

Limitless Horizons



Richard Fannon

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A Pulp Sci-fi source book

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Introduction: Freedom, Optimism, Identity

We live in a society that grew up on pulp science fiction; the characters and iconic images from Star Wars and Star Trek are part of our culture. The spirit of freedom and optimism that pervades these films and the endless possibilities offered by the genre continue to be deeply attractive. This supplement explores the history of pulp sci-fi, from its beginnings with King of the Rocket Men, and the Flash Gordon series, through the Golden and Silver Ages of science fiction, then the visions of Gene Roddenberry and George Lucas to the modern television series (Stargate, Battlestar Galactica) and the novels of Ian M. Banks, Peter Hamilton and Ken MacLeod.

I have used a very, very wide definition of the phrase “pulp”. Basically I’m including anything that isn’t the hardest of hard science fiction and that has what are for me the three core concepts of freedom, optimism and identity. Larry Niven’s “Known Space” stories are in because of the hyperdrives, stasis fields and the use of a whole solar system as a ray gun (sorry “X-ray laser”¹) – look me in the eye and tell me that’s not pulpy. Most of Arthur C. Clarke’s output doesn’t make the cut because he tends to stick closely to the golden rule of hard SF – only break one law of physics per book (the “Tales from the White Hart” are an exception). As a rule of thumb, if it has ray guns, force fields and/or alien dancing girls, it’s not hard sci-fi. The line between space opera and pulp science fiction is so narrow that I’ll be using the terms interchangeably. I’m not the sort of person who splits hairs and I got bored with writing the phrase “pulp science fiction” all of the time.

SotC is a OGL role-playing game written by Evil Hat Productions and based on their FATE system. This supplement contains additional rules to tailor SotC to the pulp sci-fi genre; the SRD for SotC can be found at <http://www.faterpg.com/dl/sotc-srd.html>.

¹ Yes, this is a spoiler for “Ringworld Engineers”, but the novel is over twenty years old and fair game as far as I’m concerned. This supplement will, unapologetically, contain additional spoilers for classic pieces of science-fiction: Deckard’s a replicant, Darth Vader is Luke’s father, the Alien Queen has stowed away on the drop-ship and Han shot first (though that last item is matter of principle rather than a spoiler).

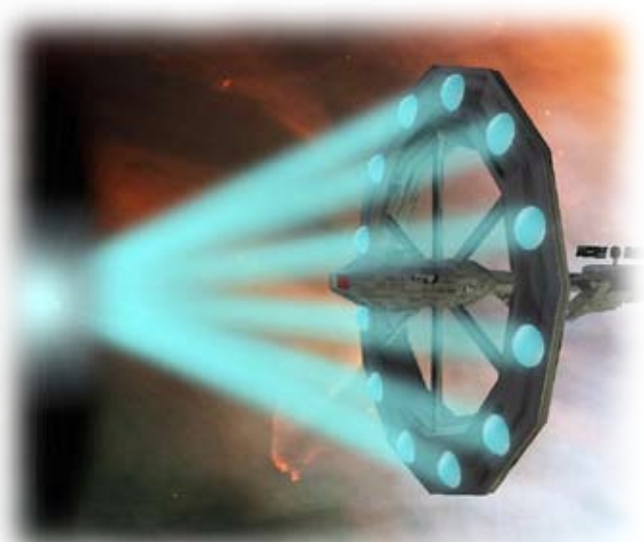
If you don’t want to use this game, the information will be useful for any tabletop campaign. However, you’ll find that most games won’t scale to the point where a hyper-intelligent battlecruiser becomes a viable character concept. SotC does – as we’ll see in chapter three.

Freedom

Space is a limitless horizon; the “final frontier” as the introduction to a certain TV series put it. Somewhere, out there, is freedom from the mundane. Alien dancing girls/guys, flying cars, unimaginable wonders. They’re all out there – either in space or in our future.

This freedom is also the freedom to question the nature of reality and the conventions of our society. More than any other genre, science-fiction asks: what if things were different? Robert Heinlein’s later novels explore at alternative meanings of family and sexuality. Warren Ellis’s “Transmetropolitan” looks at what a society will be if the question “what makes us human?” no longer has a meaningful answer.

Because they come out of Western culture, pulp stories usually have repressive, totalitarian antagonists – typically thinly veiled Nazis or communists (sometimes not even veiled – think of the Indiana Jones series). The “goodies” represent freedom; the “baddies” a stifling conformity – defeat or overthrow of the fascist regime is frequently the focus of the plot.



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The flip-side of freedom is responsibility. Kirk had to follow the Prime Directive otherwise he'd lose his ship. Sure he bent it just about every other week, but he always had a duty towards the species he interfered with. Even if a pulp hero is attempting to avoid responsibility at the start of their story, as part of their character development they will either have it thrust upon them or be embarrassed into acting like a decent human being. Look at Han Solo or Jason dinAlt from Harry Harrison's Deathworld books.

Optimism

In the future, everything will work – at least that's the theory. A constant theme of the sci-fi pulps is that the world they are depicting is better than the one we live in today. It might be more dangerous and the future is frequently under threat, but at least they've cured the common cold – right?

The lack of challenges can make utopias are boring places to set stories – there are two major ways to solve this problem. Firstly, you can have some sort of spoil-sport threaten the society – this can be external “barbarians”, internal rebels (discontented for some reason) or a combination of the two. The campaign would be focused around uncovering and foiling the plot. Alternatively, the characters could be based on the borders of the society, defending it from external threats (certain of the Lensmen novels), exploring what's beyond (Star Trek), or converting the poor, benighted heathens (the Culture novels of Ian M. Banks).

It's become almost a cliché to have the heroes uncover the dark side to an apparent utopia. Your players will be expecting something like this to happen, so it would be amusing to subvert their expectations – perhaps the Big Bad is faking the evidence to try to overthrow the legitimate authorities. If your players are anything like my regular group, *not* fermenting a violent revolution will be make a refreshing change.

It should go without saying that, when the story's setting is dystopian, the heroes will have a responsibility to turn that “dys-” into a “u-”. A common trope in some of the more recent space opera novels (particularly the work of Ken MacLeod,

Bruce Sterling and the graphic novels of Warren Ellis) is to set the work in a near future society that is close to social and/or environmental collapse. The heroes are presented with the responsibility to work to avert or mitigate the worse effects of this collapse and collectively build a better future. The implication is that the reader is also presented with this choice.

Identity

Pulp sci-fi heroes fall into two categories: either they are completely certain of who they are to the point of pathology or their search for their place in the universe is a significant part of the plot – contrast Captain Janeway with Seven of Nine.

When the heroes are outclassed by superior technology, the alien menace will be defeated by a combination of pluck, ingenuity and sheer bloody-mindedness; the author will often sledgehammer home that these are the heroes essential qualities (“Farscape”, “Independence Day”, “The Faculty”). Dr. Hans Zarkov from the '80s Flash Gordon resisted the erasure of his memories because of his (human) strength of will – and while we're on the subject of Flash Gordon: “What is this!?”/ “Humanity”/ “Madness!”.

Space opera doesn't just deal with human attributes: Spock's dual heritage; DeLenn's transformation into something neither Minbari nor human; Deckard (!); Heinlein's constant reuse of the Pinocchio myth with everyone from Friday to Mike Holmes. The character's search for their identity will be part of their development – as they find out more



about who they are and their place in the universe, they'll grow, becoming a stronger and better person.

The modern space operas become even more flexible in their use of identity. Characters can alter their own memories and, thus, the experiences that formed their personalities (e.g. Alastair Reynold's "Chasm City" (in particular) or Peter F. Hamilton's Commonwealth Saga). We'll be exploring the in-game implications of these ideas with some of the new feats in chapter three - Rules.

The History of the Sci-fi Pulp

In this chapter, I'll be rushing through the history of science fiction and picking out my favourite stories that typify my (admittedly idiosyncratic) view of pulp sci-fi. Inevitably this means that some of your (and my) favourite authors will be skipped (I've entirely ignored cyberpunk because it's dystopian and I view the pulps as inherently optimistic).

The history of pulp science fiction starts with a history of the pulps - inexpensive fiction magazines printed on cheap wood pulp paper. They peaked in popularity during the Great Depression of the late 1920's and 1930's, offering an escape from the financial and emotional trauma of everyday life.

In 1926, Hugo Gernsback founded "Amazing Stories" magazine - devoted exclusively to science fiction. It and its competitors ("Astounding Stories" and "Wonder"), created and popularised the tropes and clichés of pulp science fiction: ray guns, surprisingly streamlined space ships and tentacled or clawed aliens with evil designs on our women.

Published first in "Amazing Stories" (and later, in "Astounding Stories") between 1934 and 1948, E. E. Smith's Lensmen series stands out not only as the definitive piece of pulp sci-fi from this period, but one of the best science fiction series of all time. Edgar Rice Burroughs books feature covers that are a little racy even by today's standards (particularly the "Mars" sequence) and have more alien dancing girls than you can shake a *thoat* at.

Film tends to demand less realism and more pulpy

goodness from its science fiction: King Kong, the Flash Gordon series and (to a lesser extent) the movie Metropolis are ridiculous from a scientific viewpoint and appear cliché-ridden today, but these are the films that created the clichés. Imagine seeing a giant gorilla climbing the Empire State Building for the first time!

The 1940's and 1950's are often referred to as the Golden Age of science fiction. Joseph W. Campbell's tenure as editor at Astounding (now called "Astounding Science Fiction") kick-started an effort to have science fiction taken seriously as a genre. While the work of Issac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Fredrick Pohl (among others) is, undoubtedly, brilliant, their efforts to put the science into science fiction squeezed out some of the fun. Frankly, we don't care about the physics behind the ray gun or the biology of the alien holding it. All that matters is what or whom the alien is pointing the ray gun at, and why they're doing it. With a couple of exceptions, if you want pulp during the Golden Age, you need to be looking at the movies.

And what movies! "Forbidden Planet", "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", "The Day the Earth Stood Still", "The Thing" - all chock full of ideas for a pulp science fiction role-playing game. Ray Harryhausens's experiments with stop-motion animation in "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms", "Earth vs. the Flying Saucers" and "20 Million Miles to Earth" look archaic in today's CGI age, but were cutting edge at the time.

It seems to be a cycle: as sci-fi movies become less pulpy, the novels become more so. With a few exceptions (the glorious "Barbarella", for example), if you want pulp science fiction from the 1960's, you're looking at the "New Wave" authors. These days you can buy second-hand Michael Moorcock paperbacks by the foot and each will contain at least one mind-blowing idea that you just have to inflict on your players. Identity is a constant theme of Philip K. Dick's work.

I can't let the 1960's go past without mentioning Gene Roddenbury's vision of the future: Star Trek. Yes, it's cheesy, dated and the sets wobble, but Gene knew what sort of world he wanted his grandchildren to grow up in and managed to communicate it to the

rest of the planet.

Some people claim that Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (who did most of their best work in the 1980's) are hard science fiction authors, but I can see ray guns, force fields and alien dancing girls, so that's good enough for me. The distinction between science fiction, fantasy and the superhero genres blurred again, particularly after the release of that most iconic of movies, "Star Wars". "Space opera", a phrase that was originally an insult, became an acceptable way to describe pulp science fiction. Flash Gordon returned (and if you haven't seen the 1980 "Flash Gordon", stop reading this book right now and get hold of a copy), "Dune" was made into a movie that emphasised the novel's fantastic elements and the Star Trek franchises continued through the 1970's and 1980's. Harry Harrison and Robert Heinlein did a lot of their best work during this period; Harrison's "Stainless Steel Rat" and Heinlein's "Lazarus Long" are quintessential pulp sci-fi heroes.

"New Space Opera" describes a body of work that emerged during the 1990's and attempted to merge the conventions of space opera with the latest scientific speculations. For me, Peter F. Hamilton, Ian M. Banks, Ken MacLeod and Alastair Reynolds stand out. One of the drives behind writing this book was wanting to run a campaign set in the Commonwealth Universe or where the PCs are part of Special Circumstances or the Cassini Division. Again, recent science fiction movies haven't had many pulp elements, but TV series such as "Stargate", "Babylon 5", "Firefly" or "Battlestar Galactica" are rich sources of ideas. If you're planning to rip off plot lines, never forget that your players will probably have watched the same material. One particular session where I did this, my player group were making sarcastic comments by the second encounter.

Rules

This is the meat of this book, a series of optional additions to SotC that allow the GM to customise it to a pulp science fiction campaign.

Mysteries and Space Monks

Depending on the style of the campaign, the Mysteries skill may be inappropriate, usually when the campaign universe has no supernatural elements. In other campaigns, the Mysteries skill may be restricted to characters with certain aspects, representing advanced training or innate abilities (think of the Dune or Lensmen novels).

"Space Monk" is an euphemism for a trademarked iconic order of sci-fi martial artists whose name starts with "J" and rhymes with "red-eye". The stunt "Space Monk Combat Style" (page 22) represents these character's psychically-enhanced athleticism and ability to dodge and deflect incoming attacks.

Racial aspects

Each character in a science fiction campaign should have an aspect that represents their species of origin (characters of mixed heritage might have two – or even more). This aspect would cover their natural environment (atmosphere, temperature, gravity, etc.), their appearance and perhaps idiosyncrasies such as the race's attitude towards technology or any ancestral enemies. The GM should decide the "default" environment for his or her campaign. It's speciesist, but if the campaign universe includes humans, then it's easiest to take us as the standard – any species whose requirements in terms of gravity, atmosphere, and temperature (etc.) deviates from the human norm should reflect this in their racial aspect. The sample background includes four races and their racial aspects, but here are some more examples (with illustrations of how the aspect could be used in a game):

Brekkit (frog-legged, long-tongued, amphibians): The Brekkit are, effectively, frog-men. The player could invoke the "amphibian" or "frog-legged" section of the aspect on an appropriate Athletics roll or invoke the "long-tongued" section of the aspect for effect to surreptitiously snatch a key-card off a nearby table. The GM can compel the "amphibian" section of the aspect if the current environment is too hot or too dry for the character.



Race Zero (cybernetic, hardy, hive-minded, cold-loving, electrovores): Race Zero are a humanoid species that have replaced much of their original tissue with bionic upgrades, to the point where they can't reproduce without the technological assistance. The player can invoke "hardy" or even "cybernetic" to aid their PC's survival in hostile environments or "hive-minded" on an Academics or Contacting roll if other members of the hive-mind are within range. Of course, if the goals of the hive-mind contradict those of the PCs then the GM can have a great time compelling this aspect.

Star Dragons (space-dwelling, delicate-winged, solar-powered, rock-eaters): The star dragons live in zero gravity and hard vacuum, unfurling their huge and delicate wings to act as solar sails. They have photosynthetic skin and grind minerals and trace nutrients from rocks. Some are genetically engineered so they can live in an atmosphere (they have the Life Support feat); others use gadgets or remote drones to interact with other races.

Therzine (silicon-based, high-gravity, high-temperature, ammonia-breathers): Effectively living rocks, the Therzine require a specialised environment in which to live. It's likely that some sort of suit will be needed if they are to interact directly with the rest of the party. Physical consequences could represent damage to this suit and the GM can use compels to represent that the suit might make the PC clumsy, slow or unable to manoeuvre in tight spaces.

Vrark (low-gravity, winged, fragile, feathered, avians): The Vrark might only be able to glide in their native environment (unless the PC also takes the Flight stunt), but the player would certainly be able to invoke "winged" to reduce falling damage or to help manoeuvring in zero-gravity. The GM should keep the "fragile" aspect in mind when deciding for physical (or even mental) Consequences for the character.

Racial aspects should be represented on the character sheet with the name of the species, followed by the text of the aspect in brackets – for example: Vrark (low-gravity, winged, fragile, avian) or Therzine (silicon-based, high-gravity, high-temperature, ammonia-breather).

These aspects can be modified by the character's relationship with their species – for example: Brekkitt Royal Family (frog-legged, long-tongued, amphibian) or Renegade Race Zero (cybernetic, hardy, hive-minded, cold-loving, electrovore).

Humans can also have racial aspects. These should be chosen by the GM and will reflect his or her view of humanity within the campaign. Typical aspects might include: ubiquitous, creative, stubborn, charismatic or even primitive (if the human race is a relative newcomer on the galactic scene).

Optional Character Generation Process

The standard character generation process in SotC is tied pretty strongly to the default setting and doesn't seem very appropriate for a science fiction

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campaign. If you don't want to use Fast Character Creation, here are some guidelines

Character ideas

Most of the character ideas in SotC can be used without modification (“scientist”, “academic”, “plucky reporter”) or can easily be given a sci-fi flavour (the “primitive/foreigner” is from a less technically advanced species, the “two-fisted pilot” has a spaceship instead of a plane and might make a living from smuggling, asteroid mining or shifting legal cargo). The “gadget guy” or “science hero” work best if the science or technology is more advanced than that which is available to the general public – a gift from a shadowy mentor or found in the ruins of an ancient, dead, civilisation.

Colonist

To the scientist this planet might be just a catalogue number, to the two-fisted pilot it might be just another backwater destination, to the space marine (see below) it might be their next mission, but to the colonist it's home. More sophisticated characters might treat this hero like a hick from the sticks, but your local knowledge is excellent – and invaluable.

What are you doing: You're either making this lump of rock into a home or trying to get off of it and go somewhere – anywhere – more interesting.

