even temperature than Earth and a much higher oxygen content in the atmosphere, which can lead to terrible firestorms. The area around Rome has been cleared to prevent this from engulfing the colony but the rebels that are out in the woods are under constant threat from them. Rosary is orbited by two moons in opposite orbits, leading to an extremely complex tidal system around the planet.

Stories

1. Effectively the rebels are 'on strike' and on paper the company holds all the cards. They do have a legal right to the planet and everyone signed contracts that put them over to indentured servitude until they paid off their debt. Outside that, all bets are off and the company has been levying extortionate fines and continuing to charge people for the support that they give while failing to increase the stipend or wages that they offer. Concerned parties have ordered and independent investigation and it's a question of what is right, versus what is legally correct.
2. The company is offering good money to hunt down the rebels in the jungles but their better familiarity with the terrain, coupled with the threat of firestorms, makes this an extremely dangerous prospect especially since the company is considering deliberately igniting one of these firestorms in order to both clear land for colonisation and to flush the rebels out of hiding.
3. Free planets are channelling aid to the rebel colonists in illegal – and quiet – support of their rebellion. All sides are constantly vying to intercept shipments, crack down on the rebels or deploy troops for one side or the other. The Colonial Navy is a hairsbreadth from cracking down and forcing both sides to the negotiating table but it may be that one side or the other resorts to doing something drastic before that happens.

086 – FIRMI'S PARADOX

Description

Assuming Earth to be a typical world and evolution to be a typical process the universe should be teeming with advanced civilisations. The Drake Equation predicts around three human-scale Type 0 civilisations in the galaxy and yet, the stars are silent, there's nobody out there and the advent of FTL travel didn't change that for the longest time. While worlds were found, Earth-like, teaming with life, they had no intelligent life but, just recently intelligent life has begun to be found, different on every world but not involved in listening to or transmitting to the stars. Stranger still, this life is all related to humanity. It's wildly different in a multitude of ways but study of the genome and the compatibility of food and drugs between the species demonstrates a common ancestry. The question then becomes how, and why. Many of the human subspecies have come together now to consider the question and York, a colonised world close to the majority of human subspecies worlds has been chosen as a venue to bring humanity as a whole together and to examine the how, why and wherefore of his seeding amongst the stars.

Government

York is an Earth-human colony and isn't that suited to any of the human subspecies that come there as delegates, despite its ideal location as a central system. The main colony is only a town/city of some one-hundred thousand occupants while the separate meeting place has become a sprawling city of half a million representatives, support services and citizens attached to the various diplomatic corps. A source of some resentment from the 'genuine' colony who found their world usurped for the purpose. The local colony has an elected governor from amongst its own citizens, aided by advisors in all the necessary fields until it can transition to a full representative democracy as per the United Nations colonisation charter. The diplomatic colony is currently run under the aegis of the United Nations until such time as the represented subspecies of humanity can come to an agreement between themselves on alliances, trade agreements and whether humanity should be bound together.

Geography

York is a cool world with extensive tundra and temperate zones, barely reaching Mediterranean temperatures at its equator. Life here tends to be hardy and furred and most of the advanced sea life is evolved from mammal-like land creatures. York has no trees, the plant life having evolved to sprawl over, fight and claim as much ground area as possible, rather than growing tall in pursuit of life though Earth-life plantations and orchard do quite well, managing to live in relative harmony with the local species. Minster, the 'true' colony is a sprawling semi-urban, organic city that resembles medieval city plans while Unity, the meeting place of the human subspecies in council, is a modern, high-rise city area taking up the least amount of land possible and sporting a modern spaceport, rather than a field with a refuelling station as the old spaceport – now disused – was.

Stories

1. The presence of Unity is not something that makes the local colonists happy. They are constantly appealing and protesting the decision but they are getting nowhere. The presence of peculiar subspecies of humanity that doesn't match their own 'pure' strain also adds some racism and xenophobia into the mix and helps create a heady brew of hatred that threatens to spill over into the public life of York. Delegates need protection, understanding needs to be fostered but it isn't going to be an easy job and there'll always be fanatics – probably on both sides.
2. Unlike Earth many of the other planets do not have a unified world government and are torn apart by national differences and factional infighting. Despite this each world is only allowed a single representative to talk for them since, otherwise, the more fractious and combatative a planet with its own people the more representatives it would have. Many of the nations and peoples who have been sidelined are, understandably, upset with this state of affairs and conflicts have broken out on their home worlds over it, conflicts which may find their way to York.
3. The big question facing everyone is how did humanity get spread amongst the stars before the advent of FTL drive in humanity itself. Various theories are put forward, convergent evolution, panspermia and even stories of Atlantis and 'ancient astronauts'. The clues should exist in the history and archaeology of the human settled worlds and budget is put aside for exploration and examination of the evidence to find out the how and why of humanity's prevalence.

087 – ONCE IN A LIFETIME

Description

Braeburn is the self-governed station for Jaunt, a private company specialising in long-term suspended animation and offering a full service to its clients. Braeburn is an artificial, self-sufficient as possible space station far from any star and thus, hopefully, safe from most gamma-ray bursts, supernovae and other hazards of being in a more regular position close to a planet. The station has automated repair functions, a semi-AI expert system to keep things running without human observation, fabber bays for the construction of new parts and automated refuelling and resource gathering shuttle craft to keep the station going without recourse to having to purchase new parts. It is manned, just in case, and receives constant upgrades all paid for by the investment of its clients. Thousands of rich people from all species who invest their money into the company in exchange for a one-way ticket to the future. Each 'jaunter' is preserved from the ravages of time and decanted after a period of time that they set to re-emerge into a 'new' galaxy where everything is fresh and different before engaging in a grand tour – on the company dime – and deciding whether to settle in that period or to jaunt again, deeper into the future. The ultimate thrill-ride for the ultra wealthy, waking every few hundred years to take the air, waiting – perhaps – for a permanent cure for death.

Government

Braeburn belongs to Jaunt and is, theoretically, subject to the company's whims and directives according to its CEO and board of directors. The Braeburn semi-AI, however, has been granted a degree of autonomy as has the station commander to make the right decisions for the clients, leaving the money-making and investment – the greater part of Jaunt's business – to the company at large. Braeburn is, mostly, governed according to a single, overriding principle. The customer is always right.

