diaspora

hard science-fiction
role-playing with fate

b.murray
c.w.marshall
t.dyke
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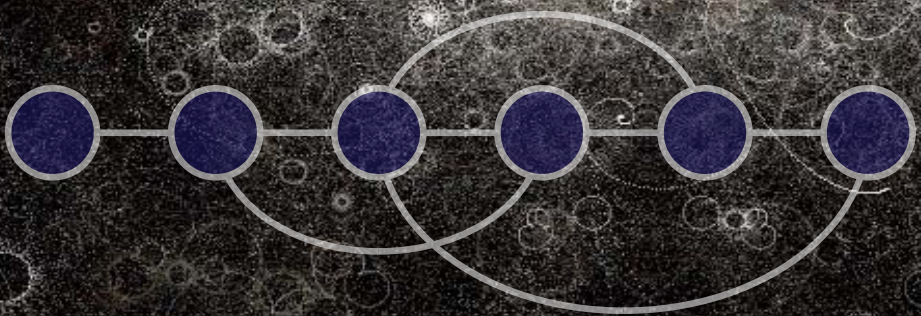

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VSCA Publishing
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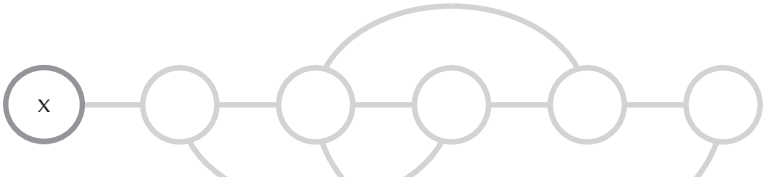

x

o. introduction

Lawrence was a farmer, but his pigs weren't pigs, and his cows weren't cows. The grass wasn't green and the sky wasn't blue and the delicate flowers that grew along the low stone walls between plots weren't yellow. But the blood that flowed through Lawrence's veins was red, just like any man's, and it flowed inexorably, day after day after piercing blue-white day. The colours were all pretty much pale blue-white, or would be if he lifted his goggles to look into the actinic flare of his daylit farm. Eyes are fragile things, though, and they burn in this light.

Built into a hillside, his home was mostly underground, carved from stabilized earth under meters of the world to protect him from the harsh radiation of this very foreign sun. In this warm shade the colours were rich red-browns and golds, wood grains and metals and paper and fur. In his home Lawrence could remove his goggles and his protective suit (all six layers) with its coolant pump and heat radiation grill and ultraviolet protection and catheter.

For thirty-two years, years about as long as any year you have known, Lawrence had worked his plot. Every day after the sun set, he would throw off the furs and call the lights on, then clothe himself for work. He would check his schedule, take what tools would be needed from the locker, and climb the stairs to the door of his home. At the door, he would take a deep breath full of earthy smells, mostly himself, and then crank open the door in three strong turns. And the Diocese sky would greet him and his pulse would double, even now, thirty-two years after first seeing it. The sky was why he never sought re-assignment, no matter how hard it was here or how sick he got or how much he hated the sun.

The sky at Diocese was unobstructed. Trees (not trees) grew no taller than a meter and the forces that throw up mountains on other worlds died off thousands of millions of years ago on this world. And so the mountains (now plains) had long since eroded into the seas. And so the sky was unobstructed.

The sky at Diocese was full. Here suns were packed a thousand times more densely than in your home and so the awesome sight that you see when you find a cloudless night in a lightless place, the sight that makes your breath catch and makes you re-consider your ideas about gods and miracles—that sight would bore Lawrence.

And that's why Lawrence was still here. The days could kill, so he farmed at night. And the night re-affirmed his faith in god—some god, somewhere. Nothing so beautiful, he reasoned, could exist without the purpose of being seen, and nothing can have a purpose without a mind to intend. Lawrence worshipped that mind, and his worship consisted of standing at the doorway an hour after sunfall and letting his pulse race as he stared skyward.

❦

Once there was a great idea. Once we played *Traveller*. We played it day and night. When we weren't playing it we were rolling up characters for it or generating subsectors or designing spaceships. Who needed to level up, when you were happy your character had survived the generation process?

Fast forward twenty-five years, and we find ourselves with new games in our hands. Scary games that challenge our ideas about the relationship between "referee" and "player," and that bandied around narrative authority. Games like *Universalis*, *Burning Wheel*, *Dogs in the Vineyard*, and others. We were hesitant, then intrigued, and then hooked. Not all the way mind you, but even experiments like *Universalis* found a niche in our gaming. You see, we were used to using everything as a tool to make our own games. *Traveller* taught us to do that and we would not be untaught.

So, when we found ourselves playing *Spirit of the Century* and marvelling at how incredibly stories flowed out of it and how passionately everyone played, we wanted to take a piece of that for ourselves. In fact, for the first time, everyone at the table wanted to be the referee; that hadn't happened before, and we found ourselves passing around the mantle on a week-by-week basis at one point. *Spirit of the Century* was another tool for our kit, but it had something that other games had lacked. And, as always, we just wanted to boogie through space.

However, *Traveller* itself is a heavily published license. At least half a dozen variants exist, not counting board games and fan productions, and after much effort and false starts and legal ponderings, we decided that we wanted to build something new. Something that wasn't our old favourite, but which would push the same buttons as did the games we played in the 1980s. Some guys in a ship, visiting new planets, shooting at stuff. Or getting embroiled in a civil war. Or being caught on a low-tech planet looking to recharge an energy rifle. Or finding the archaeological remains of sentient lizardmen.

And thus, *Diaspora*.

While not all of us had the same goals to begin with, we hammered out some

objectives. First would be that the game retain as much of our previous tinkering as possible because it was really good tinkering. Second would be that the game would aim for the feel of hard science-fiction. Harder than *Traveller*, than *Star Wars*, than *Battlestar Galactica*. No quasi-magical anti-gravity. No inertialess drives. No Faster-Than-Light (FTL) travel.

Okay, we need FTL. But we wanted the feel of something harder, where one would always be aware of the physical constraints that space travel would impose, while still offering a game that allows stories to be told on the scale of multiple worlds, in a reasonable human time frame. It doesn't matter if it's realistic. We want many worlds and we don't want to deal with long term relativistic travel to get them. That's another game. But we wanted a different understanding of how a futuristic technology could work, that wasn't clearly adapted from whatever movies we happened to like.

In doing this, we gained something.

We gained the realization that the game we were writing was really ours. The space combat system, for example, truly sings in play. Its core is *FATE*, but the simplified vector combat is both straightforward and satisfying. And it's ours. And now, it can be yours.

Diaspora is written deliberately to be a tool kit. We provide a setting, but we encourage you not to use it. We want you to build your own. Instead, we provide a set of axioms about the universe and make some hand-wavey statements about humanity's place in it. And then we give you the tools.

We give you tools to create a cluster of worlds in which to adventure. We give you ways to generate and describe the worlds and their connections as a full-table exercise rather than the more typical GM-only mini-game. We give you tools to describe characters that are organic to the cluster you just created and have intrinsic connections to the characters the other players will create. We give you an arsenal of weapons from which to choose, and, for those inclined, we give you a system to generate more.

We give you transcendent technology and clearly label it scary and dangerous and a sure route to disaster. After all, from the outside, for those cultures that are still struggling with atomic power and orbital lasers, any form of transcendence looks like catastrophe. A hundred billion souls disappear and leave a fragmentary ringworld and a tiny population of ageless, beautiful, and uncommunicative farmers. Or a planet filled with grey goo. The fringe of technology is a nightmare for intrepid heroes.

And intrepid heroes you will be. There is plenty to explore and much about the past that is unexplained. But not only will you explore it, you will decide what you find. It is not our place to write your story: we will stop at giving you some ideas and the tools to proceed into space on your own and find what you will.

You will be the diaspora.

acknowledgements

The cover and various internal imagery is derived from Jared Tarbell's bubble chamber simulation using the programming language, Processing.

Spirit of the Century (Evil Hat, 2006) and the *FATE* system by Fred Hicks, Leonard Balsera, and Rob Donoghue pointed us in all sorts of great new game-mechanical directions.

Traveller (GDW, 1977) gave us RPG characters who could start in middle age and barely change no matter how long you played them, and gave us a populated science fiction universe that showed how variable technologies could exist alongside one another. So thanks to Mark W. Miller, Frank Chadwick, John Harshman, Loren Wiseman, Darryl Hany, and all the others who stuffed precious hours into those little black books.

Vincent Baker, author of *Dogs in the Vineyard*, gave us "Say yes or roll the dice," drawing on Keith Johnstone's improvisation methods.

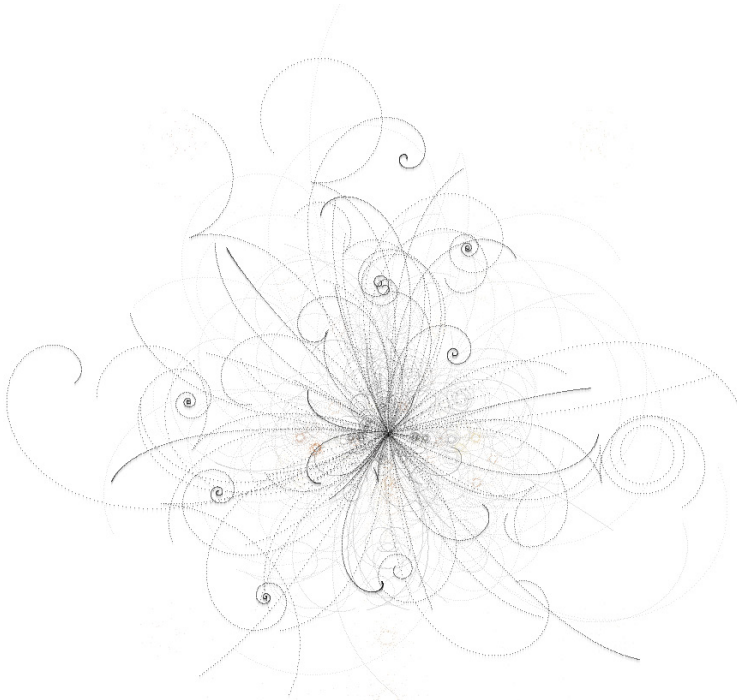
Certain ideas can be traced to the fiction of Vernor Vinge, Jack McDevitt, David Drake, Larry Niven, Robert A. Heinlein, Iain M. Banks, and of course many, many others, that have given us *Have Spacesuit—Will Travel*, the Rebel Blockade Runner, Asteroids, Known Space, the Nostromo, "Darmok," *Cowboy Bebop*, and the sincere desire to go to "the crappy planet where I'm a hero."

Thanks to Karen Dyke who, despite having no interest in role-playing games, edited our work with startling enthusiasm. Everywhere the grammar and consistency are correct, we owe Karen. Everywhere it is wrong, she probably caught it twice and we still didn't get it right.

We also must thank wives, lovers, friends and family (as applicable), for their tolerance (and even support) of our weakness for evenings away from home, claiming with single malt scotch on our breath that we were working hard on a new book. We totally were.

And thanks, of course, to JB Bell, a latecomer to our table with great ideas who embraced what we were doing and where we were going.

This "corrected version" also owes a debt to our fans, who responded enthusiastically to our call for errata. In particular we want to call out to Simon Ward and Mark Delsing, who are nit-pickers extraordinaire: we really appreciate their helf.



1. playing with fate

Diaspora is a role-playing game. As such, it is a mechanism for collaborative storytelling, with a focus on hard(ish) science-fiction adventure. You build a universe, you build characters, and then you play with them in it. A game might last two or three sessions, or it might last more than twenty. Then you start over again. Fun is had, stories are told, lives are improved.

Underpinning the game, though, is a task resolution system, described in this chapter. Its mechanics are part of all that follows.

All conflicts in *Diaspora* are resolved using the *FATE* mechanics as elaborated in *Spirit of the Century* and available from the system reference document for that game, available on the Internet. All you need to know, however, will be here in this book.

You roll your set of four Fudge dice, which yields a result between -4 and +4, you add an appropriate Skill, and then you compare against some difficulty level, which might be someone else's roll or might be a level imposed by the referee. As a matter of taste, static tests (those rolled against a fixed difficulty) are not as fun as opposed tests and you should always consider carefully whether or not a roll is interesting especially in these cases. If the story is going to stall when the characters can't find a parking space, then

Real Time

Campaign: a series of stories and not necessarily with an end in sight.

Story: a single storyline planned by the referee.

Session: one sitting's play.

Scene: all of the play that takes place in a single setting—a fight, an argument, or maybe a scientific survey.

Round: one trip around the table in which everyone gets a chance to roll.

finding a parking space should just be granted, and not subject to a die roll.

Diaspora is also a set of mini-games. Each of these use Fudge dice, Aspects, and other elements from the *FATE* system but they may have other distinctions. These mini-games are:

- Cluster creation (chapter 2)
- Character creation (chapter 3)
- Personal combat (chapter 5)
- Space combat (chapter 6)
- Social combat (chapter 7)
- Platoon combat (chapter 8)

Each mini-game has a Sequence of events that is followed by all players to resolve portions of the greater conflict being played out. Each uses only Fudge dice for randomization and each involves interaction with other players.

These games can be played on their own: an evening of ship battles can be fun, and for an RPG campaign we strongly suggest the first session consist of the cluster and character generation process. While this can be done by just the referee, there are great rewards in making this a collaborative process.

players get the power

We said "it's a role-playing game" like that tells you all you need to know about role-playing games, and that's both true and false. It's true because we're not going to tell you how to run things at your table, but it's false because there are some things you may think are true about role-playing games that are not true in *Diaspora*. Specifically, player authority.

Now, this isn't a game in which the players drive the action without the input from a Game Master, Story Teller, or referee. There is indeed someone in charge who establishes the setting and mediates the rules. But many of the ways players can use their characters' Skills give the player more power over narration than you might be comfortable with. Try to let go.

Seriously, it works. It's fun. And, if you are a skeptical referee reading now, let me try to sell it a little: it makes your work easier.

The guiding principle is "say yes or roll the dice." What that means is, when a player has an idea about what he wants to happen, it can often be the case that what he wants doesn't mesh with what the referee wants. In this game, we want you to quash that instinct to tell the player, "no." Instead, look at the idea, ignore your plans, and either say, "yes" or set a difficulty and make them roll to see what happens.

Say yes or roll the dice.

Alternatives to "yes" exist that are not "no." One popular one is, "yes, but…." In this case the referee agrees but adds a complication. If everyone is grinning and nodding, the referee has succeeded. Another is, "yes, and…." Here the referee agrees and escalates the player's idea even further—the player wanted to hunt down some food and came back with food and a new friend from the wilderness.

As you read on you will see that players sometimes get to say something that's true without much mediation from the referee. Let the players run with it and see where it goes. Having that power is part of what's fun about this system for the players, and we hope you'll find that it's at least as much fun for the referee.

We also talk frequently about "the table" and many things happen in the context of the table's authority. The table is, simply, the sum of the players, the referee included, with all opinions weighed equally. The table is the consensus, and it is more important than any single player's authority, including the referee's. Much of the game is explicitly under the power of the table, but it is true whether a game says so or not, that all of the game ultimately lies within the context of table authority. Referees and players alike should seek consensus.

The table is the consensus.

So when we say "at our table" we are not talking about rules or even house rules per se, but rather interpretations arrived at consensually. We leave a lot here to your table and encourage you to seek genuine consensus when elaborating your clusters, your systems, and even your characters. To this end we grant equal weight (though your table may choose otherwise) to all players throughout the first session. Cluster, system, and character creation are all egalitarian pursuits.

We're also, then, tacitly acknowledging that every table is distinct. We wrote this game and play tested it, so it reflects the interests of our table. Your table, however, will necessarily create a different game. That's not just okay with us, or even expected, but rather that's awesome. And so, in realizing this, we have decided to stay as far away from territory that belongs to your table as possible. *Diaspora* recognizes that almost everything past the mechanical is your territory.

Fudge Dice

Every roll in *Diaspora* is 4dF: a single roll of four Fudge dice, yielding a range from -4 to +4. A Fudge die is a d6, with two faces marked -, two faces marked +, and two faces blank. You add up the +s, subtract the -s, and you have a total. Without special dice, you could treat 1-2 as -, 3-4 as blank, and 5-6 as +; this is the same as rolling 4d3-8. This yields a particular curve, around which the game is built.

The system will work with a different probability curve by rolling two different coloured six-sided dice and subtracting the darker from the lighter. Treating the -5 and 5 results as zero keeps the expected range though with better chances for extreme results, and we do not recommend it.

roll	odds	%	% to roll or beat
-4	1/81	1.24	100
-3	4/81	4.95	98.8
-2	10/81	12.35	93.85
-1	16/81	19.75	81.5
0	19/81	23.46	61.75
1	16/81	19.75	38.29
2	10/81	12.35	18.54
3	4/81	4.95	6.19
4	1/81	1.24	1.24

abstraction

In any RPG, there is a balance between story and crunch. Some games present rules for every small maneuver, and rigidly plot character locations on a grid. *Diaspora* recognizes the value of such information, but denies that it is essential to play. While crunch (hard rules) are needed for balancing characters and objects against each other, in actual play we value abstraction wherever possible.

In place of hard rules, though, what *Diaspora* rewards is narration: narration from the players, and from the referee. Giving details of what you want to happen within the game is as important as working out what roll on the dice is needed for success. Both, of course, will happen. The talk around the table will always be a mix of in-game-character-based narration and out-of-character rules discussion. If the idea of a gradually increasing spider-web crack growing across your pressure suit faceplate seems a cool idea, as your character's vision is increasingly occluded and panic mounts, then you only need to say so and it has happened. There are no necessary mechanical consequences of this in the game, but the image itself may prove to be the most memorable of the session. A single piece of inspired narration becomes a crucial part of the memory of the table.

This double level of awareness is to be encouraged. Player authority and character integrity are both important, but, because of the fate point economy, it will often be the case that the player wants something to happen that the character would not. For example, in a long combat, a player might want an opponent to offer a valuable fate point, even though the character might very naturally want to hit the opponent with a clean shot! Two things follow from this.

First, at our table at least, the referee keeps very little mechanical information secret. There is no need to hide behind an eleven-inch screen. Mechanical details are not hidden from the players (unless there is a game-based reason why that might be). Players are maintaining a double awareness at all times, and the tension between player and character is something that the *FATE* system exploits powerfully.

Second, there is a continual back and forth between these two levels, and narration, from the players and from the referee, becomes essential. A player narrates what he wants to happen, which may lead to an out-of-character tabulation of whether a roll is needed and what the target number might be. Dice are rolled, and the result leads to more narration (from the successful player, from the referee, or from the table generally) giving an interpretation of the roll within the game.

Abstraction facilitates narration, because it allows the players to define constraints or accomplishments for themselves. Narration feeds into the rules, which then in turn provide opportunities for the interpretation of a given roll, in the form of more narration. It's all about the stories.

the ladder

In *FATE*, successes and difficulties are rated by numbers or by the terms on The Ladder. Our Ladder here is slightly different from the *Spirit of the Century* Ladder, in

that the term "Fair" doesn't fit logically between "Average" and "Good" in our minds, so we have used "Decent" instead.

Nevertheless, the words can be misleading, and are really only applicable when a single character acts. Since a pinnacle Skill is at level 5 (as we will see in character generation) and since the best result from a roll of the dice is +4, a result of +9 represents an exceptionally successful attempt at something by a dedicated professional. While higher numbers are possible (through the invocation of Aspects, described below), most numbers in the game, when all things are considered, are single digits. If one is looking for appropriate adjectives to describe an action, it is often the difference between the two rolls that might determine the quality of success. So, in an opposed roll (described below, in which a player roll is compared against a referee roll), the results may be 7 against 5, but this represents only a decent success.

The Ladder

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Decent
+1	Average
+0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

the fate point economy

Fueling almost all interactions in *Diaspora* is the fate point economy. Characters have fate points, as do ships, and the referee has an unending supply. Even if a given interaction doesn't actually lead to an exchange of fate points, the possibility that it might do so inevitably affects player choices. Fate points are limited, and as a scarce resource, players will be looking to spend them carefully and collect them zealously. If a player wants something to happen and the dice have said no, then fate points provide a mechanism for the player to create success.

Fate points use other qualities of a character to create in-game effects; that is why the precise wording of an Aspect can be so important. The natural instinct for players is to hoard fate points, and save them for a big flourish at the end. This is natural, but there are rewards to be had in keeping the flow of fate points relatively constant. Maybe not for every roll, but regularly, fate points should be spent by players, or should be offered by the referee, to create a sense of them as units of trade, as a genuine economy, which creates an ebb and flow throughout the session.

aspects

All characters and some things will have Aspects. Aspects are short phrases that indicate important, well, aspects of the character. Scenes might have Aspects, maps might have Aspects, systems, worlds, and cities might all have Aspects. Give a thing an Aspect when you want it to have a feature but don't need a specific rule mechanism to govern how that feature operates. You are instead declaring that something is important and leaving it to the players to determine how to make it important.

what do aspects do?

So there are a number of ways that Aspects come into being, and a number of ways they can be used during conflict (whether that's just a Skill check during regular role-play or a specific roll in a combat Sequence).

Any time you roll the dice, you can bring Aspects into play.

You can invoke one of your own Aspects after you roll the dice. You narrate how the Aspect affects the roll and, assuming everyone at the table nods assent and says "that's cool," you can add +2 to your roll or re-roll. You pay a fate point immediately.

You can tag an Aspect on something else that's relevant to the roll after you roll the dice. That could be an Aspect on your opponent ("Not too smart" on an NPC villain maybe), an Aspect on an ally, ("Gives great covering fire"), an Aspect on a map ("Floodlamps" to spot an enemy skulking in the shadows, perhaps), or any other Aspect that's relevant and not on your character sheet. Pay a fate point and either take +2 on your roll or re-roll.

Aspects have a scope: the thing that the Aspect is actually on (you, your pal, a scene, and so on).

You may only tag one Aspect from any given scope per roll.

For example:

- One opponent Aspect
- One system Aspect
- One scene Aspect (if one exists)
- One zone Aspect (if one exists)
- One ship Aspect (if a ship is relevant)
- One campaign Aspect (if one exists)
- One Aspect from each ally

In addition, any number of free-taggable Aspects from any scope may be tagged and don't count against your tagging limit (that is, you can tag two free-taggables at zone scope and still tag a third if there is one for the usual fate point cost).

You can compel an Aspect on your opponent before you roll the dice. In this case you offer your opponent a deal related to his Aspect: he can take the deal and one of your fate points or deny the deal and give you a fate point. Outside of a combat Sequence the deal can be quite free-form and it is a negotiation between players and not between characters. You might offer the referee a deal relating to an NPC ("I think the robbers are too stupid to look there: 'Not too bright'"), or a deal relating to an ally

Aspects Summary

Invoke your Aspect: after dice roll, +2 or re-roll; costs a fate point

Tag another Aspect: after dice roll, +2 or re-roll; costs a fate point

Compel another Aspect: before dice roll, negotiate result; costs someone a fate point (compeller if accepted, character getting compelled if denied)

("Oh surely you are gung-ho enough to just charge in with us: 'Damn the torpedoes'") or, most commonly a deal offered by the referee to a character's player. During a combat Sequence the effects of a compel are far more constrained (and dealt with in detail in the appropriate section), usually something like "fail to act" or "take -2 on your roll."

You can compel an Aspect on a scene or zone (or anything for that matter). You offer the referee a deal related to the Aspect: he can take the deal and one of your fate points or deny the deal and give you a fate point. You might offer the referee a deal relating to a zone with an "Half busted ladder" ("I think that ladder comes off its moorings and falls free"), or a deal relating to a scene with "Torrential downpour" ("I think we lose our pursuers in this obscuring rain and mud.")

Aspects come into being in several ways:

- Player characters start with 10 Aspects derived from the character generation stories. They start each session with five fate points.
- Spacecraft start with 5 Aspects created by the designer (some forced by the design process). They start each session with five fate points.
- Scenes, maps, campaigns, and things get Aspects at the discretion of the referee. The referee has an unlimited supply of fate points.
- Players can put an Aspect on a character or scene with a maneuver.

Awesome Aspects

Awesome Aspects inspire people to use them. They generally (though not always) present clear opportunities for invokes (using to your own advantage), tags (used against you), and compels (used to suggest alternative actions). They can be statements about the character's nature, or things the character cherishes, or any other short phrase that invites narration:

- Calculating flint-hearted opportunist
- My father's gun
- Facts just get in the way
- I've patched this suit a hundred times

maneuvers

A maneuver is one of the ways you can act in any situation. A maneuver is an action your character takes that will change the status of something and this status change will be represented by the addition of an Aspect. For example, a player might declare that his character is going to set an enemy's jacket on fire with a can of hairspray and a lighter. We could write rules about how to simulate hairspray and lighters and jackets but a maneuver is much more elegant: the referee will decide the roll to succeed (either a fixed difficulty roll or an opposed roll—see the Resolution section) and on success the target acquires an appropriate Aspect ("Jacket on fire!").

Having an Aspect of your choosing placed on an enemy is pretty powerful all by itself, but there is an additional power: an Aspect placed as a result of a maneuver can be tagged without paying a fate point once by the maneuverer or an ally (it is "free-taggable"). It can be tagged subsequently as long as the Aspect lasts (usually the scene), but the first time (and only the first time) is free.

Place an Aspect on an opponent, scene, or zone with a Skill check (static or opposed, as determined by the referee). If successful, the target now has the Aspect for the duration of the scene. This Aspect can be tagged once for free and thereafter for a fate point.

resolution

So you want to do something: shoot a gun, open a locked door, successfully lecture to a team of professionals on canine anatomy.

All resolutions that involve the dice are handled basically the same way. First, the acting player declares his intended action and, if there is one, its target. Next, the player managing the order of events (usually the referee) asks for compels.

Any player can compel the acting player's character. If someone does, he offers a story based on one of the opponent's Aspects and presents a fate point. If the opponent accepts, he receives the fate point and complies with the compeller, forfeiting his action. If he denies he must pay the compeller a fate point. The compeller can demand only one of two things: inaction or forced movement. The mechanical specifics of these is described in each combat mini-game.

The referee, however, can compel for story purposes at any time, in or out of combat, and the effects of the compel are not constrained. That is, the referee can offer pretty much anything as a compel, as long as it ties in to the Aspect well. If there's a story, it stands.

Once compels have been resolved, any actions that can be taken are resolved. This usually means that dice are rolled and a Skill value added.

Players may invoke an Aspect of theirs, narrating how it relates to the situation, pay a fate point, and gain either +2 on their roll or the right to re-roll. They may tag an Aspect on their opponent, narrating how it relates to the situation, pay a fate point, and gain +2 on their roll.

Players may tag as many free-taggable Aspects as they like that exist on their opponent and gain +2 on their opponent for each.

Players may use any spin (see below) accumulated by them or an ally to gain +1 on their roll. Any number of spin points may be used towards a given roll.

Compels happen before the dice hit the table. Invokes, tags, and spin happen after the dice hit the table.

There are a couple of possible kinds of tasks you might run into.

fixed difficulty roll

The referee sets a difficulty level and tells you what Skill you need to use. You throw your fate dice, add them to your Skill and if it's equal to or greater than the difficulty, you succeed. If you fail, you can invoke an Aspect and spend a fate point for +2 or a re-roll. If you still fail you can try to bring in another Aspect. And so on.

Example: throwing a stone at a jar. Let's say the difficulty is the range to the jar and the Skill is Agility. So, a jar 3 zones away is difficulty 3. Lawrence, with Agility 2, rolls and gets -1. His total is 1, which is not enough to hit the jar.

A fixed difficulty roll is made with 4dF + Skill against a target value established by the referee based on the estimation of the task's difficulty (the Ladder may be a useful tool here). The result is the number of shifts obtained.

Zero shifts is a success. Rolls that use shifts for effects do not generate effects with zero shifts. These may be useless successes.

opposed roll

You want to beat someone else at something. The defender rolls defensively and you need to meet or beat that roll offensively. Use fate points as before to increase your result. Your opponent may well do the same.

Example: shooting someone in the face. Lawrence, armed with a pistol and having Slug Thrower 4, shoots unfortunate customs officer David, who has Agility 1. Lawrence rolls -2, which is a total of 4-2 = 2. David rolls +2 for a total of 1+2 = 3. Lawrence fails as David dodges his bullet.

An opposed roll is 4dF + Skill compared against an opponent's 4dF + Skill. Attacker and defender may use different Skills. The result is the number of shifts obtained.

Zero shifts is a success. Rolls that use shifts for effects do not generate effects with zero shifts. These may be useless successes.

Rolls

Fixed: referee sets a difficulty value and the player must meet or exceed it with dice + Skill. Result - difficulty = shifts.

Opposed: attacker and defender roll dice and add Skill. Attacker result - defender result = shifts. If negative 3 or lower, defender gets spin.

shifts and spin

The degree to which you beat your target value is your shift. Shifts might be used for something or they might not. In combat, for example, shifts determine the amount of damage done. If you exceed your opponent when you make a defensive roll that does not have any effect other than being a successful defense, you don't get shifts. Instead, for every three by which you exceed the attacking roll, you generate spin. Spin can be used by you or an ally to gain +1 on a roll—basically your defensive maneuver put your opponent at a disadvantage or one of your allies at an advantage somehow. You need to use up spin by the time the turn comes back to whoever generated it—he's the last person that can take advantage.

It can be handy to throw some kind of token on the table in front of the generating player to indicate spin, and let anyone pick it up—where it is placed helps remembering when it expires.

Each number above the target value is called a shift. Hitting the target number exactly is a success, but generates no shifts. When an attacker fails by three or more (negative three shifts), the defender gets spin.

Spin can be spent by the defender or any ally, and must be used before the end of the defender's next turn. Defenses that can harm the attacker (such as defending against Electronic Warfare in space combat) do not generate spin because they already have an effect beyond successful defense.

declarations

At any time a player can pay a fate point and declare a true fact about the world as pertains to the character's apex Skill. The referee can return the fate point and modify the fact but cannot simply deny it altogether.

skill interactions

Sometimes it makes sense to have two Skills interact to form the basis of a check. In particular, this happens in space and platoon combat, but you may find other uses for it as well. There are two forms:

skill a is limited by skill b

This indicates that Skill A is used for the check but at a level no higher than Skill B. Thus, for example, an EVA check limited by Stamina (as might occur on a high gravity planet with a toxic atmosphere) with EVA 5 and Stamina 3 would be checked at 3 + 4dF.

skill a is amplified by skill b

This indicates that Skill A is used for the check. If Skill B exceeds Skill A, then an additional +1 is granted. For example, a Brawling check amplified by Strength (as might happen if a character tries to throw a large table during a fight) with Brawling 2 and Strength 5 would be checked at 3 (Brawling rank +1) + 4dF.

Time Track

Instant
A few moments
Half a minute
A minute
A few minutes
15 minutes
Half an hour
An hour
A few hours
An afternoon
A day
A few days
A week
A few weeks
A month
A few months
A season
Half a year
A year
A few years
A decade
A lifetime

dealing with time

When a Skill check should take some amount of time, it might be useful to have the success (and maybe also failure) affect the time it takes to complete. Well, the *FATE* system has a way: the Time Track (at left).

When you want an action to succeed but have the degree of success (or failure) determine how long it took, the referee should set the difficulty and the base time needed to resolve (picked from the Time Track). Each shift generated moves up the track one line. Negative shifts move down the track one line for each shift.

Some tasks might fail altogether with negative shifts, but potentially go faster with greater success.

Here's another example. You make a roll for a test you have all the time in the world for and blow the roll. That sucks.

If you had all the time in the world, surely you could have succeeded? Well, at the referee's discretion, sure!

Here's how it works: find how long the task should have taken on the Time Track. Now, move down the list a number of lines equal to however much you missed your target number by (to a maximum of 4). You succeed, and that's how long it takes. Blow a 15-minute task by 3? It takes a few hours.

physical bits

The *FATE* system generates a few transient "points" during play that are handily managed with physical tokens. Because they are generally refreshed at the beginning of a session and may be exchanged between players, keeping a running total on paper isn't nearly as effective as moving actual physical objects around the table. Our preference is a set of nice solid and heavy poker chips in several colours, but you can use anything: coins, glass beads, cowrie shells, or what have you.

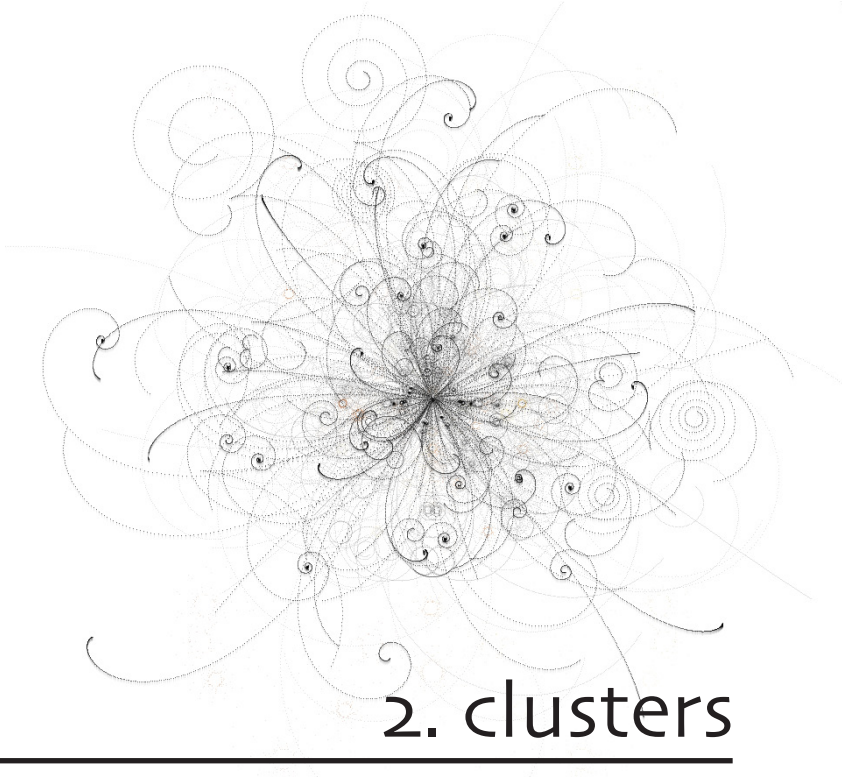
We represent character fate points with one colour of chip and exchange them as needed. They are stacked on the character sheet ready for play.

We use another colour chip to represent ship fate points because they come into play under different circumstances and they are not interchangeable with character fate points. They are stacked on the ship's reference card.

Finally we use a third colour chip to represent spin. Because spin is associated with one player and must be used inside one round, when it's generated we put a spin token in front of that player. This token will be removed if it is not used before the end of that player's next turn.

We also find that a whiteboard is handy to draw quick maps on a table-sized playing surface on the fly.

1. playing with fate



2. clusters

Ceva looked at the starmap the Tenbrean had given him. It was just a handful of circles connected by a few lines. "That's it? That's the universe? I see a million stars and this is the whole universe in six dots?"

"No," replied the hairless and ancient youth, "not the whole. Man is out there on myriad stars. One of them is our home. But today this is all we can reach. One day we may break through that veil. Your world could be the Gate."

The first session of a *Diaspora* campaign is used to create the setting and the characters. This is intended as a full group activity—*Diaspora* is not a game that rewards lonely character creation and lonely setting design. Rather this is a game that rewards social interaction to create cooperatively. At the time of this first session it is not necessary to have a referee (what some games call the Game Master or GM). It is perfectly feasible (and perhaps desirable) for everyone to have complete narrative authority over the pieces they will create. As we will see with the combat chapters, however, it can be valuable to designate someone as caller. This person will guide the group through the application of the rules and perhaps take notes on the results, even though the caller's creative input need not be any greater than that of any other player.

Two things will be constructed in this first session: the cluster (the star systems and how they link to one another), and characters.

To create a cluster, we begin with the systems in it. This lays out the place where adventure occurs. Systems are defined and given some narrative description, and then they are seen in a larger context, which provides the opportunity for further definition and refinement. Systems are therefore considered as independent entities before you

have to consider their dependencies. That is the subject of this chapter. Characters come last because they are wholly dependent on the rest of the cluster that they will inhabit (though we will also see that they feed back again into the systems). Character generation is described in the next chapter.

You will create a handful of systems and find out what they are like, filling in details with your own stories as you make sense of the system statistics.

You will then link these systems into a structure called the cluster, which will show which systems are connected to which other systems by slipstreams. Faster-than-light travel between stars only occurs along these paths. Once this geometry is established, it can be useful to go back to the systems and write a little more—how do the various surpluses and deficiencies affect traffic on the slipstreams? Who supplies slip ships? Who competes?

systems

> *Stories are told of other clusters. Clusters where there is a naturally breathable atmosphere, somewhere. We're all human, yet none of us survive without a mask or a tank in any system, which the philosophers say is proof that we began somewhere else. Eight systems, and not one holds an atmosphere. Our governments build weapons, and they build spaceships. It's all they ever do. Why can't they find scientists to build air?*

The first step in creating a cluster is to create the set of systems that will belong in it. The caller shall assign each player, including himself, one or two systems such that the total being developed is not less than six and not more than, say, ten. That's a soft rule, but it is a great range for cluster size.

This process should take 60 minutes or so, more if (like us) conversations lead down sidetracks.

Systems will be described by their statistics and their Aspects. Details can be elaborated through narrative, but will have no mechanical effect in the game unless accompanied by Aspects.

Each system represents some place in space where humans might reside. It's a place where two slipknots exist—those mysterious points in space that allow limited faster-than-light travel. Nothing else is written in stone—a system can be completely empty but for the slipknots, and that's got to have a story. Typically, however, a system consists of a star and some attendant planetary bodies. It could be as familiar as a yellow star with eight worlds, one of which is habitable, or as exotic as an artificial quintet of neutron stars and a vast field of rubble a thousand million miles away. These things are for you to determine. They are what you invent to make sense of the statistics. We often write a paragraph about the worlds we design after the first session, which allows some time for thoughts to consolidate, and then revisit the systems briefly at the beginning of the next session.

generation

1. Each player (including the referee) is assigned the worlds they will develop. Everyone will use slightly different notation, but numbering the worlds to be generated

on a piece of paper, allowing three or four lines per system, is sufficient. We find it helpful if everyone records the information for themselves as the process is underway.

2. In turn, each player determines the attributes for their system. Systems have three attributes, each graded on a 9 point scale from -4 to 4:

- Technology
- Environment
- Resources

There are many ways that a system's attributes may be generated. We assume random generation by a roll of the dice (4dF): the typical world will therefore be T0 E0 R0, or a system with a sustainable garden world which is actively exploring space. In practice, of course, the range will be much wider than this. Nevertheless, systems do not need to be randomly determined, and any attribute may be determined by player selection, by table consensus, or by some combination of these.

3. **The Slipstream Guarantee.** It is suggested (though perhaps not strictly necessary) that at least one system be able to create and maintain slip-capable ships. To that end, if no system in the cluster has T2 or higher, give the system with the lowest sum of attributes and the system with the highest sum of attributes each T2. If systems are tied for best sum or crappiest sum, one can be picked randomly.

4. Each attribute value corresponds to a short phrase (see the table to the right), which may become (and will certainly influence) one of the system's Aspects. These may be noted, but as they derive automatically from the attribute value, they may just be borne in mind as the procedure continues. Detailed

Technology

4	On the verge of collapse
3	Slipstream mastery
2	Slipstream use
1	Exploiting the system
0	Exploring the system
-1	Atomic power
-2	Industrialization
-3	Metallurgy
-4	Stone age

Environment

4	Many garden worlds
3	Some garden worlds
2	One garden and several survivable worlds
1	One garden and several hostile environments
0	One garden world (and perhaps additional barren worlds)
-1	Survivable world
-2	Hostile environment (gravity but dangerous atmosphere)
-3	Barren world (gravity, no atmosphere)
-4	No habitable worlds at all

Resources

4	All you could want
3	Multiple exports
2	One significant export
1	Rich
0	Sustainable
-1	Almost viable
-2	Needs imports
-3	Multiple dependencies
-4	No resources

descriptions of each entry are found later in this chapter.

5. Each player shall give each of their systems a name, ideally with a starting letter that is unique to the cluster. You might want to talk with the other players and establish some framework for naming or just wing it. Don't shy away from just using plain English words, words from other languages, or real place names with "New" tacked on front. These people are humans after all, and we want to talk about them and with them—so start by assuming they are comprehensible.

6. Players give each of their systems two Aspects that reflect their unique identities, extrapolated from the attributes. This is best done in consideration and discussion with others at the table—the final result is under the control of the table authority (player ownership is not strict, and the guy across the table might have the perfect wording for your idea about what is driving your system). Give it two Aspects that describe things that are not represented by the numbers or that are implied by the numbers. These things might relate to politics ("Balkanized," "A benevolent monarch," "Turmoil!"), philosophy ("Hopelessness is a way of life," "Every man for himself," "The Law above all"), geography ("One vast desert," "Basalt plains," "Underground cities"), hydrography ("Waterworld," "Poisonous lakes"), local astrography ("Neutron star," "Deep in the dark nebula," "Life in an asteroid belt") or history ("Once was great," "Won the battle but not the war," "Remembering the yoke"). Or something else…

7. The relationship between the systems within the cluster is then developed. The procedure is described below in the section Linking Systems.

8. Players should now examine their systems and their place in the cluster and add a final Aspect to each system to reflect their place in this implied web of trade and politics. Discuss the ramifications of these worlds and their placement—who is the hub? Who controls technology? Can the resource-heavy worlds defend them? Do they need to?

9. Finally, the player generating the system should write a brief paragraph describing life in it. This doesn't need a lot of work—the details of each system will eventually be fleshed out as the referee prepares the sessions and by all the players as their stories in the cluster progress, but there is a sense of ownership that

Earth

Our solar system in the 21st century might look like this:

T-1 atomic power
E1 one garden world (Earth) and several hostile worlds (Venus, Mars, Titan, Europa)
R1 rich (multiple gas giants, heavy metal asteroids, etc.)

Earth's Aspects would include "Heavily balkanized" (there is no world government, and language and cultural borders are everywhere) and "Microprocessors everywhere" (see the section on technology). Maybe also, "Apparently alone."

System Probabilities

There is less than a 2% chance that a world will be the most common form: T0 E0 R0.

There is about a 10% chance that there will be a T4 system in a cluster of 8.

There is about a 45% chance that there will be at least one 4 or -4 stat in a cluster of 8.

can be exercised here. This will get fleshed out further through character generation and further through play, so it's not necessary that it be comprehensive. A few questions that one might want to answer, though, include:

- What does the sky look like here?
- How does the average person live?
- Why was this system colonized in the diaspora?
- What has changed since then?

This last step can even be done after the session as ideas get a chance to percolate and consolidate. It's not uncommon at our table for worlds to be revised one or even two sessions after the first.

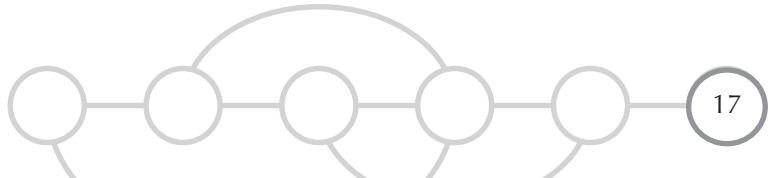
linking systems

> *Sheol and Caradoc were at war and connected directly by slipstreams, making for a very tense stalemate that had endured for years. New ships arriving in-system spent a great deal of effort to announce themselves and their interests on all radio spectra to anyone that would listen, in many languages. But there was one other destination that could also be reached from either side. A useless rock of a world orbiting a fading sun at R912—too useless even to warrant a name. And there a brisk trade began to emerge between combatants on unofficial terms. Arriving in R912 you could ignore who, exactly, everyone was and maybe come back with a speculative cargo worth a fortune.*
>
> *Of course, such cargoes attract more than just merchants.*

In *Diaspora*, systems are separated by unknown volumes of space—their positions in the universe are so diverse as to be likely unknown and possibly unknowable. And yet they are connected into a tight cluster of only a few stars by some currently inexplicable laws of physics. These connections, the slipstreams, take only an instant to traverse, but in that instant vast quantities of heat accumulate and must be dissipated upon arrival.

Slipstream points (slipknots) are located above and below the plane of the ecliptic for the system, at a distance roughly 5 AU (astronomical units) above and below the poles of each system—a point directly above (and below) the barycenter, which is the point around which all bodies in the system revolve. How close you need to be to this point is determined by the technology level of your slip system—a small device capable of translating the ship across unknown distances pre-determined by hidden geometries of our universe.

You can re-use your clusters as often as you like—there is room in any one of them for more than one campaign—but they are small enough that it's simple to build a new one every time you make characters if you prefer.

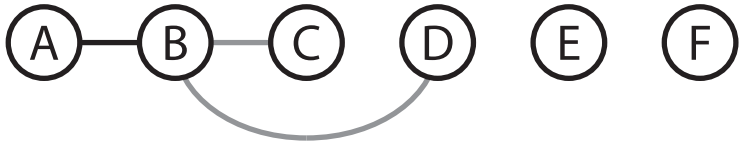


construction sequence

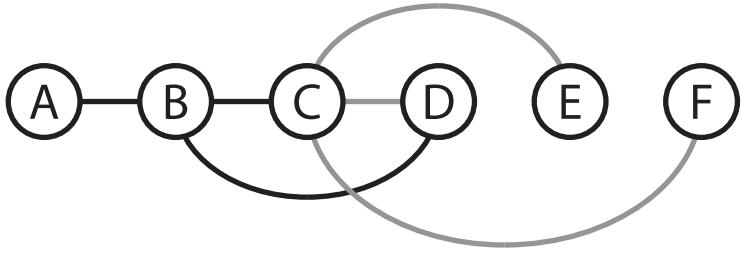
You have already created some number of systems, so now we're going to determine how they are connected. The caller will draw a line of systems, using the initial letter of each system name to identify it:

For each system, the owning player will roll four Fudge dice. On a negative result, connect the system to the next neighbour in the line. In our example we roll a negative result for world A:

On a zero result, connect the system to the next neighbour in the line as above, but also, if a system further down the list has no connections, connect to that neighbour. In our example, we roll a zero result for system B, generating a link to its neighbour, C, and its next unlinked neighbour, D:

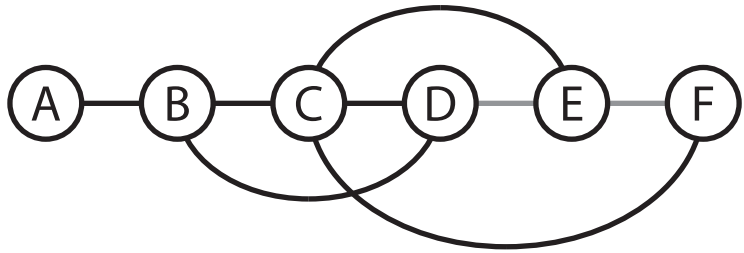


On a positive result, do all that you do for a zero result and if another system further down the list has no connections, also connect to that neighbour. In our example we roll a positive result for C, generating the minimum link to its neighbour, D, a link to its next unlinked neighbour, E, and a third link to the next unlinked neighbour after E—F:



Continue for each system until all systems are connected. In our example we see that we only have an adjacent neighbour link remaining, so there is no need to roll for D (it can only link to E now as C already links to F) and you never need to roll for

the second to last or last system, in this case E and F as the E—F link is automatic and there's nowhere else to go.



That's your cluster! You will note that there are natural hubs and relationships between systems with positive and negative resources. Each world is connected by one to five links to other systems. Next we will discover which worlds can exploit these links and which will have to pay to engage in interstellar trade.

system attributes

technology

> *The Disassembler gloves are a pair of segmented black gloves that self-fit to any hand. They enclose a shallow beam disintegrator that strongly interacts with most matter, though rather more weakly with water-bearing materials (like flesh). A combatant equipped with Disassemblers tends to smash fist-sized holes in armour, leaving nasty burns on the flesh beneath. It's not uncommon for similarly equipped individuals to punch each others' clothes completely off before someone finally succumbs. High end Battlesuits may incorporate Disassemblers to devastating effect with the addition of servo-enhanced strength.*

Because of the nature of the game, the technology scale is privileging space exploration technology over other technological advances. Associated with each tech level is a whole host of other technological advances, and these may be extrapolated in the world design, and may be clarified with Aspects.

So a T2 system can create and maintain slip-capable ships, but what that means in practice may vary from system to system: slipships might be commercially available, or they might all be controlled by a system or planetary government and used for military purposes only, for example.

t4 on the verge of collapse

T4 systems are very rare, and while they are interesting we don't say much about them. They are on the verge of collapse—they are about to unfold one or many failed dreams, spiraling into a transhuman ascension indistinguishable from a multi-billion-death disaster. In most cases, the person developing the system should pick one and that will give us a taste of contact with these cultures, which should generally be insular—already everyone else is looking as uninteresting as insects. Here are some possibilities:

Nanotech: submicroscopic automation has been unlocked, eventually resulting in a grey goo disaster. Early signs will be perfect health, advanced self-repairing ships, and baffling body modifications.

Unchecked intelligence: artificial intelligence has been unlocked, leading to systems that can improve themselves making some branches of technology improve exponentially. Humans become servants to the machine and the machine has inhuman motives. Eventually the humans and even the physical manifestation of the machine will be irrelevant. This all eats lots of power.

Casual FTL: the key to travel outside the cluster has been discovered. Ships dump heat into "grey spaces" and some advanced vessels may travel without reaction mass. Eventually, given the infinity of possible "other" places, one is found that is vastly more appealing or vastly more dangerous. Exeunt local humanity.

Eternal life: the culture has found a way to prolong life indefinitely, but at what cost? Perhaps a race of eternal children served by machines now completely devoid of any culture but unsophisticated play. How do corporate raiders and pirates trade with children... children with super-technology weapons?

T4 doesn't need mechanical representation. Where it interacts mechanically, it hasn't changed much. Where it has changed it always dominates.

Slipknot Stations

At T2, slipknot stations must thrust constantly (or maintain a thrust, coast, re-thrust pattern, yo-yoing very slowly above and below the knot) in order to stay near the slipknot. As a result, they are expensive to maintain, requiring a constant influx of reaction mass and fuel. The amount of fuel and r-mass required is small as the thrust needed is extremely tiny (less than a ten thousandth of a gravity for a Sol-sized system). Poor systems may not maintain a slipknot station at all, however, and most will not bother maintaining one for each knot.

At T3, slipknot stations keep their position with photon sails, some aligned to accept pressure from the sun and others maneuvering slowly to accept pressure from laser stations at convenient locations (near fuel or population sources) in orbit in the system.

At T4, stations hang at the slipknot with no obvious means to do so. The technology they use to accomplish this is non-Newtonian. It may involve anti-gravity or perhaps some "free" energy source. There may be a way to latch onto whatever the slipknot actually is, and use the knot itself to keep station.

t3 slipstream mastery

At this technology level slipknots are easily reached both because reaction-drive technology has become very efficient and because the distance from the point can be much greater before entering the slipstream. Further, this generates less heat than at lower technology levels.

Computer systems are now very advanced and communications systems are powerful and pervasive. Power supplies can be very small with extensive life spans, but the personal fusion power plant seems improbable. Ships are very efficient and heat exchange systems use exotic mechanisms like liquid sodium droplet collectors.

A culture at T3 will dominate a cluster unless it is ideologically opposed to doing so or politically opposed by another T3 culture: they

have effective domination of space where they want it but it is likely too expensive (or simply not profitable) to do so at every world in every cluster. Instead they will protect what they perceive as their interests. They might maintain a monopoly on technology or strive to bring all cultures to their level. They might sell ships, lease them, sell space on them, or even manufacture inferior vessels at a lower effective technology rating for sale to preserve their dominance.

Technology

There are three essential stages to any given technology: discovery, in which it is a governmental pursuit; exploitation, in which it is a commercial pursuit; and finally cultivation, in which it is a leisure pursuit.

So there are stages when spacecraft are the property of whole governments, and then later where they can be owned and operated by corporations, but ultimately the technology is completely democratized and individuals can reasonably hope to own one if they so desire, though likely at a cost on par with home ownership in a nice part of town.

t2 slipstream use

This culture has commercialized slipstream technology. It is expensive, requires long travel and precise positioning and is only militarily viable in special circumstances because of the extraordinary heat debt slipstream usage accumulates.

T2 implies relatively cheap and light power and a regular familiarity with space travel. At this technology it is feasible not only to travel between stars, but also to trade between them. Within the system itself, commerce will be vigorous thanks to the ready availability of effective civilian spacecraft, and it can be expected that all habitable and many partially inhabitable worlds will have permanent colonies and industrial, military, or scientific outposts.

t1 exploiting the system

This culture is able to commercialize the exploitation of its system. Any habitable systems will likely be inhabited to some degree and any resources can be exploited for trade or use. Slipstream technology is not available but this culture can still trade with slipstream cultures rather than be exploited by them, and likely buys or rents slipships or at least space on regular routes.

t0 exploring the system

This culture has sufficiently efficient spacecraft to explore their system thoroughly. They cannot yet move huge amounts of cargo, so commercialization is still a ways away, but colonies can be established now on multiple worlds if they are sufficiently viable. This is a cusp technology, ripe to be exploited by others yet ready to emerge as a power on its own if given the chance. Much volatility potentially exists here.

t-1 atomic power

This culture can barely reach space—it may have sent some cumbersome probes out and might have a few manned vessels capable of long journeys on scientific voyages, but in general all of the action is planet-bound. Power is readily available and information technology is taking off, but reliance is on local resources. If the rest of the system is being exploited by outsiders, the locals can detect them and complain, but cannot mount any reasonable resistance. If it is profitable for others, this culture may

well be carefully suppressed from advancing further. Information might be digitized. This is where Earth has been since the 1940s; while great advances in computer technology have changed things, we have not moved off planet.

t-2 industrialization

The industrialized culture is capable of mass production and local exploitation, but power is still expensive and not widely available. The primary world occupied is extensively explored but the rest of the system is known only by records dating from before technology fell to this level. If other systems are exploiting the other worlds of this system, the locals may not even know about it. This corresponds to Earth (European) technology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

t-3 metallurgy

This culture has fallen so far that it is only capable of basic metallurgy. If there is power, it is supplied by machines that the locals can no longer maintain and probably do not understand. Something catastrophic must have pushed this culture so far back and the world likely bears the scars of it. This technology band includes most of Earth's technology from 3000 BCE to the eighteenth century—the bronze age, the iron age, and into the modern period.

t-4 stone age

This culture may not exist. If there are people at all here, they have no useful technology to draw upon. Anything beyond simple tools constructed from raw material on raw material must have been imported or is an artifact from an earlier age. Note however, that this might equally describe an outpost (scientific, commercial, military, or otherwise) that has no intrinsic capacity for manufacture.

environment

> *Birds sang in the Garden as he sipped his coffee and enjoyed the warmth of the sun. A cloud, carefully generated by the control system, shaded him as it traversed overhead on its plotted course. Outside the dome the hurricane winds blew methane ice against mountains, withering the very stone. Soon it would be time to go back to work, but until then, the Garden was everything.*

Generally a high-environment system is going to see vast immigration. How the local system inhabitants feel about that will drive regional politics and adventure.

e4 many garden worlds

This system is implausibly rich in habitable worlds. This could be a random effect—perhaps several worlds occupy a broad biozone and their moons are big enough to hold water and atmosphere. Or perhaps there are multiple stars far enough apart to each support comfortable worlds.

Whenever we have a system with 4 in any stat it is worth exploring extremes as they will generate play motivations reliably. Perhaps, for example, the system is a ringworld—this would certainly satisfy the "many garden worlds" criterion as it represents thousands or even millions of times the surface area of a typical planet. Or

maybe dozens of worlds have been terraformed, some supplying their own heat from advanced technologies no longer in evidence. Perhaps the star is surrounded by a cultured rosette of five or more worlds, all in the same orbit.

e3 some garden worlds

This system has at least two worlds that are inhabitable by humans at ground level. These systems do not need an unnatural explanation, but they might have one. Immigration will be substantial and, as with E4, will be something that drives politics in the area (and beyond—the places that people are coming from care about this effect as well).

e2 one garden and several survivable worlds

An E2 system has one world perfectly suited to human habitation and several that can be inhabited with some hardship. It's not necessary that any particular technology be available to survive on the difficult worlds, but there could be. The survivable worlds may represent terraforming efforts from the past or those underway by current governments. If Venus and Mars had turned out just a little differently in our own system, it might qualify as E2.

Survivable worlds are intended to be extremes of human habitation: ice worlds, desert worlds, or even water worlds fit this category.

e1 one garden and several hostile worlds

This is a comfortable system to occupy, simply because it's common enough, it has a single world that easily sustains humans at any level of technology, and some of the other worlds may be amenable to terraforming or relatively inexpensive occupation through technological adaptation.

The hostile worlds in this system cannot be occupied without some technology to counteract whatever makes them uninhabitable. They are not, however, actively destructive to human life. A vacuum world that has minable water might be hostile. A world with very high pressures, or one with a normal pressure but no oxygen would also qualify. Extremes of cold or heat are fine. Europa in our own system, if it contains liquid water beneath its icy and airless surface, would qualify.

If there are no other high environment systems in the cluster then these hostile worlds may well be filling up with claim-stakers and squatters.

e0 one garden world (and perhaps some barren worlds)

The most common system environment classification, this represents a system with a single world capable of comfortably supporting human habitation without special tools.

Any other worlds in this system are uninhabitable without significant technological support. These other worlds are likely low gravity, no pressure, and probably have either no water or water locked up in underground ice. While hard to use for civilians, they might support a military or trading base.

e-1 survivable world

This system contains a single habitable but unpleasant world. The world may be defined by extremes of temperature, water availability, weather, pressure, or some

other factor, but it has breathable air at the surface and water in sufficient quantities to support life. No other world in the system is anything but an airless rock.

Aside from the story of emigration that is likely a constant problem, another question that might have adventures as an answer is, "Why was this system colonized in the first place?" Did it look better than this from survey? Did it used to be more inhabitable and its current state was caused by some human effect (war, pollution, botched terraforming…)? Or were the original colonists desperate and willing to take the bottom of the barrel from the survey lists? Why?

e-2 hostile environment

This system has a single world that can reasonably support a population and that world is hostile to it. If this world does not sustain a technology of T0 or higher, then the technology the population needs to survive is not indigenous, and that's a story in itself. These worlds are not vacuum worlds and there is gravity, but the atmosphere does not support human life, or the temperatures are too extreme to be mitigated by simple clothing, or there is no water to be had short of chemical extraction from more complex molecules.

People are almost certainly leaving this system unless it has some wealth in resources or technology or both.

e-3 barren world

An E-3 system is desolate. The only planet remotely viable for colonization contains no air and any water to be had must be mined or chemically extracted. If the local technology is below T1, then the technology that supports the local population must not be indigenous. It may be an asteroid belt.

e-4 no habitable gravity or atmosphere

This system may as well be filled with gravel. There are no worlds worthy of the name. It is entirely likely that this system has no regular habitants at all and that any technology rating suggests the capabilities of the occasional scientific or military outpost. Anyone living here is living in a man-made structure in space.

resources

> *Rael was a pilot and a damned good one, but the ship wasn't really hers. She leased it from the Tenbreans for a huge sum, but not an unreasonable sum—her world couldn't make a ship that could tow this sixty-thousand ton diamond from the belt to the moonbase. She didn't see herself renting for more than a couple of runs. Soon enough she'd own a fleet of ships.*
>
> *Oh yeah, it was worth it.*

The resource value of a system is what drives the economy. It tells you if the system is economically dependent on other systems, or if it is supporting them. In order to cultivate a story for a system, invent the flow of trade in this way: every system with a R-2 or less is getting something from somewhere, and every system with an R2 or more may very well be the source. Knowing what these economic factors are should create plenty of room for competing interests and establish some conflicts between systems.

r4 all you could want

R4 systems are packed with valuable metals, minerals, and other precious things. They are studded with ice-laden asteroids, heavy-metal rich rings around relatively quiescent planets or other gravity wells, are showered with convertible radiation, and megatons of cheap r-mass are everywhere. The question you want to answer about any given R4 system is, "How did this happen?" Because this is atypical in the extreme.

Such a system might be home to one or more very-high-density objects—perhaps a neutron star or even a black hole. These things may well be very dangerous indeed, even though there are riches to be had here by side effect. This site may be the remnant of a vast and recent supernova. Whatever makes this place so rich, it is extreme and improbable.

The one thing that is certain about an R4 system is that someone is getting rich. If the locals are equipped to mine it, then they are either rich or at war. If they are not equipped to mine it then someone else is or they are leasing the technology to do it themselves. The fate of this system may rely heavily on its most powerful neighbours—a T3 system might own this place or it might protect it as part of its concord, keeping all members rich.

There is enough here to make the entire cluster wealthy, provided everyone is happy with their share. Consequently no such system is entirely wealthy.

r3 multiple exports

A system this rich has far more than it needs. If it has the technology to do so, then it is exporting either raw material (at the low end of the technology scale) or manufactured goods (if it is lucky enough to have a high technology compared to the rest of the culture). If its technology is not space-faring then it may be leasing slipships and trying to get there on its own. There's enough here for plenty of systems to stay wealthy.

r2 one significant export

An R2 system has more than it needs—either a little more of everything or a lot more of one thing. This system is possibly the only place in the cluster with more of a particular valuable commodity than anywhere else. There's not enough here to start a war over, unless the rest of the cluster is especially resource-poor. If the locals don't have the technology to exploit it then someone else does.

r1 rich

This system may be an active trader in cluster-wide commodity markets if its technology level is sufficient. Even if the technology is low there will be an active trade in rights to spacefaring neighbours to exploit the outer system, simply because taking things by force is not all that profitable for the minor gains in an R1 system.

r0 sustainable

A sustainable system like this is generating no particular surplus but no particular needs, either. It gains nothing by exporting, importing, or licensing operation inside its boundaries and regardless of its technology rating, it has enough of everything it needs. An R0 system may become quite insular—having no extremes of need or surplus, it may not interact with the rest of the cluster at all.

r-1 almost viable

R-1 systems are lacking something. This may explain their technological lag or be a focus of their technological excess. It might explain their poor environment or technology. If other stats are high, then they will be the source of trade for the missing resource. R-1 systems are low-pressure sources of trade conflict.

r-2 needs imports

At R-2, however, the pressure for conflict becomes high: this system cannot sustain itself without some imports. If it has nothing to trade then it is failing. If it has something to trade then it is doing so and probably not on favourable terms. Consequently R-2 systems are likely embroiled in conflict (though not necessarily military) both internally and externally.

r-3 multiple dependencies

The R-3 system is completely at the mercy of its neighbours. It absolutely requires imports to avoid rapid degeneration and must be prepared to either fight for those imports, pay far too much for them, or fail. At R-3 a system is desperate.

r-4 no resources

R-4 systems have nothing. It is so very unlikely that a system will have absolutely no resources that it demands an extraordinary explanation. Who swept this system clean? Using what technology? Or is it devoid of minerals for natural reasons—perhaps this region of space is somehow brand new, and this is a first generation star presenting no opportunity for heavier metal production. If it was swept clean, why?

Why does a culture exist here at all? If it has positive values for technology and/or environment, what does that mean? How is the technology sustained—or is it?

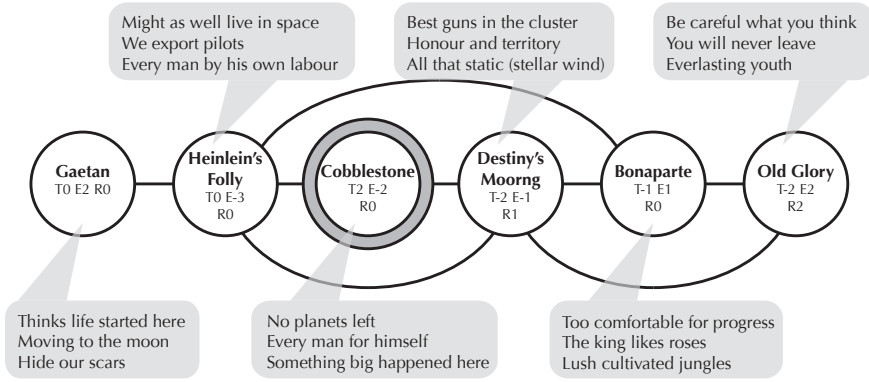
Other Kinds of Clusters

The cluster creation system can be extended to other uses, perhaps in other games. It can construct fantasy city-states and their trade routes. It can construct political parties and their allegiances. All you need to do to make that work is to redefine the core three statistics of the cluster's nodes. Consider the possibilities of:

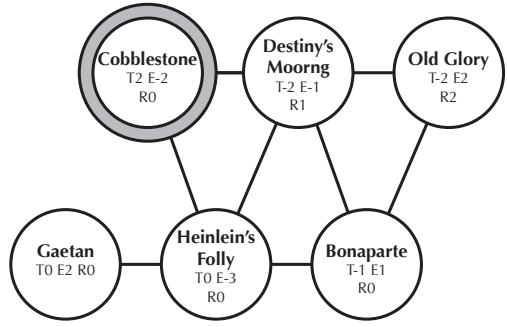
Magic	Order	Liberté	Weather	Science
Warfare	Compassion	Égalité	Barbarians	Sorcery
Trade	Economics	Fraternité	Priesthood	Sanity

examples

This cluster connects six systems, one of which is capable of FTL travel. Does it rent ships? Sell them? Or just let you book passage? The most resource-rich system in the cluster is Old Glory—how does it get taken advantage of?



There are other ways to represent the links between systems within a cluster: the line is handy for the generation process, and looks cool, but it may be desirable for some to maintain the links but represent them in another way graphically. This sample cluster, for example, could also be diagrammed more this way:



To demonstrate the flexibility of interpretation, here are four distinct stories for the same system statistics (T2 E-2 R0) as above in Cobblestone, as told by each of the authors.

diocese

T2 E-2 R0

Diocese has been greater than this. In fact, this system bears evidence of no fewer than seven distinct Collapses. In the course of this long oscillating history much of the system resources have been spent, but in their place is the detritus of ten thousand years of culture exploring and exploiting space before inevitably failing from war, famine, plague, or just plain hubris. The primary world of the system sits well inside the biozone of its brilliant blue-white star (a star that makes naked exposure on the surface of the world lethal), and the atmosphere is full of irritants and carcinogens. No one goes outside any more except the farmers, and they only go out at night or in special suits. Mineral exploration is as likely to turn up complete and partially functional ancient technology as simple ores, and so there is a technical branch of archaeology (closer to mining than any form of academic research) that goes on throughout the system. Find an old T3 station out there in the deep black and you could strike it rich.

