STARBLADE BATTALION
MEKTON

多次元機甲戦士道

AN ANIME CAMPAIGN SETTING FOR **MEKTON**
メクトン

MK 1211

DEATH BY STARLIGHT

2180 A.D.

Everything in war is barbaric.. But the worst barbarity of war is that it forces men collectively to commit acts against which individually they would revolt with their whole being.

—Ellen Key, *War, Peace & The Future*

This is how it began. Two nations, arrogant of purpose, unbending in their ideals, unswerving in their determination, fired to the terrible choice of war. The **United Stellar States Alliance**, heir to the ruined world of the cybernetic age, born in the shadow of extinction and death. The proud **Pleiades Confederation**, strong and aggressive child of the Alliance, eager to conquer and exploit, free from the draconian control of distant Earth. They met on the battlefield of space, among the glittering rings of a long-dead world, to duel with fire and flame for the mastery of the Galaxy.

A thousand years scarce serve to form a state: An hour may lay it in the dust
—Lord Byron

In the first great contest of these titans, tens of thousands died. The reasons were as nameless as the dead themselves, and the causes as senseless as their deaths.

Then two men, once sworn enemies, skilled soldiers of their respective worlds, looked across that bloody field of battle, and saw another way. One in which the dying must stop

The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman
—Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

Together, they would gather around themselves a mighty band of heroes, whose struggle to bring peace to a shattered Galaxy would one day become legend. Because they alone believed. Because they had no other choice.

They were called the **Starblade Battalion**. This is their story.

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE, APRIL 26, 2180
CAPT. REDDING FROST COMMANDING:

TIME: 12:51.6

On the suggestion of our SCC military liaison, Lt.Cmdr. Dyson, I have decided to begin this supplemental log as an amendment to our regular exploration records. In the best case, it will serve as a personal record of the events that have led to our current position; in a worst case, it will serve as a defense in any future trial the Admiralty Board convenes against me.

Let me briefly outline our situation. I am the captain of the Deltaboat-class exploration cutter Starblade, duly appointed under the authority of the Stellar Colonization Command [SCC] on 2178.05.10. I am not presently an official member of the armed forces, although from our current situation, I suspect that could change very soon.

As Rangers, our entire reason for existence is exploration missions, not war. It was while on one of these six month forays into the Pleiades Cluster that we picked up a distress databurst from Battle Group Kinkade, stationed on eco-blockade at the Ranoxis system. The prelim report was grim—ambushed by a cloaked task force, heavy casualties—followed by a maximum priority distress call to all available ships in the area—

Then the message broke up.

We reached Ranoxis in seven hours. It didn't take long to find the battlefield; North's rings looked like they'd been hit with a scattershot blast. There was wreckage everywhere.; the entire region was a maze of blasted, tumbling hulks, fitfully illuminated by crazed arcs of energy discharge and spiralling contrails of superheated hydrox fuel. It looked worse than we could have possibly imagined.

Battlefleet Kinkade had been obliterated.

We traced the databurst to the remnants of the flight deck of the fleet carrier Macedonia, flagship of the Battlegroup. The only things left alive were the derelict marker lights. We can only assume everyone in the Battlegroup is either dead or has been evac'd by SCC rescue teams. But to judge from the thousands of vac-frozen, laser-charred bodies drifting through the Rings, the latter is a very slim probability.

On the third sweep through the debris field, we finally found a lone Mekton drifting on FLASH* life-support. And in one of those weird twists war so often hands you, it turned out that the the only thing alive for a thousand klicks was to be the Enemy—

—a Pleiadean Jäger

* FLASH: Final Last-chance Accelerated Systemic Hibernation

■ Designer's Intro

Welcome to *Starblade Battalion*. This book has a unique history. *Starblade* started out as a straight-forward science fiction mecha world. We imagined a human culture polarizing along two modes of thought: One reacting to the collapse of the biosphere with a static, ecofascist platform; the other more dynamic, but carrying many of the same destructive policies that have so damaged our Earth. There was to be no real black or white to the situation, but rather a complex scenario where both sides had valid ideas and serious flaws.

While we were developing this project, we noticed that it was a very logical extension of the *Cyberpunk 2020®* world we had been working on for years. It only seemed natural to use the depth of background and history we had at our fingertips there to help flesh put the early history and sociological underpinnings of the *Starblade* saga.

So as we worked, we tried to keep these three ideas in mind:

• **This world came from the *Cyberpunk®* history and technology base.** The Links and nanotech-based bioware ("Livemetal") are highly advanced descendants of the cyberware from *CP2020®* ("Dead-metal"). The Dataweb is a highly sophisticated info-sharing network which is derived from the Net. Everyone has a datalink implanted by the age of 17 and can access the Web. The Mecha themselves are simply extensions of the ACPA that are standard milspec hardware in 2020. The large scale myomers proved even more efficient on larger exoskeletons. While this new world is very different, its roots can be traced back to the *Cyberpunk Age*.

• **Both sides are extremist.** Solingen GmbH, the largest interstellar megacorp and descendant of International Electrics and other euro-corps, has an ambitious plan to gain control of the colonies and mold them into a state in which the Megacorps can flourish once again. It is willing to use both a secret army and propaganda-blasted colonists to gain this end. The USSA, while ostensibly nice guys, are too draconian for their own good. The Gaian leaders are fanatics whose rigid ideals do not always translate well into the real world. Both are creating a war for their own reasons.

• **It is up to the players to form a third, renegade group: the *Starblade Battalion*.** This group's goal is to avoid the extremes presented by the opposing sides in this war and hopefully offer an alternative philosophy. They must gather the outcasts of this society and form a movement which can find a way of preventing either government from locking humanity onto a path that will destroy either its environment or its spirit.

Now you and your players can shape the fate of the human galaxy for the next two hundred years. Choose wisely ... and, more importantly, have a hell of a good time.
—The Starblade Team

PERSONAL LOG: JESSE RYUZAKI, ODF JÄGER FORCES.
APRIL 25, 2180 [0800 HRS]

TIME: 12:51.6

This will be my final message.

Since you can hear this, you're accessing my flight recorder and have managed to break the encryption string I placed on it. Sorry to make it tough on ya, but I can't afford to let my telemetry fall into SAC hands. And if you're, by any chance, one of my ODF compatriots, sorry again to impose, but I'm going to need help to get this back to my family. After all, I'm probably dead.

My name is Jesse Ryuzaki. I am —or was—a Captain in the 124th Exploration Group of the ODF Jägers—now renamed the *Marauders* in honor of our bright new commissions in the Defense Fleet. I hope you've heard of us; it would prove we acquitted ourselves well in this fight and that maybe, just maybe, the deaths of the rest of my crewmates will be worth it.

That maybe this fight will be worth it.

Fight—this stupid, ruthless war is more like it. If you're SAC— hear me out. Let this dead man have his last word.

We never *wanted* this war, you know. Yeah, I know the USSA propaganda machine will make the most out of the fact that we were the ones to kick things off, but the war had already started by the time we faced down at North. *You* were moving your forces in—yeah, you saw the whole thing as a police action, but the fact is your USSA sought to enforce its laws on our worlds by right of conquest. Well, hell—you've got no more right to rule us than the Brits had the right to rule the Americans 400 years ago. They overthrew their tyrants, and so will we.

We figured you'd send forces to blockade Ranoxis. But we're not fighting for those trees. We're fighting to defend our homes from extraterrestrial invaders. You.

So you came. We picked up your fleet and uncloaked to engage. You were just spoilin' for a fight, hoping to teach us a quick lesson. I intercepted one of your officers' broadcasts as he helped gun down the helpless *Lindisfarne*. He called us "a bunch of eco-pirates." That was right before our opening barrage fused him to his cockpit for eternity. Guess he's re-thinkin' his options now. In Hell.

I think we won.

To my family, friends and fellow Jägers: *Keep fighting.* Remember me with your deeds. Don't make our sacrifice at North worthless.

I'm almost out of air. I'm going to FLASH myself now in the hope that someone recovers my body. In a day, I'll run out of power and start to cool down to about two Kelvin, precious body heat bleeding away into eternal night; the long slow cooldown to death—

I have no regrets.

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE:

Time: 12:51.6

—That's where Ryuzaki's log ended. By the time we pulled his FLASH-frozen body from the wreck of his Troubadour, he was halfway dead despite the hibernation drugs. It took every trick our Med Officer had in her bag to get him back.

Even half dead, Ryuzaki is already a handful of trouble. Never mind the fact that, for all her work, Med Officer Karyana, (a devout Gaian) *still* wanted to kill him for being one of the "planet-defiling scum" that led the pillaging of Ranoxis' ecosystem. Never mind that Andre Dyson wanted to strap him back to the table and vacuum his brain with a suction pump for Pleiadean military secrets. I can handle *them*.

No, Ryuzaki brings his own brand of trouble. He's argumentative, moody, rash and headstrong. He's a mule-headed hothead who thinks with his joystick and a full clip; someone who would never make it as a Ranger.

Actually, I kind of like him.

At least he didn't go for his gun the moment he came to. And, although he was a bit surly when he found himself a "prisoner" on an SCC ship, he has eventually settled down to become a model guest. Except for the frequent fights he and Karyana get into over Gaian doctrine! Sometimes we all want to throw them *both* out the airlock—

Unfortunately, a lot of people, Earth native and colonial alike, haven't been through the Ecocollapse. A lot of colonials have never even *seen* Earth at all. And it is exactly because of this ignorance of Earth and the Ecocollapse that they don't have the background to understand why the USSA's mission is so important.

■ A History of the Human Expansion

— Dataweb Entry 2180.02.03 by Leona Falk, Web University, Primus 4.

■ The Birth of Fire

The End of the Second Millennium was a traumatic time for Humanity. The economic collapse of the major national powers and the rise of the Megacorporations had resulted in complete social chaos. The simultaneous development of a prototypical Dataweb (a crude VR system called the Net) and early man-machine interface links (achieved with dead-metal processors and radio modems surgically implanted in people's craniums) radically accelerated dataflow and encouraged the dissolution of traditional methods and mores, which, in turn, created further anarchy. There was a brief popular movement for individual empowerment led by independent adherents to the new technologies (called Cyberpunks in the old parlance), but that bright spot was somehow lost in the political riptides of the time. The period from the turn of the century until the early 2040s is often called "The Cyberpunk Age" for its violence, rampant technological and sociological experimentation, and general lack of stability.

By the end of that era, the Megacorporations, such as **International Electric**, **Militech**, and **PetroChem**, stood alone as the only groups capable of large-scale organization and activity. They soon consolidated their power and went on a rabid campaign of development to every corner of the globe. Their influence spread as their search for raw materials and new markets finally reached out to the early orbital habitats and beyond to the asteroid belt. They erected huge city-buildings called arcologies, made Interface Links more accessible and useful, developed advanced exoskeletal systems (the precursors to modern Mektons), and spread the **Net** as far as Mars. But, while they represented some measure of structure and control in a world gone wild, they also sponsored a rapacious mentality of consumption, waste, and lack of social responsibility. They plundered rather than planted, and used rather than integrated. Thus the next crisis the world faced was predetermined by the corporations' very nature.

■ The Ecocollapse

By 2070, the Earth faced complete ecological disaster. Two hundred years of careless industrialization and pollution had devastated the Earth's biosphere, along with nearly four-fifths of its native flora and fauna. The skies were black with smog, the oceans choked with algae and mutant fish. The globe had been sterilized by pollution and waste, with nearly every area of habitable land covered by sprawling cities. Degenerate animals, resistant to the acid rain and industrial toxins, ranged through the shadows of those cities, and new plagues swept the world, killing millions before they could be brought into check (see Dataweb References for details).

Out of this catastrophe arose the first group to challenge the corporations' authority in fifty years: the **Ecological Emergency Government**. The EEG was an alliance of the few remaining national governments, joined together to try stem the tide of ecocollapse before the planet was rendered entirely uninhabitable. They resurrected the old United Nations forum (previously abandoned when terrorists nuked New York in 1997) and delineated a set of policies to prevent further erosion and lay the groundwork for rebuilding the biosphere. These proposed measures were necessarily harsh ... especially on the Megacorps, who controlled the lion's share of industry.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

ACID RAIN DEVASTATES CANADIAN FARMLAND

DATAWEB REFERENCE

Dateline: May 3, 2068

The increased acidity in the rainfall in Canada, as well as Norway and other Scandinavian countries, has resulted in almost complete defoliation. Petrochem, the world's leading manufacturer of grain alcohol fuel has been hard hit by these crop failures. Both forests and croplands have suffered, and "rain warnings" to keep people inside during the heaviest acid rains have been instituted. Schools throughout these countries now have rain drills to teach children what to do in case of potent rainfall.

What affect this will have on the world's ecosystem as a whole is yet to be determined. The United Nations has called for a meeting of the world's top meteorologists and ecologists in Geneva later this month.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

RADIOACTIVE WASTE

DATAWEB REFERENCE

Dateline: September 12, 2072

Recently, the world learned that the Russian watertable has been contaminated by radioactive waste, which has been pumped underground for over one hundred years.

Last week, the Russian government released photos of blasted stretches of land with toxic waste literally bubbling up from the ground, such as this park in Volgograd.

The Russian government has since announced that 80% of its water supply has been so contaminated, and they have begun to negotiate to purchase crops and water from other countries.

PERSONAL LOG: JESSE RYUZAKI, ODF JÄGER FORCES

TIME: 12:51.6

Well, at least they didn't try to suck my brains out with a vacuum pump. They eventually set me free to wander around the ship—under guard, of course. But still...

A little freedom goes a long way with me. I was born on Solingen, see, and with one city per continent, we colonists don't take well to being fenced in.

Grand-dad used to tell us what it was like living back on Earth. Life, he said, was completely fenced in. Everything was work-oriented. Everything was regulated. Anything that wasn't prohibited was required. You were always fenced in. That's why we left on the Longrider.

Those who opposed "despoiling virgin worlds" didn't want to leave Earthspace. They didn't want *anyone* to leave. Those who thought colonization was a great idea left anyway. And the more of them that left, the more oppressive Earth became, and the more those who supported expansion were reviled. A vicious cycle.

So what happened that was almost everyone who remained behind opposed colonization, and everyone who left supported it. It's only natural that we're at each other's throats— our side and theirs were formed by people with two completely incompatible views of reality.

Now, I'm stuck with the other view. There's too many of the crew here to hijack the Starblade, even if Frost was stupid enough to give me the chance (he isn't). And I guess it wouldn't be fair to try and kill someone who just saved your life.

On the other hand, I'm willing make an exception for Med Officer Karyana.

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE:

TIME: 12:51.6 I regret to note in this log that almost seventy two hours of continuous scanning has gotten us no further in our search for survivors. I must conclude that any survivors either escaped or are now dead.

Well, at least we saved Ryuzaki.

Now we must decide our next course of action. HyperWeb chatter has been non-existent, and we don't dare try to com back to Earth ourselves for instructions. We've already dodged one large group of what appear to be Pleiadean colonial ships inbound for Ranoxis by lying doggo in the wreckage.

In any event, I find myself in command of a Ranger vessel, and while I know exactly where I am, I haven't a clue where the rest of the human race is headed. I can't even tell who won the battle: the Jäger pilot wiped his black box.

Ryuzaki. I just can't see him as the Enemy. He didn't want a war any more than I do. And I've just got a gut-level feeling about him. He's got that walkabout look every scout has.

I'm sitting back, watching him argue with Dyson over which planet to go to next. He's pushing for Telluria or Hammersmith, claiming colonial sympathies are far less hostile than the USSA-controlled (and Gaian-influenced) media would have us believe. Ryuzaki is a very passionate speaker, but so far I can see no logical alternative other than to return to Earth.

Hmm. Ryuzaki seems to have given up. Looks like Dyson won the argument. Either that, or Ryuzaki has found out how intractable military officers can be.

But our Jäger friend has a point. If the colonists don't want to fight, and *our* citizens don't want to fight either, then who's pushing all the bloodshed?

Who (and what) are we all dying for?

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

When the Megacorps forcibly resisted (they had their own limited military forces back then), the EEG activated the remaining national armies over which they had control and launched the Unification Wars. To the EEG, the crisis demanded that every facet of global society be brought under the strict rules of population control, recycling, pollution control and ecological management. There was no room for negotiation. Countries and corporations alike either adhered to the EEG's principles voluntarily or were forced to comply. Ultimately, the Megacorps were forced to withdraw to their orbital colony strongholds to nurse their wounds and sue for peace.

So despite the odds, the Unification Wars achieved their goal; the polluters and despoilers were stopped, and the first steps towards reconstruction brought to bear. For the millions dying in fetid toxic waste dumps, lashed by the horrors of mutated viruses, the EEG brought new hope and a chance at survival; enough that soon almost all organized opposition fell apart.

By 2090, the wars had all but ended. The remaining individual governments of Earth were officially dissolved in 2092, as the EEG was declared the unified authority overseeing the long and difficult road back from self destruction. The corporations which had sided with the EEG early on were given preferential placement in the newly formed Economic Council, and all corporations were forever banned from having armed security forces of any kind.

■ The Solar Exodus

The EEG soon began a radical program to recover the Earth's ecology. All remaining resources went into converting existing arcologies into Zeniths (Zero Emission, No-Impact Terrestrial Habitats) and creating new Zeniths into which the population would be moved.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

Criminals and others who simply refused to join the system (some of them remnants of the Cyberpunks, dubbed "ravagers" by the media) were denied entry to these sanctuaries. They were left to die in what few sprawling cities that were not bulldozed in preparation for eco-renewal. Alongside the Zeniths, the EEG built gigantic atmosphere processing towers to clean up the air, supplementing these structures with genetically engineered strains of algae and kudzu. Similar programs were enacted to restore enough of the lost animal species to rebuild a viable ecosystem.

But it was too little, too late; Earth's biosphere could not repair itself with the burden of ten billion humans to support. Mankind, at least on Earth, was eventually doomed. The EEG decided to move a significant portion of Mankind into space, creating a branch called the Solar Colonization Council (SCC), responsible for the titanic task of evacuating humanity into orbit. The EEG reorganized itself around this new approach, becoming the United Solar States Alliance. The USSA continued the EEG's policies of enforced population control and clean manufacturing, but also took on the new missions of relocating humanity and establishing the Ecological Protocols under which all of the solar system would operate. The USSA included a new sub-division: the SAC (Solar Armaments Command). SAC was the military and police arm of the USSA, and would be responsible for keeping order in the planned off-world colonies.

The newly chartered SCC began moving man into orbit, but the job of colonizing space was too big. Only a dozen orbital colonies were constructed, at a staggering cost of money and lives. The lucky ones made it to these cramped footholds in orbit or to the relatively tiny outposts on the Moon and Mars; the rest huddled in their doomed arcologies and cities. Some died; others committed suicide; still others refused to have children. A worldwide "extinction cult" known as the Midnight Sun arose, prophesying Man's doom by the year 2125.

Then came a technological innovation that would prove to be humanity's salvation. For decades, artificial neoplastic muscles (called myomers) had been used in conjunction with interface links to create life-like prosthetics and powered armor exoskeletal frames. But in 2111, Cal R. Adrean, a farsighted designer, applied new Tripolymers to a large-scale exoskeleton (one fully thirty feet high) and integrated one of the new nanotech-derived interface links (the "Livemetal" links we know today). The result was the first "Mekton": a huge humanoid robot, controlled neurologically by a linked pilot. These new Mektons gave a single human the strength of a giant with the control of a craftsman. They would soon revolutionize construction, exploration ... and warfare ... forever.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

The USSA now had the tools with which to rebuild. Mekton construction units were immediately deployed (in SCC-controlled units) both on Earth and in space. With the power of Mektons, truly gigantic colonies could be established in high orbit around Earth in a fraction of the time expected. A flood of colonization inundated the Solar system. By 2122, vast caverns had been excavated under the lunar surface, revealing water ice and providing space for huge cities; cities made possible because a single team of a dozen Mektons could raise a city block in a couple of days (it's easy when handling steel and stone is as easy as two kids building a tree fort!). By 2130, the asteroid colonies were revitalized, and the USSA, hopeful at last, turned it s eyes to expanding the Mars colony that had been only marginally maintained during the last century. The old-style Net was renovated into the Dataweb, a unified data and sensory access system with full link access and interplanetary scope. Unmanned probes were even sent out to the surrounding solar systems (if at slower-than-light speeds) in the hopes of finding other-Earth-like worlds. It finally looked as though Humanity would escape the trap of the decaying homeworld.
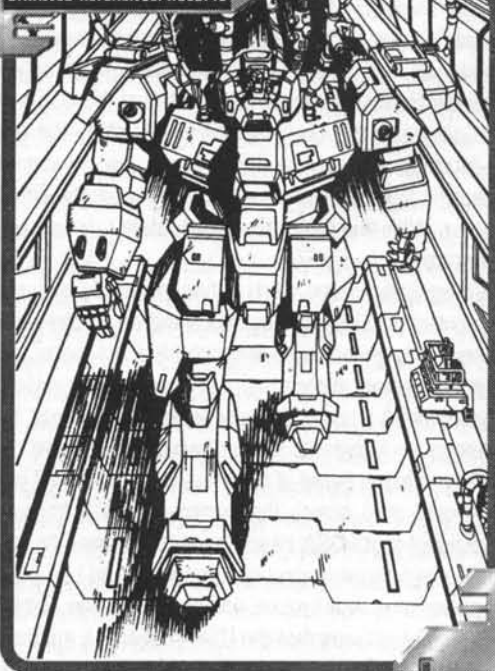
PERSONAL LOG OF JESSE RYUZAKI, ODF JÄGERS:

TIME: 12:51.6

Over the past two days, as the Starblade's been searching the wreckage at North, Frost and I have been swapping notes. Nothin' treasonous or militarily important; just what our side said and your side countersaid sorts of things. We say we're fighting for our freedom, fighting regulation without representation, unilateral government mandates, coercion instead of compromise. They say we're compromising the future of humanity, pointing to situations like Ranoxis as proof. And maybe we're both right.

Maybe this war was inevitable, but if the Earthers had just given us a chance, they'd have seen we don't *have* to fight. But they're worried that we'll use up all the resources. Their leaders want to stop us from ruining planets. They honestly fear the destruction of whole ecosystems. They're terrified that we'll wreck hundreds of worlds like we wrecked Earth.

The Ecocollapse was the result of centuries of abuse with inferior technology. Not only do we colonials never want that to happen again, but with this cluster, we won't ever *need* to. This isn't just one little planet. This cluster is immense! We couldn't ruin it if we tried; there's too many worlds (and if we ruined Cueball, who would care, anyway?).

I could probably still be shot on Earth for making that joke.

That's the problem. In Earthspace, disagreeing is almost treason. To the USSA, we're not mature enough to work for the betterment of humanity without them looking over our shoulder and guiding our steps. They must be in charge, because they know best. Just ask them.

Somehow, we gotta change that viewpoint.

Somehow.

TIME: 12:51.6

My dad once told me "People are never more frightening than when they're convinced beyond a doubt that they're right." I wondered about that; it seemed kind of out of character for him; he's generally a pretty optimistic guy.

I don't wonder about it any more.

It was about 1500 hours on Day Four when Dyson returned from a last EVA on the wreck of the Macedonia.

"The main computer wasn't entirely wiped." explained Dyson as he shrugged out of his flightsuit. "I went in to finish the job; couldn't let all that intel fall into the wrong hands." He flipped an Eyes Only Pad over to Frost. "And while I was wiping the Mac's Gaian Observer's database, I found this, Skipper."

Frost scanned it. His face went grim. After a moment, he said in a flat voice, "We owe you an apology, Capt. Ryuzaki.", and handed the pad over to me.

It was a contingency plan for an ecological police state.

Absolute bans on homesteading. Reproductive licensing and family planning. No private ownership of mecha, ships or personal weapons. Death penalties reinstated for eco-crime. All based on a proposed SAC occupation of the Solingen colonies.

There was a long silence. When the Starblade's causality distortion alarm suddenly went off, the interruption was almost a relief. Lucky for us we were lying powered down in the shadow of a wrecked SAC cruiser— seconds later, three dozen ships exploded into reality overhead, headed inbound on max thrust; transports, cruisers; you name it. All ODF. I almost cheered.

Until an hour later, when bright pinpoints began to flare in the upper atmosphere of Faraday.

"Spectral scan!" barked Frost. Karyana powered up the dop-scanner and lined up one of the flares in the crosshairs. Moments passed. Her face went white.

"They're using airburst nukes." she whispered in horror.

What few had anticipated was that Mektons also gave unexpected strength to the few remaining opponents of the USSA. Stolen Mektons meant survivability to the people who lived in the Blight or the Old Cities, and terrorist raids on Zeniths boomed, aided by armed Mektons. Other ravager caravans traveled throughout the world, scavenging and trading, using Mektons for defense, heavy labor, and exploration. And some corporations, who made Mektons but who weren't some of the SCC's favored few, secretly set aside mecha for their own future plans.

■ The Schism

Despite technologies that promised salvation, humanity had seen over half the population of Mankind wiped out in the last horrible days of the Ecocollapse. They were understandably afraid of uncontrolled expansion, but yearned for new living space and resources. From this combination of fear and need, arose two political factions.

The Gaians were rigid ecological defenders, determined that Humanity would never again outstrip its resources. Their meme: "Man must remain firmly part of the natural order." Near-extinction had pointed out the logic of this path, and the Gaians were willing to enforce its adherence. Their philosophy of ecological awareness—and enforcement—became one of the foundations for the USSA.

The Expansionists believed that Humanity must never again be restricted to one limited environment. Their meme: "No single ecological collapse should ever be able to wipe us out." Naturally, the Megacorps, now recovering from their defeat in the Unification War, backed this faction. In the heady days following the discovery of Mektons, the Expansionists briefly gained control of the USSA and dictated policy accordingly. However, it soon became obvious that terraforming the rest of the Solar System would prove too daunting a task even with Mektons, and the unmanned probes sent to other systems were not finding any planets useful for humanity. Earth appeared to be alone in the local cosmos. With this realization, a negative reaction set in, allowing the Gaians to regain some control of the USSA.

The first serious clash between the Expansionists and the Gaians was the "Snowball" Incident. In 2136, Expansionists shifted a huge ice asteroid into a collision course with Mars, hoping to generate an atmosphere and a water supply. Citing unforeseen ecological consequences from such a rash act, the Gaians convinced the USSA to send a fleet to stop the asteroid. A pitched battle between Expansionist forces and the SAC blew the iceteroid into mega-ton fragments, some of which then landed on a major Martian colony called Redsands, destroying it. Some of the colonists were linked into the Dataweb at the time; their screams reverberated across the system, causing tremendous public outrage. The Expansionists claimed that USSA interference had caused the disaster, while the USSA said the disaster was exactly what they had predicted and had tried to prevent. In the end, the Expansionist power base was broken, and the USSA was firmly moved into Gaian hands.

The result was that the USSA became a means of enforcing the plans of the Gaian-dominated Councils. The SAC took on the new role of being the eco-police of Humanity. Mankind would need to learn the lessons of self-sufficiency and ecological integration before it would be allowed to build on new worlds.

■ The Leap to the Pleiades

Fed up with Gaian limits, the most powerful remaining megacorps, led by the Expansionist-minded Solingen corporation, decided to leave the solar system. In 2142, they revealed the product of years of clandestine labor: *The Longrider*. It was an entire colony cylinder, fully equipped and populated, which had been mounted with an experimental faster-than-light drive (called a Shunt drive—Solingen had been very busy). Advanced spectroscopic analysis had revealed the presence of water—and hopefully habitable worlds—in the Pleiades cluster, so the makeshift starship boosted out of the solar gravity well, pointed itself rimward, and then simply disappeared.

The USSA government immediately offered to buy the plans for the Shunt drive from the local Solingen offices. The Solingen execs refused, saying that the design was for Solingen

GmbH's exclusive use and not open for sale. They were probably still saying that as the SAC Marines raided the Solingen orbital offices and pried the Shunt design specifications from their computers. But the retrieved data was incomplete, and none of the subsequent prototypes built by the SCC proved viable.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC
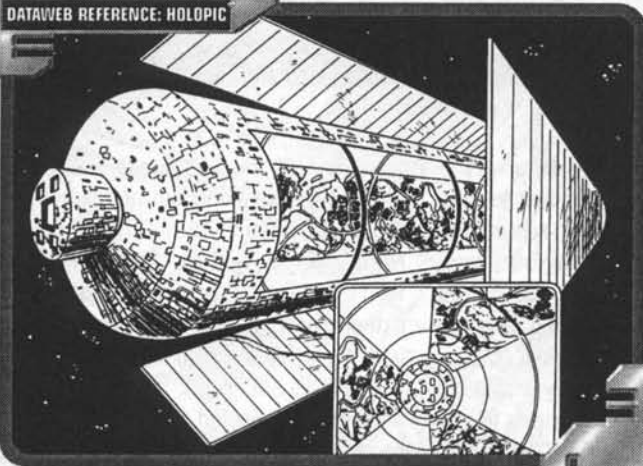
Imagine the USSA's surprise and elation then when, four years later, a Shunt-equipped scout from the Expansionists appeared in the outer Solar System and radioed in that a thriving colony was now established over 340 light years away! Even more, the ship was piloted by no less than Nathan Parker, the primary designer of the Shunt drive. He and his associates had finally realized that Solingen had no intention of sharing the FTL drive with the USSA, and, unable to see such a gift denied the rest of humanity simply due to corporate greed, had commandeered the scout ship and brought it to Earth. Declared a hero by the USSA, he then began supervising the construction of the SCC's own Shunt-drive vessels.

Suddenly, the USSA came to mean the United Stellar States Alliance, the SCC, the Stellar Colonization Commission, and SAC Stellar Armament Command. They tried exploring the local arm of the galaxy, but further missions to the surrounding star systems (including Tau Ceti and Epsilon Eridani) proved to be less successful than the Pleiades. Only in that distant cluster were there worlds ready for colonization. The SCC started overseeing the transport of their own volunteers to these "Outworlds", working with the local corporations and governments to provide proper jobs and homesteads for the transportees. The USSA grew to dictate colonial policy, through arrangements the colonists had never expected to be enforceable from four hundred light years away, as well as the power of an expanded SAC designed to carry USSA doctrine to the frontier by means of Mekton and starship. The USSA may have changed it's name, but not it's mission; it had been so scarred by the desperate straits Humanity had faced only a few generations ago that it still maintained a tight grip on the expansion and exploitation of the Outworlds. This was exacerbated by the power of the Gaian faction that bitterly opposed any destruction of native colonial habitats, citing that this was the way Earth itself had been destroyed.

Soon the SCC's rigid policies began to collide with the plans of some of the colonists ... and the Expansionist corporations. Solingen and the other megacorps protested USSA interference in "their" colonies and even began to establish local "militias"—actually corporate armies recruited from the colonists—to protect colonial (i.e. corporate) interests. The Outworlds began drawing up sides, some allied to the USSA and its preservationist polices, while others, influenced by Solingen, desired more freedom of action to ensure the prosperity of the frontier. Friction gradually grew, with a series of violent incidents between colonial agents and SAC monitors serving to fuel feelings of animosity on both sides.

In 2175, Solingen Corp and the Directors of four of the colonies met in secret and drew up the Articles of Confederation, a clandestine agreement of mutual trade and defense that excluded the USSA. They then began to quietly make preparations for what they saw as the inevitable break from the USSA. Events came to a head in January of 2180, when after frustrating discussions concerning the protection of the biosphere of Ranoxis III (aka Faraday), representatives of four of the Outworlds openly declared the Confederation as the only true government in the Pleiades and walked out of the USSA Council. Relations between the USSA and the disaffected Outworlds had reached a new low.

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE:

TIME: 12:51.6 We used the ranging telescopes to spy on the whole operation. Through the continent wide firestorm, we could pick out transports landing and lifting off the surface in a continuous stream.

"They're using airburst tac nukes to level the entire forest cover of the third continent." said Dyson grimly. "Ten to one, those transports are deploying mecha right now to load as many fallen crystalchime trees as they can stuff aboard..."

"We're being used." growled Ryuzaki. "This whole war is a sham. Your side, my side, both. The Gaians want to conquer the colonies. The Confed wants total exploitation. This has got to stop."

He turned to me, eyes narrowed. "Do you think you could round up some people on your side willing to help put a stop to this?"

"Can you?" I replied.

"No scout worth the name would back this sort of thing. And I know the Rangers wouldn't. I'm just not sure how much we can do about it."

"A very few people can do a lot, Jesse." I said finally, staring at the distant flashes. "It just has to start with one."

▼   ▼   ▼

We have wiped the logs of all references to Ryuzaki, and reprogrammed them to list the Starblade's EVA mecha as having been lost during the first battlefield recon. Jesse has taken it (claiming it was captured during the battle), and is now moving to intercept the now outbound ODF fleet. He intends to go back to Solingen and enlist as many Jägers as he can to join us.

By the time the ravagers of Ranoxis arrive at the entry point, Starblade will be gone. Back to Earth. To do what we have also promised. To do what we must.

We have engaged in a willful act of treason, against our governments and against our sworn oaths. We have conspired with the enemy and made false alliances.

But in the end, all a man can truly betray is his conscience.

THE BATTLE OF THE NORTHERN RINGS

The situation in Ranoxis III began with the discovery of the silicate life form colloquially known as the "Crystalchime tree." As soon as it was discovered that this life form's structure could be turned into room-temperature superconductors, Solingen "developers" descended on Ranoxis III en masse to begin harvesting the trees. This situation was reported to SAC Command on 2180.01.22.

Immediate steps were taken to preserve this possibly unique life form. The cruiser *Mandrake* was dispatched to the Ranoxis III system with full complement. The *Mandrake* arrived on 2180.02.24, with a mission profile to arrest and detain the colonists engaged in the illegal harvest. Upon dispatching a Mekton squadron to the planet, the SAC forces were astounded to find a well equipped group of mechanized militia waiting for them—in the ensuing conflict, one third of the SAC force was destroyed or incapacitated before the rebels were stopped.

In response to this unexpectedly high level of resistance, an entire Battlefleet was dispatched to Ranoxis to establish a blockade—and teach the colonials a lesson. Battlefleet Kinkade consisted of eight fully-equipped cruisers and the fleet carrier *Macedonia*, under command of Admiral Aaron Kinkade. Two cruisers were immediately put into orbit around the planet to join the *Mandrake*, while the other six and the flagship were deployed to take control of the primary points of entry around the system.

In the first few hours, the blockade around the planet seemed adequate enough to stop any further eco-raiders. Sure of his position in the system, Kinkade now directed the non-blockade elements under his command to converge around the system's gas giant, North; a popular hiding place for colonial ships (particularly Shunt carriers for smaller vessels), and where advance scouts had detected some amount of suspicious activity. Now, Kinkade was determined to crush the threat for once and for all.

But the SAC "assault" on Ranoxis was also the last straw for the Solingen corp; the attack on their harvesting project was a financial disaster to the company. The corporate and colonial leaders decided that the time for subtlety was past. A squadron, part of a special fleet which had been secretly assembled by the corporations for just such an eventuality, was dispatched to Solingen. The squadron's commander, Elise Shaol, was confident in their ability to break the blockade for, despite the fact that her forces were outnumbered, they had an ace up their shelve.

The combined SAC task group entered the Northern Rings sector on 2180.04.25. In the first few minutes of entry, a pair of colonial Shunt vessels were flushed from the planetary rings. Captain Gina Laitaimi of the cruiser *Centaurian* gave chase to the larger one, taking her ship through a dangerous-density ring in order to close range with the colonial. She destroyed it when it failed to heave to, but the *Centaurian* was so badly damaged by the ring debris that it was forced to withdraw from the system.

But just as the *Centaurian* Shunted, seven unidentified ships appeared—seemingly out of nowhere—right on the flank of the SAC fleet orbiting North. They had appeared too deep inside North's gravity well for them to have just Shunted in, and even then their tactical positioning would have been the result of either extreme luck or impossible precision. The new ships opened fire with their spinal railguns, launching plasma explosives into the unprepared SAC ships. Two cruisers immediately fireballed and another was crippled as the *Macedonia* and the other two ships began frantic evasive maneuvers. At this point, the unknown ships broadcast an announcement stating that they belonged to the Outworlds Defense Fleet and demanding the immediate withdrawal of all SAC forces from the system. They then dispatched a squadron of armed Mektons which rapidly closed on the crippled cruiser to deliver a *coup de grace*.

Shocked, Admiral Kinkade moved the flagship and remaining two cruisers into a defensive formation while deploying all subcraft. The SAC ships released Mektons to support their immobile sister ship while trying to avoid secondary enemy fire. But the ODF ships then launched a second spinal railgun salvo, perforating the *Macedonia's* powerplant. The blossoming plasma cloud which marked the fleet carrier's death illuminated the entire night side of North. Then the respective Mekton flights engaged and it became a free-for-all, as heavy weapons and Mektons ripped at vessels on both sides.

Commander Shaol was proud of how her new command was handling itself. Her ships had been waiting in orbit over North until the SAC fleet presented itself for challenge, masking themselves with the Cloaking Effect which had been secretly developed from the Shunt drive. But when the *Centaurian* attacked the civilian Shunt cruiser in a cowardly act of terrorism, she knew that she had to act. The Cloak also provided the edge that she had needed to get the jump on the Terrans. Her ships' Shunt generators were severely strained by the effort, but she calculated that her fleet had inflicted break-off casualties on the SAC with minimal cost to her own. Once again, she broadcast the request that the SAC ships vacate the Ranoxis system.

But such was not to be the case. Instead, the SAC cruisers and assault boats, enraged at seeing their flagship destroyed in a sneak attack, broke doctrine and ranks as each ship and sub-craft hurtled itself at the enemy. In the next few minutes, the ODF Mekton screen was dispersed, and ODF cruisers fired frantically as Mekton kamikazes flung themselves into their hanger bays. Two ODF cruisers were destroyed and another nearly crippled by the unorthodox and vicious attacks conducted by the SAC pilots. Despite these self-sacrificing tactics, the odds had shifted too far in the ODF's favor, and the last few SAC ships were ultimately—and utterly—destroyed.

The *Mandrake* and the other two SAC cruisers orbiting Ranoxis decided that discretion was the only option left to them and Shunted out, leaving the newly-blooded ODF in possession of the system.

And so the First Interstellar War began ...

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE:

TIME: 12:51.6 Earth is in a mess. The entire System is in an uproar over the disaster at Ranoxis. Frantic detachments of SAC are now scurrying to set up perimeter patrols against the ODF invasion everyone expects.

By the time Starblade hauled into her slip at Orbital Dock 21, the panic was in full swing. To make things worse, only hours after the Battle of the Northern Rings, someone on the General Staff leaked news of the Colonial's new secret cloaking device—now the Webmedia is blasting us with dire warnings and pronouncements about the ODF's plans. Needless to say, the Gaians are using this opportunity to promote their view that unless "pacified", the Colonists will wreck every planet from here to Altair. Their new proposed program looks very much like the contingency plan we found on the Macedonia; I don't know why I'm all that surprised. The ODF's played neatly into their plans by giving them the perfect excuse for an occupation.

We needn't have worried about Starblade attracting any special notice. In the flood of men and materiel trans-shipping around the Sol System, our request for a replacement for our "missing" Galliard was simply rubberstamped and sent up the line to Refitting.

Meanwhile, I have left an urgent Dataweb message with Frank Talbot. I'm going to hope that ten years of friendship will get me further than a lowly Mission Commander would normally rate with the Head of the Rangers.

■ *The USSA*

Following the Unification Wars on Earth, the leaders of the EEG decided that a new form of government was necessary to lead humanity into a bright, new future. To accomplish this, the EEG was reformed as the United Solar States Alliance.

With their roots in the EEG, the USSA's first and foremost mission is to protect humanity while at the same time preserving the biospheres they lived in. In general, the USSA is a socialist bureaucracy, which can effectively control everything on every body in the Sol System—even if it does not choose to do so.

In order to efficiently manage the populations of several planets and asteroids, the USSA was subdivided into four councils; the Military Council or Solar Armament Command; the Economic Council or Far Trader's League; the Science/Ecology Council and the Colonial Council. The SEC, based on Earth, has the most influence in day-to-day affairs in the Sol System. Many of its members are of the Gaian faction and continue to pursue the eco-controls established 90 years ago. The SAC is primarily based in the Belt, and tends to back the SEC and Gaians, and is the second most influential group. The Lunar-based Economic Council takes a back seat to the other two, with its protests and proposals all-too-often ignored. This is due to the fact that the Economic Council is the last holdout of the Expansionists in the government. Each off-world colony that has been established more than 5 years and has more than 10,000 population can send representatives to attend USSA Council sessions, held three times a year in Sydney, but the Colonial representatives have the least amount of influence in the meetings. They can present and vote against proposals, but both the Science and Military Councils outnumber them in total ballots. Of course, this fact may now be moot: Following the debate about the Ranoxis system, many of the Pleiades colonial representatives walked out of the September 2180 Council meeting, effectively dissolving the Colonial Council.

The USSA is still very military in nature, as it was born in the embers of the Unification War, and the Snowball Incident evidenced the need for the maintenance of a substantial military force. Confronted with rebellious Expansionists armed with mecha and mass drivers, hell-bent to icebomb Mars, the USSA was forced to hurriedly equip the Solar Armaments Command to parity with the Expansionists. Following this, the USSA cracked down on personal Mekton ownership, but resistance from off-planet made enforcement difficult. Even so, it is almost impossible to get a Class One Weapons Permit, which would allow the mounting of military weapons on a Mekton, anywhere in the Sol System.

With the expansion of humanity into the Pleiades, the responsibilities of the USSA expanded. In the early days, the Pleiades colonists demanded USSA protection from pirates, would-be warlords and criminals. In response, the SAC, the USSA's military arm, was upgraded to a large, well disciplined fighting force, dedicated to protecting Humanity no matter where it settled, even if the main threat came from those it had sworn to protect.

Following the disastrous Battle of the Northern Rings, the USSA considers itself to be in a state of war in regards to the newly-revealed Pleiades Confederation. The USSA has declared full martial law, and has set up provisions for a draft if that becomes necessary. All SAC battle groups have been put on full alert, and are ready to sail within hours of receiving orders. The "hawks" in the Military Council are all for unleashing the full might of the SAC on the Confederation to bring "this pack of eco-terrorists, no better than the Ravagers" back in line quickly, before the entire cluster defects. They are supported in this by Gaian fanatics in the Science/Ecology Council, who wish to defeat the Confederation but argue that the risks to local ecosystems is high, and want to keep the war confined to space. The Economic Council is being forced to support this war stance—whether it agrees with it or not.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

■ *The Military Council*

The Military Council consists of the four flag officers in charge of each separate division of SAC, and the SAC liaison to the USSA. These five officers are the real head of SAC, charged with making long-ranged decisions regarding SAC's mission, operations, and organization. They are assisted in their duties by the Command Policy Board, a think-tank of flag officers drawn from all branches of SAC. The best strategists, the best logistics administrators, and the best researchers that SAC has to offer make up the Command Policy Board. They strive to keep the Military Council supplied with the information and suggestions needed to make their decisions.

But suggestions and updates are where the CPB's role ends. The five minds of the Military Council are directly responsible for SAC's directives. The responsibility for the success or failure of a policy rests with this quintet of officers.

There is no appointed or ranking leader of the Council; the officers chose a chairperson from among their ranks for their meetings. This person's role is less to lead the Council than it is to act as a moderator and perform parliamentary functions such as calling for votes, announcing new subjects, etc. Policy is freely debated among the officers, who all hold the same rank; in order to avoid hasty decisions, policies must receive at least four votes in favor to pass. This tends to bias policy towards the conservative, but minimizes risks.

At present, the Council is made up of Admirals Shive Romanov (Line), Lanita Morrow (Support), Peter Tung (Command), Gustav Adoun (Assault), and Magda Okana (USSA Liaison).

Shive Romanov is the nominal head of the Council, and comes from fifteen years of Line service as a Cruiser captain. His sympathies are well-known, and he's a champion for those captains who hunger to convert SAC from its police role to a more combative stance. He's quite pleased with the new war.

Lanita Morrow is a Master Engineer with twenty year's experience. Her approach to decision-making rests on information; she refuses to vote without all available data concerning a situation.

Peter Tung is the oldest and most influential member next to his old crewmate, Romanov. Tung is a brilliant reactive strategist and chess master.

For all his years in Assault, Gustav Adoun is surprisingly passive, listening to the opinions of the others and evaluating them before casting his vote.

Magda Okana is the youngest member of the Council, a Command grad with ten year's experience dealing with the USSA government. She's expert at getting SAC's wishes through the bureaucracy, and pushes the more extreme views of the Science Council.

■ *The Science Council*

The Science Council is perhaps the most powerful branch of the USSA government. When the Expansionists fell from favor after the Snowball Incident, the Gaians took control of the Science Council, as well as key positions in the Military Council. Leaving only the backwaters of the near-powerless Economic Council and the Colonial Council for the Expansionists, the Gaians have been running the show ever since, using the SAC as their enforcers.

The role of the Science Council is that of a ecological watchdog. They keep an eye on all technology and its applications to ensure that they are not hazardous to the environment— any environment, be it terrestrial, natural, or artificial. At the slightest sign of environmental impact, the offending technology is banned. Further, any technology under development is subject to review by the Science Council at various stages of the project, and if it is found to be environmentally detrimental the project is taken under the control of the Council; the technology and any research related to it declared prohibited for non-governmental use.

The Science Council also has sole dominion over the restoration of Earth's ecology. No environmental clean-ups can take place without Science Council approval. No Zeniths can be constructed before extensive environmental impact studies have been undertaken. And, ironically, no demolition of Old Cities can take place without similar studies, as in a few cases the Science Council has declared that such demolishment would be disastrous to species that have adapted to urban environments to the point where they would die outside of an Old City.

The twelve-member Science Council is based in Sydney. The three designated representatives from the Science Council usually take charge of USSA meetings, dictating policy to the other Councils. After the Military Council, the Science Council gets the least support from the Colonial Representatives, except for the representatives from the Venus terraforming project, who are all die-hard Gaians. When the Confederation representatives walked out of the Colonial Representatives Council, the remaining colonial votes were rendered all but powerless, and the Science Council knew its rule would be unopposed.

ADM. SHIVE ROMANOV

Head of the USSA Military Council

Description: 1.72m, 72kg, 66 years old, white hair with a receding hairline, blocky body build makes him appear heavier than he actually is, always wears his military uniform even when off duty.

Quote: "We cannot let the Pleiades Radicals think that they can do whatever they want."

Notes: Romanov is a long standing member of the Solar Armaments Council, and a career military man. He started fresh out of the Academy by commanding a small cutter, the *Broad Arrow,* which scored several kills against fanatic Belters during the Snowball Incident.

The Gaians have worked with Romanov since his appointment to the SAC some 15 years ago. In fact, most of the public believes him to be a Gaian, despite several official denials by both parties. He has always been their best ally on the SAC, even advocating their position to arm the exploration-oriented Rangers.

He wishes to be in power for a long time. He has contacts throughout the military, the Rangers and the Gaians, all owing him favors, and his attitude is that he will help those people who help him. Although he claims to have no enemies, he has made some political power plays that hurt people opposed to him.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, EMP 4, Leadership +9, Fleet Tactics +8, Shunt Navigation +7. Datalink, Bioarm x1, Nanobodies.

DR. PHELDON MELAN

Chief of the Earth Science Council

Description: 1.9m, 102kg, 73 years old, black hair with white at the temples, weathered darkly tanned skin gives him the appearance of carved wood, wears brown and green clothing all the time.

Quote: "We must repair our world, and prevent tragedy from striking again."

Notes: Melan has a deep rumbling voice that instantly grabs everyone's attention. He is always friendly, but somehow distant to everyone, even in interviews. He has received several high scientific awards, including a Nobel Prize for his work on the new viral diseases, which he shared with Dr. Samarakand Chandrasakar-rampillai.

A long-standing Gaian, Melan has been in his position as chief scientist for over two decades. Rumors say he is really just a Gaian puppet, used to get their own pet projects through the council.

Recently, he has become reclusive. Some sources say that he is dying of a rare cancer, possibly caused by the research he did with radiation-based mutations in the last two years.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 10, BODY 4, Biochemistry +8, Medicine +7. Datalink, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE | **ANTON PHAR**

President of United General Manufacturing

Description: 1.50m, 60kg, 52 years old, dark brown hair that recently was silver gray, always wears gray corporate suits, has large ears and an oversized nose

Quote: "Folks want plain talk, and I give it to them."

Notes: Loud, opinionated and egotistical, Phar has made his reputation on making outrageous statements in public. His scandalous (and vicious) takeover of UGM (see next file) made headlines even on Solingen. He still claims that his competitor sent pirates to attack him on his private solar yacht, and sent minions to disrupt his daughter's wedding. None of these have been substantiated.

Phar is politically ambitious, and made a bid for the Directorship in the last stockholder's convention. Although his background isn't political, he has developed a small but vocal following. Phar's politics seem vague, however, due to his disastrous tendency to make off the cuff statements without prior research. His corporate background does give him a keen sense of what his people want to hear, however, and he does know how to turn a phrase for maximum effect.

UGM has a booming business in the Sol System, and Phar had a hand in guiding the anti-Confederation policies of the USSA Economic Council which filled the corporation's bank accounts to overflowing.

He was elected as a member of the USSA Economic Council in 2175. He is in the process of parlaying this position into a more powerful place on the Council. Since he hates Solingen Gmbh with a passion (there can be only one big corp, and it's going to be UGM), he is ready to support the Military Council directives to gain backers for his next power play. If he is made head of the EC, the USSA government will be almost unanimous in its drive for war.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, TECH 8, EMP 6, Expert: Manufacturing +9, Oratory +8. Datalink, Nanobodies, Cyberaudio.

■ *The Colonial Representatives Council*

The USSA Colonial Representative's Council, even before the Confederation staged a walk out in September of 2180, is the perhaps least powerful part of the USSA government. It requires a three quarters majority to qualify as a Council vote, which is hard to achieve under the best of circumstances. Even if the entire council agrees on an issue, the CRC only has a 20% voice in the government (the Science and Military Councils each holding about 30%). This means that even when they are able to generate a consensus to cast a vote as a council, the other two branches of the government often cancel their vote out. This often leaves the Colonial Representatives to carry the word of the USSA back to their colonies, and make sure that word was carried out. Alliances with the Economic Council are common, but they have failed to build a unified a front as have the Science and Military Councils under Gaian influence.

Each colony that has been in existence for more than five years and has a population of ten thousand receives a seat on the Council. For every additional ten thousand population, the colony receives an additional representative. This does nothing to increase the lobbying power of a colony; rather it more often simply leads to infighting among a given colony's representatives and made it more difficult for the Council to come to agreement on any given issue.

The minimal power of the Colonial Representatives Council was completely undermined in September of 2180. The Science and Military Councils had voted to prevent the harvesting of Crystalchime Trees in the Ranoxis System. The Pleiades Colonial Representatives strongly protested this action in the USSA Council meeting in Sydney. While they actually managed a majority vote against this, when the Military and Science Councils outvoted them, they were simply told to be "good little colonies" and to follow the directives of the USSA. Fed up, representatives from four of the colonies vocally delivered their resignations, announced the existence of the "true government" of the Confederation, and walked out. This, unfortunately, gave the SEC and MC the ammunition they needed to emasculate the Colonial Representative's Council even further, and gain greater control of the USSA government. The remaining representatives are torn between outrage and loyalty, but their claims of neutrality have rendered their votes meaningless in the USSA.

■ *The USSA Economic Council*

The Economic Council, unofficially called the Far Trader's League, is the next-to-least-powerful section of the quartet of governing bodies that make up the USSA. The last refuge of the Expansionists in the solar government, the providence of the Economic Council is economic matters both at home and, nominally, in the off-world colonies. The Economic Council monitors production and consumption of goods on Earth, and it is their responsibility to ensure that the two come as close to balancing out as possible, with a minimum of waste or environmental impact. In addition, it is the Economic Council who controls taxation levels, tariffs, duties, and trade regulations within the Sol System. Technically, they are also empowered to do the same for the Pleiades Cluster, but when the Confederation made it known in no uncertain terms that they could balance their own books just fine, thank you, the Economic Council was shoved out. Nonetheless, the Economic Council was the first group to offer to talk to the Confederation to try and ensure that trade relations remained viable.

The twelve-member Economic Council is based in Armstrong City, on Luna. When USSA board meetings occur, three designated representatives from the Economic Council travel to Sydney via shuttle—dataweb conferencing is *not* allowed to prevent hackers from sabotaging the meeting. The position of the Economic Council at such meetings is mostly that of a silent partner. The Economic Council pretty much does what the Science Councils tell them to do. The only real support the Economic Council ever got was from the Colonial Representatives, who were very vocal but difficult to get a consensus from. When most of the representatives walked out, the remaining Colonial Representatives were severely hamstrung, and the Economic Council resigned itself to being bullied by the SEC and the Gaians during the coming war.

■ The Major Corporations of Earthspace

While the corporate world of Earthspace isn't as completely dominated by one corporation as it is in the Pleiades, one corporation is very close to achieving that position—and getting closer every day: **United General Manufacturing**.

Following the Unification Wars, the USSA restructured many of the corporations who had been loyal to the EEG, amalgamating companies that produced similar goods into one corporation that was given a government-sanctioned monopoly. These included PetroChem (a manufacturer of artificial fuels), Consolidated Agriculture (a major framing and produce conglomerate), and a still-vital Mitsubishi. The result was United General Manufacturing, which produces just about everything the civilian market could want. Anything it does not yet produce, its ambitious new President Anton Phar is planning on introducing next quarter.

Despite UGM's mammoth market share, two of the most important corporations in the Solar System, at least from the viewpoint of the USSA Science Council, are **Earthworks** and **Biotechnica**.

Earthworks is a relatively new (est. 2095) multinational conglomerate that has the exclusive contract on managing ecological restoration, demolishing Old Cities, and planning and constructing Zeniths. Naturally, Earthworks has solid links with the Science as well as Economic Councils. Because of this close relationship with the USSA, when they run into problems during the course of a job, as has happened in London, Earthworks has the option of calling in SAC ground forces to make their lives easier.

Biotechnica began in the late twentieth century as an Italian genetics firm. It soon branched out worldwide, and made amazing progress in the fields of genetic engineering and biotechnology. What ultimately endeared them to the USSA was that they had managed to store huge gene-banks of plants and animals long thought extinct. These genetic archives possibly contain as many as 75% of the Earth's species cryogenically preserved until a reconstruction program could be put into place. Now, with government funding, Biotechnica is reinstalling these animals into the biosphere as it heals. Biotechnica has spent enormous resources and time playing into the belief structures of the Gaians, and has made itself invaluable in just about every environmental rehabilitation project conducted in the system, as well as a few in the colonies.

When Expansionists left for the Pleiades in 2142, several major electronics corporations left with them. Scrambling the fill this important void, the USSA stepped in for the first time since the Unification Wars and helped form several smaller companies, such as Microtech and Raven Microcybernetics, into a new, sanctioned, company. Thus was born **Combined Comptronics,** makers of most of the USSA's nanotechnology, artificial intelligences, and computer systems. While cybernetics are not as prominent as in the early 21st century, almost everyone now has an implanted Datalink which allows them to access the Dataweb as well as most machine/vehicle interfaces. CC makes most of the Datalinks available in Earthspace, as well as the live-metal cybernetics still popular with many people and organizations (particularly the military).

Stellar News Service (SNS) is the descendant of two 21st century firms: WorldSat and World News Service. Early supporters of the Net, these two corps united during the Unification War to try to keep the information network intact. SNS now fills the same role for the Solar System as PNN does in the Pleiades, namely providing news and entertainment web sites and updates. While not owned by the USSA, everything SNS broadcasts must be cleared by the USSA Bureau of Information, to insure that no misinformation is transmitted.

While Mektons are an important part of the economy of Earthspace, the USSA tries to keep them from unauthorized use. A rogue fifty-foot giant is seen as too great a threat in the Zeniths or the orbital habitats to be used (or made) by just anyone. Thus there is only one major corporation in the system sanctioned to produce Mektons on a industrial scale, most of which is sent exclusively to the SAC and SCC. While a couple of minor companies dabble in custom Mektons, this vast majority is made by **Bahn/Zai Incorporated.**

Bahn/Zai Inc. is a U.S.-Japanese aerospace venture with a long history of working with the SAC, having developed the first construction Mekton with Col. Adrean in 2110. This allowed them to cinch government contracts, and when the crackdown on Mekton ownership came after the Snowball Incident, Bahn/Zai was able to maintain its sales quotas by influencing USSA policy in their favor. *All* SAC Mektons are manufactured by Bahn/Zai as well as most civilian construction models which work for the SCC. Despite this apparent monopolization, their quality of work is excellent, and their Mektons give good service and are well-liked by their pilots. Their designs usually have a simple, high-tech look to them with dome shaped heads and characteristic tri-vane backpacks that house the main thrusters, the powerplant and maneuver thrusters.

UGM
United General Manufacturing

BAHN/ZAI

BIOTECHNICA

EARTHWORKS

LECRETZIA GIOVANNI

Chairperson of Biotechnica

Description: 1.68m, 59kg, 54 years old, long dark brown hair, tall and slender in the way of the 20th Century fashion models. Always dressed in the highest of fashions and most expensive make-up.

Quote: "You must look under the surface to see the real person!"

Notes: Formerly a major fashion model, and still very beautiful, Lecretzia controls one of Earth's largest corporations. Her family is a major investor in Biotechnica, and she recently engineered a take over of the board of directors.

She has a passionate opinion about everything, and expresses herself without any reservations. Although she has said repeatedly that she has no political ambitions, she is a vocal advocate of improved Earth/Pleiades relations. While she has a reputation in the industry for somewhat hasty decisions. since taking the Chair of Biotechnica, she has not had any major successes or failures.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, TECH 6, EMP 7, ATT 9, Expert: Earth Corporations +6, Economics +7, Personal Grooming +10 Wardrobe and Style +9. Datalink, Nanobodies, Incredibly cool clothes.

■ *The Stellar Armaments Command*

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

Towards the end of the Unification War, it became apparent that the USSA was going to have to extend some sort of armed presence throughout the Solar System. There were already too many space habitats to depend upon economic pressure as a method of enforcing USSA directives, and extraterrestrial colonies were being used as havens for those opposing the USSA … including a good many of the Megacorps. Some of these still voiced intentions of rebuilding their industry throughout the Solar System without direction from the EEG. Extreme plans such as breaking up Mercury for its resources to dumping asteroids into Jupiter to harvest the resultant gas plumes were put forward. Some of these plans would threaten the balance of planetary ecosystems, and the decision was made to construct a solar police/customs force, a space navy distributed across the entire system.

The Solar Armaments Command grew out of the combined surface navies of the Unification Wars, but began to mutate as soon as the size of its mission became apparent. The navies of the 21st and 22nd centuries were small, computer-driven affairs, in continual communication with and largely run by command headquarters. Most of them were utterly dependent on satellite data and evaluations from "higher up." The job of policing the entire Solar System required addressing a major problem: Distance.

On Earth, the most distant communication took a second. In space, a message to Luna took four seconds round-trip. It could take hours, even days, to dispatch and receive a communication to the Belt or the Jovian system. Clearly, the "remote-control" mode of command would not do at all. Instead, command bases would have to be established at several points in the system, complete with depot facilities for personnel and ships.

The final shape of the SAC resembled the navies of two centuries past, with bases to be scattered throughout the system in order to support individual ships and squadrons. These ships and task forces would be largely functioning on their own initiative, reporting to the nearest command center and referring decisions to higher command only in the case of important matters. Each captain would have the capability and responsibility of enforcing USSA directives on his or her own (although they are often subject to review by Wardens; see below).

This command structure proved to be quite effective in curbing smugglers, deterring and tracking down space terrorists, and keeping an eye on potential troublemakers. Using small cutters and relatively few larger ships, the SAC managed its job on a small budget (considering its patrol beat). As the years passed, a new kind of ship was added, a fleet tender that could carry and supply whole flotillas of cutters, Mektons, and fighters, serving as a mobile base. The SAC began marshaling its forces around the tenders and fixed bases, evolving into a force with a shorter leash on its captains. The tenders provided closer control, the possibility of reinforcements, and rescue capabilities for crippled ships. Some captains, angered at the return of a restrictive higher echelon, resigned and joined the Belt community.

The new system became suddenly necessary when intelligence caught wind of the "Snowball" operation. Several tenders were moved into the Belt to intercept the asteroid as it progressed. It was these units that were accused of accidentally fragmenting the iceberg and sending it down to Mars in pieces. Still, the SAC seemed vindicated and their presence in the solar system reinforced.

S.A.C.

2146 saw the surprise acquisition of the Shunt drive. The SAC (now the *Stellar* Armaments Command) immediately moved to construct ships to travel to the Pleiades, there to establish an SAC base and begin constructing the factories to construct new Fleet Carriers (the official name for the new, self-sufficient model of the old fleet tender) to help police the new worlds and protect them from inevitable corporate raiding.

Until Solingen's declaration of war over the Ranoxis III crisis, the SAC had been organized as a police force; military organization within the SAC was small, represented by the Strike Force created during the Snowball War. This is rapidly changing, especially since the Battle of the Northern Rings has given the hawks on the Military Council the weight they need to push for full militarization.

■ *The Mission of the SAC*

The SAC's basic mission was to provide a forcible means to monitor the activities of humanity in space, and to prevent the unscrupulous from flaunting the edicts of the SEC. In practice, this took the form of conducting searches of space vessels, of pursuing and stopping space pirates and terrorists—the Midnight Sun didn't restrict its activities to just Earth—and using remote sensors to monitor potential trouble hotspots, such as the Asteroid Belt settlements.

With the development of Shunt drive and mankind's expansion into the stars, the SAC was assigned another duty, that of providing protection for the SCC's scouting ventures. Each SCC Shunt cruiser is accompanied by a SAC battlerider(s), Mektons, and fighters. These are not merely reserved to the defense of the scout group, but are actively employed in assisting the scouts in patrol and exploration missions.

The new war with the Pleiades Confederation has changed the mission of the SAC once again, forcing it to abandon the old enforcer outlook in favor of a full military stance, dedicated to fighting the Confederation and the other enemies of mankind.

■ SAC Structure

SAC's administrative requirements are split into four divisions: Command, Support, Line, and Assault.

The **Command** division is responsible for the SAC's strategies and command reviews. This division is housed at bases spread throughout the Solar System (the main base at Deimos and others at Earth, Luna, Titan, and the asteroid Mjolnir) and out-system at Pleiades Gamma IV. Flag officers at each base are in charge of their sectors, passing on and implementing the strategies dictated from Earth and Deimos. The base at Deimos is most important: Deimos houses SAC High Command.

A branch of Command, the **Command Policy Board**, operates out of the USSA Government Complex in Sydney, Australia. Although not a combat division of Command, the CPB is the liaison with the USSA government, consisting of the Commander In Chief of SAC and the Admirals commanding each separate SAC administrative division. The CPB answers to the USSA government and the Military Council in particular (although the SEC has considerable clout as well). The Head of the Military Council, often being a current SAC officer him/herself, works closely with the Commander in Chief of the SAC, but the government always makes the final decisions. It's the SAC's directive to implement those orders given through the CPB.

Support division handles all aspects of maintenance, materiel, and design for SAC, working from depots at each SAC base. These depots contain factories and fabrication facilities for construction and repair of all machinery used by SAC. Because of the enormous amount of materiel used by the Command, Support still relies heavily on supplies from Earth and the Solar System; its depots are barely enough to maintain SAC's equipment in the field. The transport ships and fleets needed to ferry new men, Mektons, and materiel make up the lion's share of Support's bulk.

The **Line** division is the actual space navy—the ships and personnel that serve them. The largest of SAC's administrative divisions, Line has two sub-administrations for managing its personnel: Enlisted (all non-officer personnel) and Command (officer personnel). The **Assault** division administers fighter and Mekton pilots and assault command personnel (liaison officers and flight commanders). This also includes ground troops and Mektons for police and anti-pirate duty, as the SAC does not typically "occupy" any planets. That may change soon.

■ The Gaian Wardens

Unfortunately, Gaian influence isn't limited to the Council chambers. While each and every SAC officer is indoctrinated with the USSA's ecological and sociological policies (it helps to know what you are fighting for), that was not considered sufficient for some of the more "pro-active" members of the Science Council or the Gaian hierarchy. So special "Warden" positions were created within the organizational chart. These are SAC officers who have been chosen by the Science Council for their acceptance and adherence to Gaian philosophies. They are given special training in ethics and political motivation techniques and placed in advisory positions next to SAC field officers, usually at the ship or Battalion level. Their assignment is to advise the commanders of the best means of advancing USSA (i.e. Gaian) policy in any given situation.

While they have not been given any official authority within the chain of command, they have been told (unofficially, of course) that, should a SAC officer be about to perform an act that is in direct violation of USSA policy, they have the duty to take command and declare the miscreant officer unfit for duty. If they face any military justice retribution for this act, the Science Council has assured their full support of any such actions.

No Observer has yet to try to replace a commander, but the threat is enough to make SAC officers follow Wardens advice wherever practical, even if it's against their better judgment. Naturally, most officers assigned

to work with Wardens hate their guts, and the scuttlebutt is that the Wardens aren't there to protect nature, they're there to watch over the SAC. This feeling of mistrust has severely fractured the Command's *esprit de corp*, and it remains to be seen if this dissatisfaction will filter up to the Military Council.

■ Example SAC Missions

The *Phesarius* Piracy, 2130.05.19: The SCC exploration ship *Phesarius* was en route to the Oort Cloud, three days beyond Mars orbit, when it first detected another vessel on an intercept vector. The SAC sent the cutter *Montgomery* to intercept and protect the *Phesarius*. The unidentified interceptor accelerated and successfully caught the exploration ship three hours before the *Montgomery* could close. To command's relief, messages from the *Phesarius* indicated that though the bogey had been hostile, the SCC Mekton aboard had been successful in destroying the attacker. True, the *Montgomery* could detect no separate target as it closed.

It was a trap. The hostile had captured the *Phesarius*, and was hiding in the larger ship's echo. Enemy Mektons attacked the *Montgomery* as it matched vectors, destroying the cutter's bridge. Ensign Benjamin Xjiang took control as the senior officer surviving and used the cutter's superior speed to retreat, make repairs, and resume the attack. The combat Mekton and the cutter's armament made short work of the invaders—who turned out to be Midnight Sun pirates—and Xjiang rescued the *Phesarius*.

The NB184 Crisis: The SCC exploration cruiser *Bonaventure* and crew managed to save an entire planetary ecosystem. The survey crew detected unusual thermal emissions from orbit, and sent down a Mekton team to investigate. They found a group of prospectors planting nuclear explosives in a volcano chain; the resulting explosions would bring fantastic amounts of metals to the surface—along with pollutants that would destroy the biosphere. The SAC military pilots fought a pitched Mekton battle to defeat the armed prospectors while SCC engineers successfully defused the bombs.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **ADMIRAL JOANNA DOVER**

SAC Commander In Chief

Description: 1.60m, 55kg, 44 years old, red hair with some gray at the temples, eyes are a dark blue, her face is narrow, but usually smiling.

Quote: "We are the protectors of Mother Earth."

Notes: Good looking with a forceful personality, Admiral Dover over sees the SAC with a strong hand. Her military record includes time as a starship commander, and a Mekton pilot. She has built up a respectable service record in the SCC, but there are no outstanding events.

She was appointed to the CinC position two years ago by Romanov who had admired Dover for years. He felt her direct and efficient management would be ideal for the build-up to the coming hostilities which Romanov foresaw in the SAC.

Unfortunately for Romanov, Dover is something of a political moderate rather than the hawk he had hoped for. Her views on the Confederation are mixed, and she had even toyed with the idea of being a colonist once. Thus she implements the Military Council's directives to the letter, but does not push the hawks' agenda with the enthusiasm Romanov had hoped for.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, EMP 7, REF 7, Fleet Tactics +7, Tactics +6, Leadership +6, Oratory +5, Expert: SAC Administration +7. Datalink, Cyberoptics, EO-Pad.

■ *The Stellar Colonization Commission*

S.C.C.

The EEG was formed in hopes of saving humanity from the fate it had brought upon itself. The facts were clear: The Earth was too far gone to support more than a fraction of the population. Perhaps, in centuries, enough of the biosphere could be regenerated but in the meantime, mankind would have to find new places to live. That meant the rest of the Solar System, as inhospitable as it was. Plans were made to begin the endeavor as soon as the Unification War ended. Thus the SCC began its bureaucratic life as the fledgling Solar Colonization Council.

The period from 2095 to 2107 is referred to as the Golden Age of the SCC, a time when millions of workers and robots toiled to construct spinner colonies, establishing High One through Five and Circum Luna as population centers for over 40 million people and as industrial centers for the incredible amounts of materiel floating in from the Asteroid Belt. SCC ships would voyage to the Asteroid Belt, select appropriate rocks, erect mass-drivers, deploy robots, and begin the lengthy process of pushing the massive mountains into Earth-Luna space, there to be dismantled and turned into building materials for more spinners, more Zeniths, and more prospecting ships. It was truly a rich time. The populace of Earth was united by the hope that they could all have better lives, the workers in space driven by the pride and pace of providing those better lives. Ecologists worked alongside long-time space expansion enthusiasts.

The Golden Age began to tarnish around 2108. Despite the fantastic achievements of the SCC, detractors questioned the effectiveness of the whole project. The spinners were working, and the Tycho and Copernicus colonies were growing, but for what return? Fewer than 100 million people were living in space, less than 2% of humanity, while the rest awaited the inevitable deterioration of Earth's biosphere. With all the effort, surely Earth could have been made better for all, rather than coddling a mere few.

The controversy turned into the Schism, with the Earth-first Gaians and the space-centered Expansionists fighting over the SCC's goals. The argument poisoned the glory of the great triumphs of the Venusian cities, the Martian colonies, and the Ceres asteroid spinner. The schism grew from a simple faction fight to a deadly political battle, with the fate of humanity as the prize. Even the Mekton revolution, which provided new tools for space development, could not stop the rift from growing. By 2136, the Expansionists were losing the SCC to the Gaians, and retreated off-world. The Snowball Incident was their final, reactionary, effort.

Meanwhile, the moderates in the SCC had turned their gaze starward. Space telescopes and probes examined nearby star systems, and improved computer imaging techniques allowed them to spot evidence of possibly habitable worlds in the distant Pleiades. But the Expansionists got the jump on the SCC as their secret *Longrider* expedition and its revelation of Shunt principles changed the face of space travel. Now the SCC's charter was the stars, and it became the Stellar Colonization Commission in 2146.

The current SCC is an unusual operation. It's a loose organization of small bureaucracies, dedicated to the exploration of stellar systems, the quantification and monitoring of new biospheres, and the transportation of colonists from the Solar System to the Outworlds. There are surprisingly few radical militants in the SCC. It doesn't even have a large, mobile arm, preferring to use Ranger teams for field work, and reserving its budget for simple transport ships and the people and machines needed to collate, integrate, and store all the data coming in from their myriad sources.

Control of the SCC still rests with the Gaians, but this power is usually applied in the selection of the scientific specialists that accompany Ranger expeditions. The recommendations of these Gaian-influenced specialists ensure that new worlds will be evaluated with an eye towards preservation rather than exploitation. It's just as well to keep politics out of the SCC, since they have a twenty year backlog of planetary data to assimilate and more coming all the time.

In addition, the SCC handles dozens of ships every year headed for the Outworlds. These colony vessels are largely simple Shunt carriers, hauling small insystem craft, bulk cargo and passengers who are looking for a better life. The SCC coordinates the movement of these colonists with the local authorities, making sure no single world receives too large an influx of people to strain their systems. So far the SCC and the locals seem to get along fine, and the SCC is sympathetic to colonial needs, but this new violence may curtail colony ships for the foreseeable future.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

DATAWEB REFERENCE

ANDALANA MBUTU

Head of the SCC

Description: 1.65m, 63.5kg, 45 years, short black hair w/ streaks of white, medium build w/a round face just showing the first few worry lines, eyes are dark and flash with penetrating intelligence

Quote: "Let's look over the issues here."

Notes: Always bright and witty in interviews, Ms. Mbutu is an energetic proponent of human colonization. She can be deadly serious, however, and is a formidable opponent when debating. Even her political enemies admit that they like her style and admire her determination. On her 10th anniversary as the director of the SCC, Ms. Mbutu plans on celebrating the largest expansion of human kind since the 14th century. The plans include a parade through Sydney which will be broadcast to all the orbital colonies and even the Confederation. Andalana does not spare her displeasure over the warlike posture of the Pleiades Confederation. She openly scorns their opinion of Earth and criticizes their militaristic stance. She doesn't call for Earth to respond in kind, but calls for the Confederation to rejoin peaceably with Earth in colonizing the cosmos.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, EMP 7, TECH 6, REF 6, Expert: Politics +8, Oratory +6, Interview +7, Planetology +6. Datalink, Nanobodies, Hand Comp.

■ *The Rangers*

Join the Rangers and see the Universe—first!

—Recruiting slogan

RANGERS

S.C.C.

It's a big galaxy. Thousands and thousands of stars, with millions and millions of worlds, barely anything known about them except stellar type and relative location.

The only way to find out what's really in these systems is to go there. Somebody has to survey these new systems, mark navigational hazards, plot orbits, scan planetary surfaces and eventually get down on the ground and walk around where the really dangerous threats can get at them. In 2180, that somebody is the Rangers.

The USSA Ranger service is a loose paramilitary organization operating under the auspices of the Stellar Colonization Commission (SCC). In many ways, it's similar to its ancient ancestor, the old National Aeronautics and Space Administration: a civilian exploration operation with military overtones.

Each Ranger mission team serves under a local Divisional Exploration Command, SCC bureaucrats who assign missions and debrief returning teams. However, most Rangers are essentially freelance explorers paid as SCC contractees. The SCC provides a Shunt ship with crew, subcraft, and a Mission Specialist as part of the contract; this specialist is usually a planetologist/xenoecologist appointed by the Science Council back on Earth. In addition, it is common for SAC to assign a combat specialist (a long-service vet) to a Ranger team to act as a seasoned military liaison and emergency adviser in case of a crisis. All of the crew, including the mission specialist and the combat adviser, are under the command of a Ranger Mission Commander, who is usually an independent contractor who has elected to take the mission and his orders from a local SCC Divisional Exploration Commander. Should the Mission Commander decide to act against the best interests of the SCC and the USSA, the mission specialist, the combat adviser, and the ship's crew are there to ensure that he does not succeed.