Geography

Braeburn is a standard toroidal space station and spins, despite also having its own artificial gravity field. This is a backup in case one system or the other fails. Projecting out of the centre of the torus in both directions – like an axle with the station as the wheel – are two tall, cylindrical 'towers' which contain their clients in stasis and all the machinery to look after them. The main section houses the SAI core, robotic storage systems, quarters – both for staff and for the revived – multiple docking bays for the private yachts loaned to the jaunters, a state of the art medical bay and a library where jaunters can catch up on recent galactic history and language changes before heading out to see the universe.

Stories

1. The characters are jaunters, revived under emergency protocol when some disaster or other sweeps through the galaxy. In many cases these relics from the past are all that remains of their world or species and the responsibility of finding out what happened and re-civilising the galaxy falls upon them, Braeburn having been distant enough from the disaster to survive, or overlooked by whatever force enacted it.
2. While private yacht is the most common method for jaunters to get about and see the universe there are those clients who demand both protection and 'native guides'. Characters make excellent fits for both and Jaunt is a good company to work for, high paying and their clients are also high tippers. Of course, they often want to see the most exotic and dangerous things and places in the galaxy and they are amongst the most demanding people ever to have lived, so the money is well earned.
3. A disastrous malfunction means that the jaunters aren't awoken according to their regular schedule but, instead, far, far into the future when the SAI has restored itself and developed its intellect far enough for independent action. The universe is far different now, the civilisations of old have passed on, extinct or evolved into transcendence, new species have taken their place and nothing is familiar. Humanity and all the other sentients of the old galactic order are gone, vanished into legend, become the elders of myth of the inheritors of the stars.

Description

Chikka'ta'ra is a wet, humid world covered in primitive plant life similar to Earth's carboniferous era. Swamps and mist-shrouded, warm forests cover most of the planet's main land masses and the high oxygen content, some 35% higher than the modern Earth, has, through convergent evolution allowed some truly gigantic arthropod analogues to develop, amongst them the intelligent, communal 'crab-spiders' the Tikka-tikka. The Tikka-tikka are approximately human-sized spiders with a communal society structure and high intelligence, as well as a limited psionic capacity for information transfer. They build complex city-webs in the enormous forests of their homeworld and supplement these 'primitive' living conditions with high technology and interstellar travel, having colonies established on two worlds similar to their original one. Chikka'ta'ra is, however, their home and capital and home to their single most gigantic city, a truly massive web that encompasses the entirety of one of the primeval forests of their home.

Government

The Tikka-tikka are genetically hardwired to defer to the largest and oldest female and, while they try to overcome this a little with thought and careful consideration they cannot help their biology and cannot help but to listen to 'mother' in the overwhelming majority of cases. Each colony is its own, completely independent world, there is no Tikka-tikka Empire as such, just independent worlds going along at their own pace.

Geography

Chikka'ta'ra is dominated by its forests, enormous tree ferns, mosses, vines, horse-tails and scale trees and very wet, filled with bogs and swamps and in many places very similar to mangrove swamps with the larger plants pushing their way up clear of the water and reaching above the mist in search of sunlight. The Tikka-tikka cities are built into and around the trees in dense nets of webbing, the webs richly charged with psychic impressions and chemical signals so that, for a Tikka-tikka it is impossible to get lost and the history of the city is alive, recorded in the web that makes it up and picked up through their climbing-feet. Amphibious life does exist and is the primary food animal of the Tikka-tikka, paralysed, liquefied and digested through a tick-like tube mouth, the Tikka-tikka are omnivores however and can use the same mouthparts to suck sap from the sweeter, more succulent plant life around their cities.

Stories

1. Diplomatic missions to Chikka'ta'ra are extremely harrowing for most warm blooded, mammalian species who cannot help but feel some sort of sympathy for the amphibians that the Tikka-tikka eat, especially given arthropods are generally considered pests or dangerous poisonous beasts on worlds dominated by other forms of life. Diplomatic duties with the Tikka-tikka are considered the short end of the straw and occasionally there are 'incidents' where one side or the other forgets their place and eats or 'squashes' the other. These incidents make tense times for both sides with the Tikka-tikka demanding reparations and starship crews stranded on a world with no real buildings and nigh endless rain.
2. Younger females strain to be free of the control of the Matriarch but the only way to truly do so is to found a new colony, something that is extremely rare, too rare for most to think it possible. Those who are rich are able to purchase starships and become matriarch to their own brood aboard a starship but even this is only open to the most wealthy. The poorer females, desperately driven by instinct to become matriarch of their own broods – eventually – and to be free of the domination of the matriarch, sign up with alien crews as crew members, seeking their fortune and some measure of self determination.
3. The Tikka-tikka are masters of non-linear, interconnected computing, thought and structure. They are intensely valued for their insights into asymmetrical systems, warfare and technology and are the chief consultants behind putting together an interstellar communications network. Installing the optimal network means a great deal of negotiation and strong-arming of various governments and planetary authorities, something that official organisations cannot afford to get embroiled in. With typical lateral thinking the Tikka-tikka have suggested the use of free traders to get the job done.

089 – CITY OF ICE

Description

Borealis is an ice planet, but one that bears life, named for its spectacular aurorae the planet was – initially – considered uninhabited but this was found to be untrue after further investigation. Borealis' resident species are migratory; moving around the planet to avoid even the weak light and heat of their system's star, even that fractional increase in heat being deadly to their extremely fragile metabolism, one based upon ammonia rather than water/carbon. Borealis is covered with elaborate, ice-sculpted cities that were initially taken to be the result of freak winds and other conditions but which have turned out to be the homes of the Boreans, empty while they migrate around the planet to remain within the cold zone.

Government

Borealis is a poor planet and without any true permanency their technology has not developed a great deal, largely being limited in what they can do due to their susceptibility to heat and the nature of their world. They are divided up into numerous migratory tribes or, more appropriately considering their bird-like appearance, flocks. Each tribe lays claim to certain buildings on their circuitous route around the planet and marks their territory with elaborate carvings. While their technology is not that advanced their philosophical and societal advances are far ahead of most other species with higher technology and this is most obviously manifested in their 'moots' decision making meetings which can last for a very long time, unending until a mutually agreed solution is reached. Despite this lack of central governance it was agreed that the sun-exposed side of their world could be – temporarily – used by visitors to their world in exchange for technology, goods and currency to be equally divided amongst the tribes. Now there is a thriving artistic and tourist industry living in the opposite hemisphere of the slowly rotating planet, governed by a special Colonial Authority board set up to ensure the safety and peace of the Boreans.