It doesn't seem likely that Diocese will get another chance. The culture here has recently recovered the capacity to slip and uses it regularly, but the next time this place collapses it will likely be the last time.

Diocese has the distinction of being very near some galactic core, and its night sky is more brightly (and certainly more colourfully) lit than any other system's days.

- On our last legs
- Lethal actinic glare
- Applied archaeology

flicker

T2 E-2 R0

The single planet in this system is a gas giant, Garamond, in a close orbit, and around it spin a dozen moons. The largest of those moons, Flicker, has an atmosphere, which means that it keeps the heat it gets when it is on the sunward side of Garamond. But nobody lives on Flicker. Instead, the population resides in one of the dozen stations that orbit Flicker, orbit Garamond, or are based on one of the vacuum moons.

Flicker should be habitable, and many stations have ambitions for settling it first. The atmosphere is breathable, the water from the moon nourishes all those in the system. But the corrosive spores in the atmosphere accumulate in the lungs, and are almost always fatal. Rarely, radiation can save individuals, but nothing has proved effective on the moon itself. And so the fish swim freely, relatively undisturbed, and Flicker continues its silent existence.

Each station at Garamond is autonomous, administering its own laws and government. Interests of the system are determined by a board of representatives, but the only common interest is in keeping the system clear, except around Garamond. Both slipknots are unregulated, and will stay that way. Four stations have active shipyards, and these ships feed the cluster.

- All life is in orbit
- Spores have taken our world
- Each station for itself

patience

T2 E-2 R0

All of the planets are barren here, except for one. Patience.

This planet doesn't have a breathable air, at least by humans. It's mostly hydrogen sulfide.

A native micro-organism lives in the water, however, and so the colonists have established massive granular sludge beds that create methane gas from organic effluent. The methane is used to produce electricity in abundance with plenty to spare for breaking water down into something breathable.

A perfect cycle.

There is danger in the seas, however, as the CO_2-saturated water forms a dangerous layer over pressurized solutions of water and gas—a lot like a bottle of soda. The deepest waters have trapped enormous amounts of gas at the bottom: the water's dark depths are a time bomb. Any disturbance of the water bed could have an explosive effect.

Patience's population is thriving, and self-sufficient, with guaranteed jobs at the methane mills, if you want one.

Electricity runs everything here, with no need to waste the precious atomic materials. They are needed for the spaceships which can finally make it to other worlds, looking for some place more hospitable.

- The government knows something the population doesn't
- Newly exploring other systems with government ships
- Go back to sleep; it's just the ocean exploding

bundang

T2 E-2 R0

The settlers of Bundang received false information about this system. Whether this fault stems from political maneuvering or technological malfunctions remains unclear. The settlers expected to find a lush world with a pure atmosphere and multiple exploitable resources.

The resources are there but Bundang isn't. Not exactly. Bundang once might have been a complete planet but it is now a ring of varying sized asteroids orbiting around a temperate star. Through a quirk of space, the destruction of the planet of Bundang Proper allowed a handful of planetoids to retain a wisp of atmosphere and freed up billions of tons of heavy metals—essential to building and maintaining slipships.

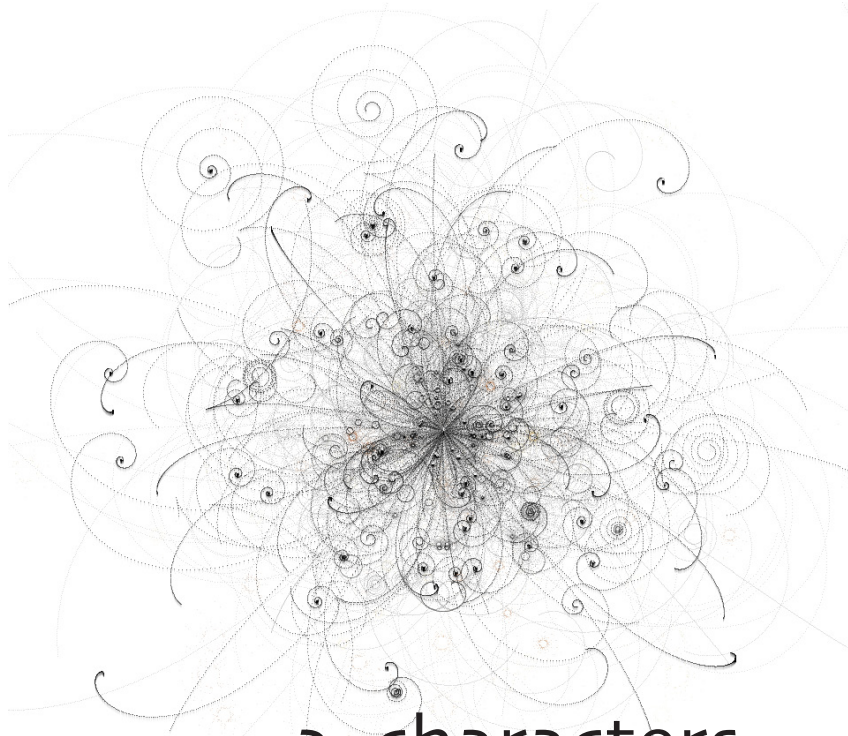
Bundang Slipstream Shipyards runs a brisk business, pumping out ships to the cluster and helping the population import food and necessities.

Due to the hazardous nature of the planetoids, population control is essential and the planetoids have reached their maximum density. Robots run many of the factories and the population is stringently controlled. Attempts to colonize the smaller asteroids have met with minimal success and now most youth who aren't the best and brightest are shipped out-of-system to live in the rest of the cluster. Exiled Bundangans resent their home system and now many of the emigrants from Bundang resent the ones chosen to stay. The entire cluster seems to be splitting along factional lines and the power

balance is in constant flux.

As long as the heavy metals remain and the atmospheric filters continue to function Bundang will continue to prosper, and likely continue to rile up the cluster.

- Easy exploitable heavy metals.
- A finite amount of inhospitable space.
- Stirring up the cluster for profit and revenge.



3. characters

Rebekah's hand hovered over the keyboard, looking one last time at the code she had banged out in the past hour. It would work. It had to work. The mass that had ejected into the slipknot would doom six billion souls in a little over four months' time, as it shifted the barycenter of the whole system, throwing off all the habitable orbits forever. Her shipmates had the locals convinced they could just retrofit a bunch of in-system mining vessels and rescue everyone, but it would never be fast enough. She had to use the Old One's tech to reverse what it had already done. Only she had the knowledge to untangle the astromechanics, the quantum entanglement gravitic topology—she knew them better than anyone else. She'd skulked around the edges of academia and shoehorned her way into the Syndicate so that she could learn about the Old Ones and their remaining technologies. This one, she was sure, would pull the mass out of the system's center and disperse it into the slipstream. She'd get it right, this time. Her hand dropped to the keyboard, stopped, caressing EXECUTE. And then her index finger pressed down that last critical centimeter, as she drew in her breath…

Creating a character uses a process that creates significant interaction in each others' stories. No *Diaspora* game begins, "You all meet in a space bar,"—how all the characters know each other and even what dirty secrets they share will all be considered as part of character creation. By this stage you may already have selected a referee from your group to run the game. That's cool and natural. Resist, however, the temptation for the referee to not make a character. There are several rewards to the inclusion of the referee in this process.

First, when there are more than three characters being created there are characters

who do not necessarily know each other except as a "friend of a friend" and this is cool.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, it creates the opportunity for players to change roles as the campaign progresses—if a player has a story in mind and an urge to referee a game to trigger that story, it's a great deal of fun if the prior referee can grab his character and join a new game in a familiar story line. In fact, you might find that the process creates referees out of players that normally would never be interested, and having all the tools available to accommodate them is awesome. Your sessions don't need to involve all the characters you generate (in fact it can sometimes be a bad move for the referee to run both a character and the game at the same time—we prefer to avoid it), but you can't go too far wrong by anticipating the possibility and making sure everyone has a character who is organic to the cluster and the group.

Character creation is ideally done as part of the first session: characters develop naturally out of the system development, and the process of making characters in turn elaborates crucial details about the cluster.

Characters are composed of four mechanical elements: their Aspects, their Skills, their Stunts, and their stress tracks (Health, Composure, and Wealth). Aspects are short, evocative statements that describe the character in ways that can be used mechanically both for and against the character as well as being points at which the referee can suggest actions to players for their characters. Skills are the basic abilities of the character, chosen from a list provided later in this section, and used mechanically to add to the basic roll during any conflict in which the Skill is relevant. Stunts are new rules that apply to the character. Stress tracks are indications of how stressed the character is physically, mentally, and financially. Aspects derive from the character's story. Skills and Stunts are selected after the story is constructed. Stress tracks have a basic rating modified by some Skills and Stunts.

generating aspects

Aspects are extracted from a story that each player will tell about his character during creation. The story is told in five phases, and two Aspects are derived from each phase.

Some phases are collaborative.

For each phase, players should follow this procedure:

1. Write a short paragraph describing the events of this phase (think in terms of allocating no more than five minutes for this each time; less is fine).

2. In turn, read them out to each other. This is important, as it helps others learn about your character at the same time that you do.

3. Select two Aspects, derived from the written paragraph. They can literally be phrases pulled from the paragraph or new phrases relevant to the story. This can be done individually, or as a consultative process with the table. Once selected, everyone should read out their two derived Aspects. You'll find that there is plenty of fiddling with Aspects at this point—have fun with it and don't get too stuck on procedure: your core objective is to come up with cool Aspects, and so listening to the table and how they respond to your ideas can often yield exciting results.

4. Repeat for each of the five phases, until each character has ten Aspects.

Going through the five phases for four characters might take 45-60 minutes, including reading aloud the gradual development of the characters after each phase.

Characters have ten Aspects.

phase one: growing up

This phase should establish the character's home system and maybe some information about his family and upbringing. Information written here might reasonably feed back into the system description for the world: it's likely that the player will find new ideas percolating about the world as he wonders about his character's place in it. The two Aspects derived from this phase might include features of the home world, such as how its technology or political structure impacts the character.

phase two: starting out

This phase describes the character picking a direction in life. It might be a career choice or an education or it might be a circumstance forced upon him, but it should be a formative choice that establishes who the character has decided he will be. Career decisions often mean the player decides whether the character has gone to space before, and, if so, in what capacity. Does he serve on a ship? Is he part of some military or government organization? An independent trader? A belter mining asteroids? Scientist, ninja, spy? Perhaps he is a barbarian, uncomfortable with all the technology that drives the cluster; perhaps he is an explorer, or a drive mechanic, or someone who never found a career, and has been wandering the stars looking for purpose…

phase three: moment of crisis

Now players will write a brief description of an event that created change in the character—something that the character would talk about later (maybe to his pals around drinks, maybe only to his wife, maybe to himself while in his sleep with the cold sweats and the voices and the screaming). The moment of crisis must reference the character of the player to your right—you want to bring them in as an observer, or a participant, or even as the focus of the event. This is an opportunity to help define another character as well as your own.

phase four: sidetracked

This phase is about events out of your control. As with life, not everything goes as planned, and it may be that your life has taken an unexpected turn. This phase revisits the story of the player to your left's moment-of-crisis event from your character's perspective. They wrote you into their story in phase three—now is your chance to tell it the way your character saw it happen.

phase five: on your own

In the final phase, write briefly about where the character is now. What are his immediate needs and goals? What is he doing to get by in a hostile universe?

Effective Aspects

One good rule of thumb is to make some Aspects that are deliberately designed to give you the power to push the story where you want it to go. This is especially effective when the referee is fond of showing you events to react to rather than supplying you with an explicit mission. Filling in the blanks of any of the following should lead to an Aspect that you can have compelled reliably to take part of the story for yourself:

I know in my heart…
I'll make my name by…
More than anything I need…

You can even choose very specific mission-style Aspects for yourself and, when they are resolved, replace them as per the experience rules. So don't necessarily shy away from:

I intend to…
My most immediate concern is…
…must die.

advice on selecting aspects

The selection of a character's Aspects is an essential part of character generation. Aspects are the catalysts for the economies of fate points. They need to be worded in a way that you can invoke them on yourself (for when a bonus to a roll is needed), but—more importantly—they need to invite compels from the referee. Otherwise you lose your fate points too quickly and there is no obvious source for replenishment. A well-worded Aspect can be both revealing of the character's nature, and be obviously invokable for both benefit and detriment.

Not all Aspects can work that way, and it may emerge in play that some Aspects do not enter into the fate point economy at all. They are the ones which can be traded out through the experience process as play progresses.

Aspects reveal something about the character that the character may not even know. Similarly, an Aspect might be a physical object (an heirloom weapon, or a spaceship). In making that choice, the player is telling the referee that this object is part of the character's identity. It won't be taken away, but it will also confer obligations and responsibilities, so that it too becomes an active part of the economy.

skills

Players select 15 Skills for their character and rank them in a pyramid: one at level 5, two at 4, three at 3, four at 2, and five at 1.

Selected Skills should be logically consistent with the character's background material as elaborated in the Aspects phases but there are no hard and fast rules for selection. Skills are selected so that they are appropriate for the characters about whom we've now learned quite a lot (with even more existing in the players' imaginations). Players will also select three Stunts (see below). Some players may prefer to select their Stunts before their Skills, or at the same time. This process may require some revision of Aspects or some redefinition of character direction.

One approach for new players is to choose an apex Skill first—what the character does best. Stunts may follow from that. Finally, the size of the various hit tracks is calculated. This process might take another 20-30 minutes perhaps, yielding completed characters.

There are many Skills from which characters can choose, most of which represents a specific area of learned knowledge. Each Skill is presented with a brief overview, and some idea of what a character choosing this Skill as their apex might be. In each case, though, the precise range of a given Skill's effect is to be determined by the referee in consultation with the table, and other stories are possible.

Untrained Skills: an attempt to use any Skill that is not in the character's Skill pyramid does so at an effective Skill level of –1.

Within this list, there are three classes of Skills that have been identified explicitly. Combat Skills represent the ability to use a weapon in personal combat; other Skills are of course useful in combat (Agility, Alertness), but do not convey the ability to use a weapon. Space Skills represent the ability to fill a position on a spaceship that is relevant to space combat; other Skills are of course useful in space (Aircraft, EVA), but do not convey specific Skills relevant to the space combat mini-game. Further, three Skills (Assets, Resolve, and Stamina) have a direct impact on the length of a character's stress tracks: with these three Skills alone, an untrained character is considered to have a default of zero for the purposes of determining stress track length (*i.e.* a character untrained in Resolve will still have three boxes in their Composure stress track); checks on these Skills are still made at –1.

Most characters will want at least one combat Skill and one space Skill, or will have a good story for why they do not.

Agility—measures how fast, flexible, and dexterous a character is. Use Agility to throw for accuracy (opposed attack roll to hit someone with a rock), to dodge an attack (opposed roll against an attack roll), or to vault a fence (fixed difficulty). It is most typically used as a movement check in combat. Apex: an acrobat or similar athlete; his speed and precision of movement are legendary.

Aircraft—the ability to pilot all forms of aircraft, including interface vehicles into low orbit. Apex: a pilot capable of daredevil Stunts and precision aerobatics that win awards.

Alertness—determines just how on the ball a character is. Alertness checks might be made to establish whether a character spots a hidden character (opposed roll, Alertness against Stealth) or to fix an order of action in combat. Apex: unsurprisable, the character with apex Alertness might be a highly trained martial artist or a highly skilled observer such an investigator or military scout.

Animal Handler—represents the ability to control, break, and ride animals (as appropriate) on all worlds for which the character has Culture/Tech. Apex: a master of animals, perhaps running a circus or someone with a preternatural ability to commune with animals.

Archaeology—archaeology in the cluster is the study of earlier civilizations, before the most recent fall. An archaeologist might possess broken fragments of knowl-

edge of higher tech, the residue that might have survived the inevitable collapse, on all worlds for which the character has Culture/Tech. Note that Archaeology in a cluster is not strictly an academic pursuit. In fact in most cases it is not academic at all—it can be industrial, technical, and secretive. In a sense it is closer to prospecting than what we think of as archaeology, hence its division from the Science Skill. Apex: an intuitive locator of artifacts, able to find signs of ancient habitations in the slightest perturbation of orbit or change in colour of foliage; his past finds are legendary and probably dangerous.

Arts—understanding of the literature, history, and fine arts on all worlds for which the character has Culture/Tech. Apex: a renowned researcher and teacher in her field whose opinion is sought after by others whenever controversy arises, or a highly-skilled creative genius.

Assets (track)—the Assets Skill is the only way to be rich. Money is never tracked independently. It is used in practically any roll related to a purchase and it establishes the length of the character's Wealth stress track. It models the availability of cash, but also contacts, convertible properties, loans, and even an ability to evade debt collection. Apex: a tycoon with the resources of worlds to bring to bear. Small worlds, mind you, but worlds.

Brawling (combat)—fists, feet, found weapons. Apex: the Brawler might be an accomplished professional fighter, a spiritual martial arts specialist, or a military trainer. She might also just be someone with a lot of experience in crummy bars.

Brokerage—knowledge of interstellar trade and how to manipulate it. Directly assists ship maintenance Assets checks if ships are hauling cargo or passengers. Apex: the Broker is a legend amongst traders and speculators of any system she's passed through. She always finds a bargain and always finds a desperate buyer and, when times are really tough, she knows how to make her own luck. After all when she makes a decision, whole stock markets follow.

Bureaucracy—facility with handling the people and paperwork associated with government and other institutional processes. Use your Bureaucracy Skill when filing for a license to mine an asteroid or to find the person responsible for paying out your slipship insurance. Apex: taking Bureaucracy as a apex Skill flags the character as a professional pusher of paper, certainly, but more interestingly a professional pusher of people in a professional, procedural context; this is the kind of person that knows how to game corporate and government processes to get what he wants from people who attend more closely to their procedures and paperwork than the reality of what they are doing. Which is most everyone.

Charm—sometimes you want to sway your opposition on looks and a smile. Whatever you want and wherever that might lead, Charm is your one-on-one persuasion Skill. Apex: the apex Charmer might be a celebrity, trading on her status and fame to persuade, or might be one of those smooth, naturally friendly people that everyone just wants to please. Either way she is legendary for it, whether through fame or infamy, or just police rap sheets for fraud and confidence tricks.

Close Combat (combat)—knives, swords, spears, etc. Apex: the Close Combat specialist can always find a use for an apparently archaic weapon. He's the one that knows the gladius is the best possible boarding weapon as long as the defenders don't

have pikes (or fusion cannons), but, more, he's confident (and correct) that he can get inside a shooter's guard before the trigger is pulled. He might be a famous swordsman (an entertainer or a duellist) or he might be a low-profile but in-demand trainer for military or private interests.

Communications (space)—different from the Computer Skill, Communications uses communication and computer assets and is primarily offensive: it's about hacking, subverting, destroying, or otherwise incapacitating data and data carrying systems. In the space combat system, Communications is used to augment Electronic Warfare attack and defense rolls. Outside of that system it might be used for all manner of nefarious and destructive communications—jamming, hacking, eavesdropping, spoofing, and so on. Apex: the Communication specialist has communication equipment with her at all times, ready to communicate with anything even if she has to jury rig a solution to do it; once in communication she owns the channel, capable of manipulating its contents and endpoints to her own needs. She's a security specialist wearing both hats and may be famous, infamous, and/or wanted by the police.

Computer (space)—the computer engineer is the one coping with data-related disasters. He wrote the security policy and he can repair and restore in real time. In space combat, this Skill is used as part of the damage control phase. Outside of space combat it might be used to evaluate data systems, use a sophisticated computer to find some hidden data, or reprogram a device to perform a new function. Apex: Computer as an apex Skill describes a person obsessed with the detail of computer function and operation, possibly at the expense of application knowledge. In deep multi-collapse databases he might even be a kind of archaeologist, able to dredge up obscure ancient algorithms and craft them to the current purpose to great effect. Every problem looks like a computer problem to the Computer specialist, and it often is—he's the guy that wired the airlock to ignore safety interlocks and blow those boarders out of the hull, and then fixed it afterwards.

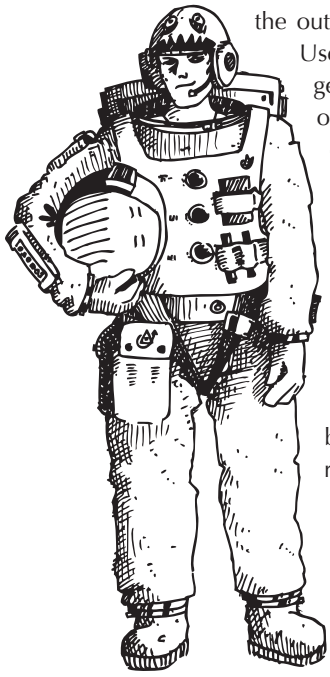
Culture/Tech—represents the facility of the character with culture and technology of a given system in the cluster. Apex: Culture/Tech is a special Skill and having it as an apex Skill is more of a quantitative statement than qualitative: you have travelled widely, and are at home in most systems in the cluster; you might even be able to pass yourself off as a native of somewhere else.

Demolitions—an understanding and experience with the controlled use of explosives and related devices. This Skill would pertain at least as much to defusing explosives as to setting them off and includes knowledge of effective use of the explosives for demolition and excavation: you know how much to put where in order to get the effect you want. Apex: the Demolitions guy gets the most done with the least; he can manufacture efficient explosives from stuff in the ship's locker, and can use those improvised explosives to destroy a bridge because he also knows the weak points on such structures.

Energy Weapons (combat)—lasers, plasma weapons, lightning guns, or anything else that does harm with energy. Apex: energy weapons are only really efficient at T2 and above, so the Energy Weapons expert is an unusual enthusiast for this specific kind of weapon. She takes advantage of obscure features of her preferred weapon type, like the zero flight time and the high energy density in storage on the device, to get every

ounce of advantage—she shoots down drones, sets low-power lasers on overload so they explode, can get energy from one device to another, can modulate the power on a laser to use it as a communicator, and hits everything she aims at. Her fascination with the specific form of weapon likely borders on nerdish.

Engineering (space)—your ship's engineer is the guy that keeps the hulk in space, moving, and at a temperature you can all live with. He's also the guy that repairs damage from battle or accident and generally knows what's where. In space combat, this Skill is used as part of the damage control phase, to repair damage to the Frame stress tracks on spacecraft. Outside of space combat it might be used to fix Consequences on a ship, assess the state of a vessel, or make a gadget related to spacecraft and their drives and power plants. Apex: choosing Engineering as an apex Skill means being the engine room miracle worker—when the pilot needs a little bit more V-shift from the motors, he delivers; when the damage seems irrepairable, he gets critical systems back online.



EVA—the Extra-Vehicular-Activity master knows her way around the outside of a spaceship and the equipment needed to do that. Use the EVA Skill to patch a pressure suit, get people into emergency gear fast, hang onto the hull under thrust, or find an obscure way into someone else's space station. Apex: a specialist in EVA knows everything there is to know about wearable vehicles. Anything you climb into and operate like your own limbs, she is comfortable with it and ready to fight if need be; she is used to working surrounded by lethal environments like vacuum, oceans, ammonia atmospheres, and lethal vegetation leaking poisoned spores; she knows what a WALDO is and how not to hurt herself with it; she can climb the outside of a spaceship under thrust and get back inside safely. When the only safe place is the centimeter between your skin and the inside of the suit, the EVA expert runs the show.

Gunnery (space)—this Skill gives command over all the many ship's weapon systems, whether torpedoes or beams. It is used to augment weaponry rolls in the space combat system but it can be used outside that system to declare or discover capabilities of examined equipment or to modify existing gear for good or ill. Apex: the Gunnery specialist is familiar with all forms of ship-to-ship weapons in offensive, defensive, and creative use. Of course he can hit an enemy vessel at a hundred thousand meters with a coilgun battery, but he also knows how to rig a missile as an observation drone or signal with a fusion torch. He's aware of every computer interface and targeting algorithm available for running weapons and he has distinct preference; his customised weapons console is probably incomprehensible to any lesser user.

Intimidation—sometimes you want to force the other guy to back down or act against his interests and, violent though you may be, you don't feel like shooting him just yet. Intimidation is your first stop before combat. An opposed Intimidation versus

Resolve might be used to bluster your way past guards. Apex: choosing Intimidation as an apex Skill creates a character that is used to getting his way without being right. He can threaten subtly or overtly, bringing to bear knowledge of weapons or bureaucracy, but he always threatens: when he wants something from you, you know you are in danger.

Medical—low levels reflect basic first aid; advanced levels reflect the skills of a professional surgeon or internist. Apex: the Medical expert might be a renowned doctor or just an especially skilled Emergency Medical Technician; whichever she is, she gets things done: this person is not by nature a theorist but rather a practical healer of people.

MicroG (combat)—the facility to move and fight in a very low-gravity environment, such as a ship under low or no thrust or in space. When fighting in these micro-gravity environments, characters use the MicroG Skill instead of the appropriate combat Skill (replacing Agility for movement, and Brawling, Close Combat, and Slug Thrower for doing damage; energy weapons are recoilless and still use the Energy Weapons skill). The MicroG expert must still be trained in the replaced Skill, of course—no matter what rank his MicroG, he still uses an untrained weapon type at a rank of -1. This makes a MicroG expert a versatile and creative combatant but only in this specialized environment. MicroG could also be used to perform other difficult tasks while in micro-gravity, such as finding a way to get leverage to unjam a warped door or maneuvering to put a "Spinning out of control" Aspect on an opponent. Though this Skill supplants combat Skills while in micro-gravity it does not confer any special familiarity with the weapons—checks to clear jams, disassemble, re-assemble, fix sights, or otherwise manipulate the weapon itself use the appropriate weapon skill. Apex: the MicroG specialist is completely at home in very low gravity, able to find a grip or brace on any surface and never making "up-bias" mistakes—he'll pick whatever orientation is most advantageous at any time, using recoil to advantage and instinctively ignoring ballistics and coriolis effects. When fighting in close he never makes the mistake of looking for friction leverage, but always fights isometrically, bracing against his opponent and himself.

Navigation (space)—locating that envelope of space where the slipstream can be entered is tricky business, and the Navigator is the one who knows it inside out. This Skill is used in the space combat system to decide the placement of most ships at the beginning of a fight. Navigation might be used out of combat to plot efficient paths through a system or to find a planetary object that isn't supposed to be there. Apex: the dedicated Navigation specialist is a cerebral mathematician capable of juggling a thousand variables in a dynamic state with great precision. She knows where things should be, how fast they should be going, and what the fastest or most efficient way through is. She may be well known in some circles and totally unknown in others; it's possible no one anywhere knows her name, but only that she is uncatchable—or inescapable—in space.

Oratory—when you need to be persuasive to a crowd, you need to speak to them with that honeyed voice and careful elocution that makes them want to love you. Use Oratory to rile up a crowd or talk one down. Apex: the Oratory specialist has made his life's work communication with the masses; his gift is in persuading crowds, taking

advantage of rhetorical and emotional tools that make people believe. He's likely well known, his face recognized; he may be a media personality or a politician.

Pilot (space)—someone has to fly these things! Pilot Skill is used in the space combat system to influence each turn's positioning roll. It also might be used outside of that system to resolve an escape scene quickly or to conduct a complicated orbital maneuver. Pilot Skill refers specifically to the big long-haul reaction drives ship's use for intra- as well as inter-system travel, but not for interface vehicles that ply the space between ground and orbit. Apex: the hotshot Pilot identifies herself with her craft, understanding that the basics of spaceships are the same no matter where you go or how technology changes. She knows how much further you can push a motor past its design specs, and can tell from the hull vibration just how dangerous a maneuver is; she manages heat and burn so as to gain maximum tactical advantage over other vessels, and is probably in demand by private military ventures and criminals—everywhere else you can survive with a mediocre pilot.

Profession: <choice>—players choose a profession and can expect to perform any tasks related to that profession using this Skill rank. Examples: Bartender, Butler, Farmer, Naval architect, Blacksmith, Teacher. Apex: an apex Professional is the best at what he does, gracing the cover of appropriate trade magazines and is sought after for advice by lesser professionals; he is at the cutting edge of his profession's development and speaks frequently at large, very serious gatherings; he may be on committees, setting standards for his area of expertise.

Repair—the ability to effect mechanical and electronic repairs, excluding computer repairs, weapon maintenance, and spaceship drive maintenance. Apex: to the Repair expert nothing is broken, just temporarily out of commission; missing parts can be fabricated from substitute materials, broken things can be glued or welded or braced, electronics can be re-purposed from one device to another with just a little logic from this third thing between; she has a tool for every purpose and a box full of minimum essential parts, all adaptable to myriad purposes.

Resolve (track)—this is how dedicated a character is to his objectives. Just how far is he willing to go? While Resolve primarily determines the length of the Composure stress track, it would also be used to defend against covering fire (defensive roll to oppose a Composure attack with a weapon) or to oppose Intimidation attempts (defensive roll to oppose an Intimidation roll). Apex: a person with peak Resolve is a cool, cool customer; under the direst of circumstances he does not shake, press the wrong buttons, or make bad choices, but rather he proceeds with his purpose unshaken and all his faculties intact; he is virtually immune to any form of persuasion unless he decides to be persuaded.

Science—an understanding of the principles of physics, mathematics, chemistry, and biology. Apex: a character with apex Science Skill is a scientist of some renown—known, sought after, published, and cited all over the cluster, or at least the system. She knows her field and remains something of a jack-of-all-trades in other fields, bringing her vast knowledge and earnest desire for facts to bear on all problems.

Slug Throwers (combat)—firearms, whether black powder, cordite, or obscure binary propellants. Apex: this character is your classic movie gunslinger, familiar with all projectile hurling weapons and their nuances. She can patch ammunition to sabot through too large a barrel, she can overcharge a binary propellant magazine to get better penetration, and she knows ballistics tables better than you know the galley menu after seven years on the same ship. She hits what she aims at every time and has a preternatural intuition for when you are going to expose yourself from cover; she's a killer.

Stamina (track)—measures the character's general well being and strength. It is primarily used to establish the length of the character's Health stress track, but would also be checked when exposed to disease (fixed difficulty check) or to lift heavy weights. Apex: the Stamina specialist is a superman. He eats right, lives well, trains his body, and as a result he finds himself immune to normal disease and able to stress his body almost indefinitely. He's a powerful athlete: a weight lifter, an endurance runner, and an Aphexian buzzclouder. Alternatively, his augmentation may be unnatural, the result of technology rather than good living. He is almost unstoppable by natural means.

Stealth—this is the Skill for sneaking around, and avoiding notice. Apex: the local equivalent of the mythical ninja, the Stealth specialist is never seen or heard. She is not just hyper-aware of her surroundings and how they make her apparent, but also a master of available technology whether that's light bending meta-material clothing or lampblack. She almost certainly uses her Skills professionally, and it's hard to imagine how that's legal, though she might be an ex-special-forces military professional or perhaps a famous practitioner of an obscure local sport. She always enters the room unnoticed and departs without comment.

Survival—the ability to survive in the wilderness: building fires, making shelters, surviving hostile environments, etc. Apex: the Survivalist knows everything there is to know about making the basics of life support from whatever is handy; any dabbler can make do in the wilderness of an earth-like planet for a few months, but this extremist can find air enough in frozen gases to top up his tanks and has the adapter for her suit to do it; she knows what animals you can eat, can make a fire, and can make a lethal trap from something flexible and something sharp. Left alone almost anywhere, she will still be there when you get back.

Tactics—the ability to make the right choices in the heat of combat. Use your Tactics Skill to place unpleasant Aspects on your opponents as a maneuver ("Out in the open!") or on the scene ("Fog is rolling in"). The implication is that this was always true, but that the character with Tactics can make it useful to himself and his allies, so now it is an Aspect. Apex: a character with Tactics as his apex Skill is a master at moving men through hostile situations—he always chooses the best cover, times his actions at the expense of his opponents, and provides the best advice; he's probably a military man or a member of an elite police unit and he's seen combat before.

Vehicle—the ability to drive all terrestrial vehicles, on land and water. Apex: the character with Vehicle as his apex Skill is able to drive practically anything as long as gravity (or an artificial equivalent) is pinning the bottom of the vehicle to something. He's the go-to person for getaways and pursuits planetside.

some special skills

profession

Profession is the only Skill that can be taken more than once. It represents the character's familiarity with the expectations of a given profession. Anyone with two levels in a given profession may confidently present themselves as a member of that profession, whether it be cobbler or diplomat. Note that a knowledge of professional standards can at times be separate from a practical expertise in the necessary subject areas. Profession: Astronomer (which involves the necessary Skills associated with holding the profession) is different from both Science (which might include astronomical knowledge as part of a general appreciation of science) and Navigation (which is the applied knowledge, using astronomy in the field, as it were). A player wishing to play an astronomer may wish to invest in all three Skills, or only some of them; each combination could yield slightly different stories. Profession allows the player to choose a particular career for his character not otherwise covered in the Skill set: Asteroid Miner, Horticulturist, Union Leader, Prostitute…

culture/tech

Culture/Tech represents the ability to get by on other planets within the cluster, and covers anything that would be part of regular civilian day-to-day life. It won't make you an atomic plant engineer, but it will let you wire up a VCR. The intent is more exclusive than inclusive—it's more useful in how it keeps characters from easily performing basic tasks way outside their area of familiarity. Culture/Tech works differently than other Skills, in that ranks indicate the total number of systems in which the character is comfortable: it is not something that is subject to rolls, though lacking the Skill in an appropriate context might create a penalty to rolls on other Skills.

Skill	effect
nil	(untrained) you can get by on your home world.
1	(minimum investment) you can get by comfortably on your homeworld and one additional world in the cluster (specify)
2	you can get by comfortably on your homeworld and two additional worlds in the cluster (specify)
3	you can get by comfortably on your homeworld and three additional worlds in the cluster (specify).
4	you can get by comfortably on your homeworld and four additional worlds in the cluster (specify).
5	you can get by comfortably on your homeworld and five additional worlds in the cluster (specify).

So someone with Culture/Tech 3 would note all the worlds on which the character is comfortable (i.e. the home world and three others). On the character sheet, they could use the system letter code to indicate their comfort zones: "C/T 3 (A, B, F, D)." This means that someone with an apex investment in the Skill is comfortable on most worlds in the cluster, but it's unlikely that anyone is happy everywhere.

Players may select familiarity with cultures that do not actually exist in order to represent historical knowledge or re-enactment hobbies. If you are playing with the Weapon Familiarity optional rules below, this can be a cool way to build a high technology person with an interest (and facility) in ancient forms of warfare.

weapon familiarity

All Close Combat weapons, Slug Throwers, and Energy Weapons have a technology rating, which reflects their capabilities. Characters are skilled in all weapons for the technology ratings in the range between the highest tech and lowest tech world for which they have Culture/Tech (C/T) familiarity. A character who has C/T for two T2 worlds can only use T2 weapons and Brawling weapons with their combat skills; all other weapons are considered untrained (skill -1). A character with C/T for a T-1 world and a T1 world can use T-1, T0, and T1 weapons as trained.

Characters may, however, select "archaic weaponry" instead of a system in the cluster to gain familiarity in historical styles of fighting (T-4 to the highest C/T tech value) or may choose "precollapse weaponry" to gain proficiency with high tech weapons (from the lowest C/T tech value to T4). Players should note on their character sheets the tech range of weapons their characters are familiar with.

languages (optional)

Some games may wish to add the issue of language comprehension. If so, this Skill can be included. It works like Culture/Tech with each rank corresponding to one language you can speak fluently other than your native tongue. (All characters are assumed to speak one language fluently).

Skills and Aspects

The interplay between Skills and Aspects is not obvious, but with a properly worded Aspect differentiation for a given character idea becomes possible. You want to be the world's best surgeon? Medical 5 and the Aspect "Arrogant surgeon" raises you above the others with Medical as their apex Skill. Want to be a pilot who only truly shines in combat? Pilot 3 and the Aspect "Works best under pressure" might do that. Want to have learned your martial arts through a correspondence course? Take Brawling 3 and the Aspect "This has only been tried in simulations." A prima ballerina might not have Arts 5 if she doesn't have a broader awareness of history and literature; it might be Arts 3 and "Her dance is a song."

A player might choose deliberately to limit the pinnacle Skill in order to attempt to draw fate points: A fix-it character who has Repair 5 still might have the Aspect "Clumsy around wires" in order to reflect a preference for mechanical repairs; a natural shot might have Slug Thrower 5 but an Aspect "Guns don't need maintenance; people need maintenance"; a specialist with boats might take Vehicle 5 but have an Aspect "On land I'm all at sea." Thinking about the interaction between Skills and Aspects can help refine the character, and if this means you want to go back and reword an Aspect from your five phases in order to get the right effect, by all means do so.

stress tracks

Every character has three stress tracks: Health, Composure, and Wealth. Each has a relevant Skill that can modify the number of boxes in the track. Some Stunts can modify the number of boxes as well. The Health track is associated with the Stamina Skill. Composure is associated with Resolve. Wealth is associated with Assets. Tracks start out with three boxes in them, which represents a character untrained in the relevant Skill. If the relevant Skill is 1 or 2, the track is four boxes; if it is 3 or 4, the track is five boxes; if it is 5, the track has six boxes.

health

The Health stress track represents how close you are to sustaining an injury that will affect your performance and require time to recover from. It does not represent actual injury. The Health stress track is modified by Stamina.

The Health stress track takes hits when a character loses a combat check—he takes a bullet, gets burned by a laser, is cut by a knife, or is punched in the eye. It's not an effective injury unless it causes a Consequence—there is no mechanical effect to having a box filled in a track. It's when boxes you don't have get filled that you have trouble.

composure

The Composure stress track represents how close you are to mental breakdown. It does not represent the degree of actual breakdown. The Composure stress track is modified by Resolve.

The Composure stress track takes hits when a character loses a social combat check and sometimes when under fire in combat. As with Health, it's not an effective hit until a Consequence is applied.

wealth

The Wealth stress track represents how close you are to having real financial trouble. It does not represent actual debt or financial ruin but rather how close you are to feeling the ramifications of debt. The Wealth stress track is modified by Assets.

The Wealth stress track takes hits when a character fails a Wealth check when buying something or assisting with monthly ship maintenance. It follows all the same rules as the other stress tracks do, though recovery can take longer.

consequences

Any time you are taking hits to a stress track, you can reduce the number of hits with Consequences. A mild Consequence reduces the incoming hits (usually shifts) by one, a moderate Consequence reduces them by two, and a severe Consequence reduces by four. Normally you can have at most three Consequences and no more than one of each kind.

Each Consequence is a kind of Aspect and represents real damage: "Shattered jaw" or "Hopelessly depressed" or "Hunted by loan sharks" are all good. Each is free-taggable by your enemies once.

Consequences are discussed in more detail in each combat chapter.

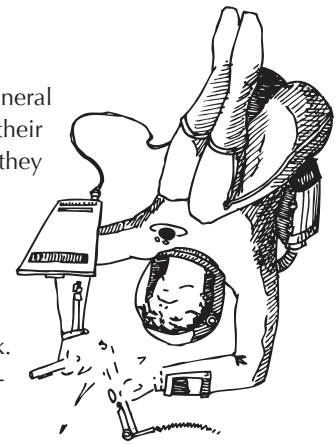
taken out

When you take a hit that would go off your stress track, you are Taken Out. Whoever scored that fatal hit gets to decide what happens to you. You could be dead or you could just be unconscious. Or, with a financial hit, you could be slaving away in a burger joint with no prospects of happiness or promotion.

concessions

At any time in a fight of any kind, if you have not been Taken Out, you can offer a concession. Referees especially like this to keep villains alive for another day. A concession is a story that you offer to end the combat instead of play it through. If your opponent accepts it, it's true. Good concessions give something up but keep you in play. Things like, "I tell him the combination to the safe but sneak out while he's not looking, escaping back to my safe house" or "Our ship escapes through the slipknot but our motors are not working so we're stranded on the other side" are great.

stunts



Each character also selects three Stunts, from a list of general Stunt types. Players are expected to define what exactly their Stunt does based on the general rule for the type of Stunt they have selected.

Characters have three Stunts.

There are four well-defined categories of stunts: military-grade, have a thing, skill substitution, and alter a track. There is also room to build your own stunts without reference to these categories, which we call "free-form" stunts.

military-grade

Apply to one Skill. Military-grade (MG for short) provides a qualitative difference to its Skill: it allows you to make rolls in circumstances where you would not be able to otherwise. For weapons and armour, the character can now use and have access to non-civilian weapons. For space Skills, the effect varies by Skill: these functions are defined elsewhere in the rules. For example:

Military-grade Communications: you are able to initiate EW attacks in combat.

Military-grade Slug Throwers: you are able to fire slug throwers that lack the Civilian Stunt.

Military-grade Pilot: you are able to pilot a military spaceship.

Military-grade Engineering: in the repair phase of space combat, your target value is zero instead of the highest marked box on the stress track (see Chapter 6, Space Combat). Or the player may choose to interpret MG Engineer such that her target value is the highest marked box of both Heat and Frame stress tracks, but a success allows

Stunts and Aspects

A character may choose to take a spacecraft as both an Aspect and as a Stunt. She doesn't need to, but they represent different things. The Stunt means that she has all the effects that a ship brings: she can fly around in it, and is responsible for maintenance. The Aspect ties it to her: that particular ship is part of her identity. The player wants the referee to compel it for complications and intends to invoke it for advantage. You don't need to make your ship both an Aspect and a Stunt, but it does make things more personal.

repairs on both tracks at the number of shifts. Choose one effect at character creation.

Military-grade Computer: in the repair phase of space combat, your target value is zero instead of the highest marked box on the Data stress track.

For other Skills the player may have to invent the effect:

Military-grade Alertness: a successful Alertness check before personal or platoon combat allows you to position enemy or friendly units to your advantage. This may allow you to simulate an ambush, a counter-ambush, or an escape that might otherwise be impossible.

Military-grade Assets: allows you to purchase normally unavailable or illegal weaponry.

Military-grade Bureaucracy: might allow you to forge documents.

Military-grade Medical: lets you disable a free tag gained from the Health stress track of any ally in the same zone as you, as a combat action (this prevents an opponent using the Consequence to your ally's disadvantage).

Military-grade Navigation: lets you place three ships during a successful detection roll in ship combat, rather than the usual two.

Military-grade Brawling: may be used to represent martial arts training, adding +2 penetration to Brawling attacks, and +1 to Brawling rolls in defense.

Military-grade Brokerage: when conducting deals relating to military equipment, you never suffer adverse modifiers when they are illegal to buy, sell, or both. Normally brokering such goods in an illegal environment would substantially reduce your profits by increasing the sale difficulty. You know all the right paperwork to apply and all the right names to drop, not to mention legal avenues of sale for restricted equipment. Another possibility is to get +1 to spacecraft maintenance rolls when you have served aboard throughout the period since the last maintenance roll.

The precise effects of a military-grade Stunt can vary from game to game and from character to character. The above list offers an example only and your table might invent very different effects.

have a thing

The character has an important thing at his disposal. This might be a spaceship, property, or something else. Note that this does not help with monthly maintenance costs, and so a character with this Stunt who has taken a slipship may be assuming obligations he otherwise wouldn't face.

Increased technology: with the referee's approval and a good narrative, the thing

may be at one tech level above the cluster maximum: e.g. "Grandma's blaster" an ancient T3 laser pistol that survived the last collapse. This works better for personal weapons or armour than for a spaceship, though conceivably two Stunts could justify owning a spaceship a tech level higher than the cluster maximum (not to exceed +4, naturally).

Integral equipment: when a character's story demands that some piece of standard equipment be intrinsic to his body, this Stunt provides it. Choose a piece of equipment of T0 or lower and it will always be present. Use Aspects to provide limitations if that feels necessary. Applying this stunt twice could grant functionality of a T2 or T1 piece of gear.

Claws: (Integral equipment: Knife) character can command a set of extremely dangerous blades to spring forth from his cybernetic hands, used with the Brawling Skill.

Toughened hide: (Integral equipment: Bulletproof vest) this character has been genetically modified to have an extremely tough skin, equivalent to a bulletproof vest.

Doesn't breathe: (Integral equipment: Pressure suit) this character has several biological functions managed by implanted machinery and consequently does not need to breathe. He may always act as though he has a pressure suit on, though does not gain the armour effects.

skill substitution

Apply to one Skill, to benefit either yourself or an ally.

Swap a Skill: some Skill you have can be used in place of some other Skill from the list, to a maximum value of 3. If you want to use a high-ranking Skill at a higher level, this Stunt costs you a fate point each time it is used (high-ranking Skills can be used at level 3 without paying a point).

Bribery: use Assets for Bureaucracy

Natural swordsman: use Agility for Close Combat

Rope-a-dope: use Stamina for Brawling

Ship tactics: use Navigation for Gunnery

Note: Using Swap a Skill changes the Skill needed to make a given roll, it does not confer training or ability in the Skill being replaced. One

Skill Synergies

Many Skill and Stunt choices develop out of the narrated backgrounds. A character who has conducted civilian surveys of celestial objects as a career might have a swap-a-skill Stunt, "Commo wizard" that allows him to make Alertness checks with his Communications Skill when using a communications array. This Stunt may be less advantageous than Military-grade Communications (which would allow him to initiate Electronic Warfare attacks), but is more appropriate for his explorer's background.

Unexpected stories can emerge from this process. For example, a Stunt "Knows the market" (allowing Brokerage to be used for Assets) gives a character easy access to cash, but it doesn't really make her more financially secure—her Wealth stress track can still lead to negative Consequences pretty easily (since only Assets alters the Wealth stress track). This means it would make sense for a character with such a Stunt also to have Assets 1 in her Skill pyramid, even if she has an effective Assets 3 from a Stunt.

might have a stunt that lets him use his Charm 3 as Assets ("Pretty Please?"), but this does not give the character two extra boxes in their Wealth stress track: they don't actually have the money, and they accumulate debt as would you or I. Someone with the stunt "Natural Swordsman" who has attacked using Agility cannot also roll Agility to dodge an incoming attack in the same turn (since one may only use a given Skill once per turn in combat).

Use my Skill: allies can use the Skill you specify (or, depending on the story, they may use it as another Skill) instead of their own, to a maximum value of three. You need a story that explains how this works, and a formal condition must be stated so that it is not universally available (the implementation of this will be at the discretion of the referee, so it is best to be clear early on).

Wingman: use my Charm when I'm nearby. Condition: must be in the same zone or a neighboring zone, if in a mapped engagement (social combat).

Boarding party leader: use my Tactics for MicroG, when I'm leading.

It's a software problem: use my Computer for Repair, on anything with a processor.

Take a bonus: allies can use a Skill of at least level 3 to receive a +1 bonus to a roll, as specified. When there are restrictions, the effects may operate at the scale of space or platoon combat, subject to the approval of the referee.

Cover me: use my Slug Thrower Skill for a +1 bonus on Agility in combat (the Agility roll may be used for defense or for movement).

Fleet tactics: use my Tactics for +1 bonus to Beam or Torpedo rolls during space combat. There must be more than one ship on either side of a space combat.

Out of the sun: use my Pilot for a +1 bonus to the Navigation roll in the detection phase of space combat.

Combat medic: use my Medical to get a +1 bonus on rolls to repair Morale stress track hits on any unit within command range in platoon combat.

Note: Using a "Take a bonus" Stunt in space combat counts as the character's action for that phase, and risks incurring Skill penalties for further actions later in the turn.

alter a track

Improve the length or functionality of one of your stress tracks and the way hits on them are mitigated.

Resiliant: player may use four Consequences instead of three. The fourth is another mild Consequence.

Lucky: player uses the Consequence progression 2/3/4 instead of the usual 1/2/4. This applies to Consequences mitigating hits to any track.

Extra stress box: the player may add one box to any of his stress tracks (Health, Composure, or Wealth) permanently.

Skill replacement: the player may change the skill that determines the length of the stress track.

Bomb disposal training: use Demolitions instead of Resolve to modify the Composure track.

Self-directed stock portfolio: use Brokerage instead of Assets to modify the Wealth track.

Note: in both of these examples, the character would be considered untrained in Resolve or Assets for any Skill rolls, unless it is also taken as a Skill.

free-form stunts

Stunts like Military-grade that can have a player-defined effect are approved under the authority of the table—that is, they are acceptable when there is consensus from all players.

Other Stunts might be created at the discretion of the table. For example, a player wants his character to be "Programmable." The exact mechanism for the Stunt would be agreed upon by the table and might be refined from the player's original concept; it might even be agreed that the Stunt is cool but powerful, and therefore counts as two Stunts. In another case, one might want the only T3 ship in a cluster with only T2 worlds—you'll want the Stunt to allow repairs, so go with "Try this piece: uses Archaeology to make ship repairs as if the repair station's technology level were one higher." This is fine—by definition whatever the table decides is okay. If a player wants something, and is prepared to invest in it (with Stunts, particularly) there should be a way to make it work.

equipment

Characters should be considered to start with whatever equipment is relevant to their Skills. Any trivial equipment should be present if needed unless lacking the item advances the plot. The only equipment that is guaranteed to be with the character when they need it is equipment that is represented by a "Have a thing" Stunt.

The referee cannot take away equipment specified as a Stunt from a player's character unless the player agrees and the Stunt is changed. This does not imply that an owned spacecraft (through a Stunt) cannot be Taken Out in combat, but rather that Taken Out cannot mean total loss of the craft with no chance of repair or replacement, unless the owning player agrees.

Rather than itemizing in a list, starting gear is assumed based on the Skills players select for their characters; quality of gear might also be affected by the Skill level: a character with EVA 1 might have an old T1 suit worn by her father; a character with EVA 4 might have a sleek T3 suit, custom fitted. Whatever makes for a good story.

automatic skill gear

Some Skills imply access to some kinds of equipment. Below are a list of associations that one can afford to take for granted, though, unless the equipment is represented by a "Have a thing" Stunt, it's not guaranteed to always be with the character—it can be lost or destroyed. This list can be extended, according to the decision of the table: the standard is "whatever's reasonable."

Agility: access to a gym.
Aircraft: certification, silk scarf.
Arts: toolkit, or database of relevant information.
Brawling: gold teeth.
Brokerage: certification, contacts.

Bureaucracy: a personal organizer and communicator.
Close Combat: one appropriate weapon.
Communications: hand computer.
Computer: hand computer.
Energy Weapons: an energy weapon.
Engineering: an iron ring (certification), toolkit, access to a machine shop.
EVA: a pressure suit.
Gunnery: certification.
MicroG: velcro shoes.
Navigation: certification, computer with database of star charts for the cluster.
Pilot: a license to fly in system (certification).
Profession: player choice based on chosen profession.
Resolve: sunglasses.
Science: database of relevant information.
Slug Throwers: a slug thrower.
Stamina: running shoes.
Survival: emergency kit, rations.
Vehicle: certification, fuzzy dice.

Nothing guarantees the continued presence of the equipment, unless there is also a Stunt to cover it.

Many people will want the highest technology gear for their characters, and it is worth keeping track of the technology rating of anything purchased, if only because that can possibly serve as an Aspect at moments of crisis. Nevertheless, things do not stay at the same quality once they are invented, and a T3 hand computer will be far superior to a T0 one.

Creativity can be rewarded, especially when the benefits come at the level of role-playing, rather than at the level of the specific combat sub-games. A highly advanced knife might not do any more damage, but perhaps is made of a memory plastic—when inactive, it is a simple cylinder of plastic but becomes activated by smacking it against a hard surface, and the cylinder deforms to become a hard, sharp, combat blade. Similarly, an energy weapon might have a biometric check associated with it, allowing only the owning player to use it (this would be similar to making the weapon integral). Something like this might be hard to find, and it may be illegal, but it does not require a special Skill or Stunt to use.

example: the programmable man!

To make things a little clearer, here's a character generated during playtesting along with some commentary about the effects and interactions of the choices.

growing up (Old Copenhagen)

Benny grew up in the town of Coventry Cross and the vegetation attack of ought-

six was as far back as he could remember. His favourite job growing up was running the combine, but he hated the vegetable hunts. But you wind up doing what you're good at.

Aspect: *I hate the outdoors*
Aspect: *Natural mechanic*

Commentary: Three sentences tells us a lot about Benny, but also a lot about Old Copenhagen. The character generation process fills out details about the cluster as well. The choice of Aspects (one positive, one negative) will both see a lot of play, particularly the punning "Natural mechanic," which combined with the idea of hunting wild vegetables begins to point to stories that could develop on the planet.

starting out

Benny left the front lines and got work in a power plant, eventually rising to be general manager of the second-largest plant dirtside. His job was to keep the Tesla field running 22/7, and there never was an outage under his watch. Seven long years he spent managing people as they came and went: training them, burning them out, and moving them on. Benny knew his time was running out—his hair was coming out in patches, and his chest was getting heavy. The only place to fix that would be Gravity's Rainbow.

Aspect: *Radiation sickness*
Aspect: *Solution oriented*

Commentary: Benny draws on the world's statisics as he chooses his Aspects. The planet's environment was rolled as E3, and this was interpreted and expanded during cluster generation with the Aspects "Irradiated environment" and "Unnatural vegetation." He gives himself "Radiation sickness"—a problem subsequent phases can fix. Negative aspects are fun!

moment of crisis

(Implicate the player on your left.)

Benny hitched a ride in a suspended travel liner to Gravity's Rainbow, and the suspension was a relief—that many more days in which he did not feel ill. The Rainbow did the trick, fixing things up and saving his life, but it was hard to get used to having a machine breathing for you. Not to mention the voices in his head. Alien calculations and thoughts distracted him constantly as he fought to learn control. Then he met Qantii and things got a little better, even if he mostly had to do whatever she said. Or thought.

Aspect: *Only part man*
Aspect: *Plug and play software*

Commentary: As Benny moves, so does the fleshing out of the cluster. "Plug and play software" will eventually tie to a Stunt.

sidetracked

(Write the right-hand player's Moment of Crisis from your perspective.)

Benny didn't know the details, but Qantii somehow got them a ride off Gravity's Rainbow with some kind of lizard from the new system…

DATABASE UNKNOWN 0001A ERROR

…and the next thing he knew he was a real estate expert negotiating a deal for some moon in Xeno. Outside he was great but inside he knew this was a bust. The lizard was nice enough but kept the life support dialed way too hot and sticky. And of course Benny had to do everything from fixing the ship to manning the guns to cooking the food. Good thing he bought all that software.

Aspect: *Internal strife*

Aspect: *Sucks to be programmable*

Commentary: This phase is crucial for understanding a character's relationship to the others at the table. By re-interpreting another player's narration, you are helping write their character as well. Sometimes this leads to chronological difficulties, and what is a major event for one person can be a passing moment—or even an annoyance—for another.

on your own

He worked as ordered until the day they found the Library. In it was some kind of device that shattered Qantii's control and gave him a hoard of software. With the crystal device his thoughts were under control and he was finally his own man; his own part-man. And he could do, well, anything. Anything at all, but one thing at a time.

Aspect: *Never going to have a master again*

Aspect: *Could always use another good program*

Commentary: This is the third Aspect on programmability. The player has an idea, and is laying it down strongly, sending a clear signal about what it is that he wants the game to be about—at least as far as his character is concerned. It may emerge in play, however, that not all three Aspects are needed, and one of them might be swapped out, eventually.

skill pyramid

5—Repair

4—Bureaucracy, Intimidation

3—Tactics, Charm, Resolve

2—Oratory, Survival, Science, Vehicle

1—Agility, Profession: Farmer, Alertness, Profession: Teacher, Stamina

Commentary: By making Repair his apex Skill, Benny's player makes it clear that he is going to be Mr. Fix-It. The player knew that when he wrote "Natural mechanic" as an Aspect, which in some contexts will enhance this top Skill. Resolve at 3 and Stamina at 1 are going to impact Benny's relevant stress tracks. Most striking of all is the player's choice not to have any space Skills or any combat Skills. Benny is not going to be useful in these (relatively common) circumstances, which is also making it clear how he's going to function during play. Benny is a social

character: Bureaucracy, Charm, Oratory are all useful in social conflicts. Intimidation and Tactics will also be useful in combat, being used to put Aspects on zones or on other combatants; Benny isn't going to be attacking directly, but he is still far from helpless.

stress tracks

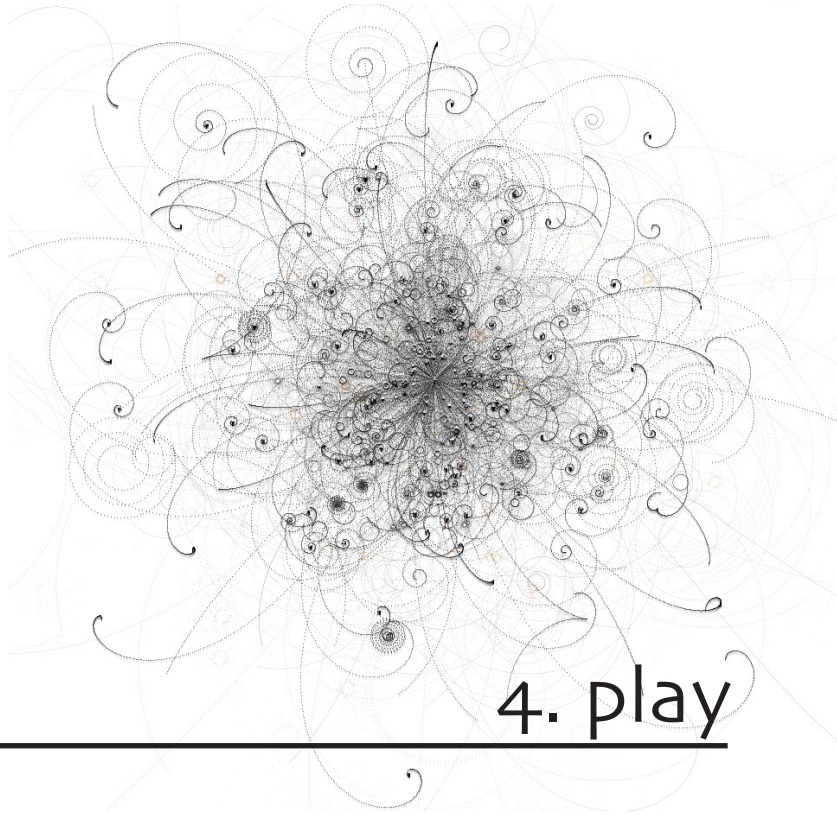
Health: OOO O (base three plus one for Stamina)
Composure: OOO OO (base three plus two for Resolve)
Wealth: OOO (base three, and no Assets Skill to improve it)

stunts

Programmable: once per session, Benny can use any Skill not already in his pyramid at rank 5 for the rest of the session.

Have a Thing: Benny doesn't need to breathe, so he effectively always has a pressure suit on.

Commentary: The Programmable Stunt was created by table consensus—we decide this is two Stunts worth of capability, and included the proviso that while for any session Benny gets to become an expert at any Skill, it has to be one that he hasn't chosen to invest in already. Suddenly, the absence of space Skills and combat Skills isn't an insurmountable hurdle. It may even be that during play consensus shifts, and it is the first untrained Skill that Benny uses in a session that becomes his programming. That could lead to some interesting choices, and maybe some unexpected Consequences. The goal, though, is emphasized by three of the written Aspects, and is again reinforced through the choice of Stunts. Benny becomes a comprehensible, unique character, and our understanding of the cluster is greatly enriched in the process.



4. play

the diaspora universe

Things were quiet before the Rainbow fell. Slipstream travel was cheap so's even the backwaters were clawing their way out of the well and anyone could make a buck. Now, though, it's all the lizards' game. No more Rainbow ships to be had and the lizards got no interest in seeing Rasputin or Brinks stage a comeback. Humans got to stick together now.

Diaspora is not going to provide you with a great deal of setting material. The process of constructing the setting is part and parcel with game play itself. There are, however, some basic tenets of the *Diaspora* universe that make it distinct. You are free to alter these as you see fit, of course, but the rules as written assume these things to be true.

Each world in the vast diaspora, of which your cluster is but a fraction, was colonized by humans who originally came from Earth. What technology brought them here, when, what's remembered, what they found when they arrived, and how many worlds are in the diaspora are all questions we will not presume to answer.

Science in *Diaspora* is the science of the world you live in with a few minor tweaks—a little artistic license to keep the realm diverse. That is not to say that technology is current—obviously there is room for enormous leaps in technology—but rather that some unlikely branches of technology never quite worked out in the *Diaspora* universe: faster-than-light (FTL) travel can only occur at the constrained location of slipstream end points; the best way to propel ships through a vacuum is with reaction drives; anti-gravity doesn't work; and artificial intelligence is plenty of the former and

not much of the latter. The only place the rules of science get broken regularly is at the T4 technology point, which is also the point where civilizations destabilize, becoming incomprehensible, collapsing, or disappearing altogether. Human technology can only advance so far.

The use of reaction drives assumes an efficient means of converting matter to energy. Reaction drives use a high-energy reaction of some kind (fission or fusion at lower technologies and perhaps antimatter at higher ones) to power the engines, which convert the reaction mass—the largest part of the volume of any ship is dedicated to reaction mass, which could be anything from water to lead oxide depending on the technology story you want to tell—and push it out the engines. Since this uses up the reaction mass, the safe handling of ships in space involves a careful balance of variables. There are no dogfights, and turning a ship around takes time, consuming mass and adding to the ship's heat. The laws of thermodynamics still apply, and the greatest problem with doing anything exciting in space remains the efficient dispersal of accumulated heat.

The slipstreams are not well understood. They are passages between stars that may be arbitrarily far apart. In fact, in most cases the systems in a cluster will have no idea where in the sky their neighbours are, let alone how far away that might be. Their connection by slipstream is related to something other than distance. The endpoint of each slipstream is in a very sparse position in the system—there is one below and above the plane of the ecliptic for the system, about five astronomical units away (roughly the distance from the sun to Jupiter—say 800 million kilometers), positioned precisely above and below the barycenter of the system.

At T2, spacecraft that can reach this point, can, through application of a relatively small device, transit through this point along any connected slipstream in effectively zero time, accreting substantial heat along the way. At this level of technology the vessel must approach the slipstream access point with some precision, say within a few hundred thousand kilometers. Perhaps the slipstream drive itself is at least partially a detector of the point.

At T3, a ship properly equipped can transit the slipstream without being precisely at the end point—they can instead be anywhere in a cone with the base a million kilometers wide opposite the barycenter and a million kilometers long. The heat gathered inside the slipstream at this technology is much less predictable, however, and can even cause damage to the ship.

Sometimes, for reasons you can decide for yourself, new slipstreams appear. This might happen once a century; perhaps not even that often. Sometimes they connect a single new system to the cluster and sometimes they connect two clusters at the "source node." Sometimes they are permanent and sometimes they are not. At T4, cultures that have dedicated themselves to solving the problem of FTL travel may be able to create or destroy slipstreams, but this never works out well.

The systems themselves represent a broad range of habitability, and each permutation presents new story possibilities. Many worlds are economically sustainable (R0+) and possess areas that are comfortable for humans (E0+); many are aware of the possibilities of space travel, but are only beginning to take advantage of it (T0+). (Note that while T0 E0 R0 may be the most common result possible, it still will only appear 1.3%

of the time). Each system establishes its place in the cluster, balancing sustainability, habitability, and progress. Through all of this, the characters, who are created as above-average humans, will have the ability to affect the overall picture significantly, if they so choose. In many cases, even the ability to travel through space is a valuable commodity, and one that is likely to provide opportunities for discovery and adventure.

Personal weaponry is largely based on kinetic energy application (propellants and bullets) until around T2, when energy weapons become efficient enough to supplant them. The specific descriptions of these weapons can vary dramatically as suits the feel of your cluster—we provide examples that suit us, but we also offer a means to make your own, and all are simple enough that the statistics could be retained while giving the description a complete makeover.

That is the *Diaspora* universe. Most of the questions you still have about the setting are yours to answer. We provide examples that you can use if you don't feel like answering the questions yourself, but mostly we provide the means to create answers that fit with the above axioms of the setting. *Diaspora* is very intentionally a toolkit that you can use to create something fun. It doesn't demand a hundred sessions of play—when you reach the limitations of a scenario, you can re-use your cluster with new characters if you wish, or add a new cluster by linking with a new slipstream, or, best of all, start over with a new cluster and new characters. That first session is fun, so don't be afraid to go back and do it again.

the refresh

> *It doesn't cost much to become a deputy, and so it is something friends might buy each other when they are teenagers: a novelty gift, but also a start in entrepreneurial law enforcement for those that want it. As a deputy you get access to the bounties, and, for those that want, the opportunity to chase any and all whom the government designates. It's the only way one system can police all the corners of a cluster, offering a living wage to those that can choose to take it, and happily avoiding entanglement with local laws. The deputy is a freelancer, and has to follow the rules of a system, and at times competition for bounties can get fierce. It's not a license to kill, of course: bounties come back alive, or you don't get paid. It's a job, but it's not exactly what most would call honest work.*

The first few minutes of every session are set aside to manage some accounting and preparation that needs to take place before actually getting down to the game. This is called the refresh. In *FATE* this is when you get your fate points assigned for the session. In *Diaspora* there is some more going on.

The first thing that happens in the refresh is the referee asks for a recap of the last session. This is each player's opportunity to recall the last session out loud, which will set the starting point and the mood for the session.

Next, assign fate points for each character and each spacecraft. Characters get five fate points each. Fate points are not recorded between sessions, so at the refresh all characters start with five no matter how many they ended the last session with. Spacecraft similarly get five fate points.

Seeming to Improve

Diaspora characters do not increase in abilities over time. Characters, thanks to the pyramid Skill organization, are all equal though they must be played differently to leverage their assets. So how do we "get rich" in *Diaspora*?

Getting rich, becoming a better brawler, and so on are well modeled through the system of Skill shuffling during the refresh. You want to be rich? Start moving your Assets Skill up the pyramid. Yes, it will cost you something—your single-minded dedication to acquiring wealth is at the expense of your regular exercise regime or keeping up with the technical journals. If it's a real obsession for the character, couple it with an Aspect replacement that reflects it. Now you are not only getting rich, you get paid to play the obsession.

Fundamentally, though, acquiring wealth is solely at the discretion of the player. If you want to keep a ship that you commandeer during an adventure, changing an Aspect or a Stunt allows you to do so. Without that commitment from the player, the referee can always take things away (the item has no mechanical effect), but again, it is at the choice of the player.