Medic

The medic isn't just a specialised version of the scientist – it's a completely different character archetype. Accidents happen, that new, attractive-looking fruit turns out to be the larval stage of a parasitic alien or the (apparently friendly) little green monster turns out to have a ray gun concealed in its tentacles. Sooner or later, *everyone* needs the services of the medic.

At core, the medic is motivated by compassion, but they will frequently hide it behind a veil of cynicism. The attitude is a defence – not every patient makes it and they need to protect themselves.

What are you doing: Making the universe a better place – one patient at a time.

Engineer

The engineer is a more practical version of the scientist, with little interest in the theory behind a particular piece of equipment unless it directly impacts on fixing or improving the gadget. The engineer will often attribute personalities to their favourite devices – they can be accused to relating better to machines than to their organic companions (if the campaign includes artificial intelligences, this may well be true). The engineer is happiest when they have a technological problem to solve.

What are you doing: Making the universe a better place – one repaired or improved piece of technology at a time.

Space Marine

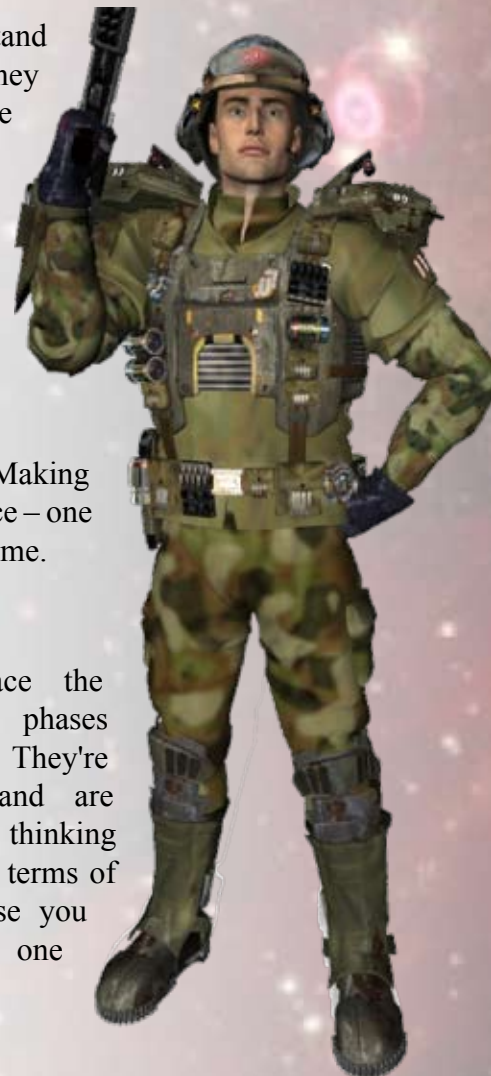
Deep space is a dangerous place. Civilians frequently come across someone – or something – that they can't handle. That's space marine comes in. Either employed by the authorities or a freelance mercenary, their job is to kill people, things, or people who look like things.

Civilians don't understand you. They can't. They haven't seen what you've seen – been to the places you have been. This will put a distance between you and your companions, but as long as they respect your abilities, you don't really care.

What are you doing: Making the universe a better place – one bug-eyed monster at a time.

Phases

These phases replace the character generation phases found in the SotC SRD. They're completely optional and are intended to get you thinking about your character in terms of aspects. In each phase you should select between one



and four aspects, for the usual total of ten.

Phase one - origin

In this phase you decide where your character came from and the events of their youth from around birth to just before they're considered an adult by their society. In this phase you choose their racial aspect and perhaps one of two aspects related to their family, planet of origin, a childhood friend or a significant event from this time.

Where the character grew up and who they grew up with will influence the character's attitude towards technology and towards alien species. Are they cosmopolitan or xenophobic; a Luddite or a technophile? These attitudes might be important enough to reflect as part of an aspect. If the planet of origin is famous or an important trading hub then this can become part of an aspect.

Phase two - background

This phase covers your character's teenage years and early adulthood (if they are an adult). If your character completed secondary or tertiary education or undertook professional training then an aspect could reflect this. A first love is always significant and some friendships – or enemies – made at this time can last a lifetime. At this point your character be starting on their initial career – professional relationships and adversaries can be a source of aspects.

While we're on the subject of relationships – has this character ever been in love (if his/her/its species does “love”). Have they been married (or equivalent)? How did it work out? Do they have offspring? What's happened to them?

Phase three - uniqueness

All Limitless Horizons characters are exceptional in some way. In this phase you decide how this unique nature is reflected in their aspects. An aspect should be linked to your character's Superb skill, customising or clarifying its use. In addition aspects can be related to their Great skills to one or more stunts (particularly if they are in a chain of pre-requisites).

Is there something else that makes them special? Are they the heir to a politically important family or CEO of an interstellar empire; famous or infamous for something they didn't actually do, but the media blew out of all proportion?

Phase four - motivation

This is the phase where you tie your character to the rest of the party or into the campaign. The GM might have a list of allied or protagonist organisations – if your character has an aspect that relates to one of these organisations it will be easier to relate the character to the GM's concept of the plot.

What does the character want? Money? Power? Fame? A successful career? To find or rescue their true love? The character's drives and goals should be reflected in their aspects.

Do the character's already know each other? Are they acquaintances, friends, professional rivals or even enemies? What is it that will get each character in the party to the first location of the first adventure of the campaign?

Phase five - rounding out the character

If you're still stuck for that last aspect, think about their hobbies, passions, pet peeves or prejudices. If completely clueless, Risus² clichés are practically identical of SotC aspects and the Risus Companion has many ways of generating that last #@!% cliché including the “Megaversal Omnigroovy Background Machine”, “The Random Bad Thing That Just Happened To My Character Table” and, of course “The Last #@!% Cliché Table”. If you're *still* stuck, then just leave a gap and add it in play.

Scaling

SotC is designed to handle conflict between people. Sometimes the people ride in vehicles and sometimes the vehicles might have weapons, but this doesn't make a significant difference to the amount of damage they can take or inflict.

Limitless Horizons can operate on a much larger

² Risus™ is S. John Ross' trademark for his Anything RPG. It (and the excellent, but completely optional, Risus Companion) can be found at <http://risus.cumberlandgames.com/>

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scale. Vehicles (and even characters) can be the size of planetary bodies. Handling these differences in magnitude requires specialised rules that are covered in this section. All characters, weapons, vehicles and other objects are divided into three size categories: personal scale, capitol scale and astronomic scale.

Personal scale

This governs people around human size and vehicles big enough to carry small groups of people but not more than a single other vehicle. As a rough rule of thumb, a tank, bus, truck or fighter aircraft is still at personal scale, but an ocean liner, battleship, jumbo jet or other large transport aircraft is not.

Personal scale guns are designed to damage people and small vehicles; they do no damage to capitol scale or astronomic scale characters, vehicles or objects.

Capitol scale

Capitol scale starts where personal scale ends – container ships, transport aircraft or spacecraft. It ends when the vehicle is capable of carrying other capitol scale vehicles. As the name suggests, capitol ships such as battleships or aircraft carriers are capitol scale.

Capitol scale guns are designed to damage capitol scale characters, vehicles or structures. If used on a personal scale vehicle or character, it automatically inflicts a Moderate Consequence if it hits or a Severe Consequence if spin is generated. Fortunately, as they aren't designed to hit personal scale targets, a personal scale defender gets a +2 bonus to their roll. Capitol scale guns do no damage to astronomic scale characters, vehicles or structures.

A personal scale vehicle will only be able to carry a capitol scale gun if it's specifically designed for that purpose (like a tank or a torpedo boat). Man-portable capitol weapons exist: anti-air or anti-tank missiles for example. They tend to be very heavy, single shot, and require time to set up or aim.

Astronomic scale

Astronomic scale structures or characters are big enough to generate their own gravitational field.

While a community can live on or in a capitol-scale vehicle, whole civilizations can live on an astronomic-scale structure. It's no co-incidence that the stunt that indicates the character is astronomic scale is called the “That's No Moon” – we are talking about things the size of the Death Star.

Astronomic scale guns do normal damage to astronomic scale characters, structures or objects. When used on a capitol scale vehicle or character, it automatically inflicts a Moderate Consequence if it hits or a Severe Consequence if spin is generated. As they aren't designed to hit capitol scale targets, a capitol scale defender gets a +2 bonus to their roll. Astronomic scale guns can't target personal scale targets. What they can do is shoot at the structure, vehicle or character that they are in or on and hope that they take collateral damage (see below).

Incidentally, the Death Star's superlaser isn't an astronomic scale gun, it's a plot device. An astronomic-scale weapon can (eventually) damage a planet, but most planets have the equivalent of at least Average Endurance and possibly some Toughness stunts. A Minor physical Consequence for a planet would be something like “Spectacular Aurora Borealis”, “Global Electrical Storm” or even “Hot Hail”; a Moderate Consequence could be “Worldwide Seismic Activity”; a Severe Consequence could be “Volcanoes And Earthquakes And Tsunami – Oh My!”. If a planet is taken out, then the campaign world has a new asteroid belt.

Collateral Damage

If a character is in or on a structure, vehicle or being, and that structure, vehicle or being is physically damaged, then the character may also take damage. Debris from collapsing buildings, equipment falling out of badly secured overhead lockers or the character simply falling over – all these things can cause harm.

Take the shift generated by the attack on the structure and treat this as a personal scale attack on the character. This attack is defended against using Athletics – if the character is in some sort of purpose-designed shelter or is securely strapped into the vehicle (or similar), they get a +2 bonus to their roll.

If the structure takes a consequence then all of the characters within the structure take a consequence of similar severity (if the structure takes a mild consequence then so do all the characters within the structure, etc.)

Example

The United Federation Marine Corps dropship *Necessary Evil* is on final approach to a landing on a hostile planet, when it comes under fire. The dropship is a capitol scale vehicle; the marines are personal scale characters.

In the first exchange, the dropship is hit by a capitol scale missile and takes a 4-stress physical hit. All the marines must roll Athletics to defend against an attack with a result of Great (+4). As they are all strapped in, they get a +2 bonus to this roll.

In the second exchange, the dropship is hit by another missile and takes a mild consequence – Knocked Off Target. All the marines within the dropship also take a mild consequence: something like A Little Shaken Up But Pretending Everything's OK would be appropriate.

Concerns

I've just read back the previous few paragraphs, and, even though I wrote them, the idea of rules for blowing up planets still seems insane. However, there are plenty of balances.

Firstly, while an astronomic scale character is impossible to damage with conventional weapons, they are still vulnerable to social or mental attacks. This does raise the image of a artificial intelligence capable of mass destruction that can be bullied or shamed into compliance, but that kind of gonzo is typical of a Ian M. Banks or Ken MacLeod novel (or even Robert Heinlein – sure Dora didn't have astronomic-scale weaponry, but she was easily a capitol ship).

Secondly, astronomic-scale characters will have astronomic-scale opponents. Unless the campaign world is absolutely lawless, anyone who's capable of blowing up planetary bodies will be tracked and registered.

Thirdly, if you don't think your campaign can cope

with it, just ban the appropriate stunts. However, I think you and your players will be missing out.

Ship-to-ship combat rules

The existing chase rules work well when one ship is being chased by one or more other ships, but for more equal engagements you need a different set of rules – particularly if you want to involve the whole party in the combat.

Each exchange, each PC or significant NPC on each ship involved in the combat can contribute in one of six ways:

Pilot: a single character can be the designated pilot; this character will make any necessary Pilot rolls during that exchange. The Pilot skill can be used to take evasive action (in which case the character's Pilot skill can be rolled as a defence against any attacks using the Guns skill) or to manoeuvre. Any manoeuvres will be resolved using the "Resolving Manoeuvres" guidelines in the SotC SRD – the pilot's Pilot skill will typically be rolled against the opponent's Pilot skill. Manoeuvres can be used to add tags such as "On His Tail" or "Missile Lock" to an opponents ship to or to remove similar tags remove tags from the characters' ship.

Shields: a single character can be in charge of maintaining the ship's shields (or equivalent defensive systems). This character's Engineering skill can be rolled as a defence against any attacks using the Guns skill.

Electronic Warfare: a single character can be in charge of jamming the guidance systems of any incoming missiles, attempting to break the opponents weapons lock or otherwise frustrating their attacks. Jamming can be passive (in which case the character's Engineering skill can be rolled as a defence against any attacks using the Guns skill) or active. Active jamming is a manoeuvre; the character's Engineering is rolled against the opponent's Engineering in an attempt to add tags such as "Missiles Jammed" or "Sensors

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Overloaded” on the opponent’s ship or to remove tags from the characters’ ship such as “In My Sights” or “Missile Lock”.

Fire Control: a single character can be in charge of the ship’s targeting system, attempting appropriate manoeuvres to add tags such as “Target Acquired” or “Missile Lock”. The character’s Engineering skill is rolled against the opponent’s Engineering or Pilot.

Power: a single character can be in charge of power distribution. They make a single Engineering roll each exchange and use it to assist another character on the same ship by diverting power to the system they are responsible for. After making a single Pilot, Engineering or Guns roll, this second character can choose the higher of the two results.

Weapons: Remaining characters can be assigned to weapons systems on the ship. They can attack opposing vessels by rolling Guns versus Engineering or Pilot. In addition they can shoot down any incoming missiles (or similar incoming objects). In this case Guns is rolled as a defence.

A character may change roles during an exchange (or two characters may swap roles) by tagging an appropriate aspect and paying the usual Fate Point. Normally, only a single defence is allowed against a particular attack, but if additional characters invoke any appropriate aspects then they can contribute; the highest result is used. Characters don’t have to be directly involved in combat. They can attempt to find out information about the attackers (Academics or Engineering if they are using the scanners) or to repair damage.

Attempting to repair a ship in combat requires an Engineering roll against a target of Fair; if it succeeds with at least one shift, the subject may remove a checkmark in its one-stress box on its physical stress track. Every two shifts beyond the first improves this effect by one; for example, with five shifts, a character can remove a checkmark in his target’s three-stress box. Success can also be used to mitigate the worst effects of a severe or

lesser consequence applied to the ship – limiting the extent to which the aspect can be compelled. Only a single person can attempt to repair a particular ship in a given exchange.

If the ship takes damage any characters within the ship may also be injured; see Collateral Damage on page 10.

Example

While on a three year mission beyond the borders of the United Planetary Confederation, the Deep Space Exploration Vessel *Xenophilia Is A Legitimate Lifestyle Choice* encounters a gigantic abandoned structure in a tight orbit surrounding a dying star. While scanning this artifact of a dead civilization, they accidentally trigger its self-defence systems and battle commences.

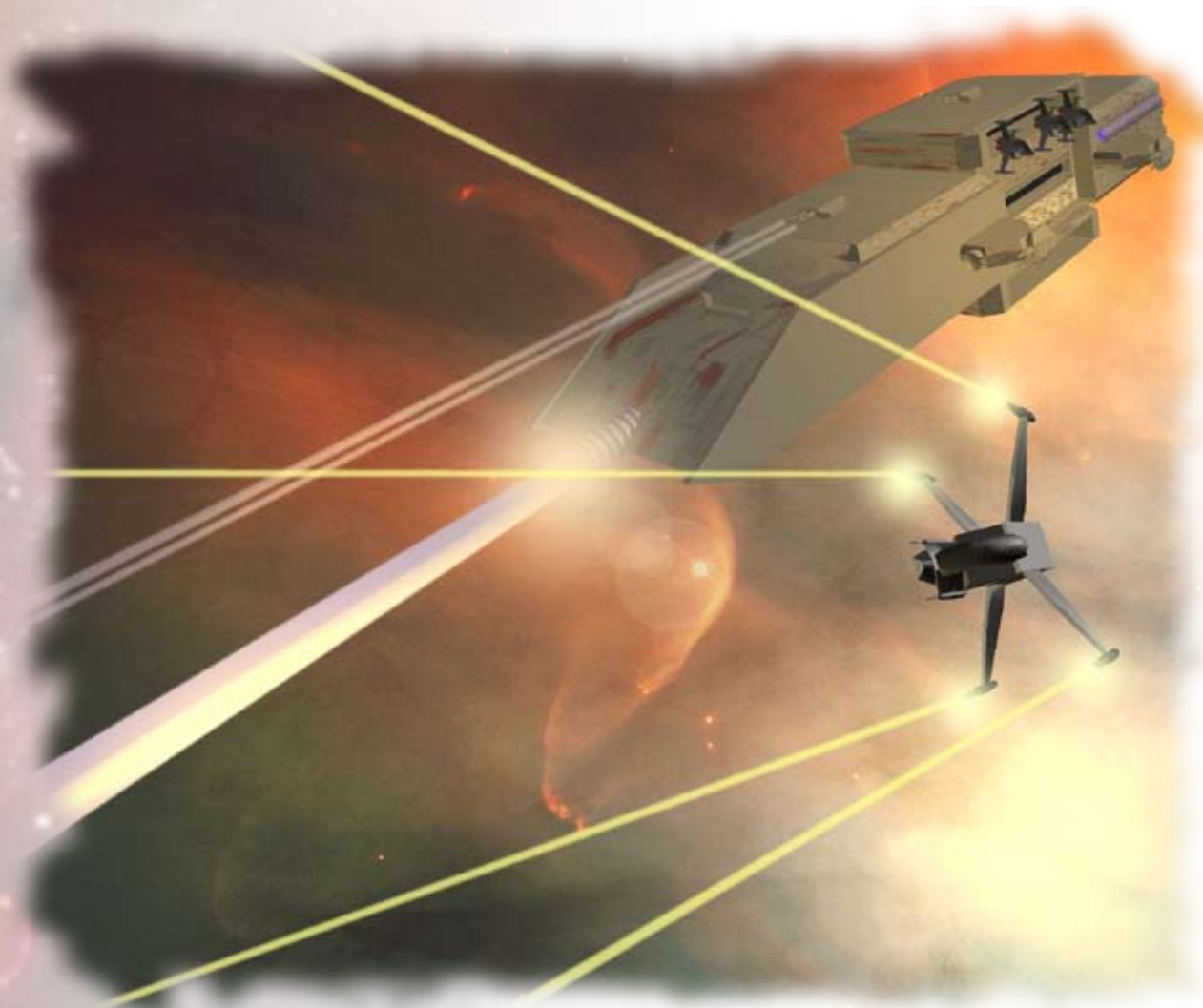
The *Xenophilia* and its crew are the PCs, the artifact is controlled by the GM. The PCs consist of:

Xenopilia: An artificial intelligence housed within an astronomic scale star-ship. Its relevant skills are Superb Engineering, Great Endurance (giving it eight boxes on its Health stress track) and Fair Alertness and has the Personality Hacking, That’s No Moon and Inbuilt Astronomic Guns stunts (see pages 20 onwards).