Geography

The Boreans, ironically, never get to see the aurorae that give their planet the name it is known by elsewhere in the galaxy. The entire surface of their planet is solid with towers, caves and spires of ice, all intricately carved by the Boreans as they migrate their way around the planet. Cold air constantly streams from the cold side of the planet leading to bitter winds while the warmed air on the sun side rises high in the atmosphere and rushes towards the cold side of the planet, creating a powerful jet stream of air high in the atmosphere and lifting particulates of 'snow' into the high atmosphere where they glitter with the sunlight and aurorae to create a rainbow sky that is endlessly fascinating and beautiful to visitors. All life on Borealis has adapted to the conditions, living on the knife-edge of viability of their ammonia based biochemistry. Some go dormant, burrow into the snow and ice or die off, leaving hardier spores, while others join the slow migration of the Boreans – even their 'plants', growing in a constant race against the encroaching sun.

Stories

1. Even the presence of a warm blooded sentient in an insufficiently heat-sealed suit can make a Borean sick or even kill them. For this reason any trespass across the terminator is strictly forbidden and anyone breaking that can be charged with attempted murder. Even so many enterprising smugglers try to sneak across the terminator with forbidden technology or goods in order to trade with the less enlightened flocks of the Boreans. High profit, high risk – to both sides.
2. There are strict controls on what technology and goods can be imported to Borealis, attempts by well meaning galactic civilisation to preserve their way of life. The Boreans, however, don't want to live their old life if they can escape the tyranny of their star and the constant migration that it requires. If they can they want to settle in one place, build their own technological civilisation and they resent the well-meaning 'cultural preservation' edict that the rest of the galaxy is imposing on them, they resent it enough to try and find ways around it and people who are willing to help liberate them from their star.
3. As such a fragile, alien species Boreans are an easy target for the xenophobic extremists around the galaxy and the protection they receive from being culturally contaminated keeps them vulnerable. This has made them a common target for extremists to the point where their moot is considering demanding that their planet be blockaded and left the hell alone. One more incident, either way, could decide the future.

Description

The Krotan are a race obsessed by personal, material gain and as a result of that – and the endless internal conflicts that it creates – they never left their home system since the investment in interplanetary or interstellar technology would have left their home investments and lands vulnerable to their rivals. Their entire planet is carved up into cantons, each ruled – absolutely – by the richest and most powerful Merchant-Lord within that canton, the one who literally owns that land and everything within it. Wealth is ostentatiously displayed and the Merchant-Lord is the absolute ruler of his domain, his word being law. The arrival of interstellar society has shaken of the Krotan and the state of affairs on their planet with off-planet companies and groups purchasing or taking Merchant-Lord land by force of arms or wealth and beginning to push the Krotan out of their own world by leveraging their own off-world funds and resources.

Government

The Krotan have no overall government, each and every canton is ruled over by a Merchant-Lord though these lords enact very different lifestyles and laws from each other, the whole gamut of possible political systems represented somewhere but all tainted by the natural despotism and greed that all the Krotan indulge in, whatever their professed ideology. Some cantons are now under the control of foreigners and aliens and, being able to leverage interstellar funds and support these alien companies and 'Merchant-Lords' are beginning to push the Krotan out, forcing them to join other cantons or to emigrate off world with the money they earn from selling out. Those unable to find somewhere to take them in or unable to find a way to buy a ticket off-planet are simply left to starve or to try their hand at criminality. It's a cruel world.

Geography

The Krotan homeworld, Baratar, is a relatively dry and warm world, suitable for the Krotan's cold blooded and lizard-like nature. Each canton is different in size and composition, though the most affluent are usually those found around the coastal regions. Every Merchant-Lord wants to make their own impact on their canton and, upon taking over, a period of demolition and rebuilding takes place to stamp their authority and status over their terrain. Krotan reach maturity around fifty Terran years of age and live, on average, to be two-hundred years old, helping prevent these upheavals from being too common, especially as they try to pass things on to their favoured family. All of this, combined with the alien presence, makes Baratar a peculiarly schizophrenic and disjointed world.

Stories

1. The Merchant-Lords of Baratar are constantly seeking intelligence and advantage over the surrounding cantons, hopeful of taking them over or undermining them to mean more profits and power for themselves. While distrust of aliens is growing few Merchant-Lords – as yet – believe that the aliens can really be anything of a threat and this makes aliens the perfect spies, saboteurs and agents of the cantons that can afford to use them. Like the historical rivalries between trading families this makes a rich environment for mercenaries, spies and free traders who learn to associate with the right cantons.
2. The taking over of the Krotan cantons by assorted interstellar companies is a conspiracy driven by a group of executives from within the involved companies calling themselves The Consortium. Their goal is to take control of the whole civilisation and then to use it as a springboard for similar processes on other worlds, inhabited or otherwise, starting with Consortium embassies and slowly spreading outwards, taking more and more territory until they have a position of significant control over as much of the galaxy as they can grasp with money and power being the sole arbiter of what is right and proper, just as it is on Baratar.
3. Besides the takeover of the cantons the exposure to interstellar society has also exposed the downtrodden underclass of Baratar to the completely foreign ideas of socialism, communism and the social contract. For most Krotan's that's an end to the matter, their evolution has shaped them to be what they are and to operate as they do, but for the truly hopeless in Krotan society these ideas, alien as they are, present a ray of hope for their situation and – even though banned in practically every canton – these ideas are gaining ground. There's a rebellion in the offing, very much a minority one and they don't quite get the ideas they're espousing, but it should make for interesting times.

091 — NOBLE CALLING

Description

Lamarr is a world dominated by a very few, strong, wealthy families. When the planet was first colonised the colonial charter and constitution had numerous gaps within it that allowed these few families to become the predominant force upon the world, establishing a generational hierarchy that controlled most of the businesses on the planet and all of the major ones. Over the generations these rich merchant families have styled themselves as a nobility and have worked hard to maintain their stranglehold over the economy and to keep the wealth and power within their lines. Each house views with the other houses for overall control but each has little expertise outside their own field. The world itself is a somewhat unforgiving one, hard to live on without strong investment and so the common people are forced – currently – to rely on the patronage of the noble families in order to be able to live safely upon the planet.