Improving the capability of a ship or character is best handled through Aspect replacement. Plug in Aspects that declare the improvement. Need a better firewall? Get rid of that "Baskets of fresh fruit" and add "Ancient software defends for us." Boom! Now you have a clear Aspect to call on for defending automatically and at the expense of some colour—a trade-off that should be made. As your ship becomes more dedicated to solving certain kinds of problems, some of the art comes down from the walls.

Players may make adjustments to their characters to represent changes and experience as a result of the last session.

Characters should be checked to see if they qualify for any healing. Specifically, any severe Consequences that have been carried completely through the last session (that is, they were inflicted the session before the last session) can finally be erased. All Health and Composure stress is cleared. Wealth stress might be cleared (see Stress Track Recovery below).

If the session begins at an appropriate facility, any spacecraft may make a maintenance roll now using modifiers based on the prior session (for determining whether the vessel was engaged in trade, and so on).

Occasionally a session will narrate away large blocks of time as downtime (everyone's in jail, maybe). It's perfectly reasonable for the referee to offer one or even several refreshes to let the players decide how this time has affected their characters. Rarely, and only between sessions, a referee may grant two or three refreshes to the players to indicate major life changes that take place over several months.

fate points

Players usually regain fate points between sessions, when a refresh occurs. If the referee left things at a cliffhanger, he is entitled to say that no refresh has occurred between sessions. By the same token, if the referee feels that a substantial (i.e., dramatically appropriate) amount of downtime and rest occurs in play, the referee may allow a refresh of fate points to occur mid-session. Normally each character starts each session with exactly five.

experience

During the refresh, a player has the option to change his character in three ways.

A player may move any Skill up the Skill pyramid one place (though not past 5) and then must move a Skill from that new rank down one level. That is, the Skill pyramid must be maintained, always having one Skill at rank five, two at rank four, and so on.

A player may change an Aspect that isn't getting any use for an Aspect that relates to in-game events from previous sessions so that the characters gradually acquire definition based on actual play.

A player may exchange one Stunt. (Optionally, Stunts cannot be changed except by the agreement of the table, arising directly out of the adventure; such changes should be rarer in any case).

Example: Mizer Tad has Bureaucracy 4 and Slug Throwers 3 in her Skill pyramid and wants to reflect the fact that the last few weeks of adventure have been mostly firefights and not a lot of paperwork. Her player elects to change the character to have Slug Throwers 4 and Bureaucracy 3. If the Skills were not sequential (say Bureaucracy 5 and Slug Throwers 3) this would not be allowed, and it would take several sessions of incremental shifts to effect this change. Mizer also had an amusing run-in with pirates that left her with a face full of bright blue paint (long story). While the paint eventually washes off, her player decides to remove her "Running wild" Aspect which she doesn't use much and adds "Wary of unaccompanied packages."

Characters may therefore change from one session to the next, and can develop Skills and interests as time progresses. Nevertheless there is clear continuity from one session to the next. The goal is to allow players to describe all the changes their characters undergo, while keeping all characters at notionally equal ability.

stress track recovery

Any meaningful downtime can remove the accumulated effects of hits to the Health and Composure tracks.

Health and Composure stress tracks are cleared any time there is a refresh.

Wealth stress box hits don't go away as easily as other stress. The "combat" of finance is an ongoing issue and characters are never very far from it.

Wealth stress track hits are cleared at the end of any session in which the character takes no hits or Consequences against his Wealth stress track.

removing consequences

Consequences will fade with time—characters heal, rumors die down, and distance brings perspective. How long this takes depends upon the severity of the Consequence, which in turn depends upon how it was received.

Mild Consequences are removed any time the character has the opportunity to sit down and take a breather for a few minutes. These Consequences will last until the

end of the current scene, and will usually be removed after that. The only exception is if there is no break between scenes—if the character doesn't get a chance to take five, the Consequence will remain in place.

Moderate Consequences require the character get a little more time and distance. A good night's sleep or other extended period of rest and relaxation is required. Moderate Consequences remain in place until the character has had the opportunity to take several hours of "downtime." This may mean getting sleep in a comfortable bed, with a charming girl, a delightful fella, or a full bottle. As long as it's appropriate to the Consequence, it stands. An afternoon of hiking might be a great way to get past a "Heartbreak" Consequence, but it's not a great choice for a "Bad ankle." Time serving as a gunner on a ship, though, even if there is no combat, does not count as downtime.

Both mild and moderate Consequences are removed each time there is a refresh.

Severe Consequences require substantial downtime, measured in days or weeks. Generally this means that such a Consequence will linger for the entire session following the one it was received. We expect that session to contain a month or so of in-game time explicitly spent recuperating.

Severe Consequences must be carried through one complete session (from beginning to end) in which the stress track associated with the Consequence does not take any hits, and are removed at the next refresh.

opposition

One aspect of conflict in the stories you will tell is going to be combat, whether physical or social, and that will require some kind of mechanically represented opposition. Most games talk about "non-player characters," as though such a thing can exist. Of course all characters have a player running them, it's just that the referee is burdened with running most of them. And so we will ease that job a little with a few mechanical tricks. We'll still use the term non-player characters (NPC) regularly though—it has an identity independent of the words that make it up now and will be familiar.

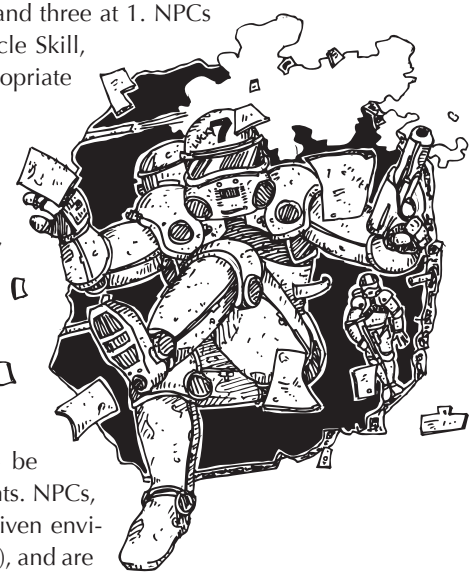
This process acknowledges that the player characters are exceptional. They aren't superheroes, but they are exceptionally competent.

non-player characters

It's not necessary to create statistics for all characters that the referee will bring into play—in many cases their participation in a scene will never be more than a single roll of the dice and consequently the referee need only establish their single Skill rank in much the same manner as he would estimate a difficulty level for a static check. Characters that will aggressively oppose the player characters, however, should get some more detail.

Non-Player Characters (NPCs) have Skills in a pyramid just as the regular player

characters have, but the peak value of the pyramid might be lower than 5. A moderate-threat NPC, for example, might be capped at Skill rank 3 (a "3-cap" character, for short): one Skill at 3, two at 2, and three at 1. NPCs have one Aspect for each rank in their pinnacle Skill, one fate point per Aspect, and Stunts as appropriate (no more than 3).



This is a sufficient representation for thugs, policemen, goons, and villains. While six Skill slots does not seem like many (compared to the fifteen of the player characters), in practice it works because these characters have context-appropriate Skills. The person trying to seduce you in the nightclub will have Charm 3 and a relevant Aspect; if the referee expects them to fight, they have an appropriate combat Skill at level 2. Player characters are, out of necessity, designed to be able to function in any number of environments. NPCs, in most cases, need only be functional in a given environment, for a short time (often only one scene), and are designed for that circumstance. There remains, however, enough variability that a given opponent may still have a rank in a Skill that the player characters lack, and can then be co-opted and introduced into the larger story ("Who knew she was also a master electrician?").

wing it a bit

Sometimes you don't have time to prep a full character, even an NPC. An easy way to handle this is to specify the cap and the pinnacle Skill and fill in the rest as it comes up in play. Give them one Aspect, too, and leave the rest for player characters to fill in through maneuvers and such.

Applying a Skill to an NPC during play should be under table authority—the consensus of the table should be reached in order give an opposition character a Skill not already on the list. This is usually easy to get—it's only hard when it's probably a bad call anyway. "I think that policeman would probably have Brawling 2" will get a nod in most cases. "It turns out the vagrant has Assets 3" may be less likely.

NPCs have Health and Composure stress tracks derived from their Skill pyramid as player characters do.

When non-player characters have not been made in advance, it is possible for the players to define Aspects for these characters through maneuvers. A player might roll their character's Alertness to see if their character notices that the soldier at the bar is limping—*i.e.* using the Skill to try to place a pre-existing Aspect on him that can be called on if combat breaks out. If only one of the soldier's Aspects has been decided at this point (the referee has decided he has Military-grade Slug Thrower 3 and Stealth 2, and that he's a crack shot with a rifle, but nothing else has been determined), the referee can decide whether this is a fair thing to assume (no roll needed—the referee likes the idea), or that a successful roll could observe that (in which case the soldier's

card could have the Aspect, "Broken knee never healed" added to it). This addition might in turn encourage the referee to fill out the card in other ways, perhaps giving the soldier Agility 1 and Stamina 1 (to reflect an amateur interest in athletics) and a third Aspect, "It's all just a game." The creation of NPCs becomes a collaborative process. It might be, though, that the referee, even if the soldier is being made on the fly, has other intentions for him and doesn't want this character to be limping around. That's okay too—the referee can decide not to allow the suggested Aspect, but should offer the player something else, another Aspect to help fill the character out. The referee might say, "Well, he's not limping; in fact you notice that he's particularly light on his feet. We'll say he has, 'Born to be a dancer'," which he then writes down on the card. This process means that a player's actions do not need to determine the Skills and abilities of the NPCs they encounter, but that through the process of interaction the players will come to know who it is that they are dealing with (and that Aspect might be able to be compelled in another context; the player attempting the maneuver still gets mechanical information about the character).

In most cases, NPCs will not take Consequences: any hit over their stress tracks takes them out of the scene. Only in cases where the referee needs the character kept alive (for plot, or because a player character has an associated Aspect) should NPCs be given Consequences.

sample non-player characters

Policeman 1 (T1)
Brawling 3, Vehicle 2, Slug Thrower 2, Stamina 1, Resolve 1, EVA 1
Aspects: "Serve the public trust," "protect the innocent"
T1 ballistic armour, pistol, smoke grenade

Policeman 2 (T1)
Slug Thrower 3, Profession (Investigator) 2, Intimidation 2, Stamina 1, Resolve 1, Brawling 1
Aspects: "Uphold the law," "Who needs backup?"
T1 ballistic armour, pistol, submachine-gun

Soldier 1 (T2)
Slug Thrower (MG) 3, Resolve 2, Stamina 2, Alertness 1, Demolitions 1, EVA 1
Aspects: "Just following orders," "Keep it tidy"
T2 military rifle, T2 combat armour

Soldier 2 (T2)
Brawling 3, Energy Weapon (MG) 2, Alertness 2, Stamina 1, Agility 1, EVA 1
Aspects: "My country's good," "Hungry"
T2 laser pack, T2 combat armour, knife

Thug 1
Close Combat 3, Profession (Con Man) 2, Slug Thrower 2, Brawling 1, Stamina 1, Intimidation 1
Aspects: "Blood is scary," "Do the job"
Sword, submachine-gun

Thug 2

Profession (Skulduggery) 3, Brawling 2, Slug Thrower 2, Charm 1, Alertness 1, Vehicle 1

Aspects: "Strike first," "Stay alive"

Shotgun, knife

Generic Crewman

Agility or Profession (Slipship Crew) 3, *any space* Skill 2, *any combat* Skill 2, MicroG or Aircraft 1, Alertness or EVA 1, Stamina 1

Aspects: "On this ship too long," "This is my post"

Doctor

Medical 3, Assets 2, Science 2, Computer 1, Bureaucracy 1, Resolve 1

Aspects: "First, do no harm," "In my own time"

That Girl in the Bar

Resolve 3, Charm 2, Arts 2, Vehicle 1, Bureaucracy 1, Assets 1

Aspects: "Comes here all the time," "Not interested"

animals

Animals can be modeled precisely as non-player characters, but animal Skill diversity is probably not as high. Instead give them a "Skill column": one Skill at each rank starting at some maximum. Add a Stunt to round them out. No Skill should exceed level 6. Some Skills (such as Stamina and Resolve) will not affect tracks, but can still be used to achieve maneuvers and defenses. Any appropriate integral equipment can be modeled based on the nearest human equivalent; in most cases, it should be powered by a new Skill, Natural Weapons (Close Combat would imply opposable thumbs, and the ability to pick up other weapons; Brawling would prevent the possibility of operating at a range of 1). All Natural Weapons or armour would also require a Stunt analogous to Integral Equipment.

Common animal Skills are: Agility, Alertness, Brawling, Charm, Intimidation, Resolve, Stamina, Stealth, Strength, Survival, and Tactics. Some animals also have a Skill in Natural Weapons, which is not available to PCs (humans with built-in weapons from a Stunt use Brawling).

Animals only have Health and Composure tracks, of whatever length the referee deems appropriate, based on the size and mass of the creature in question. The following chart uses familiar animals (that may or may not be present in the cluster!) to give rough sizes:

Squirrel: 1 box
Dog/cat: 2 boxes
Human: 3-5 boxes (exceptionally 6)
Wolf: 4 boxes
Lion: 6 boxes
Horse/cow/bear: 8 boxes
Elephant: 10 boxes
Whale/Tyrannosaur: 12-15 boxes
Diplodocus: 20 boxes

Hunting larger animals therefore requires attrition, wearing down the tracks with multiple hits. Such animals can do extensive damage, and then retreat or flee. When they first achieve a hit, the players decide whether or not they want an opposing animal to take Consequences. If they do, then victory means the players can narrate the conditions of the victory (trophy!); if they do not, then the referee does (which may be death, but may also be flight).

Callowsnatcher (animal)
Stamina 4; Natural Weapons 3; Endurance 2; Resolve 1;
Aspects: "Huge shovel-faced hexapod," "That's a lotta horns"
Stunts: Sword (natural weaponry), Defense: 2 (natural armour).
Health and Composure tracks: ten boxes each.

mooks

Sometimes even non-player characters are too much to represent a certain kind of threat. A pack of dogs, say, or a gang of teenagers, doesn't need full representation in the system. In such cases, establish a "threat level" to represent how much trouble these "mooks" are. They will be represented without Skills or Aspects. Instead they have a single stress track that is used to mark all hits. The number of unchecked boxes on this track is also their attack and defense value for all cases. Any hit that goes past the stress track defeats all of the mooks represented by it. With mooks you do not apply the "First Blood" rules.

space travel

Everyone aboard knew, or at least suspected, that the corsair was Konstan's ship. But he wasn't the one in the Captain's chair: the Captain was friendly, and she made the uniform look good. Why he kept deferring to her, telling her his opinions only to have her broadcast his views, never made sense to me. It was ridiculous. He'd drag her around, leave her waiting for us by the highport airlock—it made no sense. Until the Captain was murdered by an irate scientist we'd been commandeered to take somewhere, her body discovered one morning with her throat slit. Then I began to understand. Konstan hired a new Captain. He was friendly and he made the uniform look good. And everyone aboard knew, or at least suspected, that the corsair was Konstan's ship.

what is a spaceship?

All science fiction spacecraft have a distinctive feel derived from their setting, and this is no different in *Diaspora*. Given the premises of the game—'hard' SF, no reactionless thrusters, no grav plates—a large number of popular ideas of what spaceships are become impossible.

Spacecraft in *Diaspora* are big. Space, of course, is bigger, and in the end size didn't make a great deal of difference, no matter how we chose to simulate spacecraft design. Spacecraft are built around a symmetrical Frame, attached to which are the motors, which take reaction material and convert it into something pushed out the

back end; that's how ships travel through space. We largely abstract the fuel from the conversion process (we can assume it's some sort of fusion device), since the bulk of the mass, indeed the bulk of the ship's total mass, is reaction material ("r-mass," we call it in *Diaspora* jargon), which is consumed and needs constant replenishment. Without reaction material, there's no way to go anywhere.

Ships cannot enter atmosphere, as the gravity and atmospheric drag would crush the frame; consequently all travel between planet surfaces and orbiting stations or spacecraft is done through interface vehicles, like the Space Shuttle.

When traveling, ships accelerate to the midpoint of their journey, turn around, and decelerate. No dogfights, no Immelmann or Crazy Ivan maneuvers: safe travel means you accelerate to a midpoint at 1.0-1.5 G, turn around, decelerate at 1.0-1.5 G, over a period of several days. Ships are built like office towers, with small decks stacked on top of each other, which experience gravity only when the ship is under thrust.

Heat is always a problem, and an inability to dissipate heat can get one into trouble. We have imagined some technology that bleeds (radiates) heat into space, that cannot easily be deployed when the ship is under thrust. Burn your engines too much, or fire too many lasers, and you start to have problems in combat yourself, because of an inability to radiate heat into the darkness of space.

Both Heat and Frame tracks can be attacked in combat (Chapter 6, Space Combat), from which a ship may receive Consequences. A third track, the Data track, represents the ship's computer system: data hacking and electronic warfare (EW) generally seemed a fun and powerful dimension to add to space combat.

These concerns combine to suggest that whatever the design specifications we invent for spacecraft (and we tried a great many), in the end, the payload section is relatively small (10-30% of the ship's mass), and that would be true whether the r-mass were water (a relatively common and manageable source of hydrogen) or heavy metals such as cadmium and lead (rarer, but much denser); these are details we leave to the table to decide. However, given the limits on payload, space for crew, weapons, cargo, and extras was limited. Slipdrives allow FTL travel, and had to be small if FTL travel was to be at all viable within these constraints (i.e. if we wanted ships both with slipdrives and with guns, which we did!), and so the limit on FTL travel comes from the point of departure, well above the ecliptic of the system which made it an interesting destination we had not seen explored in science-fiction.

After trying a number of models, the most elegant means of construction proved to be a point-buy system (Chapter 9), that allows players to make their own choices concerning payload deployment. While less "real" than other options, it modeled much more simply what we were striving for with more simulation-oriented models. It also meant that building ships was easy, and every ship is (notionally) balanced against each other: the distinction between military and civilian ships, and the option to spend points on sink Stunts (Stunts with no effect), to get a "cheap" ship for example, allows us to model differently capable ships at the same technology level.

Finally, when we wanted to model travel in three spatial dimensions, we considered using a vector model, but in the end again figured simpler was better. A ship's V-shift rating models its ability to change vectors: that will represent a blend of acceleration, maneuverability, and structural strength.

slipping between systems

Activating a slipdrive is relatively simple: flick a switch and you're there. A robot could do it. Problem is, you can't predict within a hundred thousand kilometers where that will be. Nor how fast you'll be going. Nor in what direction. Since a ship emerging from the slipknot has, essentially, a random vector, in almost every case one loses by going through with momentum. Except in emergencies, pilots tend to decelerate as they approach the knot.

A person with sufficient training and a good computer with up to date information, however, can significantly reduce the unknowns: momentum can usually be preserved, even if the entry vector cannot be governed. The process requires sophisticated problem solving and pattern matching that is just not available directly to computers until the dream of artificial intelligence is realized (T4), and so automation can only enter the slipstream with the expectation of spending significant time on the other side reorienting. This makes automation imperfect for all but the most routine (and regular) cargo operations, and practically useless for military operations.

> **When exiting a slipstream, make a Navigation roll against the Time Table, measuring the positive or negative shifts against a target of "a day". The result is the time to orient the vessel and begin normal travel. If a ship had entered the slipknot without control (e.g. if there had been no deceleration), this roll is made at -2.**

Automated navigation systems always score a -4 on a Navigation roll (that is, they don't roll: they always generate -4 shifts) unless it has T4 equipment. T4 equipment has arbitrary behaviour under the narrative control of the table or the referee.

All spacecraft have a Heat stress track that keeps a record of how hot the vessel is compared to how fast it can dissipate the heat. This stress track is used in combat. It also absorbs the heat that is generated while traversing the slipstream. On arrival after a slip, a ship with a T2 slipdrive has its Heat track filled. A ship with a T3 slipdrive has its highest box marked, but none below. T4 slipdrives do not generate Heat stress in the slipstream.

If a ship enters combat as it enters the system, the initial detection phase of the ship combat system replaces the orientation check. Ships leave combat oriented.

Example: A T2 ship, Barry's Bingo Emporium, is running from the law, again. This time, there was no time to slow down before slipping the system, but with three possible destinations, Barry hoped that he would at least lose most of the cruisers following him. The Emporium had headed to the knot at a full G for the week: he only hoped they would be in an acceptable position when they emerged in the new system. The default navigator has Skill level 2, but the with no deceleration before slipping, the roll suffers -2. He rolls -1, for a total of -1; one negative shift on the time track yields "a few days" before the ship can re-orient itself and head in-system. That's all moot, however: one of the police cruisers has followed the Emporium through the slipknot and combat begins. At the end of combat, if the Emporium is still flying, it will have a standard travel time to reach the highport.

Note that a much worse roll, -3, would mean a disastrous overshot, and require "a few weeks" to re-orient. The ship might not have enough supplies for that, and suddenly the story becomes one of deep-space rescue.

moving within systems

We are postulating realistic (whatever that means) reaction motors whose efficiency changes as technology increases, but which are still fundamentally operated by sending some reaction mass out the back at high velocity, usually by heating it. The performance of a spacecraft is measured by its V-shift Skill for game mechanical purposes (including combat).

in soft terms

T-1 Atomic Power

Spacecraft use vastly inefficient chemical propellants and are not typically constructed outside a gravity well, so they spend everything they have just to get clear. They are not viable military vehicles.

T0 System Exploration

The reaction motors in use have approximately 20:1 reaction mass/payload ratio for 1G of thrust. Space travel is the sport of governments and corporations. Real spacecraft are constructed in space and stay there. Interfacing with orbiting stations or with lunar bases is a nontrivial problem. Spacecraft typically accelerate well below 1G and spin a crew habitat for artificial gravity.

T1 System Exploitation

The reaction motors in use have approximately 5:1 reaction mass/payload ratio for 1G of thrust. You can go a lot further at lower thrusts with different technology, but the bottom line is that you aren't speeding around as though in an airplane. Ships that go anywhere interesting are large (see *2001: A Space Odyssey*), probably fragile, and expensive. Spacecraft are constructed in micro gravity and stay there, but orbital high ports become the norm, and interface with the planet surface is conventional. Spacecraft typically accelerate at 1G and spin a crew habitat for artificial gravity.

T2 Slipstream Use

Reaction motors are at a theoretical peak in efficiency. You can get 1G acceleration (and turn around to slow) over long distances with a decent payload, so ships are smaller (though the reaction mass will still be much larger than the payload); space becomes more accessible: it's as feasible to buy a ship now as a nice house. Ships are still constructed in micro gravity but are less fragile. Spacecraft align decks with the line of thrust to use acceleration as artificial gravity. They may also have spin gravity systems deployed during periods without acceleration. The ability to enter the interstellar slipstream is available, requiring special technology and the ability to generate a lot of power. As high fractional G acceleration can be sustained, it becomes possible (though not always efficient) to be under constant thrust, removing the need for spun gravity simulation.

T3 Slipstream Mastery

Reaction motors improve somewhat, perhaps impinging on theory. Power supply becomes more efficient allowing ample supply for better weapons, however you still need lots of reaction mass. Slipstream use becomes more flexible, allowing ships to enter from a substantial distance away from the entry point and the characteristics of heat accumulation are different and less onerous.

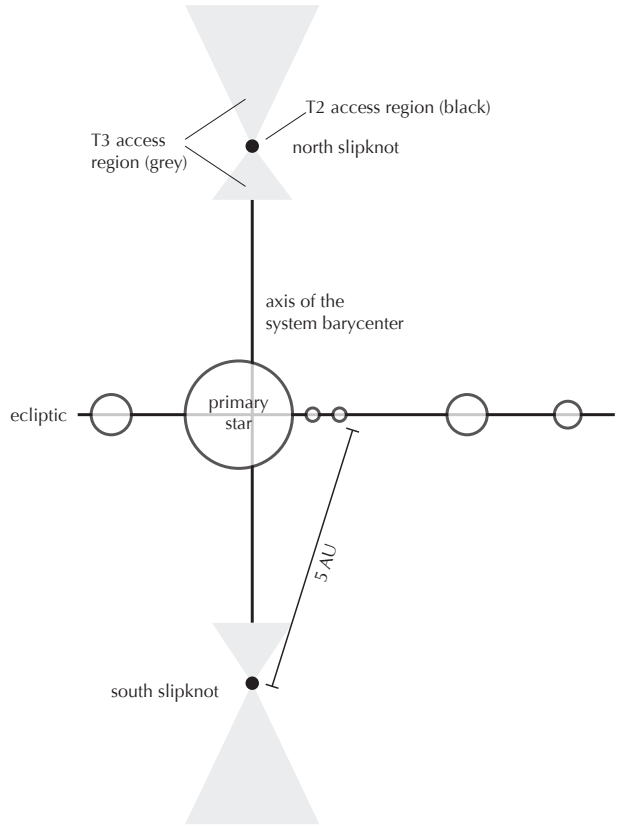
T4 On the Verge of Collapse

No change in ship technologies. Except near the end. Then there are rapid and enormous changes. Sometimes while you are watching.

in crunchy terms

V-shift rating relates to the maximum acceleration you could use to get to a slipstream entrance from the average point in the habitable zone on the ecliptic, slip, and return to a useful spot in the destination system. It's the mean acceleration for any noodling about. It's more a measure of r-mass and fuel efficiency than anything else.

The slipknots are above and below the system's plane of the ecliptic at a distance roughly equal to 5 AU, the distance from the Sun to Jupiter.



In general, travel times will be determined by the referee or the table, but you may want more detail. In most cases, a ship will be traveling from one planet to another, or to or from a slipknot. In our solar system, Earth is (by definition) 1 astronomical unit (AU) from the sun, Mars is roughly 1.5 AU, Jupiter is just over 5 AU; and Pluto with its eccentric orbit is roughly 30-50 AU. Traveling from Earth to Mars, then, means traveling between .5 AU (closest approach) to traveling more than 2.5 AU (though since a straight line through the sun is not possible, the actual journey travelled would be closer to 3AU. Similarly, travel to Jupiter means crossing between 4 and 6 AU, depending on the planets' positions in their orbits.

The following table gives some guidelines, highlighting the common case: travel between the slipknot and the habitable orbit zone of most stars.

V-shift	Acc. (g)	Duration (extended range)	typical range to slipknot (5AU)	Earth to Moon (400,000 km)	Earth to Mars (.5 AU)	Earth to Pluto (30 AU)	Earth to Oort cloud (1 ly)
0	0.01	130 (520) days	65 days	34 hours	17 days	6 months	40 years
1	0.1	40 (160) days	20 days	11 hours	5.5 days	56 days	12.5 years
2	0.5	18 (72) days	9 days	5 hours	2.5 days	25 days	5.5 years
3	1	13 (52) days	6.5 days	3.5 hours	2 days	18 days	4 years
4	1.5	10 (40) days	5 days	3 hours	34 hours	14 days	3 years
5	2	9 (36) days	4.5 days	2.5 hours	29 hours	12 days	2.8 years
6	3	8 (32) days	4 days	2 hours	24 hours	10 days	2.3 years

Interplanetary distances are closest approach. Safe to say that the Oort cloud is forever out of reach to human travel: no one has enough r-mass to run a motor for 2 years and no one would be able to live under 3G acceleration for that time anyway.

Moving around inside the system can be extrapolated from these numbers—the typical distance to a slipstream entrance from a world on the ecliptic is around 5AU, which is a little less than the distance from the sun to Jupiter. Typical destinations inside a system will be around that number—much less inside a planetary system, traveling from moon to moon.

resources

Ships generally carry enough r-mass to reach a slipknot and back, with some to spare. You can go faster, using all your r-mass, to a closer destination.

Civilian ships never travel at more than 1G (V-shift 3) for longer than a full day.

Military ships never travel at more than 2G (V-shift 5) for longer than a full day.

Any ship thrusting at its full V-shift for at least the rated time to slipknot has the free-taggable Aspect "Low on r-mass."

Any time someone attempts to free-tag a "Low on r-mass" Aspect, the ship's navigator may make a Navigation check against target 3 to deny it, indicating that he has plotted an extremely efficient course.

A ship that travels at speeds two V-shifts lower is conserving r-mass to maximize

effective travel range. It may use the extended range duration for the (adjusted) V-shift rating.

Example: a V-shift 3 ship that takes 20 days to travel to the slipknot (the V-shift 1 row, two ranks below its maximum V-shift) is conserving resources, and will not be low on r-mass—that is, it does not get the "Low on r-mass" Aspect. It has enough r-mass and supplies to operate for for 160 days at this level of efficiency.

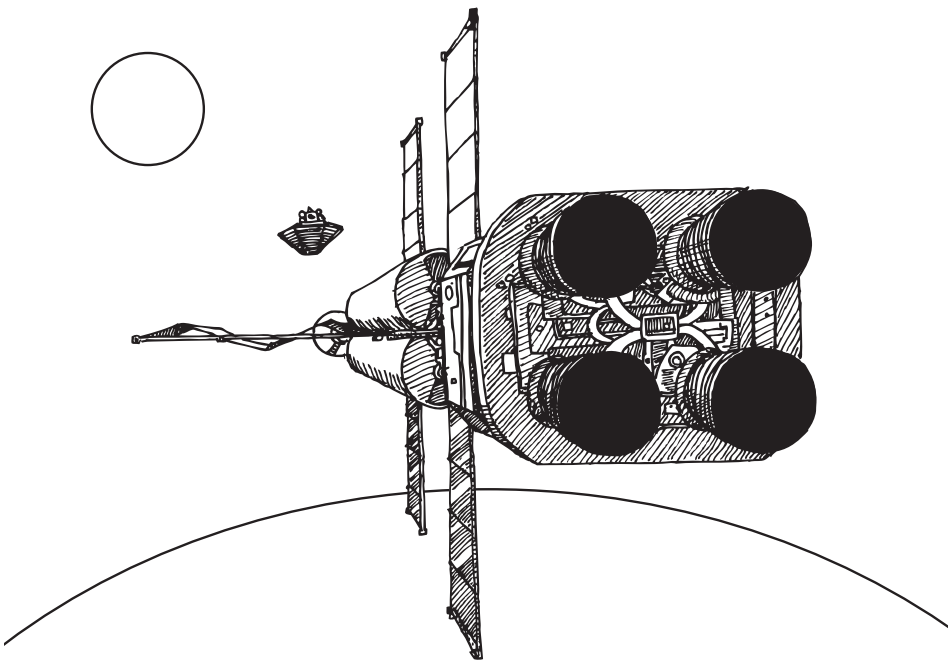
overburn

A ship may travel at one V-shift higher than its stat value for no longer than the time it takes to reach a slipknot (overburn). On arrival the Heat track is filled and the ship acquires the free-taggable Aspect "Low on r-mass." If you can count on a refueling point right outside your slipstream, you can use the next better category: a V-shift 2 can reach the entrance point in 6.5 days, arriving empty and helpless.

In other words, following an overburn, a ship has an effective V-shift 0 until it can re-supply. For purposes of combat, the Aspect and Heat track problems should be enough to deal with (see Chapter 4, Slipping between Systems).

extended range

Ships with the "Extended range" Stunt cannot conduct an overburn. They can, however, travel for 4 times the normal period. So, whereas a V-shift 2 vessel normally has a duration of 18 days (twice the slipknot distance), one with the "Extended range" Stunt has a duration of 72 days but cannot run faster than V-shift 2. Note that this does not speak to life support duration which may last much longer or much less long depending on technology and story concerns.



Unless in-game narrative requires something different, any ship can be assumed to carry a year's worth of life support material. Extended range vessels carry twice that.

While it may be "realistic" for a ship to be completely empty of r-mass or fuel and unable to go, this is uninteresting for story and so we ignore it. A crew is always able to eke out some last bit of performance amidst the penalties associated with their decisions. A ship that is truly and completely disabled for any reason is technically Taken Out: it's no longer a ship in any game mechanical sense except as a potential location for personal combat. If that is the story, then declare it so—we don't believe it needs mechanisms other than those elaborated here and those present in the ship combat system. That is to say, if you arrive in the middle of a firefight with a free-taggable Aspect and a full Heat track, you are probably screwed and soon to be Taken Out anyway. If you arrive in that state at a way-station, you are totally not screwed—in fact you're fine. If there's no fight and no way-station, then that's a story in itself, so tell it! You don't need a mechanism to tell you what to do.

economics

Ain't nothing free. Sure, the border patrol will let you run detached duty with one of their 'vettes. They won't charge you so long as you're doing the job. But they won't pay for r-mass or whatever you burn in a 'vette these days. And they sure as hell won't re-tune that core for you. Not for free. You're lucky if they let you dock. You want to make it rich? Sell the 'vette and settle somewhere green. Get a dog maybe. Now you're rich.

Wealth in *Diaspora* is a player choice. It's not a reward granted by the referee to player characters but is instead integral to the character each player has intended. As such, there's no economic mini-game that players can play to get their characters rich. You want to be rich? Make Assets your apex Skill. Want to model getting rich? Use the advancement system to shift Assets up your pyramid until it's your peak stat. Players are in complete control of this. But we still want to model the fact that characters are not in control of it. Sometimes they can afford something and sometimes they can't. And sometimes they buy it anyway.

All items have a Cost attribute, whether they are spacecraft or candy bars. Some big items (mainly spacecraft) also require regular maintenance checks. The Cost attribute is an exponential scale that represents the difficulty a character might have in scraping up the funds (whether cash on hand, selling stocks, or acquiring loans) to get the item. And spacecraft require constant upkeep; owning a ship (through a Stunt, and perhaps supported by an Aspect) does not confer the resources needed to maintain it. This is modeled on a required roll each session.

purchasing an item

Purchasing an item is a Assets Skill check against the Cost of the item. Regardless of success or failure, the character gets the item. A failure does generate a hit on his Wealth stress track equal to the number of negative shifts: mark that box and all the character's boxes below it. If the box is already marked, then mark the next higher available box and all below it. As always, a character can take a Consequence to

reduce or remove the number of shifts. The Wealth stress track accrues hits and is mitigated by Consequences (which again come out of your precious three) and could lead to being Taken Out (in this case smothered by debt, working as a fry-cook forever, or dodging loan sharks). A character who has taken a hit on his Wealth track and maybe a Consequence demonstrates the lengths he has gone to in order to finance the purchase. He's made enemies, got a bad bank loan, stolen from his boss, borrowed from his mom, and generally set himself up for catastrophe—so of course he gets the item!

Purchasing Spacecraft

If a character does not start with a ship as a Stunt, they may choose to pay for one: depending on the story and the cluster, this may represent outright ownership, or an extended lease. Initial ship cost (separate from regular payments) is 8, modified as follows: -2 if ship has the Civilian Stunt; -1 if it has the Cheap Stunt.

Cost is finally modified by the difference between the ship technology and the system technology where it is being purchased. Thus, purchasing a T3 Civilian ship on a T1 world would have a Assets check of 8. Buying it at its native T3 shipyard would be a check of 6.

Example: Mackenzie wants to hire a personal physician because he has a severe Consequence from last session ("Shattered knee") and he wants it healed. The referee determines it's an Assets 4 check, and would take a week. Mac doesn't have Assets, but has a stunt that lets him use his Charm 3 for Assets ("Pretty Please"). With Assets, the decision to make the roll means that you get your item, but you need to live with the financial Consequences. This situation is different. A failure won't impact his Wealth track, since Mac isn't putting up any money. So it is decided that the variable at risk is time. A bad roll will mean that it might take a much longer time to find someone willing to come along based on Mac's Charm alone. Mac rolls, and gets a three, which added to his Charm 3 gives a six, for two shifts. Two shifts up the Time track means that Mac will have his rehab physician in only a day.

As Assets is, unlike all other Skills, tied to something fairly concrete, free-tagging multiple Aspects set up by maneuvers simply doesn't work—or rather it works too well: three characters without a nickel can each perform a maneuver to place a free-taggable Aspect on the situation (or vendor or whatever) and then a character with, say, Assets 5 could tag all three for an extra +6 bonus and buy a star system. Since that's not what we want out of the economic system, in this case free tags may not be stacked. Purchases are a personal affair.

When making purchases, the character whose Assets Skill is being rolled (and whose Wealth track is at risk) may invoke a single Aspect (free-taggable or otherwise), and may receive no other help.

Cost	Example
1	Hotel (per day), close combat weapon
2	Civilian slug thrower
3	Military slug thrower, single passage ticket to another system, civilian energy weapon
4	Vehicle (ground), pressure suit, military energy weapon
5	Interface vehicle, vehicle (specialty)
6	Civilian spaceship, a nice house
7	Huge house with servants
8	Military spacecraft

The cost of things is determined by the referee: while the economics of a given system will depend on the overall cluster, the table above is offered to give approximate price-points.

If an item falls between two Cost points, the higher number is used. Specific prices and currency are dependent on the system or cluster, of course, but each additional Cost point should represent substantially increased expense. For any character with an Assets Skill, a roll for Cost 1 items should only be required if the result is potentially interesting for the narrative: if failure is boring, items should simply be granted.

debt and solvency

Wealth stress track hits don't go away as easily as other stress. The "combat" of finance is an ongoing issue and characters are never very far from it. Consequently, recovery requires time explicitly spent recovering finances. It only requires that the downtime exists.

recovering stress hits

Wealth stress hits must be carried for one complete session. At the end of the first session in which no new Wealth stress or Consequences have been acquired, erase all Wealth stress.

recovering consequences

A mild Consequence is cleared when the stress track is.

A moderate Consequence can be repaired by anyone (including the character) with an Assets check against difficulty one as soon as all Wealth stress is cleared. It is automatically cleared if it is carried through a complete session with a clear Wealth stress track.

A severe Consequence can be repaired by anyone (including the character) with an Assets check against difficulty four as soon as all Wealth stress is cleared. It is automatically cleared if it is carried through a complete session with a clear Wealth stress track.

Example: Tamar Bendigo really wants a hovercraft (who wouldn't?) which has a Cost 5. That's an Assets check of 5 and Bendigo only has Assets 1: a standard, good credit rating. He's still got a shot at it, though, so he decides to give the dice a spin. He rolls -1. That's five shifts of harm to his Wealth stress track, which is only four boxes long! This would take him out unless it is mitigated. Rather than leave the game crushed by debt, Tamar's player decides to take a mild Consequence ("Worried about payments") and call it a 4-box hit, filling all of his Wealth stress track (mark the hit and all boxes below it). He has his hovercraft but he better watch his account balance closely.

Note that time spent clearing Wealth stress effects still triggers maintenance checks, except now you aren't running the ship either. If you want a ship with no trade value, you better have a bankroll to fund it.

selling things

When you sell something, you clear the checked Wealth stress track boxes up to the Cost of the item, less one (less two if the object is stolen or otherwise compromised). A Cost 4 item can be sold to clear all Wealth stress boxes up to three. Selling many small items cannot therefore remove the extremes of financial stress, but can provide "breathing room" on the track. Consequences can also be cleared by selling things. In addition to removing stress hits, selling a Cost 4 item will remove a mild Consequence, a Cost 5 item removes a moderate Consequence, and a Cost 6 item a severe Consequence. This assumes there is a plausible buyer, reasonable title to the object is held, etc.

If a character sells an item that is owned from a Stunt (i.e. spacecraft, her father's T3 gun, or whatever), then all financial effects are cleared, but you lose the Stunt (at the end of the session, a new Stunt is selected, as per the Experience rules; the Stunt selected must reflect the new conditions and the narrative).

No other advantage is conferred from selling something: as the Assets Skill is a character Skill and changes according to the experience rules and in accordance with the player's wishes (and is balanced with other Skills), characters cannot become "rich" in any mechanical sense except through juggling Skills during the refresh. The Assets Skill, like all game statistics, are effects and not causes: causes emerge only through narration justifying the effects, as with everything else. This means that when your spacecraft has become a crippling burden, making you a combat liability because you are carrying around so many Consequences, selling it has only one effect: clearing your stress.

maintenance

Some things you have need regular maintenance, and certainly a spacecraft is one of those things. Keeping track of precise tonnages and balance sheets of credits spent and credits earned doesn't fit well with the *FATE* paradigm, though, and besides your cluster might not use "credits" or "simoleans" at all. Some resource is being expended, however, and we want to model that in a way that creates story pressure.

These rules are intended to integrate specifically with spacecraft economic issues and model a simple cargo ship at least breaking even in regular service; similar rules

should be used for any item with a base Cost of 6 or more that a player may own. Treat equipment with the "Cheap" stunt as two levels of Cost higher than its base Cost. Cheap is never cheap in the long run.

Every session, the first time a spacecraft is at a station equipped to perform maintenance, a maintenance check is made. Every month of downtime that passes during the session, another maintenance check must be made. This includes downtime that occurs in order to make repairs.

If a player has a full Wealth track and a ship, to remove the Wealth stress he needs a month of down time, but still needs to roll on the ship maintenance. This could easily turn into a downward spiral as a month downtime could require another month downtime….

The ship needs to roll its Trade Skill against a target value of zero, the target value modified as below:

- Station is a lower technology than the ship: add the difference
- For each Consequence on the ship, add 1 (this pays for repairs if repairs are possible here—so now's a good time to see how long they take)
- If no maintenance check was made last session (possible if the ship was never at a station), add 2
- If the ship was not used for commercial work since the last maintenance check, add 2 (see below)

Only ship Aspects may be used to modify the roll, and they use ship fate points.

This assumes the ship is working full-time to maximize legal cargo or passengers, etc., but still allows two periods of three days per month on planets for shore leave (adventure!). It does not imply anything about how much time it takes to ply the space lanes—presumably the combination of V-shift and Trade value on the ship describe how it makes its money. It does imply that all or most of the flight time is devoted to the ship's commercial purpose. If the ship has spent more than travel time to and from a slipknot doing something other than servicing their commercial purpose, add 2.

Success indicates that the ship remains solvent: crew is paid, fuel is fresh, docking fees and local taxes are paid, minor repairs are made, and a percentage is kept for annual maintenance. This abstract system does not measure any huge profits: it is assumed that running spacecraft is not going to yield huge personal profits. The ongoing use of the ship is, essentially, the reward (again, unless the player chooses to model profits by raising his Assets skill).

Failure on the roll must be mitigated by Consequences on the ship just as combat damage is, but, since there is no "track" for this damage, it always gets a Consequence on a failed roll, which is repaired as any other damage Consequence. That Consequence will be mild. If a mild Consequence is already on the vessel, then a moderate Consequence is taken. If a mild and moderate Consequence are already on the vessel then a severe Consequence is taken. If the vessel already has three Consequences, then it is Taken Out (see Chapter 6, Space Combat for a discussion of being Taken Out): inability to accept a financial Consequence means the ship is repossessed (or at least marked for repossession), or suffers some similar fate.

Failure also negatively impacts the owner (whoever has the ship as a Stunt or who

holds the title if it was bought during play). On failing a ship maintenance roll, the owner takes a hit to his Wealth stress track according to the degree of failure. This may have its own Consequences.

A failure might also be mitigated by a character's credit check—-the target value is the amount by which the cargo roll was missed.

Example: the Tapered Frog has a Trade rating of 2 and a required Maintenance roll of 6, which without a broker on board is a pretty hard roll to make each month, and the owner does indeed blow it. He rolls a zero for no bonus to his Trade 2 so that's a failure by 4 shifts. That would be a Consequence for the ship but also a 4 shift hit on the owner's Wealth stress track.

Fortunately, the extremely wealthy patron of the vessel, Winnie Botaro, has Assets 4 and foots the bill by making an Assets check against the failure value of 4. Winnie rolls for +1, a total of 5. Winnie saves everyone's day. This month.

Note that if Winnie fails, according to the Buying Stuff rules she still gets what she paid for! The ship is saved, financially, and Winnie takes all the Wealth track hits and Consequences that come from it. She might not be so keen to help next time though.

On a successful Trade roll, crew members may use any shifts to clear their Wealth stress track hits. The crew will have to negotiate who gets to use how many shifts, if that proves an issue. Each shift may be used to remove one hit anywhere on one player's Wealth track, at the decision of the owning player (or as negotiated by the table). Shifts from a Trade roll cannot be used to clear Wealth Consequences.

optional modifiers

The following modifiers may be added to increase the choices players can make about the trade their ship conducts, at the discretion of the referee (or the table, as appropriate). Use these when the story is about trade, otherwise they are not necessary and can be skipped.

Situational modifiers which result from player choices may affect the Trade roll by -2: extended shore leave, sub-optimal cargo, etc. These are additive.

If the ship is on a subsidized trade route (limiting the choice of planetfall for the characters, and requiring a schedule to be kept, as determined by the referee), or if it is trafficking in illegal cargo (opening many potential hazards in the event of a failure) the Trade roll gains +2. Only one of these benefits may be claimed.

Ships may elect to spend their time speculating, which introduces the potential for greater gains (and greater losses!). The effects of speculative cargo may have a positive or negative value: roll the dice, and apply - 2 to the Trade roll if the result is negative, no effect if zero, or +2 to the roll if the result is positive.

Further, if a ship has been engaged in some adventure other than the pedestrian trading of cargo from one system or another (or however it is a ship usually earns its keep), that adventure may yield value that can be put towards the maintenance roll, at the discretion of the referee. He should allow some fraction of (part of, all of, or possibly more than) the ship's Trade rating to be rolled for maintenance this period even though no trade as such was accomplished.

Example: the crew of the Maelstrom have just finished a harrowing investigation of a derelict spacecraft from another cluster whose crew were somehow…changed. After clearing the vessel of the hostile crew, the referee decides that there is plenty of value here—it's a technology level higher than is typical in the cluster and there are rich archaeological interests in the vicinity. Despite the Maelstrom's relative inaction this period (it's a courier that moved no messages), the referee allows a Trade roll at the ship's Trade value and adds two for the Wealth of the find. The shipboard broker, Amson, is thrilled—some bad deals a while ago left him with a full Wealth stress track, but of course this benefit will only help this month, and next month it's back to business as usual.

Some ships may carry individuals who are dedicated to turning a profit. Such Brokers are considered part of the crew. They may serve in other crew positions (with the standard penalties) as well. When a ship carries a Broker, the Trade roll is amplified by the Broker's Skill—that is, if the Broker's Skill is higher than the ship's Trade value, the maintenance check gets +1 on the roll.

Example: A T2 civilian courier (Trade 2) travels the cluster buying up mail deliveries and dropping them off on their route. The captain has Brokerage 3, which earns her +1 on the roll (recall the roll is amplified by the Brokerage Skill but it's the ship's Trade value being tested). As long as she takes contracts as they come, she will usually stay solvent, with a base +3 before rolling against 0. If she is heading to low technology space (T-2 is a difference of 4), the contracts are less secure and the check is 4dF+3 against a target value of 4.

Example: A T2 subsidized civilian cargo hauler (Trade 4) enjoys a cushy government-sponsored route between the same two systems (+2). As long as nothing untoward happens, the ship will always break even—even if the roll is (-4), 4+2-4=2. In fact it can manage maintenance at stations as much as two technology levels lower without risk, presumably because they are part of an established government route and therefore are obligated to carry appropriate parts for subsidized vessels.

Example: A T3 independent trader (Trade 5) is detained for a week, meaning that only one slip is possible in the session (+2 target value). Though there is a crewman with Brokerage 3 aboard, the roll is unaffected (3 is too low to amplify the Trade value of the ship), but it is likely that there will be no adverse Consequences. Even if the roll is -3, it would still meet the maintenance target.

Any ship with a Trade value of 2 should be able to stay solvent in the normal course of things. Once one roll is missed, however, the consequences of debt accumulate rapidly which can put huge (fun) pressures on the players.

long term downtime

Sometimes player characters are not in contact with their ship for extended periods. In this case, where the characters are not conducting ship's business but are also not using the ship for anything, don't go making a lot of maintenance rolls. Instead assume that the ship has been properly mothballed or leased or is otherwise taking care of itself. Make a single maintenance roll and call it a day. No one wants to roll twelve

times in a row when a character with any common sense would have considered the storage and care of his prized possession. Assume the characters are smart and resourceful, especially when it's not fun or interesting to do otherwise.

mini-games

We have an elaborate system for resolving conflicts already, so what's special about combat?

In *Diaspora* we are interested in dealing with various forms of combat as more detailed structures than a simple roll of the dice, because combat games are fun. As an adjunct to this, we want the combat games to stand on their own—you should be able to make up guys and run a big fight with no role-playing context and no referee, not because of some nebulous design principle that "combat should be a mini-game" but because the combat mini-game is so very fun that you will want to do it sometimes even when you haven't assembled a whole story that justifies it.

So the primary combat mini-games of *Diaspora*—personal combat, social combat, platoon combat, and space combat—can be played with or without the context of the role-playing game. As such, they have a fairly rigid and detailed structure that constrains action called the Sequence. Within a role-playing game, of course the referee should run fast and loose and help players interpret their intentions as *FATE* mechanisms, drawing both from the general system and from the specific combat system. That's fun stuff. But if you don't feel like going all the way there, follow a Sequence including its constraints, and this will create a fun and fair game.

In each case, the Sequence is essentially a list of things to do, in order, during play. Following the list is a longer discussion of each "phase" and how to handle it, including what actions are available and how to resolve them.

It can be useful, especially if you are playing a combat session without a referee, to designate a player as the caller. The referee might even find some relief in having someone else handle this implicit role of his for a change in a role-playing session in which combat breaks out.

The role of the caller is simple. He's the guy with the book in front of him who goes through the Sequence step by step and announces what's going to happen now, and when that phase is over. He can also be playing the game proper because he is not adjudicating anything—he's just controlling the steps of play, the transitions between steps, and by side-effect, the pace of play. When learning the game it can be valuable to take turns as the caller to get a familiarity with the subsystems of combat.

All that said, you can skip any or all of these subsystems. If combat mini-games don't interest you, the core mechanisms of *FATE* are certainly sufficient to resolve issues, whether gunfire is involved or not. A game might never need to use these subsystems, but they are there to help enable certain stories to be told. It's perfectly possible to play a few sessions without combat (of one sort or another)—that can be a lot of fun. But If you want to change the scale, or the focus, these are available. The grittiness of a little rigid simulation, however abstract, is a lot of fun and meshes with (though doesn't seem to have explicit dependencies on) the hard science-fiction genre.

scale

There are four "scales" to combat in *Diaspora*: personal combat, space combat, social combat, and platoon combat. This demands that we address the issue of the interface between them: what happens when a guy shoots a spaceship? Or the reverse?

Nothing.

To make that a little clearer, individuals do not affect space combat directly. Spacecraft do not affect personal combat directly.

That's not to say there can be no interaction, but rather that there is no strict mechanical interaction between stats in one and stats in the other. Any interaction is part of the table process of negotiation for effect common to all the combat systems. So, shooting your laser (a personal combat weapon) at the hull of a spaceship does not cause hull damage (a space combat statistic) to the spaceship. It might, however, be done to add the Aspect "Weakened hull" to the zone in the context of personal combat. A spacecraft firing a shipboard weapon at people on the planet's surface does not do health damage, but it might place the Aspect "Under bombardment" on the zone in the context of personal combat, or it might be the equivalent of an area-effect grenade going off (or more). But the point is, the resolution must come into the context of one of the mini-games: there is no interface. So bombarding a planet might add the Aspect "Ruthless killer" on a ship in the context of space combat, but the planetside effects, if pertinent, would need to be determined in the context of personal combat. If during social combat someone starts firing an assault rifle, the social combat is deemed unsuccessful, and a new map is drawn for the personal combat. Any strict mechanical linkage between Skills and stats of one system and Skills and stats of the other system will be intrinsically broken, though, so don't do it.

Time scale

Each mini-game has an imprecise time scale. That is, turns and phases do not take a discrete, constant, amount of time. A turn in space combat might be an hour or two. In personal combat, perhaps it is as fast as a few seconds. Let the story and the table dictate the actual time elapsed or, better, use the Time Table and a target time-to-complete in turns, and count up or down after combat by however many turns the fight actually took.

structure

The rules for each of the sub-systems have at least the following parts: the map, the Sequence, and detail of the Sequence. The map describes the terrain in which combat is fought. In all sub-systems, it is abstracted, like so much of *Diaspora*, to allow a rough-and-ready feel without a great deal of preparation. The Sequence outlines the order of combat, and is presented both in outline and with detailed explanations. Wherever relevant, a list of equipment is provided: guns and armour in the chapter on personal combat, typical units for platoon combat, and ships in the chapter on space combat.

mini-games

There are four combat mini-games in *Diaspora*.

Personal combat: whenever things go south in a scene and the result is violence. Personal combat assumes that there's an interesting map to be drawn and that there is something at stake. Before starting establish what the objectives are and what's at risk—are the characters trying to escape? Trying to capture something? Beat a clock? Draw the map, set a timer if appropriate, and go. Player character Skills are highlighted.

Space combat: when some vessel wants another vessel to behave other than the crew desires, go to combat. As with any other combat, set the risk and set the objective. Space combat rewards escape, evade, and incapacitation over simple destruction: equal ships beating on each other is less interesting. Ship capabilities are highlighted with characters having minor influence on results.

Social combat: whenever a role-playing scene is stalling with players over-thinking, planning, or otherwise not getting down to the nuts and bolts of a problem, take them to social combat. This turns the problem into an immediate tactical one where they have to solve specific problems in easily managed pieces. Use this to break up any session that's nursing a problem but not dealing with it. This is going to handle seductions, debates, murder mysteries, and year-long political battles. Character Skills are in the spotlight.

Platoon combat: in military campaigns, you will sometimes find that there are scenes needing resolution that involve dozens or even hundreds of people, vehicles, and other weaponry. This is the tactical warfare mini-game, letting you get down to traditional wargame objectives with *FATE* mechanisms. Tank assaults, commando raids, or desperate defensive hold-outs are all well modeled. Player character Skills take a background role, influencing results but dominated by the effects of technology and tactics.

Leaving Dice Lying Around

There's something we do in *Diaspora* that warrants a little discussion because it's unusual. Most defensive rolls in the tactical combat systems stay on the table. That is, when you roll to defend against an attack, you leave that defense to stand for all subsequent attacks on you until you next get the opportunity to act, at which time you pick up your dice to do so (clearing your defensive roll).

This doesn't usually happen in player-by-player tactical turn-based games. So why?

First, it seems unusual to allow a player to roll many times in a round for one kind of action (defense) but only once for his deliberate action. So we experimented with not doing that and it's both novel and fun. From a game-play perspective (is this fun?) it works and it's less rolling, so that's cool.

Second, from the perspective of simulation (as in, what are we simulating with this?) this gives continuity to both success and (more relevant) failure. When you blow a defense roll by a lot, the narrative possibilities increase because of this persistence. Your bad roll is now rationally explained as "slipping and falling to the ground" or "leaving yourself wide open for attack" precisely because all follow-on attacks get the same advantage until you have the opportunity to act (and automatically correct the failure). Subsequent attacks may force the defending player to spend fate points to buy up the bad roll, in which case he'll wish he'd done so sooner!

It also means that a player outnumbered does not lose all his fate points in the first turn: multiple defenses in a single turn creates a fate point sink with a wide drain, and they just got used up too quickly.

sample first session

If you want an example of the outcome of a complete "first session," here you'll find the results of an early playtest session. You can use this to see how narrative is pulled from simple statistics, you can mine it for ideas, or you can use it straight up as a pre-generated place and people ready for adventure.

sample cluster

donegal

Technology: 2
Environment: -1
Resources: 1

Donegal is the only actively spacefaring culture in the cluster. It is also not a human world. Sometime in the past century or so, it became connected to this cluster, and with it re-introduced FTL technology. Its inhabitants are lizards, and the huge planet, riven by fissures that go miles deep, show all the evidence of a barren, dead world. But there is an atmosphere that is breathable about 3km below the surface, and it is in this narrow habitable band that the lizards live, in deep, mined cracks. The life cycle of the lizards (who refer to themselves simply as "the People") begins in the dark, and represents a sideways growth, until one reaches the fissures themselves, around which complex cities have developed, built into the walls of the planet. On the surface, there is almost nothing to see—vast windswept rock which can double as landing areas for interface vehicles.

The People of Donegal have sustained their current level of technology for many, many years, and so their military industry has tended towards energy weapons as the waste is reduced and the opportunity for efficiency improvements is greater. The People have not developed a preference for armour usage, however, and so their weapons often reflect this.

aspects

We live in the cracks
Space is ours to sell
Sentient lizardmen

Lizardfolk (the People)

The lizards of Donegal stand about five feet high when adults, nine feet from snout to tail. They walk upright with a loping gait, but can drop to all fours naturally, as they often do in their athletic competitions. The culture is stratified, with several periods of the life cycle, and an in-built expectation that adults will lay eggs or fertilized young. Many ships cabins are left with a clutch of unfertilized eggs to be cleaned away after the lizard has left.

Lizards have the same range of abilities as humans though they tend not to be as physically strong (Stamina often not taken), and have good balance (Agility often is). Most adults have some Brawling Skill (reflecting the successful struggles through childhood). Most lizards will also be taught the cluster's human language in addition to their own tongue. Since joining the cluster, there has been an impetus to teach all adolescents some marketable space skill: there is a strong cultural bias against any who are not willing to work to ensure lizard dominance in space.

ssang

Technology: 0
Environment: 1
Resources: 2

Ssang finds itself shocked by the current state of affairs in the cluster. Recently Ssang developed the technology to properly explore their system. As they ventured out from their homeworld they were shocked to find their system already cluttered with other ships. Ships they didn't know existed but knew shouldn't be there. Ssang enjoys an inviting homeworld and about the system are mineral rich moons and planetoids with inhospitable environments. Much of Ssang's current dilemma stems from trying to figure out a way to protect their rights from the interstellar looters and squatters throughout the system and stake their claim to the slipstream points they can only just reach with great expense and long travel times.

Ssang may be an up-and-coming power in the cluster if it can survive the current painful teething it is experiencing.

The planet currently is in the throes of a potential revolution as the once-unified government splintered with the discovery of their space already being exploited by other worlds. Currently the major groups bicker for power and control of the direction of Ssang.

The Purified Party wants to end the exploration now since pushing into the heavens can only bring about a holy wrath.

Branch Sokju currently holds the most power due to its catchy slogan during the last election, "Explore the Lore," but this is far from absolute. However, it remains to be seen if their scientific ideals can withstand pressure from all sides as their coalition wobbles under various pressures.

Jjan Migukk pushes forward Ssang's unquestioned right to rule their system and believe in military force to enforce their right to rule. The fact that in order to successfully impose this belief would require spacecraft from other worlds hasn't slowed their rhetoric or vitriol at all.

The Nugg Corporation is a mercantile consortium looking for ways to profit from the recent exploration of the venture and sell everything from tea to tectonic resonators.

aspects

New to the cluster
Dangerous occupation
Space is scary

adventure ideas

Stealing Supplies: the outer reaches of the Ssang system are there for the taking, and a few other people are doing just that. Without any real law in the system (since Ssang is incapable of policing its space), the players can make some quick cash by raiding a mining colony of its hoard and selling it out-of-system to the highest bidder.

Ssang Negotiations: someone in power on Ssang contacts the players to help

them set up an interstellar trade agreement which will supply Ssang with spacecraft and technology capable of patrolling and protecting the system in return for mineral rights or some other thing of value (referees, get creative!). The players must negotiate within the power structure of Ssang as well as the other systems (Donegal and New Algiers seem likely culprits) to permit Ssang entry into the cluster's trade channels.

new algiers

Technology: 1
Environment: 2
Resources: -1

New Algiers is a beautiful system. Two worlds, Multal and Aslamad, inhabit the biozone of this yellow G5 star, and both have been populated for all of written memory. Both sport lush biospheres of similar genetic origin, and scientists place their point of divergence at perhaps 10,000 years or less, thus pinpointing the first Colonization. A third world, Damask, inhabits an eccentric orbit that carries it in and out of the biozone, but the eccentricity is such that tidal forces store enough heat through friction in the crust of the planet that it is inhabitable all year round on the surface. It bears the scars of vast attempts at terraforming—huge craters only a few thousands of years old—but carries only the sparsest of biomass. Some grasses cling to the rocks and sand, and the turbulent oceans teem with algae and other simple organisms, and fungi seem to thrive, but nothing more sophisticated than a mollusc inhabits the land. Except for man. And more men every year—already the old city enclaves are having their perimeters blasted open so that they can expand even further, and there is no sign that that's slowing down any time soon.

And it is on Damask that human technology is thriving since the last Fall. Damaskian orbital stations build huge ships under the flag of one of the vast Corporations and ply the system for its resources. These resources, however, are sparse. At one time it was possible to purchase slipships from Gravity's Rainbow, and thus gain access to the rest of the cluster, but contact with Gravity fell off many years ago and now the remaining slipships are in disrepair, though many still function as systemships. And warships.

Recently, however, the slipstream points have been found alive again, since the new star at Donegal became attached. The species that flies these slipships is not human—something not heard of in any records, however spurious—and their technology is clearly not derivative of Gravity's Rainbow. They are eager to trade, however, and pay in quality metals and exotics to stay on Multal, where they hunt the local wildlife. And now that there are slipships for sale (or at least for lease), the vast surplus of water in the system is again a commodity. And you can never really run out of water. Right?

New Algiers has spent many years as the de facto power of the cluster, relying on its aging fleet of refitted T3 ships from Gravity's Rainbow and its own arms manufacturing capacity. Slug Throwers are still its most efficient product, and it excels at efficient lethality.

aspects

Exploding population
An emerging power
Selling water to everyone

adventure ideas

Have I Got a Deal For You: the Tlam Corporation on Damask needs a fleet of slipship liners to take advantage of the tourist trade and bring in wealthy inhabitants from Xeno and Donegal. Leasing is fine in some cases, but no one wants to be eternally beholden to some cold blooded lizard forever. Your mission is to make contact with whoever sells ships from Donegal and buy six with Trade value 4 or better. You can use the Company card. Problem is, the guanas really don't want to sell. It's up to you to motivate them.

rasputin

Technology: -1
Environment: -2
Resources: -1

Back when Gravity's Rainbow was making its ascension, but before they went crazy and started disassembling their system, Rasputin was a super power. Its earth-like world and pleasant yellow star were central to a system full of riches and Rasputin ships plied the entire cluster, exporting its materials and goods and bringing in tourists and immigrants. The war with Gravity changed all that forever.

When the idea struck Gravity to construct a ringworld, it was clear that Rasputin stood to make a great deal of money in the process—its technology would improve alongside its neighbour and obviously its resources—metals, biologicals, and just plain mass for that matter—would be in demand. What no one counted on was the fervor of the Gravitons.

When their neighbour's technology exceeded the explicable, Rasputin's position suddenly became precarious. Single ships were entering Rasputin space and taking entire moons—sometimes with existing industrial colonies—to construct the ring. Rasputin's economy turned to military production in order to protect its space, but there was no organization with which to wage war—it appeared that single individuals from Gravity's Rainbow were taking it upon themselves to battle all of Rasputin. Eventually disaster struck, in the form of a single unbalanced Graviton.

It has never been clear what exactly struck Rasputin Two, the only habitable world in the system, but it was … energetic. Much of the atmosphere was ripped away and the rest rendered nearly unbreathable. The industry was set back a thousand years and, as the warships ran out of reaction mass and fuel, Gravity savaged the system at will for parts. Then one day it stopped.

Now Rasputin is wreckage. Most heavier metals have been stripped and the population is a tenth of its former numbers. There is no longer a local industry in space and not much there to exploit in any case. Rasputin itself is encumbered with the problem of sustaining itself on a planet where everything has been torn from it, and the population that remains live in a small number of underground cities where the few remaining

ancient machines are kept running with guesses and desperation. While the system is a charity case for systems in the cluster that care for such things, none of the incoming aid is enough to keep the children of Rasputin from searching for new homes. And thus the coming of Donegal is likely the death knell for Rasputin, as the guanas provide the ships by which the future of Rasputin is exported to other stars.

aspects

Asshole of the cluster
Everyone who can leave, does
A dying giant

adventure ideas

Vengeance: there are those on Rasputin who still seek vengeance against Gravity's Rainbow. They will pay what they can to those who can bring back anything of value from the Arcworld, especially if it includes evidence of the failure of that world. They can even provide a ship—one taken from the guanas at the price of its crew. Their hides carpet the bridge.

gravity's rainbow

Technology: 4
Environment: -1
Resources: 0

The stories of Gravity's success are many, and is the subject of histories and fictions popular throughout the cluster. Gravity was a technological success, then later it housed the Tyrants; it spawned trade conglomerates, empires, and of course, fulfilled all the dreams that technology could whisper into the imaginations of its inhabitants. Gravity was ascending, and at some point, thousands of years ago, it decided to remake itself. A ringworld would take resources, and it would take time, but that, above all, would show the universe the magnificence of which it was capable. The project was never finished, however, and Gravity's Wheel, as it was to have been called, was only partially built. As it is a thirty-degree arc, Gravity's Rainbow stretches between LaGrange points, providing an amazing amount of territory. And with this space, the people were happy. There was no longer a drive to improve because competition for land, and for space, reduced to almost nothing. Pastoral idealism fills much of the land, along with castles, ruins, remnants of attempted technology, and the evidence of failed experiments. But the arcworld is bleak, and lacks the biodiversity that is told about in stories. And the wonderful technological empires, no longer capable of traveling freely between the stars, are no longer to be seen. The technology exists, and it is still maintained, but in the otherwise empty system (all other planets had been incorporated into the arcword's mass long ago), most visitors are greeted with the rolling countryside, stretching up into the sky. And from the slipstream point, looking down on the system, one sees only the star and the glistening arc, which is Gravity's Rainbow.

Most equipment that comes out of Gravity's Rainbow is found by explorers and it can take many years to discover the intended purpose or effect. Weapons usually make themselves apparent immediately, and most are obviously such. There are exceptions, however, and the natives aren't talking.

aspects

Arcworld
We should have kept the trees
Fatally satisfied

xeno

Technology: -1
Environment: -3
Resources: 1

Xeno is not a planet as much as a failing moon. The planet itself was called Cho Mal and it was a flourishing, vibrant planet filled with deep oceans and lush forests. For millennia the people of Cho Mal lived and thrived on the land and spread across the waves as their world seemed custom made to support habitation. With the surplus came scientific advancement. The world realized it was no longer the centre of the galaxy, but it seemed the stars were there for the snatching. Soon the Chomals pushed chemical rockets outwards, and found their moon (Xeno) with a thin atmosphere capable of supporting a small colony, from which it seemed natural to base their starfaring explorations.

Then disaster!

As Cho Mal pushed the envelope and sought to unravel the mysteries of space their world suffered a catastrophic collapse and overnight Cho Mal became a dead world. Now the small colony of Xeno is all that remains of a once surging system. The Xenians (they don't feel worthy of calling themselves Chomals) eke out an existence on the moon, grimly selling rights to the world and the rest of the system to anyone who stops by their moon.