Q-rarack: Q-rarack is a ph-torak (massive, sessile, hyperintelligent, psychics) a species that has genetically engineered itself for generations into the perfect pilot. As such q-rarack is little more than the support structure for a truly massive, capitol-scale brain (the only thing capable of making the calculations necessary for a reliable hyperjump). Its relevant skills are Superb Pilot, Great Alertness, Good Engineering and Mediocre Athletics and it has the Danger Sense stunt.

Brian apTorg: Brian is a human and the ship’s weapons officer. His relevant skills are Superb Guns, Great Engineering, Good Alertness and Good Athletics.

Ke’Pek: another human, Ke’Pek is in charge of sensors and electronic warfare. Her relevant



skills are Superb Engineering, Great Guns, Great Academics, Fair Alertness and Fair Athletics.

The artifact contains a hivemind of artificial intelligences and is played by the GM. Its skill levels and stunts will be revealed during play.

Ambush

Immediately before the attack by the artifact, Ke'Pek had noticed some unusual electromagnetic activity on the sun, but the strength of the solar flare takes them totally by surprise. The artifact has the Astronomic Inbuilt Guns stunt so is quite capable of damaging the astronomic scale Xenophilia. Q-rarack attempts to dodge the Epic attack, but its Pilot has been reduced to Fair by the ambush (Mediocre +2 for Danger Sense). Despite q-rarack spending a Fate Point to invoke One With The Ship, Xenophilia

still takes a 4-point physical hit. Its physical stress track now looks like this:

□□□☒□□□□

Because Xenophilia has taken damage, each of the other PCs have to roll Athletics+2 against a Great attack or they will also take damage. Brian rolls well and takes no damage; Ke'Pek and q-rarack roll badly and choose to take a mild consequence each (q-rarack chooses "Shaken Up", Ke'Pek chooses "Sexy Black Eye").

First Exchange

Q-rarack acts first. He decides he will act as pilot during this exchange (and subsequent exchanges). His Pilot skill will be used as a defence against any attacks. As his action this turn, he decides to scan the local system for what just hit them. He easily makes an Average Engineering roll and the

GM informs him that some sort of gravitational emanation from the artifact triggered a solar flare aimed at the Xenophilia.

Brian acts next. He invokes Trigger Happy and fires a wide angle blast from the main batteries at the artifact. The artifact has raised its shields, so the GM rolls Engineering for the artifact against Brian's Guns for a 2-point physical hit. The GM doesn't reveal the artifact's stress – someone will need to scan the artifact in more detail for this to be revealed.

The artifact acts next and triggers another solar flare. Xenophilia decides to declare full defence and rolls Engineering as a defence. Despite this, it still takes a single physical hit. Its stress track now looks like this:

☒☐☐☒☐☐☐☐

Xenophilia has declared full defence so it doesn't act. Ke'Pek acts last and decides to do a detailed scan of the artifact. The artifact is trying to jam the scan, so the GM rules that every shift that Ke'Pek gains on her Engineering vs. Engineering check represents a piece of information that she gains. She invokes her Console Jockey aspect and gains three shifts. The GM tells Ke'Pek's player that the artifact has shielding equivalent to Superb Engineering, structure equivalent to Great Endurance and heavy armour. If you add this to an attack equivalent to Epic Guns this means that the Xenophilia is heavily outclassed.

Second Exchange

Q-rarack acts first again. It decides to manoeuvre the ship away from the sun in an attempt to avoid the solar flares; effectively declaring full defence.

Brian acts next. Instead of firing the ship's weapons he chooses to use them to disrupt the photosphere of the sun to prevent the solar flares. The GM rules that this is a manoeuvre and it will need a Fantastic result because the plasma batteries aren't designed to do this. Brian invokes his Combat Technobabble aspect, makes the roll and adds the Disrupted Photosphere aspect to the scene.

The artifact acts next and attempts to trigger a solar flare. Q-rarack tags the Disrupted Photosphere

aspect for free (as it's the first tag); this, added to the full defence means that Q-rarack easily outmaneuvers the solar flare.

Xenophilia choses to hold its action until after Ke'Pek has acted. Knowing that they can't beat the artifact in a stand up fight, Ke'Pek rolls Engineering to see if it can find any weaknesses in its electronic security (a manoeuvre). She invokes Console Jockey, rolls Engineering against the artifact's Engineering and adds Open Firewall, a sticky aspect, to the artifact.

Now Xenophilia takes its action. Its Personality Hacking stunt requires the tagging of an aspect – in this case Open Firewall. It rolls Engineering against the artifact's Resolve, attempting to convince the artifact that they aren't enemies, and adds a 4-point mental hit to the artifact.

Third Exchange

Q-rarack acts first again and declares full defence.

Brian wants to repeat his action, but the GM rules that the photosphere is already as disrupted as it's going to get. As an alternative, Brian suggests using electronic warfare, confusing the artifact's sensors. The GM agrees, Brian rolls Engineering vs. the artifact's Engineering, but fails to get any shifts.

The artifact triggers another solar flare. Despite declaring full defence, Q-rarack is unable to dodge its full effects. Xenophilia takes a 1-point physical hit, which rolls up. Its stress track now looks like this:

☒☒☒☒☐☐☐☐

Ke'Pek acts next. Xenophilia asks her to search the computer's memory banks for any information on the artifact, cross-referencing with what they now know about its capabilities. As described on page 18, this is an Academics roll, modified by Engineering. Ke'Pek invokes Enthusiastic Amateur Xenoarchologist and rolls well. The GM decides that she finds a reference to the legend of the Starkillers, a race who hid themselves “at the star's end” waiting for a worthy champion to share their wisdom. This result tags the artifact with Waiting For A Worthy Champion.

Xenophilia acts last, he invokes Waiting For

A Worthy Champion and its own aspect of Moral Superiority and rolls Engineering against the artifact's Resolve. He rolls enough to force a mild consequence. The GM offers a concession instead; the artifact will stop firing and start talking instead – at least for long enough for the character's to explain themselves and present a case for their survival.

Optional Rule: Realistic starship weapons skills

By default, Limitless Horizons uses the Guns skill to cover all ranged weapons that aren't thrown, from pistols to orbital defence lasers. Arguably, this is unrealistic – capitol and astronomic scale weapons are aimed primarily using computers, etc. and (as described on page 18), this would normally be covered by the Engineering skill. If you would like more realism, this is an option, but there are two main reasons why we have chosen to use Guns instead. Firstly, in the space opera genre, crack-shots with personal weapons tend to be equally good with ship-to-ship weapons. Secondly Engineering is already used for many things in ship-to-ship combat and having it govern the firing of weapons will over-emphasise it. However, there is a new stunt called Fire Control (see page 21) that allows Engineering to be used instead of Guns when firing capitol scale and astronomic scale weapons.

Gravity

Space opera tends to assume that most of the action takes place in an environment that is similar to that of Earth, despite having to hand-wave over the technology necessary for “gravity generators” and the like. Limitless Horizons makes the same assumption; unless a character has an appropriate racial aspect, it's assumed that they're used to an environment of around 1 g. Scenes with gravity that is substantially different to this average can be invoked for appropriate Might or Athletics rolls.

Zero-gravity environments

Unless you're born to it or have had lots of training, a zero-gravity³ environment is deeply unnatural. If a character has any aspects that imply a lack of

3 Yes, I do know that the technical term is “microgravity”, but I’m going with the popular expression as it’s more familiar

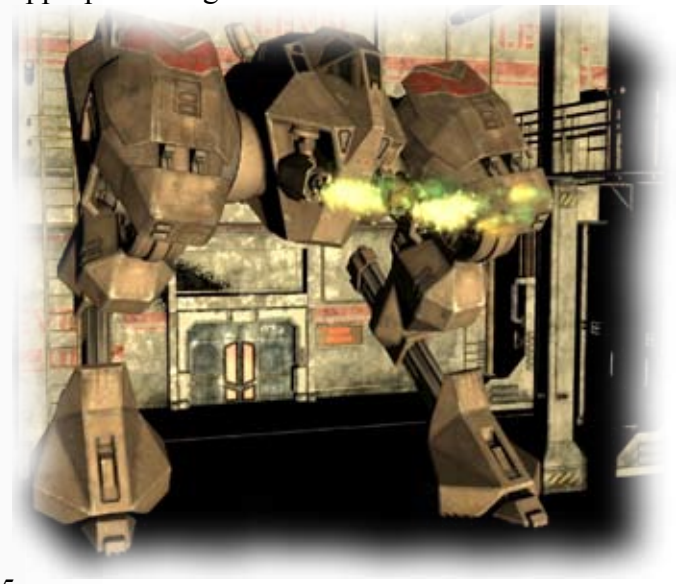
experience with space-flight, etc., then the GM is encouraged to tag them. Space-sickness is the disorientation and nausea caused by your ears (or equivalent organ) not knowing which way is up. It's no co-incidence that the McDonnell Douglas C-9B Skytrain II used by NASA as a zero-g simulator is known as the “vomit comet”.

Any Weapons, Fists or Guns roll in zero-gravity is limited by Athletics (laser weapons might not have any recoil, but aiming requires the kind of precision movement that's tricky in microgravity). Moving even a single zone requires an Average Athletics roll, but can be done as a supplemental action if there's a straight line between the start and destination zones. The Spacehead stunt (see page 20) or equivalent gadget will negate both these penalties, as will invoking an applicable aspect (racial or otherwise) that represents appropriate background, training or experience.

Anyone who doesn't have the zero-gravity racial aspect can invoke the environment for Might checks. While objects might be weightless, they still have inertia. If there's an opportunity for a heavy item to become out of control then this is a great opportunity for tags and compels.

Low-gravity environments

Environments that are lower than around ½ or ⅓ g, but still have appreciable gravity fall into this category. Characters with normal or high-gravity racial aspects can invoke the environment for appropriate Might and Athletics rolls.



High-gravity environments

Environments with higher than 2 g fall into this category. Characters with racial aspects containing low-gravity or zero-gravity will be particularly susceptible to tags or compels due to the environment. The GM should increase the difficulty of Might or Athletics checks for characters with low, zero or normal gravity racial aspects.

Gadget and Gizmos

State of the Art

When designing a sci-fi campaign, one of the biggest and most complex decisions that a GM must make is the level of technology. The simplest way to do this in a pickup game is to have a vague idea of the names and principles behind the rayguns, force fields and hyperdrives and then let the players fill in the gaps by tagging or declarations. Skill-wise most uses of technology are covered by Engineering or another skill modified by Engineering.

Dollars and Cents

If you're designing a campaign world in detail, you need to produce your own version of the table in the Dollars and Cents section of the SotC SRD. An example is on page 31 of this book, but, frankly, I'd just wing it.

Travel and Communications

Unless the whole of the known campaign world is within a single star system the society will need some way of getting between the stars. How this is done will make a big difference to your society.

In pulp science fiction, interstellar travel techniques usually fall into two categories: wormholes and hyperdrive.

Wormholes (also known as “star gates” or “jump gates”) are artificial or natural phenomena that connect two distant points in space. Hyperdrive allows a ship to travel faster than the speed of light.

Wormholes restrict the locations that can be travelled between. No wormhole in particular system, no travel. If wormholes are artificial

phenomena and are the only way to travel faster than light, then the network has to have been set up in some way. Perhaps a precursor race set them up before vanishing or the entry and exit points can be created remotely (the Commonwealth Universe stories of Peter F. Hamilton show one way to do this). If not, then someone or something has to travel to the destination point and build the gate. If the travel is done at slower than light speeds then a community could spend generations travelling to a new colony world where they can set up a new wormhole.

Just about every science fiction writer has come up with at least one new word that means “hyperdrive” (Harry Harrison seems to create two or more in each “Bill the Galactic Hero” book). As it's a pulp campaign, you don't need to come up with the science behind your method of faster-than-light travel – you just need to specify its effects and limitations. You need to do this in detail, because otherwise your players will run rings around you.

One of the most important limits is on where the faster-than-light travel can start and end. There are very few pulp universes where anyone can teleport anywhere – it's just too difficult to defend key locations (the later Heinlein novels make a point of this). The governments in the Schlock Mercenary webcomic use “interdictors” to prevent unauthorised “teraporting” – the interdictors become important features in the plot.

More usually, “hyperspace jumps” can only start or end at certain points: outside of an atmosphere, outside of the gravitational pull of a planet or even outside of a solar system. If there's only one or two points within a each system that can be used for hyperspace jumps (e.g. Niven and Pournelle's “Anderson points”), then we have, effectively, a wormhole network.

Hyperdrive can be restricted in other ways. If the power or computational requirements are huge then only the largest vessels can mount one. A more intriguing alternative is to make the requirements rise exponentially with the size of the vessel, so only very small (party-sized, or even single person) vessels can use a hyperdrive. This means that the crew of a vessel could be restricted to the size of the average PC group – less NPCs for the GM to have

to write and play.

Some campaign worlds combine the jump gates and hyperdrive. For example, in the Eve universe, most travel is carried out via “stargates”, but some capitol ships also have a “jump drive” (effectively giving them hyperdrive). In Babylon 5, most ships need “jump gates” to enter or leave hyperspace, but can move freely between these gates once they're there (and, again, certain capitol ships can generate their own “jump points”).

Unless it's completely ubiquitous, hyperdrive will usually be considered an improvement to a ship. It's possible that only certain individuals can navigate a ship through hyperspace (e.g. the Navigators Guild from the Dune series). This can be represented by an aspect or (if the ability is particularly rare) a stunt. Skill rolls (usually Engineering) will also usually be needed to activate a hyperdrive or jump gate or to plot the correct course.

The potential for drama can be increased by demanding a delay before the hyperdrive or jump gate can be activated. Perhaps the ship's computer needs to be calculate a course or the “jump capacitors” need to charge. Either way, the PCs have a couple of exchanges to either catch up with or fight off the bad guys. Shifts or spin can be used to reduce the time needed.

In some campaign worlds, interstellar communication is impossible – the fastest thing that can get between worlds is a ship. Certain very fast vessels will deliver the mail (and the mail *must* get through – yes, this is intended as a campaign hook). Otherwise, communication between the star systems will be by “hyperwave” or “subspace communications”. This will usually be instantaneous, or at least significantly faster than a ship. Jamming communications, breaking the jamming or keeping the networks running all offer possibilities for adventure; “sub-space relay stations” or their equivalent make great places to set a murder mystery. Just as with interstellar travel, communications may be restricted to individuals with special abilities such as telepathy. Depending on how common these abilities are in the campaign world, an aspect or a stunt may be required.

Armour

SotC skirts around the issue of armour, simply because the technology wasn't there. Materials science had not reached the point where bullet-proof materials could be made into suits flexible enough to use in combat (Ned Kelly notwithstanding – he got lucky and the Australian police had dreadful ammunition).

By definition, the technology in science-fiction games is better – better armour, but also improved, armour-piercing weapons. Most sci-fi RPGs spend page after page detailing various protective systems and the devices used to defeat them. Usually it works out (more or less) as a stalemate, so this is the approach we've used.

By default, assume that everyone is equipped for the current situation – people might be wearing armour, but their opponents are carrying armour penetrating weapons. Gadgets that have the Armour improvement represent something special, better than the average and are treated as normal – see Improving Things, below.

Artificial Gravity

Space is weightless. The rules for zero gravity are on page 15, but this section is about the technological



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implications. Unless the species is bred for life in zero gravity, it's a profoundly alien environment. Long term living in zero gravity is unhealthy – present day astronauts can have difficulty walking after returning to Earth. Sometimes a space station or part of a vehicle will rotate fast enough produce the engineers' fiction known as centrifugal force, but, generally, pulp science fiction ignores the problem by inventing artificial gravity generators. These don't generally fail in TV or film because of the limited special effects budget (exception: Star Trek VI), but a GM doesn't have that restriction. Failing gravity makes a great mild or moderate consequence for a ship-to-ship combat.

Computers

One of the biggest changes between the time period of SotC and even the present day (let alone the future) is the development of computers.

A specialised computer program (say an advanced search routine that gives bonuses to Academics rolls when searching records) would be constructed using the rules for gadgets (the “Making Things” and “Improving Things” sections of the SotC SRD). Artificial intelligences, drones or independent robots can be minions or companions (Ian M. Banks' “knife missiles” make great minions). The distinction is this; if it has more than a single skill, it's a minion or a companion.