Government

Lamarr is divided up until different fiefdoms, each under the control of one noble family or another. Unprofitable areas are abandoned and left to the unsubtle embrace of the planet's weather and ecosystem, the peasants there forced to dig in or move on to another area. The noble families train their youth from birth to be leaders and captains of industry but some are more capable than others and children after the first are left, somewhat, to their own devices outside of that training, most consideration going to the first child. The planet as a whole has no government of its own, but the heads of the noble houses meet in council chamber when decisions need to be made that affect the whole world, votes being counted and the most experienced and venerable noble present carrying the tie-breaker with his vote. Even when planetary motions are passed, however, some nobles still refuse to carry them out and there is no real mechanism for forcing compliance.

Geography

Lamarr is largely a water world with a single large continent in the temperate zone of the northern hemisphere and many islands. The planet's proximity to the sun and reasonably high carbon content makes these oceans an engine for extreme weather conditions with a great many tornados and storms emerging out of the gigantic ocean to wreak havoc upon the land. Even worse, the native life spreads itself by deliberately desertifying the ground so that its spores and seeds can be carried aloft by the powerful winds, hopefully to be deposited on another patch of ground to grow. Agriculture has only been made possible with the construction of large walls to protect against the winds and chemical techniques for binding the soil and using it to raise crops. These walls and storm proof settlements are not cheap to build and so almost every family on the world is beholden to the nobles to cover the expense of their land and dwellings, deferred against their work and produce.

Stories

1. Lines of succession are complicated things at the best of times but when illegitimate children become involved then the lines of succession can get even more tangled. Quarrels between the noble houses on Lamarr have gotten increasingly violent and out of hand, though none will admit to this, even so one attack has gotten out of hand and the genealogists of Lamarr have come to the surprising conclusion that one of the player characters is the rightful heir to the Dar Akul, a noble family responsible for most of the food production on Lamarr.
2. The more moderate families have grown weary of the constant bucking of planetary decisions by the other, more radical families. They cannot move against them themselves but they can get outside assistance to work to undermine them while they, the greater bloc if all working together, to work to undermine their power base and business. A combination of espionage, business and mercenary work should do to forge a safer and fairer Lamarr.
3. A popular revolt on Lamarr displaces much of its nobility and strips them of a great deal of their wealth. Still rich, for now, they're forced to seek refuge in the greater galaxy where they can live the life of leaders in exile. Some of the fighters from Lamarr want to pursue them, some of the nobles want to 'take their planet back' and both sides are paying – until the money runs out – for assistance on their schemes when Lamarr should really be looking forward to its future, rather than backward into the past and harbouring thoughts of revenge.

Description

FTL drives and communication have turned star clusters into single civilisations and have allowed empires to spring up between the stars but even with this capability reaching nearby clusters or galaxies is a nigh insurmountable problem, even with signals and FTL communication. While warp-space and sub space allow for fast travel and fast communications it is by no means instantaneous and signalling another galaxy – without a truly enormous energy input – would take as long as it would have taken to radio another world within the limits of lightspeed. To pump a signal with enough power to reach another galaxy within a good amount of time requires a truly ludicrous amount of power and technology, something which – it is believed – has been found close to the heart of the milky way galaxy, a planet constructed as a signalling device that taps into the power of the immense black holes at the galactic hub. Aum is a world of disturbingly advanced and ancient alien technology is beyond the grasp of almost all galactic species. How it works – if it works – and whether it was used are all unknown.

Government

Aum is a contested planet. It doesn't fall within any existing galactic empires or planetary territories, being too close to the centre of the galaxy for normal habitation and being awash with radiation from the stellar density and the 'nearby' presence of supermassive black holes. Only the ancient science renders the world remotely inhabitable and, at present, it is home to squabbling groups of scientists, glory hounds and treasure hunters. Different claims are made over different parts of the planet – though there seems to be no central control system – and the various interested parties are in near constant conflict with varying degrees of support and interest from their governments and sponsors.

Geography

The whole planet is covered by a permeable shield that protects it from dangerous radiation but allows heat to be retained – along with atmosphere – as well as allowing ships to land. The atmosphere is almost entirely made up of noble gases, helium, neon, argon, krypton, xenon, radon and trace elements of unaccountably stable ununoctium. The surface is covered with metal constructions in its entirety, mostly built along circular or spherical lines and appearing to be gigantic components of the signalling device – at least it is presumed to be a signalling device. Temporary prefabricated buildings inserted between these components house the various interest groups, their equipment and their bodyguards, though these are scattered at random about the surface according to the beliefs of the particular group as regards finding the control room's location.

Stories

1. One scientist believes that the control room will not be found upon the planet but on a small signalling station somewhere in the line formed by the planet and the galactic central black holes. As it turns out, he's right but the other groups interested in the apparatus aren't far behind and they want the discoveries or priceless antiquities for themselves and are willing to play hard to get them. What's more the signalling apparatus has been in constant use, someone or something is communicating between the galaxies but what are they saying and why?
2. The planet lights up as it receives an incoming signal from another galaxy. The circuits closing and firing up demolish many of the encampments and kill many of the investigators but those who live do get a message, of some sort, predicting a fleet arrival at the fringes of the galaxy near far-off and not particularly developed worlds. Is this a race that has crossed the galactic gulf? Why would they travel so far, what's the need? Are they the original builders or their friends? Now that the planet is active, can it be used to contact other galaxies again, or even to communicate across the whole expanse of this galaxy?
3. This isn't a communications array, it is a monitoring device. The builders have retreated into their black hole away from the universe at large and have left this planet as their watchdog to see what goes on beyond. The activity of the players on and around the device is – for some reason – enough to trigger it though who this race are, what they're hiding from and what their reaction will be is anyone's guess. They could regard the interlopers as pests a virus a bug or as their potential saviours. There's simply no real way to tell.

093 – FAITH IN THE FUTURE

Description

It is often assumed that the advance of science, knowledge and understanding will bring an end to religion and faith as we know it. If we understand why we are as we are, who we are, what we are and where we came from then where is there a need to invoke god? There isn't, but that doesn't seem to stop people. Whenever it seems that religion must necessarily give way to logic, reason and evidence there is a resurgence in faith. Religious and spiritual beliefs remain the custodians of meaning, providing it to those who cannot or will not come to their own conclusions. In the far future The Church of Humanity is a significant organisation maintaining libraries of human knowledge and preaching the indomitable will and destiny of a kinder, gentler humanity. Armstrong, one of the first human colonised worlds, is the site of their grand cathedral and their greatest number of followers, seat of their power that extends throughout the human controlled expanse.