Most opt to slip into drug-fueled hallucinations and remember the good old days.

aspects

Once we were advanced
These survivors are strong
Everything is for sale

adventure ideas

Atomic Treasure Hunt: Cho Mal remains a treasure trove to be uncovered: what loot and what atomically altered monsters remain on the world are the stuff of legend. Getting to Cho Mal isn't the trouble, landing, finding and surviving the nightmare world that was Cho Mal is where the difficulty lies.

brinks

Technology: -2
Environment: 0
Resources: -1

Brinks is a place of great paperwork. While its technology slowly declines, it has been the repository of vast stores of valuable paperwork for centuries, and so its population dresses in ancient fashions but they move paper around desks of brass and

wood. Everyone comes here for legal expertise, escrow services, and numbered bank accounts, but without this, Brinks would be dead.

aspects

Banking capitol
Police state
Strangled by red tape

old copenhagen

Technology: -1
Environment: 3
Resources: -2

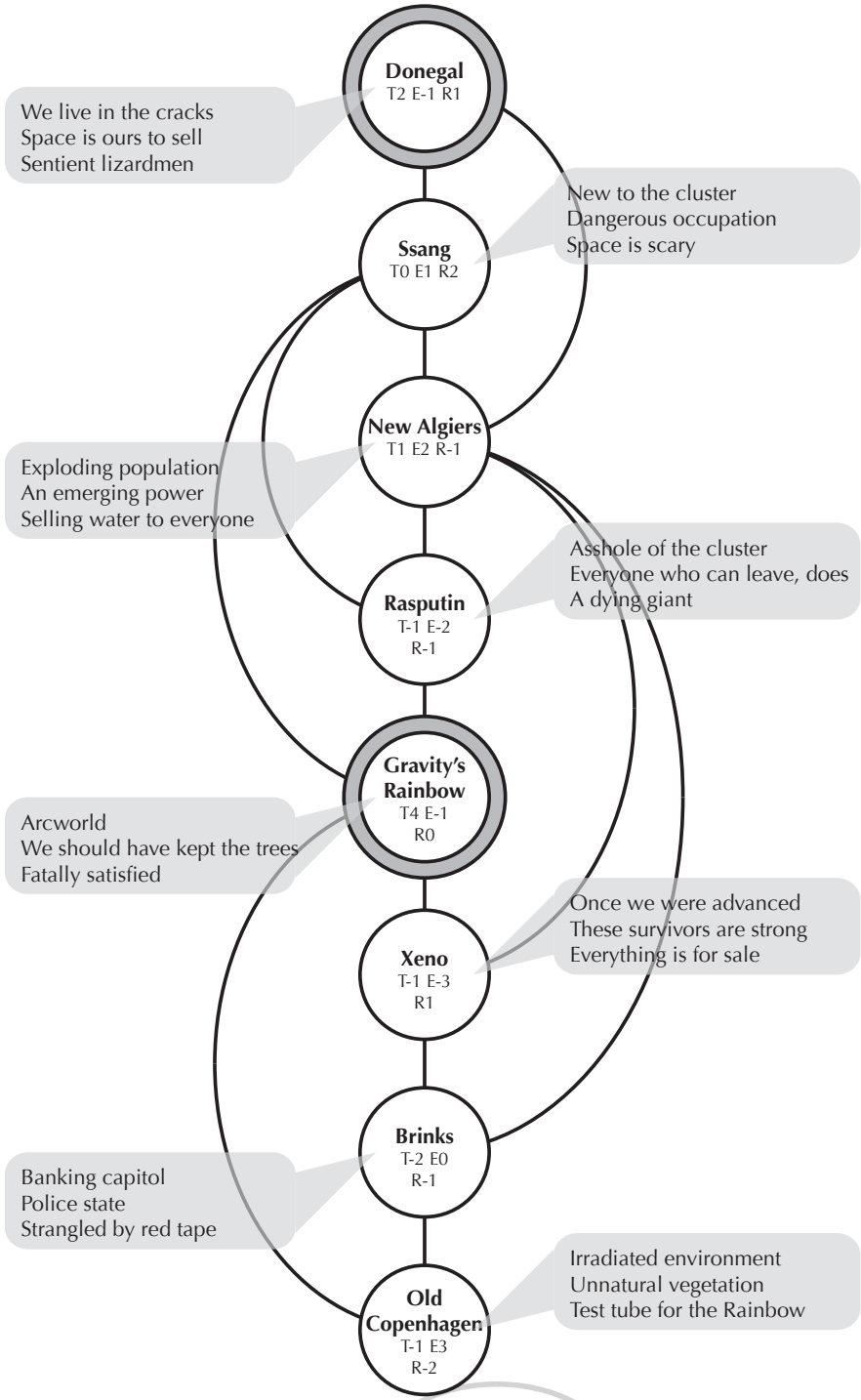
Old Copenhagen wasn't always this…lush.

There are a dozen planets in the system that can support life and most of them do, but that doesn't mean life spans are long. At one time there was a colony on a single world and that colony thrived, but being next door to an Ascending culture has a price. In the case of Old Copenhagen the price was its mineral resources (of course—everyone lost minerals to build that crazy Arc) but it was also something more subtle. When the Gravitons tinkered with the Old Copenhagen sun in order to establish ways to maintain their ringworld, they left behind a burgeoning system. They brought in water and other volatiles to experiment with terraforming, and what remained was a garden of a system.

Unfortunately the changes weren't stable. The biozone is still effectively broad enough for life to thrive on four worlds and survive on eight more, but on all of them you better bring the sunblock: the system's star generates some hefty radiation. On most worlds the local vegetation has adapted (or perhaps been adapted), but the animal population fares less well. Any occupation that leaves you outside for any length of time shortens your life, either through radiation related sicknesses or, sometimes, injury from the plants. That crazy sun seems to make them hungry.

aspects

Irradiated environment
Unnatural vegetation
Test tube for the Rainbow


Donegal
T2 E-1 R1
We live in the cracks
Space is ours to sell
Sentient lizardmen
Ssang
T0 E1 R2
New to the cluster
Dangerous occupation
Space is scary
New Algiers
T1 E2 R-1
Exploding population
An emerging power
Selling water to everyone
Rasputin
T-1 E-2
R-1
Asshole of the cluster
Everyone who can leave, does
A dying giant
Gravity's Rainbow
T4 E-1
R0
Arcworld
We should have kept the trees
Fatally satisfied
Xeno
T-1 E-3
R1
Once we were advanced
These survivors are strong
Everything is for sale
Brinks
T-2 E0
R-1
Banking capitol
Police state
Strangled by red tape
Old Copenhagen
T-1 E3
R-2
Irradiated environment
Unnatural vegetation
Test tube for the Rainbow

characters

Benny Inkle

growing up (old copenhagen)

Benny grew up in the town of Coventry Cross and the vegetation attack of ought six was as far back as he could remember. His favourite job growing up was running the combine, but he hated the vegetable hunts. But you wind up doing what you're good at.

"I hate the outdoors"

"Natural mechanic"

starting out

Eventually Benny left the front lines and got work in a power plant, rising to the rank of general manager. His job was to keep the Tesla field running 24/7, and there never was an outage under his watch. Seven long years he spent managing people as they came and went, training them, burning them out, and moving them on. Benny knew his time was running out—his hair was coming out in patches, and his chest was getting heavy. The only place to fix that would be Gravity's Rainbow.

"Radiation sickness"

"Solution oriented"

moment of crisis

Benny hitched a ride in a suspended travel liner to Gravity's Rainbow, and the suspension was a relief—that many more days in which he did not feel ill. The Rainbow did the trick, fixing things up and saving his life, but it was hard to get used to having a machine breathing for you. Not to mention the voices in his head. Alien calculations and thoughts distracted him constantly as he fought to learn control. Then he met Qantii and things got a little better, even if he mostly had to do whatever she said. Or thought.

"Only part man"

"Plug and play software"

sidetracked

Benny didn't know the details, but Qantii somehow got them a ride off Gravity's Rainbow with some kind of lizard from the new system…

DATABASE UNKNOWN 0001A ERROR

…and the next thing he knew he was a real estate expert negotiating a deal for some moon in Xeno. Outside he was great but inside he knew this was a bust. The lizard was nice enough but kept the life support dialed way too hot and sticky. And of course Benny had to do everything from fixing the ship to manning the guns to cooking the food. Good thing he bought all that software.

"Internal strife"

"Sucks to be programmable"

on your own

He worked as ordered until the day they found the Library. In it was some kind of device that shattered Qantii's control and had a hoard of software. With the crystal device his thoughts were under control and he was finally his own part-man. And he could do, well, anything. Anything at all, but one thing at a time.

"Never going to have a master again"

"Could always use another good program"

skills

5—Repair

4—Bureaucracy, Intimidation

3—Tactics, Charm, Resolve

2—Oratory, Survival, Science, Vehicle

1—Agility, Profession: Farmer, Alertness, Profession: Teacher, Stamina

stunts

Programmable: Once per session, Benny can use any Skill not already in his pyramid at rank 5 for the rest of the session.

Built in Equipment: Benny doesn't need to breathe, so he effectively always has a pressure suit on.

Tok-Tar-Rim

growing up (donegal)

In our nest, the brood-nurse watched as I fed on my siblings and grew, as one of us was destined to do. I took their strength and their thoughts and developed into an adult, leaving behind my own eggs, to be fertilized eventually, and soon the brood-nurse would watch them grow. But I was moving up, to the clutch-house, to the wardhouse, to the city, and then to the stars.

"Memories of my sisters"

"I'm a survivor"

starting out

When the People were cut off from our cluster, we'd been the broken tail, of little use to the race as a whole. But as the galactic axes shifted, we were suddenly in contact with Humans, a race that barely knew the stars, the only slipstream-capable system already past its prime. For those who survived and those who made it to the stars the opportunities for expansion were endless. Throughout the cluster, space was ours, and buyers were everywhere. I started on a freighter, but soon found my way to Gravity's Rainbow, where treasures could be found, if you knew where to look.

"I'm a lizardman archaeologist"

"Helping humans reach space"

moment of crisis

I found the ship, and it still worked. There weren't many left that could put out these speeds: none of the People could produce them, I'm ashamed to admit, but a few adaptations, and I was back in the nest. I took on passengers and crew as I could, but no one who really understood the human bureaucracies like the bald one who was looking to heal himself. And Ben-Ee was there when we bought Xeno's moon; but such ventures are not always as satisfying as we imagine them.

"No profit in real estate"

"A human ship - *One Hatchling's Prize*"

sidetracked

Our culture has legends of the creature that brings destruction to all it touches. Not respectably eating their family and foes, but bringing their death and letting them rot. The humans call this creature Quanti. And she works for me.

"She does my bidding"

"Always a way out of trouble"

on your own

I went back to visit the world the humans call Donegal. I no longer had a place there. I met a grandchild who was a clutch-nurse, but she had no desire to travel, and I spent most of my time in the high port, barely fertilizing half a dozen nests. The People prefer humans not to come to the surface, but I no longer really had a place there either. I don't know what brought us to this cluster, and I don't know how long the axes will allow us to stay, but this is my home now, and I, like so many of my kind, just need to get by.

"A human perspective"

"Oh, the children I'll never eat"

skills

5—Computer

4—Science, Pilot

3—Brawling, Resolve, Culture/Tech (D, G, X, S)

2—Language (Human, Lizard), Alertness, Agility, Archaeology

1—Stamina, Assets, EVA, Slug Thrower, Brokerage

stunts

Have a thing: T3 ship, One Hatchling's Prize

Military-grade: Computer

Hack: use Computer for EW (at level 3)

Qantii

growing up (rasputin)

Despite what the sector claims, Rasputin allows people to move up and move up quickly on the world. With people leaving on every passing ship, there is always room for advancement. Qantii proved ambitious and street smart and ruthless. Her movement up the Rasputin scene could only be called meteoric.

"Looking for a way up"

"Hustling since birth"

starting out

The golden rule on Rasputin is "them with the gold makes the rules." Qantii used her smarts and sexuality to hop, skip, and sleep her way into a fair amount of gold and power. And she gave it all up for a flight out of that backwater system.

"Knows how to work it"

"The Golden Rule"

moment of crisis

When the ship arrives, people leave. No questions asked, just gold paid. Just so happened the captain of this ship was an upright gecko. Meh, Qantii had done worse. They slipped to a place Taktar called Gravity's Rainbow. It had gravity, but Qantii didn't know what a rainbow was. The gecko kept poking about old huts and Qantii couldn't find a city. Or gold. But there were still items to filch.

"It was always in my pocket"

"Close my eyes and don't think of Rasputin"

sidetracked

It was in Qantii's pocket. Honest! She knew just enough to get it operational. Some sort of Rainbow-powered Crystal. Qantii fired it up and Benny Inkle fired up too! Qantii had been in positions of power before, but never complete control. It's harder than it looks. Benny shambles, glows in the dark and takes a blaster shot like no one living. It's odd, Qantii wouldn't go so far as to say she liked Benny, but he's the first man who didn't try to use her.

"A matter of trust?"

"Rainbow-Powered Crystals are the shit!"

on your own

When the controller stopped working Qantii felt a sense of loss. The Rainbow Crystal no longer glowed. No matter. Benny seemed powered enough. Between Benny and Taktar it made for odd living arrangements. Qantii requires the hustle and bustle of a city, yet the lure of adventure with her pair of outcasts cannot be denied. Qantii finds herself poised for the next adventure. But where? Hopefully a city!

"Frighteningly open horizons"

"Craving control"

skills

5—Charm

4—Survival, Slug Thrower

3—Intimidation, Alertness, Profession: Grifter

2—Brawling, Resolve, Stealth, Tactics

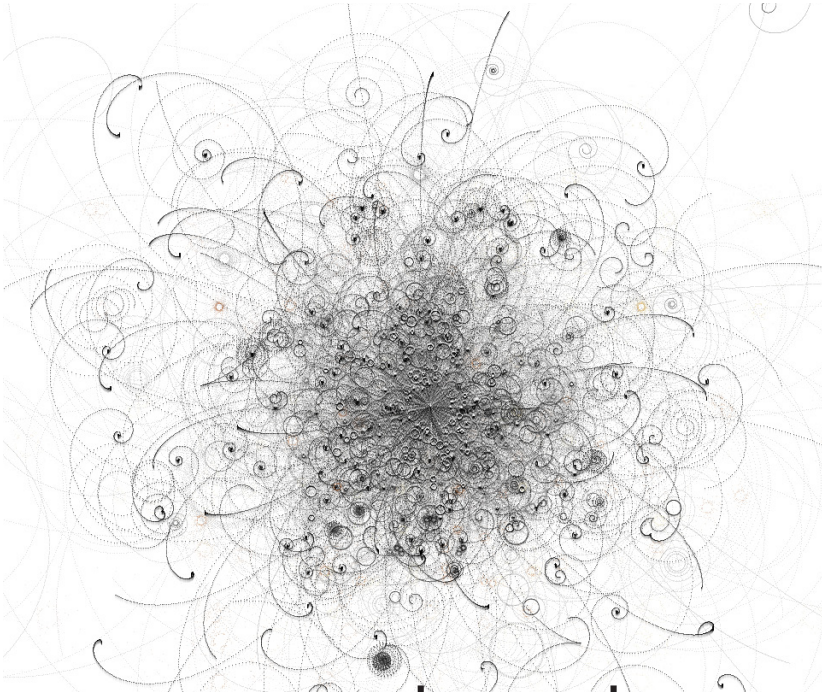
1—Arts, Culture/Tech (R, G), Bureaucracy, Stamina, Vehicle

stunts

On the Grift: use Grifter for Assets on a new world

Military-grade: Slug Thrower

Can you do the paperwork for me?: use Charm for Bureaucracy (at rank 3).



5. personal combat

With all the advances that contact with the slipstream brought—tastier food, cleaner streets, imposed order—and with all their fancy technology and science, when it comes to a fight in the close quarters of a ship, there's still nothing to beat a good sword. Nothing to reload, only one thing to break, and no chance of putting a hole in a wall that keeps out the vacuum. So I don't know how to fly, and I don't know how to fix these ships, but you'll find a swordsman like me inside every one of these buckets.

Combat in *Diaspora* is lethal. Intimidation is a useful Skill but during combat (and often outside of it) true intimidation derives from the genuine danger a weapon puts the characters in. The stress tracks you'll be marking are Health and Composure on individual characters.

the map

A combat session should take place on a map laid out in zones. Transition between zones may have some action cost associated with it (doors, etc.) or not, using a mechanism referred to as a border. Range is measured in numbers of zones, and is pretty loose; but generally:

- Characters in the same zone are in hand-to-hand combat range. They can punch, grapple, and stab with ease.
- Characters in adjacent zones can be poked with sticks with some effort—a couple of meters distant or so.

- Characters five zones apart are at the limit of effective rifle range—hundreds of meters.

This is deliberately abstract, and involves some deliberate bending of space. Maps for a good *Diaspora* fight should be kept simple. We like to lay a piece of paper over the playing area and then sketch the map. When a few terrain elements have been laid down, it should become obvious how to divide it into zones and apply zone Aspects and pass values.

Avoid laying out a grid. The zone system rewards non-orthogonal layout. Zones should not only represent strict distances but also represent the relationships between space and ease of travel and view. Wide open spaces can be big, for example, while rooms in a spacecraft or building can be much smaller, becoming zones with their walls as boundaries. A long straight corridor can reasonably be a single zone if it is narrow enough that you couldn't swing a broadsword in it.

Some heuristics for zones inside structures include:

- Rooms with doors that close are a zone, no matter how small.
- Split big zones up simply because the range is long (if the space is big enough to swing a broadsword).
- Overall, try to keep the basic rules for zone ranges: same zone is punching, adjacent zone is poking, two zones away is throwing, three or more is shooting. Four zones is enough to credibly claim you can escape.

Write the Aspects right on the map. If a zone has an Aspect (and this is a great way to model terrain effects), just write the Aspect right on the zone: "Plunged in darkness," "Oil slick," "The corpses of the crew," "Stacks of books."

Borders can have pass values. Any borders between zones that are especially difficult to cross will have a pass value—the number of shifts (from a successful move action) needed to pass through the border. Basic doors might have a pass value of 1 or 2. Dogged hatches might have a much higher pass value: perhaps 4 or higher. A pass value may be zero, as in an open room or an automatically opening door.

Borders that have a state—a door, for example, which might have a pass value of 2 in its closed state and a value of zero in its open state—change state when the pass value is paid and remain in that state until the pass value is paid again. So a door that someone has already paid to pass through is now in the open state and costs nothing to pass through until someone pays 2 movement successes (shifts) to close it. Some borders may have a state that is not reversible—for example an obstacle that must be dismantled somehow and cannot easily be put back together—in which case the border remains permanently at the new state's pass value (probably zero, but a referee could get creative here). Note then that the pass value is also the cost to change state, even when it is in a state where the effective pass value is zero.

A simple notation for borders is to use a digit representing the pass value. For borders with two states, separate the three (cost to open, cost to pass while open, cost to close) pass values with a slash. A low stone wall might be represented simply with a 2/2/2 or just 2. A dogged hatch might be 4/0/4, and would cost 4 shifts to open at which time its pass value is zero. It would take 4 shifts to then close it again. Punching

a hole in a thin bulkhead might be represented 20/4/X—costs plenty to get through and is never all that easy to crawl through the hole and isn't reversible.

Some pass values:

- A dogged hatch (hard to open, stays open, hard to close): 4/0/4
- An automatic door/hatch (opens on a button push and closes automatically): 1/1/1
- A barrier of burning tires (hard to clear, stays cleared): 8/0/X

The situation is slightly different for outdoor locations, where too many zones clutter the map.

Outdoors all brawling and close combat weapons have a range of 0 (combatants must be in the same zone).

overhead map

In the map below we have several zones. In the lower left is a region full of trees split into two zones. You can use images on a map exactly as a worded Aspect, so this zone has the implicit Aspect, "Forested," which has a border around it with value 1. Entry and exit from the zone is relatively easy but does reduce your movement a bit. Characters inside the zone might tag the zone Aspect defensively to avoid being spotted or reduce the effects of enemy fire. Characters outside the zone might tag the zone Aspect to spot sneaking characters by the moving branches. Anyone might use the zone Aspect as a compel to halt an action, provided they have a story to offer that's about trees.

To the right of it is a wide-open zone with no Aspects at all. This is a fairly big zone and represents no tactical options. It would probably be wise to get out of here—a zone with Aspects is more powerful to you (and to your enemies) and lets you play the fate point economy, which is a big part of the tactical game. Below it is a field of corn.

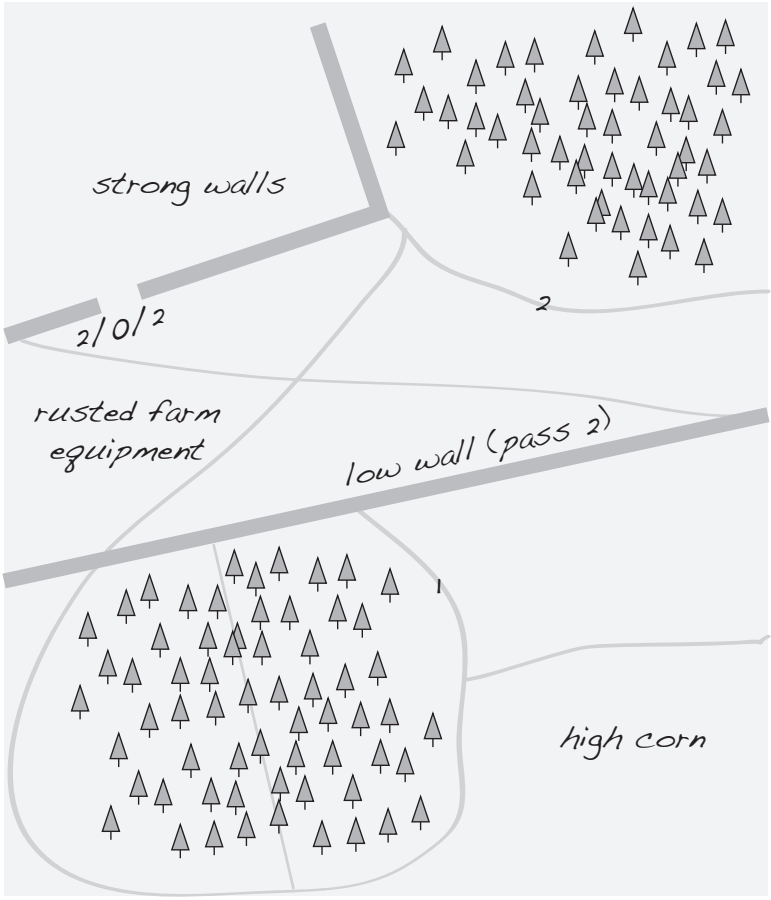
The Broadsword Rule

When determining interior zones, a good rule-of-thumb is whether the space is big enough to swing a broadsword. If it isn't, it's a single zone (since the range of a broadsword is 1, not 0-1). The entire space of a large cramped engine room might be one zone, as might a small stateroom, though a spacious stateroom might have two zones. And remember, which zone a character is in does not say where she is in the zone, or what she is doing. A narrow corridor might have a single zone, but have all sorts of crannies in which to hide. The characters can then choose to hide as a combat action (adding a temporary Aspect to the zone or to themselves) but remain in the same zone.

A low wall with pass value 2 divides the map and delineates the open area that we've divided into four zones. One of these zones has some broken down farm machinery in it, which we model with another Aspect ("Rusted farm equipment") and now that can be used as cover or compelled to impede movement. That "low wall" should also be treated as an Aspect—certainly a good rule of thumb is that if there are words on the map, they are Aspects. Now the wall inhibits movement but also provides cover or any other advantage that a player can narrate around the low wall. Characters

are identified as being in a given zone, but not at a specific location within that zone (use a sculpted mini, a coin, or what have you to represent which zone your character is in). Any character in a zone can make use of the zone's Aspect regardless of where within the zone the player puts his miniature.

In the upper right is a zone with more trees (another implicit Aspect: "Trees" maybe) which has a border with value 2 around it and in the upper left a zone that represents some structure that has the Aspect "Strong walls." There appears to be only one way into the structure: an industrial door with pass value 2. Doors are usually stateful borders, so it will cost 2 to open, after which it stays open and costs nothing to pass. For an expenditure of 2 more movement shifts a character could close it again (so 2/0/2 is written on the map).



This map is sufficient for a half dozen characters and NPCs to interact and have some interesting tactical options available. A map can be much more complicated, obviously, but doesn't need to be: a simpler map suits the system's level of abstraction better than a complicated map.

cross sectional map

> *What the broadcasts never show you about boarding a ship is how much work it is. Even if all the passengers keep to their cabins, no one wanting to be a hero, there's still all the climbing. Once you're aboard and the engines are secured, you need to go up. Up past the cargo; up past the cabins. You have to make the bridge, and secure that before the crew separate the command deck from the rest of the ship. Without the command deck, your salvage is worth nothing. If they kept the autolift on, it would be easy; but they never do. So you learn how to climb. You earn your prize.*

Spacecraft will typically be organized with small decks stacked along the axis of thrust so that the ship's acceleration provides "gravity" for the occupants. This presents a minor problem for running personal combat: the decks are not going to be very big or very interesting, so a familiar overhead deckplan view might not be the best way to proceed. Certainly you can, and progress from map to map as characters move through the vertical, in which case use the same heuristics as you would for an outdoor map, except that the space is constrained.

Another possibility is to display the ship in lateral cross section instead of the usual overhead view and increase the abstraction. In this case (or any case where you want to use a cross section instead of a floorplan—a fight in an office building, for example) it will be handy to invent a Stunt that makes a whole set of zones (a deck or a storey) behave accordingly. We'll call that set of zones a "level."

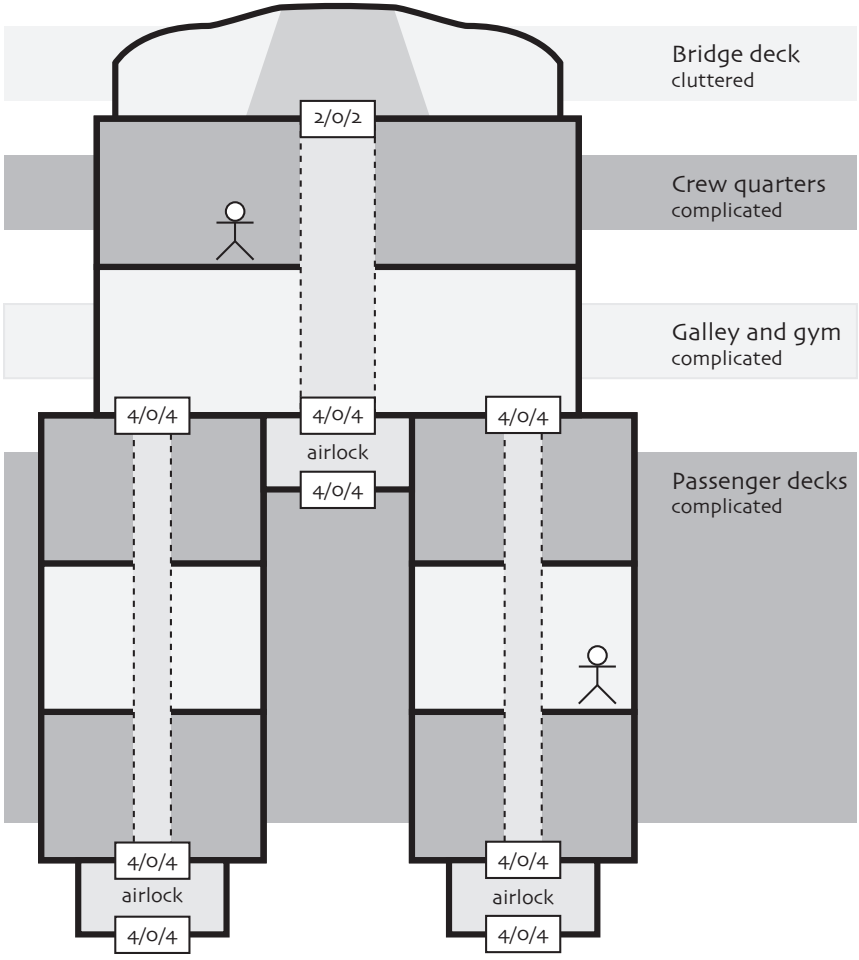
Cluttered: a cluttered level is full of things that block line of sight and make movement difficult. It can still be huge (two, three, four, even five zones), but the clutter means that weapons cannot be used beyond range zero.

Complicated: a complicated level is such that it is impossible to acquire line of sight past an adjacent zone. A good example might be a deck with a central shaft and four or five rooms arranged radially around the shaft, or a floor in a hotel with many rooms. There's no line-of-sight from one room straight to any other, and so the maximum range characters can engage in is one zone regardless of the number of zones in the level.

Open: an open deck has no interesting obstructions and characters can engage at any range.

When using this slightly abstracted map, it is not necessary (or even desirable) to attempt to represent literally the features of the interior.

As with the overhead map, borders (doors in this case) are given numeric values for the number of shifts needed to cross. In all these cases, the borders are stateful. Assume it takes the same number of shifts to open a door as to close it unless the map clearly states otherwise.



the sequence

Combat occurs according to a strict sequence of events. In order to run the Sequence, one player should be named the caller (usually the referee, but if one player's character is not physically present, it makes sense for him to call, while the referee controls the opposition). The duty of the caller is to run the Sequence: he ensures that each phase is given sufficient time and that there is a smooth pace as phases proceed. The caller should have the Sequence Summary in front of him during the game.

While objectively it is more appealing to poll characters in order of some Skill (Alertness is the usual choice, with ties broken by Agility), in practice this does not have a huge impact on play except to slow it down and confuse the order. A more effective solution for actual play is for the caller to select a player by any criteria he likes and then poll players clockwise or counterclockwise around the table.

The caller decides on the order in which players will declare actions in the combat Sequence.

Combat is organized into turns of non-specific length, but each representing something between twenty seconds and a minute, depending on the actions described. Consequently, it may be assumed that more is happening within each turn than is actually being described, and in a given round a guy with a pistol might shoot an opponent, or he may defend against multiple attacks by shooting (but never hitting) in the direction of his attackers.

In combat, each player may only use a given Skill only once per round. You cannot use the same Skill for offense and defense in the same round.

Each player's turn consists of a "free" one-zone move and an action.

The "free" move may constitute eroding a pass value by one.

The action will fall into one of four categories: attack, move, maneuver, or do something else.

attack

If an attack action is declared, the player will announce their character's action for the round and will interpret it, with the assistance of the caller, in game mechanical terms as a Skill test roll of some kind with appropriate results.

Attacks roll 4dF + the appropriate Skill and add the weapon's harm value. The Defender rolls 4dF + an appropriate Skill + any defense conferred by armour. Armour defense is reduced by weapon penetration, though no lower than zero. See the weapon tables to find the harm and penetration values for weapons. See the armour tables for the defense values of armour.

A weapon used inside its minimum range or outside its maximum range applies a modifier of -2 to the roll. Brawling and Close Combat weapons may not be used outside of the weapon's maximum range unless they have a Stunt that allows it.

Both attack and defense rolls may now be modified by invoked or tagged Aspects (though only one of each type: see Playing with Fate), spin, and any other available modifier.

The difference between the attacker's roll and the defender's roll after all modifications is the number of shifts. If this number is positive, the attack was successful. If zero or negative the attack fails. If the result is -3 or lower, the defender gets spin.

For each successful attack, damage is noted, and mitigated as per the Damage section below. If this is the first time the character has been hit in this session, the damage is to both Health and Composure stress tracks as per the First Blood section below. Free tags resulting from Consequences are immediately available to the next opponent character to announce action (or any following opponent, until the free tag has been tagged).

Leave defensive rolls on the table (note the value on a piece of paper or the map if Aspects have been tagged or invoked—the value left at the table is the roll + Skill + any Aspect related improvement). If the character is attacked a second or further times, before acting, use the roll on the table whenever the same skill is used for defense.

This "one defensive roll per round" rule has tactical ramifications. First, if you get

Attack!

It might not be clear how to phrase actions to accomplish some tasks, so here are some examples that might give you ideas of your own.

"I spray them with lead to keep their heads down"—fire a submachine-gun into the neighbouring zone to cause one Composure hit to everyone in the zone. Check Slug Throwers.

"I shoot him in the head"—fire a pistol at a specific target in a neighbouring zone. Note that there are no called shots in the game: the attacker narrates the intended result, rolls the dice, and the roll is interpreted based on the number of successes. So if the person who made this roll achieves one shift, the result may be "The bullet deflects off his faceplate, rattling him"; four shifts may mean "The bullet hits his forehead." Note, however, that it only does actual damage if the hit produces a Consequence.

"I throw a grenade behind their cover to wipe them out"—roll Close Combat amplified by Agility to attack everyone in the target zone.

"I point the flamer at his head and remind him how these work"—roll a Military-grade Energy Weapons to do Composure damage to the target.

Defenses should be any Skill that the player can sell to the caller or vice versa. "I dive for cover" is probably Agility. "I blaze away at him, ruining his shot" is probably Slug Throwers. But you can't defend with a skill you've already attacked with this round, or roll the same skill more than once per round.

a bad defensive roll expect to be ganged up on. Second, if you get a great defensive roll you could generate multiple spin counters.

When it's your turn to act, remove your defensive roll record.

composure attacks

A Composure attack is conducted exactly as an attack above, but the damage done is to the Composure stress track only.

Any attack can be made against either Composure or Health tracks. They are made with any weapons Skill. Characters may attempt Composure attacks without using weapons, in which case the character also gains the temporary Aspect, "Sitting duck." (A given table may decide that MG Intimidation could avoid this result Aspect, and allow Intimidation attacks in combat without penalty). Armour affects Composure attacks just as it does Health attacks but only those that use a weapon.

Any attack that would normally cause damage to the Health track can instead be used to damage the Composure track if the attacker so desires and declares before the dice are rolled. The attack is conducted exactly as normal with all modifiers unchanged.

move

Any combat action allows a character to move a single zone. If, however, the player declares his whole action to be a move, he may roll Agility (or MicroG if in a microgravity environment) against difficulty zero and count shifts. He may use these shifts for movement in addition to his free move of one zone for up to two additional zones.

A character may move no more than three zones in a single turn, including the free move. Excess shifts can be used to erode pass values, though.

Borders with a multiple move cost to pass through (like a closed door or difficult terrain) can be moved through with one

turn's expenditure (if it's sufficient) or can be eroded over multiple turns. So, for example, trying to move through a closed door with pass value 2, a player adjacent to it could erode it by 1 and still make a combat action or forfeit his combat action and make a Agility roll. At a minimum he will erode the pass value by 1 but he may well generate enough successes to open the door and move through it. Any number of successes may be brought to bear on border obstacles as long as the three zone movement limit is maintained.

Example: Thorvald Henriksson (Agility 2) is trying to escape his flooding submarine. The hatch has a pass value of 2/0/2. He decides to take a move action. His free move erodes one point from the door value. He rolls a zero, which added to his Agility gives him two shifts. He pays a fate point to invoke his "I want to be under the sea" Aspect to achieve four shifts (Thorvald has Vehicle 3, but he specializes in water vehicles), and he continues to open the hatch (one shift—recall his free move already eroded it by one), walks through to the next zone (one shift), and closes the hatch (two shifts), stopping the rising waters reaching him, for now.

maneuver

A player may wish to place an Aspect on a zone, a character, or the scene. This can represent anything from lighting the opponent on fire (Aspect: "Pants on fire!") to turning on the sprinkler system (Aspect: "Noisy water spray everywhere"). First, the player may choose to move one zone.

The maneuvering player makes a roll at 4dF + an appropriate Skill (as chosen by him when narrating) against target zero or a defensive roll (if against a character).

A successful maneuver roll places a free-taggable Aspect on a person, or zone.

Maneuver rolls can be modified by invokes, spin, tags, and so forth as any other roll is.

Any free tags placed by maneuvers at this time are immediately available to the next character to announce action (or any following character, until the free tag has been tagged).

Aspects that have been placed on a zone may also be used to compel anyone in that zone, just as that character's own Aspects might be used in a compel. The caller should determine whether the Aspect placed is permanent or transient.

Permanent Aspects are Aspects that affect the person or terrain directly. This includes things like "Your pants are on fire" (technically temporary, but permanent for the purposes of the story), "Cratered roadway," "Hole in the floor," "Sprinkler system running," and so on.

Transient Aspects are Aspects that derive from the continuous action of an individual. "Doorway sighted in," "Continuous hail of covering fire," and so on. Transient Aspects last only until the placing character acts again, though he may use the Aspect in this last turn of its existence.

Aspects placed on a character can be removed by the character on his turn. If the Aspect is still free-taggable, he may free-tag it and remove the free-taggability without a roll as his action. If it is not free-taggable, he may remove it with a maneuver against himself at target zero. Success erases the Aspect.

Write that Aspect right on the map!

do something else

Players invariably will want to do something that doesn't naturally fall into one of the above three actions. This is fine, and is subject to table consensus and a plausible narrative. A player may want to jury-rig a circuit, by making a Repair roll (against a difficulty determined by the referee), or shut off the engines, by making a piloting roll (against a difficulty determined by the referee), or any of a host of other things. Here are some further ideas, with mechanisms to deal with them.

seal a suit

When a pressure suit has lost integrity (i.e. when the player has received a Consequence from his health track), that hole needs to be fixed.

When a suit capable of resisting the hostile environment loses integrity, the wearer must make an EVA Skill check against difficulty 4 to repair it instead of a combat action. Each turn this check is failed the character sustains a Composure and Health track hit on a box equal to the amount the check was missed by (negative shifts).

If the player refuses to declare a repair action and instead takes a combat action, he automatically takes four shifts of damage to both Composure and Health tracks. These shifts may of course be mitigated by Consequences.

Some environments may set a different difficulty target (and consequently a different level of automatic damage) to represent lesser danger—the difficulty of 4 is intended to model a zero pressure environment.

apply first aid

Someone with the Medical Skill may wish to help an ally during combat. The target number for success is the highest box marked on the Health track. The number of shifts indicates the track box (and all marked boxes below it) that are erased. If that track box is not marked the next lower marked box is erased. The assisting charac-

Some Combat Strategies

Stacking Maneuvers
It's tempting in combat to go for the kill, and to think wearing down the enemy's track one box at a time is the best strategy. It's not. Spending a turn or two doing maneuvers, i.e. putting free-taggable Aspects on yourself, your opponent, or the zone he is in, rapidly leads to the killing head-shot you are hoping for. Maneuvers are easy with their target roll of zero, and don't require high Skill levels. Teamwork here can help greatly. If the first two or three people in a turn put relevant Aspects on a situation, the fourth can bat clean-up, at +6 plus a fate point or two, to make a hit with epic precision that can't be mitigated.

Spin!
Look out for spin! Sure it seems like a good idea to take that shot at long range even though your opponent will probably avoid it. There's always a chance, right? Well, remember, whenever the defender beats the attacking roll by three or more, he gets spin and he'll use it against you.

What's the story here? You decide not to shoot because power is scarce and ammunition is expensive. Or maybe you're just tired of the fact that all it does is give your position away! In any case, look out—a competent defender can turn into a dangerous attacker next round when armed with spin.

ter receives the temporary free-taggable Aspect, "Sitting Duck," unless the character has Military-grade Medical.

create an obstruction

One way to inhibit movement is to create an obstruction, which applies a pass value to the border between two zones. The precise nature of the barrier, and its duration (whether it needs to be maintained or whether it is permanent) depends entirely upon the narrative offered by the player, and is subject to table approval.

The player declares a target zone boundary and declares a Skill to be used, then narrates his attempt. He rolls 4dF + Skill against target value 2. Bring all the Aspect invokes, tags, and spin to modify the roll that you would for any other roll.

If any shifts are generated, the player may place a pass value of two on any single border of the zone he has declared as his target (2/2/2). If a pass value already exists on the border, it may be incremented by +1 (+1/+1/+1).

Some examples might include moving a credenza in front of a hotel room door, throwing a rock to make a sound indicating enemy presence, forcing the opposition to be extra careful moving there, or aiming at a particular spot with the laser gunsight on so that it is obvious that the doorway is covered.

As with other combat actions, the decision to do something else may be preceded by a "free" one-zone move. The player can be compelled to prevent the action; if a compel is accepted the player's action ends. Whatever the result, the process should be narrated once it is completed.

using compels for special effects

Marines are outside the airlock, about to enter.

Morgan: "I fire into the airlock as it cycles, keeping their heads down." That's a maneuver using a Slug Throwers check to place "Keeping heads down" as an Aspect on the airlock zone.

Caller: "Roll against target value zero." Dice are rolled and evaluated as success. Caller notes the new Aspect on the map and gives it an open check box for free-tagging.

Marine A (played by the referee): "I'm going to make a move check to enter the airlock."

Caller: "Compels?"

Morgan: (holding up a fate point) "Hey, it's raining lead in there—you hold up outside until the automatic fire subsides."

Marine A: (giving one of his own fate points) "Yeah right—we are MARINES!"

Caller: "Roll your Agility for movement then." Dice are rolled, shifts generated, and the marine enters the airlock.

Hallie: "I fire on the marine that just entered."

Caller: "Compels?"

...and so on. Hallie, if not compelled to inaction, might well free-tag the covering fire Aspect to get a solid hit. The important thing is that the Marine gets to decide whether or not to pay for his ability to ignore the covering fire, using the same mecha-

nism we see all over the game. The fate point economy gets ramped up and story-relevant decisions abound.

damage

When a character has been hit by an attack that generates shifts, she may take damage. Before marking the damage, she may reduce the shifts by applying one or more Consequences: a mild Consequence reduces the number of shifts by one, a moderate Consequence reduces the number of shifts by two, and a severe Consequence reduces the number of shifts by four.

After mitigation by Consequences, the remaining number of shifts indicate the box to be marked on the appropriate stress track. Mark this box and all boxes below it. If the highest box to be marked has already been marked, the damage "rolls up": mark the next higher open box and all below it.

A player may only ever have a maximum of three Consequences and may only have a maximum of one of each type regardless of the track the Consequence was scored against. This means that a character suffering economic hardship (see Chapter 4) is easier to take out.

The defender determines the precise wording of the Consequence (subject to reasonableness, as determined by table authority).

taken out

A character is out of play when he sustains a hit past the end of any stress track. This means a person can be Taken Out without ever taking a Consequence and therefore without ever taking any serious damage! A person that takes eight shifts past his Health stress track cannot be saved. That's a one-shot kill… or maybe there's a better way to narrate it?

The attacker narrates taking out his opponent (subject to reasonableness, as determined by table authority). Anything that suits the method (gunfire, punching, whatever) and that genuinely removes the character from play is suitable.

When narrating how an opponent is Taken Out, it is essential to articulate how and if the opponent can return to the game. A ship that has been Taken Out is no longer able to participate in space combat, but could, in theory, be boarded (where it could revert to the personal combat game). Or it could be destroyed (in which case it could not re-enter the game). This gives a lot of power to the victor, and should be an incentive to players to offer concessions when things aren't going their way. A major opponent Taken Out in personal combat can no longer fight, but the long-term repercussions are determined by the narrative. Being Taken Out might also change features of a character sheet, though this requires some negotiation.

Example: Karen has spent a Stunt for her character to have a ship, and the ship is Taken Out. The referee may determine that the ship explodes, in which case at the end of the session, Karen will be able to re-invest the Stunt (subject to the progress of the narrative and table consensus). Let's say that the narration for Taken Out was simply that the ship was abandoned by the crew. Now Karen has a choice: she can change the Stunt as above (acknowledging that the ship is no longer hers);

however, by leaving the ship in play, the referee cannot take it away from her. She may have lost her crew, but if Karen wishes to doggedly hold on to the floating wreck (keeping the Stunt), she will have major repairs ahead of her, but the ship can be saved. In any case, the ship will not be capable of space combat again in this session.

Another example: Jack's character has the Aspect "Señor Padillo is hunting me." After a gruelling duel using the personal combat game, Señor Padillo is Taken Out (Jack rejected the referee's offered concession that he escape to fight another day). Jack now has a choice: is Señor Padillo to be actually written out of the story? The narration might say he is dead, in which case the character's Aspect will have to change at the end of the session ("I slaughter any who oppose me," perhaps). Perhaps Señor Padillo is only unconscious, and the players leave him "Bleeding out" or "Unconscious but stable": both of these indicate that Padillo is out of the personal combat, but Jack needs to decide as part of this narration, whether Padillo can ever return. If the Aspect remains unchanged, he'll be back (if not next session, perhaps in a later one); if the Aspect is removed completely, the matter is left in the hands of the referee. What Jack can't do, however, is appropriate Señor Padillo as a benefit for the players: he has been Taken Out, and if the team wants an ally then someone will need to invest a Stunt, committing character resources, before Señor Padillo can become part of the team.

healing

Characters cannot begin removing Consequences until the associated stress track has been cleared.

recovering stress box hits

Stress box hits are not real damage. They are the sweats, panic, scratches, "only a flesh wound," and so on: nothing that can't be fixed with a tiny amount of downtime and nothing that actually affects performance. Consequently all Health and Composure stress track hits are cleared at the first instance of downtime, whether that's a fancy hotel room with no one fighting in it or just the three or four days' travel time to the slipknot.

The table should rule when enough time has passed or whether the downtime was sufficiently relaxing.

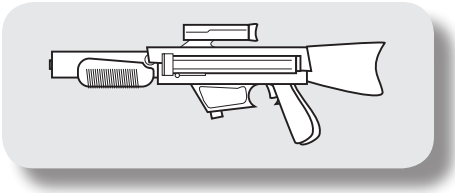
recovering consequences

Healing Consequences is governed, in the first instance, by an external time frame, which forces players to endure the effects of combat through the rest of the session.

A mild Consequence is cleared as soon as the associated stress track is cleared.

A moderate Consequence remains until the end of the session.

A severe Consequence must be carried through one complete session in which the associated stress track is never marked. If it is incurred during session one, it is gone no sooner than the end of session two, and if the associated stress track takes hit in a fight during that session, you'll need to hold the Consequence through yet another one.



medics

In addition to the purely mechanical process of recovery described above, there may be narrative reasons to introduce the need for actual medical help. The following guidelines are suggested, when pertinent.

A mild Consequence can be treated by a medic without a roll after the combat in which the wound was sustained is over. It requires a first-aid kit.

A moderate Consequence remains until a medic can make a successful check against difficulty zero. Base time to heal is a week with (positive or negative) shifts modifying time to solve by one per shift. It requires a medical clinic (such as would be found on an ambulance or in a ship's sick bay), and the technology rating of the facility is applied as a modifier to the roll.

A severe Consequence can be healed by a medic rolling against difficulty 4. It requires an advanced medical facility such as would be found in a hospital, and the technology rating of the facility is applied as a modifier to the roll. The referee may decide that the facility is, despite technology, better or worse equipped and apply this as a modifier to the difficulty. This takes one month, modified by the number of shifts achieved. In no case is the impact of the severe Consequence removed before the end of the session following the one in which it was received.

example: getting a finger shot off

Panko has four boxes in his Health stress track and the first two are already marked. He's got an old hazard suit that has a Defense value of 4.

His opponent rolls a 2, plus his Slug Thrower skill of 2 makes 4. The coilgun he's firing has a Harm of 2, so that's 4+2=6 shifts.

Panko defends with his Agility of 3, but rolls a dismal -3, for a total defensive roll of 0.

The coilgun's Penetration is 3, so his armour is only worth 4-3=1, reducing the incoming shifts to 5. If the Penetration reduced the Defense effect below zero, we'd treat it as zero, but in this case the armour still has some effect.

Attacker's coilgun roll (2) + Skill (2) + Harm (2) = shifts = 6

Panko's Agility roll (-3) + Skill (3) = Defensive roll = 0

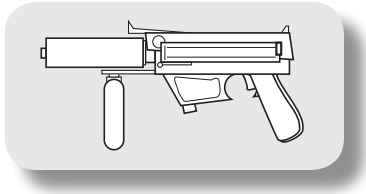
Shifts = 6-0 = 6

Armour effect = Defense (4) - Penetration (3) = 1

Shifts after armour effect = 6-1 = 5

So he takes five shifts from the coilgun, which would fill his Health track (mark the track at the number of shifts and all boxes below) and one past it. If he can't reduce the number of shifts so that it's smaller than his track, he's out, so he will need to take a Consequence. He could use a severe and reduce the number of shifts from five to one, but that would indicate an already filled box and the hit would roll up to the first open one—the 3-box. Instead he chooses the moderate Consequence, reducing the shifts from five to three and marking the 3-box. All below it are already marked.

He might want to use both a severe and a mild to reduce the shifts by five to noth-



ing and ignore the hit. That would leave him with a lot of free-taggable damage stuck to him, though, and a future full of careful living to heal up.

He might prefer to use a mild Consequence only and reduce the shifts to four, filling his whole track but remaining only lightly injured.

However, he chooses the moderate and marks his 3-box. For the Consequences he chooses, "They give you ten fingers so you have lots of spares". He also chooses to flee.

In the next round, Panko's enemies will be able to free-tag his new Consequence for a bonus to their attacks (or any other rolls they care to make), but Panko has the chance to get away on his terms, rather than have his attacker describe the way he is Taken Out. This is the chief danger of Consequences: they give your opponent immediate and substantial advantage.

special rules

first blood

Getting shot is scary. Even when you are a professional.

When a player marks a Health stress track hit and has not yet marked any Health or Composure boxes, the Composure stress track is also marked at the same value (and all boxes below, as always). After this initial combat shock all attacks are against Health or Composure but not both.

Note that Consequences reduce shifts before they are marked as damage, so they do not have to be applied separately for each of the Health and Composure tracks here. This means that when first hit, a player must decide whether to take a Consequence that will have a doubled effect (but making the character more vulnerable in the next round) or decide to tough it out, in hopes of finishing the fight quickly.

out of ammo

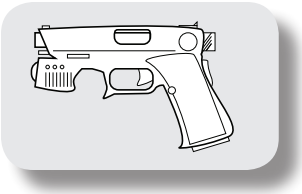
Who wants to count bullets? Not us. It's way more fun to have an Aspect, and let your opponents decide when you run out of bullets.

Anyone using a slug thrower automatically gets the Aspect "Out of ammo" to be compelled liberally, but which cannot be free-tagged.

Anyone who has used a slug thrower to make an Area of Effect attack (fully automatic fire, a Stunt that some weapons have to allow multiple attacks in the same zone) gets the Aspect "Out of ammo" to be compelled liberally, and it can be free-tagged each time the weapon is used for an Area of Effect attack.

military-grade and civilian

Any weapon or armour that does not have the Civilian Stunt requires a Military-grade Skill in order to use. It may be the case that it is sufficient at some tables to deny access and not explain, but it might be more satisfying to have a mechanism. A



character without the appropriate Military-grade stunt can use the military equipment (at her Skill level), but only by paying a fate point for each roll. Thus the player can have her character use the superior but unfamiliar equipment, but with an attendant loss in fate points.

hostile environments

Sometimes a fight will take place in an environment where the integrity of armour is important not only to absorb combat damage but also to resist environmental effects. These environments might include low pressure, high pressure, or toxic atmospheres. In these cases a loss of suit integrity has serious ramifications.

A hostile environment suit has lost integrity when the wearer takes any Health track Consequence.

zero gravity

When fighting in zero or low gravity the scene has the Aspect, "Zero gravity" or "Low gravity." This can be tagged as usual by participants.

Some weapons are recoilless, and are designed for low gravity, and these will have the Low Recoil Stunt.

All attacks using weapons without the Low Recoil Stunt use the MicroG Skill instead of their preferred Skill (Brawling, Close Combat, Slug Thrower).

MicroG rolls may also be called for to perform movement or other activity in zero or low gravity.

In some contexts the shifting of gravity can lead to interesting play environments. This might lead to a permanent penalty on all action in the scene: *e.g.* "Sloping gravity" (when a ship is rotating under thrust, for instance), where all actions are done as if in gravity (*i.e.* without the MicroG Skill) and are at -2; or "Stuttering microgravity" (if a drive keeps kicking in and out), where all actions are as in MicroG, but at -1; or "Low gravity," where all actions are at -2, using the better of MicroG or the relevant combat Skill. These environmental effects may be determined by the referee as the map is designed, or they may be a consequence of player actions.

The MicroG Skill does not confer knowledge of the maintenance and repair of any weapons: for that, checks need to be made against Slug Throwers or Energy Weapons, as applicable.

The referee may determine penalties that apply in MicroG environments: without a handhold, it simply may not be possible to throw a grenade effectively.

wargaming

I hunt with my crossbow, lying in wait for one of the Guardsmen to cross my line of sight. I don't need their laser sights or their fancy training; I just hunker down behind the plasma coil and wait for them to come for me. I'm hidden, lined up, cool and collected, in the shadows… a standard marine doesn't stand a chance against me, even with his armour. Normally they'd be quick to let off a snapshot, but they always hesitate if they think they're going to blast away the slipdrive. One by one they find me, and one by one I pick them off.

Sometimes it's fun just to make one-off characters and have them shoot at each other. To play independently as a tactical war game, you need three things: a map, a story, and characters.

the map

Someone is chosen as caller. Either the caller or the table draws a map. Is it a shoot out in an airport? A race to secure a bunker at the top of a hill? A boarding action in a submarine or a spaceship? Whatever the case, you need a map to play on.

You can start with a blank piece of paper, and take turns drawing features, until it looks good enough. Feel free to write words on the map too – these can become Aspects and help clarify what's what.

Once that is done, divide the map into zones. You don't want too many, but enough to allow opportunities for getting outside of range, and to allow movement. When drawing zones, it is often helpful to go from corner to corner: that means it is always clear when a character enters an area (from a door, or otherwise along a side) what zone he is in.

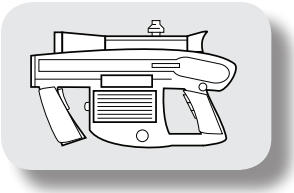
the story

The process of drawing a map has already begun to determine what the story is: is this a fight to the death? Are there teams? Is most of the table maneuvering against a small cadre controlled by the caller (or by someone else)? Is there a difference in tech level between two sides? Whatever the case, articulating the story that is being told might mean that you go back and change the map slightly, add an Aspect to a zone or two, or whatever.

Most important is that the story articulates victory conditions, which need not be the same for all players. Is this a fight to the death? An attempt to capture someone alive? Someone working to escape detection and get out of a building, or sabotage a spacecraft's drives? Whatever the case, the victory condition might be defined in terms of time: get off the ship in eight turns; spend two turns alone in the engine room setting explosives.

characters

Once the map and the story are determined, everyone should spend five minutes (no more) making one or two characters to push around the map.



skills

Given the limited focus of this tactical game, 3-cap characters should be sufficient: pick one Skill at level 3, two at level 2, and three at level 1. Everything else is considered untrained. While any Skill might be taken, the following list presents Skills particularly relevant to this mini-game: Agility; Alertness; Brawling (combat); Close Combat (combat); Energy Weapons (combat); EVA; MicroG; Resolve (track); Slug Throwers (combat); Stamina (track); Stealth; Tactics.

stress tracks

Characters should only concern themselves with Health and Composure stress tracks. Each is three boxes long. If the character has Resolve at level 1 or 2, the Composure track has four boxes; if he has Resolve 3, the Composure track has five boxes. If the character has Stamina at level 1 or 2, the Health track has four boxes; if he has Stamina 3, the Health track has five boxes.

stunts

Every character selects a Stunt. Making something Military-grade or altering how a stress track works are both obvious choices. (For some stories, it may be desirable to allow two Stunts per character; that's fine, as long as it's the same across the board).

aspects

Each character should have three Aspects, revealed to all at the table. Each character also begins with three fate points.

Making a note card for each character, placed in front of the player with all the relevant information and a small pile of fate points stacked on top keeps all the information clear at all times.

This is obviously scaled back from the RPG, and introduces a slightly different calculus for what constitutes a success. With reduced characters, teamwork, particularly in laying down maneuvers to be free-tagged, is rewarded.

combat equipment

Eventually it's time to stop talking and start threatening. When that happens you better be ready to follow through. And you better assume she's ready too, because nothing's more embarrassing than pulling a knife on some girl with a plasma gun.

Weapons break down into the following categories, each represented by a Skill of the same name:

- Brawling
- Close Combat
- Slug Thrower
- Energy Weapon

Weapons not designated as civilian can only be employed by characters with the appropriate Military-grade Stunt. That is, non-civilian slug throwers require the Military-grade Slug Throwers Stunt, and so forth.

The statistics of weapons are:

- Harm (modifier to offensive roll)
- Penetration (negative modifier to armour Defense value)
- Minimum range (range below which a penalty is applied to offense roll)
- Maximum range (range beyond which a penalty is applied to offense roll)
- Cost (the target number for Wealth rolls to acquire the weapon)

Most equipment needs little more than a list of their statistics, and so at the end of this chapter there will be a table of all the equipment tidily presented in a way that's easy to use during actual play. Each can benefit from a little cluster-specific story, though, so feel free to write that. Give the weapons technical sounding names and military designations. Give them manufacturer's names and model numbers. Make them yours.

Weapons have Stunts and Aspects. In the weapon tables at the end of this chapter, Stunts will be **bolded** and Aspects in *italics*.

brawling

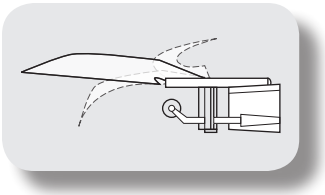
Brawling involves the nitty gritty fighting with fists, found weapons, clubs, and knives.

close combat

Tallico had lain in wait for his quarry, spear in hand, since dawn. The path had narrowed, and any opposition would be marching single file along the trail. The tribe would reward Tallico if he could get another kill—his third—but to hunt required patience. He adjusted his fingers on the grip, and then he saw one, making its way through the cooling afternoon mist. Tallico stood, and walked the three confident steps from his ambush as the spear rose up, and his right hand secured the base of the spear, to strengthen the thrust. Right through the suit. the hiss of escaping oxygen was reassuring; Tallico knew that after a minute of fumbling, the creature would die. This one was alone, and Tallico's hunt was over. As he reached down with his armoured claw, Tallico grinned. The tribe would would eat well tonight.

Poison

You can add poison to an arrow or blowgun dart, as a maneuver, and freely tag that Aspect when the weapon is used: that would provide a +2 on the roll (affecting both to hit and damage). For a slower acting poison, or a contact poison, one could make a weapon roll as a maneuver to put a free-taggable Aspect onto the victim of "Poisoned," which could be used to compel inaction, or to enhance damage from another source; with a fate point, it could also be used to provide an ongoing source of damage/inaction. The same mechanism could be used for other special features, such as flaming arrows.



The Close Combat Skill covers all melee weapons, all of which are civilian. If a player wishes his character to own such a weapon it should simply be granted. There is no obvious reason to differentiate or restrict. Assets check to acquire a blade anywhere is 1.

The Broadsword includes any long two-handed blade, including battle axe. While not a common weapon, where technology and industry have fallen behind, these are the mainstay of the heavy infantry.

Any long stick with a pointy end is a spear. These stats model all pole-arms. Wherever technology has fallen, these cheap and effective weapons will be common. In some cultures spears might also be found as part of a spacecraft's defensive equipment—a long pointy weapon could be particularly effective in the narrow confines of a ship.

Some Close Combat weapons are designed to be thrown. These will have the Thrown Stunt and they get to be re-used indefinitely as it is assumed that characters carry multiple devices (grenades in a bandolier, say). They get the "Out of ammo" Aspect to model this.

close combat stunts

Civilian: weapon may be used without Military-grade.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer.

Free modal: this weapon can be used in either of two modes as the user wishes.

Integral: this weapon is built in to the wielder.

Non-lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks.

Stealthy: weapon does not appear to be a weapon outside of combat.

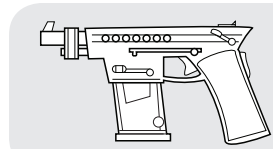
Versatile: This weapon may be thrown, using the Agility Skill, at range 1-2. Normal penalties for exceeding this range (-2 per band) apply. The weapon may only be re-used if the character goes and spends an action picking it up from the target zone.

Thrown: This weapon may only be thrown, using the Agility Skill, at range 1-2. Normal penalties for exceeding this range (-2 per band) apply. Weapon has the, "Out of ammo" Aspect, which may be compelled.

slug throwers

> *The N-71 Coilgun is your new best friend. Cared for and properly wielded, it will kill any enemy you aim at and some of his nearest friends. It launches six hundred Danoplast ferrous-core flechettes per minute which gives you about one-and-one-half seconds of fire on auto before you need to reload. This is when the enemy will choose to shoot you, and he has one of these too.*

The basic cost for a slug thrower is 3, modified by the difference between the weapon technology and the technology of the system in which it is purchased. Thus a T2 combat rifle requires an Assets check of 3 in a T2 system, but 5 in a T0 system and only 1 in a T4 system. Civilian weapons are one level cheaper.



slug thrower stunts

Many slug throwers have associated Stunts:

Awkward reload: "Out of ammo" is free-taggable (or free compel) after regular fire and not just AoE fire.

Civilian: Makes the weapon available to those without the Military-grade Stunt for slug throwers.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer.

Free modal: as Modal but is set automatically rather than as an action.

Full auto: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone. AoE effect cannot be used in the same zone as the firer. After firing on full auto, the firer's "Out of ammo" Aspect is free-taggable.

High capacity: "Out of ammo" cannot be free-tagged.

High recoil: weapon can only be fired every other round unless the firer is prone.

Low recoil: weapon can be fired without penalty in low gravity.

Modal: this weapon has multiple modes that can be selected with a combat action.

Non-lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks.

Undetectable: any Skill check made to detect this weapon is made at -2.

slug thrower aspects

Some weapons have Aspects. The weapon becomes a new pool of Aspects that can be tagged in addition to the usual ones on friends, foes, and places.

Out of ammo: automatic Aspect on any slug thrower. Free-taggable after a Full Auto AoE attack.

Military equipment: any weapon that does not have the Civilian Stunt has the "Military equipment" Aspect.

Concealed: automatic Aspect on any weapon with a minimum range 0.

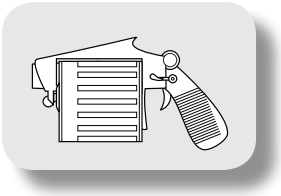
energy weapons

My specialty is forward obs, so I get geared with a Manniken R-19 "laser designator," which is something of a misnomer. See, it's also my longarm. No matter what the range I don't worry about leading the target, cause light is just that fast. And when I hit, the steam explosion that blows out his armour is a very satisfying indicator. And, of course, I can always tune it down a few watts and paint targets for artillery. If I want.

The basic cost for an energy weapon is 4, modified by the difference between the weapon technology and the technology of the system in which it is purchased. Thus a T3 laser pack requires and Assets check of 4 in a T3 system, but 6 in a T1 system and 3 in a T4 system. Civilian weapons are one level cheaper.

energy weapon stunts

Civilian: makes the weapon available to those without the Military-grade Stunt for energy weapons.



Dispersed fire: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer.

Free modal: as Modal but is set without an action.

High recoil: weapon can only be fired every other round unless the firer is prone.

Low recoil: weapon can be fired without penalty in low gravity.

Modal: this weapon has multiple modes that can be selected as a combat action.

Non-lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks.

Rechargeable: weapon has the Aspect "Low battery," which may be compelled to prevent firing.

Undetectable: any Skill check made to detect this weapon is made at -2.

armour

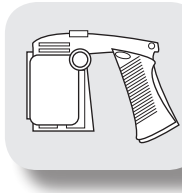
> *Suddenly the cabin was clouded with debris and I knew that we'd been boarded. We'd already blown the air and set up by the main hatch, but they didn't use the door. Instead they blew the bulkhead above the con and jetted in, beamers flickering through plasma-flashed particles of ex-spaceship. Our return fire was just stupid—shotgun rounds sparking off their polycarb armour uselessly. Then one of them bent an I-beam in half to clear a field of fire and I knew it was white flag time: jets, poly-carb, beamers, and waldoes meant the Border Patrol had new uniforms and they weren't made here. Looking back it's a wonder they could fit through that hole.*

Armour not designated as Civilian can only be employed by characters with the Military-grade EVA Stunt or any Military-grade personal combat Stunt. A referee would be perfectly right to rule by context (say, for example, that chain mail can't be used with Military-grade EVA), but writing those down as rules would just create a ton of uninteresting exceptions.

When in doubt, have everyone agree to be reasonable.

Armour has three statistics: Defense, Stamina Mod, and Agility Mod. The Defense rating of armour is the amount by which an attacker's roll is reduced automatically. It may be modified by the attacking weapon's penetration value. The Stamina Mod applies to powered armour only—it is the amount by which the wearing character's Stamina rolls are modified when a Stamina Skill check is made. Note that the Stamina Skill is not modified—the roll is modified, and the Health stress track is not affected.

The Agility Mod applies to all armour, positive values implying powered armour. This value modifies all Agility rolls made by the wearer. Note that the Agility Skill is not modified—the roll is modified. Thus a character with an untrained Agility Skill and powered armour with an Agility Mod of +2 would roll 4dF -1 (untrained Skill value) + 2 (Agility Mod) for any Agility checks. Most armour will have a negative Agility Mod, representing the awkwardness or discomfort of wearing the armour.



Armour has cost 3, modified by the difference between the armour technology and the technology of the location at which it is purchased. Civilian armour is one cost level cheaper.

armour stunts

Civilian: this armour requires no special training to don and use. Unless this Stunt is purchased, the armour is Military-grade.

Flexible: this armour easily shifts with the wearer, allowing greater mobility.

Lightweight: this armour is made of a lightweight material.

Pressurized: this armour acts as a pressure suit, carrying its own supply of oxygen and power for heat and communication.

Power Suit: this armour is powered.

Servos: armour enhances mobility.

Sensors: armour is equipped with enhanced sensor equipment.

Crushing fists: armour is designed for punching people.

Armoured penetrators: armour is designed for punching through other armour.

Long range: armour is designed with extensive power and environmental resources: it does not have the "Out of juice" transfer aspect.

Jump jets: armour has limited flight capability. Wearer gains +2 to any Agility checks for the purpose of movement and has no maximum movement rate.

aspects

Very heavy: referees should happily compel this to ruin roads, damage bridges, and get the authorities mad where it refers to high technology armour. For lower technology armour it may merely imply awkwardness, restricted vision, and other encumbrance effects appropriate to the armour being described. It might reasonably be compelled against Stealth checks and so forth too.