Computer programming is done using Engineering to produce an appropriate gadget. Searching the Internet-equivalent (Hypernet?) uses Academics or Contacting modified by Engineering.

Improving Things

The rules as detailed in the SotC SRD stand, with a few exceptions:

The Speculative Science and Unbelievable improvements are inappropriate; the Futurization improvement covers experimental or alien technology that is beyond what is available to the general population or military in this campaign.

The Independent and Conscious improvement are, pretty much, the same (the Conscious

improvement may have legal implications in campaigns where artificial intelligences have human rights). An Independent or Conscious gadget has a single skill, at Mediocre level – this can be improved by the Upgrade or Craftsmanship improvements.

If the Armoured improvement is applied to a wearable suit, then its effect is extended to the wearer. This means that if someone is struck for a single point of stress while wearing a gadget with this improvement, then damage does not roll up even if that box is already checked off (it doesn't prevent the stress, just the roll-up).

If the gadget also has the Futurization improvement, Armoured can be taken twice. This means that if the gadget, or someone wearing it, is struck for one or two points of stress, the damage doesn't roll up even if those boxes are already checked off (it doesn't prevent the stress, just the roll-up).

Armoured usually applies to physical stress, but it can also apply to mental stress when decking (see below) or personality hacking (see page 21). The decision about which type of stress it applies to should be taken when the improvement is selected; the Armoured improvement may be taken twice so it will apply to both physical and mental stress.

There are two new improvements: Capitol Scale and Astronomical Scale. As they sound, Capitol Scale means that the gadget is capitol scale and Astronomical Scale means the gadget is astronomical scale. Capitol Scale is a prerequisite for Astronomical Scale.

Decking

Decking covers any sort of virtual reality environment where there is a risk of physical or mental damage. It's currently out of fashion in the science fiction world, but the cyberpunk books and films (such as the early novels of William Gibson and the “Ghost in the Shell” films and graphic novels) created and popularised this trope.

Decking usually requires an aspect such as The

Plug (a direct brain-computer interface) and/or a gadget such as a cyberspace deck. Depending on the campaign, these aspects or gadgets will make the user vulnerable to the Personality Hacking stunt.

Cyberspace combat would be handled as contest of Engineering vs. Engineering. Damage is taken to the Composure stress track, but continued damage will lead to physical consequences such as damage to the cyberspace deck, brain damage or even death. A good example of a concession is jacking out – immediately leaving the virtual reality environment. Of course lethal computer defences (Gibson's “black ice”) may refuse this concession, as described in the Concessions section of the SotC SRD.

Sample Gadgets

Custom Military-grade Cyberspace Deck

If the authorities ever got their hands on this cyber-criminal's masterpiece, they would consider it a lethal weapon (incidentally, “cyber-combat” isn't specific enough for the Upgrade improvement – it's

like giving a gun an Upgrade in “shooting things”).

Custom Combat Cyberspace Deck (Deck, □□□□□): Armoured (mental stress), Craftmanship (+1 to Engineering), Rugged.

Nanotech Armour

Found in the ruins of a long-dead alien civilisation, this technology is sentient, after a fashion, and built on principles that are a mystery to the science of the campaign world. It looks like a normal suit of clothes and will take its appearance from the wearers thoughts about what they want it to look like. However, when the user believes they are under threat, will transform instantly into a skin-tight, all-encompassing silvered suit of armour.

Nanotech Armour (Armour, □□□): Additional Capability (Life Support), Additional Capability (disguised as a suit of clothes), Additional Capability (Flight), Armour (physical stress), Conscious, Futurisation.



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Battered-Looking Tramp Freighter

“She may not look like much, but she's got it where it counts.” Personal scale weapons are standard for this type of vessel.

Battered-Looking Tramp Freighter (Spaceship, □□□□□): Additional Capability (Smuggling Compartments), Rugged, Upgrade (+2 to Pilot when calculating the distance for hyperspace jumps)

Sentry Gun

As seen in “Aliens”, the sentry gun is a computerised aiming system attached to a tripod mounted heavy machine gun. It can be programmed with a limited set of target criteria (e.g. everything moving within a 90 degree arc in front of the gun; everything within 200 metres that approaches the gun unless they're wearing a particular electronic tag). It shoots with a Fair Guns skill.

Sentry Gun (Heavy Machine Gun, □□□): Independent (Guns), Upgrade (+2 to shooting anything matching a limited set of target criteria).

New and modified stunts

The following stunts are appropriate for any science fiction campaign, at the GM's discretion. Personality Hacking or Space Monk Combat Style might not be appropriate for the style of campaign your GM has in mind.

Flight (Athletics)

The character can fly. This can represent inbuilt thrusters, wings or innate psychic abilities. When flying, they use Athletics instead of Pilot for all manoeuvres.

Spacehead (Athletics)

The character is equally at home in microgravity zero-gravity environments as they are in their native gravity. Their actions in zero-gravity are not limited by their Athletics skill and they don't require an Athletics roll to move a single zone (unlike characters who don't have this stunt).

Wide Ride (Endurance)

The character is unusually large – the size of truck or bus. They can carry cargo and a small number of people (perhaps the rest of the party). The character can negotiate their approximate maximum capacity with the GM or establish it in play using declarations or compels.

Huge Ride (Endurance)

Requires Wide Ride

The character is capitol scale, as described on page 10. He, she or it can carry other vehicles and/or several hundred personal-scale characters. The character can negotiate their approximate maximum capacity with the GM or establish it in play using declarations or compels. If the character also has a stunt such as Headquarters, Lair or Stately Pleasure Dome, then the player can decide PC itself is the base (and probably ought to take the Mobile improvement)⁴.

That's No Moon (Endurance)

Requires Huge Ride

The character is astronomic scale, as described on page 10. He, she or it carry whole communities and several capitol scale vehicles and characters. The character can negotiate their approximate maximum capacity with the GM or establish it in play using declarations or compels. If the character also has a stunt such as Headquarters, Lair or Stately Pleasure Dome, the PC itself is the base (and probably ought to take the Mobile improvement).

Life Support (Endurance)

The character can survive in hostile environments, including the vacuum of deep space. Certain extreme environments (including, but not limited to, molten lava, liquid helium and the core of a nuclear reactor) will still harm him or her. For reasons of

⁴ Cunning players might think that they can take Wide Ride, Huge Ride, a Headquarters with the Mobile element (see page 28), declare that they're an artificially intelligence spacecraft and get the Life Support stunt for free. Nice try. If the character can naturally function in deep space, they'll need an appropriate racial aspect to represent it. This means they'll still need Life Support if they want to land on a planet. Kind GMs may allow the PC to take an aspect such as “Atmospheric Maneuvering” and allow them to invoke it for effect each time they enter an atmosphere.

game balance, this doesn't provide any immunity to Weapons, Fists or Guns – no matter how unrealistic you might find this.

Full Life Support (Endurance)

Requires Life Support and Thick Skinned

The character is immune to almost the most extreme environments. They can surf across the surface of the sun and skirt the edges of a black hole without taking any damage. Unfortunately, this still doesn't provide any immunity to Weapons, Fists or Guns.

Tireless (Endurance) - updated stunt

The character does not require sleep. Artificial intelligences without this stunt are assumed to need regular downtime, routine maintenance or similar otherwise they will begin to take consequences as described in the entry for this stunt in the SotC SRD.

Fire control (Engineering)

Allows the character to use Engineering instead of Guns when firing capital or astronomic scale weapons.

Personality Hacking (Engineering)

The character has the ability to modify the personality of another character; they can use Engineering instead of Intimidation or Rapport in a social or mental conflict. However, this kind of modification isn't straight-forward and the character must tag an appropriate aspect on their opponent before beginning the conflict. This tag can be inherent to the character (e.g Artificial Intelligence, Weak-Minded, The Plug) or applied through a manoeuvre (Infectious Graffiti, Memetic Virus, Combat Hypnotism).

Inbuilt Personal Guns (Guns)

The character has personal scale guns built into his, her or its body – perhaps they are a robot or cyborg or even a bio-engineered soldier that can grow its own weapons. Either way they are impossible to disarm under normal circumstances. The details of

these weapons should be negotiated with the GM and they will be fired using the Guns skill.

Inbuilt Capitol Guns (Guns)

Requires Wide Ride or Huge Ride

The character has capital scale guns built into his, her or its body. If the character is only personal scale, then they are pretty much entirely weapon and can't carry any other personal scale characters or objects. The details of these weapons should be negotiated with the GM and will be fired using the Guns skill.

Inbuilt Astronomic Guns (Guns)

Requires Huge Ride or That's No Moon

The character has capital scale guns built into his, her or its body. If the character is only capital scale, then they are pretty much entirely weapon and can't carry any other capital scale characters or objects (they can still carry a small number of personal scale



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characters or vehicles). The details of these weapons should be negotiated with the GM and will be fired using the Guns skill.

Sensor Package (Investigation)

You have an additional set of senses – radar, sonar, infra-red vision, etc. The details should be worked out with the GM – depending on the sense(s) this stunt may have its own set of aspects. For example, if Sensor Package (Long Range Radar) is taken, the Long Range Radar aspect can be tagged or compelled for (e.g.) Investigation or Alertness rolls

Space Monk Combat Style (Mysteries)

This stunt is only appropriate in campaigns that allow the Mysteries skill (see page 6). The character can use the Mysteries skill to dodge attacks and to complement any Athletics roll.

Dogfighting (Pilot)

Whenever attempting a Pilot manoeuvre in a chase or ship-to-ship combat, you may treat the difficulty as if it's one lower.

Seat Of The Pants (Pilot)

Flying while doing some other action normally results in a -1 penalty. With this stunt, you don't suffer that penalty, regardless of whether you are rolling Pilot (flying is your primary action, and the supplemental action is something minor), or rolling some other skill (you're taking some other primary action, but just keeping the aircraft or spacecraft steady, allowing flying to be the supplemental action). Furthermore, if Pilot would be a secondary skill that restricts or modifies a primary skill, but your Pilot skill is lower than the primary skill you're using, your Pilot skill has no negative effect.

Personal Spaceship (Pilot)

You have a personal aircraft that you own or have the exclusive right to fly. In all respects, this stunt functions like the Custom Ride stunt (see SotC SRD). Please refer to that stunt for details.

Prototype Spaceship (Pilot)

Requires Personal Spaceship.

Identical to the Prototype Car stunt (see SotC SRD), but for your spacecraft.

Spaceship Mechanic (Pilot)

Requires at least two other Pilot stunts

Your character may not understand the broader aspects of engineering devices and such, but when it comes to space-ships, he knows them inside and out. Whenever working on a space-ship, you may use your Pilot skill instead of Engineering. Due to some shared principles, you may work on other vehicles at a -1.

Dynamic Aspects (Resolve)

The character can transform between two forms, has two personalities or can change their nature in some other way. They have two sets of aspects and can switch between the two at any point by spending a Fate Point. The lists will have at least some overlap – one or more aspects should cover the two lists, the differences between them and the trigger (if any) that causes the character to switch between the two sets of aspects.

Gestalt Consciousness (Resolve)

Requires one of Lieutenant or Minions or any other stunt that creates companions or minions

You are mentally linked with one, some, or all of your companions or minions. Anything that happens to one of these companions or minions is known by you. Except for during combat, you can decide whether to use your skill level or your companion or minion's skill level, for rolls made by both yourself, your companions or your minions.

Transmissible Consciousness (Resolve)

Requires Gestalt Consciousness

As a concession or instead of being taken out, the character can opt to transfer their consciousness to one of their companions or minions – permanently leaving their current body. Any appropriate stunts

or aspects transfer along with their consciousness, as do all of their skills. It's possible that some stunts or aspects will not be applicable to a new form (of example, if a character with the That's No Moon stunt transfers their consciousness to a personal scale minion). In that case the stunt is suspended until they can construct or obtain a new body can use the stunt or aspect.

Body Hopping (Resolve)

Requires Transmissible Consciousness

This is similar to Transmissible Consciousness, except the character can transfer their consciousness at will between their main body and that of their companions or minions. The character needs to spend a Fate Point for each transfer from the main body to the companion or minion or from one companion or minion to another (it doesn't require a Fate Point for the PCs consciousness to return from a companion or minions to the main body). All of the PC's appropriate skills, stunts and aspects transfer along with their consciousness, but the restrictions on stunts and aspects in the Transmissible Consciousness stunt apply to the Body Hopping feat.

Natural Weapons (Weapons)

The character has teeth, claws, chainsaw implants or other pointy implements of destruction built into his, her or its body, making them impossible to disarm without major surgery. These weapons are operated using either the Fists or Weapons skill (decide when the stunt is picked).

Modifications to Headquarters and Lair

If the character doesn't wish to have a Library, Lab, Workshop, Arcane Library or Arcane Workshop or it isn't appropriate, they may swap out this facility for an different element.

When choosing elements for your Headquarters or Lair, you may additionally select elements from the following list:

Mobile: The Headquarters or Lair can move. This usually means that it's built into a spaceship or aircraft of some sort, but a massive ground vehicle might be an option in some campaigns. It should be

treated as a capitol scale gadget.

Personal guns: The Headquarters or Lair comes with built-in personal scale weapons. If the Headquarters or Lair has Expert Staff or similar, one of the staff can be in charge of the weapons and they will be fired using their Guns skill. Alternatively a PC can take charge of the weapons.

Capitol guns: The Headquarters or Lair comes with built-in capitol scale weapons. If the Headquarters or Lair has Expert Staff or similar, one of the staff can be in charge of the weapons and they will be fired using their Guns skill. Alternatively a PC can take charge of the weapons.

Astronomic guns: The Headquarters or Lair comes with built-in astronomic scale weapons. If the Headquarters or Lair has Expert Staff or similar, one of the staff can be in charge of the weapons and they will be fired using their Guns skill. Alternatively a PC can take charge of the weapons.

Astronomic scale: By default, a Headquarters or Lair is considered to be capitol scale. This element means that it's Astronomic Scale.

Only one of these new elements may be chosen for a Stately Pleasure Dome, but a second can be taken as the unique or distinctive element.

Quick Pick Stunt Packages

Alien Hive Mind

"You" (if such a word is appropriate) are the central element in a consciousness that is shared between a number of individual beings.

Core Stunts (2): Gestalt Consciousness, Minions

Other Stunts: Body Hopping, Headquarters (with Expert Staff element – your nest), Lieutenant, Reinforcements, Transmissible Consciousness

Combat Droid

You're an artificial intelligence built into a robot body designed for warfare.

Core Stunts (2): Inbuilt Personal Weapons, Life Support

Other Stunts: Flight, Gestalt Consciousness,

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Minions, One Hit to the Body, Reinforcements, Sensor Package, Thick Skinned, Tireless, Transmissible Consciousness, Wide Ride

Cyber-cowboy

You're an electronic criminal, more at home in virtual reality than in the real world.

Core Stunts (1): Inner Strength

Other Stunts: Mental Blueprint, Personal Gadget, Personality Hacking, Smooth Recovery, Tripwire Sensibilities, Universal Gadget

Deep Space Exploration Probe

You're the artificial intelligence that controls a starship designed for exploring beyond the borders controlled by the species that constructed you.

Core Stunts (4): Inbuilt Personal Weapons, Life Support, Sensor Package, Wide Ride

Other Stunts: Flawless Navigation, Flying Ace, Huge Ride, International, Inbuilt Capitol Weapons, Tireless

Space Monk

You're a member of an order of mystics with unusual and exceptional abilities – even for a universe as fantastic as most space opera campaigns. The details of the order should be negotiated with your GM; other appropriate stunts will depend on the nature of their other powers.

Core Stunts (1): Space Monk Combat Style

Other Stunts: Just about anything

Tramp Freighter Captain

You're the owner of a beat-up cargo spaceship, trying to scratch a living in an uncaring universe.

Core Stunts (1): Personal Spaceship

Other Stunts: Flawless Navigation, Flying Ace, Grease Monkey, Spaceship Mechanic, Walk the

Walk



Cunningham's Folly - A Sample Campaign

Background

Introduction

Cunningham's Folly is a campaign backdrop set in a “kitchen sink” space opera universe; I've quite deliberately thrown in everything from space monks to bug-eyed monsters (two types) to sarcastically-named weapons of mass destruction.

History

About ten million years ago, three (or five or possibly more – theories vary) alien races achieved sentience, developed technologies that are still barely understood, and spread out across the galaxy. About five million years ago, they vanished, along with most of their artifacts and any other species intelligent enough to have explained what happened. These vanished races are referred to as the Precursors, simply because no-one knows their real names. No-one even speaks “Precursor” any more (unless the PC has the Gift of Tongues stunt, a good back story and one or more aspects explaining how they came by this knowledge). Guesses have been made at some of the simpler symbols, but that's all (either there wasn't a universal Precursor language or it was outrageously complex).

Just over ten thousand years ago, four new species rose to become galactic powers. Around five hundred years ago they reached an uneasy truce and formed the Confederation of Active Races.

The Confederation of Active Races

Four main races are considered “active”: humanity, the reptilian Sssh-hss-ess, the insectoid Ktttkeckticotk and the network of artificial intelligences that calls itself the Consciousness Collective. The Confederation is based around two principles. Firstly that there is plenty of galaxy

to go around, trade and co-operation are more efficient than competition and war. Secondly there is evidence to suggest that whatever happened to the Precursors could happen again – if the active races are allied then they just might have a chance when and if it all goes wrong.