This tends to make Ranger teams an eclectic mix of government professionals and freelance operatives, all thrown together in the confines of a small Shunt ship for extended periods, with a tough job to do. It's a situation most USSA employees aren't used to; the scientists have a hard time of it in particular, since the freelancers are likely to have their own ideas about proper procedure ("whatever works"). Since most SCC Ranger ships have crews that have years of field experience, both with the dangers of unknown space and with the largely-piratical freelancers, these crews are often little more than USSA privateers. Oh, they believe in the goals of the Science Council, but they're not going to stand on ceremony or protocol And they have the firm belief that rules and regulations are written by people who've never seen more of the universe that their dusty desktops, so said rules usually get conveniently ignored.

The freelance contractor system produces entire mercenary companies of freelance combat scouts/scientists, working under a "captain" who is their company negotiator and usually serves as Mission Commander. This can bring up some conflicts of interest, since some of these companies work Outworlds jobs as well as SCC missions! Because of this, there is an unwritten code among Ranger and Outworlds freelancers: Always help another spacer in trouble—you never know when you might need help yourself—and avoid hostilities whenever possible. Working for both sides, no mercenary company wants to shorten their client list by making trouble. The "shoot 'em up" orders that had been given to Solingen's Jägers (their equivelent to the Rangers) are not well-liked among the mercenary community.

■ *Ranger Procedures*

The general routine of a Ranger mission goes something like this: Upon Shunting into a new system, immediate scans are made to map the system's dynamics and locate any astronomical threats that may be nearby. If the Ranger expedition is a large one with a carrier and subcraft, scout boats (assault boats with sensors replacing their torpedo launchers) fan out from the ship, enlarging the primary scan data while the ship deploys its huge, external sensor array and conducts more detailed scans of the system and its planets. Once these detail scans are made, the mission specialist and expert contractors select the best planets—those with life-bearing ecosystems, minerals, or oddities—and the ship moves to make close examinations. Scout Mektons also deploy with their thrusters to go to other planets so the team can explore most of the system simultaneously. More often, the Rangers are operating out of small Cutter-type Shunt ships, with a single Mekton and minimal crew.

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE:

TIME: 12:51.6

Frank Talbot is a bear of a man; solid, stern. He doesn't mince words; and he didn't waste time on chit-chatting around my opening query on the current state of the Rangers.

"I'll be straight with you, Red." he growled. "Things are bad. For starters, my cutter teams aren't thrilled about having the Council put Wardens on their ships. In fact, they're mad as hell."

"You seen this?" I said, quietly sliding the Eyes Only Pad from my jacket and across the desk to him. His eyebrows raised at the fact that I was using a pad rather than just uploading the data to him via link. He took it with some skepticism, then, as he began reading, his eyebrows rose again.

"It's no surprise," he grunted after a few minutes of scanning. "The Gaians have been pushing for a return to the old EEG for some time. It's gonna be a bloodbath unless somebody backs off." He handed the pad back to me.

"What if I told you I knew someone on the other side? Someone with a vested interest in stopping this?"

"I'd say you've got a really valuable asset, Frost." He looked sidelong a moment, then added, "And I'd also say you're about three months behind the curve."

"Meaning?"

"You're not the only one who's fed up with the current situation. For the past few months, I've been talking to another group that also wants to talk about a constructive solution to this mess. If you can get us together with someone from the colonial side.—someone who can be trusted..."

"He's a Scout." I replied levelly. "Jäger, actually. He thinks most of their scout cadre'd join in a minute if they could get another option to this war."

Talbot's eyes closed; I could tell he was thinking, weighing. "We'll talk later," he finally said. "This isn't the time. Auden Dominica—

she's running the Gaian faction now—is scheduled to meet with me in a few minutes." He raised a hand to silence my reply. "Tomorrow, Red." he said. "I'll contact you, ok?" Then he pointed to the door and said, "Git."

▼   ▼   ▼

I was halfway out of the secretarial anteroom when she walked in. Auden.

If she had been beautiful back in college, she was more beautiful now; possessed of a steely poise and an absolute self-control adulthood had given her.

It was too bad Audie still had a rod up her tail. *That* part hadn't changed at all.

"Frost!" Her voice rang out in friendly recognition, even if the eyes didn't show it. "How are you?" Her voice became serious. "I've heard you were at Ranoxis."

"Not as a combatant." I demurred. "We arrived too late to do anything but pick up the pieces. It was...terrible." We stood a moment in silent commiseration; we had both lost friends at North.

Then she looked up; her eyes met mine "So." she said with deceptive lightness. "You've been in to see Frank?"

"Yes. It's been over a year; I thought I would try and look him up for a drink as long as I was in port." I tried to make it sound casual; I hoped it sounded that way.

"Did he talk about the police action? And the Rangers' role?" she pressed.

"Well, yes." I shrugged. "Sounds like my fellow Rangers aren't too happy with the idea of Wardens aboard." I was about to make an offhand comment that with Med. Officer Karyana on <u>Starblade</u>, we probably wouldn't notice an extra Warden, but the sudden fury of her expression stopped me cold.

"He doesn't understand." she railed in cold passion. "The colonials are *monsters!* They're atavisms from the Cyberpunk Age; their atrocities at Ranoxis prove it. We are the only thing standing between them and the Ecocollapse on a hundred—a thousand worlds!" By this time, she was almost shaking.

I raised a hand to steady her, although touching her was the last thing I wanted to do right then. But the storm passed as suddenly as it had begun. "When you see Frank again, you must talk to him," she finally said in a much calmer voice. You must help me make him understand how critical the Rangers are to what must be done. Without their help, we cannot hope to re-educate the Colonies; to bring them back into the Family." She reached out a slim hand to lightly touch mine. "Promise, Redding? It's so *very* important."

I nodded and turned to leave. I could feel her diamond-blue gaze boring into my back as I passed out the door.

These are riskier mission types, with little or no back-up, but since Cutters tend to be more cost-effective than carriers, they are far and away the most common form of Rangers ship. For the cost of a single carrier expedition, the Rangers can send out ten Cutter expeditions. Of course, Cutters can only investigate one planet at a time and take far longer to perform a survey and close scan.

These close scans can tell many things about a world—chemical makeup, heavy mineral deposits, tectonic activity, density. Really interesting worlds, such as those with living ecosystems or indications of minerals that need closer study, require landings. These can be full-scale camps, made via scout boat, fly-bys, or the famous "walkabout" expedition.

In the "walkabout", one or more Mektons are airdropped or landed at scattered points on the planet's surface, and the pilots "walk" to a central pick-up point, gathering data (and discovering the risks and dangers of the planet firsthand) on the way. A Cutter performs walkabout in much the same way, only the whole ship is often taken down. Then, the Mekton can detach and scout around on "foot" while the Cutter itself acts as a base camp.

■ *Ranger Ships and Mektons*

The SCC Rangers pioneered the exploration techniques which are now standard operating procedure throughout human space. The vehicles used to perform these missions include Shunt ships, Cutters, and Mektons.

As soon as the first Shunt ship returned from the Pleiades, the SCC knew they had found the key to exploring the universe and preserving any habitable planets they found. In fact, the SCC has access to Shunt drives that are smaller and more efficient than those available to civilians.

A typical Ranger Shunt carrier is not much more than a glorified transport, with a Shunt Drive, upgraded maneuvering thrusters and docking facilities for Cutters and other subcraft. The smallest Shunt carriers have docking facilities for only one Cutter; the largest can carry six.

The Cutter is the standard exploration vehicle for the Rangers. several types are currently in use by the Rangers, but the most common is the *Deltaboat* class Light Cutter. All classes are capable of atmospheric flight, and all have a standard crew capacity of six. The larger size of the heavier Cutter classes does not increase crew comfort, but rather the increased volume is used to extend the Cutter's range and cargo capacity.

The Rangers also use a great many military-surplus Mektons (see page 37 for details). These designs are slightly modified for the purposes of long-range exploration, and are crammed full of sensors. Hardpoints, used for weapons on military types, often mount additional sensors or specimen collecting gear. The most specific change is adapting the Mektons airlock and docking collar to allow the Mekton to dock onto the front of a Cutter. This permits the crew to move directly from the Cutter into the Mekton. Ranger Mektons retain the "battle cockpit" in the torso of military suits. Unfortunately, when the Jäger's Mektons were armed by the Confederation, so were the Ranger's.

For most of their life, the SCC Rangers have possessed few ships larger than a Cutter, relying almost completely on the Cutter-Shunt ship combination. However, after the ODF Jägers were upgraded to military status, the SCC began petitioning the USSA military council for Ranger Cruisers, identical to SAC Cruisers, to defend their personnel. With the outbreak of war, it is likely that their petitions will be favorably answered.

It should be noted that in most ways, the ODF Jägers have copied the SCC Rangers methods of operation and equipment.

> **Game Note:** In case it isn't obvious, the Rangers were specifically designed to provide ideal player character groups. Here you have small teams of professionals, each draw from varied (and sometimes questionable) backgrounds, who are given small, Shunt-capable ships and their attached Mektons with which they are told to go out and explore. This gives the characters the ability to get around the galaxy without hamstringing them with military protocols or obligations. The group can include scientists, naval personnel, colonists, or even ex-pirates. The Rangers are an independent bunch who live at the edge of civilization—in both the physical and metaphorical sense. But there are some catches: they have contracts and must perform their missions or else they don't get paid. They are usually given specific systems to survey, and there will be at least one Gaian and one SAC officer on each ship (although they need not be fanatics or hardasses).
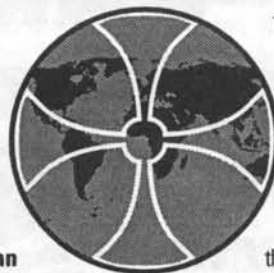
■ The Gaians

The Gaian movement started in the middle of the 20th Century. Ecological movements began to call attention to the disturbing changes humans were causing to their environment. Political groups sought laws to protect the environment from humans. Social groups tried to instruct people on how to reduce human impact on the ecological structures around them. Militant groups activity slowed the technological expansion using sabotage and violence. By the middle of the 21st Century, all of these groups merged into a single unified socio-political force, calling themselves "Gaians" after the ancient name for the Earth goddess.

Most Gaians are not "tree hugging semi-religious nuts" as the Pleiadean Colonists characterize them. They *do* have a philosophy that "everything runs out, eventually", and like to point to the ruined Earth they still inhabit as an example. They practice what they preach: tight birth control, maximum recycling, maximized use of alternative energy resources and limited industrial growth. While not particularly religious in the traditional sense, Gaian philosophy stresses the Taoist aspect of living with nature, avoiding conflict with the universe, and creating as little impact on the natural order as possible.

Active Gaians gravitate to the sciences, as a rule choosing careers as planetologists, xenologists or ecologists, where they can best serve Mother Nature. It's no accident that the Science Council and the SCC are dominated by Gaians. Surprisingly many Gaians serve in the military, perhaps as a holdover from the days of the EEG and the Unification War, when many Greenpeacers and Friends of the Earth took command roles in the unification forces. The Gaian Spokesperson, who is the nominal leader of the group, is always a scientist with a life science background. The process of choosing this leader is democratic, peaceful and calm by comparison to the usual Earth political processes.

The Gaians believe that until they get the majority of Humanity off planet, they can't begin to heal the damage that Mother Earth has suffered. To that end, they sponsor and advocate many of the more progressive technological projects in Earthspace. The Drift Cities of Venus were one early Gaian attempt to shift population to other worlds. Gaians also drove the research that expanded the orbiting space habitats from their corporate beginnings.

The Gaian plan to terraform Venus and, eventually, Mars has confused many people. How can they respect nature and yet do so much to change it? The point is, the Gaians are *not* against altering planets or nature. They *are* against messing with biospheres or native life forms. Venus and Mars don't have any real biospheres (Mars did once, but not any more) so altering them to be more amenable to life is no more a violation of Gaian philosophy than mining the asteroids. In fact, these plans bring life to where there was none before.

■ The Circle

But the Gaians do have a dark side as well. To some, star travel came too early, allowing Humanity to dodge the responsibility of learning how to live within the natural order. This fanatic core group, sometimes referred to as the Circle, has managed to control the USSA government for the last fifty years. They have installed policies of planetary management for Earthspace and the colonies that limit not just corporate activities but sometimes endanger colonists' lives. While their goals are understandable, the implementation is mostly of the "the end justifies the means" variety.

With the fervor of the righteous, these Gaians have co-opted the SAC as their police force to make sure that no one steps out of line ecologically, enforcing laws that are often impractical on the frontier. They also use the SEC's control of the SCC to sponsor most stellar scouting missions—and to get Gaian observers on every mission. These observers' primary agenda is often to get to as many untouched systems as possible and protect them before they are destroyed by the human Expansionist wave. They also watch out for violations of ecological doctrine as set by the USSA, and see to it that any found are prosecuted to the full extent of the law (which is why the SAC is kept so busy in the Outworlds). All these extreme measures are probably unnecessary; many Rangers are Gaian, at least in some nominal way, and usually demonstrate a profound respect for the new worlds that they discover, as do many of the colonists, if not to the same degree.

But, like stern parents out to teach a wayward child a lesson, this is not enough for the Circle. They feel that the current conflict has been brought on by the colonials themselves with their greedy, short sighted actions. While many Gaians advocate a peaceful solution, the Circle sees this as the chance to finally bring the Expansionists to heel and end their growth. The Circle is proof of the axiom that idealism breeds the cruelest tyrants.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **AUDEN DOMINICA**

Chief Spokesperson for the Gaian Movement, Head of the Circle

Description: 1.58m, 58kg, 32 years old, shoulder length red hair, blue eyes usually with old fashioned gold rimmed spectacles, slender build, always dressed in formal business attire when in public.

Quote: "Our duty is to restore our Mother Earth to what she was when we found her."

Notes: Dr. Dominica's serious manner has been criticized even by her own people. But when she got in front of the camera for the first time, she instantly became the perfect media face for the movement.

A former classmate of Redding Frost, Dr. Dominica isn't just a skilled orator, she is a widely acknowledged expert in ecology and holds degrees in several other life sciences. Her technical papers have been described as brilliant, and she has been discussed as a Nobel Prize nominee more than once.

Currently she is researching the unusual abundance of life in the Pleiades cluster, and strongly supports the SAC actions against the Confederation. Just *how* strongly will soon be revealed to both Frost and Talbot ...

Important Stats and Skills: INT 10, EMP 9, Ecology +10, Biology +8, Botany +5, Zoology +5, Oratory +5. Datalink, Nanobodies, An elaborate wardrobe of business suits, Glasses with built-in holographic display for data she does not wish to display on the Web.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

"Audie wants me to convince you to back the Gaian plan." I said as I sat down in the booth the next day. It was lunchtime in downtown Sydney, and the small café was packed.

"So, convince me." replied Talbot, scanning the menu. "I can't." I grunted back. "The very idea appalls me too."

"Hmm. Thought so." He gestured towards the quiet, spectacled man sitting next to him. "This is Campbell Hahn; my Chief Executive Officer. He handles the administrative duties, as well as some of my more irregular projects..."

Campbell grinned. "For starters, I've been communicating with the Ravagers for several years on the Head Ranger's behalf."

"I didn't think the Ravagers talked to *anyone*," I said, surprised. "They'll talk to me; I was raised by them," replied Campbell with quiet assurance.

Talbot spoke up. "After seeing you, I had Camp contact their leader—Grey Redmond, about your Jäger friend. They've been trying to find a way to derail this war too; it disrupts their critical supply links with the Charybdis ...

"We think that a face-to-face meeting could bring both the Outsider groups and the Pirates into our little club," finished Talbot. "Obviously, I can't do it; especially with Dominica dogging my heels. But no one's going to notice a lowly Ranger Captain..."

And that is why I'm now aboard an unmarked jump-jet with Campbell, streaking through the night towards the Los Angeles Black Zone...

■ *Life in Earth-space*

—Dataweb Entry by Jan Kawazaki, San Francisco City Councilman, 2180

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

The USSA is an ecological dictatorship, but one with the consent of the governed. You visit Earth. You get the idea. There isn't any other way. For all that the USSA has colonized the Solar System and reached for the stars, Earth dominates life everywhere. The memory of Earth's devastation colors every decision that is made. Remember. The USSA is the embodiment of the Gaian philosophy. Preserve. Protect. Prosper. Most citizens of the USSA willingly accept this credo. They look upon those who don't as irresponsible at best, ecotraitors and criminal scum at worst.

■ *Cool Like Us*

You may get the notion that such devotion and authoritarian rule makes for a regimented, pretty dull place. You'd be dead wrong. Individual freedom is not abridged much more than it ever has been under most forms of government. There is no Big Brother. And this is all by design. The USSA has adopted the principle that the government that rules least, rules best. They do what has to be done, ruthlessly, but otherwise they back off. No sense wasting valuable resources just to have uniformity for uniformity's sake. The overwhelming majority of USSA citizens fully support this approach because they know how close it all came to ending.

In fact, the USSA sees itself as very enlightened and tries not just to project, but to honestly promote a liberal stance. The USSA is cool. They listen. They solicit opinion via Dataweb and media feedback. They try to reach a community consensus after all the facts have been presented. Everybody votes on such referendums via their datalinks. It's the law. You will participate in your own government, since it's the responsible thing to do. That's what really makes the USSA different. People take responsibility for their actions and the effect those actions will have on others. To a remarkable degree, people care. They've learned that selfish indifference gets you a polluted, burned out planet. Even the densest dullards can learn from a planetary-sized lesson.

There are still rich, poor and middle class, but the disparities between them are less severe than they have been in the past. There are no desperately poor, except in Earth's Old Cities. There are no obscenely rich, except in Saturn's Ring Cities. Everyone has enough to survive and live fairly comfortably. Some more or less than others. Of course, life is easier in some places than others as well. San Francisco is plush. LA is not. Luna is plush, the Belt and Mars are not so blessed with luxuries. However, this kind of difference should come as no surprise, given the level of development and resources in each place. The USSA does not redistribute income to make everyone equal but does try to promote equal opportunity. The rest is up to you.

■ *The Dataweb and Cybertech*

The first consensual/virtual reality information system, the Net, was born in the early 2000's, along with the first cybernetics craze. Cyberpunks and others were constantly replacing bits of their bodies with mechanical parts to enhance performance, as well as linking their brains into machinery via early deadmetal interface systems. While that fad has ebbed over the last 170 years, nanotech-based cybernetics, "live-metal", and the Dataweb are permanent fixtures of life in the 22nd century.

The Dataweb and the implanted datalinks which connect to it are the most obvious facets of this technology. Almost every adult (age 17 or older) has an implanted datalink processor which contains a nano-computer and radio. This system allows the user to connect the Dataweb, the broad-band computer network, accessing information and connecting with more powerful computers with a simple thought. Earthspacers are used to being able to tap into this dataflow at any time and most take it for granted.

The Dataweb provides everyone with instant access to almost any data they need, as well as providing communication services on a planetary scale. The Dataweb is supported by the satellite systems of all Earthspace worlds as well as most colonies. Even ships usually have their own mini-Webs linked to their main computers. Of course, there are parts of the frontier where the Web doesn't reach; blind spots in colonial satnets, isolated low-tech encampments. etc. An unfortunate consequence of this is that people venturing into these areas who are used to having the Web available may suffer from "Web Withdrawal"; a minor psychosis resulting from having to rely on their own, limited, cranial database.

Cyberware is used in other areas as well. Live-metal technology is more biologically friendly than the older tech, creating nano-tech-based systems that are capable of limited self-repair and smooth integration with organic systems. Optical and neural enhancements, synthetic muscles, artificial limbs that are almost undetectable, and even subdermal body armor are options which some people seek to add to their bodies.

Still, cyberware (beyond the datalinks) is not for everyone. Only a few people choose upgrades beyond nanosurgeons to help maintain their health. The more elaborate (and dangerous) 'ware is used mostly by people on the physical edge; soldiers, government agents, some explorers, and surprisingly, the outcasts—cyberware use is actually fairly high among the Ravagers who live in the Old Cities and the pirates that wander the spacelanes. While there is little stigma attached to using cyberware, anyone displaying *serious* bodywork on the street is likely to be given a wide berth by civilians and close scrutiny by the authorities.

On a side note, despite the extensive use of genetic reconstruction techniques in the rebuilding of Earth's biosphere and clone technology that can grow replacement organs and limbs, genetic manipulation, especially on the human genome, is strictly prohibited by USSA (i.e. Gaian) law. The USSA doesn't mind the occasional altered wheat grain that can grow in the dry air of Fourwinds, but improving more advanced species is seem as tampering with Mother Nature and potentially upsetting the balance in a big way. Few crimes bring a swifter and harsher response.

■ Popsicle Crime

Of course, there are those who just don't, or won't, get it. While they may claim they are exercising their personal freedom, they foul the planet or hurt others as a consequence. They are criminals, and the Model Criminal Code was designed for them.

Adopted in 2113, the Code classifies all criminal offenses onto four color coded categories, likened to those of a popsicle and earning the name Popsicle Crimes. **Green Crime** consists of all offenses against the environments of any planet, celestial environment or artificial habitat and is the most serious because it endangers everyone's well-being. **Red Crimes** are violent offenses against persons or property; while **Orange Crimes** are nonviolent offenses against persons or property. The last category is **Blue Crime**. This category includes so-called white collar crimes and victimless crimes. Most victimless crimes that would formerly have been classified as vice offenses have been legalized, as almost all addictions are now medically or psychologically treatable.

The enforcement provisions of the Code are pretty standard with one exception: Citizen enforcement is fully authorized. Any citizen witnessing a crime may apprehend the perpetrator. The citizen is authorized to use only non lethal force but may meet any lethal resistance in kind. Organized bands of citizens who systematically seek out criminals committing Popsicle Crimes are known as Poppers. Vigilantes by any other name, the Poppers are often more repressive than the police. They commonly ignore the provision of the Code that requires the crime to be actually witnessed, taking preemptive action. Heavily armed and looking for an excuse, Poppers should not be taken lightly.

■ The Slacker Act

On a planet where resources are stretched thin and the ecosystem is very fragile, on a colonized planet where pressure domes are all that keeps everyone alive, on a Spinner in the depths of space, there is little room for nonproductive persons. Non-productivity drains resources from society without any offsetting return. Such people are deemed Slackers, socially irresponsible parasites. Where once such persons were carried by their more industrious neighbors, the days of such free rides are long over. Such people *will* be productive. If they fail to do so, they will be reeducated, punished or exiled. If they think they can make it on their own in hard vacuum, they can go for it.

The Slacker Act enforces the productivity and social responsibility of all USSA citizens. It is rigorously enforced by the government and Poppers throughout the USSA. Children under the age of consent and students are exempt. Everyone else is expected to produce. The government will help citizens become productive by finding them employment and helping them obtain the education necessary to become productive, but they will not carry nonproductive citizens. There is no welfare system because the USSA can't afford it.

Those citizens who refuse to be productive are forced to flee the reach of the USSA. Earth's Old Cities are filled with Slackers, surviving as best they can. Some of Luna's abandoned surface structures, and Vagabond City in the Belt's Freefall habitat also support Slacker communities. Elsewhere in the solar system, there are very few places a Slacker can hide.

■ Mindsongs

But Earthers aren't simply industrious ants either. The Arts, and music in particular, are very important. Rock, Jazz, Synth-vibe, and Classic Buzz all survive and then some. The USSA stays out of the music business, leaving that to the entertainment corporations. However, the anti-authoritarian message of some music can lead to problems, the USSA makes the best of it, seeing messages in the music as keeping the government honest.

A current fave with the public are Mindsongs: music generated and passed through the Web. It can contain visual as well as audio elements, and even some emotional content if the designer so desires. Advanced mindsongs can even be integrated with other data so users can listen while they work. Anyone can link in, pay a small user's fee and download an entire composition to enjoy on their own, or participate in a web concrete with literally millions of others (the official record for a webconcert was 1.5 *billion* listeners for the Tokyo-based *Hurricane Sound's* broadcast from the orbiting Crystal Palace on July 12th, 2178).

> **Game Note**: This essay tends to contradict the harsher view of the society presented in the previous section, doesn't it? That's because the USSA government generally works for Earthspacers. They are a relatively happy and focused people, striving to behave responsibly to make up for centuries of recklessness and waste. Where the system tends to break down is on the frontier, where Gaian edicts often prove impractical or downright dangerous. Basically, Earthers are cool people, but their government has gotten too rigid for its own good. You can find game stats for the Dataweb and cyberware on pgs.128-131.

■ *Earth*

Earth. The Blue Planet. Home to humanity. This is where it all began and until the Gaians came along it looked like it was where everything might end. From a pristine place of unimaginable beauty, the Earth was steadily used up, from the first flowering of civilization to unchecked industrialization, till eventual Ecocollapse. Before the Gaians came to power, Earth teetered on the brink.

The Ecocollapse took out the oceans, the atmosphere and land pretty effectively. The atmosphere went first as air pollution thinned the ozone layer to dangerous levels, bathing the planet in sterilizing ultraviolet radiation, while at the same time Greenhouse gases raised global temperatures. The land went next. Crops wilted in the increasingly hot environment or under the lashing of UV rays. The oceans were the last to suffer, as man turned to them to provide the food that the land could no longer produce. But the oceanic ecosystem, polluted and over harvested, couldn't handle the strain.

Luckily, Earth caught a break just as the Gaians took charge and managed to at least keep the environmental damage from escalating. As temperatures rose, the polar caps began to melt, inundating coastal cites like New York (which had been partly rebuilt after a nuclear bomb decimated it in 1997). This turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the fresh water from the polar caps diluted the concentration of pollutants in the oceans enough to prevent their total destruction. With the Gaians in charge, Earth was on the way back.

Today, the Earth is still dangerously polluted. Desert regions have grown. Coastal areas are flooded. Sunblock is an essential. But it could be and was far worse. Humanity is nothing if not adaptable and with formidable technology and the backing of the USSA, Earth manages to support 9 billion people. Though still far too many to make recovery easy, progress is being made.

The majority of Earth's population is concentrated in huge urban centers. Agriculture is almost totally automated to make the best use of whatever farmland is still productive. Under USSA mandate, huge tracts of land, most notably the Amazon Basin and Australia, are being reforested or otherwise reclaimed and human habitation is forbidden. Ecocrime is now considered as serious an offense as any violent crime or treason, and often punished more harshly. Enforcement is draconian—things are still too bad off to have it any other way.

Earth's urban centers are sharply divided. In the heart of most cities stand one or more towering super-arcologies called Zeniths. Taking the idea of an arcology one step further, Zeniths are designed to exist in total harmony with the environment, while providing the necessities of life for between 10 and 25 million people in each Zenith. Most Zeniths are megalithic toroids. The open center of each Zenith is either recreational park land or the preserved remains of the historic city center. Of course, regional conditions will often demand modification or departure from this basic design but the model is surprisingly adaptable and ubiquitous. Life in the Zeniths is relatively good, with hi-tech conveniences and sophisticated distribution systems assuring that people always have enough to eat (most of it real food!), have adequate lodging, employment and data access (which was declared a right in the EEG Constitution in 2092).

Surrounding the glistening Zeniths are the Old Cities. Decayed, polluted and falling apart, it was from the ashes of the Old Cities that phoenixlike the Zeniths arose. Now, they remain as festering reminders of the Bad Old Days. Ideally, the Old Cities would be torn down and the land


DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC
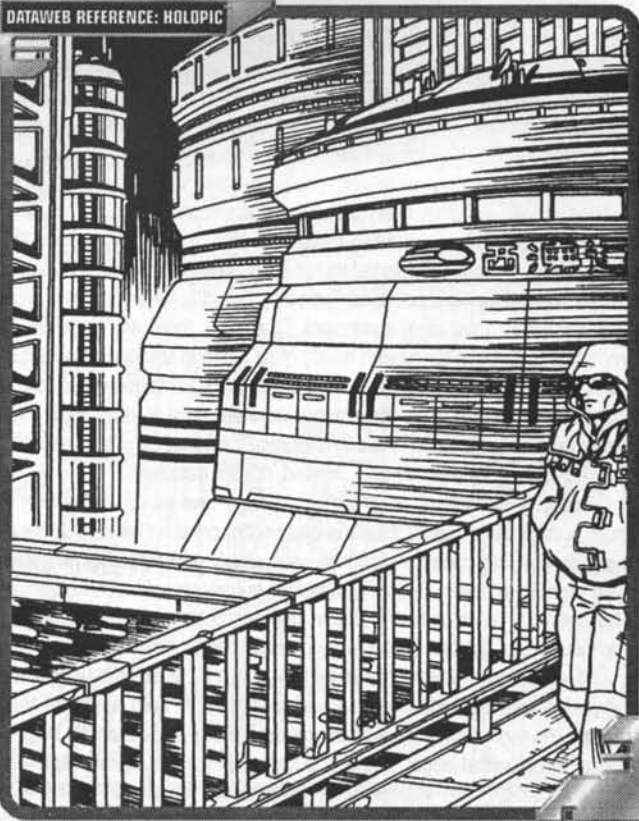
cleansed. Economic and ecological reality, however, demands that Earth's resources be put into other more pressing projects first. So, the Old Cities remain, now resembling those lawless areas of urban violence and decay that used to be known euphemistically as "Combat Zones". Not yet abandoned, the Old Cities are home to those who can't or won't embrace the Gaian vision of the future. Generally, thought of as criminals or crazies, the inhabitants of the Old Cities are nothing if not unpredictable. However, rarely are these inhabitants numerous enough to pose any threat to the nearby Zenith.

Beyond the Old Cities, population density rapidly drops. While some traditional cultures remain beyond the cities, they must struggle to survive. In the new wilderness, life is short and brutish without technology and access to a steady food supply. Reclamation Stations dot the land, working to undue local environmental damage and protected by SAC Mektons. The Gaian policy is to take the Earth's revitalization slowly, so as not to overextend available resources. Trying to do too much too fast is seen as part of what got the planet into trouble in the first place. The only other regularly encountered concentrations of population and technology are found on sprawling automated farms.

Life on Earth has certainly changed, and while not all for the better, neither has it become a jackbooted ecodictatorship. The USSA wants Earth to be livable, not just in the future but now. The cooperation of Earth's billions is essential if the planet is too be saved. So, while ruthless when they have to be, the government otherwise stays out of people's way. Life in the Zeniths is not terribly regimented and life in the Old Cities is positively anarchic! Earth comes first but people and their humanity have not been forgotten.
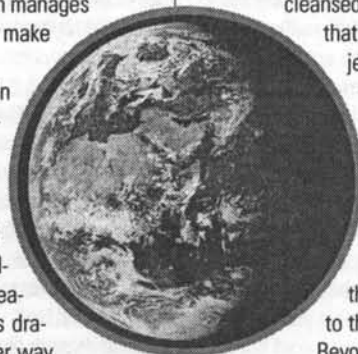
■ *Sydney*

Sydney, Australia, is the capital of the USSA and the Special Ecological Administrative District of Australia, which includes New Guinea, New Zealand and Tasmania. Sydney was chosen as the capital because of its untroubled and nonaligned history of ecoconsciousness, and because its position on the Australian continent offered unique opportunities to develop the capital as an ecological showplace of what life on Earth could be. The city itself consists of the worlds largest Zenith modeled after the famous Sydney Opera House, which still survives. Early on it was decided that Sydney would not merely serve as a government complex but would be a cultural and industrial center as well. With that in mind, the Sydney Zenith was designed on a monumental scale.

Of course, all governmental offices, bureaus, directorates and secretariats have their headquarters in Sydney. Collectively, the administrative sector of Sydney is known as Earth Center and takes up a full quarter of the Zenith, sealed off from the remainder and accessible only through security checkpoints. Nowhere on Earth is security tighter or law enforcement more rigid than in Sydney. Only Luna is more regimented.

Travel to Sydney is restricted and closely monitored. Transport is available via sealink from the Singapore Zenith, via Delta Clipper from San Francisco, Tokyo, London, Cape Town and Buenos Aires or directly from orbit. Sydney boasts a small but state-of-the-art spaceport with regular scheduled service to Luna and Axis Mundi. Attempts to enter Sydney other than through these approved channels are met with lethal force.

Besides government offices, Sydney has a huge industrial base with most major corporations represented. The Sydney Zenith was intended to be a "working Zenith" and it has more than fulfilled that dream. Like everything else in Sydney, the industrial sector is cutting edge with only the finest and most advanced equipment available. Products include advanced electronics and nanotech, Mektons (Bahn/Zai has a center here), and other heavy machinery. Even streamlined spaceship hulls have been assembled in the harbor outside of Perth and sailed to San Francisco for boosting into orbit for final work.

Centered around the Sydney Opera House is the Terran Museum and Cultural Center. Assembled from great collections around the world, the Terran Museum is the foremost archive of human achievement, artistic and scientific expression. Exhibits also chronicle the mess man has made of his planet and efforts to clean it up. No one can view these exhibits and not come away powerfully affected. The Cultural Center preserves information on Earth's indigenous cultures such that individuality will not be lost in the conformity of a world united by instantaneous communication and same day transportation.
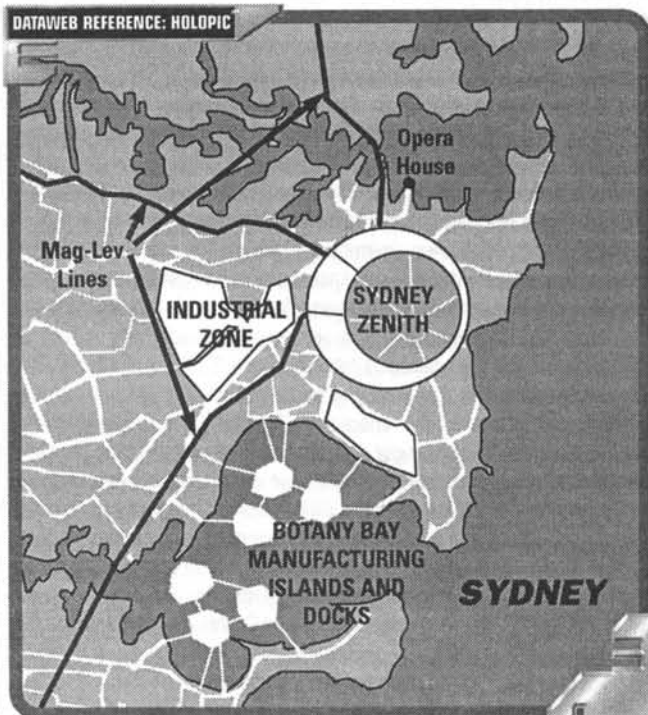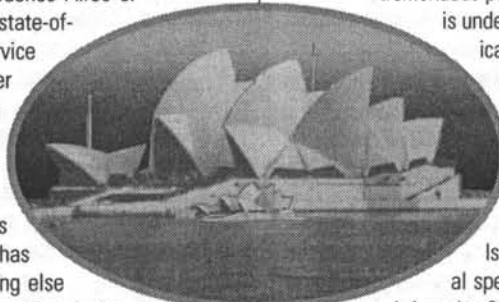
Complementing the Terran Museum and Cultural Center is Sol University, the foremost educational institution in the Sol System with special emphasis on environmental and space sciences. The University maintains research Zeniths at Nogoro Crater, East Africa, Tranquility Base, Luna and the Galileo Spinner in Jovian orbit. With full USSA backing, Sol University has resources no other university can match. Practically every major scientific figure has either graduated or done post-doctoral work at SU.

Unlike most other major cities on Earth, the Sydney Zenith is not surrounded by the decay of the Old Cities. Sydney was intended as an example and that means no unsightly clutter. Well tended park land and hydroponic farms stretch away outside the Zenith. In fact, the only Old Cities still surviving within the Special Ecological Administrative District of Australia are Melbourne and Perth, and they are being systematically dismantled. When the remains of Melbourne and Perth are gone, Sydney will be the only city remaining within the Special Ecological Administrative District, although Perth is to be rebuilt along the lines of Sydney.

Operation Dreamtime is the name for the wholesale ecological reclamation of Australia, New Zealand, New Guinea and Tasmania and their maintenance as the first Terran Ecological Park. The intent is to return each of these islands to pristine ecological condition, demonstrating that the Gaian plan for Earth is not as farfetched as some might claim. Ongoing reclamation efforts around the globe continue and are not intended to be as drastic as that taking place in Australia. However, it was believed by the radical Gaians who first initiated Operation Dreamtime that an example of planetary proportions needed to be set. Less radical successors have continued the program because of the strong message it has sent and the almost universally positive reception it has received. When the program is complete, the USSA capital at Sydney will be an ideal city in an idyllic setting.

Already New Guinea has been eighty three percent restored and Tasmania has been seventy six percent reclaimed. The North Island of New Zealand and Australia, heavily damaged in the Ecocollapse, are proving harder tasks but the removal of the human populations has had a tremendous positive impact. The South Island of New Zealand is under quarantine. The initial site of an illegal biological research station working to revive through advanced genetic engineering extinct species of which surviving genetic samples existed, containment was broken at the research facility. Unchecked, formerly extinct species have repopulated the island. While the release and environmental damage are evaluated, South Island is isolated. Of particular concern are several species of sauropods, some carnivorous, that now infest the South Island. The Gaians are torn about how to handle this situation, being loathe to destroy the animals but fearing the possibly disastrous consequences to the global ecology.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

Opera House

Mag-Lev Lines

INDUSTRIAL ZONE

SYDNEY ZENITH

BOTANY BAY MANUFACTURING ISLANDS AND DOCKS

SYDNEY

■ *San Francisco*

Next to the USSA capital in Sydney, San Francisco is perhaps the greatest metropolis on Earth. Hard by Silicon Valley, San Francisco has always been a leading center for high tech computer design and applications. Now the entertainment capital of the USSA and Earth's leading spaceport as well, San Francisco is the keeper of Earth's dreams and her gateway to the stars.

Always a liberal city, San Francisco and San Franciscans were influential in the early Gaian movement, eagerly embracing the Gaian message of ecological restoration and responsibility. But, being San Francicans, they could not agree on a single unified development plan. The result was a compromise that fully recognized the cities diverse populace.

San Francisco Zenith was built in the heart of the old downtown as the center of civic government and the central habitat. Nearby, smaller Chinatown, Mission and Castro Zeniths were built. These Zeniths reflect San Francisco's Asian, Hispanic and gay and lesbian communities, influential in the life and culture of the city. Across the Bay, the Oakland Zenith is similarly representative of the Bay Area's African-American community. Rather than isolated cultural enclaves, these Zeniths are vibrant parts of the mosaic that is San Francisco, preserving the cities' multi-cultural distinctiveness and attracting not a few tourists.

Making all this possible has been the Bay Area's thriving economy. Silicon Valley is the oldest of the city's economic engines. Now enclosed in an artificial Geofront, Silicon Valley and Tokyo are Earth's high tech titans. Inside the manmade cavern, the Geofront's environment is much like that in Tokyo, with buildings rising from the floor like stalagmites. However, because the roof of the Geofront was extruded from the surrounding mountains using a forced plasma field effect, it is not strong enough to support hanging structures.

Glitter Gulch, stretching up the Peninsula, is a series of geodesic domes, each representing a studio facility. Seventy-five percent of all entertainment programming originates here. The revenue from these productions and the tourism the presence of media celebrities brings into the Bay Area cannot be underestimated.

However, while technology and entertainment are key components in San Francisco's economy, they are ultimately eclipsed by the city's spaceport facilities. Alameda Spaceport, taking up all of Alameda Island, is Earth's chief passenger terminal for orbital and transorbital flights. Its counterpart is the San Jose Commercial Spaceport, which is limited to cargo flights. Also providing bulk cargo transport is the five mile long Mt. Tamilpaias Mass Driver, powered by a coretap that siphons off the otherwise destructive force of the San Andreas fault. Finally, Livermore Field is a 36 pad Laser Lift Array, capable of either cargo or passenger launches. The high energy lasers, along with the mass driver, coincidentally make San Francisco the best defended city on Earth.

Complementing the spaceport facilities is the San Leandro Naval/Rail Station. An immense rail yard and port complex, the Station provides global connections to the spaceport. Similarly, the Treasure Island Aerodrome provides passenger dirigible connections for flights too short to warrant transatmospheric launches from the Alameda Spaceport.

Connecting the various Zenith's, Glitter Gulch, Silicon Valley and the transport facilities is a web of freeways, monorails and civilian air corridors. Keeping feeder traffic flowing smoothly, while coordinating space launches, shipping schedules, air flights and rail departures is the responsibility of the Embarcadero Metro Command Center. Metro Command is a combination transit authority, port authority and police force. If it moves in San Francisco, Metro Command has jurisdiction.

Transportation is San Francisco's lifeblood, more so than in cities comprised of but a single Zenith. Metro Command's police powers spring directly from the realization that any threat to the transportation network is a serious threat to the city. Within a Zenith local authorities handle police matters. If the criminals take it outside, Metro Command has jurisdiction, even if the investigation leads back inside a Zenith.

Despite the building boom, three Old Cities remain in the Bay Area. The Richmond and Hayward sectors, north and south of the Oakland Zenith, are rundown and rusting, freefire zones—the techno-feudal domains of San Francisco's crimelords. In addition, far to the south, but still considered part of the area, is Night City, one of the "New Cities" of the Cyberpunk era. It, too, has been overrun by criminal elements and Ravagers. These are collectively known as the Blight. As no civilian authority exists, Metro Command is charged with maintaining what passes for order. Heavily armed Mekton patrols do their best to maintain control in the Blight, with success often hinging on the caliber of firepower involved and the willingness to use it.

In sharp contrast to the squalor of the Old Cities are the amazing efforts toward ecological reclamation that have been undertaken. In the heart of San Francisco, the Golden Gate Biodome stretches from old Golden Gate Park to encompass the full extent of the Presidio, greening everything in between. In climate controlled splendor, nature is preserved, awaiting the day when the protective differentially permeable osmotic canopy is no longer necessary. Northeast of San Francisco the Napa Biodome similarly protects the vineyards of the Napa Valley, where wines to rival those of French vintage are still produced.

Ringing San Francisco are a series of hills and low mountains, which act as an atmospheric catch basin. Set at regular intervals along this natural boundary are atmospheric processors that scrub and detoxify the air. This is the Green Line, San Francisco's response to air quality problems. While not perfect, the Green Line anticipates a day when the Biodomes will no longer be necessary. Share The Air days celebrate those days when air quality is especially good.

Beyond the Green Line stretch the hydroponic farms of Concord and Pleasanton. Once a vast suburban wasteland, this area has been cleared and now feeds all of San Francisco with ease. Public markets filled with produce draw gasps and stares from those new to the Bay Area. Rival plans call for the expansion of hydroponic farming throughout California's Central Valley or the creation of the worlds largest Biodome.

Life in San Francisco is not all work. As befits the entertainment capital of the world, and San Francisco's storied tradition, life is also a party. In addition to the parklands inside the Golden Gate Biodome and Glitter Gulch's attractions, San Francisco boasts world class amusements. The Alcatraz Fun Park is a state of the art entertainment complex, featuring live action as well as virtual rides and adventures. The China Basin Sportsdrome is home to the city's sport franchises.

Adding a bohemian touch, the Berkeley People's Zenith is home to not only the University of California but an eclectic collection of shops, specialty stores, boutiques and cafes. While less radical, the Stanford Zenith also has that college atmosphere. Both UC and Stanford are the premier educational institutions in North America, since they were able to attract faculty from eastern facilities that were being flooded. Harvard and Yale never recovered.

Finally, mention must be made of San Franciscans love of alternative lifestyles. After all, this was partly responsible for their easy acceptance of Gaian philosophy. As long as you don't hurt anyone else, its legal in San Francisco. While the USSA has largely done away with victimless crimes, they have been completely abolished in San Francisco. Hedonistic? You bet!

RECOVERY PROJECT
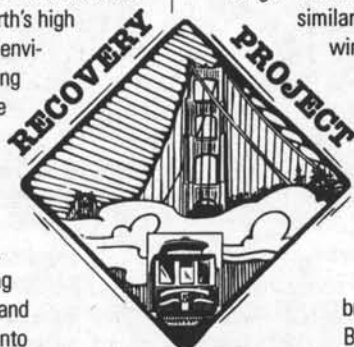
SAN FRANCISCO

■ London

The Sprawl. That's what they call London. The London Zenith stretches from the Docklands through Whitechapel, north of the Barbican Center to Highgate, west to Hammersmith and finally to the Thames River. Between the Thames and the rambling Zenith, the old city of London roughly from Tower Hill to Knightsbridge and from the river to Regent Park stands as it always has. The idea was to preserve the London of yore. The results have been mixed. South of the Thames, another circumferential Zenith was to have been construct-

LONDON

ed, completing the encirclement of the historic precincts of the city, but construction has barely begun. South London is a sprawling Old City, resolutely defended by its inhabitants—street people, punks, third world refugees, Gypsies and ordinary Britons not quite taken with the Gaian idea of progress.

The Greater London Council, controlled by radical types, iconoclasts, eccentrics and curmudgeons from the populous Old City of South London, is perpetually at odds with the Gaian Lord Mayor of the London Zenith. Genuinely interested in reaching popular agreement on London's Gaian future, the Lord Mayor has resisted calls to send in the SAC to clear South London. For their part, the GLC is not opposed to progress so much as they can't agree on what form that progress should take. As a result South London continues to grow unchecked, while the South London Zenith slowly goes up in its midst. However, the Board of Directors at Earthworks, the corporation the USSA has chartered to build all Zeniths on Earth, is growing tired of this situation, and may call in the SAC themselves to clean up the South London mess. The local populace can be expected to react poorly—not to say violently—to such a move.

Throughout London, a nihilistic punk movement similar to the Ravagers has made violence an all too frequent occurrence. The punks see the Gaians as eco-fascists determined to crush freedom in the name of saving the planet. At the same time, the punks despair that the only alternative is a dead future on a fatally polluted earth. While no connection between the punks and the Midnight Sun has been established, Gaian officials are plainly worried that this may happen.

The British Government has only shifted from a martial law stance within the last fifty years. In the early 2000's, the Isles had grown so chaotic that the Martial Law Authority was established by Parliament and the army to restore order. This government was united with a new aristocracy under Queen Victoria the Second in 2022, but the MLA remained in power in deed if not in word until 2106. Then the USSA shifted them to a more democratic basis in 2120 although the aristocracy remained as a fixture. The Brits just don't seem ready to give up their monarchs.

in fact, the British are still stubbornly class conscious. Although the Middle Class has more power than ever, they, in sharp contrast to the punks, are technologically savvy and politically moderate. They tend to live modest lives, cutting loose on the weekends or when the local sports team wins. Of course, the traditional British upper class is crazy. They are given to radical Gaian philosophy, espousing a Crypto-Luddite ideal where a technological elite would rule a neoprimitive agrarian class. One duke, claiming desecndancy from Queen Victoria II, has claimed the throne in the name of this new technocracy, although he made no real moves towards taking any political power. Needless to say, this embarrasses the more moderate Gaians but there is not much they can do about it.

■ Paris

Paris is the leading city of Europe. When the Ecocollapse hit, French vineyards were devastated, galvanizing the French into action. Always possessed of an international outlook, the French played a lead role in the Gaian movement. Paris became the center of Gaian influence in Europe and eventually the regional administrative center for the Continent.

No European city is more prosperous than **PARIS** Paris, the financial capital and transportation hub as well as administrative center, of Europe. This came as the result of some rather ugly politics at the beginning of the EEG. Germany, at the time one of the most powerful members of the European Economic Community (EEC) was also vying for a power position in the fledgling world government. But the German government was in a conservative and nationalistic mode at the time, lead by a old-line president (the Greens had been temporarily marginalized). While they wanted to help the EEG, they had a more moderate stance on ecological issues than the French, who while they had started out conservative, demonstrated their flexibility by calling on an unscheduled (and constitutionally illegal) set of elections to bring a more pro-Gaian group to power.

Thanks to this early (and radical) commitment to the Gaian agenda, the French secured funds to begin the wholesale reclamation of their agricultural base before other areas of the region. The Germans were left with seconds and a bitter resentment about how they had been cheated by the French. As a result, the French economy recovered from the Ecocollapse quickly, spurred by agricultural exports. And the Germans still hate their guts to this day.

Paris is the chief beneficiary of this prosperity. With more than enough capital, the Paris Zenith was designed to reflect the city's historic commitment to culture and the arts. Unfortunately, since the late twentieth century when a glass pyramid was erected in front of the Louvre museum, French architecture has taken an erratic course, marked by the glaring juxtaposition of tradition and avant-garde forms. The Paris Zenith, designed according to this philosophy, is a garish collection of severe geometric shapes set amidst what remains of old Paris or newer construction designed to look retro. The overall effect is dizzying. Only at night does Paris regain its dignity, becoming the City of Lights once more.

Life in Paris is much as it has always been, cafes along the boulevards are still popular. The food is still among the finest to be found. Wine is served with every meal and the nightlife is wild. Its local Dataweb is known for its seductive beauty. Throughout Europe, Paris has a reputation as a party town where sexual mores are very loose. While Paris is still romantic like no other city, Paris is also sensual, sexual and hedonistic. Anything goes in Paris after dark.

To a very real extent, Paris at night is a completely different city that Paris by day. Le Freaks come out at night. That is the name given to the inhabitants of the Old City of Paris. Unlike the decaying urban areas that surround other Zeniths, Paris' Old City is underground and its inhabitants hide from the light in the sewers, abandoned basements, miles of ductwork and the old Paris Metro. As darkness falls, they emerge to work in the less savory businesses that shun the light. Of course, it is often quite difficult to tell the difference between a habitué of Paris' nightside and a Freak.
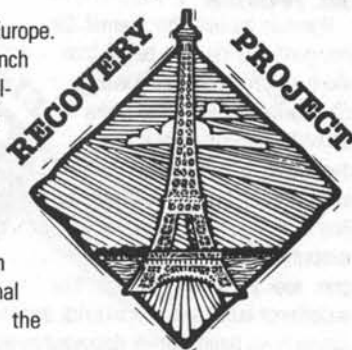
■ Rome

Rome is called The Eternal City but don't bet on that being true much longer. If ever there was a city ravaged by the Ecocollapse it is here. Built over three thousand years ago and continually inhabited, Rome is worn out. The antiquated roads, sewers and power grid are all falling apart. The majority of buildings built of brick and plaster have been heavily damaged by acid rain and the freak weather that came with **ROME** the disruption of the planetary ecology. The population, meanwhile, has continued to grow, defying the global trend toward population reduction.

Attempts at modern construction began late and never really affected the city as a whole. The ruins of what was to be the Vatican Zenith, destroyed in the A.I. Revolution of 2060, stand as mute testimony to Rome's failure to find peace with the modern age. In fact, when the Vatican was destroyed in that bloody but brief conflict, it was a major blow to both Italian national pride and to the Net itself, since the Vatican database Netnode was one of the finest repositories of arcane and esoteric data extant. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church was forced to abandon Rome as well, moving its capital to Warsaw, and reuniting with its lost brother, the Church of Poland, creating the Unified Catholic Church in 2076.

Only the small San Marino Zenith was successfully completed before Rome just gave up. Now, Rome slowly decays, but a shell of its ancient and medieval glory. Even it's glorious history, carved with skilled hands from rich marble and shaped in ancient concrete, is dissolving under the pitiless downpouring of industrial waste that lingers in the air over central Europe.

The whole of Rome is an Old City. Nowhere is there a sign of hope. The San Marino Zenith on the outskirts of the city is run by the Gaian government which has determined that, even though Rome can't be saved, its decline can and must be managed. SCC and SAC maintain a polite but dictatorial presence in Rome. The Roman people are sullen, resigned to their fate but still resentful. This makes Rome a very dangerous city, prone to the worst sorts of riots and violent crime.

No one who has a choice does business in Rome, unless it is very lucrative. This has left much of the economy to black marketeers, profiteers, con men and criminals. The civic government is notoriously corrupt, rocked by a constant succession of scandals. Conditions have proven ripe for both Ravagers and the Midnight Sun to make Rome their headquarters for European operations. The USSA, operating out of the San Marino Zenith, has responded with a heavy hand, only making matters worse.

Rome, then, is a cesspool. Corrupt. Polluted. Wracked by crime and violence. Even abandoned by God if you believe in such. If you're on the run, want to disappear and are desperate, Rome is the place. If you need to conduct an operation the Gaians wouldn't appreciate, set it up in Rome. If you need something, anything, and can't get it anywhere else, try Rome. In Europe, it doesn't get any worse than this. Chiao bella!
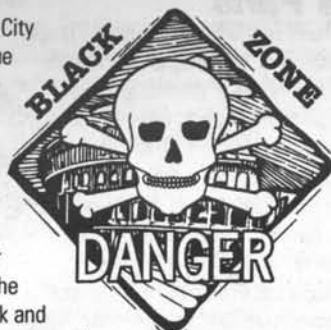
> **Game Notes**: This is a center for organized crime and fringe elements on Earth. Even the Charybdis pirates of the Pleiades come here to do their secret business in the Solar System. This is the place to use those *Streetwise*, *Intimidate*, and *Persuasion* skills. Also, Mektons aren't too common here (unless they're SAC mechs), so be ready to walk.

■ New York

New York got a serious raw deal two hundred years ago. When a group of South American terrorists popped a nuke under the World Trade Center in 1997, downtown Manhattan was rendered unhabitable by radiation, and most of the surrounding burbs were swamped in refugees for years. Soon, most businesses moved elsewhere and the city was nearly abandoned.
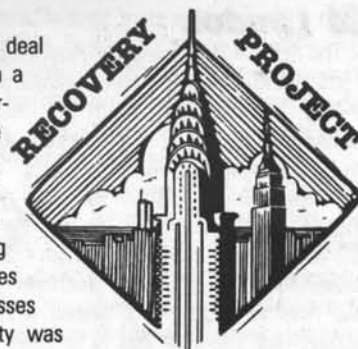
Then global warming looked to screw **NEW YORK** New York. The polar caps had started to melt, and the oceans started to rise. New York City was low laying land to begin with, and had no easy choke point where a sea barrier could be erected to halt the rising waters. So, New York City went for a swim. Most of the five burroughs are shallow seas, covered by eight feet of water. The same goes for Manhattan; but strangely, this inundation is what brought about the city's rebirth.

The novelty of owning an east coast Venice attracted some corporate bigwigs, and they began buying up the drowning real estate and moving their businesses into the upper floors of the empty downtown buildings. The radiation levels were safe again, and, God knows, the price was next to nothing. Soon, other corps joined in, and a skeleton population began a slow trek back to the Big Apple. Some New Yorkers were even there to greet them, having refused to leave their beloved burg. By 2085, things had gotten almost back to normal ... or as close as it was going to get under the circumstances.

Now, you can still hail a cab downtown. It will just happen to be some sort of watercraft. You can still shop on Fifth Avenue but window shopping is out, unless you're wearing SCUBA gear. Life in New York goes on but only from the third floor up. New York City's skyscrapers proved the key to her survival.

Long Island still remains largely above water and is home to New York's wealthy, along with Tuxedo Park, long a summer retreat. To house the millions made homeless by the bomb, the first arcologies, forerunners of today's Zenith's were built at the edge of the New York floodplain in the mid-21st Century. Westchester Zenith, north of Manhattan is the only real Zenith in the metro area. The Bayonne Zenith is entirely devoted to automated heavy industry; while up the Hudson River, the Westpoint Zenith, along with the Sandringham Zenith in England, is the premier SAC military academy.

New Yorkers still commute, from Long Island and the arcologies to Manhattan and the Bayonne Zenith. Hydrofoils and hover-Mechs are the preferred methods of personal transportation. The New York subway, pressurized and watertight, is still the mass transit choice. Substations are now connected to most major buildings' basements via newly constructed passageways. Along with the maze of underground access tunnels, sewers and abandoned buildings, underwater New York is a huge submerged Old City, haphazardly pressurized.

Above the waterline, construction continues. Some skyscrapers are now connected by a maze of aerial bridges and skyways. New construction rises from the rooftops of buildings otherwise nearly submerged. Most ambitious of all is the Central Park aquatic Zenith, now nearing completion. Already fifty percent inhabited, the CPZ, as its called, is a Zenith on stilts and the first of its kind. When finished, the CPZ will mark the rebirth of New York from the waters. It would also be the jewel in the crown of Earthworks if this Zenith is successfully constructed.

Los Angeles

BLACK ZONE

LOS ANGELES

Los Angeles has suffered almost as much as New York, and come out far worse for wear. L.A. was *the* major urban sprawl for the Southern California Free State during the 2000's. Even then, it was a smog-smothered urban waste-land run as much by the gangs as by the neo-fascist police force. Still, the city staggered on, using its legacy as an entertainment and financial center to keep its businesses going. The megacorporations kept the city resuscitated through most of the 21st century, and it hardly noticed the Unification Wars, since the EEG was prepared to step in and help the city through the transition to a better world. Mother Nature had other ideas.

The Big One showed up to party New Years Eve, 2099. Measuring 9.7 on the Richter Scale, with its epicenter in the San Gabriel Mountains east of Los Angeles, it ripped through the city like a scythe. Nothing survived intact. When it was over a minute later, Los Angeles was a smoking ruin. San Diego was heavily damaged, and as far north as San Francisco older buildings collapsed. And the fun had only begun.

The main aftershock was a 7.4 trembler off Long Beach. The ensuing tidal wave smashed into coastal areas, sinking ships, wrecking port facilities and creating an ecological disaster as the fully loaded supertanker, *Aramaco Star*, burst like a greasy balloon, spilling millions of gallons of thick crude oil along the devastated coast.

Used to earthquakes, though not of this magnitude, California authorities swung into action, tending to the survivors and beginning the massive cleanup effort. That all came to a dead halt after a week when forest rangers in the San Gabriel Mountains reported the discovery of a two mile long volcanic fissure, opened by the tremendous quake. With molten lava pouring out of a baby volcano in Los Angeles' backyard, rebuilding just didn't seem worth the effort.

That's how it began. Some people worked to rebuild Los Angeles anyway but no concentrated effort could be organized. Instead, San Diego, which had already absorbed a great deal of L.A.'s business and popularity, was rebuilt and survivors moved there or on to points north and east. Today, Los Angeles is a polluted, heavy metal wasteland, home to outlaw biker gangs, post-apocalyptic punks, Ravagers, the Midnight Sun, and the occasional Mecha-nomad. The population of Los Angeles is either on the run, criminal, insane or so down and out that they have nowhere else to go. Los Angeles is worse than an Old City—its an Old City shot straight to hell.

The Gaian authorities would like to do something about Los Angeles but with resources already stretched to support global reclamation, interplanetary colonization and interstellar exploration, one sucking wound of a city can wait. The USSA has quarantined Los Angeles so that its foulness doesn't spread. Heavy combat Mektons guard an electronic perimeter around Los Angeles, supported by light recon Mektons, air and naval units. (Ironically, most Mecha-nomads savage or steal Mektons from the surrounding SAC bases, so the SAC is creating their own worst enemies with their very presence.) Anyone can enter the perimeter but no one gets out alive. Not that this is much of a problem, Los Angeles eats its young—literally, if you believe the media accounts of cannibal street gangs, giant cockroaches and mutant sewer rats. The City of Angels has become the City of Fallen Angels.

Tokyo

RECOVERY PROJECT

TOKYO

Japan has struggled to balance domination by corporate interests and the interests of its people for three centuries. The zaibat-su tradition of strict corporate culture which formed the model for the 21st century Megacorporations was born here and exported to the rest of the world. But the Japanese also kept their eyes open, and they never let go of their loyalty to their nation and their emperor, even when he was just a figure-head. So when the Unification Wars swept the megacorporations into space, Japan was ready to accept a new agenda and take its place in the EEG. Tokyo was to become the home for this transition—and it did, but not exactly as was initially planned.

Tokyo has long been known for two things: high technology and earthquakes. Both of these have determined its current shape. The Millennial Quake of 2099 devastated both sides of the Pacific, and Tokyo was not spared. The damage was extensive, but as rebuilding was about to commence, it was discovered that an up thrust of the earth's crust had formed an enormous stable Geofront exactly beneath what was left of Tokyo. Essentially a tremendous underground cavern, the Geofront proved sufficiently stable to prompt an outrageous, but ultimately successful, plan. The city of Tokyo would be rebuilt inside the Geofront. While initial progress was slowed by the need to create adequate means of entrance and exit, the new subterranean city was completed by 2160.

Tokyo is now the most visually spectacular city on Earth. Entering the Geofront, the blackness of the entry tunnels gives way to the firefly brilliance and wispy glow of millions of lighted windows, softly revealing the immensity of the Geofront. Towering buildings rise from the cavern floor and astonishingly, equally enormous buildings hang from the cavern roof above. Amidst these man-made stalactites and stalagmites run ribbons of highway along which hum countless electric cars. Rising through the air, elevated highways connecting the buildings rising from the floor with those descending from above create a gossamer tangle of dura-concrete reminiscent of a vast spider web. Luckily, all vehicles are equipped with autolocators and computer navigation systems or it would be all too easy to become lost. By necessity, Tokyo remains the center of high technology on Earth and an sterling example of its application.

Entrance to the Geofront is via one of 22 tunnels. High speed rail links and tremendous multi-deck 16 lane highways connect the subterranean city with the world above. On the surface, each tunnel connects to a terminal building which, in turn, interfaces with the Honshu transportation grid via the Tokyo Circumferential Beltway. Tokyo does not have either a spaceport or a seaport. Rather, high speed rail connects Tokyo with the Osaka Cosmodrome and Yokohama harbor. The entire Osaka/Tokyo/Yokohama corridor is one megacity. Dilapidated and dangerous Old Cities stretch from the Osaka Zenith to the outskirts of Tokyo, then on the other side of Tokyo to the Yokohama Zenith.

Above ground Tokyo is park land, broken only by the terminal buildings, the Emperor's Palace and Nippon Historic Trust buildings. The Historic Trust preserves a number of shrines and monuments from Old Tokyo. Several rebuilt samurai castles are also maintained, giving the park an otherworldly, timeless, feel. Close by, Mt. Fuji completes the picture of restored natural beauty.
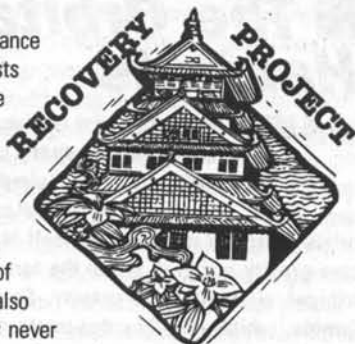
■ The Orbital Habitats

"The new habitat of humanity" was the SCC description of the first space colonies assembled between Earth and Luna. A simple, elegant, and old concept, a spinner is a central core with one or more toroids rotating around it. The core itself is counter-rotated to maintain zero-gravity inside it, while the toroid is rotated to provide centrifugal simulation of gravity. Some spinners have multiple toroids, which may counter-rotate on their own, canceling the need to rotate the core.

A typical spinner core is 1-2 kilometers across, and sometimes as long as 10 kilometers (the High Five spinner has a 12-kilometer length to support its six toroids). The core itself serves as spacedock, cargo storage, industrial manufacturing site, and control center. Here, zero or micro-gravity is essential, particularly for zero-gee industrial purposes. the core itself seems to remain stable in space while the toroids rotate around it; this is necessary for any margin of safety when landing and launching spacecraft. Not even spacefighters are agile enough to make a safe landing in a rotating bay; only Mektons are that quick.

The toroids themselves are over seven kilometers in radius, with a circumference of about 184 kilometers. Four hundred meters thick, they are big enough to house teeming masses of humanity on the "ground" while maintaining almost 200 meters of air space above. This air space is dual-purpose; not only is it necessary for efficient air circulation, but it also makes flying space for the hoverfan cars and transports that are used for cargo and travel. There are elevators down the spokes to connect toroid and core, but most inhabitants take fan cars straight up the largely-open spoke when they want to go to the core. When a spinner has multiple toroids, this is the fastest way to go from one toroid to another. Each toroid is a city, with industry, residential, office, and recreational space— a complete artificial habitat, free from pollution and disease. Sunlight pours through windows on the "sky" inner surface of the toroid; this also provides heat and solar power (spinners in the deeps of space have to make their own light and power). These windows are polarized to provide blue sky color during the day period and a starry sky during the night period. Each ring can house and support up to 3 million people.

The "spinnerites" (spinner inhabitants) work in the industries that crowd the spinner's core, taking in raw materials from their area of space and churning out processed material for more spinners, Mektons, spaceships, and goods to be used planet-side. This orbital factory aspect of spinners was designed in from the beginning, and proved vital to the next development in spinner evolution.

The Expansionists built the first spinner/starship, *the Longrider*. The main modification to the *Longrider's* design is the addition of a huge Shunt drive running the length of the core and a fusion thrust maneuver drive to move the colony outside of the local gravity well. While several such "colony spinners" were constructed and used in the early colonization of the Pleiades, smaller Shunt systems have since made smaller transports more practical.

■ Spinners in Earthspace

The first Spinner ever built was the Crystal Palace, put up by the European Space Agency back in 2011. In the following twenty years, several of the cylindrical colonies (built as large, hollow, spinning cylinders instead of a series of toroids) were built at the La Grange points. These were the early staging points for the Lunar facilities and the Mars colonies, as well as providing a refuge for a small percentage of humani-

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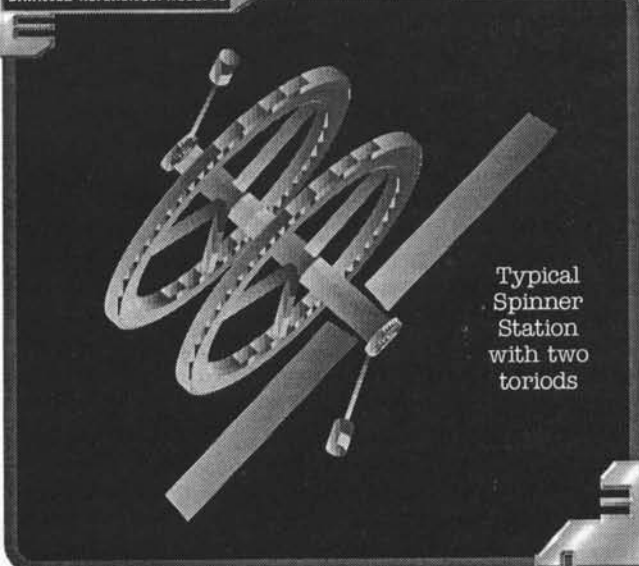
Typical Spinner Station with two toriods

ty from the declining world below them. They were also the model for the later colonies built by the SCC after the Unification War. Unfortunately, the concept of moving humanity into space and onto these colonies met with mixed success, driving the Expansionists to try the Snowball to speed the terraforming of Mars, and, later, to build the *Longrider*.

Throughout the Sol System, there are now some fifty Spinners. Most are parked in Earth or Lunar orbit, though a growing number are in Mars orbit. There is at least one Spinner in orbit around each of the planets out to Saturn. Several Spinners in close proximity are known as a Shoal, though this term can also refer to areas containing large concentrations of space junk. Construction of Spinners is ongoing throughout the solar system. Because they are independent of any planetary body, creating no environmental impact, the USSA's Gaian government is particularly fond of Spinners.

Johnson Space Platform in geosynchronous Earth Orbit was one of the the first orbital stations constructed. Expanded and regularly refurbished, it is still in operation, serving as·Earth's space traffic control center. All orbital, transorbital, interplanetary and interstellar flights arriving and departing the Earth must be cleared by Johnson Station or be marked for intercept and potential termination.

Circum Luna in Lunar orbit performs a similar function for all Lunar flights. However, rather than orbiting Luna's equator, Circum Luna orbits Luna along the boundary between the day and night sides of the moon. Both Circum Luna and Johnson Platform serve as failsafes for each other. Each is capable of assuming the other's responsibilities as well as its own.

Darksyde is perhaps the most famous Spinner in Lunar orbit, even though few have visited the station. Devoted to military research and development, including long range reconnaissance of the entire Sol System, Darksyde is off limits to all but SCC and SAC personnel. Access to the space surrounding Darksyde is restricted. The station itself is equipped with the latest in advanced stealth technology, making it virtually impossible to locate without precise coordinates.

In stark contrast is High Five, built at Earth's L-5 point. High Five is an Earth-like showplace designed in 2050 to demonstrate that living in hard vacuum could be safe and fun. Designed to impress tourists from Earth, the station is a huge pleasure complex with six rings. Everything goes on High Five. The USSA continues to sponsor cut rate tour packages to High Five to keep the USSA's Earthbound citizens enthusiastic about space colonization.

■ *Luna*

L una, more commonly called The Moon, is an airless ball of rock without any valuable mineral resources save those deposited by thousands of meteorites that have impacted the lunar surface. Proximity to Earth is Luna's greatest advantage. The ESA and Nasa populated Luna with small mining and scientific colonies as early as the 2000's, the Tycho and Copernicus bases being the most notable. When the USSA government determined that Earth's biosphere could not be repaired so long as Earth's teeming masses continued to stress the environment, they looked first to Luna. Plans were made to radically expand the existing colonies and mining facilities.

But the initial plan to relocate Earth's billions off-planet proved unworkable in the short run and much of the work was curtailed. Still, substantial progress was made in relocating Earth's industrial base to Luna, thereby reducing the impact of industrial pollution on Earth's environment. Today, nearly a 300 million people call "The Moon" home and Luna is the industrial heart of the Sol System. Of course, with few resources of its own, Luna must import the raw materials to fuel its industries. Alloys from Mercury used to produce top-of-the-line Meks, long chain polymers from Venus, industrial metals from Mars, ice and carbonites from the Belt and chemical cargoes from Jupiter and Saturn all find their way to Luna to be processed into usable products. All this cargo traffic, via transport or mass driven drop-shots, has demanded sophisticated administrative
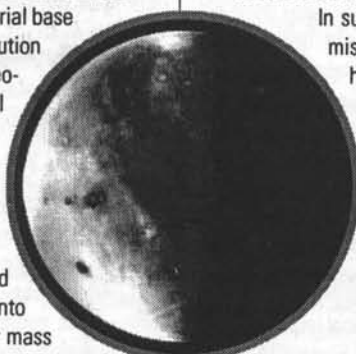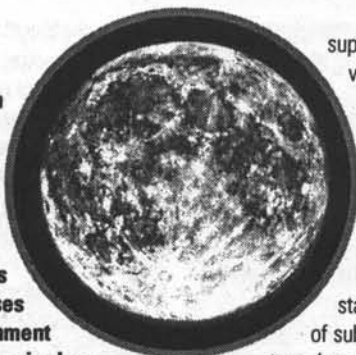
support. The Gaian-controlled government in cooperation with practically every major corporation has given Luna an infrastructure second only to that found in the USSA government dome in Sydney. In addition to government and corporate installations, Luna is also home to the largest SAC base in the Sol System.

With no atmosphere, all facilities on Luna must be pressurized. Early freestanding surface habitats were long ago abandoned, though many still exist in various states of repair, to be replaced by an ever expanding series of subsurface excavations. The culmination of Lunar architecture, however, has been the domed craters. Diamond laminate domes extending from crater walls provide a pressurized environment with a sense of space otherwise lacking in the subsurface habitats. With living spaces carved out of the crater walls and a promenade of shops and stores circling the interior base of the crater twice or three times around, the center of most domed craters have been reserved for park-like public areas.

In such a pressurized environment, there is little room for misadventure. Consequently, law enforcement on Luna is heavy and harsh. While such extreme measures are chiefly confined to Luna, they have given Gaians an undeserved reputation for dictatorial high-handedness.

■ *Mars*

M ars. The Red Planet. It has always held a fascination for humanity. For years it was believed there was life on Mars. Now, there is. Thriving colonies on Mars make it the most productive and populated Earth colony after Luna. Blessed with a wealth of mineral resources, Mars is also quite prosperous. Known for mining operations, Mars is increasingly a producer of manufactured goods as well.

Chryse and Isidis were the first two colonies established in the 2020's and became the source of severe competition between the ESA and NASA as each struggled to prove they could develop their colony faster. The Domed Cities of Ursa Planetia were the first large-scale metropolises established in 2125 and remain the largest thanks to the orbital elevator connecting them with Diemos, one of the asteroid-sized moons of Mars. It was towed into a geosynch orbit and linked to the cities below by a super-strong cable. Now a huge SAC Naval shipyards resides there and is reinforcing itself since the beginning of hostilities. Ursa Planetia is also the capital of Mars. Other cities are built into the walls of the Rift Valleys and the bottom of the four kilometer deep Hellas Basin.

Life on Mars reflects the changing economy. Miners have always been a rough bunch, hardened by their dirty, often dangerous occupation. They gave Mars its reputation for no-nonsense hardheadedness. However, with an increasingly large segment of the population no longer working the mines, Mars has smoothed the rough edges. Life is still tough, but it has become quite civilized in the Domed Cities. In each city, large areas are set aside as parks with many trees. This is not a wasteful extravagance as these trees provide valuable oxygen. Mars' atmosphere is tainted and too thin to be breathable. There is an ongoing effort to terraform Mars at least to the point of creating a breathable atmosphere but that effort has been slowed to a crawl by radical elements within the USSA government that would "preserve" Mars. Martians are far less philosophical about such matters that the Gaians of Earth. Life in a pressurized dome will do that to you. While not abandoning the Gaian philosophy, the

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DATAWEB REFERENCE | **CAPT. CARTER JONES**

Administrator of Armstrong City, Luna

Description: 1.81m, 100kg, 38 years old, black hair cut in a military flat-top style, he wears corporate suits in the office, but his old USSA uniform for formal situations.

Quote: "Every problem has a solution."

Notes: Jones has a long history as an officer in the USSA Military. Decorated for bravery during police and anti-piracy actions, he has a strong following in the armed forces. He retired after an injury put him on his back for a year. Immediately after recovering, he found he loved politics. He is a native of Armstrong City, returned there to start his second career.

His manner is laid back and relaxed, even during crisis situations. Jones is loved by the whole population of the city. Despite this adulation, he has never publicly admitted to any political ambitions. He is known to be good friends with Maria Chang, General Administrator of Bradbury City, Mars. They frequently visit each other and even have shared administrative staff over the years.

The Gaians have been making public suggestions that Jones should think about applying his talents on a larger scale. They have offered him choice positions on Earth, which he has always turned down. The political rumor mill says that the Gaian leadership wants him out of the way because of his opposition to the Anti-Confederation stance which is being promoted by the USSA.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 7, BODY 6, REF 6, Expert: City administration +8. Datalink, Nanobodies, Muscular/Skeletal Enhancement (to repair damage suffered in battle), Bioarm x1 (this is a secret and contains a compartment which houses a pistol).

Martians are quite flexible in their approach to ecological issues.

There is something almost hypnotic about the Red Planet. Out in the Red Deserts there is an alien beauty and a feeling not unlike being watched. Terrans may laugh, but more than a few Martians believe Mars is haunted. There is a sense that this planet was once inhabited and that something remains of those earlier Martians, though no such evidence has been revealed to the public, if it exists.