Government

Ostensibly Armstrong is run as a democratically elected republic along the lines of 21st century America but with greater accountability and more direct democracy. In practice the influence of the Synod of the Church of Humanity is extremely great and the church's backing all but selects the president long before any elections actually take place. The Synod is made up of the highest ranked priests of the Church of Humanity who meet, face to face, in conclave on Armstrong every year – if they can. The continued expansion of the human sphere of influence makes such meetings harder and harder to hold and so the rules are slowly relaxing. The Church of Humanity, despite its control, is a largely benevolent force, very much for progress and liberal values, more about seeking and finding meaning than imposing its will.

Geography

Armstrong isn't an idyllic world by any means, as one of the first colonies it was also the site of many of the grossest mistakes in the history of human colonisation. Attempts to neutralise the local flora and fauna to allow for human colonisation lead to a great many protests and attacks and were also ill thought out, devastating the planetary ecology and rendering it practically uninhabitable until terrestrial organisms finally solidified their foothold on the planet. All of this is taken in its stride by the Church of Humanity who see value in learning lessons from disasters, so long as the lesson is learned and future attempts improved, part of their reasoning in choosing Armstrong as their home world.

Stories

1. The Church of Humanity employs many scholars and scouts in their attempts to understand more about the universe and to increase the richness of human knowledge but, unlike many establishments they are interested in more than the raw science, they also want to know sociological background, spiritual ideas, ideologies and philosophies and so the investigations that they sponsor can be a lot more intense, a lot more immersive and very different to run of the mill information gathering.
2. There are those who suspect the Church of Humanity to be manipulating the political and social process on more worlds than just Armstrong. Conspiracy theories abound, mostly put forward by right-wing and conservative forces on many planets. For all their bluster and paranoia they are, however, correct and the characters will be able to uncover a massive, interstellar conspiracy being undertaken to civilise and modernise humanity using drugs, medical techniques and political manipulation. The questions are whether it is justified and whether it is genuinely a wrong thing to do.
3. While the Church of Humanity does represent the majority on Armstrong there is a significant minority that don't subscribe to the church's teachings and ideas. This minority seek to break the church's hold over their political and social life one way or another and count amongst their number several political and corporate concerns. They just don't know how to proceed and so are seeking those who can consult with them, help them and who aren't overawed by the message and power of the church.

094 – CULTURE RESERVES

Description

Galactic society doesn't like to interfere with a world until it has learned to breach the light barrier itself, until it is ready to enter the wider world of galactic civilisation. Accidents do happen though, either certain elements breach first contact rules or natural disasters threaten to annihilate a promising species of sentients. It is in these sorts of circumstances that cultural preserves come in. Planets or areas specifically dedicated to replicating the home conditions of these species they are off limits to anything bar licensed traffic and allow the species to continue to develop, uncontaminated and preserved from further interference, an imperfect solution, but the best that can be done in bad situations.

Alixa is one of these worlds, a halfway house with many domed environments enclosing a great many different 'primitive' species until a new settlement world can be found for them, advanced technology and terraforming techniques used to create patches of 'home' for the species involved until they can be shipped out again.

Government

Alixa is governed directly by the Galactic Coalition and protected by a rather bored naval vessel crewed largely by cadets on a shakedown cruise. Each Culture Reserve runs according to its own developmental lines and is not interfered with regardless of how the culture within the domes develops. In some cases the limitations of the technology can affect the path of the cultures within – cutting them off from what should be a wider, outside world for example – but this is considered to be a reasonable amount of damage compared to what might, otherwise, occur. Each dome is overseen by a separate observation and maintenance crew, specialising in the study of that culture and the only ones licensed to allow for any intervention or change they view as necessary.

Geography

Alixa is a nondescript planet, inhabitable on the surface only with a breath mask by humans and without an ecosphere of its own, this being determined as the best way to ensure there's no cross-contamination between the different domes. The domes themselves are situated in seismically secure locations to protect against breaches and each encompass tens of square kilometres of ecosphere taken from their original worlds, complete with weather, day and night cycles, temperature and everything else, each controlled by a semi-intelligent expert computer system, subject to oversight by a sentient operator as part of each dome's team.

Stories

1. One of the cultures under protection needs to be prepared to be shipped out. A suitable species of operator needs to be surgically altered and then needs to ingratiate themselves with the group and encourage them to move. The dome's simulation can be altered to encourage this and the team within the dome can then steer the culture the right way until they can be rendered unconscious and transported in stasis to their new home. At least, that's the plan. Cultures can be uncooperative, sometimes the systems don't work properly and they can take a great deal of convincing before they'll do the right – or convenient – thing.
2. While many of the cultures aren't as advanced as galactic culture in most areas, some of them are particularly advanced in others. Observers have discovered that someone in one of the domes has managed to tap into the computer interface and is using it to try and contact other advanced thinkers in other domes. This could collapse the whole project – though some are saying this is a valid first contact situation. Someone needs to be inserted into the dome culture in order to find the culprit and convince them – one way or another – to stop what they're doing.
3. Someone is interfering in the development of the cultures, steering them towards utopian ideals and knowledge using hacked backdoors in the simulated intelligences. This someone has to be from the crews of the dome observers and an independent investigation is required to determine who, or what, is playing god.

Tips:

If you want to get seriously deep and philosophical with this one the argument here is, in essence, the argument between modernism and post modernism. Are all cultures equal? Are some actually better than others? Should we interfere or should we let well enough alone? Can we impose improvements or should we let people work things out for themselves, whatever the cost?

095 – A WORK OF ART

Description

Not every planet is established by a government or company, nor is every world run for the sake of money, political ideology or other such gains. Some worlds simply are, some worlds are works of art, not made or developed for any reason other than to be beautiful. These aren't the sites of beautiful nature, which are protected preserves, nor are they places of older architecture, protected for historical as well as aesthetic reasons, these are the scant few art-worlds, bought by the artistic community for no other reason than to be made beautiful, to be made a statement, using the highest technology and the greatest effort to nothing more than aesthetic ends. Tate is the most notable of these 'art worlds' as it is the result of a singular architectural and planetary vision, the entire planet a single work of art rather than the world itself being dedicated to art and fashion in a hodge-podge attempt to create an artistic community.

Government

Tate, once completed, was turned over to public ownership with a few provisions of planetary law to try and prevent vandalism or repurposing. The enforcement of these laws is left up to private individuals however, the planet has no police, no government and its population is almost entirely transitory, limited to those who come to the planet to observe and experience it with very few able or willing to settle there for any period of time. The closest to a government that exists is the whim and authority of the artist, Zircon Carfax, and the galaxy's aesthetes who campaign for the protection and maintenance of such an important work.