Out of juice: powered armour gets the Aspect, "Out of juice," which one might compel to restrict actions in order to conserve energy.

Industrial equipment: the armour is intended for civilian industrial use rather than combat.

weapon tables

Weapon (Type)	Harm	Range	Pen.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
BRAWLING, CLOSE COMBAT						
Fists (B)	0	0	0	na	0	Composure damage only if untrained
Found weapons (B)	0	0	1	-4	0	*fragile, cheap*
Knife				-3	1	**free modal**
brawling (B)	1	0	0			
melee (C)	0	0-1	1			
Sword (C)	1	0-1	0	-3	1	
Broadsword (C)	1	1	0	-3	1	**two-handed (amplified by Stamina)**
Spear (C)	0	1 (1-2)	2	-3	1	**versatile**
Throwing knives (C)	0	1-2	1	-3	2	**thrown,** *out of ammo, finely balanced*
Hand held taser (B)	2	0	0	0	1	**non-lethal,** *scary blue arc*
Hand grenade (C)	1	1-2	0	1	2	**thrown, explosive,** *out of ammo, simple*
Variable blade (C)	1	0-1	1	2	1	**two-handed (amplified by Stamina)**
Gravity bomb (C)	2	1-2	2	4	2	**thrown, explosive,** *out of ammo*
SLUG THROWERS						
Blowgun	1	2-3	0	-4	3	*poisonous*
Longbow	1	2-4	1	-3	3	
Crossbow	0	2-3	2	-3	2	**civilian**
Black powder pistol	0	0-2	0	-2	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Musket	1	2-4	0	-2	2	**civilian**
Hunting rifle	1	2-4	2	0	2	**civilian**
Handgun	1	0-2	0	0	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Rocket launcher	2	3-4	3	0	3	**explosive, awkward reload, low recoil**
Submachine-gun	1	0-3	1	1	3	**full auto**
Automatic shotgun	1	1-3	1	1	2	**high capacity, civilian**
Self-loading pistol						choose a mode as an action
single shot	1	0-3	1	1	3	*concealed*
auto	1	0-2	1	1	3	*concealed,* **full auto**
Flechette gun	2	1-2	2	2	2	**civilian**
Personal assault gun	2	1-4	2	2	2	**awkward reload, civilian**
Adv. combat rifle	2	2-5	1	2	3	**full auto, high capacity**
Adv. bullpup rifle	2	1-5	2	2	3	**full auto, awkward reload**
Adv. Sniper rifle	2	2-6	2	2	3	

Weapon (Type)	Harm	Range	Pen.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
Coilgun	2	2-5	3	3	3	**full auto**
Targeting pistol	2	0-3	0	3	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Low velocity pistol						choose a mode as an action
homing slug	2	0-1	0	4	2	**high capacity**, *concealed,* **low recoil, civilian**
tranquilizer	2	0-2	0	4	2	**high capacity**, *concealed,* **low recoil, non-lethal, civilian**
ENERGY WEAPONS						
Early laser system	0	2-5	0	0	4	**low recoil**
Pulse laser pack	2	1-4	1	2	4	**low recoil**
Fusion gun	3	1-4	2	3	4	**low recoil**
Sniper laser	2	2-6	4	3	4	**low recoil**
Hand flamer	3	0-3	0	3	4	**dispersed fire, low recoil**
Neural disruptor	2	0-2	4	4	3	**non-lethal, low recoil, civilian**
Disintegrator	4	1-3	2	4	4	**dispersed fire,** *slaved to the owner's eyes*

armour tables

Armour type	Def.	Sta.	Agi.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
Found armour	1	0	-2	-4	3	**civilian**
Chain mail	1	0	-1	-3	3	**flexible**
Police entry armour	3	0	0	0	3	**flexible, lightweight,** *built-in radio*
Bulletproof vest	2	0	0	0	2	**flexible, lightweight, civilian**
Pressure suit	1	0	0	0	2	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight, civilian**
Hostile environment suit	4	+2	-2	2	3	**power suit, pressurized, sensors (+1 Alertness)**, *industrial equipment, self-repairing, out of juice,* **civilian**
Cargo handler	3	+2	0	2	3	**power suit, servos, crushing fists (+1 Brawling harm)**, *industrial, out of juice,* **civilian**
Combat hazard suit	5	0	0	2	3	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight,** *on the net*
Advanced pressure suit	3	0	0	2	2	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight,** *On-board computer, easy to fix,* **civilian**
Powered marine armour	4	+2	0	3	4	**power suit, pressurized, servos, sensors (+1 Alertness), armoured penetrators (+1 Brawling pen.),** *out of juice, encrypted comms*
Hardflex skinsuit	6	0	0	4	2	**flexible, lightweight,** *networked,* **civilian**
Battlesuit	5	+2	0	4	4	**power suit, pressurized, servos, crushing fists (+1 Brawling harm), armoured penetrators (+1 Brawling pen.)** *very heavy, out of juice*

personal combat play sheet

For each player in an order determined by the caller:

1. Caller asks the player to declare an action. Player declares an action as one of move, attack, maneuver, or do something else.
2. Player conducts his action as per the action detail below.
3. Results of the action are determined and the acting player narrates the result.
4. Once all players have had a turn, the caller changes any turn-based counters (timers, etc.) that the referee may have added to the scene.
5. Repeat

attack (opposed)

1. The attack action may be directed at an opponent's Health stress track or his Composure stress track. If the latter, the attack is a called a Composure attack.
2. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
3. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
4. Player declares a target of the attack.
5. Player declares the Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
6. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense. If the target has already defended this round, this roll is used again (with any modifications from Aspects it had at the time).
7. Attacker rolls 4dF + Skill. If the defender has not previously rolled this round for defense, he rolls 4dF + Skill. Otherwise the defender uses his recorded defensive result. Count shifts as attacker - defender. Each Skill may only be used to make a roll once per round.
8. If this is the defender's first defense since attacking, save his roll (write it down, remember it, or keep the dice on the table).
9. Add Weapon harm if applicable.
10. Subtract Defender's (armour defense - weapon penetration) or zero if negative.
11. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll. Modify the defender's recorded roll by any advantages paid for here if the roll was recorded in this action. A previously recorded roll can only be modified by spending fate points.
12. Once all modifications of the roll are complete, any positive result is the number of shifts. Shifts may be reduced by the defender using Consequences.
13. If shifts are still positive, the defender's Health stress track is marked at the box indicated (one shift marks the first box, two shifts marks the second, and so on) and all boxes below. If the highest box to be marked is already marked, mark the next higher free box and all below.
14. If this is the first time the character has taken damage in this scene to his Health stress track, apply damage to both the Health stress track and the Composure stress track (First Blood rule).
15. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.
16. Narrate the result.

move (unopposed)

1. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
2. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
3. Player rolls 4dF + Agility (or MicroG if in microgravity) against a target value of zero and narrates his attempt. Record shifts.

4. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll.
5. Player may move his character a number of zones equal to his shifts, expending points for borders. A character may move a maximum of three zones in a single turn.

maneuver (unopposed or opposed)

1. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
2. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
3. Player declares a target zone or character.
4. Player declares a Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
5. For maneuvers against a zone, player rolls 4dF + Skill against target value zero and subtracts the range in zones to the target.
6. For maneuvers against characters, the target will select a Skill to oppose and roll 4dF + Skill. If the defender has defended previously this turn with this skill, use the recorded value rather than roll. The attacker will roll 4dF + Skill against the target's roll. Subtract range to target.
7. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll. They do not modify previously recorded rolls—only rolls made during this action.
8. If any shifts are generated, the player may add an Aspect to the target, and that Aspect may be free-tagged once in the course of the scene.
9. Caller determines whether this Aspect is permanent or transient.
10. Narrate the result.

do something else (unopposed)

Seal a suit

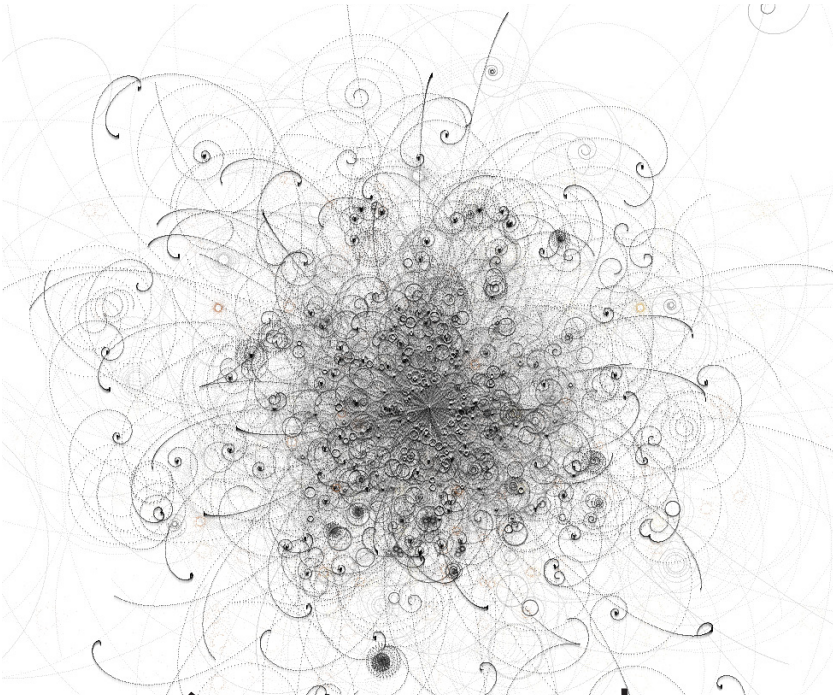
When a suit capable of resisting the hostile environment loses integrity, the wearer must make an EVA Skill check against difficulty 4 to repair it instead of a combat action. Each turn this check is failed the character sustains a Composure and Health track hit on a box equal to the amount the check was missed by (negative shifts). If the player refuses to declare a repair action and instead takes a combat action, he automatically takes four shifts of damage to both Composure and Health tracks. These shifts may of course be mitigated by Consequences.

Apply first aid

Someone with the Medical Skill may wish to help an ally during combat. The target number for success is the highest box marked on the Health track. The number of successes indicate the track box (and all boxes below) that are to be erased. If that track box is not marked the next lower marked box and all boxes below are erased. The assisting character receives the temporary free-taggable Aspect, "Sitting Duck," unless the character has Military-grade Medical.

Create an obstruction

1. Player declares a target zone boundary.
2. Player can be compelled to forfeit his turn.
3. Player declares a Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
4. Player rolls 4dF + Skill against target value 2.
5. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll.
6. If any shifts are generated, the player may place a pass value of two on any border of the zone he has declared as his target (2/2/2).
7. If a pass value already exists on the border, it may be incremented by +1 (+1/+1/+1).



6. space combat

As its engines flared, the Midnight Dancer pushed toward the inner planets with an acceleration that it wouldn't be able to counter without using up its r-mass. But then the vector changed, and the ship began to rise, imperceptibly at first, away from the plane of the ecliptic. Over the next two days, it angled up, no longer heading for anywhere in this system, but for the slipstream point, and for escape. It was the only destination it could be heading for, the only reason any one would leave the system proper, and get above the sun. But we had more reaction mass, and we would catch them before they would slip. Or so we thought until we saw the telltale flare of a ship arriving from the other side, first one, then another. They had friends coming.

Spacecraft are large, relatively fragile things pursuing their goals at high velocity in the dead of space. They are constrained by their available reaction mass, the mass allocated for trade cargo, and their ability to dissipate heat. When they test each other to destruction using the assorted weapons of space combat—beams, torpedoes, and electronic warfare—they are chiefly pursuing goals of domination or escape. This system emphasizes these goals. The stories we want to tell include:

- an inferior ship escaping from the authorities
- a hostile vessel capturing cargo
- a threat so powerful the only real option is to surrender
- a convoy of merchants and escorts safely defending itself from marauders

Space combat occurs on a simple 1-dimensional map that emphasizes pursuit and range and ignores the specifics of three dimensional positioning in order to pro-

vide a simple and fast system that still feels "real."

Combat occurs in phases. First is the detection phase which establishes the initial positions. Then the positioning, electronic warfare, beams, torpedoes, and damage control phases are repeated in order until everyone is happy, dead, or escaped. Order of action is controlled by social pressure: a player is designated caller for the fight and that person controls the transition from phase to phase (see section on "Social Initiative"). If a player wants to act in a particular phase, he announces his action. The advantage of going first goes to the one that speaks first. The advantage of going last goes to the person who speaks last. When the caller calls for a change of phase, it is possible that some players failed to act in time.

the crew

Diaspora assumes that spacecraft have a fully functional crew aboard, who draw a salary and are able to man their stations competently. There is no need to flesh them out unless there are role-playing reasons to do so, and player characters can work beside an undifferentiated crew happily.

Except as noted below, all combat crew positions on a ship are assumed to be staffed by someone with a Skill level of 2.

The purpose of this assumption is to allow a default Skill level of 2 to exist on board for each combat crew position for which the ship has a value of at least 1 (or, in the case of Pilot Skill, the default equals the ship's V-shift rating, to a maximum of 5). If a ship has torpedoes, it also routinely carries a gunner capable of launching the torpedoes. Military ships with an EW of at least 2 will carry someone with Military-grade Communications (at Skill level 2); civilian ships will do so only when the EW is at least 4. PCs serving aboard such ships may use their individual Skill levels, but if they choose not to (*e.g.* if they ride as passengers), there is always someone who can do the job.

A ship's Trade value is not used in combat, and therefore there is no default broker aboard to assist with maintenance rolls.

The exception to this is a spacecraft that has the Skeleton Crew Stunt, in which case all the jobs in combat must be taken by a known individual (either a player character or an NPC who has been developed) who is trained in the relevant Skill. In particular, Communications and Gunnery stations, if they have a positive value, may not be operated by an untrained individual.

For each crew position, there is only ever one person doing a given job at a given time. One Navigator rolls in the detection phase, and only one Computer expert rolls to repair the Data track. One Gunner fires beams; another torpedoes.

A PC may occupy more than one position on the ship, but it becomes challenging during combat. Each Skill associated with a combat phase normally requires a single crew member to staff it.

Staffing more than one crew position during combat earns a -1 cumulative penalty to the effective Skill level.

A gunner may fire beams offensively and defensively without penalty, but would receive a penalty on the torpedo roll if he has fired beams.

Each crew member may only act once per phase in combat.

A single gunner may not fire beams defensively and launch torpedoes in the same phase.

spacecraft

Spacecraft are the unit of scale in this mini-game, and not player characters. They have their own Skills (V-shift, Electronic Warfare, Beams, and Torpedoes), Stunts, Aspects, and stress tracks (Frame, Data, and Heat). The mini-game will involve rolling those Skills to achieve results and marking damage against those stress tracks. Spacecraft can mitigate stress hits with three Consequences, just as characters do. You will find a list of ships at the end of the chapter, and later a method for creating your own.

Spacecraft not designated as Civilian can only be flown by characters with the Military-grade Pilot Stunt. Further, offensive use of the EW ship Skill can only be done by characters with the Military-grade EW Stunt. Aspects listed are meant as suggestions: every ship has its own quirks and personality.

Here is an example of a good player character spacecraft, a T2 vessel that makes its living through common piracy. This ship is a civilian vessel because piracy is not a military activity.

T2 Civilian Pirate, "The Silent Sufferer"
V-shift 3, Beam 4, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 2
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beam.
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Rotating license plates
Glory-hungry pirates
Camel of space (long time between refills and repairs)
Friendly and approachable
Big bowls of fresh fruit

The Captain
Profession: Spokesmodel 3; Resolve 2, Alertness 2; Charm 1, Slug Thrower 1, Intimidation 1
Health OOO
Composure OOO O

The ship has a default crew with Navigation, Gunnery, Computer, and Engineering (space skills) at level 2. The crew's default pilot has level 3 (to match the V-shift of the ship).

Pirate Crew

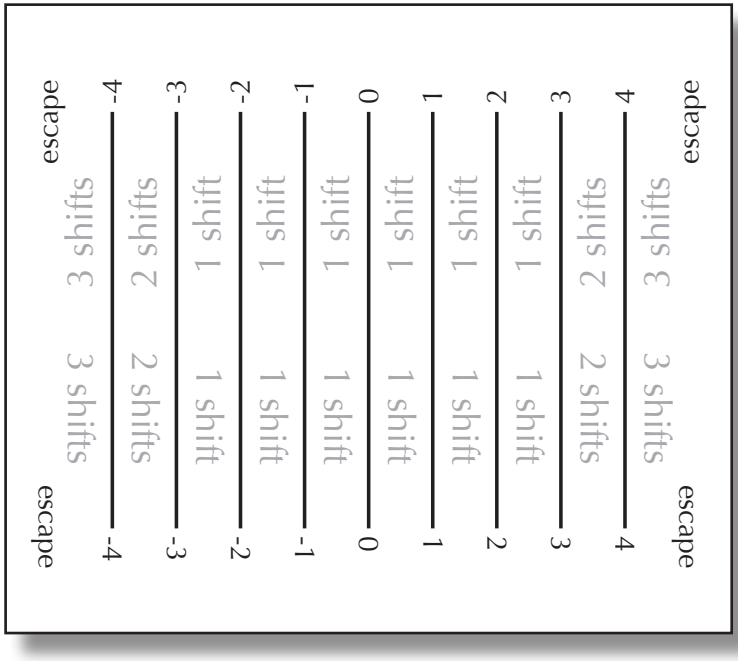
Brawling 3; Slug Thrower 2, default Space Skill 2; Stamina 1, Agility 1, Resolve 1
Health OOO O
Composure OOO O

the map

Space combat is hard to represent in all three dimensions: the math gets complicated fast and the payoff is minor unless you really like the map. As any abstraction from three dimensions to two is going to be either a big abstraction or an inaccurate one, we've chosen to go all the way and abstract space combat to one dimension. The rationale for this is simple: mostly what we care about is managing range and building enough change in velocity to escape or to deny escape to another.

So our map becomes a piece of ruled paper: number each line from -4 to 4 and place (or draw) ship models on the lines.

Moving a ship between the 3 and 4 bar (or the -3 and -4) costs 2 shifts. Moving a ship from the last bar off the map costs 3 shifts.



Because of the constraining boundaries (escaping the map is escape from combat, or forced removal from combat) we have to see the map as also abstracting relative

velocities. That is, we are not collapsing 3-dimensional position information into 1-dimensional (range) position information. Rather we are collapsing everything about the current 4-dimensional space state of an object into a position on the map. Therefore the map should be read thus:

- The distance between two vessels is their separation in space. The distance between two vessels does not encode their bearing, heading, or velocity.
- The distance between a vessel and the nearest boundary is, roughly, a measure of its vector (both direction and magnitude) away from a hypothetical ship at range bar 0.

When a player determines position, then, he is determining the range between his placements but he is also determining their relative velocities. Placing two ships at the zero line means that not only are they close, but they are not moving relative to the hypothetical observer. More importantly, they are not moving relative to each other.

This need not be true of two ships sharing the -4 line. They may have widely diverging vectors though they are close in space or they may be far apart on parallel vectors. Should they remain in this map location at the end of the next turn, the transition should be read as the vessels have diverged and then re-converged, retaining large differences in velocity vectors. They could be seen as "braiding" around each other.

Where it is desired that ships be in close proximity to each other and sharing vectors and at the same time be distant from other vessels, formation and tethering rules may be used to collapse the ship representations.

Placing a ship near the boundary indicates that that vessel is moving rapidly away from the battle.

So when we have a case of three fleeing ships placed near a boundary being pursued by one ship some bars away towards the zero line, we do not just have three ships far away from a pursuer. We have also indicated by map position that the three ships are already moving much more rapidly than the pursuer, and in different directions. This is why an excellent V-shift roll on the part of a pursuer can only allow him to move one vessel: he must now choose between moving one pursued vessel towards him, modeling a change in relative distance and velocity between the two (he has cut off after one vessel) or he can move himself closer to all three but also closer to the edge, indicating that he's trying to maintain distance to all of them but at the same time acknowledging that he now has a massive velocity vector that doesn't necessarily intersect with any of them: by averaging their hypothetical directions he's not actually pursuing any. If he doesn't make the shot it's unlikely that he will be able to change his velocity enough to keep at least one from escaping.

This abstraction denies some level of tactical decision from the players. A player cannot, for example, decide to apply thrust left by noticing his opponent has applied thrust right. But more importantly, a player can't really decide on low level group tactics like "we'll all fly in different directions." Those decisions might well be encoded in a great Navigation roll at the outset that lets him position all his vessels near the escape line, but that level of tactical decision-making is actually embodied in the Skill of the character rather than the player. A lousy Navigation roll might leave a player with no options at all—he got outfoxed and found himself in the middle of a bad situation with

no relative velocity and with his (smarter) friends moving rapidly away. The player, in a way, decides how to deploy the tactical abilities of his characters.

Collapsing four dimensions of state into one is going to lose some information in the process. There will be some things that you can't explicitly model (that is, there may be a story you want to see that cannot be represented). It does succeed at the reverse: for every board state and state change, there is an interesting and believable story that can be told. Further, the stories that are told are definitive of the genre—outmatched pursuit, well-matched firefights, and blockade running.

social initiative

The space combat mini-game operates using a form of social initiative. While often it is possible for the caller to start with one player who wants to act first and to proceed simply around the table, the stalemate-inducing anxieties of the uncertain commitment of resources over time can be fun to play with—it creates the eerie feel of submarine combat, reducing the information available as decisions get made. For each of phases 1-4, the decision to act first resides with the player who states that they act first, with the caller determining priority if more than one person speaks at a time (or the table if the caller is controlling one of the affected ships).

Going first entails a commitment of resources, and responses to the initial action can be proportionate, using the information of how much the first player has committed.

> **Resources, once committed, can only be increased. They are never decreased.**

As each phase ticks by, players may hold back attacking to wait until they see if they are being attacked and by how many, or they may strike hard and fast, filling their Heat track and hoping for a quick kill (or escape!).

the sequence

Space combat is played in turns, each of which might represent fifteen to thirty minutes of in-game time—this too has been largely abstracted. Each turn consists of several phases, and each phase will offer a test—an opportunity to cross-compel, a roll, and an opportunity to tag and/or invoke Aspects.

The phases are:

0. Detection
1. Position
2. Electronic warfare
3. Beam
4. Torpedo
5. Damage control

detection

Before a fight can start, everyone needs to find each other. Position will be plotted on a linear scale from -4 to +4 on the map. As always, before any dice are rolled, the caller will ask for compels, at which time players can compel each other to fail to act. Failure to act in this case is represented by an automatic result of -4 (dice are not rolled and Skills are not considered: your final result for your Navigation check is -4).

A Navigation check is rolled by each ship's navigation officer, and all rolls are ranked. Ties are resolved by raw Navigation Skill. The highest ranked Navigator will place two of the ships to be played on the map anywhere except the two most distant lines (-4 and 4). The next highest rank then places a single ship and this continues until all ships are placed. The lowest ranking Navigator places nothing.

The ship which wins the detection round may also decide if there will be a positioning roll in the first turn (only). Once all the ships are placed, the winning ship in this phase decides whether to proceed to phase 1 or directly to phase 2. This allows a ship to attempt escape without engaging in combat immediately on being detected—going to phase 1—or it allows it to use the tactical position from the detection phase for an optimized initial combat round - going to phase 2.

In the event of a tie between two ships (as might happen when two standard T2 merchant ships meet, with default navigators), if neither ship is willing or able to invest fate points to gain victory, ships are placed randomly, based on a roll of the fate dice (it is only in this circumstance that a ship may begin at the 4 or -4 band).

position

As always, before any dice are rolled, the caller will ask for compels, at which time players can compel each other to fail to act. Failure to act in this case is represented by an automatic result of -4 (dice are not rolled and Skills are not considered: your final result for your positioning check is -4).

Spacecraft positions are plotted on a simple linear scale from -4 to +4. Ships begin as they were placed in the detection phase. At the beginning of each round of combat, pilots jockey for position. All pilots roll their ship's V-shift rating limited by their effective Pilot Skill (i.e. if one character is serving both as Navigator and Pilot, then the Pilot's effective Pilot Skill is reduced by one). Note also that this is not simply a modifier to the roll: since V-shift is limited by effective Pilot Skill, this penalty might affect performance for the first turn as well.

In addition, ships may apply burn: by running their drives over rating, they can exchange Heat for an advantage in maneuver, improving the V-shift roll. Any ship may declare that it is applying burn, state the value and add that value to their roll (not to the V-shift rating). They immediately take a hit to their Heat stress track equal to the value of their burn, marking that box and all unmarked boxes below it. If the highest box to be marked is already marked, mark the next higher open box. Before marking the damage to the Heat stress track, the pilot may reduce the detrimental effects through Consequences exactly as mitigating combat damage. The caller may allow negotiation of burn declarations at his preference, though generally a declared burn rating by a ship's player must stand.

Ships may choose not to use their drives in order to bleed heat. Each turn that the V-Shift is not engaged allows the highest filled box in the Heat track to be cleared immediately. This decision results in an automatic -4 final result for the positioning check, which might still be modified by Aspects, but no dice are rolled and no Skill is used.

No burn declarations can be made once the caller declares the bidding closed and asks for dice on the table.

Only the highest roller may alter any ship's positions:

- He may move himself the difference between his roll and the lowest roll, or
- He may move any ship with a lower roll up to the level of the difference between them.

He may not, however, move any vessel more map bands than his own vessel's V-shift rating. Remember, moving a ship between the 3 and 4 bar (or the -3 and -4) costs 2 shifts, and moving a ship from the last bar off the map costs 3 shifts.

Example: Daniel De Soto (Pilot 4) is trying to escape in a stolen ship (V-shift 1) from a police cruiser (V-shift 3, with a default Pilot 3). Daniel's ship is at the 3 band, the cruiser is at the zero band. Dice are rolled, some fate points are spent, and Daniel's ship ends up with a total of 7, the police cruiser with 4. That's three shifts, which is enough to take his ship to the 4 band (the maximum he is allowed to move since the ship's drive value is 1), or to move the police ship to either the 1 or the -1 band: despite the number of ships, there is only so fast he can pull away. Daniel is making a break for it, and his ship moves to the 4 band. Next turn, he will probably initiate a burn in hopes of escape: he needs at least three shifts again to leave the map, and a bad roll could mean the police cruiser pulls him back, from the 4 band to the 1 band (since its V-shift is 3), drawing out the combat much longer than Daniel wants.

If the winning positioning roll is tied, the next highest roll is the winner. This presents some interesting tactical choices for fate point expenditure: sometimes it's advantageous to forfeit your awesome roll so that your ally, who rolled lower, can make use of his better V-shift, for example. You might then use an Aspect to force a tie so that you lose control.

If a ship exceeds the band at -4 or 4, they leave combat, whether forced off by others or maneuvered off by their own pilots. In this fashion a really excellent pilot in a hot ship can cut down the odds by positioning enemy vessels off the map until he faces only one opponent. Similarly, more than two ships chasing a single ship can usually keep the lone opponent on the map through positioning.

electronic warfare

As always, before any dice are rolled, the caller will ask for compels, at which time players can compel each other to fail to act. Failure to act in this case is represented by the ship being unable to declare a target.

Before any destructive weapons are used, each ship may conduct electronic warfare, pitting its communications officer against the enemy. If a communications officer has Military-grade Communications, she may pick a target and roll the ship's Electronic Warfare (EW) rating, amplified by her effective Communications Skill (if the communications officer has acted in any of the previous phases, there is a cumulative -1 penalty

for each phase she has acted). The defender also rolls his ship's EW rating, amplified by the communications officer's effective Communications Skill. The rating may be zero, in which case there is there is no crewman staffing the position unless this is done by one of the PCs. Ships may have a Stunt (Firewall) that automatically provides a defense value of 2, and which may not be modified. Subtract the defender's modified roll from the attacker's.

As with any roll, these results can now be modified by tagging or invoking Aspects and paying a fate point to get +2 or re-roll.

Positive values are treated as shifts against the defender.

Negative values are treated as shifts against the attacker.

Whoever has shifts against him will take a Data stress track hit to the ship. Before damage is calculated, the player may apply Consequences to reduce the number of shifts: a mild Consequence reduces the shifts by one, a moderate Consequence reduces the shifts by two, and a severe Consequence reduces the shifts by four. Recall that no entity can have more than three Consequences of any kind and never more than one of each type.

Once the final number of shifts are determined, the corresponding box on the Data stress track is marked and all open boxes below it are also marked. If the highest box to be marked has already been marked, mark the next highest.

Note that only one roll is made for each ship, so in some cases with more than two ships in play, a single roll may defend against multiple attacking rolls as well as conceivably acting as the attacking roll on a declared target. Note also that a good defense against hacking can inflict damage on the attacking Data stress track, even if the defending communications officer does not have Military-grade Communications.

The Electronic Warfare (EW) defense roll is persistent through this phase, but the total may be added to over the course of the phase through the spending of fate points. An outnumbered ship may still mount a reasonable defense.

Example: an interdiction cruiser (EW 3) is conducting EW on the Southpaw (EW 0). Rampion Budge (Communications 1) is alone on the ship, and is trying simply to escape. It's the first turn, and Rampion has already made a Navigation roll and a Pilot roll (at -1). Now, with the EW assault, he has to make a Communications roll as well at (-2). This leaves him scrambling, and means that he won't fire his Beams this turn; at an automatic -3, there is too much likelihood to grant the defender spin, and given his desperate situation, that's the last thing Rampion wants! If he survives this encounter, he'll want to get a Firewall.

The cruiser (EW 3) has a crewman with MG Communications 2, which means the position is staffed but the roll will not be amplified. The referee rolls -1, for a total of 2, but pays a fate point to raise it by 2, tagging the cruiser's Aspect of "Pull over, we just want to talk," for a total of 4. The Southpaw has no EW value, and Rampion has Communications 1. This would normally be enough to amplify his EW roll (creating an effective EW of 1), but since he has already served double duty, Rampion's effective communications Skill is reduced by one. He is still trained, and can mount the defense, but his roll will simply modify the base EW of 0. He rolls well: +1, for a total of 1. That's three shifts, when compared with the cruiser's

roll of 4, a significant hit on the Southpaw's Data track, but one that could perhaps be reduced by investing a fate point and tagging a relevant Aspect: perhaps the system's Aspect "Intense solar flares" (which are interrupting the signal) or the Southpaw's Aspect "Not the ship you're looking for."

Rampion's player decides to swallow the hit, in hopes of saving the points for a getaway next turn. The referee notices that Rampion Budge has an Aspect "Is this thing on?" and offers him a fate point, suggesting that with everything going on, his EW defense may have been further compromised. If he takes it, that increases the shifts to five, and he'd need to use Consequence to stay in the game. This is too much for Rampion's player, who refuses the fate point, gives one to the referee, and takes the data hit, crossing off the first, second, and third box.

beam weapons

Beam weapons subsume all relatively short range unguided weaponry, so for story purposes they may be described as lasers of various wavelengths, artillery, unguided rockets, railguns, electromagnetically propelled storms of small projectiles, particle beams, or anything else that suits the setting developed at the table.

As always, before any dice are rolled, the caller will ask for compels, at which time players can compel each other to fail to act. Failure to act in this case is represented by a failure to declare a target in whatever phase the player ship was compelled.

A ship with a Beam Skill can attack at a value from 1 up to the full Beam rating.

All combat rolls, offensive and defensive, are made at the Beam rating amplified by the gunner's Gunnery Skill (that is, the Beam rating is used and increased by one if the Gunnery Skill is higher). If the gunnery officer has acted in any of the previous phases, there is a cumulative -1 penalty to the effective Skill level for each phase he has acted. Defensive rolls are made once for each defensive system but stay on the table—that defensive roll you made against Beams stands throughout the Beam Weapons phase, complete with any modifications from invoking Aspects, using spin, etc. Defensive rolls are persistent through the phase, so it can be handy to note them on the ship card or use a coloured 12- or 20-sided die set to the result. Sometimes we write them on the map. Offensive Beam rolls are distinct from defensive Beam rolls (from the Torpedo phase) and should be recorded separately.

A roll with no modification is made to oppose all incoming Beam attacks. Ships may have a Stunt (Vector Randomizer) that changes the base from 0 to 2.

When Beams are fired offensively the attacker must declare what Beam rating he will apply. Note the Beam value used.

Beams firing at three or more bands range subtract 2 from the roll.

Attacks are resolved as they are declared, again leveraging social pressure to determine who goes first: the caller closes the call for targets by announcing a final call, and counting slowly to three (if necessary—if your caller is fair and fun, he'll leave plenty of time), after which no further targets can be announced.

Subtract the final defender's sum from the attacker's to find the number of shifts. The defender may reduce these by applying one or more Consequences: reduce the

shifts by one by applying a mild Consequence, reduce the shifts by two by applying a moderate Consequence, and reduce the shifts by four by applying a severe Consequence. Recall that no entity may have more than three Consequences and never more than one of each kind.

torpedoes

As always, before any dice are rolled, the caller will ask for compels, at which time players can compel each other to fail to act. Failure to act in this case is represented by a failure to declare a target in whatever phase the player ship was compelled.

Torpedoes attack at the spacecraft's Torpedo Skill rating.

All combat rolls are made at the Torpedo rating amplified by the gunner's effective Gunnery Skill (that is, the Torpedo rating is used and increased by one if the effective Gunnery rating is higher). If the gunnery officer has acted in any of the previous phases (including the Beam phase), there is a cumulative -1 penalty for each previously active phase. Defensive rolls are made once for each defensive system but stay on the table—that defensive roll you made with the Beams stands throughout the Torpedo Phase, complete with any modifications from Aspect invocation, spin, or other sources. As these rolls are persistent through the phase, it can be handy to note them on the ship card or use a coloured 12- or 20-sided die set to the result. Sometimes we write them on the map. Though persistent, defensive rolls are distinct from offensive rolls and should be recorded separately.

A Beam roll is made to oppose all incoming Torpedoes. To do this, the beam position must be staffed. If Beams were fired in the Beam Weapons phase, then the roll may be made as usual, amplified by gunner's effective Gunnery Skill. If Beams were not fired, then there must be a trained crew member available to man the beams in this phase: normal penalties and bonuses apply, but since each crew member may only act once per phase, a ship with a single gunner (as might happen with a skeleton crew) may have to choose between offensive Torpedo fire and defensive Beam fire. Beams so used may also have been fired offensively, and defensive fire may cause damage to the Heat stress track. Ships with no Beam rating or those unwilling to fire Beams defensively, roll with a base of 0 unless they have a Stunt (Point Defense) that changes the base from 0 to 2.

When Beams are fired defensively the defender must declare what Beam rating he will apply. He may apply any value from 0 to the full Beam rating. Note the Beam value used. If the sum of the offensive Beam used plus the defensive Beam used in one turn is greater than the total Beam rating, then the ship takes a hit on the Heat stress track equal to the difference and marks all boxes below as well.

Torpedoes firing at one or zero bands range subtract 2 from the roll.

Attacks are resolved as they are declared, again leveraging social pressure to build an initiative order as in the Beam phase. The caller closes the call for targets by announcing a final call, and counting slowly to three, after which no further targets can be announced.

Subtract the final defender's sum from the attacker's to find the number of shifts. The defender may reduce these by applying one or more Consequences: reduce the shifts by one by applying a mild Consequence, reduce the shifts by two by applying

a moderate Consequence, and reduce the shifts by four by applying a severe Consequence. Recall that no entity may have more than three Consequences and never more than one of each kind.

Example: the Conquering Fist (Beam 4) has scored a hit on the missile boat Sunshine's Promise (Torpedo 3) in the Beam phase, adding a mild Consequence "The handle came off." In the Torpedo phase, Sunshine's Promise launches a Torpedo salvo. The base value of 3 is not affected by the default gunner (Gunnery 2), and at range 3 it does not need to face the penalty that the Conquering Fist dealt with in the previous phase. The gunner rolls 0, for a total of 3. The Conquering Fist elects not to fire its Beams: its heat track is full, and it had used its full beams in phase three. Against a base defense of 0, the Conquering Fist's gunner rolls +1, for a total of 1. However, "The handle came off" on Sunshine's Promise, and the Fist tags the Consequence for free (it's the first time it's been tagged), granting +2 and giving each side 3. The torpedoes sail past the bow of the Conquering Fist, slightly off target because of a malfunction with the launch handle aboard Sunshine's Promise.

Note that before the Fist made its roll, Sunshine's Promise had the option of trying to compel a defense: if the ship had an Aspect such as "Space lasers of death" or the gunner had an "Itchy trigger finger," these could have been compelled to make the Fist fire its lasers defensively, which would have led to a Consequence from the heat track, and maybe even taken the ship out! Space fights are dangerous!

damage control

Damage control checks may now be made on Frame stress tracks (using one crew member's effective Engineering Skill) and Data stress tracks (using one crew member's effective Computer Skill). Since each crew may only staff one position per phase, the same individual may not be responsible for both rolls. If the engineer or computer officer has acted in any of the previous phases, there is a cumulative -1 penalty for each previously active phase. The target number for success is the highest box marked on the relevant track. The number of successes indicate the track box that can be erased. Erase it and all unmarked boxes below it.

The Heat stress track cannot be repaired during combat, except by shutting off engines, as described in the positioning phase.

Example: the Meritorious Conduct has a 6-box Frame stress track with boxes four and below filled.

The Engineer 3 is trying to make repairs, and rolls against a difficulty of 4 (highest Frame box hit). If he can generate 4 shifts he can repair the worst of the damage. Even fewer shifts will help though. It's a hard roll—the engineer rolls +1, which added to his Skill gives a total of 4. That's a pretty good roll but against difficulty 4, it's still no shifts and nothing is repaired.

However, that engineer might be a player character, in which case he could spend a fate point and use his "Handy with a spanner" Aspect. That gets him +2 for 6. That's two shifts against difficulty 4 and he could at least repair the first two boxes. Now she can take a little more, Captain.

damage

Shifts for a given attack are calculated by the difference between an adjusted attack roll and an adjusted defense roll.

Consequences can be used to buy down these shifts before they are applied as damage. A mild Consequence reduces the number of shifts by one, a moderate Consequence reduces the shifts by two, and a severe Consequence reduces the shifts by four. A ship may only have a maximum of one Consequence of each severity. A ship can have no more than three Consequences total regardless of the type of track the Consequence was on: Frame, Data, or Heat. The actual Consequence is named by the defender.

A Consequence is also an Aspect and can be free-tagged (once) by any opponent at any time after it is applied, and tagged or compelled as usual thereafter.

Once the number of shifts has been modified by Consequences, the corresponding box on the specified stress track (Frame for beams and torpedoes, Data for electronic warfare) is marked and so are all open boxes below it. If the highest box marked has already been marked, mark the next higher open box. If you must mark a box off the high end of the stress track, the ship is Taken Out.

Unlike Consequences, the attacker narrates the final state of the defeated ship (exploding in a blaze of glory; empty derelict; captured), subject of course to final approval by the referee. This may be a reason for the crew to voluntarily take themselves out before it comes to this, either by surrendering, agreeing to a tether, or jumping into the lifeboats!

This also means a ship can be Taken Out without ever taking a Consequence and therefore without ever taking any serious damage! A ship that takes eight shifts more than its Frame stress track cannot be saved. This is the canonical piracy success: the winner chooses to narrate the Taken Out result as surrender and an undamaged ship is captured without Consequences.

If the relevant conditions are met, being Taken Out may also include an enforced Tether as a step towards coupling (see Special Maneuvers below). Ships that are Taken Out may not be used for positioning advantage in subsequent turns: it is usually best simply to remove the counter from the map.

Consequences can be compelled, tagged, or invoked just like any other Aspect. Their description is up to the controlling player but must obviously appear to be negative and meet with the table's approval as a suitable description of the effects on the vessel. And remember, if you forced the Consequence you can tag it once for free!

Remember that at any time during the fight before damage is marked, any spacecraft owner may negotiate a concession rather than play out.

recovering stress box hits

From the highport lounge, you can look out to the ships docked around the facility. They're beautiful, their wings extended to bleed off heat, glowing orange or red. Like butterflies, frozen in time, pinned against the blackness of space. The wings aren't strong enough to work under thrust—when flying it's always crucial to maintain perfect symmetry along the ship's axis—but when they pause, and hold their breath, they extend their wings and remind me of the angels.

Stress box hits are not real damage. They are alarms going off, rattled crew, shrapnel dinging off the hull, shutting down non-essential systems, blowing air to avoid explosive decompression, and so on. Nothing that can't be fixed with a tiny amount of downtime and nothing that actually affects performance.

Remember that Heat track hits may be cleared by not using drives for a turn. Each turn that the V-shift is not engaged allows the highest filled box in the Heat track to be cleared.

All stress box hits are cleared at the first instance of downtime, whether that's time in dock or just the time in transit to the slipstream.

recovering consequences

In calculating time to repair, there are two scales that must be kept in mind. First, is in-game time. Repairs take time, and this has to be modeled somehow. More important, however, is living with the repercussions of a space combat in real time, from the player's perspectives. While clearing a mild Consequence is possible right after combat, and a moderate Consequence can be repaired at any respectable facility, severe Consequences should be felt by the players; they should realize that they have seriously hurt their ship. Consequently, the soonest that a serious Consequence can be removed is at the end of the session following the one when it was received: players must carry the effects of severe damage for at least one full session in addition to the session the damage is received, during which time the Consequence should be continually compelled by the referee if the ship is being used.

A mild Consequence can be repaired by an engineer or computer expert (depending on the type of Consequence) without a roll after the combat scene is over.

A moderate Consequence remains until the engineer or computer expert can make a successful check against difficulty zero. Base time for repairs is a week with (positive or negative) shifts modifying the time to repair by one per shift. It requires docking at a repair facility within one technology rating of the ship. If the only repair facility available is of an inappropriate technology rating, treat the Consequence as Severe for repair purposes.

A severe Consequence can be repaired by an engineer or computer expert against a difficulty four. It requires docking at a repair facility within one technology rating of the ship (though the referee may decide that the facility is, despite technology, better or worse equipped to repair the vessel and apply this as a modifier to the difficulty). Repairing a severe Consequence also forces an extra maintenance check. Regardless of when the maintenance work is done, the Consequence is only removed at the end

of the session after which it was received. (If the referee needs a guideline for the time of repairs, he may say it takes one month, modified by the number of shifts achieved; such time pressures, however, do not outweigh the need for the severe Consequence to be borne for a full session).

Example: Alice's T2 ship has survived combat, barely, but all three Consequences have been taken on the Frame. The mild is automatically repaired after combat as she has an engineer—if she didn't she'd have to hire one. The ship has limped to a facility in a heliocentric position near the slipstream point of a T3 system and the engineer (with Engineer 2) goes to work.

First she fixes the moderate: she rolls for a total of 5. Against a difficulty zero that's 5 shifts, so the repairs take only an hour (a week on the time track shifted up (quicker!) 5 places).

After the easier fix she tackles the severe Consequence: the difficulty is 4. She rolls for a total of 2. Against difficulty 4 that's -2 shifts, so these repairs are going to take a whole season. That's too long for Alice, so she spends a fate point, tagging the ship's Aspect "Cluttered with spare parts," reducing it to a month.

At this point, the players will want to decide whether to head to a more competent facility for repairs or wait the time. The engineer might want to spend some fate points. Regardless, the roll stands: even if they slip their broken ship to a better port, all they can do is modify the roll already made. Getting help from a better engineer can shift the roll by one place, but no one gets to re-roll (except as the result of a fate point spent on an appropriate Aspect of course).

The players may decide simply to wait it out; there's plenty to do planetside, and at the end of the month, the ship can fly. Alice makes the extra maintenance roll to repair the severe Consequence, and so all is well. The Consequence, however, will not actually be removed from the ship's sheet until the end of the next session's play. If Alice wants to go back in space, she needs to endure the negative effects of the Consequence.

special maneuvers

formation flying

Formation flying is a means of keeping two ships in the same range band at all times. Ships in formation may not be separated by the positioning rolls of another ship. This allows a merchant to fly with an escort, for example, or a fleet of fighters to maintain a common range for their attacks.

Ships may begin combat in formation. During set-up in the detection phase, any two ships (or more) in the same band may (but need not) be in formation, if the players controlling the ships so choose. Models are pressed next to each other to represent this.

Ships may enter formation with one another during the positioning phase. In the turn in which any ship is moved to band 0, and there is at least one other ship at band

0, the ship entering the band may enter formation with another ship in that band.

Each pilot makes a roll, but the formation moves based on the lowest roll. If repositioned by another ship, the formation is moved as a unit. Ships in formation may only move as fast as the V-shift of the slowest ship allows.

A ship may leave formation at any time during the positioning phase.

Formation flying allows all ships autonomy, but is more challenging to maintain than tethering in combat situations.

tethering

Tethering offers increased performance for ships in formation, at the expense of some autonomy for vessels. Tethering need not be physical, and any viable picture may be used to describe it: slaving the computer, perhaps; tethering could also be useful for slipping ("Convoy"). Two (or more) ships in formation may be said to be tethered, if one of the two following conditions are met: either both ships agree to be tethered and one agrees to lead, or one ship wishes to tether and lead and the other has been Taken Out with a compatible narrated result.

There is always a primary ship when ships are tethered; one leads the other (or others). Multiple ships may be said to be tethered together, but only one can be leading. Only fate points from the lead ship can be spent while ships are tethered. As with formation flying, models are pressed together, but tethered ships gain the temporary Aspect "Tethered." Tethered ships may not fire on other ships within their formation. They may be disengaged at any point, but only at the discretion of the leader. In the positioning phase, only the leader makes a piloting roll. Tethered ships may only move as fast as the V-shift of the slowest ship, and may not initiate a burn.

boarding

In any turn, individuals from a lead ship may board any ship to which it is tethered. At this point, the game would normally revert to the individual tactical game: characters fight boarders! See Chapter 5, Personal Combat.

However, boarding can be addressed within the space combat game with an opposed roll, where any positive result for the boarders indicates the boarding action to be successful by the end of the following turn. Relevant Aspects include "Boarding crew," "Bunch of thugs," "Tight security," or "Elite marines," but not "Tethered." Ties favour the defending ship, however, and any ship that withstands a boarding party for three turns has repelled the boarders, and is no longer tethered. If it was tethered as a result of being Taken Out, it remains Taken Out, but requires new narration, this time provided by the defender (since he succeeded in repelling boarders). (These rules could also become applicable if the players stumble onto a boarding situation, or are asked to escort a target ship that is then attacked by pirates: the pirates board the target, while the characters in their ship maneuver about.)

coupling

All ships have a nose coupling mechanism which may be attached to the base of the mast of any one other ship and can be used to tow (or, actually, push) the other ship. The coupled ship must be Taken Out or tethered, and need not have a working drive.

Two coupled ships move at the lead ship's V-shift rating -2. The lead ship gains the temporary Aspect "Slow to respond," and the coupled ship's counter is removed from the map: the coupled ship may not fire weapons or take any other actions in the space combat game until it is decoupled. Ships couple or decouple during the positioning phase as an action. If ships decouple, the lead ship loses its temporary Aspect and regains full use of its V-shift, and a counter is placed on the current range band to represent the decoupled ship. Derelicts are not placed on the map.

wargaming

The courier's mayday came in as soon as we left slipstream. Condensation on the interior walls of our ship let us know that the heat sinks were at capacity, but there wouldn't be time to bleed all that heat if we were to help the courier. So we had a choice. Wait it out, and hope that the pirate would take his time in hopes of swallowing the courier whole while our sinks cooled the ship, radiating our accumulated energy off into space, or fighting right away, and hoping that we just didn't need to push our engines too much. Cassie announced that she had a lock, that she could compensate for the divergent vectors. Our gunner's a math genius, you see; she's always finding a way to make a spectacular, improbable shot that she could brag about for days. "Torpedo launch…," said the Captain, as Cassie released the volley into the black of space. The Captain continued, under his breath, "Let's make this our fight."

This combat Sequence is presented in a form sufficient to play independently as a wargame. The core design philosophy that makes this a wargame is that the combat is chiefly between spacecraft. That is, rolls are based on ship statistics (which function as analogues of Skills) and ship Aspects are invoked, tagged, and compelled. The role of individuals, even player characters, is for the most part ancillary to actual combat.

When playing this mini-game as part of a role-playing game, however, the range of action for players extends to their characters and the spaceships in play. Specifically, at any point in the combat Sequence, players should feel free to have their characters do things to influence events. Chiefly this will be a maneuver—a Skill check, possibly opposed, intended to place a free-taggable Aspect on an enemy vessel. This is not part of the combat Sequence because it depends on the creativity and judgment of the players rather than on a strict application of rules, and consequently sits firmly in the space of the role-playing game, with final authority residing with the table, the caller, or perhaps the referee as appropriate.

As a stand-alone game, ships can be pitted against one another, without the need for player characters. Ships may be drawn from the lists below, or may be designed from scratch. Assuming ships all have standard (default) crews (*i.e.* they do not possess the Stunt, "Skeleton Crew"), any of the following basic scenarios should be playable:

- Duel: two ships at identical technology levels attempt to take each other out.
- Border Patrol: T3 civilian ship seeks to escape two T2 military ships.
- Pirate Attack: T2 ship attempts to take out another T2 ship which may not fire until the pirate has fired or initiated EW.
- Smuggling: T2 civilian ship seeks to escape T2 military ship.

aspects and fate points

Each ship should have five Aspects, revealed to all at the table, which need not be the Aspects given in the ship list. Each ship also begins with five fate points.

crew

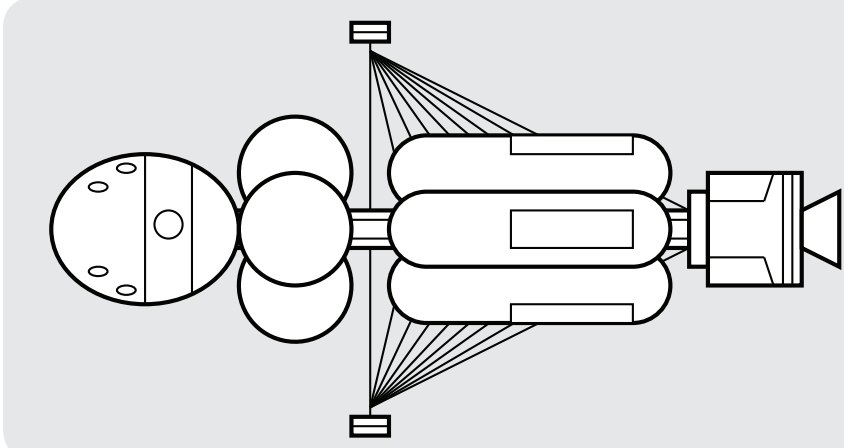
All crew positions are assumed to start at Skill level 2. Pilot is not automatically raised to match the V-shift. Players may spend additional points to raise the Skill level of a given crew position. Ships receive between three and six points to spend: the base is 3. Add 1 for T3 vessels. Add two if the ship is military (all ships are military unless they have the Civilian Stunt). Points may be spent to raise the value of the crew position by one or to make a Skill Military-grade (most often with Pilot or Communications on military ships).

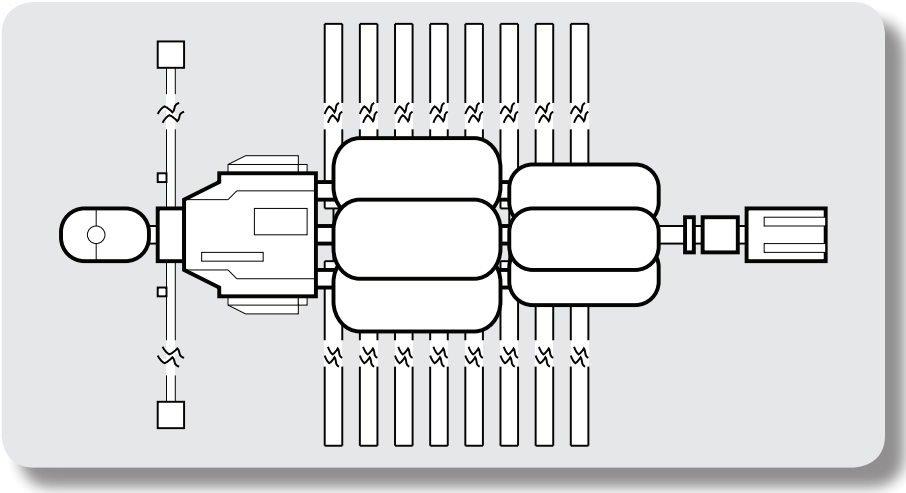
sample spacecraft

T3 Kestrel Class Interceptor

The sight of an Interceptor above the ecliptic guarding a convoy or leading an invasion sends pirates behind the nearest stellar body in the hopes of finding easier, less dangerous prey. The combination of speed and a monstrous battery of torpedo tubes lets the Interceptor pin its prey at long ranges and extreme vector differences without losing contact, dropping salvo upon salvo against any foe. Flight is always the safer option for foes of the Interceptor. Not that running is going to be an easy task.

V-shift 4, Beam 0, Torpedo 5, EW 0, Trade 0
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO OOO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Firewall: base 2 defense against EW.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
High capacity magazine: never "Out of ammo".
Fragile
Behind a wall of torpedoes
Stop in the name of the law
Hard to control
Defender





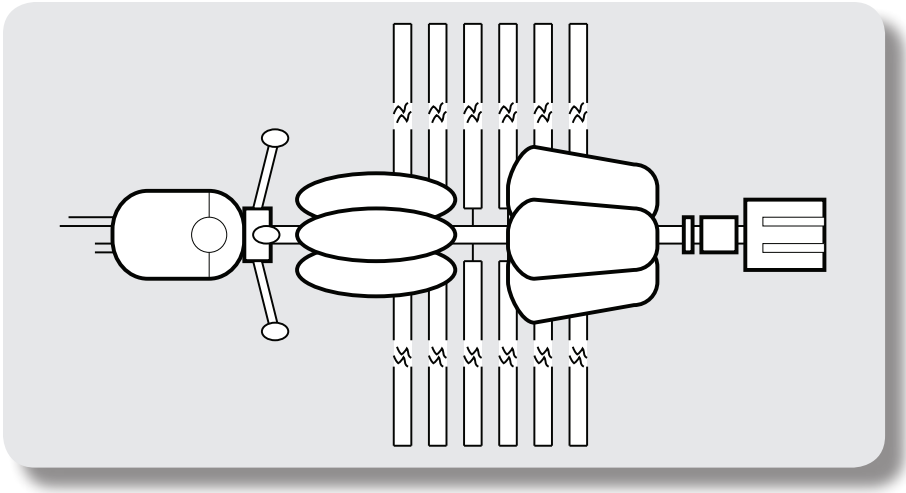
T3 Myriad Class Forward Refinery

The Myriad class spacecraft was designed for exploitation of the outer planets in foreign systems. It has two gigs that perform basic ore extraction and which can land and take off from planets. These gigs deliver to an automated refinery system, which conveys refined ingots to main storage. The vessel is designed for long missions and includes two "vacation" crew compartments that can be extended on 400 meter cables and spun to provide up to a half gravity. Normally these would be fitted with gym equipment and other facilities considered a luxury in space travel. Getting to and from the bays is accomplished by an elevator system that traverses from the main life support module to the spun gravity modules.

Because all extant Myriads are old now, the complicated vacation bay system is often disabled and permanently clamped to the main life support module.

Special rules: the Myriad class gets its full Trade value only when it is operating as a refinery. When operating as a cargo hauler its Trade value goes down to 3. If operating as both cargo and passenger system, and has its gravity module still working, it operates at Trade 4.

V-shift 3, Beam 0, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 5
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Interface vehicle: has a separate vehicle capable of landing on planet surfaces.
Cargo hauler
Fragile (lots of heat sinks)
Not all these parts are factory spec
Most of this ship isn't essential
Super efficient power system

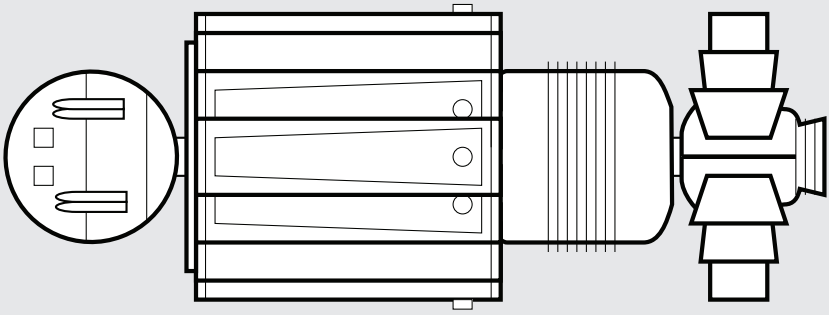


T3 Ephemera Class Patrol Cruiser

The Ephemera class is designed to keep the peace, which largely involves threatening lower technology spacecraft with destruction should they interfere with "legal" police operations, like mining everything valuable in the system. As its primary use is patrol and escort, its systems are largely defensive but they are very powerful offensive military vessels, easily outclassing anything built at a lower technology level.

They are expensive to maintain, having no real cargo space and composed of parts and materials that may be beyond the ability of the typical owner's home technology to replace.

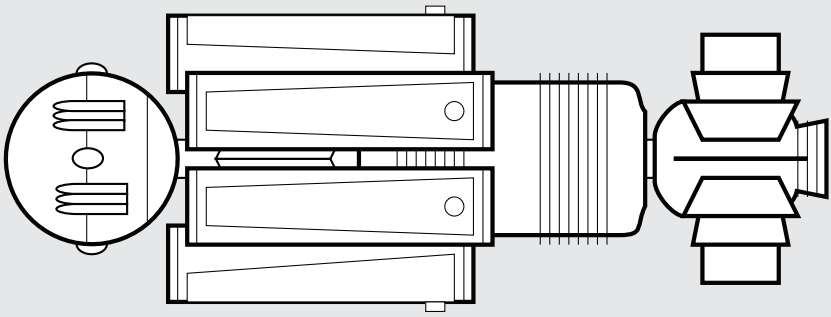
V-shift 4, Beam 4, Torpedo 0, EW 4, Trade 0
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO OO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
Overwatch: may use its beam in defense of friendly vessels.
To serve and protect
Not always what it seems
Baffling high technology drives
Costly
Some parts left over after maintenance



T2 Rah-Kash-Ka Fierce Trader

In the culture of the People, violence is not unusual. In fact it's really just a normal part of business. Consequently most merchant vessels designed before the Attachment are fairly heavily armed. As the People get used to human space, however, new ships are supplanting these "Fierce Traders" and the military variant is deployed as an escort to unarmed cargo haulers.

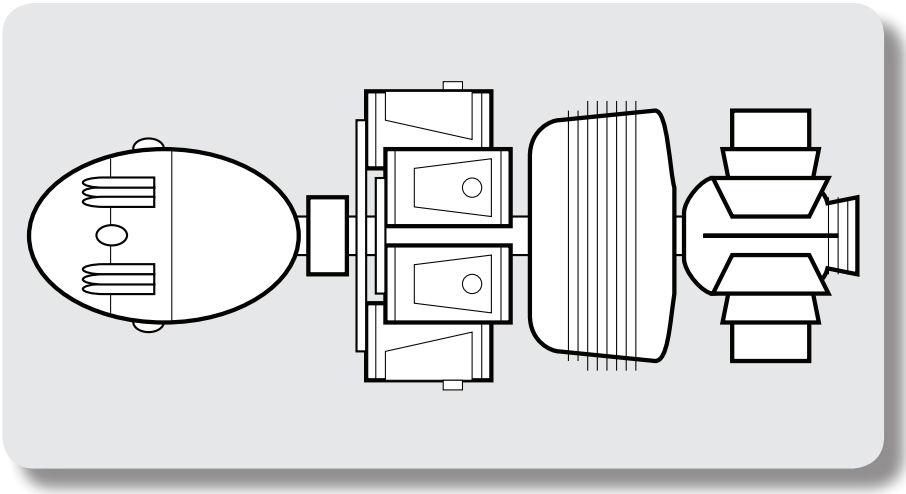
V-shift 3, Beam 2, Torpedo 2, EW 0, Trade 3
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Sometimes trade involves take
If it cannot run and it cannot fight then it is food
Modular, easy to understand components
Out of ammo
There's no word for "pirate" in this tongue—only "merchant"



T2 Peh-Nak-Tah Export Slipper

Designed by the People for export to human worlds, the Penakta (human transliteration) class slipstream vessel is a multi-purpose hull that is reasonably well suited to most purposes but is not quite up to the same quality standards as those ships designed for use by the People. As usual, the People cannot really conceive of a merchant vessel that cannot fight, and so the Penakta typically mounts a low-quality missile launch system that is trivially refitted with state of the art terminally guided ammunition, making it genuinely dangerous.

V-shift 2, Beam 0, Torpedo 2, EW 0, Trade 4
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Cheap: made from inferior materials (no mechanical effect).
Quality control stamp missing
Built for humans by lizards
Out of ammo
Huge
Cargo hauler

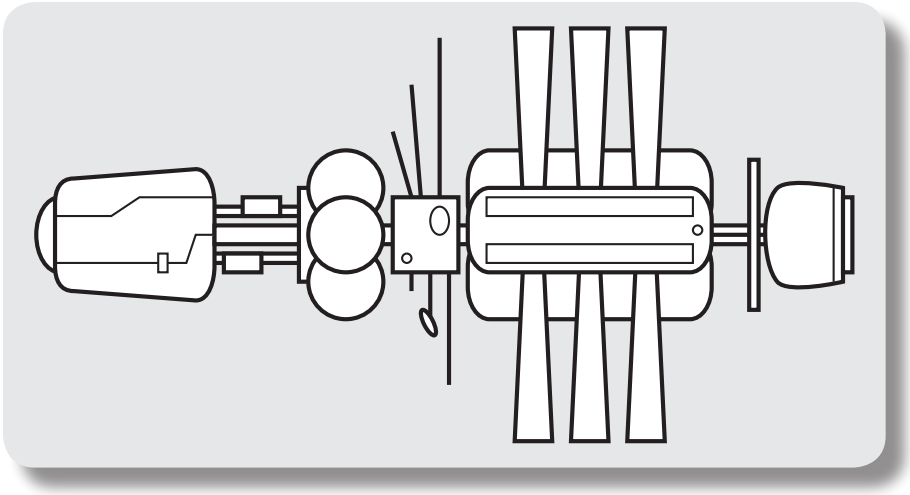


T2 Rah-Aro-Ka Fierce Escort

When Gareth and his brother Tristan first captured their "Fierce Trader," they saw the advantages of the alien design. It was when they finally captured an Escort, though, that they came to understand how balancing trade and violence could really be profitable. Since then a number of independent traders have found that appropriating the alien technology can yield jump-capable profits. Trade and violence, it turns out, are connected.

Retrofitted from the Fierce Trader deisgn, the Fierce Escort still retains some trading facility as the People cannot completely shake the idea that trade and violence are conected somehow.

V-shift 3, Beam 3, Torpedo 3, EW 0, Trade 1
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Overwatch: may use its beam in defense of friendly vessels.
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
Defending our weak and delicious friends
It is sad to carry no valuable cargo
Modular, easy to understand components
Gets pretty warm in here
Out of ammo

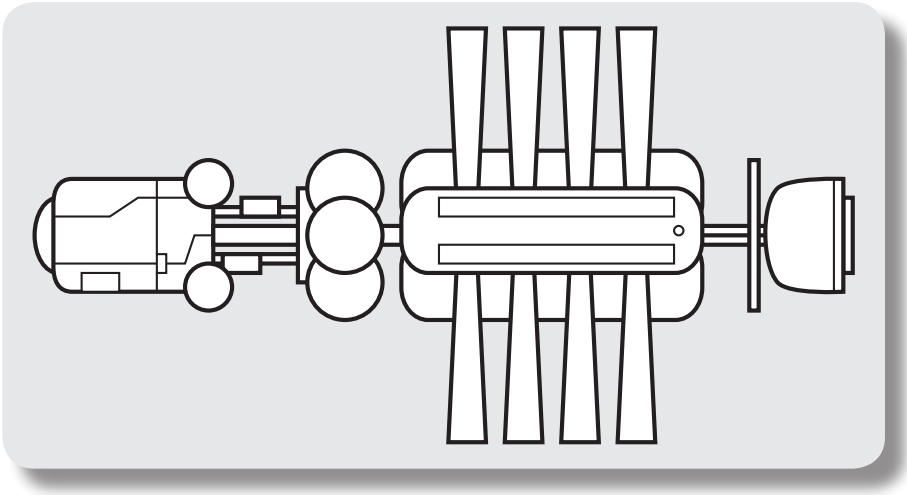


T2 Wild Weasel Electronic Warfare Platform

When one of these cerebral beasts slips into a system it can only mean dire consequences for the planetary inhabitants. Often the first ship through the slipknot it frequently goes undetected due to the advanced electronics that permeate the vessel. Crews of these ships have a high mortality rate when flying solo but their effects on a system's defenses can be catastrophic. Used to block and disrupt and confuse an enemy's electronics, these ships can take out convoys and never fire a shot. In the hands of a skilled pilot and brilliant hacker these vessels strike fear into the souls of the bravest warriors.

The EWP is also occasionally deployed as an escort for high ranking diplomats. Especially those with enemies behind every moon.

V-shift 2, Beam 0, Torpedo 0, EW 4, Trade 1
Frame OOO
Data OOO O
Heat OOO OO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
Point defense: base defense 2 against torpedoes.
Fragile
Wild weasel knows how to bite
In harm's way
Hacker's dream job
We are the static on your radar screen

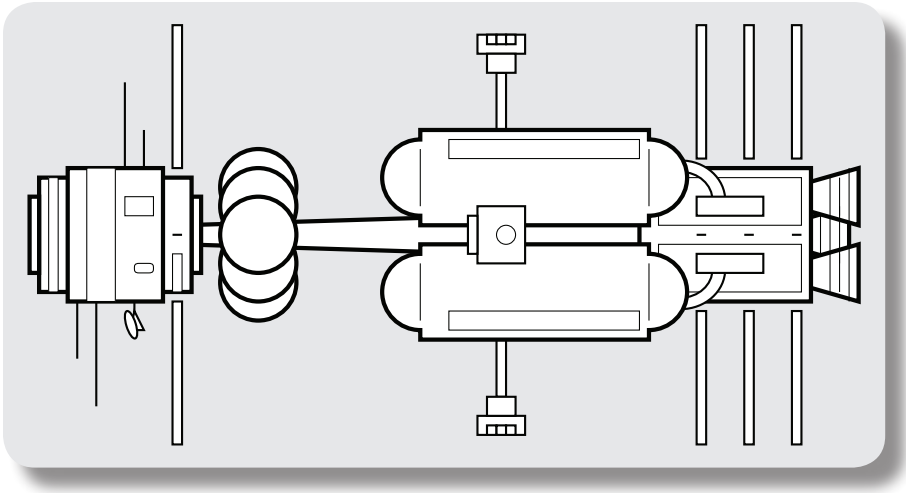


T2 Belinda Class Escort Gunship

Designed to operate with the Wild Weasel in patrol and offensive operations, the Escort gunship is equipped with several high energy particle weapons and shorter range coilguns that can coordinate with friendly vessels to provide anti-missile fire in a broad range of cicrumstances. When paired with a Wild Weasel, this presents a lethal problem for any miscreant to solve, with the Wild Weasel standing off at longer ranges conducting destructive electronic warfare while the escort combines its point defense overwatch duties with the occasional offensive blast from short range.