■ *The Asteroid Belt*

The Asteroid Belt of the Sol System turned out to be not quite the goldmine everyone thought it might be. While rich in ice and carbonites, it lacks more fantastic wealth. Still, in space, water is a precious commodity and carbonates are the key to establishing and sustaining Earth-type ecosystems. So while not necessarily glamorous, the Belt has proven productive all the same.

Originally a NASA mining outpost, the Ceres Spinner is now the administrative center of the Belt. Built using the body of the largest asteroid Ceres as the central hub of a gigantic spinner, the resulting Ceres Spinner is a one-of-a-kind locale and without doubt the largest spinner ever constructed. The Cerian population lives and works in the habitat rings, while the asteroid hub has been transformed into a massive SAC base and Mech construction, repair and supply point.

Throughout the asteroid belt are scattered hidden SAC bases, remote sensor arrays, missile batteries, smart bombs and gun emplacements. The Belt represents the final defensive line in the Sol System and a for-

midable challenge to any would be attackers. Throughout the Belt, marshal law is in effect. All Belters understand this and behave accordingly, giving them a not undeserved reputation for militarism and a can-do attitude. Gaian patriotism is not just a slogan in the Belt; its a way of life.

However, not everyone in the Belt belongs to SAC or otherwise works for the Gaian government. Just as many Belters work as ice or carbonite harvesters, either independently or for some corporate concern. Most harvesters call Freefall home. Constructed out of thirty six moderate sized asteroids linked by two mile long struts and set in a geodesic pattern, Freefall uses clear diamond laminate panes to enclose a pressurized bubble of air. Great airlocks are located at the upper and lower axes of Freefall. Work areas dominate the asteroids, while living quarters stretch out along the struts. The great central atrium, originally intended to be crisscrossed by a latticework that would accommodate more living and work areas, has grown up haphazardly and is now derisively known as Vagabond City, a zero-G slum pieced together from odds and ends. The word is, if you want it, you can find it in Vagabond City.

Despite the best efforts of Freefall's nominal government Vagabond City encompasses fully half of Freefall's atrium and continues to grow. The anarchic Vagabonds contrast sharply with the otherwise solid Belt citizens of Freefall's superstructure. Still, somehow, the two societies manage to get along and even prosper.
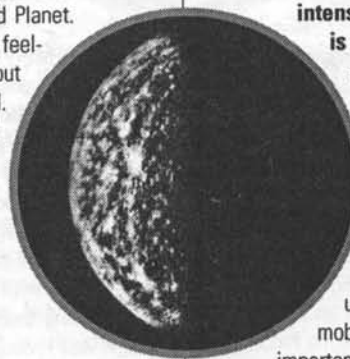
■ *Mercury*

All human activity on Mercury is tied into mining in one way or another. Either you mine or you support mining operations. Being the closest planet to the sun, Mercury is continually bombarded with not only heat but high intensity solar radiation. As the planet rotates, the crust is baked then frozen in a fashion unique in all the solar system. The result is a wealth of minerals, rare earths and chemicals found practically nowhere else. Mining operations take advantage of this geological wonderland.

In twelve gigantic mobile mining stations, known as the Roller Cities, miners scoop up the minerals there for the taking. The size of arcologies, the Roller Cities get their name from the immense spiked rollers they use to lumber over Mercury's blasted landscape. Being mobile lets you go where the mineral action is and just as importantly, it lets you get out of the sun and into the shadow zone between the day and night sides of the planet. Staying too long dayside is just not a good idea.

Life in the Roller Cities is split. In the bowels of these mobile arcologies are the immense mining machines. This is the realm of the Grinders, as the miners style themselves. Topside are the operations and support areas. Grinders tend to look on Topsiders as soft, while Topsiders see the Grinders as dirty muscleheads. Everyone comes together, however, to support the City's Rollersphere team. An incredibly violent game played in light sportbikes with inline wheels, each Roller City sponsors a Rollersphere team and intercity competition gives the Hotheads, as natives of Mercury are called, something to talk about other than the solar wind.

While life on Mercury has never been luxurious, it is far from being a hellhole, at least not anymore. Deepcore is the name for mining operations that seed areas of the surface with specific minerals. After seeding, miners let Mercury do its thing, coming by later to pick up newly formed composite materials. What's more, Deepcore mining lets individuals and small con-

cerns outside the Roller Cities get in on the lucrative action. All you need is a 35 ton Earth-auger bit capable of drilling a Deepcore site, the minerals to seed it with and some kind of platform to carry you, your drill, the minerals and your money. Of course, Corejumpers may have other ideas.


DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

Venus

The surface temperature averages nine hundred degrees. Sixty atmospheres of pressure threaten to crush anything not baked. Lightening storms slash yellow-green clouds that rain sulfuric acid. Constant hurricane force winds lash the planet. Welcome to Venus. In all the known universe, no planet is as deadly or as hostile. Ninety minutes is the longest time any probe has survived on the surface. Yet amazingly, Venus supports life.

Most of Venus' atmosphere is made up of carbon dioxide with just enough other chemicals and elements thrown in to create those frightening clouds of pure acid. Ironically, it was precisely this deadly chemical stew that first attracted human colonists to Venus. Within the corrosive maelstrom that passes for the Venusian atmosphere certain long chain polymers exist that can be found nowhere else. While of immense utility, the trouble is wresting them from the planet's hellish grip.

Detailed surveys of the planet, undertaken to determine if atmosphere skimming, like that practiced in the atmospheres of Jupiter and Saturn, would be workable on Venus to recover long chain polymers, revealed a belt of oxygen in breathable concentrations approximately fifty miles up in the Venusian atmosphere. Sandwiched between the hellish lower atmosphere and a frigid ammonia and methane upper atmosphere, the Oxygen Belt was scoured fairly clean of more harmful gases by Venus' unique coreolis effect and titanic convection currents from below. Though whipped by near hurricane force winds, the Oxygen Belt was the only area of Venus that held out even the faintest hope of supporting human life. The plan that was subsequently developed in a rare show of cooperation between Gaian and Expansionist factions was to use atmosphere
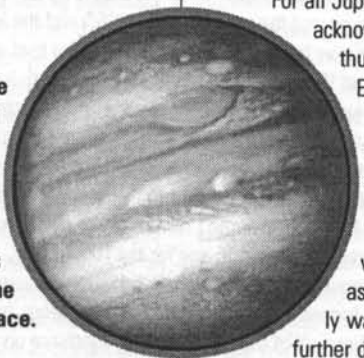
braking saucer shaped ships to enter the Oxygen Belt and seed it with quantities of water vapor and tailored plants that could form the basis of a free fall ecology.

The first two such missions went off without a hitch and the crews reported that even with empty storage tanks, the multi-ton saucer ships resisted the strong winds of the upper atmosphere, slowly drifting on the strong air currents without beginning a fatal descent into the lower atmosphere. The implications were obvious. Crews were dispatched to man the now empty saucer ships full time, converting empty tanks to living quarters. Four newer, more advanced ships, designed not only to seed the Oxygen Belt but to provide homes for thousands of permanent residents, were soon on their way. Today, seven Drift Cities exist in the Oxygen Belt of Venus. The newest, the *Aphrodite*, is the size of an arcology and is the airborne capital of Venus.

Trans-Jovian Space

Beyond the Belt, things get sparse. While Jupiter's moons offer a host of opportunities, Earth's Gaian government has kept the Jovian system pretty much a cosmic wilderness. A few gas skimming operations are licensed to work in close orbit from the Galileo Spinner but nothing much beyond that. Of course, this hasn't stopped rogue miners operating from hidden bases in the Trojan asteroid fields that share Jupiter's orbit, but SAC sharply limits their activities.

For all Jupiter's majesty, however, it is Saturn that is universally acknowledged as the show-piece of the Sol System. It was thus with undisguised horror that the Gaians saw the Expansionists sponsor the placement of habitats in Saturn's rings! Three such Ring Cities were built before the Gaians managed to stop the Expansionists. While initially tempted to dismantle these blights on the pristine beauty of the rings, the Gaians reluctantly came to the conclusion that it would be as harmful to the rings to remove the cities as to leave them be. Thus, the Ring Cities survive, closely watched by SAC and the SCC to insure they cause no further damage to the system but otherwise ignored. Despite this official policy of benign neglect, the Ring Cities have prospered.

Everyone agrees that Saturn is beautiful. As long as cities in the rings exist, it makes no sense to waste the view. In this way, the Ring Cities have become the Gaians' guilty pleasure. While righteously condemning the very existence of the cities, the Gaians nonetheless have made them a major tourist destination, creating a thriving economy in the process. Everyone wants a Saturn vacation and wealthy Gaians have even made Saturn a favorite honeymoon destination. But the Ring Cities are known for the racy as well as the romantic. Hustlers, smugglers and other shady types attracted by tourist wealth have flocked to the system, offering all manner of services and entertainments unobtainable, or illegal, elsewhere. Gaming casinos do a booming business in all three cities and the "sexy robot" look, first adopted by the casinos, is now the fashion throughout the Ring Cities.

Titan, rumored to support indigenous lifeforms, has been quarantined.

Leaving Saturn's gravity well, the lonely depths of interstellar space beckon. Neptune and Uranus are even more untouched than Jupiter. Pluto is home to a SAC base. There is a cosmic observatory and research station on Charon. Then, only the blackness of space.

I've been in worse places. Just not as a habit.

Firelight threw thirty foot shadows against a framework of rubble and girders as we entered the Ravager stronghold. I noticed several loiterers eyeing my EVA jacket; I leaned one hand on my pistol and matched them stare for stare. Campbell didn't even look.

Ravager Leader Grey Redmond wasn't what I expected (for one thing, *he* was female). She was hunkered down in front of the fire as we walked up. She greeted Camp with a familiar nod, then turned her amber gaze on me.

"Like the jacket," she commented idly. "So do the boys." she added, gesturing to the lurking figures. "Glad they do." I replied. "Of course, they'll have to take the clip of G-slugs that goes with it." She smiled at that, then gestured at me to join her by the fire.

"I'll get to the point." she began. "We survive 'cause the USSA is too busy thuggin' the colonies to notice us. But 'bout a month ago, we cracked the secure dataweb archive of a secret government faction called the 'Circle'.

"Filed right after a copy of the plan you found at North, this Circle had another little plan. For us "dissidents." She spat the word out. Then; "So what do you and your ODF friends want, Frosty?"

"We want to set up a meeting." I replied. "In private; in space. You, the Rangers, the Jägers, maybe the Charybdis. All we want is a safe place."

"What do you get outta this?"

"We get to go back on walkabout without getting get shot at. People stop dying for someone elses' agenda. You get help to break this Circle before they get you."

She looked thoughtful. "Camp says you're ok; I trust his instincts." She stood up suddenly, her decision made.

"You got a deal." she grinned.

■ *The Outsiders*

A Burning hot sun hovers over the ruins of a once rich business district. A single human figure walks down the center of an empty street. At the edges of vision, shadows furtively follow the figure.
—Opening credits from the popular vid series "The Slacker"

The Earth isn't all bureaucratic dictatorships, ecological disasters, religious nutcases and impending interstellar war. It also has a dark side. Most refer to it as "The Outside." Most Slackers get dead in the first hundred hours after the gates shut behind them. Vulture gangs tend to lurk near city gates for weaklings to cannibalize. Once you are past them, you might be able to join a scavenger flock picking over the bones of a long dead city. Be careful though, they tend to get violent about intruders on their territories. The average life span of a fat and contented scavenger is about 18 months. Tainted food, treacherous companions, decaying buildings, uncounted diseases and no medical care make life nasty, brutish and short.

The Ravagers are the toughest survivors in the old cities. The original Ravagers were mostly the eco-criminals, terrorists and military from the losing side of the Unification War. Later, many Slackers and others who just weren't comfortable with the limitations of life in the USSA drifted out into the Old Cities. They are nomadic, roaming what remains of the open wilderness of the Earth. Ravager clans tend to have frequent "rumbles" with each other, so it helps to have no real desire to live. They also have control over the important resources in the Outside: untainted food, clean water, medical supplies and weapons. They also get access to a surprising amount of illegal cyberware, probably through the Charybdis smugglers from the Pleiades, making them even deadlier.

If you have a death wish that even the Ravager's can't deal with, you could always join the Midnight Sun. They are a religious cult that believes in killing themselves, but only after taking as many people as they can with them. Midnight Sun holds it's black masses at midnight, where grisly ritual suicides are the main event. Of course you have to be "baptized" into the cult first. This usually involves being sprayed with the blood of a suicide and taking an oath to bring death on humanity.

Vagabonds are another group on the prowl for bodies. They are the remaining asteroid belt miners that refused to accept the control of the USSA and the SAC. When they show up to trade raw materials for live food, you may have a chance to show them that you can pilot a shuttle or a Mekton, or repair a fusion plant. Most Vagabonds are Slackers from Mars, Jupiter or Saturn, who managed to steal a spaceship and not get blown into tiny shrapnel by the USSA system defense ships.

Life in the Belt isn't all that bad. Your spaceship bunk may remind you of the claustrophobic room you left behind in the City. Since everything has to be monitored, you can expect to be charged for every breath, every drink of water, every visit to the sanitary facilities, in short: everything. Everything is paid by cash or work, no credit. If you don't have cash or can't work, you can expect a visit to the nearest air lock, with your spacesuit pawned to pay for the trip.

The largest collection of Vagabonds is on an asteroid called FreeFall City. A maze like warren of tunnels, it was a former nickel mine that has long since been abandoned. FreeFall holds about 10,000 people at any one time, all of them Vagabonds. There are no spaceports, you just take your ship over, sink an anchor line into the surface and walk to the nearest airlock. Once you have negotiated the entry fee, you can enter into the least pleasant human habitation in the Solar System. You can buy almost anything in FreeFall City, but make sure to save some pocket change to buy air when you run out.

The Charybdis Guild is starting to make appearances on Earth, usually in the ruins of the cities. Pirates are always ready to hire fresh meat to take with them back to the Cluster. Because manpower is short all over the Pleiades, you have a pretty good chance at making a living almost as good as in the USSA. Of course you had better have pretty spectacular skills in something they're interested in, because they're pretty picky. You will have to take a shower before they let you on their ships; they don't like Earth diseases, and will put anyone contaminated into their thrusters' fusion stream to be vaporized.

It's not as though life in the Zeniths was all that great. Boxed up like a factory chicken, doing someone else's bidding until you are recycled into fertilizer. No wonder so many people become Slackers. All of these groups have a sneering disdain for the soft city dwellers—understandable after living in the eco-nightmare wilderness of Earth for a few months.

■ *Hooking Up with the Ravagers*

Most newbie Slackers try to seek out the closest Ravager's clan. Ravagers are all interested in the new skills and information that a newbie Slacker can bring. If you make it to their encampment with no terminal diseases, crippling injuries or disabling psychological problems, you have passed the first test. The second test is to get past the guards around the camp's edge. They love finding a vulture or scavenger for target practice.

GREY REDMOND

Current leader of the Ravager's Council

Description: 1.67m, 58kg, 25 years old, short black hair with blue, green and red stripes, deeply set brown eyes that seem to have some pain behind them, typically skinny build of a Ravager, multi colored tattoos on face.

Quote: "Yeah, well this is what I think (sound of gunshot)"

Notes: Grey is the third leader of the Council in the last three years. She got to her position by killing her predecessor in the ritual combat. Grey also had the clan strength to keep herself in power for almost a full year, much better than average. She is tough, but has a wry sense of humor. Her clan has managed to contain most of the worst of the Ravager's predation in the Los Angeles area, in return for better trading privileges. Grey's clan has done very well with her leading the council. They are getting the best pick of the trade goods and locations, and the best weapons for their protection. (At least those weapons which get on the black market.) The last attempt on her life was only a month ago. She doesn't talk about it, but the rumors say that she was targeted by one of her trusted advisors. This would explain the gruesome executions of some of her clan members.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 7, EMP 5, BOD 7, REF 9, TECH 7, Survival +8, Oratory +5, Tactics +6, Rifle +7, Knife Fighting +9. Datalink, Cyberoptic, Skinweave, Cyberclaws, +2 Boosterware

Once you get into the camp, try showing off as soon as possible. The first skills you will need to demonstrate are hand to hand combat (when they find you), and resistance to torture (after they capture you). Of course you could just announce that you are a Webwriter, a mechanic or some other very useful skill. It probably won't stop the Ravagers from beating you up, but they won't kill you right away if you claim to have a skill to trade for your worthless life. After some nominal first aid has prevented major scarring or disabling infections, you can call yourself a Ravager.

Ravager clans have long somewhat twisted histories. Make sure to ask your clan for the official version before someone else lies to you. Since they often descended from the losing military and paramilitary groups of the Unification Wars, many will have a military or guerrilla organization. Some them have sworn to destroy the USSA and kill all the Gaians for leaving them outside to die, others simply want to be left alone to pursue their own destiny. Make sure to take any oath that your Clan requires, before their paranoia gets the better of them.

The tech available to the Clans varies tremendously. Some have considerable hi-tech gear, including cybernetics and Dataweb transmission nodes. They will only share this tech with you when you've proven yourself useful, then the resources you get are proportionate to your contribution to the Clan. Note that, while some may have advanced medical techniques, they are usually rather direct in their application (and anesthetics are a luxury out here). Being granted the boon of a cybernetic implant from a Clan can be both flattering and frightening. In fact, in some Clans, receiving an implant such as skin armor or a battle limb is a ritual representing full membership in the Clan's warrior class. Naturally, suffering the pain of the application without screaming is part of the ritual ...

Some Clans have old mektons or antiquated tanks and airplanes for travel and combat. You will frequently raid the Old Cities for hidden weapons caches, planted before and during the Unification Wars. Other jobs include protecting the scattered farming villages, fighting off scavengers during trade sessions with Zeniths, and attacking other Ravager Clans.

Ravager Mektons are lightly armored, if any armor is available. They fight with projectile cannons and some missiles for weapons. The primary fuel for these military units is alcohol distilled from the available plant life. You will probably end up diluting the fuel and drinking it, so you won't remember the life you left behind in the city.

Of course, the clans trade with local Zeniths and the Charybdis smugglers and blackmarketeers for specialized foods and materials—including hi tech materials like high powered ammunition and cyberware. Despite the self sufficiency of the Cities, some things cannot be found, grown or manufactured inside cement and steel walls. Ravagers found farm villages and ranches Outside, that the Gaians long since wrote off as lost. These pay the Ravager Clans with fresh food and hand made goods for protection from scavengers, other Ravager Clans and any predatory group. Your clan takes these goods and trades the Zeniths for high octane fuel, medical supplies and other small comfort items.

The current heavyweight Ravager Clans include The Seventh (A militaristic group of pirates and nomads, marked by the bright red "7" scar on member's arms), The Nationals (Formed from the remnants of the old US National Guard, Nationals seem to have access to just about all of the old garrisons and guard posts. They are about as high tech as you can get in the Ravager Clans), Eagle's Claw (who claim to be the last remains of the North American aboriginal tribes people. They protect Clan ranches, farms and various sacred places), and Black Flag (Suicide warriors who are the most frightening and vicious in the Outside. Even the Seventh avoids them when possible.)

The Ravagers Council was set up about five years after the first Zenith closed it's gates, designed to organize the destruction of the USSA and the Gaians. Since then, it has become the main forum for cooperation between the Clans, mediating territory disputes and trade agreements. If you are brave, you can sneak up and listen in on a "Jamboree" as they call it. You will see chieftains from most of the large clans. For the most part they argue loudly with each other, drink huge quantities of diluted Mekton alcohol fuel, and eat the richest foods from the Zeniths.

Leadership of the Council is determined by who has the most powerful clan. Currently the position is held by Grey Redmond of the Nationals Clan. She got to her place by traditional means: success in ritual combat and a Clan powerful enough to enforce her will.

■ *The Midnight Sun*

In the year 2117, a masked man calling himself "Nemyss Blaavat Makra" made numerous public appearances. He predicted that the solar eclipses of the year 2118 would be the herald of a new dark age for humanity. Death, destruction, moral decay were his key points. On the first full solar eclipse of 2118, suicide bombers appeared in every city that the eclipse touched. Almost 3000 people died in under twenty minutes. Public panic ensued, traffic arteries clogged with terrified people, riots consumed several cities. For the first time in nearly three decades, the USSA sent the military into the cities to re-instate calm. Later that day, the Nemyss made an appearance on a pirated Agent channel, declaring that the Midnight Sun had shone for the first time.

Once peace returned to the Earth, the USSA authorities quickly checked all the visual records of the attacks. Every one was committed by a man or woman with a black sun tattoo on his or her forehead.

The remaining eclipses that year were also marked by suicide bombers. Fortunately, many were caught before the explosions went off. The authorities knew to look for the Midnight Sun tattoo, and arrested anyone wearing one on sight. Every person arrested bearing the tattoo died within five minutes of being captured. A systemic poison shut down their nervous systems, and nature of the poison has still not been discovered.

The Midnight Sun recruits actively from the millions of people left outside in the dying wastelands surrounding cities: slackers, vandals, scavengers and occasionally Ravagers. Ravagers confirm that the Midnight Sun is looking for anyone who wants to die. However, even the Ravagers don't know where the home of this fanatic group is. No one who investigates them survives for very long.

The Midnight Sun, like most people, has access to the Dataweb, and everyone on Earth has seen one or more of their doom and death broadcasts, manifestoes, public mass suicides or other events. USSA authorities have already shut down more than fifty pirated weblink nodes since 2118, but this hasn't even slowed down the death cult. Since 2118 the cult has made various "predictions of disaster," their phrase for an impending terrorist attack. Some have been mere hoaxes, designed to terrorize a city. Many have been deadly real and even disastrously successful. The USSA has only been moderately successful at tracking down the members of this cult, and public frustration with their lack of success is growing.

December 24, 2142 was the next major Midnight Sun event. New Tokyo, still under construction at the time, experienced a mild earth tremor at midnight. Suddenly military style Mektons descended all over the city, destroying everything in their path. USSA peacekeeping forces quickly stopped all the Mektons, but all but one exploded, destroying several city blocks—every nook and cranny had had been packed with old fashioned plastic explosives. The destruction seemed random at first, but a satellite image showed the fanatic's Mektons were carving a huge Midnight Sun on the downtown business district of New Tokyo. Later, investigators discovered that the midnight temblor was set off by a small underground nuclear device about 100 miles from the city.
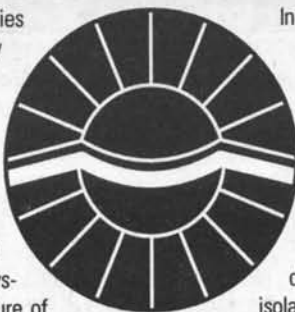
In 2150, a faction of the Midnight Sun downloaded a Black Virus into the Dataweb. This virus was a throwback to the counter-intrusion software from the 21st century, created to kill dead-metal-linked hackers. It was designed to invest itself into people's datalinks when they accessed the Web, then activate in the individual's implanted processor and stimulate the autonomic nervous system to cause a cardiac arrest. Suddenly, there was a rash of heart attacks across a Webzone about 200 kilometers in diameter. Fortunately, the Web Authorities reacted rapidly and isolated the virus files before they could spread very far. An entire Webzone had to be sterilized, but casualties were contained. Since then, elaborate and extensive safeguards have been emplaced, including webfile filters, nano-circuit breakers and more to ensure Web safety.

Although this information was just released over the Pleiadean Dataweb, the Midnight Sun made an attempt to destroy the *Longrider* after it was launched in 2142. A small group of people managed to stow away on board the huge colonial craft before it's launch. They lived on their own supplies in their tiny ship attached to the outer hull. Days after *Longrider* left the Solar System, the group of five commandos broke into the ship. They made it all the way to the fusion reactor core before they were finally killed by the ship's security forces. One of the team was a well known fusion engineer that had been exiled from a spinner colony a year before. He was killed just as he tried to shut down the reactor's coolant systems.

Since 2160, the Midnight Sun has kept a very low profile. They occasionally make stabs at terrorist acts, but most have been averted before major damage or loss of life. The Gaians take credit for this reduction of the cult's activities. The Gaian philosophy of preserving all life seems to prevent many Outsiders from joining the cult like they used to. This will likely change, as the current Nemyss, Tauutus Shabatai, has set up a new recruiting center in Zanzibar in the Pleiades. He makes his speeches on the Dataweb from there, and may have allies in the Charybdis smugglers guild. At the very least, the smugglers and pirates ignore the cult, and give them a wide berth in the city.

Nemyss Tauutus Shabatai claims that the Midnight Sun has renewed its quest to destroy all humans plus all human artifacts and history. He has just recently made the first major "prediction" of disaster in the newly-founded Confederation. He claims that a whole world will be "joined in death." Of course, the new ODF are on alert for any kind of trouble.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **TAUUTUS SHABATAI**

Nemyss of the Cult of the Midnight Sun

Description: 1.77m, 75kg, 35 years old, long, very pale blond hair, with thin braids at the ears. Thin muscular build, Midnight Sun tattoo on forehead, piercing grey eyes, on an angular and expressive face.

Quote: "It is finally time to end all this evil"

Notes: Good looking and very much aware of it, the Nemyss' powerful skills at oratory, crowd manipulation and political infighting have earned him a reputation in Earthspace as a man who doesn't take no for an answer. Of course, Tauutus Shabatai isn't his original name. News media and police haven't been able to track down where exactly he came from, but he is believed to have been a corporate salaryman who's family was a long time supporter of the Midnight Sun Cult. He quickly reached the rank of Nemyss, the leader of the whole cult. Since the Earth is well on the way to rejuvenation, this Nemyss has developed several plans to bring an abrupt end to the Human race. The authorities have never been able to get enough evidence on him or his cult to make arrests.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, EMP 3, REF 8, TECH 6, BODY 10, Oratory +8, Persuasion +7, Leadership +6, Conspiracy +8. Datalink, Skinweave, Muscle/Skeletal Enhancement, Cyberoptics, Bioarm x1 w/pop-up gun.

▲ Mekton Technology

The developmental history of the modern Mekton begins in the early 2000s, the age of the birth and development of cybernetics. Along with neural interfaces and synthetic myomer muscle-tensors, 21st-century cybernetics produced the Linear Frame, a neurally-controlled exoskeletal framework of synthetic musculature and rigid supports. Linear Frames were originally developed to assist in loading tasks, increasing the wearer's strength by 80% up to a maximum lifting capacity of about 800kg. While a great boon to everyday warehouse operations, the military-industrial complex saw in Linear Frames the potential for a revolution in infantry technology.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

In order to bring this potential revolution about, two of the biggest corporations at the time, Militech and Orbital Air, pooled their R&D resources. This rare cooperative effort was aimed at realizing the vision of cybernetically-controlled armored suits which would allow soldiers to wade through small arms fire, run faster than an olympic athlete, perform incredible feats of strength and wield heavy-duty vehicular weaponry. The combined R&D team's efforts soon resulted in the development of superior myomer tensors and heavier-duty structural components. These new developments were used to build a massive Linear Frame capable of supporting thick plates of composite vehicle armor, and the final result was **ACPA** (Assisted Combat Personal Armor).

ACPA did indeed revolutionize the role of the infantryman. By 2025, ACPA like Militech's "Commando" had become the standard battle dress of elite troops worldwide. Over the years, ACPA suits became even stronger and tougher, due to their progressively increasing efficiency at larger sizes. For a time it seemed that ACPA suits would inevitably become larger and larger with no end in sight, but the practical limitations of weight eventually put a ceiling on the size of powered armor: The Russian "Mikael" ACPA, weighing over 2 tons, remained the largest suit of powered armor for decades.

Then, in May of 2111, a scientific discovery was made which would change humanity and its place in the universe forever—a Princeton engineer named Cal R. Adrean created a super-strong polymer with magnetic properties, one which was so strong and yet so light that it would allow a magnetically-actuated, ACPA-like skeleton/musculature framework to be built at MUCH larger sizes. The Tripolymer skeleton was fully capable of mimicking the abilities of ACPA myomer muscles on an as-yet-unheard-of scale.

Dr. Adrean was immediately headhunted by United General Manufacturing, the 22nd century inheritor of the military-industrial mantle formerly held by Militech, Orbital Air and other corporations. With access to UGM's massive resources, Dr. Adrean soon created the Mechanically-Enacted Kinetics Tripolymer Operative Network, a gigantic, humanoid-shaped robotic vehicle operated by a combination

of a wireless Datalink and conventional aircraft-type controls. Standing ten times the height of a man, this first "Mekton" was the herald of a new age of exploration, construction and warfare.

■ Mekton Systems

Mektons, being humanoid in shape, require a Datalink to operate. This allows the frame to use the user's own brain and nervous system as a balance and control mechanism. This is particularly important since Artificial Intelligences were outlawed in 2061.

The cockpit is usually located in the head, which is primarily an observation dome with sensors optimized for long range observation and analysis. In combat, the command chair slides down through the collar into the armored chest, and the Mek switches over to its highly specialized combat sensors (recognizable by the appearance of two glowing optics within the smoked-over canopy).

Mektons are designed to be very survivable. In the case of an impending powerplant explosion, the entire backpack may be jettisoned, taking the plug-like fusion core with it—the Mek can then run battery power for about 2 hours. In case of terminal damage, the pilot can "eject" back up into the head, which blows off to serve as a small escape vehicle.

■ Mektons at Work

There are many types of terrain which are inhospitable to any tracked, wheeled, or hovercraft vehicle, and while aerial vehicles can easily traverse any type of terrain, they may well be incapable of landing in it! The only type of motive system that can manage nearly every terrain type is a legged system, something which can walk and use joints to adjust to the slope being negotiated. This means Mektons. A good Mekton can go just about anywhere; with the right fixtures, it can even navigate water areas.

For exploration purposes, Mektons are ideal. They're rugged, can go practically anywhere, and don't require paved roads. Fitted with a mini-fusion engine, a Mekton can go for weeks without refuelling. As long as the machine carries enough supplies for the pilot and crew, a Mekton can stay in the field for over two months.

Mektons are now everywhere, occupying roles as varied as construction machines, landing crafts, hostile environment protection,

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

space fighters and battle suits. There are still many areas where the Mekton is not supreme; specifically long range and mass transport (where small cars and motorbikes are more efficient). There are still helicopters, diving suits, APCs and small aircraft, but almost all construction machines and armored fighting vehicles have been replaced by the infinitely versatile Mekton.

One of the most successful industrial Meks is Bahn/Zai's **Mason**. A basic and reliable work-Mek, it was a favorite among asteroid miners back in the Sol System (and as such was hastily armed to fight in the Snowball Incident). Once colonies began being established in the Pleiades, Bahn/Zai increased its manufacturing of Masons to assist in the construction of new colonies. It has remained a standard work-Mek ever since, spread throughout the Solar System and the Pleiades Cluster; every colony sported them, many ships had one or two for cargo and repair work. The crude armaments of the Snowball Incident were even duplicated occasionally, since piracy was (and still is) a serious problem.

■ SAC's Mektons

The Bahn/Zai corporation is the primary designer and constructor of the Mektons and fighters used by the USSA's Stellar Armament Command. Thanks to Bahn/Zai's skilled design teams, SAC's Mektons are up-to-date, well-armed combat machines.

Bahn/Zai's company-wide design concept started with their popular Mason. When the SCC and the SAC came into being thanks to the sudden goldrush of colonization, with them came a need for a new generation of advanced Mektons. The Mason design had continued to be upgraded and improved over the years, so the directors of Bahn/Zai planned to use a modified Mason as the USSA's frontline combat Mekton. However, the requirements for a combat unit were so advanced that the proposed combat Mek evolved into a significantly different machine; while the new Mekton shared 80% of its features with the Mason, its performance was so different that it was worthy of a new name.

The new Mekton which they eventually designed, SAC's first combat Mek, embodied Bahn/Zai's design approach. Charged with meeting the SAC's and SCC's military supply and training requirements, Bahn/Zai's designers had to pick a standard frame size as a basis for their mass-produced Mektons; all of the SAC's combat Mektons were based around the Mason's frame and general configuration. Even today, the SAC's main Mekton (the MM-8B-SLD "Galliard") uses a Mason-type endoskeleton. This is also used in their other frontline Mektons, the MM-8B-INT "Zephyr" interceptor and the MM-8B-HA "Manticore" artillery Mek.

Bahn/Zai designs its Mektons to be easily modifiable, with modular servos and assemblies as well as external weapon pods to fit almost any tactical need. The main advantage of this system is that rather than having to build a completely new variant to fit a mission objective, the Mekton bays of almost any SAC ship usually hold the necessary components to assemble whatever is needed. Shared internal structures allow all Bahn/Zai Meks to swap circuitry and even internal structural components for field repairs, and if said com-

ponents aren't available, then the nearest SAC Supply depot can (and usually does) fabricate modular components to fit the bill.

There are some drawbacks to the system; detractors have mentioned that the variants are not nearly as individually efficient as custom-built models. In addition, the changeability of the basic models is an administrative nightmare at the larger formation level in terms of providing combat planners with the information they need to muster required forces—If records of the current variants within a wing aren't equally current, then a wing might be sent on a mission requiring, say, assault and firepower variants when the craft in question are actually equipped with, oh, interceptor modules!

As far as standard combat units go, Bahn/Zai's Mektons are a fair cut above the minimum design called for—the **Galliard**'s capabilities include an aerial cruising speed of 300 kph, a full sensor array, space-environment capabilities, an anti-missile system, and a lethal weapons array of interchangeable rail guns and missile pods. Many argue that few regular combat troops are going to have any real use for an extended sensor array, and the Galliard's high speed make it a notorious gas-guzzler (the Galliard has only three hours' fuel at cruising speed). As it turns out, the biggest proponent of these features is not SAC's Mekton Command, but SCC and its Ranger division. Equipped with external fuel tanks, a Galliard can easily make a preliminary survey of a large planetary area, enabling maximum use of Ranger time and effort.

The Galliard's heavy assault version, the **Manticore**, is an extremely heavy (and extremely slow) Mekton designed for the express purpose of providing mobile firepower to less heavily armed Mekton units. Its armor is stout enough to take severe punishment, and its armaments, both internally and externally mounted, can destroy whole flights of Mektons in a few seconds.

As opposed to the Manticore, the **Zephyr** stands in stark contrast—this interceptor variant is meant to act as a second line of defense along with aerospace fighters, intercepting intruders that make it through the fighter screen. A "chopped and channeled" Galliard, the Zephyr places more emphasis on speed (top airspeed of 1600 kph) and maneuverability, and less on armament. In fact, there are no hard-mounted weapons on the Zephyr—all armament is carried externally, but thanks to the general overkill rating of SAC's standard weapons, the Zephyr suffers little effective firepower loss.

(This fact doesn't sit well with the Bahn/Zai design team—the initial concept of the Zephyr called for lighter, more accurate weapons, concentrating on surgical-point kills rather than SAC's typical blast-and-smashers. However, SAC's procurement division remained adamant about the armaments, and the Zephyr's proposed weaponry prototypes had to be consigned to the warehouse.)

While Bahn/Zai's troika of combat Mektons do an excellent job of serving the purposes of the SAC and the SCC, they were designed before the threat of the ODF was a known quantity. When faced with the possibility of engagements with the remarkably advanced mecha turned out by Solingen Gmbh, Bahn/Zai realized their Meks would need to be improved. The problem was that there wasn't enough time to build a whole new line of Mektons which could successfully counter the ODF's superior technology.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

The solution Bahn/Zai came up with was **Command Armor Upgrades** for each unit they produced, beginning with the Galliard. With these CAUs, the Galliard could be easily mission customized by loading it up with CAUs of the same type, or by mixing different types. The Mission Types for CAUs are Assault, Destroyer, Reconnaissance, and Strike.

The **Assault** (A) CAU is designed to increase hitting power and armor strength while maintaining maneuverability, but at the sacrifice of speed. Sensitive systems, such as sensor upgrades, are not included as they would not likely survive the kind of punishment Assault armor is intended for. Additional fuel is carried in drop tanks.

The **Destroyer** (D) CAU is designed to increase hitting power and armor strength while sacrificing maneuverability and speed. Long-range targeting systems are often included, as the Destroyer role is more stand-off support, rather than frontal assault.

The **Reconnaissance** (R) upgrade is designed to increase sensor and EWAC capability, as well as range, speed and maneuverability, while sacrificing hitting power and armor strength. Most internal space, as well as some external space, is taken up by sensors and EWAC systems. Additional fuel is carried internally or in drop tanks.

The **Strike** (S) upgrade is designed to increase hitting power while maintaining maneuverability and speed. Some armor is sacrificed. Sensor upgrades are common. Additional fuel is carried in drop tanks.

While this system leads to some supply and logistics nightmares, it provides for extreme flexibility and easy customization of units. The SAC is generally happy with this solution, but they are constantly pressuring Bahn/Zai to crank up production. What's worse, though, is the fact that Solingen has already copied this design strategy and has begun introducing its own CAUs for its Draken combat Mektons!

■ *The SAC's Combat & Assault Structure*

The Assault Branch of the Stellar Armament Command makes use of numerous combat craft, from aerospace fighters to infantry fighting vehicles to Mektons, but the formidable fighting power of these units is owed largely to SAC's efficient command structure.

The SAC's primary organizational element is the proven, time-honored Flight—a group of four units. These four operate in two pairs, each comprised of an experienced pilot and a (usually) somewhat less adeptly crewed unit acting as wingman. This 150-year-old aircraft "finger four" pattern works equally well with Mektons or fighters, allowing for flight flexibility and the protection of the wingman "buddy" system.

Four flights are grouped together to make a squadron, roughly equivalent to the old ground-based company. Squadrons can be combined into wings (3-6 squadrons) for larger operations and administration, but usually the squadron is the largest cohesive fighting unit.

Scout flights are quite different; a scout flight consists of a mobile sensor/electronic warfare craft and a stealth/intrusion craft. Rather than working as a group, these craft work separately—the sensor/EW craft accompanies a combat formation, while the stealth craft works alone as a scout. Scout flights are assigned to other wings and squadrons according to the mission and the size of the combat formation. For instance, in the case of a Battlerider's complement of 10 Mektons, there will be two regular flights of combat Mektons and a single Scout flight. In cases of heavy combat or reconnaissance needs, Scout flights might be assigned in as heavy a proportion as one Scout flight to one combat flight.

■ *Combat Command*

SAC commanding officers operate upon three vital principles: Obedience, initiative, and cooperation. Obedience is required by any SAC commander, because with his greater information input, he may well be aware of developments not known to line and unit commanders. Therefore, breaking from orders may trigger a disaster rather than victory, due to factors beyond the scope of an individual officer's information.

Individual initiative is also highly valued, since information gaps and transmission lags are so common in space combat that tactical opportunities may well be lost if there has to be a wait for all available information to be relayed to higher command. Officers on the spot are obligated to swiftly evaluate openings and chances, then exploit them.

SAC commanders also insist upon cooperation. Pilots are often assigned to random teams for exercises, and teams may be combined equally at random. Pilots are urged to combine forces whenever possible, and to cooperate under any conditions. This allows officers to work with any command that they might be assigned to, and to combine commands with others on a moment's notice, a necessity when considering the far-flung size of SAC. Given the offensive capabilities of even a single flight of Mektons and the greater amount of battlefield opportunities presented in the melee of small-craft combat, Mekton pilots are also well-trained in the ability to act decisively and make the right choice.

■ *Tactics*

SAC pilots and ship commanders act as cohesive units, and practice constantly at large and small-scale maneuvers. Counterbalanced by the policy of individual initiative, the result is a curious composite of obedient response to higher command, cooperative maneuver, spiced by outbursts of apparently spontaneous initiative. It's very confusing to the enemy, because despite the uniform tactics common to almost every SAC combatant, there can be and are interruptions of the normal doctrine to prevent enemies from depending upon SAC forces going "by the book." The fact that, in the SAC, success vindicates what other armies would have labeled rank insubordination, provides great incentive for individual commanders to exploit perceived openings. (This perceived tendency to go off half-cocked tempts a great many of SAC's opponents to try faking an opening to sucker SAC commanders into making a stab for what turns out to be an ambush. Academy training stressing responsible battlefield evaluation and caution goes a long way to counteract such plots.)

One factor remains constant: whenever possible, SAC Mektons and fighters will deploy and maneuver in a set of pairs, attempting to keep the flight as coherent as possible. Even in whole carrier groups of over 100 craft, the internal structure of the assault swarm really breaks down into a mass of flights acting in well-drilled concert with each other. If you're fighting SAC craft, you can depend upon having to fight the whole flight, not one-on-one duels.

However, SAC tactics are being reviewed in the aftermath of the Battle of the Northern Rings, which was their first real application. Some modification of SAC doctrine is expected to take into account the tactics (and cloaking device) used by the ODF.
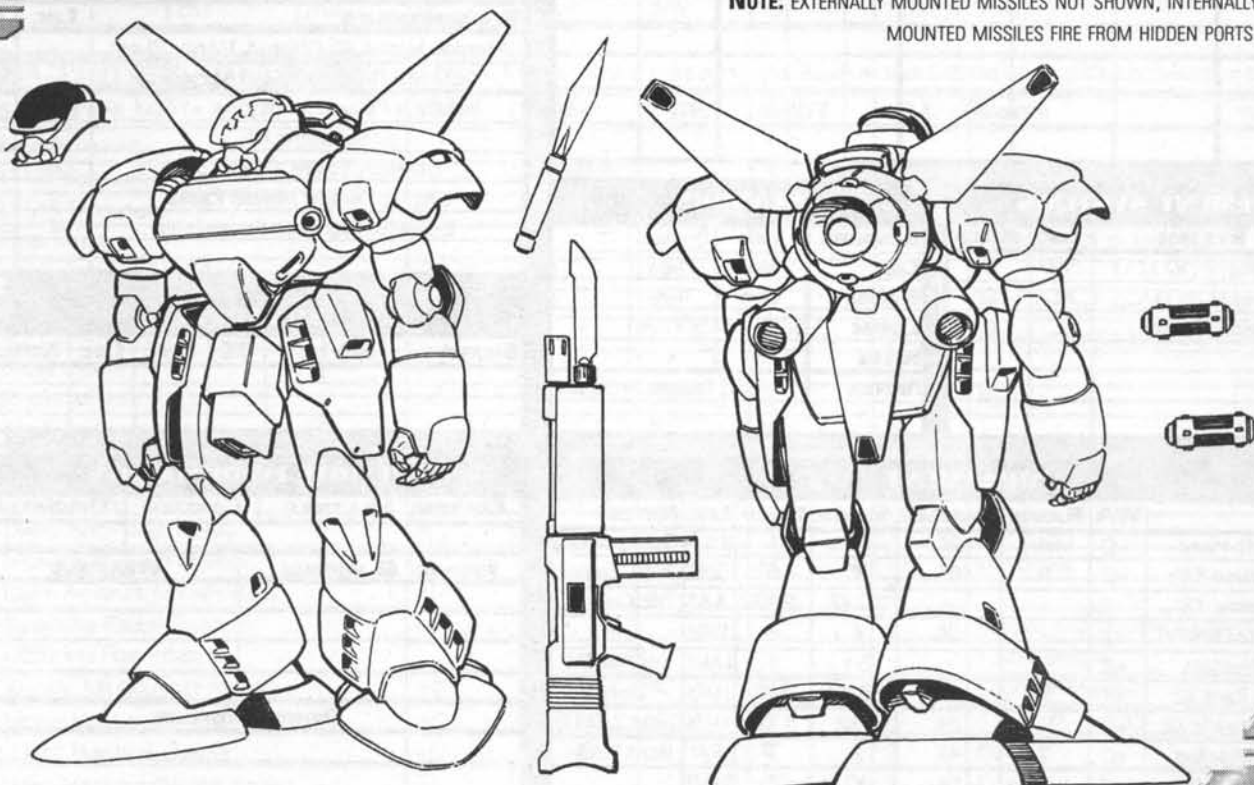
MEKTON

多次元機甲職士道
メクトン

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-4		6 Hexes	0

MANEUVER POOL: +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Undercharged Powercell	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	2	0	-	5	-
Torso	-	-	-	2	0	-	10	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	2	0	-	6	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	2	0	-	6	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	2	0	-	6	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	2	0	-	6	+2

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Wheels (1 MA)	RL	1
Wheels (2 MA)	RL	2
Wheels (1 MA)	LL	1
Wheels (2 MA)	LL	2

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	
LOC	Head	
RANGE	11km	
COMM	1300km	
KILLS	2	
NOTES		

ARMAMENT

| WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	LA	Quick, Handy

General Purpose (or GP) Mektons are the best sellers in any company's production line. Highly versatile and easily customizable, GPs work throughout human space at a wide variety of tasks. The **MC-2B-GP Mason** is typical of it's type; a solid, well built machine capable of handling a multitude of jobs, stressing a modular design. Entire limbs can be removed without any tools more complex than a wrench and screwdriver, and it's onboard diagnostic system can even assist in the process.

Adaptability is the Mason's hallmark, with over twenty home modification kits and thirty standard packages available from Bahn/Zai and numerous other modifications. The Mason is capable of holding up to 9 tons of added equipment without any loss of it's performance characteristics and comes with a torso mount. The Mason is not flight capable in it's basic configuration, but is provided with wheels for road use, giving it a top speed of roughly 100 kph. The Mason also sports a sizable cockpit, capable of holding four people, along with a liftwire, a rugged code lock and an armored storage compartment with a capacity of nearly half a ton. Two high-power lights are also standard equipment.

The Mason sees a great deal of sales and use in the Pleiades. Introduced during the great expansion wave, many of the new colonies purchased Masons in quantity to assist in construction and exploration on their new homeworlds, and many of those are still in use to this day.

STATISTICS: Height: 15m, Weight: 30.5t, Cost: 28,000 Cr., Speed 22.8 kph (Walking), 108 kph (Driving). Note that the Mason represents a typical GP-Type. Statistics for GP-Types produced by other companies will be nearly identical.

MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
MC-2B-GP	Mason	30.5 t	56

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	4	Std	Canopy	E-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Weapon Mount	T	-
QCMs (1/Limb, Wpn Mount, Powercell)		-
Self-diagnostic System (+1 Tech)	T	-
Storage - 500kg	H	-
Lights X2	T	-
Basic Lock	H	-
Liftwire	H	-
Stereo	H	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS	

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ *MM-8B-SLD "Galliard"*

Designed in 2158 by Bahn/Zai's now legendary Team Arcane, the MM-8B-SLD "Galliard" is one of the oldest military suits still seeing active duty. A ground-breaking design for it's time, the 8B was based off of Team Arcane's previous project, the highly successful MM-7B-SLD "Starlock". The Galliard quickly proved itself as a successor to the classic MM-7B-SLD, and soon became a favorite among SAC pilots for it's combination of speed, versatility, and withering firepower.

With a top flight speed over 600 kph, the Galliard set a benchmark for soldier units which is only just being reached by competing military suits. Much of the Galliard's thruster system is located in it's three-vaned thruster pack. An innovation by Arcane, the Tri-Vane Thrusterpack is responsible not only for the Galliard's speed, but also for much of it's maneuverability. The vanes' ability to adjust and vector thrust greatly increases the Galliard's agility and removes any need for a separate system of dedicated verniers. While this can lead to a serious loss of maneuverability if the thruster system is damaged, the saving in space on the frame opens it up for the placement of a great number and variety of weapon systems.

With a standard complement of five separate types of missiles, two different gauss systems, a bayonet, grenades and a knife, the Galliard is not lacking in armaments. The Galliard's standard sidearm is a United Armaments GMR-14 medium gauss rifle with integral mono-bayonet. The Galliard also carries four medium Hunter missiles, two light seeker missiles, two racks of medium swarm missiles, a rack of medium attack missiles, and four smoke screen missiles. With the recent "Eye of Ra" advanced sensor upgrade to all SAC suits (another innovation from Team Arcane) the Galliard can use these smoke missiles without hindrance, greatly increasing it's tactical utility. A UA advanced anti-missile gauss system is also standard, along with a mono-knife for close fighting.

Standing a relatively typical 18 meters tall and weighing in at a mere 58.3 tons fully loaded and fueled, the Galliard is standard by which all other MEKs fielded by the SAC are judged, existing as a measure of any other Mekton's effectiveness. With over 50 variants and innumerable individual pilot modifications, the Galliard is the backbone of the SAC's mechanized assault wings, and is still going strong.

STATISTICAL DATA

		Armament	
Height:	18 m	GMR-14 Gauss Rifle	x1
Weight:	58.3 t	Swarm Missiles (23 each)	x2
Cost:	3,546,000 Cr	Hunter Missiles (2 each)	x2
		Seeker Missiles	x2
Speeds		Attack Missile	x10
Walking:	72 kph	Mk. 7 Combat Knife	x1
Flight:	634 kph	GGB-4 Grenade	x2

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

NOTE: EXTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES NOT SHOWN, INTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES FIRE FROM HIDDEN PORTS.

MEKTON

多次元機甲戦士道

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-3		4 Hexes	16 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS: 1

+2 Verniers, "Weapon" Mated with Thrusters

Space Protection

Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	5	1	-	5	-
Torso	-	-	-	5	1	-	10	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+2
3-Vane Backpod	-	-	-	5	1	-	0	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (10 MA)	POD	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	RL	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup
LOC	Head	Torso
RANGE	11km	1km
COMM	1300km	300km
KILLS	2	2
NOTES	ASP, Target Analyzer	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right / Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	R/LA	Quick, Handy
GMR-14 Gauss Rifle	+0	11	5K	▼	5	2H	BV3, Tracer
Gauss Ammo X2	(+1)	-	-	20 X2	2 X2	▲&T	or Kinetic
Bayonet (mated w/Rifle)	+1	-	5K	4	4	Rifle	AP
Phalanx System	+2	-	-	34	1	LAMT	Ded. Phlx., BV7
M. Swarm Rack X2	+1	5	2K	23 X2	3 X2	LMTs	Linked
M. Hunter Missile X2	+0	10	8K	2 X2	1 X2	TMTs	Smart 2, Skill 15
L. Seeker Missiles	+0	7	4K	2	1	RA	Smart 1, Skill 12
M. Attack Missiles	+0	12	5K	10	3	RAMT	
Smoke Missiles	+0	8	"5"	2	2	LA	Smoke, Rad. 4
Std. Mono-Knife	+0	Melee	4K	-	3	1H	AP, Quick
Grenades	+0	Thrown	10K	2	1	1H	Blast 2, Fuse
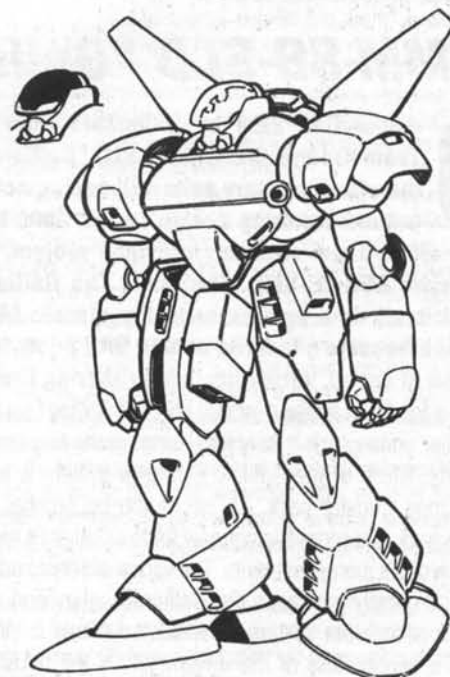
MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
SAC Mekton MM-8B-SLD Galliard		58.3t	349.1

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	Screen	Canopy	M-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Weapon Mount X6 (2Torso, 1/Arm, 1/Leg)	-	-
QCM X12 (1/limb, 1/WM, Powerplant)	-	-
Bahn/Zai Futuristic Styling, +1 Cool	-	-
Spotlight X2	T	-
Stereo, Liftwire, Basic Lock	H	-
Link for Swarm Missile Racks	-	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

ASSAULT UPGRADES — Total Effects: +1 MV, +1 B-Mod (drop tanks), +1000km fuel, +41t.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	LH	Std	2	1	2/2	9.8	5
Torso	LH	Std	7	1	7/7	116	[(6x2 X, 7x2) 1] x2, 2
Arm	LH	Std	5	1	5/5	34.1	8, 9
Leg	LH	Std	5	1	5/5	27.6	4, 10 L

Swap rifle, ammo, bayonet for: Auto Shot Gauss, OWA, Rng 6, 4K, BV4, 2 clips of 20 brsts scattershot.

DESTROYER UPGRADES — Total Effects: +36.5 t

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	MW	Std	1	1	2/2	21.3	11, 12
Torso	MW	Std	6	1	6/4	105	[(14)1] x2
Arm	MW	Std	4	1	4/4	38.5	(13)1, 5
Leg	MW	Std	4	1	4/4	23.5	15 L

Swap rifle, ammo, bayonet for: Gauss Cannon, -1 WA, Rng 18, 10K (13Cp, 10spc), 2 clips of 20 shots AP.

RECON UPGRADES — Total Effects: +3 MV, +1 B-Mod (drop tanks), +4 MA, +1500km fuel, +20.2 t.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	MW	Std	1	1	2/2	21.3	11, 12
Torso	MS	Std	4	1	4/4	83.6	(16)1, 2, 3x2
Arm	MS	Std	2	1	2/2	47.8	17, 2
Leg	MS	Std	2	1	2/2	13.5	3, 4

STRIKE UPGRADES — Total Effects: +1 MV, +1 B-Mod (drop tanks), +4 MA, +1000km fuel, +26.7t.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	LW	Std	2	1	2/2	10	18
Torso	HS	Std	5	1	5/5	108.5	[(19)1]x2, 2, 3x2
Arm	HS	Std	3	1	3/3	39.8	(20 X, 21)1, 22
Leg	HS	Std	3	1	3/3	19.1	(23 L)1, 3, 4

SYSTEM NOTES — "L" = Linked. "X" = Cross-linked. If there is only one weapon on that limb, the link is to it's complement on the other limb.

SYSTEM TYPE	WA	RNG	DMG	SHOT	KILL	NOTES
1: Weapon Mount						
2: +1 MV Section						
3. +1 MA Thrusters						
4: Drop Tanks						+500km, .5 B-Mod/leg
5: Light. Assault Missiles	+0	22	10K	2	1	
6: Medium Auto-Gauss Cannon	-1	14	6K	▼	6	BV3, Mount and 1 Hand to fire
7: MA-GC Ammo x2				20 brst	2x2	tracer or kinetic, extra clip stored externally
8: Small Shield	DA:-1				6	
9: Smoke Missile Rack	+0	8	"5K"	3	1	Radius 4
10: Medium Swarm Missiles	+1	5	2K	16	2	
11: LH Sensors						20km, 1800km, 2K
12:x64 Res. Intensifiers						
13: Light. Anti-Ship Missile	-1	55	100K	1	7	x10 Scale
14: Heavy Anti-Ship Missile	-1	80	200K	1	13	x10 Scale
15: Light Assault Missile Rack	+0	22	10K	5	3	
16: Spotting Radar System					4	Sensor Rng 200km, Radar/Radio Anal.
17: +250 km Fuel Internal						+2.5% weight
18: Kinetic Kill Counter Missiles	+3	-	1K	20	1	Counter-Missile
19: Heavy Hunter Missiles	+0	"11"	10K	2	1	Smart 2, Skill 15
20: Light Machine Gauss	+0 (+1)	12	2K	▼	2	BV4
21: Light Machine Gauss Ammo	+1			20brst	2	Tracer
22: Smoke Missile	+0	8	"5K"	1	1	Radius 4
23: Medium Attack Missiles	+0	12	5K	10	3	

■ *MM-8B-INT "Zephyr"*

The MM-8B-INT is the fastest unit fielded by the SAC. When the SAC decided to decommission the MM-7B-INT "Starwing" in 2161, they turned to Bahn/Zai's Team Tidal, who had created both of the SAC's previous interceptors. Tragedy struck when an accident during the testing of the prototype 8B's powerful "Firehawk" thrusters killed over half of Tidal's design staff, including most of it's senior designers. Gairon Balemore, the only surviving test pilot and a longtime friend of Tidal's leader, Jason Sullmins, was able to rally the survivors, complete the design, and present it on time to a stunned Bahn/Zai board of directors. In the two years since the completion of the Zephyr, the newly re-christened Team Tsunami has become one of Bahn/Zai's powerhouses.

Despite it's dramatic history (or because of it) the newest SAC Mekton has gained quite a reputation as a fast, capable design. Based on the chassis of the familiar Galliard, the Zephyr is a slightly smaller and lighter combat Mekton than the MM-8B-SLD, coming in at a height of 17 meters and a fully loaded weight of 49 tons.

Capable of sustained flight speeds over 1600 kph, the Zephyr is the fastest and most agile of the SAC's Mektons. The majority of it's thrust is located in it's three-vaned "Firehawk" thrusterpack. Like all SAC thrusterpacks, the Firehawk integrates verniers and thrust into one system to save space. The main power for the Zephyr comes from it's unique Bahn/Zai type 23 powerplant, a modified fighter engine which can provide the Zephyr with more than enough power for even it's engine requirements.

The Zephyr is heavily armed for it's size, with a wide variety of missiles and gauss weapons. One interesting system is the Rangers' Kinetic-Kill Counter Missiles, which work in tandem with the suit's phalanx system. After observing the effectiveness of Tsunami's KKCM's, particularly against smart missiles, the SAC is looking into equipping more Mektons with them, and has already done so with it's fighters and HAs. The Zephyr's knife is also notable, as its the first such weapon that's designed to be thrown.

The Zephyr is already seeing widespread use throughout the SAC and has been enthusiastically adopted by interceptor pilots. Team Tsunami is already being kept busy creating various modifications and variants to team Tidal's last design and Tsunami's first.

STATISTICAL DATA

Height:	17m	Armament	
Weight:	48 t	GMR-10 Gauss Rifle	x1
Cost:	4,215,000 Cr	Swarm Missiles (40 each)	x2
		Hunter Missiles (2 each)	x2
Speeds		Assault Missile (2 each)	x4
Walking:	108 kph	Attack Missiles	x3
Flight:	1642 kph	Mk. 7 Combat Knife	x1
		GGB-4 Grenade	x2

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC
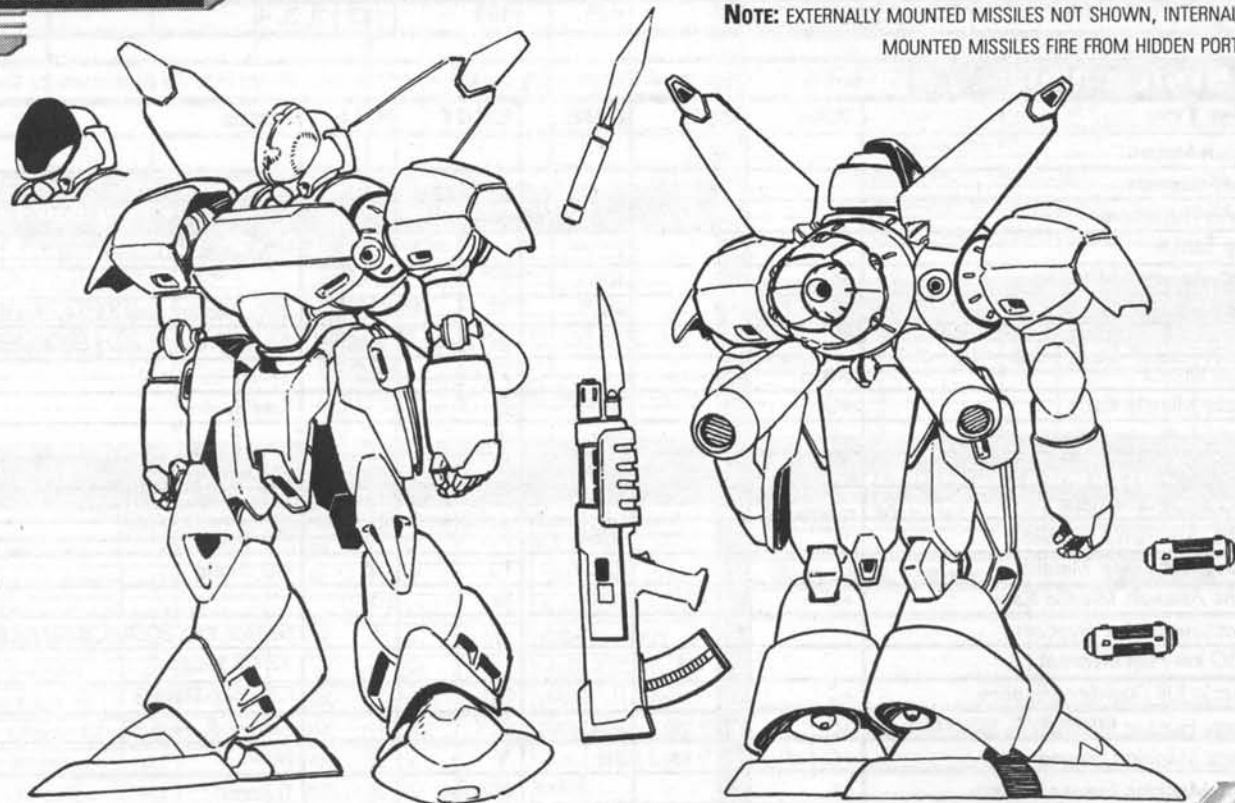
NOTE: EXTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES NOT SHOWN, INTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES FIRE FROM HIDDEN PORTS.

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-0		6 Hexes	24 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL   +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS: 1

Supercharged Plant

+2 MV Verniers, "Weapon" mated with Thrusters

Space Protection

Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	4	1	-	4	-
Torso	-	-	-	4	1	-	8	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	4	1	-	5	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	4	1	-	5	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	4	1	-	5	+1
L. Leg	-	-	-	4	1	-	5	+1
3-Vane Backpod	-	-	-	4	1	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	SAC Mekton	WEIGHT	COST
	MM-8B-INT Zephyr	49t	421.5

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	Screen	Canopy	M-Pod	
SUBASSEMBLIES				**LOC**	**K**
Linkage (Autocannons)				T	-
Liftwire				T	-
2 Spotlights				H	-
Antitheft Codelock				T	-
2 Micromanipulators				Arms	-
1000km Fuel (+5.35t)				Pod	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (16 MA)	Pod	0
Sub-Thruster (4 MA)	RL	0
Sub-Thruster (4 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	
LOC	Head	Head	
RANGE	20km	1km	
COMM	1800km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		ASP, Target	
		Analyzer	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	LA	Quick, Handy
GMR-10 Gauss Rifle	+0	12	4K	▼	4	2H	BV3, Tracer
Gauss Ammo X2	(+1)	-		20 X2	2 X2	▲	or Kinetic
Phalanx System	+2	-	1K	25	1+1	LAMT	Ded. Phlx., BV7
KKCMs X2	+3	-	1K	10 X2	1 X2	R/LA	Ded. Ctr-Missile
L. Swarm Missile Racks	+1	4	1K	40 X2	3 X2	LMTs	Linked
L. Hunter Missiles X2	+0	9	6K	2 X2	1 X2	TMTs	Smart 2, Skill 15
L. Assault Missiles X2	-2	22	10K	2 X2	2 X2	TMTs	
L. Attack Missiles	+0	10	4K	3	3	LAMT	
L. Knife	+0	Throw	3K	-	2	1H	AP, Quick, Thrown
Grenades	+0	Throw	10K	2	1	1H	Blast 2, Fuse

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS	

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ *MM-8B-HA "Manticore"*

Following the MM-7B-HA "Starmax" (Or the "Star-lax," as it was dubbed) debacle, Bahn/Zai held the largest design competition in it's history. Nearly every team submitted a design for the new Heavy Armaments unit, but in the end it was Team Buckaroo's innovative "Manticore" that Bahn/Zai selected for production. Odd, since Team Buckaroo hadn't been competing.

Buckaroo, a "renegade" design team whose members possess skills in a wide variety of areas including racing, music, medicine and particle physics along with Mekton design, was actually working on a different project. They were designing an exo-skeleton for the Galliard to assist in battlefield construction. It was going well, and one of the team members joked that the exo-skeleton was so good it should be entered in the HA design contest. As it turned out, Bahn/Zai's production managers agreed entirely. They integrated the exo-skeleton, refined the design, and created the Manticore.

Internally, the Manticore bears quite a semblance to the Galliard/exo-skeleton original concept, though the two are now seamlessly integrated. Capable of lifting 70 tons and ripping limbs off other Mektons, the Manticore is the SAC's strongest and most durable combat unit. It is also large, with a height just over 19 meters and weight of 79.2 tons. Despite this massive presence, the Manticore is also one of the new breed of HAs capable of flight, though only just barely, with a top flight speed 144 kph.

The Manticore is an incredible force on the battlefield. The standard Manticore is equipped with a UA Mark 3 Very Heavy Auto-Gauss Cannon—a weapon so large that it requires both hands, one arm mount, and a torso mount to use! The Mk3 is one of the heaviest weapons ever mounted on a Mekton, capable of cutting most Mektons in half with a single burst and doing hull damage to Battleriders. The Manticore carries a heavy gauss pistol as a back-up, along with various types of missiles including KKCMs to supplement it's phalanx system. While the Manticore also carries a knife, Manticore pilots are notorious for using limbs of enemy Mektons or even entire suits as weapons.

Team Buckaroo earned praise from all sectors for the Manticore, and HA pilots instantly fell in love with the suit, painting them up in every color scheme imaginable from tiger-stripe to rainbow to tie-dye, reinforcing the Mek's reputation for being slightly odd.

STATISTICAL DATA

		ARMAMENT	
Height:	19m	GAC-3 Auto Gauss Cannon	x1
Weight:	79.2 t	GGP-7 Gauss Pistol	x1
Cost:	5,768,000 Cr	Swarm Missiles (21 each)	x2
		Smoke Missiles (2 each)	x2
SPEEDS		Hunter Missiles	x2
Walking:	54 kph	Seeker Missiles	x1
Flight:	144 kph	Mk. 7 Combat Knife	x1
		GGB-4 Grenades	x2

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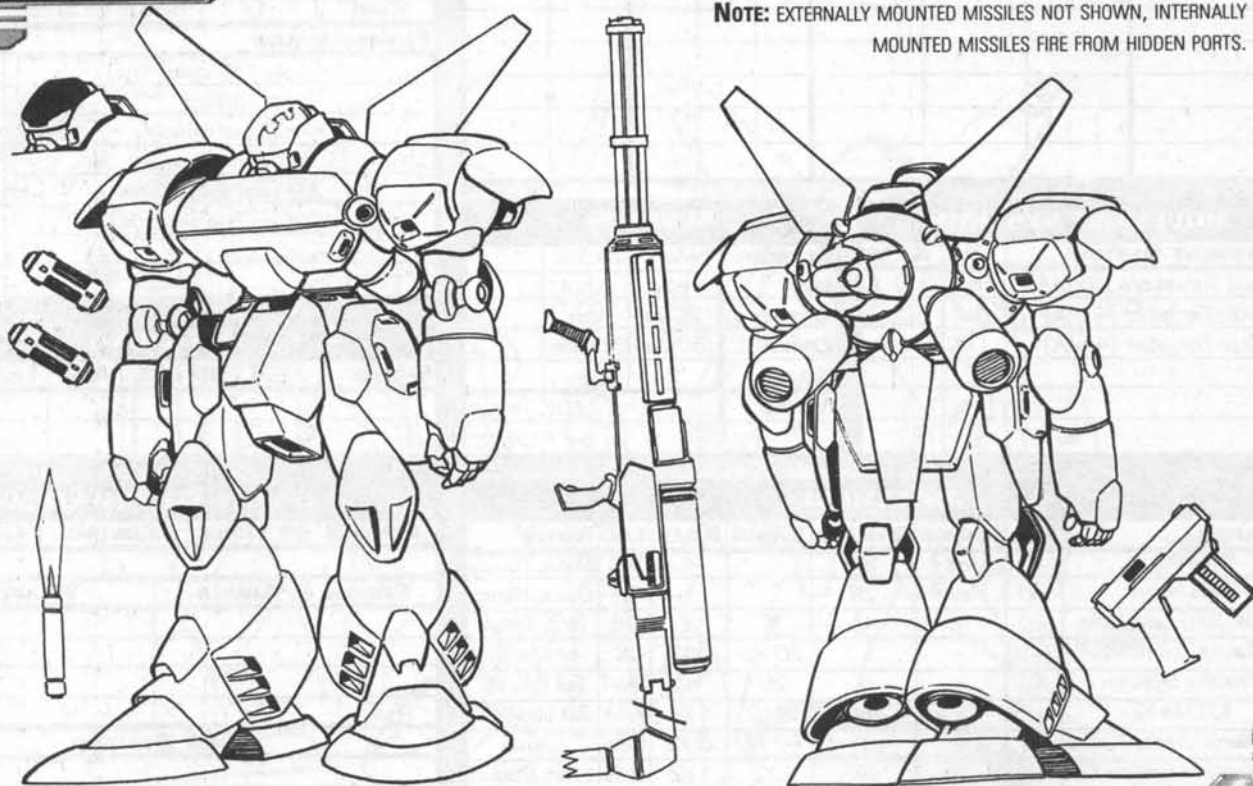
NOTE: EXTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES NOT SHOWN, INTERNALLY MOUNTED MISSILES FIRE FROM HIDDEN PORTS.

MEKTON STATS

Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA
Humanoid Mekton	-5(-3)		3 Hexes	8 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

Mecha Piloting	+ MR=	
Mecha Fighting	+ MR=	
Mecha Melee	+ MR=	
Mecha Gunnery	+ MR=	
Mecha Missiles	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

Powerplant XS:	1
Superheavy Hydraulics	
+2 Verniers "weapon" mated with	
Thrusters	
Space Protection	
Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

Servomodule	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	Kills	Add+
Head	-	-	-	9	1	-	7	-
Torso	-	-	-	9	1	-	14	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	9	1	-	8	+4
L. Arm	-	-	-	9	1	-	8	+4
R. Leg	-	-	-	9	1	-	8	+5
L. Leg	-	-	-	9	1	-	8	+5
3-Vane Backpod	-	-	-	9	1	-	0	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

Movement System	Loc	Kills
Main Thrusters (3 MA)	T	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	RL	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

Sensors	Main	Backup
Loc	Head	Torso
Range	11km	1km
Comm	1300km	300km
Kills	2	2
Notes	ASP, Target Analyzer	

ARMAMENT

Weapon	WA	Range	Damage	Shots	Kills	Loc	Notes
Right / Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	R/LA	Quick, Handy
Phalanx System	+2	-	1K	34	1	LAMT	Ded. Phlx., BV8
KKCM	+3	-	1K	5	1	LAMT	Ded. Ctr-Missile
VH Auto Gauss Cannon	+0	18	10K	▼	10	2H, RAMT, 1TMT	BV3
Gauss Ammo X2	-	-		20 X2	6 X2	▲	AP
Heavy Gauss Pistol	(+1)	8	3K	20	3 & 1	1H	BV3, Tracer
H. Swarm Racks X2	+1	6	3K	21 X2	4 X2	LMTs	Linked
Smoke Missiles X2	0	8	"5"	2 X2	1 X2	R/LA	Smoke, Rad4
H. Hunter Missiles	+0	11	10K	2	1	TMT	Smart2, Skill15
M. Seeker Missiles	+0	9	6K	1	1	TMT	Smart1, Skill12
Std Knife	+0	Melee	7K	3	3	1H	AP, Quick
Grenades	+0	Thrown	10K	2	1	T(1H)	Blast 2, Fuse
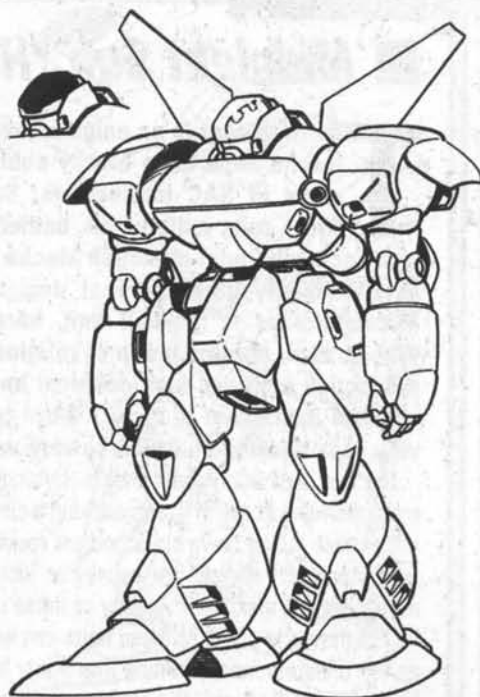
MECHA PROFILE

Name		Weight	Cost
SAC Mekton MM-8B-HA Manticore		79.2t	577.1

SUBASSEMBLIES

Cockpit	#Crew	Type	Enc.	Options	
Head	1	Screen	Canopy	M-Pod	

Subassemblies	Loc	K
Weapon Mount X6 (2 Torso, 1/Arm, 1/Leg)	-	-
QCMs X12 (1/limb, 1/WM, Powerplant)	-	-
Bahn/Zai Futuristic Styling, +1 Cool	-	-
Spotlights X2	T	-
Stereo	H	-
Liftwire, Basic Lock	H	-
Link for Swarm Missile Racks	-	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	-

SHIELDING

Shield	DA	SP	DC	AbC	Loc	Notes
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

Control Multiple	Control	Operation

Servos & Armor		Weapons

Other Systems	

Weight	MV	MR	MA	Skill	MA	Accel	MP

■ *Midnight Sun "Harbinger"*

The Harbinger is an enigma. Previous Midnight Sun mecha have been hastily cobbled together amalgams of SAC Interceptors, Soldiers, and Heavy Arms suits culled from battlefield salvage or, on rare occasions, mint-condition Mecha stolen during transport. The only other original design attributed to the Midnight Suns is a small unit, barely combat worthy. Where, then, did this group of religious fanatics gain the production facilities and technical know-how to develop such an instrument of terror? More to the point, exactly why does this unit do its job so very, very well?

The first indication given that a Harbinger (if, indeed, there is more than one of them) is approaching a city is the enormous flare of the twin Indigo Nova class booster rockets built into the titans legs. Approach speeds are usually at just over 6 G's, and estimates put the maximum velocity of these units combined at over 10 G's (how the pilots of these units can withstand such strain is as yet undetermined). Burning into a city before the local Militia can summon SAC aid, the Harbinger then typically lands in the middle of the nearest district, laying down a vicious hail of cover with its Hellstorm missiles. These insidious devices have time-delayed switches in their warheads, allowing them to lie in wait for days, even weeks, before savagely detonating; the loss of civilian life to these Hellstorm missiles has been staggering.