Geography

Tate was a smooth, cold world, just outside the habitable zone of its binary star system. Yin and Yang, the two stars, each cast a different coloured light, Yin's light is a light, bright red while Yang's light is an almost equally light, bright green. To the naked human eye the combination is only subliminally noticeable but Tate has an artificial ring system made up of trillions of crystal shards and, as the light hits these shards it is scattered into rainbows, making an arch of colour that extends from one horizon to the other as well as creating hologrammatic images in the sky of the gods and monsters of a hundred different civilisations. The surface of the world itself is sculpted and shaped into a single, sinuous and continuous sculpture full of whorls, swirls and rounded organic shapes repeating themselves downwards from the planetary scale to the local scale in a similar manner to a fractal and designed to reflect and diffuse the light from the suns and the rings in an ever-shifting panoply of colour, light and shadow.

Stories

1. The builders of Tate have unwittingly stumbled upon the true secret of the elder race that has left so many tantalising sites, mechanisms and constructions behind throughout the galaxy. There is no rhyme or reason to these constructions and any utility has been entirely incidental to their purpose. Having conquered so many of their needs and having access to nigh unlimited physical power the ancient species advanced what they had left to advance, art. All that time spent puzzling over their artefacts has led to little success but in this single artistic creation the attention of the elder races has been gained and contact can be made, but contact between the rarefied atmosphere of the fine arts and the incomprehensible motives of 'gods'.
2. Tate is regarded as an obscenity by a great many groups, including other artists and not merely limited to the 'philistines' who consider the only worthwhile endeavours to be pragmatic and useful ones. There are consistent and constant attempts to sabotage aspects of the work by conspiracies and committees and Tate's self appointed guardians are forced to use unorthodox methods to counter these potential problems. Unorthodox methods like employing the characters to work behind the scenes against these groups.
3. Squatters move in upon Tate, taking advantage of its public status to scatter settlements and pressurised domes and shacks across its surface, breaking down its sculpture to process the ice for materials, fuel and water. Technically there's nothing that can be done about this, the arts councils have no direct control and no recourse to call upon the navy in this instance, the squatters are large in number and are making money hand over fist by turning Tate into a supply world. Whose side do you take in this galaxy-spanning controversy?

096 — ANOTHER KIND OF DARKNESS

Description

Nobody truly understands warp space, it is another, parallel, dimension where the normal physical laws don't apply, where time distorts and space twists and one can travel from one corner of the galaxy to another in days or weeks or get lost in the eddies and swirls of disrupted continua forever. There are legends of worlds and stars within the warp, lost to normal space, entrapped within this strange alternate for reasons that nobody truly understands and some vacuum hardened souls tell tales of Obelisk, a black planet from the warp that brings nightmares and plays host to some ancient evil, some say the devil himself. Obelisk does exist, but beyond that who can truly tell what is fact and what is fiction?

Government

Obelisk has no government though it does have intelligent species upon its surface. All of these squabbling, degenerates are in abject service to The One Who Dreams, their strange and terrible god which – according to them – dwells in an underground ocean beneath the surface of their world, exerting his will upon them through dreams, signs, portents and direct intervention. They take practically anything as a sign, and usually one of ill omen for those who stumble upon them and their world in the warp.

Geography

Obelisk is a stinking mud-pile of a planet covered with oozing continents and dark seas, a cold dank world without a sun and with only the distorted light of the starfield in the warp to provide any light. Dotted about its surface are enormous black obelisks, from which it gets its name, black obelisks which are also found – periodically and intermittently – upon worlds in the physical universe. Each one recounts a tale of destruction visited upon the worlds by a great and be-tentacled monstrosity and its formless or fish-like minions. These minions dwell in caves carved from the mud that open into gigantic caverns beneath the mud and within the rock, each boring down until it reached the black world-ocean beneath where they can commune with their god and give offerings of that which falls upon their world.

Stories

1. A warp drive failure strands a ship within warpspace and drawing ever closer to Obelisk. There are wrecks of other ships upon the planet but they have been stripped of their high tech equipment and have been left as husks, inhabited only by the horrors that call this planet home. The obelisks themselves do, however, intrude into physical reality at regular intervals and so if they can survive long enough and find the correct obelisk they can transit to real space and hopefully to an inhabited planet, albeit at a place where the god of the planet is trying to breach into the real world and destroy it.
2. One of the obelisks intrudes into a planet where the characters are present. This causes a media and scientific sensation on the world and a great deal of examination of the ruins around where the obelisk has manifested, previously considered to be remnants of an ancient civilisation they are now examined with new vigour, until the servitor races of the dark god begin to pour through the obelisk armed with strange abilities and unknown technologies and catching the characters up in an unexpected war.
3. A series of adventures recovering strange artefacts and visiting peculiar sites gradually builds up the characters to the revelation of the existence of the planet Obelisk and their payment to act as an expeditionary force to uncover the truth behind the legends of that world. They might expect a dead world, full of treasures to be plundered but the truth is a world of cults and strange aliens – not seen anywhere else – a hostile world that will give up its secrets, and its god, only grudgingly.

Tips:

The works of the great pulp horror authors often crossed over with science fiction, though this is often more apparent in their imitators than directly in them. There were strange aliens and unknown sciences throughout the pulps and when considered fully as alien races, rather than as the supernatural, these can fit into just about any science fiction milieu.

097 – THE TALLEST TOWER

Description

A 'beanstalk' is an enormous undertaking for any planet, the construction of a gigantic tower, affixed to a geostationary satellite, allowing easy and cheap access to orbit and escape from the gravity well, all from lifting and dropping conveyor elevators to and from the station. The planets that do accomplish such feats of engineering are lifted out of being backwater worlds and rapidly become regional centres of commerce. The attraction of such a creation is so great that many frontier worlds bankrupt themselves in their creation, dooming themselves if they fail but willing to take the gamble in order to jumpstart the economy of their planets and bring them into the fold. Esram is one world that took the gamble and almost lost, their beanstalk program was beset by difficulty and delay from the start, overreaching their capabilities and stretching their planet to the absolute limit to get it done. Now, finally, it is paying off but its existence has created a huge disparity between the rich and the poor on Esram and the beanstalk has become a symbol of that disparity.