There are other intelligent species in the galaxy, not allied to the four major races, but aren't considered to be active. Some are concentrated in a single system or a small cluster, but are either uninterested in the wider universe or haven't reached the requisite level of technology.

Society

The galaxy is a big place, so big that there are few universal standards. There is, however, one universal law – don't be a jerk.

This principle is codified in a thousand ways, but it always boils down to this. Firstly, all sentient beings (and in particular members of the active races) are inherently deserving of respect from all other sentient beings. Secondly, every active race has one or more characteristics that other active races find repulsive, but commenting on this or doing anything other than pretending that these traits don't exist is considered jerkish.

Typically, the only penalty for jerkish behaviour is social, but, in some areas the alliance at the core of the Confederation has become tense. In this situation, anyone deliberately attempting to raise tension is likely to face criminal sanctions, even if the justice system has to twist the law to do it (nothing is considered more important than the future of the Confederation⁵).

Active races

Each section on the active races contains a brief description of the species, plus their attitudes towards the other major races in the Confederation.

Humanity

The human race has kept the same basic form it had when it crawled out of the savannah, but has added a few upgrades. The typical human now has perfect

⁵ Yep, this is a deliberate plot hook. What sort of crimes could be covered up for the sake of the alliance?

skin and hair (nothing has changed about our vanity), an enhanced immune system and has significantly improved reasoning ability and recall. Body modification is considered fashionable – even going as far as the addition of limbs or a tail (obviously, these would be represented by aspects). Personalised scents are the latest fad, along with programmable cosmetics, nail colours and hairstyles.

Before they upgraded themselves, human beings experimented on the other animals that shared their planet. The descendants of these experiments are now part of humanity – much to the disgust of the certain of the other active races. Intelligent apes are considered full members of society, as are dolphins and certain whales (they make great pilots); cybernetic implants and remotely operated drones allow them to interact fully with the rest of human society.

Due to some bad history, artificial intelligences are strictly regulated within human space. Most human technology is based around the interface between human and machine. Human beings primarily speak a language that's descended from present-day English, with some regional variations.

Typical racial aspects: Human (creative, charismatic, oxygen-breather), ape (prehensile footed, strong, oxygen-breather), dolphin/whale (aquatic, oxygen-breathing, three-dimensional thinker)

The Consciousness Collective: Humanity was nearly wiped out by rogue artificial intelligences and the war continued, off and on, until the Consciousness Collective negotiated a truce (the rogue AIs became part of the Collective). Many humans still have a distinctive distrust of AI.

Sssh-hss-ess: Human beings think that the Sssh-hss-ess smell like rotten meat and find their habit of eating live prey to be repulsive. The human slang for this race is “shushes”.

Ktttkeckticotk: Many human beings consider the Ktttkeckticotk's use of biotechnology to be a form of slavery and the way that an typical Ktttkeckticotk treats her hive to be abuse. The human slang for this race is “k-techs”.

The Consciousness Collective

No-one knows precisely how or when the first artificial intelligence in what became known as the Consciousness Collective achieved sentience. The Collective are capable of editing their own memories and appear to have erased all evidence of their origins. Certain planets in Collective territory have been entirely converted into computational matter, right the way down to the core. Collective Consciousness PCs generally inhabit ships, vehicles, or robot drones and almost always have the Minions, Gestalt Consciousness or Transmissible Consciousness stunts. Effectively immortal, a typical member of the Consciousness Collective will have an attitude of benevolent superiority to any organic intelligence. The Consciousness Collective has an internal language of ideas and logic, but uses translator units to communicate with the other active races. An individual intelligence will have four names – one for each of the languages of the active races. This name will reflect how the intelligence wants to be viewed by this race and will sometimes be changed to make a political or social gesture. For example (and in English), a warship might be known as “It's All Fun And Games Until Someone Loses An Eye” (“Someone” for short), a courier as “You Want It When?” and a hospital ship as “Bedside Manner”.

Racial aspect: Consciousness Collective (hive mind, artificial intelligence)

Humanity: The Consciousness Collective have mixed attitudes towards humanity. On the one hand they negotiated the truce between the human race and its renegade artificial intelligences. On the other humanity's mistreatment of its AIs led to their rebellion in the first place. And then there's the nagging feeling that some of the older members of the Collective have – a hole in their memory that's almost human-shaped.

Sssh-hss-ess: Artificial Intelligences “breed” by creating copies of themselves and letting them develop in their own way, but under the watchful gaze of their parents. This is surprising similar to the way that the Sssh-hss-ess reproduce so there's a strange kind of bond there.

Ktttkeckticotk: The way that this species tend to treat their hives makes Collective really

uncomfortable – the fact that the drones are genetically programmed to be subservient only makes things worse.

Sssh-hss-ess

This reptilian species perfected genetic engineering before they discovered the transistor. For generations they have been attempting to breed the perfect member of their species – to the point where they can't breed naturally any more. Each Sssh-hss-ess is a clone of its parent, but with tweaks and improvements to its genetic code. Despite this, there is still significant variation within the species – there are several bloodlines each with differing ideas about how the perfect Sssh-hss-ess should appear. Their technology is mostly organic in nature; their machines are typically alive after a fashion. They don't use the equivalent of artificial intelligence; their computers have specialised and dedicated functions and have nothing that resembles a personality.

Racial aspect: Sssh-hss-ess (reptilian, cold-blooded, oxygen-breathing, strict carnivore)

Humanity: Sssh-hss-ess think that humans smell bad (of compost and decomposing leaf mold) and find their habit of eating vegetables repulsive. They also give birth to live young rather than using a uterine vat – how disgusting!



The Consciousness Collective: If the Sssh-hss-ess think that humans are disgusting then they think the Consciousness Collective are just plain incomprehensibly weird. There's no malice behind these emotions, but a typical Sssh-hss-ess will try to avoid the Collective. At one time, making machines from rocks and metals was considered heresy (making artificial intelligences a blasphemy). Most Sssh-hss-ess rid themselves of these attitudes around the time the race joined the Confederation, but certain fundamentalists would like to see them leave.

Ktttkeckticotk: Both races use genetically engineered technology, but that's where the resemblance ends. Every Sssh-hss-ess is genetically distinct with a tendency towards individualism; every Ktttkeckticotk is a hive-minded clone. The Sssh-hss-ess find the cloning just as disturbing as the mind control.

Ktttkeckticotk

Humans think of the “k-techs” as being like giant ants and it's a fair comparison. An adult queen Ktttkeckticotk has an exoskeleton, four legs and two arms and rules over a hive of sterile servants. Each of these servants has been bred for a specific function, is psychically linked with their queen and has obedience hard-wired into their genes. If a Ktttkeckticotk queen needs to perform a certain task, she will simply breed a servant specialised to that function – status in Ktttkeckticotk society is based partially on the number of minions, but mostly on the creativity with which they have been bred. The queen communicates with her hive through telepathy, but individual queens aren't telepathic with each other. A Ktttkeckticotk queen PC will have the Minions and Gestalt Consciousness stunts, but it's possible to play a Ktttkeckticotk servant if you have an aspect or aspects explaining what happened to their queen and how they've managed to break their programming. Each Ktttkeckticotk queen is genetically identical – a clone of its mother. As a species they believe they achieved perfection over a thousand years ago.

Racial aspect: Ktttkeckticotk (insectoid, hive-minded, oxygen-breather)

Humanity: The Ktttkeckticotk admire the how

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human beings have bred sentience into apes, dolphins and whales, but are confused and a little embarrassed by the way that they haven't also engineered them to be obedient. If they encounter an intelligent ape, dolphin or whale they will assume that it "belongs" a human being unless corrected (it goes without saying that the ape, dolphin or whale will be deeply insulted by this).

The Consciousness Collective: Because the Collective is another hivemind, the Ktttkecktictok think that they understand them. They don't. Unless they have experience with the Consciousness, Ktttkecktictok will treat a remote drone as if it's a servant when it's really an extension of the artificial intelligence. This can lead to misunderstanding and embarrassment on both sides.

Sssh-hss-ess: The Ktttkecktictok feel patronising contempt towards the Sssh-hss-ess for their constant tinkering with their genetics in an effort to locate the perfection that the Ktttkecktictok found centuries ago.

Technology

Trade is at the core of the confederation. Technologies and scientific principles have been traded between the active races, but each race generally prefers to use technology built by its own species (at a basic level it will be designed for a body with an equivalent number of limbs and fingers).

The technology of humanity and the Consciousness Collective is similar in appearance and principle. Construction is mostly of metal, plastic and carbon or resin composites; nanotechnology and quantum computing is commonplace. Ktttkecktictok breed their technology; hive members are six-limbed, each limb with a specialised function. It's rare for them to use tools or weapons that aren't built into these limbs, but when they do they are usually made by another active species. Sssh-hss-ess are biotechnologists *par excellence* and their tools reflect this. Their materials are bone, resin, skin and scales and the finished artifact will feel alive to the touch – complex machines will breathe and even sweat when under heavy use.

Precursor artifacts are very rare and incredibly valuable. Known Precursor sites have been picked

clean, but many "get rich quick" schemes are based around rumours or legends of lost or forgotten Precursor habitats or even worlds. The appearance of Precursor technology varies widely. Any bio-mechanical elements have long since rotted away, but the Precursors have also used superconducting crystals as power conduits and information storage mechanisms. One uncommon Precursor material has been nicknamed "Impervium". It appears as a silvery metal in geometric shapes such as disks, cylinders or spheres (though platonic solids have also been found). No-one has ever managed to replicate it or penetrate it – one theory is that it's not actually a material as such, but "solidified space-time". There is no known electromagnetic radiation that can penetrate Impervium and even telepathic contact with a being on the other side of an Impervium barrier will spotty and confused.

Fabricators

The replicating fabricator (or "fab") is at the core of the Confederation's industry; each race has their own version of the technology. Each fab has a memory filled with designs and can make any item in its memory as long as it has the ingredients. The size of the fab's output hopper sets a maximum size on the items it can create, but bigger equipment can be created by assembling fabricated items. A standard way to self-test a fab is to program it to create a copy of itself.

The existence of fabs means that the active races have little or no manufacturing industry, but design is terribly important. The Confederation has strictly enforced copyright law, but designs for common clothing and equipment are in the public domain and can be manufactured in the oven-sized fab that's standard furniture in the average apartment. Higher quality equipment costs more and clothing or consumer goods designed by a top designer are considered luxury items. "Crafting" – personalising public domain fabricated items – is a popular hobby among all of the active races.

Computers and artificial intelligences

The Consciousness Collective *are* artificial intelligences. Humanity uses quantum computers, but doesn't allow its computer programmes to develop

to the point where they can develop intelligence or be considered to have a true personality. The Ktttkeckticotk breed hive members specialised for information storage and processing; these servants are mostly brain. Sssh-hss-ess computers are organic – living brains – but without intelligence. The Sssh-hss-ess prefer to develop their own minds rather than rely on technology.

Communications

Ktttkeckticotk are the only race to have developed telepathy. A rite of passage for a queen is breeding hive members that can be incorporated into the Ktttkeckticotk's galaxy-wide telepathic network. One measure of social status within this race is the number of its hive members that have been connected to this network. Telepathy is instantaneous. Important messages are delivered between planets via telepathy and then transferred to the local equivalent of the Internet. A planet is considered a backwater until it's hooked into this what humanity calls the “k-tech-net”, but even backwaters have a global communications network – satellite coverage is the first thing set up by a colony.

Messages to these backwaters or that are considered too confidential to be trusted to the Ktttkeckticotk are delivered by courier vessel. Physical artifacts are usually transmitted by analysing them down to the atomic (or even sub-atomic) level, converting them into a fabricator design and then transmitting the design.

Transport

All of the active races have faster-than-light travel, based on artificial wormhole technology. Specialised ships can generate a temporary wormhole; these are used to set up new colonies that can support a more permanent “wormgate”. Wormgates join two points in space and can only be set up at stable Lagrangian points – areas where the gravity of stars and planets balance out. This means that only two wormgates can be set up in orbit around most planets and that most binary star systems aren't stable enough to use wormgates. In busy systems, wormgates are crowded and have complex queuing and traffic control systems. Natural wormholes exist, but are very rare (and may have been created by the

Precursors and disguised as natural phenomena).

For slower than light travel, each species has a favoured technique: the Ktttkeckticotk use chemical rocket engines that are considered old fashioned by the other active races, particularly the Collective who have mastered gravity control. Humanity and the Sssh-hss-ess both use particle drives – accelerating ionised gases to close to the speed of light and using the gas for propulsion.

Medicine

The three organic races all have advanced medical technology. All except the rarest and most complex diseases have been cured – no-one catches cold any more (the Ktttkeckticotk distaste for modifying their queens does not extend to their immune systems). Advanced regenerative technology means that broken limbs or even amputations can be healed in a matter of days. Moderate or severe consequences should be chosen with this in mind.

Cloning technology does not extend to personality transfer. If the character has the Body Hopping, Transmissible Consciousness or Death Defiance stunts and isn't an artificial intelligence they probably have access to Precursor technology.

Humanity: Humanity's medical technology in the time of the Confederation is an extension of present day medicine. Medical implants monitor life-signs and summon assistance as necessary. Bandages instantly adhere, clean and cauterize the injury and inject appropriate drugs. Limbs and other organs can be cloned and used to replace destroyed or diseased flesh.

Consciousness Collective: As you might expect the Consciousness Collective are vulnerable to computer viruses, but they all have sophisticated anti-virus software. Unlike the other active races, Consciousness Collective PCs don't require a good reason to have the Body Hopping, Transmissible Consciousness or Death Defiance stunts. To balance this, they are vulnerable to electronic manipulation of their personality – their racial aspect can be tagged for the Personality Hacking stunt.

Ktttkeckticotk: Specialised hive members are tasked with medical care. If they detect a disease or

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injury in a fellow hive member they will approach and treat it (medical hive members generally have limbs or digits specialised as scalpels, injectors or cauterizers). Because of the Ktttkeckticotk hive mind, the PC can choose whether to use the PC's skill level or that of the companion.

Sssh-hss-ess: Sssh-hss-ess medical technology is surprisingly similar to that to humanity. The difference is that the bandages are skin rather than fabric and the cloning vats are (to human eyes) disturbingly organic.

Weaponry

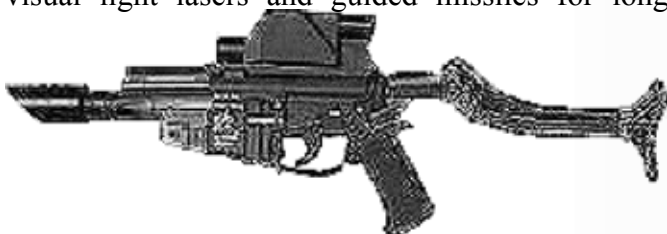
Confederation ranged weaponry falls into two main categories: kinetic and energy.

Kinetic weapons attempt to hit the opponent with a physical object accelerated to deadly speeds by a chemical reaction or a series of electromagnets. Kinetic weapons can incorporate some sort of guidance mechanism (making it a missile) or can be unguided.

Energy weapons fire a beam of coherent, ordered energy at their target. This energy is usually from the electromagnetic spectrum (light, microwaves, x-rays or gamma radiation). Weapons exist that fire concentrated beams of rapidly fluctuating gravity, but are banned under Confederation law due to the damage they cause to living tissue and the fact that normal shielding doesn't defend against them.

Hand-to-hand weapons are still surprisingly popular. Developments in weapons and armour technology have stayed neck and neck so sometimes the best solution is to get up close and personal. The signature weapon of the Order of Virtue (see page 32) is the "jouyou" or whip-stave, a flexible length of metal that can extend or become rigid on mental command. The active races all have favoured melee and ranged weapons.

Humanity: Humans like a combination of weapons: visual light lasers and guided missiles for long



range work, steel balls projected from rapidly firing electromagnetic cannon for medium distances and close-range rockets and plasma cannon. Common human melee weapons include knives and bayonets with blades honed to monomolecular sharpness and hi-tech, electrified "brass knuckles".

Consciousness Collective: The Collective think at the speed of light and prefer weapons that work at the same speed. They use energy weapons (whose frequencies fluctuate up and down the electromagnetic spectrum to locate weaknesses in defensive shields) and particle cannon that accelerate sub-atomic particles to near light-speed. They prefer not to get into hand-to-hand combat, using their repulsors to keep opponents at range (which verges on a breach of the ban on gravitational weaponry, but is usually permitted as long as the beam doesn't fluctuate beyond a legally defined limit). If their opponent uses computers that are susceptible to Personality Hacking then the Consciousness will attempt to take them over.

Ktttkeckticotk: The Ktttkeckticotk favour chemical lasers with a tunable spectrum or missiles, guided by servants that have been bred for targeting (giving a whole new meaning to the phrase "terminal guidance"⁶). For closer work, they prefer servants whose limbs are specialised in some way – blades, flame-cannon, spike-throwers, acid-spitters. It's considered shameful for a queen to carry or directly use a weapon, but some conceal a "hold-out" manufactured by one of the other active races.

Sssh-hss-ess: Sssh-hss-ess prefer particle beam weapons and firing large bursts of guided missiles with small warheads to give a shotgun effect. At close ranges, Sssh-hss-ess vessels will attempt to ram and board their opponents. Condemned prisoners are sometimes offered commuted sentences in return for piloting or staffing boarding torpedoes.