Even more devastating are the Scatter guns mounted in the arms of this terrifying machine. Each gun fires a spray of plasma-state Gauss rounds at a rate of over 1,200 rounds per minute. A single burst from this weapon can cause several dozen fires in an instant. Mounted next to each Scatter gun is what is most accurately described as a "Ripper". Each Ripper is a single, serrated poly-carbon blade, extending a third the length of the Harbinger's arm and proving more than a match for any SAC combat blade. A short range, low rate of fire Gauss cannon is mounted in the chest for fire support.

If the Harbinger has a weakness—barring soldiers who can resist such a menacing visage—it is the possibility of destroying it in flight. Unconfirmed reports indicate that the Harbinger cannot maneuver while using the Indigo Nova rockets. It is hoped that this will be confirmed soon.

STATISTICAL DATA

Height: 21m	ARMAMENT
Weight: .... 80 t	Hand Talon x2
Cost: .... 7,904,000 Cr	Arm Ripper x2
SPEEDS	Arm Scattergun x2
Walking: .... 126 kph	Chest Gauss Cannon x1
Jump: .... 300m jump	Hellstorm Missiles (7e) x2
Indigo Nova Boosters: ..... 5~10 G's	

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

NOTE: EXTERNALLY MOUNTED HELLSTORM MISSILES NOT SHOWN.

多次元機甲戦士道
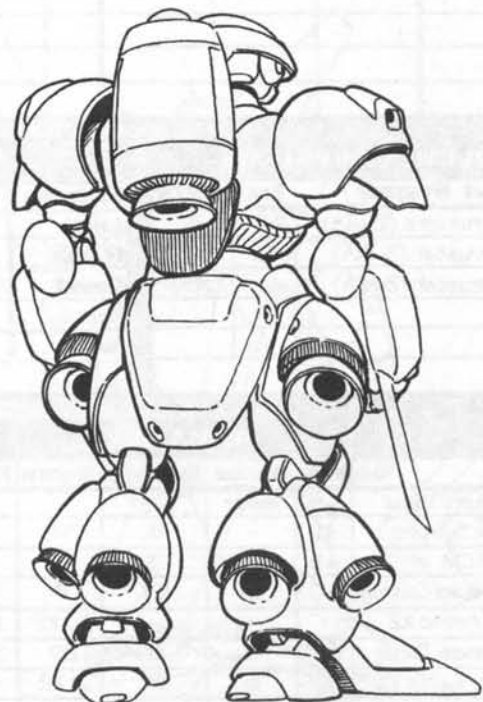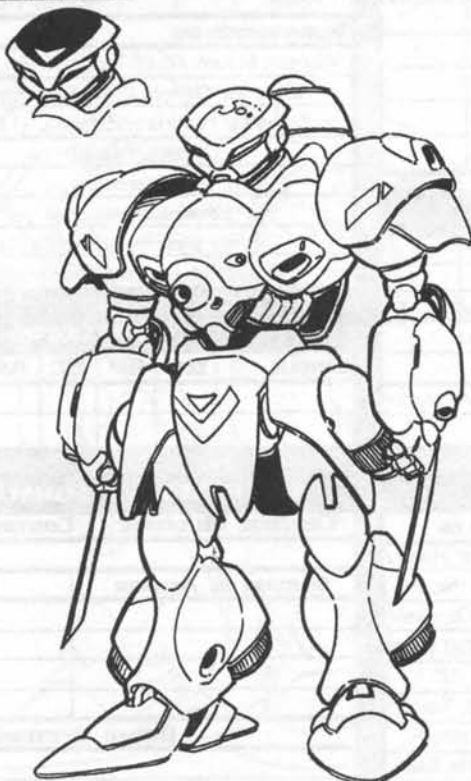
MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-3		7 Hexes	6 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL   +0

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1

+2 Verniers in Backpack
+1 Verniers in Head
Space/EM/Arctic/Desert Protection
High Pressure
Superheavy Hydraulics
Combat Cockpit in Torso

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	11	1	-	11	-
Torso	-	-	-	11	1	-	22	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	11	1	-	11	+5
L. Arm	-	-	-	11	1	-	11	+5
R. Leg	-	-	-	11	1	-	11	+7
L. Leg	-	-	-	11	1	-	11	+7
Backpack (Pod)	-	-	-	11	1	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	Midnight Sun Mekton Harbinger	WEIGHT	COST
		80 t	790.4

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	STD	Canopy	M-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Locking System	-	-
x2 Spotlights, x2 Nightlights	-	-
Storage (500kg)	H	-
Damage Control	T	-
QCMs (all servos & powerplant)	ALL	-
+3 cool - really scary paint job	T	-
x2 weapon mounts	R/LA	-
1,000 km fuel	-	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Thruster Pack (6MA)	Pod	0
Indigo Nova Booster	RL	5
+50 MA/+50 MB		
Indigo Nova Booster	LL	5
+50 MA/+50 MB		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	ASP
LOC	Head	Torso	TARG
RANGE	20km	1km	x32 RI
COMM	1800km	300km	R/R
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES			

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right/Left Hand Talons	-1	Melee	6K AP	-	1	R/LA	Quick, Handy
Right / Left Foot	0	Melee	9K	-	0	R/LL	
Right Ripper	+1	Melee	8K AP	-	3	RA	
Left Ripper	+1	Melee	8K AP	-	3	LA	
Scattergun #1	-1	3/9	6 KSI	20	7	RA	BV 2
Scattergun #2	-1	3/9	6 KSI	20	7	LA	BV 2
(Scattershot / Incend)							
AMS	+2	NA	1K	20	2	T	BV8, Phalanx
Chest Cannon	+2	7/49	5K	18	6	T	
Hellstorm Missiles	+0	6/36	3K	7	1	RAM	BR3, Fuse
Hellstorm Missiles	+0	6/36	3K	7	1	LAM	BR3, Fuse

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE		CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ CUTTERs: Combined Universal Tactics and Territorial Exploration Rigs

I n the early days of exploration, the SCC quickly realized that it would need a specialized exploration vehicle. It had to be adaptable to nearly every conceivable environment, have modular storage capability, be capable of long-range travel, be self-sufficient, and provide living space for a Ranger team. The solution to this problem was the Cutter.

A Combined Universal Tactics and Territorial Exploration Rig is essentially a compact, configurable starship. Most of the space inside a Cutter is given over to the fusion generator core and the Shunt drive, with most of the remaining room dedicated to fuel tankage and storage and a state-of-the-art (if cramped) laboratory facility. Minimal space is left for a small galley facility, a bridge with next to no elbow room, and even smaller bunk spaces for the crew. Service on board a Cutter has been compared by military historians to service on a World War II-era U-Boat; although modern air recyclers keep the air fresh, and there is a small shower (not much bigger than an average-sized person, it uses recycled water kept on board in case the reactor overheats), in all other respects the analogy is accurate. While external cargo modules can be attached to the outside of the Cutter, extended missions usually call for the bunks to be dismantled—in such cases, the crew actually ends up sleeping on top of the cargo crates or specimen boxes piled in their quarters.

■ Physical Data

A typical Cutter like the "Deltaboat" model used by USSA Rangers is about 40 meters long, and weighs over 250 tons. Internally, it is divided into two sections; the Command Section and the Aft Hull, and both the Command Section and Aft Hull have two separate decks.

The Command Section is 8 meters long. Deck 1 of the Command Section, the top deck, is the bridge, which is very cramped, with most of the available space taken up with crew stations, a large number of monitors, and the Cutter's mainframe computer system (which serves as the Shunt navigational station). Directly below the bridge on Deck 2 of the Command Section is the Mekton docking collar, airlock, and spacesuit lockers. Airtight pressure doors lead aft from the command section to the Aft Hull.

Directly aft of the Bridge, on Deck 1 of the Aft Hull, are the crew's quarters. This area, roughly four meters long, consists of bunks for six, a one-meter by one-meter galley, and a shower facility about two-thirds the size of the galley. The same sink used in the galley is also used for shaving, tooth-brushing, etc. Aft of the crew's quarters is an air recycler, a water recycler, and a two-hundred liter water tank that feeds into the crew's quarters, and also into the fusion generator area in case of an overheat. Overall, there is less space in this Deck than in any other area of the ship.

On Deck 2 of the Aft Hull, occupying only a little more room than the crew's quarters, is the mission area, also known as the lab. This area contains a comprehensive laboratory area which also includes medical facilities. The lab has its own forty-liter water tank with a recycler and purifier. Two pressure doors lead aft from the lab; one leads to a small closet lined with Flash Freeze lockers for storing specimens, and the other leads to the fusion generator and the reaction mass (i.e., fuel) section.

Surrounding these areas is a labyrinth of claustrophobic engineering crawlspaces which afford vital access to the innumerable systems which comprise the Cutter's Shunt drive: The anomalon generator, the Graser, the sidereal collector and the fusion generator. In addition, these crawlspaces include maintenance panels leading to the Cutter's thrusters, vernier rockets, landing gear mechanisms, and the rotational motors which deploy the cutter's variable-geometry wings (used for atmospheric flight).

■ Mission Parameters

On a typical mission, the Cutter uses its Shunt system to take the Cutter from system to system. Upon arrival, the Cutter descends to the planetary surface, protected by a re-entry ballute.

What makes the Cutter truly versatile is the Mekton which is typically docked to it. All SAC Mektons have specialized head units with an airlock located at the back of the head. This locks onto the top-front of the Cutter, and the crew can transfer between the two. In this arrangement, the Cutter almost seems to be an oversize backpack for the Mekton. Further, the the body of the Mekton can rotate 90° backwards underneath the Cutter, for streamlining or re-entry purposes. At any time, one of the crew can move forward into the Mekton's specialized cockpit and detach the Mek from the Cutter. These two "halves" are each capable of independent operation. The advantage to this design is that the Cutter does not require a large internal mecha hangar, which allows for a more compact design which can dedicate more internal space to engines and crew than to its Mekton.

For planetary survey missions, the Mekton can disengage from the Cutter (which stays where it is to gather sensor information) while the Mekton goes on a "walkabout" to explore or perform reconnaissance. While the SCC's Cutters are generally armed only with defensive Gauss weaponry, the SAC's models are usually modified to mount heavy anti-ship armament.

The docking procedure and format has worked so well for the SCC Rangers that the ODF Scouts, and later the ODF Jägers, duplicated this system almost verbatim for their own use. ODF Cutters are generally larger and more heavily armed than their SCC counterparts, and the ODF is prepared to use their Cutter force to keep the SCC from "claim jumping" new planets for colonization.
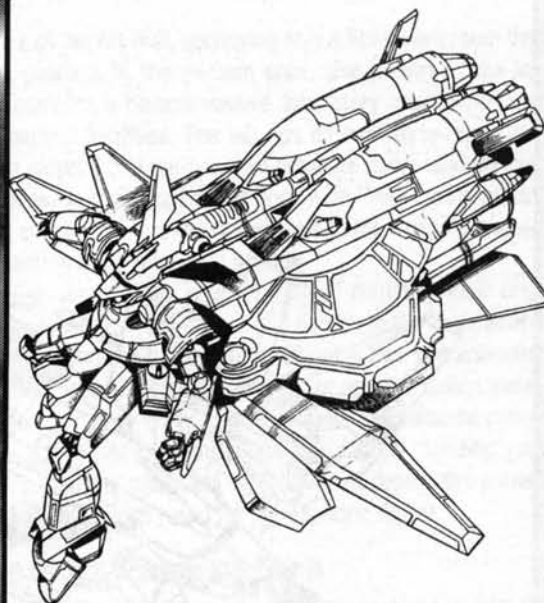

SCC *DELTABOAT*-CLASS CUTTER
The image at right depicts a Cutter used by the SCC Rangers for short-range exploration. It is often teamed up with Galliard Mektons for system exploration.

MEKTON STATS
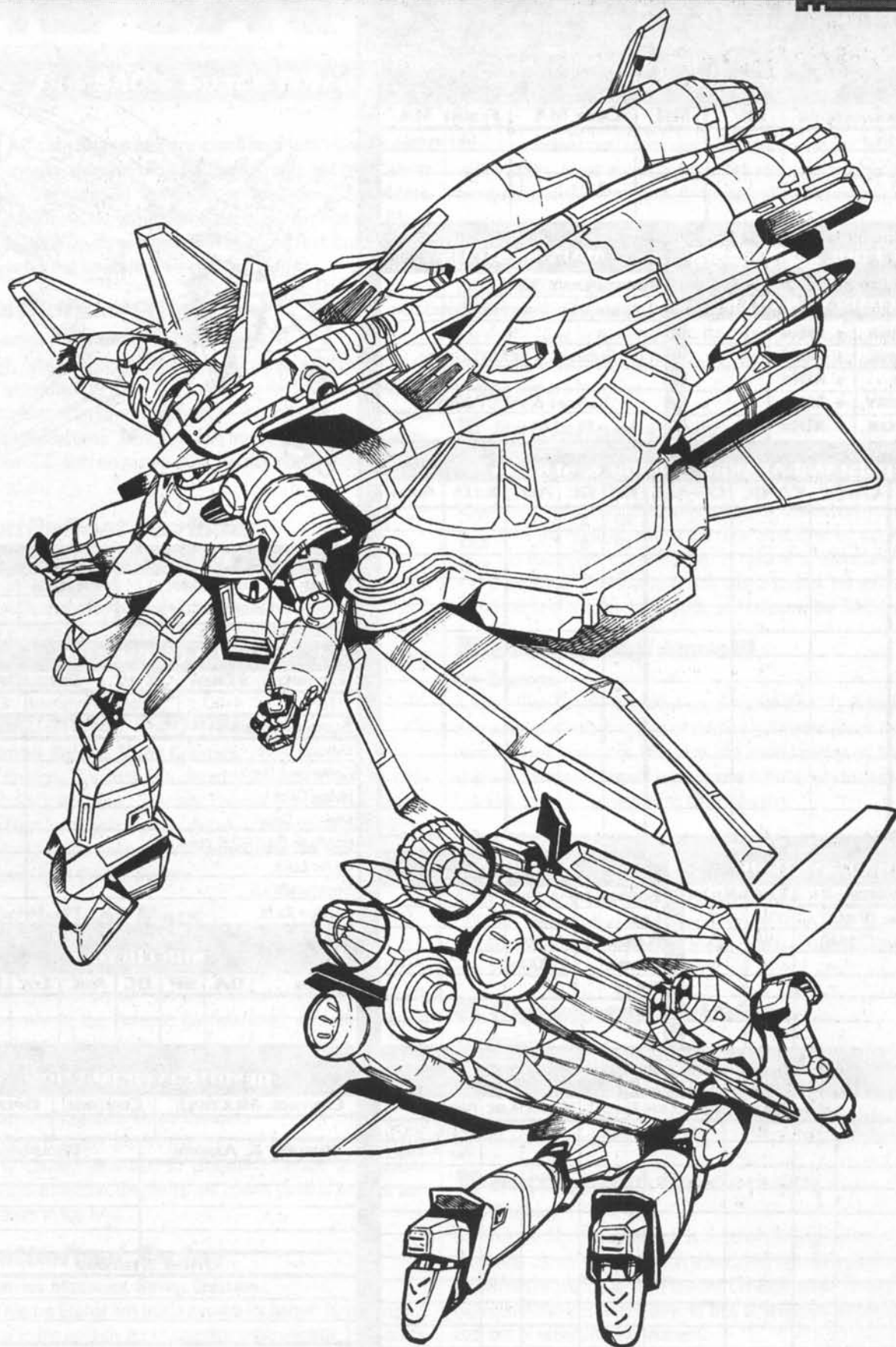
CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starship	-2		0	14 Hexes
(Superlight x100 scale)				

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1

Universal Environment Protection

Sublight & SHUNT Drive

Transat & VTOL Ability

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Hull (Torso)	-	-	-	10	10	-	200	-
R. Wingblock	-	-	-	10	10	-	100	-
L. Wingblock	-	-	-	10	10	-	100	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	SCC Cutter Deltaboat Class	WEIGHT	COST
		350t	31,365

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Torso	4~10	Screen	Armored	E-Raft

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Mekton Dock	T	-
Command Deck	T	-
Living Deck	T	-
Mission Deck	T	-
Storage Bay (12.5 tons)	T	-
Basic Lock	T	-
Spotlights x3	T	-
Escape Raft	T	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thruster (7 MA)	RW	0
Main Thruster (7 MA)	LW	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main		
LOC	Hull		
RANGE	100km		
COMM	30,000km		
KILLS	-		
NOTES			

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Pop-Out Gauss CIDS	-2	13	10K	n/a	10	T	∞ BV, 360°, Var. A-Miss.

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS							

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

SAC ship squadrons are combined into combat commands, composed of a Shunt-equipped Fleet Carrier and/or several Cruisers, as well the Battleriders, Mektons, fighters, and Cutters carried on the Shunt vessels. Battle*fleets* are based around a Fleet Carrier; battle*groups* do not contain a Fleet Carrier.

Battlefleet Xjiang

Fleet Carrier *Phoenicia*, Four Cruisers.

At age 61, Admiral Benjamin Xjiang is still fit, alert, and capable. He prefers negotiation to force in his dealings with Outworlders, and has compromised on several occasions—his leniency and views on "managed ecosystems" bring criticism from the more radical members of the SCC; only his record of successful missions keeps him in the SAC at all.

Battlefleet Marindar

Fleet Carrier *Sleipnir*, Six Cruisers.

Admiral Emilio Marindar is renowned as a stickler for regulations and is a skilled amateur xenobiologist. He transferred from the SCC to better enforce the USSA's edicts and protect alien biosystems. He is ruthless in his pursuit of "eco-exploiters," as he calls them, and there are gruesome rumors about his interrogation methods...

Battlefleet Derjinsky

Fleet Carrier *Solaria*, Three Cruisers.

Admiral Phillippa Derjinsky is rumored to be next in line for command of SAC Academy. She has commanded the Sol System Defense Fleet for 12 years, and is already in charge of the advanced training for Line and Assault Division personnel. As such, her fleet rarely moves from the Sol System.

Battlefleet Mars

Fleet Carrier *Ares*, Eight Cruisers.

The newest fleet with the newest ships, Battlefleet Mars is SAC's main striking arm of the war. Admiral Khamul Mars is charged with taking the war to the Pleiades Confederation, and not bothering with small-scale exploitation.

Battlefleet Naguma

Fleet Carrier *Megiddo*, Three Cruisers

Admiral Boris Naguma doesn't see that much combat, since his battlefleet is usually employed in protecting distant SCC probes. Because of the mission, the battlefleet boasts some of the best sensor operators in the SAC.

Battlefleet Escher

Fleet Carrier *Madonna*, Seven Cruisers.

Admiral Alanna Escher has made a name for herself by training her personnel in the unlikely art of boarding other vessels. Her tactics,

though unconventional (some describe them as "insane"), have met with success. Ships and Mektons in her command tend to eschew heavy weaponry in favor of swift speed and maneuverability.

Battlefleet Kazaki

Fleet Carrier *Regulus*, Five Cruisers.

Admiral Kalvin Kazaki is one of the old guard, a man devoted to SAC's duty to enforce the USSA's laws rather than fighting a war. His crews excel at detecting, tracking, and apprehending malefactors, even through the voids of space. How his command will fare in open war is a question.

Battlefleet Cipotek

Fleet Carrier *Atalanta*, Ten Cruisers.

Admiral Donal Cipotek has the best combat record of SAC's admirals. A bold and insightful tactician, Cipotek has the uncanny ability to make the right decision at the right time, even on insufficient data. His battlefleet is usually held in reserve at Gamma IV base, and is deployed to handle problems others cannot. He arrived late at the Battle of the Northern Rings, and oversaw the SAC's retreat.

Battlegroup Napelli

Six Cruisers.

Admiral Gina Napelli is a direct appointee of the SCC. Promoted as a reward for intercepting and destroying a Pleiades Shunt ship carrying Crystalchime trees (although she nearly destroyed her own ship in the process), Napelli is convinced that the way to destroy the Pleiades threat is by destroying their shipping.

Battlegroup Landopov

Eight Cruisers.

Admiral William "Bill" Landopov advocates the destruction of the ODF. His tactics have been described as rash, and he's been accused of being a glory-hound, but to date he's won his battles, if only just barely.

Battlegroup McHaless

Six Cruisers.

Commodore Namh McHaless is largely viewed as a political hack, given a minor command in return for his liaison service. His record is undistinguished, and his group captains are largely responsible for any effectiveness his group has.

Battlegroup Gundersson

Five Cruisers.

Commodore Ngao Gundersson is another SCC appointee, but his command comes from a faction advocating the obliteration of the industrialized worlds of the Pleiades Confederation. To date, SAC high command has a dim view of this strategy, so Gundersson is kept out of action, for the moment.

■ *Ships of the SAC*

When it first took shape, the SAC's navy was designed to cover the Solar System with relatively small vessels. These vessels had limited armaments and crews, but great operational range and low cost, so they could be deployed for greater coverage than larger, more capable ships. Since the pirates and smugglers they were going after were small and under-armed, this didn't matter too much.

These small ships have remained the basis for SAC's construction and combat philosophy. As the command turned interstellar, the corvettes and cutters were adapted to ride along with the new Shunt vessels, forming the cloud of ships characteristic to SAC assault groups. This scheme also gave SAC battlegroups the ability to cover more space than a single ship would.

This philosophy affected the concepts of SAC's Shunt ships. Whereas the assault boats were streamlined and capable of atmospheric maneuvers, the new big ships took on the appearance of modules strung together by structural members. With so many subsidiary ships, there was no reason to streamline the Shunt vessels, and the open frame left docking ports for the smaller ships.

At the present time, SAC has four distinct types of spaceship: Fighters, Battleriders, Cruisers, and Fleet Carriers.

■ *Fighter*

Length 50-75m, Mass 20-50 tons, Crew 1-3, Acceleration 3-4 G, armed with missile-type weapons and gauss guns.

This is the SAC's dedicated assault ship, about the size of a small scramjet or shuttle. It forms the outer picket lines of SAC fleets; if larger-scale combat is anticipated, it is re-armed with anti-ship missiles and attacks in squadrons, like torpedo bombers of old.

■ *Battlerider*

Length 250-500m, Mass 2,500-15,000 tons, Crew 50-100, Acceleration 1.5-2 G, armed with torpedo launchers, gauss guns, a starbolt cannon bay, and fighter/Mekton bay.

The Battlerider is the mainstay of SAC. A long-haul ship, it is almost the equal of a cruiser, but lacks a Shunt drive. Because of this, it must be "ferried" from system to system; once there, a battlerider can function almost as well as a cruiser. It carries its own fighters, and Mektons, as well as crew facilities for all its craft. There are two main models of SAC battleriders—the first is the *Ace* class, which was designed for Solar System duty. The second is the *Journeyman* class, which resembles a small Cruiser. Both are armed with a central starbolt weapons bay and several torpedo bays, with gauss weapons turrets for handling Mektons and small ships.

■ *Cruiser*

Length 300-600m, 40,000-90,000 tons, Crew 150-250, Acceleration 1.5 G, armed with torpedo launchers, gauss turrets, 2-3 starbolt cannon bays, 2-3 Mekton/fighter bays. Some are armed with Gauss Cannon.

The Cruiser is a beefed-up Battlerider with a Shunt drive. It serves as the base for a number of fighters and cutters and 1-2 Battleriders (The *Master*-class, for example, carries two). Some of the new Cruisers pack Gauss Cannon armament, like their ODF counterparts—the lessons learned from the Battle of the Northern Rings means all future Cruisers will be armed this way.

■ *Fleet Carrier*

Length 1500m, 2,500,000 tons, Crew 1500, Acceleration 1.5 G, armed with Gauss Cannon, torpedo bays, starbolt bays, Mekton/fighter bays.

The Fleet Carrier is the center of an entire battle fleet. It can ferry up to sixteen Battleriders or dozens of shuttles (in a Mechabay). Hundreds of Mektons and fighters cram its bays, and it even carries ground troops and vehicles (although no carriers currently carry their full complement, most are at 50% or less). The Admiral aboard makes a Fleet Carrier the command center for its area of space. At present, SAC is trying to figure out a way to fit larger, spinal-mount Starbolts into their Fleet Carriers.

■ *SUBLIGHT TRAVEL*

Large starships are equipped with Shunt drives, but all ships have high-G booster engines for sublight, planet-to-planet travel; they move the ship at about 433km/sec (or 1/4 AU per day).

■ *STARSHIP WEAPONS*

Gauss Turrets: These are dual-barrel, triple-barrel, or full-automatic versions of the normal magnetic accelerator weapons commonly carried by Mektons. Used against Mektons, fighters, and missiles, although Naval Gauss Howitzers are available too.

Gauss Cannon: Mounted only on large vessels, this is a spinal-mount mass-driver with tremendous punch.
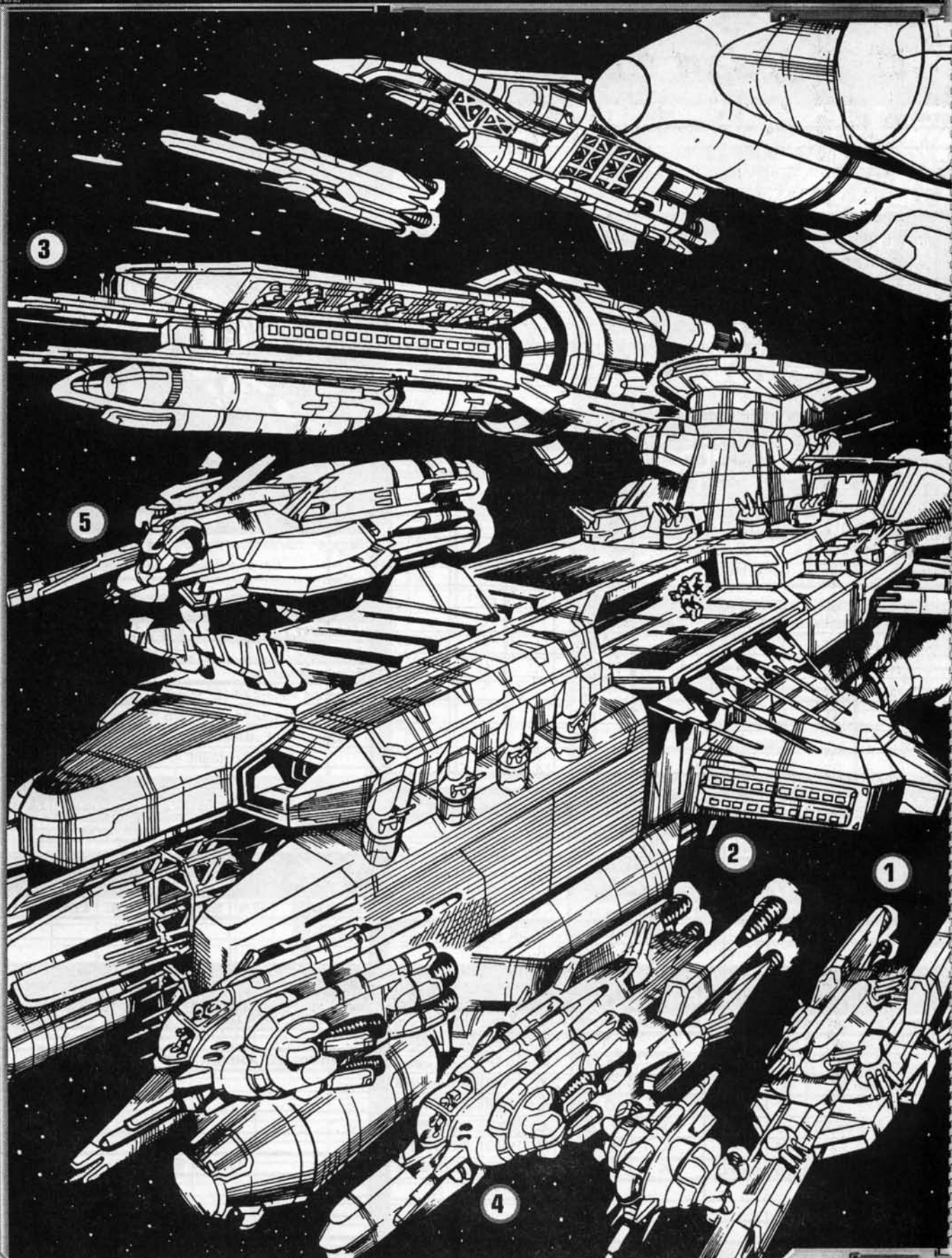
Torpedoes: Large ship-to-ship missiles. One will obliterate an assault ship; two or three will finish off a Battlerider or Cruiser.

Starbolt Launchers: Linear accelerators that launch a magnetic bubble of fusing hydrogen plasma at the target. Short-ranged but incredibly destructive, they can tear a ship apart with a few shots—the effect is like hitting the target with a miniature sun!

**Stellar Armament Command's
Space Forces**

1: *Journeyman*-class Battlerider.　2: *Legend*-class Fleet Carrier.
3: *Master*-class Cruiser.　4: *Cavalier* Starfighter.
5: *Deltaboat* Cutter.

MEKTON

多次元機甲騎士道

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starfighter	-3		0	32 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Supercharged Powerplant	
Space Protection	
Transat	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Nose	-	-	-	6	1	-	6	-
Fuselage	-	-	-	6	1	-	12	-
Right Wing	-	-	-	6	1	-	6	-
Left Wing	-	-	-	6	1	-	6	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (6 MA)	Fus	0
Sub-Thruster (4 MA)	RW	0
Sub-Thruster (4 MA)	LW	0
+2 MA for Wings		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup
LOC	Nose	Fus.
RANGE	15km	1km
COMM	1500km	300km
KILLS	2	2
NOTES	ASP, Target Analyzer	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Machine Gauss	+0	12	2K	▼	2	Nose	Linked to other M
Ammo	+1			40	4	N &F	Gauss, Tracer
M Gauss Pod X2	+0	12	2K	▼	2 X2	1/WMT	Linked to other M
Ammo X2	+1			40 X2	4	1/WMT	Gauss, Tracer
H. Hunter Missiles X2	+0	11	10K	2 X2	1 X2	F MTs	Smart2, Skill 15
[KKCMs X2	+3	-	1K	3 X2	1 X2	F MTs	Ded. Ctr-Missile
[KKCMs X2	+3	-	1K	5 X2	1 X2	Wings	Ded. Ctr-Missile

MECHA PROFILE
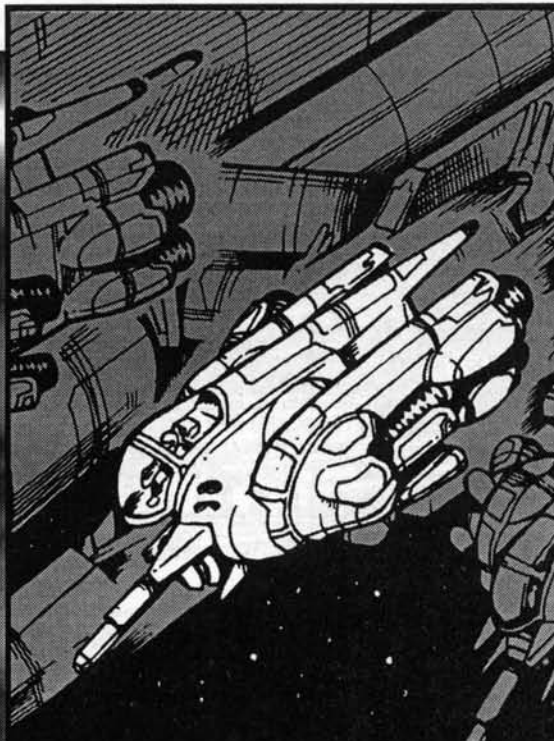
NAME	SAC Starfighter	WEIGHT	COST
	Cavalier Type	38.5t	371.7

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Fuselage	1	Screen	Canopy	E-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Weapon Mount X4 (2/ Fuselage, 1/ Wing)	-	-
QCM X5 (1/ Weapon Mount & Powerplant)	-	-
Bahn/.Zai Futuristic Styling +1 Cool	-	-
Spotlight	Fus	-
Stereo	Fus	-
Basic Lock	Fus	-
Links for all M. Gauss, all KKCM.	-	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	Fus	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Battlerider	-9(-5)		0	14 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=		
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=		
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=		
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=		
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=		

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS: 1

Space Hydraulics
Space Protection
+3 MV Verniers
+4 Targeting Comp
Sublight Drive
Crew Quality = 13+1D10

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	50	10	-	110	-
Superstructure	-	-	-	50	10	-	220	-
Under-hull	-	-	-	50	10	-	110	
Mecha Bay 1	-	-	-	50	10	-	0	-
Mecha Bay 2	-	-	-	50	10	-	0	-
Rotating Crew Section 1	-	-	-	50	10	-	110	-
Rotating Crew Section 2	-	-	-	50	10	-	110	-
Nose	-	-	-	50	10	-	110	-
Thruster Block	-	-	-	50	10	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	Battlerider —	WEIGHT	COST
	Journeyman Class	1296t	34,804

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Bridge	7	Screen	Armored	-	

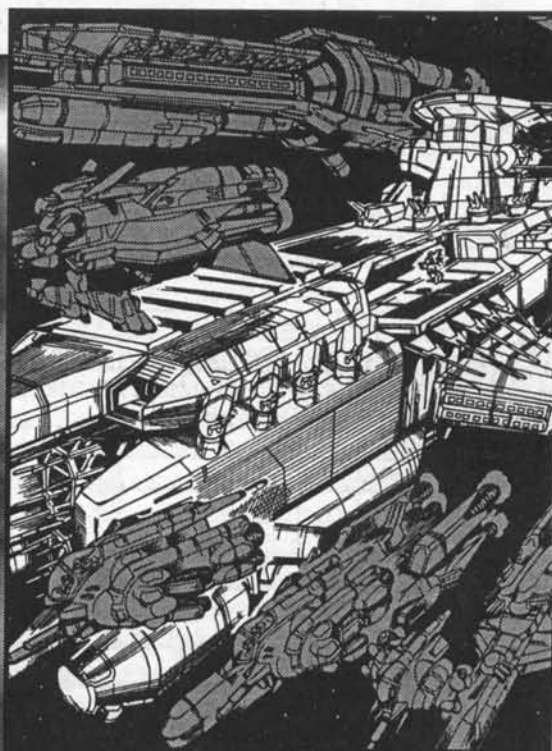| SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Mecha Bays - 2 Bays, 2 Mecha each	Mek Bay	-
Damage Control	S-Str	-
Micromanipulators	U-Hull	-
Cargo - 60 tons	-	-
E-Pod Bay X4	Crew Sct,	-
	S-Str	
QCM and E-System for Powerplant	S-Str	-
Extra Fuel - Double Range	TBlock	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (7 MA)	TBlock	0
Main Thrusters (7 MA)	TBlock	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Radar
LOC	Nose	S-Str	Bridge
RANGE	150	10	1500
COMM	1500	300	
KILLS	20	20	40
NOTES	ASP< Target Analyzer		

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Core L Starbolt	+1	65	100K	∞	100	U-Hull	1 Turn Wrm Up
Naval Gauss Turret X2	+0	30	10K	▼	10 X2	S-Str	BV5
Gauss Ammo				25 X2	25 X2	S-Str	
Light Torpedoes	+0	110	100K	20	130	S-Str	Smart2, Skill 9
Heavy Torpedoes	+0	160	200K	10	130	Nose	Smart 2, Skill 9

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE		CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starcruiser	-5		0	12 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL | +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT X5:	1
Space Hydraulics	
Space Protection	
Sublight Drive	
Shunt Drive	
Crew Quality = 13+1D10	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	60	10	-	400	-
Superstructure	-	-	-	60	10	-	800	-
Rotating Crew Section	-	-	-	60	10	-	400	-
Nose	-	-	-	60	10	-	400	-
Under-Hull	-	-	-	60	10	-	400	-
Mecha Bay	-	-	-	60	10	-	400	-
Thruster Block	-	-	-	60	10	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
SAC Cruiser Master Class		90,000t	367,350

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Bridge		Screen	Armored	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Rotating Crew Section- Lots of living spc.	RCS	-
Mount for Radar	Bridge	-
Damage Control	S_Str	-
Escape Pod Bays X3	S-Str	-
Mecha Bays - 24 Meks, 24 fighters, 16 Tender and Aux vehicles	M-Bay	-
Storage Bays X4	-	-
QCM & E-System for Powerplant	S-Str	-
Spotlight	Nose	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (6 MA)	Tblock	0
Main Thrusters (6 MA)	Tblock	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Radar
LOC	S-Str	S-Str	Brdg Mt
RANGE	1100	100	11000
COMM	13000	3000	
KILLS	200	200	400
NOTES		ASP, Target Analyzer,	
	x256 Res. Intensifiers, Radio/Radar Analyzer		

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Med. Starbolts X3	+1	225	500K	∞	500 X3	2 Nose,	1 Turn Wrm Up
						S-Str	
L Torpedoes (X10	+0	110	100K	100	100	U-Hull	Smart2, Skill 9
Scale)	+0	30	10K	25 X5	30 X5	S-Str	BV5
Naval Gauss Turret X5							

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON

多次元機甲戦士達
メクトン

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starship	-10		0	12 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL

+0

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Hydraulics	
Space Protection	
Sublight Drive	
Shunt Drive	
Crew Quality = 13+1D10	

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Superstructure	-	-	-	100	10	-	2200	-
Turret 1	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Turret 2	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Turret 3	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Turret 4	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Mek/Ftr Bay	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Ground Assault Bay	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Rotating Crew Section	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Nose	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
Rt Thruster Block	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-
L Thruster Block	-	-	-	100	10	-	1100	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (6MA)	TBlock	0
Main Thrusters (6MA)	TBlock	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Radar X2
LOC	Nose	S-Str	Brdg MT
RANGE	2600	200	
COMM	230000	30000	
KILLS	300	200	400 X2
NOTES	ASP, Targ. Anal, x256		
	Res Intens., Radar/Radio Anal.		

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	SAC Fleet Carrier	WEIGHT	COST
	Legend Class	2,500,000	1,204,850

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Bridge	"1"	Screen	Armored	E-Pod	
SUBASSEMBLIES				**LOC**	**K**
Secondary Bridge, 3rd Bridge				S-Str	-
Ground Assault Bay - 6050 Marines				GAB	-
Mek/Ftr Bays - 605 Mek, 605 Ftrs				MBay	-
Marine Vehicles - 7 Spaces				GAB	-
Asst tender & repair vehicles - 1 Spc				MBay	-
Damage Control				Nose	-
E-Pod Bays, Spotlights X5 in var. locations				-	-
Mount for Bridge Radar				Bridge	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Hvy Starbolt X12	+1	275	800K	∞	800 X12	3/Trt	1 Turn Wrm Up
Core Gauss Cannon	-2	900	1000K	▼	1000	S-Str	
Ammo				20	100	S-Str	AP
Gauss Turret X10*	+0		10K	▼	10 X10	S-Str	BV5
Ammo		30		25 X10	25 X10	S-Str	
H Torpedoes*	+0	160	200K	100	1300	S-Str	Smart2, Skill 9
L Torpedoes*	+0	110	100K	200	1300	Nose	Smart2, Skill 9
* X10 Scale							

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION
SERVOS & ARMOR	**WEAPONS**	
OTHER SYSTEMS		

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

COMMON STARSHIP — Courier Starship - Mercury Class

COST	2889.3	WEIGHT	222.22 t	MANEUVER POOL	+0

Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA	Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA
Starship	-1		-	36 Hexes					

Notes: This craft has a Supercharged Powerplant (XS = 1), Space & Underwater Protection, Stealth, a fast Sublight Drive, a Shunt drive, and it has Transat and VTOL ability. It uses an Armored Cockpit with Screen-type controls (and a Stereo of course).

System	Lvl	WA	Range	Dmg	#Sh	K	SP	DC	AbC	Notes	Loc	CP	Eff	Spc	Cost
Fuselage	SL	-	-	-	-	100	10	10	-	Torso servo	-	-	-	-	-
Thrusters	-	-	-	-	-	0	-	-	-	MA=18	Fus	-	-	-	-
Sensors	LH	-	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	200km/18,000km	Fus	-	-	-	-
Passenger Space	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	Room for 10	Fus	-	-	-	-
Cargo Space	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5 tons	Fus	-	-	-	-
QCM x3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	'Plant & Drives	Fus	-	-	-	-
Ejection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	For Powerplant	Fus	-	-	-	-

COMMON STARSHIP — Typical Insystem Transport Ship

COST	2874	WEIGHT	118 t	MANEUVER POOL	+0

Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA	Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA
Corvette	-3		-	16 Hexes					

Notes: This craft has space protection and a sublight drive, as well as 10,000km of reaction mass. Each Cargo Pod section has a QCM and six 5000kg storage blocks. In addition, the hull has 4 additional 5000kg storage blocks (also with QCMs), and the 10-person crew is supported by an Escape system and a Damage Control Package.

These ships were attached to large commercial Shunt carriers for intersystem jumps.

System	Lvl	WA	Range	Dmg	#Sh	K	SP	DC	AbC	Notes	Loc	CP	Eff	Spc	Cost
Hull section	STR	-	-	-	-	60	3	0	-	Torso servo	-	-	-	-	-
Bridge section	STR	-	-	-	-	30	3	0	-	-	Hull	-	-	-	-
Drive section	STR	-	-	-	-	30	3	0	-	-	Hull	-	-	-	-
Cargo Pods 1~4	STR	-	-	-	-	0e	3e	0	-	-	Hull	-	-	-	-
Sensors	MS	-	-	-	-	2,2	-	-	-	70km w/ 10km backups	Hull	-	-	-	-
PDS Gauss Gun	-	+2	4-16	2K	-	2	-	-	-	BV 2 x3	Hull	-	-	-	-
PDS Ammo	-	+1	-	(x15)	40b	2	-	-	-	Variable Anti-Missile	Hull	-	-	-	-

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COMMON STARSHIP — Typical Aerospace Shuttle

COST	143.4	WEIGHT	33.8 t	MANEUVER POOL	+0

Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA	Configuration	MV	MR	Land MA	Flight MA
Shuttle	-6		-	16 Hexes					

Notes: This craft's Powerplant has an XS of 1, and it has Space Protection and Transatmospheric capability. It also carries a 3000km fuel load. The shuttle uses 2 Crew and can carry 10 passengers in the Hull, with enough Escape Pods for all as well as a Damage Control Package.

System	Lvl	WA	Range	Dmg	#Sh	K	SP	DC	AbC	Notes	Loc	CP	Eff	Spc	Cost
Hull	MgH	-	-	-	-	22	1	1	-	Torso servo	-	-	-	-	-
Wings (R & L)	MgH	-	-	-	-	11e	1e	1	-	-	Hull	-	-	-	-
Engines	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12MA hull, 2MA/wing	H, Ws	-	-	-	-
Sensors	MS	-	-	-	-	2, 2	-	-	-	7km, w/ 1km backups	Hull	-	-	-	-
Distress Flares	-	-2	4-16	"5K"	10	3	-	-	-	Flare	Hull	-	-	-	-
Defense Flares	-	-2	4-16	"5K"	4	1	-	-	-	Blast-3 Smoke	Hull	-	-	-	-
Cargo Modules	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2 tons per wing	Hull	-	-	-	-

Shunt Technology

The SHUNT (which stands for Shrodinger/Hawking UNcertainty Transpositioner) is a device that transposes a ship to all points in space/time, then relocates it to a place distant from the starting point. This method of travel is reactionless and instantaneous—there is no applicable "speed" when Shunting.

In order for a starship to travel with this method it must have a GRASER (Gravity Amplified by Stimulated Emission of Radiation), and an anomalon generator. These systems require a sidereal collector to produce the billions of electron-volts necessary to power the systems. One problem is that the sidereal collector must be ignited by a very high energy electromagnetic pulse, which can only be created by large and bulky fusion generators. This means that even slow, small civilian starships have a large percentage of their mass dedicated to fusion reactors.

Faster than light travel near large gravity fields is limited. Gravity bends space and tends to cause the transpositioner to move toward the center of the gravity source. This makes the starship more likely to travel in an undesirable, and potentially deadly direction. Starships have a fusion based thruster or sub-light drive system to push them out of the most effected areas around planets and near stars.

The process is relatively straightforward. The starship's large fusion generators create a high-energy electromagnetic pulse to power the ship's Graser and ignite its sidereal collector, which starts to collect virtual particles (gravitons and anomalons) from the micro-quantum foam of space/time. The ignited Graser uses the collected gravitons to generate a spherical soliton field of coherent gravitic energy around itself, which is injected with anomalons by the anomalon generator. As the ultra-high-energy anomalons enter normal space they decay rapidly, supercharging the ship's gravitic soliton field. This supercharged gravitic field accelerates the ship to infinite speeds, passing through every point in the space/time continuum. Changing the frequency and power of the anomalon beam adjusts the direction and distance that the starship jumps.

The gravity soliton protects the starship during the instant of translocation, due to a quirk of quantum gravity. The total energy in the soliton is infinite, effectively creating a singularity. The singularity and the uncounted stars, planets, galaxies and other objects it passes through, are mutually unaffected. The starship appears at the other end of the wormhole in less than Planck time (10^{-42} seconds). At this point the starship can recharge the sidereal generators for the next jump. If the ship is near its destination, it can proceed at sublight velocities.

Due to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the starship's destination location can vary somewhat. However, modern stellar cartography eliminates the obvious problems of becoming lost by tracking quasars and other objects so distant that they effectively don't move in relationship to any trips inside the Milky Way Galaxy. The skill of a good Shunt navigator can reduce the randomness of each jump, or at least its effect on the interstellar trip. Starships usually have a sublight drive to get around quickly after they reach their destination. All Shunt drives take **1D6 hours** to recharge before another transposition can be made.

The smallest production starship that has a Shunt drive installed is a Superlight Class hull of Starship (100x) Scale. Ten percent of any starship's mass will be just the Shunt drive. A Shunt drive is a cost multiplier, as listed on pg. 81 of *Mekton Zeta Plus*. Shunt transposition time is nearly instantaneous, no matter the Tech Level (this, and the Shunt weight requirement, supercede the rules on pg 81 of *Mekton Zeta+*).

■ *The HyperWeb*

Shunt drives can also be used to transmit radio information at FTL speeds. These HyperWeb relay stations provide an FTL communication network for both the colonies and Earthspace. These are simple Shunt drives combined with a elaborate radio/computer system positioned at a predesignated Shunt Point (at least 1AU above the plane of a system's elliptic). They maintain station-keeping at these points while messages for interstellar transmission are radioed to them from the system's planetary Datawebs. Every 12 hours, they transmit their collected data in a radio burst through a Shunt wormhole to the appropriate system where it is received by the HyperWeb station there and downloaded to the local Dataweb. Each colony has at least one HyperWeb station, thus maintaining a more or less continuous level of 24-48 hour data delivery between all the colonies and Earthspace.

The war has seriously disrupted the HyperWeb Network. The Confederation has "nationalized" its stations and communications between the Confed and the rest of known space have effectively been cut off. It seems likely service will stay rather limited while the bullets are still flying.

NEW SKILL: Shunt Navigation (INT) [H]: In order to successfully navigate a starship through a translocation, a character must have this skill. It is based as much on intuition and experience as book learning. Level 1 is the minimum requirement for a person to get a license to own a translight yacht. Most commercial Shunt lines (including the SCC) require a minimum Level 3 to pilot freighters or mega-carriers. Military and Ranger ships usually have at least one person with a navigation skill of over 6. Shunt navigators of this quality are very rare and can command very high salaries. An associated skill that a navigator should have is Astronomy.

How to use it: First, the ship's computer needs some astronomical data on the destination to present courses— a detailed telescopic examination (max distance 600LY) at the *very least*. Well-travelled systems have specific "Shunt Points" for commercial travel with Data bonuses of up to +10. Scout surveys of distant systems can give Data bonuses of up to +5. The navigator uses his own intuitive feeling on which presented course is the best one to use. When a ship is ready to ignite the Shunt drive, the navigator rolls INT + *Shunt Navigation* +1D10+ Data Bonus: The higher the result, the closer to the target the ship Shunts (but note that if the destination is a planet, the minimum distance is 1AU).

Roll	Transposition Result
35+	As below, but 1/2 AU from planet (wow, a quantum anomaly)!
25-35	Right on target (or exactly 1AU from a planet).
20-24	Nice and close; 5 hours sublight travel away (or 1.5 AU from planet)
15-19	Nearby; 10 hours sublight travel away (or 2 AU from planet)
10-14	In the vague area; 3D10 hours from destination (or 3 AU from planet)
<10	Oops… You've Shunted to an unknown location! The navigator must make a Very Difficult Astronomy check to determine the ship's position so that a return jump can be correctly calculated.

NEW SKILL: Shunt Tech (TECH) [H]: Shunt systems require a huge amount of maintenance, and need to be overhauled about once every year. The Shunt drive requires special training to service properly. The SCC requires Engineers with at least Level 2 of this skill on all starships. Characters with Level 5 can to do major overhauls to the Shunt system in a starport. At Level 7, a character could be a chief engineer on board almost any civilian ship. Basic Tech, Repair and Jury Rig are associated skills, and an engineer typically has the science skill Quantum Physics.

PERSONAL LOG: JESSE RYUZAKI, ODF JÄGER FORCES.

TIME: 12:51.6 Moments after I cut loose the Mekton's shoulder blocks and blew the docking link to the Starblade, it hit me. *I must be crazy! I've just volunteered to stop a frackin' war!*

For the next twenty minutes, I was able to shove it to the back of my head, sweating on getting that old-model Galliard lined up on the Fleet's outcoming vector and laying on the burn. Then followed ten minutes of terror as I desperately convinced the cruiser sent to intercept my SAC mecha that I was really on their side. Honest.

I told the Cruiser Loki's crew my Troub had been clobbered during the battle and I'd had to search the wreckage for a suit I could salvage. They bought it; especially when they saw the plasma burns and the blown-off arm (thanks to Dyson's careful gunnery). Two Drakens dragged me into the flight deck and watched carefully as I popped the top and clambered out.

"JESSEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE!"

Akadi Kafe slammed into me like a soft tornado, and wrapped her arms around my waist. "I thought you were dead," she exploded happily, spinning me around in a zero gee waltz. I grinned. "Wanna bring me back to life?" I bantered back.

Her brilliant smile was the second best homecoming present I could have asked for...

"What's going on, Jess?" she asked a few hours later as we lay wrapped in her bunkbag on the nearby cutter Paradox. I must have had on my "thinking look".

"I have to go to Solingen." I began cautiously. "I have to talk to Placide. I've got something important I have to tell her about."

If Aki and I hadn't been more old friends than lovers, I guess I would have been in a *lot* more trouble. Instead of killing me, she made a sour face. "Placide, huh?" she said acidly, just a little jealousy in her tone. "Any reason other than the obvious?"

"I found out what the Earthers are really planning for us. And I also found out that the Board of Directors is jackin' us around. They *bombed* Faraday, Aki."

Akadi grimaced. "You're not going to get much sympathy there, Jess. Skip the fact that Placide probably still hates you like poison; she already <u>knew</u> about the Ranoxis op."

"Huh?" I sat bolt upright. She crossed her long legs and floated over me like a zero-gee Buddha, explaining patiently the whole time. "I *said* she knew all about it. She signed the directive to send my Jäger group to site mark the airdrops." Her expression became serious as she saw my face. "Okay, Jess—what's going on?" she finally said. "What happened out there—really?"

So I told her.
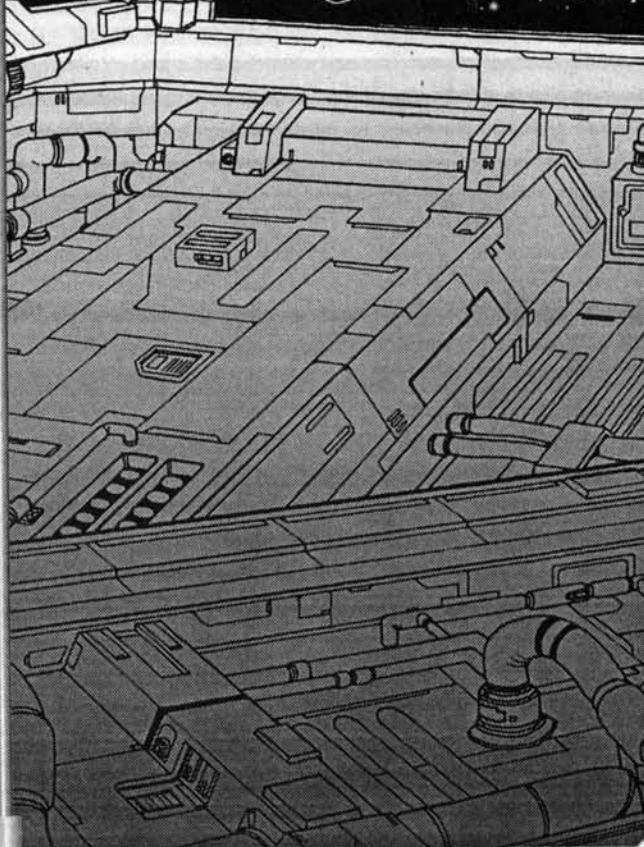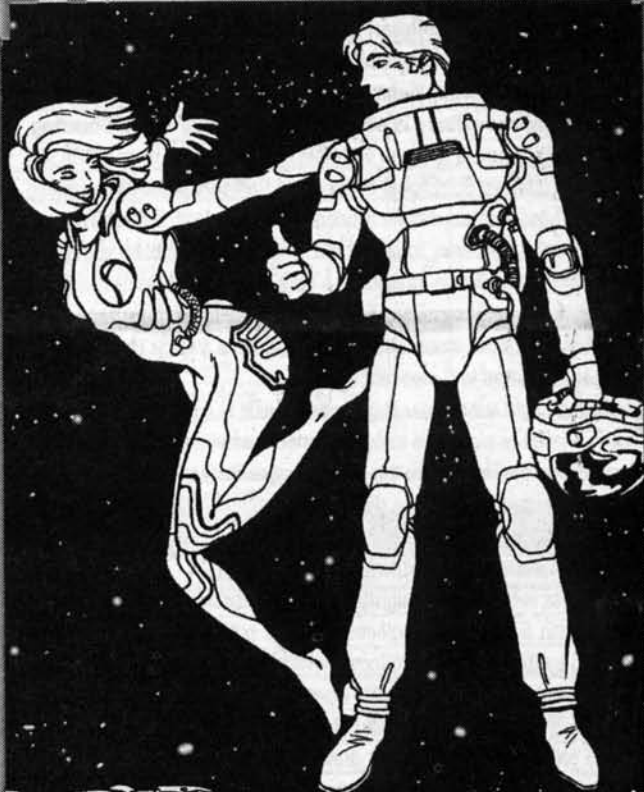
■ *A History of the Pleiades*

Following the Snowball incident, Expansionist influence waned as the Gaians gained control of the USSA. Limited by this growing Gaian interference, the Expansionists held a referendum with representatives of the megacorporations. At Ceres Dome in the Belt, they devised a brave plan. Their new goal was to leave the ravaged solar system altogether, and a key element of this plan was the Solingen corporation's offer to sponsor the building of a starship!

Solingen GmbH, a powerful conglomerate descended from International Electric and other euro-corps, had become fed up with Gaian policies. Dr. Nathan Parker, head of astrophysics research for Solingen, had discovered certain quantum uncertainty principles that lead him to believe he could create a system that would allow the ship to "jump" through space at faster-than-light speeds: the Shunt Drive.

Construction of the ship began in secret in the asteroid belt under the administrative smokescreen of yet another colony habitat project. A dozen asteroids were completely dismantled for raw materials and thousands of people were quietly recruited into the project. The result was the *Longrider*, a colony spinner outfitted with a massive fusion sublight engine and a prototype Shunt drive. Their proposed destination: the Pleiades globular cluster, some four hundred light years from Earth. In 2142, with a great amount of ceremony and hope (and considerable USSA surprise and consternation), the huge ship's mighty fusion drive was ignited and the ship moved up the plane of the solar elliptic to get clear of the gravity well. Once free of gravity's interference, Parker activated the Shunt drive and the *Longrider* jumped out of the solar system and into history.

With it's new stardrive, the *Longrider* transpositioned itself directly to the Pleiades Cluster in twelve and two tenths seconds. A few smaller jumps brought them to the planet-rich Primus system. As soon as the colony on Primus 4 was established, it grew quickly, and Solingen GmbH started building Shunt transports to spread throughout the cluster. But when Dr. Parker's requests to send an envoy back to Earth with the good news were constantly denied, he realized that the Powers That Be (namely Solingen GmbH) were simply not going to recontact the USSA. Incensed, he made his own arrangements to "acquire" a Shunt ship and go back himself. Within six months of his historic hijacking of the *Starlight Express* to Earth in 2146, SAC Shunt ships started appearing in the Pleiades.

The colonial leaders were outraged, and threats of armed response swept through the Primus system. But some were actually grateful to hear from Earth—setting up colonies this far from any civilization was a daunting challenge to even the most hardened frontiersman. And, as if they appreciated the delicacy of the situation, the SAC ships came in peace, stating that they simply wanted to make sure that the colonies were properly protected. Despite the fact that the colonies were founded in violation of USSA policies, Earth seemed willing to make peace with the Expansionists, and the Expansionists seemed ready to oblige.

The reality was, the Expansionists had accomplished most of their goals. The existence of the colonies was an established fact which the USSA now accepted, and the support of a strong industrialized center (even one 400 light years away) helped speed their consolidation. The colonies needed willing people most of all, and the SCC was prepared to supply these in abundance, arranging colony transports in coordination with the local Board of Planetary Directors which had been set up by the colonists as an inter-

planetary administration. The SAC forces seemed mainly interested in preventing excesses by developers and corporates. While protests from corporate leaders and even a few terrorist attacks continued for years, the transition to a USSA administration in the Pleiades was surprisingly—and, to some, depressingly—easy.

Still Solingen GmbH was not sitting on its laurels, and it continued to work to dominate the Pleiades. In 2154, Primus 4 was officially named Solingen, with its capital being the largest city, New Plymouth. Solingen (the planet) was given a seat on the Colonial Representatives Council and that year the Board of Planetary Directors officially opened up the rest of the cluster to colonization. From 2154 to 2168 the cluster experienced a population boom. The seven systems of the Pleiades were colonized. The main planet in each system was generally reserved for "residential" use only, with heavy industry or other undesirable functions located off-planet. Things moved apace as the colonies spread across their planets. Solingen GmbH supplied the ships, the SCC supplied the people. Gravesend (Forge 5) became an industrial world, and the center of shipbuilding for the entire cluster. In 2166 the various shipbuilding companies merged into Gravesend Shipwrights.

But the honeymoon was soon over as small frictions began to occur between the USSA and the colonies. Mandatory birth control, strictly limited residential growth, and prohibitions on interacting with native ecologies were starting to hamstring growth and seriously tick off the colonists. SAC patrols started arresting colonists and demanding their incarceration at Gaol. In 2167, Avatar Shiva, a successful, if unscrupulous, businessman from Earth, purchased the Rocinante system, colonized a moon of Rocinante 5, and christened it Zanzibar. Furthermore, he declared that the entire Rocinante system to be exempt from all laws. The SCC, predictably, threatened SAC intervention, but eventually relented. Zanzibar has since become a haven for smugglers, black marketeers, and, supposedly, pirates. Such incidents inspired an increasing SAC presence and simply contributed to the mounting pressure.

By 2175, the Board of Directors of Solingen GmbH decided that the cluster needed to become autonomous. At their urging, the Planetary Directors

PLEIADES HISTORY TIMELINE

Date	Event
2142	The *Longrider* transposes to the Pleiades. Primus 4 colonized.
2145	Colonization of Pleiades Cluster begins.
2146	A scoutship arrives at Earth from the Pleiades.
2146.04	Telluria (Proteus 3) established.
2147-2150	The first USSA ships arrive in the Pleiades. Relations are established and the SAC begins to deploy as a defense and police force. SCC colony ships begin to arrive to supplement local colonization efforts.
2152.08	Hammersmith (Forge 5) established.
2154.09	Settlements on Claymore (Primus 2) and Salamanca (Primus 3) established.
2155.02	Fourwinds (Asgard 3) established.
2159.10	Organon (Cronus 2) established.
2160.11	Aldersgate (Halcyon 3) established.
2161.03	Settlement on Chelsea (Forge 3) established.
2164.02	Ironsun (Loki 2) established.
2166.06	Formation of Gravesend Shipwrights, Inc. Gravesend assumes a virtual monopoly on starship and Shunt construction in the Pleiades.
2167.06	Settlement on Arcadia (Halcyon 2) established.
2167.11	Rising crime in the cluster results in the establishment of a penal colony on Gaol (Cronus 1).
2168.03	Zanzibar, and the entire Rocinante system, declared free of laws.
2172.05	Settlement on Rubicon (Proteus 4) established.
2174.03	Settlement on Athanaeum (Cronus 3) established
2175.06.15	In a secret meeting, the Solingen Corp arranges the Articles of the Confederation with various directors of four Pleiades systems. They begin arming the militia and building the Outworlds Defense Force.
2176	Cold war begins between Earth and Solingen over colonization issues.
2176.05	SAC Pleiades Gamma Base established and brought up to full strength. SAC cruisers begin policing systems on the fringe of colonized space.
2176.06-2180	A series of SAC interventions in Pleiades space strain relations between Earth and Solingen. These incidents include pitched battles with planetary resource pirates and other minor forces.
2180.01.20	Debate rages in the USSA government concerning the planet Ranoxis. Several Pleiades representatives declare the existence of the Confederation and walk out of the USSA Council.
2180.02.24	SAC Cruiser *Mandrake* sent to act as a sentry in the Ranoxis system. They find an illegal crystalchime harvesting team on planet.
2180.02.29	SAC Mekton forces attacked by corporate Mektons. SAC battle fleet dispatched to Ranoxis.
2180.03.22	SAC battle fleet arrives in the Ranoxis system.
2179.03.26	ODF battle fleet arrives in the Ranoxis system.
2179.04.24	SAC Cruiser *Centaurian* destroys a corporate Shunt ship near the ringed gas giant North in the Ranoxis system.
2180.04.25	Battle of the Northern Rings. ODF fleet defeats SAC fleet. SAC fleet retreats from the Ranoxis system.

of Solingen, Telluria, Hammersmith, and Ironsun gathered together and drafted the Articles of Confederation for an interplanetary government, independent of the USSA. These ambitious (and undoubtably brave) individuals became the nucleus for the Pleiades Confederation.

The Board of Planetary Directors was immediately faced with a dramatic shift in power. A four system voting bloc was now in place (even if they had not announced the Confederacy, they were acting with a united front). This bloc began legislating strongly to suit the needs of colonists on the frontier of known space, in many cases ignoring or blatantly violating directives from the USSA and SCC. They argued that the idea of preserving planets as parks was a fine one to espouse from a comfortable armchair on Earth; but an extremely impractical one in an environment where many people were homesteading in wilderness areas.

The USSA gave its response to this shift in sentiment in 2176. On an uninhabited world orbiting a red giant called Pleiades Gamma, the SAC established an extensive naval base, larger than any of the ones previously constructed in the Pleiades. The first the BPD knew of this was when a massive fleet of transports transpositioned into orbit around Gamma 4, and the pre-assembled components of a military base and shipyards unloaded. When the base became operational scarcely a week later, the USSA announced that the Gamma 4 base would be the SAC regional headquarters for maintaining order in the Pleiades cluster.

The BPD viewed this incident as a invalidation of their authority in the Pleiades and colonial policy as they saw it. The USSA had not requested permission (or even announced the intention) to establish such a massive military presence in the Pleiades. While it was voted against after the fact by the Colonial Council, the base became an fact of life which would not go away. The BPD reacted in 2178 by limiting SAC docking rights within colonial systems. If the SAC insisted on having a huge base in the cluster, it would be the only place SAC ships would be able to resupply. Many SAC bases were stripped down as local support was withdrawn.

In the meantime, other incidents continued to spark unrest and anger. Colonial militia Mektons were found escorting corporate expeditions into areas interdicted by USSA law. SAC cruisers would stop transports and independent freighters and search them without cause, often levying fines or confiscating cargo under questionable grounds. Broad limits on colonial weaponry were passed to prevent wholesale slaughter of native wildlife, but these laws greatly endangered the colonists of Telluria, who needed heavy weapons to defend themselves from the native saurian fauna. Militia weapons grew more powerful as SAC responses grew more harsh.

Then, in 2179 the independent Cutter *Wildemuth* explored the Ranoxis system. On Ranoxis 3, it discovered a strange, plant-like silicate life form soon dubbed "Crystalchime Trees" due to the wind-chime like noises they produced, but tests soon revealed that their crystalline structure was a natural superconductor at "room temperature." Solingen GmbH immediately set up shop and began the mass harvesting of the Trees.

Eventually, the information on Ranoxis made its way to the Science Council in Earthspace. Concerned about the planet's biosphere—and to prove a point—the SEC lobbied to interdict the system until it could assess the situation. The Pleiades Colonial Representatives strongly protested this action in USSA Council. At first ignored, then outvoted, the majority of Pleiades representatives vocally declared the succession of the Confederation, delivered their resignations and walked out.

The SAC immediately dispatched a ship to the Ranoxis system to prevent the mass harvesting of Crystalchime Trees. When the SAC Mekton force encountered a harvesting project under way guarded by a squadron of armed Mektons, the battle was joined. Soon, both the SAC and ODF dispatched battle fleets to the system. On April 25th, in the rings of the gas giant North, the first true space naval battle in the history of humankind happened, with a costly victory being won by the ODF. The war for the fate of the Pleiades had started.

For the past two months, known space has held its collective breath. Both sides have been digging in, reinforcing their main systems and building up their fleets. While war has been declared by the Confederation, neither side has launched a major strike. Like two samurai with swords locked, the antagonists seem to be waiting for the other to make the first move—but no one doubts that move *will* come ...

■ *Corporations of the Pleiades*

The corporate world of the Pleiades is dominated by <u>Solingen GmbH</u>. As the founders of the first colony, Solingen GmbH is the oldest corporation in the cluster. It was founded out of a merger of two megacorporations which survived the Unification War, International Electric and Euro Business Machines. Solingen now makes just about everything, from arms to pharmaceuticals to Mektons to clothing, and receives very preferential treatment when it comes to taxes, duties, and shipping. Now that the Confederation is in charge, their dominance is assured. Even those worlds not part of the Confederation are dependent on Solingen goods and the trade flow continues despite the impending hostilities. Basically, if you do business in the colonies, you do business with Solingen.

The reason Solingen receives cuts on shipping and duties is that the Cluster's main (actually only) inter-system transportation firm, **Pleiades Freight & Shipping**, is a subsidiary of Solingen. Their ships are the primary form of interstellar transport in the cluster, something Solingen has worked hard to maintain. This monopoly has forced many firms into contracting the Charybdis smugglers from Zanzibar to haul freight for them. Even with the extra fees required to buy the Charybdis' honesty, it still comes out to be less than the extra fees tacked on by PFS to make up for the discounts they give Solingen. Also, several small companies have recently merged to become **Colonial Independent Shippers**, and are trying to gain a market share.

Frontier Armaments is a new company with an old history and one of the few powerful corporations not directly linked to Solingen. With the strict gun control on Earth, Colt Mauser saw nothing but declining markets. Knowing they did best in a frontier environment, they moved to the Pleiades. Frontier Armaments has set up shop on Telluria, and Frontier Armaments weapons are currently the most popular in the cluster. Before the declaration of war, they were also doing a respectable amount of business secretly exporting to the Ravagers on Earth.

Gravesend Shipwrights is a conglomerate of ship building firms, and supplies nearly all military and civilian starships in the Pleiades Cluster. They are also the sole manufacturers of Shunt ships in the Pleiades. Incorporated in June of 2166 on Gravesend, Gravesend Shipwrights annual income is comparable to that of Solingen GmbH.

Control of the mass media in the Pleiades is currently split between three different companies. **DMS** (Diverse Media Systems) was once a media megacorporation in its own right, but it chose the wrong side in the Unification War and it now survives as a subsidiary of Solingen. They upload the lion's share of dataweb files and updates in the Cluster. In addition, DMS controls **PNN, the Pleiades News Network**. As a Solingen subsidiary, PNN pretty much toes the party line, and reports the news Solingen wants you to hear, in the manner they want you to hear it.

Fed up with this situation, Avatar Shiva sponsored the establishment of the **PRCI (Pleiades Reliable non-Corporate Information)** Network. PRCI is a "pirate" station that broadcasts over hyperweb terminuses from Zanzibar. Despite its shady origins, PRCI broadcasters are as respectable looking and competent as those on PNN, while giving their viewers more information.

Organon Datacrafters style themselves the "people's press." If an author is turned down by DMS, he is almost guaranteed of posting by Organon Bookcrafters, especially if the subject is one that DMS' corporate masters would not approve of. Much of the best colonial literature is published by Organon Bookcrafters.

Mekton construction is a huge business in the Pleiades, and Solingen has once more stepped in to meet the colonists' needs, limiting competition to those it owns or can control.

Solingen Mekton are durable, dependable, and available everywhere. Nearly every colonized world in the Cluster has at least one Solingen Mekton Service shop. Solingen Mektons generally have bucket helmet shaped heads and large pods on the hips that house thruster systems. The characteristic tri-vane backpacks of Earth Mektons have been replaced Solingen suits by a larger wing/backpack arrangement housing the powerplant and maneuver thrusters. Solingen GmbH has been very busy producing military Mektons for the fledgling Outworlds Defense Force and have made an art of redirecting resources and distribution reports to cover this arms build-up.

Seven Sisters Industrial (SSI) is a new corporation, a subsidiary to Solingen. Their units look like Solingen suits, but more utilitarian. They produce civilian and industrial suits, and are currently staging a marketing blitz to try and take the civilian market away from Solingen. Solingen makes this look competitive, when in fact it is an arranged shift in markets, completely engineered by the Solingen Board of Directors. SSI is based on Telluria.

The Board of Planetary Directors

From the very founding of the Solingen colony, the company directors realized that it was practically impossible to establish any kind of dictatorship in the Pleiades Cluster. Therefore, a government as decentralized as the settlements in the cluster was created, along the corporate model that completely empowered it with all the authority it would need to effectively govern while still being subservient to the needs of the Solingen Company. Thus the Board of Planetary Directors was born. The BPD was co-opted in 2180 (with some notable changes) to act as the governing body for the Pleiades Confederation as well.

The BPD provides a method to oversee events on all the disparate worlds of the Pleiades while effectively allowing for self-rule in each system, and occasionally upon each world. The BPD is made up of the Directors of each of the seven major systems in the cluster. Leading the BPD is the President, who is elected by his peers on the Board to serve a seven year term. On individual planets, the Director has nominal authority, but this may vary. Cities and towns are run by Managers, who often have their own political agendas or are hip-deep in controlling the vice operations in the city. These Managers may have more political power than the Directors, and sometimes, a planetary Director may be a puppet to his Managers. The BPD met quarterly, more often when necessary, at the capital on Solingen.

The Board is guided and bound by the Solingen Articles, modeled upon the old United Nations Constitution, which were drafted at the time the colonies were formed. What was *not* publicly known was that these Articles may be temporarily suspended or completely waived upon a directive from the Board of Directors of Solingen GmbH. In 2180 this fact brought a crisis. When the four systems of the Confederation declared their independence from Earth, they invoked the "Solingen Override Clause" and took control of the BPD. The three Directors who had not been part of the Articles of Confederation were told to join up or leave. Unready to commit to such an extreme action or uncertain of their loyalties, they were forced out of the Board and into political limbo.

The current membership of the BPD consists solely of the Confederation members: Mr. Barnabus Richter, Director of Solingen; Ms. Gracia Rothwell, Director of Telluria; Mr. Anson Rydecker, Director of Hammersmith and current President; and Mr. Andre Roarke, Director of Ironsun.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **BARNABAS RICHTER**

Director of Solingen

Description: 1.81m, 90kg, 48 years old, brown hair, usually dressed in casual clothing, unless in a Board meeting.

Quote: "Our world is the center of the New Humanity."

Notes: Richter has a slick public image, one that he has carefully groomed. He is always ready for news media reporters. He prefers to be seen in non-corporate settings, to emphasize that he isn't all work and no play. His biggest hobby is his ocean going sailboat *Stardust Memoirs* where he gives many of his interviews for the news media. All of this is a smokescreen, however, as he is a driven and focused individual. He has been working for years to help Solingen GmbH build up the power base for this bid for succession and feels ready to assume the Presidency now that everything has come to fruition. He is more than willing to use colonial patriotism as a tool and keeps a tight rein on the ODF, using the corporation's logistical hold on the fleet. He also has a special cadre of ODF commandoes at his personal command, ready to perform "services" as he sees fit. Rydecker had best watch his back.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, EMP 5, ATT 7, REF 5, Interview +9, Persuasion +8, Oratory +6, Ocean Sailing +6. Datalink, Nanobodies, Skinweave (secret).

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **GRACIA ROTHWELL**

Director of Telluria

Description: 1.77m, 68kg, 37 years old, long wavy blond hair, good looking but not model quality anymore.

Quote: "My family history and traditions are the strengths that Telluria is built on."

Notes: Gracia was born into the ultra-rich Rothwell family, one of the original founding families of Telluria. She has always had a carefree attitude, and dresses in the best that the Confederation can provide. Often she is seen with her twin brother Aaron. There is little doubt that her rise to power was engineered by the family's wealth in strategic minerals. She has done little to dispel this rumor, and has the image of a somewhat distracted and uninvolved politician. Experts say that her twin brother is using her as a puppet for his own climb to power. Gracia publically supports the Confederation's call to war and has pledged Telluria's resources to the cause. It appears that Aaron will back these promises and perhaps make his own move soon.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 6, ATT 9, Personal Grooming +9, Wardrobe and Style +9, Interview +7. Datalink, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **ANDRE ROARKE**

Director of Ironsun

Description: 1.74m, 70kg, 69 years old, black hair, walks with a slight limp in the left leg, wears mostly corporate suits and looks uncomfortable all the time.

Quote: "We have to fight, but we shouldn't revel in it.."

Notes: Decorated several times for bravery in militia service, he still walks with a cane because of an injury he received in combat against pirates—he likes the style it gives him. A very effective administrator and political boss, he has been in corporate politics for decades. His keen mind and nearly photographic memory are his primary tools. Roarke knows the names, faces and powerful connections of every major figure in the Cluster and on Earth. He even knows a good chunk of the minor players. He has used this skill to forge seemingly impossible deals. He was chosen by Solingen to run Ironsun (the election was more of a formality) and he does believe in the freedom of the colonies. Quietly, however, he is concerned about the human cost of this war.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, EMP 7, REF 4, Negotiation +10, Persuasion +5, Oratory +6. Datalink, Nanobodies, Bioleg (secret).