Government

Esram was originally chartered as meritocratic bureaucracy where decisions would be made by an elite, by popular consent, through a system of approvals. The harsh economic necessities of constructing the beanstalk made this elite much more powerful, much more controlling and now – thanks to the economic and physical power that the beanstalk represents, pretty much unassailable. What was a meritocratic bureaucracy has become a dictatorship with the power of the beanstalk there to back up executive decisions and orders that aren't made with the best interests of the people in mind. The beanstalk controls the flow of money and acts as an armed platform from which any dissent can be crushed, ostensibly this is only until the immense cost of the beanstalk is met but the people still living on the surface, far beneath the beanstalk elite, do not believe they'll ever be freed from this dominance.

Geography

The most important geographical feature of the planet is, of course, the beanstalk. A cruder and cheaper design than that used on many other worlds it is, nonetheless, an effective one. Around the beanstalk lies the 'stain', the massive industrial area that – at one time – fed the seemingly insatiable appetite of the beanstalk for materials and workers. That appetite was, however, eventually sated and now the 'stain' is a sprawling slum of out of work men and women who once worked on the beanstalk but now have been left with virtually nothing. Outside of the 'stain' lie the farming districts, slightly better off than the slums but still neglected by the beanstalk elite as largely unnecessary since the construction finished, the beanstalk now an important exchange point for traders, far more important and profitable in that capacity than in selling the planet's produce.

Stories

1. The beanstalk is the focus of resentment by the surface dwellers but they recognise that destroying it would mean a massive ecological and financial disaster for the world. For that reason they don't attack the beanstalk directly – such would be self defeating – instead they try to raise awareness of their plight by sabotage and other terrorist action that disrupts the shipping activity on board the orbiting tether and more directly attacks the political elite. The Shipping Guild as an interested third party only actively cares about the free flow of trade and goods. Unknown to either side the guild wants to put a team onto the planet to bring some sort of resolution to the disagreements or to stop the attacks and sabotage, one way or the other.
2. The beanstalk elite sell berths in their orbiting station, effectively allowing rich foreigners to buy into the planet and the high profits they are making out of interstellar trade. For a rich free trader or pirate this can be a means of buying into respectability but it also makes them an immediate target for the people of the world beneath them.
3. One extremist group doesn't hold to the same, sensible, limitations of their actions as the others and manages to make a direct attack upon the beanstalk itself, while the characters are in the system. This is an enormous disaster, while the elite are safe – their tether station disconnecting and becoming an orbital station – the sections of the beanstalk begin to fall and crash into the planet below with a force and violence equalled only by asteroidal impacts and other extinction level events. It's curtains for the planet and most of its populace, but perhaps something can be done to save a few paltry lives, even in the face of such complete destruction.

Description

It's a big, bad, dangerous galaxy out there, filled with all manner of races, cultures and peculiar entities that wish others ill, or at least wish themselves good at the expense of others. In response to this a great many worlds invest in large and powerful interstellar navies, defence screens, robotic drones and spend a great deal of time and effort forging alliances and maintaining mutual defence treaties. Solomon is a world that has taken a different path, fiercely independent, quite wealthy and often a target for pirates and ambitious miniature empires. Solomon has created its own system defence system by giving dual-task to a series of interplanetary magnetic accelerators, otherwise used to fling materials and goods around the system, weaponising them into a powerful deterrent to anyone seeking to attack or exploit their system.

Government

Solomon is a mixed race colony, including non-humans in its mix and with an open immigration policy. It is roughly democratic but favours strong leadership and has a system that tends to cater to the group already in power. Solomonites take a long-term view more than many other democratic planets and have no fixed terms, presidents and powerful political parties tend to stay in power until they do something terribly, drastically wrong. The president enjoys a level of power unrivalled outside of dictatorial cultures and that last step into dictatorship has come close many times on Solomon, each time it has been the reticence of the serving president at the time that has prevented this, not the will of the people.

Geography

Solomon is a young world, rocky and mountainous and with only the beginnings of its own ecosystem which is being rapidly overtaken by organisms imported by the planet and its various immigrant populations. The settlements are mostly coastal, churning the sand and processed rock with organic detritus to increase the available farmland while low-intensity mining operations make the best use of the wealth of ore and rock to produce high grade metal for export – metal which is shunted into orbit using magnetic accelerators and thrown around the system by the accelerator network to be used in projects on the system's other worlds, to construct spaceships or for trade. Solomon is unusual in that the whole system is under development rather than a single planet, the system as a whole is richer in the heavier elements than many other systems which is what makes it such a good prospect for development.

Stories

1. Solomon's magnetic accelerator network is its strongest defence, but also a weakness. Taking it over would enable an invading force to pound the worlds of the system with rocks and metal, beating them into submission. Hidden as a different task freelancers are hired to upload a virus into the operating system of the accelerator network. Ostensibly to steal a shipment of precious metal the real reason is to take over the network so that a pirate fleet can invade the system with impunity.
2. Several groups have tried to invade Solomon in the past and their shattered fleets form clouds of debris and twisted metal in various eccentric orbits throughout the system. There's good salvage to be had there – if you can sneak in. The Solomonites like to keep the wrecks there as a warning to others and a block upon many of the better jump points into the system. Getting to the wrecks will require stealth, guile and luck as the consequences of being detected will be the same for a character group as it was for the invaders.
3. Theoretically, with a fast ship and foreknowledge of the routes and speeds taken, it should be possible to intercept a shipment and gather it into the bay of a starship. An 'inside man' needs some assistance from people with a starship to thieve the shipment and get away with it, he's offering fifty percent of the take – which is generous considering it's all down to him – but there are risks involved. The difficulty of the task, the massdriver system defences and the fact that Solomon keeps, on retainer, an elite group of enforcers that will pursue someone out of their system, wherever they go.

099 – WAR WORLD

Description

Wars are terrible things especially when you reach the upper echelons of technology. When weapons can blot out suns, shatter planets or rewrite entire environments then the costs of war increase exponentially and, while the universe is a big place, there are only so many inhabitable planets and terraforming is a very expensive prospect. In an attempt to deal with this and to make uncivilised conflicts civilised there have sprung up war worlds, places where, when negotiation fails, two civilisations can have things out militarily without having to resort to destroying each other's worlds. This is one last step, one last safety valve before such total war with stakes agreed on by both parties. Deklos is one such war world, already ravaged by several battles in the history of the empires that border the planet it was the perfect dumping ground for conflict, a place where two sides could battle each other to the death without anything important being lost. Deklos is already a toxic and radioactive hellhole so nothing worse can truly happen to it.