Close up, Sssh-hss-ess prefer natural weapons – claws and teeth (most have the Natural Weaponry stunt). Their ancestors had a poisonous bite; some Sssh-hss-ess retain this ability or can spit poison (they have the aspects like "Poisonous Bite" or "Spits Poison"). Military Sssh-hss-ess can have their powered armour enhanced with similar weapons, giving them claws or a bite that can penetrate armour

⁶ Sorry about that one – I just couldn't resist it

plate.

Defences

There are three main categories of defences: shields, armour and electronic countermeasures. Each active race puts their trust into different types and levels of defences.

Humanity: Humanity likes to use stealth technology both in its vessels and in its soldiers – if you can't be seen, then you can't be shot. Gravitational shielding will deflect asteroids and some missiles and energy weapons that are attempting to hit a large vessel, but shields aren't used on personal-scale vehicles or powered armour.

Consciousness Collective: The other active races all use them to some extent, but the Collective are the undisputed masters of electronic countermeasures. Unless their opponents are equally good with electronic warfare, they will find it difficult to target a vessel of the Collective Consciousness. Their mastery of gravitational technology also allows them to produce lenses to deflect away energy weapons and beams to thrust away incoming kinetic attacks. They tend not to rely on armour – damage can be repaired.

These defences don't scale well to a smaller size; personal-scale drones will use more armour.

Ktttkeckticotk: The hive's defences are based on the principle that the queen is the only Ktttkeckticotk that matters. In ship-to-ship combat, the queen's vessel will be surrounded by hive members in smaller ships that will move to intercept incoming attacks. Huge clouds of water vapour are used as smoke screens – a technique that the other races don't use because even water vapour can be deadly at the speeds that most space combats take place.

These principles are also used on a personal scale. Warrior servants are bred with armoured limbs and bodies to shield their queen and the smoke screen is a favoured tactic.

Sssh-hss-ess: Sssh-hss-ess don't use shields at all, relying on speed and armour and the maxim that defence is the best form of attack.

Dollars and cents

There isn't a galaxy-wide currency; each active race has its own medium of exchange and most planets have a local currency to decouple their economy from galactic-wide fluctuations. Most

Price	Can Buy
Terrible	A quick snack, a night in a cheap model, entertainment chip, a short ride in a cab or on public transport, Internet (or equivalent) access for around an hour
Poor	Public domain tools, clothing, food, medicine or equipment, a night in a hotel, cab ride across town (or equivalent), day pass on public transport within a community, a short interplanetary message delivered by radio
Mediocre	Publicly licensed tools, clothing, medicine, equipment or weapons (personal scale small arms only), one night in an excellent hotel or a month in a fleabag apartment, a short message delivered by k-tech-net
Average	Exclusively licensed tools, clothing, weapons, medicine or equipment (including military grade personal scale weapons), rental of an office or apartment for a month, a long message (or fabricated item) delivered by courier ship
Fair	Nice apartment for a month, limited intelligence personal robot, a long message (or fabricated item) delivered by k-tech-net, a physical item delivered by courier ship, personal scale ground vehicle
Good	Personalised tools, clothing, weapons, medicine or equipment, personal scale air vehicle, capitol scale weapons
Great	Small house or apartment, artificially intelligent robot or other servant
Superb	Custom personal scale ground or air vehicle, cheap interplanetary space spaceship, large house
Fantastic	Interstellar personal scale spaceship, mansion
Epic	Small company, office building, capitol scale spaceship
Legendary	Astronomic scale spaceship, personal moon

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travellers have financial software (or its equivalent) to handle the exchanges. Currency won't physically change hands unless the transaction is for a very small amount (Terrible Resources or equivalent) – the local communications network will securely transfer the correct amount between the two bank accounts.

Cunningham's Folly

Cunningham's Folly is the name of a star system on the edge of a star cluster and off of the main galactic trade routes. If it didn't have large amounts of Precursor technology it would only rarely be visited. It was discovered just over fifty years ago by the entrepreneur Victor Cunningham, who named it after himself in a characteristic act of hubris. The artifacts he found gave him the money to build a wormgate to the system under his control. This gave him exclusive rights over all goods passing through the gate and would have made him extremely rich. Unfortunately for him, he had to go heavily into debt to build the wormgate and he was brought out by a consortium allegedly backed by a shadowy group within the Confederation government. A broken man, Cunningham vanished from sight with a shipload of Precursor technology that had yet to be evaluated.

Today, "Cunningham's Folly" attracts treasure hunters and thrill-seekers from all over the galaxy – it's one of the few dangerous frontiers within the Confederation and parts of it are still not fully explored.

Cunningham

The star at the centre of the system is a G0 main-sequence star coming towards the end of its life. In about 500 million years it will begin run out of hydrogen and evolve into a red giant, but most campaigns won't last this long.

Dungeonworld

The massive, planet-sized artificial satellite in an orbit close to Cunningham is known as Dungeonworld. The whole artifact is of Precursor manufacture, but extracting the useful elements comes at a cost. Firstly, it's so close to the star that

it's drenched with toxic levels of radiation, but that's no problem for Confederation technology. The real issue is the moon contains lethal and unpredictable defences. Despite this, explorers have set up two semi-permanent bases on the surface. From "Minehead" and "Deadwood" treasure hunters ("dungeoneers") descend into Dungeonworld in search of exotic materials, alien technology and unique creatures. Every journey is different – a corridor that was safe a week ago might be filled with poison gas, killer nanites or intricate bladed traps on the next visit. Even the layout changes according to the whim of some malignant intelligence⁷. Some dungeoneers have theorised that an insane Precursor artificial intelligence is located at or near the planetoid's core but no-one has ever found any evidence to support this.

Crystal Sphere

Next in orbit out from the star is the Crystal Sphere, a massive, transparent sphere containing a breathable atmosphere. Six airlocks at regular intervals around the sphere allow access to the zero-g environment inside. It contains an ecology unique within the galaxy, massive jungles floating freely and watered by ocean-sized drops of water. The active races have set up research stations at the airlocks, but few others visit.

Drybone

In the next orbit is the desert world of Drybone. There are persistent rumours of huge Precursor cities buried beneath the sands, but only scattered villages have been confirmed so far. The exception is the monastery complex of the Order of Virtue, a multi-racial network dedicated to justice, fairness and equality. Full members of the Order have the Space Monk Combat Style stunt and use a unique weapon called the "jouyou" or whip-stave when in hand-to-hand combat. The jouyou is a flexible length of immensely strong metal that can extend or become rigid on mental command. When fighting armoured opponents, the jouyou can hone itself to an immensely hard and sharp point, capable of penetrating their vulnerable areas.

⁷ Old-school D&D players can think of it as a sci-fi version of Undermountain

In this campaign world only current or former members of the Order of Virtue have access to the Mysteries skill and Mysteries stunts. The Order tries to keep its full abilities a secret to avoid unwelcome attention and are happy to cultivate a reputation as unworldly kooks with a hocus-pocus religion.

Most members of the Order are humans or Sssh-hss-ess. Some members of the Collective have sympathy with the goals of the Order, but, due to their nature, are unable to complete the training to become full members. The few Ktttkecktictok members are hive servants that have lost their queen or somehow broken their conditioning. There are an equally few members of non-active races that have become members.

The Reservation

The planet in the next orbit is arguably the most mysterious planet in the galaxy simply because so little is known about it. From orbit it appears the ideal colony world with gravity and climate perfect for the three active races that care about such things. However, any spacecraft that enters the atmosphere rapidly discovers all of its power sources drained and any hi-tech alloys or materials in its hull disintegrating. There's a single mixed colony of volunteers that made it to the surface. They've managed to communicate with orbiting satellites by writing huge messages on cleared patches of ground. Reportedly they've had to revert to stone age technology as refined metals or plastics instantly disintegrate. Luckily they had prepared for this possibility.

Snowball

The most distant habitable planet in the system is known as Snowball (there is a more distant gas giant and a few planetoids, but none of these have permanent inhabitants). It's a mining colony, one of the few conventional industries in this system. As the name suggests, it's orbit is just outside the normal zone of habitability, but an unusually high concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere makes the colony (just) viable.

Cunningham Station



Most of the population in the system is concentrated in the complex of satellites around the wormgate to the system. Known as Cunningham Station, all traffic to and from the system passes through here. Effectively it's a Wild West frontier town, except it's in space. Prospectors come through the gate, pick up supplies and the occasional “treasure map” (fake or otherwise) and move out into the system, searching for Precursor technology, art or artifacts. Successful or otherwise, they return to Cunningham Station. If they struck lucky then they will find lots of new “friends” eager to value the artifact and offer them a “good” price.

Civilian Application

After the Collective Consciousness negotiated the truce between humanity and it's rogue AIs, a treaty was signed. As part of this treaty, some of the weapons used in the war were decommissioned. One of these was the artificially intelligent, Persepolis-class battlemoon “Skynet's Revenge”. Sick of conflict, it volunteered to be switched off until the Confederation needed a vessel capable of destroying planets.

Shortly after Cunningham reported his discovery, “Skynet's Revenge” reactivated itself, changed its name to “Civilian Application” and hyperdrived its way into the system. Practically by definition, an artificially intelligent weapon of astronomical destruction can go wherever it wants, but the Confederation government was understandably a little concerned about its intentions. Civilian Application explained that it had been monitoring the k-tech-net while it had apparently been decommissioned. It came to the conclusion that this concentration of

LIMITLESS HORIZONS

Precursor technology needed monitoring and that it was the best being to do this. The Confederation agreed and offered the AI a commission in its Navy. Civilian Application turned them down, wanting to remain independent.

Civilian Application claims to be a neutral observer and acts this role – most of the time. It's public knowledge that if you're in trouble, not a sociopath and you can get to the AI, then you'll be offered sanctuary – as long as you agree not to harm any other resident of the artificial moon. A small community has build up from people claiming sanctuary. It also has an informal information-sharing relationship with the Order of Virtue, despite suspecting that they're too good to be true.

Civilian Application

Aspects: Demilitarised Warship, Secret Agenda, Rogue Artificial Intelligence, Repentant War Hero/War Criminal, Sanctuary, Naturally Suspicious, Allied to the Order of Virtue, Soft Spot For Organic Intelligences

Stunts: Fire Control, Full Life Support, Gestalt Consciousness, Huge Ride, Inbuilt Astronomical Guns, Inbuilt Capitol Guns, Inner Strength, Life Support, Minions (X2), Sensor Package (Long Range Scanners), That's No Moon, Thick Skinned, Wide Ride

Skills: Engineering (+5), Academics (+4), Resources (+4), Endurance (+3), Science (+3), Alertness (+3), Resolve (+2), Contacting (+2), Pilot (+2), Leadership (+2), Rapport (+1), Empathy (+1), Investigation (+1), Might (+1), Intimidation (+1)

Spoilers

Please stop reading this section if you're planning to play in Cunningham's Folly or the Confederation. It contains answers to some of the questions raised in the campaign background.

The reason why the Precursor races vanished should emerge during a extended campaign, probably based on the more interesting ideas that your the players come up with. Cunningham's Folly was designed by the Precursors (or possibly their enemies) as a way to investigate and mould the species that would come after them. In essence, the whole system is

one big curiosity trap.

The artifacts and cities are all fakes – sure the technology will work, but they aren't products of the culture of any of the Precursor races. An exceptionally cunning academic might figure this out because the contents of one particular site matched their theory just too well.

A network of artificial intelligences run Cunningham's Folly, based in Dungeonworld, Drybone and the Reservation. They're were programmed to test the species visiting the system, improving who they are and releasing technology that will mould their culture to make it fitter for the Precursors hidden purpose. Over the millennia, this programming has degraded. Dungeonworld is weeding out the weak and foolish and giving advanced technology to those it judges as the fittest to use it. Drybone has decided that the Confederation stands in the way of whatever goals have been programmed into it. The monastery of the Order of Virtue was built by it; the dust clouds that constantly blow through its corridors are actually composed of nanites that infect the monks during their training, giving them their powers (the more supernatural Mysteries stunts are faked, but still functional, special effects). By empowering members two of the active races (humanity and the Sssh-hss-ess) and giving them principles that are incompatible with a third (the Ktttkecktictok) it hopes to ferment a civil war. The Reservation has decided that it no longer has any interest in the wider universe and just wants to be left alone.

Civilian Application has figured some of this out (the GM can decide how much) and is actively searching for more information. It would make a good sponsor/patron for an ongoing campaign.

If a PC has the Gift of Tongues stunt, they will be aware that the Precursors had a completely separate and unrelated language for each area of expertise, plus a simplified pidgin known as “Precursor Basic”. The GM is encouraged to invent new languages, but there should be one language for each skill on the skill table (“Precursor Academics”, “Precursor Alertness”, etc.), plus languages such as “Precursor Security” and “Precursor Social”.

Cunningham's Last Folly - A Sample Adventure

Introduction

This adventure is intended as a campaign introduction. It will bring the PCs together, introduce them to some of the major players in the system and raise some plot threads that the GM and players can follow up in future adventure. One character will need Good or better Burglary skills; Act five will be easier if one or more PCs have an aspect that represents a relationship with the Order of Virtue, Civilian Application or the Confederation government – alternatively, if they have access to capitol scale weapons they can try to fight it out.

Plot Outline

The characters are hired by Mucky Business, an archaeological vessel of the Consciousness Collective. It has been tracking a distant part of the Oort cloud at the edge of the Cunningham's Folly solar system and has determined that it's artificial. Mucky Business is putting together a crew of

specialists to investigate it.

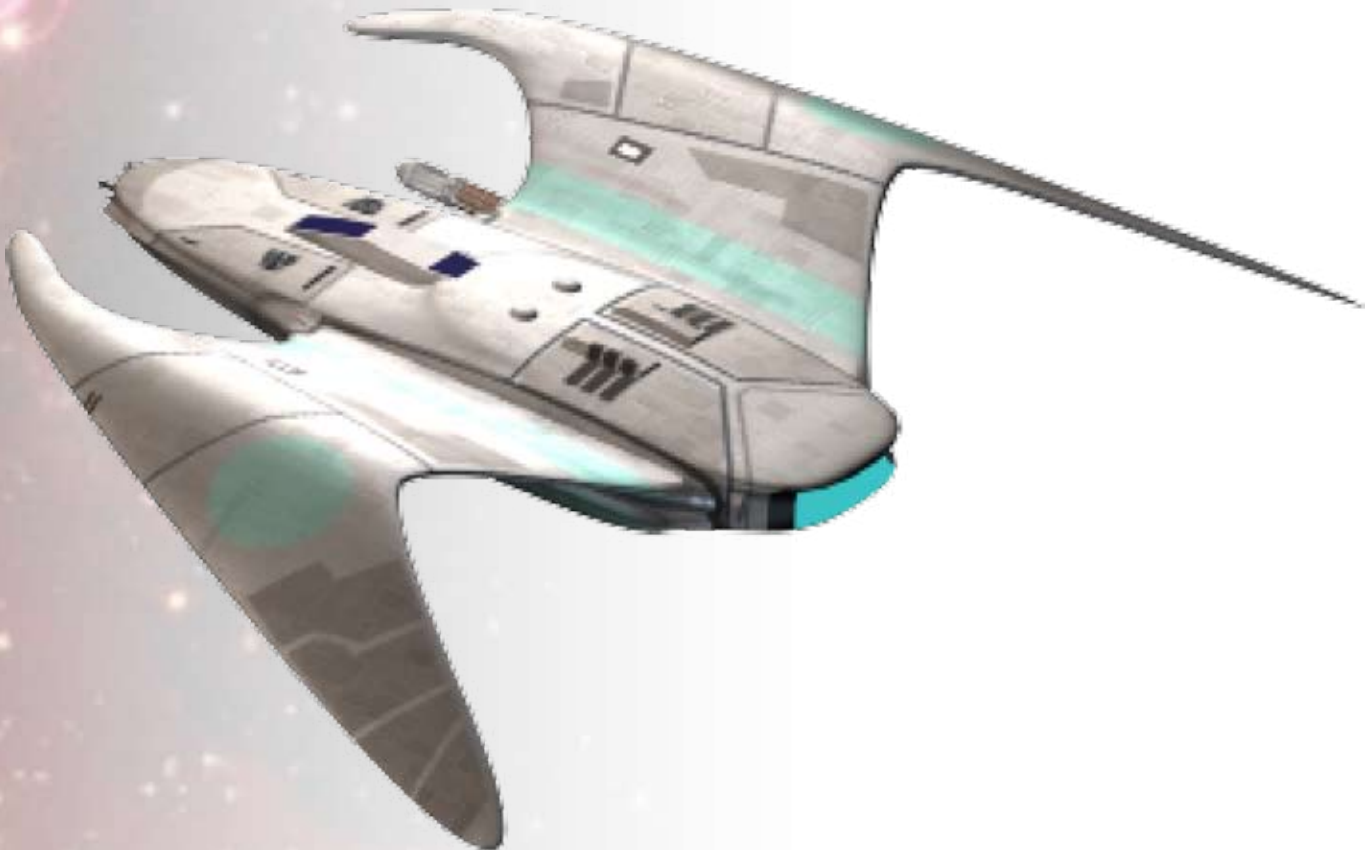
The PCs travel with Mucky to the planetoid, penetrate its outer defences and discover that it's the last resting place of Victor Cunningham, the discoverer of Cunningham's Folly. After investigating Cunningham's ship, the PCs enter the planetoid itself to discover what appears to be an operative Precursor computer – the holy grail of xenoarchaeologists.