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **ANSON RYDECKER**

Director of Hammersmith, Current President

Description: 1.77m, 80kg, 40 years old, dark blond hair, icy blue eyes, round flat and nearly expressionless face, thin body accentuated by his choice of dark tight clothing.

Quote: "I want every encounter to be a win for both sides."

Notes: Rydecker has always been a noted hawk on the Earth/Pleiades relationship. He always talks about how the Earth forces its will upon the Pleiades, and the council he has appointed to support him all share his beliefs. Famous for his last minute deals, and eleventh hour negotiations all over the colonies, Rydecker brags that he has never let anyone get the best of him at the negotiation table. Even the smugglers of Zanzibar show him some respect when he starts talking about them. He is a fervent colonial patriot, but not blind. He realizes that Solingen GmbH could turn on them at any time, and has no intention of letting the BPD become subservient to the Solingen whip. Naturally, he and Richter have clashed on many issues, and Rydecker has recently hired a guard to protect him.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, EMP 8, REF 6, Negotiation +10, Persuasion +7, Oratory +9, Datalink, Cyberoptic, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

THE BOARD OF PLANETARY DIRECTORS BEFORE THE CONFEDERATION SPLIT (2179.05)
BACK ROW (L-R): Barnabus Richter, Joanna Rem, Felix Kender, Anson Rydecker.
FRONT ROW (L-R): Gracia Rothwell, Andre Roarke, Richard Sandringham.

DATAWEB REFERENCE

RICHARD SANDRINGHAM

Director of Aldersgate,

Description: 1.57m, 63kg, 41 years old, red hair beginning to turn grey.

Quote: "We need new ideas and new people to make things work again"

Notes: Sandringham is a reformist who gained power recently as an opponent to the old management. A coalition of power groups selected him to take over Aldersgate. Some of his reforms have gone through, and some have hit serious obstacles. There is still an open question as to whether he can keep his coalition from falling apart, and the declaration of war has put his administration in crisis. Aldersgate has been forced off the BPD and fac-tions have starting pulling for a commitment in both directions. Arcadia, their sister planet, is pro-Gaian while others seek to join the Confederation. Sandringham would rather keep the Halcyon system neutral, but cumulative pressure may prevent this.

He has had a long term romance with a vice president of the local min-ing cooperative, Minerva MacDougal. The most recent twist was his mar-riage proposal transmitted to her over the dataweb so that every person in the Halcyon system could watch the five minute presentation.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 10, EMP 8, ATT 8, Interview +8, Persuasion +6, Oratory +8, Expert: Politics +6. Datalink, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE

JOANNA REM

Director of Organon,

Description: 1.55m, 68kg, 40 years old, long brown hair, blue eyes set, high cheekbones, wears standard corporate formal wear.

Quote: "Let's work something out."

Notes: Rem is an unabashed political schemer, plotting her rise to power in detail, and following her plans to the letter. Her determined behavior has also helped advance Organon to a central role as a biochemical supply com-petitor to Solingen GmbH. This competition has almost resulted in war between the two worlds, and made Rem reluctant to side with any move-ment controlled by the Richter family. Despite the fact that she is seeking personal power, she hasn't lost sight of the people she has to please to stay in power. She can fit into any crowd to get support, from the lowest work-er to the highest director. Her ability to talk to anyone at any time is leg-endary. But Rem also has an expert's touch when it comes to dirty negotia-tions behind closed doors, no one gets the better of her if she can help it.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, EMP 6, ATT 7, Negotiation +9, Interview +6, Persuasion +7, Oratory +8, Expert:: Politics +8. Datalink, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE

FELIX KENDER

Director of Fourwinds

Description: 1.79m, 67kg, 38 years old, black hair always slicked back, dark brown eyes and usually has a smirk, always dresses in the lat-est fashions.

Quote: "Let's not be hasty, shall we? War isn't a game."

Notes: Kender's unusual personal style and witty public appearances set him apart from the usual dull corporate image.He doesn't just give interviews, he holds court and makes a dramatic statement. All over the Cluster he is known as the king of one-liner sound bites. Despite Kender's unique attitudes, he is always at the cutting edge of technology and sup-ports almost any kind of research at Fourwinds. He has a brilliant mind and is on top of every major innovation in the Pleiades and on Earth. Kender has set up several grants for major universities in the cluster, each to be used to promote intellectual and technological innovations.The current cri-sis has tested his leadership. While he wishes to side with the Confederation, a declaration of war is more than Fourwinds is ready for.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, EMP 6, ATT 9, TECH 8, Negotiation +7, Oratory +7, Expert: New Tech +7, Expert: Botany +6. Datalink.

■ *The Outworlds Defense Fleet and the Militia*

The military might of the Pleiades Confederation falls into two distinct categories: The Outworlds Defense Fleet and the Planetary Militia. The militia was first formed over twenty years ago, when it became clear that the SAC couldn't defend the colonists against everything (including itself). Instead of being a government-mandated, singular military organization, it is a collection of quasi-military units drawn from many sources in the colonies. The ODF, on the other hand, has been secretly built up over the last five years to form the nucleus of a professional military force. These two disparate units are (nominally) under the command of Outworlds Defense Force (ODF).

The stated mission of the Outworld Defense Force is to protect all Outworlds in the Confederation's sphere of influence from outside aggression. Although this aggression is expected to be from Earth, the ODF's charter allows it to act against any aggressor, so long as the attack comes from outside.

■ *The Militia*

The first human to step off the shuttle onto the surface of Primus 4 carried a rifle, and the colonists have been arming themselves ever since. The rigors and dangers of the planets they found made it clear that some sort of defense force was going to be necessary, just to protect the colonies. As they prospered, armed crime appeared in the form of piracy and internecine strife, enough to spark the construction of armed Mektons, vehicles, and infantry. Spaceships began featuring weapons for self-defense; USSA protests were rebutted with the argument that the SAC couldn't be everywhere at once, particularly in the Outworlds.

In fact, increasing friction with the USSA served to strengthen Outworlder resolve, and more colonists began arming their ships and Mektons in defiance of SAC restrictions. Not that it did any good; the only units that could hope to best the warcraft of SAC were the official corporate militias of the Solingen Corporation, but even a popgun was a show of defiance. The militias received a serious upgrade about ten years ago when Solingen GmbH decided to "subsidize" new equipment acquisitions. Suddenly, more money and Meks were available and the militias grew in size and effectiveness. It almost seemed as if Solingen was looking to build an army …

Still, these colonial forces are far from standardized. The militia volunteers are equipped with whatever their governments (or business sponsors) could afford or find. The Raptorsaurs and the Tyrannos from Telluria came with Solingen-manufactured heavy Mektons. The Lightning Storm unit from Aldersgate has specialized desert Mektons, converted from Solingen stock models. The famed Chelsea Steppers are equipped with hovercraft and wheeled AFVs instead of Mektons. Many militias could only spare pilots, and sent who they could, to be equipped with old Solingen Mektons. And the Last Chance Brigade from Cueball use a variety of SAC Mektons, salvaged from the wreckage of a USSA transport found in their asteroid belt. While the units have a standardized organization, each has its own commander and unique style.

Militia units are noted for their individuality, high spirits, and generally mixed fighting ability. While there are a few individual units and pilots who are actually better than their military counterparts, on the the whole the militia are inferior to the SAC in both training and equipment. Still, they make up the bulk of the Confederation's forces (even with three systems missing), and the ODF is working with them to increase their training and coordination; sort of a "crash course" to get them up to speed. Also, every militia battalion has an ODF "advisor" assigned to it to help coordinate with the regular units. These advisors are authorized under the Confederation to take command of the militia unit should, "in their judgement", the need arise.

■ *The Fleet*

The Outworlds Defense Fleet, while ostensibly the defender of the colonies, is actually Solingen GmbH's private army. The company always had long had links to the military, a legacy of its German origins, and trained military personnel accompanied the *Longrider* on its trip to Primus 4. These people formed the core of the Solingen planetary militia which soon became the best equipped and trained in the cluster.

One of the Articles of the new Confederation was the establishment of a clandestine military force for the common defense of the Confederation, sponsored by—surprise, surprise—Solingen GmbH. Critics accused the corporation of using its economic power to gain control of planetary militias and embryonic fleets, and generally take over the Confederation whole. Were it not for the fact that SAC presence was continually increasing, it's likely these arguments would have dismantled the OD Fleet before it got started, but lingering memories of the past convinced Confederation delegates to contribute.

Once more, using the techniques perfected during the building of the *Longrider*, Richter and the others enacted a massive build-up of troops and material, actually performing training and garrisoning on the uninhabited planet of Christabel in the Forge system. Under Christabel's dense forests, an army formed, as in the shipyards of Gravesend, the hulls of interstellar warcarft were disguised as cargo submarines being built for use on Salamanca. Fleet units were often used as security guards for Solingen GmbH and other corporate activities to give them field experience (sometimes against SAC patrols). While the OD Fleet has never come near matching the SAC in size, they worked to give it the best technology and training money could buy.

One major asset was the discovery of the Cloaking Effect which Solingen's technicians stumbled upon in 2177. this simple change in a Shunt drives programming gave the ODF Shunt ships the ability to remain undetectable until they attacked. Now the OD Fleet could choose when and where they struck; more than compensating for the numerical disparity between their forces and the SAC's. This single program is the most hotly sought bit of data in known space.

By June of 2180, the OD Fleet consisted of a four fleet carriers and 23 cruisers plus support ships and subcraft. It also included almost 1200 Mektons and 30,000 ground troops. This Solingen financed, built and lead army would be the core around which the Confederation would build its forces.

■ *ODF Structure*

The Outworld Defense Force is to Outworlds military power what the Confederation is to Outworlds politics. Like its parent organization, the
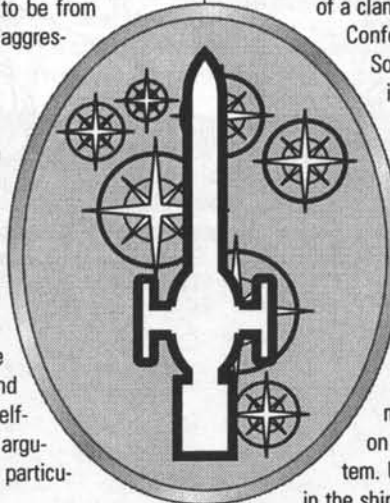
GRAND MARSHAL KARL RICHTER

Head of the Outworlds Defense Force

Description: 1.74m, 68kg, 45 years old, dark brown hair combed over a bald spot, moustache

Quote: [Laughter] "In every important way, we are more than equal to Earth."

Notes: Richter comes from a family that has been at the center of power since the founding of the colonies. He attended the best (and only) Pleiades military school when he was young, graduating at the top of his class. He has little real combat experience, however, focusing most of his studies on tactics and strategies of whole starship fleets. His strategic knowledge is excellent, especially concerning the Earth Defense forces.

He represents the old fashioned "gentleman general" from the 19th century, always insisting upon the best behavior from his troops and his staff. He is calm and tactful in all situations, never showing any uncontrolled emotions in front of his troops. Still, Richter has managed to climb the corporate political ladder to a high position, frequently competing with his cousin, Barnabas. Rumors say that he is going to make a bid for the Directorship of Solingen or even the Presidency. He is popular with the people of Solingen, especially with his recent militarization of the Jägers, and hawkish statements about Earth.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 9, TECH 8, EMP 6, REF 7, Fleet Tactics +8, Oratory +6, Politics +7, Expert: ODF Administration +6. Datalink, Nanobodies, +1 Boosterware (trying to beat his age).

ODF is a collection of allied military units, drawn from every Outworlds group that wants to (or is pressured into) contributing. The Solingen Corporation sponsors the ODF, contributing over 90% of its upkeep and over 50% of its forces (and over 60% of its naval forces). This makeup gives the ODF a sort of split personality, with their units ranging from the quite professional Fleet units to green militias to crack mercenary units.

According to the articles of Confederation, the ODF is supposed to be controlled by a central commander, the Grand Marshal. The Grand Marshal and his staff are supposed to plan operations for the defense of the Confederation, and then give orders to the ODF units for execution.

At any rate, that's the theory. The ODF does not have a strict military hierarchy, like its opposite number, the SAC. In the ODF, individual Generals command entire battle groups. Under them are the Colonels, who are in direct command of their units. Therein lies the problem, because the militia colonels are appointed by the unit's sponsor, or are the actual sponsors themselves! As such, these commanders are fiercely individualistic, and not disposed to following orders from someone "higher up" if there's any disagreement. This puts them at serious odds with the OD Fleet officers, who are disciplined to the core (and fanatically loyal to Solingen and the Confederation).

A number of militia colonels are actively distrustful of Grand Marshal Karl Richter, seeing him as nothing more than a Solingen flack, fighting the war for Solingen's benefit. This distrust of Solingen can extend to equal distrust of battle group Generals, most of whom are Fleet (i.e. Solingen) professional military. Indeed, there's even infighting among colonels, due to Richter's habit of stiffening battle groups with Fleet units—he sees it as an effective military strategy, while independent colonels cite this as just another Solingen plot to seize the ODF.

So the ODF consists of a crack core army of the Fleet elites, supported (most of the time) by a uneven mix of independently-minded militia units. While the Fleet units ostensibly have authority in all situations, militia colonels are more that willing to "reinterpret" orders to fit their ideas. Added to this is unit pride. The volunteer units will often vie with each other for the glory of an assignment, abandoning their orders and forging ahead to seize a perceived opportunity, hoping to score a great victory. Thus the habit of installing Fleet officers, whose presence is often resented by the soldiers themselves.

Still, it is important to remember that *all* ODF soldiers are dedicated to the independence of the Pleiades from USSA domination and are more interested in fighting the Earthers than fighting each other.

■ *ODF Logistics*

Solingen forces are fairly small, but well-organized, trained, and equipped—their Mekton units are as well-trained and equipped as the SAC's, and Solingen ground forces are equal to equivalent USSA infantry who tend to be trained for commando or riot duty, and not much in between. The same sort of conditions apply to the OD Fleet Solingen ships dominate the ODF, with units from the Gravesend fleet filling out the rest of the bulk of the Navy. Few colonies could afford to send more than a few transports and subvessels, although Hammersmith has actually contributed a Shunt cruiser, and rumor has it that the Cueballers are working to scrounge up money to repair the SAC cruiser. Solingen space forces are generally superior to SAC equipment, particularly with the use of the Cloak Effect, but lack real combat experience.

The entire force is supplied with logistics by Solingen Corporation. The corporate merchant fleet is practically at the ODF's beck and call—they own most of it, after all. Solingen shipments have first priority; only disasters will "bump" an ODF shipment. This is necessary, because the ODF lacks the tremendous logistics system commanded by SAC, with all of its tenders, and cargo vessels.

Solingen's merchant fleet can move Mektons, men, equipment, and even battleriders as efficiently as SAC can. In addition, the financial powers of the Solingen Corporation can charter independent Shunt vessels to assist in transporting ODF units. This gives the ODF its great mobility (although not without cost; SAC transports are made with combat in mind, and can defend themselves where Outworlds merchants are only just beginning to acquire the defense systems necessary to repulse a Mekton attack).

Of course, this advantage is almost neutralized by the many and varied supply requirements of ODF units. SAC's logistic strength lies in its uniformity of supply—a SAC unit anywhere can scrounge from any other SAC unit. The variety of ODF equipment means that units must carry around great amounts of spares and ammunition for their own machines, and that restocks have to be made on their own homeworlds, so supplies are always low.

Solingen Corporation has been trying to rectify the situation by encouraging a more uniform system of supply and equipment. Not only would this make the ODF more effective, but the idea also fits the Solingen mold of militaristic efficiency. So far, many less-wealthy units are resisting this drive, motivated by a combination of stubborn pride and the unvoiced fear that Solingen could take over the ODF simply by restricting supply.

Placide. Bad history coming back to bite me in the butt. We were thrown together four years back; I ran recon on a renegade pirate base and she led the attack. Both of us were hot, cocky mechajocks; she was a Militia superstar, I was a top scout just "upgraded" to Jäger. We had different styles. We didn't get along. We fought like two slargs in a sack. We fell hard.

Placide was military to the core; her parents had served in the SAC, and she was on the fast track up. But she didn't have a life. I showed her one; from the glitter-ice fields of Corona to the ringbows of Tharsis, I dragged her along on my scouting missions every chance I could.

I tried to get her to transfer to the Jägers. She wanted me to join the newly formed and very secret ODF. We had it out. Hard words got said. I walked out. She went on. Now she was my boss.

It had taken ten calls and a blizzard of web-mail to get her to agree to see me. Now I finally was in her spartan office on Solingen.

"Ryuzaki." Her voice sounded as tired as she looked. "What do you want?"

I leaned over her desk and locked eyes. "Word is, you authorized Jagers to spotmark the bombing on Faraday. They say you knew all about it; that you allowed Solingen corp to obliterate two thirds of an entire planet's ecosystem. I wanted to hear it wasn't true."

She stood her ground and glared back at me. "You think Ranoxis was special? It's just the start. Look at this!" she said, furiously throwing an EO-Pad at me. "A directive from the ODF. 'Secure valuable military resources for the war effort.' Gold? Gemstones? Rare lifeforms? These aren't military resources; they're plunder. This whole war's turning into an excuse to gut the Cluster.

"I used to believe in what I was doing, Jesse. But this war has taken away any leeway I had. Now I'm about to do things that utterly sicken me. And I have no choice. None." She sank back into her chair, spent.

"Maybe you do."

And I started to explain everything; the secret Gaian objectives, the alliance with Frost, our mutual plan hatched out of desperation and just plain cussedness.

She didn't buy it; not at first. But I kept working on her, explaining, reassuring. Like Frost says, I can be *real* persuasive when I want to be.

And I figured I was fighting for more than just another ally.

The Jägers

Almost as soon as the Primus 4 colony was established, Solingen GmbH was sending prospectors to find as many new worlds as possible. The Longrider had set sail festooned with small single-and-dual man ships destined for prospecting use, and even while the colony's supplies were being ferried to the planet's surface, these were headed deep into the Primus system to find out what was there.

These space prospectors were a mixture of Solingen company people and independent operators, often actual asteroid prospectors from the Solar System. Upon them rested the responsibility of locating resources for the new colony; geologists reported that Primus 4 was adequately stocked with mineral resources, but decades of space exploitation had proven that asteroid clusters were much better sources of non-biological minerals (biological minerals being those that evolved from life, such as limestone, coral, petroleum, etc.) and deep space sources of iron, nickel, tungsten, titanium, and radioactives were soon surveyed.

As soon as more Shunt ships were ready, prospectors fanned out into the cluster, seeking exploitable worlds and rich asteroid concentrations. Many of them were driven by more than the promise of wealth; they had fled the Solar System to escape from the stifling policies of the Gaian-dominated USSA. These prospectors believed that it was mankind's destiny to go to the stars, and at long last they had the capability to find new worlds to support humanity and allow the species to expand.

And find them they did. The Pleiades Cluster was awash in exploitable worlds, so many that only the closest could be exploited in a lifetime. Within a decade the demand for general prospectors dropped to almost nothing; the Outworlds had more wealth than they could practically exploit! With such an embarrassment of riches, who needed to go out and find more? Prospecting changed from that point on, evolving into two categories: the Planetary Scouts and rarities prospectors.

The Birth of the Jägers

The Planetary Scouts were founded in 2162. They were a loose union of explorers and scientists designed to work in the same fashion as the Stellar Colonization Commission—the Rangers in particular—they would act as an expedition to go to uncharted planetary systems and survey them, cataloging planetary conditions with an eye for future colonization and exploitation. The expeditions would be teams of union contractors hired to survey and record by a sponsor. Most of the time, these Scouts were directly or indirectly sponsored by Solingen GmbH, although on several occasions, these expeditions were actually conducted under the aegis of the SCC, with Solingen GmbH as a silent partner. In general, the Rangers and the Scouts carried a mutual respect for each other and cooperated when possible, no matter what the political affiliations of their sponsors were. The Anniadae Group expedition of 2163, for instance, was a complete joint exercise, with SCC Ranger groups reinforced by Solingen Scouts, accomplishing their joint task of completely surveying the quartet of systems in under a year.

But tensions continued to rise between the USSA and the colonies. Underdirector Hermann Kanter persuaded his fellow directors of the then secret Confederation that, with the incipient conflict, the Gaians would be arming the SCC to ensure that Outworlds expansion would be retarded by the destruction of Outworlds Scouts. This inflamed the embryonic Confederation government into militarizing their corporate Scouts, and hiring some of the better free-lance teams in at the same time. In 2178, all personnel were put through combat training (supposedly so they could act as support to the colonial militia) and new armaments fitted to their ships and Mektons. These newer, more militarized scout teams were renamed the Jägers, or Hunters in German, and sent back out into the frontier. Many of the freelancers were extremely dismayed by being turned into paramilitary units, but went along to support their ships and teams. As long as a war didn't break out, they rationalized, everything would be alright.

But the breaking point came from the actions of the rarities prospectors. These individuals worked out of small ships, often not even the size of an assault boat, conveyed to new systems by healthy bribes to merchant Shunt ship captains, and left there to roam through new systems for up to half a standard year, looking for any resource which could be easily and profitably exploited. Equipped only with their small ships and a Mekton or two, these wildcatters earned some praise and much scorn from the SCC and the Solingen Scouts. Pure profiteers working for their own pocketbooks, they were called; interfering with scientific research directed for the betterment of mankind. For their part, the prospectors thought of the Rangers and Scouts as "boy scouts with pipelines to government/corporate grants," and avoided the big projects when they could, looking for that big strike that could provide a wealthy retirement. Strikes like the discovery of the crystalchime trees on Ranoxis 3.

The resulting chain of events has lead the Pleiades to war and carried the Jägers along with it. The Jägers were made the official stellar scouting arm of the ODF in January of 2180, and ordered to fire upon any SCC forces or personnel that dared to interfere with their mission. ODF "advisors" are also being assigned to some of the larger Jäger teams.

This action has produced internal strife in the new organization. Many of the old Scouts have worked with SCC Ranger surveys, and a professional camaraderie has grown out of the association—the Scouts and Rangers had considered themselves largely above government squabbles. The situation is even worse for many of the better free-lancers, because they found it very profitable to sell their services to the highest bidder, working for the SCC and Solingen GmbH as it suited them.

Of course, many of the former prospectors in the Jägers are overjoyed at the thought of sticking it to the Rangers, who often stood between them and imagined wealth. Added to this are patriotic Jägers who harbor the fanatical belief that the SCC is the enemy, a bureaucratic extension of the Gaian octopus trying to ensnare all the good worlds for Gaian parks. To date, the conflicting views haven't been made into a real schism, because the Jägers haven't come into direct conflict with the Rangers ... yet.

■ *Jägers Procedures & Equipment*

Since they were modeled after the Rangers, Jäger techniques and organization closely follow the Ranger mode. The differences have only become obvious recently, as the ODF has co-opted the Jägers into its military forces and appointed a military officer as its commander. What was once a union has turned into an armed extension of the corporate army that now dominates the Confederation.

While the Jägers use cutters and Mektons in much the same manner as the Rangers, theirs are now more heavily armed than their Ranger counterparts. The Jägers have also been equipped with Solingen military Meks rather than refitted civilian models (the Drakens are the most common, with a few Viggens thrown in, see page 88). What few Shunt transports the Jägers use are owned by Solingen GmbH, and reserved for large scale operations. Some cutters (those with very trustworthy crews) have been given the Cloak program for their Shunt drives, allowing them almost total invisibility while on recon—a very powerful edge.

Their mission is still to survey and explore, but they are now ordered to report (and possibly engage) any SCC units in their operating area. In addition, they have been ordered to "lay claim" to planets they survey, thereby preventing the legal use of same by USSA representatives. Their armed cutters and Mektons have orders to use those weapons against any "unauthorized intruders"—in other words, any curious Rangers that come snooping around.

While these orders stand for all Jägers, many are very vague in their application. Most of the Jägers didn't get in to this to fight, and some are considering taking their cutters "on extended expeditions" for the duration of hostilities. Their new Commander, Placide Strazza, comes from the Fleet, which has caused further dissension and doubt. Still, she has been lenient in her application of ODF policy and has shown a strength of character that has kept the Jägers from dismissing her out-of-hand for her military background. Whether she can keep them together through the coming conflict remains to be seen ...

Game Note: The Jägers are the colonial equivalent to the Rangers, but, paradoxically, they are more militant and structured that their SCC counterparts. While many of the members come from the same background as the Rangers, the politics of the frontier have galvanized many into supporting the Confederation's bid for an independent Pleiades. Player character Jägers are ideal for independent types who desire a more militant bent, since they have more freedom of operation than a standard military unit, but are equipped almost to military standards. The down-side is obvious: The ODF has taken control of the Jägers and is using them for military operations against the USSA. If the players' politics are ambivalent, they may be able to "just follow orders". Otherwise, they will be caught in the schism which is rending the organization. Which way will they fall?

LT. CMDR. PLACIDE STRAZZA

Commander of the Jägers

Description: 1.80m, 75kg, 29 years old, collar length brown hair, brown eyes that tend to squint even in low light, perpetually seen with a slight frown.

Quote: "I have a job to do, and I do it."

Notes: Tough and silent when in the public eye, Strazza has the classic appearance of a military commander. The ODF High Command *assigned* her as the Jägers' leader, since her predecessor resigned after speaking out against the militarization of the scout group.

Her appointment has caused some problems as her background is surprisingly militant for a Jäger. She is an ace mekton pilot, flying a customized Mekton and bearing the nickname "The Barracuda" for her fast, silent and vicious style of combat. She is famous for her victory leading the militia against Freemen Pirates in the Zanzibar asteroid belt in 2178.

Strazza's life seems to be totally in the military service as were her parents'. Privately she is concerned that her military experience doesn't apply to leading Jägers, an independent and individualistic crowd. In fact, the other Jägers are angered by her assignment and tensions are rising.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, REF 8, EMP 7, TECH 8, Persuasion +8, Negotiation +7, Espionage +7, Oratory +6, Mekton Piloting +6. Datalink.

When I got back to my temporary digs at my Uncle Akira's place at dawn, I found him already puttering in the garden, snipping bits off a tiny potted tree. "You're back early," was all he said; but his wicked grin filled in the gaps; he knew that I was meeting Placide.

"*Shittakaburi!*"* I retorted. Uncle Akira and I have always gotten along pretty well, considering the age difference. Maybe it's a natural simpatico between engineers and pilots—as he likes to say, "I make em, and you break em." He chuckled and turned back to his tree.

I slid back the shogi screen door and walked into my borrowed room—

My gun was in my hand and trained dead center on his heart before I'd even thought about it. Jägers are tough to sneak up on.

"Frost said you were trigger happy," the pirate leaning in the corner commented, seemingly unfazed by my reaction. "And who invited you here?" I growled, the gun never moving from the stylized seamonster patch on his chest.

○ "Listen, I'll make it simple for you, Jägerboy." he said, straightening up. "Shiva says the meet's on. Ten days from now, in Platt City. Frost's Rangers, the Ravagers, the Charybdis. You bring your Jägers to the party; we'll talk." Then, still ignoring my gun, he sauntered past me to the door and out into early morning.

"I'd assumed he was a friend of yours. He sure *looked* like one." smiled Uncle as I stepped out to watch the pirate go. I nodded, then turned back to him. "*Oji-san'*," I began. "we really have to talk."

[*] WISEACRE   † HONORED UNCLE

■ *Life in the Pleiades*

—Dataweb Entry by Luther Krakov,
Professor Solingen University, Primus System, 2180.05.07

In many ways, life in the Pleiades Cluster isn't very different from life in Earthspace. The Dataweb, medical care, cybernetics, and a whole host of other technologies are about the same in both places. However, life in the Cluster is that of a rip-roaring frontier, full of the things that make a frontier so exciting. New planets are always ready to explore, new discoveries over the next horizon. There is also very little law or law enforcement, so like a frontier, the Pleiades can be a pretty dangerous place to live.

After about 38 years of colonization, the Human population of the Confederation falls pretty much into two categories: City folks and Outback folks. They have some things in common, a serious dislike of Earth, a strong belief that they are the chosen people to carry out the destiny of Humanity, a desire to be somewhere other than Earthspace, and a powerful sense of self reliance. Unfortunately, they also share an unhealthy dependence on the corporation that founded the colonies, namely Solingen GmbH.

■ *The Cities*

The major industrialized cities in the Confederation are almost identical to their counterparts on Earth. They are large, urbanized arcology structures, packed with people. Currently there is usually only one major city on each world. It is the capital, spaceport, manufacturing center and communications hub for the planet, containing most military, starship, systems defense craft and Mekton construction and housing facilities. With the Anti-Earth sentiment brewing on the colonies, some cities have considerable stockpiles of Mekton weapons and armor "in case of Earth attack." The most striking visual difference is that the Pleiadean Cities look out over virgin wilderness, fertile farmland or open ocean. The cities themselves are clean, well maintained, and often even open to the unfiltered atmosphere of the planet. (An item that makes some Earthers uncomfortable when they first arrive.) Almost all cities have an open roof gardens or parks, displaying the interesting native plants and animals.

City folks are pretty much the same as their Earth cousins. They all have corporate jobs, usually administrating planetary resources, off planet trade or basic factory work linked to various processing machines. Despite Gaian edicts, families are larger than on Earth, usually 3-4 children with both parents working. The children go to communal schools and occasionally on field trips to the "outback" of the planet. In an echo of Earth, the size and location of a family's living space is directly related to how high up the parents are on the corporate ladder. However, even the lowliest dormitory on Solingen is better than most middle class accommodations on Earth. Cyberfashion and other, more frivolous, elements of high-tech cultures are less common out here than in Earthspace. When you life constantly depends on your machines like you do on the frontier, they have to be extraordinarily reliable, so people only use tried and tested tech.

The Pleiades corporate heritage is most obvious in the cities. The work ethic is easily as strong here as in Earthspace, and there is no public welfare system. Everyone earns "city shares" which give them voting rights in the city corporation (electing the City Manager, for example). All dwellings are maintained by the city corporation as are Health care, food distribution, basic city services and law enforcement. Public transportation inside the cities is by Mag-Lev train and ground car, with trips outside the city made by airships or suborbital aircraft. Local Datawebs are well-maintained on most worlds, extended across of the planet's surface via satellite networks—generally about 65% of a primary colony planet's surface will have Dataweb access, less on less-developed worlds. Dataweb concerts are a popular in the colonies as well, with several local performers touring the stars.

Economically, the cities rely on the income from manufacturing, in-system mining and farming. Local farms provide the majority of the food for the cities, and any surplus is shipped to the deep space mining bases and other colonies, or stockpiled in case of emergency. The colonial stockpiles have saved more than one colony from death when disaster struck. This stockpiling has grown enormously in the last two years, as Earth/Pleiadean relationships grew more and more strained.

Strangely, the Anti-USSA movement started in the cities. The city folks have more contact with Earth and are more vocal and radical about Earth than their country cousins. The cities are almost controlled to a greater degree by the colonial corporations, including Solingen GmbH, and these corporations encourage dissatisfaction. City people have a definite fear that the SAC could take over their cities by force, since the populations are so localized and controllable. Confederation-sympathetic politicians have echoed this fear in the last few years.

Outside the cities, there are no law enforcement agents except the Marshals. Wild stories abound about the horrible things that can happen to a person in the frontier. They are all a little in awe of the country folks who have successfully carved a place in the wild.

■ The Outback

Most residents of the wilderness areas are farmers and ranchers on the 22nd Century scale; the homesteaders of 2180. Often a single family will own several thousand square miles of property (once more in direct violation of Gaian policy). They have the highest agricultural technology that the Pleiades can make and raise species from Earth and a dozen other worlds.

Mektons are in more frequent use on the frontier, although you won't find them just anywhere. The smallest farms will have a dozen or so small robots specialized for farming. On the large farms, one or two Mektons might be rented on a periodic basis to till large areas of farmland quickly. On the ranches that handle cattle, or any other livestock animals, light Mektons (Roadstriker-scale) provide a means of subduing animals quickly and neatly.

Country folks use airships to transport large, non-perishable crops to the cities. Perishable crops are transported by suborbital cargo aircraft working regular charters. Farms are all self sufficient and rely mostly on small hardy fusion plants and solar collectors for power. All of them will have sizable gardens supplementing their main crop or livestock, and several month's backup in storage. And, although most farmers won't admit it, every one of them has a heavy weapon stored somewhere on their property ... just in case something nasty comes to call.

Country folks have good relationships with their neighbors. The rare feud that occurs between farmers makes media headlines, but is rarely bloody or very damaging. Farmers and ranchers still have an ongoing dislike of each other, which seems to extend back to ancient Earth history. Of course, different kinds of ranchers don't get along very well either. They generally get along well with city folk, paying taxes into the cities to support global systems such as the datawebs and the Marshals, but brook little interference otherwise.

Unfortunately, these folks are the colonists most bound in by USSA laws. Gaian policies are very strict when it comes to interacting with local ecosystems, requiring self-contained food systems and extremely narrow parameters for the size of a tract and its distance from urban facilities. Adherence to all of the strictures would bankrupt most homesteaders, so most ignore all they can get away with. They uniformly consider the Gaian movement to be a legacy of a dead planet. The country folk aren't land rapists, they "just don't worship Mother Nature the way the religious nutcases on Earth do." This brings them under the scrutiny of the SCC and the SAC fairly often, and they have developed a network of double-blinds and fake property maps to fool the series of SCC inspectors who come around to check on their licenses and titles.

Despite this constant pressure, the farmers are not particularly interested in the Earth/Pleiades conflict. They see it as an inconvenience to interstellar trade, and are against any form of conscription, because that could only reduce their already small work force. Like farmers and ranchers on old Earth, they're a conservative group, not willing to leap into any cause without a good reason.

■ The Rise of the Confederation

Despite many similarities, the colonies have long felt the alienated from the politics of Earthspace. A good many colonists have never been to Earth, having only seen it from educational web entries, and have no experience of how a shattered ecosystem can affect an entire planet and people. They really don't understand when a Gaian talks about Mother Earth; every planet is the mother of it's people to a colonist.

Thus, when Gaian policies such as mandatory birth-control implants, the limiting of homesteading to within a 50 kilometer radius of designated

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

urban zones, and the requiring of prohibitively expensive agricultural technology for any farm were implemented, the colonists bridled. While the comfort of SAC protection was nice, the burden of USSA law became heavier and heavier. Soon the SAC was seen more as a Gaian police force, ready to pounce on the colonists more than protecting them from pirates or other threats. And the colonists paid taxes to support all this.

The situation was reaching a crisis as colonial defiance grew in the face of greater limits on personal freedoms. Then came the a bold declaration at the January summit of the USSA government of the succession from the USSA of the four primary colonial systems. This new state, the Pleiades Confederation, is now seeking to make it's own future, apart from Gaian and Earth control. It consists of the systems of Primus, Forge, Proteus, and Loki. The systems of Asgard, Halcyon, and Cronus remain uncommitted, and the Confederation is watching them carefully to see if they will side with the USSA or not. The rest of the cluster consists largely of individual mining operations or exploration outposts.

All this has had a dramatic effect on life in the colonies. Solingen GmbH's profile has increased greatly, as the Board of Planetary Directors declares martial law and institutes extreme measures to pursue the war effort throughout the cluster, recruiting volunteers for the newly revealed Outworlds Defense Force. All USSA restrictions have been lifted and a score of new mining and farming projects are under way. Unfortunately, many are using "expeditious" methods which are quite wasteful and sometimes downright destructive.

Propaganda is starting to be webcast by both sides and Earth goods are being boycotted on many worlds. Earth tourists have also been threatened (and some lynched). Lines are being drawn, forcing many colonists to make a decision: stand with the Confederation against Earth, or stand aside. The majority have been siding with the Confederation, but controversy and hard feelings have split many families and townships, particularly on the neutral worlds. Many fear this will turn into a Pleiadean Civil War, rather than a War for Pleiadean Independence.

RANOXIS:
Faraday (Ranoxis 3)
North

PLEIONE
(Beacon Star)

ATLAS
(Beacon Star)

ROCINANTE:
Zanzibar

HALCYON:
Arcadia
Aldersgate

CRONUS:
Organon
Athanaeum

ALCYONE
(Beacon Star)

GAMMA:
Gamma 4 (SAC Base)

LOKI:
Ironsun

PROTEUS:
Telluria
Rubicon

MEROPE
(Beacon Star)

MAIA
(Beacon Star)

THE PLEIADES CLUSTER

This image, taken at a distance of 400ly,
shows the locations of the major star sys-
tems in the Pleiades Cluster. The Cluster
itself extends beyond the picture.

ASGARD:
Fourwinds

ELECTRA
(Beacon Star)

PRIMUS:
Solingen
Salamanca

FORGE:
Hammersmith
Gravesend
Chelsea

TAYGETA
(Beacon Star)

CELAENO
(Beacon Star)

■ *The Primus System*

The formation and arrangement of planets in the Pleiades Cluster is puzzling. Several stars have planets in the habitable range, and many of these planets shouldn't be habitable at all. The curious greenhouse gas layers of Hammersmith, the marvelously reflective clouds of Arcadia, the jungle plants of Claymore, the stable planet ring of Cronus; these and other examples defy conventional theory. To be sure, none of them are impossible in nature, but to find so many in the same stellar grouping is suspicious. Some scientists have put forth theories of terraforming by powers unknown. To date, these theories are unproven, but the anomalies of the Pleiades give pause to even the most skeptical.

The star Primus (Pleiades 1) is a F5V main-stage star, putting out 3.5 times the radiation of Sol. Despite this fact, observations had given indications that there were worlds around Primus, and spectrographic analysis strongly hinted at one world that had an oxygen/nitrogen atmosphere. The Expansionist party certainly hoped so—their main hope, the *Longrider*, was aimed at Celaeno , a beacon star in the cluster. From there they made their way to the Primus system.

Once the *Longrider* arrived in the Primus system, the spinner moved its slow way towards the most likely planet, Primus 4. Hordes of smaller craft moved swiftly to closely examine the rest of the system. For a brief time, the colonists were elated about the possibilities in the system: there was one indubitably habitable planet, a second water-world looked like an option, and there was a trusty asteroid belt to provide the raw materials for expansion.

Primus 3 turned out to be a bit of a disappointment; sure, it was awash with life-rich water, but its atmosphere contained too many poisonous trace elements for safety—rather like living in one of Earth's old smog-shrouded cities—and Primus 3.5, number Three's companion planet, made for massive tides every "lunar" rotation. This left only Primus 4 as the place for the colony.

Primus 4 was a fine choice, though. Located at 1.7 AU from Primus, it was nearly a too-good-to-be-true parody of Mars—same orbital location, two small moons (bigger than Deimos and Phobos), nearly the same size and composition, but somewhat more dense, and receiving enough radiation from Primus to support abundant life. And it was even fairly close to the asteroid belt!

The rest is history. The Primus 4 colony was constructed and inhabited in a year; New Plymouth, the first colony site, housed 250,000 people by 2158. Other cities were begun nearly as swiftly, and a smaller colony established to reap the aquatic wealth of Primus 3.

The political significance of the Primus system cannot be overstated. Its capitol, Solingen, is the first Outworlds colony, the home of Solingen GmbH and its manufacturing facilities, and is the showplace of Expansionist party doctrines and triumph. It's living proof that, from the Expansionist point of view, the Gaians are wrong, and that mankind's destiny lies in the stars. Almost every technological advancement made in the Outworlds comes from Solingen; most Outworlds social trends come from its society, and it's the center of culture and entertainment for the Outworlds at large.

The council chambers of the Pleiades Confederation are located on Solingen, in New Plymouth, in the Helmut Tower.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

Once the site of Solingen GmbH's corporate headquarters, the Helmut Tower was donated by the corporation to house the bureaucracy needed to run the Outworld Defense Force and administer the Confederation's affairs. This system has seen a massive effort to upgrade its defenses since the Battle of the Northern Rings. Ships and Mektons are in constant movement, mounting mysterious installations and mechanisms throughout Primus space.

■ *Primus 1—Broadsword*

The closest rock to the sun, this lump is more molten than Mercury.

■ *Primus 2—Claymore*

The Primus system swarms with life. Claymore is another oxygen-nitrogen world, with plenty of water and stifling jungles. If anything, it's too successful. The mixture of climate, weather, and plant life make for an atmosphere that's over 33% oxygen, with plenty of acids and corrosives to make the world inimical for mobile, non-plant lifeforms. It's a beautiful world from orbit; the plants and chlorophyll in the water make it an emerald green decorated with fluffy white clouds in baroque swirls... Those clouds are constantly evaporating water vapor, fueled by a mean temperature of 170 degrees Fahrenheit. Claymore is tortured by continual hurricanes where the winds average 150 kph. Few ever go to Claymore for any reason.

■ *Primus 3—Salamanca*

The blue carbuncle of the Primus system. Salamanca is entirely surfaced with water, a lovely blue in color. This contrasts nicely with Anduril, its satellite sister world, which is covered with brilliant white silica sand. The combination is striking, and ironic—it's been remarked that the two should be combined and two equal worlds made from the total, because, as it stands,
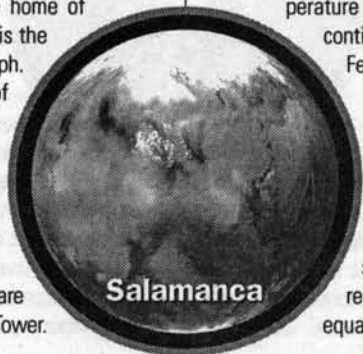
Salamanca

one world is all surf, and the other's all beach. At least Anduril gives Salamancans moon-lit nights seldom seen anywhere else; the effect is about twice the light that reflects from Luna to Earth.

And this light comes through an atmosphere as clear as an unclouded conscience; Salamanca's atmospheric pollution is natural, consisting of pollen-like spores generated by the oceanic plant life.

Salamanca is home to a small colony, named in tongue-in-cheek fashion **Waikiki**, consisting of nine semi-aquatic townships. Each houses about 20,000-50,000 people, and is a floating city, loosely anchored to the gigantic reefs that house most of the native life on the planet. The reason for the reefs and the wave-riding cities is the tide. To be more specific, the tidal wave, once per day. Anduril is a large moon (or small world), and when it comes around Salamanca, it drags a 40-meter wave with it. (This massive daily wave scrapped the first proposed habitat designs, which called for permanent domed cities; the wave would smash them within a week.) One of the big tourist attractions for those visiting Salamanca is the evening wave, when the whole city lifts up and rides over the wave-crest.

Salamanca's economy is driven by tourism and aquatic hunting, using Mektons to harvest the huge crustaceans that rule the underwater reefs. These man-eating super-crabs, the pollen spores, and constant danger from heat exposure and sunburn are Salamanca's main dangers.

■ *Primus 4—Solingen*

The capitol of the Primus system, the birthplace of the Outworlds, the most heavily populated world except Earth and Mars, and by default the capitol of the Pleiades Confederation. Solingen is a rugged world, a ball slightly larger than Earth, surmounted by ice caps. The planet's landmasses are split into two large continents, separated by shallow seas. These continents are largely temperate grasslands, although each does have a long and tall mountain range, betraying active plate tectonics. Conifer forests cluster at the feet of these mountains, rivers cut through to the seas, and the whole place was so close to the state of once-green northern Europe that the Germanic Solingen corporates declared that they'd found their new home.

In truth, the colonists couldn't have found a better world to settle. The flora was easily adaptable to human use, the fauna weren't threatening (resembling bipedal variants of small and medium-sized terrestrial mammals; there are some species of larger quadrupeds), and the atmosphere was a little thin, but nothing the Swiss hadn't dealt with for millennia.

Solingen

Solingen, named after the corporation that made the *Longrider* possible, is now the home of ten major cities, with over a hundred smaller settlements. Despite Gaian propaganda, the planet isn't overtaxed or polluted. Solingen corporate heads decided that they'd do what they could to preserve the ecosystem as an example to the Gaians of what they would be doing throughout the cluster. There would be plenty of other systems they could be sloppy in elsewhere; here they would make a showplace of corporate concern.

They made a separate industrial base in space. Heavy industry is in orbit, clustered around the *Longrider* and other spinners, settlements on the moons (Falchion and Dagger) operate even more industrial might. This leaves Solingen as a practical garden world, with the land preserved through the use of vertical habitation (i.e., skyscrapers) and the cities tend to be high buildings with parklands surrounding. Its major cities are New Plymouth, Northpoint, Sealth, and New Berlin.

■ *The Primus Belt*

True to their asteroid miner ancestors, the colonists opened up a habitat in the Primus Belt as soon as New Plymouth was built. The planetoid station Epee is home to 10,000 miners and construction workers; Epee is the second-largest shipyard in the Outworlds.

■ *Primus 5 & 6—Katana & Wakizashi*

Katana is a small gas giant, smaller than Neptune, tinted ammonia yellow, and orbited by a single superplanet, Wakizashi. Wakizashi is only an airless chunk, but it's an airless chunk 40,000 km in diameter! It has been speculated that Wakizashi is a captured rogue planet, and will eventually break away from its larger master.

■ *Primus Politics*

Primus is politically controlled by Solingen GmbH and with the Primus system, Solingen has tried to control the rest of the cluster through economic and cultural means. As the capital of the Pleiades Confederation and Solingen GmbH, Primus is effectively the center of industry and politics for the Confederation, which means that it will also be at the center of the coming war. Martial law has been declared and all Gaian laws revoked. There is little internal dissension here, as the populace has taken the cause of independence as their own. In this interim after Northern Rings, a massive defensive build-up is in progress and military traffic is high. Any SAC ships unlucky enough to be on patrol in the system have either been impounded or expelled. Earthers (and Gaian sympathizers) are being banned from the system and ships are currently transporting these people to the neutral colonies.

■ *The Proteus System*

Pleiades 2 is a G3V star, heart-breakingly similar to Sol. It is circled by six planets; a sparse system, when compared to Sol's escorts. When first surveyed, the Scout report wasn't encouraging—the system only contained two habitable worlds, and neither of them was any prize, as colonizable worlds went.

Proteus 3, christened Telluria, was in a Terran orbit, at the right place but apparently not at the right time. Life was well-established—in fact, *too* well-established! The Scouts that went on "walkabout" (the habit of setting lone pilots down in Mektons to walk across a continent, sampling and surveying as they go) called for recall within three days! All were out of ammunition, and several had lost their Mektons to "enemy activity." The native lifeforms were characterized as large, formidable, and combative, resembling Terran dinosaurs to such an extent that the Scouts petitioned the SCC to have the world renamed "Dinoworld." (They were turned down by the bureau; it had already been named.) These lifeforms, and the fact that the atmosphere, though adequate in oxygen content, was too thin for comfort, cooled their opinion of Telluria as a colony world.

Proteus 4, named Rubicon, held some promise. Its atmosphere was thick enough for comfort, and perfectly breathable, but Rubicon was a cold, cold world, too far away from Proteus to receive more than token warmth. Mars with an atmosphere; an example of what Mars would have been like had the Expansionists succeeded with the asteroid (an unhappy comparison, showing just how desperate the Expansionists had been). To be sure, the iron content of the planet's crust was also adequate, but Rubicon wouldn't support the plant life necessary for a colony.

Despite the Scout report, the colonization spinner neared completion, and plans were made to settle Telluria. Preparations included a Mekton construction facility aboard the spinner, and an amount of armament sufficient to equip an army. Telluria, it seemed, would be the first colony established in the face of active resistance.

The first step was clearing a selected island of all the "Tellursaurs" (Earth scientists classified them as *pseudo dinosaurus telluria*, and accompanied the colonists in order to study the creatures). The fledgling colony was then constructed on the secured beach-head, and expeditions went ashore to see about clearing more space. The colony was decried by the Gaian faction of Earth's scientific community, but they were outvoted by hordes of xenobiologists and paleontologists who studied the beasts. After all, this was hardly a dying ecology—not when the flora vied with the fauna for the honor of killing you!

The final act in the war on the Tellursaurs came when Gaian scientist Jals Machen perfected a sonic projector that would cause non-damaging pain to Tellursaur hearing. "Fences" constructed of these projectors allowed the colonists to clear land without having to lose men and Mektons to Tellursaur attacks.

■ *Proteus 1—Perdition*

A more accurate name for Mercury's twin. Hot and hellish, with no atmosphere. Diameter 5000 km.

Telluria

■ *Proteus 2—Subaru*

Another example of Proteus' similarity to Sol, Subaru is a double for Venus, down to the poisonous, crushing atmosphere. Diameter 11000 km.

■ *Proteus 3—Telluria*

Diameter: 10,000 km, surface gravity: .92 standard gravities, temperate climate, mean temperature: 25 degrees Celsius. The planet's atmosphere is thin (9.7 psi), but livable after an adjustment period. Telluria has a small (800 km diameter) moon. Major cities are Crichton, Doyle and Kroft.

The main inhabited planet of Proteus and system capitol, Telluria is a thriving colony. Its main industries are Mekton construction, weapons development, and tourism. These are linked, because most of the tourists come to Telluria to hunt Tellursaurs, and they need custom-built Mektons and good, solid weapons to use on monsters which are fully capable of taking a combat Mekton apart with one unstoppable charge. Telluria is the only colony in the Outworlds where civilian Mektons are sold with a heavy weapon as standard equipment.

A note on Tellursaurs: The genus *pseudo dinosaurus telluria* is divided into two closely-related species, the Grazers and the Hunters. Both are quadrupedal, with a long tail and narrow head. Grazers tend to be larger (an average of 30 meters long and 6 meters at the shoulder) and slower, while Hunters are slightly smaller (20 meters long, 5 meters at the shoulder) and faster. Both are omnivorous, with Grazers preferring plants to freshly-killed prey, and Hunters vice versa. There are plenty of smaller variants on the theme, including a two-legged, man-sized Tellursaur called "Raptorsaurs" which some scientists claim might be on the verge of evolving intelligence.

■ *Proteus 4—Rubicon*

There's a small mining settlement on Rubicon, extracting metals from a huge meteor crater. Although Telluria has plenty of metals, extracting them from volcanic fissures isn't as easy as cutting them out of Rubicon's desert and rail-gunning them to Telluria.

■ *Proteus 5—Virginia's Rock*

A small planet surrounded by an atmosphere of chlorine.

■ *Proteus 6—Beliaal*

Proteus' only giant, a modest gas giant with thick rings and three small moons.

■ *Proteus Politics*

Proteus was the only other colony besides Primus to be established before the USSA recontacted the Pleiades in 2147. As a result, it has always had a larger independent streak than most. Combined with the rugged nature of life on Telluria, the politics of this system have always been anti-Gaian and pro-colonial succession. It was only natural that the Proteus system would side with the Confederation and its Mekton factories have proven a significant boon to the ODF. In fact, the ODF conducted several "war games" on Telluria prior to the outbreak of war, using the native fauna as the enemy. Not all the ODF soldiers survived. As everywhere, tourism has dropped off here, but the increase in industrial demand for the war effort has more than compensated the local economy.

The Forge System

Pleiades 4, Forge, is an K0V star. The SCC's astronomers felt that it, like most orange stars, had few chances of sporting habitable worlds—orange stars are too small, too cold, too old to have much in the way of planets at all.

When the first scouts reached the system, they couldn't believe their sensor reports. Forge had not one, but *four* planets with breathable atmospheres. Of course, the most distant one was too cold for easy colonization, but overall, Forge turned out to be a stellar jackpot.

Until the reports on sunspots started coming in. Forge, it seemed, was an unhappy star. It waxed and waned its way through an entire sunspot cycle, and had begun a second, during the short time the scouts were there surveying the system. No fewer than 12 solar flares were noted in two months! The phenomenon did explain the worlds there; Forge was putting out 160% of the energy it was supposed to, which was enough to warm its worlds. Still, settling the system would be a hazardous and expensive undertaking, due to the heavy radiation storms coursing through the ether.

Forge 1—Hell's Kitchen

An airless rock, constantly blasted by Forge.

Forge 2—Furnace

Another radiation-burned rock, Furnace has a fledgling atmosphere of crude chemical compounds.

Forge 3—Chelsea

Chelsea's radiation belt is uncommonly strong, funneling the cosmic ray storms towards its magnetic poles in an auroral display that lights up over a quarter of the planet's atmosphere. This makes the planet livable, if a bit on the sterile side. The main plant life is a persistent grass covering the wide, dry plains; Chelsea is water-poor, with its water underground. The inhabitants are a sect of motorized nomads, the Cleansers. A former Earth religious cult, the Cleansers petitioned the SCC to allow them to leave Earth and settle in the Outworlds. Solingen let them have the industrially worthless world of Chelsea, and cut a deal with the SCC to transport them there. Since then, the Cleansers have surprised everyone by prospering, increasing their population, setting up a city (of sorts) at Aragon, and mining deposits of silver and platinum (discovered deep underground) to finance their mobile, well-armed lifestyle.

Forge 4—Christabel

Another marginally livable world, at present unsettled. Christabel is a nice place, but the oxygen content is only 17% (at 8000 km diameter, the surface gravity is only .8 Gees). Only its thick forestation keeps it from sinking into a permanent ice age.This is where the Fleet ground forces were gathered and trained before the beginning of open hostilities. It still houses a fair-sized garrison and resupply base.

Forge 5—Hammersmith

Hammersmith should be a frozen lump of ice, like Europa. The world surprised everybody with its atmosphere—the planet has a multi-layered greenhouse gas envelope that would kill a world with a hotter sun. As it stands, the atmosphere does a nice job of keeping out Forge's radiation and keeping Hammersmith warm enough to live on. The entire planet has been compared to Earth's Pacific Northwest: temperatures averaging between 40-60 degrees Fahrenheit, constant overcast, almost constant precipitation, lots of little rivers, all plant and animal life well-adapted to shedding the omnipresent water. Hammersmith was the first planet settled insystem, and made the system capitol. Its major cities are Redemption, Reykjavik, and Orinoco. It's a nice place to live, although the weather can be depressing.

Forge 6—Gravesend

This is a desolate world, too far away from its star to warm the water permanently frozen in its icecaps. Still, plants growing on those icecaps produce a thin but breathable oxygen-nitrogen atmosphere. This is good, because recycling atmosphere is one of the more important and expensive aspects of space habitats.That means the people who keep Gravesend's shipyards going can live on the planet, in the city of Sepulchre, instead of in orbit. Gravesend's single moon, Lodestone, is a 3000 km chunk of nickel-iron thought to be the remnants of a planetary core. The Gravesenders use it as building materials for the shipbuilding capitol of the Outworlds. These yards produce 90% of the Shunt vessels made outside of the Solar System.
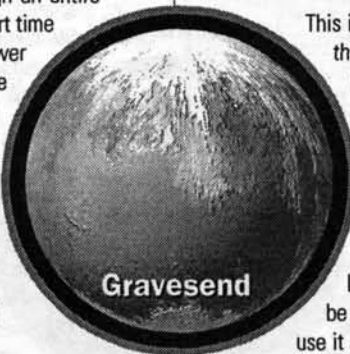
Forge 7—Rockpile

A rocky ball shrouded in thick methane.

Forge 8—Caledonia

Forge's inner gas giant is very much like Jupiter, but, curiously, has no satellites.

Forge 9—Outback

The system's outer gas giant is likewise moonless. The thickness of its huge and magnificent ring system makes up for it; it's speculated that the rings might be part of the same planet that made Gravesend's moon Lodestone.
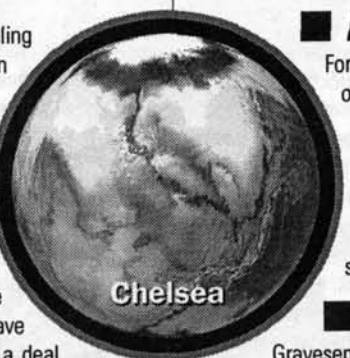
Forge Politics

Gravesend and Hammersmith are both cornerstones of the Confederation. In particular, the Gravesend shipyards are the backbone of the Fleet and are currently geared up to maximum capacity to build up the Outworlds Defense Force. Their industry and resources support the ODF and the Forge system as a whole represents significant untapped wealth and living space. Christabel has become a garrison post and even Chelsea has been considered for a military outpost. This concentration of resources makes Forge a likely battleground in the coming war and it is reinforcing in anticipation of a possible siege. The current Director of Gravesend, Karina Dmitov, is less enthusiastic about the war than Hammersmith's Director, Anson Rydecker, but can't deny that her planet's economy has blossomed. She is also aware, however, that the Gravesend shipyards are probably the biggest single target in the Pleiades.

The Loki System

Ironsun

Pleiades 7, named Loki, is an A-class white dwarf, a cold, dim white sun. It is all that remains of a once fierce blue-white solar furnace, and its planets were probably once ensconced in its outer orbits. Then, the sun went nova, throwing off its outer layers, consuming its worlds all the way out to its gas giants, and building a minor nebula. All that was left was its core, a few of its outer planets that were captured by its remaining gravity, and the coldly luminescent dust of its nebula.

When Scouts arrived in Loki, it wasn't in search of habitable worlds (although given the oddities that had been discovered in other systems, it wasn't a forlorn hope). No, spectrographic scans from the neighboring system of Cronus had indicated materials in the Loki nebula that fit no known classification ... they weren't on any periodic charts. The Scout team spent months probing the nebula and its belts, as well as the surfaces of all three worlds, looking for these new elements.

And they found them. Five new elemental classifications were added to the periodic chart of atomic measurements. Apparently, these highly unstable and radioactive elements were naturally possible only in the nebular remains of a nova. The team dutifully reported their finds to the SCC and departed, glad to flee the stellar graveyard.

Man soon returned to Loki. First came independent prospectors, looking for concentrations of the new wonder elements; a single kilogram of Lokium would net enough money to retire! They grouped together into consortiums to hire Shunt ships to take them and their vessels there, and then scattered across the system. As the few souls poked and prodded their way through the nebula, a lone miner named Purpont was about to make history. On the third planet, he braved the sulfuric atmosphere to find a meteor crater that held a vein of Lokium. He kept it a secret, and taking the next Shunt ship out, went straight to Solingen and sold them the location and his samples.

Solingen GmbH moved in with a cargo ship to establish a permanent dig. They brought Mektons in a bid to secure the whole planet before the miners could find out about the strike. Unfortunately, Purpont talked, and a range war flared up, with outnumbered Solingen corporate troops trying to keep hordes of miners off the world (christened Purpont's Dig). They failed, and soon other companies had cargo ships in the system, building permanent space habitats as bases to deal with the wildcatters.

Finally, Solingen GmbH made a desperate bid to dominate the system, outfitting a small colony spinner and Shunting it into the system in orbit around Ironsun, where the largest mineral finds were now taking place. It worked; with its facilities, the Solingen spinner could provide comforts none of the other habitats could match, giving Solingen GmbH the edge it desired.

Today, the system is a loose collection of miners, wildcatters, corporate personnel, and camp followers, still looking for and working the fantastic mineral deposits in the system. It's an official member of the Confederation, largely due to representation of wealth rather than population base.

Loki 1—Galgenvogel

This lunar-sized rock could more accurately be called a moon to the system's dead primary. It follows a tight elliptical orbit that brings it within mere tens of millions of kilometers of the dwarf. It's never been prospected, since the primary's radiation and gravitation make landing on Galgenvogel an impossibility.
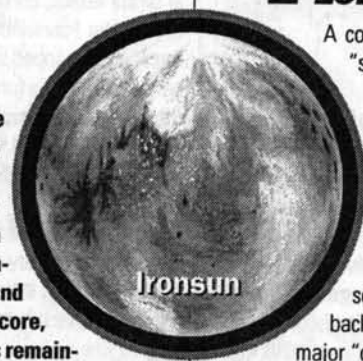
Loki 2—Ironsun

A cold, dingy grey world of iron-tainted ammonia-fluorine "snow" over a meteor-pocked, dead planet. Ironsun is so awful, it makes Gaol look like Miami Beach. Only the distant speck of the white dwarf shines any light onto the dismal terrain; the navigation lights of the spinner Sutter's Mill seem brighter, and certainly hold more promise. The atmosphere is sluggish, sullen, and abusive, eventually eating its way into machinery, pressure seals, and metals. And still men slave here, searching for the one meteor crater which will knockback the radiation signature that spells wealth. Its two major "cities" are Pitchblende and Foothold.

Near Loki Belt

A thick belt of nebular gas, still glowing, with asteroids and planetoids scattered throughout. The gas is still hot enough to obscure radar and other sensors, and navigation through the belt is hazardous. But there's no lack of prospectors combing the belt looking for Lokium.

Loki 3—Purpont's Dig

A ball of rock and ammonia ice, with a thin ammonia atmosphere. Thought to be the remains of one of the sun's planets, it's practically deserted; no-one's turned up a find here in years.

Loki Belt

A larger version of the inner belt, this vast ring of gas and chunks is actually the innermost part of the nebula. It could well be hiding unbelievable amounts of ore, but since it's got the volume of a small solar system, man is only beginning to chart the belt.

Trailing Loki Belt

A spur of the nebula, formed when something large passed through the larger belt and dragged gas and rocks along in its wake.

Loki Politics

Solingen GmbH owns the Loki system and where Solingen goes Loki follows. Mining is accelerating as restrictions are lifted and more "economical" but destructive means are brought into play. The Solingen spinner colony is currently being expanded to include an ODF support facility.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **YUJI TATENO**

Manager of Pitchblende, Capital of Ironsun

Description: 1.62m, 68kg, 47 years old, long black hair tied into pony tail, solidly built in his youth but now growing soft around the edges, wears Japanese kimonos to formal events and business suits most of the rest of the time.

Quote: "There is only one way to run a city..."

Notes: Tateno is a quiet and meditative person, in public. He got to his position by putting up the appearance of a completely controlled and serene manager. Polls say his people love him. In private, he is rumored to have an explosive temper. His second wife divorced him after a long and public argument where she made several accusations against him. After the divorce, she stopped talking, and like his first wife quickly left Pitchblende. Rumors say that he paid them handsomely to go away.

He is for the war with the USSA, but is concerned about Ironsun's vulnerability. His calls for a garrison force are just now being addressed.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 7, EMP 6, Expert: Politics +9, Persuasion +6, Kendo +6. Datalink, +1 Boosterware , Nanobodies.

■ The Asgard System

Asgard (Pleiades 3) is a GOV main-stage star, just a bit larger than Sol. The single exception to this is Asgard's sunspot activity. The star is remarkably stable, with few sunspots reported in the past dozen years of observation. This makes for stable radio communications in the system, and for light cosmic ray activity, but it also means that Asgard doesn't give out as much energy as Sol. Until Asgard's sunspot pattern changes to a more active mode, the system's planets are doomed to a bit of coolness.

Asgard doesn't have a lot of planets. It even lacks the gas giants common to most systems. As far as astronomical interest, Asgard is a bust.

As far as colonization goes, it's not bad. The lesser radiation from the star means that orbital industries can be built without the heavy radiation shielding most other systems require, which means faster construction. The single habitable world, Fourwinds, is about 11% closer to Asgard than Earth is to Sol, and maintains a comfortable temperature. The system's single asteroid belt is in the middle orbit, nestled in between Fourwinds and Mishima, which means it's less than 15 million kilometers from Fourwinds. This does cause occasional problems; the gravitic interaction between the two worlds causes meteors to break loose from the belt and careen through the system at odd intervals, but this is only a minor concern, and is far outweighed by the benefits of an easily accessed asteroid belt.

The scout report on Asgard was favorable. The system situation held particular appeal for Solingen GmbH; the belt, rich in raw metals, was practically begging to be mined, and the habitable world nearby was perfect for a base to sustain the asteroid mining effort. Furthermore, the low incidence of cosmic rays meant that the colony spinner could be constructed swiftly, built for a short trip and a long life as an orbital factory for new Mekton construction.

The colonists for Fourwinds were recruited from among the company personnel at *Solingen GmbH,* and from the asteroid miners of the Celaeno Belt. Knowing that speed was the key to developing industry on Fourwinds, the call went out for go-getters and over-achievers. The selection had its desired effect; the Asgard spinner factories were up and produced their first Mekton 43 days after arriving in permanent orbit about Fourwinds.

Today, Fourwinds is sort of a lesser Solingen. The planet incorporated itself as a sovereign government in 2169, and the super-achievers who settled the planet organized a buy-out of Solingen's interest in the system's industry. Christened Fourwinds Industrials, the new company specializes in conversions and modifications of standard Solingen civilian models (under license from Solingen GmbH, of course). It also engages in secret research that is too hot for the centralized and cosmopolitan capitol, for Solingen's benefit. Fourwinds Industries does so much work for Solingen GmbH, including subcontracting for subassemblies manufacture, that it's often called "Solingen Junior."

Unfortunately for the stability of the system, it's well-positioned to be a Shunt recalibration point, lying within 30 light years of three other systems. Early in Zanzibar's development, pirates and smugglers grew into the habit of using the Asgard system as a stopping point, even to the secret construction of a base on Cueball. The interference, the occasion-

Fourwinds

al pirate attack, and the danger to the research conducted on Fourwinds moved the Fourwinders to construct a fairly large and effective patrol force, one equipped with excellent Solingen Mektons and even some light battle-riders. This force put paid to the pirate presence, driving them from the system and capturing the Cueball base. With the advent of war, Fourwinds has had two whole brigades of Mektons defect to the ODF without significantly reducing their security.

■ Asgard 1—Dyna

Another Mercury-type world, but possessing a very thin chemical atmosphere. It's theorized that this is actually the planetary crust slowly vaporizing in the heat.

■ Asgard 2—Mishima

A more poisonous version of Celaeno's Claymore, Mishima isn't as stormy, but its atmosphere makes up for it in corrosive compounds. How plant life survives in this hellish chemical bath is a mystery to human science; probes are frequently sent to the planet to retrieve plant samples and atmospheric scans. An entire branch of xenobotany has been established on Fourwinds to study this curiosity.

■ Asgard Belt

The system's belt is slowly being devoured by Fourwinds' need for raw materials. At the present rate of increase, usable nickel-iron asteroids should begin to become scarce in around 2390...

■ Asgard 3—Fourwinds

Another Earth-type world, Fourwinds is as stable and boring an ecosystem as the regimented and static culture imposed by the early settlers. The lack of cosmic ray storms has stunted evolution on Fourwinds, and the most advanced forms of life are fish and insects. Its two major cities are Osterville and Aeolia.

■ Asgard 4—Cueball

This ice-world is inhabited by a relative few misfits who grew tired of the dog-eat-dog, get-ahead culture on Fourwinds. So far, they've managed to convert the old pirate base into a small township, and are slowly developing it into an underground city.

■ Asgard Politics

Asgard finds itself walking the line between the Confederation and the USSA. While most of the populace's sympathies are with the Confederation (and in fact, several militia units have gone over to the ODF without official permission), the Fourwinds government's notoriously conservative nature has prevented it from leaping into war with the USSA.

In the meantime, Director Kender has been careful to maintain neutrality, providing open access to both sides, but trying to keep from committing further militia or industrial resources to either. This isn't easy, as both sides are beginning to exert considerable pressure to commit. In particular, the SAC has requested that Fourwinds' militia be attached to them. Kender has vehemently refused, and the very request may be edging the Director closer to an alliance with the Confederacy.

Asgard is also being flooded by refugees from the Confederation as Earther and USSA loyalists are moved out en masse by the new government. Kender is trying to come to an agreement with the SCC to ship them back to Earthspace, but so far, nothing has been done.
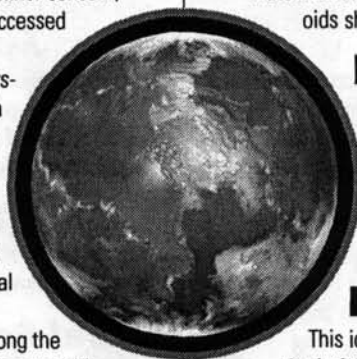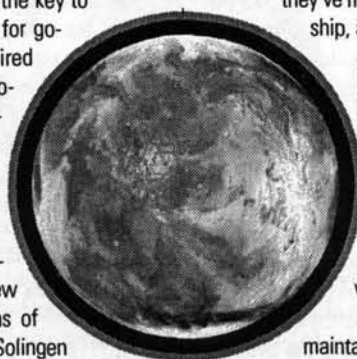
■ *The Halcyon System*

Pleiades 5, Halcyon, is a G1V star. It's very much like Sol, just a little hotter and brighter. SCC astronomers were pretty sure that it would have habitable worlds around it. They were right.

Halcyon was a double win; two worlds supported life in the skimpy system. The inner world, dubbed Arcadia, drew instant interest from the planetologists. The first explorers to draw nigh found a small world dominated by the biggest trees in man's recorded history. Arcadia's low gravity, high amount of sunlight, and plentiful water grew unimaginable trees, plants bigger than any fairy tale ever told. Trees 2-3 kilometers thick at the base! The place was an utter fantasy. The planet's mean temperature was merely steamy (around 95 degrees Fahrenheit). Life flourished, growing in and around the trees—mosses and lichens of all sorts, insects, and arboreal pseudo pterosaurs, gliding saurians of titanic size, flying on wings of skin and snaring the insects in their two heads.

Yes, two heads. Over 70% of the known species of Arcadian pterosaurs have two necks springing from their bodies, with two narrow, sharp-toothed heads scanning the air for prey. Each head carried a brain that could comfortably keep the creature alive and functioning normally. Xenobiologist Meryle Cooper proposed the unthinkable: The dragons of Arcadia were created creatures rather than evolved species.

His proposal was denounced by the councils of scientific respectability. Improbable, they said; the creatures have to have evolved! But try as they might, no evidence could be unearthed that showed the intermediate step between single and double-headed dragons. (Paleontological research still continues to look for the missing link that would put paid to Cooper's theory.) The argument remains undecided. Both sides wait for the discovery of the evidence that will conclusively solve the riddle.

■ *Halcyon 1—Crisp*

A sun-scorched, semi-molten rock.

■ *Halcyon 2—Arcadia*

The jewel of the Halcyon system, this tree-world's only drawback is its thin atmosphere—there's plenty of oxygen (with trees that big, there has to be), but the air pressure is so low most feel like they're suffocating until they get used to it. Arcadia's unique ecosystem isn't bothered by human presence—the trees were too big to knock down! Instead, human dwellings are built among the boughs of the leafy titans, and entire townships such as Arboria and Santos are nestled along a single branch. Inter-tree transport is via cable-car or dirigible; Mektons don't fly much on Arcadia, because the dragons are likely to mistake them for hostiles … and the dragons are big enough to do something about it.

At ground level, Arcadia is safer, but hard to get around on. The surface is a mix of spring-fed lakes, meters-tall mosses, and deadfall branches that are up to a hundred meters thick and take decades to decay.

Meteorologists have noted a stratospheric layer of highly reflective dust in the planet's atmosphere. This layer's effects are visible from orbit; the dust gets heavily mixed into the clouds, and makes them so reflective that they are blindingly bright when the sun's rays bounce off of them. Likewise, the dust

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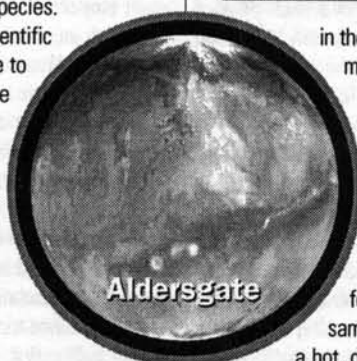
Aldersgate
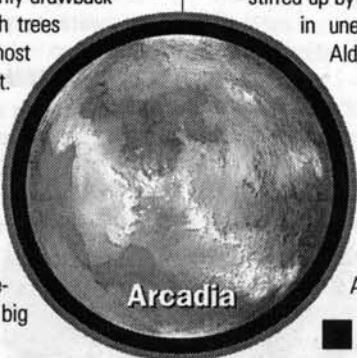
Arcadia

in the atmosphere makes Arcadia look "fuzzy," reflecting back more sunlight. The overall effect is to make the sky look blue with a golden tinge when seen from the ground, and to increase Arcadia's albedo to 0.93, lowering the planet's effective temperature.

■ *Halcyon 3—Aldersgate*

A normal-sized world with standard atmosphere and gravity, Aldersgate was a much more likely candidate for a colony than Arcadia, and it was colonized about the same time as Arcadia, if with less enthusiasm. Aldersgate is a hot, dry place, its desert buttes shining with the solar panels gathering energy to cool its partially-underground cities (Kadath, Morocco, and Tangier). The desert sands turned out to be rich in minerals stirred up by active vulcanism and high winds, so the planet is a rich in unexpected resources. This economic strength lead to Aldersgate being chosen as the system capitol.

■ *Halcyon 4—Blackfield*

A desolate world, covered with thick sheets of black ice. So far, all tests show this to be simple water ice, but there's no explanation for its dark color as yet.

■ *Halcyon 5—Pentus*

A useless ball of carbonaceous rock.

■ *Halcyon Politics*

Halcyon remains neutral as a system, but Arcadia is one of the few colonies with a solidly Gaian bent. Its elaborate ecology and huge tree-buildings have inspired Gaian philosophers and scientists alike (ironically, this Gaian enchantment with Arcadia has resulted is more lenient colonization laws than anywhere else). As the administrative center for the system, Aldersgate has tried to keep the system out of the war, but the Arcadian colonists are strongly lobbying for a USSA commitment.

■ *The Cronus System*

Cronus (Pleiades 6) is an M0V class star. The fact that it had planets was interesting enough; the fact that it did have a small coterie of worlds hovering about it was extraordinary. M-class stars are not known to be colony sites, so the Cronus system, with three worlds in its habitable zone, ended up being quite a surprise.

The scouts couldn't believe their eyes when the Shunt ship *Voyager* dropped into the system and telescopes were trained on the primary: The system was empty, save one lone planet orbiting at .42 AU. Then a shadow passed before the red ball of Cronus itself—another planet, at barely .56 AU! Further analysis found yet another world at .75 AU. Cronus, it seemed had no fewer than three worlds in stable orbits. A thin asteroid belt occupied the space in between the inner and outer orbits, with a streamer trailing off in the direction of the outer world. The three inner worlds of Gaol, Organon, and Athanaeum all occupied the inner orbits.

■ *Cronus 1—Gaol*

The nearest planet, Gaol is a dead rock-ball, veiled in a thick cloak of carbon-dioxide gas. Since its atmosphere is almost completely composed of this greenhouse gas, Gaol's average temperature is a deadly 230 degrees Fahrenheit, hot enough to retard the function of any space-suit, and all but specially built Mektons.