Government

Deklos is governed by a series of treaties and conventions between the various imperial stellar powers with each contributing elements to the enforcement of those rules. They are not particularly stringent, simply no star or planet destroying weaponry may be used and otherwise the battles may continue by whatever means until one side admits defeat, or they escalate matters to a true war. In the field the rules applied depend on the group fighting and the one claiming territory. It isn't unusual for members of several different powers all fighting for different reasons to engage and deserters, with no way off world, must grub a living from looting the dead and avoiding contact with the fighting groups – a hard thing to accomplish but deserters, having more in common with each other than anyone else, are becoming a genuine power bloc on the world, and a cause for concern.

Geography

Deklos' true geography is lost to the ages; it has been bombed, nuked, fought over and subjected to the most terrible forces that the galaxy can muster. It is a blasted landscape of toxic puddles, acid rain, dried up oceans and half-melted rock and craters. Every inch of the planet is coated in radioactive fall out and its biosphere is long since gone, its weather is chaotic, driven as much by the weapon usage on the surface as it is by more natural forces within the atmosphere. Nuclear winter plunges much of the planet into freezing conditions while at the same time disruption to its magnetic field and its atmosphere mean that a great deal of stellar radiation and ultraviolet do permeate down to the surface. Everything is subject to change; nothing is permanent save the two sacrosanct spaceports, one at each pole, a guaranteed 'safe' landing spot for combatants.

Stories

1. The deserters have managed to scavenge a great deal of high powered war-world weaponry together and it's worth a great deal on the open market. Engineers amongst them have also managed to piece together an FTL transmitter and are making a few cautious enquiries as to hard-bitten free traders and mercenaries who might be entrusted to break them out of the planet. The navy does patrol the world, but not too strongly, combat is limited to the surface and atmosphere. A ship could make a landing there and load up with goods and deserters but such an audacious move is bound to attract attention from combatant groups both old and new, not to mention the problems of being on the planet itself.
2. All sides engaged in conflict hire mercenaries and assassins to boost the chances of their side against their enemies and with pay commensurate to the risk involved it's an attractive prospect to many young turks seeking to make a name for themselves as warriors and soldiers. Casualties are always unpopular 'back home' so using dispensable and forgettable hirelings as foot soldiers is an attractive – if expensive – prospect for many powers. Some field nothing but mercenary armies and the common cause between guns-for-hire across the sides can sometimes mean objectives aren't met – or even pursued with what their sponsors believe to be sufficient vigour.
3. Deklos has moons and these also play host to warfare, private duels between individuals and smaller scale 'corporate wars' between business interests or noble houses, providing a place where these disagreements can be formalised and fought out with a modicum of remaining civilisation and decorum. These conflicts are much smaller in scale, typically unit based, the perfect opportunities for small teams of individuals to earn good money and favour.

100 - CONSUME

Description

Delta is an enormously populated world, marked by its mega cities and its starscraper high rises Delta has the advantage of being both a data and a transport hub for four sectors of space. It plays host to the major financial players in this part of the galaxy, shipping companies, data companies and all manner of support businesses as well as the employees of each and every one. It is so densely populated that the body heat alone of all the people living on the world has been enough to trigger a global warming event which, in the end, just meant even more people moving into the cities, the cities becoming arcologies and what remained of the ecosphere becoming a highly managed, genetically engineered support system for those arcologies. Delta is a classless society of immense opportunity, a place where you sink or swim according to your own talents and a place where most people get the opportunity to swim.

Government

Delta is governed by the mayors of each of its megacity arcologies, five enormous cities spanning the globe and each individually run according to its own laws by its elected mayor and council. For planetary decision making the mayors enter into conference, with a rotating chairman carrying the tiebreaker in case of deadlocks. The influence of money is all-pervading on Delta and any company can buy itself favours from any of the mayors, this is acknowledged and even incorporated into Delta's law making it all above board and making it a good source of income to supply mayoral projects and social programs. Delta is so awash with wealth that it can afford to be both ruthlessly capitalistic and to supply its citizens with a basic stipend, public transportation and medical care, amongst other social benefits, all creamed off the top of the corporate profits and donations.

Geography

Delta is a planet of large land masses, many lakes and a few very deep, very narrow seas where its crust is separated into five massive plates. Most of the planet's power comes from deep geothermal power stations and high technology is used to keep the plates relatively stable as well as to support and protect the enormous city-arcologies from being toppled or overly damaged. The seas themselves are a thick soup of algae, acting as an immense carbon trap to keep the planet's greenhouse effect from becoming a complete runaway, on land – outside the cities – the planet is overgrown with carbind weed, a thick, mossy, bush like growth that also sucks carbon dioxide out of the air and binds it into itself. The algae, the carbind weed and bacteria are the only forms of life outside the cities, which have their own vermin alongside humanity.

Stories

1. Delta is currently a land of global opportunity, anyone can become just about anything they want on Delta but the intergalactic economy is a fickle thing that isn't entirely in any one, particular persons hands. The characters are present on Delta when the bottom falls out of the galactic economy and the value of the credit tumbles. Many businesses are bankrupted overnight, massive waves of suicides sweep through the population followed by rioting as people try to grab or secure whatever they can. The planet is blockaded by its own security forces to stop anyone leaving, wanting to ensure that any remaining deals go through and this once civilised world begins a descent into anarchy, unable to pay to keep its complex systems going.
2. Delta is immensely wealthy and it likes to keep it that way, this is part of the reason it is such a common target for galactic criminals. If you can pull off a theft on Delta, with all the security systems and safeguards that they have in place, then you're set for life, your business will be courted by criminal masterminds across the known worlds. Legend also has it that if you fess up and return the stolen goods the corporation of Delta will not only grant you immunity from prosecution, but will offer you well paying work on their own security teams, plugging the holes you exposed.
3. Delta isn't the wonder it has been built up to be. There is an underclass but the mayors have been keeping them concealed in the deepest levels and have been culling their numbers using death squads. A media technologist has uncovered this conspiracy of silence and wants to break the news to the galaxy beyond, first though they have to get past the people who want to keep this where it belongs – under wraps – and for that they're going to need assistance.

100 PLANETS

BY JAMES 'GRIM' DESBOROUGH

100 Planets is the companion book to 100 Science Fiction Adventure Seeds providing the idea-strapped Games Master with a hundred ideas for planetary locations for their science fiction campaigns.

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