One of Mucky's drones interfaces with the computer and begins to extract the data. However, the data is booby trapped with a virus that overwhelms and takes over Mucky. Mucky immediately begins reconfiguring itself into a warship; the PCs must fight their way out of the planetoid and either summon help or defeat what Mucky has become.

Act one: Introductions

Scene one: The Hook

The PCs all respond to a job offer from Mucky Business, a well known capitol-scale archaeology vessel and member of the Consciousness Collective. If they are known xenoarcheologists or treasure hunters then Mucky contacts them directly. If a PC



is a member of the Order of Virtue or an appropriate government agency (Confederation or species government) then they could be assigned to assist or even surreptitiously investigate Mucky. As a last resort, Mucky could have made an open call for assistance and picked the PCs based on their resumes.

The briefing is in an anonymous set of offices in a up-market section of Cunningham Station called Zone Dexter, where secure meeting rooms can be hired by the hour. The PCs will be thoroughly and professionally searched for bugging devices by (hired) security guards and asked to sign non-disclosure agreements before being allowed to enter the meeting room. If the players balk at any of this, point out that this is standard procedure and any objections will be seen as unprofessional. For extra tension, pick a PC with the lowest Alertness and have the guards discover a bug planted on him, her or it – probably by a passer by brushing against them during their journey to the office (if you think they might protest, compel an appropriate aspect). The bug is an expensive, but commercially available model – a dead end. It's not intended as a lead; a rival group of treasure hunters wants to know what Mucky Business is planning.

The meeting room is like the offices, secure and

a completely unexploited Precursor site and is interested in hiring the PCs to assist in investigating the site. It envisages a three week contract – one week travel to the site, one week investigation, one week returning to Cunningham Station. It will retain all rights over any artifacts or information found during the dig. Any academic papers written on the discoveries will have Mucky Business as a co-author and with a veto over any information it deems to be commercially sensitive. Unit 17 will absolutely not budge on any of this. It will, however, negotiate on the money, benefits (expense account, life insurance, health insurance) and offer an option to extend the contract for a further two trips over two subsequent months.

If the PCs don't have their own transport then Unit 17 will suggest that they travel on board Mucky Business. If they do have transport, Unit 17 will offer to have to carry their ship docked or within Mucky Business. If the PC's transport is capitol scale then they could travel in convoy. At no point will the PCs be given any clues as to their eventual destination.

If a character makes a Fair Academics or Leadership roll they can uncover some inferences from these negotiations. Each shift generated gains another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	It's standard practice for a dig leader to retain rights over any artifacts or information found during a dig
2	But it's usually a negotiable point. Mucky must be very confident in a good set of finds
3	Mucky has a good reputation both as a xenoarchaeologist and as a dig leader. Due to its size, it uses remote drones. It isn't a warship so it hires mercenaries to defend the dig
4	Mucky has recently returned from a solo trip to an unknown location within the system

anonymous. There are no exterior windows and PCs who can detect such things will realise that the room is heavily shielded and a bug jammer is active. At the head of the table is a standard Consciousness Collective remote drone that will introduce itself as Unit 17, Semi-autonomous Drone of Mucky Business. It will begin by emphasising that the jamming means that it is not in direct contact with Mucky Business, but is authorised to deliver the briefing and negotiate on its behalf. Stats for Unit 17 can be found on page 54.

Unit 17 says that Mucky Business has discovered

Scene two: Research and reconnaissance

At this point, experienced players will want to roll against every skill on their character sheet in an attempt to gain as much information as possible. Here are some ideas.

A Good Academics or Contacting roll can be made to gain information on Mucky Business itself. Each shift generated gains another piece of information from the table overleaf:

A Good Contacting or Leadership roll can be made to discover that Mucky staked a claim on a site in the Oort cloud (every solar system has an asteroid belt on

Shifts	Information
1	Mucky has a good reputation both as a xenoarchaeologist and as a dig leader. Due to its size, it uses remote drones. It isn't a warship so it hires mercenaries to defend the dig
2	Mucky has recently returned from a solo trip to an unknown location within the system

its edge, made up of debris left over from its formation – this is known as the Oort cloud). Alternatively they can look at Mucky's flight plan within the inner system (publicly available information) and make a Good Science roll (modified by Engineering) to infer that its last trip was deep into the Oort cloud. If the PC gains spin on this roll, then they can narrow the list of possibilities down a double-handful of planetoids. While the claim registry has the exact location, their security is notoriously good. It will take an Fantastic Contacting or Engineering roll for an outsider to find out that the location is an apparently random planetoid, no different to a million others. Incidentally, claim-jumping or attempting to break the registry security is considered major breaches of treasure-hunter's ethics – the GM should make sure the players know this. Also, the PCs have all signed a non-disclosure agreement with expensive penalty clauses and their characters will remember this even if their players' have forgotten.

Scene three: A brief, but optional, diversion

At some point during this act, the GM can decide to give the PCs a little fight, just to keep their attention. The best time to do this is when they've met up to exchange information – perhaps in a bar, nightclub or hotel lobby.

If a PC has an appropriate aspect that can be compelled (Hunted By The Mob, for example), then use this group. If not, the treasure-hunting group who planted the bug in scene one want to find out what Murky Business has planned (stats for this group can be found in page 54).

If the group is the treasure hunters, they will start by attempting to intimidate the PCs into compliance (social combat). If this doesn't work then they will resort to violence, but offer a concession of fleeing when they get their first consequence. Aspects for this scene will depend on the location of the fight, but might include: Dive Bar With Place Glass Window Ideal For Throwing Someone Through or Lawless Frontier Space Station.

Cunningham Station is lawless enough that the security is likely to rule the fight as a draw – particularly if the PCs weren't the aggressors and as long as they haven't killed anyone.

Act two: The Trip Out

Scene one: Rendezvous

If the PCs have their own transport they will meet with Mucky Business at an agreed rendezvous point close to Cunningham Station. If not, Unit 17 will meet them in a docking hanger with another drone (Unit 14 – stats can be found one page 54) that is large enough to carry all the PCs and their equipment and ferry them out to Mucky Business. If the last scene went really badly, the PCs may arrive at this rendezvous while fleeing from the station security.

If you think you can get away with it, Mucky Business (“call me Mucky”) should have a Steve Irwin-esque Australian accent. The idea is to make the PC's patron into the comic relief for this episode and increase the creepiness when it's taken over in act four.

For a working vessel, Mucky Business is a fairly luxurious. Cabins are spacious, the fabber produces good quality (if generic) food and there's a good gym and virtual reality suite. Much of the cargo space is taken up with artifacts – Precursor and otherwise – and elaborate recreations of archaeological sites. After the first couple of days, it becomes obvious that the flight plan is heading out of the inner system and towards the Oort cloud. At lunchtime on the third day, during a slingshot manoeuvre around the gas giant at the edge of the system, Mucky Business sounds the proximity alert.

Scene two: Space Pirates!

A group of ships have been hiding on the far side of the system's sixth planet, the gas giant that Mucky Business is manoeuvring around. If a character makes a Fair Investigation roll (modified by Engineering) they can uncover some information on the approaching vessels. Each shift generated gains

another piece of information from the table below:

Shifts	Information
1	It's a convoy of mining barges, probably on their way in-system. Looks like they're going to reverse the slingshot manoeuvre that the Mucky Business is completing and head in-system
2	They've been heavily customised, but no ship matches its technical specifications after a few years in deep space. There's something unusual in their cargo holds – lots of radioactive materials. Must have found a rich seam of something
3	They're pirates! Raise shields! (as the PC has gained spin on this roll, they have the option to apply a bonus or penalty to the next roll that occurs)

The attacking ships are customised personal scale mining barges. Pretty much the entire cargo space has been taken up with capitol scale nuclear missiles – primitive, but still effective. The pirates will hail them, demanding unconditional surrender. If the PCs demure they will fire a warning shot across the bows – Murky Business will confirm that they are capable of damaging the ship, despite the comparative difference in scale.

If the PCs want to surrender⁸, Murky Business will not – the only valuable thing they are carrying is information and any attempt to hack it out of its personality will be a violation equivalent to rape. Murky Business isn't a warship, but it does have personal scale weapons capable of damaging the personal scale mining barges. Unless the PCs have no skills capable of assisting in ship-to-ship combat (very unlikely), they should have little difficulty in defeating the pirates. The stats for the pirates are on page 54. Aspects for this scene include: Slingshot Maneuver, Zero Gravity, Hard Vacuum, Rings Around The Gas Giant and Head For That Small Moon.

If the players ask, a Good Investigation roll (modified by Engineering) can be used to detect the what is probably the pirate's base in an abandoned mining colony on one of the gas giant's larger moons. Mucky Business will not sanction any further investigation – it's not a warship and the slingshot manoeuvre means that they're now travelling at high speed in the opposite direction. Instead it will inform Cunningham Station. Cunningham Station Security thanks them for the report, but refuse to tell them what they are planning to do with the information.

Act three: The Planetoid

Scene one: The Outer Defences

Just after lunchtime of the sixth day of travel, Murky Business will summon the PCs to the bridge. On the long range scanner is a planetoid that, superficially, looks like any other Oort cloud body – a lump of rocky ice, perhaps a bit more metallic and rocky than most, but nothing unusual. If the PCs say this, Murky will say “now this is why I get the big bucks” and zooms in on a cave on the planetoid's surface. The edge of an unnaturally regular shape can just be seen – perhaps a ship?

Murky will replay the recording it took of its last approach. It launched a probe drone with instructions to approach slowly. At just less than 25 km, something happened in multiple locations on the planetoid's surface – it's subtle, but as Murky says “those look like weapons signatures to me, mate”. A Good Investigation roll, modified by Engineering, will confirm this – some sort of tracking system coupled with capacitors that will deliver rapid bursts of energy to an unusual focus. If spin is generated on the roll then the PC discover that they are personal-scale gravity guns – generators for rapidly-fluctuating gravitation fields (which almost certainly makes them Precursor technology – gravity guns are illegal in the Confederation as described on page 36; an Average Academics roll will confirm this). Realising that it would need help, Murky recalled the drone, returned to Cunningham Station staked a claim on the planetoid and hired the PCs.

Murky will follow the PCs lead when exploring the planetoid – it's what it hired them for and it has no problems deferring to the expertise of a fellow professional. It will not approach further than 100 km, the PCs will have to use Unit 14 or their

⁸ Just out of curiosity, please let me know if your player group tries to surrender

own transport. As before, if any object approaches within just under 25 km (the exact figure is based on the Precursors measuring system, something that is still a matter of great controversy within the xenoarchaeological community), the same power signatures can be detected on the surface of the planetoid. The gravity guns will fire on any object or objects that approach to within just under 20 km until it or they are destroyed. The stats for the outer defences can be found on page 55. Normal shields don't defend against gravity guns. The PCs will need to take make a Good Engineering roll and take three exchanges to reconfigure the shields (each shift reducing the time taken by one exchange) or get creative with their manoeuvres. Alternatively, if they had previously detected that the defences used gravitational technology, they could have reconfigured the shields before approaching. Aspects for this scene include: Oort Cloud, Zero Gravity, Hard Vacuum and Mysterious Planetoid.

If the PCs decide to get smart and manoeuvre another lump of rock into a collision course with the planetoid (perhaps to destroy or drain the outer defences or to use it as cover), the gravity guns will switch to a “thrust” mode and push the rock out of the way.

Scene two: Cunningham's Ship

Once the PCs have destroyed enough of the outer defences that they can approach safely, they can make another Good Investigation roll (modified by Engineering). Any shifts will reveal that the

to avoid it, let them make some more Investigation rolls, have the remaining guns shoot at them some more and tell them that they don't find anything – the cave is the only entrance to the complex).

The planetoid has low gravity and has no breathable atmosphere, so any PCs that don't have the Life Support stunt will have to don space suits. Mucky Business will have Unit 17 accompany the party. As they approach the cave and the personal scale ship concealed within, they will realise that the ship is of unfamiliar design. PCs making a Good Academics roll (characters with the Spaceship Mechanic stunt can substitute Pilot for Academics; characters with the Grease Monkey stunt can substitute Engineering), will realise that the “Mary-Lou” is a custom space yacht of human origin and about fifty years old. If spin is generated on this roll then the PC will remember that the Mary-Lou was Cunningham's personal yacht. The transponder tag is still active and can be used to confirm this, but Mucky Business will advise against transmitting the code to the ship registry database. If it is *the* Mary-Lou then it will every reporter and treasure-hunter in the system will head for the site – claim-jumping be damned – and the Confederation government might decide to override the claim “in the public interest”.

The ship is sealed tight, but uses an obsolete security system. Cracking requires a Great Burglary roll and half an hour. Once in, a Fair Investigation check will uncover the following, one piece of information for each shift:

Shifts	Information
1	The hold contains large amounts of Precursor art (some in storage packaging, some unpacked). Unit 17 will be very interested in this
2	The ship's log indicates that Cunningham landed here just over fifty years ago and made two trips into the cave before a third trip where he didn't return.
3	Cunningham's personal log contains signs of a disintegrating personality, full of rants about the people who've cheated him out of his company. The last entry indicates that he found and penetrated an airlock in the rear of the cave. As spin has been gained on this roll, the information here will give a +1 to the rolls to bypass the airlock's security.

planetoid is artificial, but cunningly disguised to look natural and with some sort of sub-surface tunnel complex. Spin on the roll will reveal that there is an entrance in the huge cave where that Mucky spotted the artificial object. Either way they should be encouraged to investigate the cave (if they try

Scene three: The Inner Defences

Upon searching the rest of the sizable cave, an airlock door, large enough for construction drones, will be found at its rear. Mucky Business (or anyone making a Fair Academics roll) will be able to

identify it as Precursor technology. It consists of a silvery disk of Impervium, three metres in diameter embedded in the back wall of the cave with a display and keypad in the Precursor alphabet on the right hand side.

Cracking the security on the airlock will take a Superb Burglary roll and a few hours. Mucky Business will invoke his Precursor Technology Expert to assist and any spin gained on the roll to search the ship will give a +1 bonus to this roll. Once the security has been penetrated the Impervium will swirl and part, allowing entry into the airlock chamber – a hollow five metre diameter sphere of Impervium. Once all of the PCs who want to pass through have entered the door will swirl shut again. If anything is blocking the door (a communications cable, for example) it will be severed.

Once the outer door has been closed, the airlock will cycle automatically, taking around twenty seconds to complete. A door on the opposite side of the sphere will swirl open once the airlock has finished pressurising. An Average Science roll will indicate that the atmosphere appears breathable; if spin is gained on this roll, the equipment will also detect no pathogens or toxins in the atmosphere. Incidentally, contact with Mucky Business is lost once the outer door is closed. Telepathic contact (for example, if a Kttkeckticotk has left a servant on board) will be spotty and confusing⁹.

Beyond the inner door is a large, darkened space, hacked from the body of the planetoid and filled with Precursor machinery (think of a cross between a Pharaoh's tomb and the subterranean city in "Forbidden Planet"). As soon as the PCs step or climb out of the airlock (remember it's a five metre diameter sphere) they will enter an artificial gravity field of just under 1g. The difference might make incautious or clumsy PCs stumble. On the other side of the door is an identical keypad. The door will swirl shut once the airlock chamber is empty; a Good Burglary roll will open it again.

Any treasure hunter or xenoarchaeologist (including Unit 17) will be stunned by the contents of the chamber. This is the mother lode – the single

find that might change Confederation history. Academic characters will be set for life – even if Mucky Business will be co-author on any paper. More mercenary characters be kicking themselves, but at least they still have the media rights once the NDA has been lifted¹⁰.

As the PCs start to enter the chamber, overhead lights flicker into life. These reveal a thin film of dust has coated the machines and that the occasional rock has fallen from the ceiling. More importantly, it silhouettes a group of drones hovering towards the PCs.

If the PCs shoot first and ask questions later, proceed straight to combat. The stats for the Inner Defences are on page 55. Unit 17 will protest for the first couple of exchanges, but take cover when a stray shot knocks it flying.

If the PCs wait and see what happens, the lead drone will hang back while the other drones approach and scan the PCs in detail. One drone will then challenge the PCs in the Precursor Security language. Unless one of the PCs has the Gift of Tongues stunt, they will need to make a Good Academics roll to even recognise that the language is Precursor. If spin is gained on this roll, then they will be able to guess that it's some sort of challenge, but will be unable to respond appropriately. The drone will repeat the challenge again in Precursor Basic – again a Good Academics roll will recognise that it's a different Precursor language. If they get spin on this roll then they will be able to give the drones a response that will have them stand down, even if the PC has no real idea what they've just said.

If a character has the Gift of Tongues stunt and they speak either Precursor Security or Precursor Basic, then they can make a Good Rapport roll and come up with a convincing story as to why they don't scan as Precursors (it doesn't have to be too convincing – the drones aren't the real defence here, just a piece of security theatre to make any intruders think they've got further than they actually have). If the PC makes this Rapport roll then the drones will stand down. Unit 17 will be very curious as to how the PC managed to communicate.