V-shift 3, Beam 4, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 0
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO O
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
Overwatch: can fire beam in defense of other ships.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Fragile
Dangerous friend
Standing in the line of fire
Defensive weaponry

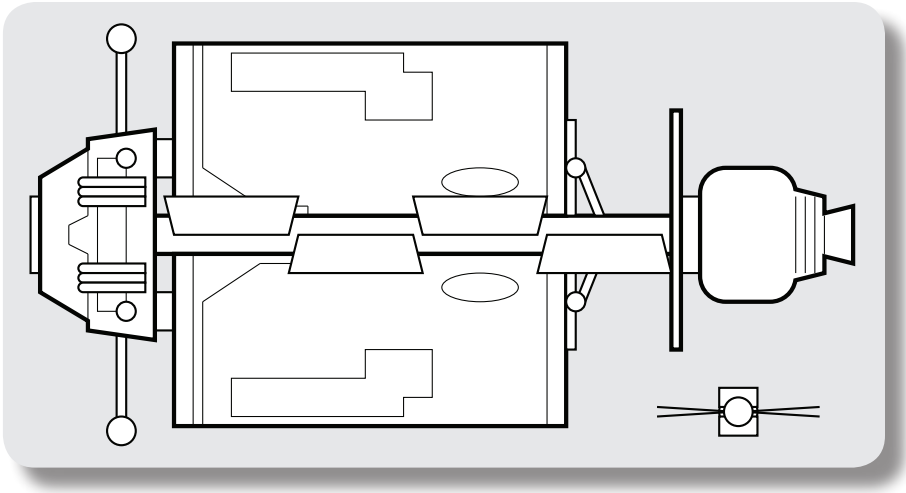
Pirates beware



T1 Oberon System Defender

The Oberon is more of an announcement than a warship. It was designed to provide a military capability against higher technology cultures invading with the intent to mine the system. As such, though it expects to be outclassed technologically, it also expects to be dealing with vessels optimised for trade and not combat. This is a classic system patrol monitor, designed to support drone bombardment with effective electronic warfare. Tactically, it is a wholly offensive platform.

V-shift 1, Beam 0, Torpedo 3, EW 3, Trade 0
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Defending the homeland
A storm of drones
Experimental warfare methods
Out of ammo
Built to last



T1 Princess Liner

Many systems have only their environment to generate commerce, and these systems need a way to transport rich tourists from garden world to garden world. The Princess Liner is typical of the trade. It's huge and it's ugly and it's slow, but it moves people with efficiency and comfort.

V-shift 1, Beam 0, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 3
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Interface vehicle: has a separate vehicle capable of landing on planet surfaces.
Huge
Passenger liner
A sitting duck
Proudly built by local unions
It's sure nice to get back to solid ground

T3 Registered Interdiction Trader

A fast high-technology vessel designed to trade in dangerous space. It might be found running guns through blockades or in regions with a high rate of piracy.

V-shift 3, Beam 3, Torpedo 3, EW 3, Trade 4
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Interface vehicle: has a separate vehicle capable of landing on planet surfaces.
Trading in hostile space
Not so easy prey
Out of ammo
We don't negotiate with terrorists
Cargo hauler

T3 Scout Hunter

This craft is designed as a privateer that can sustain itself for long stretches moving small cargos while watching for enemy vessels. In the event of trouble it can escape or scramble enemy transmissions.

V-shift 4, Beam 1*, Torpedo 1*, EW 4, Trade 2
*Effective level 2 with default crew.
Frame OOO
Data OOO O
Heat OOO O
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
T3 Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Interface vehicle: has a separate vehicle capable of landing on planet surfaces.
Extensive sensor array
Waits in silence
Out of ammo
The manual is not in English
"That lever always sticks."

T2 Blockade Runner

Built to run illegal cargo past border patrol vessels, the blockade runner is fast but fragile. It sports an enormous heat exchanger.

V-shift 4, Beam 0, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 3
Frame OO
Data OO
Heat OOO OOO O
Point defense: base defense 2 against torpedoes.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Fragile
Cargo hauler
Desperate burn to escape
Illegal cargo
Low on r-mass

T2 Courier

A basic small cargo mover equipped with civilian weapons.

V-shift 2, Beam 2, Torpedo 0, EW 2, Trade 2
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO OO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams.
Fragile
The mail must go through
Small
Cargo hauler
Your secret is safe with us

T2 ECM Gunboat

Sometimes you want to take out the enemy without hurting anyone, and the ECM Gunboat is just the tool. It has an effective EW system and its torpedo system fires comm drones that scramble communications and deploy hostile software.

V-shift 2, Beam 0, Torpedo 3, EW 3, Trade 0
Frame OOO
Data OOO O
Heat OOO
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Point defense: base defense 2 against torpedoes.
Attack a different track: Torpedo attacks damage Data instead of the Frame.
Electromagnetic pulse weapons

Out of ammo
No one gets hurt
Every surface is an antenna
Nowhere to hide

T2 Modular Cargo Hauler

Some cargo is not worth holding on to, and this vessel is built with that in mind. At the least sign of trouble, the crew can eject the cargo module and escape the scene at a very high delta-v. Preferred by slavers everywhere.

V-shift 2, Beam 2, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 4
Frame OOO O
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
Modal: Jettison modular cargo and stats become V-shift 4, Trade 0, and it gets +1 Heat box. Maintenance checks are made based on the current configuration. May return to cargo configuration after a maintenance check.
All cargo is expendable
Save our skins
Unexpected burst of speed
Plenty more space back there
Can't make money dead

T2 Personal Starship

Sometimes you just want to get away from it all.

V-shift 3, Beam 0, Torpedo 2, EW 0, Trade 2
Frame OOO OO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Skeleton crew: can be piloted with as few as one crew member.
Interface vehicle: has a separate vehicle capable of landing on planet surfaces.
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
The freedom of solitude
Navigating by the stars
Every single control within reach of one seat
Walnut and brass
Nautical tradition

T2 Generic Hauler

When you need to get stuff from A to B, this is the cheapest way to do it.

V-shift 2, Beam 0, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 3
Frame OOO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
Civilian: can be piloted without military training.
Slipdrive: can traverse slipstreams.
Skeleton crew: can be piloted with as few as one crew member.
Firewall: base defense 2 against EW.
Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beam.
Point defense: base defense 2 against torpedoes.
Cheap
Steers like a cow
Heavily automated
Please move to the back
Options: Choose one aspect: for moving van, take "Cargo hauler." For bus, take "Passenger liner"

T1 Missile boat

The missile boat is the mainstay of system defense fleets for cultures that do not yet have the capability for interstellar travel. It is heavily armoured and able to inflict substantial harm even on more advanced vessels.

V-shift 2, Beam 0, Torpedo 3, EW 0, Trade 0
Frame OOO OO
Data OOO
Heat OOO
High capacity magazine: never "Out of ammo."
Huge
Fragile
Fire and forget
Heavy armour
Nuclear warheads

T1 Anomaly Class Lab Vessel

Autonomous sensor drones, nuclear seismic charges, x-ray lasers, and powerful computers are all dangerous in the hands of a motivated scientist.

V-shift 1, Beam 2, Torpedo 2, EW 2, Trade 2
Frame OO
Data OOO

Heat OO
Out of ammo
For science!
Government lasers are pretty good it turns out
Powerful automation
Efficient use of space

T0 Flying Laser

A low-technology warship mounting the most effective energy weapons available. Very fragile.

V-shift 2, Beam 2, Torpedo 0, EW 0, Trade 0
Frame OO
Data O
Heat OOO
Fragile
Huge
Stripped the armour to make the beam hot
Arcane computer systems
Defending the high ground

T-1 Explorer

This is the basic science vessel of a newly space-faring culture.

V-shift 1, Beam 0, Missile 0, EW 0, Trade 0
Frame OO
Data O
Heat O
Extended range: can use the extended range column of the travel tables.
Huge
Fragile
Science mission
We come in peace!
Software archaeologists

space combat play sheet

0. detection

1. Caller announces "Detection" and asks for compels.
2. Navigation roll determines position for each ship (roll at most once per ship)
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Resolve tags and invokes.
3. Highest roll places any two ships on bands between 3 and -3.
4. Subsequent rolls place one ship each.
5. Lowest roll places nothing.
6. Winner of detection phase decides to move (for this turn only) to phase 1 or phase 2. If there is no winner then always continue to phase 1.

1. position

1. Caller announces "Position" and asks for compels.
2. Ship's V-shift roll, limited by effective Pilot Skill, determines who wins position. A ship declaring no V-shift (compelled or recovering Heat) gets an automatic result of -4.
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Resolve tags and invokes.
   c. Apply spin if desired.
   d. Apply burn if desired.
3. Highest roll may move his vessel the number of shifts between his roll and the lowest (to a maximum number of bands equal to the V-shift rating of his own ship) or another vessel the number of shifts between his roll and the target vessel's roll (again, to a maximum number of bands equal to the winner's V-shift rating).
4. A ship that has not applied V-shift for any reason may erase the highest checked box on its heat track.

2. electronic warfare

1. Caller anounces "EW" and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship's EW roll, amplified by the communication officer's effective Communications Skill.
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Leave all dice on the table (since the single defensive roll applies to all attacks).
   c. Resolve tags and invokes.
   d. Apply spin if desired.
5. For each ship that declared a target, compare offense and defense roll and count shifts.
   a. Negative shifts are applied as damage to the attacker's Data stress track.
   b. Positive shifts are applied as damage to the defender's Data stress track.

3. beam weapons

1. Caller announces "Beams" and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare beam targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship's Beam roll from 1 to a maximum of the Beam rating for each ship that declared a beam target, amplified by the gunnery officer's effective Gunnery Skill.
    a. Defenders roll modifying a base defense of zero unless they have a Stunt providing better defense. If the defender has already rolled to defend against a Beam attack this round, use the recorded value.
        i. Beams fired at range greater than 2 bands take a -2 penalty to the roll.
        ii. Resolve tags and invokes. Do not modify previously recorded defensive rolls. Defensive rolls just made are modified and recorded with modifications.
        iii. Apply spin if desired.
        iv. If the attacker's roll generates shifts, apply the number of shifts as a hit to the corresponding box on the Frame stress track and mark all boxes below as well.
        v. Wherever a defender succeeded by three or more, spin is awarded.

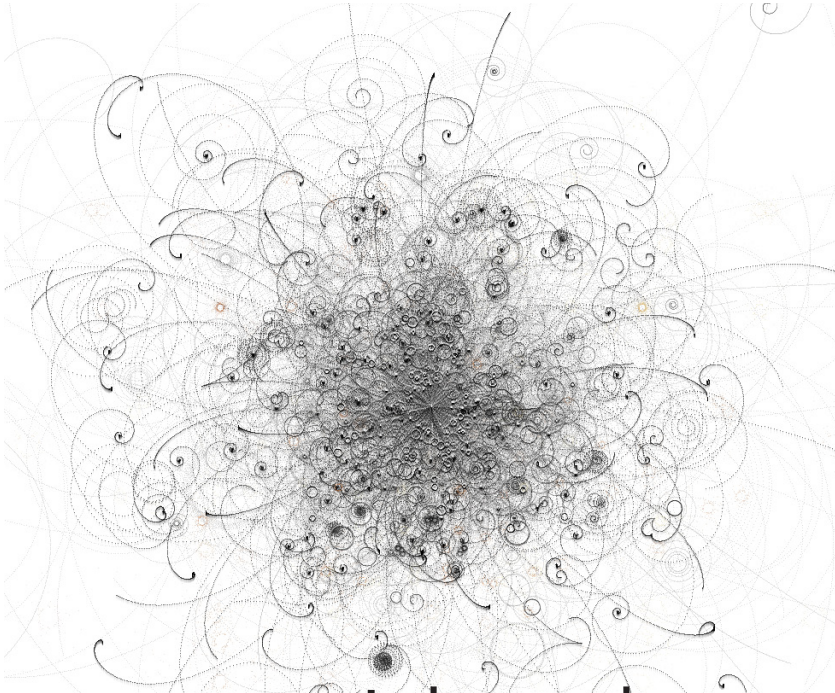
4. torpedoes

1. Caller announces "Torpedoes" and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare torpedo targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship's Torpedo roll for each ship that declared a torpedo target, amplified by the gunnery officer's effective Gunnery Skill.
    a. Targets roll with zero Skill unless they have a Stunt providing better defense or, if they choose, defend with some fraction of their Beam rating. If the defender has already rolled to defend against a Torpedo attack this round, use the recorded value.
    b. If the Beam rating applied offensively (in phase 3) + the Beam rating applied defensively exceeds the ship's Beam rating, apply the difference as a hit to the corresponding box on the ship's Heat stress track.
        i. Torpedoes fired at a range less than 2 bands take a -2 penalty to the roll.
        ii. Resolve tags and invokes.
        iii. Apply spin if desired. Do not modify previously recorded defensive rolls. Defensive rolls just made are modified and recorded with modifications.
    c. If the attacker's roll generates shifts, apply the number of shifts as a hit to the corresponding box on the Frame stress track and mark all boxes below as well.
    d. Wherever a defender succeeded by three or more, spin is awarded to the defender.

5. damage control

Engineering and Computer Skills can be used to effect repairs, to a maximum of one roll per ship for each of Frame and Data stress track repair. Repair rolls are considered simultaneous, and the same character may not attempt both rolls. The target for repair rolls is the highest marked box on the relevant track, and success is measured in shifts: players may erase all the boxes below the degree of success.

Repeat phases 1-5, as necessary.



7. social combat

This is not the evening Derek had planned. An evening with the Deputy Minister of Trade, that she was paying for, as she attempted to convince him to run a convoy through the blockade in the Caspian system. She needed to resupply the colony in Lillooet, but Derek knew already that it was too dangerous. Leading some freighters would take away all the strengths his ship had in a fight. But he was very happy to be entertained by the Deputy Minister, all the same; it would be a nice way to spend his last night in port, before he headed out, prepared to slip far away from any Caspian troubles. What Derek didn't know was just how persuasive the Deputy Minister could be...

Social combat can be used to handle complicated social and personal situations. It adds a clear objective, so you can avoid spending a lot of energy talking fruitlessly in character when no real strategies for resolution present themselves. It gives the same opportunities to make interesting narration as the regular combat system, wrapped up in a tactical challenge.

To begin, set the stakes: establish clearly what happens if the characters win and what happens if they lose. Stakes might be "We get the location of the secret base" or "We get to make a Science roll to determine how much about the base we get to narrate" or "I get the girl" or something entirely different. Losing could simply indicate failure to achieve these things, but the referee should be creative in establishing real (but interesting) losses—failure perhaps earns the enmity of the girl's family or gets your license to practice medicine revoked.

Once the stakes are established, establish victory conditions, which depend on the map.

The only stress track that gets action in social combat (and it doesn't need to) is the Composure stress track on individual characters. In some cases it might make sense to place the Wealth stress track at risk instead or as well, but this is at the discretion of the referee when designing the conflict.

the map

Social combat takes place on a zone map much as it does with personal combat. Instead of representing some physical geography, the map represents the social space of the encounter. Because of the kinds of options available to characters involved in social combat, certain kinds of map shapes have certain kinds of effects on behaviour and can be used to represent specific issues.

In general, concentric circles imply intimacy. Zone shapes with many borders, and therefore many avenues of escape or access, better represent socially open places like chatting about the weather at a party. Intimate zones are often objectives (you want to get someone to reveal valuable information, and so you want to maneuver them into intimate, trusting conversation).

To begin with, moving between zones has no additional cost—there is no initial use of "borders" as there is in personal combat.

Characters in the same zone can be said to be engaging each other socially—they are conversing about interesting, relevant things that they care about. The further apart characters are, the more social distance is in their conversation. Range has a deep impact on effectiveness and so one must usually close the range before one can do anything useful, such as move the conversation to a more intimate space.

Zones represent in the first instance a degree of intimacy in the social context. This will sometimes correspond to a spatial dimension too, with a separate zone corresponding to a small balcony where a conversation might occur, but more often it represents something much more nebulous. It is often a good idea for the table to design the map of the social combat as a group. Optionally, once the map is created, each player may choose to put a single free-taggable Aspect on a zone or a single pass value of 2 on a border, to reflect the personal contours of the social situation.

Example: Captain Di Gregario wishes to bribe the pass codes to another ship from a customs agent. He comes upon him in the refectory. Despite the other people in the room, there are only two relevant individuals, and a small tight map of four zones is proposed. Di Gregario's player suggests that sitting at the table should be marked as a pass value between zones 1 and 2: if both characters are sitting together at the table, it will be harder for one to escape. The referee accepts this, but adds an Aspect to zone 1, "Talking about a local sports team," to reflect that other customs agents at the table will not want to reveal pass codes in this area.

time

For each zone on the map, create one time box to represent available time to resolve. If you need to know exactly how long something took, the table should determine what the maximum amount of time something will take, based either on player

intention ("We have to find someone who knows a pilot in the next hour!") or agreed-upon common sense (even the best party will disperse by morning). If a victory condition is achieved before the time boxes run out, the maximum time can be downgraded a number of shifts on the Time Track (see Chapter 2, Dealing with Time) equal to the number of unchecked boxes. Often, table consensus will determine a very similar result in any case.

the actors

One of the biggest conceptual hurdles in adopting this system for resolving social interactions is recognizing that not every person in a scene needs to be represented on the map. Part of this is embodied within the zones themselves. In the above example, the only two actors are Di Gregario and the Customs Officer, even though there might be twenty people or more in the refectory. What is important is whether Di Gregario can get his information within the lunch hour. Aspects on the zones can indicate the other people involved.

This can in fact be made even more abstract, when you want to make a situation tactical that has become mired or unproductive in regular role-play. By making some of the actors on the map ideas instead of explicit people, you can conduct a scientific investigation or any other information-revealing multi-step endeavour. Make the opposition the Fact and, maybe, an Attractive Falsehood and you can do science. Add in people with conflicting goals (a young whipper-snapper who wants to be primary author on the publication of your discovery!) and the abstract can engage the concrete in both directions.

victory

Victory conditions should relate to map position. Usually the objective will be to get a certain person or persons into a specific zone before the timer runs out. This can be more complex, however, to achieve different goals: if you want to model persuading a crowd, you could score participants by how many crowd members are in their target zone when the timer runs out. Feel free to push the system around and find other victory conditions.

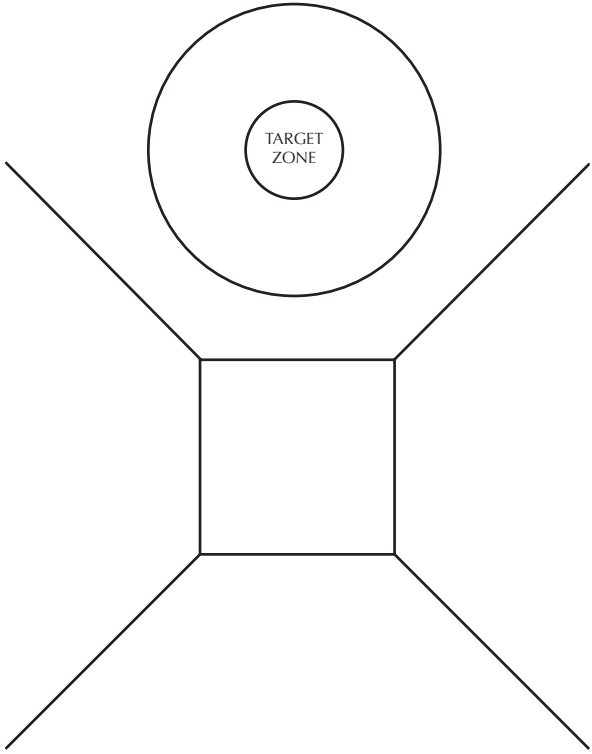
Example: there has been a murder aboard the passenger liner Tachyon Dream. Though there are dozens of passengers and the same amount of crew, it may be that the only actors are the Murderer and each of the players. If the players can position the murderer within a specific zone with any one of them before the time track runs out, they have elicited a confession. If two of them are in the specific zone with the Murderer, they have evidence as well. With the victory conditions set so rigidly, player goals come into focus. What is important here is the difference between player knowledge and character knowledge. The players do not know that it was the cruise director who killed the passenger, but that is their reward if they achieve the victory conditions. The players are engaged in social combat with an unknown quantity (whose Skills and Aspects might only gradually be revealed), but victory means the characters discover the truth. What's more, failure occurs only at the level of the players: if they are not successful in their goal, it may

be that they are convinced that the wrong person is the killer. With these stakes established beforehand, even if the players know that they have failed, they have agreed to pursue their vendetta against the poor soul who has been mistakenly accused.

sample maps

party

A party has a lot of accessible conversation space—everyone is there to chit-chat after all—and probably at least one intimate space. It is well represented by a central shape with several attached shapes. Inside one attached space, add a couple of concentric circles for intimacy. An objective in the party might be to hook up with a powerful businessman and get him to brag about his company's secret operation on the dark side of the moon: you win if you can get him, yourself, and the science officer into the center of the intimate zone before the timer runs out.

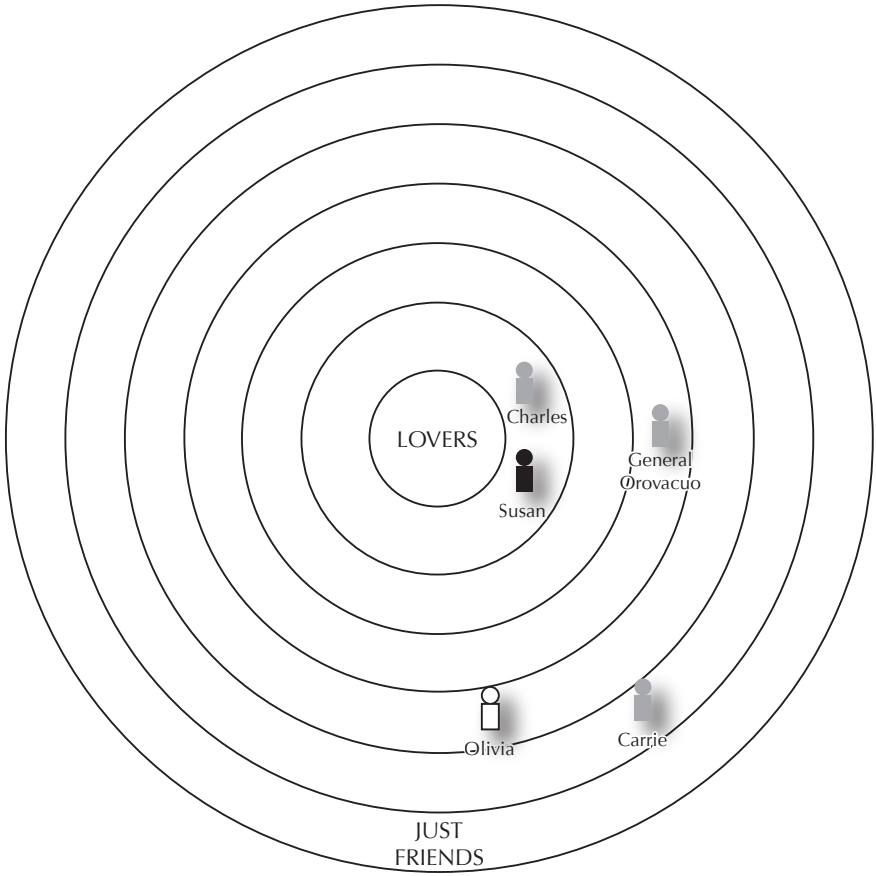


The party map doesn't need to be complicated—the simpler it is the faster things will go. The important thing is to make it take a few steps to get to the target zone and be complex enough to imply story with every move. The map above is about the minimum complexity you would want from a social combat map. It might be close to the maximum also!

seduction

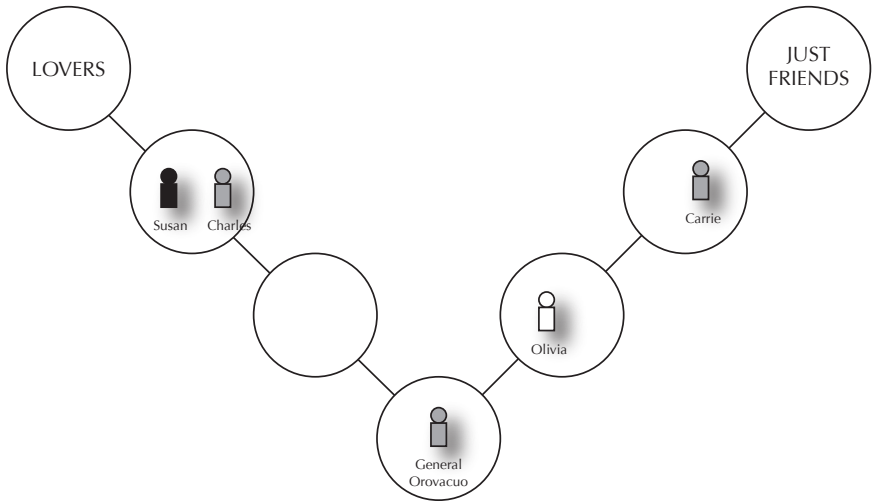
A seduction might be well modeled with a deep set of concentric circles—say five or six—with the objective of getting both characters in the bull's-eye. Such an engagement could have multiple suitors and possibly require removing some or all from the map through Composure damage.

Suitors might be PCs or they might be NPCs or in some cases they might just be "pawns"—if there is a concept you want to be relevant to the goal but that doesn't necessarily need to have free will in the fight, just give it a marker and no statistics. Players can move it around towards or away from goals (voters in an election or observers at a debate!) but it doesn't do anything on its own.



This could also be done with a simple linear track of, say, seven zones (functionally the same as a bull's-eye but with different aesthetics). Mark the first zone "LOVERS" and the last zone "JUST FRIENDS." Start the seducer, Susan (in all black), on or near LOVERS and her objective, Olivia (in all white), on or near JUST FRIENDS. Start other competitive suitors (gray), Charles, Carrie, and General Orovacuo, anywhere that seems fun or scary. Now, if Olivia and anyone else are together on the LOVERS zone, Olivia has fallen for that suitor. If Olivia and anyone else are together on the JUST FRIENDS zone, whoever has joined the target there is removed from play.

This is tactically rich: do you get rid of competition by creating an atmosphere of superficial fun, lacking intimacy, trying to move as many of your competitors as possible into JUST FRIENDS, but making your project more difficult by having to remain relatively aloof yourself (in order to keep the range low) and keeping the target from intimacy as well? Or do you eliminate your opposition *à la* Oscar Wilde, with witty jests at their expense? Or do you simply play your own game and ignore your competition, driving directly for intimacy between yourself and your love? All are viable and highly dependent on the character's specific resources as a would-be lover.



debate

A debate can be modeled with two sets of concentric circles representing opposing perspectives. The objective would be to move the opponent into your own central circle or moving the majority of audience members into your zone. Note that because of the steep drop-off in effectiveness at range, it will be necessary to move towards your opponent in order to engage him and pull him back to see your point (answering his specific arguments, showing sympathy and understanding).

the sequence

Combat occurs according to a strict sequence of events, just as with the other combat systems. In order to run the Sequence, one player should be named the caller (usually the referee, but this is not essential). The duty of the caller is to run the Sequence: he ensures that each phase is given sufficient time and that there is a smooth pace as phases proceed. The caller should have the Sequence sheet in front of him during the game.

To begin with, the caller will establish the order in which players will be polled for their actions. The best possible way to do this is the simplest way the table can all agree on: a random order proceeding clockwise, starting with the highest Charm and then clockwise, or descending order Charm (or whatever social Skill is most relevant).

Then, for each player, the caller will ask for an action. Actions can be one of the following:

- Move
- Composure attack
- Obstruct
- Maneuver
- Move another

If the player is running multiple characters (as might well be the case if he is the referee), each of these characters should declare and resolve their actions separately as though run by different players.

Once the player declares his character's action and target, the caller will ask the table for compels. A compel can involve any of the acting character's Aspects, any Aspect on his equipment, any Aspect on the zone he is in, or any Aspect on the scene. Anyone wanting to compel should hold up a fate point token and name the Aspect being compelled. The caller will verify that it is a legitimate Aspect for a compel and the acting player can either accept the fate point (and thus the compel) or pay the compelling player's character a fate point and deny the compel.

If a compel is accepted by the player, go to the next character (possibly one run by the same player).

Next the caller will ask the player to make his free move. The player may then move his character a single zone if he wants to.

The caller will then ask the player what Skill will be used for his action.

> **Characters in social combat may not use the same Skill twice in a row.**

Each action requires a 4dF + Skill roll to resolve. Once the dice are on the table, Aspects may be invoked or tagged by all participating players as appropriate. The usual rules for tagging Aspects apply: you may tag only one of each scope of Aspect except for free-taggable Aspects, of which you may tag as many as are available. A tagged or invoked Aspect adds 2 to the roll or allows a re-roll.

During the Aspect tagging, the caller will offer all players any spin that's on the table in order to improve their rolls. It can be spent to add one to a roll.

Once all negotiable dice modifications are complete, the caller announces the resolution of the roll (who won) and directs the appropriate player to narrate the result. The authority to narrate depends upon the action declared—see below for details.

When all players have had a turn, the caller then checks a box on the timer and determines whether the victory conditions have been met. If there is a victory, he announces it and hands control to the referee. If there is no victory, he begins the next turn.

move

For a move action, the player rolls 4dF + Skill, then modifies by any Aspects tagged or invoked. He may then move his character this many zones, expending movement points as needed to erode any pass values that might be on borders between his character and his goal.

The move action represents the character aligning himself with his interests (moving towards a target zone) or feigning alignment with another in order to be more effective (moving closer to another in order to reduce range modifiers).

Example: Simon is being tortured by Colonel Ridgeway. Ridgeway wants some information, and if he gets Simon to a target zone and keeps him there for a full turn, Simon will confess! Ridgeway begins with Charm, finding a point of contact between him and his captive. The success allows him to move three zones, to the other side of where Simon is on the map, so that as Simon escapes (increasing the range between them), he will in fact be moving towards the point of confession.

composure attack

A Composure attack is an effort to remove a character from play altogether by attacking his Composure stress track until he is Taken Out. To begin, the acting player names the target of the attack. The attacker names his attacking Skill and the target names the Skill he will use to defend. Both will narrate their efforts or otherwise justify the Skill selection.

Both players then roll 4dF + Skill and modify through Aspect tags, invokes, and spin. Count the attacker's shifts and then reduce the shifts by the range between characters. The defender may reduce these shifts using Consequences. He may reduce the shifts by one by taking a mild Consequence, reduce by two by taking a moderate Consequence, or reduce by four by taking a severe Consequence. He may apply more than one Consequence if necessary. Each Consequence becomes a free-taggable Aspect on the character.

The remaining shifts are then used to mark the defender's Composure stress track: one box on the track is marked at the rank according to the shifts and all open boxes below it (one shift marks the first box, three shifts marks the first, second, and third box, and so on). If the highest box to be marked has already been filled, then the next highest available box is filled. If the box to be filled is past the end of the character's Composure stress track, then the character is Taken Out. The two players should negoti-

ate what this means, mediated by the referee.

If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.

The Composure attack represents an attempt to remove a character from play by making her ineffective. It might be an embarrassing anecdote designed to shame the character into removing herself from the scene, or a stinging insult that makes her too angry to act with the social subtlety necessary to participate in this kind of combat. Or something else.

Example: before the inquisition began, Ridgeway softened Simon up with his fists. Simon had taken hits on two boxes of his Health track, and was given no time to recover. While Ridgeway doesn't want Simon to fall unconscious (a Taken Out result, which would prevent the confession), he is hoping to gain a Consequence to leverage Simon. He lights a butane torch and rolls his Repair Skill—he had used Intimidation last time, but perhaps his professional understanding of how these torches work will convince Simon to speak. The roll is a success, generating four shifts which would go past the end of his Composure track, so Simon uses a mild Consequence, "He's going to melt my flesh!" which Ridgeway can free-tag next turn. Simon's three-long Composure track is now full (four shifts, reduced by one by the Consequence, marks the third box and all boxes below it).

obstruct

The player obstructing begins by identifying the zone that will be obstructed. He then rolls 4dF + Skill - Range, modified by any Aspects tagged or invoked. If he obtains a positive result, he may apply the number of shifts as pass values on any borders in the zone. The total of all pass values added cannot exceed the number of shifts. So, if a player generated four shifts he could create a single pass value of four on one border, or a pass value of three on one border and one on another, or any other combination of pass values adding up to no more than four.

The obstruct action represents efforts to pin a character into his current mind-set or deflect him from ideas that would be contrary to the acting character's interests. This might be attempts at levity in order to block off a more sober zone, awkward geek behaviour in order to make it harder to get into an intimate zone, or similar.

Example: Simon is exhausted, and has no Resolve Skill on which to draw (he has already rolled his untrained Skill at -1). So he decides to divert himself. He starts rattling off slipship vectors that he memorized in flight school, hoping that the sequence of numbers can help him withstand the terror he is feeling. He chooses his own zone as the target (range zero) and makes a Navigation roll, getting three shifts. He chooses to spend all three on the border between his zone and the zone Ridgeway is drawing him towards. A pass value of 3 is drawn on the map.

maneuver

The player maneuvering begins by identifying the target of the maneuver. This target is typically a zone, but may be a character or the entire scene. He then announces the Aspect he intends to put on the target and narrates the effort. He then rolls 4dF +

Skill, modified by any Aspects tagged or invoked. If he obtains a positive result, the target acquires an Aspect described by the acting player. This Aspect is free-taggable once by any ally. Putting an Aspect of "Long-winded anecdote" on a zone will give other players a reason to avoid that zone, lest they be mired in a boring conversation, and unable to escape.

Permanent Aspects are Aspects that affect the person or zone directly. This includes things like "Liar," "Out of cruditées," and so on.

Transient Aspects are Aspects that derive from the continuous action of an individual. "Making socially unacceptable small talk," "Spitting," and so on. Transient Aspects last only until the placing character acts again, though he may use the Aspect in this last turn of its existence.

The caller determines whether an Aspect is permanent or transient.

Example: Simon is not doing well in opposed rolls, and so decides to put an Aspect on the zone he is in, "False clue." Unopposed, the roll is easily made, and the clue lies in wait for a future turn.

move another

The move another action is an attempt to force another character to move along the social map in a direction desired by the attacker. To begin, the acting player names the target of the attack. The attacker names his attacking Skill and the target names the Skill he will use to defend. Both will narrate their efforts to justify the Skill selection.

Both players then roll 4dF + Skill and modify through Aspect tags, invokes, and spin. Count the attacker's shifts and then reduce the shifts by the range between characters. These shifts are then used to move the defending player: one zone or pass value per shift, exactly as a move action.

If the attacker fails by three or more shifts, the defender is awarded a spin token.

The move another action is a careful effort to persuade. It represents effective rhetoric, brilliant argument, seduction, and like forms of persuasion. The acting character is trying to manipulate the target character directly.

Example: Ridgeway makes an Intimidation roll to move Simon towards the target zone. Because of the pass value Simon has added, he needs three shifts, but Simon's Resolve roll of 0, even when bought up to two with a fate point (Simon has an Aspect, "I've been through worse") can't match Ridgeway's Intimidation roll of 5. Simon, however, free-tags the "False clue" (he is still in that zone), and so now has 0 + 2 (personal Aspect) + 2 (zone Aspect) = 4. That's against Ridgeway's 5, which is only one shift when three are needed. Simon therefore survives the interrogation one more round.

damage

Stress box hits are not real damage, but they can lead to Consequences. All stress box hits are removed after a few days of relaxing stress-free downtime. As with personal combat, the table should rule when enough time has passed or whether the downtime was sufficiently relaxing. Generally speaking it should be trivial.

recovering consequences

A mild Consequence can be self-medicated with a bottle and some time alone once the scene is over. No roll is required and it is cleared as soon as the social combat scene is over.

A moderate Consequence remains until the end of the session in which it was incurred.

A severe Consequence must be carried through one complete session in which the associated stress track is never marked. If it is incurred during session one, it is gone no sooner than the end of session two, and if the associated stress track takes a hit in a fight during that session, you'll need to hold the Consequence through yet another one.

example: changing history

Social combat is more loosely defined than the other combat systems, and for it to work it relies heavily on creative choices for the map, the actors, and the "pawns." Many scenarios benefit from abstractions that don't use the characters directly at all, but rather organizations composed of character traits. As this is not simple stuff, here's an example of actual play that made use of very deep abstraction and was highly successful at the table.

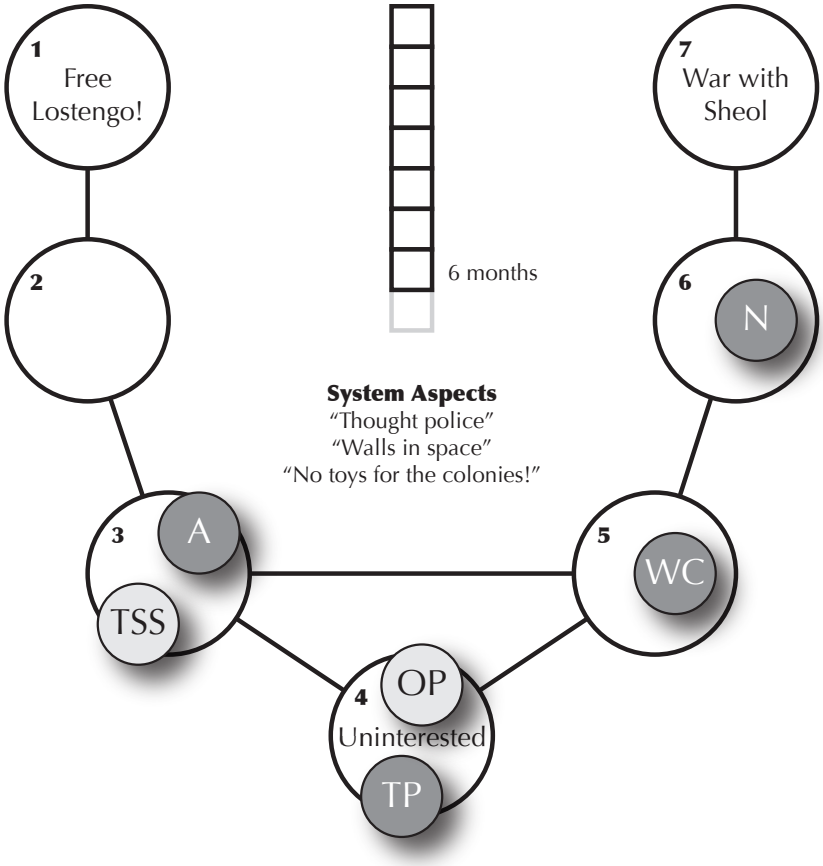
The scene begins with our heroes, the crew of "The Silent Sufferer," trying to stop a war between the systems of Caradoc and Sheol. They also want to stop a slave trading operation that is going on in the Caradoc-controlled colony system of Lostengo. So they choose to conduct a political campaign at Caradoc, which is still reeling from a nuclear attack by agents that appeared to be from Sheol. An unknown agency wants Caradoc to go to war and is benefiting from the slave trade at Lostengo.

The map is drawn as below. It has seven zones and at the far left is "Free Lostengo!" which is the player target zone. At the far right is "War with Sheol," which is the enemy target. We draw a 7-box timer and call the seventh box 6 months.

Now we place four "pawns." These are entities that we want to move around to score a victory but that don't have "agency"—they don't act for themselves. They are: the Working Class (WC), the Academics (A), the Nobles (N), and the Thought Police (TP). There are only two agents in this fight: "The Silent Sufferer" crew (TSS) and the Opposition Party (OP).

The victory conditions are simple: if either side gets three interested parties in their target zone, that's how the Caradoc government acts.

We build two pseudo-characters to play as agents on the map, each representing the small, dedicated faction attempting to win over the populace: the player character "The Silent Sufferer" builds a 5-cap skill tree from player Skills (looking back, it would have been sufficient to take a single story-relevant Skill from each player, one at rank 5 and two at rank 4). The top three are Charm 5, Tactics 4, and Science 4 (one from each of the three players). The enemy character, "OP," is composed of a 5-cap fabricated skill tree. The top three are Assets 5, Arts 4, and Culture/Tech 4. Ten Aspects are chosen for each pseudo-character, drawing on player character Aspects for the Aspects of TSS. Each pseudo-character receives five fate points.



turn one

TSS moves into the same zone (free move) as the Working Class (cuddling up) and elects to move another with Charm on the working class and makes an awesome roll after tags; the Working Class is moved all the way to the target zone, "Free Lostengo!" Mac, the team Charmer, is doing speaking tours planetside, working the crowd and explaining the plight of indentured servants on Lostengo. The opposition presents a propaganda campaign emphasizing the conservative values of Caradoc and the necessity of reaction to hostility, but Mac's charm is overwhelming. He speaks to the Working Class heart, fueled with the image of a frozen child slave he had seen in the vacuum of space two sessions previously, and which had become one of his Aspects.

OP puts an obstacle on zone 3, getting 4 successes, all of which were placed between 2 and 3, effectively alienating the Working Class from the smaller but more influential elements of society. The opposition simply dumps a ton of money into bribing officials to keep Mac from organizing and speaking effectively, making information about the slavery slow to move and suspicious when it does.

turn two

TSS elects to move another on the Academics but is compelled to inaction; they deny it and fail anyway. The Sufferers try to bring a body of scientific evidence proving the degrading effect of slavery on culture but are unconvincing in the face of the counter-argument from the Arts community presented by the opposition.

OP moves to the Academics and uses move another to shift them to the right but fails. This time they leverage their Assets to create lucrative grants for those making a strong case for the inevitable warlike nature of Sheol. Some brilliant Tactics from the Sufferer team, however, manage to make the grants ineffective.

turn three

TSS elects to move another on the Academics but is compelled to inaction; they deny this one too but with an unlucky roll TSS fails to get any actual movement. They've fed a lot of fate points to the OP. Again Mac takes to the podium (Charm), but the opposition wields its knowledge of local custom and the tendency towards conservatism and order (Culture/Tech) effectively. (It is agreed by the table that the pseudo-character can roll C/T.)

OP elects to move the Academics again and is compelled to inaction; they pay it off and swing the Academics to the right (from 3 to 5). This time a fat wad of cash (Assets) is delivered directly to the most persuasive hands, assisted by the Thought Police (who are an Aspect on the system, and so paid to the caller and not the other player) and the efforts of the scientific community (Science) are ineffective counter-arguments to a well funded and warlike Humanities bloc.

turn four

At this point there were precious few fate points left. Compels are a reason to offer fate points to the opponent, if you plan on capitalizing on them, but it is better to tag system or zone Aspects, removing the point, than invoking something that will hand a point to the opponent.

TSS tries to move the Nobility but fails.

OP moves the Academics into to the "War With Sheol!" zone.

turn five

TSS adopts a new tactic: direct attack. They make a Composure attack (massive smear campaign with Tactics) against the OP (Culture/Tech, justifying rather than denying the charges) and get a 4-hit and a moderate Consequence. Their stress boxes are full and they take "Connection to Sheol revealed" (it was suggested that having the propaganda posters all labeled "Made in Bannock," thereby betraying where the funding was coming from, was a mistake of the OP).

OP decides things need to move fast, and moves Thought Police into the war zone with a massive Assets roll ineffectively defended against with Science. The Nobility cares not for logic and science! Fat wads of cash! That's two of three and the Nobility is close!

turn six

TSS decides they need time and builds a massive obstacle to warfare, building a war profiteering case with Mac's Charm that makes it impossible for the Nobility to go all the way to war, though they remain as hawkish as ever—they realize that with the Working Class so adamantly opposed, they risk civil war now (story). Seven shifts are placed on zone 6, all of them on the 6/7 border.

OP moves (unopposed) to erode that massive obstacle using their Culture/Tech to entrench themselves in the warfare side of things. This is seen to be a much more effective way of removing barriers than pushing someone else through them.

turn seven

Without fate points these later turns are proceeding much more quickly.

TSS makes a Composure attack (free-tagging the OPs Consequence and rolling with Tactics again), forcing a severe Consequence, "Enemy agents deported," and a mild Consequence, "Sex scandal." Now the story of the OP is complete: independent Sheol operatives assisting enemy agents are trying to destroy Caradoc in order to sustain the extremely profitable slave trade and development at Lostengo. No amount of cash (Assets check) solves this problem.

OP tries desperately to move the Nobility to war (Culture vs. Science), but they will not budge: the logical case against actual war is too strong, despite the value in a hawkish position. The TSS gets spin. Civil war is too scary.

turn eight

TSS finishes off the OP with a final Composure attack with Charm versus Assets: Mac takes to the streets and talks down the opposition, revealing all its flaws with magnificent charm and persuasion, precisely identifying the key failings of the opposition, free-tagging both Consequences and using spin in a massive overkill effort. The opposition's cash just can't keep up against the free tags.

OP is Taken Out.

results

The scene went one box past the end of the timer, so (checking the Time Track for the next increment above six months) the 6-month operation ran a full year. A player offers a Taken Out result that the Sheol Military Surplus Reallocation syndicate that was building first military ships and then slaver shells for Bannok and private interests are identified and rooted out by Sheol officials. A small core of evil executives are banished forever to a low environment system. The Opposition Party are in disarray and are ineffective—no new ships are forthcoming and the finances have dried up.

However, the players did not get what they wanted (Caradoc to stop the slavery at Lostengo) as no one got three factions into a target zone. The referee interprets the social combat map thus: the Working Class, dedicated to the cause of the Lostengo slaves, are so opposed to the Thought Police and Academics who are loudly urging war to a largely sympathetic Noble ear, that they organize a general strike (a new Aspect on Caradoc to replace the "Walls in space"). So now, just as Caradoc is reeling from

an extensive nuclear attack, it is rendered utterly inert to act and yet is a powder keg ready to explode into internal violence. Certainly, there is no hope for Lostengo there, but neither is there war with Sheol.

And so the slave trade to Lostengo continues, though now private and disorganized and actively opposed by a suddenly aware Sheol. The reputation of Sheol is (somewhat) restored, but the danger of war is oddly at an all time high. Is Sheol supporting the General Strike at Caradoc, which now guarantees Caradoc cannot field a fighting force? I would.

This outcome led directly to a platoon-scale battle (see chapter 8), with the Thought Police crushing a worker's rebellion and the crew of the Silent Sufferer barely escaping with their lives.

social combat play sheet

1. Caller polls the table in order of descending Charm or by any other fixed method that seems appropriate to the topic at hand. We often find that simply going clockwise around the table is adequate, perhaps starting with the highest Charm.
2. For each player, Caller asks for an action which is one of move, Composure attack, move another, obstruct, or maneuver and asks for the target if there is one.
   a. Caller asks for compels. If accepted, skip to the next player.
   b. Caller asks player to make his free move.
   c. Caller asks for Skill to be used and verifies that it has not been used twice in a row.
   d. A roll is made according to the specific action (see below).
   e. Aspects are invoked or tagged to improve the roll as per the Aspects rules.
   f. Caller offers any spin on the table.
   g. Resolution is announced by the caller and players narrate the results.
3. Once all characters have taken a turn, check off a timer box on the time track.
4. Examine the map for victories. If no one has won, repeat.

move (unopposed)

Player rolls 4dF + Skill and may move his character this many zones, expending points for borders as in personal combat. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.

The move action represents the character aligning himself with his interests (moving towards a target zone) or feigning alignment with another in order to be more effective (moving closer to another in order to reduce range modifiers).

composure attack (opposed)

1. Player declares a target of the attack.
2. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense.
3. Both players roll 4dF + Skill and count shifts. Reduce the shifts by the range between characters. Rolls are modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
4. If the attacker has shifts, they may be mitigated by Consequences.
5. The defender's Composure stress track is marked at the box indicated and all boxes below.
6. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.

The Composure attack represents an attempt to remove a character from play by making her ineffective.

obstruct (unopposed)

1. Player declares a target zone to attack.
2. Player rolls 4dF + Skill. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
3. Reduce the number of shifts by the range to the target zone.
4. If any shifts are generated, the player may increase any pass values in the target zone such that the total is no greater than the number of shifts.
5. If a pass value already exists on the border, it is increased by however many shifts are allotted to it.

The obstruct action represents efforts to pin a character into his current mind-set or deflect him from ideas that would be contrary to the acting character's interests.

maneuver (unopposed)

1. Player declares a target zone.
2. Player rolls 4dF + Skill and subtracts the range to the target zone. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
3. If any (or exactly zero) shifts are generated, the player may add an Aspect to the target zone, and that Aspect may be free-tagged by an ally once in the course of the scene.

A maneuver adds a free-taggable aspect that reflects a change in the social situation that does not directly affect the principle actors in the social combat.

move another (opposed)

1. Player declares a target of the attack.
2. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense.
3. Both players roll 4dF + Skill and count shifts. Reduce the shifts by the range between characters. Rolls are modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
4. If the attacker has shifts, he may move the defender that many zones.
5. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.

The move another action is a careful effort to persuade. It represents effective rhetoric, brilliant argument, seduction, and like forms of persuasion. The acting character is trying to manipulate the target character directly.

running the player action part of the sequence

Once the player declares his character's actions the caller will ask the player to make his free move. The player may then move his character a single zone if he wants to.

The caller will then ask the player what Skill will be used for his action. The table will verify that the Skill was not used immediately previous.

You may not use the same Skill twice in a row.

Once the Skill is announced, the caller will ask the table for compels. A compel can involve any of the acting character's Aspects, any Aspect on his equipment, any Aspect on the zone he is in, or any Aspect on the scene. Anyone wanting to compel should hold up a fate point token and name the Aspect being compelled. The caller will verify that it is a legitimate Aspect for a compel and the acting player can either accept the fate point (and thus the compel) or pay the compelling player's character a fate point and deny the compel.

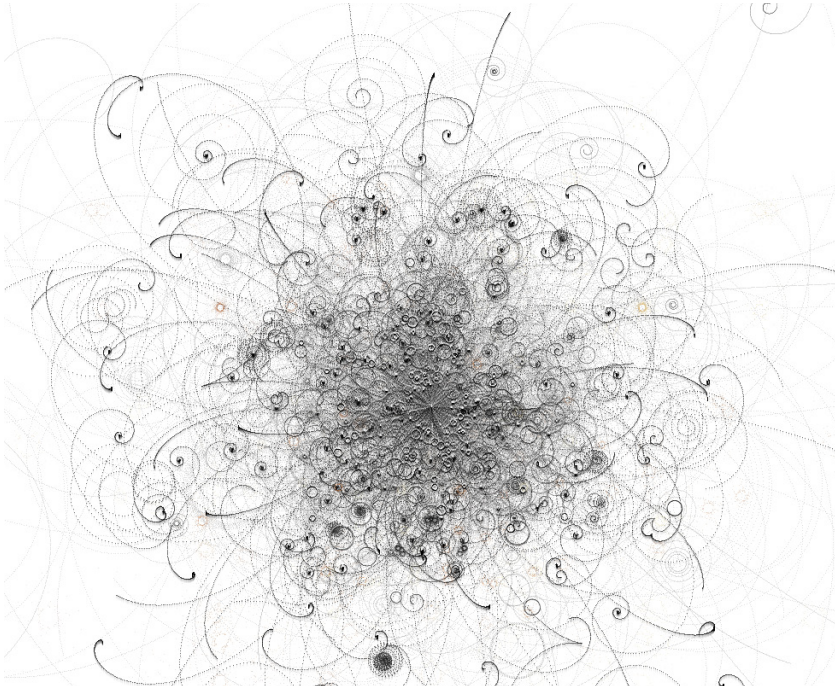
If a compel is accepted by the player, go to the next character (possibly one run by the same player).

Each action requires a 4dF + Skill roll to resolve. Once the dice are on the table, Aspects may be invoked or tagged by all participating players as appropriate. The usual rules for tagging Aspects apply: you may tag only one of each category of Aspect except for free-taggable Aspects, of which you may tag as many as are available. A tagged or invoked Aspect adds 2 to the roll or allows a re-roll.

During the Aspect tagging, the caller will offer all players any spin that's on the table in order to improve their rolls. It can be spent to add one to a roll.

Once all negotiable dice modifications are complete, the caller announces the resolution of the roll (who won) and directs the appropriate player to narrate the result. The authority to narrate depends upon the action declared.

When all players have had a turn, the caller then checks a box on the time track and determines whether the victory conditions have been met. If there is a victory, he announces it and hands control to the referee. If there is no victory, he begins the next turn.



8. platoon combat

It was the third day of low-level bombardment from an enemy we never saw, and we had been out of radio contact for a week. The borders had shifted so many times that our HQ on this backwater was now occupied territory. Our only orders had told us to hold the pass against any assault, and so we were staying. In the rain, in the cold, on a world none of us had visited before, waiting for extraction. The narrows were mined so we didn't even have to pull a trigger, and as the bombs went off, the explosions would echo through the canyon. Debris might also set off a mine. More explosions, more echoes. Ripples from many splashes intersecting on an otherwise tranquil pond. As forward observer, I saw our targets first, and it was I who signaled to the platoon the precise distance of the approaching foe. A string of jeeps, apparently unarmed, and marked with the colours of the local Gibson militia.

It was going to be a massacre, and I grinned as I phoned it in.

Sometimes characters in *Diaspora* get swept up in events larger than themselves. The space combat game allows characters to travel and to control huge arsenals battling off world. If characters get caught up in geopolitics, it might revert to the social combat game, whereby the characters attempt to persuade system leaders to accomplish their aims. But not all problems can be solved by words.

The rules for platoon-scale wargaming are provided in *Diaspora* for campaigns that want to focus on military combat. Perhaps the players are old army buddies, offering their services to their planet's defense. Perhaps a heavily balkanized world is enlisting off-worlders to fight their battles for them. Perhaps the characters are a mercenary strike team, performing short-term contracts for anyone willing to pay. Whatever the

Military Organization

Organizational units vary from army to army, and from world to world, but it might help to think in terms of the following.

A team is composed of 2-5 soldiers or a single vehicle. The team is the basic unit of platoon-scale combat, and is represented on the map by a single figure.

A squad is composed of 1-3 teams, and is commanded by a Sergeant or a Corporal.

A platoon is composed of 2-6 teams, under the command of a Lieutenant.

A company is composed of 3-5 platoons, under the command of a Captain. A company is the largest unit to be controlled by a single player.

A battalion is composed of 2-6 companies, under the command of a Lieutenant Colonel. An engagement of two battalions is at the extreme end of what can be modeled in Platoon-scale combat in *Diaspora*.

story, it is easy to imagine combats where the scale of personal combat is simply inadequate: when there are too many individuals active in battle, platoon scale provides opportunities for incorporating infantry, artillery, armour and aircraft units in a ground war.

Some campaigns may choose to build around this sort of encounter, with the story effectively moving the characters from one mercenary ticket to the next with each game session. Others might never need these rules, but will be able to use them to model robbing an armoured vehicle. Whatever the application, the rules are provided as a means of representing something that could also be done within the existing *Diaspora* mechanisms. Operating at the platoon scale becomes an option that is available for those tables that want it.

For infantry units, platoon scale represents combat between teams of 2-5 soldiers organized into platoons of 2-6 teams; an armour platoon might be 4 or 5 tanks. Individual characters can improve a platoon's performance, but, as in space combat, an individual can only modify the performance of the larger unit. The principles of *FATE* still apply, of course, and (as is common in *Diaspora*), they have been stripped down. At the platoon scale, there is only a single stress track: morale. If a platoon loses morale, it can no longer function. Whether it has lost morale because of its ongoing frustration with lack of supply lines, because of the constant pressure of close enemy fire, or simply because most of the platoon has been killed, *Diaspora* models the only crucial variable of loss at the platoon scale along the axis of morale. How that story becomes interpreted is a question for the table and the larger narrative.

As with the other mini-games, platoon-scale wargaming can be played independent of the larger *Diaspora* RPG.

The organizational unit of interest is the platoon, which is a number of single units, one of which is a leader, all in communication. The only stress track that will be marked is the Morale stress track of individual units.

In most games, players will control either a single platoon, or (as is more usual when used as a stand-alone game) a company of 3-5 platoons.

the map

The map is constructed like the maps described in the section on personal combat (see Chapter 5, Personal Combat), with a few differences.

There are many more zones: you want at least a zone per unit, so a platoon engagement might have 10 or more zones.

A regular grid is less effective than irregular shaped zones reflecting the contours of the landscape. Irregular shapes allow access to a greater number of neighbouring zones.

Altitude is marked for determination of line-of-sight.

Each zone has a center mark.

Difficult terrain (e.g. forest, swamp) is represented with smaller zones; easy terrain (plains, roads) with larger zones.

A Re-arm track of six boxes exists on the side of the map to manage aircraft availability.

line of sight

Because we want to empower indirect fire units (artillery), we need ways to block line of sight (LOS). To this end each zone is marked with a center point (which need not be exactly in the center, but close is good) that contains a number representing the altitude. Base level should be zero, and increment up or down one or two. No need to go crazy. The guideline is as follows.

If you draw a line between your zone's center mark and your target zone's center mark and that line is obstructed by a zone with a higher altitude than your zone, LOS is blocked. You may only engage this unit with indirect fire.

If the target zone is lower than yours and you draw a line between your zone's center mark, LOS is blocked when that line is obstructed by a zone with the same or higher altitude than your zone. You may only engage this unit with indirect fire.

Things

Platoon-scale combat requires a bit more mechanical representation than the other mini-games. You will need the following:

Miniatures or unit counters

Paper or whiteboard (for the map)

String or a long ruler (for line-of-sight examination)

Fate point counters (~6 per platoon—poker chips are good)

Spin counters (~5 total—a different colour poker chip)

Spotting counters (~10 per platoon—poker chips placed under the miniature work best)

OOC counters (~10 per platoon—again, poker chips under the miniature are very tidy)

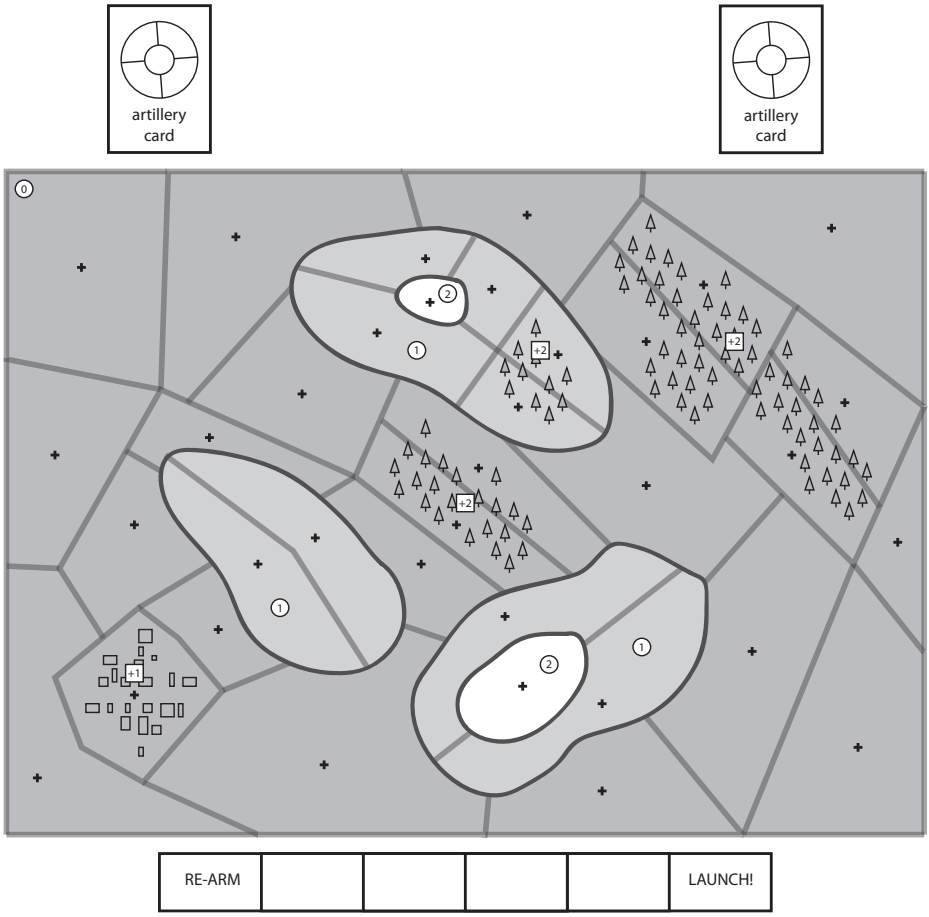
Platoon Acted markers (1 per platoon—a glass bead or just pencil marks on the map)

Artillery battery zones can be just a sheet of regular paper kept to the side of the main map

Miniatures represent individual units, which may be any of a number of types. Since not everyone will have small-scale combat minis, 3cm squares of cardboard with a little picture drawn on them (a guy for an infantry unit, a tank for an Armour unit, a big gun for an artillery Unit, and a plane for an aircraft unit) can serve just as well. Units within the same platoon can be labeled A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, etc. These codes can be tied to the unit stat sheet. An L can be written on the unit which contains the platoon leader (or the leader can always be the first number: A1, B1…).

You can always fire into an adjacent zone.

Some terrain features block line of sight but not through elevation (a forest or a town, for example). If you want to model these features, give each zone an altitude as normal, but for zones with blocking terrain add another number indicating the effective altitude for tracing LOS though it. For example, a forest at altitude 1 might be marked as 1 (+2). When tracing LOS through this zone, it has effective altitude 3. When tracing LOS into or out of this zone (that is, tracing from the unit itself or the ground level), its altitude is 1.



This rule works best if raised terrain (like the hills in the example above) have zone divisions along their ridge lines as this prevents firing across the ridge to terrain below on the opposite side.

Each unit may be in only one zone at a time, and a zone may contain any number of units. The system does not represent where within the zone a given unit is located.

zone aspects

Zones may have Aspects on them at the start of the session.

A terrain icon drawn on the map is an implicit Aspect and may be tagged normally.

pass values

While generally mobility is well modeled by the size of the zone and possibly by adding an Aspect, it may be the case that a border has features that intrinsically limit mobility (a low wall, for example). In this case apply a pass value and a direction in which the pass value applies. Pass values are not eroded—they must be exceeded in order to continue through in the direction they specify. Shifts spent on passing through a border with a pass value do not count against maximum movement.

When working with pass values, always consider whether it is more effective to model the terrain with a simple Aspect. Simply placing the Aspect, "Raging river!" on river zones would attract compels that are much more interesting. Also, keep in mind that just making zones small intrinsically impedes movement, providing a third way to model difficult terrain.

Some actions work by placing pass values, allowing the ability to funnel enemy movement in certain directions or into specific zones with finer granularity than placing Aspects provides.

aircraft re-arm track

If aircraft are used in the scenario, add a re-armament track: six boxes with the first labeled "RE-ARM" and the last labeled "LAUNCH!"

artillery battery zones

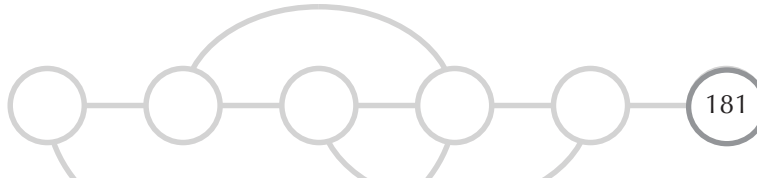
Artillery that are represented off map should be placed in a zone on an artillery card created and placed at the side of the map. If the artillery is capable of operating at range from their leader, the artillery card can have multiple zones and one unit placed in each.

Units on an artillery card can move from zone to zone on the card in the same way as they would on the main map, but they cannot move onto the main map.

command

A platoon is a grouping of units that can be ordered to act by a leadership unit. By default that unit must be in the same zone as the leader, but this may be modified by Stunts. The maximum distance allowed between a unit and its leader in order to maintain membership in the platoon is the unit's command range.

Command range indicates how may zones a unit can be away from its leader and still be in communication with it.



Command range is zero (same zone only) unless modified by a stunt on the leader, the unit, or both. Non-leader units that do not belong to a platoon (are out of command range) may move away from enemy units, may attack enemy units that have fired upon them, and may attempt to unjam and remove Out of Communication (OOC) counters on themselves, but may take no other actions. They have no fate points and do not share a platoon's Consequences. Hits on these units may not be mitigated by a platoon taking a Consequence. Units that become disassociated from their platoon do not change the platoon's fate point total.

Platoon membership is checked at the beginning of the platoon's action.

Units with OOC counters are only part of a platoon membership when in the same zone as the leader unit.

A leader unit with OOC counters disconnects all its platoon members but suffers none of the other restrictions described here.

units

A unit is the minimum element represented on the map for each type: a single miniature or counter. For infantry, that's a team of a few soldiers. For armour that's one vehicle. For artillery that's a battery.

There are four types of team units: infantry, artillery, armour, and aircraft. For each platoon, one unit (which may not be aircraft) is also designated the leader. There is no maximum number of units in a platoon.

Each unit in a platoon grants the platoon one fate point. All fate points are kept on the platoon and spent from the platoon. All Consequences are on the platoon.

Similarly, spin counters are associated with platoons and not with units. They may be spent by any unit in the platoon. Spin expires after having had one complete turn in which to use it (thus if spin is acquired during a defensive roll, it lasts until the end of the platoon's next opportunity to act whereas if it is acquired during movement, say, it lasts until the end of the platoons next opportunity to act and *not* the opportunity in which it moved).

Units that are not normally part of a platoon (typically aircraft) are associated with a particular platoon and donate their fate point to that platoon. They draw fate points from that platoon when invoking, tagging, or compelling.

All units have Skills, Aspects, Stunts, and a Morale stress track. Skills are an n-cap pyramid (*e.g.* one Skill at level three, two Skills at level two, and three Skills at level one) or an n-cap column (*e.g.* one Skill at level four, one Skill at level three, one Skill at level two, and one Skill at level one).