Yet the planet is inhabited. Underground, in warrens vaporized out of the living rock, thousands of souls labor in lives of desolate imprisonment. Gaol is the penitentiary of the Pleiades; any criminal that survives capture and is convicted of serious crimes against the Confederation (piracy, murder, sabotage, terrorism, slavery, etc.) is brought to Gaol aboard special prison ships. These ships visit the planet from time to time, bringing new inmates to the lockup, lingering on the hellish surface long enough for technicians in special Mektons to service the heat exchangers, power plants, and life support systems that keep the inmates alive, and leave as soon as their job is done. Occasionally, they retrieve a prisoner whose time of incarceration has been served. This doesn't happen often...

Gaol's prison is protected against jailbreaks by automated surface turrets, and by a fail-safe which will detonate explosives and destroy the complex should the other defenses be breached.

■ *Cronus 2—Organon*

An Earth-type world most noted for its astounding amount of flowering plants (over two million species, by last count) and its spectacular view of the sun. Seen from less than 65 million kilometers away, Cronus appears to be over half a meter across as it treks through the mauve sky (yes, mauve—Cronus' red light combined with the normal oceanic blue reflection into the atmosphere makes Organon's sky a lovely shade of mauve).

All of Organon's creatures are insectoid—even the aquatic creatures are basically water-going insects. Fortunately for the Organonites, none of the native lifeforms share a taste for human blood, because some of these bugs are big— the largest flier has wings two meters across, and the largest aquatic form is nearly the size of a Mekton.

The colonists are busy trying to build an industry based on these insects' biochemistry—there are many venoms and other secretions that show promise as anti-biotics and even anti-viral agents in human physiological systems. This research has spawned several fledgling companies in the cities of Kabush and Ozrica, which have provided some competition with Solingen GmbH in various markets. Solingen's subsequent attempts to buy out, shut down or sabotage these micro-corps has resulted in serious ill feelings on both sides. Organonites have since gone out of their way to establish self-sustaining food and goods sources so they can limit their links to Solingen GmbH and, next to the Charybdis, are the most independent-minded people in the cluster.
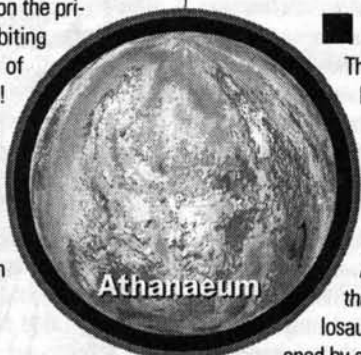
■ *Cronus 3—Athanaeum*

This world is also Earth-like in composition, but it's 17,000 kilometers in diameter! With an appropriate density and gravity (1.25 Gees). This higher gravity, combined with an atmospheric pressure of 17 psi, kept Athanaeum from being selected as the colony world, and still restricts most of the colonization to hunters and prospectors operating out of the city of Malathis. Athanaeum's major lifeforms are mammalian creatures that resemble a cross between an armadillo and an ankylosaur. They are normally placid plant-eaters unless threatened by anything their size. Once confronted by a large interloper, their territorial instincts kick in, and they attempt to drive off the intruder, first with intimidation, then with actual club attacks, using the spiked maul at the end of their tails. Fortunately for those who hunt them, these creatures are slow and can be picked off with long-ranged head shots.

Fortunately for the inhabitants of the system, these "ankadillos" are prolific, short-lived, and good eating, otherwise the people of Organon would be doomed to a diet of bug.

■ *Cronus Belt and Trailing Belt*

These asteroid belts have the same mineral content as the Unholy Trio, leading to speculation that they're the left-overs from the construction of the aforementioned trio. Gravitic interaction with Anubis has drawn out the "tail" of the Trailing Belt, a crescent of rocks trailing off toward Anubis' orbit.

■ *Cronus 4—Anubis*

A world plated in fluorine ice and cocooned in fluorine gas that the sun's heat has melted.

■ *Cronus Politics*

If there is a truly neutral colony system in the Pleiades, it's here. The administrative center on Organon has little love of the USSA (the hunting on Athanaeum has gotten them in trouble with Gaian authorities on more than one occasion), and they will *not* fight their fellow colonists. At the same, time, their experience with Solingen GmbH has resulted in a serious distrust of the megacorporation bordering on hatred. They don't trust that the corporation has the best interests of the colonies at heart and refuses to throw in with them.

Director Rem, despite the fact that the war curtails her own political ambitions, is willing to wait out the hostilities, but she afraid that Solingen GmbH may use Organon's neutrality as an excuse to destroy their credibility in the colonial markets (which, in fact, they will try to do). She fears that she will be forced to take action soon, on one side or the other ...

■ *The Ranoxis System*

Ranoxis is a fairly typical G-class star system, sporting a moderate number of planets, arranged in a comfortably classical fashion; seven planets, one in the star's habitable zone, and a ringed gas giant in the sixth orbit.
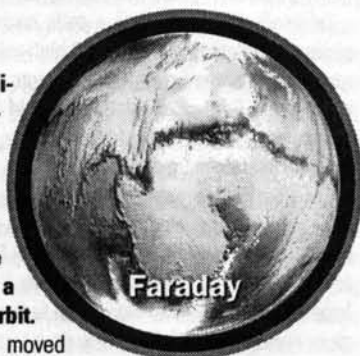
Faraday

When the prospector team moved through the place, they really discovered nothing out of the ordinary. To be sure, the biology of the single habitable world, Ranoxis 3, was interesting. A warm world with plentiful plant life, Ranoxis 3's atmosphere spawned thunderstorms at four times the rate of Earth's—big storms. The amount of energy released in the form of lightning was astounding, and rivaled that of some small gas giants.

The survey crew slapped the moniker "Faraday" onto the planet and set about figuring the best way to land a "walkabout" Mekton amidst the near-perpetual storms. A lot of electrical shielding and improvised lightning rods later, the prospector Mekton was successfully landed and on its way. It reported no interference from flora or fauna, and its jury-rigged voltage protection held.

One salient feature of the ecosystem was noted: Any flora two meters tall or taller incorporated a significant amount of a natural silica-metal mix in their systems, allowing them to act as conductors. The trees were particularly good at this, shunting truly massive gigawatt lightning bolts into the ground without harm. The prospectors secured samples of these trees and moved on. Faraday was cataloged as "marginally habitable."

When the expedition returned to Solingen, the tree samples were analyzed. Tests revealed that the wood could handle electrical currents less gross than lightning bolts; as a matter of fact, the wood could handle micro-current as efficiently as mega-current. The "crystalchime" tree (so called because the crystalline matrix ran through the tree and its leaves, and when struck by lightning the whole structure would glow as if translucent, and ring like fine crystal) was, it turned out, a nearly-perfect room-temperature superconductor.

Solingen scientists attempted to suppress this information, since these trees had immediate industrial applications. The information leaked anyway, and before a SAC ship could be dispatched to attempt planetary interdiction, Outworlds entrepreneurs had already begun wholesale destruction of crystalchime forests, carting the wood back to industrial worlds for sale. The rest of the story you know.

Ranoxis' and Faraday's actual importance in the war is questionable. Solingen has not had time to integrate crystalchime superconductors into their technology, and they don't represent a significant enough resource to make the system vital to either side's war effort.

But this is where the first blow was struck, and the SAC is still seeking vengeance for the attack on Battlefleet Kinkade—both sides may make Ranoxis the center of their struggle just to prove a point. Meanwhile, Solingen harvesting is still going on in sporadic expeditions. The ODF doesn't have sufficient forces to protect a permanent harvesting operation should the SAC come back in force, so they simply maintain a rotation of cloaked ships to monitor the system. Solingen periodically sends in convoys that come through to get what they can from Faraday and then leave as quickly as possible.

■ *The Rocinante System*

Rocinante is an F class star somewhat hotter and whiter that Sol. The system only has 5 major planets, of which one is a gas giant, all surrounded by a dense nebular gas cloud.
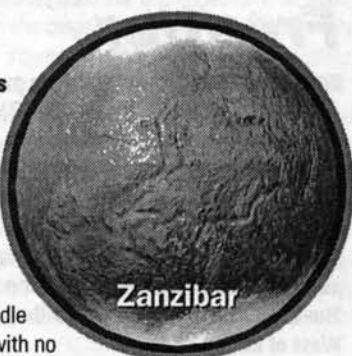
Zanzibar

All of the smaller planets huddle close to the star, and are rocky with no atmosphere. They may have valuable minerals on the surface, much like Mercury in the Sol System, but no one has gotten enough capital or motivation to do much exploring.

The planets in the Rocinante system are referred to only by their catalogue numbers. The only moon that has a name is Zanzibar (Rocinante 5-D), and it is the only human habitable body in the system.

The first three planets have extremely eccentric orbits, none on the ecliptic plane. They have heavily cratered surfaces. However, no large group of asteroids is found within the system.

Planet Four is about the same size as Mars. It's axis of rotation points at Rocinante. It has a moon about 1/10 the mass of Planet Four

Planet Five is a helium-rich gas giant with spectacular rings. When explorers first saw it, they favorably compared it to the rings of Saturn. The planet is otherwise an ordinary gas giant with bands of clouds colored by the impurities floating within them. About twice a year a giant storm will sweep over the planet, creating intricate patterns in the clouds. Planet Five is about the same distance from Rocinante as Earth is from Sol.

Zanzibar is an earth sized, habitable moon of Planet Five. Because of its unusual position, it is a planet of extremes. On the sunny side of planet five, Zanzibar has temperatures that average 120° F, and almost no surface moisture.

When it passes through the shadow of the gas giant, the weather becomes arctic cold, and snow storms rage over the planet. A complete cycle takes about one human year. During the 3 months between the hot and cold periods the planet blooms with all manner of living things. All of these life forms have adapted to hibernate during the extreme heat and cold.

Platt City has the central starport, and most of the population of the planet, about 1 million people. It is as lawless and wild as any frontier town of the ancient west. Zanzibar is generally a planet of traders, smugglers, and pirates. It is also has headquarters of the Charybdis, a loose organization of smugglers who also dabble in crime and piracy as a means of livelihood.

> **Game Note**: These are only a few of the worlds in the Pleiades; there are *hundreds* of systems in the cluster. While most contain planets of limited value, the Rangers and the Jägers are constantly coming across new Earth-like worlds and the room for growth (at least from an Expansionist point of view) seems infinite. The Gamemaster should feel free to build his own worlds as his campaign requires, keeping in mind that not every system has to have a habitable world to be of interest (take the Loki system, for example). Also, any human outposts outside of the main colonies will probably be fairly small. These stars have only been within Man's grasp for 38 years—there is certainly a great deal left untouched and unexplored.

■ *Outlaws on the Frontier*

The Pleiades used to be a pretty calm place. The cities are as safe as any on Earth. The level of technology allows them to use the most up to date methods of law enforcement. The countryside is almost empty of people. There simply aren't enough humans around to cause any large scale problems. Once outside the cities and away from the farm compounds, there are no real laws or law enforcement to speak of. A person's best friend is most often their mekton's pulse cannon. The Colonists often compare their worlds' outback to the Wild West of ancient Earth.

Of course the Farmers and Ranchers don't have the best relationship, sometimes things can get down right ugly. Farmers grow crops according to the seasons, and the Ranchers' animals tend to eat or trample the crops regardless of who owns them. Farmers have long since learned to drive herds off cliffs, or into other herds to get them off their lands. Ranchers get revenge with the occasional blitz assault on a farmer's compound, or tipping pirates off to a major shipment of food stuffs going to a city. Even Ranchers don't really like each other. New animosities have grown with the addition of new herd animals. The Arcadian two headed Screetch likes to attack sheep from the air, mistaking them for their native tweezel flower bushes. Tellurian ceratopsians and hadrosaurs always butt heads when they meet Terran long-horns, usually with bloody results. Ranchers often settle their differences with bar fights, and rustling of animals of rivals.

Then there are the Freemen: men and women opposed to corporate rule, who decided to make a living by stealing from others. Some of them are loners, who are running from any number of crimes in cities. Some work together as bandits, raiding farms and ranches for food and technology. When a bandit group is reported, usually a Marshal is sent out to investigate, but this can sometimes take months. During this time the bandit groups can keep whole districts in terror.

■ *The Charybdis*

The Charybdis is the name for a loose guild of smugglers, pirates and black marketers who have made Zanzibar in the Rocinante system their home base. It is as close to a real government that Zanzibar has. The leader of Charybdis is Avatar Shiva. He says that he was a successful Earth Corporate climber who finally decided that if he was going to play the dirty corporate political game, he was going to make his own rules. He sold all his interests, took the money and moved to the Rocinante System. Once there he started the of Zanzibar Independence movement. He also fortified the system with Probability Anchors and mass drivers. Since then, Avatar has become a ruthless smuggler, privateer, and distiller of the best home-made Gin in the cluster. (Shiva Gin is said to be based on the mildly hallucinogenic shreega berry.) Shiva holds most of his power through his cynical charisma, quick use of force and a big personal bank account.

The Charybdis organization walks on both sides of the legal line. They do a lot of low-key freight hauling, offering an independent shipping group and acting as an irritating thorn in Pleiades Freight and Shipping's (and Solingen's) side. They also handle anything that people don't want the authorities to know about, either to avoid taxes and tariffs, or, more often, to avoid arrest. This has put them in with organized crime on more than one occasion, as smugglers can't be too picky about what they are hauling (assuming they even ask what it is).

Originally Charybdis was a code name for a group of smugglers specializing in drugs and other small high value items within the Pleiades system. Avatar Shiva bought his way into the group, and brought with him the highest Earth technology he could buy. His influence and business smarts changed the organization from a small time smuggler's group into a sophisticated smuggling syndicate.

The Charybdis even smuggles contraband to and from Earthspace. They have set up a huge black market in Earth goods in almost every major colonial city, managing to avoid or buy any law enforcement in the area. The few times that they have been targeted is when Earth diseases make an appearance on a Cluster world (due to the appearance of Ravagers in smuggler's muscle squads). They also do a lucrative business shipping weapons and cyberware to Earth, as the Ravagers and others are a ready market.

The Charybdis' latest expansion was into piracy. Armed Charybdis ships have started to raid both Earth and Solingen vessels. They are remarkable in their relative bloodlessness—if a ship surrenders its cargo, it will often be allowed to leave unmolested. If the pirates want the ship itself, they usually leave the crew and passengers somewhere safe from which they can be rescued. Chivalry may be alive in the strangest place. Unfortunately, other pirates have jumped on the band wagon, with somewhat less cultured tactics or sensibilities. This upsurge in piracy in the last ten years has caused a backlash against the Charybdis, and militia and SAC units have been actively pursuing the worst offenders back to their bases and purging them.

Of course, now that the Pleiades Confederation has declared war on Earth, the Confederation has offered to issue Letters of Marque to the Charybdis, paying them to attack Earth vessels. Shiva has tentatively accepted the offer. Meanwhile piracy on Pleiades vessels has dropped off somewhat and the Confederation ignores occasional acts that still occur. Even merchants' guilds, who occasionally benefit from Zanzibar's lawlessness, remain silent as long as most of the victims are Earth ships.

■ *Charybdis History*

First charted in 2145, the Rocinante system seemed to be one of the least habitable systems in the entire Pleiades cluster. The entire system is located deep in a dense nebular dust cloud. Zanzibar was a world of intense heat and cold, with life forms that only came out during the short time between the extremes. No Earth crops or livestock were suitable for this difficult environment. Because of this, Rocinante remained unexplored for more than 15 years.

By 2161 several corporations combined to set up an exploratory colony on the 4th moon of Planet Five. The original purpose of this habitat was to be a base of operations for a potential mining industry. Named "Platt City" after the vice president who approved the operation, it started out as a frontier town with no legal structure, or even police department. Because of this, people who didn't like the restrictions of life in the Pleiades, or Earth, began to migrate to Zanzibar.

In 2168, Zanzibar declared itself to be an independent planet without law. In part this is due to the arrival of Avatar Shiva and his supporters, the Charybdis. How Shiva got the SCC to recognize this independence remains a mystery to this day. Now, not even a Marshal's authority is recognized on Zanzibar, and it rapidly became home to all sorts of smugglers, black marketers, and pirates.

For the first twenty years of the Pleiades, organized crime was exclusively dedicated to smuggling. The Charybdis Guild started their lives by making quick Shunt runs transporting whatever they were paid to transport. It didn't take long for them to start looking into the very profitable business of shipping illegal drugs, weapons, and other items. They stayed within the Cluster, because they had to rely on the large commercial FTL carriers to move their cargo ships around. Fortunately most of the carrier captains could be paid to look the other way.

Piracy became a major issue just about ten years ago with the introduction of cheaper starships. The corporations wanted everyone to have the means to get around in the Cluster, but didn't realize what they had gotten into. As the shipping traffic increased, reports of ships being attacked and looted climbed. At this point, the Charybdis acquired their own Shunt ships (from a variety of shady sources) and started making their own interstellar runs. When the Charybdis started hitting other people's shipping, the SAC and the militia started patrolling the major space lanes to bring this piracy under control.

During January 2180, The Pleiades Confederation issued Letters of Marque to Shiva. Shiva made huge amounts of money by publicly auctioning the letters off to various groups. Of course, he received a percentage cut of each take going into his personal accounts. Although this caused some embarrassment to the Confederation, it was quickly buried in the news of the Battle of the Northern Rings.

■ *Platt City*

Zanzibar became the defacto capital of crime for the entire Pleiades. The nominal ruler of the planet has openly invited all pirates, smugglers and outlaws to join him on his world. For a cut of the profits he promises protection from the Confederation.

Zanzibar's capital, Platt City, has been called "the ugliest human habitat ever constructed." It has no sewage network, no trash collection, no water or power distribution systems. In fact, it doesn't have what most humans would call standard conveniences of modern 22nd Century life. Despite all this, it is the permanent home for almost 1 million people.

Getting to Zanzibar is a matter of knowing the right people, and paying them a lot of money. Ships and shuttles can land anywhere in the Import/Export district, as long as they can pay the group that owns a particular landing area, and can protect their ship after it has landed. The

Charybdis allows anyone to enter or leave Zanzibar at any time. There is no official immigration or customs, and no fees. The guild does have an amazing spy network that keeps up on the cargo that passes through Platt City, however. Charybdis is particularly interested in dangerous things: weapons, toxic chemicals, drugs, nuclear bombs, and spaceships.

The city grew up from the original mining colony in an unplanned and chaotic way. The level of technology depends on the district you visit. Beside the original mining company, there are a couple other interstellar corporations that have heavily defended enclaves in the Business District. The major crime syndicates of every world have elegant accommodations in the Criminal District. Pirates and smugglers have created a haphazard starport in the Import/Export District. Those people who are not directly connected with one of these groups live in The Warrens, a low tech slum covering about half the city.

There aren't very many people living in the rest of the planet, because of how inhospitable it is. A few brave freemen have staked out a homestead far enough from Platt City to avoid the majority of the crime, and close enough to make occasional visits to buy necessities. Somehow, these pioneers are surviving in the 3 months of Spring and 3 months of Fall when the planet briefly blooms into life.

■ *Charybdis Ships and Mektons*

About ten years ago, Shiva bought a number of ships converted for the high-speed, high-danger mission of smuggling. He soon organized the locals under his rule, and set about setting up a smuggling and pirate empire that major corporations and governments would find useful.

As a result of this, Shiva was able to recently contract a small fleet of smuggler ships from Gravesend Shipwrights. About the size of an Battlerider, Charybdis raiders are Shunt-capable with considerable firepower, even if they are less well-armed than full-on military ships. Most of the available interior space is dedicated to cargo, some of it in secret holds which would avoid casual inspection (see pg. 125 for stats).

Each ship also carries one to two Crossbones, mektons that are a fusion of the best of Bahn/Zai and Solingen designs, again customized for boarding actions and piracy. All Charybdis ships and Meks proudly display the distinctive sea monster that is their symbol, since the Charybdis have such a powerful (if tarnished) reputation that Shiva can flaunt the identity of his vehicles.

AVATAR SHIVA

Leader of the Charybdis, the smugglers of Zanzibar

Description: 1.79m, 86kg, 33 years old, long stringy black hair, long goatee, despite his wealth he always looks very thin but robust.

Quote: "If the colonies didn't need me, they would have killed me years ago."

Notes: News media rumors say that Shiva is the most vicious leader that the Charybdis have ever had. In the few interviews that he has permitted, always in secret locations, he appears erudite and composed, if completely cynical and ruthless. Avatar was a salary man who finally got tired of running the corporate rat race before coming to Zanzibar and declaring himself the leader of the smugglers. At least this is the story that he has always told the media. Some new research indicates that Shiva was a SAC mekton pilot who got shell shocked and decided to desert his ship.

Some of these rumors must be true, since the Charybdis only appreciate a strong leader. However, Shiva has held onto the position for a considerable length of time, a feat that demonstrates the ability to negotiate between various factions of the Smugglers. The planet Zanzibar and the collection of criminals and outcasts there have all benefited in some way from the increase in business that he has brought.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, REF 8, BODY 7, EMP 5, Persuasion +8, Negotiation +7, Oratory +6, Mek Piloting +6. Datalink, Cyberoptic, Skinweave, Nanobodies.

■ *The ODF's Combat & Assault Structure*

Although the Outworlds Defense Force is far younger than the SAC, its assault forces are composed of a much wider variety of elements. This is due to the fact that the ODF's leaders, elite soldiers and all of their mecha come from Solingen's secretly-created, privately-funded Fleet, but these forces are outnumbered by their Militia subordinates, who are loosely organized to say the least.

In order to cope with this difficult situation, the ODF's combat forces are strictly organized using the theories expounded by Guderian and Rommel—principles even older than those used by SAC! These ancient principles form the basis of the ODF's combat policies, with Mektons regarded as essentially advanced armored fighting vehicles (with the additional ability of flight, of course).

Among both the Fleet and the Militia, the ODF's mecha are organized into the same basic Mekton unit as that used by SAC: A four-machine team. Normally, three MM-1G-SLD Drakens and one MM-1G-HA Blitzen make up an ODF Mekton team, but the difference comes from the fact that the teams don't operate as two pairs of leader-and-wingman, but rather as a Guderian/Rommel-style Platoon: One lead Mekton and three other "flying AFVs." The Fleet's training officers make sure that Platoons train together, live together, and maintain as much unit cohesion as possible; if one Mekton is knocked out, the other three will continue to fight as a unit, and so on, until the mission is accomplished or orders are given to withdraw.

Platoons are organized into 12-Mek companies, which are, in turn, organized into 40-Mek Battalions and 150-Mek Regiments. The 30 extra Mektons in a Regiment are mostly Interceptor Meks, namely the MM-1G-INT Viggen—Following the tank warfare model, ODF Platoons are often protected by escort groups of 1 to 3 Interceptors. These escort groups are treated much like anti-tank helicopter units of old, moving ahead of the Platoon and protecting them by intercepting enemy Missiles and Aerospace Fighters.

■ *Militia Command & Tactics*

The bulk of the ODF's forces are made up of the Militias of the four member systems of the Pleiades Confederation. Four to six regiments are supplied by each system, for a total of 20 regiments (supposedly about 3,000 Mektons, but some are understrength). Each Regiment is led by an individualistic Colonel who is voted in by the soldiers of that regiment, all of whom are volunteers. Despite the fact that most of these volunteers start out as inexperienced hotshots, overzealous industrial Mek-pilots, and ex-"armchair soldiers", the Fleet's instructors do their best to galvanize them into an effective fighting force through rigorous training.

As it turns out, the ODF's training is derived from SAC training—"Better than SAC" is the unofficial motto of the Fleet, although "More SAC than SAC" is how the Militia translates it. The strict professionalism of the Fleet often crimps the loose organizational structure that makes up the Militias, and this has been known to cause serious friction between Militia and Fleet personnel—on one occasion this friction led to a shooting conflict between a Fleet Platoon and a Militia Platoon. Incidentally, the Militia Platoon lost, largely due to their inferior Mektons.

Combat-retrofitted industrial Meks like the Troubadour are used by most of the 20 regiments in the ODF Militia forces; these Mektons are usually armed with overcharged industrial laser-cutters and chainsaws and Solingen-made gauss rifles such as the basic Mark-6C (shown at the bottom of this page). However, six of the Militia's regiments were recently provided with Solingen's 1G-series combat Meks (i.e., about 900 assorted Drakens, Viggens and Blitzens) through a far-too-affordable subsidizing plan. Solingen GmbH has declared that they intend to extend this contract to the other Militia regiments in the hope of "bringing them up to speed" with the Fleet—although analysts have concluded that this is actually an attempt by Solingen to effectively "buy" the entirety of the Militia forces for its own use.

■ *Fleet Command & Tactics*

The Fleet, Solingen's professional military cadre, forms the core of the Outworlds Defense Force. All of the ODF's high-level officers are Fleet personnel—the top brass, the training instructors, and the policy-setters are Solingen-backed Fleet officers. Similarly, all of the ODF's elite forces (such as commandos and other special-
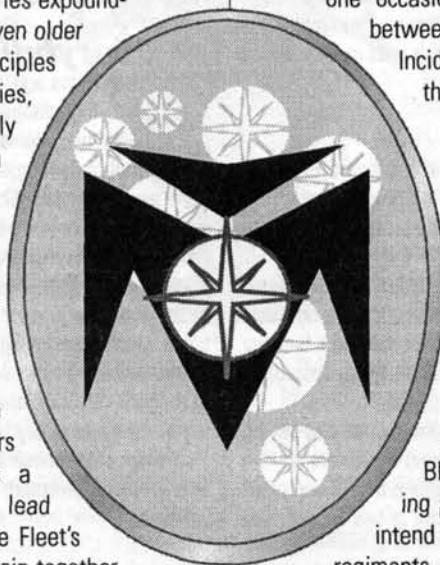
DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF

**Solingen GmbH
Mk-6C Gauss Rifle**

ODF Soldiers and APC
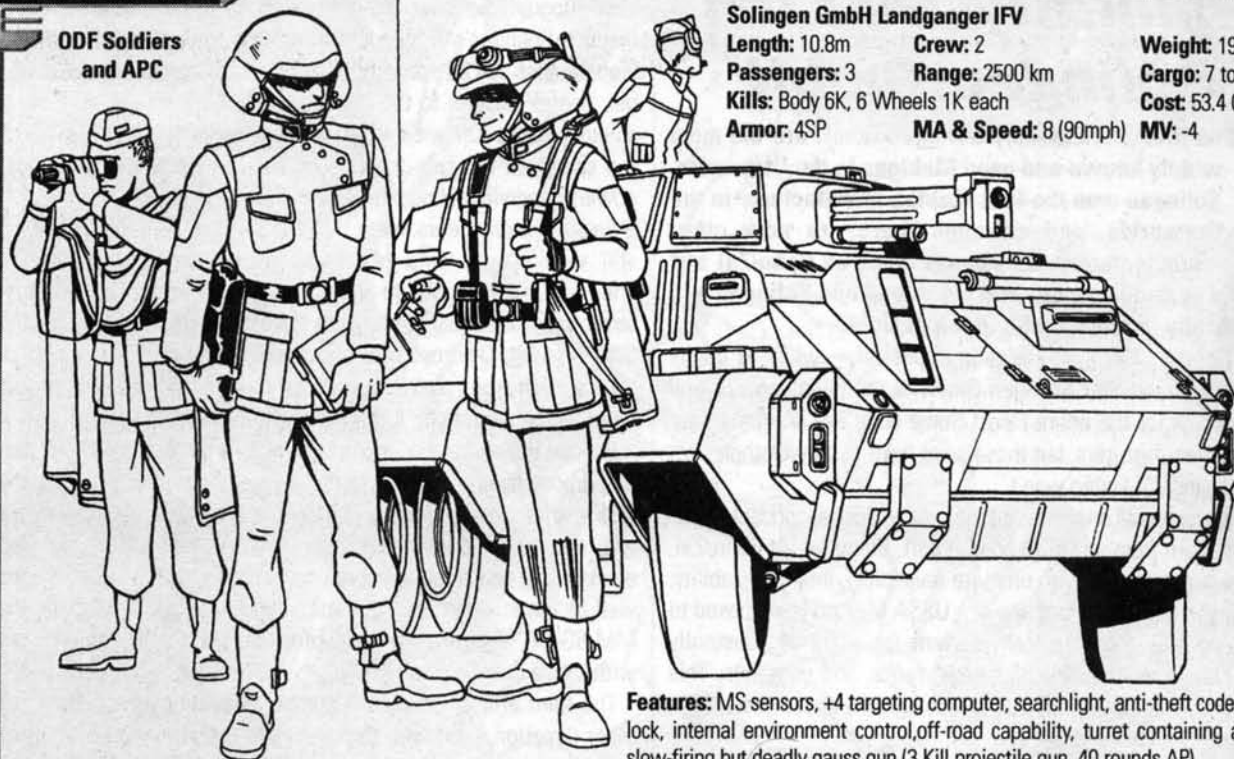
Solingen GmbH Landganger IFV
Length: 10.8m   **Crew:** 2   **Weight:** 19 tons
Passengers: 3   **Range:** 2500 km   **Cargo:** 7 tons
Kills: Body 6K, 6 Wheels 1K each   **Cost:** 53.4 CP
Armor: 4SP   **MA & Speed:** 8 (90mph)   **MV:** -4

Features: MS sensors, +4 targeting computer, searchlight, anti-theft code-lock, internal environment control, off-road capability, turret containing a slow-firing but deadly gauss gun (3 Kill projectile gun, 40 rounds AP).

ops teams) are staffed exclusively by Fleet personnel. In total, the Fleet represents a force of 9 Regiments, or roughly 1200 Mektons, distributed among the seven Task Forces to watch over and lead their Militia personnel. Furthermore, each and every 40-Mek battalion in the Militia forces has its own Fleet officer assigned to it. In general, this officer is supposed to serve as a liaison between the battalion and the Fleet's command structure, but these officers do have authorization to take command of the battalion "In case the need arises."

While most Militia forces are fiercely loyal to the Pleiades Confederation and its goals, there have already been two cases of entire Militia *regiments* finding their elected Colonel suddenly being replaced by a Fleet official (by executive order from Solingen). In both of these cases, the replaced Colonel was an outspoken opponent to Solingen's policies. It's dubious as to whether removing the charismatic leaders of these Militia regiments was the most effective choice—the potential for insubordination (or even open rebellion) among these Regiments may only be inflamed by this action.

■ The Neutral Militias

Further aggravating the tensions within the ODF is the unknown factor represented by the Militias of the neutral systems in the Pleiades: Asgard, Halcyon, and Cronus. These three systems have their own Militias just like any other colonized system, but they have not yet thrown in with the Confederation, nor do they consider themselves members of the USSA. Consequently, there are another 8 Regiments of combat-capable Mektons (and the many

craft and personnel required to support them) out there which have the potential to help or hinder the ODF.

Needless to say, these 8 regiments do not have any of Solingen's 1G-series combat Meks, but Fleet officials do make regular visits to the colonels in charge of these regiments in the hope of winning them over to the ODF's side. At the same time, the Fleet is checking to make sure that these neutral regiments don't inspire dissension or invite desertion among the more disgruntled of the ODF's own Militia forces. For the moment, Asgard's, Halcyon's, and Cronus' Militias remain neutral, but it's a sure bet that they'd readily throw in with a third party ... were one to come along.

■ ODF Tactics

While the "split-personality" character of the ODF can cause (and has caused) some inter-ranks tension, it also affords an interesting tactical advantage—the dual nature of a combined Fleet/Militia assault is very hard for the SAC to deal with. Once they decloak (naturally, nearly every ODF assault begins with an ambush), the Fleet's forces maintain the center of a cohesive attack while the wilder, more "freestyle" Militia Mektons zoom off at tangents to attempt envelopment and breakthrough. So far, SAC has had trouble reacting to this strategy, since they can't ignore the solid Fleet ranks to chase the Militia teams, but they can't blast the Fleet forces with massed firepower while their flanks and rear are being threatened by Militia Mektons. This situation is especially effective for the ODF since it allows them to extend the initial confusion caused by their decloaking and keep the SAC off-balance for the length of a battle.

■ Military Mektons of Solingen GmbH

The Mektons made by Solingen GmbH are the most widely known and used Mektons in the Outworlds. Solingen was the first Mekton manufacturer in the Outworlds, and although there are now other Mekton manufacturers in business (such as Bahn/Zai and SSMI), they generally do little more than ape Solingen and occasionally improve on Solingen designs.

The ODF uses Solingen Mektons exclusively—which is hardly surprising, seeing that Solingen GmbH is the main sponsor and parts supplier for the entire Fleet! Some units use Mektons from different manufacturers, but these units have to provide their own supplies, since Solingen won't.

Despite common origins, a fundamental design concept separates Solingen from its USSA counterpart, Bahn/Zai. At Bahn/Zai, Mektons are designed with ultimate reusability, interchangability, and utility in mind. As word has it, a USSA Mekton is supposed to be able to stay technologically current for years by constantly going through modular modifications, refits, and upgrades. This philosophy is well suited to the ecologically-conscious USSA, where recycling is job one.

Meanwhile, Solingen's military Mektons are designed and constructed in the opposite fashion. Solingen's design teams know that a machine specialized for one specific purpose is usually much better at its task than a general-purpose machine would be. Solingen's designers live by this concept, making mecha that are precisely crafted for clearly-delineated combat roles. This makes the ODF's combat Mektons generally superior to those employed by the SAC's forces.

There are downsides to the Solingen equation, of course: To begin with, since mecha still need to be supplied even in the most unexplored depths of the Pleiades Cluster, armaments and ammunition requirements are problematic with the lack of interchangeability between Meks. However, this is only a minor setback, because standard ODF weapons configurations will work for almost any purpose in a pinch.

Another problem with the Solingen equation is that their specializations don't work well with field modifications and accessories beyond those originally designed for each model. In simple terms, changing Solingen Mektons to fit new situations is difficult and often reduces the overall performance of the unit.

One more complication associated with Solingen's design approach came up when the ODF was formed. Since all of the Outworlds Defense Force's mecha were constructed in secrecy, the development of the ODF's Mektons had to be simplified somehow. Solingen's narrow-field design principle was anything but simple, so the choice was made to streamline the manufacturing process by basing all of the ODF's Mektons on an already-proved frame design, namely that of Solingen's best-selling industrial Mekton, the **Troubadour.**

The Troubadour's frame turned out to be a perfect choice. It's shock absorbers were superb and its gross motor controls were easily upgradable to meet the demands of the ODF, so after only 9 months, Solingen's Troubadour gave birth to the **Draken**. With a loaded mass of 72.7 tons and a height of 18 meters, it was a bigger, beefier answer to the question of combat capability. With a shield, plasma cutter, external weapons racks, a gauss rifle and a top speed of 450 kph, the Draken was, at its advent, the most powerful individual combat Mekton known to man.

Solingen's engineers knew that the Draken, as good as it was, still wouldn't be able to handle every combat requirement. Therefore, they decided to adopt a Command Armor Upgrade system almost identical to the one developed by Bahn/Zai for the SAC. Assault, Destroyer, Reconnaissance and Strike upgrades of the basic Draken have thus become commonly seen (and wisely feared) sights throughout the Pleiades Cluster.

Beyond the multi-role Draken, Solingen's philosophy of dedicated-purpose mecha remains firmly in place. In order to provide the ODF with a mobile artillery platform, the reliable old Troubadour was again cannibalized: Equipped with new engines, upgraded electronics, point-defense systems and long-range missiles (as well as the standard shield, cutter, and gauss gun) it became the MM-6G-INT **Viggen**, an interceptor that could easily duke it out with SAC's Cavalier starfighters.

The third arm of Solingen's combat Mekton concept went the other direction. Built on a Draken chassis, plated with even more armor and heavier weaponry, the MM-4G-HA **Blitzen** completed the triumvirate, providing heavy firepower (at the expense of mobility) for the war that the Pleiades Confederation seemed resigned to wage.

Although not strictly a Mekton, the **Vogel** aerospace fighter is also an important factor in the ODF's combat scheme. At over 3000+ kph maximum airspeed, the Vogel can intercept enemy Mektons at extreme range and engage them before they reach ODF ships. In addition, the Vogel can carry anti-ship missiles and engage enemy vessels at speeds which Mektons simply can't reach. Vogels are usually deployed with external fuel tanks, so that they can cruise far in advance of an ODF fleet like mobile sensor units. Entire picket patrols of these fighters accompany ODF capital ships, ready to intercept any targets spotted by the sensor patrols.

MEKTON

多次元機甲戦士道
メクトン

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-3		5 Hexes	12 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Underwater Protection	
Space Protection	
Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

| SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	4	1	-	5	-
Torso	-	-	-	5	1	-	10	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	4	1	-	6	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	4	1	-	6	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	5	1	-	6	+2
Carriage Pod	-	-	-	4	1	-	0	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Sub-Thruster (2 MA)	T	0
Main Thrusters (5 MA)	RL	0
Main Thrusters (5 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Head	Head	T
RANGE	15km	1km	
COMM	1500km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		Marine suite is	
	linked to both sensor suites		

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	1+1K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	1+1K	-	1	LA	Quick, Handy
Shock-Absorber Foot	+0	Melee	2+2K	-	0	RL	-
Shock-Absorber Foot	+0	Melee	2+2K	-	0	LL	-
Industrial Chainsaw	+1	Melee	3+1K AP	-	3	1H	-
Mk. 6C Gauss Gun	-1	12/144	4K	▼	4	(2H)	BV 3
Ammo		-	-	20 Brst	1/1	R/LA	Kinetic

Solingen's best seller is the **MC-2G-GP Troubadour**, a basic bipedal Mek. It's a pricey at nearly 1.8 million creds (sans extras), but it's tremendously adaptable. Cloud Works gave the Troubadour the respectable Standard 100 power plant and employed a modular design for ease of repair (the legs, with integral flight systems, aren't modular). The torso has 2 Mounting Stations for tools, cranes, even self-defense weapons, supplementing 14 hardpoints. In addition, 2.5 tons of cargo can be hauled in the backpack unit.

Like all Solingen mecha, the Troubadour has integral ballast tanks and foam rubber sealing, as well as a fine-tuned gyro system linked to its thruster controls; like it's "Big Brothers" in the ODF, the Troubadour is equally at home on the ground, in the sky, underwater or in space. However, according to some consumers, the thruster controls are a bit *too* reliant on the gyro system—the loss of a thruster unit lowers the Mek's maneuverability by at least a third. Finally, considering the Troubadour's potential of being drafted into militia use, Cloud Works took a lesson from their Nebula Works neighbors—they installed a secondary cockpit in the torso, and made the Mk. 6C Gauss rifle available (when authorized).

One interesting variant is the Tellurian-model TyrannoMEK (or "Troubasaur"). This monster adds a bladed tail, a pair of huge clawed arms on the mounting stations, and modifies the leg servos for more running speed. Its used to control the local fauna.

STATISTICS: Height: 17m, Weight: 38t, Cost: 1.754 million Cr., Speed 1500m/min (Walking), 302 kph (Flying). Note that statistics for GPs produced by other companies will be nearly identical.

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	Industrial Mekton	WEIGHT	COST
	MC-2G-GP Troubadour	38t	174.5

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	# CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Head	1	STD	Canopy	M-Pod

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
x2 Spotlights	T	-
QCM - Head	H	-
QCM - R. Arm	RA	-
QCM - L. Arm	LA	-
Wpn. Mount - up to 10 spc. (x2)	T	-
Storage Space (500kg)	H	-
1000 km Fuel	T	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ *MM-1G-SLD "Draken"*

The Draken bears little resemblance to its Civilian ancestors. Nebula Works, operating out of the Solingen GmbH offices, was given the task of upgrading Cloud Works' highly successful (and profitable) Troubadour into a model that was not only capable of combat, but would thrive in it. With the fielding of heavier armed and armored SAC Mecha, the ODF needed a staple Soldier that was fast to produce and to respond. With an increased thruster package, and similar maneuverability profiles, the Draken was more than maneuverable enough to win the contract, and production began immediately.

The hallmark of the Draken is it's "hyper-efficient" design. Its equipped with a standard Mk. 3 Heat Sabre, "Dueling" shield, Mk. 7M Gauss cannon, and two Type 3M missile racks, located on two Mounting Stations in the torso, similar to the Troubadour. Barring the addition of Command Armor, these stations have served to the delight of every Draken pilot, allowing for easy reloading. Like every other successful Solingen design, the Draken has a modular head and limb arrangement, to ensure quick repairs—when a limb is damaged, just pop it off and fit a new one! Taking clues from the SAC, the Draken is also equipped with superior imaging sensors in addition to their standard Marine scanners and backup units.

A pair of retractable manipulators supplement the Draken's hands, and the spacious 500kg storage area, supplied with a standard complement of three weeks consumables, has been the most well received feature of this unit. Additionally, a pair of spotlights reside just beneath the Mekton's head, bringing visual range up to 100 meters even in pitch blackness.

The Mk. 7M Gauss cannon, while not as accurate as that of the Viggen, or as affordably repaired as the Troubadour's unit, was well received by both test pilots and combat veterans as well. With a cyclic rate of 2,400 rounds per minute, and enough ammunition for just under 7 minutes sustained fire, the 7M has become the most common Gauss weapon for soldier units among the ODF. Lasting power, it seems, wins out in the minds of those who have to use the weapon. If the Draken has a weak point, it is the flight range. All too often, pilots may find themselves victorious in battle, but stranded behind enemy lines.

STATISTICAL DATA

Height: . . . . 18 Meters	ARMAMENT
Weight: . . . . 72.7 Tons	Mark 7M Gauss Gun x1
Cost: . . . . 3.7 Million Cr.	
SPEEDS	Mark 3 Heat Saber x1
Walking: . . . . 900 m / Min.	
Flight: . . . . 454 kph	Type 3M Missiles (20 each) x2

DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF
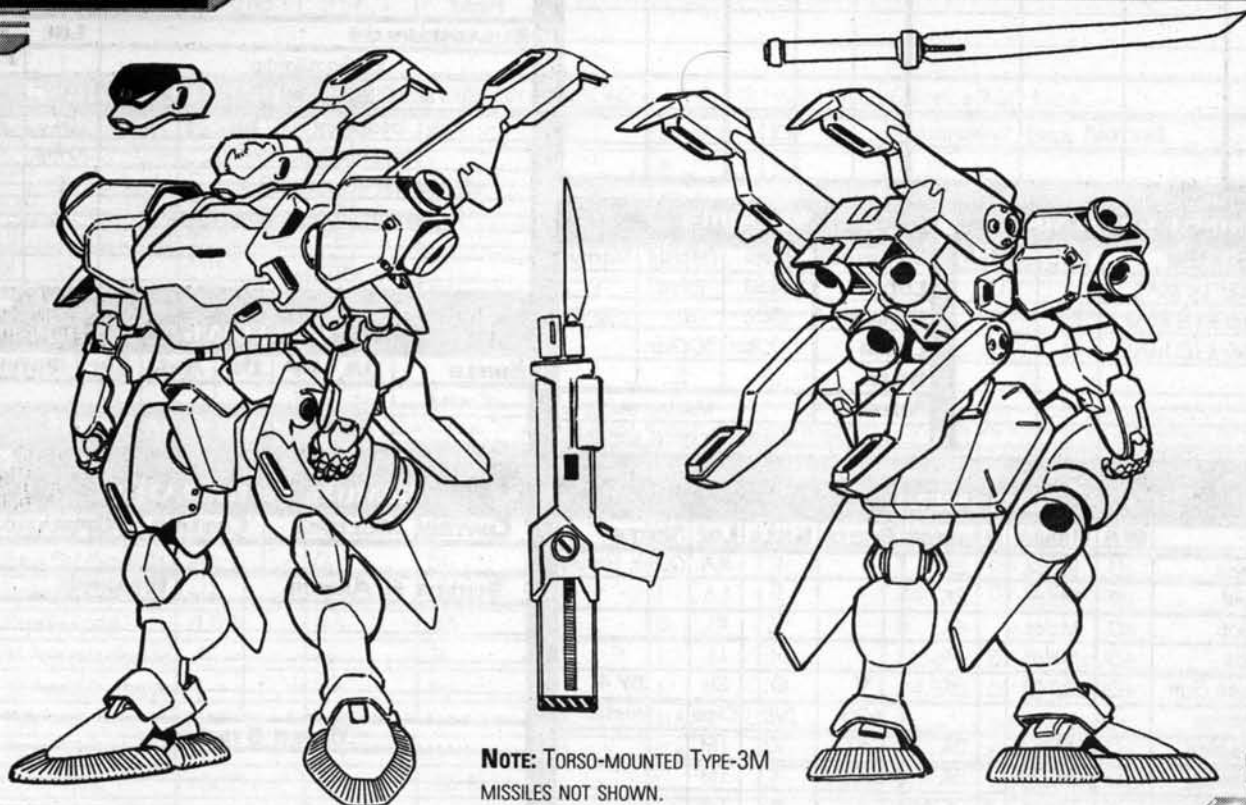
NOTE: TORSO-MOUNTED TYPE-3M MISSILES NOT SHOWN.

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-3		3 Hexes	14 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
+4 Verniers	

Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	6	1	-	6	-
Torso	-	-	-	6	1	-	12	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+2
Wing Array	-	-	-	6	1	-	2 x4	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Sub-Thruster (2 MA)	T	0
Main Thrusters (6 MA)	RL	0
Main Thrusters (6 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Head	Torso	T
RANGE	15km	1km	x32 RI
COMM	1500km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		Marine suite is linked to both sensors	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	LA	-
Right Foot	+0	Melee	4K	-	-	RL	-
Left Foot	+0	Melee	4K	-	-	LL	-
Mark 7M Gauss Gun	+0	12/144	6K	▼	6	2H	BV 4
Mark 7M Ammo	-	-	-	40B	5/5	Clips	Kinetic
Type 3M Missiles	+0	16/256	5K	20	7	TM	
Type 3M Missiles	+0	16/256	5K	20	7	TM	
Mk 3 Heat Saber	+1	Melee	4+1 K AP	-	4	LA	
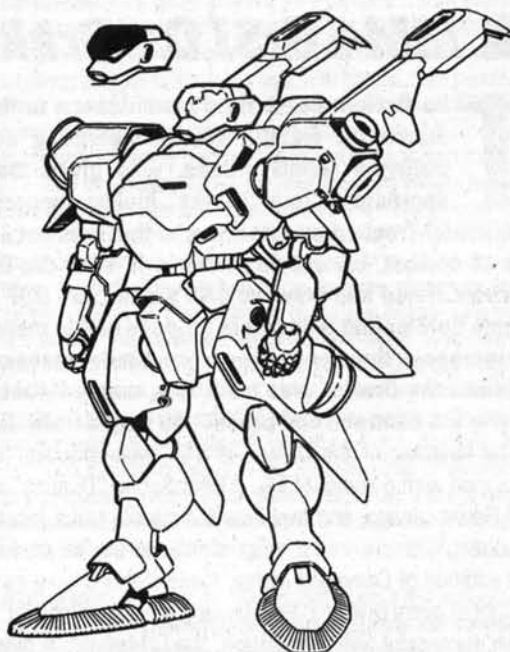
MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
ODF Mekton MM-1G-SLD Draken		72.7 t	417.4

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	STD	Canopy	M-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
x2 Spotlights	T	-
QCMs (all limbs & head)	All	-
Storage (500 kg)	H	-
Micromanipulators x2	Arms	-
x2 Weapon Mounts (12 spc. each)	T	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	-
1000 km fuel	-	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
Round	-1	7	1	-	LA	

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

ASSAULT UPGRADES — Total Effects: +3 MV, +1 B-Mod (drop tanks), +1000km fuel, +68.0 tons.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	MH	Std	3	1	6	12.1	1, 13, +1 MV Section
Torso	MH	Std	8	1	16	42.9	3, 4, 12 (2), 13, +1 MV Section
Arm	MH	Std	6	1	12	49.54	1, 3, 5, 12 (7), 13
Leg	MH	Std	6	1	12	38.5	3x2, 10, 12 (1,2), 13
Backpack (Pod)	MH	Std	3	1	6	12.1	1, 13, +1 MV Section

DESTROYER UPGRADES — Total Effects: +0 MV, +0 B-Mod, +0 fuel, +52.0 tons.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	LH	Std	2	1	4	10	1, 13
Torso	LH	Std	7	1	14	38.5	4, 12 (2), 12 (2), Storage Space, 13
Arm	LH	Std	5	1	10	48.16	4, 5, 12 (6), 13
Leg	LH	Std	5	1	10	38.5	3x3, 12 (1,2), 13
Backpack (Pod)	LH	Std	2	1	4	17	12 (8,9), 13

RECON UPGRADES — Total Effects: +0 MV, +0.5 B-Mod (drop tank), +18 Flight MA, +0 fuel, +23.25 tons.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	MW	Std	1	1	2	2	8, 9
Torso	HS	Std	5	1	10	23.5	1, 4, 10, 13
Arm	HS	Std	3	1	6	16	1, 5, 13
Leg	HS	Std	3	1	6	26.97	1, 11, 13
Backpack (Pod)	MW	Std	1	1	2	4	11

STRIKE UPGRADES — Total Effects: +2 MV, +0 B-Mod, +12 Flight MA, +0 fuel, +32.0 tons.

LOCATION	CLASS	TYPE	SP	DC	SPACES	CP	EQUIPMENT (SEE NOTES)
Head	MW	Std	1	1	2	9	8, 9
Torso	MW	Std	6	1	12	36.75	3, 12 (2), 13, +1 MV Section
Arm	MW	Std	4	1	8	22.55	1, 12 (1x2, 3, 4), 13, +1 MV Section
Leg	MW	Std	4	1	8	40.67	11, 12 (3x7), 13
Backpack (Pod)	MW	Std	1	1	2	4	1

SYSTEM NOTES — "L" = Linked. "X" = Cross-linked. If there is only one weapon on that limb, the link is to its complement on the other limb.

SYSTEM TYPE	WA	RNG	DMG	SHOT	KILL	SPC	COST	NOTES
1: Type 2M Missiles	+0	NA	2K	10	2	2	2	Counter Missile
2: Type 3M Missiles	+0	16	5K	20	7	12	13.5	
3. Type 5M Grenade	+0	0	5K	2	1	1	1	BR 2
4: Solingen Beta	+0	NA	1K	10	1	2	2.5	BV 8 Phalanx
5: Small Shield	-1 DA	NA	NA	NA	5	1	5	
6: T1 Assault Gauss	-2	16	7K	20	10	14	21.16	BV 3, Kinetic
7: T2 Assault Gauss	-1	16	8K	20	17	14	24.54	BV 2, Kinetic
8: Res. Intensifier	NA	+x16	NA	NA	NA	1	2	Sensor Unit
9: Radio/Radar	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	1	5	Sensor Unit
10: Drop Tank	+500 km		.25 B-Mod			1	2	-.5 MA/MV
11: +6 MA	11.47 cp + (.9 spc efficiency)				0	2	15.97	
12: Weapon Mount						2		
13: Balance Vernier						-1/2 section		Fully negates B-Mod for section

■ *MM-1G-INT "Viggen"*

Faced with superior aerospace fighters, Missile technology, and just plain intimidating Heavy Units in the SAC, Solingen GmbH researchers turned to the best and brightest of the various Works crews, and set them to their own devices in Singularity Works, the "Brain Trust". The result, modeled after the Draken, was the Viggen, an interceptor with flight and maneuver capacities equal of an SAC interceptor, and the striking range and anti-missile qualities needed to fight them on their own terms.

The Viggen boasts the new Solingen Super 150 power plant, as well as an upgraded Gyro/Thruster assembly. Like most Solingen models, the gyro and thrusters are constantly communicating with each other, but in the Viggen they do so three times faster than normal, giving the unit exceptional maneuverability and response time. Like all other Solingen models, the Viggen comes equipped standard with a Heat Sabre and "Dueling" shield. In this case, the Sabre is the Mk. 2. While lighter even than the type issued to the Draken, the Sabre is adequate defense if the Viggen pilot ever gets dragged into a hand to hand fight.

The Mk. 5M Gauss cannon is carried externally by the Viggen. It's design is light, though bulky, and the weapon contains an integral targeting scanner, as well as firing tracer ammunition at a cyclic rate of 3,600 rounds per minute with enough ammunition for just over 4.5 minutes of constant firing. Two Solingen Alpha model Anti-

missile systems are mounted in the arms, just above the Viggen's additional fuel tanks. Usually, these are dropped before battle, and the unit flies home on internal reserves. What truly makes the Viggen shine, however, is the twin rack of "Shrike" Long Range Missiles mounted on the external hard points.

Each rack carries three of these marvels of Solingen engineering. With superior targeting computers designed to home in on the emissions from the enhanced sensor suites of SAC Meks, the Shrikes were originally intended to be artificially intelligent. However, the advent of SAC anti-missile clouds negated this idea, and instead led Singularity Works to develop a warheads loaded with hundreds of autonomous, terminally-guided submunitions! While SAC suits can disable enhanced targeting systems, they generally cannot avoid the rapidly-expanding swarm of visually-tracking shaped charges which burst from Shrike missiles once they get close!

STATISTICAL DATA

Height:	17.5 Meters	**ARMAMENT:**
Weight:	49.2 Tons	Mark 5M Gauss Gun x1
Cost:	4.546 Million Cr.	Mark 2 Heat Saber x1
SPEEDS		
Walking:	1500 m / Min.	Alpha AMS x2
Flight:	1642 kph	Shrike LRM Rack (3 each) x2

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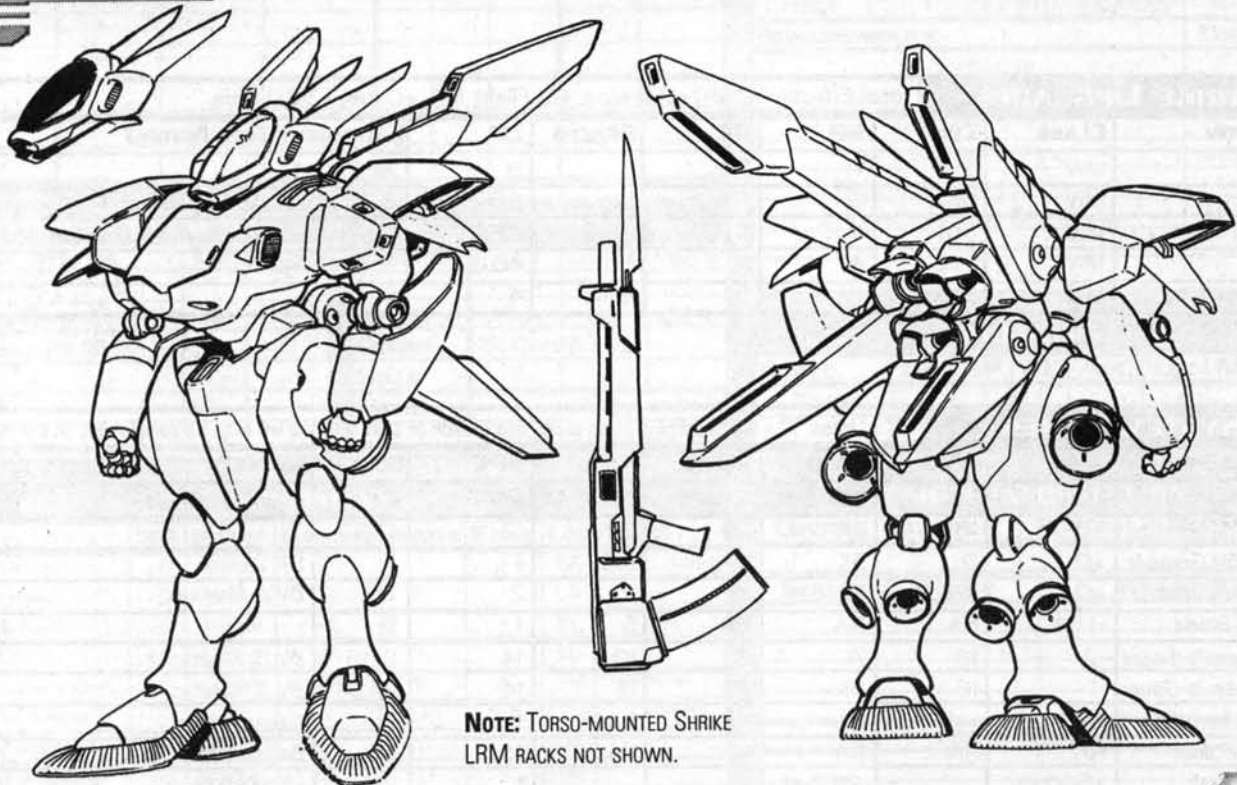
NOTE: TORSO-MOUNTED SHRIKE LRM RACKS NOT SHOWN.

MEKTON

多次元機甲職士道

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-0		5 Hexes	24 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL +0

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
+3 Verniers	

Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

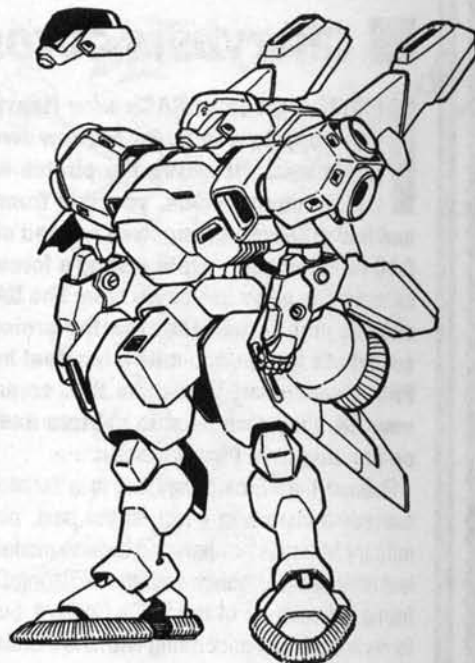| SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	3	1	-	5	-
Torso	-	-	-	3	1	-	10	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	3	1	-	6	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	3	1	-	6	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	3	1	-	6	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	3	1	-	6	+2
Wing Array	-	-	-	3	1	-	1 x4	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	ODF Mekton	WEIGHT	COST
	MM-1G-INT Viggen	49.2 t	478.4

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Head	1	STD	Canopy	M-Pod

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
x2 Spotlights	T	-
X5 QCMs (all limbs & head)	All	-
Storage (500kg)	T	-
x2 Weapons Mounts (10 spc. each)	T	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	-
2000km Fuel	-	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Sub-Thruster (2 MA)	T	0
Main Thrusters (11 MA)	RL	0
Main Thrusters (11 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Head	T	T
RANGE	20km	1km	x32 RI
COMM	1800km	300km	Targ.
KILLS	2	2	Anal.
NOTES		Marine Suite is	
		linked to both sensors	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
Round	-1	6	1	-	LA	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right / Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	R/LA	Quick, Handy
Right / Left Foot	+0	Melee	4K	-	-	R/LL	
Mk. 2 Heat Saber	+1	Melee	3+1 K AP	-	3	RA	
Mark 5M Gauss Gun	+2*	12/144	2K	▼	2	2H	BV 6,Kinetic
Mark 5M Ammo	-	-	-	30 Brst	6	Clips	*Tracer
Solingen Alpha AMS	+2	NA	1K	▼	1	RA	BV 8
Alpha AMS Ammo	-	-	-	20 Brst	1	RA	Phalanx
Solingen Alpha AMS	+2	NA	1K	▼	1	LA	BV 8
Alpha AMS Ammo	-	-	-	20 Brst	1	LA	Phalanx
Shrike LRM Rack	+1	40/1600	5K	3	1	TM	BR-2
Shrike LRM Rack	+1	40/1600	5K	3	1	TM	BR-2

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ *MM-1G-HA "Blitzen"*

At first glance, the Blitzen very heavily resembles the Draken. Indeed, the Blitzen's basic frame is a stripped Draken endoskeletal frame, with increased hydraulics and a Solingen Super 150 power plant installed in place of the Standard 100. Additional armor plating is standard, and the Type 8 "Dueling" shield is one of the heaviest fielded by either the ODF or the SAC. The similarities to the Draken are increased in the "hyper efficient" design, right down to the twin shoulder top Mounting Stations, fully stocked storage module, and spotlight suite. The sensor package and thrust arrangement is virtually identical, although the Blitzen's increased weight does tax the flight system, imposing a lower maximum speed.

The similarities to the Draken were intentional, as a confused enemy is a more easily defeated enemy. While more disparate in servo classification than SAC models, the Blitzen's weapons systems are technologically similar to the Draken's suite. Armed with a Mk. 4 Heat Sabre, the Blitzen can sever most limbs in a single stroke (two if fighting a SAC HA unit). The Mk. 8MH Gauss cannon, while not equipped with the standard high impact ammunition, does boast a Type 1 targeting system, as well as both an 1,800 rnds/min. cyclic rate of fire, and polymer cracking "AP" ammunition. The one major flaw with this system is that many pilots find it's range limited (a mere 350m effective combat distance), and compared to other Military Gauss weapons, it has a very limited constant firing rate (although the statistics say it can fire constantly for 5 minutes if belt fed, this is rarely the case).

Rounding out the Blitzen's weapons suite are four racks of missiles. Mounted in the forearm hardpoints (which on the Draken are normally left empty) are a pair of Type 4M missile racks, which utilize the same sensor tracking computers as the Shrike missile type. Twenty of these missiles are loaded in each forearm, giving a decent combat life to the system. The two large torso Mounting Stations are each loaded with a rack of Type 2M missiles. Lacking a targeting program, these are basically dumb-fired, and used when the 4M's are depleted. Their lower payload and range tends to limit their usage in battle. Nebula Works refuses to comment on future system upgrade releases.

STATISTICAL DATA		
Height: . . . . 19 Meters	ARMAMENT	
Weight: . . . . 83.25 Tons	Mark 8MH Gauss Gun x1	
Cost: . . . . 4.541 Million Cr.	Mark 4 Heat Saber x1	
SPEEDS		
Walking: . . . . 72 kph	Type 4M Missiles (20 each). x2	
Flight: . . . . 238 kph	Type 2M Missiles (20 each). x2	

DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF
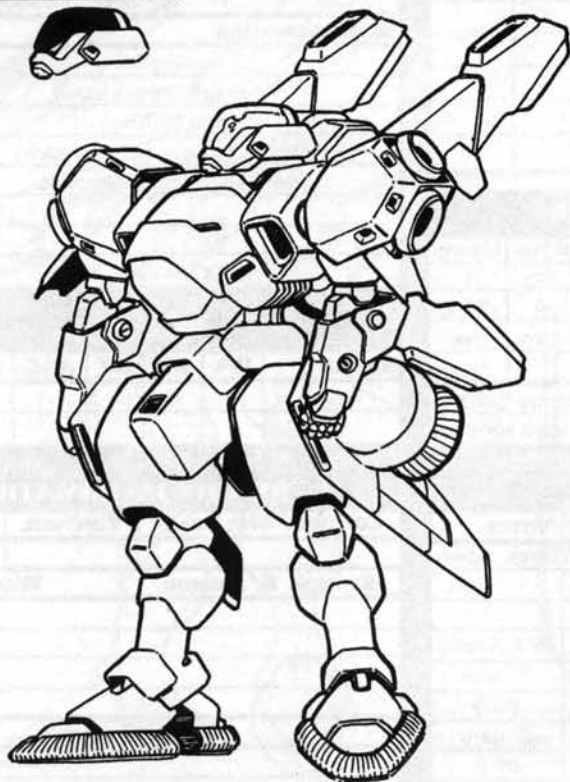
NOTE: TYPE-2M AND -4M MISSILES, DUELING SHIELD, AND MARK-8MH GAUSS CANNON NOT SHOWN.
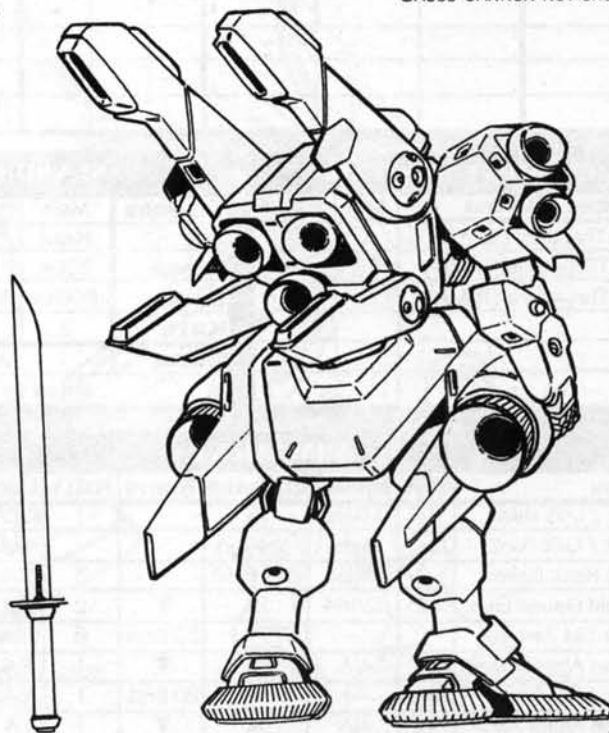
MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-5		4 Hexes	11 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
Heavy Hydraulics	
+1 Verniers	
Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	7	1	-	6	-
Torso	-	-	-	7	1	-	12	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	7	1	-	7	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	7	1	-	7	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	7	1	-	7	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	7	1	-	7	+2
Wing Array	-		-	7	1	-	2 x4	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
ODF Mekton MM-1G-HA Blitzen		83.25t	509.5

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	STD	Canopy	M-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
x2 Spotlights	T	-
QCMs (all limbs & head)	All	-
Storage (500kg)	H	-
x2 Weapon Mounts	T	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	
1000 km Fuel	-	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Sub-Thruster (2 MA)	T	0
Main Thrusters (4 MA)	RL	0
Main Thrusters (4 MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Head	Torso	Torso
RANGE	15km	1km	x32 RI
COMM	1500km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		Marine suite is linked to both sensors	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
Round	-1	8	1		LA	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	3K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	3K	-	1	LA	Quick, Handy
Right Foot	+0	Melee	5K	-	0	RL	
Left Foot	+0	Melee	5K	-	0	LL	
Mk. 4 Heat Saber	+1	Melee	5+2K AP	-	5	RA	
Mk. 8MH Gauss Gun	+1	7/49	6K	▼	6	2H	BV 3
Mk. 8MH Ammo	-	-	-	30 Brst	6	Clips	AP
Type 4M Missiles	+1	13/169	6K	20	8	RA	
Type 4M Missiles	+1	13/169	6K	20	8	LA	
Type 2M Missiles	+0	10/100	2K	20	3	TM	
Type 2M Missiles	+0	10/100	2K	20	3	TM	

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

■ *Charybdis "Crossbones"*

In 2172 a group of SAC's new Heavy Armaments Meks was supposed to make a clean sweep of a suspected pirate base. However, the pirates had found out about the imminent attack, possibly from Solingen sources, and had prepared themselves instead of running. When the SAC attacked, they were met by a force of pirates in brand new mecha of an unknown type. The SAC Meks were massacred, and the pirates took the cruiser they had arrived on. What's worse, the entire incident had been filmed by a PRCI news team! While the SAC scrambled to produce a new HA, they also tried to capture and gather information on the unknown Pirate mecha.

Dubbed the "Crossbones," it is a formidable unit, and points towards a disturbing trend. In the past, pirates used scavenged military Mektons or upgraded civilian models, but the Crossbones is a new design, though based on existing ODF and SAC suits. It's frame is based off of the SAC's Galliard, but it uses an ODF-style four-vaned thrust pack along with the standard Solingen thrusters, giving it a flight speed of over 1,200 KpH, along with the vectored thrust effects of an ODF-style wingpack array. It would seem that the designers, though gifted, couldn't manage to duplicate Solingen's thrust balance system (thankfully).

The Crossbones resembles it's SAC cousins, standing 17 meters tall and weighing 72.6 tons fully equipped. It is fully submersible, and even includes a set of dedicated hydrojets for underwater propulsion. It's sensor suite is sophisticated, and appears to include a target analysis system.

The Crossbones carries a variety of weapons, including a Solingen heat saber, SAC standard grenades and a gauss rifle based on the GMR-14. In addition, the Crossbones carries a unique melee weapon called a "chain cutter." A Mekton scale chainsaw with monoblade teeth, the chain cutter is designed for cutting into ships, but can be a deadly weapon in trained hands. However, most disturbing of all is the inclusion of a phalanx system in the Crossbones' torso. The technical sophistication this indicates is frightening.

The SAC has already logged 12 confirmed variant Crossbones models, and more are suspected to exist, along with individual pilot modifications. The source of these suits is unknown, but suspected to be hidden somewhere on Zanzibar.

STATISTICAL DATA

Height:	17 Meters	**ARMAMENT**
Weight:	72.6 Tons	GMR-14 Kai Gauss Rifle x1
Cost:	3,757,000 Cr	Point-Defense Phalanx x1
SPEEDS		Hand Grenades x2
Walking:	54 kph	Mark 3 Heat Saber x1
Flight:	1210 kph	Chain Cutter x1

DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF

NOTE: CHAIN CUTTER NOT SHOWN.
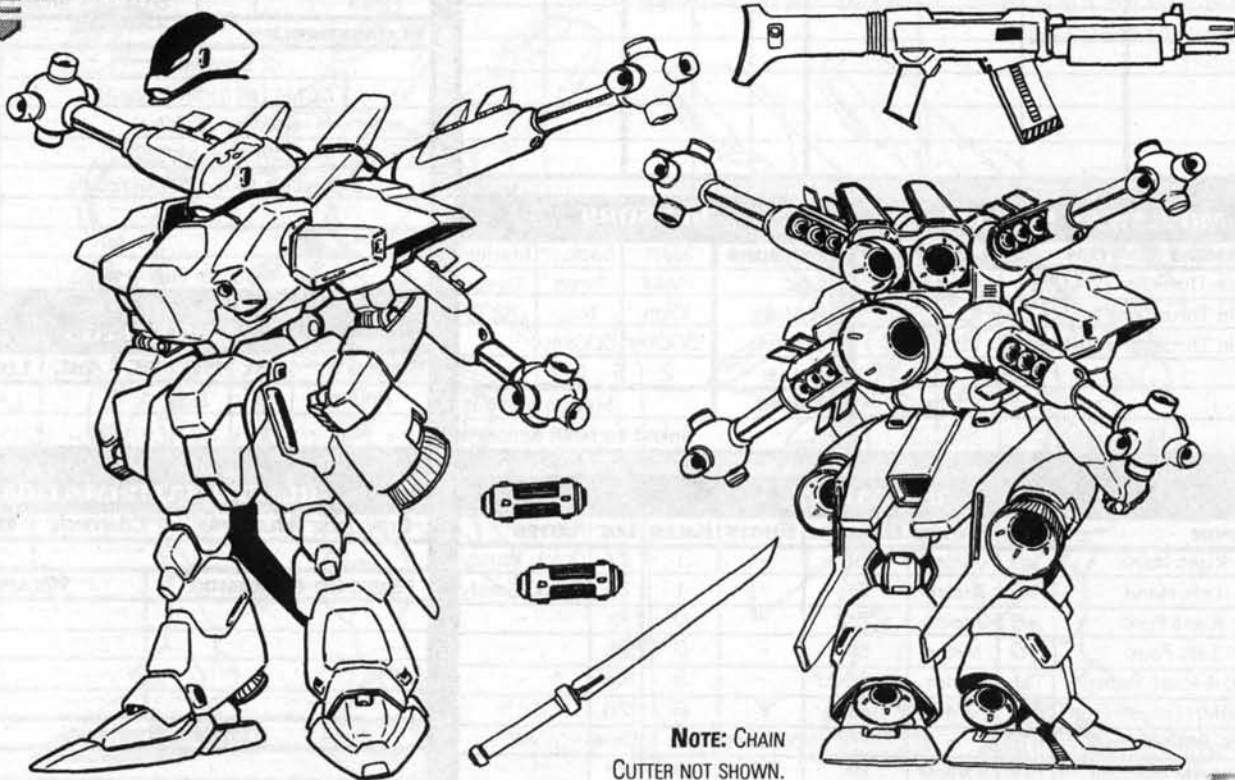
MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Humanoid Mekton	-4		3 Hexes	21 Hexes
				(Underwater: 2)

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1

+3 Verniers, mated with thrusters
in thruster pack.
Underwater Protection
Space Protection

Combat Cockpit in Torso (Screen, Armored)

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Head	-	-	-	6	1	-	6	-
Torso	-	-	-	6	1	-	12	-
R. Arm	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+1
L. Arm	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+1
R. Leg	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+2
L. Leg	-	-	-	6	1	-	7	+2
Wing Array	-	-	-	6	1	-	2 x4	-
Booty Storage	-	-	-	6	1	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	Pirate Mekton "Crossbones"	WEIGHT	COST
		72.6 t	399.2

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	# CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Head	1	Screen	Armored	M-Pod	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Weapon Mount X4 (2 Torso, 1/Arm)	-	-
QCM X5 (1/wpn mount, Power Plant)	-	-
Pirate Styling, +2 Cool	-	-
Spotlight, Stereo	T	-
Liftwire, Basic Lock & Advanced Lock	Head	-
E-System to eject Powerplant	T	-
Micromanipulators X2	1/Arm	-
"Booty" spaces - 6 tons plunder	Pod	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thrusters (10 MA)	POD	0
Sub-Thruster (4 MA)	T	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	RL	0
Sub-Thruster (3 MA)	LL	0
Hydrojets (1MA)	RL	0
Hydrojets (1MA)	LL	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	
LOC	Head	Torso	
RANGE	11km	1km	
COMM	1300km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		Target Analyzer, Marine Suite	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Right Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	RA	Quick, Handy
Left Hand	+0	Melee	2K	-	1	LA	Quick, Handy
Chain Cutter	-2	Melee	11K	∞	10	1H	AP
Heat Saber	+1	Melee	5K	∞	4	1H	AP
Gauss Rifle	+0	11	5K	▼	5	2H	BV3, Tracer
Ammo X2	(+1)			20 x2	2 x2	▲	or Kinetic
Phalanx System	+0	3	1K	25	1+1	T	BV5, Var. AM
Grenades	+0	Thrown	10K	2	1	1H	Blast2, Fuse

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE		CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS			

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starship	-2		0	16 Hexes
(Superlight x100 scale)				

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1

Universal Environment Protection
Sublight & SHUNT Drive
(Pulse-Refract Active Cloak
Optional x.4 Multiplier, not on every
ship. Ship cost is 81,225 w/Cloak)
Transat & VTOL Ability

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Hull (Torso)	-	-	-	10	10	-	200	-
R. Wingblock	-	-	-	10	10	-	100	-
L. Wingblock	-	-	-	10	10	-	100	-
Sensor Turret	-	-	-	10	10	-	50	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	ODF/Solingen SturmKutter	WEIGHT	COST
		520t	58,018

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	# CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Torso	4~10	Screen	Armored	E-Raft

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Mekton Dock	T	-
Bridge, Quarters, Lab	T	-
Lab Computer (+1 INT)	T	-
Storage Bay (7 tons)	T	-
Basic Lock	T	-
Spotlights x7	T	-
Escape Raft	T	-
Ejection System for Powerplant	T	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Thruster (7 MA)	RW	0
Main Thruster (7 MA)	LW	0

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	
LOC	Turret	
RANGE	100km	
COMM	30,000km	
KILLS	-	
NOTES	Marine suite, ASP, x64 Resolution Intensifiers	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Missile Bay	+0	78	50K	4	13	T	-
Pop-Out Gauss CIDS	+0	13	10K	n/a	10	T	∞ BV, 360°, Var. A-Miss.