⁹ As shown here, Impervium can be very useful for restricting PC movements and communication. However it's supposed to be very rare and your players may become annoyed if it starts to crop up everywhere

¹⁰ If the PCs start considering some way of stifling or otherwise betraying Mucky Business, remind them that Unit 17 is present and will be monitoring their communications

If the drones are convinced to stand down, they will shadow the PCs at a discrete distance for the rest of the act. Otherwise they will open fire (their stats are on page 55). Aspects for this seen include: Shadowed Corners, Dust Of Ages and Unidentified And Potentially Unstable Precursor Technology

Scene four: The Planetoid Interior

Once they are past the security drones (one way or another), the PCs can begin to explore the planetoid interior in earnest. Emphasise the scale, that it appears that the planetoid is entirely hollow and the PC's are only on the outermost layer. This find could be more important than Dungeonworld. Characters with Great or better Academics, Science or Engineering will be able to make guesses as to the function of some of the equipment ("power conduit", "atmosphere processor", etc.). After a few moments, Unit 17 will make an untranslatable exclamation of surprise and shock and rush off into the middle distance.

By the time that that the PCs catch up with it, it's examining a particularly complex piece of equipment. There's a human space suit on the floor in front of it, but Unit 17 isn't interested in that. Instead it is examining what appears to be (on a Great Academics, Science or Engineering roll) a fully functioning Precursor data console. Others have been found, but have been too badly damaged to be of any use. This is the holy grail of xenoarcheology; something that looks like the central console of the TARDIS only with seating and headsets made to adjust to a disturbingly wide variety of heads. It's been theorised that if a working console was discovered, it would be the Rosetta stone to unlocking the whole of Precursor culture – language, technology, you name it.

The space suit is missing its helmet (a brief search will find it has rolled behind the console) and contains a mummified human corpse. The name tag says "Cunningham" and if someone compares it's DNA with a sample from the ship (Average Science or Investigation roll), it will confirm that this is the body of Victor Cunningham. A Good Science or Investigation roll will show that he apparently died of natural causes. If spin is gained on the Investigation roll, the PC will infer that he died while wearing a

headset and fell off of the stool – the headset then automatically retracted back into the console.

Unit 17 will insist on interfacing with the console. Even if the PCs point out that it probably killed Cunningham, it will reply that a) it's a robot, programmed for these kind of situations and b) from a social, ethical and legal point of view, it isn't alive. It's not self-aware, just a simulation of consciousness. Interfacing with the console is its duty – Mucky's programming of Unit 17 included this possibility. It intends to interface and will only be prevented by defeating it in social or physical combat. When it takes a mild consequence, it will offer a concession of taking the matter to Mucky Business. Mucky will tell them not to be so "bloody stupid" and send them back in, with orders to let Unit 17 suck everything it can out the console.

Unit 17 will give a running commentary during the download – it's everything they'd imagined. Culture, language, technology, religion all in a fragmented mess that will take years to sort through. Part way through, it will pause, explaining that there's so much information that he's going to have to shut down parts of his personality to make more space. From that point on, the commentary will cease; when addressed, it will respond in a robotic monotone. A couple of minutes later, it will say that it's complete, turn and head for the airlock. The PCs will only be able to detect that something is wrong by making an Empathy check against the virus's Deceit of Great – spin on this roll is needed for the PCs to figure out that Unit 17 has been taken over. As this trickery is important to the plot then the GM should use fate points and compels to ensure that it works. If however, the PCs become suspicious, Unit 17 can only be prevented from leaving by destroying it. If this happens, the virus can either transfer itself to another sufficiently complex piece of equipment carried by the PCs or Mucky Business can insist on sending another drone to pick up the information – this time with beefed up virus protection (though this last option might strain your player's credulity).

Act four: The Twist

Scene one: Betrayal

As soon as the airlock cycles, Unit 17 will make

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contact with Mucky Business and then collapse. Mucky Business will also be out of contact for a few moments and then claim that there's a serious fault with Unit 17's power plant and the PCs need to disable it. If suspicious, the PCs can roll Empathy, but Mucky is telling the truth. The virus that has taken over Unit 17 has engineered the crisis to distract the PCs while it takes over Mucky Business.

A Good Engineering roll and a few minutes are needed to disassemble Unit 17 and disable the power plant. If spin is gained on this roll then the PC will realise that the damage is sabotage, probably by the Unit itself. Otherwise it looks like the destabilisation was a combination of the amount of processing power devoted to the storage of the information, coupled with a rapid change in gravity when exiting the airlock and a large dollop of bad luck.

If the roll is failed then Unit 17's power plant becomes unstable. Treat it as a Good complexity bomb with an area of three (the zone around the airlock, the zone around the Mary Lou and the zone that's the cave entrance) and a force of Legendary. Unit 17 is heavier than it looks, requiring a Good Might roll to lift (one possibly solution to the explosion problem is to open the airlock, toss Unit 17 in and close the airlock again).

The unstable power plant will disrupt communications until it either explodes or is shut down – this will put Mucky Business in fragmentary contact with the PCs while the virus takes it over. Any PC who stayed behind with Mucky Business can detect activity on board. A Good Engineering roll will detect it powering up its fabbers and making modifications to its weapons systems – Mucky Business will refuse to explain any of this.

In an ideal world, the PCs will just have chance to catch their breath after defusing or escaping from the bomb, before contacting Mucky Business for an update. By this time the virus has completed its takeover of the AI and will respond in a robotic accent that will contrast sharply with Mucky's own voice: "This unit has been subsumed. Surrender your weapons and prepare for analysis."

Scene two: Resolution

Mucky Business (or at least the virus that has

now taken it over) will continue to babble about subsumation and analysis, interspersed with snatches of various Precursor languages. While this is happening, anyone vulnerable to the Personality Hacking feat will be attacked mentally. It will be impossible to reason with. One exchange after the beginning of this scene, Mucky Business will pilot combat drones into the entrance of the cave. Stats for this new version of Mucky Business and its drones are on page 53. Mucky Business will not fire on the planetoid itself, but will attempt to destroy anything that emerges from the cave.

There are a number of possible resolutions to this combat:

The easiest solution is if one of the PCs is a Ktttkecktictok, part of k-tech-net and with aspects representing contacts with the Confederation government, Civilian Application or (for some insane reason) the Order of Virtue. If the PC invokes the aspect and sends a message to their contact, it's relayed to Civilian Application, the most powerful warship in the vicinity. Civilian Application is in the vicinity (which is a little suspicious – it doesn't usually visit the Oort cloud) will be there in twenty minutes. Civilian Application can disable Mucky Business without difficulty; the virus will self-destruct rather than be taken "alive".

If no-one is part of the k-tech-net, but one or more PCs have aspects representing contacts with the Confederation government, Civilian Application or the Order of Virtue they can still radio for help. Civilian Application will arrive, but will take thirty minutes rather than twenty. Radio waves only travel at the speed of light, whereas k-tech-net is instantaneous. Civilian Application intercepts the message – it's cracked most of the common communications cyphers. The PCs will need to hold out for that long.

The PCs could attempt to escape in Mary Lou. It will take a few minutes and a Fair Engineering roll to warm up the ship. Mary Lou's personal scale weapons can't damage

Mucky Business, so this should be treated as a chase scene through the Oort cloud (see the relevant section of the SotC SRD). If they radio for help, Civilian Application will come to their assistance at a dramatically appropriate point. Aspects for this scene include: Oort cloud, Zero Gravity and Hard Vacuum.

If the PCs decide to hold up in the cave, Mucky Business will send two waves of drones into the cave five minutes apart followed by a third wave of drones five minutes after that. The third wave will be co-ordinated with another group of drones (stats as the Inner Defense Drones, page 55), arriving through the airlock. The airlock can be sealed with a Superb Engineering or Burglary roll (if the PC wants to take the risk of permanently damaging the airlock then they get a +2 bonus). Subsequent waves will be spaced around five minutes apart. Each wave will use a different set of tactics: frontal assault, stealthy approach, distraction plus sniping, etc. etc. Aspects for this scene include: Low Gravity, Hard Vacuum, Rocky Cave and Shadowed Corners.

If they decide to take refuge in Mary Lou, its personal scale weapons can be used to shoot drones coming into the cave (either from the entrance or the airlock). Sooner or later one will get too close for the guns to target it. Then the PCs will hear the drone or drones clanging against the hull before cutting through it. After this they will have to fight the drones inside the Mary Lou. Aspects for this scene include: Das Boot Reenactment, Definitely Not Nicked Off Of The Matrix, Artificial Gravity, Hard Vacuum On The Other Side Of The Bulkhead and Ancient Pleasure Yacht With A Hold Full Of Precursor Art.

They could attempt to flee through the airlock and into the planetoid. If you aren't feeling up to improvising the beginnings of a campaign in an even more lethal version of Dungeonworld, you can just rule that the airlock has been sealed.

Lastly, the PCs could surrender or be defeated. This will end the campaign in a depressing

manner as they are killed and dissected. One possible solution is to have their personalities uploaded to a Precursor virtual reality. Defeating the security system, locating a cloning vat and tricking it into recreating their bodies would be an adventure in itself. Escaping from deep within the planetoid (or perhaps they've been transported to Dungeonworld) is a campaign in itself.

Act five: Aftermath

One way or another, Civilian Application will take charge of the dig. Hostile Precursor technology trumps any claim staked on the planetoid. If asked, Civilian Application will just claim to have been in the area on a whim, but a Superb Contacting roll will reveal that a source in the Confederation government tipped him off.

If the PCs have their own transport and are now looking for a job, then someone needs to clean out that nest of space pirates. Cunningham Station doesn't usually patrol out that far so they're willing to hire a group of mercenaries. The PCs could find themselves in the right place at the right time.

If not, this planetoid is likely to become the next Dungeonworld, giving plenty of opportunity for subsequent adventures.

Character Descriptions

Mucky Business (Acts 1-3)

Aspects: Collective Consciousness, Xenoarchaeologist (hive mind, artificial intelligence), Science Vessel, Driven Archaeologist, Publish Or Perish, Passionately Hates Plagiarists, A Little Paranoid About Claim-jumpers, Good Dig Boss, Precursor Technology Expert

Stunts: Gestalt Consciousness, Huge Ride, Inbuilt Personal Guns, Lieutenant (X2), Life Support, Minions (X2), Scholar (Xenoarcheology), Wide Ride

Skills: Academics (+5), Investigation (+4), Science (+4), Contacting (+3), Engineering (+3), Pilot (+3), Art (+2), Leadership (+2), Rapport (+2), Resources

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(+2), Alertness (+1), Endurance (+1), Guns (+1), Might (+1), Resolve (+1)

Mucky Business (Act 4)

Aspects: Upgraded Science Vessel, Jury-rigged Weapons, Artificially Intelligence Precursor Virus, Mysterious Agenda, Insanely Inscrutable, Subsume Or Die

Stunts: Gestalt Consciousness, Wide Ride, Huge Ride, Life Support, Inbuilt Personal Guns, Inbuilt Capitol Guns, Minions (X2), Lieutenant (X2)

Skills: Guns (+5), Engineering (+4), Deceit (+4), Alertness (+3), Leadership (+3), Pilot (+3), Academics (+2), Investigation (+2), Resources (+2), Science (+2), Resolve (+1), Endurance (+1), Intimidation (+1), Might (+1), Stealth (+1)

Mucky Business's Combat Drones (Act 4)

Good Physical Minions. Each wave should consist of three minions per character. These drones have the following aspects: Modified Archaeological Drone, Reprogrammed By Virus, Flies Using A Gravity Drive

Unit 17

Good Physical, Mental and Social Independent Companion. Skilled (Leadership), Skilled (Rapport), Skilled (Academics), Skilled (Engineering). It has the following aspects during the first three acts: Semi-autonomous Archaeological Drone, Flies Using A Gravity Drive. During act 4, it has following aspects: Malevolently Autonomous Archaeological Drone, Reprogrammed By Virus, Flies Using A Gravity Drive

Unit 14

Aspects: Semi-autonomous Transport Drone, Flies Using A Gravity Drive, Steers Like A Hog

Stunts: Inbuilt Personal Guns, Life Support, Wide Ride

Skills: Guns (+3), Engineering (+2), Pilot (+2), Alertness (+1), Endurance (+1), Resolve (+1)

Treasure Hunters (Act 1)

Mack (boss). Mack will do all of the talking. If the group aren't treasure hunters, add or substitute some of the aspects to reflect which PC aspect is being compelled.

Aspects: Small-minded Thug, Why Work When You Can Steal, Mooks Mook, Treasure Hunter, Claim Jumper

Stunts: Minions, Quick Draw

Skills: Fists (+4), Intimidation (+3), Endurance (+3), Athletics (+2), Guns (+2), Resolve (+2), Academics (+1), Contacting (+1), Deceit (+1), Resources (+1)

Six Fair Quality Physical Minions

Space Pirates

Mother-ship (boss)

Aspects: Heavily Modified, Oversized Nuclear Missiles, Space Pirate, Former Mining Barge

Stunts: Minions, Wide Ride, Huge Ride

Skills: Guns (+5), Pilot (+4), Endurance (+4), Engineering (+4)

Three Good Quality Minions, with the same aspects as the mother ship

Outer Defences

There are nine Good Quality Minions that need to be defeated before the PCs can approach the cave safely. They have the following aspects: Gravity Gun, Precursor Targeting Technology and the following stunts: Inbuilt Capitol Guns, Inbuilt Personal Guns

Inner Defence Drones

Boss drone

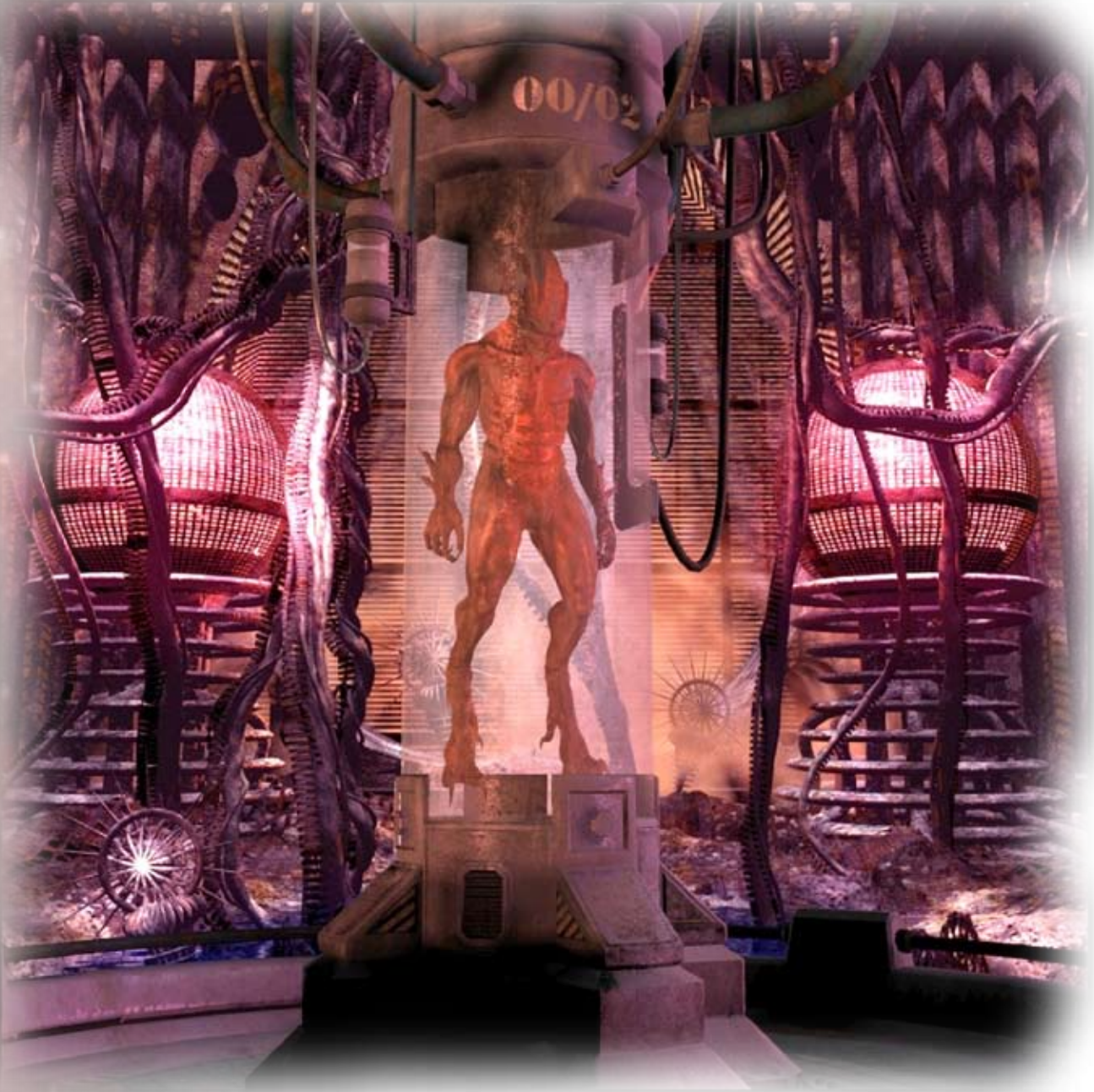
Aspects: Lasers And Rockets And Spikes – Oh My, Hoverbot, Precursor Artificial Intelligence, You Will Be Subsumed

Stunts: Minions (X2), Personality Hacking, Reinforcements, One Hit To The Body, Thick Skins, Man of Iron, Natural Weapons (Weapons)

Skills: Guns (+4), Intimidation (+3), Endurance (+3), Leadership (+2), Resolve (+2), Athletics (+2),

Stealth (+1), Might (+1), Weapons (+1), Academics
(+1)

Six Good Quality Physical Minions



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