All units have one Aspect and contribute one fate point to their platoon.

Infantry units have a baseline of zero Stunts, plus one Stunt for each technology level. All other units have one Stunt, plus one additional Stunt for each technology level; consequently, units at T-1 or lower do not have Stunts. As described below, the platoon leader always has one additional Stunt, regardless of technology level. No unit may have negative Stunts.

Units have only one stress track: Morale. When a unit takes a hit past the end of its Morale track that cannot (or will not) be mitigated by a platoon Consequence, it

is Taken Out. The narrative associated with this elimination can be determined by the table: it might represent panic and dispersal or surrender; a complete lack of morale is also adequately explained by everyone being killed. Some combination of the three is most likely, but it's your story. Regardless of the story, the mechanical effect at this scale is the same. As with other stress tracks, a hit on a marked box rolls up to the next unmarked box.

infantry

Infantry units represent a small number of individuals of similar or concerted equipment: a unit typically represents 2-5 individuals, though it could be as many as 12. Specific weapons and armour per individual are not modelled except as they are represented in the Skill and Stunt list.

Infantry have a 3-cap Skill pyramid. Infantry units choose one Skill at rank 3, two Skills at rank 2, and three Skills at rank 1. They have a Morale track two boxes long. If the unit has Veteran at rank 1 or 2, the Morale track is three boxes long. If the unit has Veteran at rank 3, the Morale track is four boxes long.

The maximum movement for infantry is two zones. Infantry units may move a maximum of two zones regardless of their movement roll.

armour

Armour units are individual tanks, cars, or other mobile armoured platforms. They represent all of the equipment present on precisely that model of vehicle.

Armour has a 4-cap Skill column. Armour units have one Skill at rank 4, one at rank 3, one at rank 2, and one at rank 1. They have a Morale track one box long. If the unit has Veteran Skill 1 or 2, the Morale track is two boxes long. If the unit has Veteran Skill of 3 or 4, the Morale track is three boxes long.

The maximum movement for armour is four zones. Armour units may move a maximum of four zones regardless of their movement roll result.

artillery

Artillery units are equipment capable of Indirect Fire which are kept off map. They move only in a notional sense insofar as they can roll Movement as a defensive roll against counter-battery detection and Indirect Fire. Infantry-based artillery (such as mortar or grenade launcher crews) should be represented by including an Indirect Fire Skill on an infantry unit. Artillery batteries that need to be represented on the map for purposes of the scenario should be represented by their attending personnel as lightly armed infantry units.

It can be handy to create an off-map artillery card for artillery platoons, especially if they have a command range greater than one. This will greatly simplify aircraft attacks on the artillery platoon.

Artillery has a 3-cap Skill column. Artillery units have one Skill at rank 3, one at rank 2, and one at rank 1. Their Morale track is two boxes long. If the unit has Veteran Skill 1 or 2, the Morale track is three boxes long. If the unit has veteran Skill 3, then the Morale track is four boxes long.

Artillery may make Movement rolls to change position on their battery card if there is more than one zone on the card. Moving artillery units do not remove SPOTTED markers, however.

Artillery can only fire on targets that are in line-of-sight to a friendly unit that is currently attached to a platoon (or does not need to be) and has no Out Of Communications (OOC) counters.

All artillery units in the same platoon are considered to be in the same zone as their leader for purposes of command and communication, and for purposes of any attacks by aircraft that affect all targets in a single zone, unless they have a Stunt that allows a greater command range. All members of an artillery platoon not situated on the map must be on the same artillery card (they cannot be spread over multiple cards). Not all units in an artillery platoon need to actually be artillery units (there might be an infantry leader unit supplying comms and other coverage and an armour unit supplying AA for example).

Non-artillery units in an artillery platoon must be in the off-map artillery card in order to be associated with the platoon. This means that, although the leader unit might be represented by something other than artillery (an armour or infantry unit might be more advantageous) it will gain no advantages from its mobility on the map.

aircraft

Aircraft are independent units and therefore require no leader unit. They also move differently from other units: an aircraft unit may place itself on any zone on the map when its turn to act comes up.

Aircraft are automatically spotted when they are on the map.

Aircraft movement is different from other units:

- Aircraft begin on the LAUNCH! box of the Re-arm track.
- While on the Re-arm track, an aircraft unit may make Movement rolls to progress along the track.
- An aircraft on the LAUNCH! box at the beginning of its turn may be placed on any zone on the map. Its turn is now over.
- Once an aircraft acts while on the map (usually in the turn after it has moved there), it is returned to the RE-ARM box of the Re-arm track.
- An aircraft unit on the map may act as any other unit except that it may not make a Movement roll.

Aircraft have a 4-cap Skill column. Aircraft units have one Skill at rank 4, one at rank 3, one at rank 2, and one at rank 1. They have a Morale track one box long. If the unit has Veteran Skill 1 or 2, the Morale track is two boxes long. If the unit has veteran Skill 3 or 4, then the Morale track is three boxes long.

The maximum movement for aircraft is zero zones as they are not represented on the map. Aircraft units do not move on the map in the same fashion as ground units and so do not make Movement rolls except to decrease their re-arm time.

Aircraft increase range by 1 for all distance calculations (both against them and against other targets).

Aircraft can only be attacked by the Anti-air Skill.

leadership

Each platoon has one, and only one, leader unit. An infantry, armour, or artillery unit can be designated a leader.

A leader unit may perform an action in addition to its normal action. It may, therefore, make two actions in a turn.

Leaders have one Stunt chosen from the leadership Stunts list in addition to the Stunts for their base unit type.

Leaders add two morale boxes to the unit to which they are attached.

The maximum movement for leader units is their base unit's maximum movement.

Leader units contribute one extra fate point to the platoon (one for the leader and one for the base unit).

Leader units have two Aspects—one for the leader and one for the base unit—in addition to "Out of ammo."

skills

All Skills are eligible to be chosen by any unit type.

Anti-air: base roll to inflict harm on aircraft units
Armour: base defensive roll against fire
Camouflage: base roll to avoid detection
Command: base roll to improve (repair) morale
Signals: base roll to jam or unjam a unit's communications
Direct Fire: base roll to inflict harm in line of sight
Hand-to-Hand: base roll to inflict harm in the same zone
Indirect Fire: base roll to inflict harm beyond line of sight (including off map)
Movement: base roll for movement. Units without the movement skill are only capable of advancing a single zone (the one-zone free move) per turn.
Observation: base roll to detect and locate enemy artillery fire
Specialist: a sink Skill that has no mechanical effect, for placing on the pinnacle Skill of a unit that is not designed for the represented forms of combat (example, artillery crews as infantry or a staff convoy as armour).
Veteran: modifier to Morale track

Units may only roll Skills for which they are trained. The only exception is when defending against an opposed roll, in which case the untrained Skill is presumed to be zero. The only case presented here is Armour, though with an appropriate Stunt Camouflage may also qualify.

typical units

Typical infantry Skill tree: Camouflage 3, Direct Fire 2, Observation 2, Armour 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1. Infantry are used to capture and hold territory as well as to provide spotting for heavier units. They have NCOs capable of regrouping broken units and are adept at close combat as well as ranged. They excel at not being seen.

Typical armour Skill tree: Armour 4, Direct Fire 3, Movement 2, Anti-air 1. There are two core types of armour—assault tanks designed to move into heavy fire and attack units spotted by associated infantry, and tank hunters, which would swap Armour and Direct Fire.

Typical artillery Skill tree: Indirect Fire 3, Camouflage 2, Movement 1. Artillery's immediate objective is to destroy spotted enemy equipment. It does so by projecting a huge volume of fire, which makes it suddenly very vulnerable. It offsets this vulnerability by immediately moving and re-hiding.

Typical aircraft Skill tree: Direct Fire 4, Observation 3, Anti-air 2, Movement 1. Aircraft Skill trees are capped by their primary design goal—Direct Fire for ground attack vehicles, Observation for reconnaissance craft, and Anti-air for interceptors. Most aircraft will be capable in all of these. Movement for aircraft indicates their re-arm time—high Movement rates indicate rapid re-arming cycles, trading off for specialty effectiveness such as ground attack or anti-air capability.

stunts

Cavalry: this unit is undersized and overpowered, so its maximum move is increased by one (infantry, armour, or artillery only). Infantry units may take this Stunt multiple times: the unit may be thought to have an intrinsic vehicle for mobility. When taken by an armour unit, the Stunt is designated "Light."

Special forces: this unit is not automatically spotted when it shares a zone with an enemy unit (infantry only).

Wireless: unit is attached to an integrated communications net, increasing command range by 1. May be taken multiple times.

Engineer: may use a successful maneuver roll to use up the free-tag on an enemy-applied Aspect or make two maneuver rolls on the zone it is in instead of the usual one (infantry and armour only).

Guerrilla tactics: attacks from this unit never generate spin for the defender (infantry only).

Highly trained: this unit has one additional morale box.

Infantry carrier: this unit can carry infantry (armour or aircraft only). One infantry unit in the zone can move with this carrying unit (including traversing the Re-arm track for aircraft). The infantry unit cannot act this turn (before or after the move). The unit can begin the game carrying its infantry load. For aircraft, when the aircraft re-enters the map, the infantry is deployed and may act normally; the aircraft may not otherwise act while deploying infantry. Carried infantry do not have to be in the same platoon as the carrier.

Interceptor: if this unit is on the LAUNCH! box, it may enter the map any time an enemy aircraft enters the map and act immediately before the target aircraft can act. It may act only against this target aircraft (aircraft only).

Irregulars: this unit is an irregular non-professional unit (a sink Stunt, chosen only to model a unit that is less effective than other units of the same technology level). Other sink Stunts can be invented to fit the scenario: Slow, to represent a low rate of fire, etc.

Long range: ignores one zone for attack roll range modification. May be taken multiple times.

Orbital: this unit can only be attacked by fire from other orbital units (artillery only). Orbital units that are attacked with the jam action, however, take damage as though attacked with weapons (in addition to the effects of jamming).

Prepared positions: this unit was set up long before the battle (artillery only). Before combat begins, it may add the Aspect of "Locked in" to any two zones on the map. This Aspect can be free-tagged by any allied artillery unit, and remains an Aspect on the zone which may be tagged normally thereafter.

Scatterable mines payload: this unit can deliver area-denial ordnance (mines). Pass values placed by the unit from an interdiction strike are permanent (artillery and aircraft only).

Scout: this unit can continue movement after entering a zone containing enemy units (infantry and armour only).

Skill substitution: With an appropriate narrative, additional Stunts may be designed to allow Skill substitutions. Each unit may only ever have one Skill substitution Stunt. The following are offered as representative examples.

Agile: can use Movement in place of Armour (armour only).

Graphite payload: this unit can deliver payloads designed to interrupt electrical and electromagnetic function (artillery and aircraft only). It may use its Indirect Fire Skill to effect Jam attacks (which would normally use the Signals Skill). Note that this combines with Zone Effect to jam all units in a zone (regardless of owner).

Shoot and scoot: this weapon system is designed to be fired while on the move or to move very soon after firing a mission. It may use its Movement Skill instead of Camouflage (artillery only).

Technology enhancement: increase any Skill by one. This Stunt may be taken at most twice per Skill, for a total bonus of +2.

Stealth technology: designed to hide, this unit can use Camouflage in place of Armour (armour only).

VTOL: this unit is designed to stay on target—once on the map it may remain, moving a maximum of 1 zone (its free move) per turn (aircraft only).

Zone effect: this unit may attack *all* units in the target zone with one roll at -2 (armour, artillery, or aircraft only). Units do not need to be spotted to be attacked in this fashion.

leadership stunts

Each platoon leader additionally chooses one of the following four Stunts.

Battlefield genius: units can be one zone further from the Leader than otherwise allowed.

Logistics genius: units in platoon do not have the "Out of ammo" Aspect.

Tactical genius: units in platoon ignore one extra zone of range when attacking.

Not a genius: sink Stunt for crap commanders.

stress tracks

All units have a single stress track, Morale. A platoon may take Consequences to mitigate hits past the end of the track on a unit. A platoon has three Consequences to allocate and each can mitigate one shift (mild), two (medium), or four (severe). As is standard in *FATE*, a platoon Consequence becomes an Aspect and may be free-tagged once or compelled or tagged normally to affect any unit in the platoon.

- Infantry units have a base Morale stress track of two boxes.
- Armour units have a base Morale stress track of one box.
- Artillery units have a base Morale stress track of two boxes.
- Aircraft units have a base Morale stress track of one box.

Unit Morale tracks are modified by the unit's Veteran skill. Leader units also gain a bonus to Morale.

- Leader units increase the base Morale stress track by two.
- Units with Veteran 1 or Veteran 2 increase their Morale stress track by one.
- Units with Veteran 3 or Veteran 4 increase their Morale stress track by two.
- Units with Veteran 5 or Veteran 6 increase their Morale stress track by three.
- Some stunts may further alter the length of the Morale stress track.

aspects

All units have one descriptive Aspect chosen by the owner and add one fate point to their platoon. All units also have the Aspect "Out of ammo." A unit, when spending fate points, expends platoon fate points. When a unit gains a fate point through a compel, that fate point belongs to the platoon.

the sequence

The Sequence proceeds in a fixed order around the table, with each player acting for each of her units in whatever order she prefers. The Sequence order is best left simple and static—clockwise from the person on the left of the caller, say.

Identify a player to act as caller. The caller manages the Sequence.

The player currently acting is the Actor.

Each player in turn selects a platoon under his command that has not acted and checks its units for platoon membership. For each unit that is part of the platoon, perform an action. Finally, mark the platoon Acted. Each unit that acts performs some bookeeping tasks (reducing jam counters by one and clearing old interdiction markers). Units that are not in platoon membership can move one free move into any zone that does not contain enemy units, or fire on an enemy unit that fired on them, or unjam, or camouflage. If an unmembered unit is in command range of another platoon's leader, it may be adopted by that platoon. No fate points are added, no Consequences are transferred: all that happens is the unit is added to the adopting platoon.

When every player has had a chance to act with every platoon under his command, the turn is complete. So basically players are alternating platoons until the turn is done. The order of platoon selection is up to the players. The first player to act is the defending player. If the scenario has no logical defender, flip a coin.

A turn is a set of cycles through the sequence such that every player has had an opportunity to move every platoon under his control.

move

Roll Movement and move the number of shifts, up to the maximum movement permitted.

If your movement places you in (or passes through) the same zone as an enemy unit, both you and it gain a SPOTTED marker of value 3 and the moving unit ceases movement.

For artillery, roll Movement against a SPOTTED marker value and reduce its value by the number of shifts.

For aircraft units, move the number of shifts along the Re-arm track.

Aircraft on their LAUNCH! box may be placed (without a roll) on any zone on the map or any battery zone off the map. Aircraft in a battery zone may be attacked exactly as spotted artillery, though only with Anti-aircraft Skills from a unit on the same artillery card as the spotted artillery unit.

If movement takes a unit out of line-of-sight from all enemy units, reduce any SPOTTED markers by one.

For each zone that a unit enters during its movement, an enemy may compel it to halt in that zone.

Moving is not affected by range or line of sight.

Compelling Movement

The objective of the rule that makes you pause for a compel after every zone moved is to more closely model terrain effects and tactical "funneling" by increasing vulnerability in long moves. This also makes ambushes work really well if planned effectively in appropriate terrain—even though the enemy knows your "hidden" units are there, he has to pay in-story currency (fate points) to flee past a choke point safely or get fate points to stop there and take the ambush the *player* knows is coming. This careful use of the player/character distinction is tricky but fun.

march formation

A platoon leader may choose to march his platoon in formation. He makes one Movement roll and may move all of the units in his zone up to the maximum movement rate of the slowest unit in the zone. All of these units have now acted.

attack

Add a SPOTTED marker to the attacking unit to a maximum of four.

Roll your appropriate attack Skill against enemy Armour Skill on any unit with a SPOTTED marker, counting shifts as damage. Subtract range to target. Add the minimum range of the attack type (zero for hand-to-hand, one for direct fire, two for indirect fire). -3 shifts gains spin for the defender.

This extra arithmetic is basically saying that the range count, for purposes of modifying the attack roll, starts (as zero) at the minimum range of the weapon.

Indirect Fire may not act at range zero or 1. Direct Fire may not act at range zero. Hand-to-Hand may ONLY attack at range zero. Anti-air may attack at any range but recall that all ranges from ground to aircraft are increased by one. Range from aircraft to aircraft are counted normally. Artillery attacks targets without range modification. Attacks on artillery in an off-map "battery zone" are at an effective range of 10 zones when attacked by on-map units.

Before marking shifts as damage, the shifts may be reduced by applying Consequences. A platoon can have a maximum of three Consequences: one mild, which

can reduce incoming shifts by one; one medium, which can reduce incoming shifts by two; and one severe, which can reduce incoming shifts by four. A Consequence is a free-taggable Aspect on the platoon. A platoon may have no more than three Consequences—one of each type.

A hit that would mark a box past the end of the unit's Morale track takes out that unit.

Attacking is affected by range and line of sight.

Remember that the defending roll, after modifications by invokes, stays on the table for the turn!

interdict

Select a target zone. Roll your appropriate attack Skill against target zero. Subtract range to target zone. Distribute shifts as pass values on any border for that zone (thus 4 shifts could place a pass value 2 on two borders, 4 on one border, 1 on 4 borders, or any other combination). Interdiction lasts until the beginning of the attacker's next turn. Interdiction attacks grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks.

Interdiction is affected by range and by line of sight.

rally

Roll Command against highest Morale track hit to repair track hits by shifts (as repair on spacecraft). Can roll against any unit in the platoon.

Rally is not affected by range or line of sight.

jam

Roll Signals against another unit's Signals. For each shift generated, place an OOC counter on the attacked unit. Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. Note that this attack is especially effective against a leader unit.

Jamming is not affected by range or line of sight. Targets need not be spotted.

Units can have no more than four OOC markers.

unjam

Roll Signals against zero and remove the shifts in OOC counters from this unit. If this unit is a leader unit, it may remove OOC counters from members of its platoon.

Unjamming is not affected by range or line of sight. It may be performed by units not currently in platoon membership.

maneuver

Roll any Skill and supply some narration to describe the effect. Subtract range to target zone. Success places an Aspect on a zone. The Aspect is free-taggable once by an allied unit. Use maneuvers to model artillery cratering ("Cratered"), forward observation ("Laser designation"), covering fire ("Keeping our heads down"), and so on.

Maneuvers that use Direct Fire, Indirect Fire, or Hand-to-Hand grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks of those types.

Maneuvers cannot be used to place an Aspect on a unit. They can only be used

to place Aspects on a zone.

Maneuvers are affected by range but not line of sight. The table has to agree that the story works despite the range and line of sight facts, however.

Permanent Aspects are Aspects that affect a zone directly. This includes things like "Cratered roadway," "Forest fire," and so on.

Transient Aspects are Aspects that derive from the continuous action of an individual. "Targeting laser," "Covering fire," and so on. Transient Aspects last only until the placing unit acts again, though it may use the Aspect in this last turn of its existence.

The caller determines whether an Aspect is permanent or transient.

spot

Roll Observation against Camouflage for any artillery that has fired or any other unit in line of sight. Place a SPOTTED marker on the unit including the number of shifts (or a SPOTTED token for each shift if you're using glass beads or coins or similar). Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. If the unit already has a SPOTTED marker, increase it by the number of shifts.

Spotting is not affected by range but is affected by line of sight.

Units can have no more than four SPOTTED markers.

cover

Roll Camouflage against a target value of zero and reduce any SPOTTED markers on the unit by the number of shifts achieved.

Covering is not affected by range or line of sight. It may be performed by units not currently in platoon membership.

limitations

You may not use the same Skill for your action that was used in defense (unless allowed by a Stunt).

SPOTTED

You can't kill it if you don't know where it is. We assume that everyone starts out hidden, so rather than model stealth we model being spotted and stealth takes care of itself.

Hence the SPOTTED marker. You can't shoot anything that doesn't have a SPOTTED marker, though you can attack the zone (with the Zone Effect stunt) or attempt to spot.

Attack actions are restricted to units that have been spotted. All other actions can proceed without having a spotted target.

SPOTTED markers are eroded by successful attempts to hide (Camouflage) or by moving while out of line-of-sight.

SPOTTED markers are gained by enemy activity ("Spot" observation) or by firing your weapons.

SPOTTED markers might be a stack of chips under the unit (one per spotted value) or glass beads touching the model or a paper chit with the number written on it. As the value will go up and down, an easy way to record this change is the only driving requirement beyond identifying the value with a particular unit.

damage

When playing a fast game with many units, any hit past the end of a track removes the unit (it is just Taken Out). Prior to determining the Taken Out result, hits may be mitigated with platoon Consequences. A platoon can have a maximum of three Consequences, exactly as player characters and spacecraft: one mild, which can reduce incoming shifts by one; one medium, which can reduce incoming shifts by two; and one severe, which can reduce incoming shifts by four. Platoon Consequences are also Aspects that are effectively on all units of the platoon. They may be free-tagged once.

sample consequences

Unit Tango Alpha is on fire!
We'll all miss Captain Billy.
How do I get out of this chicken-shit outfit?!

characters

A character may be associated with any unit. While more than one character can be associated with a single unit, for playability it helps to assign characters to different units, to allow players something to control during the game. A single character miniature can have his base touching the associated unit base for representation, but it is easier just to note which character is associated with which unit separately. The player character moves with the unit. If the unit is destroyed, the player character is no longer involved in the combat (he's gone to ground, run off, or dead—let the player narrate his character's outcome).

Each character associated with a unit may, however, amplify one Skill of the unit. The player may choose which Skill gets amplified based on the following list:

Anti-air: amplified by MG Slug Thrower, MG Energy Weapons, or Gunnery
Armour: amplified by Tactics
Camouflage: amplified by Stealth or Survival
Command: amplified by Tactics, Intimidation, or Oratory
Signals: amplified by Communications
Direct Fire: amplified by Slug Thrower or Energy Weapons
Hand-to-Hand: amplified by Brawling or Close Combat
Indirect Fire: amplified by Gunnery or Demolitions
Movement: amplified by Tactics or Vehicle
Observation: amplified by Alertness
Veteran: amplified by Resolve

Example: Sonja hasn't served on a tank crew since she had been drafted during Aratea's fight for independence, but here she was again, helping these low-tech schmucks find their way free of the Consortium. Sonja has Tactics 4 and Vehicle 1, and the T0 Striker Assault Tank she is with has Direct Fire 4, Armour 3, Indirect Fire 2, Movement 1. Because her Vehicle Skill is the same as the Tank's movement,

there is no effect. Her Tactics training, however, can potentially amplify either the Tank's Armour or its Movement. She knows they are up against infantry, and so she chooses to amplify Movement, giving the tank an effective Movement 2 as it begins its assault.

While the Skill amplification will improve overall performance, the primary value of a character attached to a unit is that the character retains his own fate points—that unit may use either platoon fate or the character's fate to compel, invoke, or react to compels.

Characters do not act at a scale relevant to platoon scale combat, but they may use their turn to perform maneuvers that place Aspects on zones or units.

wargaming

creating scenarios

Units of the same technology level should be roughly balanced unless you deliberately take sink Stunts or Skills.

When constructing scenarios you will want a way to weigh the effectiveness of different units. This system has been designed so that a unit is roughly equal to any other unit, the exception being leader units, which are the equivalent of two normal units. Units of differing technology levels are different in power but not hugely so—they differ by a small number of Stunts. Depending on Stunts taken, a good rule of thumb is that each difference in technology is about 25% more unit power.

Within the context of the RPG, scenarios will often be unbalanced, with the players struggling to make do given the odds as determined by the situation in which they have found themselves.

As a stand-alone wargame, though, some approximations of balance are possible. Nevertheless, we recommend that, above all, you run a scenario that's interesting. Create units and organizations with a story and an engagement with a purpose and it doesn't matter a ton who wins it—the simulation will be fun either way. It might even be the case that victory conditions can be created or modified as the game progresses, or even at the end. The victor is the side that achieves its purpose. Revisit victory frequently during the game—the story may change! An ambush might be won and become a pursuit which is lost. A breakthrough that starts going especially well for the runners might turn into a meeting engagement, or even an opportunity to secure objectives.

As a wargame, progress can even be determined by an arbitrary time limit. Set a number of turns after which victory will be evaluated. At this time, the game is over. If you want to continue (perhaps with new objectives!), set a new timer and perhaps allow some reinforcements in. Six to ten turns should be plenty.

purpose

Engagements come in a limited number of forms. By all means, dream up your own scenario from whole cloth, but you may find these categories useful for setting the scene.

meeting engagement

Roughly equal forces meet by accident or intent on the field and engage to destroy. Armies start on opposite sides of a map.

pursuit

A small force is pursued by an equal or superior force. The small force wishes to disengage. The large force wishes to destroy. Armies start with the pursuing force on one edge and the pursued force near the middle-ish. You want a long map for this. The more units the pursued force gets off the map, the better.

breakthrough

A dug-in force attempts to keep another force from disengaging. The disengaging force needs to get most of its units through or get special units through. Start with the blockade force setting up in the middle of the map and the runners on one edge. They must exit the opposite edge with their objective units intact.

ambush

A strong force has entered the region to patrol and is surprised by an inferior but entrenched force. Set up as Breakthrough but balance units differently (patrol is stronger), and give defensive advantages (Aspects on zones or units). The ambushers should win by inflicting lots of harm and then escaping. The patrol wins by surviving the ambush and destroying the ambushers.

objectives

Designate a number of objectives on the map—perhaps towns or hilltops. Start with equal forces on opposite edges of the map. Win by having units on most objectives at the end. You can mix this with many of the previous scenario designs (especially Meeting Engagement and Ambush).

design notes

As this is intended for use as a wargame, lacking a referee, core design principles are consistency, coverage, and symmetry. When a referee is assumed, there is great leeway in designing rules to simply say "wing it," and while that's powerful and useful in that context, it won't work here. We want the rules to be clear, well covered, and obeying general principles with sufficient consistency that a rule can be guessed and will generally be guessed correctly. Or at least playably.

This has driven choices like:

- Actions generally have specific Skills associated with them
- Rolls that do not generate additional advantage beyond success (or that generate limited advantage) generate spin (previously only defensive rolls qualified, but the reason they qualified was because they do nothing additional when they succeed exceptionally, which was asymmetrical with the attacker).

tactics

One of the chief sources of tactical pressure, aside from the obvious one of move and fire, is the choice of unit action order. The actor must elect to act with specific units in an order he prefers, but counter-activity or action results may have cascading effects on remaining unit action.

For example, it might be obvious to lead an action by moving the platoon leader. In this fashion the Actor knows exactly how far each unit must move in order to stay inside the platoon's communication envelope. This is a good, careful process. However, the enemy may elect to compel this move, which basically means halting or slowing progress of the entire platoon. That's a no-brainer to pay fate points for, which makes it a fate point sink. On the other hand, moving the leader last could wind up with a bad Movement roll, stranding the whole platoon too far from the leader unit. This is basically a manifestation of social pressure and initiative which is complicated and involves player-level psychology as well as game tactics. This is good.

Similarly, jamming leader units is time well spent—successfully suppressing the leader will disconnect the entire platoon. This will then drive unit design—the leader unit or his associated ride (recall that the leader can defend with either his or his ride's Skills) will likely be burdened with defensive Signals Skills in order to resist these attacks.

simulation through aspects

Smoke? A maneuver to place the Aspect "Smoky" on a zone. Cratering charges? A maneuver to place the Aspect "Cratered" on a zone. Time sensitivity is often sufficiently modeled by the free-tag mechanism—smoke is only especially effective the first time it's tagged; thereafter it's another source of advantage at normal cost.

Another simulation effect that Aspects can create is the idea of a forced move. If you want an enemy unit out of a zone, there is no mechanism that forces him to do so. This is because we want to retain as much player autonomy as possible: everything should be a choice. So make him choose: with as many units as you can muster, use maneuvers to pile free-taggable Aspects on his zone. Now he has to choose between leaving the zone and sitting in the same place as a potentially massive free bonus to an attack roll. Either choice has a great story.

balance decisions

Game design strains between simulation integrity and a fun game. Fortunately, in symmetric warfare there is some intrinsic balance that suits both goals. In asymmetric warfare, we are deliberately choosing simulation over game play but can adjust objective values to make up for it (that is, an incredibly weak side can "win" by running out a timer to save fictional compatriots, even though they are all eliminated). That said, there is some unit relationship balance that is more game than simulation.

These balancing ideas roughly follow the rock-paper-scissors principle, which is basically the idea that every unit type should have some important function and should be defeatable by some other unit type. No single unit type should dominate: if you go all armour, infantry will kick your ass. If you go all artillery, aircraft will cut you up. And so on.

The balancing relationship between unit types is as follows:

Infantry is intended to be flexible, capable of adequately subsuming multiple roles. An observation unit can also be a credible anti-air threat and be adept at re-hiding. An assault unit can also be a credible defensive unit.

Armour is intended to be dedicated and reactive. They do a couple of things ex-

tremely well and will generally suck up one Skill slot for Movement just to take advantage of their intrinsically high speed limit.

Artillery is intended to do lots of harm but be vulnerable to reactive attacks from other artillery. It is also intentional that aircraft are the bane of artillery in all cases. A configuration that includes artillery has to consider the possibility of enemy air power and dedicate some counter-measure or they will get their artillery cleared.

Aircraft are intended to do periodic but precise and devastating harm. They are highly vulnerable while on the map (always spotted, always in line of sight), again by design, but also extremely precise in their deployment while there (range 1 to any target they choose to kill). Countering aircraft requires deployment of specific equipment: either other aircraft or AA capable units. Putting a little AA capacity in all infantry is a good buy.

sample units

t3 marine infantry and support

a. marine platoon

3x marine infantry team
1x marine heavy weapons team
1x marine command team
Platoon fate: 6 fp

The marine platoon consists of three fire teams of marines with powered armour and energy weapons complemented by a heavy weapons team equipped with powered armour and several BVR (Beyond Visual Range) and indirect weapons options. These teams are directed by a marine command team that is essentially a standard fire team with some of the more vicious hand-to-hand equipment replaced with communications gear. All weapons are powered from power plants embedded in the infantry armour, giving effectively unlimited ammunition. These platoons are fast and versatile and very dangerous customers.

Marine infantry team (T3 infantry)
Direct Fire 3, Armour 3, Hand-to-Hand 2, Movement 1, Observation 1, Signals 1
Morale OO
Command range: 1
Cavalry: maximum move is 3
Wireless: command range +1
Technology enhancement: increase Armour by 1
Crushing dissidents one planet at a time

Marine heavy weapons team (T3 infantry)
Indirect Fire 3, Armour 3, Direct Fire 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Movement 1, Signals 1
Morale OO
Command range: 1
Cavalry: maximum move is 3

Wireless: command range +1
Technology enhancement: increase Armour by 1
Overkill

Marine command team (T3 infantry leader)
Direct Fire 3, Signals 3, Command 2, Armour 2, Movement 1, Observation 1
Morale OOO O
Cavalry: maximum move is 3
Technology enhancement: increase Armour by 1
Technology enhancement: increase Signals by 1
Logistics genius: platoon units do not have "Out of ammo"
Enthusiastic supporter of the current regime
Directed from orbit

b. gremlin platoon

2x armoured Gremlin launchers
2x forward observer infantry teams
1x Gremlin HQ team
Platoon fate: 6 fp

The Gremlin team is an indirect guided missile system consisting of an extremely sophisticated communications system (well capable of offensive jamming) tied to an HQ vehicle, a pair of stealthy vehicles designed primarily as a launch-and-run platform, and a pair of infantry squads who locate and paint targets. The infantry units typically deploy on high ground in order to command as much of the battlefield as possible while the armour units deploy behind the ridge line out of sight. The infantry calls in fire missions while painting targets with cryptographically modulated non-visible lasers. The Gremlin launchers fire a swarm of small armour-piercing missiles which ride the observer's laser with staggering accuracy, and leave the vicinity as rapidly as possible.

Gremlin launcher (T3 armour)
Indirect Fire 4, Camouflage 3, Movement 2, Anti-air 1
Morale: O
Command range: 2
Wireless: command range +1
Stealth technology: may use Camouflage instead of Armour
Zone effect: unit may attack all units in the target zone with a single roll at -2
Long range: ignores one zone for range calculation
Missile swarm!
Out of ammo

Forward observer team (T3 infantry)
Observation 4, Camouflage 2, Movement 2, Direct Fire 1, Anti-air 1, Veteran 1
Morale: OOO
Command range: 3

Wireless: increase command range by 1
Wireless: increase command range by 1 more (command range is 2)
Technology enhancement: increase Observation by 1
Eyes of the platoon
Out of ammo

Gremlin HQ (T3 armour leader)
Signals 5, Camouflage 4, Movement 2, Anti-air 1
Morale: OOO O
Stealth Technology: may use Camouflage instead of Armour
Technology enhancement: Signals increased by 1
Technology enhancement: Camouflage increased by 1
Battlefield genius: command range for all units increased by 1
Our radar dish sees everything
We own the airwaves
Out of ammo

c. t2 gauss howitzer battery

2x Gauss Howitzer
1x SAM Infantry Command
Platoon fate: 4 fp

This remote platoon represents an initial emplacement during a surface invasion, establishing a company of three remote Howitzer platoons is a prequel to clear the ground for a full-scale ground assault.

Gauss Howitzer (T2 artillery)
Indirect Fire 3, Movement 2, Veteran 1
Morale OOO
Command range: 1
Shoot and scoot: Unit may use Movement in place of Camouflage
Zone effect: Unit may attack all units in the target zone with a single roll at -2
This far and no further

SAM Command (T2 infantry leader)
Anti-Air 5, Armour 2, Command 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Camouflage 1, Veteran 1
Morale: OOO OO
Battlefield Genius: command range of all units increased by 1
Technology enhancement: taken twice to increase Anti-Air
Nothing gets our guns
Relentless assault

t2 generic units

a. air units

T2 attack drone (T2 aircraft)
Individual unit.
Donates 1fp to its director platoon.
Is affected by Consequences on its leader platoon.
Direct Fire 5, Observation 3, Movement 3, Armour 1
Morale: OO
Highly trained: one extra morale box
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Technology enhancement: +1 Direct Fire
Out of ammo
Kills with robotic glee

b. rocket assisted coilgun platoon

4x RAP Coilguns (artillery)
1x Battery HQ (armour)
Platoon fate: 6 fp

RAP Coilgun (T2 artillery)
Indirect Fire: 4, Movement: 3, Veteran: 1
Morale: OOO
Command range: 1
Technology enhancement: +1 indirect fire
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Shoot and scoot: Unit may use Movement in place of Camouflage
Out of ammo
Infantryman's worst nightmare

Battery HQ (T2 armour leader)
Anti-air: 5, Signals: 4, Movement: 3, Veteran: 1
Morale: OOO O
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Technology enhancement: +1 movement
Technology enhancement: +1 communications
Technology enhancement: +1 anti-air
Out of ammo
In constant motion

c. armour platoon

3x Tanks
1x Command Tank
Platoon fate: 5 fp

Tank (T2 armour)
Armour 4, Direct Fire 4, Movement 3, Anti-Air 1
Morale: O
Command range: 2
Wireless: +1 command range
Technology enhancement: +1 movement
Technology enhancement: +1 direct fire
Out of ammo
Inexorable

Command tank (T2 armour leader)
Armour 4, Signals 4, Movement 3, Direct Fire 2
Morale: OOO
Technology enhancement: +1 Direct Fire
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Technology enhancement: +1 Signals
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Bulletproof
Know this territory well
Out of ammo

d. infantry platoon

3x Infantry team
1x Heavy weapons team
1x Command team
Platoon fate: 6fp

Infantry team (T2 infantry)
Camouflage 3, Direct Fire 2, Observation 2, Armour 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1, Movement 1
Morale: OO
Command range: 1
Cavalry: +1 max movement
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Forward, march!
Out of ammo

Heavy weapons team (T2 infantry)
Direct Fire 3, Camouflage 2, Observation 2, Armour 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1, Movement 1
Morale: OO
Command range: 1
Cavalry: +1 max movement
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Withering crossfire
Out of ammo

Command team (T2 infantry leader)
Signals 3, Camouflage 2, Observation 2, Direct Fire 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1, Movement 1
Morale: OOOO
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Cavalry: +1 max movement
Technology enhancement: +1 Movement
Famous commander
Veteran of a thousand battles
Out of ammo

t1 hovertank platoons

hovertank squadron

3x Hovertanks
1x Hovertank command
Platoon fate: 5 fp

Hovertank (T1 armour)
Movement 4, Direct Fire 3, Armour 2, Observation 1
Morale: O
Command range: 2
Agile: may use Movement as a defense
Wireless: +1 command range.
Speed is my armour
Out of ammo

Hovertank command (T1 armour leader)
Movement 4, Direct Fire 3, Command 2, Armour 1
Morale: OOO
Agile: may use Movement as defense
Combined arms: may use Direct Fire for Indirect Fire
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Advance! Advance! Advance!
Surprise! It's a mortar too!
Out of ammo

t0 generic units

a. air units

Ground attack helicopter (T0 aircraft)
Individual unit.
Donates 1fp to its director platoon.
Is affected by Consequences on its leader platoon.
Direct Fire 4, Observation 3, Movement 2, Armour 1
Morale: O
VTOL: This unit need not return to the RE-ARM box after acting and may take

the "free" 1 zone move each turn it remains on the map.
Out of ammo
Anti-tank specialist

b. heavy howitzer platoon

4x Howitzers (artillery)
1x Battery HQ (armour)
Platoon fate: 6 fp

Howitzer (T0 artillery)
Indirect Fire: 4, Camouflage: 2, Veteran: 1
Morale: OOO
Command range: 1
Technology enhancement: +1 indirect fire
Out of ammo
Infantryman's worst nightmare

Battery HQ (T0 armour leader)
Anti-air: 4, Signals: 3, Movement: 3, Veteran: 1
Morale: OOO O
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Technology enhancement: +1 movement
Out of ammo
In constant motion

c. armour platoon

3x Tanks
1x Command Tank
Platoon fate: 5 fp

Tank (T0 armour)
Armour 4, Direct Fire 3, Movement 2, Anti-Air 1
Morale: O
Command range: 2
Wireless: +1 command range
Inexorable
Out of ammo

Command tank (T0 armour leader)
Armour 4, Signals 3, Move 2, Direct Fire 2
Morale: OOO
Tech advance: +1 direct fire
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Bulletproof
Know this territory well
Out of ammo

d. infantry platoon

3x Infantry team
1x Heavy weapons team
1x Command team
Platoon fate: 6fp

Infantry team (T0 infantry)
Camouflage 3, Direct Fire 2, Observation 2, Armour 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1
Morale: OO
Command range: 1
Forward, march!
Out of ammo

Heavy weapons team (T0 infantry)
Direct Fire 3, Camouflage 2, Observation 2, Armour 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1
Morale: OO
Command range: 1
Withering crossfire
Out of ammo

Command team (T0 infantry leader)
Signals 3, Camouflage 2, Observation 2, Direct Fire 1, Hand-to-Hand 1, Command 1
Morale: OOO O
Battlefield genius: +1 command range
Famous commander
Veteran of a thousand battles
Out of ammo

Upgrading in a Hurry

Because of the way the unit design system works, you can use these generic units as the basis of any higher technology unit if you're in a hurry. Simply add a Stunt from the Stunt list for each technology level above the generic unit that you want to model. When in doubt, use the "Technology enhancement" Stunt to increase one of the unit's primary Skills.

t-3 primitives

primitive platoon

2x Primitive infantry
1x Primitive infantry leader
Command range: 0

Primitive Royal Guard (T-3 infantry leader)
Command 3, Specialist (sink) 2, Camouflage 2, Hand-to-Hand 1, Veteran 1, Movement 1
Morale: OOO OO
Command range: 0
Not a genius
Charge the machine guns!
Crush the sky devils
Out of ammo

Primitive Infantry (T-3 infantry)
Specialist 3, Camouflage 2, Hand-to-Hand 2, Veteran 1, Movement 1, Command 1
Morale: OOO
The chieftain demands blood!
Out of ammo

example: staff blasters!

Every game and every cluster will demand new and exciting equipment. Sometimes an image is enough, and you ask yourself, "How would that work in *Diaspora*?" You start with an idea, in this case an image seen on a t-shirt of a guy in a spacesuit firing a staff-blaster at an octopus-thing in space. Pretty cool, right? But *Diaspora* doesn't have staff-blasters. So we build them as weapons for personal combat using the rules provided in Chapter 9 as a short-range energy weapon. Energy weapons are built from [bp = 1 + 3T] so at T2 that's 7 bp (10 bp at T3).

We start with the concept:

staff blasters

The badge of the Commonwealth is the ceremonial staff blaster, a weapon designed for use in spaceship boarding parties and in hostile environments. The menacing sight of the faceless pressure suit of a Marine shooting at you from a higher deck is enough to convince most enemies to reconsider their profession...or enlist.

The defining concept is range; let's pick 0-1, comparable to a sword indoors but not subject to the one-zone limit out of doors that comes with Close Combat and Brawling weapons. Minimum range 0 costs 4 bp, but maximum range 1 costs -3 bp, for a total of 1 bp for the range. This is a military weapon, so no need for the Civilian Stunt: you'll need MG to use a staff blaster. Low recoil is free for energy weapons, and no other Stunts are relevant, so at T2 we still have 6 bp. That could translate into Harm 3, or Pen 6. We want this to be fierce and accurate, but we expect our Commonwealth Marines to be using these weapons against armour, where the payoff is significantly better. So we split the difference: 6 bp buys Harm 2, Penetration 2, which means the weapon is capable of cutting through low-level armour like butter.

At T3 there are 10 bps. We decide that the technology increase is capable of slightly greater range (0-2, 2 bp), and increased penetration (Penetration 4, 4 bp). This makes a significant impact against the strongest armour types.

Energy Weapon

T2 Staff Blaster	Range 0-1, Penetration 2, Harm 2	Low recoil
T3 Staff Blaster	Range 0-2, Penetration 4, Harm 2	Low recoil

So there's something we could use for a Marine garrison in the personal combat game, or during a boarding mission, armed with combat hazard suits. That would

mean marines have two MG Stunts, one for EVA, one for Energy Weapons. We could imagine a Skill tree and write some Aspects (see chapter 4, NPCs).

3 – MG Energy Weapons
2 – MG EVA, MicroG
1 – Resolve, Endurance, Profession: Marine
Aspects: *"Dead or alive, you're coming with me"; Overdue for shore leave*

These are not guys you want to mess around with!

Now let's say we want to play the platoon game. As always, it starts with a story we want to tell. How would staff-blaster guys work on land? They are close-combat fighters, so we imagine no AA, no Indirect Fire, no Direct Fire: the offense is all Hand-to-Hand. We might have an image of a silhouette appearing through an inhospitable thick orange atmosphere, followed by another, and then two more, slowly advancing and claiming new turf.

hostile environment platoon

> *Why the Commonwealth wants this rock, I'll never know. But inch by inch we take it, stepping through the toxic soup of an atmosphere, unseen until our enemy is right on top of us. We take this ground, and we hold it.*

We start by designing the infantry unit. Skills are chosen that fit the concept, even though that limits what the group will be able to do.

Commonwealth Marine (T2 Infantry)
Hand-to-Hand 3, Armour 2, Camouflage 2, Veteran 1, Signals 1, Command 1
Morale OOO
Maximum movement: 1 (free move only)
Command range: 1 zone
Special forces: not automatically detected when they share a zone with the enemy.
Wireless: +1 effective range to platoon leader.
Anywhere, anytime

Hand-to-Hand represents the staff blasters, Armour and Camouflage the defensive abilities; all the level 1 Skills represent maintenance (Veteran 1 gives one Morale box; Signals and Command allow unjamming and Morale repair, which are unopposed rolls, and so put as a lower Skill. If our intention was to jam others, we might move Signals up). Note by choosing only Hand-to-Hand, combat is only possible at range 0 (the up-close-and-gritty feel) and by having no Movement Skill, the only movement allowed will be the one-zone free move. That gives us the sense of slow and plodding. Given the defensive investment (and the image of thick orange fog), the two Stunts allowed for T2 infantry are Special Forces, which allows us to remain unspotted until we fire (and might give us a turn to put on an Aspect or two while the enemy use

Observation to spot us), and Wireless, which allows each unit a bit more autonomy from the leader, and it invites jamming (which isn't shooting!). That seems to get our concept pretty well. Note we don't need to model "pressurized": that's operating at the personal combat level; the nature of the platoon-scale scenario guarantees that a unit in the situation is able to exist there. Also note that we're not concerned to have the Marines spot the enemy earlier either: while the player will know where the units are, the Marines will only be able to fire when we're in the same zone anyways. For all we know, the scenario might have "Thick orange fog" as an Aspect on every zone. Maybe we want some Observation rolls possible (for when going up against other Special Forces, for instance!): in that case, we might lose Signals Skill and replace it with Observation 1. Another solution emerges at T3: with an extra Stunt available, we could design a substitution Stunt:

At T3 add Stunt: **Thermal Imaging:** use Signals for Observation

Alternately, we could choose to model the increased range of the T3 Staff Blaster:

At T3 add Stunt: **Ranged Staff Blasters:** use Hand-to-Hand for Direct Fire

So there's the basic unit. The idea of their slow and steady advance appeals, but with their inability to erode borders through movement, they risk being trapped in a single zone. So we design a platoon leader to help them with that, a mobile bridge:

Mobile Bridge (T2 Armour, Platoon Leader)
Camouflage 4, Signals 3, Command 2, Observation 1
Morale OOO
Maximum movement 1 (free move only)
Logistics Genius: no "Out of ammo" on platoon members
Special Forces: not automatically detected when they share a zone with the enemy.
Stealth Technology: use Camouflage for Armour
Mobile Bridge: may ignore pass values up to 2 on free move, or allow a single other platoon member to do so.
Relentless advance

Armour units have much less Skill choice, and it's obviously unusual not to have an Armour Skill. The Stealth Tech Stunt gives the equivalent though, and fits the concept of the mobile bridge; it is complimented by Special Forces. To create the idea of the mobile bridge (offering Marines a way across pass values created by interdiction actions), we need to invent a Stunt: we want something that will allow a unit to cross a ravine or fence or mine border. After discussion with the table, it is decided that we can limit it both by the height of the pass values and by tying it to a unit's free move into or out of the zone where the Mobile Bridge is. Stunts are game mechanisms for rule-breaking, and this seems a balanced way to overcome a perceived hurdle to the effectiveness of the marines.

As the leader, the Mobile Bridge receives additional Morale boxes and another Stunt. The choice of Logistics genius takes away the "Out of ammo" Aspect (which can be a good source of fate points), but reminds us that the platoon is wielding staff blasters. Note that the Mobile Bridge has no offensive Skills: it is a support vehicle, though it is capable of jamming enemy units with its Signals 3.

Given that all units have a high-tech communications array, the extra Stunt gained at T3 is chosen to enhance this:

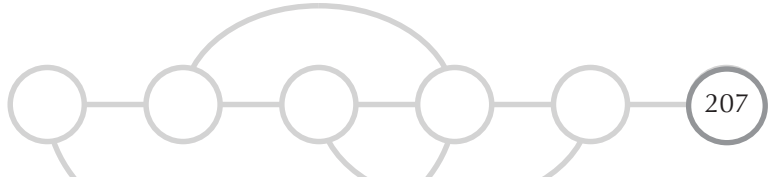
At T3 add Stunt: **Wireless:** +1 effective range to platoon leader.

This gives a command range of 2, which allows units to hold their ground very effectively while the leader ensures that everyone can keep up.

The final element of our design requires determining the size of the platoon. Four Marine Infantry units with a Mobile Bridge seems manageable, and yields this:

T2 Hostile Environment Platoon
4x Commonwealth Marine
1x Mobile Bridge (Leader)
Command range: 1 (2 at T3)
Platoon fate: 6 fp

The Platoon has an unusual Skill selection, but still represents a threatening presence. The greatest weakness is the lack of anti-aircraft ability, which makes sense: staff blasters may be able to hit an octopus, but they're not going to be shooting down jet fighters.



platoon combat play sheet

1. The caller names the next actor and asks for actions.
   a. Actor selects a platoon that has not acted this turn and for each unit in that platoon:
      i. Determine platoon membership, based on range and communication.
      ii. Pick up any Interdiction tokens placed by the unit previously and remove one jamming counter if there are any.
      iii. Select an action for the unit and name its target (if any). If the unit is an aircraft on the LAUNCH! box it can be placed on the map and its turn ends.
      iv. The caller calls for compels. If a compel is offered, the Actor may take the fate point and skip this unit or pay a fate point and continue. A compel must refer to an Aspect on the unit, the platoon, the zone, or the map.
      v. Optionally move the unit 1 zone (a free move).
      vi. Resolve action as per the specific action listed below. Generally, roll Skill + 4dF, possibly versus a defensive roll of Skill + 4dF. Success is achieved by zero or more shifts. Adjust the rolls by invoking Aspects on the attacking unit, tagging enemy or friendly Aspects (unit or platoon), tagging Consequences on the defending unit, tagging Aspects on the attacker or defender's zone, or spending spin. Resolve the attack (apply damage, garner spin, place new Aspects, move)
      vii. If the unit is an aircraft, place it on the RE-ARM box on the re-arm track.
   b. Actor proceeds to the next unit she wishes to act.
2. When all units in the platoon have acted, the platoon is marked Acted.
3. If all platoons of all players have been marked Acted, the caller announces a new turn and has all platoon Acted markers removed.

move

1. Roll Movement Skill and move the number of shifts up to the maximum movement.
2. If your movement places you in (or passes through) the same zone as an enemy unit, both you and it gain a SPOTTED marker of value 3 and the moving unit ceases movement.
3. For artillery, roll Movement against a SPOTTED marker value and reduce its value by the number of shifts.
4. For aircraft units, move the number of shifts along the Re-arm track.
5. Aircraft on their LAUNCH! box may be placed (without a roll) on any zone on the map or any battery zone off the map. Aircraft in a battery zone may be attacked exactly as spotted artillery, though only with Anti-air Skills from a unit on the same artillery card as the spotted artillery unit.
6. If movement takes a unit out of LOS from all enemy units, remove a SPOTTED marker.
7. Caller offers compels to halt in each zone moved through.

attack (range, los)

1. Roll your appropriate attack Skill against enemy Armour Skill on any unit with a SPOTTED marker, counting shifts as damage. If the defender has already been fired on this round, use the recorded value instead of rolling. If this is the first defense, record the roll after invokes have been added to it. Subtract range to target. Add the minimum range of the attack type (zero for Hand-to-Hand, one for Direct Fire, two for Indirect Fire). -3 shifts gains spin for the defender. This extra arithmetic is basically saying that the range count, for purposes of modifying the attack roll, starts (as zero) at the minimum range of the weapon.
2. Indirect Fire may not act at range zero or 1. Direct Fire may not act at range zero. Hand-to-Hand may ONLY attack at range zero. Anti-air may attack at any range but recall that all ranges from ground to aircraft are increased by one. Range from aircraft to aircraft are counted normally. Artillery attacks targets without range modification. Attacks on artillery in an off-map "battery zone" are at effective range 10 when attacked by on-map units.

3. Units that attack are automatically spotted: for Indirect Fire, add a SPOTTED marker of value 1. For Direct Fire, add a SPOTTED marker of value 2. For Hand-to-Hand add a SPOTTED marker of value 3. If the unit already has a SPOTTED marker, increase it by this value. A SPOTTED marker can be no larger than 4.
4. Before applying shifts as damage, the defender may reduce the shifts by applying Consequences. Each Consequence reduces the shifts by 1, 2, or 4 and becomes a free-taggable Aspect on the platoon. A platoon may have no more than three Consequences.
5. Mark the remaining number of shifts as a hit on the corresponding box on the defending unit's Morale track and all boxes below it. A hit past the end of the Morale track Takes Out the unit.

interdict (range, los)

Select a target zone. Roll your appropriate attack Skill against target zero. Subtract range to target zone. Distribute shifts as pass values on any border for that zone (thus 4 shifts could place a pass value 2 on two borders, 4 on one border, 1 on 4 borders, or any other combination). Interdiction lasts until the beginning of the attacker's next turn. Interdiction attacks grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks.

rally

Roll Command against highest Morale track hit to repair track hits by shifts (as repair on spacecraft). Can roll against any unit in the platoon.

jam

Roll Signals against another unit's Signals. For each shift generated, place an OOC counter on the attacked unit. Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. Note that this attack is especially effective against a leader unit. Jamming ignores range.

unjam

Roll Signals against zero and remove the shifts in OOC counters from yourself. If this unit is a leader unit, it may remove OOC counters from members of its platoon.

maneuver (range)

Roll any Skill + narrative and subtract range to target zone. Success places an Aspect on a zone. The Aspect is free-taggable once by an allied unit. Use maneuvers to model artillery cratering ("Cratered"), forward observation ("Laser designated"), covering fire ("Keeping heads down"), and so on.

Maneuvers that use Direct Fire, Indirect Fire, or Hand-to-Hand grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks of those type.

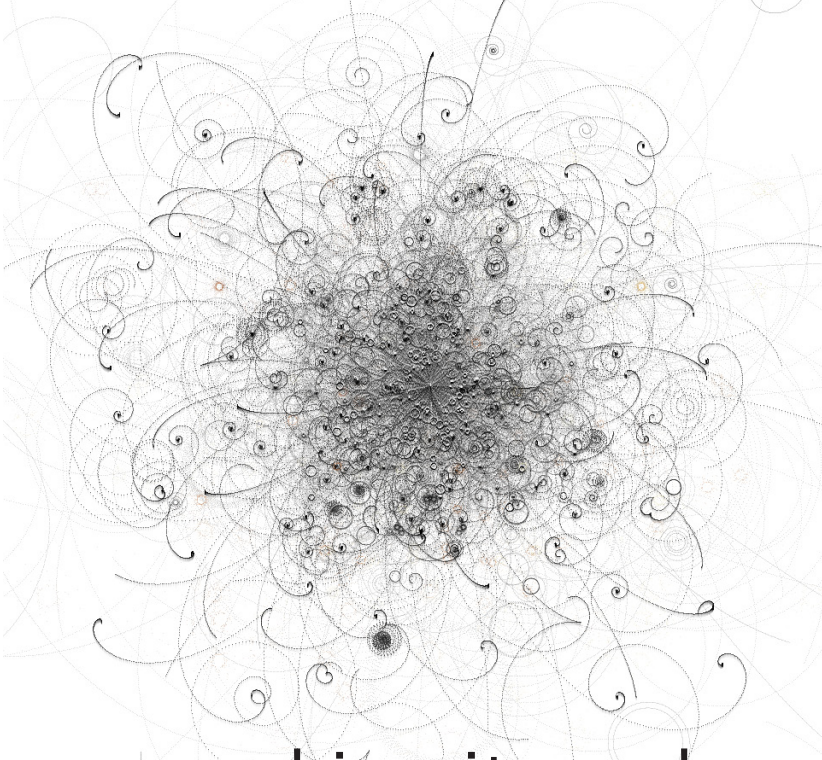
Maneuvers cannot be used to place an Aspect on a Unit.

spot (los)

Roll Observation against Camouflage for any artillery that has fired or any other unit in line of sight. On any success, any allied unit may act on the spotted unit. Place a SPOTTED marker on the unit including the number of shifts. Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. If the unit already has a SPOTTED marker, increase it by the number of shifts.

cover

Roll Camouflage against a target value of zero and reduce any SPOTTED markers on the unit by the number of shifts achieved.



9. making it work

starting adventures

When the authorities arrived at my administrative station in Golgotha and told me I had to leave, I was angry—how dare these tin pots come and evict me from an extremely lucrative automated mining stake? I made a fuss, threatened legal action, considered force, contacted powerful allies. When they showed me the astrographic data, I fell silent. Knowing that the entire system was going to change over the next year made it rather less appealing to stay. Knowing that one individual was responsible for the change made me even less interested in legalities. But oh-so-interested in how to get my hands on that kind of power.

Start small.

Sure, you began by creating multiple star systems and thinking about interstellar trade and politics. Now drill down.

The players of *Diaspora* are playing individual characters with individual motivations. So start there, with characters thinking about how to get ahead a little. Thinking about how to make ends meet, about how to make the next maintenance payment on that old clunker of a ship. Thinking about whether to make an illegal cargo run or not. Wondering if mom's okay in that system she moved to.

The game will naturally gather momentum to larger issues as long as those issues connect to something personal, so don't force them. Start small.

So what we, the players, actually do is start by setting a scene. Typically the ref-

eree will instigate this by describing a place and the characters' place in it. The referee might describe some recent events and will, after reviewing the character sheets of the players, establish a conflict in which they have already declared their investment: their characters are aready "about" that conflict. Characters will already have some relationship to each other as a result of the character generation process, so it's only really essential to hook one character. It's nice to leave them room to run their own way, too, if they already have something they want to explore.

example: poachers of paradise

You, the referee, note that Liam Daff has the Aspect, "Saving Paradisio one poacher at a time." You decide to hook that.

Referee: The three of you are relaxing in Liam's home system, Paradisio, after a long haul of immigrants from four different systems. You've been paid, you just made maintenance on the Tesla, and now you're downside in the Gardens with a thousand other people enjoying the naked sunshine, the fine food and drink, and the lush greenery. The table next to you in this giant street-side cafe with no real street per se, was empty for hours but now a group of six foreigners have arrived and sat down. They don't speak a local language and the servant staff seem nervous.

Alice: Do I understand their language? I have Culture for Paradisio, Tamarind, and Ellis.

Referee: You do. They seem to be outworld miners from Ellis. They are unpleasant and aggressive. Mining is illegal in Paradisio space, but the technology to combat it isn't prevalent.

Alice (as her character, Marin): "I think these guys are miners. What would miners be doing in Paradisio? Can you do that here?"

Bob (as Liam): "Fricking poachers."

Referee: (holding out a fate point for a compel) Liam is spoiling for a fight. Miners are ruining this system.

Bob (taking the fate point): Hmm, it says 'one poacher at a time' and not six, but okay.

Bob: You know, I think these guys are pretty drunk. Can I make an Alertness check to spot that and get the Aspect on them? I guess that would be a maneuver?

Referee: Yeah, it would be. You know what, though? I think they are pretty drunk too,

The Power of Skill Checks

Certain Skills have great in-game power, because they can help establish Aspects of the environment, if not more. You want to notice something? Roll on your Alertness: with a good enough result, you as the player get to describe what your character notices; sell it to the referee with a good story, win the table's approval, and that's the way the world is!

A Profession: Geologist roll might let you describe the likelihood of seismic activity in a given region. An Arts roll might allow your character to recall—which is to say, allow the player to invent—a key relevant fact about the area's history. Science becomes a particularly powerful and dangerous Skill at high levels. In one of the playtest games, the player's description of a celestial event was much more destructive than what the referee had intended; an exceptional Science roll meant every available ship was heading for a slipknot, trying to escape total system collapse.

so let's skip the roll and just give them the Aspect.

Bob: Can someone still free-tag?

Referee: Sure.

Bob (as Liam): "Hey, tunkface," (a tunk, Bob explains, is a local animal with a face like a pair of buttocks). "Yeah you. You smell. I don't like you. My friends don't like you."

Alice (as Marin): "I don't think they understand you, Liam."

Referee: They seem to get the gist. One of the Ellisers flips you the bird.

Charlie (motions for the referee to give him a fate point): Oh, hey, I want a compel too. I'm a "Notorious hothead!" I stand up and flip their table. Or rather Tor does.

Referee (considering whether that's worth a fate point and decides it is—it's fun and it's complicating and should therefore be rewarded—hands Charlie a chip): Trying to do anything in particular?

Charlie: Let's get right to it. It's a Composure attack with my Intimidation Skill. Tor growls with the fury of a thousand wounded jungle cats, stands, and flips their table.

Referee: Woo, a fight! Let's call it an area of effect Composure attack on their zone. Get the dice out and I'll draw a quick map.

Advice for the Referee

The section on GM Tips and Tricks in *Spirit of the Century*, on pages 276 - 335, contain more (and reliably awesome) ideas about how to create, manage, invent, and enjoy the process of running a *FATE* based game.

Go read that.

What happens next? Depends on how the fight goes. Will defeated miners reveal other poachers in the system? Will victorious miners take the characters prisoner or hand them over to authorities for disturbing the peace? What do the authorities (bound to arrive) think of Ellisian miners? Why are the miners here so bold? Answer these questions as they arrive, and the adventure has begun!

motivations

The first step in deciding what will happen in a *Diaspora* campaign is deciding what motivates the significant characters in the cluster. Before we start painting the lives of several hundred billion NPCs, however, it will be profitable to take a step back to the cluster view of things and, for each world, ask, "What do they want?"

motivations derived from diaspora

We provide a very small number of axioms to the referee in this game. One is that the current modern view of physics is generally true though, granted, we violate relativity in order to get some kind of interstellar travel in order to increase the diversity of the space to explore. Things that currently appear implausible, however, are denied. No anti-gravity, no inertialess drives, no perfect transmutation or energy conversion.

No self-terminating lasers used for dueling and no force fields.

This presents a classic problem, however, as technological growth appears to happen under constant acceleration. So, what happens when you get close to the Big Impossibles of *Diaspora*? The answer is, Collapse. At T4, breakthroughs in these "impossible" areas are being made and the result is that the culture undergoes some transformation that from the outside looks like disaster. It might look like that from the inside too, but it doesn't need to.

If we take as granted that most systems in a cluster are old and have fallen from their prime at least once (or at least presume that low technology worlds are in the process of falling), then we have a few system-level motivations right out of the box before we even look at system statistics:

- Prevent T4 advancement in this system
- Prevent T4 advancement anywhere in the cluster
- Recover this system from decline
- Recover other systems from decline
- Sustain T3 in this system
- Sustain T3 everywhere
- Pursue T4 in this system as an Ascension
- Pursue T4 everywhere in the cluster

Each of these is distinct and has very different repercussions for the environment the characters will act in. If there is more than one cluster-faring system in the cluster, there is room for significant conflicts here too as many of these goals are (or can be made) contradictory. In particular, the pursuit of T4 can be seen by opposing systems as dangerous evangelizing of known catastrophic ideas and by its proponents as an almost religious pursuit of a moral obligation to exceed the boundaries of humanity. This conflict can easily be as dark or as light as you care to paint it, on either side. Or both sides!

Another axiom of *Diaspora* is that all of the human inhabitants have ancestors who ultimately came from Earth, though they are now disconnected from it. What we don't force on you is how that happened and what's going on at Earth now. These are questions that can drive motivations of characters, organizations, and even whole clusters: does anyone remember Earth? Accurately? Is the technology that created the diaspora the same as the cluster slipstreams or something greater? Or something worse—maybe colonists came from Earth on sub-light ships over enormous time periods. If so, are they still out there? Maybe there are whole cultures that travel below the speed of light, trading between worlds of the diaspora, most of which will never connect to your cluster by slipstream. Should such a slow trader arrive, what would people make of them? What would they have to trade? What dangers would they represent?

motivations derived from the cluster

The cluster itself will give you clues to system motivations through the system statistics and the cluster layout. Some of these questions will have been considered during the cluster generation session.

The system statistics give you the technology rating of the system, the environment of the system, and the resources of the system. Resources determine how much the

Missions and Events

Play is often structured around a mission. The dungeon crawl presents a place to be plundered, and is not simply something passed by on the way to the next town. If characters are hired to deal with some new threat (a gang of thieves, a rogue celestial event), the mission is inscribed into the game world. Even if a mission is not explicit, the referee remains in control of the narrative direction.

If the referee does not give the players something to do (the mission), he may give them something to react to (an event). This is a much less controlled scenario, and transfers a great deal of narrative responsibility to the players. That's great, but there are risks. The event is a trigger, intended to make the players react but not implying a single solution; the referee and the players will need to be able to accommodate that uncertainty. This places a burden on the referee to prepare for practically any response and a burden on the players to react without a forced direction of action. The choice between event and mission play entails substantially different pressures for players and referees including different kinds of preparation and even different ways to engage the system.

What's being offered may not be clear, and a player may spend the session looking for a mission that isn't there, or may simply flee from an event, leaving the table scrambling. There is a tension between style of play and misaligned expectations, and this can lead to friction. If players disagree about the opening scene of a session (some seeing an event, some a mission), the difference needs to be stated clearly out of game, to help achieve focus.

Successful play in *Diaspora* happens when players have the power to establish missions through the system. This increases the burden on everyone—the referee needs to respond to a wide variety of player choices but now must also find ways to bring in stories explicitly stated as desirable by the players.

What Happens Next?

So what happens when an event doesn't prompt reactions from the players, or a mission is ignored? It might be worthwhile to pause in play and, out of character, articulate what happens next. Players can look at their character sheets, assess the game situation, and state their intended next step. It does not need to be related to the story at hand: "I want to attack something" is a legitimate response.

A character that has an Aspect that implies "Rushes headlong into danger" is given a game-mechanical benefit when his response to nearby boors is to flip their table and punch them in the eye. In *Diaspora*, conflict can be created out of an event by the players manipulating the system through their characters.

Not all answers to "What happens next?" are equal: perhaps one player's response is clearly most interesting (the other players like it, and they can see their character getting on-board). If not, looking at Aspects can help: players may even enjoy offering compels to one another, in order to orient player direction along a common axis (nothing buys loyalty like an extra fate point!). In all cases, though, it helps to articulate the player perceptions of what's going on. In *Diaspora*, each system and each character has Aspects that can provide the possibility of a new narrative direction. Even without a mission or an event from the referee, the players can provide narrative direction to the session. When all else fails, you can always break out a map and initiate combat in one of the mini-games.

system has that others might want. Environment determines how badly others might want to live there. Technology determines who owns space and what state the system is in with respect to the inevitable Collapse.

The cluster connections tell you more about who controls and who is controlled based on how traffic travels fastest. Systems that have few connections and nothing to offer are backwaters with no visitation and no trade: they are left to fend for themselves and the only interest in the system is either altruistic or created by the inhabitants by driving some feature other than that derived from system stats.

Systems that have plenty of resources and few connections are bottle-necked and may well be regions under military blockade to restrict trade to those that need it. Or, conversely, access to them may be guaranteed by a powerful force from outside.