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

The Outworlds Defense Force is divided into seven task forces. Each task force contains its own Shunt-equipped fleet carriers and cruisers, battleriders, shuttles, and Mekton units. The composition of a given task force can change from week to week as conscripted support craft and personnel are rotated in and out of a task force, and Shunt vessels arrive and depart to transport supplies, troops, and Mektons.

Most ODF task forces consist of one fleet carrier and 2-4 cruisers (usually as many as the General can wrangle), with a highly variable number of freighters and support craft; battleriders and Mekton groups are added to both cruiser and freighters, with a number of Mekton teams assigned to rear guard duty. Three are simply cruiser groups. For identification purposes, ODF task forces are referred to by the name of their flagship rather than their general.

■ Edelweiss Force
Fleet Carrier *Edelweiss*, four Cruisers.

Commanded by General Nils Gorda, this task force is led by the flagship Fleet Cruiser *Edelweiss* (the first of its class) and is the largest fleet unit in the ODF. It's almost 100% Solingen in composition, and receives the lion's share of upkeep from Solingen GmbH. General Gorda comes from a long line of military men, and acts it. He expects his men, ships, and machines to measure up to his strict standards. He's a competent commander, and no mean tactician, but a bit predictable (he's been typified as "Solingen's answer to SAC"). His attitude of natural superiority is not well-liked among his fellow officers; Gorda believes he's superior to all save Gfm. Richter himself.

■ Infinity Force
Fleet Carrier *Infinity*, three Cruisers.

Commanded by General Falkirk London, this task force is based around the 3rd Solingen Armored Group, one of the largest Mekton units in the ODF, a full brigade (three battalions). It is well-known that General London's father, a major stockholder in Solingen GmbH, detached the unit from the ODF for his son to command. London, a former Solingen reserve officer, is not a very good general, and his group is frequently assigned to lesser duties. His First Officer, Pitt, really runs the task force for the General.

■ Millennium Force
Fleet Carrier *Millennium*, two or three Cruisers.

Commanded by General Markus Donner, this task force has a notoriously fluid structure—but General Donner doesn't care about the chaos as long as his troops fight well and are willing to follow him into battle. Donner is a firebrand, impatient and determined, and will actually suit up in a Mekton and charge into the fray if he feels his help is needed. So far, his skills, his escort pilots, and his inspira-

tional presence have kept him alive and won him most of his battles. General Gorda thinks he's unhinged and dangerous; General Henker finds him useful, his other fellow generals think he's a loose cannon, and the media loves him.

■ Amaterasu Force
Fleet Carrier *Amaterasu*, two Cruisers.

Commanded by General Hallen Vickers, who began his career as a Mekton pilot in the Tyrannos. His skills got him promoted to command of the Tyrannos, then to command the unit's Shunt ship. Elected by ODF volunteer assembly, Vickers brought his old unit with him to make up the core of the task force ... and then didn't play favorites, administering fairly to all units in the task force. A good officer, respected and liked by his troops, Hiram Vickers has one flaw: Pride. He won't stand for slights against him or his task force.

■ Medusa Force
Five Cruisers.

Commanded by General William Henker, Medusa Force has a larger number of smaller Shunt ships than any other; they're necessary for his convoluted battle plans. A complex thinker, Henker's strategies usually revolve around spatial envelopment via Shunt space, splitting his task force up into squadrons and having them appear surrounding the estimated enemy position. Because of this, his ship crews are well-trained in squadron tactics, his Shunt navigators are some of the best in all humanity, and he maintains a unit of Jägers with their own small Shunt cutters as forward scouts.

■ Antioch Force
Three Cruisers.

Commanded by Alexi Malikov, a shipbuilding tycoon from Hammersmith who helped raise most of the ships in Antioch Force. He's popular with his troops and crews, and is handsome, individualistic, self-made, and competent as a shipbuilder and businessman ... but not as a general. Stung by his own shortcomings and by the condescension of his fellow generals, Malikov is convinced that Donner is actively working to spite him and grab the inevitable great victory for himself.

■ Malachi Force
Four Cruisers.

Commanded by General Allandra Rogers, a former actress who used to work for the SCC's Rangers before switching to the ODF's Jägers. Her skill, combat record, and success rate got her nominated for her position despite her past allegiances; Solingen GmbH was scandalized, but public opinion and the backing of Generals Malikov, Vickers and Henker steamrolled all objections. So far, their faith in her has been more than justified.
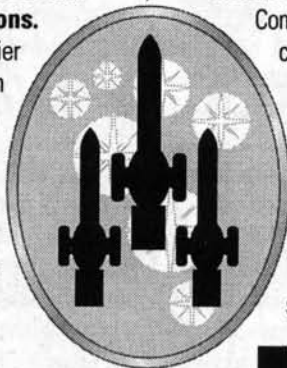
■ *Ships of the ODF*

Currently, the ODF's ships are smaller than those of the SAC, they lack comfortable long-term living quarters, and there are far fewer of them than in the SAC's fleet. On the other hand, the ODF's ships are equipped with the mysterious cloaking effect which allowed the ODF to win the battle of the Northern Rings.

ODF ships are built with transatmospheric flight and deep-sea capability, rather resembling space-going submarines. This construction pattern makes each ship, ton for ton, more expensive than normal space vessels. The need for lateral structural strength is increased, and the entire structure must be contained within an armored shell in order to allow underwater operation so the ships can use the colonies' oceans as cover. In fact, a major submerged base has been built on Salamanca to allow them a safe haven. Even the Mekton launch facilities have to be changed for all-environment operations, launching the machines vertically instead of longitudinally.

These requirements do restrict the room aboard an ODF combat vessel, and living conditions suffer as a result—most space craft don't have a great deal of spare internal room, but the sub-like ODF battle ships have accommodations which would cramp asteroid miners. Crewmembers have to share bunks, storage space is at a premium, and little is provided in the way of recreational areas.

Despite the fact that the ODF's navy was constructed in secret, they have managed already to build a force capable of posing a threat to the SAC. Their list of ships is short, but impressive: The *Vogel* starfighter, the *Krieghund* battlerider, the *Wotan* cruiser, and the formidable *Edelweiss* fleet carrier. These ships work in tandem, with each fleet carrier supported by 2-4 *Wotans*, each carrying two *Krieghunds*.

■ *"Vogel" Aerospace Fighter*

Length 15m, Mass 45 tons, Acceleration 3.25 G/sec², Crew 1, 2 gauss chainguns, 2 torpedoes, 2 10-shot missile pods.

The ODF's assault boat is a heavy, powerful bird of prey, armed almost exclusively with anti-ship weaponry. *Vogels* are not so much dogfighters as they are hit-and-run ship-killers.

■ *"Krieghund" Class Battlerider*

Length 191m, Mass 916.5 tons, Acceleration 2.25 G/sec², Crew 44, 4 Mektons, 2 starbolt guns, 2 torpedo bays, gauss phalanx.

The *Krieghund* is a fairly normal battlerider, with greater speed than its SAC counterparts, but somewhat less armament. It has transatmospheric capability, like most SAC battleriders, but its ability to cruise at 40+ kph underwater does set it apart from all other battleriders, past and present. It can even launch its four Mektons while underwater! Furthermore, it is armed with two starbolt launchers, double the plasma-based firepower of the SAC's *Journeyman*.

■ *"Wotan" Class Cruiser*

Length 680m, Mass 130,020 tons, Acceleration 1.5 G/sec², 250 crew, 50 Mektons, 2 starbolt cannon, 2 aerospace torpedo bays, gauss howitzer, gauss phalanx system.

This cruiser actually sports more weapons bays and turrets than its SAC counterparts, but it carries no Battleriders. Its salient feature is the Starbolt battery, a quartet of plasma guns arranged along the nose, and the cloaking effect its drives have been modified to create.

■ *"Edelweiss" Fleet Carrier*

Length 952m, 400,000 tons, Acceleration 1.25 G/sec², Crew 1000, 225 Meks, 8 starbolts, 4 torpedo bays, gauss howitzer, phalanx.

The *Edelweiss* (pronounced "ay-dell-vice") dreadnought actually approaches the size of the SAC's monster fleet carriers, with similar capabilities—for instance, it carries 16 Battleriders. Still, it has slightly fewer weapons, but this fact is more than made up for by the tactically overwhelming cloaking effect its drives can produce.

■ *The ODF's Cloaking Effect*

Recently, Solingen GmbH's masterminds at Nebula Works realized that because the Shunt device is able to effectively transpose a ship to all points in space/time simultaneously (rendering it "indeterminate," just like Schroedinger's famous cat), it should also be capable of rendering a ship effectively unobservable. As it turned out, this modification is remarkably easy, requiring only a recalibration of the ship's anomalon beam projector. As yet, USSA scientists are unaware of how simple it is to modify a Shunt craft for this "cloaking" ability (*Shunt Tech* vs Diff. 20, 2D6 hours to perform).

In order to cloak, the starship begins the transposition process, but instead of firing a focused anomalon beam to guide itself to a new destination, it diffuses the frequency and power of the beam, which keeps the ship from translocating towards any of the places it simultaneously exists in; though it's effectively everywhere at once, the ship does not actually transposition. Thus, thanks to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, the starship's location cannot be determined—it's rendered impossible to detect.

The cloaked ship can use passive sensors (at 1/4 normal range) in its local environment because the "local" conditions (i.e. higher probability) register more clearly on the soliton field than do more distant (i.e. lower probability) ones. The starship can move under normal thruster power (normal MA or 1/4 sublight speed) without being detected, thanks to the protection of the infinite-energy soliton field, but it cannot fire any weapons or send messages to the outside—if it does, the radio waves, energy beams, or projectiles will escape the gravitic soliton field and concretely tie its location down in Einsteinian space. This will cancel the effects of the cloak and the starship will "decloak." Once the starship does so (either deliberately or by firing its weapons), it must recharge its sidereal generators in order to "recloak" or make a Shunt transposition. Note that cloaking is not simultaneous with Shunting; you can only do one at a time.

Game Notes: This has all the abilities and effects of Active Cloaking with Pulse Refract (total cost: x0.4) as per the rules on pages 74-75 of *Mekton Zeta Plus*, and takes 1D6 hours to recharge.

Outworlds Defense Force Spacecraft

1: *Krieghund*-class Battlerider.　2: *Wotan*-class Cruiser.　3: *Edelweiss*-class Fleet Carrier.
4: Prototype Battleship　　　　　　5: *Vogel*-type Starfighter.　6: *SturmKutter*.
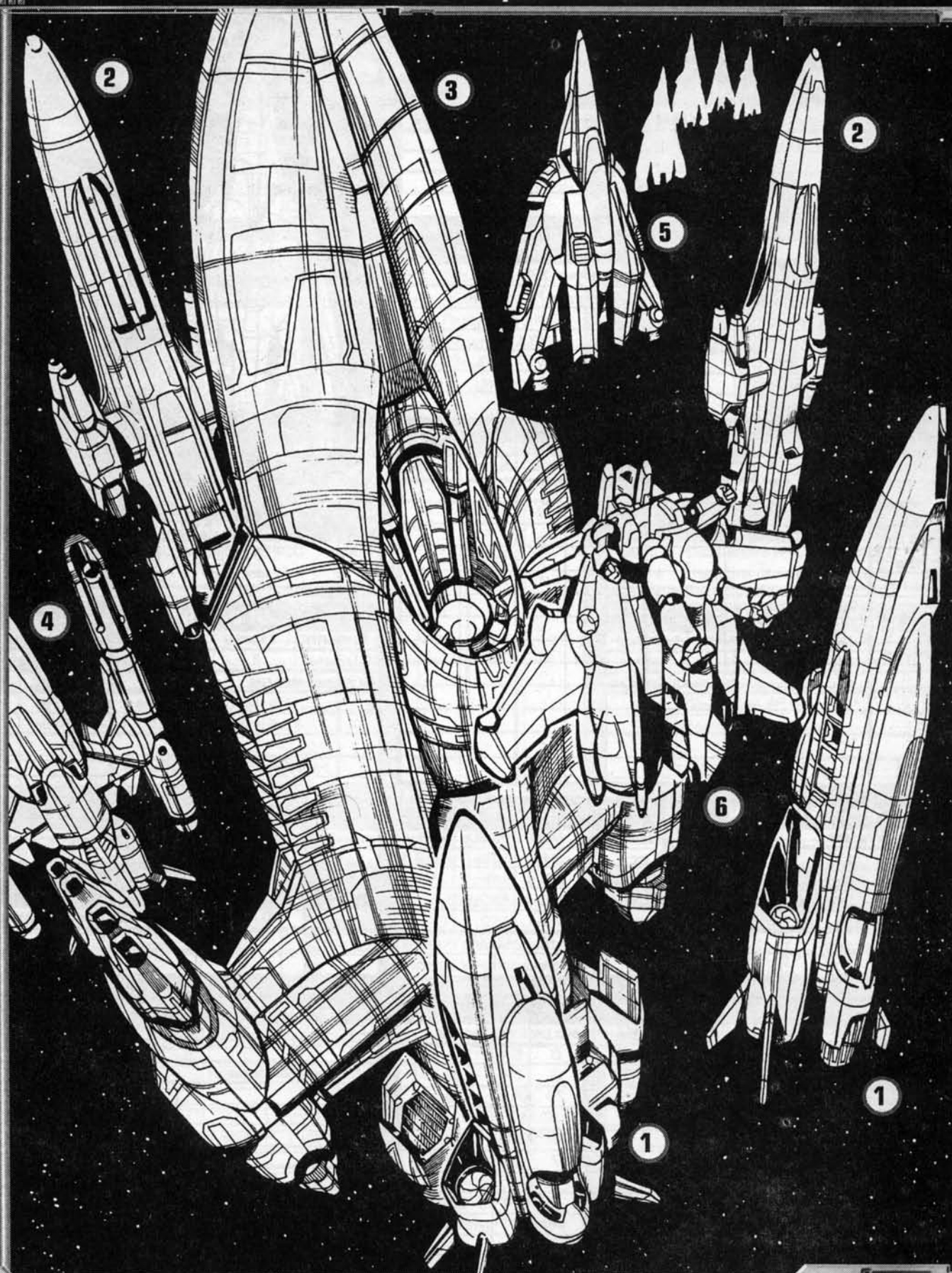
MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starfighter	-2		0	26 Hexes

MANEUVER POOL +0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Transat	
VTOL	
+3 Verniers / +100% ACE	
1,000 km fuel	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Fuselage	-	-	-	5	1	-	10	-
Stbd Wing	-	-	-	5	1	-	5	-
Stbd Tail Fin	-	-	-	5	1	-	5	-
Port Wing	-	-	-	5	1	-	5	-
Port Tail Fin	-	-	-	5	1	-	5	-
Stbd. Afterburner	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
Port Afterburner	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	ODF Starfighter "Vogel" Type	WEIGHT	COST
		45t	1628

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Fuselage	1	Screen	Armored	E-Pod	
SUBASSEMBLIES				LOC	K
ECM Suite -5 vs. All Types				Fus	-
Radius 6 Beaming 10				Fus	-
Interservo Cross-links: Gauss				-	-
X2 10spc Weapon Mounts				Fus	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Thruster (10 MA)	Fus	0
Thruster (8 MA)	SW	0
Thruster (8 MA)	PW	0
Variable Hydrojets		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Fus	Fus	Fus
RANGE	20km	1km	
COMM	1000km	300km	
KILLS	2	2	
NOTES		Marine Suite is linked to both sensors	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Chain Gauss	+2	12/144	6k	▼	6	SW	BV-6
Chain Gauss	+2	12/144	6k	▼	6	PW	BV-6
Gauss Ammo	+1	-	-	50B	29	Fus	Tracer
Class 1 Torpedo	+1	80	100k	1	7	WM	X10S
Class 1 Torpedo	+1	80	100k	1	7	WM	X10S
							S2/9t
Type 7M Missiles	+0	8/64	5k	10	4	ST	S3/12t
Type 7M Missiles	+0	8/64	5k	10	4	PT	S3/12t

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION
SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS
OTHER SYSTEMS		

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON STATS

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Battlerider	-9		0	18 Hexes
				(2.25 G's)

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
Sublight Drive, Transat Ability	
Crew 13+1d10	
+4 Targeting Computer	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	60	10	-	90	-
Hull	-	-	-	60	10	-	180	-
R. Fin	-	-	-	60	10	-	90	-
L. Fin	-	-	-	60	10	-	90	-
Mecha Bay 1	-	-	-	60	10	-	0	-
Mecha Bay 2	-	-	-	60	10	-	0	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	Battlerider — Krieghund Class	WEIGHT	COST
		916.5t	26,650

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS
Bridge	Many	Screen	Armored	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Cargo Hold (15 tons)	Hull	-
Mecha Bay (4 Mecha)	Bays	-
Flight Deck X2	Hull	-
Crew Deck X3	Hull	-
Escape Pods	Bridge	-
30,000km Reaction Mass		

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Engine 1 (6MA)	Hull	0
Engine 2 (6 MA)	RF	0
Engine 3 (6 MA)	LF	0
Variable Hydrojets		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	Bridge	Hull	Hull
RANGE	150	10km	-
COMM	15,020	300km	-
KILLS	20	20	-
NOTES		Marine Suite is	
		Linked to Both Sensors	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Class 1 Starbolt	+0	40	40k	∞	40	RF	
Class 1 Starbolt	+0	(X10 S)	40k	∞	40	LF	
Class 1 STS Torpedos	+1	80	100k	20	130	RF	S2/9t
Class 1 STS Torpedos	+1	(X10 S)	100k	20	130	LF	S2/9t
Class 1 Gauss	+0	80	20k	▼	20	Brdg	Turret
		(X10 S)					BV-4
Gauss Ammo		-		30b	20	Brdg	Variable
							Anti-Mek

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS

OTHER SYSTEMS

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION		MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Starcruiser		-5		0	12 Hexes
+5 Turn Radius					

MANEUVER POOL	+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
Transat / VTOL	
Sublight / Shunt Drive	
Pulse Refract Active Cloaking	
Crew 13+1d10	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	70	100	-	500	
Nosecone	-	-	-	70	100	-	500	
Center Hull	-	-	-	70	100	-	1000	
Stbd Hull	-	-	-	70	100	-	500	
Port Hull	-	-	-	70	100	-	500	

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Drive (8MA)	CH	0
Backup Drive 1 (2MA)	SH	0
Backup Drive 2 (2MA)	PH	0
Variable Hydrojets		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	CH	Brdg	CH
RANGE	2000km	100km	
COMM	180000km	3000km	
KILLS	200	200	
NOTES		Marine Suite is linked to both sensors	

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES
Class 6 Starbolt	+1	350	300k	∞	300	SH	X2 X100S
Class 6 Starbolt	+1	350	300k	∞	300	PH	X2 X100S
Class 5 Torpedos	+1	110	150k	20 X10	200 X10	CH	X10 S
Class 5 Torpedos	+1	110	150k	20 X10	200 X10	CH	X10 S
Class 4 Naval Gauss	+2	1200	400k	▼	400	CH	FF X100S
Class 4 Ammo	-	-	-	20	200	CH	Kinetic
Class 1 Gauss	+0	80	20k	▼	20 X10	Brdg	X 10S
Class 1 Ammo	-	(X10 S)	-	30B	20 X10	Brdg	Var. Anti-Mek BV-4

MECHA PROFILE

NAME	ODF Cruiser Wotan Class	WEIGHT	COST
		130,020t	580,075

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Bridge	250	Screen	Armored	-	
SUBASSEMBLIES				LOC	K
Escape Pods (x200 crew)				C/P/SH	-
Secondary Bridge				CH	-
Crew Deck (500 crew)				CH	-
Flight Decks (50 mecha)				NC	-
Storage (1250 tons)				CH	-
Engineering Deck (500 crew)				CH	-
400,000 km reaction mass				-	-

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE	CONTROL	OPERATION
SERVOS & ARMOR	WEAPONS	
OTHER SYSTEMS		

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

MEKTON

MEKTON STATS

CONFIGURATION	MV	MR	LAND MA	FLIGHT MA
Fleet Carrier	-8		0	10 Hexes
+7 Turn Radius				

MANEUVER POOL

+0

MECHA COMBAT SKILLS

MECHA PILOTING	+ MR=	
MECHA FIGHTING	+ MR=	
MECHA MELEE	+ MR=	
MECHA GUNNERY	+ MR=	
MECHA MISSILES	+ MR=	

MAIN SYSTEMS

POWERPLANT XS:	1
Space Protection	
Marine Protection	
Transat / VTOL	
Sublight / Shunt Drive	
Pulse Refract Active Cloaking	
Crew 13+1d10	

COMMAND ARMOR, ARMOR & SERVOS

SERVOMODULE	CA-SP	CA-DC	CA-AbC	SP	DC	AbC	KILLS	ADD+
Bridge	-	-	-	90	100	-	700	-
Center Hull	-	-	-	90	100	-	1400	-
Nosecone	-	-	-	90	100	-	700	-
Starboard Hull	-	-	-	90	100	-	700	-
Starboard Wing	-	-	-	90	100	-	700	-
Port Hull	-	-	-	90	100	-	700	-
Port Wing	-	- -	-	90	100	-	700	-

MECHA PROFILE

NAME		WEIGHT	COST
ODF Fleet Carrier Edelweiss Class		400,000t	1,162,000

SUBASSEMBLIES

COCKPIT	#CREW	TYPE	ENC.	OPTIONS	
Bridge	250	Screen	Armored	-	

SUBASSEMBLIES	LOC	K
Escape Pods (X200 crew)	Brdg	-
Secondary Bridge	CH	-
Crew Deck (500 crew)	CH	-
Engineering Deck	CH	-
Flight Decks (225 mecha)	-	-
Cargo (11250 tons)	-	-
Battlerider Mounts (16 Br's)	S/PH	-
400,000 km Reaction Mass	-	-

MOVEMENT SYSTEMS

MOVEMENT SYSTEM	LOC	KILLS
Main Drive (8 MA)	CH	0
Backup Drive 1 (1 MA)	SW	0
Backup Drive 2 (1 MA)	PW	0
Variable Hydrojets		

SENSORS

SENSORS	Main	Backup	Marine
LOC	CH	Brdg	CH
RANGE	3000	100	
COMM	300,000	3000	
KILLS	300	200	
NOTES		Marine Suite is linked to both sensors	

SHIELDING

SHIELD	DA	SP	DC	AbC	LOC	NOTES
-						

ARMAMENT

WEAPON	WA	RANGE	DAMAGE	SHOTS	KILLS	LOC	NOTES	
Class 8 Starbolt	+1	450	500k	∞	500x2	SW	X2	FF
Class 8 Starbolt	+1	450	500k	∞	500x2	PW	X2	FF
Class 6 Starbolt	+1	350	300k	∞	300x2	SW	X2	AA
Class 6 Starbolt	+1	350	300k	∞	300x2	PW	X2	AA
Class 7 Torpedos	+0	140	170k	10	110x10	CH	X10 S	
Class 7 Torpedos	+0	140	170k	10	110x10	CH	S2/ 9t	
Class 5 Torpedos	+1	110	150k	20	200x10	SH	X10s	
Class 5 Torpedos	+1	110	150k	20	200x10	PH	s2 / 9t	
Class 6 Naval Gauss	-2	1200	800k	▼	800	CH	FF	
Ammo	-	-	-	20	400	CH	Kinetic	
Class 1 Gauss Turret	+0	80	20k	▼	20x10	Brdg	BV-4	
Ammo	-	-	(x10 S)	30B	20x10	Brdg	Var Anti-Mek	

REMOTE INFORMATION

CONTROL MULTIPLE		CONTROL	OPERATION

SERVOS & ARMOR		WEAPONS	

OTHER SYSTEMS			

WEIGHT	MV	MR	MA	SKILL	MA	ACCEL	MP

LOG OF THE SCCV STARBLADE, CAPT. REDDING FROST COMMANDING:

Time: 17:31.6

And so, with treason in our souls and purpose in our hearts, we came to Zanzibar.

Frank Talbot made it easy for me; he simply assigned the newly refitted Starblade to a long range patrol that conveniently took us out of Earth contact for an indeterminate period. He arranged a similar pretext for himself and Campbell—a trip to organize the relocation of the Pleiades Divisional command offices— (an indeterminate mission that could take weeks) and left a few days after we did.

As Starblade touched down to the Platt City pad, Ryuzaki, Strasse and Avatar Shiva were waiting. I sized up the Charybdis leader as we walked down the ramp. Very tall, slight, with a feral intensity hidden under a smooth facade, he easily commanded the platform and the Pirates around him.

"So you are Frost," he greeted me, with a cool side gaze for Grey Redmond. "The author of all our troubles?"

"I didn't start this mess." I replied levelly.

"But you intend to end it, ah, Captain?" He seemed to reappraise me, then said, "You are more than you would appear. it seems. I think you would make a worthy adversary."

"I prefer ally, Shiva. But the choice is yours."

At that moment, one of Shiva's lieutenants rushed up to him in great agitation. They both exchanged a few short heated words, then Shiva's face suddenly darkened with barely restrained fury. *"On my own territory?"* he thundered. *"How dare they!"* He turned to his lieutenant, his voice a lash. "Scramble the Crossbones Wing—I want the battlesite secured and the interlopers taken—NOW!"

Shiva turned to me, eyes narrowed. "We have just received word that your friend Talbot has been attacked; I have launched my forces to aid him. But we may already be too late."

▼ ▼ ▼

We found the wreckage of Frank's cutter strewn over a ten mile radius. The only piece larger than a suitcase was the battered, drifting cockpit module of a Galliard containing an equally battered and bleeding Campbell Hahn.

"Bastards jumped us." he groaned as MO Karyana worked feverishly to stabilize him. "Six of them. Waited along our flight path and opened up on the cutter right when we came out of the "box." I was riding "head" when it happened; I cut the Zephyr loose to engage and they tore me and my suit apart."

"Who sent them?"

"Let me put it this way. The mecha were unmarked Galliards. But there were visible mounts for specialized eco-science equipment. Warden equipment. This was Dominica's doing."

"No." I protested. "I refuse to believe that Auden would have a hand in this."

"Believe what you want, Frost. But it fits. Talbot was in the Circle's way." retorted Grey. "Dominica's part of the Circle; our investigation of their database revealed that much. It's what *I* would have done in her shoes," the Ravager leader added darkly.

"You think the UJSSA suspects?" pressed Ryuzaki. "I doubt it," wheezed Campbell. "Otherwise, they would have just sent a cruiser to arrest us. No, this was an assassination, pure and simple."

Placide looked slowly around the flight deck of the Charybdis warship. "You risked your lives to do this." she said quietly. "All of you. My opposite number is dead because he chose to stand against this nightmare." She looked at Ryuzaki. "Can I do anything less?" she finished.

Grey shrugged. "I'm already in," she said shortly. "We don't have a choice." She looked expectantly at Shiva.

"As associates, I would feel some responsibility to join you." he said slowly to Redmond. "But to blazes with that—this is personal. Count me in." He turned to me.

I looked over at my friend. Ryuzaki looked back at me. He grinned

"Let's get on with it," he said.

In that moment, on the deck of a pirate warship, in the blazing heart of galactic war, the STARBLADE BATTALION was born.

■ *Starblade Rising*

When Captain Redding Frost's cutter rescued FLASH-frozen Jäger pilot Jesse Ryuzaki from the aftermath of the Battle of the Northern Rings, no one could have predicted that this would mark a turning point in history. But from this single event would rise a heroic freedom force dedicated to fighting the threat of an all engulfing Galactic war.

■ *A Birth in Fire*

From the start, the Starblade faced insurmountable odds. What could a handful of mechajocks and outcasts do against the forces of two galactic empires? They had no cruisers, a handful of cutters and pirate raiders, and scarcely any mecha.

The answer was, plenty. For like guerrilla forces throughout human history, the Starblades' greatest weapon is secrecy. And secrecy is a mighty weapon indeed.

The Starblade's mission is simple: strike fast and vanish back into the depths of space. Each strike aims to destroy or cripple a critical element of the war effort—neither side is spared. Secondary missions include protecting helpless colonies and ecosystems from attack, and revealing to the public the agendas of the Circle and it's Pleiadean counterpart, the Board of Planetary Directors. Their war is secret and undeclared; they are a force so far undetectable and untraceable.

Fortunately, several things have helped the Starblade stay invisible. For a start, it turned out that the assassination of Frank Talbot was indeed masterminded by the Circle; the renegade band of Gaian factionalists dedicated to imposing a eco-correct police state in the Pleiades. Through their mouthpieces in the USSA-controlled media, the Circle was able to place the blame for Talbot's death on the shoulders of the ODF, cold-bloodedly moving their agenda forward another notch. It remains to be

seen whether Auden Dominica was involved in this, and so far, Redding Frost has avoided confronting her about the murder of his friend.

After a short recovery aboard the Starblade, Campbell Hahn has returned to Earthspace and taken command of the Rangers. Unlike Frank Talbot, Campbell is well-versed in the subterfuges common to the corridors of power. A master at saying a lot while promising nothing, he deftly shifts Ranger assets and crews such that important units are "unavailable" when the Gaian-dominated council demands them. With the help of the Ravagers and their Outsider allies, he skillfully deletes any trace of his rebel activities. He is almost certain that the USSA does not suspect his involvement in the Starblade, and if the Circle suspects, it is too ensnared in its own perfidy to risk exposing him. Hahn is also well able to keep the Starblade out of sight from the Earthspace administration. He often dispatches them on vague missions whose wide parameters allow Captain Frost the maximum leeway to engage in Starblade activities. Hahn's opposite number, Placide Strasse, does much the same for Jesse Ryuzaki and his own handpicked cutter crew (which includes Akadi Kaffe).

At the same time that the Shunt was adopted by the SCC, the SAC saw the Shunt's military potential. They started work on a defensive system as soon as the Shunt was proven, because they didn't want someone to use that potential against them. Thus was born the Probability Anchor, which, instead of sucking negative energy out of the surrounding space, pumps negative energy into space. This effectively prevents transposition of starships inside a given area of space usually about .2 AU in diameter. Fortunately, an Anchor takes only a fraction of the power that a Shunt does, so most of them use only solar panels for power.

After the Battle of the Northern Rings, Solingen scrambled to set up a fully functional Anchor Sphere to protect their planet from any sudden attack. Not to be left behind, Earth also had it's Anchor Sphere in place within 3 weeks of the completion of Solingen's, turning the entire orbital path of the Earth into what may as well be an anti-Shunt minefield. Mars is even now being shielded as is Gravesend and Telluria.

■ *Beyond the Zanzibar Alliance*

At present, between the Charybdis and the Outsiders, the Starblade is actually capable of fielding quite a few of troops at the militia level. In addition, new recruits from both the SAC and the ODF have begun to swell the ranks and increase the danger of exposing Starblade's existence.

The problem is getting enough combat-capable Mektons for them. This is becoming a critical issue; after a cautious period which both the SAC and the ODF spent planting Probability Anchors throughout the approaches to their systems, both fleets are starting to gear up for a full out galactic conflict. There have already been several inconclusive engagements; closer to the scale of skirmishes than battles; the SAC still doesn't know how to counteract the Colonial's cloaking advantage, while the ODF dare not risk it's relatively few ships in a toe-to-toe slugfest.

One possible source of firepower for the fledgling Starblade Battalion is Jesse's Uncle. Akira Ryuzaki's engineering team is *the* Nebula Works of Solingen GmbH. Before the Zanzibar Alliance met, Ryuzaki discussed his plans with Akira, who, already chafing under the control of Solingen, expressed interest in deserting to the Starblade. But how this will be done still lies in the unresolved future of the Starblade group.

■ *The Shape of the Starblade Battalion*

he Starblade Battalion is, for the moment, still a fledgling organization. It has a few hundred members culled from just about every group in known space, and is rather loosely organized—but therein lies its strength. The Battalion is completely mobile and highly mutable, making it very hard to keep track of and harder to catch. It's a rare thing to have all the members of the Battalion assembled in one place at the same time—usually many of the members are on missions, recruiting, or maintaining "cover" roles within the USSA, the Outworlds, or working with one of the outsider groups. Still, every organization (no matter how loose) needs leaders, and the Battalion is no exception.

■ *The Leadership*

The Battalion was originally formed by the crew of the **Starblade**, and it is to them that the burden of leadership has fallen. Aiding them in their task are representatives of the many groups from across space who are, in one form or another, supporting the Battalion.

Captain Redding Frost is the nominal leader of the Battalion. After all, the *Starblade* is his ship, and he's got just the right balance of charisma, idealism, and strategic acumen to do the job. He also serves as the liaison between the Battalion and the new leader of the USSA's Rangers, **Campbell Hahn**, who shields the Starblade's activities from discovery by the USSA.

Jesse Ryuzaki serves as the Starblade's field commander—he personally leads Battalion Mektons into combat—and he maintains contact with the Jägers through **Placide Strazza**. **Andre Dyson** serves alongside Jesse as the tactical officer, coordinating battles from the pirate asteroid's bridge and he's also the Battalion's SAC liaison (he's friends with **Admiral Benjamin Xijang**).

Other commanders of the Battalion include **Ashram Skye** (once of Amaterasu Force, he represents the ODF and once answered directly to **General Hallen Vickers**), **Colonel Darlan Felix** (representing the Outworlds Militias, he is commander of Halcyon's own 3rd Militia Regiment), **Lilith Blackhand** (one of **Avatar Shiva's** 1st officers, representing the Charybdis), and **Jiron Sembawang** (a ex-Earthworks space-pilot who left their space-mining division for Freefall, he operates as liaison to the many Outsiders of the Sol system, including **Gray Redmond** and the Ravagers).

■ *Command Structure*

The assorted representatives mentioned above form the top echelon of command for the Starblade Battalion, but below them the lines begin to blur quite quickly. With only a couple hundred full-time members, the Battalion can afford to be (in fact, it has to be) loosely structured—beneath the top command level, the Battalion is broken into several units called **Blades**, each made up of a mix of personnel.

Thanks to their variety of personnel, each Blade is capable of handling several different types of missions (such as reconnaissance, assault, infiltration, etc.), but all Blades are fully combat-capable. Each

Wing has its own Blade Leader, to whom falls the difficult task of maintaining order amongst the ranks in his Blades' individual Teams.

A **Team** is the equivalent of an SAC Flight or an ODF Platoon, a group of 3-5 Mektons sometimes organized around a Cutter or Raider. **Storm Blade**, led by Ashram Skye, currently has 4 Teams, **Thunder Blade** is led by Lilith Blackhand and currently has 5 Teams, **Fire Blade** currently has 5 Teams, and is led by Darlan Felix, and **Core Blade**, led by Jiron Sembawang, crews the pirate asteroid *Libertatia* (named after an ancient Earth pirate base of long ago)—it requires a full-time crew of thirty people; about half of these these are Charybdis.

■ *Resources*

The Starblade Battalion is the dictionary definition of a rag-tag force—their mecha and weapons are an odd assortment of designs from across space, making parts, repair and resupply a primary concern of these renegades. In fact, plans are already underway to standardize the Battalion's equipment …

However, for now the Battalion must make do with what it has. The Charybdis' mobile mini-asteroid serves as the home base, and its mobility and cloaking abilities are vital to the survival of the Battalion. The asteroid can support a maximum of four small ships, and right now there are 2 ODF Battleriders docked there, along with 7 Cutters (2 Rangers, 5 Jägers). The Battalion has another 83 Mektons, mostly from the Outworlds but there are a few Crossbones and some SAC units among them.

■ *Recruitment Methods*

Most of the Starblade Battalion's "recruitment" works through word-of-mouth; every member of the Battalion's top level command has contacted any and all sympathetic, trustworthy friends, asking them to support the cause.

There are no postings through the dataweb, no rallies, no advertising campaigns. Such openness would be suicide. Instead, the Battalion's ways are far more subtle: A junior officer in the SAC, for example, grows angry with the USSA's policies. He causes some trouble, borders on insubordination a couple of times, and soon enough he finds himself in the office of an SAC command officer he's never met before. However, instead of the trouble he expects, he gets an offer to join the Starblade Battalion.

That's the kind of methods the Battalion employs. Subterfuge is the name of the game. "Moles" such as the officer mentioned above keep their eyes out for potential recruits, then do *thorough* checks on the candidate before actually approaching—after all, if the offer is turned down, there's the danger of the candidate going back to his superiors and exposing the mole!

However, given the uncomfortable climates of both the Pleiades Confederation and the USSA, the offer is usually accepted. The SB Battalion has access to a few small courier ships and Cutters and the Shunt-engines of these craft have been modified for Coaking ability specifically in order to collect new recruits from the most unfriendly of territories. Under ideal circumstances the mole will be able to concoct a "cover story" for the disappearance of the recruit, and can then go on seeking out more candidates. Not that ideal circumstances are all that easy to come by…

■ *Allies of the Starblade Battalion*

The greatest asset of the Battalion is its wide-reaching (but covert) influence. While the core group of personnel and mecha at the asteroid base is quite modest, there are sympathizers in every single group in space—the Battalion has "inside men" working for the SAC, the ODF, the Scouts, and even the Outsiders. Though it is currently short on resources, these moles are working every day to recruit more people for the cause, guaranteeing that the Battalion will continue to grow.

The Battalion has yet to publicly declare itself as an active faction in the coming war, and that affords it another advantage: Anonymity. However, all involved are fully aware that this can't last—soon enough, the Battalion will have to come forward, and when that happens, it's going to need allies if it's going to be able to stand up to the USSA and the Outworlds.

■ *Uniting the Outsiders*

For now, the Battalion's strongest allies are the Charybdis. Avatar Shiva's pirates are arguably the most powerful force in space after the USSA and the Outworlds Confederation, and it seems guaranteed that the Charybdis will publicly throw in with the Battalion when the time comes—provided, that is, that Mr. Shiva doesn't have some secret plans which he hasn't let anyone else in on …

A solid alliance with the Charybdis also ensures strong connections with most of the other Outsider groups in the Sol system, namely the Ravagers Council and the Vagabonds of FreeFall. These groups provide the Battalion with valuable contacts and resources otherwise unavailable—in tightly-controlled USSA territory, Freefall provides a safe port for Battalion ships and Cutters, and the Ravagers (while not the most friendly lot) can be useful for getting around Earth without taking official channels, and their continuing Old City salvage operations have the potential to provide the Battalion with resources that the USSA doesn't even know about: Abandoned factories, fuel reserves, warehouses of equipment, perhaps even ammo dumps.

■ *When the Time Comes*

For the moment, the Outsiders mentioned above are doing their best to support the Starblade Battalion while maintaining their cover as knowing nothing about them. However, the leadership of the Battalion hopes that it can win some groups over to its side once it "goes public"…

Depending upon how the wind blows, it may be possible to arrange for the Scouts (namely the Jägers and the Rangers) to break away from their respective governments and become fully-fledged arms of the Battalion. This would seem more likely for the Jagers than the Rangers due to their greater dissatisfaction (thanks to the new role the ODF has assigned them) and their less controlled surroundings—while Solingen's Fleet does watch over the entire Pleiades, there are still three neutral systems, and the Pleiades is a much larger area than the Sol system. Still, as the SAC has begun conscribing the

▲ **Outsider Reconnaissance:** Many Ravagers, like this member of the Nationals, can collect Earthside intelligence for the Battalion.

Rangers, a mass defection of their Scouts has become more possible. To a large extent, whether or not the Scouts fully defect to the side of the Battalion will be dictated by the tides of opportunity and the plans of Placide Strazza and Redding Frost.

A more likely source of full-blown, open support may come from the Militias of the neutral Outworlds in the Pleiades: Asgard, Halcyon, and Cronus are all currently unaligned with regards to the Sol-Outworlds conflict. While the Asgard system is unlikely to help the Battalion (being poised to ally with the Confederation at any time), Aldersgate in the Halcyon system could probably be relied upon to join the Battalion provided a few good emissaries were sent there quickly. The same can be said of the Cronus system, where the people of Organon and Athaneum are uncomfortable with both sides of the conflict and are desperate for a third option. Should these planets join with the Starblade Battalion, their strength would number approximately 8 regiments!

While their numbers would be drastically increased, even if the Halcyon and Cronus systems do join the Battalion, their equipment would still be far behind that of the enemy. Ultimately, the Starblade Battalion is going to need a technological edge. Already they have the secret of the Solingen-made Shunt-Cloak, but more advanced craft and Mektons will be needed to take a solid stand, and this is where the Battalion can take advantage of the disheartening environment bred by unchecked capitalism: Solingen GmbH, a company which answers to no-one, a company so huge it spans worlds. In any such organization, discontented groups can appear, and Jesse's uncle just happens to lead one of these groups. Akira Ryuzaki is the chief coordinator of one of Solingen's top mecha design arms, Nebula Works, and Jesse has known that for a long time his uncle has disagreed with the Solingen board's callous attitude. Nebula Works even has its own orbital spinner station. Hmmmmm…

■ *The Goals of the Starblade Battalion*

Renegades. Traitors. Rebels. Terrorists. That's what the members of the Starblade Battalion have been called by the USSA and the Pleiades Confederation. Even though the Battalion itself is as yet unknown, the governments are aware that there have been several instances of desertion and conspiracy among their ranks recently. Especially in wartime, such actions are quickly condemned and every attempt is made to stamp them out. The two sides of this war may not have any idea who these renegades are or what they want, but they do know that they must be destroyed.

But what, in fact, *does* the Battalion want, and how do they plan to go about getting it? A movement which began as a painful rejection of the coming war, is now growing into a movement dedicated to undoing the evils which brought the war about. The Gaian Circle is trying to twist the USSA government into an Ecotopian nightmare, while the Confederation is largely a front for Solingen GmbH's takeover of the Pleiades. At the most basic level, what the Starblade Battalion wants is *balance*.

■ *United They Stand*

If the Battalion is to do anything at all, it must first form an organization which is capable of carrying out its ambitious tasks. To do this, the leadership of the Battalion must attempt to unify the fringe groups of space (such as the Charybdis, the Ravagers, and the Vagabonds) into a viable league—so far, this has been going well, and success on this front may pave the way for gaining greater support from the Scouts and the neutral Outworlds. As the Battalion's strength grows, its legitimacy in the eyes of the rest of space will also grow. Hopefully, this greater legitimacy, combined with the progressive, positive nature of their mission, will draw more forces to their side.

■ *A War for Peace*

Once the Battalion has established itself as a viable force in the scheme of things, they can pursue their primary objective in earnest: Stop the impending war. This is the Battalion's most immediate objective, since the destructive capability of either side is enough to bring unimaginable suffering to billions of people across the stars.

Naturally, the more people the battalion can bring in from either side to their own will lessen the warmongers' forces, but everyone knows that soldiers are trained to follow orders, not think for themselves; the Battalion's numbers will never be as high as those of either the SAC or the ODF. Given this fact, the Battalion cannot possibly hope to militarily defeat the forces of either the SAC or the ODF, let alone both!

■ *Fight the Power*

Since they can't win in a face-to-face fight, if the Battalion wants the war to end they're going to have to do away with both sides' motivation to fight the war at all. This means dealing with the leaders; in the cases of both sides, the citizenry are somewhat less than thrilled by the prospect of killing and/or being killed in the name of…

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

whatever *it is* this war is about! The leaders of the Battalion are well aware that it was the Gaians and Solingen GmbH who provoked this conflict, and if the war is to be stopped, the leaders of the USSA and the Pleiades *must* be removed.

However, if the leadership of the two superpowers of human space are removed, the resulting power vacuum could cause as much (if not more) chaos than the war could. There will have to be something or someone to take the place of the deposed leaders; therefore, if the Starblade Battalion wants to count on any strong support to their plans, they're obligated to formulate some kind of alternative to the already-existing power structure.

■ *A New Order*

The structure which defines space in 2180—two callous, antagonistic, extremist groups—arose from the balkanization of human space into the Colonies and the USSA. The best solution to this problem would be unity: One group governing over all the worlds in human space. This group should allow each world its own identity and self-control, but also offer a place in the whole (without showing any special preference to one over another). An interstellar commonwealth.

The Starblade group is uniquely suited to bring this about. Already, its leadership has united all of the factions normally relegated to the fringes of Human society; Outsiders, Ravagers, Pirates and Vagabonds. With the inclusion of more and more mainline SAC and ODF members, not to mention the Rangers and Jägers (whose ranks are drawn from all areas of society), the Starblade Battalion could effectively create a *truly* representative government for the future.

DATAWEB REFERENCE	THE 5-STEP PLAN
1: Unite the fringes into a viable force.	
2: Establish recognition so as to gain support.	
3: Stop the USSA-Confederation war.	
4: Unseat Solingen's Board of Directors and the Gaian Circle.	
5: Establish an interstellar commonwealth.	

■ How the Battalion Works

"**C**haotic" is the best word to describe a Battalion attack. Thunder Blade, Fire Blade, Storm Blade (and the new Blades being gradually formed) each field Teams of 3-6 Mektons, and those Mektons can range from Solingen- and Bahn/Zai-made Military models to assorted Industrial GPs to the Charybdis's Crossbones units. What's more, all these Mektons fight alongside Cutters once used by the Jagers or the SCC. Consequently, the enemy is always at a disadvantage when it comes to identifying friend or foe, and to make things even more confusing, each Mek uses a different set of tactics! The result is a mechanized maelstrom which usually proves nigh-impossible to assess... until it's too late.

■ Starblade Unit Organization

A typical Starblade group will usually comprise a single Team, consisting of between four and six mecha, reporting to a larger Blade command structure. Their mecha will often be a mix of military MEKTON types from both sides, with various civilian suits (like *Masons* and *Troubadours*) and some Charybdis *Crossbones* mixed in. Starbladers like to customize their mecha, cannibalizing parts from battlefields, dumps and other unusual sources (the best way to simulate this eclectic style is to let your players choose their mecha from a pool of possible types, and give them a few extra CP to "customize" their personal suits).

In combat, Starblade Teams are pretty autonomous. Teams have no formal leaders; usually the most popular or tactically astute member of the team informally sets the pace. When operating within a Blade, however, all Teams automatically fall under the direct command of their individual Blade Leaders.

■ Methods & Tactics

While its methods are unorthodox in the extreme and improvisational as a rule, the Starblade has several standard tactical doctrines it adheres to: Here are the basic tenets of Starblade Teams:

• **Use Stealth**
Depend on it. SHUNT cloaks should be used to insert Teams into critical locations and to set up ambushes along key navigation points. Deceptive paint jobs and using SAC and ODF uniforms and identities are a rule.

• **Use Infiltration & Moles**
Since information gathering is a large part of the Battalion's work, most missions should employ one or more "insiders". Identifying the weak points of both the USSA and the Confederation, militarily and politically, is vital if the few attacks the Starblade can mount are to have any serious effect.

• **Strike Fast, and Vanish Even Faster**
Unable to mount task forces or battle groups, the Starblade Battalion must use striking tactics similar to those of combat fighters. Attacks should well-coordinated, pin-point timing affairs, designed to take

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC
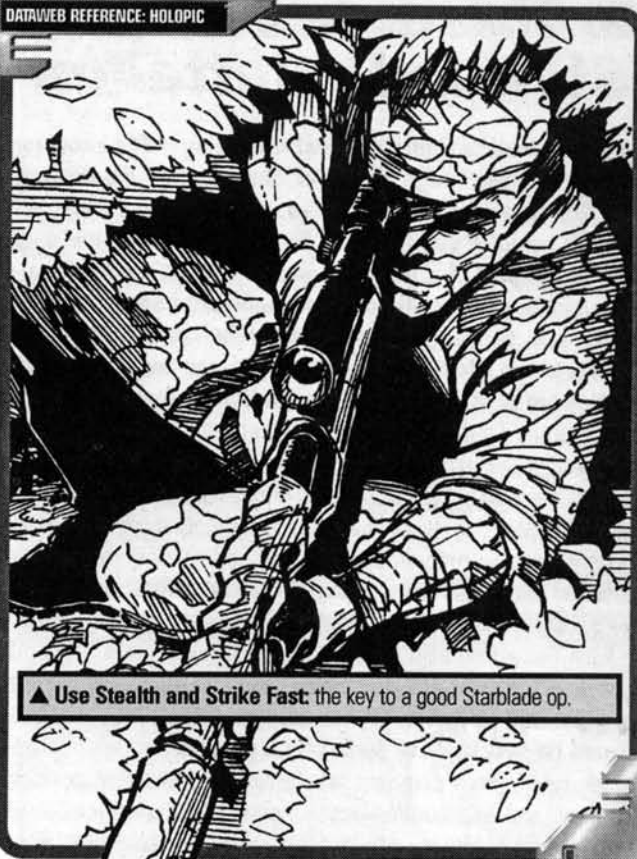
▲ **Use Stealth and Strike Fast:** the key to a good Starblade op.

out critical targets, and allowing the Team to vanish before the enemy can bring his forces to bear. Remember: Never fight a standup battle unless you have no other choice.

• **Make Friends**
Making alliances is one of the key tasks of the Battalion. New friends not only provide additional resources, but also help the Starblade make its case against the war. This rule also means Starblade Teams should *never* attack civilian targets unless they are directly related to the war effort; and even then, should go out of their way to avoid harming civilians or innocent bystanders, even to the point of risking their own Team member's lives.

The Super-Shunt System

This is an enhanced version of the Shunt system, which not only includes a Cloak, but also can defeat the newly-developed Probability Anchors. A Super-Shunt craft can actually undo the effects of the Probability Anchor, allowing the ship to transposition into the area normally blocked by the Shunt-cancelling effects of the Anchors. This secret was kindly provided by Akira Ryuzaki and Nebula Works as the exclusive property of the Starblade Battalion. The trick is that the Super-Shunt cannot be set to penetrate a Probability Anchor *and* be set to generate a cloak. If a ship needs to cloak after arrival, it can only do so after a drive reset (a Difficult Shunt tech task requiring 2D6 hours) and then a recharge can be performed. This process must be reversed to Super-Shunt again.

■ Characters in the Starblade Battalion

Starblade Battalion Mekton is designed to allow for a wide range of player character types; Pirates, Ravagers, Factors, and even Wardens are all options available. In fact, Mechajocks are only one small part of a possible party. Ravager spies, scoutship pilots, even politicians and administrators have roles to play in the drama that is unfolding in the Pleiades. Unlike other Mekton campaigns, players may find themselves out of their mecha far more than in them.

Any of the Templates from *Mekton Zeta* are applicable as well as most of the Professions (excluding perhaps Nobleman and Game Designer) as well as the new Professions and Template we list here. Some of these new ones are simply modifications of ones from *Zeta*, refined for this world setting. Feel free to use them as examples for modifying or creating others to flesh out your vision of the *Starblade* universe.

Each Profession also includes a brief description of a typical character's outlook and experience based on the setting. These are intended to provide a capsule perspective, but are by no means the only views or personalities possible for a given character type. There can be conscientious Mechajocks, vicious Rangers, and dishonorable Fleet Officers; it's all up to you.

Also, most have a lever to lead them to the Starblade Battalion. You can ignore these, however, if your campaign isn't centered around the Battalion, but instead is more of a straight war story. So if you just want to have mechajocks and fleet officers facing off against each other, with colonists caught in the middle, go for it.

■ Character Cybernetics

Big note: EVERYONE has a datalink (see page 130) unless they are a child (under 17) or the Player and the Referee decide otherwise (such as with a character who was raised in the wilds without access to cyberware). Datalinks are part of life in 2180 throughout civilized space. These links allow people to access the Dataweb and control sophisticated equipment such as Mektons, spacecraft, and even cars. People without them are considered throwbacks and are severely handicapped in modern society.

Other cyberware tends to be used far more sparingly. Surgical Nanobodies to aid in healing are the most common, if expensive, purchase. Most of the others tend to be less popular since they simply aren't as necessary or useful. The rule tends to be, if you don't need it, don't get it. While modern cyberware is pretty damn tough, solar flares, microwave pulses, static discharges and any number of other misfortunes can still scramble the nanotech resulting in potential problems. On the frontier or in space, depending too much on this kind of technology is considered foolish, since you never know where the next service center might be. Also, excessive cyberware is considered a tasteless reminder of the bad old days of the 21st century. No one wants to go back.

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **SCC RANGER**

The SCC Rangers have never lost sight of their true purpose: the exploration of the universe and the preservation of planetary ecologies from those who would despoil them. The fact that the Jägers have armed is nothing but proof that they're lost their way.

Despite the war, you continue with your original mission of peaceful exploration for the benefit of all humanity. But, pressure is building from the military to get aggressive, to attack the Jägers who cross you. Will you arm-up and march out?

Skills:

Mecha Fighting: +1	Mecha Gunnery: +1
Handgun: +1	Mecha Pilot: +1
Awareness: +1	Expert: (specify) or Shunt Navigation: +1
Aeroshuttle Pilot: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **SAC MECHAJOCK**

This war is just what you've been waiting for. Now you have the chance to engage in personal combat with the enemy, like your heroes of old; von Richtoven, Hartmann, Domingez; an honor roll to which your name will soon be added. As a SAC Mechajock, you're a pilot in every sense of the word; competent, highly trained, individualistic, egotistical, self-important, loud-mouthed, well ... you get the picture. You throw yourself into danger every day of your career, going where angels fear to tread and coming back to paint new kill marks on your Mektons. Despite the advantages cyberware may give you, you usually eschew it (other than the essential datalink) since it isn't a measure of your "real" talent.

The cause of the war is just, right? Of course, the people you're fighting might feel the same way, and you'll both pay with your lives to find out who's right. Maybe you should find out what you're fighting for.

Skills:

Mecha Fighting: +1	Mecha Gunnery: +1
Handgun: +1	Mecha Pilot: +1
Awareness: +1	Mecha Missiles: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — **SAC OFFICER**

The security of USSA-controlled space and the preservation of planetary ecologies rests squarely on your shoulders. That's something you are aware of every minute of every day.

Your job was rather easy before this year. Serve aboard a ship, do your duty, make a few patrols, bust a few smugglers, retire with a handsome pension. But then those damnable colonies declared war, and gave the SAC a sound thrashing in the Ranoxis system. Now you have a war to face ... and to end as soon as possible. And you have a Gaian Warden looking over your shoulder and second guessing every order you give. Maybe you *should* just unleash the nukes on their industrial worlds ... but, no, that would destroy too many ecologies, and kill too many innocent civilians. There has to be a better way ...

Skills:

Leadership: +1	Human Perception: +1
Expert: Tactics or Shunt Tech: +1	Handgun: +1
Oratory or Shunt Navigation: +1	Hand to Hand: +1
Zero Gee: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — PLANETOLOGIST

As a Planetologist or a Xenologist, you are one of the most respected scientists in the USSA community. As a planetologist, you study not just ecology, but entire planets as an organism. Every action taken by humans has an impact somewhere. It's up to you to figure out everything there is to know about how planets work, in order to more effectively preserve and integrate with them.

As a Xenologist, your scope is a little bit broader than that of a Planetologist. While Planetologists only study planets, you study *everything* non-terrestrial. Planets, solar systems, life forms, the whole cosmic ball of wax. Needless to say, both of you are welcome additions to Ranger—and, to a lesser extent, Jäger—crews.

Skills:
Oratory: +1
Jury Rig: +1
Survival: +1
Photography:+1
Programming+1
Expert: Field: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — GAIAN WARDEN

Constant vigilance is the price for repairing the damage Man has done to the Earth. Your job is to be humanity's conscience as they expand into the galaxy.

As a Warden, you are part local ecological monitor and part ship officer. Your beat is the ecologies of a dozen worlds, wherever your assignment takes you. The criminals you bust are despoilers of nature, the laws you enforce the ecological mandates of the USSA. Unfortunately, sometimes you also have to correct your fellow officers in their enforcement of policy. They don't seem to appreciate your help.

This war should make you feel vindicated—the colonies have shown their true face—but, somehow, you know that the cost of this war may be more than the galaxy should have to pay …

Skills:
Oratory: +1
Leadership: +1
Teaching: +1
Expert: Ecological Sciences: +1
Handgun: +1
Zero-Gee: +1
Expert: Law: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — SAC COMMANDO

The SAC Ground Forces have always been directed more for police actions or riot control. That's not you. You're the best of your breed, trained in deep insertion, assassination, and demolition. They use you for those dirty little jobs they don't want the public to know about, like striking a Charybdis pirate stronghold in Rome, or sabotaging the Gravesend shipyard before those new Shunt drive designs can give Solingen too much of an edge. You're tech-tuned, fine-honed and totally deniable. You've even been upgraded via cyberware to be able to operate with a minimum of external equipment. This war seemed to be made to order—then you saw your orders to slip a sterilization virus into a colony's water supply to render *everyone* non-fertile. That was more than even you could stomach. Is it time to decide what you want to fight for?

Game Note: Once you take Commando it remains your Profession until game time (no "retiring" from this). Typical enhancements include Boosterware, Optics, Audio, Bioarm, and Skinweave.

Skills:
Awareness/Notice: +1
Shadowing/Avoid Pursuit: +1
Expert: Demolition: +1
Handgun: +1
Hand to Hand: +1
Stealth: +1
Athletics: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — RAVAGER

Your kind has had many labels: Terrorist, Slacker, Barbarian, Cyberpunk. The name doesn't matter. What does matter is your freedom; freedom from society and the mindless automotons who run it. You make your own way in the polluted wilds, carving a place for yourself amongst the other harsh bands that have turned their backs on "civilization" for something real.

Life is hard, and death is common; that's the price you pay. But you've learned how to use a knife, skin a rat, and kill an enemy. Your band has even recognized your talent and rewarded you with a useful piece of cyberware: orbital crystal claws that retract into the back of your hand. It may be enough to earn you a place on the next smuggler ship that sets down in the Badlands. On Earth, you're a Ravager. In the Pleiades, you'll be a Freeman.

Skills:
Hand to Hand: +1
Handgun: +1
Cybertech: +1
Drive or Aircraft Pilot: +1
Survival: +1
Stealth: +1
Expert: Specify: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — SMUGGLER/PIRATE

The trade laws of the Confederation are rather lenient, but there are always items that are hard to get, considered dangerous, or are just plain illegal to own or transport—not to mention "hot". Trade in such contraband can be highly lucrative, as well as dangerous. You are the Panzerboy or Blackbeard of the frontier. Reliability, discretion, speed, and an uncanny ability to avoid any USSA entanglements are your trademarks. More than likely, you own your own ship, and are based out of Zanzibar or several of you may have banded together so as to be able to afford a Shunt-equipped raiding vessel.

If you are a member of the Charybdis, you are slightly better off than the average pirate. The Mark of the Charybdis was usually enough to grant you immunity from law enforcement. But this new war threatens everything; no matter who wins, you'll lose. But your boss has made this alliance with this new bunch, the Starblade group. They say they can find a way to end the war before one side or the other takes over. Okay, you'll listen. *Maybe* you'll even cooperate …
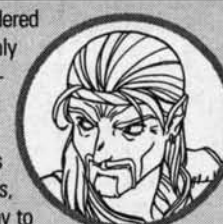
Skills:
Streetwise: +1
Aircraft/Aeroshuttle Pilot: +1
Expert: Law or Shunt Navigation: +1
Handgun: +
Expert: Trading: +1
Stealth: +1
Persuasion & Fast Talk: +1

DATAWEB REFERENCE — ODF MECHAJOCK

You started handling a heavy-construction unit, but when you got recruited by the militia, you were put at the controls of a military Mek. So what if it was just a refit Troubadour, it was still a hot machine and you loved being linked into it, feeling it as an extension of your body.

Your aptitude was quickly noted and you soon found yourself shipped off to a mysterious spinner station in the belt where some kind of super-secret army was forming. You were told you would be the vanguard of a force that would win freedom for the Pleiades. You're as cocky and confident as your SAC counterpart and you can't wait to match skills with those Earther slogs. But these Fleet guys are really fanatical, and there are a LOT of Solingen Gmbh people around giving orders. Who's really running things here?.

Skills:

Mecha Fighting: +1	Mecha Gunnery: +1
Handgun: +1	Mecha Pilot: +1
Awareness: +1	Mecha Missiles: +1
Jury Rig: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — ODF JÄGER

You ODF Jägers, like the Mechajocks, consider yourselves to be number one in the planetary exploration theater. The Rangers may be bigger, but you were the first, scouting the Pleiades when the Rangers were still in Earthspace. But when tensions began to heat up between the Pleiades and Earth, the top Scouts were given military training, and weapons for their Mektons. Now you've been ordered to secure new territory for the Confederation in the same way the Mechajocks defend the borders … with force. Some of you have leapt into this new role with gusto, seeing the cause of colonial independence as a just one. But now Jäger Mektons bear kill markers of Rangers who've refused to yield, and this just doesn't seem to have much to do with exploration any more.

Skills:

Mecha Fighting: +1	Mecha Gunnery: +1
Handgun: +1	Mecha Pilot: +1
Awareness: +1	Expert: (Tactics) or Shunt Navigation: +1
Aeroshuttle Pilot: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — ODF OFFICER

Only unrelenting vigilance and adherence to duty will preserve the Confederation from its enemies, including Earthers who have designs on Pleiades space. You were one of the first brought into the confidence of the Fleet when it was formed in 2175, and have worked your way up from the ranks. You are now a squadron leader, or perhaps even the Captain of a ship. This war seems to be the ultimate culmination of your career. But you've noticed the tight control that the Solingen corporates keep on the fleet's supplies, and you've seen Solingen officers get precedence over you. Is *this* the freedom you've been fighting for?

Officers from Solingen tend to be rather stuffy; very regular-army. Officers fortunate enough (in their opinion) to be from another world are much more relaxed, wilder, and individualistic.

Skills:

Leadership: +1	Human Perception: +1
Expert: Tactics or Shunt Tech: +1	Handgun: +1
Oratory or Shunt Navigation: +1	Hand to Hand: +1
Zero Gee: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — MINER/PIONEER

Sitting around on some civilized, regulated rock has never been your idea of happiness. You left Earth to forge your own destiny, but why travel four hundred light years to be regulated by a *different* bunch of power-hungry idiots? So you broke out on your own, preferring to live the rough life in an uncivilized area, or on an uncolonized world, rather than settle down to the comfortable life of a wage slave. You are the trailblazer of this new frontier. You carve paths into the wilderness that is uncharted space, an unexplored planet, or that big asteroid in the trailing belt. You could be doing it to get away from it all, or to get rich off that chance hot discovery. After all, the guys who discovered the Crystalchime Trees of Ranoxis 3 are loaded now! Of course, they also started the war …

Skills:

Awareness/Notice: +1	Survival: +1
Handgun or Rifle: +1	Athletics: +1
Driving or Zero Gee: +1	Jury Rig: +1
Expert: (specify): +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — OUTBACK MARSHALL

A Marshall is the highest law enforcement official in the Pleiades Confederation, subject to rigorous training and psych screening to ensure fitness for duty. Your function is the same as the Marshalls of the old American West: You take the law out in to the wilds were no law exists. A Marshall is judge, jury, and if necessary, executioner. You are the law, and your decisions override the word of any other law enforcement official. While you generally operate only in space or in the Outback of colony planets where there are no law enforcement officials, you are occasionally called in by other planetary police officials to handle a difficult case.

This war is just going to make your job harder—a lot of death and pain is going to be coming down in your jurisdiction. You'll need help, but the governments all seem too busy sharpening their swords. Then a friend told you about this Starblade group who are trying to end the war …

Skills:

Interrogation: +1	Auto Weapon: +1	Streetwise: +1
Human Perception: +1	Awareness/Notice: +1	Expert: Law: +1
Handgun: +1		

DATAWEB REFERENCE — FACTOR

Factors are a species peculiar to the Pleiades, part politician, part businessman, part troubleshooter. You primarily work as a freelance field administrator, hired by Planetary Directors or City Managers to go to trouble spots and bring together the right people and the right resources to get a job done. Sometimes it's a mining ship in the Loki Belt that's having labor problems, or a farming collective on Telluria that's having a hard time from a combination of local predators and Gaian Wardens who are limiting their ability to defend themselves. Whatever the issue, you make it possible for both sides to solve the problem. Sometimes, the solution's legal, sometimes not; as long as the goods flow and the work gets done.

You're used to traveling light, since you never know where your next job might take you. You've earned your space legs years ago and are a comfortable in Z-G as on terra-firma. You love your work, feeling like you actually help people—with a tidy profit for yourself, of course.

But rising high in the political or business world in the Pleiades means toeing the Solingen party line, so you are particularly conscious of how the deals you set up could impact their economy. But this new war tests even your resolve. Is it really worth killing millions to gain control of the Pleiades? What's Solingen's *real* angle?

Skills:

Personal Grooming: +1	Intimidate: +1
Persuasion & Fast Talk: +1	Human Perception: +1
Expert: Business: +1	Leadership: +1
Social: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — SOLDIER (EITHER SIDE)

Sure, the Mechajocks and line officers get all the glory, but it's the infantry that has to go in and hold the ground, whether it's a spaceport or a starship. No, the work isn't glamorous. In fact, it usually dirty, bloody, and vicious. But it's a fallacy that the infantry are supposed to simply lay down their lives on the battlefield. You know that your job is to make sure the enemy lays down *his* life if he tries to stop you from doing your job. In the meantime, you'll watch after your squadmates, find the most comfortable foxhole out here, and stay alive as long as possible. Of course, if the job requires steady nerves and the ability to put a rocket round into someone's eye at 300 meters, you're ready to rock.

You joined up to fight for what you believe in, but now you're not so sure. Both sides seem willing to spend lives—your lives—for reasons that don't make much sense in the field. It's easy to spout idealistic propaganda from an office, it's another thing altogether to stand in the line of fire for slogans and vague promises ...

Skills:

Energy or Automatic Weapon: +1	Survival: +1
Hand to Hand: +1	Athletics: +1
Awareness: +1	Basic Repair: +1
Rifle: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE — TECHIE (EITHER SIDE)

2180 is a wondrous world of technological toys and gadgets. Huge Mektons, vast starships, intricate nanotechnology, all of these are your playthings. In fact, you love to dabble in several technologies at once, seeing what kind of crossovers may be practical.
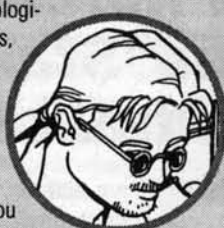
Many people (even your friends) find you a little distant and preoccupied; you're always more interested in the latest magnetic field tech or the newest cybernetic advancement. But when something breaks, they come to you, because they know you'll know how to fix it. Hell, with just a few minor adjustments, you'll make it even better than it was before!

Your kind is common in both Earthspace and the Pleiades and you're constantly 'linking files with your distant peers via the HyperWeb. But now this war thing has come up and cut you off from your comrades across the border. This is totally unacceptable. No one has the right to interfere with the progress of knowledge— besides, you just need that one last bit of data from your friend on Hammersmith to complete your new magnetic lift car ...

Skills:

Programming: +1	Mecha Design: +1
Jury Rig: +1	Expert (Specify science): +1
Basic Repair: +1	Cybertech or Shunt Tech: +1
Mecha Tech: +1	

DATAWEB REFERENCE

TEMPLATE: ROOKIE CADET (EITHER SIDE)

Young, idealistic, full of potential and unspoiled by the cynicism so common in veterans, the cadet is the future of the armed forces.

You face a long and gruelling time ahead at the academy, especially with the war on. But once you make it, you have a bright future ahead as a new pilot or shipboard officer. This war is probably the best thing to happen to your military career; after all, advancement in the ranks happens fastest in a time of war ... maybe too fast.
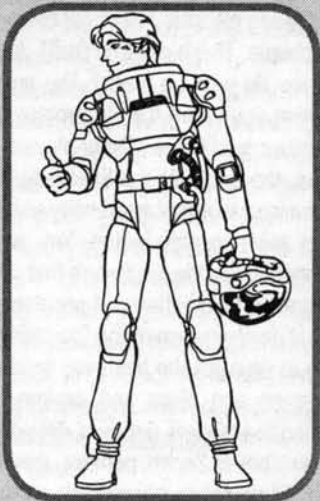
MECHA PILOT:	**+1**
TWO MECHA WEAPON SKILLS:	**+1 EA**
WARDROBE & STYLE:	**+1**
HANDGUN:	**+1**
DRIVE:	**+1**
STEALTH:	**+1**

EQUIPMENT BONUS: Datalink, stylish clothes, sharp cadet uniform, pilot's suit, handgun, sportscar.

STARTING CASH: +200 cr

■ *Refereeing the "Starblade Battalion"*

"**T**wo nations, arrogant of purpose, unbending in their ideals, unswerving in their determination, fired to the terrible choice of war. The oppressive United Stellar States Alliance— the arrogant Pleiades Confederation— both meet on the battlefields of deep space, among the glittering rings of a dead world, to duel with fire and flame for the mastery of the Galaxy."

So begins the *Starblade Saga*, a sweeping interstellar campaign in the grand animé tradition of battling giant robots, vast space fleets and charismatic blue-haired heroes. But Starblade also incorporates the elements of classic space opera as well— exploration, politics and the time honored struggle between two opposing philosophies.

■ *Starblade Scope*

Two governments, eight star systems, twenty-one planets, 160 major cities, 20 billion people. That's a lot of stuff! Just what can you do with so much? The answer is; anything you want. It's all a matter of your objectives, and those of your players.

True, the scope of the Starblade universe is immense; but that immensity gives you a lot of room to play in too. Yet, with only twenty odd worlds, you won't find it hard to explore the unique flavor of each one.

How *much* you use of the Starblade galaxy is up to you. But the best way to start is to center on one place and explore it fully; starting the players out on a mission to the same colony or Zenith, perhaps, then leading them off planet to new worlds as the story progresses.

As you move from world to world, the best idea is to pick out a key element of that world and involve your players in it. For example, if its dinosaurians are the most interesting part of Telluria, involve your players in a threat to the saurians, or a plot to turn them into roboticized monsters. Or the great trees of Arcadia may be more than they appear—they may even be intelligent. Use key elements to make each world stand out in the player's memories.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

DATAWEB REFERENCE | **REDDING FROST**

Cutter Officer (Ex-Ranger, now Starblade Battalion)

Description: 1.81m, 88kg, 45 years old, graying black hair, blue eyes.

Quote: "Of course it's dangerous. It's our job."

Notes: Frost is the very picture of a modern SCC Ranger—quiet, serious, determined. Although he gets along well with most people, he is best on his own; especially on a solo EVA mission—a "walkabout." A good leader, he is even tempered and fair to almost everyone, but has a distinct hatred of injustice and intolerance.

Frost is the de facto leader of the Starblade, although originally he hoped his old friend Frank Talbot would take the helm instead. He doesn't see himself as a heroic leader, but his plain spoken manner and determination get the job gone.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, BOD 7, REF 8, EMP 6, Survival +8, Mekton Piloting +6, Politics +5, Tactics +8. Datalink.

■ *Choosing The Right Voice*

Although the Starblade setting is about a deadly serious conflict, you don't *have* to make every campaign feel like a Russian novel. A *Medium* voice, in which character development, romance and even comedy are punctuated by moments of intense and deadly action is often the best way to play Starblade. Start your players out easy, ramp up the action, and leave them with a cliffhanger each episode, and you're halfway there. This is the voice that fits most Starblade campaigns.

But don't shy away from the dark side of the *Serious* voice if you think it suits the setting. If you're running a bunch of ground pounders dug in for tunnel warfare in the hell of Ironsun, don't spare the vermin, senseless death and mindless destruction. An intergalactic conflict in the grand tradition of Haldeman (*Forever War*) and Heinlein (*Starship Troopers*) is a great place to make the point: *War is not good clean fun.*

■ *Think Small!*

Whether dealing with a military mecha command or a Starblade Team, the Battalion universe is designed with small groups as the focus. Starblade scenarios are best when the battles are small three to six man skirmishes; when the enemy is known to the characters and the threats personal; when the action centers not on sweeping galactic empires but the people caught up in the gears.

Dealing with the characters as a small band of heroes allows players to develop their own interesting quirks and backgrounds. Use your player's Lifepath information to fill their lives with a host of interesting friends, allies and enemies; after all, with twenty worlds to choose from, they must know *someone* with a few strong opinions about them.

■ *It's the Mecha, Stupid!*

Remember: above all, Starblade is about mecha and the people that drive them. Your Starblade scenarios should always focus on this aspect of the world: in Starblade, mecha are found in exploring, fighting, constructing, policing, and in hundreds of other occupations.

In a world where Mektons are everywhere, you don't have to go looking for an SAC patrol to get into trouble. With this many giant robots kicking around, you know there's going to be a chance to slug it out; even if it's only with a

heavily armed Park Ranger or enthusiastic construction worker who thinks you're a saboteur. If you haven't put one mecha battle in each session, you're missing the point of a good Starblade adventure.

■ *Not Starblade Missions*

Not every Starblade campaign has to be centered around our brave band of revolutionaries. There are still plenty of Rangers and Jägers so far out on the frontier that they haven't even *heard* of the war—much less chosen a side. There's plenty of new worlds to explore for these guys; new dangers, new creatures; maybe even the threat of something bigger than the current petty human crisis—an invading alien fleet, perhaps? After all, have you noticed that the Pleiades Cluster seems to have an extraordinary number of habitable worlds? Almost like someone ... hmm ... *planned* it that way?

The brave new worlds option isn't the only game in town. *Someone's* building those big orbital spinners and establishing those colonies—it could be your players. Fighting the dangers of sabotage and rival work-gangers or struggling to live on a new and violent world might be right up your players' alley.

And *Ar Mate*—don't forget the Pirates! Not every group to hoist the Jolly Roger has to be the Charybdis. There are plenty of Mekton-equipped pirates making a larcenous living; *your* group could be one of them. Pirates playing both sides of the war against each other is a great place to kick off a campaign.

■ *Using the Starblade Characters*

Hotheaded, cocky Jesse Ryuzaki. Wise and tough Captain Redding Frost. The beautiful (and possibly murderous) Gaian zealot Auden Dominica. The characters of Starblade are drawn in the broad and vivid brushstrokes of Japanese animé, where every villain is cool and every hero tormented. But they shouldn't be the center of your story—the starring roles should always go to your players. The Starbladers we've created are the supporting characters in the story *you'll* write.