Systems with plenty of resources and many connections will be trade hubs, though, depending on local technology, this trade may not directly involve the local inhabitants. It may in the case of very low-technology systems take place entirely outside the sphere of influence of the inhabitants, with vast high-technology trade savaging the future resources of a culture that can barely detect this strip-mining in progress. Resistance to this may well come from outside as preservationists (those who want to maintain a stable but high technology) and ascensionists (those that want to raise the technology of the cluster) bring pressure to bear. There may even be more altruistic groups who are prepared to fight for the rights of a population that cannot yet fight for itself.

Systems with few resources and many connections may simply be waystations. In this case there may well be extensive facilities near each slipstream entry (and exit)! point but no particular reason to enter the system proper. Who runs these facilities and who profits at them (and how) will depend on all the other factors in your cluster.

Environment and connections (and technology) will describe the flow of people into and out of systems. Systems with many connections and high environment will be booming with people and its technology, whatever the current level, will likely be rising.

Systems with high environment and low connections will have steady immigration and the capacity to control it if so desired. This pressure and your decisions can drive starkly different system motivations and results.

Systems with low environment likely have a net loss of population. With a small number of connections, this may be a very rapid decline indeed as local trade suffers from being off the main routes. With a large number of connections other factors might mitigate the flow. One question that will bear asking, though, is where are these emigrants going and what route will they take? What is the impact on intervening systems?

If a system exports something, to which system or systems does the product go?

Finally, technology will drive two important motivators: who runs space and what about Collapse? If there is only one system in the cluster with T2 or better, then all of the interstellar ships that exist in that cluster originate in that system. The question, then, that will drive motivations is: what do they do with that power? Do they capitalise on it by selling the technology to everyone? Do they play favourites? Or do they keep the technology jealously to themselves and only lease the ships? Maybe they don't even do

that but only lease space on the spaceships, running the entire operation themselves.

With more efficient drive and slipstream technologies a T3 will generally dominate militarily over a T2, and this will generate further pressures to explore. This competition will also drive down the cost of T2 equipment and create a class of "slow but cheap" transport, dividing space travel into high and low classes. The friction generated by these classes can create motivations: high speed courier traffic needs to abide by T3 operation of space, but slow bulk passage of material and immigrants is at the mercy of the T2 providers.

T4 technologies should be dealt with at arm's length. (When we rolled our example cluster, it happened that a T4 system was rolled; this was the only 4/-4 result rolled, and it had a huge impact on how the conception of the cluster developed.) These are societies with miraculous technology but in a very dangerous state. There is no question that these cultures are in the process of disappearing and that process may look very violent from the outside. It might be wise not to explore the motivations of the T4 culture itself but rather treat it as incomprehensible in order to keep T4 from becoming a treasure chest. Instead the motivations worth exploring will come from outside cultures: there will be those trying to profit from the T4 system and there will be those trying to save it. There will be those trying to prevent it from spreading and there will be those trying actively to destroy it. There may be locals trying to escape and there may be locals evangelizing. An effective course to take might be to specify the nature of the Collapse and use that as a cluster-wide motivator: if the system is being consumed by a hegemonic super-intelligence that converts everything it comes in contact with into slave intelligence used to drive its own expansion, then there are obvious adventures to be had. But remember, T4 *always* collapses eventually, so this intelligence is, from the perspective of an outside observer, doomed.

making it personal

The previous motivations describe large-scale political motivations of groups based on pressures and frictions derived from hugely general data in the form of system statistics and cluster shape. The characters, however, are people, and so their motivations must be personal.

The players will decide motivations of their characters by pressure and friction applied during play by the referee's use (directly or indirectly) of various characters (non-player characters, or NPCs, in traditional parlance) and their motivations. These characters will have one or more of the group motivations or they may have strictly personal motivations, depending on whether the referee wants to explore small scale issues of local culture (personal) or larger scale issue of inter-system politics (group). Such a character might very reasonably have multiple levels of motivation and an adventure might pursue local, simple goals at first and eventually expand to cluster-wide issues: the profitable theft of an artifact from a local museum might garner the attention of an organization dedicated to preventing a system from achieving a cascading technology (*i.e.* keeping it at T3) that sees the artifact as a danger. The simple act of escorting a local low-technology aristocrat to a high-environment system may be perceived as an act of treason as the royal family attempts to move to more profitable space ahead of the "queue" managed by the only T2 game in town. The exploration of

Diaspora is fundamentally concerned with collaborative storytelling. Sometimes stories arise out of the mechanics. This happens in the combat mini-games, where a mechanical result must be interpreted and explained. A low Agility roll on an attempted movement through a zone with a pass value may get interpreted as a guy jiggling with the lock, or fumbling with his keys. Players find a way to make sense of a given roll to create a story, using the mechanics given in the rules.

At other times, story precedes mechanics. For example, Jonah wants to play a blue dog that shoots short-range lasers from its head instead of playing a character. Fine. We model it as an animal, give it a skill column, and let it have an integral weapon. It doesn't even need to be an energy weapon: we can even model it as a sword, with the range of 0-1. Mechanically, it is no different than any other creature with claws. But Jonah's imagination is on fire, and he gets to tell the stories that he wants, padding through spaceship corridors zapping boarders.

a T-4 world reveals horrors of the Collapse that brought the system to its knees. A simple mining expedition into a helpless T-3 R3 system runs into a militant group that has stolen high-technology vessels and is dedicated to terrorizing outsystem miners.

The players have made it clear in the character generation process what they want to do. If they have a ship, they want to fly it. If they have no space Skills, they are more planet-bound—perhaps a group of mercenaries deposited in a new system every session or two. Each player has made a choice about his character's pinnacle Skill, and the players have a reasonable expectation that they should be able to bring that Skill into play, somehow, each session.

exploration

With any game that's ostensibly about characters in outer space, there will be an urge to explore. So what's to explore in a cluster of perhaps a dozen worlds at most which are in regular communication and have been for perhaps thousands of years?

worlds are big

First, there are still places to explore here on Earth because worlds are big. Part of that exploration might be the remains of prior civilizations—a premise in *Diaspora* is that all these worlds have expanded and collapsed at least once since their inception. Further, there may well be regions of exotic planets that are inaccessible to current technology or where the risk:reward ratio is too high for regular traffic (tourist or commercial). That needn't stop prospectors!

star systems are even bigger

Star systems are enormous. It's unlikely that everything in a system has been visited by people or their instruments and so there is always room for something new, especially the further from the slipknots that you go. Out there could be alien factories, strange exotic materials, secret bases, and unusual astronomical entities. All of these are potential sources of profit for someone (whether fiscal or political) and so might be places characters are instructed or hired to go. Or cajoled into. Or tricked.

clusters can be extended

If you really want the feel of exploration of brand new space, add a new node to the cluster and set the technology to -4, indicating (in this case) a complete lack of population. This new node can contain anything you want. It might be a link to a whole new cluster that has never been colonized! This gives you a complete blank slate to work with and a wealth of opportunities for exploration especially at a brand new connection where everyone is scrambling to exploit the new worlds. A new cluster link to an existing cluster is a campaign ready to start. Though someone, somewhere, will surely wonder whether a new link might not be just a temporary feature…

secrets

It's generally to the players' advantage to have the Skills, Aspects, and Stunts of an opposition character to be fixed, and to be known publicly. When we play, we try to keep this information open—in most cases, there should be no reason for the referee to hide behind a screen. Players can know what the opponents' Aspects are, because then they can compel them, spending fate points, and adding to the back-and-forth of play.

Similarly, the referee should have an idea of what Aspects to use for compels from characters in a given situation (there is a reason why Aspect selection comes before Skill selection in the character generation process).

The referee will have a limited number of fate points for each opposition character (colored poker chips kept on individual character cards works well), but will also have an unlimited number of fate points for compels against character Aspects. This creates multiple pools, but it helps maintain the fate point economy: the NPCs might compel the out-of-ammo Aspect, which, if refused, will add to their pool of fate points.

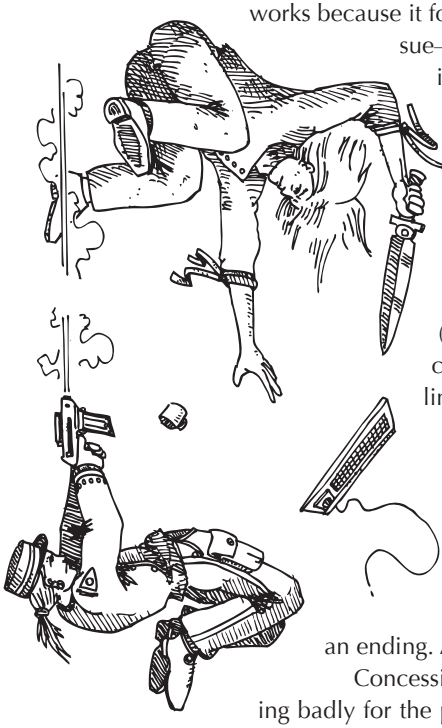
It becomes necessary to keep player knowledge and character knowledge separate. Rather than see this as a trap encouraging metagaming, in *Diaspora* it helps the players have fun with their characters. Players want their characters to face hardships, and have Aspects that they know can be used "against" them. That is part of the creation of a good story. By letting the players have some control over the ways their characters will be impeded (whether through injury, or through narrative obstacles), the Aspects provide some authorial control to the characters even when they are on the receiving end of an incredibly successful attack. It's all about the story that gets told collaboratively.

getting tactical

The tactical mini-games have a particular ability to assist the referee when things aren't going well at the table. Sometimes you will find that the players are not making progress against a puzzle or a secret and instead are circling the problem with planning and shopping. Now sometimes this is fun, but when you detect that it no longer is—that players are getting bored with the lack of effect—the mini-games can solve this problem instantly.

In particular, social combat can be applied to almost any issue (a heist, a kidnapping and ransom, removing an aristocrat from power, or even influencing the trade policies of a whole system) and so it's a handy way to push a table from planning to action.

And the joy of the combat system is exactly there: you don't need to plan and prepare. You just need to get the antagonists and protagonists on a credible map and then turn the rules like a crank and the story will pour out.



Part of the reason this works is because it spurs action, but it also works because it forces you, the referee, to start partitioning the issue—you need to decide who the protagonists are in the context of the conflict, who the antagonists are, who is relevant to the outcome but not an agent, what are the actual goals of each party, and how to represent that graphically as a combat map. All that tightly regulated thinking will make the situation crystal clear.

The mini-games with actual injury at stake (space, personal, and platoon) are even more focused and are more obvious to deploy. This is in line with advice from *Spirit of the Century*.

When in doubt, ninjas!

The reason combat works is because even if the players lose, a story is forced out of the situation and even in the worst possible situation, it doesn't have to be death and an ending. And yet it can be, which is also powerful.

Concessions play a big part in this. When things are going badly for the players, suggest that they concede. Make them offer something to get away (or, cooler, to save their friends) and suddenly failure becomes story. Konstan surrenders himself to bounty hunters to save his crew. A special forces team gets picked up at the alternate landing zone, brutally wounded but intact, and watches their allies get rounded up and disarmed or worse by the enemy as they fly to safety. Mistral is captured by police and put before trial.

And that chaining also helps: conceding a space combat might lead to a boarding action with personal combat. Conceding personal combat might lead to a trial using social combat. Losing a platoon combat might lead to a chase scene in orbit using space combat. You could be here all night turning this crank and creating stories.

softening the edges

They always say that space is dark, black, and cold. I don't know what space they are referring to—I work outside a station at the slipknot on an EVA tether for ten hours a shift and I can tell you: space is bright, hot, and filled with colour. Nothing attentuates the light from the stars and so every square inch of everything (and it's all painted white) glows so bright you need special filters. And all that light that doesn't reflect away turns into you getting warmer, so you have refrigeration coils and heat sinks on your suit. The heater you only need in special cases. But mostly, no one turns on any lights so the colour of space is not washed out like it is dirtside. Space is packed with nebulae emitting and reflecting blue, yellow, green, purple, orange, and colours you don't have good names for. I could never work dirtside. Not after seeing this.

Now, as *Diaspora* is trying to build a "hard science-fiction" atmosphere (even if we have incorporated faster-than-light travel), it may be seen as out-of-subgenre to include aliens, psionics, etc. Far be it, however, for us to declare them off limits! The abstraction provided by the underlying *FATE* system is such that, mechanically, these things are not interestingly different: they are really all story.

non-human races

If you want to create a non-human race, start by deciding what's really different, in game mechanical terms, between them and the total range of abilities to be found among humans. Designing a balanced race really means not going beyond these parameters, which, in the largely abstract system presented here, allows for a seven-point range between -1 (untrained) and 5. Wording of Aspects can increase this effective range (both for humans and for the aliens) by an additional +/- 2 (creating a modified eleven-point range, -3 to 7).

Non-human races are best modeled by augmenting the existing rules as subtly as possible—that is, the best aliens for the purposes of *Diaspora* are going to be those with few game mechanical differences no matter how bizarre the story behind them might be: you might introduce a new Skill that represents some feature specific to these aliens and maybe even require that all members of the species have it, but we recommend resisting structural changes to how a character is created.

Formulating a non-human race (or converting one from another source) may then be framed in terms of general statements that are applicable when measured against a normal human. They may suggest some Skills should be higher than others, or that some should be lower, and Stunts that would be more common in the race than in humans. These differences form the mechanical description of the race. These differences do not change the number of Stunts or Skills or the shape of the Skill pyramid; they only describe certain features of the choices one would make within those constraints in order to create a believable alien of that type.

The parameters for creating members of other races lie completely with the discretion of the player, subject to referee and table approval, of course. All choice, of course, remains with the player, as there are always exceptions to any general rule.

Optional: All aliens may be thought to have an automatic Aspect, "not human," to be compelled liberally whenever something built for or designed by humans is encountered.

Example alien: Sodali

The low, tanklike shells of the Sodali are a familiar sight in the depths of space: they introduced the slipdrive to the cluster, and it is they who maintain a monopoly on slipdrive tech. Their high-gravity world has produced a race of short hexapods, but their two manipulable limbs are capable of the most careful work. Consequently, engine rooms in slipships tend to be low, cluttered spaces (from a human perspective), with gauges and dials angled for a head close to the ground and looking up. In appearance, the Sodali resemble a small ankylosaur, with two retractable four-fingered limbs emerging from the osteoderms embedded in its skin: these limbs can operate high caliber weapons, and the sight of an infantry platoon of Sodali advancing on you, rifles held close to the dorsal line, is well represented in Sodali literature as a symbol of pride.

Within their system, Sodali are found in all professions, and their well-regulated military is a daunting sight when deployed. In human systems, though, there is higher than average representation of three career paths: engineers and pilots, maintaining control over the slipdrives; corsairs, which is to say professional mercenaries found on the fringes of human systems; and Nomads, who operate as prospectors, or, more often, criminals. When constructing a Sodali character, one or more of these professions would be a good Aspect choice.

Their hard exoskeleton offers some protection, and some characters will have an Aspect, "defensive shell," to be used in combat or related situations, or (for military characters) have reinforced their shells with a coloured lacquer, creating a unique mosaic of armour (select "Have a Thing" as a Stunt: Integral Equipment: Bulletproof vest).

Character Development: Sodali are found throughout the cluster. It is rare for a Sodali to be trained in Agility or MicroG, though most Sodali encountered offplanet possess at least one space Skill. Most humans would expect Sodali to have ranks in Brawling, Resolve, and Engineering, but these are really nothing more than cultural stereotypes.

Race-specific Skills (optional): all Sodali have a Dominance Skill valued between 1 and 5, which measures their relative rank in group situations. It can be used for Composure attacks (or defense) in combat situations against other Sodali, and as a social Skill to motivate others of their kind. Nomads are typically found in human systems because their Dominance value is not high. Humans are considered untrained in Dominace (rank -1) and may not initiate attacks. In exceptional cases, however, some humans have learned how to rise among a Sodali clan and gain a Dominance Skill.

psionics

With the referee's permission, Psionics can be introduced. The precise mechanics would require table consensus, but what is important is that the balance between characters not be thrown off. Anything with a story should be able to be modeled with

an appropriate balance of Skills, Aspects, and Stunts. If anything is happening that will be seen as exceeding human norms, it should require investment in both a Skill and a Stunt. Typically, there will also be an Aspect, such as "Hunted for my brain," "Government lab rat," or "Paranoid beyond belief."

What follows are ten ideas for how some psionic abilities could be modeled within the game system. In each of them we are assuming a common Skill powering all the abilities, Psionics (it may be desirable to have different Skills: one for Telepathy, one for Teleportation, etc., in a Psionics-heavy campaign). Some are just maneuvers, some are Stunts, and some are alternate ways to use Skills.

Awareness: add a Stunt "Swap a skill" to use Psionics for Alertness, with +2 to the roll with the restriction that it may only detect the existence of sentient minds. (Perhaps making it military-grade would allow a clairvoyant image, a flash of what a detected mind sees?)

Mass Suggestion: add a Stunt "Swap a Skill" to use Psionics for Oratory.

Psychic assault: select "Have a thing" as a Stunt to get Integral Equipment: Knife, but let the story be that it is a psychic attack (perhaps Composure damage only, in exchange for +2 penetration). Rather than tied to brawling Skill, it could be powered by a new Skill "Psionics." Some range could be modeled perhaps by allowing attacks at range 0-1, but doing only harm 1.

Regeneration: add a Stunt "Swap a skill" to use Psionics for Medical. Because age is not modeled in *Diaspora* (all characters have the same number of Skills, and players determine the composition of their own Skill pyramids), it costs nothing to add descriptive features to this such as, "eternally young," because there are no associated mechanical effects. If this is the character the player wants, let them have it, as long as there is some character investment (perhaps through an Aspect).

Shield: want to resist a psychic assault? Take an Aspect "Psionic shield" which will give you +2 to any defense, as long as you are willing to spend a fate point; fortunately, the investment need only come after the dice have hit the table, and you might win without any investment!

Telekenesis: add a Stunt "Swap a Skill" to use Psionics for Agility. (Perhaps making it "Military-grade" would allow an initial range of 1 or 2 zones, instead of zero; that would then represent a player investment of two Stunts and a Skill).

Telepathic suggestion: as a maneuver, use Psionics to put an Aspect on nearby individuals to give a free-taggable Aspect to a future action by yourself or an ally.

Telepathy: with the Psionics Skill, take the Stunt "Swap a Skill" to use Psionics for Intimidation (the victims are always aware you are reading their mind, and they may attempt to resist with Resolve).

Technopathy: want to communicate with machines? Add a Stunt "Swap a Skill" to use Psionics for Computer, or for Repair (or, with two Stunts, both!).

Teleportation: short-range, line-of-sight teleportation can be modeled with Psionics, which replicates the movement bonuses possible from Agility. (The referee may understandably not want to grant the ability to teleport through doors; it's up to the player to justify that restriction with a story!)

Some campaigns may wish to model the psychic toll that using such abilities represents. If so, each use of Psionics that achieves a Superb (+5) or better result costs a fate point, in addition to any points spent ensuring the success. Since the restriction for players will be the same as it is for any characters run by the referee, such a restriction, while onerous, should ultimately favour the players who have greater resources of fate points.

landing a spaceship

Spacecraft design in *Diaspora* precludes the possibility of landing a spacecraft easily: they are simply not built to balance on their tails in an atmosphere. If transferring between orbit and the surface is a plot your table doesn't want to tell, however, there are options.

Given that an interface vehicle costs one build point in the spaceship design process (see next section), a table might decide that any ship that invests two build points can land in an atmosphere. The choice to be able to land a ship (avoiding highports, orbital stations, any surface-to-orbit transfer, etc.) is offset by the additional investment in frame construction. The most capable ships will continue to be those specialized vessels without the ability to land.

designing equipment

A good many science-fiction games are practically defined by their equipment design systems and we built one in order to generate balanced gear for the equipment lists, and so we offer it to you here.

Now, because we developed this system in order to generate balanced content, this system is explicitly a game design tool. It is not a tool within the context of the game as played. By that we mean that it does not attempt to simulate the construction of equipment. You will not determine sizes and volumes and mass and perform energy efficiency calculations to determine the statistics of your equipment under design. Designing stuff is not internal to game play in any way. It is strictly external, game design work. We are trying to achieve two things:

- Balanced output—this should not generate a single piece of equipment that is obviously best in all circumstances.
- Reverse engineering—you should be able to start with a story (what you want to build) and construct viable statistics for that story. An example is given in Chapter 8 in the section on Staff Blasters.

So you will start the process with an idea in mind, a story, as it were: a specific weapon for a specific culture that you want to determine appropriate statistics for. You will allot a certain number of build points (bp hereafter) based on type and technology level and use those to establish the statistics that tell the story for that piece of equipment. This is a tool for you (with your game design hat on) to create roughly balanced equipment to meet your campaign needs. Any player-created designs are of course always subject to approval by the referee.

The core design process for equipment—ships, weapons, armour, and possibly

other things we haven't considered—is:

1. Establish the number of build points (bp) as a function of technology rating.
2. Establish the statistics that can be modified by bp.
3. Establish the cost of increasing or decreasing each Statistic.
4. List Stunts that affect the function of the system under design with their costs.
5. List Aspects that derive from the choices made.
6. Establish a function that derives the Cost from the above.

We have constructed several design sequences in this framework for you but you could easily extend this framework to construct your own design sequences.

spacecraft design

assumptions

There are some axioms that this system will maintain. These are the rules of the *Diaspora* universe as they pertain to space flight, and keeping true to them will be central to achieving a "hard science-fiction" feel.

ship size is not interesting

The proportion of a ship devoted to reaction mass and heat management is vast compared to the crew quarters. Further, even basic automation can do most of the job of running a ship. Finally, the nature of reaction drives makes most variations in ship size inefficient—there is a sweet spot where you want your ship to be and there's not a lot of point in making it bigger or smaller. So, we will derive ship size as colour (maybe an Aspect!) from the stats of the desired ship rather than derive the stats from the desired ship form. Crew sizes, however, are pretty static: a dozen people or so make a full compliment, and some ships are designed specially to be run by only three or four.

maneuver is a resource

The basic efficiency of a reaction motor is fixed by technology level and all other aspects of maneuver are based on how much reaction mass you want to blow out the back. Consequently V-shift ratings are (relatively) fixed by technology level.

slipstream drives are little

If they are big then reaction drives make shipping cargo impossible—you just don't have room for cargo, reaction mass, and something else huge. Whatever device controls slipstream entry, it does not significantly change the payload mass.

build points

$$bp = 5 + (6T)$$

Tech	build points
T-2	-7
T-1	-1
T0	5
T1	11
T2	17
T3	23
T4	29

statistics

Stats at or below zero indicate a component that cannot be used offensively. All stats have a maximum value of the technology rating plus two.

All stats start at value zero and can be increased by 1bp/stat point up to stat point=T, and by 2bp/stat point up to the cap. Thus, rank cost by technology can be found on the following table:

rank	T-1	T0	T1	T2	T3	T4
1	2	2	1	1	1	1
2	-	4	3	2	2	2
3	-	-	5	4	3	3
4	-	-	-	6	5	4
5	-	-	-	-	7	6
6	-	-	-	-	-	8

The statistics are:

V-shift: influences positioning roll and heat accumulation

Beam: attacks offensively and defensively against Torpedo attacks, possibly accumulating heat

Torpedo: attacks only offensively, no heat, has the “Out of ammo” Aspect

EW: attacks offensively if the crew is trained for offensive EW and is reflective in that offensive and defensive rolls are compared and the loser takes the shifts in damage

Trade: influences monthly maintenance rolls

A ship which doesn’t invest points in a statistic possesses a default value of zero.

stress tracks

Stress tracks start at three boxes and cost 1bp to increase or give back 1bp to decrease except the Heat track, which costs 2bp to increase and gives back 1bp per decrease.

Hull track: a measure of structural integrity

Data track: a measure of network and comms integrity

Heat track: a measure of heat sink capacity

stunts

common stunts

Skeleton crew: ship can be crewed with a crew the size of the table (2-4 individuals), as long as Pilot and Navigation are represented in the available Skill sets. The ship may not have any crew-related Aspects ("Boarding party," say). In combat, there is no default Skill ability available, and similarly there is no opportunity for role-playing scenarios with traitorous crew members aboard. 1bp.

Attacks a different track: applies to a single weapon system. This weapon system now attacks a track other than its usual target track (a microwave cannon that attacks the heat track instead of the Frame stress track, an ECM drone missile system that attacks the Data stress track instead of the Frame stress track, etc.) 4 bp.

Attacks an additional track: applies to a single weapon system. This weapon system now attacks a track other than its usual target track in addition to its usual target track (a fusion cannon that attacks the Data stress track and the Frame stress track, a thermite missile that attacks the Frame and the Heat track, etc.) 8 bp.

High capacity magazine: Torpedo does not get the automatic "Out of ammo" Aspect. 1 bp.

Overwatch: may fire its Beam defensively against missiles targeting any ship it is tethered with, as many times as opportunity arises in the phase. Each counts against the sum of beam fire for heat accounting. 2 bp.

Automated defense: an automated defense system can be installed for any specific offensive roll. This gives a rank 2 defense with no offensive capability, even for reflective rolls like EW. It is never modified by character Skill in any way. 1bp each.

Vector randomizer: base defense 2 against beams

Firewall: base defense 2 against EW

Point Defense: base defense 2 against torpedoes

Civilian: This ship is designed for private ownership. It comes with registration papers for all systems on board and is perfectly legal to own and operate without special licensing. More importantly its drives come with all regulated safety interlockings, restricting its power output and its thrust. Piloting a ship that is not Civilian is much trickier and requires Military-grade Pilot. 3bp

Cheap: This ship is constructed from old technology or ill fitted parts. It might be a factory second, failing quality control and listed for resale in systems with looser restrictions. Cheap ships cost 2bp.

Interface vehicle: carries its own interface vehicle, capable of landing safely on a planet with surface gravity equal to ship technology and taking off again. 1bp

Extended range: carries vastly more r-mass than is efficient, removing its ability to over-burn drives to reduce travel time but increasing its maximum travel duration by a factor of 4. Extended range ships are huge and cumbersome and cost 2bp.

technology restricted stunts

Dumps heat into another dimension: T4. No Heat track. Can't burn, can't sell down the Heat track and can't take Consequences from a heat-based attack. 3bp.

T2 Slipsdrive: T2. This ship is capable of using slipknots to travel between star systems. 1 bp.

T3 Slipsdrive: T3. This ship is capable of more sophisticated slipstream travel. 1bp.

aspects

All ships have five Aspects. Determine the required Aspects and then fill the remaining slots with Aspects that suit the ship's purpose and history.

Huge: if the Trade value or the V-shift rating is greater than or equal to twice the technology rating, the ship is Huge (implies large amounts of reaction mass).

Cargo hauler: if the Trade value is 3 or more, the designer may choose this Aspect or "Passenger liner."

Passenger liner: if the Trade value is 3 or more, the designer may choose this Aspect or "Cargo hauler."

Falling apart: if a ship has the Cheap Stunt, then it also gets one Aspect that is largely negative, represented by the "Falling apart" Aspect. The table should feel free to rename the Aspect to reflect the specifics of the ship's cheapness.

fighters (optional)

Given the use of reaction drives in *Diaspora*, effective single-pilot fighters are technologically implausible. Still, they can be fun, and vessels that carry small amounts of reaction mass would be capable of extremely high acceleration for a short while.

Fighters are small ships to aid in combat, but which may not enter slipstreams. Any spaceship which buys the Stunt "Carries Fighters" (2bp) may reduce its Trade value by 1 for each fighter carried, to a minimum of zero: this decrease affects all rolls involving the Trade value, as the small fighter occupies space that could be used for cargo or other means of economic viability. Fighters may be launched in any combat phase that the parent ship chooses not to act when it otherwise could do so. If the parent ship chooses the Beam combat phase, the Beams may not subsequently be used defensively, however.

Decoys

One thing that fighters are extremely powerful for is decoying enemy ships. Because they generally have very high V-shift ratings and commensurately high pilot Skills, they represent a great opportunity to drag an injured opponent back to the middle of the map where he can't escape (harrying!) or push him off the 4-line—decoying him so far and so fast away from his target that he can't return to the fight. Take advantage of the fact that your opponent probably won't target your little fighter when he can concentrate on killing your Corvette.

All fighters are military vessels, and pilots require Gunnery and Military-grade Pilot Skills. Fighters are designed by buying Beam, Torpedo, and V-shift values (as per ship design) and all tracks have two boxes. They may buy "High-capacity magazine" and "Automated defense" Stunts, but no others. Fighters have one aspect, but no fate points, and any fate points spent come from the parent ship (or the pilot, if a PC); similarly, any consequences taken are given to the parent ship.

At T2 fighters are built with 6 bp; at T3 fighters are built with 8 bp (2+2T).

personal weapon design

Weapons break down into the following categories, each represented by a Skill of the same name:

- Brawling
- Close Combat
- Slug Thrower
- Energy Weapon

The statistics of all weapons are:
Harm: modifier to offensive roll
Penetration: negative modifier to armour Defense value
Minimum range: range below which a penalty is applied to offense roll
Maximum range: range beyond which a penalty is applied to offense roll

Build points for weapons vary by type.

brawling and close combat weapons

Brawling and Close Combat weapons are blades, clubs, and other designed melee weapons. They also include thrown weapons such as spears, shuriken, and (at higher technologies) grenades.

build points

There is less variety between tech levels than with other objects in this game. The number of available build points is determined by the Tech level at which the weapon first becomes available:

Tech	build points
T-4	2
T-3 to T-2	3
T-1 to T0	4
T1 to T2	5
T3	6
T4	7

statistics

Range: A weapon with range 0 is a Brawling weapon. There is no cost.
A weapon with range 1 is a Close Combat weapon. There is no cost.
A weapon with range 0-1 is a Close Combat weapon. This costs 1bp.
Penetration: Base 0. 1 bp per point to increase. Maximum 3.
Harm: Base 0. 2bp per point to increase. Maximum 2.

All Brawling and Close Combat weapons are Civilian—they do not require a Military-grade stunt to use. They may, however, be constrained by cultural familiarity.

stunts

Cheap: crap weapon. Costs 2bp.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer. 1bp.

Free modal: this weapon can be used in either of two "modes" as the user wishes. Each new mode is bought separately, with 1 bp less from the available build points for each available mode after the first.

Non Lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks. -1bp.

Stealthy: weapon does not appear to be a weapon outside of combat. 1bp.

Transfer Aspect: this weapon has some special feature not covered here that is modeled by applying an Aspect to the wielder. This Aspect can be tagged in addition to the allowed character Aspect invoke as it remains, technically, on the weapon. 1bp.

Versatile: weapon may be thrown, using the Agility Skill, at range 1-2. Normal penalties for exceeding this range (-2 per band) apply. The weapon may only be re-used if the character goes and spends an action picking it up from the target zone. 1bp.

Thrown: weapon may *only* be thrown, using the Agility Skill, and uses the range 1-2. Normal penalties for exceeding this range (-2 per band) apply. Weapon has the "Out of ammo" Aspect, which may be compelled. Increases base cost by 1. 1bp.

Two-handed: weapon is designed for two-handed use and is awkward in the hands of those not sufficiently strong. The wielder may amplify his Skill check with his Stamina. 1bp.

aspects

Cheap: automatic on any weapon with the Stunt Cheap.

cost

If a player wishes his character to own such a weapon at the start of a game, it should simply be granted. There is no obvious reason to differentiate or restrict them as thematic restriction comes out of in-game narrative of local laws anyway. The base cost for Brawling and Close Combat weapons is 1 except for found weapons, which are free.

slug throwers

Once we reach slug throwing technology we have more credible technology dependence. Build points for Slug Throwers use the formula:

$$bp = 6 + T$$

Tech	build points
T-4	2
T-3	3
T-2	4
T-1	5
T0	6
T1	7
T2	8
T3	9
T4	10

statistics

stat	bp cost for rank 0	bp cost for rank 1	bp cost for rank 2	bp cost for rank 3	bp cost for rank 4	bp cost for rank 5	bp cost for rank 6
Harm	0	2	4	6	8	10	12
Penetration	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Minimum range	4	2	0	-1	-2	-3	-4
Maximum range	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2

Maximum range can never be below minimum range. No stat can be below zero.

stunts

Awkward reload: "Out of ammo" is free-taggable after regular fire and not just AoE fire. -2bp.

Civilian: Makes the weapon available to those without the Military-grade Stunt for Slug Throwers. 2bp.

Cheap: Crap weapon. 2bp.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer. Cannot be Civilian. 1bp.

Free modal: as Modal but is set automatically rather than as an action. 2bp.

Full auto: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone. AoE effect cannot be used in the same zone as the firer. Cannot be Civilian. After firing on full auto, the firer's "Out of ammo" Aspect is free-taggable. 1bp.

High capacity: "Out of ammo" cannot be free-tagged. Cannot be combined with "Awkward reload." 1bp.

High recoil: weapon can only be fired every other round unless the firer is prone. -1bp.

Low recoil: weapon can be fired without penalty in low gravity. 1bp.

Modal: create two weapons with the same point value. This weapon can use either stat block as a "mode" set as an action. Each new mode must be bought separately. 1bp.

Mostly plastic: a poor quality weapon, but not so poor that you'd remark on it. 1bp.

Non Lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks. -1bp.

Transfer Aspect: this weapon has some special feature not covered here that is modeled by applying an Aspect to the wielder. This Aspect can be tagged in addition to the allowed character Aspect invoke as it remains, technically, on the weapon. 1bp.

Undetectable: any Skill check made to detect this weapon is made at -2. 1bp.

aspects

Out of ammo: automatic Aspect on any slug thrower. Free taggable after a Full Auto AoE attack.

Concealed weapon: automatic Aspect on any weapon with a minimum range 0.

Cheap: automatic on any weapon with the Stunt Cheap.

cost

Slug Throwers have a base cost of 3. The Civilian Stunt reduces a weapon's cost by 1. Add the technology rating of the weapon and subtract the technology rating of the system in which it is being purchased. Thus a Civilian T3 rifle would cost 2 on a T3 world, but 4 on a T1 world. Cheap weapons have their cost reduced by 1.

energy weapons

Energy Weapons become feasible at higher technology levels than slug throwers do, and become more effective. The build point equation for energy weapons is:

$$bp = 1 + 3T$$

Tech	build points
T-4	-11
T-3	-8
T-2	-5
T-1	-2
T0	1
T1	4
T2	7
T3	10
T4	13

statistics

stat	bp cost for rank 0	bp cost for rank 1	bp cost for rank 2	bp cost for rank 3	bp cost for rank 4	bp cost for rank 5	bp cost for rank 6
Harm	0	2	4	6	8	10	12
Penetration	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Minimum range	4	2	0	-1	-2	-3	-4
Maximum range	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2

Maximum range can never be below minimum range. No stat can be below zero.

stunts

Civilian: Makes the weapon available to those without the Military-grade Stunt for energy weapons. 2bp.

Cheap: Crap weapon. 2bp.

Dispersed fire: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone. Cannot be Civilian. 1bp.

Explosive: weapon can fire as an Area of Effect weapon, applying its offensive roll to each target in a zone including the firer. Cannot be Civilian. 1bp.

Free modal: as Modal but is set automatically rather than as an action. 2bp.

High recoil: weapon can only be fired every other round unless the firer is prone. -1bp.

Low recoil: weapon can be fired without penalty in low gravity. No cost: all energy weapons are low recoil unless otherwise specified.

Modal: create two weapons with the same point value. This weapon can use either stat block as a "mode" set as an action. Each new mode must be bought separately. 1bp.

Mostly plastic: a poor quality weapon, but not so poor that you'd remark on it. 1bp.

Non Lethal: weapon can only be used for Composure attacks. -1bp.

Rechargeable: weapons has the Aspect "Low battery," which may be compelled to prevent firing. -1bp.

Transfer Aspect: this weapon has some special feature not covered here that is modeled by applying an Aspect to the wielder. This Aspect can be tagged in addition to the allowed character Aspect invoke as it remains, technically, on the weapon. 1bp.

Undetectable: any Skill check made to detect this weapon is made at -2. 1 bp.

cost

Energy Weapons have a base cost of 4. The Civilian Stunt reduces a weapon's cost by 1. Add the technology rating of the weapon and subtract the technology rating of the system in which it is being purchased. Thus a T3 Plasma Gun would cost 3 on a T3 world, but 5 on a T1 world.

Transfer Aspects

Transfer Aspects are a great bargain. They give a weapon or armour some special "flavour" text that suits your story. More importantly, though, it's another Aspect scope that a player can tag along with his character Aspects.

Any time you dream up something we haven't thought of a point value for, consider just making it a transfer aspect.

Want to fight with a net and trident? Make a trident (a weak spear) and use that extra build point to take the transfer aspect, "I totally have a net."

armour design

Armour uses the build point equation:

$$bp = 2T + 9$$

Tech	build points
T-4	1
T-3	3
T-2	5
T-1	7
T0	9
T1	11
T2	13
T3	15
T4	17

statistics

stat	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Defense	-	-	0	1	2	3	5	7	9	13	17
Agility	0	see Stunts									

Armour that isn't light and flexible is hard to move around in, and characters wearing armour suffer a -2 penalty to Agility. This penalty can be offset by buying the Stunts Lightweight and Flexible: either reduces the Agility pnealty to -1; both mean there is no penalty but that costs 5bp. Powered armour stunts can give an Agility bonus.

stunts

Civilian: this armour requires no special training to don and use. Unless this is Stunt is purchased, the armour is Military-grade. 2bp.

Flexible: this armour can be easily shifted with the wearer, allowing greater mobility, decreasing the Agility penalty by 1. Can only be taken once. 2bp.

Lightweight: this armour is made of a lightweight material, decreasing the Agility penalty by 1. Can only be taken once. 3 bp.

Pressure suit: this armour acts as a pressure suit, carrying its own supply of oxygen and power for heat and communication. Requires T-1. 1 bp.

Power suit: this armour is powered. It allows the purchase of power suit stunts. Requires T1. Stamina checks made by the wearer are made at +2 (this does not confer any changes to the Health stress track, however). Armour acquires the transfer aspect,

"Out of juice." Cost of the armour goes to 4. 4bp.

Servos: wearer does not receive the -2 Agility penalty for wearing this armour. 2bp.

Sensors: Alertness rolls are increased by 1 while wearing this armour. Alertness is considered increased for the purposes of combat order selection or similar checks. Can be taken multiple times. 2bp.

Crushing fists: wearer receives +1 to his harm when Brawling while wearing this armour. His Brawling also does normal lethal damage rather than Composure damage (unless he prefers otherwise). Can be taken multiple times. 2bp.

Armoured penetrators: wearer receives +1 to his penetration when Brawling while wearing this armour. His Brawling also does normal lethal damage rather than Composure damage (unless he prefers otherwise). Can be taken multiple times. 1 bp.

Long range: armour does not have the "Out of juice" transfer aspect. 2bp.

Jump jets: armour has limited flight capability. Wearer gains +2 to any Agility checks for the purpose of movement and has no maximum movement rate. 3bp.

Transfer Aspect: this armour has some special feature not covered here that is modeled by applying an Aspect to the wearer. This Aspect can be tagged in addition to the allowed character Aspect invoke as it remains, technically, on the armour. 1bp.

aspects

Armour with a Defense value that costs more than (4+T) and does not have the Lightweight Stunt gets the Aspect "Very heavy," which referees should happily compel to ruin roads, damage bridges, and get the authorities mad. It might reasonably be compelled against Stealth checks and so forth too.

Armour with the Stunt Power Suit also gets the Aspect "Out of Juice," which one might compel to restrict actions in order to conserve energy.

Armour with a Defense value higher than its tech level that has the Stunt Civilian and does not have the Stunt Lightweight also gets the Aspect "Industrial equipment."

cost

The base cost for armour is 2 for Civilian and 3 for non-Civilian. Armour with the Power Suit stunt costs 4 regardless of its Civilian status.

epilogue

When Dave was growing up, he dreamed of going to the stars, but his suburban life didn't afford him that opportunity. He'd met an astronaut once who had even been in orbit, and shaking his hand is something Dave will always remember. Dave was a welder, as his father had been until the accident. But when he'd come home, wash up, and have supper, he'd have a few hours of darkness, where he could go outside with his telescope, and simply look up.

One night Dave, while trying to spot a nebula he'd read about, saw the flash. It was in the foreground, and it threw off his measurements, like something had exploded deep in space. He was excited, and he returned to his telescope. There shouldn't be anything there, he thought, and then he saw it again. Flash. "Carrie!" he called to his wife, wanting to share his enthusiasms. "Bring the camera, quick!" Carrie was patient, and she understood Dave's dreams, and, really, this was cheaper than him owning a motorcycle. She brought out the camera, which Dave attached to his scope, clicking it into a bracket he had ordered by mail a few months earlier. He set the timer to take a photo every thirty seconds.

"What is it?" she asked. Dave turned a few knobs, but having nothing to focus on he was unsure.

"I saw something. A flash; two." He'd not seen anything like this before, and he was excited. The excitement didn't abate over the course of the next few hours, though Dave saw nothing more. Carrie had given up after a few minutes and left him there, with a kiss and a reminder to keep breathing. But when Carrie woke up the next morning, she found Dave sitting at the computer, looking at the photos he had taken.

"There's two of them. Look!" He pointed to the screen, where there were two tiny orange blobs. The resolution was very poor, but Carrie could see something.

"What is it?" she asked, but Dave only shrugged. They were there again the next night, and the night after that. Dave had bought a new camera for his telescope, one that took movies, and set it up. He therefore had a recording when the two orange dots disappeared and, before dawn on the fifth day, captured one more flash.

Dave sold his film, and became a minor celebrity. It was his film that had guaranteed space agency funding for the next decade, and it was because of Dave that the unmanned Thunderbird missions had begun. Of course people complained—why do we need to send a rocket into the middle of nowhere, just so it can look down on the solar system? The press had described the scientific benefit of being that far off the plane of the system ecliptic, and a few high school students had even had their experiments chosen to go on Thunderbird Three, as part of a public relations effort. But when Dave would read about it, he'd just beam with pride. He even had a thunderbird tattooed on his arm, which made Carrie roll her eyes, but, as we've said, she is patient and this wasn't a motorcycle.

Dave didn't know that he had filmed the departure of two small scout ships from the system, and that he had found the South slipknot, the first time, it seems, it had ever been used. In the coming years the flashes were more frequent, and we all discovered that there was more intelligent life out there, and that faster-than-light travel was possible under certain conditions. The Minister of Science and Defense, Abraham Tucker, became very rich off the Thunderbird missions and the patents deriving from the discovery, while Dave stayed at home, putting in his ten-hour shifts four days a week.

The first people to head towards a slipknot did so on an alien scout very much like the ones Dave had first seen, radiating its heat before making another jump. It wasn't they who began the custom of naming them that has stuck today, nor was it the aliens, who strangely looked a lot like the people here. But slowly, the change happened. The North slipknot was named after Tucker—the Tucker point—but now that space is commercial, and now that we can get there easier than we used to get across the country, most space travellers prefer to head South, and slip through Dave.

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weapon tables

Weapon (Type)	Harm	Range	Pen.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
BRAWLING, CLOSE COMBAT						
Fists (B)	0	0	0	na	0	Composure damage only if untrained
Found weapons (B)	0	0	1	-4	0	*fragile, cheap*
Knife				-3	1	**free modal**
brawling (B)	1	0	0			
melee (C)	0	0-1	1			
Sword (C)	1	0-1	0	-3	1	
Broadsword (C)	1	1	0	-3	1	**two-handed (amplified by Stamina)**
Spear (C)	0	1 (1-2)	2	-3	1	**versatile**
Throwing knives (C)	0	1-2	1	-3	2	**thrown,** *out of ammo, finely balanced*
Hand held taser (B)	2	0	0	0	1	**non-lethal,** *scary blue arc*
Hand grenade (C)	1	1-2	0	1	2	**thrown, explosive,** *out of ammo, simple*
Variable blade (C)	1	0-1	1	2	1	**two-handed (amplified by Stamina)**
Gravity bomb (C)	2	1-2	2	4	2	**thrown, explosive,** *out of ammo*
SLUG THROWERS						
Blowgun	1	2-3	0	-4	3	*poisonous*
Longbow	1	2-4	1	-3	3	
Crossbow	0	2-3	2	-3	2	**civilian**
Black powder pistol	0	0-2	0	-2	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Musket	1	2-4	0	-2	2	**civilian**
Hunting rifle	1	2-4	2	0	2	**civilian**
Handgun	1	0-2	0	0	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Rocket launcher	2	3-4	3	0	3	**explosive, awkward reload, low recoil**
Submachine-gun	1	0-3	1	1	3	**full auto**
Automatic shotgun	1	1-3	1	1	2	**high capacity, civilian**
Self-loading pistol						choose a mode as an action
single shot	1	0-3	1	1	3	*concealed*
auto	1	0-2	1	1	3	*concealed,* **full auto**
Flechette gun	2	1-2	2	2	2	**civilian**
Personal assault gun	2	1-4	2	2	2	**awkward reload, civilian**
Adv. combat rifle	2	2-5	1	2	3	**full auto, high capacity**
Adv. bullpup rifle	2	1-5	2	2	3	**full auto, awkward reload**
Adv. Sniper rifle	2	2-6	2	2	3	
Coilgun	2	2-5	3	3	3	**full auto**

Weapon (Type)	Harm	Range	Pen.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
Targeting pistol	2	0-3	0	3	2	*concealed,* **civilian**
Low velocity pistol						choose a mode as an action
homing slug	2	0-1	0	4	2	**high capacity**, *concealed,* **low recoil, civilian**
tranquilizer	2	0-2	0	4	2	**high capacity**, *concealed,* **low recoil, non-lethal, civilian**
ENERGY WEAPONS						
Early laser system	0	2-5	0	0	4	**low recoil**
Pulse laser pack	2	1-4	1	2	4	**low recoil**
Fusion gun	3	1-4	2	3	4	**low recoil**
Sniper laser	2	2-6	4	3	4	**low recoil**
Hand flamer	3	0-3	0	3	4	**dispersed fire, low recoil**
Neural disruptor	2	0-2	4	4	3	**non-lethal, low recoil, civilian**
Disintegrator	4	1-3	2	4	4	**dispersed fire,** *slaved to the owner's eyes*

armour tables

Armour type	Def.	Sta.	Agi.	Tech	Cost	Stunts/notes
Found armour	1	0	-2	-4	3	**civilian**
Chain mail	1	0	-1	-3	3	**flexible**
Police entry armour	3	0	0	0	3	**flexible, lightweight,** *built-in radio*
Bulletproof vest	2	0	0	0	2	**flexible, lightweight, civilian**
Pressure suit	1	0	0	0	2	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight, civilian**
Hostile environment suit	4	+2	-2	2	3	**power suit, pressurized, sensors (+1 Alertness)**, *industrial equipment, self-repairing, out of juice,* **civilian**
Cargo handler	3	+2	0	2	3	**power suit, servos, crushing fists (+1 Brawling harm)**, *industrial, out of juice,* **civilian**
Combat hazard suit	5	0	0	2	3	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight,** *on the net*
Advanced pressure suit	3	0	0	2	2	**pressurized, flexible, lightweight,** *On-board computer, easy to fix,* **civilian**
Powered marine armour	4	+2	0	3	4	**power suit, pressurized, servos, sensors (+1 Alertness), armoured penetrators (+1 Brawling pen.),** *out of juice, encrypted comms*
Hardflex skinsuit	6	0	0	4	2	**flexible, lightweight,** *networked,* **civilian**
Battlesuit	5	+2	0	4	4	**power suit, pressurized, servos, crushing fists (+1 Brawling harm), armoured penetrators (+1 Brawling pen.)** *very heavy, out of juice*

personal combat play sheet

For each player in an order determined by the caller:

1. Caller asks the player to declare an action. Player declares an action as one of move, attack, maneuver, or do something else.
2. Player conducts his action as per the action detail below.
3. Results of the action are determined and the acting player narrates the result.
4. Once all players have had a turn, the caller changes any turn-based counters (timers, etc.) that the referee may have added to the scene.
5. Repeat

attack (opposed)

1. The attack action may be directed at an opponent's Health stress track or his Composure stress track. If the latter, the attack is a called a Composure attack.
2. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
3. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
4. Player declares a target of the attack.
5. Player declares the Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
6. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense. If the target has already defended this round, this roll is used again (with any modifications from Aspects it had at the time).
7. Attacker rolls 4dF + Skill. If the defender has not previously rolled this round for defense, he rolls 4dF + Skill. Otherwise the defender uses his recorded defensive result. Count shifts as attacker - defender. Each Skill may only be used to make a roll once per round.
8. If this is the defender's first defense since attacking, save his roll (write it down, remember it, or keep the dice on the table).
9. Add Weapon harm if applicable.
10. Subtract Defender's (armour defense - weapon penetration) or zero if negative.
11. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll. Modify the defender's recorded roll by any advantages paid for here if the roll was recorded in this action. A previously recorded roll can only be modified by spending fate points.
12. Once all modifications of the roll are complete, any positive result is the number of shifts. Shifts may be reduced by the defender using Consequences.
13. If shifts are still positive, the defender's Health stress track is marked at the box indicated (one shift marks the first box, two shifts marks the second, and so on) and all boxes below. If the highest box to be marked is already marked, mark the next higher free box and all below.
14. If this is the first time the character has taken damage in this scene to his Health stress track, apply damage to both the Health stress track and the Composure stress track (First Blood rule).
15. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.
16. Narrate the result.

move (unopposed)

1. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
2. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
3. Player rolls 4dF + Agility (or MicroG if in microgravity) against a target value of zero and narrates his attempt. Record shifts.
4. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll.
5. Player may move his character a number of zones equal to his shifts, expending points for borders. A character may move a maximum of three zones in a single turn.

maneuver (unopposed or opposed)

1. Player can be compelled to prevent the action. If a compel is accepted the player's action ends.
2. Player may make his "free" one-zone move.
3. Player declares a target zone or character.
4. Player declares a Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
5. For maneuvers against a zone, player rolls 4dF + Skill against target value zero and subtracts the range in zones to the target.
6. For maneuvers against characters, the target will select a Skill to oppose and roll 4dF + Skill. If the defender has defended previously this turn with this skill, use the recorded value rather than roll. The attacker will roll 4dF + Skill against the target's roll. Subtract range to target.
7. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll. They do not modify previously recorded rolls—only rolls made during this action.
8. If any shifts are generated, the player may add an Aspect to the target, and that Aspect may be free-tagged once in the course of the scene.
9. Caller determines whether this Aspect is permanent or transient.
10. Narrate the result.

do something else (unopposed)

Seal a suit

When a suit capable of resisting the hostile environment loses integrity, the wearer must make an EVA Skill check against difficulty 4 to repair it instead of a combat action. Each turn this check is failed the character sustains a Composure and Health track hit on a box equal to the amount the check was missed by (negative shifts). If the player refuses to declare a repair action and instead takes a combat action, he automatically takes four shifts of damage to both Composure and Health tracks. These shifts may of course be mitigated by Consequences.

Apply first aid

Someone with the Medical Skill may wish to help an ally during combat. The target number for success is the highest box marked on the Health track. The number of successes indicate the track box (and all boxes below) that are to be erased. If that track box is not marked the next lower marked box and all boxes below are erased. The assisting character receives the temporary free-taggable Aspect, "Sitting Duck," unless the character has Military-grade Medical.

Create an obstruction

1. Player declares a target zone boundary.
2. Player can be compelled to forfeit his turn.
3. Player declares a Skill to be used and narrates his attempt.
4. Player rolls 4dF + Skill against target value 2.
5. Aspect invokes, tags, and spin modify the roll.
6. If any shifts are generated, the player may place a pass value of two on any border of the zone he has declared as his target (2/2/2).
7. If a pass value already exists on the border, it may be incremented by +1 (+1/+1/+1).

space combat play sheet

0. detection

1. Caller announces “Detection” and asks for compels.
2. Navigation roll determines position for each ship (roll at most once per ship)
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Resolve tags and invokes.
3. Highest roll places any two ships on bands between 3 and -3.
4. Subsequent rolls place one ship each.
5. Lowest roll places nothing.
6. Winner of detection phase decides to move (for this turn only) to phase 1 or phase 2. If there is no winner then always continue to phase 1.

1. position

1. Caller announces “Position” and asks for compels.
2. Ship’s V-shift roll, limited by effective Pilot Skill, determines who wins position. A ship declaring no V-shift (compelled or recovering Heat) gets an automatic result of -4.
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Resolve tags and invokes.
   c. Apply spin if desired.
   d. Apply burn if desired.
3. Highest roll may move his vessel the number of shifts between his roll and the lowest (to a maximum number of bands equal to the V-shift rating of his own ship) or another vessel the number of shifts between his roll and the target vessel’s roll (again, to a maximum number of bands equal to the winner’s V-shift rating).
4. A ship that has not applied V-shift for any reason may erase the highest checked box on its heat track.

2. electronic warfare

1. Caller anounces “EW” and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship’s EW roll, amplified by the communication officer’s effective Communications Skill.
   a. Roll and add Skill.
   b. Leave all dice on the table (since the single defensive roll applies to all attacks).
   c. Resolve tags and invokes.
   d. Apply spin if desired.
5. For each ship that declared a target, compare offense and defense roll and count shifts.
   a. Negative shifts are applied as damage to the attacker’s Data stress track.
   b. Positive shifts are applied as damage to the defender’s Data stress track.

3. beam weapons

1. Caller announces “Beams” and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare beam targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship’s Beam roll from 1 to a maximum of the Beam rating for each ship that declared a beam target, amplified by the gunnery officer’s effective Gunnery Skill.
    a. Defenders roll modifying a base defense of zero unless they have a Stunt providing better defense. If the defender has already rolled to defend against a Beam attack this round, use the recorded value.
        i. Beams fired at range greater than 2 bands take a -2 penalty to the roll.
        ii. Resolve tags and invokes. Do not modify previously recorded defensive rolls. Defensive rolls just made are modified and recorded with modifications.
        iii. Apply spin if desired.
        iv. If the attacker’s roll generates shifts, apply the number of shifts as a hit to the corresponding box on the Frame stress track and mark all boxes below as well.
        v. Wherever a defender succeeded by three or more, spin is awarded.

4. torpedoes

1. Caller announces “Torpedoes” and asks for compels.
2. Caller asks for ships to declare torpedo targets.
3. Caller announces target declaration is closed.
4. Ship’s Torpedo roll for each ship that declared a torpedo target, amplified by the gunnery officer’s effective Gunnery Skill.
    a. Targets roll with zero Skill unless they have a Stunt providing better defense or, if they choose, defend with some fraction of their Beam rating. If the defender has already rolled to defend against a Torpedo attack this round, use the recorded value.
    b. If the Beam rating applied offensively (in phase 3) + the Beam rating applied defensively exceeds the ship’s Beam rating, apply the difference as a hit to the corresponding box on the ship’s Heat stress track.
        i. Torpedoes fired at a range less than 2 bands take a -2 penalty to the roll.
        ii. Resolve tags and invokes.
        iii. Apply spin if desired. Do not modify previously recorded defensive rolls. Defensive rolls just made are modified and recorded with modifications.
    c. If the attacker’s roll generates shifts, apply the number of shifts as a hit to the corresponding box on the Frame stress track and mark all boxes below as well.
    d. Wherever a defender succeeded by three or more, spin is awarded to the defender.

5. damage control

Engineering and Computer Skills can be used to effect repairs, to a maximum of one roll per ship for each of Frame and Data stress track repair. Repair rolls are considered simultaneous, and the same character may not attempt both rolls. The target for repair rolls is the highest marked box on the relevant track, and success is measured in shifts: players may erase all the boxes below the degree of success.

Repeat phases 1-5, as necessary.

social combat play sheet

1. Caller polls the table in order of descending Charm or by any other fixed method that seems appropriate to the topic at hand. We often find that simply going clockwise around the table is adequate, perhaps starting with the highest Charm.
2. For each player, Caller asks for an action which is one of move, Composure attack, move another, obstruct, or maneuver and asks for the target if there is one.
   a. Caller asks for compels. If accepted, skip to the next player.
   b. Caller asks player to make his free move.
   c. Caller asks for Skill to be used and verifies that it has not been used twice in a row.
   d. A roll is made according to the specific action (see below).
   e. Aspects are invoked or tagged to improve the roll as per the Aspects rules.
   f. Caller offers any spin on the table.
   g. Resolution is announced by the caller and players narrate the results.
3. Once all characters have taken a turn, check off a timer box on the time track.
4. Examine the map for victories. If no one has won, repeat.

move (unopposed)

Player rolls 4dF + Skill and may move his character this many zones, expending points for borders as in personal combat. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.

The move action represents the character aligning himself with his interests (moving towards a target zone) or feigning alignment with another in order to be more effective (moving closer to another in order to reduce range modifiers).

composure attack (opposed)

1. Player declares a target of the attack.
2. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense.
3. Both players roll 4dF + Skill and count shifts. Reduce the shifts by the range between characters. Rolls are modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
4. If the attacker has shifts, they may be mitigated by Consequences.
5. The defender's Composure stress track is marked at the box indicated and all boxes below.
6. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.

The Composure attack represents an attempt to remove a character from play by making her ineffective.

obstruct (unopposed)

1. Player declares a target zone to attack.
2. Player rolls 4dF + Skill. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
3. Reduce the number of shifts by the range to the target zone.
4. If any shifts are generated, the player may increase any pass values in the target zone such that the total is no greater than the number of shifts.
5. If a pass value already exists on the border, it is increased by however many shifts are allotted to it.

The obstruct action represents efforts to pin a character into his current mind-set or deflect him from ideas that would be contrary to the acting character's interests.

maneuver (unopposed)

1. Player declares a target zone.
2. Player rolls 4dF + Skill and subtracts the range to the target zone. Roll is modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
3. If any (or exactly zero) shifts are generated, the player may add an Aspect to the target zone, and that Aspect may be free-tagged by an ally once in the course of the scene.

A maneuver adds a free-taggable aspect that reflects a change in the social situation that does not directly affect the principle actors in the social combat.

move another (opposed)

1. Player declares a target of the attack.
2. Target player declares the Skill to be used to defend and narrates his defense.
3. Both players roll 4dF + Skill and count shifts. Reduce the shifts by the range between characters. Rolls are modified by tags, invokes, and so on exactly as any other roll.
4. If the attacker has shifts, he may move the defender that many zones.
5. If the attacker fails his roll by three or more (gets three or more negative shifts), the defender gets spin.

The move another action is a careful effort to persuade. It represents effective rhetoric, brilliant argument, seduction, and like forms of persuasion. The acting character is trying to manipulate the target character directly.

running the player action part of the sequence

Once the player declares his character's actions the caller will ask the player to make his free move. The player may then move his character a single zone if he wants to.

The caller will then ask the player what Skill will be used for his action. The table will verify that the Skill was not used immediately previous.

You may not use the same Skill twice in a row.

Once the Skill is announced, the caller will ask the table for compels. A compel can involve any of the acting character's Aspects, any Aspect on his equipment, any Aspect on the zone he is in, or any Aspect on the scene. Anyone wanting to compel should hold up a fate point token and name the Aspect being compelled. The caller will verify that it is a legitimate Aspect for a compel and the acting player can either accept the fate point (and thus the compel) or pay the compelling player's character a fate point and deny the compel.

If a compel is accepted by the player, go to the next character (possibly one run by the same player).

Each action requires a 4dF + Skill roll to resolve. Once the dice are on the table, Aspects may be invoked or tagged by all participating players as appropriate. The usual rules for tagging Aspects apply: you may tag only one of each category of Aspect except for free-taggable Aspects, of which you may tag as many as are available. A tagged or invoked Aspect adds 2 to the roll or allows a re-roll.

During the Aspect tagging, the caller will offer all players any spin that's on the table in order to improve their rolls. It can be spent to add one to a roll.

Once all negotiable dice modifications are complete, the caller announces the resolution of the roll (who won) and directs the appropriate player to narrate the result. The authority to narrate depends upon the action declared.

When all players have had a turn, the caller then checks a box on the time track and determines whether the victory conditions have been met. If there is a victory, he announces it and hands control to the referee. If there is no victory, he begins the next turn.

platoon combat play sheet

1. The caller names the next actor and asks for actions.
   a. Actor selects a platoon that has not acted this turn and for each unit in that platoon:
      i. Determine platoon membership, based on range and communication.
      ii. Pick up any Interdiction tokens placed by the unit previously and remove one jamming counter if there are any.
      iii. Select an action for the unit and name its target (if any). If the unit is an aircraft on the LAUNCH! box it can be placed on the map and its turn ends.
      iv. The caller calls for compels. If a compel is offered, the Actor may take the fate point and skip this unit or pay a fate point and continue. A compel must refer to an Aspect on the unit, the platoon, the zone, or the map.
      v. Optionally move the unit 1 zone (a free move).
      vi. Resolve action as per the specific action listed below. Generally, roll Skill + 4dF, possibly versus a defensive roll of Skill + 4dF. Success is achieved by zero or more shifts. Adjust the rolls by invoking Aspects on the attacking unit, tagging enemy or friendly Aspects (unit or platoon), tagging Consequences on the defending unit, tagging Aspects on the attacker or defender's zone, or spending spin. Resolve the attack (apply damage, garner spin, place new Aspects, move)
      vii. If the unit is an aircraft, place it on the RE-ARM box on the re-arm track.
   b. Actor proceeds to the next unit she wishes to act.
2. When all units in the platoon have acted, the platoon is marked Acted.
3. If all platoons of all players have been marked Acted, the caller announces a new turn and has all platoon Acted markers removed.

move

1. Roll Movement Skill and move the number of shifts up to the maximum movement.
2. If your movement places you in (or passes through) the same zone as an enemy unit, both you and it gain a SPOTTED marker of value 3 and the moving unit ceases movement.
3. For artillery, roll Movement against a SPOTTED marker value and reduce its value by the number of shifts.
4. For aircraft units, move the number of shifts along the Re-arm track.
5. Aircraft on their LAUNCH! box may be placed (without a roll) on any zone on the map or any battery zone off the map. Aircraft in a battery zone may be attacked exactly as spotted artillery, though only with Anti-air Skills from a unit on the same artillery card as the spotted artillery unit.
6. If movement takes a unit out of LOS from all enemy units, remove a SPOTTED marker.
7. Caller offers compels to halt in each zone moved through.

attack (range, los)

1. Roll your appropriate attack Skill against enemy Armour Skill on any unit with a SPOTTED marker, counting shifts as damage. If the defender has already been fired on this round, use the recorded value instead of rolling. If this is the first defense, record the roll after invokes have been added to it. Subtract range to target. Add the minimum range of the attack type (zero for Hand-to-Hand, one for Direct Fire, two for Indirect Fire). -3 shifts gains spin for the defender. This extra arithmetic is basically saying that the range count, for purposes of modifying the attack roll, starts (as zero) at the minimum range of the weapon.
2. Indirect Fire may not act at range zero or 1. Direct Fire may not act at range zero. Hand-to-Hand may ONLY attack at range zero. Anti-air may attack at any range but recall that all ranges from ground to aircraft are increased by one. Range from aircraft to aircraft are counted normally. Artillery attacks targets without range modification. At-

tacks on artillery in an off-map "battery zone" are at effective range 10 when attacked by on-map units.

3. Units that attack are automatically spotted: for Indirect Fire, add a SPOTTED marker of value 1. For Direct Fire, add a SPOTTED marker of value 2. For Hand-to-Hand add a SPOTTED marker of value 3. If the unit already has a SPOTTED marker, increase it by this value. A SPOTTED marker can be no larger than 4.
4. Before applying shifts as damage, the defender may reduce the shifts by applying Consequences. Each Consequence reduces the shifts by 1, 2, or 4 and becomes a free-taggable Aspect on the platoon. A platoon may have no more than three Consequences.
5. Mark the remaining number of shifts as a hit on the corresponding box on the defending unit's Morale track and all boxes below it. A hit past the end of the Morale track Takes Out the unit.

interdict (range, los)

Select a target zone. Roll your appropriate attack Skill against target zero. Subtract range to target zone. Distribute shifts as pass values on any border for that zone (thus 4 shifts could place a pass value 2 on two borders, 4 on one border, 1 on 4 borders, or any other combination). Interdiction lasts until the beginning of the attacker's next turn. Interdiction attacks grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks.

rally

Roll Command against highest Morale track hit to repair track hits by shifts (as repair on spacecraft). Can roll against any unit in the platoon.

jam

Roll Signals against another unit's Signals. For each shift generated, place an OOC counter on the attacked unit. Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. Note that this attack is especially effective against a leader unit. Jamming ignores range.

unjam

Roll Signals against zero and remove the shifts in OOC counters from yourself. If this unit is a leader unit, it may remove OOC counters from members of its platoon.

maneuver (range)

Roll any Skill + narrative and subtract range to target zone. Success places an Aspect on a zone. The Aspect is free-taggable once by an allied unit. Use maneuvers to model artillery cratering ("Cratered"), forward observation ("Laser designated"), covering fire ("Keeping heads down"), and so on.

Maneuvers that use Direct Fire, Indirect Fire, or Hand-to-Hand grant SPOTTED markers exactly as attacks of those type.

Maneuvers cannot be used to place an Aspect on a Unit.

spot (los)

Roll Observation against Camouflage for any artillery that has fired or any other unit in line of sight. On any success, any allied unit may act on the spotted unit. Place a SPOTTED marker on the unit including the number of shifts. Failure by three or more generates spin for the defender. If the unit already has a SPOTTED marker, increase it by the number of shifts.

cover

Roll Camouflage against a target value of zero and reduce any SPOTTED markers on the unit by the number of shifts.

The Ladder

+8	Legendary
+7	Epic
+6	Fantastic
+5	Superb
+4	Great
+3	Good
+2	Decent
+1	Average
+0	Mediocre
-1	Poor
-2	Terrible

Time Track

Instant
A few moments
Half a minute
A minute
A few minutes
15 minutes
Half an hour
An hour
A few hours
An afternoon
A day
A few days
A week
A few weeks
A month
A few months
A season
Half a year
A year
A few years
A decade
A lifetime

Technology

4	On the verge of collapse
3	Slipstream mastery
2	Slipstream use
1	Exploiting the system
0	Exploring the system
-1	Atomic power
-2	Industrialization
-3	Metallurgy
-4	Stone age

Environment

4	Many garden worlds
3	Some garden worlds
2	One garden and several survivable worlds
1	One garden and several hostile environments
0	One garden world (and perhaps additional barren worlds)
-1	Survivable world
-2	Hostile environment (gravity but dangerous atmosphere)
-3	Barren world (gravity, no atmosphere)
-4	No habitable worlds at all

Resources

4	All you could want
3	Multiple exports
2	One significant export
1	Rich
0	Sustainable
-1	Almost viable
-2	Needs imports
-3	Multiple dependencies
-4	No resources