So when's the best time to use a Starblade character? Answer; any time the players are over their heads and need bailing out, or when they need someone to help them get a little direction. Saying "Go to Salamanca to fight the SAC." may not get your players moving, but having someone like Andre Dyson dragging them there will get them moving in a hurry!

■ *Starships in Starblade*

Starblade Battalion MEKTON features a wealth of deadly machines which you and your players can use to stage massive battles and set fire to the galaxy. However, when one looks at the tremendous Kill levels of the starships fielded by both sides, you may ask how a pesky Mekton or ten could possibly bother such titanic vessels? Well, this is where those fun ol' Optional Rules and Critical Hits come in handy, so keep in mind the following concepts when starship combat occurs in your *SBB* game:

1) Considering the large role that starships play in *SBB*, they were all designed using complete MTS rules rather than the abbreviated rules from *Mekton Z*. However, they still use most of the Mek-favoring Starship Combat Rules on page 108 of *Mekton Z*. A starship's Initiative will always come after any 1:1-scale mecha have acted, and it has the same Action choices as listed, but when hit, the standard Hit Location table on page 102 is used. (Note that for Special Hits, #7 corresponds to #9 on the Ship Hit Location Table.)

2) 1:1 mecha (Mektons and fighters) will always get a +6 to-hit modifier when attacking x100-scale ships (like Cruisers and Fleet Carriers) and +3 to hit x10-scale ships (such as Battleriders). Furthermore, these ships will have equivalent penalties to hit 1:1-scale mecha—note that no *SBB* ships have CIDS systems!

3) Remember that any attack which beats the defender's roll by 10 or more will ignore armor—given the +3 to +6 modifiers afforded to 1:1 mecha, they're going to ignore armor pretty often. Now for the important note: The G-Factor (page 105 of MZ) is in effect for starships in SBB, and Scaling has no effect. That's right, if you've got a Mekton trying to take down a Cruiser with 800K in its Torso, any armor-penetrating (or ignoring) hit will require a 1D10 roll to be made vs the <u>unscaled</u> number of Kills in that Servo!

For example: *A Mekton fires an 8K beam at a SAC Master-class Cruiser (800K in its Torso); the Mek's +6 to hit allows it to ignore the Cruiser's armor easily, reducing the cruiser's Torso to 792K. However, the Cruiser must now roll 1D10, vs its unscaled Torso Kills—7 in this case, since 792÷100 is less than 8! If the Cruiser rolls an 8-10, the ship's Torso is disabled... and it's up to the Referee as to whether the ship just sputters into a dead drift, looses its atmosphere, falls apart, or swells up and pops.*

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

RYUZAKI.J

DATAWEB REFERENCE

JESSE RYUZAKI

Mekton Pilot (Ex-Jager, now Starblade Battalion)

Description: 1.62m, 72kg, 22 years old, spiky blue hair, impetuous, brash, and opinionated.

Quote: "I got good tone! I got good tone!"

Notes: Jesse Ryuzaki is the archetypical Jäger mechajock Young, brash, enthusiastic, as well as a tactical wizard, he has a rep for audacity and courage. Fiercely proud of his home world of Solingen and his citizenship in the Pleiades Confederation, he once saw the ODF as being able to do no wrong. He has since gained a more mature and balanced view of the current conflict thanks to his association with Redding Frost. His closest family member is his uncle Akira—chief administrator of Solingen GmbH's Nebula Works.

Important Stats and Skills: INT 8, REF 10, BODY 8, TECH 7, Mecha Fighting: +6, Mecha Gunnery: +8, Mecha Pilot: +6, Awareness: +4. Datalink, Nanobodies.

DATAWEB REFERENCE: HOLOPIC

■ *Starblade Adventures*

I n *Starblade Battalion MEKTON,* **Humanity is faced with a lose-lose situation: a war without winners, where a victory by either side could spell disaster for everyone.**

Still, a few brave people have found a third option—they have chosen to turn the tide and fight back. As members of the Starblade, your players will be those brave few. Armed with Mektons, a handful of ships, guts and a sense of destiny (not to mention a sense of humor!), they are the ones who get the job done. No matter what.

But where to start your grand crusade? **That's where Adventure Outlines come into play**. Designed to allow Referees to customize on the fly, these outlines are a good way to kick off any Starblade campaign:

■ *ADVENTURE ONE: The Taking of Nebula Works*

> *"It's pretty simple, people. All we have to do is move a colony. A small colony."*
> —Jesse Ryuzaki

■ **Mission Background**

Up to now, the Starblade has been a ragtag force of used civilian Mektons, borrowed or stolen military suits and whatever the Charybdis pirates could spare.

Until now.

In the last few weeks, the Nebula Works design team has been feeling more and more unhappy with their parent group, Solingen GmbH. The "Viggen" project raided some of the design team's most popular members for Singularity Works' staff; ever since, both groups have been locked in a escalating struggle for resources and manpower. Second, the Nebula Team, once the premier group for new and innovative designs like the Draken, has been relegated to upgrading older designs into heavy support units like the Blitzen. The final straw has been the war; most of the Nebula team started out as civilian designers and they want to get out of the milspec business as soon as possible.

Enter Jesse Ryuzaki, Starblade leader and nephew of Nebula Design Chief, Dr. Akira Ryuzaki. Jesse has a novel proposal; enlist the Nebula team to design really cutting edge suits for the Starblade. This not only would allow them to do something to stop the war, but also have fun making new stuff to do it. The Nebula Works team likes the idea.

But Uncle Akira has an even better idea. Why not take Nebula Works' entire orbiting factory and Proving Ground along with them?

■ **Mission Abstract**

Nebula Works is based in a small spinner colony about ten miles in diameter. Originally designed as a mining support base very early in the colonization of the Cluster, the spinner was purchased back from its investors by Solingen GmbH in 2174, and has become its primary Orbital Proving Ground. Although all of the various units of Solingen GmbH use the spinner at times, only Nebula Works has permanently set up housekeeping there; besides their offices and test facilities, the group has also moved their families into the apartment blocks reserved for company employees.

Cantankerous and lacking the more sophisticated navigational control of later models, the spinner's Shunt engine was removed when the colony was handed over to Solingen GbmH. Renamed the *Mud*

Slargh, sporting an external three man control cabin and festooned with a variety of umbilicals, handholds and racks for holding small spaceships and Mektons, it provides an undemanding ferry service between the Primus and Proteus systems. Too antiquated and too huge for any ship to use, it is never guarded (unless you want to count whatever armed civilian mecha happen to be aboard).

Your mission is simple: hijack the Spinner's old Shunt engine (at either the Primus or Proteus Shunt points) and reinstall it in the colony (a 1 hour process). Once installed, you'll Shunt the entire colony to a safe place arranged by the Charybdis deep in the nebular gas cloud surrounding the Rocinante system.

■ Mission Tactical Hints

There are a lot of possible ways to play this mission out. The straightforward way is to get a bunch of Mektons together and storm the *Mud Slargh* full on. If you're feeling subtle, a cloaked Raider could get you right up on top of the old boat before she even notices.

The down side of this is that if you barrel in with Gauss-guns screaming, you're probably going to hurt a lot more people than just yourselves—with all the attached small transports and mecha, this is equivalent to opening fire in a heavily packed commuter train. Needless to say, this could be *real* bad for the Starblade's public image.

Another option is to get sneaky. You could join the *Slargh* as passengers, with or without mecha, and take it over without a shot. After all, there's only three guys in the cockpit, and you could Shunt the *Slargh* out of the system before anyone even gets wise (after all, they're *expecting* a Shunt!). For an extra fillip, you could have a few dozen Crossbones waiting at the rendezvous. To pull this one off, you'll need to recon the *Slargh's* schedule and get past the watchful eye of any ODF officials guarding for Earther spies (*Hint, hint.*)

Assuming you get control of the *Slargh*, you'll also have to get her to the colony. If the *Slargh* vanishes for too long, there's always a chance that some bright boy in Solingen GmbH will think, *"Hey..I know where that Shunt engine fits!"* and you'll walk into a waiting army of Blitzens (*Hint, hint*). So there *is* a time limit. You'll also want to make sure there are no unwanted guests (like the ODF Fleet Review Board coming to watch the test trials of the new Singularity Works' *StürmDrachen* or something), that any last minute problems have been weeded out of the Nebula Works team (*"I was gonna go, but then my wife said she*

couldn't leave her mother, so she called the Planetary Board of Directors..."*) or that you know the *real* layout of the colony (*"Funny, the plans never mentioned this really big deflector dish blocking the hole where the Shunt system used to be plugged in."*) All of these contingencies will require more than a fast hand on the joystick—you'll probably need some on site, out of suit recon, time to check out all of the Nebula crew (and their families, some of which might still be on Solingen), some infiltration on Singularity Works to make sure they aren't planning any corporate shenanigans, and probably leaving part of the Team onboard to deal with any other little disasters that typically crop up when you're trying to steal a world (*"My genius kid brother wanted to help, so he enhanced the Drive to take us to the Andromeda Galaxy..."*) And hey, if you slip the Blitzen pilots a Micky during breakfast, you might not even have to fight them at all!

■ Support

The Nebula Works have agreed to share their cloaking technology with their Starblade friends. Since the old Shunt engine's anomalon beam projectors are so ancient, they've given the Team an entirely new calibration module with the cloaking technology already built in. It can be carried in one hand by any standard Mekton; you'll need 2 hours to put it in.

Nebula Works will also take care of any guards on the premises, although they won't be able to do anything about the Blitzens (see below) on patrol around the colony. However, they can jam any transmission in and out of the colony and cover that jamming with an innocuous series of routine transmissions.

■ Resistance

Since Solingen has become a critical element in the ODF war effort, its security has been stepped up accordingly. The Spinner colony where Nebula Works is established has an on-site military presence of six Blitzens. In addition, the ODF Battlerider *Donner* is on polar orbit nearby; it can respond to any threat within five minutes of having received an alert. The *Donner* also carries four Drakens aboard.

■ Complications

• Hijacking the old SHUNT ferry may be a bit more complex than expected; three Militia officers from Malachi Force shuttling home with their modified Troubadours (see pg. 88 for ideas).

• Nebula Works doesn't know that Singularity Works is planning to use the Proving Grounds the next "morning." This gives you only a 24 hour window to complete your mission.
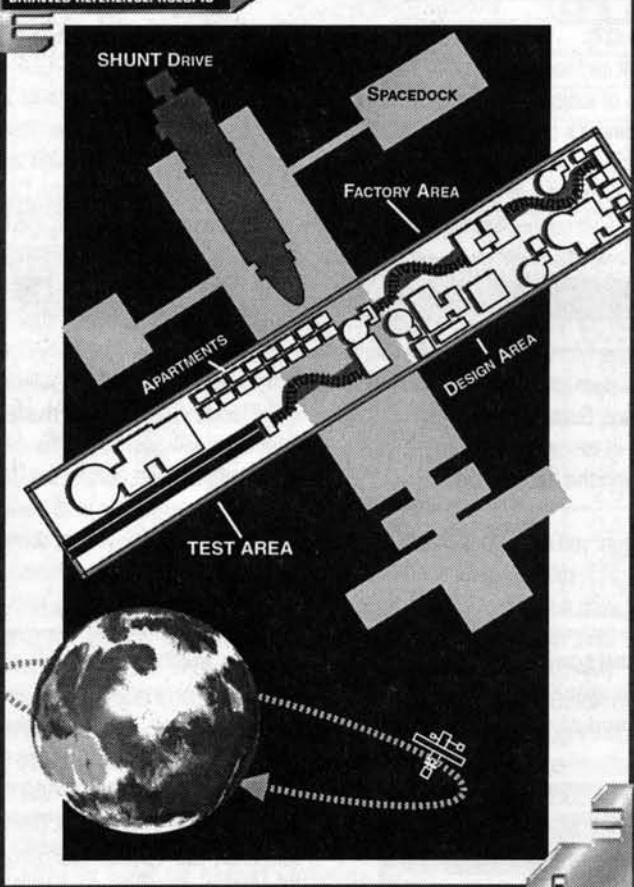
■ ADVENTURE TWO: Closing the Circle

"Nailing someone is the easy part. Sometimes, the hard part is findin' out who to nail."
—Grey Redmond

■ Mission Abstract

Several weeks ago, a Starblade agent on Mars managed to steal an EO-pad listing the names and locations of major members of the mysterious Circle, a group of Gaian arch-fanatics dedicated to establishing a dictatorship in the Colonies. Before he could transfer the data to the Starblade base, the Colonial War broke out in earnest; and the ODF and the SAC both broke the HyperWeb connection that links the Dataweb system between Earthspace and the Pleiades.

Hotly pursued by Circle agents, the Starblader went to ground (with his civilian Mason) in the rugged terrain of Valle Utopis, a gigantic, mile-deep warren of canyons deep in the Martian wastelands. Circle Mektons have closed in on his *approximate* location, but still haven't been able to dig him out. The Starblade Battalion needs his critical information, and is sending your Team in to recover its missing member, even if that means duking it out with the Circle's goons.

■ Support

Don't underestimate the Starblade agent you're trying to rescue. He's an old Smuggler (use profession on pg. 117, roll 1D6+2 for each of his Stats, distribute 30 points to his Skills), with a lot of experience under his belt. Besides knowing the lay of the land, his "civilian" Mason has been modified with a thruster pack (MA10), a 12 point Sensor Jamming system (MZ+, pg. 53), and a VH AutoGauss Cannon stolen off a Manticore (pg 48). He's also been pretty good about covering his tracks; draping his Mason in a heat reflective poncho, eating in the cockpit and storing his trash and waste products in sealed bio-sample bags; it will be a Very Difficult task to find any trace of him, and even then only if he's within a mile of you.

■ Resistance

The Circle group is piloting five Warden-specialized Galliards, modified with special scientific sensing equipment (Advanced Sensor Package; MZ+,pg. 51) normally used for locating and cataloging new lifeforms. In this case, they are using it to methodically search out traces of the hidden Starblader. The Wardens are tough (use SAC Mechajock on pg. 117, roll 1D6+2 for each of their Stats, distribute 30 points to Skills) and have no worries about wasting anyone in the way.

■ Complications

• The team sent in by the Circle are made up of a cadre of their most fanatical Wardens; the very same group that a few months earlier performed the assassination of Head Ranger Frank Talbot. Capturing one or more of the rogue Wardens would be a real coup; the Starblade Battalion could learn who actually masterminded the murder and also have a witness to expose the Circle's activities.

• Remember that you're sneaking around on one of the most heavily fortified planets in the Sol System. It took a cloaked Raider to insert you; only the steep canyon walls are hiding you (and the Wardens) from any SAC ships in orbit. If you start lighting up the night with missiles or explosions, you'll have a SAC cruiser down on you in 1D6 minutes. Then it'll *really* hit the fan.

■ ADVENTURE THREE: The Enemy Below

"We can make some important friends on this one. But it's going to take getting our feet wet."
—Jesse Ryuzaki

■ Mission Abstract

It's no mistake that the ODF designed most of its spaceships to resemble submarines—one of its strategies has been to hide their ships at the bottoms of planetary oceans where they can lurk undetected. This ability has proven to be extremely useful, especially with SAC intel scouts combing the Cluster for the location of ODF's bases.

After a recent battle with the ODF at Gamma IV, the damaged ODF cruiser *Ifni* went to ground at the bottom of the ocean near Fourwinds' port city of Osterville. The Fourwinds government is extremely concerned that this will violate their hard won neutrality and make them a target for the SAC. Planetary Director Kender is afraid to make a formal protest or use his own militia for fear of reprisal, but Jesse Ryuzaki and Placide Strazza have made him an offer he can't refuse—the Starblade will get rid of the cruiser, if Kender will agree to throw Fourwind's support behind the Battalion.

Your Team's mission is to make good on the Starblades' side of the deal either by destroying or driving the cruiser offplanet. The *Ifni* is on the sea bottom ten kilometers north of Osterville. The water is only about 60 meters deep; the bottom is smooth dark sand dotted with small reefs and rock outcroppings. The *Ifni's* spacedrives are currently under repair; and will take one hour to restart and lift off.

■ Support

Director Kender will provide a secure staging area in the dockside area of the city. He can provide two small gunboats for support (each has 6 Kills, 2SP armor, an MA of 6, and is armed with two Medium Cannon [range 7, WA 0, 9K Damage, 10 shots, 2 reloads] mounted in fore & aft 180° turrets. Your group will get backup from *Team Ballistic*, (use Ranger profession on pg. 116, roll 1D6+1 for each of their Stats, plus 30 points to Skills) giving you help in the form of 3 underwater modified Mektons; a Draken, a Crossbones, and a Troubadour, in addition to your own Team's units.

■ Resistance

The *Ifni* is a Wotan-class cruiser with 50 mecha. However, between heavy losses at the battle at Gamma IV and damage to its launch bays, only 10 Drakens are available at this time. If the *Ifni* is attacked, it will scramble mecha first; if the mecha fail, it will resort to using its hydrojets [MA2] to move out of range. It depends on the mecha screen, as its torps and gauss guns are generally too big to bring to bear on speeding Mektons. If it takes any armor penetrating hits, (or loses all its mecha) it will run for space as soon as its drives are operational (1 hour).

■ Complications

• Your mecha will need to get underwater modified; this will take two days, but will give you hydrojets and Underwater Environmental Protection. Being underwater also complicates combat (2 accuracy on weapon attacks, divide walking MA by 3, reduce melee damage by 2K, regular thrusters will not work underwater).

This is a Charybdis-made Pirate Raider, used for jumping smaller cargo vessels and sacking them. It also has plenty of cargo space dedicated to its other primary mission; smuggling.

SHIP PROFILE

Name	Pirate Raider	Weight	Cost
		26,000t	237,672.5

SYSTEMS — x3.55

System	Mult
Space Hydraulics & Protection	-x0.05
Sublight Drive	x0.75
Shunt Drive	x1.25
Crew Quality 14+1D10	x0.6
(Cloak comes later)	(...)

TURN RADIUS — +3 Hexes

SUBASSEMBLIES — 72.1 CP

System	Spc	CP
50 Crew	1, 1	1
Mek Bay (20)	2.2	2.2
MA24 (43t thrust)	6.9 x2	50.9
Damage Control	0	1.5
STR Sensor Suite	2	12
1,035t cargo space	2.3	2.3
Escape Systems	0.6	2.2

HULL — 47 CP

Servo	CPs	Space	Kills	SP	CPs
Hull	6	8/0	400	50	5
Bridge	2	3/0	100	40	4
Port Engine	4	8/0	0	60	6
Stbd Engine	4	8/0	0	60	6
Lower Module	4	8/0	0	60	6

ARMAMENT — 14.8 CP

Weapon		WA	Range	Damage	Shots	Kills	Cost	Space	Notes
Hull:	Gauss Turret	0	165	30K	25 bursts	30	1.1	1.1	BV=5
Port Engine:	Gauss Turret	0	165	30K	25 bursts	30	1.1	1.1	BV=5
Stbd Engine:	Gauss Turret	0	165	30K	25 bursts	30	1.1	1.1	BV=5
Lower Module:	Gauss Turret	0	165	30K	25 bursts	30	1.1	1.1	BV=5
Hull:	Gauss Cannon	-2	600	400K	5 shots	400	2.5	2.5	-
Port Module:	Torpedo Rack	-2	61 km	100K	6	40	0.8	0.8	Long Range
Stbd Module:	Torpedo Rack	-2	61 km	100K	6	40	0.8	0.8	Long Range
Lower Module:	Grappling Anchors	+2	Melee	(5)	n/a	500	6.3	6.3	Entangle, roll vs 15.

Note too, that Starblade Battalion cutters are being modified with exterior clamps to hold two-three additional Mektons, thus allowing them to carry an entire team. This modification limits the cutter's speed (sublight speed and normal speed down to 1/2 MA while so loaded), and the pilots have to board their Meks via spacewalk (no airlock links to these additional Meks).

This is a Fast Smuggler Transport, also used by the Starblade. Like the Pirate Raider, it is able to land on planet surfaces, making it ideal for supply work or covert missions.

SHIP PROFILE

Name	Fast Transport	Weight	Cost
		34,000t	98,605

SYSTEMS — x 2.05

System	Mult
Space Protection	-x0.05
Sublight Drive	x0.75
Shunt Drive	x1.25

TURN RADIUS — +3 Hexes

SUBASSEMBLIES — 53.1 CP

System	Spc	CP
10 Crew	1	x1.0
MA24 (43t thrust)	6.9 x2	50.9
Escape Systems	0.6	2.2

HULL — 42 CP

Servo	CPs	Space	Kills	SP	CPs
Hull	6	8/0	400	30	3
Bridge	2	3/0	100	30	3
Port Engine	4	8/0	0	30	3
Stbd Engine	4	8/0	0	30	3
Cargo Module	4	8/0	0	30	3
Cargo Module	4	8/0	0	30	3

ARMAMENT — 1.1 CP

Weapon		WA	Range	Damage	Shots	Kills	Cost	Space	Notes
Hull:	Gauss Turret	0	165	30K	25 bursts	30	1.1	1.1	BV=5

■ *Weapons and Armor*

In 2180, there are two kinds of ranged weapons available: firearms and gyrojets. 2180-era firearms are bullpup slugthrowers with built-in gyro-stabilization (for zero-gee combat) firing caseless ammunition.

On the other hand, gyrojets use recoilless launchers to fire self-propelled explosive rounds. This makes them ultra-effective in zero-gee, and they boast the flexibility of a wider variety of ammunition thanks to their large warheads. Their main drawback is that gyrojet rounds travel about 3m before igniting their rocket motors, and they don't arm their warheads until their motors fire.

■ *Firearms*

These are generally bullpup-configured weapons firing caseless ammo and featuring integrated gyro-stabilizers, making the weapon easier to use (particularly in zero-G). When firing a firearm, roll Zero-Gee skill vs (10 + the number of damage dice the weapon does) in order to keep from spinning like a top. All of *MZ*'s guns and firearms are commonly available in 2180, as are

all Weapon Options (including Smartguns which link the gun to the user's datalink and fire with a thought—see page 132).

■ *Gyrojets*

These are lightweight, highly advanced, ergonomically designed, computer-targeted, gyro-stabilized micro-missile launchers. Gyrojet pistols, carbines, and rifles all have a minimum range of 3 meters; until the round has traveled that far, it does no harm. Rocket guns may use the following types of ammo: HE, Kinetic, AP & Blast Grenades. Gyrojet weapons are listed in the table below.

■ *Melee Weapons*

In the arena of zero-gee combat, a good blade in your hands can make up for the problems of a good gun (recoil from normal guns, minimum ranges for rocket guns). Besides, blades don't jam, and they don't run out of ammunition! All of *MZ*'s melee weapons except for the Force Staff and Energy Sword are commonly available in 2180.

■ *Other Weapons*

Mekton Zeta's standard Heavy Weapons are all in military use in 2180 except the Anti-Mek Beamgun. Other Energy Weapons (lasers) are used mainly as Squad Support Weapons. Needle weapons are not common.

■ *Armor*

This is a dangerous galaxy. Therefore, all of the armor listed on pages 45-46 of *Mekton Zeta* is available, with the exception of Force Screens. *MZ*'s suit of Powered Armor is available (albeit at 10x the listed cost) for use as an extended EVA unit, assault gear, and worksuit, but you must have a cybernetic Datalink (see page 130) in order to operate it.

■ *Infantry Gear*

Modern Infantry equipment is quite sophisticated. Armor is usually a Flak Mesh uniform (SP 18) and Light Helmet (SP 20) which includes a Multivisor as well as an amplifier and scrambler for a datalink so it can act as a combat commlink. Standard weapons are a Gyrojet Assault Smartrifle or a Laser Squad Support Weapon (a Heavy Energy Rifle). Elite Assault Infantry Units are sometimes equipped with Powered Armor and other heavy weapons (like Armor Buster Rifles or 5K Anti-Mek Missiles) as well. Commando or elite units may also have Boosterware, cyberoptics and skinweave armor "issued" to them to make them more effective without external equipment.

DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF

"Pocket Rocket"
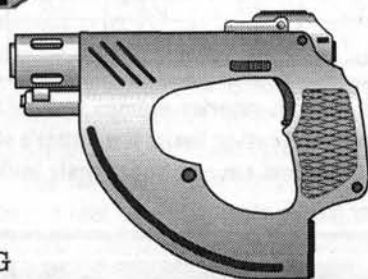
Gyrojet SMG

GYROJET WEAPONS TABLE

	WA*	Range	Damage	Shots	BV (ROF)	Conc.	Weight	Cost*
"Pocket Rocket"	+0/-0	10-50	2D6	5	1 (2)	P	1.0kg	437/2
G-Pistol	+0/-0	20-100	3D6	10	1 (2)	J	2.0kg	518/7
G-MachinePistol	+0/-0	20-100	3D6	20	5 (25)	J	2.0kg	741/14
G-Carbine	+0/-0	50-250	4D6	20	1 (2)	L	3.0kg	619/18
SubMachineGyrojet	+0/-0	50-250	4D6	50	5 (25)	L	3.0kg	939/45
G-Rifle	+0/-0	80-400	5D6	30	1 (2)	N	4.0kg	745/36
Assault G-Rifle	+0/-0	80-400	5D6	100	5 (25)	N	4.0kg	1177/120
G-MachineGun	+0/-0	100-500	6D6	500	8 (100)	N	7.0kg	1569/700

*WA at Combat Range/WA at Maximum Range, including range penalties.   *Cost of Weapon/Reload.

■ Space Suits

Most EVA is done with Mektons; spacesuits are reserved for emergencies or transfers, so they're short on life support and long on comfort. This concept is epitomized by the Skinsuit.

■ Skinsuits

As a newly-certified Mekton pilot, you step into the dimly-lit fitting room. You shiver a bit, the cold air of the room tingling over your naked body. A technician sits at a console to your right, ignoring your nudity and busily tuning an array of controls before him. "Step inside," he requests, gesturing towards what looks like a high-tech shower stall. You enter and are told to close your eyes. You hear the hum of the laser sensors—you know they're scanning your form, determining your exact dimensions and measurements. The procedure is over almost as soon as it has begun, and as you exit the scanner the technician hands you a smock.

"How'd you like your 'suit stylized? Any particular colors? You want a pattern—maybe a picture or symbol? Patches, logos? We got a library of images, and any image you provide can be injection-molded into the structure too," he explains. You choose a yellow-and-black tiger-stripes pattern, and ask for a silver tiger-head image to be emblazoned on your left shoulder. The technician enters the data on his console, then rotates his chair, facing away from you.

Beyond the tech, you see a foam mannequin standing between two blocks that resemble pressure-cookers. You both watch as the mannequin shrinks a bit here and expands a bit there, becoming an exact replica of your body. Then the two pressure-blocks close around the mannequin, and steam hisses out as memory-polymers are injection-molded to precise specifications. The hissing stops, the blocks separate, and your very own Skinsuit stands before you. "It'll cool in about 2 minutes," the tech says as he pulls out a magazine and offers it to you—it's the December issue of *Armored Cuties*, the magazine for the distinguished Mekton pilot.

A Skinsuit is the 2180 version on the traditional space suit: A skin-tight survival covering commonly worn by space pilots. Skinsuits are made of high-tension polymers with enough structural integrity to hold the human body together in a vacuum. Each Skinsuit is personalized, being based on a laser-scan of the pilot's form and his/her color and style preferences. Since Mechajocks are expected to work under scramble-ready conditions, a Skinsuit's copolymer structure is interlaced with memory-fibers: When a pilot initially dons his 'suit, it is baggy enough to allow rapid access. Once the pilot is fully geared up, he activates the "seal" button (usually located on the belt, wrist or collar), sending a tiny electrical signal which stimulates the Skinsuit's memory-fibers to constrict and conform to the pilot's body, as based on the template obtained by the laser-scan. Deactivating the safety and resetting the seal button returns the Skinsuit to its baggy state. (Many female Mekton pilots, being both daring and athletic, like to set the snugness to maximum.)

The only part which isn't made of this memory-polymer is the lightweight helmet, whose clear, polarizing plastic visor is LCD-augmented to link with any vehicle's HUD systems. The communicator is in the collar so that the pilot can still communicate even if the helmet is lost, and the collar also contains a transponder which broadcasts on radio and sensor-system wavelengths. The suit also has a port for a 6-hour recycler lung which can be worn as a shoulder bag or a backpack. Without this recycler, the suit can support life for 1/2 hour on the internal scrubber packs in the chest, arms, and legs. This is usually enough to EVA to a waiting Mekton, but should the pilot finds himself adrift space with no immediate hope of rescue, a built-in canister of Cryogas can be vented into the Skinsuit's air mix-
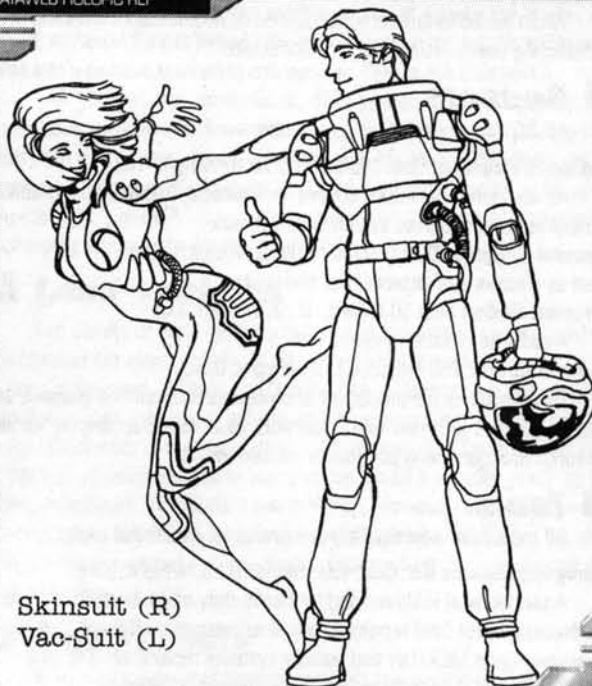
Skinsuit (R)
Vac-Suit (L)

ture, flash-freezing the wearer. In this state of suspended animation, a pilot can be rescued far beyond the limits of his Skinsuit's limited oxygen supply—theoretically up to years later.

Additional equipment, such as firearms, tools and computers are commonly strapped to the outside of the Skinsuit by way of holsters, harnesses or good old velcro.

■ Vac-Suits

Bulkier, more durable space suits are available for extended periods of exposure to vacuum or hostile environments; the life support capability of these Vac-Suits is extended to eight hours, thanks to a back unit containing air tanks as well as a recycler lung. The back unit also contains maneuver verniers, providing a MA Stat of 6. In other respects, spacesuits incorporate all the features of a skinsuit, except for the "shrink-to-fit" capability.

Skinsuit: 480cr, TL7, 1.6kg, SP5 (Helmet SP10).
Vac-Suit: 260cr, TL5, 4.7kg, SP10 (Helmet SP15).

■ Personal Equipment

■ Communications

All *MZ*s commos, cameras, and recorders are available, plus:

Commo Link: Cost 75 credits, TL: 6, Weight: negligible.

A personal recorder or a micro-cam may be outfitted with a communicator that will broadcast the video/audio reception to a remote point, as well as recording the input normally. Can link with satellites or ships in orbit. Note that this can link to a cybernetic Datalink.

Radio Direction-Finder: Cost 100 credits, TL: 5, Weight: 1kg.

This device can detect and locate radio transmissions within a 50km radius (including radars). It only has a 40% chance of detecting and finding a scrambled transmission.

Scrambler: Cost: 150 credits, TL: 6, Weight: negligible.

When added to any communications device, it makes listening in on or detecting transmissions nearly impossible.

■ *Sensors*

All *MZ's* sensors and vision gear are available, plus:

Radiation Scanner: Cost 150 credits, TL: 6, Weight: 1kg.

An all-source radiation scanner that detects, locates, and identifies unusual radiation sources within a 50m radius.

Thermal Goggles: Cost 50 credits, TL: 6, Weight 0.5kg.
A set of glasses that detects heat emissions.

Personal Radar: Cost 50 credits, TL: 6, Weight: 1kg.

A radar set with a range of 1km.

Multivisor: Cost 250 credits, TL: 7, Weight: 0.5kg.

This combines the properties of binoglasses, amplified goggles, and thermal goggles into one unit. Also acts as a heads-up display for any sensors, smartguns, and computers hooked into it.

■ *Tools*

All tools from *Mekton Zeta* are available. Additional tools:

Heavy Mechanics Kit: Cost 450 credits, TL: 5, Weight: 50kg.

A tacklebox of tools needed for heavy-duty metal shaping and welding. Necessary for field repairs to armor and structure (SP and Kills/Hits). Necessary to do MEKTON and vehicle systems repairs, at -3 to skill.

Mobile Shop: Cost 2500 credits, TL: 5, Weight: 1,000kg.

A well-equipped shop the size of a small trailer; can be mounted in a vehicle (8 spaces to allow working inside it, 4 spaces if it must be unpacked to be used). a mechanic with this can do Mekton/vehicle repairs at no skill penalty.

■ *Survival Gear*

All of the survival equipment in *MZ* is available, plus:

All-Environment Tent: 200 credits, TL: 6, Weight: 10kg.

Holds up to two people in environment-controlled comfort, keeping the inhabitants cool at external temperatures down to -100C or up to 40C.

■ *Medical Tech*

All medical supplies in *Mekton Zeta* are available. All drugs from TL 7 and below are available.

■ *The Dataweb*

In 2180, the Dataweb itself forms the most common form of computer used by individuals. The Web represents a network of computers (some personal, some maintained by organizations) integrated into buildings and comsystems across a civilized world—and beyond via the HyperWeb network. A Web usually covers all urban areas and most open areas on developed worlds, and everyone can access it at any time for information or processing.

In other words, the Dataweb is almost everywhere civilization pokes its head, and people have learned pretty much to take it for granted, but it does provide certain valuable services to its users. First, it is a planetwide communication system, and 'linking to someone is the equivalent of phoning them. Second, the Web is also a consensual entertainment locus with sensory shows and mindsong broadcasts being shared and sampled constantly. In fact, people have to be careful not to become Web addicts, lost in the intensive sensations of Web simulations.

Third, Web access provides information at a thought. This can act as an Education bonus in areas where the Dataweb is present. Most areas pro- vide a bonus of +1 to +3 to terms of Education which can be added to the any skill roll involving general knowledge or background information.

Fourth, Webdata may also add bonuses to some other INT- or TECH-based skills; using the Web for a skill is like any other skill test, except that the user has the choice of using the Web's skill level or adding the Web's skill bonus to his own skill (maximum total of +6 or Web's max bonus). It is the Ref's call as to how much the local Web might add to specific skills— again a level of +1 to +3 is typical, but esoteric skills (like Awareness/Notice, Shadowing/Avoid Pursuit or Jury Rig) will *not* be available. Typical skills available are Expert Skills such as sciences or languages, Programming, Basic Repair, and First Aid

■ *Limitations*

It may seem like the Dataweb is a miracle for Players; they can get any info they want and add all sorts of bonuses to their skills. But there are limits. First, the Ref always gets to decide what data may not or may not be available on the Web (such as classified military or corporate info, etc.). Also, radio datalink access can be jammed or blocked in an area (a great plot device), rendering the user offline and dependent on his own systems. This may be bypassed by direct contact with a Webnode terminal via a user's palm or neck nodes (such tactile contact is not subject to radio jamming). Also, despite the hype, the Web doesn't go everywhere. Earth, Luna and Mars have complete coverage, but, you can only count on access within 800 km of any city or spinner habitat in the Outworlds. Ships have their own Webs but once you're out in a Mekton or really small vessel (i.e. one without a sophisticated computer), you're on your own.

There are two things you *won't* find in the Dataweb. The first is the Black ICE and hacking software of the Cyberpunk era. The Web is too evolved for that. Its systems have been refined to ensure the safety and security of its users and such programs just don't work here. In fact, most sensitive systems are not directly linked to the Web, but kept isolated, and can be hacked only with powerful time-delay viruses and great patience. The second are the sophisticated Artificial Intelligences of the 21st Century. Most true AIs were eliminated in the A.I. Revolution of 2060 (a bloody war for the Net in the Corporate era). The purge that followed limited AIs to a very low level of intelligence and necessitated the development of the datalink to allow people to assume many AI functions.

At least, they were *supposed* to have all been eliminated ...

■ *Hand Computers*

If someone needs computing power outside of the Web, the standard personal computerized data system is a somewhat smaller micro-comp (*Mekton Zeta*, page 48, but 1.0kg, the size of a book) It can simultaneously run up to eight small programs, or a lesser number of larger, more complex programs (common programs are defined below). While running, each program takes a certain number of program spaces from the computer's eight. These programs can add to the user's skills as with Web use, but the level of bonus is limited by the computer. Computers can be made "smarter" (i.e., capable of faster responses through fuzzy logic), adding to skill checks at a cost of +1 INT for 300cr; +2 INT, 1000cr; +3 INT, 2200cr. Vehicular computers must buy the Logic Processor upgrade (*Mekton Zeta Plus*, page 57).

Any computer will back itself up regularly to the Dataweb as a safety feature, but a computer could be cut off from the Dataweb just as with a datalink. For this reason, truly sensitive information may be transmitted via EO-Pads (for "Eyes Only"), which are palm-sized, write-once datachips accessible only with the correct thumbprint and can only be read, not loaded through a datalink. However, please note that computer security is not an issue in 2180—nigh-unbreakable codes were long ago developed to secure computer transactions. Mektons and vehicles can also have com-

puters, but they're larger and can run many more programs. These have no weight, take no space, and cost 0.1 CP per 10 program spaces (max of 50).

Computer programs in 2180 are well-written, user-friendly, and are capable of responding to vocal commands or cybernetic operation. These programs give computers the illusion of pseudo-intelligence, but in actuality it's only a sophisticated conversation module. Of course, the ultimate in "smart" computers is Internal Automation, but that's illegal as noted above.

> • **ENCYCLOPEDIA 2.3:** 50cr, 1 program space. An on-board encyclopedia that will look up subjects on request.
> • **TRANSLATOR 6.9 (Specified language 7):** 25cr, 2 program spaces. This program turns the computer into a simultaneous translator.
> • **LIFESCAN 3.3 (*Xenobiology* 6 or +2):** 100cr, 3 program spaces. This program allows a micro-comp to evaluate the input from a bioscanner to detect and identify lifeforms within the scan area.
> • **TACTICOMP 1.1 (*Tactics* 5 or +1):** 100cr, 3 program spaces. A game-theory program that evaluates data to "second-guess" enemy activity.

■ *Vehicles*

Most advertisement copy seen on the Dataweb in 2180 might lead a casual observer to believe that everybody gets to work with Mektons. Not so. Anyone who's actually used even a simple industrial Mekton like the Mason or the Troubadour can tell you that it takes a lot of training, not to mention a huge amount of resources for maintenance. The truth is, getting the chance to work in a Mekton is sort of a testosterone dream for the everyday joe.

There are still countless vehicles dedicated to the same old task of personal transportation. In the USSA, the ubiquitous public transportation networks are fast, efficient, environmentally harmless, and often mandatory—relatively few automobiles are made, and those few are eco-friendly and highly efficient. However, the only cities in the Outworlds that have efficient civic transport are the three largest cities on Solingen itself, so there's high demand for personal transports ranging from simple family automobiles to aircraft to watercraft, and where there's demand, there are corporate entities ready and willing to supply.

In the USSA, vehicles of all types are manufactured by UGM, while in Pleiades that role is occupied by Solingen GmbH. Like any other business,

the idea is to provide what the market wants, at a price the market can afford, so Seven Sisters Industrial is striving to turn the liability of its newness into a positive marketing concept (i.e., "we're not Solingen").

All vehicles use datalinks as their primary control interface, but some have manual systems as back-ups (-1 to Driving and Piloting rolls with manual controls). Most vehicles work on standard battery banks, storing 12 hours worth of power at a time. In the outworlds, although in the Pleiades "car-dells" tend to have more than 12 hours of power since recharging stations are usually few and far between.

■ *Land Vehicles*

The variety of cars, motorcycles, trucks, hovercraft and ATVs which are cranked out every year by UGM, Solingen, SSI, and others is enough to boggle the mind. Wheels and Ground Effect Systems are both utilized, depending upon the type of vehicle and the environment it's designed for. In the USSA most of the population is concentrated in Zeniths, with little in the way of rough terrain to worry about, so GES vehicles (such as the UGM HoverSport "Elegantia") are common. However, in the Outworlds, the need is for durability, long range, and toughness, so simple, austere, wheeled (or sometimes even tracked) vehicles which use interchangeable parts are more popular.

■ *Sea Vessels*

A wide assortment of watergoing craft see a great deal of use both in the colonies and in the USSA; several of the planets in the Pleiades are largely or totally water, while the nature-minded USSA encourages an appreciation of the ocean in its citizens. Speedboats, catamarans, fishing trawlers, yachts, cruise liners, and submarines of all sizes use an assortment of different methods of propulsion, from the classic propellers to sails to hovercraft fans to magnetic "caterpillar" drives.

■ *Aircraft*

There's a great deal of use in the USSA and the Outworlds for helicopters, airplanes (driven by jets, pull-props or push-props) and vectored thrust vehicles (aerodynes). Commuter flights and cargo transport are as much an issue in 2180 as they were in the 20th century, magnified by the fact that colonization in the Pleiades continues to expand, creating ever-growing supply lines. It's well known that all the major corporations are in a race to invent some kind of magnetic flight system.

COMMON VEHICLES IN 2180

Wheeled or Hovercraft	MV	MA (Speed)	SDP	SP	Crew/Pass	Cargo	Weight	Cost
Motorcycle	-1	12 (188mph)	15h	10h	1/0	50kg	100kg	1,000cr
Automobile	-2	11 (145mph)	40h	10h	1/1-3	200kg	1,000kg	4,000cr
All-Terrain Vehicle	-3	9 (100mph)	60h	25h	1/3-7	500kg	3,500kg	10,000cr
Cargo Truck	-4	8 (90mph)	100h	15h	1/1-2	5000kg	5,000kg	20,000cr

Aircraft	MV	MA/Speed	SDP	SP	Crew/Pass	Cargo	Weight	Cost
Helicopter	-2	10 (111mph)	40h	10h	1/1	50kg	1,000kg	10,000cr
Transport Chopper	-5	9 (100mph)	100h	20h	2/20	2000kg	2,500kg	50,000cr
Aerodyne	-2	13 (233mph)	50h	10h	1/3	500kg	1,500kg	35,000cr
Airplane	-3	15 (333mph)	55h	15h	1/0	50kg	1,200kg	20,000cr
Transport Plane	-5	14 (280mph)	200h	25h	2/100	8000kg	6,000kg	100,000cr

Sea Vessels	MV	MA/Speed	SDP	SP	Crew/Pass	Cargo	Weight	Cost
Speedboat	-4	6	50h	10h	1/1-3	100kg	750kg	8,000cr
Yacht	-6	4	100h	20h	2/20	1000kg	3,000kg	100,000cr
Minisub	-5	4	75h	25h	1/3	500kg	2,000kg	50,000cr

■ *Cybernetics*

DATAWEB HOLOPIC REF

MILSPEC
ENHANCEMENT
PACKAGE FZ109
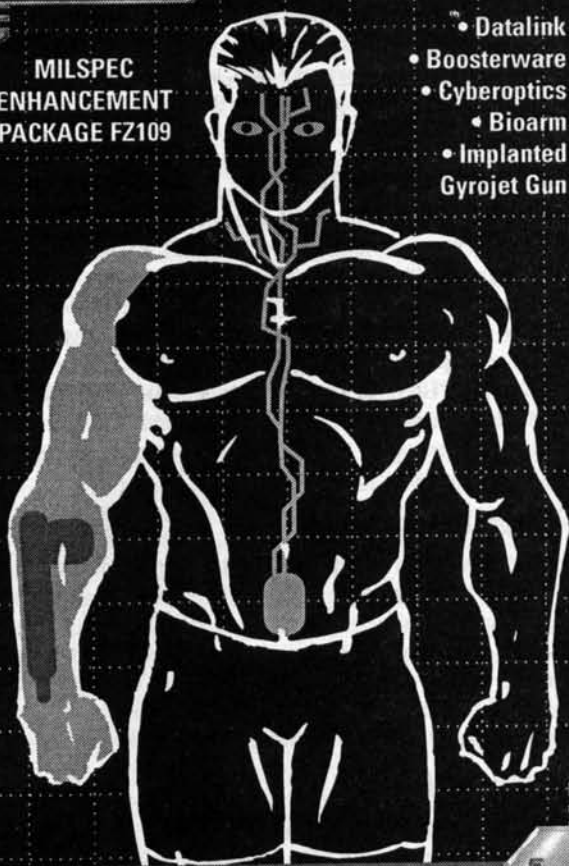
• Datalink
• Boosterware
• Cyberoptics
• Bioarm
• Implanted Gyrojet Gun

I n the early 21st century, cybernetic enhancement became an everyday practice. Back then, the process involved having bits of your body surgically replaced by "dead metal" machinery. That fad has gone out of vogue, and now cyberware is based on nanotechnology and DNA transform viruses. This techno-organic method ("Livemetal", as it's called) is far less intrusive and is so efficient that cyberware can actually heal itself over time.

While the actual performance of cybernetics has plateaued somewhat, all enhancements now look exactly like the natural parts of the body they have replaced; a Diff-20 Awareness check is required to spot any disguised cyberware. If the searcher is performing a detailed examination (like a simple body search) lower this to 15. Most are also multifunction units, performing or enhancing a variety of abilities. Another improvement is that while too much cyberware used to result in cyberpsychosis (fragmentation of the personality), in 2180 a better understanding of the immune system and psychology has ensured an enhanced person's rationality through the use of pseudo-organic nanotechnology.

■ *Basic Enhancements*

These enhancements are fairly common. In fact, many people get one or more of these enhancements simply to perform their jobs. The list below describes the most common types of cyber-enhancements, but is by no means a comprehensive list.

Datalink (6000cr): A synthetic nerve cluster grafted to the lower spine, serving as a "switchbox" which interprets signals between the central nervous system and direct cybernetic transmitter nodes, hidden beneath the surface of the skin (usually at the palms and at the back of the neck)—these tiny radio transmitters can communicate with corresponding nodes in any device or vehicle, and everyone's nodes have their own specific frequencies to prevent "crossed wires."

The nerve cluster "switchbox" emulates a basic hand-comp (see page 128), and using its radio commlink (100 km) it can access Web databases and memory storage devices and feed data displays to the optic nerve. MTS: Logic Processor, Thought Control system, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Chipware (600cr for +1, 1500cr for +2, 3300cr for +3): Bio-plastic circuit chips that have been imprinted with information or even skills that can then be accessed by the user via his datalink. A chip can contain memory (MRAM chips), which provides information on a specific subject, acting as the appropriate INT or TECH skill at levels from +1 to +3. The catch for both of these is that they replace any level you may have of your own in that area. In other words, if you have a Math +3 skill, and use a +2 Math MRAM chip, you would only use the chip's +2 skill level plus yours, as it overrides your own learning with the chip's. A datalink can access up to ten chips of various types, but you may only "run" as many as your current INT stat at a time. Chips must be purchased separately with cash. MTS: Logic Processor or Tech Processor systems, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Cyberoptics (9,000cr): An imaging system grown into the optic nerve, cornea, and retina. In 2180, all cyberoptics come standard with the following options: infrared/lowlite vision for dim or near darkness, anti-dazzle protection against harsh sunlight, flares or strobes, x128 image magnification, and a 20-image digital camera which can download to any digital media device. MTS: Megaheavy Sensors, 1/2 Cost, with ASP and x128 Resolution Intensifier systems, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Cyberaudio (7800cr): An augmented hearing system with sound amplifiers (+2 to sound-related Awareness checks), increased hearing range (ultra- and sub-sonics), a radio link (ten km radius), a digital recorder (with one hour of storage), and a level damper (which compensates automatically for loud noises). MTS: Megaheavy Sensors, 1/2 Cost, with ASP, 1/2 Cost, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Nanobodies (3000cr): These are assorted enhanced antibodies, toxin binders & nanosurgeons which are injected into the bloodstream, programmed to repair the body's systems and protect against disease. They effectively double your healing rate. MTS: Regenerating, MTS: Concealment and Arctic, Underwater & Desert protection cost multipliers (average BOD of 6 x0.5).

Musculoskeletal Reinforcement (4200cr): Transform viruses used to enhance bones and muscles. The result is an increase of +2 to the character's Body Type stat, both in strength and the ability to absorb physical damage. This enhancement cannot be detected unless a special examination is made. MTS: Superheavy Hydraulics (Average BOD of 6 x0.2 + x0.5 for Livemetal).

Boosterware (4200cr): Neural sheathing which increases response times, allowing superhuman reactions. Gives a +1 or +2 to Initiative Rolls. These are not obvious unless used, and even then, it can be mistaken for simply good reactions. MTS: +2 Maneuver Verniers (Average REF of 6 x0.2 +x0.5 for Livemetal).

Biolimbs (see table): Synthetic limbs which are stronger, more durable, and never get tired. Assorted options can be installed inside a biolimb (so can cyberweapons, but that's illegal, of course). Bioarms can deliver impressive crushing and punching damage, while Biolegs do increased kicking damage, and paired biolegs allow the character to make incredible leaps. Biolimbs can also take more hits of damage than real limbs

before being incapacitated or destroyed, and can be armored (but then it becomes obvious that they're artificial).

Built-in Tools (2100cr): A modified biolimb hand module which has a variety of built-in tools, including pliers, drills, wire-cutters, screwdrivers, soldering iron, and circuit tester. The edge of the hand can be used as a hammer, and the fingers are strong enough to be used as a wrench as well. MTS: Micromanipulators & Tech Processor, x1.5 for Livemetal.

■ *Milspec Cyberware*

This is kind of stuff that's heavily monitored by the government—only soldiers, police and corporate security are supposed to have it. If you do have it, you're supposed to register it with the government. Failure to register can result in arrest, a fine of up to 2000cr, and possible removal of the restricted item.

Skinweave (10,800cr): Subdermal mesh woven by nanomachines through the skin (grants full-body SP8). MTS: SP3 armor over all 6 locations, weight efficiencied to zero, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Subdermal Armor (3600cr): This is an antiballistic polymer carapace which is formed by nanites under the skin, granting the character's torso heavy armor (SP15). MTS: SP6 armor over 1 location, weight efficiencied to zero, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Cyberclaws (3000cr): Long, sharp, synthetic claws implanted in the fingers, knuckles or forearm of either flesh or synthetic limbs. They do 2D6AP plus HTH damage, and be retracted when not in use. MTS: 5K-AP Melee Weapon, x1.5 for Livemetal.

Bioarm Implanted Gyrojet Gun (600cr): A modified Gyrojet Pistol (same as that on p126) built into a bioarm, with clips inserted into the bottom of the biolimb.

Smartgun (600cr): Less a piece of cyberware than a addition to a firearm, a Smartgun add-on consists of a sensor package and electric trigger which can be built into a weapon to allow it to communicate with a user's datalink. This way the user can receive target data from the weapon and fire it with a thought. The overall effect is to grant a +2 bonus to the gun's Weapon Accuracy at Combat Range, and a +1 bonus at Maximum Range. Most Tech 7 or higher firearms can be so modified. MTS: TM-2 Targeting Computer (Average REF of 6 x0.1), no Livemetal modifier.

■ *Final Cybernetics Notes*

On the topic of repairing damaged cybernetics, plan on paying at least 1000-2000cr for any full replacements and 200-800cr labor (not counting any surgery needed). In other words, make sure you take care of yourself! On the other hand, if you want to do your own repairs, you'll need the skill of *Cybertech* (see below).

All of the cybernetics listed here were built using MTS—they're all 1/10th Scale mecha components with the Regenerating, Concealment and Arctic, Underwater & Desert protection cost multipliers applied to represent their "Livemetal" nanotech nature; the total cost for this Livemetal system is x0.5, and yes, you must pay for it! All cybernetics are weight efficiencied to zero weight, and any Cost multiplier systems were applied to an average Stat level (6) to determine their base CP cost. The final cost conversion is 1 CP for 1,000 credits, and the surgery needed to install a cyber-enhancement costs 1/5th that of the cybernetic item itself. *Cyberpunk* players will notice that the prices listed here are different from those in the *2020* rulebook; this is due to new technologies and manufacturing techniques involved, new legal parameters and a new economical environment.

New Skill: Cybertech (TECH) [H]: This is the knowledge of the advanced cybernetics systems of 2180, including basic nanotech and bioware. With this skill you'll be able to perform basic repairs and maintenance, while at the higher levels you'll be able to modify (Level 5) or even invent (Level 8) your own cybernetic enhancements.

BIOLIMB OPTIONS

Biolimb Options	Spaces	Cost
Armor (per 1 SP)	0	600cr
Heavy Strength (HTH+3, Lift&Throw/Jump x1.5)	-1	+11%
Superheavy Strength (HTH+1D6, Lift&Throw/Jump x2)	-2	+22%

BIOLIMBS

Bioarm	Hits	Space*	Cost	Possible SP	HTH+	Lift/Pair**	Throw
Very Weak	8	2	7,500cr	0-10	+1	35/50kg	10m
Weak	13	4	10,500cr	0-15	+1	70/100kg	15m
Average	18	6	13,500cr	0-20	+3	105/150kg	20m
Strong	23	8	16,500cr	0-25	+1D6	145/200kg	25m
Very Strong	28	10	19,500cr	0-28	+1D6+2	185/250kg	30m

*This is the number of 1/10th Scale spaces available in the limb.
**"Lift" is determined from scaled Lifting Capacity value per Classification Level divided by 2, added to half normal human Lift per Body Type. "Pair" is determined from scaled Lifting Capacity value per Classification Level.

Bioleg	Hits	Space	Cost	Possible SP	HTH+	Jumps*	Pair MA**
Very Weak	10	4	6,000cr	0-13	+4	+1m	MA x2
Weak	15	6	9,000cr	0-18	+1D6+1	+2m	MA x2
Average	20	8	12,000cr	0-23	+2D6-2	+3m	MA x2
Strong	25	10	15,000cr	0-28	+2D6	+4m	MA x2
Very Strong	30	12	18,000cr	0-28	+2D6+2	+5m	MA x2

*"Jumps" applies to characters with a single Bioleg, and the bonus is applied to Jumps, Running Jumps and Anime Leaps.
**"Pair MA" applies to characters with two Biolegs, and doubles the character's MA for the purposes of determining Running Distance, Jumps, Running Jumps and Anime Leaps.

■ *Robots*

Robots in 2180 are not as advanced as they might be due to the outlawing of Artificial Intelligence. Given this condition, the field of robotics has remained relatively lightweight; most robots tend to be squat, mobile computers with on-board toolkits. Free-moving robots (as opposed to static industrial designs) generally fall into the following categories: household servants, medical robots, engineering robots, recon/scout models, and the immensely popular "autodoc," which is a fairly static unit due to its complexity and the necessity of keeping the patient stationary.

A typical robot of 2180 sports fairly minimal sensors (visual/auditory/tactile) in a typically-hemispherical "head" turret; upgraded sensors can be added in the space provided. Two external servo arms are standard (more can be easily added for specialized models, up to an operating maximum of six arms). The delicate electronics and power cell (yes, 'bots work off standard automobile power cells! Such a cell will keep a 'bot going for 240 hours of continuous use) and is easily reached via convenient access panels. Depending on the environment, the 'bot will have a wheeled (for normal, easy environments) or tracked (for rough terrain) transmission system, providing a wheeled speed of 7 meters per second (4 mps for tracks). Those made for zero-gee environments will also have built-in thrusters for 0.75 Gees of acceleration (this adds 4 kg to the mass and 1000 credits to the cost).

Robot programming is available in standard packages, and includes limited learning-curve algorithms so that the robot can adapt itself to its specific environment and its owners preferences. Changing a program entails little more than slotting in the appropriate memory cassette (removing another if there's no space). Normally, three programming slots are provided. These programs feed directly into the brain-unit that forms the core of every robot.

Game Notes: The common robot-form is a 1/10 scale Mekton with a Medium Striker torso, a Striker head, two Striker arms with hands, Striker track or wheeled movement platform, Superlight sensors, level 5/portfolio 3 internal automation, powercell power plant. The torso and head have 10 Hits of armor; no other servos are armored. Mass is 33 kg, MV is -4, 15.84 CP. MA 6 thrusters add 3.3 kg mass, take up all spaces inside the torso, and add 1.78 CP.

■ *Household Robots*

The standard household robot is a multi-use model, capable of cleaning and maintaining a household, doing the laundry, cooking, and routine maintenance. It can even act as a valet, thanks to its Blackwell Fashionware programming. The base model costs 3,950 credits (plus 445 credits for zero-gee thrusters). No internal tools are provided, although they can be installed as options: Vacuum cleaner, 100 credits/4 spaces. Basic tool kit, 75 credits/3 spaces. Internal washer/dryer (does one large or three small pieces of clothing at a time), 150 credits/8 spaces. First Aid kit, 25 credits/1 space.

Programs normally found in a household robot tend to cover such subjects as household maintenance (included), basic repair (Basic Tech 5, 50 credits), basic first aid (First Aid 5, 60 credits), cooking (Expert: Cooking 5, 30 credits), and Blackwell Fashionware (Wardrobe & Style 5, 70 credits plus 25 credits per year for updates).

Household robots are typically 1-1.3 meters tall, .4-.6 meters in diameter, with arm extension of 1 meter, and come in a variety of designer colors.

■ *Engineering Robots*

The basic engineer is almost identical to the basic household model in capabilities but tends to be a tall, thin cylinder atop the wheel/tread unit. This elongated silhouette is necessary to fit into narrow access areas and reach tall machinery; it also serves to allow instant identification of an engineering 'bot. Engineer arms also share this elongated feature, extending to a full 1.5 meters per arm. The hand grippers are capable of being removed and replaced with specific tools.

Engineer 'bots are usually outfitted for almost any and every environment, from space to underwater to arctic conditions. These add to the cost, bringing the price tag up to 4,795 credits (plus 595 credits for zero-gee thrusters). No internal tools are provided, but can be added (light electrical tools 100 credits/2 spaces, heavy engineering tools 200 credits/6 spaces). Includes basic repair and maintenance routines built in (Basic Tech 5); it can be loaded with 2 other specialized tech routines (Mecha Tech, Expert: Spacecraft Tech, at level 5, or Jury-Rig level 2; 150 credits per program).

Engineer 'bots perform routine and emergency maintenance but work best when closely supervised, since their lack of creativity severely limits their ability to deviate from standard practices. If you use engineering 'bots, they'll perform routine tasks just fine without supervision—but if you're doing anything that deviates from extremely normal routine, such as trying to construct a new Mekton (or a variant), or trying to modify parts to fit, you'd better tell your 'bots exactly what to do—remember Murphy's Law of Robotics: "If orders can be misinterpreted, a robot will do so, in the worst possible fashion, at the worst possible moment." Trusting a robot's Jury Rig skill is begging the referee to use the Tech Construction Table (MZ+, page 7).

■ *Medical Robots*

There are two breeds: The Medibot and the Autodoc. The Medibot is a standard robot with an internal medikit and medscanner (4 spaces; 2 per arm) and medical programming (First Aid 5, Medical 5). It costs 4,450 credits (plus 445 credits for the zero-gee model).

The Autodoc is a stationary unit the size of a closet, with an attached surgical table. It has complete emergency surgery and diagnostic capabilities (Medical 10, with a base "Tech" stat of 5). It can handle any programmed emergency...this excludes such situations as new and unfamiliar toxins and viruses, though it can prescribe extended treatment for recuperating patients. It takes up 2 spaces in 1/1 scale, and costs 10,000 credits.

■ *Recon/Scout Robots*

The standard ground-pounder recon robot is a low, wide unit with treads. It's usually outfitted with superior sensors, and may even have extra sensors in the torso section. Standard programs include enhanced image processing (Awareness 5), and can include specialty programs (Expert: Geology, Chemistry, Biology, etc., all at level 5, costing 100 credits per program). All-environment treads are supplemented with all-environment protection. This robot costs 4,500 credits (plus 500 credits for MA 6 thrusters).

A common variant of the basic, land-roving scout robot is the flying reconnaissance robot. This uses helicopter or thruster/jet configuration instead of treads. The jet model removes the arm servos; they are retained on the helicopter model. The helicopter model costs 4,500 credits and has a flight MA of 9. The jet model weighs 31 kg, has Medium Striker sensors, costs 4,700 credits, and has a flight MA of 16 and a range of 1000 km.

W hile this information is available on our web page (http://www.best.com/~rtg1/), we print it here for the benefit of those without web access. This comprises all the known errata for Mekton Zeta, Mekton Zeta Plus, and the Mekton Zeta Tactical Display.

■ Mekton Zeta Errata

Pages 41-42: A combat knife can't be thrown accurately, but a dagger can.

Page 41-42: Personal Energy Swords get the EMW "hot knife through butter" effect; they treat personal armor as being 10SP less.

Page 45-46: The cost of the Personal Powered Armor is off by a power of 10; it's actual Cost should be 10,560¥.

Page 53: Mechatank Form mecha all have an additional -1 MV.

Page 55: Sensors need to be placed in the head to offset a -3 Awareness penalty only for Humanoids (Mektons), Beasts and Avians.

Page 55: Legs: "Leg servos must be at least one level below the Torso to be able to walk" should read "Leg servos can be no smaller than one Classification Level lower than the Torso".

Page 55, (Mekton Z+ p30-31): Hands: Mekton Hands technically should cost 1.75 CP, but they were rounded to 2 for simplicity's sake—we wanted the stats on Hands to be easy to remember.

Page 59, 82: Medium Shield has a -2DA, and Small Shield has a -1DA. This is not a typo; the smaller Shield has a better DA because it is light and can be brought to bear more quickly than the Medium Shield.

Page 59-60, 82: It should be stated that all EMWs get the "hot knife through butter" effect; they treat armor as being -4SP less.

Page 60, 82: All Mekton weapons listed have no areas of effect (see the sidebar on page 11 of this book); see the Missiles section (pages 31-35) to build Mekton hand grenades, etc.

Page 64: The Aquamecha description should read that it "ignores the x3 MA penalty."

Pages 67-72: The sample mecha are controlled by the following factions: Rapier, Gunther, Talos, and Hermes are PDF units, while the Gorgon and Kraken are Imperial.

Page 71: Kraken: This mechabeast should have an MV of -7, not -8.

Page 78: The Starships' MA listing is just for maneuvering; their Sublight drives are used for determining interplanetary travel times.

Page 77: If you do the math, you'll find that CIDS systems listed in the Ship Weapons and Subassemblies table are cheaper than they should be (they're built as 1/1 Scale Beam Weapons with a 360° Wide Angle Effect and an Infinite Burst value). Let's just say that the ones in the book are "on sale."

Page 88: Initiative can be deferred. If the person who goes first wants to wait, he can let the next person go, and then act.

Page 88: In the sidebar under "Turns & Actions," the EVADE Entry is poorly worded. To clear up confusion, it should read, "EVADE: Evade rolls are made whenever you are attacked, and take no actions."

Page 89: MZ can be played without minis by calculating all mechas' Speedlines and using real-world values for hexes (1 Hex = 50m).

Page 92: In the example on computing to-hit numbers, Nick is, obviously, firing his AdVantage's beam rifle, not a Turbo beam rifle.

Page 94: The sidebar refers to advanced space movement rules in Z+. Our mistake—as you now know, there are none.

Page 95-102: You may Call Shots at Special or Cinematic locations at -6.

Page 95-96: Autofire: you may fire any weapon once per Action, and may do so consecutively; you could indeed fire an autofire rifle on every one of your actions in a turn.

Page 96: Re-Adjusted Burst Value: A Weapon's BV tells you two things: 1) How many consecutive Hexes its fire may be split between, and 2) How many times any target hit by the weapon may be damaged; each point over the Defender's roll = 1 hit, up to the BV of the weapon. Example: A BV6 machinegun can fire into as many as 6 connected hexes, and any target within any of those 6 hexes may be hit up to 6 times. Even if only one target is fired upon, it may only be hit up to 6 times. Mekton Z to Cyberpunk: (BVxBV)x1.57 = Rate of Fire.

Page 97: Area-Effect Weapons & Indirect Fire: Difficulties are too high. Difficulty should actually be equal to distance in Hexes, with a Deviation of 1 per 3 by which the Difficulty was missed. -OR- Difficulty is just plain old 15.

Page 97: On the deviation chart, replace "The number rolled on the unsuccessful attack," with "The number by which the attack is failed".

Page 98: Armor-Piercing Attacks: "axes" should not be listed as AP.

Page 98: For Shock attacks, the rules say the pilot loses Turns, but the example indicates Actions. It's TURNS.

Page 99: Bite is WA +1 in the chart and WA +0 in the text. +0 is correct. Attacking with head-mounted weapons is possible for humanoids; putting a Melee Weapon in your Head Servo can be very helpful if you are Pinned. This could also simulate jaws for Humanoid "monster" mecha; it's all WA +0.

Page 99: Dismemberment: damage is the same whether you have 1 arm, 2 arms, 4 arms, whatever. If you do not do enough damage to rip the limb off, the limb still takes the listed damage.

Page 100: "Other Actions." Replace a Weapon. Should read: "It takes an action to replace a weapon, but not to drop one (why do you think so many pilots in mecha shows simply throw away weapons in the middle of a fight? They just didn't have time to put them away!)"

Page 101: Out-of-Scale combat: To damage a target of Mekton (1/1) Scale or larger, your weapon's average damage must be at least 1 Kill (25 Hits). A 5D6 autorifle cannot hurt a Mekton, because its average damage is 17.5. Human-Scale weapons must be able to do at least 7D6+1 in order to damage Mektons. Roadstrikers can be hurt by any weapon with an average of 5 points or more (1D6+2 or 1D10 or more).

Page 101: Out of Scale Mods chart contradicts the Ship-building section where it's said Ships have -8 vs Mektons and Mektons have +8 vs Ships. In fact, the difference is not 8, but 6 in both directions.

Page 102: Crits & Megacrits when caused by Autofire Weapons and Missile Salvos: refer to the top of page 32 of this book.

Page 102: When applying Cinematic Damage, unless you beat your target's defense roll by 10+, he still gets armor protection.

Page 103: Because a Stun Roll is an attempt to roll under your Stun Save (rather than over), the listed modifiers for Drugs or Sleep Gas should be positive, not negative.

Page 104: Powerplant Explosion: Hot Powerplants cause 2D10 damage to the six Hexes adjacent to the Mekton, and 1D10 to the 12 (not 10, as it says) Hexes around that.

Page 105: The damage taken from falling can be reduced by the output from a damaged lift system or jumpjets. Simply subtract the MA of this system from the damage you take from the fall.

Page 106: The Driving Roll Failure table should not use a D10 roll, but rather be determined by the amount the roll is missed by (see the example).

Page 114: Under So They Didn't Get Shot..., the phrase in the example which says "That shifts the damage down to 8..." should read "That shifts the damage down by 3 levels...".

Page 117-118, (Mekton Z+ p144): Anime Leap: Okay, the REAL distance for Anime Leap is MA x1.5. An MA of 8 grants an Anime Leap of 12m.

■ *Mekton Zeta Plus Errata*

Page 27: Mega-Beam Weapons: When mega-beam weapons are fired at opponents of a larger Scale (i.e., the larger mecha won't fit in a 50m hex/is taller or longer than 50m) then it takes damage to one location, and that one location takes damage as if the Mega Beam was one Scale greater than its actual design (i.e., a 1:1 10-Kill Megabeam fired at a x100 Scale starcruiser would be a 100-Kill Beam hitting a single location on the starcruiser.

Page 30-31: Hands: Mekton Hands technically should cost 1.75 CP, but they were rounded to 2 for simplicity's sake—we wanted the stats on Hands to be easy to remember.

Page 32: Dive-Bombing is, as the rules stand, easier to perform on a moving target than an immobile building. It should state that bombing a moving target, such as a Mekton, incurs an additional -5 Attack Roll penalty).

Page 35: Flare Missiles. It does not say how long the blinding effects of Flare Missiles lasts. The effect lasts for one full Round (e.g., they burn out after every combatant has had one Turn).

Page 36: Phalanx Example should actually read "... +5 for the five-point margin of success..."

Page 39-40: There are two references to Scattershot ammo delivering only 1/2 damage; once in the Scattershot entry, once in the Blast Radius entry. This is WRONG; Scattershot ammo can do up to full damage.

Page 55: Remotes: When a remote goes out of sensor range, it continues to function as per item B under "Control Range"

Page 60: Internal Fuel Tanks. The first sentence of this paragraph should read "The biggest advantage to this system is that it cannot be hit by enemy fire; only if a servo containing an Internal Fuel Tank is destroyed will the extra hexes from that servo's Tank be lost."

Page 61: Zeta Plus stated that GES propulsion requires Fuel to function. In Mekton Z, it is clearly stated that GES does not use Fuel. The rule in Zeta Plus is correct; GES propulsion does need Fuel.

Page 64: The header for the second table under "Boosterpacks" is incorrect. Replace "B-Mod" with "Cost".

Page 67: Powerplants: It should be noted that the MV modifiers granted by Overcharged and Supercharged Powerplants cannot raise MV above -0. Also, Hot Undercharged power plants should cost -x0.25, as you should get some points back if you not only blow up more quickly, but you are also slower.

Page 75: The Cloaking section mentions the mecha's height for determining how difficult it is to spot a Cloaked Mekton, but it doesn't list how to determine a Mekton's height. We assumed that you, as imaginative types, would arbitrarily decide upon your mecha's height, since it can vary drastically from concept to concept. However, as a stand-in rule for humanoid mecha: Height = Torso Servo's Kills x1.5. Thus, the smallest Mekton is 3 meters tall, average size is 18 meters and the largest Mekton stands 33 Meters tall. Note that this guideline is set for 1:1 Scale; smaller or larger-Scale mecha will need to be adjusted as the designer sees fit.

Page 81: Lightspeed: The second paragraph lists the speed of light as being 1AU per 8.5 hours; this should actually read 1AU per 8.5 minutes.

Page 94: Special Effect Weapons: Note that this SMT can be used to allow a Weapon to use the effect modifiers of other Weapon types (i.e., Seeking Beam Weapons or Blast Radius Beam Weapons).

Page 107: Nowhere in the Human Scale section is it mentioned that any powered suits or armor which are designed to be worn by their pilot, any damage which exceeds the suit's Toughness or Servo Hits goes straight to the corresponding body location of the pilot. Thus, if a suit of armor takes a Leg hit which penetrates the armor and exceeds the Servo's Hits, the wearer's leg takes any remaining damage that blows through. Ouch.

Page 107: Scaling: Fuel ranges should scale.

Page 107-108: Human Scale: All Human-Scale Weapons MUST do damage in Dice values; Kills x0.42 = D6 values.

Page 108-109, 144: Roadstrikers: Roadstrikers can be damaged by 5+ hits, but ablated by 25+ hits. Human-scale is ablated and damaged by 5+ hits (avg 1D6+2). Roadstriker ablation rates: Ablative = 5h (0.2K), Standard = 25h (1K), Alpha = 30h (1.2K), Beta = 35h (1.4K), Gamma = 45h (1.8K); all Roadstriker-Scale mecha should measure Hits/Kill values in Decimal Kills: 60H = 2.4 Kills.

Page 111: For Corvette Scale, the Maximum Range for Weapons is listed as BOTH (unscaled Maximum Range)x10 AND (scaled Maximum Range) x (scaled Maximum Range). The Correct method for scaling Starship Weapon Combat Range is (unscaled Maximum Range) x10.

Page 112: For Starship Scale, the Maximum Range for Weapons is listed as BOTH (unscaled Maximum Range)x100 AND (scaled Maximum Range)x(scaled Maximum Range). The Correct method for scaling Starship Weapon Combat Range is (unscaled Maximum Range)x100.

Page 115: Let's Active!: All Rounds occur in 2-Action "Phases"; if you have more than 2, everyone takes 2, then anyone with 3 or more actions take their next 1 or 2, then anyone with 5 or more actions take their 1 or 2 actions.

For example: A four-way battle takes place between two Gorgons (APT2 each), a Rapier (APT3), a Gun-Gorgon (APT4), and a Strike-Rapier (APT5). First, all combatants would take their first two Actions in the order of their Initiative. Then, the Rapier, Gun-Gorgon and Strike Rapier would take their next two Actions in the same order (excluding the Gorgons, who have already used up all their Actions). Finally, the Strike-Rapier would take its fifth Action, and the Round is over. Everyone establishes Initiative again, and continues going at it.

Page 121: How Psi Points are Spent: In the example, if Kenty had Telepathy at +9, her full potential with Telepathy is only 9, not 10 as listed at the end of the example.

Page 144: Anime Leap: Okay, this time for sure—the REAL distance for Anime Leap is MA x1.5. An MA of 8 grants an Anime Leap of 12m.

Z+ Build Sheet: There are two columns marked for the Location of the Shield. Oops.

■ *Mekton Tactical Display Errata*

ADDENDA TO THE CINEMATIC COMBAT SYSTEM:

Cinematic Build System

Mixed Armor: Figure out what part of your suit is armored with the better type of armor. Multiply that fraction by the decimal portion of the armor multiplier. Add one to this number. Multiply your overall suit SI by this number. Round off.

Example 1: *I have an SI 10 suit with six locations (Head, Torso, Arm, Arm, Leg, Leg). The Torso is armored with Alpha, all other locations with Standard. Therefore, 1/6 of the suit is armored with Alpha. Multiplying 1/6 by 0.1 gets you .016. Add one, to get 1.016. Multiplying 10 (your overall SI) by 1.016 gets you a new SI of 10.016, which rounds down to 10.*

Example 2: *I have an SI 10 suit with six locations (Head, Torso, Arm, Arm, Leg, Leg). The Torso and both Arms are armored with Gamma, all other locations with Standard. Therefore, 3/6 of the suit is armored with Gamma. Multiplying 3/6 by 0.5 gets you .25. Add one, to get 1.25. Multiplying 10 (your overall SI) by 1.25 gets you a new SI of 12.5, which rounds up to 13.*

Cinematic Combat System

Critical Hits: Do not apply damage when a critical hit is scored. The effect of the critical hit, as rolled on one of the Cinematic Damage Tables, replaces normal damage.

Special Weapon Effects

Called Shots: Apply a called shot modifier to the to-hit roll. If you succeed, roll damage resolution as normal on the Damage Chart. If the result is C2 or better (i.e. C2 or anything below it on the column), the target location is destroyed. Otherwise, the target location is simply damaged, and all systems in it are useless.

Missile Salvos: A question was raised as to what the damage multiple of twenty 1K missiles all hitting would be. The damage multiple for this would be 250% (1 doubled is 2, 2 doubled is 4, 4 doubled is 8, 8 doubled is 16, 16 doubled is 20+, for five doublings).

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